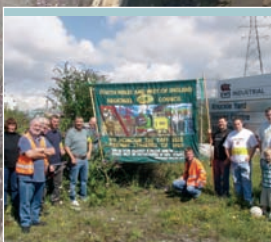


Essential reading for today's transport worker

RMT *news*

GUARDS WIN AT SWT

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PROTECTING AND PROMOTING OUR MEMBERS' INTERESTS

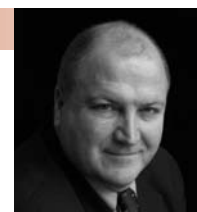


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EDITORIAL

GUARD VICTORY



RMT has successfully convinced South West Trains to drop proposals to reduce the role of the guard on the franchise.

The company had revealed plans for drivers to open the powered doors despite the fact it had won the franchise on the basis of retaining all guards in a full operational capacity and not imposing driver-only operation.

As a result of the solidarity shown by SWT members there will be no future proposals to reduce the guards' role.

Guards are on the front line and face risk of assault every day often in order to raise revenue for the private operator and their shareholders.

Therefore it is shocking to report that members at 'One' are having to take strike action to demand the re-instatement of guard Paul Yarwood who tackled an aggressive fare evader who was smoking and abusive to staff and passengers.

Management sacked Paul and redefined the fare evader as a 'customer' in spite of him boasting that that he has never travelled with a ticket in his adult life.

Paul's colleague's are furious at this betrayal and are rightly demanding his re-instatement.

Operators are also putting the squeeze on passengers through fare rises because of the ridiculous franchising system, putting our members at risk or under the threat of disciplinary action.

It is only a few months since the Transport Select Committee concluded that no amount of tinkering could resolve the fundamental flaws in the franchising system which offers only fragmentation, confusion, ever-higher fares and a squeeze on passengers, services and rail workers alike.

The collapse of Metronet has once again exposed the failings of the PPP privatisation of maintenance and renewals.

Metronet's shareholders may have walked away because they couldn't squeeze £2 billion more out of the public purse, but our members are still working to maintain and improve an essential public service. Now is the time to bring Metronet's contracts back in-house.

RMT has just won guarantees from companies covered by the Transport for London Pension Fund that no attempt will be made to undermine the pension

rights of people forced to leave their jobs through ill-health.

The employers involved have confirmed that they will not alter the existing arrangements after members had voted by a 15-to-one margin to strike.

The vote must have concentrated their minds.

As we go to press RMT members at Orkney Ferries have voted by a five-to-one margin to strike over the company's "still wholly inadequate" below inflation 3.5 per cent pay offer.

The union has won good pay deals at the bus company Southern Vectis and at the rail franchise Silverlink and is striving to win similar deals wherever it can.

RMT's annual general meeting in Edinburgh brought members together from all grades and regions to decide the priorities of the union over the next 12 months.

Delegates displayed the maturity and discipline required to discuss the many issues and problems members face at the workplace and beyond.

One of the issues discussed was the legacy of the trade in slaves in the centenary of its abolition. The union is committed to the various forms of slavery that persists even today.

AGM also reiterated the union's campaign against the imposition of an EU Constitution which gives the EU all the powers of a new state entity for the first time.

Most people would say no if they were asked if they wanted this. Yet that is exactly what the new treaty, like the old one, proposes to do.

Moreover, one of the 50 areas where all national vetoes are abolished is transport. This means that member states could be outvoted on transport matters and be forced to implement EU diktats.

Bearing in mind that our railways were privatised according to EU directive 91/440, this means that all member states could be ordered to hand over control of their rail networks to the private sector.

This union is, along with others, demanding a referendum on the constitution which was promised two years ago.

Best Wishes

Bob Crow

BAKERLOO LINE STRIKES OVER SAFETY

A 24-hour strike by RMT Bakerloo Line drivers and station staff in a safety dispute over lone working was 100 per cent solid.

London Underground only ran an emergency service between Elephant and Castle and Queen's Park and the union renewed its call for the company to take safety concerns seriously and negotiate.

The dispute centres on LUL's attempt to impose lone-working at Queen's Park, Willesden Junction and Harrow and Wealdstone stations, increasing the risk of assault for station staff and drivers.

"Our members have demonstrated how angry they are that LUL is still set on plans that will increase the danger of assault on our members at stations where trains are tipped out," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said from the picket line.



"This is a simple dispute about the safety of our members, and the 95 per cent vote for strike action should have told the company everything they need to know about their plan," he said.

The stations involved are in

areas that have more than their fair share of violent crime problems, and RMT argues that it is not unreasonable to expect that there are two station staff on duty to give more security to each other and the public.

"It is our members who are

out there trying to deliver a service in demanding circumstances, and their employer shouldn't be attempting to impose changes that make that job harder and more dangerous," Bob Crow said. ■

SIGNALLERS IN SCOTLAND WIN BONUS INCREASE

The threat of strike action by more than 400 Network Rail signallers and supervisors in Scotland has forced Network Rail to improve an offer on disputed bonus payments.

The dispute centred on the company's original decision to dock three-quarters of the £400 bonus paid to those who took part in a strike over the company's failure to honour the implementation of the 35-hour week in Scotland.

Network Rail originally insisted that the matter was non-negotiable, but the company then twice tabled increased offers, ultimately halving the amount docked

from £150 per shift to £75.

A strike originally scheduled for July 6 was suspended after last-minute talks yielded some progress.

However, Network Rail then withdrew its offer and paid no bonus at all to the signallers, who made it clear they would not be victimised for taking action aimed at making the company keep to its side of an agreement.

Delegates at the union's annual general meeting in Edinburgh had voted unanimously to endorse the action, and to ballot all 15,000 Network Rail members for strike action over the bonus issues.

VIRGIN CATERING STAFF STRIKE AGAINST UNFAIR SACKING

Around 100 catering staff at Virgin West Coast's Manchester Piccadilly mounted their third day of strike action in support of an unfairly sacked colleague.

RMT is demanding the reinstatement of Rachel Tombling, who sustained injuries when her head hit a computer screen in an on-board shop when her train experienced rough riding – but was sacked for wilfully damaging it.

"The ludicrous allegation that she deliberately head-butted the screen shows a complete disregard for the welfare of Virgin employees," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said.

He said that Rachel should

have been given sympathy and help for her injuries, but Virgin chose instead to discipline her, and upheld the ruling at appeal.

"The CCTV evidence the company presented simply does not support their absurd case that this was a deliberate act, but their unwillingness to listen to reason left us with no option but to call strike action.

"Our members have responded magnificently once more, and picket lines have been busy with colleagues eager to demonstrate their solidarity with Rachel.

"It is time for Virgin to reverse this ridiculous sacking," Bob Crow said. ■

RMT WINS IMPROVED PAY DEAL AT SOUTHERN VECTIS

RMT has suspended planned strike action at the Southern Vectis bus company on the Isle of Wight after an improved pay offer from management.

The 234 members at the company overwhelmingly backed the new offer in a referendum.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow said that the threat of action had brought the company to its senses.

He said that by standing firm the members at Southern Vectis had won themselves a greatly

improved offer which the union executive encourages them to accept.

"However, we were greatly disturbed by the company's decision to withdraw our members' sick pay scheme in an attempt to intimidate the workers from going on strike.

This was done on July 3 - four days before the action was due to start," Bob Crow said. ■

The two-year offer is as follows:-

YEAR ONE

- An eight per cent increase to all other rates and driver grades, effective June 3 2007.
- An eight per cent increase to basic rates of pay only and also on shift allowance payments to qualifying engineering, clerical and supervisory grades, effective February 25 2007

YEAR TWO

- All rates increase by the January 2008 RPI figure announced in February, plus one per cent.
- Driver basic rate to move to a minimum of £8.20.
- Cleaner overtime rate to become 50 per cent above the new basic rate.

WILTS AND DORSET BUS WORKERS BATTLE OVER EXCESSIVE DRIVING HOURS

A series of planned 24-hour strikes by members at the Wilts and Dorset bus company over excessive driving hours and imposed rosters were suspended pending further talks.

RMT members at Poole, Bournemouth, Blandford, Lymington, Ringwood and Swanage depots were set to strike after returning a strike majority of more than ten to one.

The dispute centres on the company's refusal to accept that drivers should be rostered for no more than four-and-a-half hours' continuous driving, and on the imposition of duties and rosters without the agreement of union reps.

Delegates at the union's conference in Edinburgh also voted to campaign to press the government to reduce the current legal maximums of ten hours' daily driving time and five hours' maximum without a break.

"This is a straightforward

issue of the health and safety of our members and their passengers, and the company simply has no excuses," RMT general secretary Bob Crow told conference.

"It is breathtaking that Wilts and Dorset maintains that it is acceptable to expect drivers responsible for the safety of passengers drive for more than four-and-a-half hours without a break and continues to impose rosters without agreement.

"I hope passengers will understand that we have tried for many months to get the company to shift on this vital issue and we can only hope that the company now recognises our members' anger and negotiates seriously.

"The company should take a sober look at the massive vote for action and recognise the growing anger over the company putting its profits before the safety of our members and their passengers," Bob said. ■



GUARDS' VICTORY AT SOUTH WEST TRAINS

South West Trains has dropped proposals for drivers to open powered doors following a campaign by the union.

The company revealed the proposals after winning the 10-year franchise on the basis of retaining all guards in a full operational capacity and not imposing a driver-only operation (DOO).

Management had claimed that the plan would 'improve performance and safety' – but they fooled no-one.

The union saw it as a creeping attempt to introduce DOO onto the franchise and transform the guards' role by stealth.

South West Trains' own safety department contradicted the company over its DOO plans, instructing guards to "stop, open the local door, step out onto the platform, check the

train is correctly positioned on the platform. Once this has been done the train doors can be released as necessary".

As a result RMT warned the company that it would ballot members' for strike action unless guards retained their existing responsibility for door operation.

RMT guards had voted to strike at SWT over the same issue in the past – delivering a massive 85 per cent vote for action in 1998 and causing the company to back down then.

As a result, SWT withdrew their proposals in a letter which said: "I confirm that the intentions expressed in the original briefing to the Guards Company Council have not been progressed and are withdrawn".

RMT general secretary Bob Crow said that as a result of the solidarity shown there are to be no changes to existing



arrangements, there will be a guard on every passenger train and there are no proposals to reduce the guards' role.

- RMT has said that plans by SWT to take disciplinary action against guards who exercise their discretion when dealing with passengers who board trains without tickets was 'out of the question'.

The union is opposed to

guards on the front line being put under greater pressure, into potentially confrontational situations and at greater risk of assault.

The discretion of the guard must remain paramount for their own safety and because their primary role is the safety-critical duties they undertake as train guards.

RMT MEMBERS BACK ACTION AT 'ONE'

RMT guards, revenue-protection inspectors and retail staff at 'One' railway in north Essex have taken strike action over the dismissal of a guard and the company's failure to support other members involved in an incident with a fare evader.

Guards based at Colchester and Clacton, revenue-protection inspectors based at Colchester

and retail members between Chelmsford and Manningtree, took 24-hour action.

RMT is demanding the immediate re-instatement of Paul Yarwood, who was sacked after the incident, confirmation that there will be no further disciplinary action connected with it, and a guarantee that the company will fulfil its duty of care towards employees in the

future.

"It is breathtaking that after our members were left to deal with a violent and abusive fare-evader who refused to stop smoking on a train, assaulted a platform supervisor and threatened a passenger and other staff the company has chosen to turn on its workforce," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said.

He said that rather than support its employees the company re-defined a fare-dodger who boasted that he has never travelled with a ticket in his adult life as a 'customer' and sacked one loyal member of staff and suspended two others.

"Railway staff who face the daily prospect of abuse and violence should be able to count on the support of their employers, but this company has totally failed its workforce.

"We have told 'One' that we expect our member to be re-instated, that we expect no further disciplinary action arising from this incident and that we expect guarantees that the company will in future honour its duty of care to its workforce," Bob said.

RMT WINS IMPROVED PAY OFFER AT SILVERLINK

Three days of strike action by more than 350 members at Silverlink were called off after the company increased its pay offer to 4.6 per cent.

RMT guards and retail and revenue staff were due to strike on July 30 and August 13 and 27 after voting by

more than seven to one to take action against a sub-inflation 3.6 per cent offer.

"Our members demonstrated their strength and unity with a huge vote for action that signalled that they were simply not prepared to accept what amounted to a pay cut,"

RMT general secretary Bob Crow said.

"That decisive mandate gave our negotiating team exactly what they needed to secure an acceptable no-strings pay offer, and the strike action has therefore been lifted," he said.

RMT VICTORY ON TFL PENSIONS

RMT has won the guarantees it was seeking from companies covered by the Transport for London Pension Fund that no attempt will be made to undermine the pension rights of people forced to leave their jobs through ill-health.

RMT members last month voted by a 15-to-one margin to strike against moves that would affect qualification for ill-health pensions. As a result the principal employers have confirmed that they will not attempt to alter the existing arrangements.

Ill-health pensions are granted to workers in the Tfl fund whose ill-health makes them unfit to do their particular job.

Proposed changes would have meant that anyone capable of earning an income, regardless of how small, would probably not qualify for or retain an ill-health pension.

"Our members showed with a massive majority that they were prepared to strike to defend their hard-won ill-health pension rights, and they have won a significant victory," RMT

general secretary Bob Crow said.

"We still believe that the fund rule that allows annual review of ill-health pensions should be scrapped, but we now have written confirmation that it will remain suspended.

"Our members have shown once more that collective strength can successfully defend pension rights when they come under attack," he said.

At present if medical evidence indicates that a member is unfit to do his or her own job, an ill-health pension would be granted.

Under the abandoned proposals ill-health pensions would have been split into two parts: a basic pension and an additional ill-health supplement.

Crucially, the test for receiving an ill-health pension would have been changed to an 'all-work' test rather than the current 'own-job' test.

This would have left the majority of those leaving employment due to ill-health facing the prospect of their pension being stopped because they would not be totally incapacitated.

EWS STAFF STRIKE AGAINST JOB CUTS

RMT groundstaff at the Knuckle Yard EWS depot near the Corus steelworks at Margam in south Wales took solid 24-hour strike action in a dispute over "absurd and highly dangerous" moves to make half of them redundant.

Engineering staff at the depot have also voted for industrial action over the cost-cutting redundancy plan, under which arduous and dangerous shunting of heavy steel-wagons is to be imposed on them.

EWS is reportedly on the verge of being bought out by the German state-owned Deutsche Bahn for about £300 million.

An EWS spokesman admitted there were to be redundancies at the depot, but said they were necessary so the firm could remain competitive.

But EWS' claims that the union strike ballot was flawed were dismissed by RMT General Secretary, Bob Crow who confirmed that RMT has complied fully with the relevant legislation.

RMT is taking legal advice over the company's supposed criteria for selecting people for sacking, which included levels of sick-leave, despite the fact that EWS management at Margam are well aware that there is a high level of absence due to injuries sustained at work.

Selection benchmarks that include 'dynamism' are almost certainly unlawful and RMT has referred their selection policy to lawyers to mount a legal challenge.

"It is time that EWS sat down with us and talked seriously about the issues,

including our reps' counter-proposals which would save jobs and keep our members safe," Bob said.

"EWS's attitude to all its staff at Margam is nothing short of a disgrace and our members are determined that these jobs will not be lost.

"The company's plan to sack ten groundstaff is about cutting costs and maximising profits regardless of the risk, and no misleading business arguments can disguise that reality.

"The company intends to force the bulk of the shunting onto engineering grades that already have enough demanding work of their own to do, and they have now asked to be balloted as well to defend their safety and conditions," he said.



LUL PLANS TICKET OFFICE CULL

London Underground's cull of ticket offices is far worse than originally feared, as Tube bosses deliberately create longer queues to drive people away from ticket offices.

RMT has learned that LUL has a hit-list of 130 stations where further "changes" to ticket office hours are proposed, on top of 39 ticket offices already earmarked for complete closure.

32 stations are scheduled to lose some or all weekend opening, 16 would lose afternoon peak services and 13 facing other major hours reductions (a full list of cuts is available on the RMT website).

The union has also learned that TfL has a deliberate strategy to lengthen queues and frustrate people into going elsewhere, and that its ticket office closure plan is based on predictions of the lower future use that it will help to bring about.

RMT has already warned that it will fight the planned cuts, with industrial action if

necessary, and is seeking public support for its campaign to maintain station staffing levels and to keep booking offices open.

TfL has claimed that it is responding to reduced demand for ticket-office services, but it is clearly engineering that reduced demand.

Ticket offices provide an essential service way beyond simply selling tickets, ticket office cuts.

For the public the will mean less security and fewer staff to deal with emergencies and ticketing problems.

For staff it means more lone working, more ticket disputes, more assaults and more stress.

"This latest hit-list confirms our warning that if TfL gets away with its first round of cuts then no ticket office will be safe," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said.

Get your MP to sign early day motion 1706 opposing the cuts. ■

EDM 1706

*Ticket office closures on the London Underground
Tabled by John McDonnell and signed by 35 others*

That this House is alarmed that London Underground intends to close 40 ticket offices and drastically to reduce the opening hours of dozens of more ticket offices; notes the concerns expressed by passenger groups and trade unions at the proposals; is further concerned that the closures will remove an essential service to passengers, make passengers feel more vulnerable and lead to increased assaults on staff; believes that the proposals are ill-thought out; and therefore urges Transport for London to withdraw these unnecessary and dangerous cuts.



EAST LONDON LINE PRIVATISATION BAD FOR SAFETY

Complex and fragmented arrangements for running the privatised 'London Rail' franchise will make it more difficult to manage operationally and safely, with potentially disastrous consequences, according to a leading rail-safety expert.

At least eight components will be involved in running 'London Rail' - two responsible for signalling, two for infrastructure maintenance, two for infrastructure renewals, one for train and station operations and another for train

maintenance.

Many of the operational and safety problems identified in a study of the plans, by Peter Rayner, would not exist if the franchise was to be run directly by London Underground, says the former manager of British Rail's biggest region.

However, Transport for London intends that the ELL's operations are taken from London Underground and handed, along with the North and West London lines, to privateer MTR Laing.

Mr Rayner's study says that

the unnecessarily complex relationships between the franchisee, TfL, Network Rail, private contractor Metronet and its own army of subcontractors, raise a catalogue of concerns.

"There is no doubt the fragmented nature of the arrangements does make it more difficult to manage operationally and importantly more difficult to manage safely," Mr Rayner concludes.

Mr Rayner, who has been an expert witness in 50 cases and gave evidence at the Southall and Ladbroke Grove inquiries,

draws on lessons from the Tebay and Edge Hill accidents.

Proposals to remove guards on the North and West London lines also raise safety fears because driver-only operation is not able to deal with passenger interface issues, says Mr Rayner.

He cites examples of serious accidents and fatalities caused by passengers being trapped in doors and trains train moving off, and says that the considerable cost of making DOO safe probably outweigh any of its claimed advantages. ■

NO TO ROAD TRAINS

All the rail unions have united to ask the Department of Transport to reject trials of new larger-sized lorries on the UK road network.

The letter said that the proposed vehicles range from 25.5 metres to 31 metres long with weights of 60 to 84 tonnes.

If introduced, these vehicles are supposed be restricted to motorways and dual carriageways but there is no mechanism to restrict access.

Unions are concerned – as happened with a previous concession of 44 tonne vehicles to railheads only – that any restrictions proposed will not be enforceable.

There are also safety concerns if these vehicles are involved in an accident.

The DfT Focus on Freight stated that because of their size and weight, when they are involved in accidents the level of injury tends to be higher with HGVs.

At a time when the government is committed to reducing carbon emissions, it also seems perverse to allow trials of vehicles which will decimate intermodal rail freight when rail freight has a much better environmental record than road haulage.

These vehicles will have minimal impact on road congestion whereas an average freight train can remove 50 HGVs from the road.

Opinion polls have consistency shown that the public are opposed to larger lorries, find existing HGVs intimidating and would prefer to see freight shifted to the railways. ■

RMT MEMBERS BACK ACTION AT 'ONE'

RMT guards, revenue-protection inspectors and retail staff at 'One' railway in north Essex have backed strike action over the dismissal of a guard and the company's failure to support other members involved in an incident with a fare evader.

Guards based at Colchester and Clacton, revenue-protection inspectors based at Colchester and retail members between Chelmsford and Manningtree, were balloted.

RMT is demanding the immediate re-instatement of Paul Yarwood, who was sacked after the June 7 incident, confirmation that there will be

no further disciplinary action connected with it, and a guarantee that the company will fulfil its duty of care towards employees in the future.

"It is breathtaking that after our members were left to deal with a violent and abusive fare-evader who refused to stop smoking on a train, assaulted a platform supervisor and threatened a passenger and other staff the company has chosen to turn on its workforce," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said.

He said that rather than support its employees the company re-defined a fare-dodger who boasted that he has

never traveled with a ticket in his adult life as a 'customer' and sacked one loyal member of staff and suspended two others.

"Railway staff who face the daily prospect of abuse and violence should be able to count on the support of their employers, but this company has totally failed its workforce.

"We have told 'One' that we expect our member to be re-instated, that we expect no further disciplinary action arising from this incident and that we expect guarantees that the company will in future honour its duty of care to its workforce," Bob said. ■

COMPANY WATCH

National Express posted a 60 per cent increase in its operating profits to £77 million for the six months to June this year.

Rail passengers may feel aggrieved by this news as National Express rail profits have ballooned by 40 per cent and the company has siphoned £28 million out of the rail industry in just six months.

Members will also note the 7.5 per cent increase in dividends for National Express shareholders, and will no doubt bear it in mind when the time comes to table pay claims.

While NatEx is feathering shareholders' nests at the expense of passengers and staff, it is converting public subsidy and over-the-odds fare increases into fat profits.

This may well get worse as rail fares are set to soar by 34 per cent after the government announced it plans to slash £1.5 billion off the £4.5 billion paid subsidies to train companies by 2014.

It remains unclear how passing the burden of subsidising the train companies from the government to the passenger through huge fare hikes tallies with promises of an environmentally friendly transport policy.

Meanwhile, First Group saw profits from its rail franchises raise to nearly £110 million compared to nearly £80 million last year. The transport privateer also saw profits from its bus interests continue to grow to £103 million.

Stagecoach profits remain steady, siphoning off the best part of £200 million a year and it has walked off with well over half a billion pounds since 2002(see table).

Go-Ahead group's overall revenue has

increased by 12.4 per cent from £1,463 million to £1,302 million and share dividends increased by 16.7 per cent.

The group's rail business saw revenue increase from £617.9 million in 2005 to £744.9 million in 2006, an increase of 20.5 per cent. Operating profits increased by 6.5 per cent from last year to £42.5 million.

As a result of ballooning profit levels, RMT has renewed its call for an end to the "rail-franchising rip-off" and for action to stem the "obscene" flow of profits out of the bus industry.

As long as franchising stays in place and prices people off the railways, the industry will be unable to play its rightful role in cutting carbon emissions by enticing people out of their cars. ■

Stagecoach Group - Operating Profits		
Year	Rail franchises (millions)	UK Bus Core Operations (millions)
Period to 30/04/07	£58.80	£89.70
Period to 30/04/06	£58.90	£86.70
Period to 31/05/05	£48.60	£81.70
Period to 30/04/04	£44.10	£74.80
Period to 30/04/03	£38.20	£67.00
Period to 30/04/02	£31.30	£71.10
Totals	£221.10	£381.30

Go Ahead Group - Operating Profits		
Year	Rail (millions)	Bus & Coach (millions)
Interim report for 6 months to 30th December 2006	£25.60	£29.20
12 months to 01.07.06	£38.10	£46.20
12 months to 02.07.05	£39.30	£52.40
12 months to 03.07.04	£40.90	£51
12 months to 28.06.03	£25	£43.90
12 months to 29.06.02	£17.50	£33.30
Total	£160.80	£226.80

BUS WORKERS DEMAND SAFETY AT WORK

Delegates to this year's RMT bus workers conference in Lincoln called for action on safety at work

Conference called for the Union to campaign for cashless or deposit box ticketing operations to be introduced in view of the increasing amount of robberies and attacks carry out on busworkers.

Peter Edwards, Exeter said that the bus industry was one of the few industries that still involved the use of relatively large amounts of cash.

"My members are exposed to potential violent attacks every day and the threat of robbery.

"The number of attacks on

staff has gone down since the introduction of cashless ticketing methods and we should learn from that," he said.

Keith Sander-Hole, Exeter said that these kinds of attacks were a sign of times and action was required.

Graham Gehlher, East Midlands Bus supported the call for cashless ticket operations but warned that in some areas it may be difficult to implement as bus companies often operate over different counties.

SECURITY SCREENS

Conference called on the union to carry out a survey on the suitability of driver cab security screens.

Keith Sander-Hole said that some screens caused blind spots in the drivers' vision, particularly if the screen was not an original piece of equipment.

"We have a particular problem in my area as old buses seem to migrant down to the west country.

"Many of the security screens have been badly fitted and they are a bodged up job," he said.

He outlined how such equipment and worn plastic and perspex screens obscure the drivers' view and caused accidents.

Michael Young, Ayr said that some original equipment was badly designed which obscured the vision of drivers.

"The protective screens also reflected light into rear-view mirrors and have even been taken off.

"These safety screens needed to be designed properly," he said.

Graham Gehlher said that a survey was fine but a campaign needed to be waged at a local level to combat the dangers of "retro-fitted" screens.

UPGRADING CAB SEATS

Conference called on the union to adopt a policy of fitting air sprung cab seats on all new vehicles and a programme to replace or refurbish the seats every two years.



Graham Geliher said that many employers installed only the most basic of cab seats.

Paul Wheeler, Isle of Wight said that a driver needed a decent seat to drive a bus.

"With the amount of money spent on buses it is not too much to ask that up-to-date technology is used in the cab," he said.

DRIVE DOWN THE HOURS

Conference called on the union to press the government to reduce the maximum 10 hours driving per day and the maximum 57 hours driving without a break.

Keith Murphy said that it was time to reduce these maximum periods for bus drivers.

"It is far too long to be driving for five and a half hours on hard seats, it's too much," he said.

David Fletcher, Camborne Bus said presently the legal maximum for continuous driving is five and a half hours but drivers can go on longer.

"They can add in ten minutes turn-around time here and there," he said.

David said that he had seen young people pass their exams and join the industry only to leave within a short period.

"Stress, illness and poor working conditions are endemic in the bus industry and such long driving hours is not morally acceptable," he said.

Andy Lister, Southampton said that TV safety campaigns constantly call on drivers to take a break every two hours and tiredness kills.

"Yet they expect professional drivers to take out buses with over 70 passengers and drive for over five hours – it's just not on," he said.

Trevor Munser-Willis, Exeter said that driving hours were a particular problem in

Exeter due to a lack of drivers.

"As a result the rosters are racked up to ensure drivers are out there the maximum amount of time with minimum number of breaks," he said.

RENATIONALISING BUS

Conference called for a campaign to renationalise the bus industry.

Darryl Emberson, Poole & District said that the current system of private operators controlling the bus network had resulted in a reduced service for the public, coupled with high fares and attacks on pay and conditions.

"The time has come for the union to utilise its resources to campaign for the renationalisation of the bus industry as it has already carried out for the railways," he said.

Graham Geliher said that bus routes run by private companies were heavily subsidised by council taxpayers.

"That hasn't stopped Stagecoach raking in £700 million in profits in just six months. "We hear about government plans for 're-regulation' and the scheme Putting Passengers First, however, all the private companies are interested in is putting profits first," he said.

BUS STOPS

Conference called on the union to conduct a campaign aimed at local government authorities to enforce parking bans at bus stops.

Trevor Munser-Willis said that despite warning signs motorists regularly obstructed bus stops, blocking the use of wheelchair access facilities in contravention of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Tony Meyer said that, unlike other European countries, there was no

enforcement of no parking rules governing bus stops.

Conference rejected a call for changes in the law regarding accidents involving vehicles illegally parked on a bus stop.

Keith Sander-Hole said that if any such vehicle was damaged by a bus the owner of the parked vehicle should have no claim for any damage caused.

"Once people realise they can't claim they would not do it," he said.

However, Graham Geliher said that the union could not condone or encourage members to drive buses into illegally parked cars.

FREE TRAVEL FOR PENSIONERS

Conference called upon the union to ensure a fair formulation by the government of payments to areas that have a high influx of tourists in view of the proposals of free travel for pensioners.

Tony Meyer, Exeter said that unless this issue was recognised the burden of the cost would be passed on in the form of higher council tax.

Keith Murphy, IoW said that the scheme will go nationwide in April 2008 and it needed to be clear how it would be funded.

MERGERS

Conference called on the union to ensure that where bus company mergers and take-overs occur, the union will be at the forefront in defending members' interests.

Graham Geliher said that mergers were often used by the employer to split and weaken the RMT.

He said that he had had personal experience of this process where depots were merged and the RMT was de-recognised in favour of other unions.

He applauded the work of RMT officials and said that as soon as these types of mergers occur the union should continue to act swiftly and get individual letters out to members explaining the situation.

Assistant general secretary Mick Cash said that RMT remained that largest specialist transport union in the UK.

He said that the best defence against poaching and in disputes with other unions is RMT's own organisation.

"We still punch above our weight and provide a good service to members," he said.

He said that the union's recent campaign with officers and RMT's organising unit which led to the recognition of RMT at the Truronian Bus Company showed the way forward.

BUS WORKERS' CHARTER

Conference called on the union to update and circulate the RMT bus workers' charter.



FAREWELL: RMT regional organiser Phil Bialyk says farewell on behalf of conference to Bob Mould of Salisbury branch on his retirement

A FUTURE FOR RAIL

RMT's Parliamentary group John McDonnell MP hosted a recent seminar on the Future for Rail

John McDonnell MP told a packed House of Commons committee room that a meeting entitled the Future for Rail "couldn't have been more timely".

Held just a week before Gordon Brown became Prime Minister and as a government white paper on the future 30 years of rail was being prepared, John said that the event was an important opportunity "to win the campaign to grow the railway system".

In attendance was a mix of interested parties from within and outside the rail industry, including MPs, representatives of commuter campaign groups,

RMT and other transport union activists.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow said that while everyone could draw up what changes they wanted to see happen on the railways, the real question to ask of Parliament was "is there a will to do it?"

"The issue is about a lot more than rail, it is about the buses too. Bus and rail should be complementing each other. That can't happen because they are in competition.

"We need a transport system that defeats environmental problems, we need to make it an issue in elections. Only when it is publicly owned and publicly

accountable will it deliver for the people," he told the audience.

Kay Carberry, TUC assistant general secretary, said that across the trade union movement there was a commitment to long term planning of the public transport system. There was also a compelling environmental and social argument in favour of improved public transport because it affects the whole community.

Questioning real government commitment to change, she pointed out that "motoring costs have decreased in real terms while rail travel has gone up in price".

She said that the TUC wanted to see a proper strategy for getting freight off of the road and onto rail and also a new high speed line linking London to the north of England and Scotland.

Tony Ambrose of the train users group More Trains Less

Strain said that "the whole structure needs to change".

He claimed that people didn't want to be humiliated by travelling in cramped conditions and did not want to be "held to ransom by rapacious private monopolies".

Tony told the story of a well-supported day of action earlier in the year in the form of a fare strike when hundreds of passengers refused to buy tickets. Instead they issued spoof "cattle class" tickets to make their point.

First Great Western had threatened to fine the protesters but on the day itself the size of the protest meant they just opened the barriers for the protesters at the end of their journey.

Rail Minister Tom Harris MP couldn't make the meeting as it coincided with the christening of his new son. Instead, Mark Lambirth, Department for Trade and Industry director of Rail Strategy and Finance, was a

Bob Crow speaks



TSSA general secretary Gerry Doherty makes his point



strong substitute. He explained some of the process that the government was going through with the forthcoming white paper and said that the government was looking into creating both new rail lines and multi-tracking old lines.

Asked by an audience member about the closure of rural lines as a cost cutting exercise, he said that it wasn't something he wanted to see happen because among other things it simply "it is not true that huge savings will be made by cutting rural lines".

Linda Riordan MP wanted to see an expansion of railway line and routes, an expansion of railway stock and the further electrification of the tracks. Referring to the forthcoming government white paper she said: "I hope it puts people first and not profits".

Gerry Doherty, TSSA general secretary, spoke about routes to public ownership of the railways and had a clear message as to the way forward.

"Take back each part of the network into public ownership one by one as franchises come to an end... The sooner we get it back, the better," he said.

Paul Plummer, a director of Network Rail Planning and Regulation was heard respectfully, but nevertheless had a hard time from some of the audience as he outlined some of the company's business plan. He said in his defence that planned improvements "have taken time after Railtrack".

Stephen Joseph, director of Transport 2000, argued that to get more people using the rail network that the cost of fares was going to be the crucial issue.

Stephen pointed to the exorbitant and often prohibitive price of a walk on fare compared to someone taking a decision to take a spur of the moment car journey.

In the battle to get more people out of cars and onto trains, "fares are going to be the absolute critical issue," he said.

RAIL OPERATORS RAKE IT IN

Train operating companies continue to profit from fare rises and the public purse

The latest figures indicate that private train operators benefited from both increased fares and huge public subsidies in the last financial year.

Fares have risen by an average of 6.8 per cent and public subsidy to the TOCs (excluding Merseyrail) virtually doubled to £2 billion in 2006/07 compared to just over £1 billion in 2005/06 (see tables).

The result has been a fuelling of private sector profits, notably at the First Group where there has been a 36.7 per cent increase in UK rail operating profits.

The Department of Trade and, more significantly, the Treasury wants to reduce the overall level of public subsidies paid to the TOCs sharply by the middle of the next decade.

Rail minister Tom Harris is talking of the need to "rebalance" TOC income between the farepayer and the taxpayer.

FARE RISES

This has led to a series of franchise agreements - GNER, First Great Western, SWT, First Capital Connect - being signed off which will see operators pay premium payments of between £800 million and £1.2 billion to the DfT.

Profits, of course, are still protected. SWT, for example, will make around £20 million a year profit over the course of their franchise which runs until 2017.

Unsurprisingly, the privateers' response is to squeeze the passengers with fare rises in a desperate attempt to meet their premium payments.

Arriva Trains Wales and SWT have recently announced off-peak fare increases of up to 34 per cent and 20 per cent

respectively. Attempts by FGW to cut costs led to a passenger fares strikes and a shortage of rolling stock in the Bristol area.

Arriva, awarded the Cross Country franchise in July 2007, will be able to increase unregulated fares by an average of 3.4 per cent above inflation every year.

Additionally, the newly awarded West Midlands (Stagecoach) and East Midlands (Govia) franchises have also seen the new operators being allowed to set annual unregulated fare increases at an average of three per cent and 3.4 per cent above inflation.

This applies to unregulated fares across the East Midlands franchise area and to the London-Northampton route in the West Midlands.

So with direct public subsidy set to fall and unregulated fares permitted to rise by some 30 per cent above inflation over the next decade the only rebalancing seems to be from which trough the TOCs go to first to make their profits and pay shareholder dividends.

In 2006/07 it was the £2 billion from the public purse, by the middle of the next decade it looks increasingly likely to be the farepayer.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow said that allowing private train operating companies to hike up fares to protect their profits was unsustainable and irrational.

"Pricing passengers off the railway will not increase rail use or encourage people to get out of their cars and onto the rail network," he said.

"The 2006/07 Annual National Rail Trends figures published by the Office of Rail Regulation on July 5

2006/07

Train Operator	Subsidy in £millions
Arriva Trains Wales	145.3
C2C	18.5
Central Trains	211.9
Chiltern Railways	32
First Capital Connect	-14.4
First Great Western	97.4
First Great Western Link	-1.3
First ScotRail	275
Gatwick Express	-15
GNER	-13.3
Island Line	2.7
Midland Mainline	29.6
Northern	168.5
ONE	2.9
Silverlink	94.7
Southeastern	144.9
South West Trains	123
Southern	162
Thameslink	-0.8
Transpennine	102.2
Virgin Cross Country	230.7
Virgin West Coast	221.3
Wessex Trains	-0.2
Total	2,017.6

2005/06

Train Operator	Subsidy in £millions
Arriva Trains Wales	99.7
C2C	-2.1
Central Trains	159.8
Chiltern Trains	12.1
First Great Western	-26.5
First Great Western Link	-4.7
First ScotRail	118.9
Gatwick Express	-20.4
GNER	-68.8
Island Line	3.1
Midland Mainline	-6.3
Northern Rail	278.2
ONE	-55.6
Silverlink	60
South Eastern Trains	50.7
South West Trains	50.7
Southern	106
Thameslink	-53.4
Transpennine	66.2
Virgin Cross Country	150.6
Virgin West Coast	92.5
WAGN	6.5
Wessex Trains	57.1
Other	-1.8
Total	1,082.5

Minus figures indicate that a premium was paid to the DfT

THE BIG EU CON

RMT calls for a referendum on the EU Constitution rejected by French and Dutch voters in 2005

RMT's annual general meeting recently reiterated the union's opposition to the privateer's charter known as the EU Constitution.

Since then a new version has been produced and the government claims it is different enough not to warrant the referendum it promised two years ago.

However, only 10 out of 250 proposals in the new treaty are different from the proposals in the original EU Constitution. In other words, 96 per cent of the text is the same.

Almost all EU leaders have also stressed that the "new" treaty is the same as the old EU one.

SAME TREATY

While Britain's Europe Minister Jim Murphy claims that "the reform treaty will differ fundamentally from the Constitutional Treaty in its substance".

German Chancellor Angela Merkel says "the substance of the Constitution is preserved. That is a fact".

Spanish Prime Minister Jose Zapatero admits "we have not let a single substantial point of the Constitutional treaty go".

While European Communications Commissioner Margot Wallstrom admits: "it's essentially the same proposal as the old Constitution".

Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos says "The wrapping has been changed, but not the content" and "legal primacy has been saved with a declaration".

Former Italian Prime Minister Giuliano Amato admits that EU leaders had "decided that the document should be

unreadable", explaining that this would allow Gordon Brown to present the text to Parliament and say "look, you see, it's absolutely unreadable, it's the typical Brussels treaty, nothing new, no need for a referendum".

The other ploy the government is using is to claim that the new "treaty" contains a gaggle of opt-outs and other "safeguards".

However, most of these were in the original version of the Constitution - on which the government promised a referendum.

These "safeguards" are designed to distract from the really big change proposed by the Constitution, which is giving the EU's own European Court of Justice full jurisdiction over justice, policing and other areas of law.

This Constitution is designed to give the EU the constitutional form of a state, owing obedience to its laws and loyalty to its authority.

It would transfer more powers to the EU and establish law-making powers over 50 new areas of policy.

In other words, an unelected and irremovable oligarchy would make binding laws for over 500 million people without a mandate to do so.

POWER TO PRIVATISE

Part Three of the Constitution will be transposed into the new treaty intact and without debate.

However, this gives the EU a permanent neoliberal orientation and gives Brussels the power to privatise services, the more reason for the No votes in both France and the Netherlands.

As Dutch left MEP Erik Meijer wrote: "The constitution

protects freedom for enterprises and 'free, unrestricted competition".

What this means in neoliberal Europe has become ever more clear in recent years.

Basic services in public transport, post, energy and telecommunications are seen as profitable assets to be sold off to the private sector.

The Lisbon Summit in 2000 began encouraging the selling of such services to major corporations.

Through compulsory tendering it has also become necessary for the remaining public services to compete with others.

This means that sooner or later they will disappear, because they are small, caring, and attached to a particular region, and deliberately not equipped to operate in competition with others.

As a result, the GMB union recently came out in favour of a referendum, while the T&G section of UNITE and UNISON are among the unions which also oppose the treaty.

AN EU 'GOVERNMENT'

Labour MP Gisela Stuart has warned that the new treaty would incorporate the European Council into the EU structures

for the first time, forcing EU leaders to "promote its values, advance its objectives, serve its interests" rather than those of member states.

The European Council was originally set up in 1974 as an informal forum for heads of EU member states to meet.

She argues, "It used to be that leaders met in order to co-ordinate the interest of the nation states. Under this new structure, that body where heads of state meet will become subordinate to the union's interests.

"They will now have a duty to represent the interests of the union, not the interests of the member state. It's a consolidation of the way the union works into a structure which is much more like a government," she says.

Stuart was a member of the convention which drew up the original Constitution and she also says that the new treaty is the same.

"The main constitutional arrangements, such as giving the union a single legal personality so that it can enter into treaties itself - that's all still there," she says.

For more information go to www.tuaeuc.org



A new pamphlet on the 'new' EU Constitution is available free from info@tuaeuc.org

CAMPAIGNING AND WINNING

Full 2007 report of this year's annual general meeting in Edinburgh

RENATIONALISE THE BUS INDUSTRY

Delegates called on the union to step up its campaign to restore the bus industry to public ownership "with utmost vigour", condemning the privateers who were running it down and devastating morale among workers.

South Devon Bus delegate Paul Rossiter said that since deregulation of the buses in 1986 "we've seen pay eroded and the job satisfaction has gone".

Paul cited the recent RMT survey which found that just 13

per cent of bus workers felt that their employers adequately rewarded staff, while two thirds said that poor pay and conditions were driving hundreds of workers to quit their jobs.

"Drivers at the moment are on very poor pay - most of our younger members cannot afford to get a mortgage and have to pay sky-high rents," he complained.

Paul pointed out that public money is being handed over to the privateers, with little improvement to services.

"The government gives

money to bus companies in fuel subsidies and councils give them money through subsidised routes.

"If councils don't pay up the companies just withdraw the routes - the travelling public and our members deserve better," he said.

Poole and District delegate Robert Clarke complained that "all the money goes to shareholders - the passengers are not bothered with.

"The companies cut out non-productive routes. They are just concerned with their profits," he said.

Senior assistant general secretary Mick Cash said that the union was "looking to push the government further than they're going at the moment".

"They pushing for more regulation - and we support that - but only as a step towards renationalisation," he added.

DRIVE DOWN THE HOURS

The AGM unanimously called on the executive council to press the government to reduce the maximum driving time of 10 hours a day - and the maximum time of five hours driving without a break - for reasons of



safety "and simple morality."

South Devon Bus delegate Paul Rossiter complained that the regulations meant that bus drivers were expected to cope with shifts far longer than drivers in the international road haulage industry.

He said that it was "about time our industry recognised you can't treat us differently from each other - it is high time this country recognised that domestic drivers suffer the same stress, the same fatigue and the same problems as our brothers in long haul".

ENGINEERING SAFETY

Delegates insisted that the designated Controller of Site Safety (COSS) during engineering work should stick to monitoring safety, and condemned efforts by some employers to allow a COSS to set up a safe system of work and then take part in the work itself.

Liverpool Network Rail delegate Mick McCabe said: "It's very important if you're doing a job like I do - ultimately you need 100 per cent concentration".

Fort William delegate Steve Wallace agreed, arguing that "if you're in charge of a workforce on dangerous sites, you have to be in charge of colleagues' safety - and solely in charge of colleagues' safety".

Mick Cash said that the job of COSS should be the same as a lookout on track repair work.

He pointed out that "it is Network Rail that makes the decisions" on this issue, and said that the executive would

now look at whether to negotiate with NR direct or whether to set up a working party.

BETTER PAY

Conference condemned the poverty pay endured by many engineering grades - often lower than £16,000 a year. Delegates slammed bosses for forcing engineering workers to work excessive overtime in order to make ends meet.

Lancaster and District delegate Steve Metcalfe said that the result of such low pay was "a high turnover and loss of staff", adding that it would actually benefit the employers to "pay staff decently".

However, he noted that "it's like banging your head against a brick wall trying to tell them that."

Mick Cash backed the resolution, but emphasised that "it is important to raise standards across all our membership".

AGM called for engineering grades to receive a base rate comparable with skilled tradesmen outside the rail industry, as a first step to remedying the problem. Delegates agreed that a high-profile RMT campaign on the issue could result in thousands of unorganised rail workers joining the union.

DEFENDING THE GUARD

Delegates condemned the rail privateers' latest attempts to downgrade the vital safety role played by guards on trains.

Delegates attacked the Rail Safety and Standards Board for

amending the industry's rulebook and removing the requirement for guards to remain at the controls of a train's doors until it had safely left the platform.

They warned that such a move placed passengers at risk from being trapped in doors.

Bridgend Llantrisant and District delegate Steve Skelly called the move "yet another attack on the overall responsibilities of the guard".

Bristol rail delegate Chris Davidson added: "They're just chipping away at the roles and responsibilities of guards - when there is an incident on the line we're not going to have trained staff on the train to look after the safety of passengers."

"We are absolutely sick to the back teeth of our roles and safety being compromised - especially by an organisation that's supposed to ensure that safety standards are being upheld."

Assistant general secretary Pat Sikorski said that the union was taking action to protect the role of guards, but warned that industrial action might become necessary.

ENDING FRAGMENTATION

South London Rail delegate

Paul Cox warned the AGM that the problems caused by rail fragmentation and privatisation affected all grades, not just train crews.

He said that the situation was creating "tribalism", with sometimes staff in the mess room "not talking to each other because they're wearing different uniforms and work for

different companies."

Paul said that there used to be a "common bond" among rail and transport workers, in the days before privatisation.

He argued that it was now up to RMT to be this bond for all staff.

"If we could do that this union would come on in leaps and bounds," he said.

AGM welcomed moves by the RMT leadership to improve the recruitment and retention of members, such as the successful new Education Centre in Doncaster, but stressed that it is primarily the rank and file activists who are in the forefront of organisation.

Delegates urged all such activists and branches to make organisation and retention of members their top priority.

Pat Sikorski agreed, noting that the rail privateers sought to divide workers by making them feel that their "first loyalty" was to the company, rather than to the union.

FIGHTING LONE WORKING

Delegates warned that the rail privateers' obsession with squeezing more profits from the system was leaving staff dangerously alone in stations and trains.

AGM voted unanimously to step up the union's campaign against lone working - and to vigorously defend members who refused to work in such conditions on the grounds of safety.

Bristol delegate Chris Davidson said: "Lone working is becoming more and more of a problem and it is putting our



members at risk.

"We are sick and tired of lone working being introduced for reasons of profit and greed."

Chris told conference about a Bristol-based guard who was suspended after refusing to work on a late night train from Paddington which was notorious for drunken passengers - despite the company's written policy supporting "refusal to work on safety grounds."

First Great Western had axed catering staff on the train, leaving the guard to deal with potential trouble alone.

Union intervention eventually got the guard reinstated, but Chris stressed that this should not be necessary.

"Why should this guard have to go through the stress of being suspended - of not knowing if he had a job to come back to?" he asked.

London Underground delegate Brian Munro said that Tube bosses were trying to introduce lone working on the northern end of the Bakerloo Line - in some of London's most crime-ridden areas.

"This is unacceptable and we will not allow this dangerous practice on our line," said Brian, revealing that a ballot of station and train staff for industrial action was underway - with all the signs of a massive Yes vote.

"The response of our members has been magnificent," he said, noting that the ballot had boosted union recruitment as well.

COMBATTING ASSAULTS

Delegates called for action to turn back the rising tide of assaults on staff - including action from staff and management alike.

AGM agreed that the union must stress the importance of logging every assault - no matter how apparently minor, such as incidents of verbal abuse.

This placed the onus on the employers to record the level of assaults and take action.

Brighton delegate Gary

Hassell said: "We've campaigned vigorously and continue to campaign vigorously on this issue."

"It is totally unacceptable for anyone to go to work and face a battering or a barrage of insults and abuse," he said.

Feltham delegate Dave

Rudland noted that many members did not bother recording incidents of abuse because it was "a daily occurrence."

Pat Sikorski agreed, noting that recently a member actually died, following an assault by two drunken bankers.

He complained that these "pillars of the community" had been freed on bail, despite facing manslaughter charges - while union members who are assaulted are often blamed for inciting violence against them, and sometimes even sacked.

Pat said that companies must be forced to prosecute every culprit who assaults or abuses a transport worker.

NO TO EU DIKTATS

AGM called for a referendum on the EU constitution, with delegates branding the document "a neo-liberal privateers' charter" and urging a broad labour movement campaign against it.

Bristol delegate Chris

Davidson warned: "If we don't have a referendum we will be giving our rights away - it's bad enough dealing with our own government, let alone some unelected bureaucrats in Brussels."

Chris complained that in the past 20 years, not a single British voter had been given the opportunity to say what they would like to see happen with the EU.

Plymouth delegate Nick

Quirk said that the reason that the government was refusing to hold a referendum on the treaty was because it knew that the British people would reject it.

Nick said that New Labour was "obsessed with spin" and was therefore trying to claim that there was no need for a



Jack Hayman addresses conference

vote.

General secretary Bob Crow accused the TUC of "hiding behind the EU" to avoid fighting for union rights, arguing that its so-called "social dimension" had given French and German workers decent pay and conditions.

"They only enjoy those because they fought for them themselves," Bob pointed out, and warned that the EU has far different intentions.

"You've got to know what beast you're dealing with."

"They want the privatisation of all public services and they want to smash the welfare state," he said.

Delegates also congratulated RMT members for supporting the struggle against EU rail "liberalisation" directives.

Cinque Ports delegate Mike Sargent said that it was great to see RMT members at the joint demonstration against EU rail directives in Paris last February.

But he warned that the battle against dangerous EU diktats, demanding the fragmentation of rail networks, was far from won. AGM unanimously backed his call to arrange a conference against rail privatisation and EU liberalisation directives in London.

US SOLIDARITY

AGM gave a warm welcome to US trade unionist **Jack Hayman**

of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, who spoke of standards and conditions under attack across America as the costs of the illegal Iraq war mounted.

Jack recalled first meeting Bob Crow on February 15, 2003, at the two million-strong anti-war demonstration in London.

"And yet Blair would not listen to the people and Bush was the same way," he bitterly recalled.

"The overwhelming majority of people in your country and my country are opposed to the war in Iraq," he said.

"It is devastating our society - schools are being closed and jobs are being cut to pay for this war."

Jack concluded by quoting the great US socialist Eugene Debs - a rail worker who was jailed for opposing the First World War - who said "it is the master class that starts the wars, but it is the subject class that does the fighting".

SWEDISH GREETINGS

Delegates then heard from **John Rudén of Sweden's Seko union**, who said that his country was also suffering from a "new Labour" government, with "classical right wing policies" such as "tax cuts, privatisation and deregulation".

He said that, just as in Britain, all state-owned



YOUTH AWARD: Transport for London branch chair Jo Parry collects this year's RMT youth award. Jo works as a health and safety advisor for TfL.

enterprises were being sold off under so-called "public private partnerships".

John said that such privatisation and deregulation was, just as in Britain, sparking major concerns over safety on the Swedish rail network as everything was left to the privateers.

"The market may be a good servant but it is a poor master," he noted.

TUC GREETINGS

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber told delegates that "nowhere is the failure of neo-liberalism clearer than in transport".

He said that the deregulation of Britain's buses had "clearly been a disaster", with low wages and poor job security.

Brendan noted that the scourge of poverty pay and bad conditions was also afflicting the shipping industry.

"We must eradicate pay discrimination and remove the clause from the Race Relations Act which allows foreign nationals to be paid lower rates.

"We must ensure that overseas workers cannot be exploited and British workers' wages cannot be undercut," he said.

Turning his attention to the troubled Tube network, the TUC leader branded the "public private partnership" a "disaster" for Tube workers and passengers, before attacking the "botched Tory privatisation" of the railways.

"Over £800 million is given to the industry every year, dwarfing the subsidy paid to British Rail, but for what - a shambolic service and lower safety standards".

He said that it was socially and environmentally vital to "get people out of their cars and on to trains and buses", insisting that "leaving it up to the market simply won't work".

He called on the trade union movement to lead the fight against neo-liberalism and "make the case for an integrated transport network run for need and not for profit."

SUPPORTING POST WORKERS

AGM threw the union's weight behind the postal workers' struggle for pay justice, when **Communication Workers Union national officer Bob Gibson** updated delegates on his union's national dispute.

Bob said that Royal Mail bosses Allan Leighton and Adam Crozier "have no respect

for the union, no respect for their workers and no respect for working people."

He said that many workers feared that they would find themselves barred from the premises on strike days, in a bid to smash the union.

Some 130,000 postal workers were preparing to walk out on June 29th after talks with management broke down. Royal Mail staff are furious at a miserly 2.5 per cent pay offer and the prospect of 40,000 job cuts under the guise of "modernisation."

"We do need to modernise the industry, but modernising to them means cutting jobs and driving down our pay and conditions. These people are trying to destroy the industry."

He revealed that bosses told CWU officials "you don't care about the industry or your members" - adding that this was an insult from fat cats who had only just entered the industry, directed at people who had worked for the postal service all their lives.

"Postmen take home just £323 a week, while Adam Crozier got a £1 million bonus last year," Bob pointed out.

Bob blamed the government's determination to open up the postal service to competition, asking: "Why introduce competition into what is supposed to be a public service?"

Pointing out that 98 per cent of mail was delivered the next day, he asked: "So why introduce competition? The only reason is financial gain for the few and financial loss for the many."

General secretary Bob Crow pledged solidarity with CWU and welcomed its request to "adopt" branches during the dispute.

REGIONAL WOMEN'S STEWARDS

The AGM pledged to create regional women's stewards to ensure that the ever-increasing number of women activists had a strong voice within the organisation.

Delegates unanimously backed a resolution which called upon all Regional Councils to create such posts, to assist in the recruitment and organisation of women members.

They agreed that women's stewards should have proper access to regional union resources and should be able to claim reasonable expenses from the councils.

London Underground delegate Linda Wiles said that such officials would be essential in "supporting and encouraging women to get involved in the union".

She insisted: "We need to raise the awareness of what our union does. A woman's place is in her union - and that union is the RMT".

General secretary Bob Crow urged all branches to campaign on women's issues, saying: "The more gains that we make, the more women will join us."

FIGHTING FOR PENSIONS

Scottish National Pensioners Convention chairman George Henderson told the AGM that the struggle for pension justice was a struggle for all trade unionists.

"Whatever gains the pensioners' movement secures now will inevitably benefit the pensioners of tomorrow - your members," he told delegates.

"That's why the solidarity between generations has to be more than just a slogan," he said.

George recalled that 2008 sees the centenary of the first ever old age pension, "which



Brendan Barber addresses conference



was won after a 10-year campaign by the pioneers of the British trade union movement”.

He said that the NPC would be using the occasion to call for improvements in the basic state pension and urged trade unionists to take a leading role in the campaign.

He stressed how urgent the need for a decent pension is - with 2.5 million pensioners currently living below the poverty line, “with millions more struggling to pay their bills”.

George noted: “Our pension is the least adequate in Europe at just £87 a week - and women don’t even get that”.

He insisted: “When the Pensions Bill goes through later this year, the government will say that its job on pensions is done. It won’t be.

“We still need a substantial increase in the state pension to around £136 a week, and a restoration of the link with earnings to make up for years of neglect,” he said.

PENSION FIGHT

TSSA general secretary Gerry Doherty warned the AGM that industrial action over rail pensions was probably inevitable.

Gerry warned that attacks on Network Rail workers’ pensions, which have already sparked strike action, signified the determination of rail bosses to “intimidate” workers.

He joked that NR boss John Armitt was “so unpopular that if he was an undertaker people would stop dying”.

He said that rail unions were already fighting hard to defend members from the worst

excesses of the fragmented railway network, with staff “being shoved from pillar to post, shoved from one pension scheme to another without any say whatsoever.”

The TSSA leader welcomed the closer links being forged between the two unions and pledged to keep working to put the organisations’ past differences behind them.

He stressed that “our real enemies are not each other, they are the John Armitts and Graham Souters’ of this world.”

Gerry noted that Mr Souter’s Stagecoach company had recently raised fares on South West Trains by an incredible 20 per cent, “without a murmur from the government”.

He warned that a similar price increase was likely now that Stagecoach had been awarded the East Midlands rail franchise.

RMT APPLAUDS MCDONNELL

AGM gave **RMT Parliamentary Group chairman John McDonnell MP** a standing ovation before he’d even begun his report.

John joked that he’d come straight from Parliament, “so it’s nice to be among friends”.

He recalled that over the last 12 months of his campaign for the Labour leadership, “you really find out who your friends are”, and stressed that RMT had been “firm friends and allies”.

He hailed the hard work of the Parliamentary Group, with strong campaigning on issues such as the need for a return to public ownership on the railways, the disastrous PPP on the Tube and the Trade Union Freedom Bill.

John warned that a Gordon Brown premiership would mean more privatisation, more cuts in public services and more attacks on working people.

He said that Mr Brown remained determined to force New Labour’s neo-liberal agenda on Britain and charged the new Prime Minister with an “incredible betrayal” of those unions who backed him within

hours of assuming power

John noted that just eight hours after being acclaimed leader Mr Brown declared that the Labour Conference would no longer be the official sovereign body of the party.

“Trade unions will no longer have any say in policy-making,” said the MP, arguing that “the reality is that to defend working-class people now there will have to be extra-parliamentary activity”.

He said that this should take the form of mass industrial action, co-ordinated between unions and sectors, with workers showing solidarity with PCS in its fight to save thousands of Civil Service jobs and CWU in its battle to preserve the Post Office as a public service.

The MP said that his own campaign to become Labour leader had been successful in raising important issues such as public ownership and trade union rights and bringing them to the forefront of debate.

But he admitted that there had been three major obstacles in his way - a “media blackout” by the mainstream media, the self-defeating support for Mr Brown by “some trade union leaders” and the difficulties faced in Parliament when it came to finding 40 Labour MPs prepared to back him.

John said that it was the duty of the left to campaign hard in the “battle of ideas” ahead of the next general election.

He said that the campaign should be a strictly “non-sectarian movement”, with groups such as the Labour Representation Committee working with any other like-minded organisations.

General secretary Bob Crow thanked John warmly for the sterling work he’d done for the union, and said that he looked forward to many more years working together.

But Bob pointed out that 92 per cent of trade unionists were eligible to vote for the Labour deputy leadership contest, but most didn’t bother.

“In my opinion the Labour Party is dead - it’s over.

“Of all the union-sponsored MPs, surely the general secretaries could have found 40 to back John,” he said.

Bob finished by stating that working people had “totally lost confidence” in the Labour Party and argued that the sooner John left and stood as an independent MP the better.

FOR TRADE UNION FREEDOM

AGM condemned new Labour’s refusal to abolish the Tory anti-union laws and demanded the introduction of the Trade Union Freedom Bill.

Delegates urged massive support yesterday for the Parliamentary rally and national demonstration for the Bill on October 18.

Delegates also welcomed the TUC’s demand for the anti-union laws to be repealed and stressed the right of every



Pipers welcome delegates

worker to be represented by an effective fighting union.

Brighton delegate Gary Hassell said that support for the Bill was a “no-brainer” and attacked laws “which give the bosses a chance to prepare for action while we have to go in with our hands tied behind our backs.”

Cinque Ports delegate Mike Sargent noted that British trade unionists now have fewer rights than they did after the Taff Vale judgment of 1901.

He attacked MPs for allowing the Trade Union Freedom Bill to be talked out in the Commons, while speeding through a Bill exempting themselves from the Freedom of Information Act.

Bob Crow pointed out the unfair balance of power in industrial relations.

Bob noted that unions cannot take lawful industrial action for up to five weeks, while bosses are allowed to impose detrimental changes to workers' terms and conditions in a single day.

He also condemned those union-sponsored MPs who have failed to sign up to the Bill, stressing that of over 300 such MPs, only 180 were openly supporting it.

END 'OFFSHORING'

Delegates called on the Scottish Executive to stop ship operators dodging their tax obligations by “offshoring” staff.

AGM unanimously agreed to campaign against the move by Highlands and Islands ferry operator Caledonian MacBrayne, which was originally undertaken to cut costs prior to the service's privatisation.

Glasgow shipping delegate Fred Potter said that by offshoring its crew to a Guernsey-based crewing agency, Calmac had avoided paying £2 million in National Insurance contributions since February 2006.

Fred said that the loophole was ostensibly set up to help create seafaring jobs, but had merely “helped fatcats line their already bulging pockets.”

He noted that the tendering exercise forced upon the ferry service had cost £17 million, even though the sole rival bidder dropped out.

Aberdeen shipping delegate Neil Keith condemned the whole process, arguing that it was “ridiculous” that it favoured “the lowest bidder rather than the safest bidder.”

General secretary Bob Crow said: “Every penny withheld in National Insurance by offshoring is money taken away from the NHS, pensions and social security.

“I don't know how the private shipping employers who take tax breaks with one hand and withhold NI with the other hand can bring themselves to look in the mirror, but it is breathtaking that a publicly-owned company should ever have been sent down the same path.”

FAIR FARES?

Delegates unanimously backed proposals for a united campaign with rail passengers for “a complete overhaul of rail fares, a system of proper regulation and a coherent fare structure.”

On the same day that privateer Stagecoach announced a 38 per cent increase in pre-tax profits to £162 million, the AGM warned that the confusing and expensive array of fares was “destroying our railways.”

Delegates dismissed the toothless system of fares regulation as a “joke”, noting that many train companies were allowed to increase “regulated” fares by up to 9 per cent - or by abolishing cheap options such as the Super Saver ticket, up to 26 per cent.

Pat Sikorski complained that “at the moment it is impossible to persuade this government that it should regulate anything”.

Bob Crow said: “The privateers' pursuit of profit at the expense of our rail and bus industries is strangling both, and real environmental progress will not be made until the government recognises that rail

franchising is an expensive failure.

“Every penny of the £700 million that Stagecoach has handed to its shareholders has been taken from the pockets of passengers and taxpayers and every penny of it should have remained in the industry”.

OILC ON BOARD

Offshore Industry Liaison Committee (OILC) general secretary Jake Molloy gave a passionate speech to conference in support of plans to merge with RMT.

Jake recalled how OILC was “created in a vacuum” in the wake of the deaths of 167 workers on the Piper Alpha oil platform in 1988.

He said that the purpose of the new union was to “take on the oil giants” in the absence of any real militancy from the established unions, who had signed cosy partnership agreements with the employers.

“We managed to achieve a lot, but at a cost,” said Jake, noting the sacking and blacklisting of over 400 OILC members.

OILC became an independent trade union in 1991, and even without the support of the TUC had achieved a great deal, he said.

“If it hadn't been for OILC the health and safety gains made in the industry over the past 15 years would never have happened.”

Jake argued that with the support of the RMT, the offshore workers could make even greater progress.

He pointed out that there were still three or four deaths every year in the sector - there have been 12 in 2007 - and this needed to be addressed.

He said that offshore workers are still fighting for decent holiday entitlement and the law still allows companies to summarily dismiss contracted staff.

General secretary Bob Crow said that it made sense for all offshore workers to be in the same union.



Glenroy Watson

“RMT, like OILC, doesn't believe in partnership agreements,” he added.

REMEMBERING SLAVERY

London Underground delegate Glenroy Watson called on the union to educate members about the horrific effects and legacy of the transatlantic slave trade.

Glenroy said that modern society was still suffering the effects of the evil trade in human beings - “racism, bigotry and discrimination.”

He called for a vigorous RMT campaign on the issue of reparations for slavery “to repair the relationship of Africans with society”.

Glenroy noted that 100 years after the official abolition of slavery, Africa was still racked with poverty, despite being one of the most resource-rich continents on earth.

“We are asking that we support this struggle - it is about unpaid wages; about the fact that we received lashes instead of wages,” he said.

“There continues to be a failure to acknowledge the suffering of the African people and to acknowledge the racist policies directed against an entire people”.

Camden delegate Peter O'Brien stressed that slavery still persisted, in different forms - such as sweated labour and people trafficking. ■

GRASS ROOTS TRADE UNIONISM ON THE RISE

RMT general secretary Bob Crow reports on the inaugural conference of the National Shop Stewards Network

July saw an important step on the road to reviving militant grassroots trade unionism in Britain with the inaugural conference of the National Shop Stewards Network, held in London.

The conference, whose roots lay in an RMT initiative last year, saw around 300 rank-and-file delegates from across the spectrum of trade unionism, gather to agree a programme of action aimed at launching a new struggle to overturn decades of retreat.

As well as hearing speeches from union leaders such as myself and PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka, activists were vocal in expressing the burning need to re-establish the kind of shop stewards movement which won such important advances for the working class through the industrial struggles of the 1970s.

At the time there were around 350,000 workplace shop stewards or worker representatives. Today the figure stands at about 100,000.

Likewise, trade union membership is nearly half what it was - 6.39 million employees compared to 12 million. While this still represents nearly a third of the workforce it is sobering to reflect that only 11 per cent of young workers between 16 and 24 are in unions.

SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP FAILS

Clearly all the promises made by the right that social partnership and sweetheart deals would be the saviour of the labour

movement have been shown to have failed.

What is now required is a grassroots trade union organisation whose demands can influence and inform policy from the bottom up.

The conference agreed as its first concrete steps, to be overseen by an elected steering committee, the following eight actions:

- To immediately send messages of support to all workers in struggle.
- To organise a lobby and fringe meeting at the TUC conference in Brighton in September to call for the unions to step up their efforts to end the anti-trade union laws as soon as possible.
- To support the call by PCS for a national day of action against the government's pay freeze in the public sector.
- To support all efforts to defend the NHS against cuts and closures by mobilising support for the proposed national demonstration in October.
- To organise at regional level conferences of work shop stewards and workplace representatives to build regional shop stewards networks, and to mobilise the local unions in support of those in struggle.
- To organise a further national conference next year in the late spring.
- To give support to all workers in struggle for a decent wage,



to defend their jobs and to fight for a shorter working week.

- To produce a short pamphlet on the need for a new shop stewards' movement.

The conference saw shop stewards compare their experiences and develop strategies to apply to their own situations. Ten workshops on pensions, anti-union laws, organising migrant and workers and young workers, fighting privatisation and the trade union freedom bill gave a forum for such strategies to be developed.

TRADE UNION FREEDOM

The trade union movement today has fewer freedoms than when the Trades Disputes Act was passed a century ago. If that is to change the broad movement must get behind initiatives such as this in tandem with campaigns such as the introduction of a trade union freedom bill.

Ten years of Labour government and unions continue to remain shackled under the oppressive laws introduced by Margaret Thatcher and the Tories from 1979 onwards.

The working class of this country have been offered little

over the past decade other than privatisation and war.

One thing is for certain, the new Prime Minister in Downing Street won't take us onto a progressive new path. If we are to roll back the tide of privatisation and war, rebuilding the grass roots of our movement is essential.

The campaign for a Trade Union Freedom Bill, making legal solidarity action, outlawing the use of scab labour and giving striking workers other important rights, continues with a national rally at the House of Commons on October 18.

The intervening years since the great shop stewards struggles of the 1970s, followed by the Tory anti-union legislation and then more of the same under new Labour has seen a massive shift in the balance of power in the workplace in favour of the employers. The time to begin to correct this imbalance is way overdue.

The creation of a National Shop Stewards Network represents an opportunity that must be seized by the movement if we are to develop the struggle for workplace democracy. ■

On the web:
www.shopstewards.net
www.unitedcampaign.org.uk

SOLIDARITY AT WIGHTLINK

*RMT News takes a look at
how Portsmouth branch
has built a solid base in
the workplace at
Wightlink Ferries*



Earlier this year RMT members at Wightlink threatened strike action and action short of a strike over the imposition of a new roster which would have increased unsociable hours and been detrimental to members' pay in the long term.

However, following pressure from the union, an agreement was successfully reached for a new more satisfactory roster.

ORGANISED

Longtime union activist, with 31 years experience, Jack Whitehead remembers a time when every worker on the ferry link from Portsmouth to the Isle of Wight was in the union.

"But Thatcher's anti-union laws ended that" says Jack, who is currently vice chair of Portsmouth's 700 strong branch.

Workers on what was then Sealink used to be solidly organised in NUR shipping. But the Conservative government in the 1980s vowed to get rid of the "closed shop", bringing in draconian anti-union legislation. Even the return of a Labour government did not see the repeal of the anti-union laws.

Union organisation and membership on the ferry link from Portsmouth to the Isle of

Wight could have been severely weakened. That was certainly the plan.

Yet some twenty years later on what is now Wightlink, RMT remains a real force with more than 90 per cent of staff in the union.

The union reps are clear as to why the membership is so firm.

"A lot of support came from the fight we had to retain our final-salary pension a few years ago," says rep Sean Hoyle, who works as a customer reception officer on the FastCat catamaran.

PENSION FIGHT

Sean is referring to six years ago when Wightlink announced that it intended to close their final-salary pension scheme to new entrants and instead move over to a money purchase pension.

Unlike the final salary pension scheme, there would have been no guarantee offered by Wightlink of what amount would be paid out on retirement. Staff were written to and told it just would not be possible to keep the pension scheme going in the same way as before.

However, staff were so angry about the new pension

proposals that when the union balloted for strike action members came out 14-1 in favour.

In the face of solid opposition, the impossible became possible and the final-salary pension scheme was left to flourish.

During this time Sean studied how pension schemes worked and his knowledge has ensured that he has ended up being a trustee of the company pension board which oversees a fund over £42 million.

"The union got a big profile from the campaign and ended up with a union man on the board," he says.

TAKEOVER

The union was in a strong position when Wightlink was bought out by investors MEIF Shipping Limited in July 2005, a company which is part of the Macquarie banking group. Unpopular restructuring without proper consultation meant that in the first year union members balloted four times for industrial action.

Then this year the final straw came when bosses wanted to implement a new roster and 11 point plan.

There were five sticking

points including making people work more unsociable day shifts with earlier starts and later finishes. Instead of five shifts being worked in unsociable hours there would be 10, with no extra remuneration.

The union offered its own ten-point plan hoping among other things to negotiate recognition for the new hours that the staff would be working.

The company's response was to write directly to staff saying that the union had got it wrong.

"But it had written to staff before over the pensions issue and it was they who had been proven wrong that time," says Sean pointing out that the branch had high turnouts at union meetings and had the members behind them.

Mick Tosh, veteran union rep and second officer on the ferry, said that negotiations "were at five to midnight" when they finally managed to hammer out an agreement with the company recognizing the unsociable hours that the staff would be doing and, therefore, averting strike action.

"People wear their RMT badges round here" says Mick explaining that what makes people want to be in the union and what makes the branch work is the fact that they have a strong team of reps that listen to the members.

VISIBLE

The visible presence of union reps doing things for the membership has meant that members come not only from more traditional transport jobs but also clerical staff who have chosen to join RMT over any other union.

They can see that the RMT is doing something for workers at Wightlink so have joined on that basis.

"At the end of the day", says Sean, "our members are ordinary working people who want to get to work and support their families in a nice lifestyle without being told to work longer hours.

"And the union is helping them to do it," he says.



TIME TO BURY THE PPP

Following the demise of Metronet, bringing London Underground infrastructure work back into the public sector is the only option if Tube upgrades are to be put back on track.

The government was warned about the dangers of fragmenting Tube infrastructure along the same fault-line as the national rail network.

They were warned that forecasts of £4.5 billion in savings over public-sector management were fanciful, and that the PPP would become an expensive drain on public money.

They were warned that there was no evidence to suggest that the private sector could deliver more efficiently than LU.

And they were warned that the public would be left to pick up the tab when it all went wrong.

Transport for London itself warned that the PPP was not value for money, was unsafe and unmanageable and would not properly protect the public interest.

Despite those warnings we were told that the PPP would deliver massive improvements funded by huge private-sector investment and, best of all, it would transfer financial risk to the private sector.

There is no pleasure in saying we told you so, not least because the fall-out threatens to undermine essential upgrades, but the reality has been in line with the warnings.

Massive improvements dissolved into a huge and growing backlog of work, with frequent engineering overruns disrupting Tube traffic, and an unprecedented string of potentially disastrous derailments.

PPP MYTHS DEBUNKED

The huge private investment was a myth, with expensive private borrowing ultimately costing the taxpayer twice as much as other options.

But the biggest myth of all was the transfer of risk.

Metronet's shareholders – Atkins, Balfour Beatty, Bombardier Transportation, EDF Energy, RWE Thames Water – abandoned Metronet because they couldn't get the public purse to underwrite their massive cost overruns – leaving the public with a £2 billion debt, racking up interest at commercial rates.

Metronet's shareholders staked a modest £350 million, dwarfed by the more than £3.3 billion in public money pumped into the PPP over its first three years.

Even so, the two Metronet contracts still managed to siphon off some £127.3 million



in profit in those first three years – more than £800,000 a week.

Recall that it cost half a billion of taxpayers' pounds just to draw up the contracts, and LUL even re-imbursed the privateers' £275 million start-up costs. Now we have the cost of administration, estimated at as much as £30 million a week.

Some have suggested that Metronet is the problem, not the PPP.

Alongside Metronet's breathtaking failure, Tube Lines' performance certainly looks better, but even if the PPP was delivering according to the script, it would still be delivering less than was demanded of LUL, at massive extra cost.

Seven years ago the Industrial Society noted that the PPP offered the prospect of a guaranteed 15.3 per cent return on equity for 30 years, with performance benchmarks five per cent below those expected of publicly owned London Underground.

MORE EXPENSIVE

The 2005 the Commons' Transport Select Committee reported that, even without the costs of the Jubilee Line extension, government expenditure on the Tube had increased more than twentyfold, from £44.1m in 1997-98 to £1,048 million 2004-05.

What limited successes have been achieved "could hardly be otherwise", according to TfL's 2005 report, given the huge sums thrown at the PPP, but overall performance was still "not good enough" and "less than was promised", and "the volume of real work out on the railway is not consistent with the payments being made."

The same report noted that engineering overruns had increased by some 35 per cent on the first year, averaging more than one a week.

The 2005/06 TfL report noted that LUL had issued a Corrective Action Notice to Tube Lines due to its "persistent poor performance" on the Northern Line which

"was manifest in repeated track, signal and rolling stock failures".

Nonetheless, Tube Lines managed to extract profits of £158.7 million in the first three years of the PPP – more than a £1 million a week.

POOR PERFORMANCE

The astonishing thing is not that the PPP has failed to deliver – because it was never going to – but that Metronet, despite some of the most generous contracts ever designed by bean-counter man, failed to bag its full quota of guaranteed, risk-free profits.

The solution to this mess is obvious to most, and even city voices are calling for infrastructure work to be taken back in-house under direct LUL control.

Network Rail has already shown what can be achieved by bringing maintenance back in-house, a move that brought immediate benefits in reducing delays, and which made a welcome start towards recreating a single command structure.

It is unthinkable that Metronet's death throes should be allowed to result in even more fragmentation, and we have warned the administrator that any attempt to cut jobs or conditions or forcibly transfer our members will be resisted, with strike action if necessary.

It is our members who are out there every day trying to deliver the improvements the Tube network desperately needs, and that skilled workforce will still be needed long after Metronet is forgotten.

Mayor Livingstone opposed the PPP and now has four years' experience of it to show that he was right to.

LUL has warned that failure to deliver its minimum improvements programme means a future of delays, overcrowding, catastrophic failures, line closures, declining safety and massive knock-on costs.

No-one will lament the end of Metronet, the PPP has failed and must be buried.

EDM 2002

METRONET AND LONDON UNDERGROUND

That this House notes with concern the collapse of Metronet, which was responsible for two thirds of London Underground maintenance and renewals; further notes with concern that the collapse may leave a debt of billions of pounds which might have to be paid for by the tax and fare payer; further notes the success of Network Rail on the mainline railway of bringing maintenance back in-house which has resulted in reduced delays and greater control over costs; believes that bringing London Underground maintenance back in-house would result in a more economic and efficient Tube; and therefore welcomes the Mayor of London's indications that some of Metronet's contracts should be brought back in-house and urges the Government to support this position.

John McDonnell MP

RMT AND TSSA BALLOTING FOR STRIKE ACTION AT METRONET



More than 2,600 members of London Underground's two biggest unions are to be balloted for strike action over the threat to jobs and conditions at failed Tube privateer Metronet.

RMT and TSSA is asking members to vote to strike over the failure of the bankrupt company's administrator to guarantee that there will be no job losses, forced transfers or cuts in pension entitlements as a result of the company's financial collapse.

"We warned from the start that we would not allow our members' jobs and conditions to be decimated by Metronet's death throes," RMT general

secretary Bob Crow said.

"It is unacceptable that our members face losing ten per cent of their pensions because Metronet's fatcat shareholders decided to pull the plug," he said.

TSSA assistant general secretary Manuel Cortes said that the job losses were the last desperate throw by Metronet to avoid administration.

"As we all know, this gamble failed.

"The forced transfer of staff to Bombardier was Metronet's parting gift to one of its main shareholders which will saddle passengers and taxpayers with huge ongoing costs," he said.



RMT WARNED OF DANGERS PRIOR TO MILE END DERAILMENT

RMT repeatedly warned London Underground of safety issues in the area of track on the Central Line where a train derailed during the early rush hour on July on a stretch of track maintained by Metronet.

Up to six carriages came off the rails on the westbound Central Line between Mile End and Bethnal Green stations.

Within the exact same vicinity of the derailment, RMT warned management that in October 2006, November 2006 and again in May that materials stored in a bolt-hole between the stations were not secure resulting in trains striking obstructions on the track.

This union also wrote to London Underground in April demanding an investigation. LUL claimed that it had

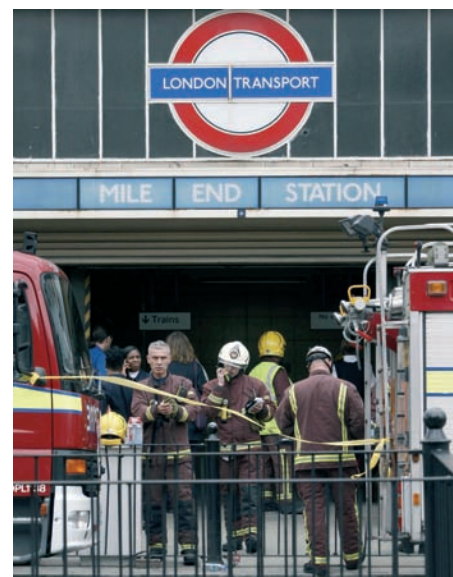
'investigated' the problems did not involve any safety reps and appears to amount to assurances from Metronet that things would be sorted out.

This form of self-regulation by a private consortium that exists to make profits for its shareholders seriously undermines safety.

It is the third serious Tube derailment in less than four years, including the Chancery Lane derailment and the one at White City, since the privatisation of LUL infrastructure maintenance under PPP.

RMT reiterated its call for London mayor Ken Livingstone to take these private contracts introduced under PPP back in-house.

An independent investigation into the latest derailment is now underway by the Rail Accident Investigation Board (RAIB).



DEUTSCHE BAHN TAKING OVER RAIL FREIGHT IN EUROPE

EC member Alex Gordon reports on how Europe's biggest rail freight operator Deutsche Bahn (DB) is seeking to dominate the sector across the continent



With its announcement last month that it is snapping up the UK's largest rail freight operator EWS and Spanish rail freight operator Transfesa, the German state operator Deutsche Bahn (DB) continues to fill the 'blank spots' in its pan-European network, as chief executive Hartmut Mehdorn puts it.

Mehdorn confirmed DB was "sniffing around" the rail freight division of Hungary's Máv, due for privatisation later this year.

The purchase of EWS will give DB 70 per cent of the UK rail freight market hauling coal, steel, aggregates and shipping containers. EWS employs nearly 5,000 people and has an annual turnover of more than £500 million.

Transfesa operates trains in Spain in competition with Renfe, the national train operator, but is also a logistics company. Its sales last year were almost £200 million.

Mr Mehdorn said DB's western European strategy had now taken a big step forward.

EWS will run DB's freight operations in the UK and France, where EWS subsidiary Euro Cargo Rail started operation in late 2005 and runs 30 trains a day. Owning EWS International will enable DB to penetrate the lucrative French rail freight market.

DB is first in Europe in tonne-kms, while DB's logistics subsidiary 'Schenker' is number two in the world in terms of revenue behind DHL and ahead of Nippon Express.

Railion, another DB's rail freight subsidiary, already owns the former national freight operators of Netherlands and Denmark. DB also has a 30% shareholding in Rail Traction Company, an Italian open-access operator.

In February 2007 DB formed an alliance with PCC Rail, a private freight operator in Poland, owned by Germany's Petro Carbo Chem and transferred 50 locomotives to PCC Rail for the new venture.

Monika Heimig, Secretary General of the European Rail Freight Association told the Rail Freight 2007 conference in London on June 5 this year, "I

think in the long term what we will see is a closing down of the European market, meaning everything that can run will be German. For me this move is no good".

Hartmut Mehdorn denies he was able to purchase EWS because of German government funding. He claims such funding was earmarked for new construction projects and DB does not receive any subsidy.

According to Mehdorn DB's bid for EWS and Transfesa has been paid from DB's 50 per cent share of the £1 billion sale of the Scandlines Baltic ferry business.

SELLING AND EXPANDING

The German government has agreed to sell a quarter of DB shares by 2009. "With this decision, we've taken a huge step toward implementing the government's rail reform programme," German Transport Minister Wolfgang Tiefensee said.

But many Germans believe local rail services will suffer. The German constitution requires the state to retain a majority holding as part of its duty to provide rail services.

The government claims 25 per cent of DB would bring in £2.02 billion but critics point out the company's total value today is around £121 billion. The reason for the ludicrously generous offer is that the DB needs money for expansion abroad. Deutsch Bahn is Europe's largest rail company with almost 1.9 billion passengers and 300 million tons of freight annually. Last year it made £1.14 billion profit.

The government also decided DB would keep control of track and signaling infrastructure for 15 years in contravention of EU directive 91/440 demanding a split between track and rolling stock.

DB privatisation is by no means certain to go ahead. Regional governments fear severe cuts to local services, job losses and a higher financial burden and could challenge the plans in the upper house of the German parliament. DB plans to increase network fees it charges

for regional trains by 2.4 per cent a year, about £882 million by 2011.

"We're afraid the Deutsche Bahn will cherry-pick the profitable, long-distance routes between the big cities," said the head of the German Association of Cities and Towns, Gerd Landsberg. "That would also endanger the necessary expansion of jobs in rural areas. That's unacceptable".

SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP

However, one rail union Transnet has welcomed the partial privatisation. Transnet chairman Norbert Hansen even said that he was dismayed the government planned to sell only the train operations and keep infrastructure in public hands.

DB was converted from a public service into a commercial business in 1994 still entirely state-owned. The consequences were devastating for wages and conditions.

Productivity increased by 180 per cent while wage costs decreased by 28 per cent. DB has shed nearly half its workforce since 1994 - approximately 150,000 workers.

At the same time those who remain are working increasing levels of overtime - 14 million hours in 2002 alone.

All this has taken place with the cooperation of Transnet, as well as two other unions GDBA and the GDL train drivers union.

In 2003, Transnet and GDBA signed a 24-month pay deal giving an annual average pay increase of 1.6 per cent.

In 2005 Transnet, the GDBA and DB agreed a "Future Programme for Efficiency and Jobs." This meant a reduction in the wage bill of 5.5 per cent through unpaid overtime, increased flexibility and lump sum payments with a two-year pay deal. The latest deal stuck between Transnet, GDBA and the company in July amounts to an increase of just 1.9 per cent above 2005 wage levels.

A "job guarantee" until 2010, which DB promised two years ago, only gives protection against redundancy for workers with a minimum five years service. This allows DB to make

further job cuts through early retirement and sacking employees on short-term contracts.

The 2005 "future programme" was meant to transform loss-making DB into a highly profitable company and prepare for its launch on the stock exchange. It certainly worked. In the past two years the DB has notched up big profits.

Both Transnet and the GDBA support privatisation. In October 2006 they drew up a joint paper, in which they wrote, "Transnet offers the federal government its advisory services with regard to the definition of the content of the privatisation law.

"The economic stability of the DB and its competitiveness in Germany, Europe and worldwide are just as relevant for job protection as securing existing contract rights," he said.

On this issue Transnet chairman, Norbert Hansen, stands well to the right of the German Federation of Trade Unions (DGB). At a meeting of the DGB executive, Hansen was the only trade union leader to vote against a resolution opposing privatisation of the railways.

Unsurprisingly Transnet and the GDBA are now playing the role of strike-breaker in the train drivers' dispute and have denounced GDL's wage claim of up to 31 per cent for its members.

Transnet chairman Norbert Hansen hit out at GDL, saying that any better deal than 4.5 per cent would "jeopardize labor relations in the company". Hartmut Mehdorn maintained that this was the highest pay increase agreed by DB since the end of the Second World War.

In fact, his statement is incorrect as the contract covers 19 months.

Average annual wage increases remain far below the rate of inflation in recent years.

STOP PRESS!

The German government has just banned planned strike action by the GDL drivers' union in support of its pay claim.

A RALLY FOR TRADE UNION FREEDOM AND AGAINST INEQUALITY—*October 18 2007*

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation published a report into poverty in July showing that inequality between rich and poor has now reached levels not seen in Britain for 40 years.

A second report, published simultaneously, found that the public thinks the gap between rich and poor is too large.

TRADE UNION FREEDOM

This is an issue relevant to trade union freedom. Unions are a force for good in dealing with such inequality and unionised workers are generally not those who suffer most from low pay.

UK laws, however, are overly restrictive in relation to trade unions. The United Nations has said repeatedly that UK laws are in breach of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, because they prevent unions from properly exercising their collective rights.

The government responds that they do not accept that they might be in breach of international law. These fundamental human rights are “aspirational” and that they do not need to be legally enforceable in the UK.

CHANGING UK LAWS

Is this a rational disagreement between the UK government and an over-enthusiastic part of the UN? No it is not. The UN is not alone in its criticisms of the UK. The same sort of disapproval is levied by the International Labour Organisation (in relation to ILO Conventions 87 and 98), the European Court of Human Rights in relation to the European Convention on Human Rights and), the European



Committee of Social Rights (in relation to the European Social Charter).

On July 11, the Prime Minister announced the Government’s draft legislative programme for the next session of Parliament. Among the proposals is an ‘Employment Simplification Bill’. This will include provisions for unions to have tiny bit more control over their own rules and how they act.

The government has agreed it must act to comply with the decision of the European Court of Human Rights in February this year in the case of ASLEF v UK. The UK laws restricting the union’s ability to expel a fascist are themselves illegal judged by reference to Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which deals with freedom of association.

The United Campaign said, “if this government does not repeal these laws, we believe the next one might well have to...”

But the United Campaign says that the proposals in the Employment Simplification Bill do not go far enough to comply with the judgment or the principles of freedom of association and article 11.

The government says that the case is limited to its facts and there only needs to be change to deal with a union’s right, in accordance with its rules, to expel those in a political party whose beliefs are opposed to those of the union.

The ASLEF case goes further to say that “under Article 11 unions must remain free to decide, in accordance with union rules, questions concerning admission to and expulsion from the union”.

However, Thatcher’s laws that outlawed unions from “unjustifiably” disciplining, or expelling strike breakers must go. This is another argument that the campaign has been putting over the years – and so have others, including the TUC with the encouragement of their affiliates.

FREEDOM BILL

Unions have been campaigning for a Trade Union Freedom Bill since the 2005 TUC. The Labour party conference also passed a motion that year in support of the bill.

The bill has been laid before parliament as a private member’s Bill and it is very modest in its aspirations.

It is so modest that it would not put the UK in compliance with its international obligations.

But the government opposes it.

On March 2 the first reading of the Bill was set, but there was no debate. Government Minister Jim Fitzpatrick "talked out" Paul Farrelly's Temporary and Agency Workers Bill listed in front of the Trade Union Freedom Bill.

So John McDonnell MP, who laid the Bill, was not called to put the case. The United Campaign supports both Bills, even though our primary focus is for trade union freedom. We understand that temporary and agency workers deprived of equal rights can be exploited to undermine trade union strength.

The good news is that Paul and John agreed on a tactic to enable both Bills to be listed on October 19.

RALLY

The campaign is organising a rally in support on the day before on October 18. It is looking to encourage TUC and others to support the rally and,

of course, needs much support from members and activists.

There is a lot more to do to make even union members aware that trade unions are trussed up by laws in the UK that are unlawful by long-standing basic international standards. Trade unions must be free to perform their essential functions to help those who are suffering poverty and inequality.

Twenty four national unions support the United Campaign and has many regions, branches and trades councils and individual supporters. We need your support. Visit our website www.unitedcampaign.org.uk for more information or contact us at info@unitedcampaign.org.uk

YOU CAN HELP

Join the campaign and support the rally on October 18 2007 to promote the second reading of the "Trade Union Rights and Freedoms Bill" in the House of Commons or get you MP to sign Early Day Motion 532 below in support of the bill.



EARLY DAY MOTION 532 TRADE UNION FREEDOM BILL CAMPAIGN

"That this House recognises that free and independent trade unions are a force for good in UK society 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 1906 Trades Disputes Act; therefore welcomes and supports the TUC campaign for a Trade Union Freedom Bill whose principles include better protection for workers, such as those sacked by Gate Gourmet in 2005, the simplification of ballot procedures and to allow limited supportive action, following a ballot, in specific circumstances; and therefore urges the Government to bring forward legislation to address these proposals"

John McDonnell MP



THE UNITED CAMPAIGN TO REPEAL THE ANTI-TRADE UNION LAWS RALLY

National Parliamentary Rally to promote the second reading of the "Trade Union Rights and Freedoms Bill"

October 18 2007

4pm - 4.30

Assemble opposite the House of Commons

4.30 - 5.30

Demonstration outside the House of Commons

5.-30 – 730

Rally in Committee Room 14, House of Commons

Further updates will soon be available.

United Campaign to Repeal the Anti Trade Union Laws, 39
Chalton Street, London, NW1 1JD |
info@unitedcampaign.org.uk
Website www.unitedcampaign.org.uk

UP TO OUR EARS IN DEBT

EC member Olly New looks at the growing problem of debt

If you're stressed over the credit card bill, you're in good company, because in Britain there are now more credit cards than people.

Our economy has become based on consumer credit – a massive debt mountain.

Nobody likes to talk about being in debt, but it has become a nightmare for millions of people and big business for banks, moneylenders and the retail industry. Personal debt is now well over a trillion pounds (a million-million). The Government quite like us being it debt – they call it the 'consumer boom'.

Many students are forced to take out student loans so they start their working lives owing tens of thousands of pounds. Likewise working people needing a roof over their head are forced to take out massive mortgages since council houses are only available in tiny numbers.

Rent controls were abolished years ago – contributing to soaring house prices and speculation in the housing market. Meanwhile we all know privatisation pushed up prices big time, especially for fuel bills. Governments of both parties have a lot to answer for.

The human cost is getting continually worse. Every month ten thousand people go bankrupt or become insolvent. Another eighty thousand have County Court Judgments made against them. And as the debts

get bigger, the lenders get worse. They are increasingly willing to apply for charging orders so that loans are secured against properties. If that doesn't work they sell their debts to collection agencies, who often try to intimidate.

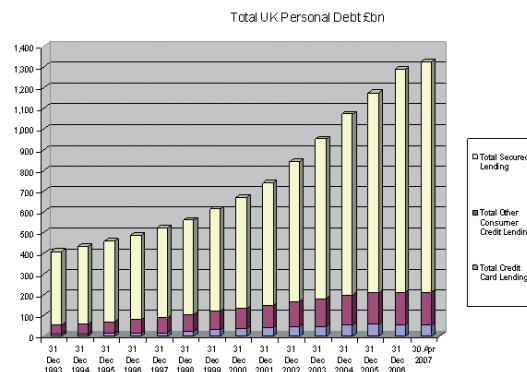
This is all pretty nasty stuff, especially since many people in debt have other problems like illness, unemployment or mental health issues. Collection agencies usually bully vulnerable people more than others, seeing them as weak. If you resort to money lenders, it gets worse, with huge rates of interest.

What's the answer? We need laws to stop some making obscene profits, while others struggle to live. There should be controls on rent and regulation of the banks and finance institutions.

Even better they should be nationalised. All older people should receive a living pension. Let's face it – we urgently need a political party that will fight for working people. Unless something is done, there could be a crash when the bubble bursts.

CREDIT UNION

Meanwhile, there are ways you can stand up to the moneylenders. Join the RMT Credit Union for one (see page 38). If you are in debt, avoid taking out more high interest loans. You can get free advice from the Citizen's Advice Bureau, the



National Debtline or the Consumer Credit Counselling Service.

Or you can sit down, work out a budget and approach your creditors to try and agree repayments you can manage. You are certainly not alone.

There are stacks of people out there in the same boat, many of them sharing advice on internet websites such as moneysavingexpert.com or fool.com.

Even the *Financial Times* commented recently: "The bogeyman that is the Ugly Capitalist, with his cigar, top hat and astrakhan collar, is reviving in popular perceptions".

TOTAL UK PERSONAL DEBT

- Total UK personal debt at the end of April 2007 stood at £1,325bn. The growth rate increased to 10.4 per cent for the previous 12 months which equates to an increase of £114bn.
- Total secured lending on homes at the end of April 2007 stood at £1,112bn. This has increased 11.4 per cent in the last 12 months.
- Total consumer credit lending to individuals in April 2007 was £213bn. This has

increased 5.4 per cent in the last 12 months.

- Total lending in April 2007 grew by £9.4bn. Secured lending grew by £8.9bn in the month. Consumer credit lending grew by £0.5bn.
- Average household debt in the UK is £8,816 (excluding mortgages) and £54,771 including mortgages.
- Average owed by every UK adult is £28,189 (including mortgages). This grew by £165 last month.
- Average outstanding mortgage for the 11.6m households who currently have mortgages is £95,871
- Average interest paid by each household on their total debt is approximately £3,542 each year (this equates to nine per cent of take home pay).
- Average consumer borrowing via credit cards, motor and retail finance deals, overdrafts and unsecured personal loans has risen to £4,537 per average UK adult at the end of April 2007.
- Britain's personal debt is increasing by £1 million every 4 minutes. ■

AGM stands for unity

It gives me great pleasure to report that this union's annual general meeting in Edinburgh in June was very successful and productive.

The importance, responsibility and function of the AGM cannot be overstated and it is defined within our rulebook as "the supreme government of the union".

My role at the AGM is to preside over the thorough debates on all the issues affecting the union that take place during the week.

The policies agreed and the decisions taken by rank-and-file delegates are binding on the union and its national leadership. The role of the leadership is to make sure these decisions and policies are acted upon.

This week-long conference gives activists from all grades and geographical areas of the

union to meet, share their experiences and learn from each other.

The reception committee and Edinburgh and Portobello district branch proved to be excellent conference hosts and made everyone feel welcome and comfortable for the week.

Guests from sister unions around the world including the US, New Zealand, Finland, Norway, Ireland, Zambia and Sweden also enjoyed this hospitality. These international delegates addressed conference and shared their knowledge and experiences.

This international perspective to trade unionism is vital to combat ignorance and prejudice and promote global workers' solidarity. As such, RMT continues to adhere to the old NUR slogan 'workers of the world unite'.

The transfer arrangements and rule changes which will bring offshore workers in OILCO into RMT membership was endorsed by delegates and I think it will prove to be a great moment in our union's history.

A particular highlight for me was to meet with the young members attending conference as part of their week-long course introducing them to the union. These young people are the future of our union and, if the quality of these members is anything to go by, that future is assured.

The hundreds of debates held during the week covered a wide range of issues and I believe the union came away from the AGM as a stronger, more effective fighting force.

John Leach



RMT AT GLASTONBURY

Bob Crow joined a panel of trade union activists from the UK and South America at the Left Field Stage at Glastonbury. Addressing a crowded marquee, he called for solidarity with the people of Latin America.

The Latin American Resistance panel discussion, chaired by NUJ General Secretary Jeremy Dear, also included the TUC's Brendan Barber, Hugh Lanning (PCS) and Colombian campaigners Wilson Borja and Carlos Lozarro.

Bob said: "We stand shoulder to shoulder with those that want a better society.

RMT has given practical support to Cuba and will continue to do so, the Cuban revolution is in the hearts and minds of the Cuban people. We say Viva Cuba, Viva Fidel and Viva Solidarity".

The event was aimed at highlighting the success of social movements in Latin America, but also to introduce a new website supporting Colombian campaigners.

Justice for Columbia, with support from the FBU and NUJ, is launching Otra Voz to give Columbians an opportunity to tell the world what is really happening in their country.

Congressman Wilson Borja, from Bogota thanked trade unionists in the UK for organising the event.

"In Columbia today unions are attacked on a daily basis, 3,000 trade unionists have been assassinated, along with many others," he said.

"We have to ask why are people being attacked, why 40 per cent of our population have no access to health care and 3 million children have no access to education," he said.

"It is governments such as the US and UK stealing these natural resources and using the excuse of the war against drugs to attack the Columbian people. It is the Trade Union movement, leading the fight against poverty, that it is attacked."

Carlos Lozarro, Editor of Voz in Columbia, added that he has survived numerous assassination attempts "There is no free press or freedom of expression in in Columbia, many journalists and correspondents across the country are assassinated, and live under constant death threat from para-militaries.

"People need to see what is really happening in Columbia."

The discussion was just one of the highlights of a packed Left Field. With two stages of music and political debate over

four days. Speakers ranged from Tony Benn and centenarian Spanish civil war veteran Howard "Andy" Andrews to Gemma Turnelty from the NUS.

A vibrant musical line-up included Joss Stone and Billy Bragg, up and coming acts including Get Cape, Wear Cape, Fly! and The Kings Blues, as well as a secret gig by Hard-Fi.

WORKERS' BEER

Amongst the crowd was RMT member, and delegate to the Battersea and Wandsworth TUC, Richard Alcock. Richard was working at the festival for the Workers Beer Company, "I always come to Glastonbury with the WBC, its been great to see the Left Field here the last few years.

"Its interesting to see

political debate along with all the music and entertainment."

Speaking about the WBC Richard said: "Its hard work with long shifts but you get to meet a lot of people involved in the movement and there's a great spirit and comradeship, which you need in this weather.

"The server groups all have a good time and it helps raise money for their campaigns, I'd suggest to anyone that needs to raise funds for their branch or group to contact them," he said.

Back on the stage Bob was encouraging people to get involved; "Sign up for Justice for Columbia, have a look at the website and promote peace in South America." ■

To find out more about what's happening in Columbia log onto www.otravoz.org



RMT member Richard Alcock volunteers for duty

TOLPUDDLE IN PICTURES...



The Bristol banner is a regular site at the Tolpuddle festival



The new South Wales and West of England banner gets an outing



Wessex and South West members on the march



The newly re-named Brighton and Hove branch show off their new banner



Each year entertainers perform to celebrate the contribution the Tolpuddle Martyrs made to the development of trade unionism



Bob Crow with Tony Benn and Siptu secretary Joe Flynn, who laid a wreath at a martyrs grave on behalf of RMT

Legal Update

Summary of fatal and non-fatal accidents and assaults to members for the period January 1 to March 31 2007

	Fatal Accidents	Non-Fatal Accidents	Assaults
Rail Operating Grades	0 [1]	93 [64]	6 [16]
Rail Engineering Grades	0 [0]	23 [19]	2 [0]
Workshops	0 [0]	1 [0]	0 [0]
Road Transport	0 [0]	7 [6]	0 [0]
Buses	0 [0]	17 [18]	0 [0]
L.U.L. and Metros	0 [0]	14 [11]	5 [2]
Shipping	0 [0]	5 [7]	0 [0]
RMT Head Office staff	0 [0]	0 [0]	1 [0]

The figures in brackets are those for the previous quarter

Claims for damages at common law for RMT members for the period January 1 to March 31 2007

Number of claims settled	79 [53]
Total amount recovered	£676,770.37 [£281,450.45] [including CICA Claims]

Legal assistance granted in respect of charges brought by the police for the period January 1 to March 31 2007

Road Traffic Act	4 [2]
Other police charges	3 [4]

JARVIS PAYS OUT DAMAGES FOR BREACH OF SAFETY REGULATIONS

Jarvis PLC has been ordered to pay £8,000 damages to an RMT member who was off work for several weeks after injuring his knee in a fall at work.

The compensation was secured via RMT's free legal help scheme with Thompsons Solicitors.

Eric Barker, a shopman at York, tripped over a brake handle in October 2004.

The handle, on a piece of equipment known as an "A" frame or iron man, was jutting out into a walkway because there was no room in the storage compound for the frame.

Eric, who already had problems with his knee, fell heavily, and sustained injuries which exacerbated the arthritis in his knee. He was off work for over a month and suffered pain for many more.

He was eventually retired on ill health grounds due to the arthritis.

Eric explains: "I caught my right trouser leg on the brake

lever sticking out from the iron man and fell forward onto my knees. It was very painful.

"I didn't see the lever. The equipment should never have been left there, whether or not there was room to store it", he said.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow said that the union was pleased with the outcome of this case for member Eric Barker.

"All employers have a duty of care to their employees and this case illustrates how crucial it is for equipment to be safely stored away.

"It is also a warning to other employers," he said.

Phil Kyte of Thompsons Solicitors in Leeds, Eric's representative, said: "Jarvis PLC clearly breached the Workplace Regulations which led to Eric Barker's accident.

His compensation is therefore wholly justified and will help to secure his future given the earnings he lost at the time".

CONSTRUCTIVE DISMISSAL WIN

RMT has won a constructive dismissal case on behalf of a member against train operator Midland Mainline.

Constructive dismissal cases are notoriously hard to win given that a tribunal rarely agrees that there has been "a significant breach going to the root of the contract of employment".

However, RMT member Sylvia Upton, supported by the union, won a substantial victory and was awarded £15,000.

Sylvia worked for Midland Mainline for three years as an on-board customer host. Prior to her resignation, Sylvia had been off sick with stress and depression which were caused primarily by her treatment at work.

To help her deal with this stress, she was prescribed fluoxetine by her GP and after four weeks felt well enough to go back to work.

However, Sylvia was told that she was not allowed to go back because of the medication due to the fact that her duties involved crossing rail tracks.

Her duties did involve safety-critical work but she knew of another colleague on the same medication who was allowed to



work in a safety-critical role for three years.

Sylvia received sick pay for six weeks followed by six weeks half pay which was then stopped. She had no alternative but to resign as she would have no income unless she gave up her necessary medication and be allowed to work.

The Tribunal noted that Sylvia was not asked if she suffered any side effects from the medication and there was no assessment

of her ability to carry out her normal duties.

It was shown that Midland Mainline decided to stop her from working merely on the grounds of possible side effects and at the same time was allowing someone else to work whilst on the same medication.

Therefore, the tribunal decided that Midland Mainline had breached the contract and failed to act as a reasonable employer.



from left to right, front row: Brother Jim Corbett, Brother Eddie Hughes, Brother Tommy Rose and Brother Joe Williams. Back Row: Brother Alan Andros, Vice Branch Secretary and Brother Sean McElvoy, Local Level Representative, GNER.

Newcastle; Rail & Catering 1089 HONOURS OVER 160 YEARS LOYAL SERVICE TO THE UNION

Newcastle Rail and Catering branch members Jim Corbett, Eddie Hughes, Tommy Rose and Joe Williams were recently presented with their there 40 year medallions in recognition of their loyal and dedicted service to the union. Vice Branch Secretary, Alan

Andros stated: "it is a very proud moment in the history of not only the branch but the union as a movement to come across such dedicated and professional individuals and hope that their fine example can be an inspiration to new and existing members."

Andover and Salisbury

Nominates

PETE GALE

For Regional Organiser,
Wessex Region

*And seeks supporting
nominations for this
Experienced candidate*

Basingstoke No.2 Branch

Nominates

PETE GALE

For Regional Organiser.
Wessex Region

*And seeks support for this
honourable and capable
candidate.*

Fareham No. 2 Branch

Nominates

PETE GALE

For Regional Organiser.
Wessex Region.

*And seeks supporting
nominations for this
Experienced candidate*

Salisbury No. 2 Branch

Nominates

PETE GALE

For Regional Organiser.
Wessex Region

*And seeks supporting
nominations for this
Experienced candidate*

Poole and District Branch

Nominates

PETE GALE

For Regional Organiser.
Wessex Region

*And seeks supporting
nominations for this
Experienced candidate*

Eastleigh Workshops

Nominates

PETE GALE

For Regional Organiser.
Wessex Region.

*And seeks supporting
nominations for this
Experienced candidate*

Newport, Isle of Wight Branch

Nominates

PETE GALE

For Regional Organiser.
Wessex Region.

*And seeks supporting
nominations for this
Experienced candidate*

Southampton No. 5 Branch

Nominates

PETE GALE

For Regional Organiser.
Wessex Region

*And seeks supporting
nominations for this
Experienced candidate*

SPECIAL HOME INSURANCE OFFER

RMT members could save up to £137 on home insurance

**PRICES
CUT
FOR RMT
MEMBERS**



Thanks to our special relationship with RMT, you could save over £137 by switching your home insurance to UIA. And because we have no shareholders to please, we have been able to cut our prices so you could now save up to £137!

You can see from the table opposite the level of savings you could enjoy with UIA. And to make things even easier, you can spread your payments over 10 months, interest free.

Either call us on **0845 842 8421** (quote ref RMT News 307) or use the form below so we can contact you nearer your home insurance renewal date with a **free quote**. We'll also enter you into a **free prize draw to win a luxury weekend for two in Venice**!

Call us for a quote today
or buy online at www.uia.co.uk

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Uia Premium	£309.33	£291.64	£321.62	£266.58
Average Market Premium	£446.33	£418.17	£441.71	£395.10
SAVING	£137.00	£126.53	£120.09	£128.52

This is an estimate and your actual premium will depend on individual circumstances. Premiums illustrated (including Insurance Premium Tax at the current rate) are for standard cover for combined buildings and contents insurance for a buildings sum insured of £110,000 and a contents sum insured of £25,000. These premiums are calculated for a 37 year old, living in a 3 bedroom semi-detached house, built in 1970. Market average is based on a selection of five leading companies (Source: ISI, Wharf, June 2007). Prices are correct at the time of print (June 2007). But may be subject to change.

0845 842 8421[†]
(please quote ref RMT News 307)

For your no obligation quote, return this form to: UIA, FREEPOST SG 947, Kings Court, London Road, Stevenage SG1 2YF. NO STAMP NEEDED.

Renewal date for home insurance: DD MM Title Forename Surname

Address Postcode

Daytime Phone Evening phone

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By entering your email address you are agreeing that Uia may occasionally contact you via email with carefully selected information and offers. DATA PROTECTION: Uia and their agents would like to contact you in the future with details of their products and special offers. If you would prefer this not to happen please tick the appropriate box(es) ☐ By post ☐ By phone

Uia is owned by and run for the benefit of its policyholders, so we can give you a better deal

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Winchester No. 2 Branch

Nominates

PETE GALE

For Regional Organiser.
Wessex Region

*And seeks supporting
nominations for this
Experienced candidate*

Basingstoke No. 1 Branch

Nominates

PETE GALE

For Regional Organiser.
Wessex Region

*And seeks supporting
nominations for this
Experienced candidate*

Croydon No1

Nominates

PAUL COX

For Regional Organiser
South East Region

"Putting Members First"

South London Rail Branch

nominates our secretary

PAUL COX

For Regional Organiser
South East Region

*And seek supporting
nominations*

Solent Salaried Branch

Nominates

PETE GALE

For Regional Organiser.
Wessex Region.

*And seeks supporting
nominations for this
Experienced candidate*

Bournemouth No. 5 Branch

Nominates

PETE GALE

For Regional Organiser
Wessex Region.

*And seeks supporting
nominations for this
Experienced candidate*

Deptford branch

Nominates

PAUL COX

For Regional Organiser
South East Region

*And asks members to
support him*

Cinque Ports Branch

Nominates

PAUL COX

For Regional Organiser
South East Region

For a member-led agenda

Dear editor,

I have been in the union many years and I have flown the NUR/RMT flag as a branch chair, school governor, magistrate, city councillor and deputy mayor for Exeter.

In March I wrote to my branch to tell them I intended to contest a seat in Exeter in the May elections and requesting help from the branch political funds.

I informed the branch I was standing on an anti-privatisation platform against the Iraq war, against EU laws, for the repeal of anti-trade union legislation and for assistance to the Palestinians.

I was standing as a candidate for the old Liberal Party, which provided help to the union at the time if the Taff Vale struggle and has four councillors on Exeter council, and not the Labour Party.

Following a debate about funding parties other than Labour, my branch agreed with my view that Labour has no pretensions of supporting the people and organisations that set it up and gave me overwhelming support.

A request was sent to the executive to endorse this support but this was turned down on the basis of lack of time to consider the request. The branch did not agree with this and appealed to the annual general meeting.

I was not surprised to learn that the AGM turned down my appeal and it appears that far too many old Labour supporters have yet to realise new Labour is a very different beast.

Our union needs to look elsewhere for a political party that goes some way to reflecting its aspirations and policies.

I feel that my union has let me down and I am disappointed that union officers still seem to be wedded to a party that is now so far to the right that even Tories are happy to defect to it.

I believe that the issue of the Labour Party and trade unionism needs to be debated fully and openly within our movement so perhaps this letter is a start.

Yours sincerely

Rod Northcott

Three Bridges Branch

Nominates

PAUL COX

For Regional Organiser
South East Region

For a member-led agenda

Dear editor,

After reading your excellent article on the merits of reopening the Skipton to Colne railway line (RMT News June/July), I proposed to members that Freight on Rail should support the campaign and I am pleased to report that the proposal has been accepted on condition that the line confirm to the principles of the Big Freight Railway, ie W12 gauge, RA10 and 775m length and has a connection to the Grassington quarry.

Regards

Philippa Edmunds

Dear editor,

As a union, we need to get some kind of safeguard for existing paid-up members in the RMT rulebook as many members are getting cheesed-off with members only joining when they are in trouble.

I can think of two incidents when non-members have refused to join but as soon as they were in trouble they get on the phone for a membership form.

These people were asked to join at some stage but claimed they didn't need the union as they could look after themselves. But, as soon as they were in trouble, they are the first to join up. This should not be the case.

The only exception would be for new entrants to the industry who have not been asked to join or are frightened to rock the boat during their probationary period.

I believe that, unless we get some kind of ruling put in our union book, these people are going to continue to abuse the union and only join up when in trouble. They are the first people to break any strike action, making it difficult to take effective industrial action. But they are the first to take the pay rises we negotiate every year.

Yours sincerely

John McEvoy

Retail Company Council Rep

New RMT membership system

RMT's membership department will not be able to answer membership queries from August 31 to September 11.

Membership records viewed via the web will also close on Thursday August 30.

The new membership system will go live on September 10, and Branch and Regional Council secretaries will be able to gain web access to it, early in October.

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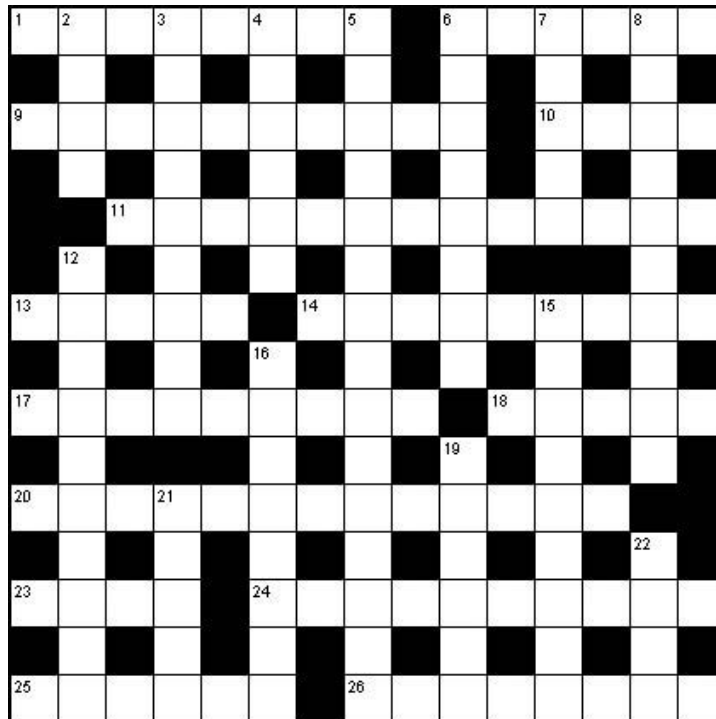
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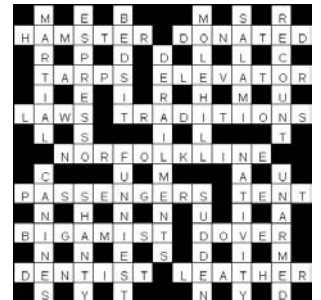
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RMT £25 PRIZE CROSSWORD

No. 37. Set by Elk



Last month's
solution...



The winner of prize
crossword no. 36 is
Mark Hignell of Stockport.

Send entries to Prize Crossword,
RMT, Unity House, 39 Chalton
Street, London NW1 1JD by
September 20 with your name and
address.

Winner and solution in next issue.

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ACROSS

- 1 Manipulated muscles - or statistics! (8)
- 6 Lifeline ferry company, in short (6)
- 9 Foot bone, broken famously by David Beckham and Wayne Rooney (10)
- 10 Female horse (4)
- 11 Worcestershire town on River Stour (13)
- 13 Leap; tied (5)
- 14 Downtrodden (9)
- 17 Opposite of port (9)
- 18 Our planet (5)
- 20 Restored, to fitness, good order or rank (13)
- 23 European mountain range (4)
- 24 Those who propel Venetian narrow boats (10)
- 25 ----- Ferries, inter-island company in dispute over pay (6)
- 26 Paid attention to sound (8)

DOWN

- 2 Cut (with woodcutter's tool?) (4)
- 3 Seller of writing materials (9) 4 Safety-critical members of traincrew (6)
- 5 Inappropriate in size or amount (of punishment, for example) (15)
- 6 Coalmine (8)
- 7 Citrus fruits, or linden trees (5)
- 8 Settlements: organised workers get better ones (10)
- 12 Large, black-and-tan, originally German dog (10)
- 15 Wound inflicted by reptile -- mixture of lager and cider (9)
- 16 With great care and affection (8)
- 19 Small boat, paddled (6)
- 21 Crime of setting fire (5)
- 22 French cheese (4)

RMT Credit Union

Our Own Savings and Loans Co-operative

Our RMT Credit Union is a great new benefit for members. It exists, not to make a profit, but to provide help and support to all our members for their savings and credit needs. By saving together, and lending to each other, we take the profit motive out of savings and loans. All the surpluses created by the Credit Union are recycled as benefits to members through cheap loans, and the ability to pay dividends on savings.

The Right Balance

CHEAP LOANS

Decisions on interest rates are made by our members. This year our AGM decided to offer very cheap loans to members. This means we can now offer loans at **9.9 per cent APR**, equivalent to **0.825 per cent per month** on the declining balance. See our great rates below.

Loan term (months) 9.9% APR (0.79% per month)

Amount	12	24	36	48	60
500	43.93	23.05	16.11	12.66	10.60
1000	87.87	46.1	32.22	25.31	21.2
1500	131.80	69.15	48.33	37.97	31.80
2000	175.74	92.20	64.44	50.63	42.40
3000	263.61	138.30	96.66	75.94	63.59
4000	351.48	184.40	128.88	101.26	84.79
5000	439.35	230.49	161.10	126.57	105.99
7500	659.02	345.74	241.65	189.86	158.98

We strike a balance between low interest rates on loans and paying a dividend on savings. We enable members to have ready access to cheap loans while building up a substantial and useful savings account. We can do this because our Credit Union is run on the same principles of mutual support and members' democratic control as our trade union, so you can be sure that it's run in the interests of us all.

SPOUSE

The Credit Union Board has made the decision that spouse are also able to join.

DIVIDEND ON SAVINGS

We don't exist to make profits. With the surplus we make from interest on loans we can collectively decide to pay a dividend. We recently paid a dividend of **three per cent** on savings – a very healthy dividend rate compared to banks' interest rates



Because we're a members' organisation with a democratic structure, we're able to make the decisions that provide a virtuous circle of saving together, providing credit at low interest rates and sharing the benefits by paying a dividend on savings.

Joining Our Credit Union

The Financial Services Authority requires us to comply fully with money laundering regulations. It's a bore but we have to do it. It means that before we can open your account we have to verify your identity and your address.

You need to complete the application form opposite along with the Direct Debit. You'll also need to get your ID verified and send it with the application to us. If you're near a regional office or Unity House you can bring it in and we'll process it there.

ID REQUIREMENTS

Getting your ID verified is quite straight forward. You need two separate forms of ID such as the following:

PROOF OF IDENTITY

- Personal Cheque used for your first month's savings if drawn on an account that includes your name
- Current valid full UK Passport; EU member state ID card
- Current valid full foreign passport
- Current UK full Photo Card Driving Licence
- Current UK provisional, Photo Card Driving Licence (Old styles not accepted)
- ID pass from Network Rail, Trans Pennine Express, Central Trains, Eurostar
- Discharge book (shippers)
- Inland Revenue Tax Notification (current year)

PROOF OF ADDRESS

- Current UK full, signed driving licence (if not used for Proof of Identity)
- Current UK provisional, driving licence Photo Card (if not used for Proof of Identity)
- A current [within last three months] Utility Bill (not mobile phone bill)
- Recent Bank, Building Society or Mortgage statement
- Current Council Tax bill
- Pension or benefits book
- Tenancy or rent book/agreement
- Recent Inland Revenue notice of coding or tax demand

The list above is not exhaustive and other documents will be considered.

You can get your branch secretary or regional office to verify and sign photocopies of the documents. As an alternative, you can also get another person of authority such as your employer, doctor, Solicitor etc to verify the forms of ID. The copies of the documents must have an official stamp and signature on them and a contact name and address. Or, you can send originals to us at the address below. Send completed verified copies of documents or originals to: RMT Credit Union, Unity House, FREEPOST NW3706, London NW1 3YD. If sending valuable documents by post you should send them recorded delivery. For assistance: Tel: 020 7529 8835

Authorised and Regulated By The Financial Services Authority FRN: 228612

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 Charlton 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

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.



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