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Strikes risk a tipping point in London life

AFTER days of rail chaos caused by cancelled strikes, London has been brought to a near standstill thanks to the latest walkout by Tube staff.

The frustration for many Londoners, beyond the widespread disruption itself, will be that it feels so unnecessary. The Mayor's late intervention that he would "not support any unfair changes" to the Transport for London pension scheme surely merited a return to the negotiating table.

This makes the RMT claim — that its 10,000 members had no choice but to strike — ring hollow. These are not nurses reluctantly striking for the first time in their history. Clearly, the unions are the main architects of the chaos but the Government must take responsibility as well. Relations between ministers, the RMT and City Hall have been in the deep freeze for years. The proposed £100 million savings to be made to the TfL pension scheme were explicitly part of conditions imposed by ministers in return for Covid bailout funds. For his part the Mayor has failed to bridge the gap between the sides.

The impact on the capital has been predictable. Meetings cancelled, some schoolchildren stuck at home and businesses losing out at a time when every pound is precious.

But take a step back and our city is approaching a dangerous inflexion point. Once commuters get to the point that they simply cannot trust the network will be functioning and get them where they need to be, they may be tempted to permanently alter their behaviour.

NHS crisis in focus

HOW long until 24 Hours in A&E isn't only a Channel 4 TV show, but a daily reality? More than 40,000 Londoners spent over 12 hours waiting to be admitted to accident and emergency departments in the last year, the highest figure since records began.

But as anyone who has interacted with the NHS in recent times will know, the issues are not confined to one department. Take waiting lists: almost a million Londoners are now waiting for treatment, rising to a record seven million across England. These figures are unlikely to be reduced with nurses set to go on strike for the first time ever.

Nor by the sheer level of churn. The capital suffers from the highest leaving rate for nurses and midwives of any English region, heaping further pressure on staff amid the ongoing shortages.

Even if the health service escapes the round of austerity being prepared by the Chancellor ahead of the Autumn Statement, many millions of people will continue to be impacted by delays to routine treatment. Meanwhile, inflation eats away at 'protected' budgets.

The NHS faces multiple and overlapping crises. They will only even begin to be addressed when the right level of funding and staffing is in place. Until then, health outcomes will suffer and our economy will limp on.

Farewell, Tamara

FAREWELL to a legend. Tamara Rojo's time as artistic director of the English National Ballet is coming to an end. Rojo's contribution, not only to her arts but to our city's wider cultural scene, has been second to none. As she relocates to San Francisco, all that is left to say is thank you and goodbye.

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Ben Judah

Reports of the death of American democracy have been greatly exaggerated



EUROPEAN leaders went to bed on the eve of the US midterms worried. Anyone talking to their ambassadors or to Washington Democrats themselves found themselves picking up real unease, even notes of fear — that the results might mark a sharp turn back towards Donald Trump. Instead they woke up relieved. Not only was there no "red wave" but the wins and losses themselves were a personal defeat for him.

Campaigning across the country, Trump spent millions and endorsed more than 300 candidates only to see some of his most high-profile bets for the Senate flop. In Pennsylvania, the Democrats beat Dr Mehmet Oz — a fellow quixotic former TV star — in a state that was the Republicans' to lose. In Arizona, the far-Right's Blake Masters — who once said he opposed American involvement in World War Two — was slammed. Meanwhile, the Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who has emerged as Trump's clear rival for the nomination, stormed to victory.

The great populist suddenly no longer seems inevitable on the Right.

The results still coming in map neatly onto the three guiding thoughts that Chris Christie, the former Governor of New Jersey, once a Trump confidante turned Trump critic, laid out to anyone in Washington who would listen before the elections. First, generic Republican beat generic Democrat. Second, Biden still beats Trump. Third, generic Republicans are having trouble getting on the ballot — beaten to their slots by Trump candidates such as Bo Hines in the House in North Carolina or Doug Mastriano for governor in Pennsylvania.

Christie predicted the Republicans would underperform where both the economy and the typical swings against the incumbent party should have them winning — because the former President's men and women were just too much for the suburbs.

American democracy has come out looking tougher than expected. Democrats have managed to get there not only by playing off these contradictions. They have also played a double game: with the President warning himself on the one hand it was in danger, while boosting Trumpist candidates by attacking their more moderate opponents to ensure unelectables were on the ballot — a strategy that paid off



The US has harmed China's chip industry and the EU feels more utterly dependent on it for security than ever

brilliantly, from New Hampshire to Michigan and Pennsylvania. Washington strategists are now already suggesting that the best way for Biden to underscore the resilience of American democracy is to turn up the volume on fears of its demise — which brought out the blue vote — while hoping a weakened Trump still ends up on the ballot. The hard-Right DeSantis — with no Russia baggage or history of attempted coup d'états — would on current trends look very hard for them to beat.

The fear among the Republican leadership is that their primary voters are

still more in love with an electoral liability. That same resilience can also be said about American world power. The intense noise of America's culture wars can sometimes obscure some startling facts. In 2022, with a fraction of its defence budget, the United States has routed — some might say almost destroyed — the Russian army via its support for Ukraine.

The Kremlin's humiliating choice to withdraw from Kherson after the votes were counted reflected something deeper. The world is not moving towards multipolarity. In 2022, with mere export controls, the US has brutally harmed China's chip industry. And in 2022, almost 30 years since the creation of the European Union, the continent feels more dependent than ever on the United States for its security and increasingly also for its energy. The dollar is at record highs.

The midterms matter for the world: a red wave would have put pressure on both Ukraine and the rest of allied Europe — with a new slew of Trumpists in the Senate unwilling to keep funding President Zelensky's armies at the same level and demanding that Brussels, Paris, Berlin and London, all suffering economically, pay much more. The results point to a Congress that is not dramatically different from the one before: where both Left- and Right-wing critics of support to Ukraine have had to walk back their questioning the policy recently under intense pressure.

Roman metaphors are inevitable when talking about empires. The US doesn't look like being challenged in a serious way just yet. Rulers of far-flung provinces of the imperium — like Britain — can breathe a sigh of relief.

Tourist-fleeing pedicabs are a menace to London

Ros Morgan

YOU may not know what a pedicab is, but you would know one if you saw one. Think bright lights, feathery thrones and a push bike in front — they're also known as rickshaws. You may think they're harmless fun.

But for the businesses we represent in the West End, they're a major issue and a real nuisance. There have been instances of unsuspecting passengers (often tourists) being charged hundreds of pounds for short journeys like from the West End to Waterloo Station.

In addition, most pedicabs ignore the Highway Code, block pavements, disturb residents and visitors with incessant music and have little or no safety specifications, including seatbelts.

Part of the problem is that the laws governing pedicabs are comparatively ancient. They haven't been updated since 1869 because the rickshaws are treated legally as "stage carriages". The Met and Westminster council have



"State carriages": the laws governing pedicabs were last updated in 1869

struggled to stop pedicab drivers from charging huge fares and driving dangerously because the vehicles are not regulated. Since November 2021, £17,375 worth of fines have been issued, but this has done little to deter them.

Happily, the council is now working with the Department for Transport and TfL to draw up new rules on pedicabs, scheduled to be part of an upcoming

Transport Bill. We hope that all pedicab operators will now work with councils to address issues around safety and fares before that legislation comes in.

In the long term, we want to see a level playing field with other private hire vehicles to ensure the highest standards everywhere for transport in London.

At this stage of the post-pandemic recovery, we must encourage tourists to visit — which also means a safe and enjoyable time when they're here.

Unregulated pedicabs have not always helped with this. They create nuisance for residents, congestion, and road safety risks. Local MP Nickie Aiken has done a lot of good work on pedicab issues and many operators have subsequently taken action to run fleets responsibly. Regrettably, others continue to be linked to unscrupulous behaviour, unwanted touting and excessive fares.

As far as I'm concerned, the council's slogan for Christmas has it best: "Be careful what you get into".

● Ros Morgan is chief executive of the Heart of London Business Alliance

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