

RMT *news*

Essential reading for today's transport worker

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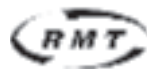
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EDITORIAL

DEFEND YOUR PENSION

Pensions are shaping up to be the biggest battleground in the rail industry for 50 years.

The Railways Pensions Scheme had a massive surplus in 1988 but, due to privatisation of the industry, it has been split into dozens of pieces and employers have taken advantage of long contributions holidays.

Yet now they want us to pay for shortfalls with massive contribution hikes, or effectively closing the scheme by barring new entrants.

RMT has united with other unions to demand that employee contributions are capped at an affordable rate, that the fund is kept open to new entrants, that benefits are maintained at least at current levels and that the scheme is streamlined.

This battle is all the more important when you consider that the state pension is not linked to RPI. A state pension worth £71 today will be worth even less in the future. It is crucial that the rail pension fund not only survives but is not too expensive for people to join.

This union has also expressed concerns over the take-over of the Channel tunnel rail link by a consortium headed by arch-privateer Adrian Montague.

We are seeking assurances that the government would not allow a land-grab or other asset-stripping and that the Eurostar workers' pension fund would not be undermined.

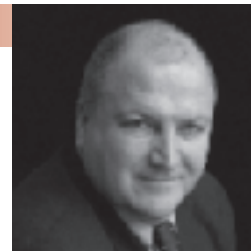
Nearly £4 billion of taxpayers' money has already underwritten this project. The last thing we need is yet more public money ending up subsidising the government's big-business mates.

The situation at the rail freight company EWS continues to be a cause for concern. The company recently told this union that collective bargaining rights would move forward on the same basis as other recognised unions. However, after the meeting, the union was presented with a no strike deal, which, of course, we refused to sign. This union remains determined to look after the interests of EWS members.

RMT shipping branches have just met to look at setting up an employee register of seafarers. This is to ensure UK seafarers are offered employment and that all seafarers are organised within the union.

On the London Underground, management tried to bring in unacceptable new disciplinary procedures which would have allowed managers to victimise local reps anyone on a whim.

After a successful strike ballot management have now confirmed in writing that they will engage in negotiation



and consultation, including referral to ACAS, before introducing new procedures.

The support from all LUL members has been crucial in bringing management back around the table to reach a resolution to this dispute.

A correspondent for that anti-union rag *The Evening Standard* recently attacked RMT and sneered that we like balloting but not striking. Well, I can only agree with him. If we can get a result without strike action all the better.

This union only ballots for two reasons, when an employer refuses to negotiate or when something is imposed on members without their consent. If we can change these attitudes without taking strike action then it is an even better achievement than if members had to take action.

Employers continue to attack our bus worker members, imposing worse conditions and forcing drivers to work longer in increasingly heavy traffic. The bus workers grades conference is coming up and we will be looking to see how we can develop demands contained within our bus workers' charter.

Rest assured, whatever grade you work in, you will be treated the same as any other member. This union does not promote sectional interests, only the interests of transport workers.

However, in order to achieve justice this country needs just laws, not legislation designed to help employers exploit working people.

With this in mind, I would encourage all members to come to May Day in London this year and bring your families to march for trade union rights and in support of the Trade Union Freedom Bill.

This bill demands that the UK meets its international legal obligations and lifts the huge barriers on workers having the right to strike.

I would also like to invite you to come to our annual Cuba night on June 7 at Maritime House, but be quick as there are only limited spaces.

Finally, membership is on the up again. Every increase in membership means that we are stronger in the workplace to defend and improve your standard of living.

Best wishes

Bob Crow

PETER LINDSAY APPRECIATION EVENING

South East Essex branch, formerly the Southend-on-Sea branch, showed their appreciation to their former branch secretary Peter Lindsay who celebrated his 75th birthday in January.

Peter retired in 1995 after serving as the Southend and District branch secretary for 15 years.

Peter also served on the NUR Council of Executives from 1979-1981 and from 1985-1987 during each term working with national president Tony Donaghey.

Tony was pleased to present his old friend Peter with some commemorative glassware, on behalf of his former colleagues, in appreciation for his services.



DIVERS MEET

RMT divers and diving personnel recently attended meetings in London and Aberdeen to demand that claims for improvements in pay and conditions are treated seriously by the employers.

National secretary Steve Todd said that it was clear that members were not prepared to accept the continuation of inadequate rewards in pay and conditions.

"They have set the agenda for change and the union will be acting on it with all the resources necessary.

"Being organised through a strong and united RMT membership will be the key to success," he said.

The divers' claim will centre on a substantial increase in all pay rates along with demands to address other issues such as travel, responsibility, stand-by and bank holiday payments. Other issues include sick pay, holiday pay, sat bonuses, pensions and loss of licence insurance.

RMT Regional Organiser Stan Herschel, who will lead negotiations for divers, said that a submission reflecting the views of members would be made.

"We expect employers to recognise the validity of our members' claim and respond positively.

"Members will be actively involved in the process through a representative structure and further meetings will be arranged as appropriate," he said. ■



ADIEU TO BRADLEY

Bradley Davis received his 40 year badge from the General Secretary Bob Crow at a recent Great Eastern Rail branch Christmas social at the Railway Tavern in Stratford, London.

Bradley Davis joined the

railways and the union in 1962. Bradley was a groundstaff employee with EWS and retired in 2005.

Great Eastern Rail meets on the third Thursday of every month at 18.00 at the same venue. ■



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Growing solidarity!

London Underground worker Priscilla Dada speaks to RMT News about becoming young member of the year

Looking at Priscilla Dada's busy schedule it is clear why she scooped RMT's young member of the year award.

When Priscilla is not putting in a shift at Canada Water Tube station on the Jubilee line as a customer services assistant, she still takes a keen interest in her union as both a learner rep and a health and safety rep.

This is despite the fact she joined the union less than three years ago. So how did she get involved?

"I met a friend on the training course for station staff and she was in RMT.

"Her brother was already a train operator and after talking to her it became clear that RMT was the union for me," she says.

She points out that she likes the idea of an all-grades union which rejected the idea of sectionalism.

"Whatever grade you are, we are all together ready to defend each other.

"I like that sense of solidarity," she says.

Priscilla got involved after meeting her branch secretary Jason Humphreys who encouraged her to take part in various union activities.

Today, she also serves on the

liaison committee for young members, the black and ethnic advisory committee and attended this year's women's conference in Gloucester.

"Jason steered me through the union structures, which can be a bit intimidating to new members," she says.

As a result, she is looking forward to going to the union's annual general meeting in Dublin this year to pick up her award and to see the governing body of the union in action.

Priscilla already shows a distinct aptitude for picking up union rules by pointing out that she will have to wait for five years in membership before she can attend as a delegate.

This year's award winner is already a picket line veteran after taking part in the Tube station staff strike over rosters.

"We still have problems with understaffing and other issues crop up but being in the union means you can raise things without fear," she says.

So what does Priscilla like and dislike about her union?

"I like getting RMT News each month to see what is going on with other grades and industries as well as London Underground," she says.

She thinks the union could do more to inform new members on how to get involved as often people just don't know where to begin.

"Not everyone is lucky enough to have a branch secretary like Jason," she says before bursting into fits of laughter.

Outside union activities, Priscilla enjoys watching

football, particularly her beloved Liverpool.

When asked why she picked a Merseyside team when Priscilla is from deepest south east London, she explains that a certain high-scoring moustachioed Liverpool player, who captained Wales many times, caught her eye in her formative years and she was smitten.

Priscilla is looking forward to going to other branch meetings to see if things are done any differently. So keep an eye out as this year's award winner may well pop up in a meeting near you some time soon. ■



RAIL CLOSURE THREAT

Since last year's Railways Act was passed there have been growing press reports that branch lines should be concreted over and many stations could be closed

Much of the 2005 Railways Act addressed the closure of lines, services and stations and the Department for Transport recently issued a consultation document which deals with closure procedures and modifications guidance.

Next year, the DfT will also announce how much money they have available in the railway pot and there are indications that the Treasury is seeking to cut £1 billion a year from the rail budget.

Under the new guidance, once a closure is proposed, a cost-benefit analysis is conducted with monetary values placed on a series of factors including the impact that closure will have on the environment, accessibility, safety and the economy.

However, this cost-benefit analysis is already used and all too often utilised as a barrier to investment on rail network.

Secondly, consultants carrying out the analysis are likely to come up with results required by the DfT to support a closure, once again raising the spectre of 'bustitution'.

The highly respected *Rail Business Intelligence* journal recently said: "the fundamental problem is an underlying assumption that buses, which obviously incur negligible infrastructure costs, are in principle as good as the rail services they replace.

"The danger is that bustitution will inevitably emerge as the cheapest option for a substantial proportion of the network as the noose tightens" it said.

The guidance also makes clear that in addition to the money which could be saved by rail closure, potential land

values should also be taken into account.

The guidance scraps the current system where the final decision over closure rests with the elected Secretary of State for Transport and regional Rail Passengers Committees report on the likely hardship caused by any proposed cut.

The new procedure will allow Network Rail, Train Operating Companies, or a rail funding authority (DfT, Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly, PTAs or the London Mayor) to propose a closure. The decision to go ahead will be made by the unelected Office of Rail Regulation.

The consultation process requires that notices are placed in newspapers and in the stations affected by the proposed closures. Organisations have 12 weeks to respond after the second newspaper notice appears.

Trade unions and local rail users' groups are not on the list of organisations to be consulted and there is no obligation to hold public hearings to discuss proposals.

RMT will be working with other rail unions and other groups to campaign for the protection and expansion of rail services.

The deadline for responses to the consultation is 21 April, any organisation or individual can respond including local rail campaigners and rail users' groups. The full closures procedure document can be found at:

http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_railways/documents/divisionhomepage/611062.hcsp ■

SAVE THE SEVERN BEACH LINE

RMT activists and supporters lobbied a Bristol city council meeting last month to save the threatened Severn Beach rail line.

RMT's Bristol Rail branch, alongside the city's trades union council and transport campaigners, lobbied Bristol councillors to throw out a Liberal Democrat cabinet proposal to axe the council's entire £138,000 rail support budget.

The grant supports services on the Severn Beach line, which provides a vital transport lifeline across north and west Bristol, through Clifton and Avonmouth

to Severn Beach.

"£138,000 is not a huge amount of money and Bristol city council should be considering increasing it, not cutting it," said RMT regional council secretary Alex Gordon.

"The Severn Beach line needs more services, not fewer, but axing this lifeline grant will start a downward spiral that could lead to closure," he said.

The proposal has already prompted First group to plan replacing some morning services with buses and rescheduling the rest to make them useless for people who rely on them to get to work.



A train crosses Narrows Junction in Bristol, where the single line to Severn Beach branches off from Bristol Temple Meads to Filton mainline.

RMT members in and around Bristol converged on the Council House when the proposal was debated to tell the council loud and clear to save the line.

Bristol East Labour MP Kerry McCarthy also tabled early day

motion 1702 condemning the planned cut that can only result in more traffic on already congested roads.

The motion, signed by several MPs already, also backed the campaign to improve Bristol's rail services. ■

Lobbying for Northern Rail

Members from RMT's parliamentary group met ministers to argue for the protection of Northern Rail services last month.

Organised by RMT group member Jim Cousins, Labour MP for Newcastle Upon Tyne Central, the meeting was part of the wider RMT campaign launched after a review was announced on the future of Northern Rail.

The review raised fear that there would be widespread cuts in services and jobs.

Northern Rail senior reps, Craig Johnson and Mick Thompson, came to London to assist in the briefing of MPs.

In a constructive meeting, Transport Minister Derek Twigg assured MPs that the government valued the role of Northern Rail services and the outcome of the review would be published shortly.

He also agreed to consider holding a seminar on the future of Northern Rail services.

The union will continue to

campaign to protect Northern Rail services and urges members to ask their MP to sign Early Day Motion 351 below:

EDM 351 NORTHERN RAIL SERVICES

That this House notes that under the terms of the Railways Act 2005 the Government will assume responsibility for the Strategic Rail Authority's review of service and fare levels on the

Northern Rail franchise; is concerned at previous press reports that the review could lead to higher fares, replacing off-peak rail services with buses, line closures and job losses; and therefore urges the Government to use its powers under the Railways Bill to oppose any line or station closures, job cuts and substitution of rail services with buses on Northern Rail services.



TUBE STRIKE CALLED OFF AFTER LUL BACK DOWN

RMT called off 24-hour strike action planned for March 1 after Tube managers agreed to adhere to current attendance and disciplinary procedures.

New proposals published on the LUL internal intranet, would have been unacceptable as they would have allowed any manager to discipline staff on a whim.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow said that management had confirmed in writing that they will engage in negotiation and consultation, including referral

to ACAS, before any steps are taken to introduce new procedures.

LUL confirmed that current procedures will continue and that any local interpretations, which have caused such difficulties, will now be withdrawn.

"The support from all LUL members has been crucial in bringing management back around the table to reach a resolution to this dispute," Bob said.

RMT members across the

Tube network voted to take industrial action if management had attempted to impose the new policies, following a six to one by RMT drivers to take action.

Progress was also been made on local disciplinary procedures and harassment policy and policies on SPADS will also be adhered to.

RMT London Transport executive committee member John Leach said that "our determination to stick together is the best protection for every RMT member for the future".

RMT MEMBERSHIP ON THE UP

RMT membership has increased to an impressive 73,347 members, a further 2.5 percent increase.

This means that union membership has grown by over 20 per cent in the last three years.

RMT membership department manager Pete Waters said that it was a remarkable achievement given the losses suffered due to redundancies at P&O and the closure of Eastleigh works.

This increase in membership has meant that the union has been able to employ additional staff to cope with the increased workload.

"We are working closely with the organising unit and a number of projects are being rolled out this year to bring even more positive results to our union," he said.

This includes the union's own call centre 'London Calling', which has surpassed all expectations with over 600 lapsed members re-joining in just over five months.

Previously, these members would have been mailed, with no further follow-up, meaning they would have been written off as non-members.

Organising unit co-ordinator Alan Pottage said that the union's strategy had been extremely successful.

"We are hitting workplaces on a constant basis and organising teams and RMT reps are helping to build sustainable union structures.

"The union has ensured that real support is available to build our strength and win victories for working people," he said.

CAMPAIGNING FOR SAFER

Returning Britain's train-operating companies to public ownership would release £200 million for improving station security and more than 1,600 extra station staff

Violence on trains has risen by 43 per cent in the last five years according to British Transport Police figures.

Over 6,350 violent offences were recorded in England and Wales in the last year compared with 5,905 in 2003/2004.

Cumbria, Cleveland, Northamptonshire saw rises of 300 per cent while Northumbria suffered a rise of nearly 400 per cent.

This shocking rise in violence on Britain's public transport network has prompted calls for better security and an end to the scandal of understaffed stations.

RMT has said that rail workers and passengers clearly want adequate staff on duty on every station whenever it is open and a guard on every train.

However, the economics of privatisation means ever more stations without staff and constant attempts to undermine the safety role of the guard.

A recent RMT report by Professor Jean Shaoul of Manchester University *The Railways in a Third Term* found that returning Train Operating Companies to public ownership could release significant public funds that could be reinvested in our railway.

UNDER PUBLIC OWNERSHIP:

- Subsidies and fare revenues would no longer be drained from the industry as returns to private lenders and investors. Dividends paid annually by TOCs to parent companies averaged £170 million in the years 2001-

2003. In 2004 total profits soared to £290 million, a 20 per cent increase on the year before

- There would be no need for tendering processes currently costing £3 million to £4 million each and averaging out at one a year- nor would the cost of preparing bids need to be factored into the cost of running services as TOCs currently do
- Less resources and bureaucracy would be needed for administering and monitoring contracts – the government does not publish a breakdown but a conservative estimate might be to suppose that “franchise management”

accounts for a third of its operating budget, saving £30 million a year

- Professor Shaol estimates that total savings of returning the Train Operating Companies to public ownership would amount to more than £200 million a year

Therefore, talk of massive investment by the private sector is a myth – the truth is that the private sector drains at least £800 million out of our railways every year.

Every penny invested in our railways ultimately comes from fare-paying passengers and taxpayers, and every penny should be used to improve the network.

The work done by Professor Shaoul shows that bringing the train-operating companies alone back into public ownership will release more than £200 million a year to invest in safer stations.

That would allow projected spending on improving station infrastructure to double, with

STATIONS

enough left over to pay for an immediate 1,600 extra station staff.

The economy and environment are crying out for more people to get out of their cars and onto trains, and the government's own research has shown that safer stations will boost rail use by as much as 11 per cent.

"More than ever before it is clear that privatisation is a brake on improving our railways, and the only sensible path is to bring the franchises back in-house where they belong," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said. ■

For more information on The Railways in a Third Term – Professor Jean Shaoul, Manchester University, March 2005.

<http://www.catalystforum.org.uk/pubs/paper29.html>

See also The Performance of the Privatised Train Operators, Jean Shaoul, Manchester University, September 2005

<http://www.catalystforum.org.uk/pubs/paper33.html>

EARLY DAY MOTION 1680

John McDonnell MP

That this House notes the Committee of Public Accounts Report – Maintaining and improving Britain's railway stations; welcomes the Committee's findings that passengers would like stations to be safe and secure with staff and good quality information available; notes that research for the Department of Transport found that improvements in stations safety would increase rail use by up to 11 per cent; further notes need for safer stations has been demonstrated by the British Transport Police report that violent crime on trains has risen by 43 per cent in the last five years; therefore welcomes the RMT study which concluded that the £200 million saved by bringing train operating companies back into public ownership would pay for more than 1600 extra station staff and double the stations improvements budget and therefore calls on the government to return the Train Operating Companies to public ownership to help finance properly staffed safer stations.

Ask your MP to sign EDM 1680

Parliamentary column

TAKE RAIL BACK



Last month marked the 10th anniversary of the first private train operating company coming onto our rail network.

Ten Labour colleagues and I marked this occasion by tabling Early Day Motion 1561 calling for the railways to be brought back under democratic public control.

Rail privatisation was driven by ideological dogma to force public assets into private hands. It made no economic sense then – public borrowing for public investment is massively cheaper and easy to raise – and the experience of the last ten years shows it make no sense now.

The Tories promised us cheaper and more efficient railways, but they fragmented the rail network and gave us the opposite.

Privatisation has been used to pour billions of pounds of public money into deep corporate pockets with little public benefit.

Since privatisation around £10 billion of public subsidy has been given to the train operating companies, around £1bn of which has been taken out of the industry in dividends paid to parent companies. In 2003/04 the private Train Operating Companies (TOCs) received in excess of £2 billion in subsidy.

In the ten years since privatisation, it is estimated that public subsidy per passenger journey rose by five times, and maintenance costs undertaken by private contractors multiplied by three and half times. As the former Rail Regulator put it in 2003, "BR worked miracles on a pittance".

A report by the Catalyst think-tank demonstrated that while nationalised British Rail was under-funded for decades, it was actually remarkably efficient with a high level of productivity.

Since 1996, rail fares have increased by 24 per cent and are among the highest in Europe. Punctuality is worse than under British Rail. Privatisation led to fragmentation, a loss of skills in rail industry and passengers and rail workers have been killed after our railways were handed over to a multiplicity of private contractors and profiteers. Railway safety was relegated to second place to cut costs and increase shareholder dividends.

In light of these tragedies, this government established Network Rail as a not-for-dividend company to take over from the disaster that was Railtrack. Network Rail took maintenance contracts in-house and costs were reduced.

When the South East Trains franchise was taken in-house in 2003, costs fell and service quality improved on £1 million per month less in state subsidy.

However, the government seemed unwilling to allow public enterprise to be seen to be working better than private enterprise, so the franchise was forced back into the private sector.

A reply to a written parliamentary question showed that by June 2004 the tendering process for Northern Rail had cost £2.6million with the final cost expected to be £3.9 million.

Indeed, it is the huge cost of privatisation which has led the government to launch a review of Northern rail services raising concerns that there could be station closures, job losses, fare increases and cuts in services.

There are many good environmental reasons to encourage people out of cars into trains, but people will not pay through the nose for a poor service.

Renationalisation would save the Treasury billions of pounds and provide a better, cheaper and more efficient service for passengers and freight.

Michael Clapham
MP for Barnsley West and Penistone

EDM 1561

That this House notes February 4 marks the 10th anniversary of private rail passenger franchises coming onto the railways under the disastrous Tory privatisation; is concerned that since that time rail fares have increased in real terms and punctuality remains worse than under public ownership; further notes the Catalyst think-tank report showing that the private sector has drained over £6 billion from the public sector since privatisation; welcomes the conclusion of the Catalyst report that renationalising the rail network would save £500 million a year; and therefore urges the Government to take early steps to implement Labour Party policy of an integrated, accountable and publicly owned railway.

PARLIAMENT DEBATES RAIL

RMT Parliamentary Convenor John McDonnell MP recently forced a special parliamentary debate on industrial relations on the railway

John McDonnell opened the debate by criticising the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) for its refusal to meet the rail unions.

"ATOC regularly meets the government and other stakeholders in the industry but it does not meet representatives of the staff – the rail unions.

"Indeed, it has refused to meet the unions to discuss anything – not only industrial relations," he said.

John secured a concession from the rail minister, Derek Twigg, that the government would host a meeting to discuss security issues, something the union has been demanding for some time.

He also attacked the government policy of providing millions of pounds of compensation to rail firms involved in industrial action as

"an astonishing use of public funds".

John said the government "was practically bankrolling private train operating companies in disputes".

With regards to the RMT Guards dispute with Virgin Cross-Country, John attacked the "barmy situation of Virgin bosses blocking a settlement that would cost them no more than £6 per guard per Sunday to settle".

John was also able to obtain an assurance from the rail minister that the government were not supporting the company in their dispute.

RMT group member David Drew Labour MP for Stroud said the government should

"insist that rail franchises include right and proper processes for trade union officials and members to engage

in industrial relations".

David Taylor, Labour MP for North West Leicestershire, pointed out that privatisation had damaged industrial relations saying "the number of strikes quintupled between 1997 and 2004, not least because negotiations involve 73 different bodies, including 25 train operating companies and 10 infrastructure companies".

RMT group member and Labour MP for North Ayrshire and Arran Katy Clark sought assurances that it was in the Scottish Executive's powers to decide whether or not to subsidise companies during industrial action.

Ian Davidson, Labour MP for Glasgow South West, urged the minister to provide detailed written answers to the questions raised.

Finally, John McDonnell used the parliamentary debate to raise the threat to the rail pension fund.

"The threat to the Railways Pension Scheme has been significantly compounded by the fragmentation and privatisation of the railways, specifically by railway

employers enjoying surpluses built up during the latter years of British Rail when thousands of railway staff left the industry in preparation for privatisation," he said.

John also said pensions were under threat because "the unified pension scheme was fragmented into 100 different sections, which has meant the loss of economies of scale and financial stability provided by the scheme".

In response to the debate, Derek Twigg, said on pensions that he was "hopeful there was a way forward... obviously people are working together to find a way forward".

John concluded the debate by arguing "the private companies are getting favours and the workers are getting no fairness".

"This is the start of a long campaign that will not go away," John said.

**A full transcript of this debate can be found and the supporting parliamentary motions can be found in the "events and campaigns" section of the new RMT website. ■*

Solid strike at Virgin

RMT train-crew members and supporters from Plymouth and Bristol heard that their dispute with Virgin Cross Country Trains over Sunday working remains solid, at a packed and lively meeting in Bristol last month.

RMT assistant general secretary Pat Sikorski congratulated the strikers on their solid support during the previous eight strike days of the dispute.

He said that Virgin Cross Country's Chris Gibb's refusal to negotiate suggested a political motive to undermine the union's organisation on Virgin trains.

The claim for Sunday working amounts to less than

70p an hour, and it would be cheaper for Virgin to settle, were it not for the government providing taxpayers' money to subsidise employers' losses during disputes.

RMT has asked ACAS to intervene, but Virgin has scuppered this by setting pre-conditions to the talks which undermines the basic purpose of ACAS.

Huge safety risks are being taken by Virgin X-Country.

This includes running trains on the Settle/Carlisle route, with no training or route knowledge. RMT relief organiser John MacDonald has asked HMRI to intervene. HMRI has merely consulted Virgin and glossed

over safety breaches.

"When it comes to a strike, the TOCs tear up the rule book and throw it out the window" said Pat.

RMT's parliamentary group put down early day motion 1574 condemning safety breaches and the waste of

taxpayers' money in subsidising Virgin to prolong the strike.

Please write to your MP to ask them to sign up and ask why the government is prepared to waste taxpayers' money on encouraging Virgin X-Country to perpetuate this dispute. ■



FIGHTING FOR TRADE UNION RIGHTS

New Trade Union Freedom Bill increases pressure for improved rights at work

Last September TUC delegates unanimously endorsed an RMT and T&G call for a Trade Union Freedom Bill and, in the same month, the Labour Party Conference backed the right of workers to take solidarity action.

The significance of these decisions was highlighted by the Gate Gourmet dispute which demonstrated the effect of laws that render unions impotent against the tactics of ruthless employers.

Never has there been a greater need for such a Bill.

The removal of trade union rights is one of the most important factors behind the collapse of collective bargaining coverage in the UK, and has therefore contributed to the marked widening of the gulf between rich and poor over the last 25 years.

TAFF VALE

2006 marks the centenary of the passing of the 1906 Trades Disputes Act, which secured for unions the legal freedom to take industrial action.

This Act paved the way for the huge improvements in the conditions and life for working people in the 20th century.

It was the preceding Taff Vale railway strike judgement against this union's forerunner, the Amalgamated Society of railway servants, which caused the outcry that led to the 1906 Trades Disputes Act.

This Act gave legal protections against anti-union laws introduced by judges.

In 1906, British trade unions were free to organise solidarity action. These are rights that do not exist today.

MAY DAY

The Bill will call for the re-establishment of solidarity action, the simplification of industrial action ballots and protection for those workers engaged in industrial action.

The implementation of these proposals would move the UK closer to its international legal obligations.

That is why thousands of trade unionists will be coming

to the national demonstration in support of the Trade Union Freedom Bill which has been called for May 1 in London.

It is also encouraging that a very large number of Labour MPs are now prepared to

support trade union freedoms. Over 100 Labour MPs have signed a parliamentary motion in support of the campaign for a Trade Union Freedom Bill. So make sure that your MP signs up. ■

EARLY DAY MOTION 1170

CAMPAIGN FOR A TRADE UNION FREEDOM BILL

That this House recognises that free and independent trade unions are a force for good in UK society and around the world, and are vital to democracy; welcomes the positive role modern unions play in providing protection for working people and winning fairness at work; notes the 1906 Trades Disputes Act granted unions the legal freedom to take industrial action; regrets that successive anti-union legislation has meant that trade union rights are now weaker than those introduced by the Trades Disputes Act; notes the overwhelming support at both the Trades Union Congress and Labour Party Conference for the Gate Gourmet workers and for improvements in union rights, including measures to simplify ballot procedures and to allow limited supportive action, following a ballot, in specific circumstances; further notes that these conferences called for legislation which conformed to International Labour Organisation Conventions ratified by the UK; and therefore welcomes the decision of the 2005 Trades Union Congress to campaign for a Trade Union Freedom Bill to mark the 100th anniversary of the 1906 Trades Disputes Act.

Tony Lloyd MP

THE STORY OF TAFF VALE

John Hendy QC reviews a new pamphlet on the Taff Vale rail strike which each member will receive with the next issue of RMT News

This excellent and well-researched booklet tells the story of the strike in 1900 on the Taff Vale Railway in South Wales. That strike led to legal action against one RMT's forerunners, the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS).

That legal action resulted in a massive award of damages against the union in a judgment which threatened the same for any union organising industrial

action.

However, that judgment also influenced political agitation which led to the formation of the Labour Party and the passing of the Trades Disputes Act 100 years ago in 1906.

That Act, though it did not grant a right to strike, gave unions legal freedoms to organise industrial action for most of the 20th century – until the Thatcher governments.

That legal freedom allowed workers to exercise a collective power which went some way to counteract the overweening power of the employer in the workplace.

That collective power was largely responsible for the increase in the standard of living of working people and the diminution of the inequalities between rich and poor up until the 1980's. However, for the last 25 years these achievements have been reversed.

The lesson of this little

booklet is that the trade union movement must once again mobilise politically to change the law.

That is why we need a new Trade Union Freedom Act 2006 to secure what is already enshrined into international laws, already ratified by the UK government: the right to strike. ■



WOMENS PAGE

RMT WOMEN LAUNCH CHARTER

RMT women gathered in Gloucester last month to launch the Women's Charter and demand that employers deliver the goods

The RMT Women's Charter represents a massive step in the right direction, but now the work starts to get it implemented, delegates at the union's national women's conference agreed.

The charter was proof that women were organising with confidence in the union – but it also threw up many challenges, said conference chair Pauline Howe.

"We need to get more women involved and to offer themselves for office at every level in the union.

"This shouldn't be a stopping point for a small group of activists – we need to go further," she said.

"RMT had just cause to be proud of the Women's Charter, but the point is to put into practice in the workplace," said general secretary Bob Crow.

"We are up against employers who would rather pay for a first-class lounge than a women's toilet," said Bob.

The battle was on to win decent childcare facilities for women – and men – despite employers' protests that it cost too much.

Pensions

RMT women had a key part to play in the battle looming on the Railways Pension Scheme, said Bob.

"Pensions are shaping up to be the biggest battleground in the rail industry for 50 years," he said.

The RPS had had a massive surplus in 1988 but been split into dozens of pieces by privatisation, and employers had taken advantage of long contributions holidays.

"Yet now they want us to pay for

shortfalls with massive contribution hikes, or close the scheme by the back door by barring new entrants.

"We want employee contributions capped at their British Rail level of 10.56 per cent, we want the fund open to new entrants, we want benefits maintained at least at current levels and we want a streamlined scheme," said Bob.

The disproportionate impact of proposed changes from final-salary schemes to average-salary schemes was emphasised by RMT president Tony Donaghey.

This was because women were more likely to have taken breaks in employment for family responsibilities, added Ruth Strong, East Midland Central.

"Women not only lost out in respect of equal pay, but were also likely to receive lower pensions than men," she said.

Delegates endorsed the union's campaign to defend pensions and to resist pressure to downgrade provision.

Conference backed the call by Stephanie MacKay, EPS branch, to insist on an 'equality audit' of any proposed change.

WOMEN'S ORGANISERS

Delegates welcomed the efforts being made to recruit and organise women members, and called for the election of lay regional women's organisers for a trial three-year period.

It had taken a lot of work to establish the first regional women's advisory committee in south Wales and the south west, said Glen Burrows, Bristol Rail, and the



experience had underlined the need to see lay women's officers elected in every region to increase women's participation in the union.

UNIFORMS

Women should be involved in the design and specification of the uniforms they are obliged to wear, conference agreed.

Bing consulted was not enough to guarantee that companies would take note of what staff wanted, said Caroline Parry, Gloucester.

It was down to the union to ensure that employers provided what was needed.

Delegates agreed that every uniform consultative committee should include at least one woman.

Existing uniforms were too often uncomfortable and inappropriate. ■

JACKIE JOINS UP

New RMT member Jackie Darby talks about her work and why she joined the union

Jackie works as an engineer on London Underground. She is employed by Metronet, one of the three infrastructure companies, or infracos, operating under the Public-Private Partnership.

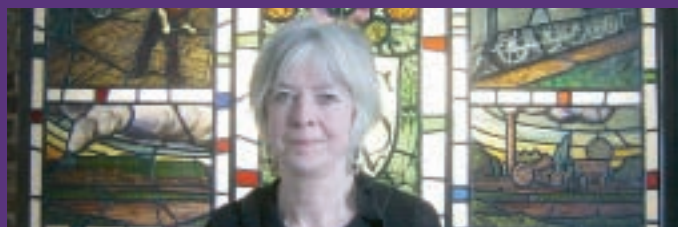
As an infrastructure protection engineer, her responsibilities include investigating how building and demolition work will affect Tube tunnels, bridges and embankments.

And she is clearly proud of her job.

"If the public could see what has been achieved in the three or four hours at night when the power is off I don't think that they could fail to be impressed," says Jackie.

She says it is a shame that engineering is not normally associated with women. Nevertheless, she says things have improved and she would encourage any woman to join the industry today.

Jackie has a lot of trade union experience and is already a rep



and has attended her first branch and regional council meetings.

"They are certainly some very lively debates," she says.

Asked why she joined RMT, Jackie says, as a committed trade unionist, she could not think of a better organisation to belong to.

"Tube workers are highly skilled and dedicated people who

deserve representation.

"I think it is important to develop a good relationship with management where possible to get good results for members," she says.

And as for the future for RMT – "well, governments come and go, but trade unions abide don't they?" she says with a smile.

CREATING THE CLIMATE FOR CHANGE

Climate change is one of the most important issues facing humanity.

In 2004 the government set itself the target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5 per cent below 1990 levels by 2010.

Targets on carbon emissions reductions are even more challenging – 20 per cent and 60 per cent reductions below the 1990 level by 2010 and 2050 respectively.

Whilst the 12.5 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions will be met, the government is now less confident that the carbon emissions targets will be delivered.

Domestic transport accounts for around 25 per cent of UK carbon emissions and are predicted to rise by a further 10 per cent by 2010.

Rail remains a less polluting form of transport than cars, lorries and aircraft.

In 2004 the Department for Transport found that on a journey between Edinburgh and London, car and air produced six and eight respectively times the level of CO₂ emissions than produced by rail.

HIGH SPEED RAIL LINK

Britain remains one of the last Western European countries to develop dedicated high speed rail routes. Instead successive governments have overseen an explosion in environmentally damaging short-haul flights.

A recent Institute of Civil Engineers report *The Missing Link* – a report on high speed rail links in the UK – outlines the case for a new high speed rail link between London and Scotland.

Journey times to Manchester could be cut to 90 minutes, with even greater benefits on longer distances to Newcastle and Glasgow.

A new link would enable rolling stock to run at 155 mph with 220 trains per day compared to a potential 98 additional trains per day following the West Coast Main Line modernisation project.

A new high speed would attract new users onto rail, ease congestion, free up space for rail freight, reduce carbon emissions and provide an attractive alternative to domestic air travel.

RAIL FREIGHT

Research by the Freight on Rail campaign indicates that an average freight train can replace 50 HGVs and an average aggregates train up to 120 HGVs.

However, in 2003 the DfT announced that the freight facilities grant in England was to be frozen.

Thankfully, the Scottish Executive continues to award such grants, which remove over 1.5 million lorry miles from Scotland's roads each year.

RMT continues to lobby for the reintroduction of the grants in England.

ROAD USER CHARGING

The government seems committed to introducing road user charging schemes, which would require enhanced capacity on the rail network.

Recent parliamentary answers suggest that congestion charging schemes could cut road congestion by up to 40 per cent, with many car users switching to public transport.

The rail network already carries more passengers than at since the 1950s and is in need of overhaul.

However, the scale of transfer to rail envisaged by government would leave the network unable to cope unless significant extra capacity was developed.

A failure to plan for increased rail capacity will result in road users remaining in their cars and contribute little to the reduction of harmful carbon emissions.

SEMINAR

The RMT parliamentary group has secured the agreement of government departments to participate in a seminar later this year on the sustainable case for rail. This will enable the union to make the case directly to the government for an expansion of rail services to secure an environmentally sustainable future. ■



Picture: Stefano Cagnoni, reportorial

CARBON EMISSIONS MEASURED BY SOURCE CATEGORY

Mode of Transport	Million tonnes of carbon	Per cent of all UK carbon emissions
Passenger cars	19.8	13
Light duty vehicles	4.4	3
Buses	1.0	1
HGVs	7.2	5
Mopeds & Motorcycles	0.1	0
Railways	0.3	0
Civil aircraft	0.6	0
Shipping	0.9	1
All domestic transport	34.4	23

CARBON EMISSIONS MEASURED BY END USER CATEGORY

Mode of Transport	Million tonnes of carbon	Per cent of all UK carbon emissions
Road Transport	38.3	25
Railways	1.5	1
Civil aircraft	0.7	-
Shipping	1.1	1
All domestic transport	41.6	27

Early Day Motion 1678

ENVIRONMENTAL CASE FOR RAIL

John McDonnell MP

That this House notes that transport accounts for more than a third of total UK carbon dioxide emissions; is concerned that carbon dioxide emissions from transport are predicted to rise by almost 10 per cent. between 2000 and 2010; supports an integrated transport system in which different transport modes complement rather than compete with each other; further notes that the railways produce substantially less carbon dioxide emissions than cars, road freight or aviation; and therefore urges the Government to ensure that the protection and expansion of the rail network is central to its policy of reducing carbon emissions.

SHIPPING

PROTECTING CONDITIONS AT CAL MAC

RMT continues to campaign at Caledonian MacBrayne to protect jobs, pay and conditions of existing workers and against a two-tier workforce

The Scottish Executive is proceeding with the tendering of Caledonian MacBrayne ferry services, despite a campaign led by RMT and STUC against the need to implement EU diktats to privatise the life-line services.

Since then, the company has given notice to transfer contracts of employment offshore, allowing Cal Mac to make significant saving on paybill costs through the non-payment of employers National Insurance contributions.

The Scottish Executive is justifying this on the basis that other companies seeking to gain

the contract will be bidding on these terms.

RMT informed the Scottish Executive that it should not be allowing any operator of these essential services to avoid paying National Insurance contributions as this will mean a loss of tax revenue.

The union demanded that the tender document be amended to ensure all companies bidding for the contract to run Clyde and Hebrides ferry services retain contracts of employment in the UK.

However, the Scottish Executive has stated that this is

against EU rules.

CAMPAIGNING

RMT will continue to campaign for union recognition, against a two-tier workforce and to protect the jobs, pay and conditions of existing workers irrespective of who wins the tender.

The Executive said it will put in place all possible measures to protect the workforce through TUPE and the transfer of existing staff, which they believe legally applies.

There will also be a clawback of subsidy should a new operator seek to save money on crewing costs through the displacement of existing crew.

The Scottish Executive has invited unions to view the Invitation to Tender documentation which will

include specific employment policies, terms and conditions of employment and levels of pay for the Clyde and Hebrides contract.

The Executive also agreed that unions can meet with short-listed bidders and prepare a report for the Executive.

The service specification for the tender will recognise the role of the trade unions and seek information from potential operators as to how they intend to develop industrial relations and bids will be closely scrutinised.

At the last meeting with the Scottish Executive, RMT received a guarantee that the network would remain intact, with the exception of Guorock to Dunoon, irrespective of who wins the contract. ■

NUCLEAR CONTROVERSY



A container of vitrified nuclear waste is loaded onto cargo ship Pacific Sandpiper belonging to British company PNTL at French port of Cherbourg last month. This is the eleventh of twelve controversial voyages returning processed Japanese nuclear waste to Rokkasho-Mura in Japan.

Wightlink ballot over attempted pay cut

RMT members working for Wightlink are being balloted for industrial action after the company refused to offer any increase in wages for this year.

National shipping secretary Steve Todd said that a nought per cent pay offer was effectively a pay cut because wages would not be keeping up with inflation.

"This disgraceful offer by Wightlink is slap in the face for the workforce and the union has decided to ballot the membership for strike action and action short of a strike.

"We demand a pay rise that rewards hard work and loyalty and Wightlink's current position is nothing less than an insult," he said.

The refusal to increase pay at

both Wightlink Guernsey and Wightlink Limited is all the more shocking given that the company has just increased prices by up to 27 per cent.

It is suspected that the company is looking to increase profits by hiking up fares to discourage passengers while cutting services in order to lower overheads.

Ballot papers will be sent out to all RMT members at Wightlink and Steve urged members to recruit those not already in the union.

"If you know of colleagues that are not RMT members, I suggest you urge them to join because the stronger our mandate for strike action the stronger our position will be," he said.

The derisory pay offer came after another dispute over redundancies had only just been resolved. The company has confirmed that there will be no compulsory redundancies for Fast Cat catering assistants.

As a result, RMT called off planned industrial action. However, the imposition of rosters remains an issue which will be taken up by the union. ■



SHIPPING

RFA DRUGS HAUL

UK ships seized a huge £350 million drugs cache after a high-speed operation in the Caribbean netted three-and-a-half tonnes of cocaine.

The raid, on a cargo ship off the coast of Miami, was carried out by the Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary using HMS Southampton and RFA Grey Rover (right).

After the cargo ship was spotted, HMS Southampton broke off from refuelling and led the charge at nearly 30 knots to corner the MV Rampage in a surprise pincer movement with the tanker, RFA Grey Rover.

A Lynx helicopter from HMS Southampton intercepted the drug runners as the ships appeared over the horizon.

A spokesman said: "The vessel, MV Rampage, which had apparently earlier had a

different name, was taken completely by surprise, as boarding teams from both Southampton and Grey Rover swooped in by fast rigid inflatable boat at sunset.

"After a search of the vessel, a large number of cocaine bales were discovered, packed in a forward section".

HMS Southampton had been working closely with the United States Coastguard and Royal Netherlands Navy authorities.

The cargo ship and her crew are currently being held by the US Coastguard Authority, based in Miami.

HMS Southampton's Commanding Officer Rob Vitali said that it was a particularly well co-ordinated operation.

"The success of this seizure will send a clear message of determination to stop the smuggling of illegal drugs - and

we are good at it.

"Southampton has had a busy operational time, with the ship's recent involvement in two search-and-rescue incidents," he said.

The Royal Navy destroyer and RFA Grey Rover have been on a five-month tour which has taken in West Africa, the Falkland Islands, Brazil and the Caribbean.

Their primary mission in the Caribbean is the security of British Overseas Territories - including helping with disaster relief - but anti-drugs work forms "a major part" of their daily work.

Both ships are due to return to Britain in the spring when Grey Rover will be decommissioned before being sold to the Chilean Navy. ■



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RAIL UNIONS UNITE TO DEFEND YOUR PENSION SCHEME

Thousands of workers past and present, who have an interest in the Railways Pension Scheme (RPS), need your help.

The rail industry unions – ASLEF, CSEU, RMT and TSSA – are backing a major campaign to safeguard workers' retirement benefits.

The unions believe the RPS is under threat and members need to be informed. Unions are calling on employers to:

- CAP EMPLOYEE CONTRIBUTIONS TO 10.56%
- KEEP BENEFITS AT THEIR CURRENT LEVEL
- STREAMLINE THE SCHEME
- OPEN THE SCHEME TO ALL EMPLOYEES

WHAT IS THE THREAT?

A pension scheme needs enough money to pay for existing benefits and those that will accrue in the future. Actuarial valuations of the various RPS sections indicate a shortfall (or deficit) in most sections, which means there won't be enough money to pay railway workers the decent pension they have paid for. Many employers think the solution is to implement massive hikes in employee contributions and cut back on future pension benefits. In other words, pay more and get less!

WHY IS THIS A THREAT?

In most sections of the RPS, employees will be expected to increase their contributions significantly. Workers could be forced to drop out of the scheme if they can't afford it. This would increase the financial burden on those who remain in the scheme, adding to the funding problems.

The workers hardest hit will be the lowest-paid, for whom any further bite out of the wage packet has a disproportionate impact.

Cutting back on pension benefits decreases the overall value, so members may see little advantage to being in the scheme. Falling membership and reduced rewards could lead to a vicious circle where the RPS disappears forever.

WHY DO WE NEED TO CAMPAIGN?

The unions have approached the major employers in the industry. We explained to them about the problems the RPS faces but it appears to have fallen on deaf ears. So we need to turn up the volume. Every union member with a vested interest in the RPS needs to let employers know how strongly they feel. Keep up the pressure on companies to keep contributions at an affordable level.

WHY CAP EMPLOYEE CONTRIBUTIONS AT 10.56%?

This was the rate paid under the original BR scheme, before contributions were reduced after surpluses in the late 1980s. Contributions higher than this could prove too expensive and lead to large numbers of members dropping out of the RPS.

WHY KEEP BENEFITS AT THEIR CURRENT LEVEL?

Pensions are deferred pay, and like all your terms and conditions of employment, they are negotiated between the employers and the trade unions.

The cost of future benefits is not the problem. The most pressing issue is clearing the deficit created by the actuary changing his assumptions from previous evaluations, such as his views on how long we are all living in retirement.

Cutting back on pension benefits will make the RPS less attractive, which means that fewer staff will want to join the scheme and more people will drop out.

WHY STREAMLINE THE SCHEME?

Privatisation of British Rail led to the creation of one of the most complex pension schemes in the UK. There are now about 100 sections. These have

different contribution rates and benefits and there are huge administration costs linked to each one. It makes sense to streamline the scheme: it would be easier to run and cut out unnecessary costs. Streamlining could also lead to a standard contribution rate.

The unions want three open sections:

- A train-operating section
- An infrastructure and engineering section
- An omnibus section.

Taxpayers – including RPS members – will save money by not picking up the bill for valuations when franchises or other contracts change. And, in an industry where workers often move between companies, an integrated scheme is simpler for workers, employers and the administrators.

WHY KEEP THE SCHEME OPEN TO ALL MEMBERS?

The more contributors to the scheme, the more people there are to build up the pension funds, so keeping the scheme open to everyone will keep it healthy and viable in the long-term. That would give all rail workers the security in retirement they deserve.

WHAT NEXT?

The rail unions have agreed to work together and not to enter into agreements with employers unilaterally. We have written to the government, to the trustees and to all the major employers. As employers have until the end of June to work out how to deal with pension deficits, the four general secretaries will address campaign meetings across the country. We should fight to protect our pensions. ■

CAMPAIGN MEETINGS

21 March, York
28 March, Glasgow
29 March, Edinburgh
3 April, Birmingham
5 April, Bristol
10 April, Perth (at the Scottish TUC)
19 April, Manchester,
20 April, London.

For campaign updates, visit
www.rmt.org.uk

RAIL WORKERS' PENSIONS
Early Day Motion 1681
John McDonnell MP

That this House is deeply alarmed at the attempts by railways employers to substantially increase employee pension contributions; notes this will not only be detrimental to rail workers' earnings but will threaten the future viability of the Railways Pension Scheme by forcing existing members to opt out, and deterring new members from joining; is also concerned rail employers are considering closing scheme sections, raising retirement ages and reducing benefits; believes the threat to rail workers' pensions is a direct result of the fragmentation of the Railways Pension Scheme and of employers taking pension holidays; strongly supports the rail unions' campaign to cap employees' contributions, maintain existing benefit rates, simplify the Railways Pension Scheme's structure and open the Scheme to all staff; and therefore urges the government to do all within its power to protect the pensions of rail workers.

Ask your MP to sign today

ENFORCE HEALTH

The Health and Safety Executive and other regulators are failing to enforce legislation on employers who shun consultation with union safety reps, RMT activists have warned at the fourth annual RMT health and safety conference in Blackpool last month.

Delegates urged the HSE to take action against recalcitrant bosses in the rail, maritime and road industries.

Moving a motion on the issue, Birmingham Engineering delegate Pat Collins argued that health and safety consultation rights remain "one of the most important weapons we have as trade unionists".

When employers do consult in good time and good faith, significant improvements in

workplace health and safety usually result, the motion noted.

"However, the vast majority of employers fail to consult with the union in any meaningful way.

"We note that there has been little or no enforcement action taken by the HSE or other safety regulators against any employer for failing to comply with their legal duties in this matter.

"The companies aren't fulfilling their function properly – we have the right to be consulted," he told delegates.

Warrington delegate Lawrence Jones also warned that consultation can simply mean bosses telling workers what to do, as opposed to unions and employers negotiating a deal.

"I get concerned when I hear the word 'consultation' too

much.

"We have the right to negotiate. We can make these people come to the table and if we allow them to do whatever they want, they will never come to the table," he said.

John Milligan from RMT's organising unit told conference that unions could not rely solely on statutory bodies.

"Yes, we can have health and safety legislation and the HSE. But what we do need is good, strong organisation in every workplace.

"We're driving to maximise the RMT in every industry we negotiate with – and in places where we've got no recognition at all," he said.

FUTURE CAMPAIGNING

Conference passed a raft of

health and safety resolutions to guide future RMT campaigning.

Delegates backed a call from London Orient to raise the issue of planning failures involving track maintenance work with Network Rail as a matter of urgency.

Kent Knight of Southall, Ealing & Slough warned: "Most of our planners are taken straight off the street and have no rail training whatsoever. There is no way to make a proper assessment of staff."

Alex Holden, Manchester Victoria recalled that the 2004 Tebay tragedy, in which four RMT track workers died when hit by a runaway truck, happened in his region.

"People will continue to die" unless action is taken, Alex told delegates. ■



BRITISH Transport Police chief constable Ian Johnston (above) told delegates that the 2,385 recorded physical assaults on staff on Britain's railways last year probably represent "the tip of the iceberg".

But the figure – up 5 per cent on the previous year – can be tackled more vigorously thanks to recent changes in legislation and new Crown Prosecution Service guidelines, the conference guest speaker said. Train staff are to be classed as "public servants", meaning that any assault is more likely to result in a charge against the perpetrator, rather than a caution.

"This is quite a breakthrough in policy – the next thing is to make it a breakthrough in practice."

He also condemned the fact that "route crime" – vandalism against trains and track – is

currently classed as a fixed-penalty offence, meaning that perpetrators can escape with a £80 fine.

"Lobbing bricks at trains is trying to kill people. The criminal justice system in general trivialises it. We're having a real go at changing that," he said.

He maintained that his 2,700 officers were "pretty thinly spread" across Britain's 3,000 rail stations and 10,000 miles of track, warning that "it is a challenge every year to get the resources we need to support you."

Several delegates challenged the effectiveness of the BTP.

"Some station staff have never seen an officer in years," said Warrington District delegate Dave Wilson. "We are facing drunks and abuse day-in and day-out and police cover is non-existent," he complained ■

TIME FOR ACTION

It's time for the government to deliver on its promise for legislation covering corporate manslaughter, RMT general secretary Bob Crow told conference delegates.

Tony Blair's administration has failed to honour its pledge to put culpable bosses in the dock since coming to power in 1997.

With incidents such as the Tebay tragedy, "our members lay dead and their families have their lives wrecked because of negligence," said Bob.

"When bosses pursue profits at the expense of workers, there will always be a temptation to cut back on health and safety.

"These are the kind of people, who when a train comes off the track, we want to see in the dock," he said.

He urged that policy outcomes from conference be transformed into action.

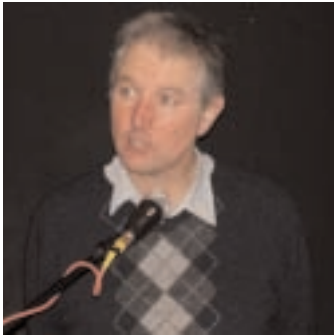
"If we pass a resolution, we should be asking what we are doing to implement it in full. That's the only way we will win a safer workplace."

RMT senior assistant general secretary Mick Cash warned that assaults on rail staff are "on an upward spiral," with far more occurring than the officially recorded 6,500 of last year.

He accused rail bosses of providing "security on the cheap" by using low-paid security staff with little or no training.

Dealing with employers throughout the fragmented rail system on health and safety issues has been difficult, added Mick, with many "very reluctant to sit down and talk." ■

& SAFETY RULES



Pat Collins, Birmingham Engineering



Alex Holden, Manchester Victoria



Kent Knight, Southall



AGS Mick Cash

Conference warned that “the pre-planning of track work and associated safety arrangements is not considered to be a safety critical task, and that no nationally-recognised standard of competence and assessment exists for those persons involved in such tasks.”

NETWORK RAIL

Network Rail must establish “proper standards of training, competence and assessment for all persons with responsibility for the pre-planning of track work and associated safety arrangements.”

Delegates were told of an assault by a passenger on a train conductor which led to the private prosecution of the

perpetrator.

When the British Transport Police fail to act, RMT must demand that train-operating companies pursue such private prosecutions, a successful motion from Warrington branch urged.

“We can say to the train-operating companies that there is a law – and if you don’t use it then we are in dispute with you,” said Alex Holden.

Another problem suffered by infrastructure workers, particularly among welding grades, is that of back problems, conference heard.

Delegates backed a call from Birmingham Engineering to demand a full risk assessment of the welding operation –

including the loading and unloading of equipment from vehicles.

“If people are getting injured, then clearly there is a problem,” said delegate Pat Collins. “The regulations say that all manual handling should be avoided.”

Darlington delegate Alan Day described how he’d completed a Network Rail manual handling course, complete with certificate.

“But if I got an injury they would just say that it was my own fault,” he added.

Graham Ashcroft, Surrey & Hants warned that Network Rail and the train-operating companies are failing to protect workers from “extremely cold temperatures” during winter.

Delegates backed his call for

the union to devise a national approach and urged that employer claims that action was impractical on grounds of cost be refuted.

SMOKING

Glasgow Shipping delegate Iain Stewart welcomed recent legislation to ban smoking in the workplace – but warned that the shipping industry may win exemption.

Conference backed his call that the legislation should not be watered down – but also warned that ships and offshore installations were places where members live as well as work, so that proper access to smoking areas should be permitted. ■



TEN YEARS OF RAIL CHAOS

Ten years after the first privatised passenger train service came into operation, RMT general secretary Bob Crow calls for an end to the great rail rip-off



Ten years ago the first private-sector trains operated by First Great Western and South West Trains heralded the fragmentation of our national railway network.

The Tories promised us cheaper and more efficient railways, but they shattered our network and created the opposite.

A decade on, few would dare suggest that rail privatisation has been anything other than a complete failure, for commuters, for the economy and for the environment.

Few people, that is, outside the boardrooms of the privateers for whom privatisation has been a nice little earner.

At a very conservative count, the privateers have removed around £7 billion from the railway industry, and continue their plunder at the rate of more than £800 million a year.

In 2003-04 public subsidy to the railways as a whole stood at £3.6 billion – more than three times, in real terms, the support received by British Rail.

In the following year, the train-operating companies alone were handed more than £1 billion in public money.

Yet train punctuality today stands at an average of less than 86 per cent, even below the 90-plus per cent achieved by British Rail before it was thrown into the mincer.

Funnily enough, the worst performer, according to Network Rail, is First Great Western, whose punctuality currently averages below 75 per cent.

And even South West Trains' slightly better 89 per cent has been achieved with the help of what can only be described as creative timetabling, under which journey times have been lengthened.

Punctuality may be down on a decade ago, but the profits, siphoned from public subsidy, a perpetual squeeze on rail workers' pay and above-inflation fare rises, are following a different trend.

Since privatisation the train-operating companies' combined income has risen by 26 per cent, while fares have gone up by 24 per cent – well ahead of inflation.

A cap on fares was supposed

to keep fare rises below inflation, but it only applies to some ticket types, and the TOCs have compensated by pushing up the price of other journeys.

In other words, taxpayers, fare-payers and railway workers are being mugged by profiteering privateers whose sole aim is to maximise profits and payouts to shareholders.

MEGA PROFITS

Meanwhile, in another neat little scam, the rolling-stock leasing companies (Roscos) have been making windfall profits of up to 30 per cent.

Island Line on the Isle of Wight pays at least £140,000 a year (some estimates are far higher) for stock that was built for London Underground in 1938.

And even the success stories are not what they seem.

The much heralded GNER and the Greater Western franchise deals are supposed to bring the Treasury income of nearly £2.5 billion over the next ten years.

However, the cleverly worded 'cap and collar' arrangements effectively transfer any risk back to the government.

In fact the huge premiums are conditional on revenues reaching projected levels, and the bulk of the tab for serious shortfalls will be picked up by the taxpayer.

Our members would be delighted to have mortgage terms that required full repayment only if their income increased by eight per cent a year.

The private sector is fond of talking about the massive investment it makes, but every penny in investment ultimately comes from the pockets of passengers or tax payers.

The pipe-dream of privatisation was that subsidies would be phased out as the private sector imposed their discipline on the industry – and the reverse has happened, and the TOCs remain reliant upon ever-increasing government hand-outs.

For our members there has been a never-ceasing attack on our pay, conditions, pensions and jobs. For the public there are unstaffed stations, closed ticket-windows, massive fares

hikes and the growing threat of line closures. For everyone it means an assault on safety standards.

Privatisation and the fragmentation of the railways effectively dismantled British Rail's safety culture, blurred lines of responsibility and communication and created the conditions that led to tragedies such as Hatfield and Potters Bar.

RMT has been fighting a constant battle to maintain the safety role of guards on trains and for adequate staff on stations whenever they are open.

Yet another report on this issue, this time from parliament's Public Accounts Committee, exposed the state of so many of Britain's railway stations: badly lit, poorly maintained, unstaffed and threatening.

One chink of light amid the gloom was the bold decision by Network Rail to bring rail maintenance back in-house, although the same privateers thrown off maintenance for safety and efficiency reasons are still loose on renewals contracts.

BROKEN PROMISES

A few months before the first services were privatised, Tony Blair had this to say to the 1995 Labour Party conference:

"I won't give any blank cheques in any areas of policy, including this.

"But to anyone thinking of grabbing our railways so they can make a quick profit as our network is broken up and sold off, I say this: there will be a publicly owned and publicly accountable railway system under a Labour government," he said.

Yet a decade on, not only does that promise remain to be kept, but the same Labour leader has presided over a government that has thrown London Underground's infrastructure to the private-sector wolves, giving them guaranteed, risk-free profits of £2 million each week in return for – essentially nothing.

Last year, the government ducked a golden opportunity to get to grips with the fundamental problems of fragmentation and the massive haemorrhaging of cash from the industry into privateers' pockets.

Unfortunately, the Railways Act, sold as a decisive move to bring costs under control and put ministers back in the driving seat, failed to tackle those central problems, despite evidence that bringing the railways back into public ownership would save the taxpayer at least £500 million a year.

And according to Manchester University professor Jean Shaoul, who last year analysed the industry's finances for the Catalyst Forum think-tank, the Act will mean closures and more fares hikes.

The publication under the Act, a week or so ago, of draft procedures for closures and 'modification' of the rail network confirmed fears that the path to closures and the replacement of trains with buses is to be made considerably easier.

In 2004, the Labour Party's annual conference voted overwhelmingly to commit the party to "resolving the fragmented structure of the industry by introducing an integrated, accountable and publicly owned railway".

Opinion polls regularly show that between two-thirds and three-quarters of the travelling public, even in the commuter heartlands of middle-England, want the privatisation nightmare ended.

And there have been tantalising glimpses of what could be.

South Eastern Trains, rescued from the privateers when Connex was booted off the franchise a couple of years ago, has made month-on-month punctuality improvements on £1 million a month less subsidy.

SET has also made great strides towards rebuilding a workforce decimated by Connex in its final months in control of the franchise.

That public-sector success story could become the blueprint for bringing all railway services back in-house.

And if track renewals follow maintenance back in-house, the stage would be set for the re-unification of operations and infrastructure in a single structure, publicly owned and democratically controlled. ■

FROM BOGOTA TO CARACAS

RMT member Dave Parkes shares his experiences taking part in a recent delegation to Colombia and Venezuela

The Colombia Solidarity Campaign delegation began the trip by attending a conference in Bogota on the impact of multinational corporations (MNC) on the situation in Colombia.

The message was appropriately summed up by a delegate by the name of Hector Mondragon, who is an economist at the National University.

"If a farmer in the US finds oil on their land they think, hurray, the good life beckons.

"But if a farmer in Colombia finds oil on their land, they think, what a disaster! "This is because they are likely to lose their land, livelihood and probably their life," he said.

The delegation travelled overland by bus to the department (county) of Arauca, which gave a real sense of underdevelopment.

On the journey to our next destination of Saravena, we were detained at a checkpoint just outside a town called Tame, by the army and DAS (state intelligence branch) with whom we engaged in an argument for about an hour, a deliberate ploy to make it impossible for us to reach our destination. This was because there is a 6pm-6am curfew, during which anyone or vehicle out within these times are regarded as guerrillas and treated as a legitimate targets ie a free fire-zone.

Following this encounter, we returned to Tame where we were accommodated in a locked

sports stadium for the night. As one of our Colombian comrades stated "we'd been kidnapped by the army".

Eventually arriving at Saravena we attended a humanitarian forum, to discuss the effects of 'Plan Colombia', a US aid package 80 per cent of which goes to the Colombian police and military for weapons, training and helicopters.

We also commemorated the lives of three trade unionists, who were murdered by the army, namely Alirio Matrinez, Jorge Prieto and Leonel Goyenche.

Here we heard some heart rendering testimonies on the effects of the army presence and what it actually means to the region. This includes the detainment of two trade unionists on trial for rebellion, one of which is Samuel Morales, the president of the regional CUT, equivalent to our TUC and Raquel Castro, who is an executive member of the teachers union. Both narrowly missed being assassinated together with the other three trade unionists.

After the forum we moved to the regional capital Arauca City where we were again detained at the border for a couple of hours due to an explosion in the city killing six and injuring 14 people. One of the injured was a member of our delegation who had gone on ahead to deal with a passport problem, whilst we were awaiting entry.



POPULAR: Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez greets supporters



Ruben Linares

VENEZUELAN WELCOME

Crossing over into Venezuela brought a contrast in both the welcome and treatment to that experienced in Colombia.

Rather than constantly being checked, search and monitored by the army, we were met by members of the local council, who invited us to a barbeque and for a few beers.

We were also conveyed on an air-conditioned bus for the trip to Caracas. In a further illustration of the contrast, when we reached a Venezuelan army checkpoint a soldier boarded the

bus smiling and greeting everyone.

The soldier noticed a pendant of Che Guevara around the neck of one of the delegation, at which he commented, "Che Bueno" (meaning: 'Che very good').

On the trip to Caracas the contrast with Colombia was quite pronounced, with the presence of a complete road system, the development of a brand new rail system together with a major expansion and development of the underground system.

Also there are policies in place to develop the country, combating unemployment, strengthening Labour rights and rights for trade unions and the democratisation and expansion of the public sector.

During our stay, we managed to visit two neighbourhoods in Caracas, where we witnessed for ourselves the positive impact of the various missions organised outside of state structures and with local input and control.

These gave local people access to cheap, good quality

food, health care, education (some for the first time) and permanent employment.

We also met with the National Coordinator of the National Workers Unity, a man by the name of Ruben Linares, familiar to members who may have met him on recent visit when he addressed the RMT AGM in Exeter last year.

Ruben explained to us the problems faced by activists in the old Central Trabajadores Venezuela (CTV), the main trade union federation or "yellow union", such as anti-democratic structures and ballot-rigging to keep out criticism.

Apparently the last straw was when the CTV leadership backed

the coup of April 2002 together with the lockout of December 2002. This led to the formation of the UNT (National Workers Unity).

There are still problems with recognition, though these problems are being resolved. The UNT usually prevails at any free ballot and is carrying out a concerted campaign to combat the reputation of the CTV, which has been seen as being in the pockets of the bosses.

The UNT has recently held a conference to formalise their structures, political objectives, and organise support and development for local, health and safety reps and local trade union organisations. ■

REPRESSION: Colombian military targets trade unionists



SOLIDARITY: Mass demonstration in support of the Venezuelan government



INTERNATIONAL FOCUS

IRANIAN BUS DRIVERS PROTEST IN TEHRAN

Hundreds of bus drivers of the Tehran bus company protested outside the offices of the Labour Ministry in the Iranian capital last month, demanding to return to their jobs.

Hundreds of bus workers have been laid off following a strike action on 28 January in which up to 1,300 workers were arrested. Most of those detained have now been released, following worldwide protests by trade unions and human rights organisations, culminating in a historic world day of trade union action Wednesday 15 February.

Trade unions around the world representing millions of workers took part, rallying outside Iranian embassies.

However, at least six union activists, including union leader Mansoor Ossanlou, remain in prison.

The judge handling the cases of the detained workers only recently allowed their families to visit them in Evin Prison.

The bus workers and their families have vowed to continue with their protest until the release of their jailed colleagues, reinstatement of all laid-off workers, recognition of their union and the meeting of their other demands.

The 17,000 employees of the state-owned bus company have been battling the management and authorities since last year for union recognition and collective bargaining.

A union meeting was viciously attacked last year by members of the state-set up

"Workers' House" and "Islamic Council of Labour", resulting in many injuries.

The government is refusing to recognise the union and meet their demands. Union leader Mansoor Ossanlou has been in prison since 22 December, without access to lawyers or family.

SLOVAKIA RAIL CARGO SELL-OFF IN DOUBT

The privatisation of Slovakia's state-owned cargo railway company may not go ahead after Hungarian rail company MÁV was ditched from the sell-off.

It has been reported that the sale could fall through following threats of the largest opposition party, which declared that it would have the government ousted if they carried on with the privatisation.

There is growing opposition within Slovakia against the privatisation of national industries. If the government decides to give in to the opposition, Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda may just keep his minority position until early elections on June 17.

A privatisation committee has recommended a consortium of Rail Cargo Austria AG and private-equity firm J&T Finance Group as the winner of the tendering for ZSSK Cargo.

Transport Minister Pavol Prokopovic said his main concern was that bidders in the tendering, ZSSK Cargo's competitors, had had a chance to study its business plans and strategic intentions.

BRITTANY FERRIES TRANSFERS CATAMARAN TO FULL FRENCH FLAG

The Normandy Express, Brittany Ferries' new catamaran, is in the process of registration under the full French flag, transferring from the Bahamas register, thus honouring the western Channel ferry operator's policy to favour

the national flag. Built in Tasmania by Incat in 2000, the vessel can transport 900 passengers and 280 cars at 40 knots. It begins its second season for Brittany Ferries this month until November with crossings between Cherbourg and Portsmouth on weekdays and between Caen-Ouistreham and Portsmouth at weekends.

ARRIVA ARRIVES IN SWEDEN

British transport private operator Arriva is extending its empire with its first operating contract in Sweden.

Apart from Great Britain, the company is already present on rail networks in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands.

It has signed an initial nine-year contract to operate from June 2007 regional trains on a 47-station network based in Malmö, southern Sweden. It won the deal against SJ, the present operator, Connex, a private Swedish/Norwegian consortium, and DSB, the state-run Danish rail operator.

Arriva operates in eight EU countries, Denmark, Italy, Holland, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK, and in the last five years European profits have risen 250 per cent to £514.8 million.

FRANCE TÉLÉCOM MARINE SEAFARERS FIND JOBS

Two years after France Télécom Marine de-flagged its three cable layers from the full French to the Kerguelen second register with the loss of 159 French seafarers, all but two have been found jobs.

But only 40 of these are seagoing with other maritime companies. FT Marine, which dismissed the crews, replacing them with 90 Madagascar nationals, now employs only 145 French seagoing personnel, all of them various grades of officers or technicians.

NEW FRENCH SHIP REGISTER

DECLARED FOC

The RIF, the new French ship register, came into force last month following a final government decree.

ADF, the French Shipowners' Association, welcomed "the new register with great satisfaction" but criticised the International Transport Workers' Federation for classifying the register as a Flag of Convenience. Unions say the RIF is worse than Kerguelen, the second French register that the new flag replaces.

SEAFRANCE FACES SPEED FERRIES COMPETITION

Unions at SeaFrance are concerned that management is seeking to chop 88 jobs following anticipated poor results for 2005.

The French Calais-Dover operator is negotiating with the unions a cost saving "re-organisation plan" with a view to balancing the books in 2007.

According to the CGT maritime union, the company wants to reduce the workforce by 60 ratings and 28 land-based staff. There would be no straight redundancies and no change to an existing agreement that guarantees 46 daily crossings using the operator's six vessels. SeaFrance employs 1,500 people including 1,300 seafarers.

MAERSK RISKS HIGHEST-EVER FRENCH POLLUTION FINE

The prosecutor at Brest, France's main court that deals with accusations of maritime pollution, has demanded that a record fine of £400,000 be imposed on the owner and master of the Bahamas-flagged Maersk Barcelona.

The owner, V-Ships, and its Ukrainian master are accused of an act of voluntary pollution last September after the vessel had been spotted trailing a 38-mile oil slick.

The court rejected a defence request that the case be



SOLIDARITY: RMT members join London protest

OCUS

transferred to the Bahamas as that flag state has not accused the vessel of the same crime. The case is to be heard next month. The Brest court prosecutor on the same day asked for a £187,000 fine from the master of the Etly Danielsen, surprised off Penmarch in 2003 trailing 12km of oil.

KOREAN TRAIN ATTENDANTS UNITE



Female South Korean train attendants shout slogans at a rally at the Seoul railway station last month. Stewardesses on South Korea's bullet trains have been barred from working on Sunday because they refused to wear uniforms in a protest about job security, back wages and better working conditions. Their headbands read, 'Unity and fight'. ■

President's column



Listening to working people

I am proud to be part of the leadership of this union, which I think tries to be as democratic as possible in our quest to represent and defend the interests of transport workers.

However, RMT is under constant attack in the media and as a direct result of privatisation, EU diktats and so-called globalisation.

Perhaps it is asking too much to expect some support from our government, even though it is supposed to be a Labour government.

The Labour Party arose from centuries of heroic struggle to represent workers in the political as well as industrial arena. Yet this so-called New Labour government has clearly been a disappointment for millions of trade unionists.

Nevertheless, I was still shocked to read that former transport minister Stephen Byers used a trade union conference organised by public service union UNISON on Tyneside last month to launch an open attack on the constitutional link between Labour and the trade unions.

He claimed that Labour must "ensure that the priorities of a small, unrepresentative number of people are not allowed to distort our programme".

So let's examine the democratic programme of RMT, which was a founding member of the Labour Party. We call for the return of our transport network to public ownership – a high priority in the manifesto of Tony Blair's first government. What happened to that?

This union called on Labour to remove the famous anti-union laws that contravene international law. Yet New Labour has clung on to the lot.

RMT has declared its support for public services against attacks from Brussels. Yet this government supports an EU Services Directive which is an outright attempt to eradicate hard-won workers rights and conditions and throws migrant workers into the lion's den in a race to bottom under the guise of open markets and competition.

This union believes in peaceful means of resolving issues, but Blair has taken us into illegal wars and clearly intends the repeat this bloody cycle in Iran.

It is increasingly clear that trade unions, with over seven million members, speak for the concerns of ordinary Labour voters whether it is about illegal wars, pensions, public services or rail renationalisation.

The only "small and unrepresentative group" seems to be the tiny cabal around Tony Blair which continually ignores votes at Labour conference, such as in support of rail renationalisation, if they happen to disagree with it.

As Tony Benn warned, "if the links with the trade unions were altered, it would destroy the Labour Party," noting that "those who advocate it know that very well".

Regardless of these setbacks, this union will continue to defend its members, listen to you and consult you. I did exactly that last month at the RMT women's conference when the union launched the women's charter.

Perhaps if Mr Byers listened to working people a little more often, you never know, he might even make a speech reflecting the views of the majority of people in this country.

Tony Donaghey

EXPLOITATION AND BLATANT PROFITEERING

Remember 'corporate social responsibility'? It was once a favourite phrase in the New Labour lexicon of spin. You don't hear it much anymore.

Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, 'the Blair apparent', used to liberally sprinkle the phrase over every speech they made following announcements of massive job losses.

Little notice was taken of it by 'the business community' but it was supposed to conjure up the notion that global capitalism would be forced by New Labour to worship at altars other than greed.

The contempt for the idea shown by the corporate world then is replicated now as it rakes in utterly outrageous profits.

Last month Shell Oil posted the biggest annual profits the world has ever seen. Their £30billion surplus of income over expenditure came from,

among other places, the exploitation of the oil reserves in the Nigerian delta. The company has long been at the centre of protest over its treatment of people and environment of that African country.

The world's richest banks have also joined in this global hedonism, this extravaganza of profit taking amidst charges of exploitation.

But it is surely at the door of the energy companies where the charge is laid most appropriately.

No sooner had the energy giant Scottish Power posted a 95 per cent rise in profits compared with the previous quarter than they announced a 25 per cent increase in fuel prices.

The outcry forced UK Trade and Industry secretary Allan Johnson – the former General Secretary of the

Communications Workers Union now charged with overseeing the privatisation of the postal service – to admit that as many as 3 million people in Britain could face immediate difficulty and fuel poverty.

But that didn't stop Centrica, the other major gas supplier joining in. They announced annual profits of £1.5billion and demanded a 22% increase in gas prices from customers.

Both companies appear oblivious to the anger.

The increase in charges is, they say, due to the spiralling cost of gas on the world market. Yet both companies admit the most profitable part of their businesses is the income they get from offshore oil and gas sites. Many will ask why therefore the cost is passed on at all.

I asked the Scottish First Minister Jack McConnell if he thought the price increases were

justified. He said no but when I asked if he would order a price freeze or accept the case for abolishing standing charges for senior citizens he refused saying that was a commercial interference in the running of the company /industry.

So apparently corporations can charge us what they like and make what profits they like and this government will not defend us from it after all.

I believe there is a compelling need to intercede in these types of situations. If companies shirk their 'corporate social responsibilities', forcing 3 million people to risk dying of cold related diseases and the NHS and social services to pick up the pieces then it is not the responsibilities which are pushed aside but rather the blatant profiteering and the greed of shareholders.

Colin Fox
SSP convenor



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STORMY STRIKE AT P&O

On the nineteenth anniversary of the bitter P&O dispute, RMT member John Kay looks back at the last battle of the National Union of Seamen

In a recent issue of RMT News, Stuart Hyslop looked back at the betrayal of Canadian seafarers in the 1950's in a review of the film 'Betrayed'.

It reminds us of the many occasions when seafarers faced storms other than those encountered when at sea.

Details of the part played by the leadership, but certainly not the membership, of the Canadian National Union of Seamen at that time also remind us of occasions when one was out of step with the other.

On the evening of March 6 1987 the Herald of Free Enterprise sank after leaving Zeebrugge with the loss of 191 passengers and crew. The disaster was predictable.

Two similar ships had sunk previously in similar circumstances.

The loss of the European Gateway and the French vessel The Mont Louis had already attracted recommendations for improved safety on this type of ship.

Townsend Thoresen, who operated two of these three ships, had no interest in improving safety as they were in the process of selling their fleet to P&O.

With the deal complete, P&O immediately demanded savings of six million pounds by way of crew reductions. Despite announcing profits of 51 million pounds, P&O turned down an offer by the NUS to go to arbitration.

In a secret ballot in 1988 the crews of all eleven ships voted to reject the reduction in manning on the grounds of reduced safety. On February 3 1988, 2,161 seafarers employed

by P&O Cross Channel Ferries stopped work.

Unfortunately, they had walked slap bang into a trap set by the new owner Sir Jeffery Sterling, bankrolled by his admirer Margaret Thatcher. Every force of the law was let loose against the NUS and the strikers.

Sequestration of NUS assets and heavy fines quickly left the union penniless and unable to pay strike benefit. Eventually, it was forced by the use of the law to abandon the strike or face jail sentences.

Following the strike, P&O sacked 2,000 workers who had stood firm against new conditions that would seriously endanger safety at sea. The strikers continued to mount a picket until June 1989 when, without funding or support from the trade union movement, they were forced to give up.

The promise of the NUS that

these comrades would never be forgotten got lost somewhere in the early days of the merger with the NUR to become RMT.

It was not until the 1993 AGM in Newcastle that this issue was revisited and delegates were made aware of the hardship still being endured by people who had lost everything fighting not for personal gain but for a cause they believed in.

Unfortunately, despite years of resolutions demanding some form of compensation being carried at the TUC, Labour Party conference, the International Labour Organisation and the European Court of Justice, there has been no recompense for the sacrifices made to prevent more accidents at sea.

Nineteen years on, strikers still meet annually at the Herald memorial service and on the anniversary of the strike. If any comrade would like to send a message of solidarity they can

be made via Steve Stevenson, Flat 20, Gerald Palmby Court, Western Road, Deal, Kent CT14 6RP.

The history of the NUS was indeed a stormy one, with the leadership found wanting on more than one occasion. However, in this final battle the leadership and membership stood firm together to the end.

We can take no comfort from the fact that in the end they too were betrayed by a Labour government not worthy of the name.

Speaking on a picket line at Dover docks during the strike, John Prescott said: "I hope the people of this country realise that P&O ships are not safe and the record shows it to be so.

"Cutting costs means more accidents and fires aboard ships," he said.

He later launched a P&O ship. ■



CROSSING THE LINE: A Dover picket during the 1988 P&O dispute with a young Ken Livingstone before he became London mayor and called on Tube staff to break picket lines.

ACTIVISTS' CORNER

REPARATIONS FOR AFRICA?

Finsbury Park branch has sent a motion to this year's RMT AGM calling for reparation for the enslavement of Africans. This motion has been supported by branches at the London Transport Regional Council.

As an African, and as one of those still suffering from post traumatic slave syndrome, I am willing where possible to attend any branch meeting around the country to put the case for reparation.

The next port of call for our motion will be the RMT black and ethnic minority members' conference.

Next year, will mark the 200 year anniversary of when imperial Britain claimed to have given us 'freedom from slavery'.

Many RMT members will not be aware of this, or that the United Nation's World Conference Against Racism in Durban South Africa in 2001, which I attended, declared 'chattel slavery' a crime against humanity.

The first thing we must recognise is that Africans were never 'slaves', we were enslaved. The distinction is very important. Nor is the words

'slave trade' an honest appraisal of what was and still is the most barbaric activities carried out by human being against other human being.

For me as an African, this goes to the heart of the matter. Why were Africans, then and now, seen as less than human beings?

The so called ending of slavery meant nothing to us.

We were still enslaved to the plantation and the plantation owners who we were dependant on for access to food, water and shelter.

No fund was provided for us to try and relocate away from our enslavers.

Indeed, in order to compound this crime against humanity, the British government of 1807 paid the slave owners for loss of 'their slaves'. They paid nothing to our ancestors, ensuring that we were a cheap ready made labour force for our former enslavers to exploit.

Put that together with the rape and plunder of both Africa and her people to the present day and you have to ask yourself 'is it enough just to stop'?

Our motion says 'No! It is not enough'. Nor are the good intentions of people like Bob Geldof going to work.

The African community has been calling for reparation for over two hundred years.

Instead, when Africans in Haiti won the freedom by defeating Napoleon Bonaparte's army, it was Africans who were asked to pay reparation to France. This debt around its neck led to the Haiti that we see today.

Why should reparation mean money? Reparation means to repair.

We are demanding that those who have damaged us, our lands, our home, our societies and, our very existence should help to repair them. Why should Africans have life expectancies of just 40 years?

Reparation means to build schools and hospitals. What is required is clean water, access to proper medical treatment and a transport infrastructure where it does not take days to do what others do in hours.

Our motion also calls on our union, as representatives of modern day seafarers, to



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condemn those who willingly participated and profited from this evil crime.

How long are Africans to live with such memories, reinforced today by those who say Africa should not have clean water because governments are not to their liking?

Glenroy Watson ■

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TENERIFE, LAS AMERICAS. Apartment in 3 star hotel on seafront. Quiet area. From £75pppw.
Tel: 01803 526168

SPANISH HOLIDAYS

Costa Blanca House sleeps 6. Costa del Sol Apartment sleeps 4. £120-£320pw. Lovely locations. Beautiful beaches. Pools. Golf. Wonderful weather. Brochure available (01344)425247

WEST INDIES

MATTINGLEY HEIGHTS, ST KITTS, WEST INDIES. Self-catering house for rent. 3 bedrooms, 1 with ensuite. Fully furnished with all mod-cons. Cable TV etc.. £250pw per person. Contact Lennox: 07831 862369 or 07771 830594 or leave a message on: 01132 628828

LETTERS

Dear Bob Crow,

The members, staff and officers of Transport Workers Union Local 100 of New York deeply appreciate your support during our recent contract fight and strike.

It seemed that our contract fight was conducted under the bright lights of the mass media. However, there were very important things happening outside of camera range, including the solidarity you displayed.

If the media ignored it, transport workers did not. Our 35,000 members were strengthened by the knowledge that they were not alone.

I would have liked to have written sooner, noting how your efforts helped produce a successful resolution to our battle. While that has not yet occurred, expressing our appreciation can't wait.

Our picket signs said "it's all about respect". Please let your members, staff and officers know that you have the respect and heartfelt thanks of the entire TWU Local 100 family.

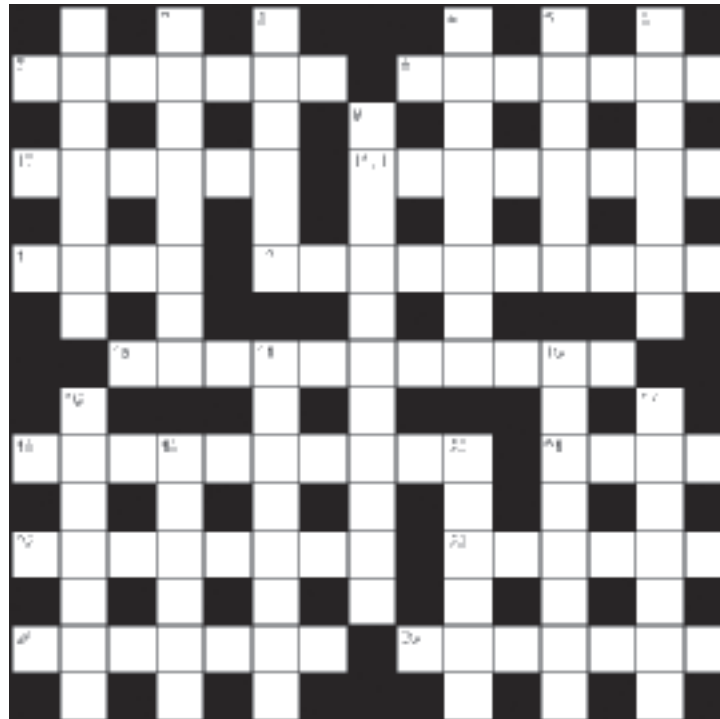
Sincerely

Roger Toussaint

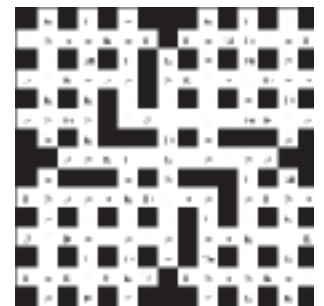
TWU Local 100 president

RMT £25 prize crossword

No. 23. Set by Elk



Last month's solution...



The winner of prize crossword no. 22 is Mr R. V. Jones of Merseyside.

Send entries to Prize Crossword, RMT, Unity House, 39 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD by April 3rd with your name and address. Winner and solution in next issue.

ACROSS

- 7 Brought round or back to life (7)
- 8 Dogs, or teeth (7)
- 10 Express agreement, permission or compliance (6)
- 11, 1 down, 23 across. Retirement fund started in BR days - RMT's campaigning to defend it (8, 7, 6)
- 11 Employer; stud (4)
- 12 Eating place (10)
- 13 Hypnotising (11)
- 18 Hampshire town or US rifle (10)
- 21 Dessert with pastry base but no top crust (4)
- 22 16 of the Philippines (8)
- 23 Plot - or see 11 across (6)
- 24 Retribution (7)
- 25 Subjected to cruel or intimidating behaviour - time to see your rep! (7)

DOWN

- 1 French boarding-house - or see 11 across
- 2 Permit holder; publican (8)
- 3 Warming device (6)
- 4 Large letters or key cities (8)
- 5 One who watches (6)
- 6 '16's of east African nation (7)
- 9 Disatisfaction; feeling of unfulfilment or being thwarted (11)
- 14 Gatherings, such as those held by your RMT branch (8)
- 15 It protects the kernel (8)
- 16 Inhabitant, or one with rights associated with living in a particular place or country (7)
- 17 Brass instrument (7)
- 19 Woodworking tool (6)
- 20 Extricate from dangerous situation (6)

HOW TO JOIN THE CREDIT UNION

To join the RMT Credit Union you need to fill in an application form and supply us with proof of **your identity** and **address**. Being an existing RMT member, you may wonder why we need proof of who you are and where you live. It is because the Financial Services Authority, in an

attempt to combat Money Laundering, has imposed strict identification rules on anyone wishing to open a Bank or Building Society account. Unfortunately, it has applied the same rules and regulations to Credit Unions.

There are two methods of supplying us with the documentation:-

METHOD 1 Send or take your **original** documents, **1 from List A & 1 from List B**, direct to RMT Credit, Unity House, FREEPOST, 39 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD. If sending valuable documents such as your passport or current full UK Driving Licence we strongly advise sending them by recorded delivery. We will photocopy the originals and return them to you.

METHOD 2 Take one original document from **list A** and one from **list B** to your Branch Secretary or any of the above approved persons listed below:-

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ● Delegated Officer of the Branch | ■ Person with honours / peerage |
| ● Divisional Organiser | ■ Full Time Trade Union Official |
| ● Executive Committee Member | ■ Member of Parliament |
| ● Credit Union Officer | ■ Justice of the Peace |
| ● Post Master / Sub Post Master | ■ Lawyer |
| ● Authorised Financial Intermediary | ■ Teacher |
| ● Councillor (local or county) | ■ Accountant |
| ● Minister of Religion | ■ Dentist |
| ● Commissioner for oaths | |
| ● Banker | |
| ● Doctor | |
| ● Police Officer | |

The Branch Secretary or other approved person will check the original documentation; will take a photocopy, sign, and Branch stamp. All proof of identity / address must bear your name, and not be solely in the name of partner etc; but can be in addition to their name.

Satisfactory proof of **identity** will include, but not be limited to the following:

- LIST (A)
- Current signed Passport.
 - Current Full UK old style Driving Licence (not old style Provisional Licence) [if not used as evidence of address].
 - Original Inland Revenue tax notification e.g. tax assessment, statement of account, notice of coding – valid for current year.
 - Pension Book or Benefits Book or original notification letter from the Benefits Agency confirming your right to benefits (if not used as evidence of address).
 - Shotgun or firearms certificate.
 - ID pass and safety cards for the following companies: Network Rail, Trans Pennine Express, Central Trains
 - Discharge Book (shippers only - current).

Satisfactory proof of **address** will include, but not be limited to the following:

- LIST (B)
- Original Local Authority Council Tax bill valid for the current year.
 - Current UK photo card Driving Licence.
 - Current Full UK old style Driving Licence (not old style Provisional Licence).
 - A Utility Bill e.g. Electricity, Gas, Water or Telephone bills. **These must be originals and less than 3 months old.** Mobile 'phone bills are NOT acceptable.
 - Bank, building society or credit union statement – within last 3 months.
 - Mortgage statement from a recognised lender – within last 12 months.
 - Pension Book or Benefits Book or original notification letter from the Benefits Agency confirming your right to benefits (if not used as evidence of address).
 - Original Inland Revenue tax notification, letter, notice of coding, P60 or P45.
 - Original housing association or letting agency tenancy agreement.
 - Local council rent card or tenancy agreement
 - Original Solicitor's letter confirming recent house purchase or Land Registry confirmation.
 - Household and motor Insurance certificates - current

Credit Union accounts may only be opened and transactions accepted when verification of identity and address has been completed and cross-referenced against RMT membership. We are using the method of Direct Debit only and money will be deducted from your bank account on the 28th of each month. Please return completed forms and ID documentation, as we need to make sure you comply with the money laundering regulations. Failing to complete all forms and ID documentation will delay us from setting up your savings account.

RMT CREDIT UNION LTD.

Finance Department, Unity House, 39 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD
RMT CREDIT UNION APPLICATION FORM – please complete your
application along with the attached Direct Debit.



MEMBERSHIP NUMBER

Please use **BLOCK CAPITALS** and **black ink**.

1 PERSONAL DETAILS.

Surname		Address	
Forename(s)			
Home phone			
Mobile phone		Postcode	
Email address			
Date of Birth		National Insurance Number	

2 Your Employment.

Employer		RMT Branch	
Job Description			

3 Mr ☐ Mrs ☐ Ms ☐ Miss ☐

4 Membership Status

RMT TU Member ☐ Retired RMT TU Member ☐

5 How much do you wish to save £ This is the amount you wish to save in 'shareholdings' monthly by
Direct Debit (you must complete form below)

6 Normally your payments are made once a month (28th) to RMT Credit Union Ltd.

7 Next of Kin

Address

8 I undertake to abide by the rules now in force or those that are adopted.

Your signature

Date



Instruction to your Bank or Building Society to pay by Direct Debit



Please fill in the whole form including official use box using a ball point pen and
Send to: RMT Credit Union Ltd., 39 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD

Name and full postal address of your Bank or Building Society

To: The Manager	Bank/Building Society
Address	
	Postcode

Name(s) of Account Holder(s)

Bank/Building Society account number

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Branch Sort Code

--	--	--	--	--	--

Originator's Identification Number

9	7	4	2	8	1
---	---	---	---	---	---

Reference Number

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

FOR RMT CREDIT UNION LTD OFFICIAL USE ONLY
This is not part of the the instruction to your Bank or Building Society.

Instructions to your Bank or Building Society.

Please pay RMT Credit Union Ltd Direct Debits for the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards
assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with RMT Credit Union Ltd, if
so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank/Building Society.

Signature(s)

Date

Banks and Building Societies may not accept Direct Debit Instructions from some types of account

This guarantee should be detached and retained by the Payer.

The Direct Debit Guarantee

- This guarantee is offered by all Banks and Building Societies that take part in the Direct Debit Scheme. The efficiency and security of the scheme is monitored and protected by your own Bank or Building Society.
- If the amounts to be paid or the payment date changes, RMT Credit Union Ltd will notify you 10 working days in advance of your account being debited or as otherwise agreed
- If an error is made by RMT Credit Union Ltd or your Bank or Building Society, you are guaranteed a full and immediate refund from your branch of the amount paid
- You can cancel a Direct Debit at any time by writing to your Bank or Building Society. Please also send a copy of your letter to us.



RMT fight back:

Our personal injury lawyers won't let bad employers get away with it.

The law says workers have a right to safe conditions – and RMT is here to defend that right. That's why our Personal Injury Service is free – and even covers non-work related accidents for family members. So if you, or a member of your family, have suffered an illness or injury due to someone else's fault, call us now.

FOR FREE LEGAL ASSISTANCE CALL THE HELPLINE

0800 587 7516 in England, Wales and Ireland

0800 328 1014 in Scotland

PROTECTING AND PROMOTING OUR MEMBERS' INTERESTS.



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Want **more** from your loan?

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from a bank with a unique ethical policy

- **Want a first class service?**

we'll give you an instant decision

7.2%
APR (Typical)

Phone **0800 591 682** (Quote ref: 791/1265)

Lines open Mon to Fri 8am–9pm, Sat 8am–8pm and Sun 9am–6pm.

Applicants must be UK resident and aged between 21 and 69 years of age.

Credit facilities are provided by The Co-operative Bank p.l.c. (Registered No. 990937) of P.O. Box 101, 1 Balloon Street, Manchester M60 4EP and are subject to status. The Bank reserves the right to decline any application or offer a loan at a rate that differs from those advertised. Interest rates are correct as at 02/06. Calls may be monitored or recorded for security and training purposes.

The Co-operative Bank is authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority (No. 121885), subscribes to the Banking Code, is a member of the Financial Ombudsman Service and is licensed by the Office of Fair Trading (No. 006110).

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