

RMT *news*

Essential reading for today's transport worker

FIGHTING FOR A LIVING WAGE

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DVD INSIDE!**



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CREDIT UNION

EDITORIAL

A CLEAN SWEEP



Solid strike action by RMT Tube cleaners has shown that they are prepared to fight for a London living wage.

After a second round of strike action, London mayor Boris Johnson promised all cleaners on Metronet contracts would be paid at least £7.45 an hour by August.

However, he later said that it would only apply to the three contracts currently up for renewal. That would leave cleaners on Metronet's ITS contract and Tube Lines being paid nearly £2 an hour less than colleagues doing identical work.

If poverty pay is unacceptable on some Metronet cleaning contracts it is unacceptable on all Tube cleaning contracts. That is our message to the employers and to the mayor and we will continue to say it until Tube cleaners get justice.

The threat of strike action by catering staff, train managers and conductors at First Great Western and a House of Commons Early Day Motion signed by dozens of MPs has led to a dramatic U-turn by the company over plans to scrap buffet cars on high-speed trains.

Bus workers at Wilts and Dorset have also settled a long-running dispute with an improved offer of four per cent while members at First Devon and Cornwall have rejected the latest pay offer.

RMT reps on Virgin West Coast are being consulted following a pay offer of 5.1 per cent and RMT members at Tube Lines are being balloted for industrial action following another unacceptable pay offer.

RMT members at Network Rail launched a second round of strike action in the long-running harmonisation dispute as we go to press.

RMT believed it had made sufficient progress on a number of key issues prior to the latest action. However, Network Rail management vetoed agreements made at the talks despite understandings reached on a number of crucial matters.

One of the root causes of the

Network Rail dispute is the damaging fragmentation of infrastructure following privatisation in 1996. The break up of British Rail, along the lines of EU dictates that demand the split of train operations from the track, has been an unmitigated disaster. Yet the same split has been applied to London Underground which led to the privatisation of Tube maintenance and, ultimately, the demise of Metronet.

Now the Tyne and Wear Metro faces the same treatment unless it is stopped. Over 150 people turned out for the launch meeting in Newcastle to save the Metro system which has been a public sector success story.

It is a scandal that government investment worth £300 Million will only be granted if the service is privatised.

The New Zealand government has shown the real way forward by not only taking the track and train operations back into public ownership but also reuniting 'wheel and steel' to create one united rail industry once more.

Seafarers from across Europe will be converging on Brussels on October 16 to defend seafarers jobs, end social dumping and stop the imposition of unnecessary EU rules that threaten jobs and fragment ferry services.

We have just had another successful annual general meeting in Nottingham which debated the course RMT will be steering for the next year. I was pleased to present this year's John Cogger young member award to Nathan Robinson and even more pleased to report he has been re-instated on appeal after being sacked shortly after the AGM.

This is just one more reason why transport workers should be in an industrial fighting union, well done Nathan.

Finally, you will have received your free DVD outlining the benefits of joining the RMT Credit Union.

In these difficult times it could be in your interest to join today.

Best wishes

Bob Crow

When you have finished with this magazine give it to a workmate who is not in your union. Even better, ask them to join RMT by filling in the application form opposite

SAY NO TO SWT TICKET OFFICE CUTS

The two largest rail unions RMT and TSSA have joined forces to urge South West Trains passengers to reject plans to cut ticket-office opening times at 114 stations.

As SWT began a compulsory consultation over its plans, RMT and TSSA started distributing postcards to commuters with which they can object to Passenger Focus, the watchdog which has the power to challenge the plans.

Around 20 MPs have already signed Early Day Motion 1969, tabled by Southampton Test MP Alan Whitehead, against the plans which would leave dozens of stations without ticket-office facilities all weekend, and dozens more with curtailed opening hours.

The result will also mean more stations completely unstaffed – often late at night.

The planned cuts come despite the fact that passenger numbers on SWT are up by nearly six per cent and it is only weeks after SWT's owners, Stagecoach, announced a massive jump in their rail profits to nearly £60 million on the back of year-on-year ahead of inflation fare increases.

"SWT's plans amount to an attack on the service to passengers and up to 140 jobs, and they undermine safety for everyone," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said.

"Rail workers and passengers alike want

to see more staff on stations, not fewer, and I hope that passengers will join us in telling SWT that these cuts are unacceptable," Bob Crow said.

TSSA assistant general secretary Manuel Cortes warned that the cuts would directly hit passengers, making stations unsafe and tickets more expensive.

"Unstaffed stations will be less safe for travellers, particularly at the weekends and

in the evenings. Tickets will be more expensive because you cannot ask a machine for the cheapest available journey," he said.

The Parliamentary EDM warned that the cuts could not be justified when the stations earmarked had seen a combined increase in passengers of nearly 27 per cent and called on South West Trains immediately to withdraw its plans. ■



UNITY: Battersea and Wandsworth trades council and local MP Martin Linton joined RMT members to halt ticket office closures

FGW DROPS PLAN TO REMOVE BUFFET CARS

RMT has welcomed a dramatic U-turn by First Great Western over plans to scrap buffet cars on high-speed trains.

The U-turn came as FGW catering staff, train managers and senior conductors voted for industrial action.

Members voted by a margin of nearly two-to-one to strike following the company's failure to guarantee that it would stop removing buffet cars and provide satisfactory assurances over jobs and safe working conditions.

But, on the eve of the closure of the

ballot, FGW issued a bulletin indicating that a review of its policy "makes a clear recommendation to retain buffet facilities on all our HST services".

"If this U-turn is confirmed it vindicates our members' campaign and amounts to a huge victory for the service that passengers want and the job security and safety standards our members need," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said.

The union's executive committee congratulated members at FGW for the principled stand they took and for making it

clear, despite enormous pressure and disinformation from the company, that removal of buffet cars was unacceptable.

A huge number of passengers backed the union's campaign and nearly 40 MPs signed Early Day Motion 1723, tabled by Stroud Labour MP David Drew, protesting against the proposals.

The EDM warned that the buffet car was an essential service and called on the company to immediately assure passengers that it will retain and improve all its buffet car services. ■

SUPPORT GROWS TO KEEP TYNE AND WEAR METRO PUBLIC

The campaign to stop the privatisation of Tyne And Wear Metro has received huge support including from MPs who have signed Early Day Motion 1862 tabled by Newcastle Central MP Jim Cousins.

Jim Cousins was also among the speakers at a campaign launch in Newcastle alongside RMT general secretary Bob Crow and Northern TUC regional secretary Kevin Rowan.

RMT and the Northern TUC are distributing thousands of postcards urging the Transport Secretary Ruth Kelly and the Nexus Passenger Transport Executive to abandon plans to franchise Metro's operations to the private-sector.

The Early Day Motion 1862 notes that the Metro is a successful, integrated publicly owned and publicly accountable railway achieving record levels of punctuality and passenger numbers, and welcomes the government's commitment to fund the upgrades it needs.

It also notes that Metro's own management had made the case that it should remain a 'vertically integrated' whole, and that passengers would be best served by the Metro remaining as a unified railway in the public sector, where every penny invested would be spent on improving passenger



KEEP IT PUBLIC: RMT members at this year's Durham miners rally campaigning to stop the privatisation of Tyne & Wear Metro. Over 70,000 people attended, with 45 bands playing and over a hundred trade union banners proudly displayed. For the first time ever, a plane flew over the march pulling a massive banner urging marchers to "Resist unjust Euro laws - don't give up the fight!"

services.

"This motion is a welcome boost for a campaign that has already attracted significant support from people who frankly have had a bellyful of failed privatisations," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said at the launch meeting.

"Rail workers have more than enough experience to know that privatisation and the fragmentation that goes with it undermines safety and service, threatens jobs and pensions and

drains huge sums of public money into private pockets," he said.

The union has argued that making £300 million funding for Metro upgrades conditional on privatisation was a pointless exercise because there is not even the usual pretence that private-sector involvement will bring any extra investment with it.

Kevin Rowan told the meeting that opinion polls had consistently shown that the vast

majority of rail users want their services back in public hands.

"It is bewildering that anyone could want to privatise the Metro, which is a public-sector success story.

"I hope Metro passengers will join us in campaigning to ensure that the Metro remains the public asset it is," Kevin Rowan said.

Get your MP to sign Early Day Motion 1862. ■



NETWORK RAIL MAINTENANCE STAFF STRIKE OVER HARMONISATION

Over 12,000 Network Rail maintenance workers took another round of solid strike action in July after senior managers vetoed agreements reached at talks on the long-running dispute over harmonisation of terms and conditions.

Assistant general secretary Mick Cash said that the union had reached clear understandings in the latest round of talks on a range of issues which would have prevented the need for a second strike, but these were later vetoed by the company.

"It is clear that the company is still trying to use what should be talks about harmonisation as a cost-cutting attack on jobs and conditions and they are not allowing their negotiators to come to any meaningful



agreements," he said.

He said that the latest strike was a solid demonstration by members that they expect talks about harmonisation to produce proposals about harmonisation, not ever-longer lists of the conditions the company wants to destroy.

RMT also called for an urgent investigation into Network Rail's contingency plans which included leaving unmarked vans loaded with explosive and highly

combustible materials parked on public roads.

Fire Brigades Union general secretary Matt Wrack agreed that it was a major concern to firefighters and the public.

RMT understands that vans containing a highly explosive combination of compressed gasses including acetylene, oxygen and commercial Calor gas, and quantities of petrol, oil and railway detonators would be left on public roads instead of secure compounds, possibly

in the Peterborough and Huntingdon areas.

Mick Cash said that it was important for members to understand that it was senior management at Network Rail blocking any resolution to the dispute, not the union.

"We remain available for talks, but if Network Rail wants to settle this dispute it should get around the table and negotiate a harmonisation package that is acceptable to our members," he said. ■

JOIN YOUR CREDIT UNION!

Abbey Tullett previews your free DVD in this month's RMT News which explains how you can beat the credit crunch

The RMT Credit Union is your own co-operative bank that offers an easy way to save and a cheap way to borrow.

Presented by Professional Footballers' Association chief executive Gordon Taylor, this short film explains how RMT members can receive low-interest loans and save their money knowing that it is safe.

This film answers the questions that people ask about credit unions and shows that, unlike the high street banks, it belongs to its members and that any profit made is ploughed back into it.

Credit Union administrator Nicola Hoarau points out that it enables members to have ready

access to cheap loans while building up a savings account – all at the same time.

"We can provide help and support for all RMT members' savings and credit needs.

"We can do this by taking the profit motive out of savings and loans by recycling all the profits through cheap loans and dividends," she says.

Put your DVD in now and see how you can find an easy way to save and a cheap way to borrow. All RMT members and their families and retired members can join simply by filling in the form at the back of this magazine. Why not join today! ■



Companywatch

FIRST GROUP PROFITS FROM GREAT WESTERN MISERY

First Group, the company behind the First Great Western rail service labelled "unacceptable" by government ministers earlier this year, has announced bumper annual profits.

The rail and bus group reported that annual operating profits reached £360.1 million, up 39 per cent on a year earlier.

The Aberdeen-based group is the UK's largest rail operator – its other rail franchises are First ScotRail, First Capital Connect and First TransPennine Express – and its latest trading update also boasted a 10 per cent-plus rise in rail revenues during the year.

In January, passengers were

hit with above-inflation fare rises across the network, although FGW's poor performance prompted fare strikes by passengers.

A month later it received a formal rebuke for its handling of the rail franchise and was forced into a £29 million programme of improvements at FGW, which runs services to Reading, Bristol, South Wales and the West Country.

Given this poor performance and general overcrowding, these figures would appear obscene to many.

Millions upon millions of pounds continue to pour into shareholders' pockets – money that should be invested into

developing the company's rail and bus services.

The profits also threw into sharp focus the folly of the Scottish executive's recent three-year extension to the First ScotRail franchise.

New revenue sharing arrangements are favourable to First and a profit-sharing scheme allows it to make £30 million a year before the extension even kicks in.

The announcement was another illustration as why Britain's rail and bus services should be returned to public ownership in order that they are operated in the national interest rather than those of greedy shareholders.

First Group's preliminary results for the year to March 31, 2008 showed:

- Adjusted Operating Profit of £360.1 million across the group, up almost 40 per cent from last year.
- UK Rail Adjusted Operating profit of £120 million, an increase of 10.3 per cent on last year.
- UK Bus Adjusted Operating Profit of £122 million, an increase of 18.4 per cent on last year. Operating margins are 11 per cent.
- Dividend payments of £69.5 million. ■

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REMEMBERING PIPER ALPHA

RMT offshore organiser Jake Molloy explains why offshore workers still have safety concerns 20 years after the disaster that claimed so many lives

On July 6 2008, twenty years will have passed since the terrible night which claimed the lives of 167 of our offshore workmates in the tragedy that was Piper Alpha.

It was a tragedy in many ways, but perhaps the most tragic aspect was the abject failure of the management systems and controls which should have prevented such an incident ever occurring.

The subsequent inquiry found management controls such as the 'permit to work' system to be little more than a 'paper chase'.

There is no doubt that significant improvements in safety have been made across the industry in the twenty years since Piper.

The industry specific regulations that have been introduced coupled with the installation of improved hardware 'should' prevent another disaster on the scale of Piper Alpha. I say 'should' because we can never say 'never'.

Regulations must be adhered to and the hardware will only ever be as good as the people charged with looking after it. 'People', are therefore key to ensuring safety standards are maintained and improved upon.

With that in mind we should remember the words of the Occidental President, Glenn Shurtz, under cross examination during the

Cullen Inquiry – "I had no reason to doubt that all was well. No one ever told me otherwise."

Twenty years ago people, and particularly the offshore workforce, were reluctant to raise safety concerns or challenge management for fear of being seen as trouble makers or not having the right attitude.

Twenty years on many workers remain reluctant to challenge, and for the same reasons. Twenty years ago we had the threat of 'NRB' (Not required back). Today we still have the threat of NRB!

NRB

I accept that NRB is not as prevalent as it was 20 years ago, but it's the fact we are still living with it today which is relevant.

Yet even where NRB is not a threat we still find major incidents occurring.

Consider some of the incidents that have occurred down the years since Piper. Many of them could have led to multiple fatalities on a similar scale. In most cases it has been luck, rather than good management, that prevented an escalation.

Consider also that in the run up to many of those incidents the workforce had been raising concerns about safety systems and hardware. Their concerns were either ignored or dismissed.

In the run up to the incident which claimed the lives of two workers on Shell's Brent Bravo in 2003, (which had the potential to kill over 150) workers were free to challenge management about safety issues but were ignored.

Everything the workers had said was subsequently verified in the investigation into the incident.

Since then, the HSE's KP3 report has confirmed what thousands of workers have been saying for many years; that regulations were being breached and there is a lack of investment in hardware.

In the run up to the Piper tragedy hundreds of workers expressed the view it was only a matter of time until a major accident occurred on Piper.

Constructive dissent serves as an important monitoring force within organisations, a warning signal of danger ahead or of organisational decline. Industry leaders on the UKCS need to realise that internal dissent is not itself a crisis: it is priceless insurance against disaster.

Until the ugly headlines appear and the consequences are unavoidable, senior managers too often forget that they will suffer more for ignoring principled dissenters than by giving them a hearing.

Superficially manipulating a few priorities and satisfying oneself that everyone sings from the same hymn sheet does not constitute a 'safety culture'. Beware of false consensus. Empower the workers. ■



REMEMBRANCE; Tributes at the foot of the Piper Alpha Memorial at Hazlehead Park, Aberdeen



RMT GIVES WELSH MPS RAIL BRIEFING

Sian James MP invited RMT, together with ASLEF and TSSA, to speak to the All Party Wales Group to discuss problems in the rail industry.

RMT Assistant General Secretary Pat Sikorski gave a wide-ranging presentation and in the subsequent debate Pat highlighted that the union's campaign to return the railways to public ownership.

Commenting on First Great Western services, Pat said that the union had for some time been engaged with Ministers and MPs on the issue. The company had been discussed at length at the union's parliamentary rail seminar in May and Welsh MPs had been working with the members of the RMT Parliamentary group to lobby rail Minister Tom Harris.

RMT Regional Organiser Brendan Kelly has also held constructive discussions with Wales First Minister Rhodri Morgan.

Pat highlighted the RMT campaign to retain buffet cars on FGW services and the fact that the company still subcontracted catering and cleaning to companies who paid exploitative rates of pay to cleaners. He alerted MPs to the fact that cleaners at Swansea employed on a FGW contract to had not received a pay rise for over a year and ATW catering had been contracted out to Sea Catering that employed staff on far worse conditions than in-house catering.

Pat alerted MPs to the problems of the lack of staffing at stations operated at ATW, pointing out 31 per cent of passengers were dissatisfied with the availability of staff at Arriva Trains Wales stations compared to a network wide average of 19 per cent.

Representatives of a number of the rail companies, including ATW and FGW turned up to watch the presentation.

He also brought the MPs up to date on the union's campaign against staff assaults which to date has been supported by around 80 MPs in Parliament.

MPs welcomed the trade union presentations and Sian James MP confirmed a point raised by Pat that First Great Western and the government had yet to publish the programme of improvements that the company would have to deliver if it was not to lose its franchise.

Martin Caton MP congratulated RMT for their campaign to save buffet cars and Mark Williams MP took the opportunity to sign up the RMT's Parliamentary motion on staff assaults.

Unions and MPs agreed that it would be useful to have further such meetings in the future. ■

Parliamentary column



MP'S DEMAND TRADE UNION FREEDOMS AND SEAFARERS' RIGHTS

In July Parliament saw the Second Reading (the debate stage) of the Employment Bill when MPs used pressed the case for the Trade Union Freedom Bill and for the minimum wage to apply to non-domicile seafarers working on UK ships and in UK waters. RMT Parliamentary group convenor John McDonnell MP argued: "we have fewer trade union rights now than we had in 1906, after the Taff Vale judgment.

"We still do not have the right to strike embedded in law and we no longer have the right to solidarity action. As a result, the reality of work for many people is that they are exploited and feel unprotected," he said.

John said that the Employment Bill can be amended to reflect some aspects of the Trade Union Freedom Bill, namely the right to strike, preventing the use of agency staff as replacement labour in disputes and simplification of balloting procedures.

Labour MP Katy Clark agreed that the Employment Bill should be amended arguing that Britain still had the most restrictive labour and employment laws in Europe.

"We have to recognise the huge imbalance of power in society. In particular, we must recognise the huge imbalance of power in the workplace between the employer and employee.

"I welcome the work that has led more than 100 MPs to sign early-day motion 1604, which calls for the Bill to be amended to include aspects of the Trade Union Rights and Freedoms Bill," he said.

John McDonnell also used the debate to press for amendments to the Employment Bill to improve seafarers' rights.

"Large numbers of seafarers are not being paid the minimum wage, even on ferries which we would usually consider to be within British waters.

"As employers continue to discriminate on the basis of nationality, I hope that in the later stages of our consideration, we will be able to amend the Bill in order to secure fairness and equity for all workers, who should get the rate for the job, based on the nature of the job itself, not on their country of origin," he said.

Katy Clark Agreed pointing out that many lifeline ferry routes served communities, whether the Scottish islands, Hull or Rotterdam.

"They are not operated by fly by night employers or industries, they provide services daily and subsidies like the the tonnage tax are, in effect, underwriting exploitation.

"From the point of view of British resident workers, it is not acceptable that such mechanisms are being used to undercut their wages and conditions," she said.

The union and its Parliamentary Group will continue to press for Trade Union Freedoms and improved rights for seafarers. The full text of the debate can be found at . ■

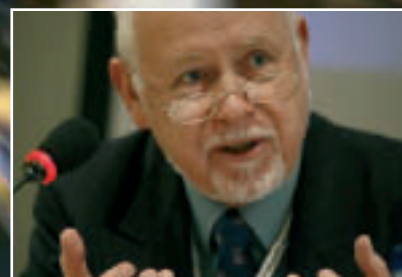
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080714/debtext/80714-0006.htm>

CAMPAIGNING AGAINST THE EU'S RAIL PRIVATISATION DRIVE

Delegates from transport unions across Europe gathered at the International Transport Federation headquarters recently to discuss opposition to the EU-led privatisation of the railways



President John Leach and Bob Crow



Kelvin Hopkins MP

Just days after the Irish rejection of the Lisbon Treaty, rail workers from across the European Union and beyond agreed it was time to campaign against various EU directives and rail packages that force rail networks into the private sector with devastating consequences.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow said that Irish voters had clearly expressed the opinion of millions of Europeans that did not want the privatisation of public services and attacks on workers' rights.

"The Lisbon treaty, like the rail directives, is designed to benefit big business that sees essential services as cash cows to exploit in the pursuit of profits," he said.

Delegates discussed strategies to oppose the privatisation and fragmentation of their public railways being broken up invariably following the disastrous EU model first carried out in Britain over ten years ago.

The drive to privatise rail networks across Europe is rooted in EU directive 91/440/EEC which demands the splitting of train operations and infrastructure, the break up of public monopolies and the introduction of market mechanisms into the rail industry.

The conference heard how this dangerous fragmentation threatened safety, pay and conditions and national collective bargaining.

"These EU diktats, which no government asked for, undermine the very basis of the concept of a social railway designed to provide decent levels of rail services accountable to elected government into herds of cash cows for the private sector which are heavily subsidised by the taxpayer," Bob told conference.

Steve McGiffen, editor of left-wing website Spectrezine, www.spectrezine.org, looked at how the rejected Lisbon treaty and various rail directives undermined democracy across Europe.

John Hendy QC outlined how recent judgments by the European Court of Justice undermined trade union rights and paved the way for widespread social dumping across Europe.

He said that the ECJ had consistently ruled that trade union rights took second place to the rights of big business to exploit workers.

"This needs a massive Europe-wide campaign to reverse the decisions of the

ECJ," Mr Hendy told delegates.

Rene Roovers, Trade Union officer for GUE/NGL group of left MEPs, argued for a workers' counter-attack to the EU privatisation drive.

"Unions are the only well organised force that can build mass opposition to the EU's neo-liberal proposals," he said.

Kelvin Hopkins MP outlined how EU rail directives had fragmented British Rail and rejected claims that opponents of EU diktats were somehow 'right wing'.

"The left led the "No" votes in Europe and is leading the campaign to defend public services under threat from EU rules," he said.

European Transport Workers' Federation general secretary Eduardo Chagas said that the ETF had already rolled back plans to 'liberalise' docks across the EU by mobilising over 10,000 dockers to protest in Brussels which led to a rejection of the proposals.

He made a strident call for transport unions to coordinate Europe-wide action to defeat rail directives in a similar manner.

The conference backed a European-wide demonstration for publicly-owned and accountable railways which has been called for November 13 in Paris.

**RMT is producing a film outlining the damaging effects of EU rail directives and the Lisbon Treaty.*

EUROPEAN CONFERENCE OF RAIL TRADE UNIONISTS STATEMENT

We congratulate participants attending this conference and contributing to this vital discussion. We welcome the support this initiative has received from the European Transport Workers Federation.

We send solidarity to all trade unionists fighting privatisation and liberalisation.

We hope that all participants at today's conference and those who could not attend will continue this dialogue and cooperation in appropriate forums in the near future so that we maximise the exchange of information and coordinate our future activities.

We believe the consequences of rail privatisation, liberalisation and fragmentation are:

- Attacks on rail safety, pay, conditions, pensions, trade union organisation and collective bargaining

- The abandonment of the social railway in favour of a railway run solely in the interests of big business and where the profit motive becomes the only criteria for delivering rail services.

- A more expensive, less efficient railway, where profit comes before the needs of the community.

We therefore condemn:

- Those EU directives, including the various railway packages which are increasingly leading to the privatisation of Europe's railways and a so-called liberalisation process that is leading to less democratic accountability and the growth of private rail monopolies.
- Those governments, EU institutions, the World Bank and other financial institutions which are increasingly making privatisation, liberalisation and fragmentation of the railways a condition of funding.

We believe that, unless effectively challenged, the employers' attacks on workers through liberalisation and privatisation will be assisted by the recent Viking, Laval and Ruffert judgments in the European Court of Justice which represent a fundamental attack on collective bargaining and the right to strike.

We therefore support and urge the ETF to call a European-wide demonstration by trade unions representing rail workers before the end of 2008 and during the French EU Presidency. The purpose of the demonstration will be to:

- Protest against the privatisation and liberalisation of our railways
- Argue for publicly owned railways that put people before profit
- Protest against social dumping and call for the defence of trade union rights and national collective bargaining.

To achieve this end we agree to:

- Coordinate our activities and work together to maximise participation by rail workers' trade unions in an ongoing discussion about the effects of EU rail liberalisation policies.
- Work with other progressive organisations and social movements that share our aims.



Alex Gordon



John Hendy QC



ETF general secretary Eduardo Chagas



HARD WORK, HIDDEN LIVES

RMT has contributed to a report by the TUC
Commission on Vulnerable Employment

The TUC Commission on Vulnerable Employment recently published 'Hard Work, Hidden Lives' which documents everyday life for those workers at the margins of employment and the degree of exploitation makes for disturbing reading.

The Commission travelled Britain interviewing low paid, vulnerable workers, as well as receiving statistical analysis and written submissions, including from RMT members.

The Commission found that the incidence of low pay in the UK has doubled since the 1970s and now 5.3 million people earn less than two-thirds of the median hourly rate (£6.67) – the worst low pay rate in Europe.

It is estimated that of these, 2 million workers are extremely vulnerable and are trapped in poverty. Women and people from black and ethnic minority groups are more likely to suffer vulnerable work and less likely to be able to leave it.

A direct correlation is drawn between the depression of wages and the trend for outsourcing work, which in turn has led to a significantly higher reliance on agency workers than in other countries. The abolition of Wage Councils under the Conservatives exacerbated the problem.

AGENCY WORK

The increase in agency work is critical because these workers can legally be paid less than directly employed workers doing the same job and seldom have rights to workplace sick pay, paid holidays or pension contributions.

The plight of the lowest paid in this country is made graver still because scurrilous employers routinely break employment law, yet general state enforcement of employment rights is weak and there is a general ignorance of these rights. The people – the vulnerable – who most need to know about their employment rights are those who know least. Even when they think their company might be abusing them, frequently they are too frightened to take action.

Government enforcement agencies are seriously under-resourced. There is approximately 1 National Minimum Wage Inspector for every 4,000 businesses in the sectors most likely to have minimum wage jobs. The average employer receives a visit from a health and safety inspector once every 12-20 years. Many small employers will never receive a visit.

Advertising budgets for employment rights awareness campaigns are low. The current budget for national minimum wage awareness is less than a fifth of the advertising budget for the Government's campaign against benefit fraud. It is estimated that 20 per cent of migrant workers may be paid less than the NMW. There is no publicity budget for working time or holiday entitlement.

RMT INVOLVEMENT

With the assistance of regional organisers and offices and branches, RMT was able to provide a number of shocking examples of employment abuses to the Commission. The union's evidence included the case of a Select Service Partner worker being paid just £4 ph, some way below the National Minimum Wage (NMW), something also common to Blue Diamond cleaners on the London Underground.

RMT also demonstrated that agency workers were not primarily supplied to give the employer flexibility, but on a long-term basis to lower payroll costs.

Agency workers were kept on for longer than 12 months without being made permanent members of staff at Meteor, Virgin Trains and Alstom Train Care depot.

The story of one RMT member Paula Mason appears in the Report as a case study. Paula was employed as a cleaner through an employment agency on cross-Channel ferry work on a 14 day on, 14 day off shift. During the 14 days aboard she was employed and she was then released (made unemployed) for the 14 days ashore.



Paula Mason

This arrangement, with the ferry company using her agency labour, rather than take her on directly, continued for eight years.

During this time she earned minimum wage level pay and accrued no associated conditions of service that would have come naturally to directly employed labour.

Today, although she has now changed employment, she continues to be worried about how she will manage financially in old age because she was not able to build up a pension whilst working on the ferries.

ACTION

The TUC Commission has made a number of suggestions to help alleviate the worst of the problems facing vulnerable workers including:

- An ongoing national employment rights awareness campaign led by the Government
- A Fair Employment Commission to co-ordinate enforcement of employment rights.
- Tighter regulation of employment agencies to ensure those agencies exploiting workers lose their licence to trade
- Legal guarantee of equal treatment for agency workers and directly employed labour

- Encouraging trade unions to recruit in the lowest paid sectors

The report was presented to the Prime Minister in June and the government's own Vulnerable Workers Enforcement Forum will report in the summer.

The government is proposing to create a clearer deterrent to non-compliance with the NMW as well as strengthening employment agency standards in the Employment Bill currently before Parliament.

It also signalled that it is to legislate for 'equal' rights for agency workers after 12 weeks employment, although no date has been yet been set.

RMT will continue to campaign for a fairer NMW and in pay submissions this year claim have been for a higher 'Living Wage' to ensure individuals are kept above the poverty threshold.

Similarly, RMT will continue to make the case for 'day one' rights at work, not just after 12 weeks.

RMT members at Serco will be interested to learn that Director Kevin Beeston was part of the TUC Commission and wholeheartedly endorsed the report's call to stamp out low pay. ■

The Report can be downloaded for free from www.vulnerableworkers.org.uk

PAY CLEANERS A LIVING WAGE!

Striking RMT Tube cleaners win cross-party support from MPs in their fight for a London living wage



London Underground's biggest union RMT has called on London mayor Boris Johnson not to backtrack on his pledge that all cleaners on Metronet contracts would be paid at least £7.45 an hour by August.

Over 700 RMT members working for four cleaning subcontractors on London Underground took two rounds of strike action recently to demand the London living wage.

After voting to strike by a landslide 125-one margin, RMT cleaners working for ISS, ITS, ICS and GBM took 24-hour then 48-hour action.

Nearly 50 Tory, Lib Dem and Labour MPs, including two former transport ministers Glenda Jackson and Karen Buck, have so far signed signing a Commons motion in support of the cleaners campaign.

All contracts held by the failed Metronet consortium have now passed to Transport for London and RMT has demanded that TfL act now to halt the scandalous practice of paying cleaners just £5.50 per hour.

Following the strike action, Mr Johnson said at mayor's question time that cleaners on Metronet contracts would be paid the London living wage "by August at the latest".

However, a few days later he said that it would apply only to those contracts up for renewal next month.

That would leave cleaners on Metronet's ITS contract, which is not due for renewal until next year, being paid nearly £2 an hour less than colleagues doing identical work, while the mayor's position also raised the prospect of cleaners on Tubelines contracts having to endure poverty pay for up to four more years.

"If poverty pay is unacceptable on some Metronet cleaning contracts it is unacceptable on all Tube cleaning contracts, including Tube Lines," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said.

INTIMIDATION

During strike action cleaners have suffered appalling intimidation and the union is



gathering evidence that cleaners have been bullied, harassed and threatened with the sack and with illegal punitive deductions from their wages if they take strike action.

Reports coming in indicate that the employers are resorting to gangster-style intimidation and using the worst sort of fear tactics to stop more people joining the strike.

However, hundreds of cleaners are joining RMT following the strike as it becomes clearer by the day to the workforce that unity is strength and they can improve their conditions by taking united action.

"That is testimony to the effectiveness of our 700 members' solid action, but it also underlines the scale of the problems our members have to endure down there.

"Managers have been threatening people with the sack if they join the strike and telling them that they will have sums deducted from their wages that are way above what they could have earned during the strike.

"Others are being told blatant lies, such as they are not allowed to join the union after the strike ballot.

"At Stratford seasoned reps are telling us that they are appalled at the level of intimidation they have seen and at the squalid conditions ISS cleaners have to endure, with men and women having to change for work together in a

tiny store-room with no privacy.

"This is also where workers have to race each other to work in the morning because managers allow the number they require to book on and send the rest home without pay.

"That is disgusting wherever it happens, but on one of the world's most prestigious metro systems it is inexcusable, and we hope Londoners will join us in demanding an end to the disgraceful exploitation that is

taking place in their name," Bob Crow said.

The cleaners' demands also include 28 days' holiday, sick pay, decent pensions and travel facilities, and an end to the barbaric practice of 'third-party sackings' in which cleaners can be dismissed, with no disciplinary hearing or right of appeal, at the behest parties other than the employer - a device used to get rid of union activists. ■

Early Day Motion 1872 Tabled by John McDonnell and signed by nearly 50 MPs so far

CONDITIONS FOR CLEANERS EMPLOYED ON LONDON UNDERGROUND

<http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=36190&SESSION=891>

That this House fully supports the 700 cleaners on London Underground who are members of the RMT union, who have voted by a margin of 125-to-one to take strike action for the London living wage and improved working conditions, including decent sick pay, pensions, holiday entitlement and travel facilities; notes that the action also seeks to end the disgraceful practice of third-party sackings in which cleaners can be dismissed, with no disciplinary hearing or right of appeal, at the behest of parties other than the employer; is appalled that these vulnerable workers who do such an essential job for London must get by on rates of pay of little more than £5.50 an hour; believes that such exploitation brings shame on London as it prepares for the 2012 Olympics; further notes that the cleaners are employed by contractors ISS, ITS, ICS and GBM who are subcontracted to Metronet and Tube Lines to undertake cleaning for London Underground; therefore believes that Transport for London (TfL) has a clear responsibility to assist in resolving this dispute; calls on the Mayor of London to honour the pledge of the previous Mayor that cleaners on Metronet contracts would receive the London living wage as soon as they passed under TfL control, and to bring pressure on Tube Lines also to pay the living wage; condemns the intimidation of cleaners by employers in this dispute; and urges cleaning bosses instead to direct their energies to reaching a just, negotiated statement.

RMT SEEKS NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE PROTECTION FOR SEAFARERS

Get your MP to join 75 other MPs and sign Early Day Motion 1006 demanding that seafarers are covered by National Minimum Wage protection

EDM 1006 EMPLOYMENT BILL AND SEAFARERS

That this House welcomes the introduction of the Employment Bill which seeks to clarify and strengthen the enforcement framework for the national minimum wage; further welcomes the fact that the minimum wage applies to non-UK workers provided that they are employed in a UK workplace; is extremely concerned that non-domiciled seafarers working in UK territorial waters or on UK-registered ships are excluded from this protection; is alarmed that this has contributed to poverty wages and widespread exploitation of non-domiciled seafarers on UK ships and in UK territorial waters; therefore urges the government to amend the Employment Bill to ensure that all seafarers employed in UK territorial waters and on UK ships receive the protection of the national minimum wage; notes that such changes to the minimum wage for seafarers were first recommended by the Low Pay Commission in 2000 and would also be consistent with other protective measures already in place for all seafarers such as the Hours of Work Regulations, the Disability Discrimination Act and the Corporate Manslaughter Act.

Gwyn Prosser

RMT Parliamentary group members have also held meetings with Ministers demanding that seafarers are covered by minimum wage legislation.

A briefing meeting for MPs also took place early in July. The campaign for changes to the existing legislation will now go to the House of Commons and RMT-sponsored MPs will be pressing the government to take action.

Unfortunately, the Minister has stated that he does not wish to bring forward changes to the Employment Bill and that any changes would need to be subject to consultation.

It would be helpful if members could write to their MPs requesting that they both support EDM 1006 and lobby Pat McFadden accordingly. ■

JOIN THE SEAFARERS PROTEST AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

OCTOBER 16 2008

- Defend seafarers jobs
- End to discriminatory practices and social dumping
- Stop the imposition of unnecessary EU maritime regulations that threaten jobs and fragment ferry services

The 2005 Irish Ferries dispute saw Irish ratings replaced by low-paid East European labour and the continuation of wide-scale social dumping. A ruling by the EU's European Court of Justice in the Viking case blocking strike action undermines the ability of seafarers and their organisations to combat social dumping.

European Transport Federation affiliates from across the EU are sending delegations to protest against these anti-worker developments. The ETF has picked October 16 as it coincides with a seminar on sea transport in Europe.

RMT is making arrangements to fund travel from London to Brussels through reserved seats on the Eurostar. Branch Management Funds can be used to further assist in funding other travel or accommodation expenses necessary to attend.

Branches need to head office if they wish to take up this offer. Please contact 0207 529 8819.



PROTEST: Dock workers from several European countries successfully protested in 2006 in Strasbourg against European Commission revised port services package, aimed at 'liberalising' port services.

AGM 2008

Nottingham



Photography by Pete Jenkins

AGM 2008

FIGHTING FOR DIGNITY

STAMP OUT ASSAULTS AT WORK

AGM demanded that the rail bosses start living up to their claims to have a "zero tolerance" policy to staff assaults.

Delegates warned that assaults continued to be a severe safety concern for rail staff - but management were still reluctant to take real action.

Worse than that, they tried to penalise the victims of assaults with disciplinary threats and loss of pay.

Carlisle delegate Craig Johnston said that the train operating companies have launched high-profile poster campaigns warning of zero tolerance, "but the problem is not matched by their actions when their employees are the victim of assaults."

Craig recalled that RMT, working with Labour MPs John McDonnell and Linda Riordan, had to raise the issue in Parliament when privateer Northern restricted the rights of assault victims to continue receiving average pay, unless they suffered serious injury.

Manchester delegate Alex Holden likened rail bosses to "a dodgy fairground operator shouting 'keep the rides moving' when all is going to pieces around them."

He said that management



Craig Johnston

was far more interested in making profits and avoiding fines than looking after its workforce.

Liverpool delegate Billy Kimm agreed: "Northern have all the glossy posters and the talk but are not being realistic.

"They hide behind the law and claim that it is not practical to stop the violence."

He stressed: "We understand that there is violence in society, but we do not come to work to be assaulted, abused, spat on and even urinated on."

Conference called on the union to step up its own campaigning to force train operating companies to take the issue of assaults on staff seriously.

Delegates said that this should include changes to the law to make companies more responsible for their employees' safety.

Assistant general secretary Pat Sikorski said that there was a "clash" between private train companies' care policies and their commercial interests.

He said that the long-term aim was the return of a publicly-owned railway, but until then it was vital to fight for sufficient staffing levels to make the "rowdy elements" on public transport think twice before causing trouble.

DEFENDING CLEANERS

AGM demanded an end to the "disgusting situation" where contract cleaning staff can be sacked on a whim at the demand of another employer.

The so-called "third party pressure" sackings are among

the worst indignity suffered by contract cleaners working for vast transactional companies such as ISS, delegates heard.

Because companies are anxious to retain the lucrative contract, they will dismiss staff on the flimsiest of pretexts - and workers have little legal redress.

Delegates unanimously condemned contractors that supported this practice - warning that it was often used to get rid of RMT activists.

London Underground delegate Janine Booth cited the case of an ISS cleaner who was sacked after a station's so-called "ambience manager" objected to the hat he took from stores for protective reasons.

"It is a disgusting situation where our members can be - and frequently are - sacked because their bosses take a dislike to them," said Janine.

However she warned bosses that the sector was becoming organised - with 700 Tube



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AND RESPECT AT WORK

cleaners striking for decent pay, conditions - and for an end to third-party sackings.

Bristol delegate Chris Davidson revealed the problem was just as bad on the overground railway, with contract cleaners forced to endure dismal conditions.

Chris urged the union to step up recruitment and organisation in this sector to prevent rail bosses using contract staff to "divide and rule."

Teesside delegate Peter Pinkney said that a contract cleaner at Carlisle station had been sacked because they did not have time - as they were rushing to have a train ready to leave - to help a passenger with a timetable query.

The passenger turned out to be a Transpennine Express manager, who demanded that the cleaner be dismissed.

Assistant general secretary Pat Sikorski said the practice of third-party pressure required both a legal and an industrial

response, to end the "collusion" between bosses of different companies.

FIGHTING TICKET OFFICE CLOSURES

General secretary Bob Crow condemned South West Trains' plans to axe 114 ticket offices after revelations that passenger numbers have increased by 27 per cent over the last year at the stations in question.

Official figures show that the threatened have between them had more than 18 million more "entries and exits" by passengers in the last year - from just over 68 million to well over 86 million.

RMT has vowed to fight the cuts, which also include plans to axe weekend ticket offices at many other stations.

Bob told delegates: "The dramatic increase in passengers suggests that SWT should be increasing the number of staff on stations, not cutting them.

"The City is expecting the Stagecoach group to register another substantial increase in profits and it is quite clear that

the group is putting its profit before the people it is supposed to serve."

He added: "For our members this is an attack on 120 jobs, and for SWT's passengers it is an attack on their service and safety - it is in all our interests to tell the company that these cuts are unacceptable."

MOBILE WORKERS

Swansea delegate Mandy Evans attacked train companies' attempts to deny mobile workers' legal claims through a loophole in the insurance laws.

Speaking on behalf of the catering grades, Mandy explained that employers claimed that the motion of the train meant that they were not covered - even though this was exactly the reason why many accidents occurred.

She called on the Council of Executives to campaign to have such loopholes closed.

Bristol delegate Chris Davidson said that it was a "no-brainer" - companies had an obligation to ensure your safety and welfare at work, yet "at each turn they're trying to wriggle out of ways of looking after you."

Pat Sikorski said the union suspected that the companies were claiming the existence of a "loophole" where no such thing existed.

DEFENDING TRACK SAFETY

Delegates demanded an end to the dangerous "watering down" of vital track inspections and demanded a public inquiry into the fatal Greyrigg derailment.

AGM heard that that Network Rail (NR) is determined to cut the number of dedicated track patrolling teams despite the derailments at Hatfield, Potters Bar and, most recently, Greyrigg in Cumbria, where an elderly woman died and five other passengers were seriously hurt.

Fort William delegate Steven Wallace insisted that such incidents could have been prevented if NR adopted a policy of more dedicated inspection teams, rather than less.

Instead, it has "tried to water down track inspections and get workers to perform other tasks," Steve complained.

Carlisle delegate Craig Johnston restated the union's demand for a full public inquiry into Greyrigg, which falls within his region.

Craig blamed "an inherited culture of privatisation and subcontractors, which places getting the job done quickly and



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Bob Crow

cheaply instead of safely and properly.

He called for RMT to keep pressing the case for the complete renationalisation and reintegration of the rail network, insisting: "We are the real custodians of the railways."

Assistant general secretary Mick Cash agreed that the need for an inquiry was paramount - noting that there have been two major incidents in five years, yet "we are no closer to finding out what happened."

Mick said that NR was now pushing for the replacement of dedicated track inspectors with "computers and cameras", which he said were no substitute for trained workers with years of experience.

He warned that the infrastructure company would be implementing such measures more aggressively in the future, as it was pressed to cut costs further by the Office for Rail Regulation, which has imposed a £3 billion shortfall in its requested budget.

"There are problems ahead and we must fight them," he stressed.

ANTI-SOCIAL HOURS

London Underground delegate Janine Booth led calls at the AGM for more rights for reserve, pool and cover staff, who were frequently asked to take on shifts or work anti-social hours at short notice.

She said that such demands took no account of the caring responsibilities of workers,

especially women workers, who had to organise childcare or look after elderly relatives.

"We need to demand that workers' caring responsibilities are taken into account and we must demand that no short-notice changes can be made to their duties without your agreement," she said.

UNSAFE WORKING

AGM called for RMT to "arm" its members with the knowledge and confidence to exercise their right to refuse unsafe work yesterday.

Delegates heard that too many transport workers were unaware that they have the right to stop work and demand alternative duties.

Bosses were all too eager to exploit this, said Carlisle delegate Craig Johnston, warning that bullying bosses would threaten workers if they refused to work on safety grounds.

Craig said that when workers balked at working on an icy platform or facing the prospect of inspecting a train packed with drunk and violent football fans, managers would demand to know "are you refusing an instruction?" with the clear implication that the worker could be disciplined.

"The reality is that our members face a culture of intimidation which damages their own safety," he said.

"We need to provide our members with the right information and the message:

'these are your rights - stand up for them'."

Newport delegate David Hobbs agreed, pointing out that bosses often wanted it both ways.

He said: "When things go wrong, management say 'why didn't you invoke the safe work procedure?'"

Delegates unanimously backed a call for the union to produce a simple "know your rights guide" for every RMT member and to provide proper training on this issue for health and safety reps.

DEFENCE OF RAILWAY PENSIONS

Delegates warned rail bosses that the union will mount national strike action in defence of pensions.

Conference warned that the Railway Pensions Scheme (RPS) is being "reviewed" by the Railway Pensions Commission.

In its final report, the commission suggested closing the scheme to new entrants or a sharp rise in members' contributions.

Steve Wallace stressed that pensions were a vital issue for working people - and any attempt to water them down had to be met with fierce resistance.

Bristol delegate Chris Davidson agreed, insisting: "It's not just about defending our members while they're at work - we have to make sure that we

can look after our members after they have finished working so they don't live in poverty."

Wishaw and Motherwell delegate Gordon Martin backed the motion, but also called for a "massive" multi-union campaign for decent occupational pensions, alongside sectors facing attacks on their penion rights, such as postal workers.

"Let's build a campaign," he urged.

"All this 'Tory' government - and the Tory party that's going to win the next election want to do is attack working people".

General secretary Bob Crow pointed out that closing the RPS to new workers was not only unfair, but reduced the size of the pension fund for all members.

He vowed: "We will not accept any pension changes that leave our members worse off. We will not pass down to a future generation worse pensions than we started with."

PENSION EQUALITY

AGM called on the Council of Executives to examine whether industry pension schemes - such as the Merchant Navy Ratings Pension Fund - which refused to pay a widow or widowers' pension to the partners of members in "common law" relationships were contravening European law.

Glasgow shipping delegate



Gordon Martin

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Steve Wallace

Davie Whiteside warned that such schemes were “discriminatory” and this exclusion often meant that, upon the death of a partner, people were being sentenced to financial hardship for the rest of their lives.

“We need to find a way around this blatant breach of equality in this, the 21st century,” he said.

General secretary Bob Crow said that the executive had already set in motion research to try and end this discrimination.

NO TO EU ATTACKS ON WORKERS' RIGHTS

AGM delegates condemned recent European Court of Justice judgments that place the rights of big business over the rights of workers.

They agreed that the recent Vaxholm and Viking cases were a “licence to undermine collective bargaining and decide the ‘legality’ of industrial action under EU law”.

In the Viking case, the court ruled that Finnish seafarers were unable to strike to defend their conditions because this interfered with their employers’

“freedom of establishment”, while the Vaxholm case ruled that strike action in Sweden against “social dumping was also against EU rules.

Fort William delegate Steve Wallace said: “We’ve a problem in this country already with the anti-trade union laws and these judgments make matters worse.

“These judgments are an infringement of workers rights - let’s stand up for those rights,” he said.

General secretary Bob Crow said that employment law expert John Hendy QC had explained the implications of the judgments to him - this amounted to the idea that “when it comes to organising trade unions it must not get in the way of ‘free trade.’”

Branding the ECJ judgments “perverse”, he said that they showed the EU for what it is: “A bosses’ organisation that wants to attack workers’ right to fight back”.

STANDING UP FOR MIGRANTS

AGM delegates pledged to stand up for migrants against attempts to play working people off against one another.

They welcomed the

contribution to British society from migrant workers and their families and condemned the ongoing demonisation of immigrants in the media.

Delegates also condemned the government for blocking moves to give migrant workers equal employment rights - which allowed employers to use them to drive down wages.

They called for unity among all working people and vowed to step up efforts to recruit and organise among migrant workers.

Southampton delegate Mick Stubbs said: “We want to send a message to the employers that Britain will no longer be a sweatshop.”

Camden delegate Pat O’Brien said that anyone who disagrees with “the unity of working people irrespective of race, religion, language and nationality” had no place in the trade union movement.

Humber Shipping delegate Ray Dickinson revealed that in his region, P&O employed over 200 Portuguese nationals on its ferries, who are “treated abysmally”, with lower pay, longer hours and next to no rights at work.

“The sooner we get them organised, the better,” he said.

AGM called on RMT to continue fighting for an end to discrimination against migrant workers by employers and agencies through changes in the law and within the labour movement itself.

General secretary Bob Crow revealed that RMT is already stepping up its efforts to organise among migrant workers, with such initiatives as

a translation service - into some 30 other languages - on its helplines and the creation of more reps among migrants.

PRESIDENT’S SPEECH

AGM opened conference with a positive speech from president John Leach.

John told delegates that the union stands at a historic moment after passing the 80,000-member mark for the first time union for a generation.

He was proud that this consistent growth had been crowned by the “fantastic” merger with the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee.

Six successive years of growth had been achieved by hard work, not just in recruiting, but in organising transport workers - and in showing that “RMT is prepared to walk the walk as well as talk the talk.”

In his travels around the union John said he noticed that confidence among members was the highest it had been for many years - reflected in successful disputes involving RMT members across the union’s entire industrial spectrum.

Turning to the union’s political campaigning, he contrasted the “heroes” of the RMT parliamentary group, led by John McDonnell, with those who should be ashamed of what they done in the name of Labour.

“There is a big hole in British politics and you could be mistaken for thinking we live in a one-party state because it’s sometimes impossible to tell the



John Leach

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difference between the main parties," he said.

"In the year of the 60th anniversary of the nationalisation of the railways we now have the spectacle of the transport minister boasting that if the railways hadn't already been privatised new Labour would have done it."

The far right was attempting to fill the political vacuum with its politics of hate, and he was proud that the union stood solidly against racism and fascism.

John concluded by stressing that RMT members could be proud of proud of its internationalism and its lay democracy - something often eyed jealously by others - and that was the bedrock of a growing industrial union.

INDONESIAN SOLIDARITY

Esron Pakpahan, general secretary of the Indonesian railway workers' union SBKA was given a warm welcome to the AGM.

Speaking through an interpreter, he said that it was a "rewarding" experience to be part of an "international brotherhood" of unions, helping to build international solidarity.

He said that his union has been in existence since 1928, but had been banned by the last "authoritarian" government until 1999. Since then, the SBKA has won several victories, chief among them making the government take responsibility for railway workers' pensions.

However, like so much of the world, the Indonesian railways have been privatised, and the union was forced to struggle to

maintain workers' conditions.

Nevertheless, he vowed that the SBKA would continue to fight and would learn from its links with RMT.

"In the future we hope to increase co-operation and learn from you, our friends and partners," he said.

EGYPTIAN SOLIDARITY

Egyptian railways' union president Ramadan El-Gendy told AGM that the "privatisation has become a sharp sword on the necks of the workers, particularly under this violent attacks of liberalisation and anti-unions."

He said that this was being made worse by bosses' "persistent attempts to set up yellow unions, to compete with the bona fide trade unions and to undermine the pillars of trade union organisation around the world."

This meant that the challenges facing railway workers were the same worldwide - deregulation, attacks on wages and the undermining of health and safety.

There was a "dire need" for unions join together in solidarity, to achieve "global peace, security and social justice," he noted.

IRELAND SAYS NO TO LISBON

SIPTU general secretary Joe O'Flynn brought fraternal greetings from Ireland after being re-elected for a second term.

He condemned the EU's attempts to "bully through" the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, despite the clear No vote from

the Irish people.

Joe said that there were attempts to dazzle the labour movement by the charter of fundamental rights contained in the treaty - particularly the right to collective bargaining.

He revealed that the Irish government refused to guarantee that such a right would be enshrined under the treaty.

"We decided that if the government was not prepared to make this commitment to us, the largest union in Ireland, we could not recommend the treaty.

"We took a decision, along with hundreds of thousands of workers, to send a message - a social Europe has to have equal rights with that of the free market.

"But all the signals we have received from Europe show that they are going in precisely the opposite direction," he said.

YOUNG MEMBERS' AWARD

This year's John Cogger Young Members' Award was won by Nathan Robinson, a 26-year-old

working as a driver for Leeds City Link who has been an RMT member for 18 months.

General secretary Bob Crow presented Nathan with the award, telling the AGM that he had been a busy recruiter for the union - in the face of a hostile management who have tried to de-recognise RMT.

Bob said: "This is recognition of all the effort and devotion you've given to the RMT to build up the organisation.

"All we've done here this week is pointless without people like you. You are the bricks and mortar that hold up this union".

Nathan said: "I hope for long and productive work as an RMT rep".

SOLIDARITY WITH CUBA

Delegates called for "maximum support and publicity" for the forthcoming 2009 anniversary of the Cuban Revolution.

Delegates overwhelmingly supported a resolution calling for RMT to publicise the Cuba Solidarity Campaign's (CSC) Cuba50 initiative and increase



Young Members award winner Nathan Robinson

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Pete Pinkney

branch affiliation to the CSC.

They called for the union to invite a delegation from RMT's Cuban sister union to the 2009 conference, alongside a national tour.

London Underground delegate Doug Hammersley said: "It is RMT policy to support Cuba against the might of the US blockade and its policy of aggression."

Brighton delegate Gary Hassell called the story of the Cuban revolution a tale of "the evolution of socialism in this world."

General secretary Bob Crow backed the resolution, adding: "We should send a message today - Viva Cuba and Viva the revolution!"

MORNING STAR SUPPORT

The AGM reaffirmed RMT's support for the Morning Star newspaper.

Teesside delegate Peter Pinkney joked that he was proud to move the resolution because he'd been trying to get his name in the paper all week.

But Peter made the serious point that the Morning Star was the only national daily paper of the left and welcomed the support that his union already gave it.

He urged all members to buy it regularly and even purchase shares in it, insisting: "This is a paper we cannot afford to lose."

Craig Johnston recalled that the Morning Star had been "crucial" for information and

support during the pay dispute with Arriva trains.

"It's the paper for the working class and of the working class," he said.

General secretary Bob Crow agreed and pointed out that the Morning Star was the only national paper which had bothered to report on the RMT conference.

Bob said: "We wouldn't expect the bosses to be our shop stewards, so why would you read the bosses' newspapers?"

"This is the paper of the trade union movement and we're proud to be part of it."

PARLIAMENTARY REPORT

RMT Parliamentary Group chairman John McDonnell MP warned the AGM that Prime Minister Gordon Brown is leading Labour "to the edge of extinction as a party."

John told delegates that it may not even be the largest opposition party in Parliament after the next general election.

He said that 12 months ago, Mr Brown enjoyed a "euphoric reception" after his "appointment" as Prime Minister - partly due to the fact that he wasn't Tony Blair but also because he promised "change."

But this change had not occurred, apart from an even greater shift to the right, John noted - with disastrous results

for Labour's support across Britain.

"Now, 12 months on, the Labour Party is at just 25 per cent in the polls, with no sign of improvement, we lost the local elections on a scale not seen for 40 years - we've lost Crewe and Nantwich, something I thought would never happen," he said.

The MP said that his experiences talking to voters had revealed that traditional Labour voters no longer wanted to vote for the party, "but all they want is a Labour government."

John insisted: "There has been no shift to the right - they want a Labour government to do the things that Labour governments are supposed to do."

Despite three-quarters of the British people wanting the railways renationalised, he said that new Labour has "made it clear that they will not even reopen the debate on public ownership."

And he warned that the transfer of failed Tube privateer Metronet's workers to Transport for London was under threat, revealing: "We've had no promises on the previous commitment made from either the new mayor Boris Johnson or the government."

John said that it was up to



AGM 2008

the labour movement to provide the real change that Britain needed and called for a new spirit of solidarity between the trade union groups in Parliament and the unions themselves.

He said that it was time for true Labour MPs to harness the "new spirit of determination" at large in the trade union movement, as seen by the actions of public sector unions such as PCS and the Prison Officers' Association.

TSSA ADDRESSES CONFERENCE

TSSA general secretary Gerry Doherty warned the AGM that the rail sector faced a "huge battle" to defend decent pensions for future workers.

Infrastructure company Network Rail wants to replace final salary pensions with an inferior "career average" scheme - and Gerry stressed the need for unity to fend off this attack.

He noted that the career average proposals would mean total contributions to the scheme of just 13 per cent -

"when if you ask anyone in the pensions industry they will tell you that you need to contribute at least 25 per cent to ensure a comfortable retirement."

He warned: "If you put in peanuts, you'll find yourself living on the shells in your old age."

Gerry said that it was the job of the rail unions to ensure that workers had proper information about the proposed changes and fully understood the implications - to counter bosses' propaganda.

"We have to put our case and say 'who do you trust? Us or them?'," he insisted.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow welcomed the speech and hailed the ever-closer relations between the two transport unions, which spelt an end to the "sectionalism and snobbery" that had plagued relations "only to the bosses' advantage".

Bob expressed hope that such closeness would deepen, leading one day to "one union for one rail network".



Agnes and Albert Wingard

WIDOWS AND ORPHANS RAFFLE

Generous AGM delegates raised over £700 in donations and in a special raffle for the RMT widows and orphans' fund.

Organisers thanked everyone who bought tickets for the raffle, plus anyone who bought fundraising ties and badges, and applauded the hard work of Agnes and Albert Lingard. ■

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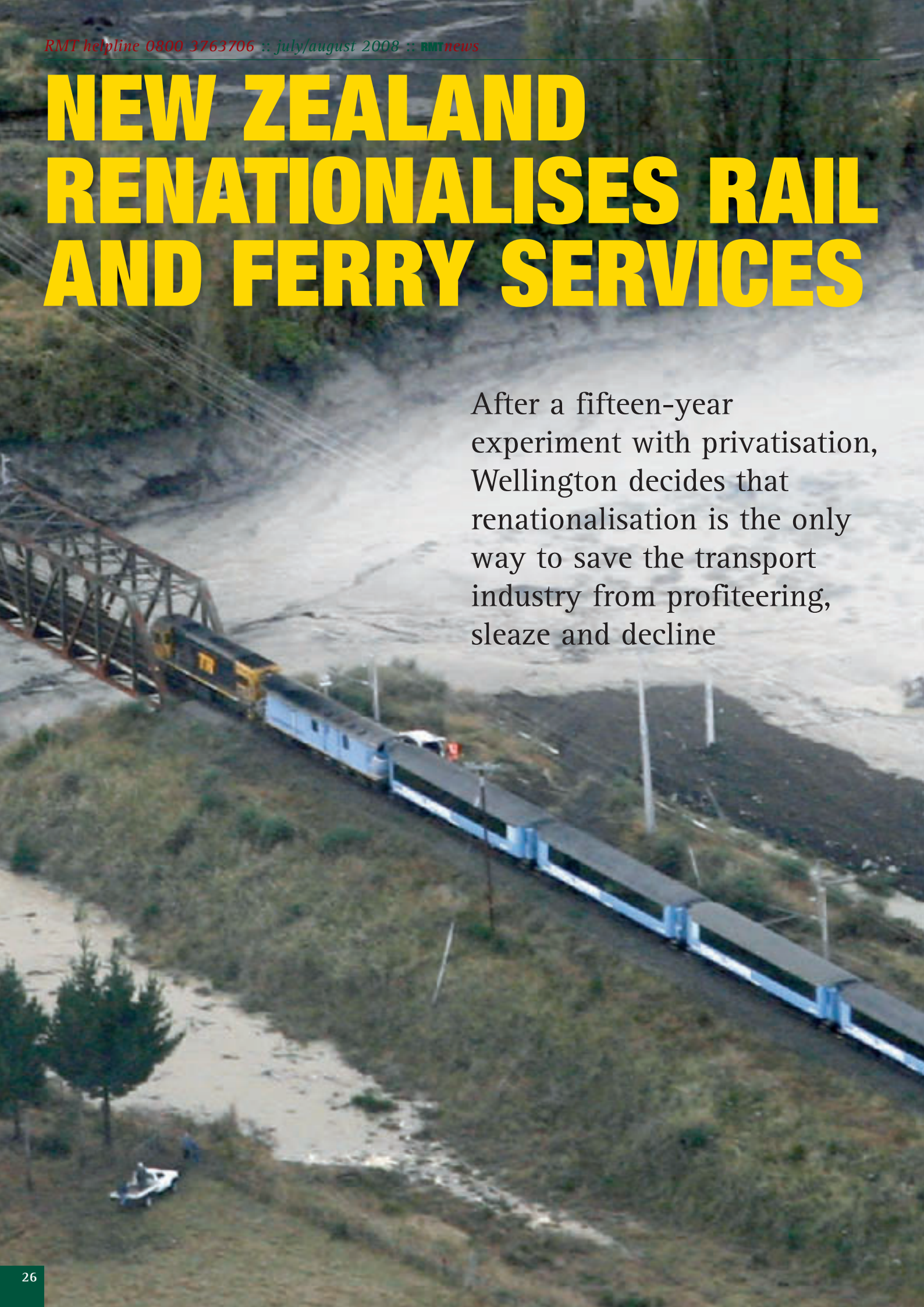
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NEW ZEALAND RENATIONALISES RAIL AND FERRY SERVICES

After a fifteen-year experiment with privatisation, Wellington decides that renationalisation is the only way to save the transport industry from profiteering, sleaze and decline



Two days after New Zealand bought back the privatised rail and ferry industries for £263 million the Labour-led government revealed that Australian privateer Toll had threatened during negotiations to close down much of country's regional rail service.

Finance Minister Michael Cullen said that Toll had threatened to close the central North Island section of the main line, the Picton to Christchurch line as well as lines in Northland, Taranaki, Hawkes Bay, Wairarapa and Invercargill in a row over subsidies.

Mr Cullen said that the privatisation of the rail network had been 'painful' and seen the assets run down in a story that would be familiar to transport workers in Britain.

"During the negotiations with Toll it transpired that buying the rail operating business including the ferries was the best way to increase investment in the industry and enable it to be more responsive to the needs of New Zealand customers," he said.

Prime Minister Helen Clark also said under parliamentary privilege that National Party leader John Key had personally profited during the rail network's chequered financial history.

Miss Clark pointed out that during the original privatisation of New Zealand Rail Mr Key was a director of Bankers Trust, which had advised over the sale.

"That sale was worth \$400 million to the New Zealand government in 1993. That same year, the Bankers Trust, of which Mr Key was director, pocketed \$39 million in profit, who benefited from the sale? Mr Key and his friends," she said.

Miss Clark also accused Mr Key's family trust of holding \$30,000 worth of share in TranzRail shortly before the government acted to prop up the failing rail sector in 2003 and took a 35 per cent share in the rail operator.

"As transport spokesman for the National Party in 2003, Mr Key commented on whether we should be buying back the track and we can find no record of Mr Key disclosing his financial interest," she said.

The populist New Zealand First party

transport spokesman Peter Brown also welcomed the renationalisation moves, pointing out that the rail network had been "sold for a song in 1993 by the National government to its rich mates Fay and Richwhite".

Since then, he said, rail had been run into the ground by a succession of private owners.

"It is time to face facts - privatisation has failed," he said.

REUNITING THE NETWORK

In order to stop the decline of rail, the Wellington government has set up a publicly-run and publicly accountable rail company KiwiRail that reunites rail infrastructure and operations.

This historical move was a final recognition that the splitting of 'wheel and steel', which European Union rail directives and rail packages also demand, had been an unmitigated failure.

Under this fragmented model, designed to create an internal market in the rail industry, track maintenance was supposed to be paid for by track access charges and private sector investment.

It has become clear that relying on track access charges alone would never raise the revenue required and the private sector has been unwilling to meet the required investment costs, leaving the taxpayer with a hefty annual bill.

This scenario has also been played out in the UK with the demise of Railtrack PLC following the Hatfield rail disaster.

Toll NZ had complained back in 2006 that the Track Access Charge (TAC) would soar to \$100 million once the \$200 million the government was investing in the network ran out in 2013.

MODERNISATION

Prime Minister Helen Clark said the renationalisation deal would pave the way for the modernisation of the rail network, which formed a key part of the government's sustainability agenda.

"Modernising our transport sector is central to transforming our economy and

making it truly sustainable," the Labour leader said.

"With rising fuel prices and growing awareness about the challenge of global climate change, many nations are looking to rail as a central part of 21st century economic infrastructure".

She said that a modern rail system could reduce the emissions of the overall transport network, take pressure off roads and allow shipping to operate more efficiently.

State Owned Enterprises (SOE) Minister Trevor Mallard said that the government was considering assembling new KiwiRail locomotives in New Zealand instead of overseas.

"It's probably a very logical thing to do from a currency perspective, from a value for money perspective," he said.

Mr Mallard said that expertise would have to be developed if the plan was to go ahead, but the work could be done at remaining rail workshops in Woburn, Lower Hutt.

UNION SUPPORT

Transport workers in New Zealand were among the first to celebrate the government's timely renationalisation of rail and ferry operations.

Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) General Secretary Wayne Butson said that the move would see national transport assets returned to the people of NZ.

"The RMTU campaigned long and hard to get the Labour-led government to renationalise the network," he said.

Mr Butson said that from the day that the government sold off rail to a consortium that included US rail operator Wisconsin Central, the lot of rail workers and passengers had gone in a down hill direction and there had been an exodus of key skilled workers.

"The flavour of the day was to extract the cash, replace it with debt and do just enough to keep it going," he said.

RMTU said that it was keen to be a part of the rejuvenation of the NZ rail industry so that it can deliver a safe and sustainable transport network.

NEW ZEALAND RAIL RENATIONALISATION TIMELINE

1990: New Zealand government removes core rail transport and shipping operations from the New Zealand Railways Corporation, creating a separate entity called New Zealand Rail Limited.

1993: Right-wing National Party government privatises New Zealand Rail Limited, selling the company for \$400 million to a consortium of merchant bankers who rename the company Tranz Rail Holdings Limited.

2003: Government proposes a \$75.8 million bailout of Tranz Rail after the private owners sweat the assets. Transport Minister Paul Swain said if

the government had not acted the trains would have stopped running within a week. The government takes a 35 per cent share in the rail operator and gives it an immediate \$44 million cash injection.

2004: Australian firm Toll Holdings buys a controlling share in Tranz Rail and sells the rail infrastructure back to the New Zealand government for \$1, in exchange for exclusive operating rights.

2006: Toll Holdings and government agency Ontrack begin wrangling over how much Toll should pay towards improving the tracks. Toll NZ nearly doubles its June year net profit to \$53.3

million and made a \$30m profit in the second half.

Toll NZ says track access fees to double by 2013 to \$100 million once government investment in the network ran out.

2007: Rumours begin that Toll can no longer squeeze a profit out of NZ railways and may sell its rail business to the government. Toll NZ spokeswoman Sue Foley claims Toll is 'absolutely committed to rail in New Zealand'.

2008: Labour government confirms on May 1 that the rail and inter-island ferry operation had been purchased from Toll

for £263 million to "avoid paying subsidies to third parties" to run the network.

2008: Government launches a publicly-owned railway company, KiwiRail, on July 1 which reunites rail infrastructure and operations. It is estimated a further NZ\$25 million will be needed to upgrade the rail rolling stock to an acceptable level.

2008: Finance Minister Michael Cullen reveals on 2 July that Toll had threatened to close down much of New Zealand's regional rail service during negotiations with the government over track charges.

A WORLD CUP IN BRITAIN WOULD GO OFF THE RAILS

Martin Samuel reports from
Euro 2008 and warns that
Britain's fragmented rail
system would not cope if this
country hosted the World Cup
- nor be able to offer the
required free service for fans

*OWN GOAL: The UK's privatised and
fragmented rail network could not provide
the level of co-ordinated train services
required to host a World Cup.*





FANS: The host countries of Euro 2008 provided extra and co-ordinated rail services to get football fans safely around the tournament

The train left Geneva at 00.51am on the dot, as stated, and arrived in Zurich two hours and 54 minutes later, which was the deal.

The ticket collector made his way down the carriage, genially ignoring the blurred lines between first and second-class travellers, as this was an Extrazug, laid on with the purpose of getting football supporters home.

He was not going to argue if some had treated themselves to a complimentary upgrade. They were well behaved anyway, the Turkish lads. They don't drink, either, and the frequent trolley remained heavy with beer.

Last night I broke the 3,000km barrier on train lines across Austria and Switzerland. Cost: nothing. Part of the deal when hosting a tournament is that media receive free first-class rail travel. Supporters get a bargain, too. The inspector wasn't checking for rail tickets but match tickets; possession entitles the holder to go free on all public transport until noon the day after the game.

The last train to Zurich, under normal circumstances, leaves at 9.45pm, but on match nights there have been additional departures in the small hours, meaning lucrative freight commitments take second place and extra staff or overtime is negotiated to compensate for keeping the equivalent of several large armies on the move, fed and watered.

In Vienna, the U-bahn network - their equivalent of the London Underground - works on the honour system anyway. There are meant to be checks, but I haven't witnessed one.

2018?

And it couldn't happen here in England. We will host the Olympics - and we appear prepared to supplicate ourselves before some of the most powerful figures in football until we are given the World Cup in 2018 - but, if that award is made, what follows will be a national embarrassment.

The clue to why the infrastructure of this tournament works is in the name of the transport companies driving it: Schweizerische Bundesbahnen (SBB) and Österreichische Bundesbahnen (ÖBB).

Owned by the nation, managed for the nation, the nation takes precedence. If late trains are running from Geneva to the rest of Switzerland, then late trains are running from Lancy-Pont-Rouge to Genève Cornavin, too, because that is the shuttle route to the stadium.

For us, it is different. Just synchronising Wembley trains alone would require the co-operation of three rail networks: Chiltern Railways, who service Wembley Stadium station, London Overground, who run trains into Wembley Central, and London Underground, who supply Wembley Park.

In total there are more than 20 rail networks in England alone that would need to be squared off if there was to be a complementary and complimentary public transport service during a home World Cup.

This is not another whine about the inferiority of modern Britain. The train into Innsbruck on Wednesday was late, the one back to Zurich yesterday was delayed and oversubscribed. British railways work most of the time, but they are not ours

to control. The system is now run by men in boardrooms, with shareholders to placate and targets to meet, who are not going to look too kindly upon a chap from the government blithely announcing that overnight freight services are to be disrupted for a month by extra passenger trains except - get this - we're letting everybody on for nothing.

SBB stations may appear confusing from the outside, because the German name also takes in a French alternative, CFF, and an Italian, FFS, but SBB-CFF-FFS is all one company, unlike the tower of Babel that is England's rail network.

FRAGMENTATION

It is not enough to bring a few big cities and the odd main line into the programme, either. Fans do not always stay in the places where the matches are played; and team training camps, for instance, which are a massive attraction, are often in the middle of nowhere. At Euro 2008, Germany are staying in southern Switzerland and the nearest venue is 386 kilometres away in Geneva. At an English World Cup, Brazil could easily set up camp at a complex near the Welsh border and bring the world's media plus a thousand fans each day hurtling down the Wrexham and Shropshire line.

Using the current framework, to introduce a coherent timetable during a World Cup would require the co-operation of c2c, Chiltern Railways, Cross Country, East Midlands Trains, First Capital Connect, First Great Western, Gatwick Express, London Midland, London Overground, Merseyrail, National Express East Coast, Northern Rail, South West

Trains, Southeastern, Southern, Virgin West Coast, Grand Central, Heathrow Connect, Heathrow Express, Hull Trains and Wrexham and Shropshire. Not to mention various tram lines, bus lines and metro systems.

ARGY-BARGY

A spokesman for the Association of Train Operating Companies is already doing the numbers in anticipation of a lavish compensation package. "It can't come cheap," he said. "That is assuming the freight customers agree; you can assume there would be some argy-bargy." Or some Argies that would be better off on a barge, rather than hanging around for a non-existent night train from Portsmouth.

Even if one is laid on, it's hard to imagine it will come free, because the Treasury would then need to commit public money to reimbursing the privatised rail network for subsidising tourists.

Yet a World Cup cannot be delivered without that promise, so what does this mean? A financial escalation comparable to the Olympic delivery, for a start. Just as nobody factored in the real cost of compensating businesses displaced by the construction of the Olympic park, so compensation claims from the rail networks would be in the realm of thinking up numbers, then doubling them.

Switzerland and Austria can control budgets because the funds are being moved from one government pot to the next. It is not the same here. England's bid will be derailed by the wrong kind of dough.

Martin Samuel is a sports writer and columnist ■

THE PRISONER OF F

Avid fan of 60's series 'The Prisoner' and RMT education officer Ray Spry-Shute explains why RMT members on the Ffestiniog railway in North Wales are 'not a number'



FESTINIOG RAILWAY

After nearly nine hours and several train journey's I finally arrive at Minffordd station where I will be running a trade union education course for RMT members working on the Ffestiniog railway.

The last leg of my journey to Minffordd takes me along the beautiful North Wales coastline and only a mile from Portmeirion where the cult 1960's 'The Prisoner' series was made.

Waiting for me at Minffordd Hostel for Ffestiniog volunteers is Mike Gorton, Branch Secretary of Eryri, and his vice chair, Jo Millington, who are 27 and 30 years of age. It was great to see such young officers of a branch and even better Mike had longer hair then me.

The company had agreed paid release for the six representatives, for two days each, so on day one I had two students.

We covered how to run a branch as the officers had only taken over last year. There is just over 60 staff on the railway and the vast majority are RMT members and Mike knows each member personally.

The vast majority of guard's drivers and signal workers are volunteers. The railway has over 500 volunteers who help to run the line.

It seems to me to be an idyllic place to work. All the people I've met enjoy their jobs and it was one of the friendliest workplaces I have been to in many years.

We discussed 'pay and conditions' many of the people (almost 25 per cent) were on the minimum wage. Skilled workers are on £13K - £17K per year, many are on short-term contracts and almost all were on a 40-hour week.

I am pleased to say RMT's Regional Organiser Andy Warnock-Smith is dealing with these issues at the next pay talks. It is an uphill struggle due to the lack of jobs in this area and the number of volunteers.

During the afternoon we were asked to help staff load a truck with hospital beds to go to Africa.



The beds were from the hospital next to the railway station and the staff were more than willing to help out. I was introduced to the general manager who had also come along to help.

BRANCH MEETING

Mike Gorton invited me to the branch meeting that night and he picked me up with his partner, Jo, and proceeded to the tea rooms of the Porthmadog railway station.

As it was such a nice evening they decided to hold the meeting out side, this was a first for me. Nine people attended with three apologies. One member was out on the weed-killing train that night. That is over 20 per cent of the branch, most of us would need much larger branch rooms if that happened anywhere else in the country.

Most of the business of the night was contracts, low pay, procedures, which needed updating and management not adhering to agreed procedures. It is disturbing that with such a skilled and dedicated workforce, the management doesn't appear to value them.

Day two started with a nice 30-minute walk in a stunning part of the country. In class we dealt with discipline, negotiation and grievance procedures and also various other matters. In the afternoon I was taken to the workshops for a tour of the works and it was interesting to see the superb skills of RMT members keeping these great little steam trains running throughout the year.

There was a coach in the paint

shop which had been hand painted with ten coats of paint and members are rightly proud of their skills.

Day three was the start of the next course for RMT reps Carol Symonds, John Maxey, Chris Mace and Ben Rose. Carol works as an Administrator at the works department and had been active in other unions.

Chris worked in the permanent way department and has been involved with the Ffestiniog railway since he was a boy and has his own train and mess wagon which he drives. John was from the S&T and before coming to the railway worked for the water board in London. Ben was the hostel warden and is the H&S representative and has been trained up to a NEBOS standard.

Day four in Wales and I'm beginning to think if they ever need a training officer on this railway I would be more than happy to accommodate, particularly in the spring and summer. The last day of the course looked at "How to deal with meetings and employment law".

At the end of this session I am off home and it will take over nine hours but it has been well worth it. The Representatives were fantastic to work with, all enthusiastic and willing to listen. Just as important, I learnt a lot from them. This has been one of the most enjoyable courses I have had the privilege to run. Many thanks to all at the Ffestiniog and to Mike and Jo, who got married last month. Peace and Love (you hippies) you are 'not a number'. ■



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By the time you get to this page of RMT News you may have read a detailed account of the debates at this year's annual general meeting in Nottingham.

Nottingham is a very hospitable city and I'd like to convey the thanks of the delegates to the hard work of the reception committee made up of local RMT members Paul Walker, Pat Collins, Jim Creamers, Dennis James, Dennis McPake, Mat Partridge, Bill Upton and John Marshall.

Delegates dealt with 93 motions covering a wide range of issues in a professional and democratic manner which made my role as chair that much easier.

The quality of debate was very high and,

although there may have been some strong differences of opinion, delegates put their views and listened to each other before voting of what then becomes union policy for the next 12 months.

The AGM is our supreme governing body made up of lay delegates which has the strength to mandate the union to carry out its wishes.

From Cornwall to Scotland delegates are elected to represent members in their regions.

What particularly struck me this year was the large number of new delegates that were attending their first AGM.

Although experience is important, it is very encouraging to see new faces that can bring new ideas and fresh approaches to the problems we face. We all have a responsibility to encourage new members to take part at all levels within the union.

Our AGM strives to be inclusive and this year also we had more female delegates than for many years, but, of course, we can always do better.

A full crèche was available to delegates with childcare responsibilities and this should go some way to encourage more

women to step forward in years to come.

It is always a pleasure to play host to our international guests and this year was no different. We invited delegations from the United States, Egypt, Indonesia, Romania and Ireland and all of them received a warm welcome from conference.

Following the AGM I had the pleasure to meet delegates from RMT's political school taking place in Doncaster.

I caught up with them at Unity House before they went on to the House of Commons for a tour with John McDonnell MP, a firm friend of the union and chair of our parliamentary group of MPs.

This new course is proving very popular and is now firmly established in the union's educational calendar of activities in order to get members politically involved in their regions.

Whatever level of political understanding you feel you may have, this course is open to all members of all ages and all levels.

It was encouraging to see that there was a good mix of young members, women and other more experienced campaigners all sharing ideas with each other.

John Leach

"I don't know what I would have done without the Railway Friendly Society - it was a real life saver"

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RMT1 0808

GRADUATES: Leicester Taxi Drivers and Project partners celebrating their achievement after the graduation ceremony at the National Space Centre IN Leicester.



LEICESTER TAXI DRIVERS GRADUATE

RMT taxi drivers successfully graduate from new training course at Leicester College

Over 50 members of the RMT Leicester Taxi Drivers Branch have successfully completed an award winning innovative new training programme.

The first graduates of a new NVQ training course for local taxi drivers were awarded their certificates at a major official ceremony, held at the National Space Centre in Leicester recently. Over 50 drivers successfully qualified for the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 2 in Road Passenger Transport, following completion of their training at Leicester College.

The work-based pilot scheme was created to help city-based taxi drivers develop their skills and knowledge and gain a nationally-recognised qualification.

The six-month training

course included sessions on the Disability Discrimination Act, personal safety, customer services and the provision of tourist information on the city. Places on the course were free to eligible drivers in the city and the qualification is equivalent to five GCSEs at grades A-C.

BRANCH

The RMT branch was one of the key partners in driving forward this initiative, providing information to drivers and recruiting them on to the scheme.

Branch Secretary Kashmir Singh spoke to as many drivers as possible, explaining to them that the course was something they all should do.

"I really enjoyed the course and found it very helpful, some

things it covered was health and safety issues around loading and unloading a wheelchair and safety tips from the Police including speed awareness and raising your hand to acknowledge passengers and notify road users when stopping," he said.

RMT Learning, the newly formed Project Team at RMT which aims to move the learning agenda forward within the union and bring learning opportunities to members, supported the Leicester Taxi Project.

Development Worker (North) Graham Chesters, said that the training programme had been a great success and a positive experience for the taxi drivers.

"The branch deserves credit for supporting this initiative and working with the other

partners to make it happen," he said.

Over 100 more drivers are now lined up to take the course, with more activity planned to encourage further applications including a roll-out programme to target the 4,000 plus drivers throughout Leicestershire.

The scheme was initiated by Leicester Shire Promotions, provided by Leicester College and funded by the Local Learning and Skills Council.

Along with the local RMT branch, the other partner organisations involved in the development of the pilot project include GoSkills – the Sector Skills Council for Passenger Transport, RMT Learning, Unionlearn and Leicester City Council. ■



BURSARY SCHEME FOR RMT MEMBERS

RMT now has a bursary scheme for members to take up courses that may otherwise not been able to afford

Union Learning Reps (ULRs) are often asked if there is any financial help to do a course, and sometimes there is.

English and maths up to

level two, for example, is always free to the learner, and ULRs can sometimes negotiate good rates with colleges for RMT members, or even get the

employer to pay. However, sometimes a course will cost a lot of money and this is where the RMT Bursary scheme will make a real difference.

RMT Learning project manager Teresa Williams said that the cost of courses may often put people off taking them up and can be a real barrier to learning.

"This new bursary scheme will make learning accessible to members who might never have

considered learning before," she said.

For more information on the bursary scheme and an application form contact your local Union Learning Rep. If you are unsure who your local ULR is, or even if you have one contact your branch secretary, or alternatively RMT Learning.

For more information contact Andrew Brattle e-mail: a.brattle@rmt.org.uk or 020 7529 8820 ■

DIVER

by Tony Groom

SEAFARER BOOKS

RMT member Tony Groom knows a thing or two about diving and he has now taken the literary plunge to put down his experiences in this fascinating book.

In this book Tony provides a no-holds-barred account of his remarkable life over several decades as a professional naval and civilian diver.

His story is gripping and highly amusing in equal measure - all the more so for the matter-of-fact manner in which he tells it.

From clearing unexploded bombs lodged in ships during the Falklands war, to hair-raising exploits in the oil fields of the North Sea, he shines a light on a calling that demands

the coolest of heads and extreme courage.

Tony writes with an honesty of style, describing experiences worthy of reading: a Royal Navy-trained demolition diver who has experienced war and on into the commercial field in 1985. He tells of what you are likely to experience in taking up one of the most demanding and dangerous jobs in the world.

This gripping account, which has already sold thousands of copies, is laced with 'black' humour. Read this book and you will learn why. ■



RMT STANDS UP FOR ITS MEMBERS

If you have suffered an avoidable injury or illness, our team of expert lawyers can help you

The law says you're entitled to compensation for illnesses or injuries caused by the negligence of others. And because the RMT only uses expert personal injury lawyers, you can be sure of a service that is second to none.

Contact us now for fast and efficient advice – even for your family members.

FOR THE BEST LEGAL ASSISTANCE FOR RMT MEMBERS CALL FREE ON

0800 587 7516 (0800 328 1014 in Scotland). Lines open 8.00am-8.00pm Mon-Fri (except public holidays) and 9.00am-5.00pm Sat and Sun. For the 24 hour criminal law line call 0800 587 7530 (0800 328 1014 in Scotland)



PROTECTING AND PROMOTING OUR MEMBERS' INTERESTS



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for RMT members

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U.K. Call centre

Member of the RMT Group of Companies. RMT Group of Companies is a registered company in England and Wales. Registered office: RMT Group of Companies, 39 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD. Registered in England No. 27749.

RMT NORTH EAST REGION MOVES TO DONNY

RMT North East Regional office will be moving from York to Doncaster this month.
From Monday July 28 the new address and phone number will be:

RMT North East Regional Office
Thomas Steels House
49a Thorne Road
Doncaster DN1 2EX

Phone 01302 760694 Fax 01302 343960

Correction

In last months issue a letter,
'Network Rail intranet trouble'
should have displayed the
authors name, Peter Pinkney.

CLASSIFIED ADS

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TENERIFE, COSTA ADEJA.

Apartment in 3 star hotel on seafront.
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£85pppw. Tel: **01803 526168**

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members. Beautiful 3 bedroom 2
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porch and overlooking a lake. Will
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www.indianwellskissimmeevillas.co.uk

UK HOLIDAYS

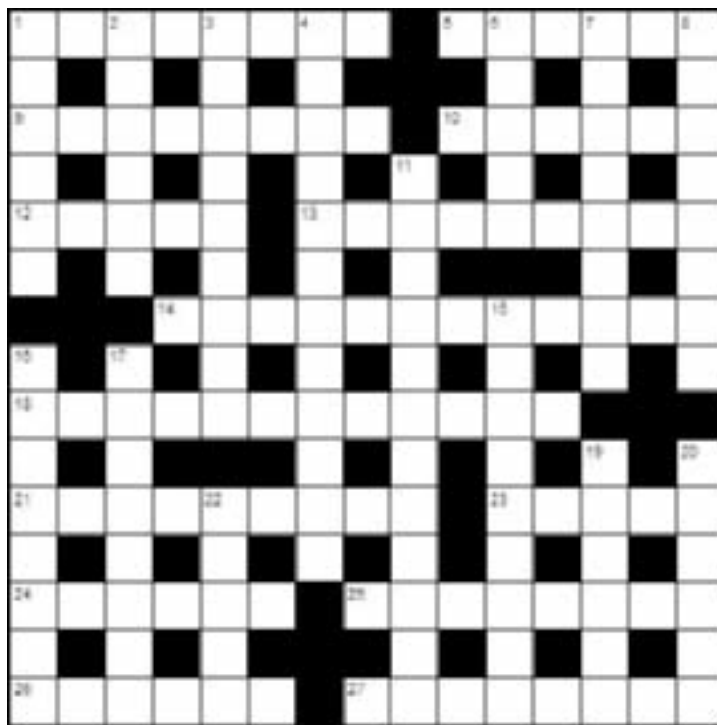
VICTORIAN FARMHOUSE B&B plus
s/c lodge, sleeps 4, also B&B. Set in
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brochure call **01425 472115**

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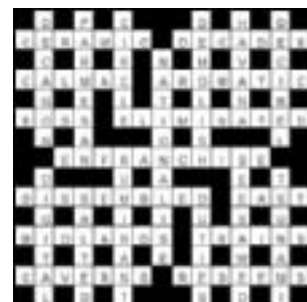
AIRPORT CAR PARKING. 5%
additional discount for RMT members
www.flypark.co.uk/discount Get a
quote and see savings

£25 PRIZE CROSSWORD

No. 46. Set by Elk



Last month's
solution...



The winner of prize
crossword no. 45 is
Charlie Hicks of Edenbridge.
Send entries to Prize Crossword,
RMT, Unity House, 39 Chalton
Street, London NW1 1JD by
September 1 with your name and
address.

Winner and solution in next issue.

ACROSS

- 1 Picture, especially of person (8)
- 5 Drooped (6)
- 9 Give cause for complaint (8)
- 10 Fruit - with slippery skin? (6)
- 12 Waterway dug by 21 (5)
- 13 Is Britain heading for one? (9)
- 14 Fails to cover adequately? (12)
- 18 Picture or drawing, often in book (12)
- 21 One who dug 12! (9)
- 23 Vessel found on 12 (5)
- 24 Noise made by mouse or rusty hinge (6)
- 25 Joined - to an email, perhaps? (8)
- 26 Female relative or union colleague (6)
- 27 safeguard - pickle - jam (8)

DOWN

- 1 Fish - at a certain point, by the sound of it? (6)
- 2 Seething - as in angry torrent? (6)
- 3 Permanent-way connections? (4,5)
- 4 Spineless creature! (12)
- 6 Grizzly ____; ____ apple; ____ Family? (5)
- 7 Frozen rivers (8)
- 8 Determine what's wrong (8)
- 11 One who pens play or film (12)
- 15 Not exactly fast vessels -- to China? (4,5)
- 16 Ticklers of ivories! (8)
- 17 Tastes - of ice creams, perhaps? (8)
- 19 One who fires arrows (6)
- 20 Small pointed thing - annoy! (6)
- 22 Serious burial place! (5)

RMT SUMMER SAVINGS CLUB

SAVE FOR SUMMER THE EASY AND SAFE WAY WITH THE RMT CREDIT UNION

Saving for summer holidays can be a real headache. Take some of the stress away by saving over the course of the year with the RMT Summer Savings Club. We'll add a little extra to your savings and pay out the money ready for your summer shopping spree or holiday. This account is designed for people who want a secure savings account that helps them to save for their summer holidays time when children are off school.

It's based on the traditional Summer Club principle of saving a fixed amount each month that is not accessible until the payout date. Many people like the discipline of a regular savings programme where they are not able to access the cash!

Even a small amount saved each month soon adds up. Saving is made easy by Direct Debit either monthly or 4-weekly to suit your pay cycle.

For our Summer Club, the maturity date will be 15th July 2009. We anticipate that we will add a bonus dividend at the maturity date. We will

pay the money direct to your bank account. There are no vouchers or hampers or anything of that kind – you decide how you want to spend your money.

The bonus will be added to your savings if you complete all of your regular payments. This year we anticipate paying a dividend of 2%*.

As all of your Summer Club money will be paid out each year it will be kept separately from your regular credit union savings and cannot be used against credit union loans.

If you want to open a Summer Club account and are already a credit union member simply complete the form below. If you are not already a credit union member you will have to complete the form below and the credit union membership application opposite. Completed forms should be returned to our freepost address.

** NB: Past bonus rate is not an indication of future bonus rate*

TERMS & CONDITIONS – IMPORTANT INFORMATION - WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT RMT CHRISTMAS CLUB

- You need to be an RMT Credit Union member to open an RMT Summer Club Account.
- You have to save at least £5 per month into a regular RMT CU account in addition to your RMT Summer Club Account.
- You pay a monthly or 4-weekly Direct Debit consisting of your nominated Summer Club payment (min. £10) plus at least £5 per month to your main RMT CU account. Summer Club payments will run from June to July each year.
- Summer Club accounts have to be opened by the end of August. Late applications commence the following July.
- As an RMT CU member you build up regular savings with a yearly dividend (3.75% in 2007) and you can apply for low interest rate loans.
- Your Summer Club money is separate from your regular savings account. That means you will have a guaranteed sum available for Summer maturing every 15th July, plus a savings account growing with time.

- The Summer Club secures your money so it's there for the Summer period. This means that your money is locked-in and you can make no withdrawals until 15th July when all of your money, plus dividend will be paid out.
- If you make all of your payments we anticipate a dividend bonus of 2% p.a. as accrued through the year
- All of your money will be paid to your bank account on the first working day after 15th July.
- If you cancel your payments the dividend is not applied and you cannot withdraw your money until after 15th July. If you think you will need access to your money before 15th July, this account is not suitable for you.
- The Summer Club will continue year-on-year, so payments after 15th July start the next year's account. Of course if you wish to cancel your payments you are free to do so at any time.

Cut here

RMT SUMMER SAVINGS CLUB APPLICATION

RMT Credit Union Account Number (If known)			
Surname		Address	
Forename(s)			
Home phone			
Mobile			
email		Postcode	
Date of birth		NI Number	
Employer		RMT Branch	

Do you save monthly on 28 th ?		Or 4 - weekly (Fri)?		You can save by calendar month or 4 - weekly
How much do you save in your RMT Credit Union Account?			£	min. £5 per month
How much do you wish to save in your Summer Savings Club Account ?			£	min £10 per month in £5 multiples
The total each period for both accounts on my Direct Debit is			£	the total month/4 -weekly
This is the total amount you wish to save by Direct Debit monthly on the 28th or 4-weekly				

Remember that if you have a loan with us your regular Direct Debit will also include that repayment

DECLARATION

I understand the Terms & Conditions of the RMT Summer Savings Club Account and that membership of the RMT Credit Union is a condition of holding an RMT Summer Savings Club Account. I understand that my monthly savings into the RMT Summer Savings Club cannot be withdrawn until the maturity date which is on or after 15th July each year.

Your Signature		Date			/		/				
----------------	--	------	--	--	---	--	---	--	--	--	--



RMT CREDIT UNION LTD.

Finance Department, Unity House, 39 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD

MEMBERSHIP NUMBER

RMT CREDIT UNION APPLICATION FORM – please complete your application along with the attached Direct Debit.

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 **Marital Status** married ☐ partner ☐ single ☐ divorced ☐ **Drivers Licence No.**

3 Your Employment.

Employer		RMT Branch	
Job Description			

4 **Mr** ☐ **Mrs** ☐ **Ms** ☐ **Miss** ☐

5 Membership Status

RMT TU Member ☐ Retired RMT TU Member ☐ RMT Family Member ☐

6 **How much do you wish to save £** This is the amount you wish to save by Direct Debit monthly on the 28th ☐ or 4 weekly (Fri) ☐

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

8 **Next of Kin**

Address

.....

.....

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

Your signature

Date

We are checking new member identification electronically. To do this, we now carry out searches with credit reference agencies who supply us with relevant detail including information from the Electoral Register. The searches will not be used by other lenders to assess your ability to obtain credit.

I agree to my identity being checked electronically ☐

If we cannot verify your identity and address by this method, we will ask you to provide paper documentation instead. Full details of these can be supplied to you by calling 020 7529 8835.



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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- Live Entertainment.
- Why not extend your stay from £36pppn.
- £10 voucher to spend on board per booking.
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- Book by 30th August 2008.

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