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RMT *news*

30 YEARS OF HEALTH & SAFETY RIGHTS

IN THIS ISSUE...



**UNION RECOGNITION
AT HOVERTRAVEL
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**FIGHTING FOR TRADE
UNION RIGHTS
PAGE 14**



**KEEP TYNE & WEAR
PUBLIC PAGE 21**



NATIONAL UNION OF RAIL, MARITIME & TRANSPORT WORKERS

Unity House, 39 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD



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CREDIT UNION

EDITORIAL

PROTEST IN PARIS



On November 13 RMT members will be joining the international demonstration in Paris, supported by the European Transport Workers Federation (ETF), to demand an end to European Union rail diktats, demanding the fragmentation and privatisation of European rail networks.

RMT's international rail conference in June heard delegations from across Europe describe the damaging effects of various EU directives and rail packages at various stages of implementation.

Without exception, this dangerous experiment attacks the concept of a social railway for public use and promotes a money-obsessed model designed to squeeze private profits out of declining rail services.

The current global financial crisis reveals exactly where that model leads – ever-increasing corporate greed and the destruction of essential services that working people rely on.

Union members also joined protests in Brussels earlier this month against the decline of seafaring jobs and for an end to discriminatory practices and social dumping. Maritime unions across Europe are also demanding the scrapping of unnecessary EU regulations that demand the breaking up and privatisation of ferry services.

If banks can be nationalised around the world when they are in trouble then transport networks cannot be allowed to decline in the name of the so-called 'free market'.

The alleged 'competition' that exists under capitalism has been exposed once more as a rigged game which allows private monopolies to extract profit at our expense.

Prime minister Gordon Brown and chancellor Alistair Darling are clearly embarrassed about taking the banks into public ownership, not least because it shows it can be done.

If social ownership is good enough for the banks, it is good enough for rail, shipping and bus industries which have been used as cash-cows for the private sector for years.

Transport privateer Go-Ahead is a perfect example boasting profits of £145 million while raking in nearly £200 million in public subsidy for its three rail franchises.

RMT has been pressing the government to improve trade union rights for many years and

this month presents an opportunity to do so with the passing of the Employment Bill.

We are asking you to send off the postcard inserted in this month's journal to your MP to ask them to support three moderate amendments including better protection against victimisation, preventing the use of agency labour during disputes and fairer ballot procedures.

The Employment Bill debate could also be an opportunity to ensure that non-domiciled seafarers are excluded from minimum wage legislation. This loophole has allowed the exploitation of foreign seafarers and widespread social dumping and must come to an end.

Despite these problems we do have a good pay offer of five per cent on the table from Cal Mac ferries plus two weeks extra leave.

One of the few trade union rights still enshrined in law are the rights of health and safety reps to demand that employers adhere to the obligations required of them.

This month marks the 30th anniversary of these important rights which can be a matter of life and death in the workplace.

Due to the corner-cutting caused by the fragmentation and privatisation of the transport sector, health and safety is more important than ever.

That is why there should be a joint public inquiry into Grayrigg and Potters Bar train crashes to look at the structure and continued fragmentation of the industry.

As we go to press two track worker members, arrested in connection with the Grayrigg crash in February 2007, have finally been cleared after being kept under caution for eleven months.

RMT has always been mystified by the arrests, and has pointed out that systematic management failings, lack of resources and unrealistic workloads were at the heart of the fatal derailment.

Finally, I am pleased to report that the suspension of one of our Metronet safety reps Andy Littlechild has been lifted following a campaign by the union including a ballot of Metronet members. Well done to Metronet workers for standing by their rep.

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

SCOTTISH NETWORK RAIL STRIKE SOLID

Rock solid 24-hour strike action by 450 RMT signallers and supervisors in Scotland has forced Network Rail to agree a deal over rostering and transfer issues.

RMT members walked off the job after voting a margin of more than two to one to take action. A second 24-hour strike was suspended by the RMT executive after the deal outlined below was agreed at ACAS:-

- Local base rosters will be agreed by both parties under the Collective Bargaining Procedures
- Once agreed, base rosters are binding on both parties
- Base rosters must contain a quarterly safety brief (QSB) day including a Cognisco test every quarter
- Cognisco assessments will be planned to take place as part of the rostered quarterly safety brief day which it is recognised as binding on both parties. In circumstances where it is necessary to carry out a Cognisco test separately from the QSB day this will be shown on the weekly roster
- As part of the QSB day, Cognisco testing will be scheduled away from the workplace. However, if necessary, this can be undertaken at the work location provided this can be carried out free of distraction.
- If business needs require management to cancel a Cognisco test they will

request the member of staff to come off their booked work and endeavour to ensure that at the earliest opportunity the member of staff undertakes their Cognisco test by mutual agreement and within 13 weeks

- If a Cognisco test falls on annual leave this will be rescheduled within 4 weeks of return from annual leave and prior notice will be given to the member of staff
- Any change to booking on or off times will be by mutual agreement. Staff retain the right to refuse to change booking on and off times. Free days on the roster will only be altered in accordance with collective bargaining procedures

During the dispute RMT asked the Railways Inspectorate to investigate reports that a train was signalled into a platform at Edinburgh Waverley station at the same time as another was being signalled out of it, and to probe the competency of managers being used to staff signal boxes during the signallers' strike. ■



WHY I JOINED RMT

Name: Steve Wallace **Job:** Ultrasonic operator in Fort William **Employer:** Network Rail

I joined RMT in order to protect myself at work. I had no hesitation in joining the strongest all-grades union on the railways.

I am proud of the fact that RMT defends all its members regardless of the job they do and what grade they are.

As a track worker I need to know that I have strong union behind me, particularly when it comes to health and safety.

I was recently a delegate at this year's annual general meeting in Nottingham and I saw the democratic structures of the union in action. Delegates took part in

the many debates and even had their arguments and disagreements. But it was carried out in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

It was also interesting to hear contributions from fraternal delegates and learn that transport and energy workers from around the world faced the same issues and problems.

I came away firmly believing that RMT is the most open, democratic and inclusive union I have ever been involved in. Members are treated equally regardless of their position or job and that unity is its strength. ■



METRONET STAFF BALLOTTED OVER BREAKDOWNS IN RELATIONS

RMT demands re-instatement of victimised rep, no cuts in signals maintenance and no imposed rosters

Around 2,500 Tube infrastructure workers at Metronet are to be balloted for industrial action over breakdowns in industrial relations following the victimisation of an RMT safety rep, dangerous plans to reduce signals maintenance and attempts to impose rosters.

RMT is balloting its entire membership in Metronet following the crudely engineered suspension of experienced health and safety rep Andy Littlechild for attempting to uphold the company's own health and safety policy.

He was suspended after a 'fact-finding' meeting pre-judged him guilty of refusing to wear a hard hat where one was required. He was told to leave the premises at 3am with no means of getting home and banned from talking to any of his colleagues.

For more than two years

Metronet has ignored a central plank of Metronet's health and safety policy, under which the first principle is to eliminate a particular hazard. Failing that attempts should be made to change the way in which a job is carried out, while the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), including hard hats, is regarded under the policy as a last resort – indeed 'PPE is the last resort' is a Metronet slogan.

The union will also ballot Metronet signals staff if the company does not withdraw proposed cuts in signals maintenance and recognise that rosters are subject to negotiation.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow said that Andy Littlechild had been fitted up on a bogus charge that "would embarrass the Spanish Inquisition".

"Andy has spent more than two years trying to get Metronet's official safety policy applied, and it is the

management that has brazenly ignored that policy that should be disciplined," he said.

Bob warned that industrial relations on the signals side had also plummeted in recent months, with management throwing weeks of patient talks out of the window and attempting to impose unacceptable rosters and transfers.

"But most worrying is the company's intention to halve the frequency of signalling maintenance and move to what it calls risk-based maintenance – something that even Metronet managers have admitted privately is simply about saving money.

"The company says it needs to divert staff for an urgent survey of signals cabling that is half a century old, but it must be unacceptable to do that at the expense of basic maintenance," he said. ■

NO AGREEMENT FOR 24-HOUR TUBE RUNNING

Despite London mayor Boris Johnson's public announcement that the network would operate 24 hours a day during the 2012 Olympics, there is no agreement with London Underground staff to run the network round the clock during the games.

RMT has yet to be even approached by the mayor, TfL or LUL management for discussions on the many complex issues involved.

"It is all very well the mayor announcing that the Tube will run-around the clock during the Olympics, but if it is going to happen it will need detailed planning and the agreement and goodwill of the professional staff who will deliver it," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said.

RMT supports the 2012 Olympics and for two years the union has been seeking an early settlement that takes account of the substantial additional burdens and responsibilities that transport workers will have placed upon them.

"There are huge difficulties to overcome and obvious safety implications, not least around ensuring that essential maintenance work is done, and I would have thought that an essential starting point would be to approach the union that represents the majority of Tube staff," Bob Crow said. ■



MARCHING AT BURSTON

Hundreds braved the pouring rain at the Burston rally in Norfolk last month to hear RMT parliamentary group chair John McDonnell MP (right) call on the government to “get rid of Thatcher’s anti-union laws”.

Celebrating the 94th anniversary of the Burston school strike he declared: “If we are to protect our members, our communities, our class, we need to make sure we do not have one hand tied behind our backs”.

The Burston strike began when the pupils of the Norfolk village came out on April 1 1914 in support of their sacked teachers Kate and Tom Higdon.

The Higdon’s were dismissed on trumped up charges after they had upset the local gentry by organising villagers into the Agricultural Workers’ Union. With support from trade unionists around the country, in particular from RMT’s predecessor the National Union of Railwaymen and the miners, a strike school was set up.

The school continued until 1939 – the longest strike in history.

A helium-filled RMT blimp hovered 200 feet in the air as the crowd gathered on the green next to the strike school building to hear speakers and music from singer-songwriter Dick Gaughan.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow was among a strong RMT contingent who joined other trade unionists and their families to march behind Easington Colliery Band – who were protected from the elements by red RMT rain capes – retracing the route taken by the pupils when they went on strike.

Mr McDonnell said that British workers needed a Trade Union Freedom Act. A previous attempt to get such a bill through Parliament had been not been defeated by the Tories but talked out by government ministers.

“We expect more of a Labour government. We expect Labour MPs to vote for this bill.

“We have less rights now than we had in 1906 after the Taff Vale case,” he declared.

He also called for council



houses at affordable rents, the restoration of the link between pensions and earnings, and respect for migrant workers.

Colombian TUC general secretary Tarcisio Mora Godoy explained how difficult it is to be a trade unionist in Colombia.

“In our country 3,000 trade unionists have been murdered, including 41 union leaders this year,” he said.

Mr Godoy called for international support for a general strike in Colombia called for in October “against injustice, hunger and poverty”.

Cuban TUC deputy general secretary Reinaldo Veldés Grillo,

recalled how Cuba had been fighting for 50 years against a criminal blockade which threatened people with hunger.

“We respect and understand those young people fighting for justice and human rights here in Burston,” he said.

National Union of Teachers president Bill Greenshields said that the Higdon’s had challenged the fundamental inequalities of society.

“When they did that the country gentry marked their card and their sacking was guaranteed, but the children fought back,” he said. ■



Companywatch

GO-AHEAD FEEDS ON PUBLIC CASH

Transport privateer Go-Ahead Group declared £145 million profit recently after receiving nearly £200 million in subsidy for its three rail franchises over 2007/08.

The company has also profited from imposing inflation-busting fares hikes and untold amounts of public money finding their way into the group's bus operations from local authorities.

As the company reported a 23 per cent rise in operating profits to the end of June and a 16 per cent hike in dividend payouts to shareholders to £81 million, Go-Ahead has declared war on the safety role of guards on the Southeastern franchise.

The Go-Ahead subsidiary is attempting to do away with guards and extend driver-only operation on new Hitachi

Javelin 395 rolling stock running in and out of London from Kent.

The company's plans, in breach of existing agreements, involve transferring control of powered doors on trains carrying up to 1,000 passengers – 20 per cent more than Eurostars – to drivers and replacing guards with a new non-safety critical post without the training in on-board safety and train protection, route-knowledge and licence that guards must have.

A twelve-car train made up of two of the new units, with no walk-through between units, will carry as many as 1,000 passengers through tunnels west of Ebbsfleet that together are at least as long as the Channel tunnel, and RMT's view is that there should be a fully safety-

trained guard in each portion.

The first five of 29 Javelin sets have already been delivered and SET intends to run the fleet on routes through Kent that are currently fully guarded.

Passengers are also facing inflation-busting fares increases and massive overcrowding in the drive to make even bigger profits.

The bottom line is that the only people who benefit from rail franchising bus privatisation are the shareholders who are shovelling public subsidy straight into their bank accounts.

Even worse, there is no telling how much more public money Go-Ahead's bus subsidiaries get, because no-one bothers to keep a central record of the handouts they squeeze from hard-pressed local

authorities up and down the country.

GO AHEAD'S PRELIMINARY RESULTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 28 JUNE 2008

- Group operating profit of £144.9 million, up 22.7 per cent from last year.
- Rail-operating profit of £77.2 million, up £11.1 million.
- Bus-operating profit of £66.2 million, up £10.4 million.

SUBSIDY TO GO-AHEAD'S RAIL SUBSIDIARIES IN 2007/08:

- South Eastern: £82.3 million
- Southern: £65.8 million
- London Midland: £44.7 million ■

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Legal helpline: 0800 587 7516 - Seven days a week

UNION WINS RECOGNITION AT HOVERTRAVEL

RMT achieved recognition at Hovertravel earlier this year after more than 50 per cent of staff were recruited by the union. The firm operates hovercraft across the Solent between Portsmouth Southsea and Ryde on the Isle of Wight.

In some four decades of Hovertravel's operations this is the first time that a union has been recognised, representing a tremendous achievement for Portsmouth branch.

RMT News joined regional organiser Peter Gale for the 10-minute sea voyage to Ryde. Peter was there for pay talks with management and it was a good opportunity to hear how the members were recruited and what it means to the staff at the workplace.

It's strange to enter a sea vessel that's sitting on land, but the transition from land to sea and back again is seamless as the craft powers up, skims both, then with a sigh powers down the other side at Ryde Esplanade.

Then it's a meet and greet with union

members as union veteran Mick Tosh unfurls the new branch banner for a photo. We have to be quick as the service operates every 30 minutes and we want the craft in the background.

Beachmasters and union reps Alan Phillips and Paul Jackson then usher us into the staffroom – a cramped area in need of updating – to explain some of the background to the union's work at the firm.

The need for the union came about through the experience of disciplinary cases. "When we had a case there would be a break in the meeting while the management got professional legal advice while we got none, we just didn't have the backup that we needed," explained Alan.

Recently, the branch did a survey of the 30 members to find out what their main concerns were, these include pay, Ryde staffroom facilities and weekend working.

"Staff work 11-12 hour shifts on the weekend, which can have a big effect on family life," says Paul.

In the past Alan had been a National Union of Railwaymen member and had previous experience of recruitment and organising. He has been a crucial link between the branch and the workplace.

Alan's role came about through a chance meeting in the pub opposite Ryde terminal three years ago, when he met Portsmouth branch Secretary Richard Howard. Richard was wearing his RMT badge and Alan struck up a conversation, mentioning that he had been in the NUR.

Richard says that union recognition at Hovertravel had been a model of how to recruit.

"We found somebody who could be a focal point, supported that person and developed the membership.

"We then supported the new members, which further grew the membership to the point where the union was recognisable. The workers here are on low pay and we are going to help them," says Richard. ■

Left to right: Peter Gale, Richard Howard, Paul Jackson, Alan Phillips, Mick Tosh, Matt Barnicoat



LOBBY YOUR MP FOR AMENDMENTS TO THE EMPLOYMENT BILL

The United Campaign to Repeal the Anti-Trade Union Laws has launched a postcard campaign to MPs in support of amendments to the Employment Bill and copy has been inserted in this magazine.

The Employment Bill will be back before the Commons soon after Parliament resumes in October and the proposed amendments would be a step forward to reclaiming fundamental trade union rights. You can help by sending your postcard to your MP that asks for support for the amendments.

The rights for everyone to form effective trade unions, with the ability to engage in collective bargaining and to withdraw labour, have been recognised as fundamental in international law – including Treaties ratified by the UK and binding on it.

But these have been seriously eroded particularly in the UK to such an extent that unions are almost powerless to prevent the growth of poverty and inequality. Pay and pensions do not keep pace with inflation and are falling in value. Dignity and equality in the workplace are under pressure. Yet the fundamental legitimacy of collective rights cannot be denied.

The campaign continues to promote the issues contained in the TUC-backed Trade Union Rights and Freedoms Bill which the government failed to support last year. The trade union movement now has the opportunity for positive amendments to the Employment Bill, currently in Parliament. Everyone can help by spreading our postcard campaign encouraging MPs to support amendments.

There may be three areas of the Employment Bill which can be amended to strengthen trade union rights, providing:

- Better protection against dismissal or victimisation of workers taking part in lawful industrial action.
- Filling loopholes in the law to prevent the use of agency workers replacing striking workers
- Fairer balloting procedures cutting the 'red tape' that unions face when balloting members for industrial action by placing a duty on employers to supply information that trade unions need to comply with balloting requirements.

These moderate amendments would still be a significant step towards that goal.

Please support the campaign by sending the postcard included in this journal to your MP or you can write to them via the website at www.writetothem.com. Order more postcards from info@unitedcampaign.org.uk or download a model letter from our website at www.unitedcampaign.org.uk

National secretary John Hendy QC

Parliamentary column



FIGHTING FOR TRADE UNION RIGHTS

The Employment Bill is due to be debated at Westminster again in the coming weeks and presents perhaps the last opportunity before the next general election to improve employment law.

It is completely unacceptable that Britain has what are considered the "most restrictive labour laws in Europe". We probably have worse labour law protection now than 100 years ago after the Taff Vale decision.

The time has surely come to recognise the huge imbalance of power which exists between employer and worker in the workplace and to start to strengthen the rights of the workforce.

Often when employers challenge trade unions in the courts they are successful on technicalities because of the way employment legislation has been constructed.

The three amendments on industrial action which are likely to be debated are extremely moderate.

One of the main amendments simply amends the current law to require employers to cooperate when asked by the union to supply information to comply with the current legislation.

At the moment the employer does not have to do so even though trade unions are required to keep completely up to date and accurate records to be provided to the employer if the union wishes to take industrial action.

Unions are not best placed to keep accurate up to date records of member's addresses, jobs and locations but employers are. The current law looks as if it were designed to make it practically impossible for a trade union to comply with the current trade union legislation. It of course was put in place by Margaret Thatcher but been left largely intact by the current Labour

government.

Another amendment strengthens the current law which bars agency staff from being used to break strikes.

At the moment it is illegal for an agency to provide workers to take a strikers job but not for the employer to take on such a worker. This amendment would close this loophole. The third amendment strengthens to the better protection for workers taking part in lawful industrial action.

The Employment Bill itself includes provisions mainly to tidy up the law on minimum wage and to help trade unions exclude fascists from their ranks. We will only have a few hours to consider amendments when the House of Commons gets to debate the Bill again.

There are so many areas of employment law which need improving but given the shortage of time MPs have to prioritise amendments. Decisions will have to be made about what other amendments we can pursue, - an extension of the youth rates of the national minimum wage for example and also amendments to extend the national minimum wage to non-domiciled seafarers.

Finally, I have been inundated with messages regarding the Inland Revenue decision to unilaterally withdraw the eligibility of the Seafarers Earning Deduction (SED) for thousands of offshore workers resulting in an attack on earnings. The financial hardship will be compounded by the outrageous decision of the Inland Revenue to backdate the withdrawal to January 2008! Together with other parliamentary colleagues I will be vigorously challenging this decision.

Katy Clark MP

North Ayrshire and Arran

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF HEALTH AND SAFETY REPS



Safety Representatives and Safety Committee Regulations 1977, made under section 2(4) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, prescribe the cases in which recognised trade unions may appoint safety representatives, specify the functions of such safety representatives, and set out obligations of employers towards them

Safety representatives and safety committee regulations, guidance notes

This month marks the 30th anniversary of Parliamentary legislation that enshrined the rights of health and safety reps

The Safety Representatives and Safety Committee Regulations (SRSCR) passed through Parliament and came into force on October 1 1978, making this corner stone of workplace safety rights 30 years old this month.

The rights enshrined in these 11 short regulations established for the first time that trade unions have the right to appoint health and safety representatives from amongst their membership.

This is not a function for employers, safety reps can't be chosen by the employer and they cannot be removed from office by an employer. This, in effect, guarantees that they will represent the best interests of the workers.

How effective safety reps are depends very much on the strength of the union organisation that exists both at a local and at national level. It is vital that safety reps maintain close relationships with the colleagues they represent and the branch structure in which they work.

ACCOUNTABLE

At RMT's annual Health and Safety conference earlier this year a resolution from Hull Rail branch called on safety reps to be more accountable within the branch structure.

It called on the union to encourage health and safety reps to attend branch meetings or submit written reports of their activities so that branches and, critically, the membership are kept informed of developments in safety.

Branches should keep an up to date list of all their safety reps, encourage them to attend branch meetings and have health and safety as a standing item on the branch agenda.

Health and safety representatives do not have any legal duties or responsibilities for health and safety beyond those applying to all employees.

Representatives are given "functions" in order to contrast their role with that of management and are entitled to:

- investigate complaints relating to their health, safety or welfare at work;
- investigate potential hazards and dangerous occurrences and to examine the cause of accidents at the workplace;
- make representations to management about health hazards, accidents and dangerous occurrences, and raise with them any matter of concern relating to health, safety or welfare at work;
- carry out inspections of the workplace;
- consult with inspectors from the relevant enforcing authority regarding any information acquired by inspectors in the course of their activities, or action that they have taken or propose to take against their employer;
- attend safety committee meetings; and
- assist in the promotion, development and maintenance of effective measures designed to safeguard the health and safety of the employees they represent.

These functions do not impose any legal duties on safety reps so they cannot be legally penalised if they fail to carry out their functions or only partially carry them out.

However safety reps are supposed to be protected by the law for carrying out legitimate trade union activity and should not be denied the right to carry out their functions.

RMT take a very strong line with employers who attack our safety reps and will take all necessary steps to ensure they are not victimised.

Safety reps also have a right to be provided with facilities by their employer to enable them to carry out their functions. The SRSCR do not define the level of facilities but RMT would expect their safety reps to be given office space and equipment such as access to computers, e-mail and the internet, a phone, photocopying, and access to technical equipment and technical advice.

RMT do not expect safety reps to have to perform any of their functions in their own time but are entitled, under the regulations, to be released from their normal duties with pay. The amount of time safety reps are allowed is not specified but must be enough to allow them to carry out their functions.

In order to carry out their functions to the best of their abilities it is vitally important that safety reps receive training in health and safety law, the rights of safety reps in the workplace and how to combine these issues to improve safety in the workplace.

COURSES

Key health and safety training is provided in the form of two ten-day TUC courses which introduce safety reps to health and safety and the safety reps' role in the workplace. A further 36-week TUC Certificate in Occupational Health and Safety is also available to safety reps who wish to expand their knowledge and skills.

RMT has also developed their own programme of short training course specific to the industries in which we organise that give our safety reps the key skills to enable them to be amongst the best trained safety reps in the country.

SAFETY

There is a wealth of evidence that shows that in workplace where there is an organised

trade union presence, with effective safety reps, there are likely to be fewer workplace accidents. One study revealed that where there were union safety reps and a workplace safety committee accident rates were 50 per cent lower than in comparable workplaces with no union presence.

Even the HSE admit on their workers' web page that involving workers in safety leads to a positive safety culture, reduced accident and ill health rates and their associated costs and in short "workplaces where workers are involved in taking decisions about health and safety are safer and healthier workplaces". A Department of Trade and Industry report also estimated that safety reps saved industry and society between £181 and £578 million each year.

HANDBOOK

RMT is committed to supporting its health and safety reps and assisting them to develop their skills so that they are fully equipped to represent our members in the field of workplace health and safety.

As part of the support RMT is re-publishing the health and safety handbook issued to all safety reps. The handbook is a valuable guide to common health and safety legislation and has been updated to take account recent changes in legislation. Work is also underway on producing for the first time a separate guide for onboard safety reps in the maritime industry. ■

• *The next issue of RMT News will look at the trade union approach to healthy and safety, organising for health and safety and how RMT will be campaigning for changes to improve the rights of health and safety reps.*

BUILDING THE UNION FOR OFFSHORE WORKERS



Two Norwegian oil workers union leaders, Leif Sande of Industri Energi and Terje Nustad of SAFE welcome the merger of OILC and RMT

Leif Sande – I congratulate OILC and our old allies RMT on their merger, but it is to UK oil workers that I address these remarks.

For many years the North Sea employers have been playing a double game. Here in Norway, offshore workers expect and get the respect of the employers, and have negotiated progressively better wages and conditions year on year.

High levels of operator compliance with safety law are monitored by a unionised workforce. And Norwegian offshore workers enjoy a quality of life that is second to none in the international oilfield.

The vast majority of our members work two weeks offshore with a four week field break. We have also achieved a great degree of harmonisation of the conditions enjoyed by oil company and contractor employees.

We are particularly proud of this achievement because initially the difference in conditions enjoyed by these two groups was huge.

We know about the vastly inferior conditions experienced by British offshore workers. The greatest evidence of the disrespect shown by the employers is the drastically poor UK offshore safety record. Even according to the regulatory authority, safety, it would seem, is hostage to maintenance cost saving and management incompetence. And with regards to work schedules, many offshore workers are still being wilfully refused even the four weeks holiday promised under European Working Time legislation. Unbelievably, drilling service hands can work over 240 days a year. This state of affairs shows huge disrespect to the workforce and to their families.

Of course we face a lot of problems in the Norwegian sector, but because we're strongly unionised it is easier for us to solve these problems as they arise. I think that's the main reason for the big difference between Norwegian and UK offshore conditions.

On the UK side you still have some way to go.

It's many years since conditions were as favourable as they are today for building a strong UK offshore union. The union that wins the support of UK offshore workers will be well placed to negotiate strong agreements to protect the safety, wages and conditions of their membership.

We can demonstrate to you what the oil employers are able, and prepared, to concede to organised workers. RMT with OILC as its offshore division is well placed to begin the task of achieving similar conditions.

The challenge to the UK oil workers is to have the courage to join the union. The determination of workers to be treated with respect is necessary before any union can succeed. We in IndustriEnergi will do all in our power to support and defend you.

Terje Nustad – My union, SAFE, has had a special relationship with OILC for many years now. You might say that for a large part of the last two decades we have been OILC's closest, and sometimes only, friend. So we were naturally cautious when we were told you were going to merge with another union.

We ourselves know the pressure that being an independent union brings, and also the complications that merger can bring. But we know that your decision was taken seriously. When the OILC leadership recommended the merger with RMT, and the members overwhelmingly supported it, then that is good enough for us.

I hope the merger confirms our hope that this will be a big step towards UK offshore workers getting fully organised and moving towards the kind of wages and conditions that our members here in Norway enjoy.

Norwegian offshore workers have proved that the oil companies and other offshore employers are willing to enter into meaningful agreements with the workforce. They are willing to negotiate on all aspects

of offshore life – safety, wages, schedules and pensions. But only if an organised workforce forces them to negotiate, and no one knows that better than SAFE.

We have always been in the forefront of that struggle. And it's thanks to that that Norwegian oilfield conditions are as good as they are. Having said that, it is also true that the two weeks on four weeks off schedule is the result of good cooperation between IndustriEnergi and SAFE.

If you want a say in your future offshore, and a better schedule with your family ashore, and to put an end to the arrogant bullying that still goes on in some places on the UK sector, then you have to make your own future and join RMT/OILC.

OILC has behind them, 20 years of determination to defend oil workers on the North Sea. And now has more resources than ever at its disposal.

My own union is determined to do whatever we can to help RMT/OILC make the necessary breakthrough. This is not just generosity from us. As long as Norwegian workers are so far ahead in the wages and conditions that they have won, they are the target for the employers. The employers would love to reduce all North Sea wages and conditions to UK levels. An organised workforce on the UK sector would be a powerful ally for Norwegian workers. But nothing can be won without a struggle.

We know some of the employers can be aggressive and brutal. But they are like this whether you organise against them or not. In the UK sector you don't need to be a union member to be NRB'd if management decide your face does not fit. Being a union member means the employers are less likely to get away with it.

On behalf of SAFE, I urge all UK workers to throw their weight behind RMT. I look forward to the day when we have equally good agreements right across both sectors of the North Sea and can widen solidarity to other areas of the international oilfield.



STOP ABUSING SIGNALLING GRADES

RMT's signalling grades conference meeting in Birmingham agrees to fight Network Rail's abuse of terms and conditions

RMT's signalling grades conference last month urged a national ballot for industrial action over Network Rail's abuse of terms and conditions.

The unanimous vote called for an extension of strike action by Scottish signallers to the entire grade UK-wide in the dispute over Promotion, Transfer, Resettlement and Redundancy (PTR&R) arrangements.

It came in the run-up to this month's strike by 450 RMT signallers and signalling supervisors in Scotland over the issue, which seriously disrupted services.

"What affects the signallers in Scotland affects us all, with further abuses of agreements taking place in other parts of the country," said John McDougall, Perth No1, moving the motion.

"PTR&R arrangements are longstanding national agreements that should be defended at all costs. We cannot and should not allow Network Rail to get away with this. Sadly this has been happening in other areas but now is the time to stand up and fight for our terms and conditions.

"In doing so this grade sends a very strong message to Network Rail and makes it clear that we will no longer stand back and see our national agreements used and abused by a management team who show and absolute disregard for the signalling grade UK-wide".

RMT general secretary Bob

Crow told the conference: "What we're heading for very rapidly in Network Rail is a national dispute over PTR&R.

"The issue is over a clear breach of national agreements by this company. This can't be just seen as a Scottish issue because there are other breaches of PTR&R happening all over the place. If they break this agreement they can break any other agreement that goes with it".

Conference also raised the prospect of industrial action over several other issues where Network Rail's actions are causing concern.

It called for an allowance for signallers required to use the complex GSM-R (IVRS) radio systems otherwise the union should ballot wherever the technology is located.

Philip Boorman, Ashford No 1, said that the system meant increased workloads: "It's beneficial for the company and we should get some benefit too."

Delegates backed a call from Tim Breed, North Staffs, for a ballot should bosses impose "any removal of allowances, illegal deductions of wages, changes to contracts of employment or job descriptions."

And conference warned that any action by the company detrimental to signallers' pensions would likewise result in a ballot.

"We cannot have our final salary pension scheme undermined," said Tim Breed,

North Staffs, moving.

REFORM COGNISCO

Conference urged reform to current Cognisco staff assessment tests. Ian Waggott, Worcester No 1, said that it was littered with "ambiguous and irrelevant" questions.

He suggested that some questions were akin to a car driver taking their test being asked about driving a lorry.

Delegates backed his call for signallers to sit on the Cognisco review panel, a slimming down of questions and the tests to be done in the classroom rather than the signal box.

But Ian Allen, Birmingham Rail, argued that union strategy should be to remove Cognisco altogether, "not testing it or making it work".

Delegates unanimously passed a resolution urging a higher percentage pay rise for grades 1-4, to stop differentials growing ever-wider.

"Smaller boxes are getting left behind and in some areas there is not the chance to go for promotion to get more money," said Peter Pinkney, Teeside.

Lee Acocks, South West Midlands, warned that managers are able to gather personal information from signal box voice communications.

Conference backed his call that management must disregard private calls, otherwise a dispute situation could arise.

"Any manager with the required software anywhere in the country can access these

messages. Don't believe a word that if they come across a private call they just skip through it," he added.

Several speakers warned against using the system for private calls, urging signallers to always use a mobile or phone from home instead.

Delegates called for the closing down of the web forums run by Network Rail, warning that they are being used for anti-union propaganda as well as the distribution of obscene, racist and sexist material by some individuals.

And they backed a motion from Mark Bellenie, North Staffs, urging that staff be paid an allowance for staff who undertake training outside of their current job descriptions and contracts of employment.

Alan Brooks, Broadlands, warned that dwindling attendances at the signalling grades conference, needed reversing.

Delegates backed his call for greater recruitment to the conference and wider distribution of its decisions.

"We need to encourage more of our reps to attend. We need to get a true representation at this conference from the elected reps and we need their input," he said.

Delegates also agreed to move conference from September to February, bringing it into line with other grades. The change will take place from 2010. ■

SETTING THE AGENDA AT TUC



RMT had a busy TUC this year, winning important debates and resolutions on trade union rights, privatisation, against the Lisbon Treaty and for more democracy at Congress itself.

The union led the way with a successful motion calling for local trades councils to receive the right to submit a motion to Congress - in line with rights already enjoyed by the TUC's equality conferences.

General secretary Bob Crow pointed out that this right was already in place at the Wales and Scottish TUC conferences.

He said that trades councils' voices should be heard at Congress because democracy and debate could only be improved by the addition of more voices of ordinary trade unionists, "rather than general secretaries talking to general secretaries."

Opponents of the proposal claimed that it would allow trades councils, dominated by "white, middle-aged men" to circumvent their own unions and force their own agenda on to the order paper at Congress.

Bob responded that this picture did not correspond to the trades councils he knew - and pointed out that it would be futile to try and circumvent union policy at the TUC because the single motion permitted at

Congress would simply be voted down.

FOR TRADE UNION RIGHTS

RMT made a successful call for the repeal of the anti-union laws and the annulment of recent European Court of Justice rulings outlawing strike action.

Delegates overwhelmingly backed a call for Europe-wide protests and a lobby of Parliament against these fundamental attacks on collective bargaining and the right to strike.

The motion pointed out that the Lisbon Treaty would exacerbate attacks on trade union rights by handing the misnamed court huge new powers.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow said that recent ECJ rulings in the Viking, Laval, Ruffert and Luxembourg cases sought to turn the clock back by undermining trade union rights in various ways.

"These ECJ rulings constitute a Taff Vale judgment for the 21st century. The supposed crime of the Associated Society of Railway Servants back in 1901 was to be "in restraint of trade" by calling strike action," he said.

Bob warned delegates that if the discredited treaty was imposed trade union rights

would be under further attack in the name of the 'free movement of goods, services and labour' within the EU.

Unison delegate Bob Oram also cited recent ECJ cases as one of the main reasons why Irish workers voted against the Lisbon Treaty.

In 2005 Congress delegates voted overwhelmingly to oppose the EU constitution and, last year, Congress demanded a referendum on the renamed constitution the Lisbon Treaty.

Bob warned that "unless we roll back these ECJ rulings we will be left defenceless against the EU's drive to liberalise markets and institutionalise social dumping.

"That means stepping up the campaign for a Trade Union Freedom Act and working with unions across Europe to demand an end to anti-union ECJ rulings," he said.

END PROFITEERING

Angry trade unionists denounced new Labour for refusing to rein in the "obscene" greed of the energy privateers.

Congress condemned the rapacious energy companies for raking in super-profits while the poor and elderly were forced to decide "between heating and eating" this winter.

Delegates demanded a

windfall tax on the privateers, as a prelude to ending the toothless "regulation" of Ofgem and restoring the utilities to public ownership.

RMT president John Leach stressed that "public ownership of the utilities would be welcomed by working people and would allow the government the strategic control it needs to end fuel poverty".

RENATIONALISE RAIL

Congress backed a composite motion on rail transport which condemned the massive fare increases and called for a publicly-owned and accountable railway and far greater use to be made of rail freight

Delegates from ASLEF and TSSA warned that this showed the utter failure of a privatised transport network, "where profit takes precedence over investment" and warned that the government's failure to address the underlying problems of ownership and fragmentation prevented rail from "fulfilling its full social, economic and environmental potential".

Congress called on the government to require train operating companies to make their cheapest advertised fares which more openly and easily available, as well as calling for an extension of free

concessionary travel for disabled people.

RMT delegate Peter Pinkney said not pleased to be supporting the call for renationalising the railway after 11 years of a Labour government.

"And don't tell me it's going to cost a fortune to compensate these people, they have made billions out of our railways, just take them back," he said to loud applause.

END DISCRIMINATION AGAINST SEAFARERS

RMT seconded a motion from Nautilus calling for an end to the exploitation of seafarers of low-paid foreign seafarers in EU waters.

Congress deplored the failure of shipowners to end these practices and their failure to stem the continuing decline of UK seafarers.

RMT delegate Mark Carden told delegates that the loophole in the Race Relations Act which allowed for the discrimination

of foreign seafarers.

"The government has an opportunity to close this loophole in the act in November with the passing of the Equality Bill.

"Previous changes which

removed discrimination on the basis of colour but still allowed discrimination on the basis of nationality has done nothing to end discriminatory practices by shipowners," he said. ■



WHAT TUC DELEGATES MISSED

Most RMT delegates took part in the various debates at TUC but, unfortunately, two delegates, Ruth Strong and Steve Metcalfe were not called to speak.

Ruth wanted to speak in support of a composite motion on violence at work. She pointed out to RMT News that violence against transport workers was a growing problem with 4,865 reported assaults in 2007 on the railway alone.

The results RMT's own questionnaire on the issue unveiled in last month's RMT News also showed that 3,690 incidents weren't even reported.

"There are two main reasons why workers don't report assaults, lack of action from the

British Transport Police and the fear that reporting incidents will get them into trouble with their employers," Ruth said.

She called for support for RMT's campaign for a code of protection for workers and for early day motion 901.

"I would urge all trade unionists to get their MP to sign this EDM and get employers to acknowledge their responsibilities and support victims of violence at work," she said.

WORKERS' MEMORIAL DAY

Steve Metcalfe wanted to speak in support on Workers' Memorial Day, which takes place on April 28 each year.

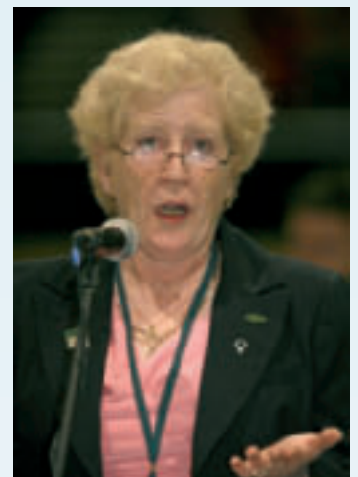
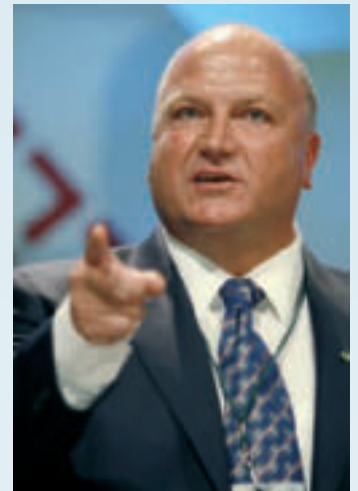
He pointed out to RMT News

that the day was required to raise awareness among the public of the dangers facing people every day at work.

"Rail privatisation has created unsafe work conditions associated with the building industry and led to incidents like Tebay where a runaway vehicle killed four RMT members.

"Cowboy operators and sub-contractors ignore safety practices brought in to prevent accidents," he said.

He said that this kind of 'employers violence' must be confronted and resisted and those responsible must be punished in order to deter the neglect of workers' safety rights. ■



ON THE FRINGE

Hundreds of delegates attended a packed RMT fringe meeting against EU 'liberalisation' diktats and the Lisbon Treaty rejected by Irish voters in June.

Labour veteran Tony Benn urged working people to resist the EU's anti-democratic, militaristic and big business agenda.

He attacked the lack of democracy and "utterly phoney competition" at the heart of the EU's policies, pointing out that the gradual privatisation of the

Post Office was down to EU "competition" laws, which allowed greedy privateers to cherry-pick the most profitable services while leaving Royal Mail to deal with the rest.

And he attacked the contempt for democracy shown by EU institutions over the recent Irish No vote on the Lisbon Treaty - where Brussels wants the vote rerun.

Unite assistant secretary Jimmy Kelly explained how his union joined the successful No campaign on the left, after the Irish Labour Party threw their lot in with the political establishment and Brussels.

He called for support from the wider trade union

movement across Europe in the battle to defend the Irish people's rejection of Lisbon and against a second referendum.

Bob Crow pledged RMT's support to Irish workers and warned that Lisbon sought to remove democracy from member states and "hand them to anti-democratic EU institutions dominated by big business".

Institute of Employment Rights director Carolyn Jones warned that the EU was using its own court, the European Court of Justice, to undermine the ability of workers to resist social dumping by removing the right to strike. ■





TIME TO END SHAME OF POVERTY PAY ON UK SHIPS

Union steps up its call for a change in the law to end the shame of poverty wages being paid to seafarers working on UK ships and in UK waters

On the day that the minimum wage rose by 21p to £5.73 an hour recently, RMT pointed out that seafarers working on UK registered ships and in UK territorial waters are still being paid wages as low as £1.50 an hour because minimum-wage legislation does not apply to them.

Early Day Motion 1006 (opposite) calls for an amendment to the Employment Bill currently going through parliament to close a loophole that allows shipowners to pay

workers at wages that would land them in court if they attempted to get away with paying them on dry land.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow said that when the minimum wage was brought in the union was promised that it would apply to seafarers, but wages are still as low as £1.50 an hour being paid on UK ships in UK territorial waters.

Even companies such as Stena Line, who have largely stuck with UK seafarers, also utilise low paid seafarers.

Recently, RMT uncovered the case of a Filipino seafaring AB rating working on the Stena Transfer on the Harwich to Rotterdam route earning \$1,000, £518 per month. However, of even more concern was the fact that information from fellow members revealed that the seafarer was employed for a period of seven months prior to receipt of a month off.

"It is eight years since the Low Pay Commission called for action to protect non-domiciled seafarers on UK ships and in UK

waters, yet the abuse goes on.

"UK-domiciled seafarers can also be denied the minimum wage on foreign-flagged vessels, even if they only work between UK ports, and that too is a scandal that has to end.

"RMT members should be asking their MP to sign Early Day Motion 1006," he said.

This simple amendment to the Employment Bill would ensure that the minimum wage applies to all ships trading between two UK ports or working out of a single UK port,

EXAMPLES OF VERY LOW PAY FOR RATINGS ON UK-FLAGGED SHIPS

Company	Vessel	Position and nationality	Salary
P&O North Sea Ferries	Pride of Hull	Portuguese Steward	Monthly Wage 1,100 euros (after 1 yr) £752. Hourly rate of pay is approximately £1.50 per hour. *
P&O North Sea Ferries	Pride of Hull	Filipino motormen	Less than the above Portuguese rate, precise details not available
Crossworld Marine Services (PI)	Ocean Primus	General Purpose	\$1,143 = £592 monthly (last available figures)
Laphorn Shipping	18 ships	Filipino Ratings	No contract details, but approximately £2 per hour

* £752 is payment for two months, following month is leave period when no payment is received, with approximate working week of 84 hrs, approximate hourly pay is £1.50 per hour.

such as in the UK offshore sector.

The minimum wage should also be applied to UK registered ships on fixed trading routes between the UK and other EU Ports and to foreign-flagged ships that ply in UK waters.

RMT will continue to organise alongside sister unions to win decent minimum standards for seafarers and will expose owners who profit from poverty pay, but the legal loophole that allows them to do it must be closed.

CURRENT LEGAL POSITION

Foreign national seafarers are only entitled to the National Minimum Wage (NMW) on UK-registered ships when they are in port or in internal UK waters, as opposed to UK territorial waters. UK-resident seafarers receive the National Minimum Wage in UK territorial waters providing the vessel is flagged in the UK.

UK internal waters include the Solent, the sea between Scotland and the Inner & Outer Hebrides, the Firth of Forth, the Wash and the Thames Estuary. They do not include, for example, UK territorial waters between Scotland and the Shetlands, or UK territorial waters between the mainland and the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man.

For example, a foreign

national seafarer employed by P&O Ferries trading from Hull to Zeebrugge is not entitled to the National Minimum Wage.

The NMW also does not apply to the foreign national seafarer, where the ship goes out of UK Internal Waters, even if the ship trades between two UK Ports, e.g. from Liverpool to Belfast or Aberdeen to the Shetland Islands.

The current law does not allow payment of the NMW to foreign national seafarers in these examples, even where employment is on a UK-flagged ship.

A simple transfer of flag would allow the shipowner to avoid paying the NMW to foreign-national seafarers even where the seafarer is employed on a trip deemed to be within UK Internal waters, so, for example, this could potentially deny the minimum wage to a seafarer working on the Western Islands and mainland Scotland.

Shipowners have also maintained an exemption in the Race Relations Act which allows foreign national seafarers to be discriminated against on rates of pay. The exemption as contained in sections 8 and 9 of the Act allows shipowners to recruit seafarers from abroad to work on UK ships on rates of pay below UK levels and equivalent to that of their country of origin. ■

EARLY DAY MOTION 1006 EMPLOYMENT BILL AND SEAFARERS

Table by Gwyn Prosser MP and signed to date by 73 others

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.

GOVERNMENT WITHDRAWS SEAFARERS' TAX EXEMPTION

HM Revenue and Customs recently announced the withdrawal of Seafarers Earnings Deductions (SED), without consultation, on members working in the offshore industry, which could result in the loss of up to 20 per cent of earnings.

The tax exemption is applicable to seafarers, divers and other offshore workers that work 182.5 days a year away from home.

National secretary Steve Todd said that it seemed that HMRC is seeking to constantly restrict eligibility for the tax exemption which will impact on many RMT members who are employed in the offshore sector of the UK shipping industry.

"The policy of seeking to carry on restricting eligibility for SED is completely contradictory to the Department for Transport policy of promoting awareness of careers at sea.

"I am alarmed at the possible financial impact on seafarers who work on vessels serving in this sector and we will be pressing for compensation for our members," he said.

The union has argued that it is also wholly unfair to change eligibility retrospectively, as HMRC has stated, and that the new rules would actually be applicable from January 2008 without at least a minimum period of notice.

"HMRC has stated that the guidance on this matter will not be published until December 2008, therefore not allowing individuals who might be affected to plan for changes to their financial situation," Steve Todd said.

The union has requested an urgent joint meeting between RMT, Nautilus UK and chancellor Alistair Darling on the matter to resolve the issue swiftly. ■

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POLITICAL SCHOOL

Merchant seamen Simon Davis and Terry Jones report from RMT's political school at the union's education centre in Doncaster

The twelve political school delegates from around the country were greeted by the ever-friendly Ray Spry-Shute who allocated each of us to our comfortable en-suite rooms, followed by directions to the local pub so we could all get to know each other.

The course began with Professor Roger Seifert on employment markets and the relationship between trade unions and the Labour Party, bringing up a couple of contentious issues, not least his insistence that young people have a deep interest in contemporary politics.

Our general view was that the Professor perhaps confines himself to more educated youth and that RMT is absolutely correct on its position with regards the Labour Party.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow addressed the school, covering the history of the union and links to the Labour Party and why we were no longer members. This was followed by a Q & A session where amongst issues raised by rail and bus workers, the seafaring members was the recruitment of foreign nationals.

One of the highlights of the course was a presentation from Justice For Columbia by the incredibly brave Juan Carlos Hurtado, ably translated by Victor Figueroa, on the humanitarian problems facing the Columbian people under the despicable US-backed regime. The students gave him a thoroughly deserved standing ovation.

The second highlight was delivered by Paul Meszaros of the Hope not Hate campaign. The Searchlight campaigner ran a workshop to design an electoral campaign, fighting the BNP in a fictional town where racial tensions had been used by the BNP following an incident involving some Asian youths.

Based on real events, it was both thought provoking and a relief to know that the strategies and ideas we came up with closely resembled what Searchlight actually did. In this instance the BNP were thoroughly beaten, but we must always be on our guard.

RMT political officer James Croy discussed campaign strategies, part of which

involved coming up with ideas to promote the issues affecting the transport industry. Very entertaining for all concerned especially when it came to presenting our agendas.

All this was done in good humour whilst never forgetting the seriousness of a situation in which we face European Court Judgments and UK anti-union laws to erode workers rights and deny the public an affordable and accountable public transport system.

There was also a video link address by Kelvin Hopkins MP on the dangers posed by the Lisbon Treaty and another Q&A session. We also had the pleasure of listening to Brian Denny of Trade Unionists Against the EU Constitution (www.tuaeuc.org) on the campaign.

RMT press officer Derek Kotz gave an informative talk on dealing with the press and campaigning. Apparently, it's not all doom and gloom, though we beg to differ in this instance.

Then onto Parliament, as guests of John McDonnell MP our Parliamentary convenor, and a tour of the Palace of Westminster including the House of Commons. John found time to chat and take questions despite the fact that he had an election to deal with in his own constituency that day. We also bumped into Boris Johnson whom we greeted with a wall of RMT bags but we refrained from asking him about his plans for a no strike agreement on the Tube.

On the last day we discussed what we had gained from the course and where it might be improved. More or less everyone felt that the course content was very good. Some felt that Roger Seifert's academic approach and perceived monopoly on the truth were a bit much, but again the majority felt that his input was essential. We wouldn't hesitate to recommend this course which provides a greater understanding of politics and the role of trade unions.

Finally, trade unionists should support the great work done by Paul Meszaros and brave Juan Carlos Hurtado. Some of us give up time and effort to fight for a fairer society. Juan Carlos may forfeit his life, could you? If, like me, you think you couldn't then support Justice for Columbia.

• The next RMT political school takes place from 15 – 20 March 2009. The school is open to all RMT members whatever your level of experience. If you are interested in applying contact your Branch Secretary, or for more information get in touch with James Croy at j.croy@rmt.org.uk or ring 020 7529 8822. ■



FESTIVE CRUISE BREAKS

GETAWAY, CELEBRATE & RELAX

Take a DFDS Seaways cruise break this winter and it's sure to get you into the festive spirit. On board one of our cruise ferries there's time to enjoy the full range of facilities. See what's on at the cinema, check out the shops, relax with a drink in the bar or go on-deck and embrace the fresh sea air. Christmas in Copenhagen or Bruges is an illuminating experience, from the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen to the historic Belgian city of Bruges, you'll find plenty to do and see.

CHRISTMAS MARKET CRUISE BREAK TO BRUGES - BELGIUM

What's included:

- 2 nights on board ship in a 2-berth inside en-suite cabin
- Live entertainment on board
- 2 nights bed & breakfast at the 3* Novotel Brugge Centrum in Bruges
- Coach transfers to/from hotel (approx. 3½ hours)

Departures from Newcastle. Departure dates: 7th & 13th December 2008.

Early booking recommended, limited places available.



CHRISTMAS MARKET CRUISE BREAK TO COPENHAGEN - DENMARK

What's included:

- 2 nights on board ship in a 2-berth sea view en-suite cabin
- Live entertainment on board
- 2 nights bed & breakfast at the 3* Square hotel in central Copenhagen
- Entrance to Tivoli Christmas Market
- Coach transfers to/from hotel including a 2 hour stop in Odense for lunch and sightseeing (lunch not included in the price)

Departure from Harwich. Departure date: 17th December 2008.

Early booking recommended, limited places available.



KEEP TYNE AND WEAR METRO PUBLIC

Some 60 per cent of people in the northeast want the Tyne and Wear Metro run by the public sector

A poll conducted for Keep Metro Public by ICM has revealed that only a fifth backed Nexus's moves to privatise the network.

Trade unionists and campaigners handed out tens of thousands of leaflets across the system to stop Britain's last fully integrated and publicly owned railway being privatised.

"The Metro is Britain's best-performing railway, and the last to be owned and operated in the public sector as a fully integrated whole – and this poll shows that people in the north east want to keep it that way," RMT regional organiser Stan Herschel said.

Northern TUC secretary Kevin Rowan backed the campaign, saying that it beggared belief that anyone could want to split up this public-sector success

story.

"Yet only recently Nexus had 100 private companies in to tell them how it intends to farm out the network for private profit," he said.

Unite regional officer Bill Green also warned that every penny of the £300 million to improve the Metro would come from the public.

"There is no earthly reason why the privateers should be allowed to turn it into a money-making machine," he said.

Unison regional officer Sheila Wilson said that privatisation was the worst nightmare for any public service.

"The time has come for us to draw a line in the sand and say it has to stop. Metro serves the public well in the public sector and that is where it should

stay," she said.

The Rail Minister has agreed to meet the union to discuss the privatisation plans and supportive MPs, with the assistance of the RMT Parliamentary Group of MPs, are stepping up the campaign in Parliament

RMT general secretary Bob Crow also said that the union intends to keep up the pressure.

"The recent turmoil in the financial markets has shown that big business is only interested in trying to make a quick profit

regardless of the impact on society and people's livelihoods.

"Be in no doubt that the fragmentation and privatisation of the Metro will lead to attacks on jobs, conditions and pensions," he said.

Please support the campaign by ordering postcards for your family and friends and to become involved in the campaign email public@rmt.org.uk or call 0191 456 1308. ■



FIGHTING FOR GAY RIGHTS

A member of RMT's Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender advisory committee outlines the importance of confronting discrimination in the workplace

"GAYS OFF THE RAILWAY!" This was written on the front of an accident repair book of a train I was working recently. It is a daunting thought that there are people in this day and age that still think in this way.

Although there are several people who are comfortable with colleagues being aware of their sexuality, there are still a lot of

people out there who are not. RMT does not tolerate any form of discrimination against individuals because of sex, race or sexual orientation.

RMT is an inclusive union that believes everyone is stronger together united, than looking for reasons to divide us. This article seeks to assure you that you are not alone

and that you have support from RMT relating to any lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues.

Having recently told my branch that I am a gay man, I have discovered how much support is given concerning LGBT issues.

There is a specially selected group of people who meet three times a year that forms an Advisory Committee.

CONFERENCE

Every year RMT's organise an LGBT Conference which enables you to use your voice and have your say. The last conference was held in Glasgow in May and it gives us all the opportunity to meet like-minded people in the transport industry. A social evening is organised on the eve of conference at a nearby gay venue which forms a great "ice-breaker" and allows you to let your hair down [those who still have hair and thankfully I fall into this category]. Correspondence is sent to your branch so put your name forward and become a delegate for the next one – May 8 2009 in Cardiff or just come along for the experience.

RMT also supports various Pride events throughout the year and welcomes anyone who wishes to lend their support.

For more information about the LGBT Committee email p.wilkinson@rmt.org.uk.



SUPPORT THE MORNING STAR

Morning Star editor John Haylett outlines why working people should support the only English language daily socialist newspaper in the world

Possibly the most stimulating fringe meeting at September's TUC congress in Brighton was the lunchtime debate staged by the Morning Star.

General secretaries Bob Crow of RMT, Mark Serwotka of PCS and Derek Simpson of Unite stressed the need to fight together industrially to defend workers' rights, which all three unions continue to do.

They also debated the role of new Labour in government and the need for trade unions to have a political voice.

This discussion was hard-hitting but comradely and all three shook hands at the end as the 130-strong audience gave an enthusiastic response to the platform, which also included Institute of Employment Rights director Carolyn Jones, who concentrated her remarks on workplace rights and recent diabolical anti-union rulings by the European Court of Justice.

Later that evening, following the Morning Star's successful social, I had a word with Mark Serwotka who expressed his satisfaction with the fringe meeting.

He said that he had been delighted by the range of views that had been put forward, adding that only the Morning Star could have drawn such speakers to debate these important issues.

This assessment encapsulates the reasons for the Morning Star's existence.

It is not simply a mouthpiece for a single political organisation. It exists to provide a daily voice for the entire labour movement.

As well as everything that you would expect from a daily newspaper (news, politics, international coverage, sport, music, theatre, gardening, TV listings and so on) the

Morning Star has an additional role of reporting on labour movement conferences, disputes and proposals on key issues such as jobs, industrial investment and workers' rights.

It certainly has a political dimension. As the paper's masthead makes clear, its aims are peace and socialism and these are the themes that dictate editorial policy.

The Morning Star's feature pages and letters column provide a forum for not only the great and the good but also rank-and-file activists (and the occasional armchair strategist) to debate the way ahead.

So the meeting at Brighton wasn't a one off. It was a live version of the exchange of views that takes place on a daily basis in our paper.

So why isn't the Morning Star a mass-circulation daily? Because it doesn't have the resources enjoyed by the rest of the media.

No newspaper pays for itself through its cover price. All, except the Morning Star, rely on big-business advertising to swell their income and their profits.

And, to the surprise of absolutely no-one, they unanimously support the free-market capitalist system that has just given rise to a massive financial crisis.

Trade unionists wouldn't elect their boss as their workplace representative. Why

should we contribute to the profits of media moguls who can be guaranteed without fail to support the employer's side whenever workers are forced to go on strike for a living wage or to defend working conditions?

Our paper relies solely on its readers and friends in the trade unions, especially through a £16,000 Fighting Fund to which hundreds of supporters contribute every month.

That's why the Morning Star has been able to survive while other, more substantially financed papers have bitten the dust.

And we are not content to simply survive. We have plans

to raise the number of pages from 12 to 16 (from 16 to 20 on Saturdays) and to increase the use of colour from next spring, thanks to financial help from a small consortium of committed supporters.

Our priority is to improve the quality of the Morning Star so as to serve the labour and trade union movement even better.

And that aim would be assisted by a sharp increase in readership to build what is not just Britain's only left-wing, labour movement daily newspaper but also the sole remaining English-language paper of its kind in the world.

Having trouble getting a regular ★Morning Star?

Just hand your newsagent this form to ensure a daily copy

Dear Newsagent,

Please reserve/deliver a copy of the Morning Star newspaper Monday to Saturday until further notice.

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Message to newsagent: The Morning Star is available from your normal wholesaler on a sale or return basis. Please order as requested by your customer.

If you have any difficulties, please contact the Morning Star circulation department on (020) 8510-0815.

UNION LEARNING A DEVON AND CORNWALL

Nick Quirk reports how the Trade Union Learning Representative scheme is achieving great successes for RMT members at First Devon and Cornwall Buses

Union learning project worker Neil Hooper of St Austell branch says that he gets great satisfaction out of being a Trade Union Learning Rep (TULR) as he can also contribute so much to help people in the area of education.

"Education is a basic human right and it's great to see that we as a union can help support

and educate our people in the workplace and the public that use our services," he said.

Literacy and numeracy skills are among the courses available as well as NVQ cleaning qualifications and the company-led NVQ road passenger transport level two.

Neil has teamed up with local author Simon Hall to run a

course on how to write short stories and help develop reading and writing skills for staff throughout the company

"Through Simon we have made contact with Accent Press that produces the Quick Reads series and we intend to set up mobile libraries and book swap clubs," he said.

To this end, Neil is involved in converting two local service buses into mobile education centres to reach out across the Penzance area of Cornwall.

"We often take Bilbo, the world's only surf life-saving dog, with us on the bus and people love making a fuss of him," he said.

Neil is currently taking a

course in understanding dyslexia which affects one in 10 people in the country. He also recently scooped the individual progression award at the Trade Union Learning Reps conference in Leeds. He is using the £300 prize to take up an Adult Learning Support course.

PLYMOUTH

Pauline Harris and Paul Murphy of Plymouth No5 branch have been working together to conduct makaton courses thanks to an RMT grant. Makaton is a method of communication using signs and symbols and is often used as a communication process for those with learning difficulties. These courses were



AT FIRST WALL BUS

organised after a survey was arranged by the reps to see what areas of passenger service they could improve on through education courses. Four people have currently passed this course with more to follow.

"We are trying to get funding for a tutor to teach advanced sign language to achieve a qualification at the end of it," Pauline explained.

Another achievement at the Plymouth depot includes Polish bus driver and RMT member Kris Pawlak who, through the scheme, gained a GCSE in English language.

BARNSTAPLE

At the Barnstaple depot, North Devon Bus branch member David Pettifer became a learning rep after winning the First Bus UK short story competition. When David initially asked the company about the competition and where he could get support, they told him to see the TULR rep but at the time there wasn't one.

He contacted Neil Hooper who offered him advice and, after winning the competition, he decided that his depot needed a learning rep and he is now currently completing the course.

"I was inspired to take on the role as I felt I could help members look in new directions and give them more confidence to learn.

"Without a local learning rep in North Devon, people would sometimes not be motivated enough to take on new educational challenges and it is just the tiniest of pushes that can get people active.

"I also think that with the learning rep support, people who would have entered the short story competition will now have the confidence to do so," David said.

CAMBORNE

Camborne Bus branch Secretary and TULR Dave Letcher is hoping that the successes achieved at other depots can spread to West Cornwall.

"Hopefully we can get more courses up and running to get members more involved in the scheme.

"We are also trying to get funding from the government with the help of the RMT for two 'learning buses' which will be invaluable to get more mobile and we will be able to reach the more secluded parts of Devon and Cornwall," he said.

RMT BURSARY

Karen Brooks is the new union learning development worker for the South of England and is hoping to establish the RMT Learning bursary.

"This bursary is set up so that members can apply to RMT Learning for grants for courses that are non-work related.

"Sometimes these courses can be very expensive and the union wants to assist financially and support the members in achieving their qualifications," she said.

Karen has plans to organise an adult learning week for next year, a book swap club and run more dyslexia awareness training courses and is very keen for TULR reps to be involved more in the branch and the structure of the union.

If you would like any more information regarding Trade Union Learning Reps, the website address is www.rmt.org.uk/learning or e-mail the RMT Learning Administrator Andrew Brattle at a.brattle.rmt.org.uk. Karen Brooks, Development Worker (South) can be contacted at k.brooks@rmt.org.uk ■

LIFE SAVING DOG BILBO PROMOTES JOIN A LIBRARY CAMPAIGN

Bilbo, the life-saving dog, regularly joins union learning rep Neil Hooper on tours of the RMT Knowledge bus. Bilbo hit the headlines last year helping to deliver the Sea Safety message to thousands of beach goers on Cornwall's famous Sennen beach.

With his owner, RNLI lifeguard supervisor Steve Jamieson, Bilbo also spends the

summer highlighting responsible dog ownership in schools, and at dog friendly beaches.

Bilbo, a Newfoundland, also made a special appearance at Penzance Library as part of the National Year of Reading's campaign to encourage parents, children and young people to join their local library. ■



BILBO: RMT learning rep Neil Hooper takes Bilbo out on one of the union's learning tours.

STRIKE MOBILISATION AND

Ralph Darlington argues there is a direct link between the RMT's strike mobilisation approach, membership growth and union revitalisation

Given that the enormous decline in the level of trade union membership in Britain since 1979 has barely been reversed serious questions should be raised about the adequacy of current union organising strategies. Particularly noteworthy is the evident failure of the official TUC approach, adopted by some unions, of attempting to rebuild union membership and influence through the avoidance of strike action and establishment of so-called 'social partnership' arrangements with employers.

By contrast, RMT's alternative pathway to the quest for union revitalisation – involving the rejection of 'partnership unionism' in favour of collective resistance and strike mobilisation – has been much more successful in terms of leveraging significant collective bargaining gains, the recruitment of thousands of new members and the reinvigoration of union organisation.

It is true that some other

unions, like Unite (T&G), have stressed that organising should not be based on growing membership by grovelling to employers, but by building strong workplace union representation that relates to workers' specific grievances and is prepared to marshal their collective strength. However, even this more ambitious approach is not necessarily enough to ensure that a union's presence is effective in influencing managerial decision making so as to improve workers' terms and conditions of employment.

The nature and extent of workplace union power, and the ability and willingness of grassroots members to engage in collective resistance and struggle (including the threat and/or use of strike activity) so as to extract concessions from management, are likely to be a crucial factor in the equation.

On one level this can be seen by looking back in time. Thus the strong historical association

between high levels of nation-wide strike activity and periods of rapid and large union growth in Britain, notably between 1910–20, 1935–43 and 1968–75, underlines the manner in which unions have in the past been built through conflict and struggle, as opposed to partnership and compromise.

Likewise, on a more micro-level, the experience of the RMT during the period 2002–08 provides clear evidence of a direct relationship between union militancy, effectiveness in 'delivering' collective bargaining gains and membership growth.

Ironically, many academic studies have shown that one of the principal reasons why British workers generally are not joining unions in greater numbers is that they are often viewed as simply too weak to 'make a difference' to the solving of workplace injustices. As a result, many employees do not think they have anything tangible to gain from membership.

DELIVERING AT THE WORKPLACE

By contrast, RMT's experience of significant membership growth in recent years suggests that what has attracted workers to join has been the union's ability to 'deliver' in terms of obtaining real improvements in pay and conditions, as well as in providing some insurance against arbitrary employer actions.

Yet it is important to acknowledge that in order to be in a position to extract concessions from employers, the RMT has often had to adopt a combative stance, sometimes involving collective mobilisation and the threat/use of strike action. Indeed per thousand members, the RMT has probably organised more ballots for industrial action and more individual days of strike action than any other union over the last few years.

Of course employers, government and others have condemned such strike activity. For example, the London

DONCASTER: Members on Network Rail picket line



SWANSEA: Members on strike during a recent dispute involving ISS cleaning staff



D UNION REVITALISATION

Evening Standard commented: 'They are throwbacks to the pre-Thatcher days of militant trade unionism ... with an easy formula of impossible demands followed by immediate threats of industrial action as a device to bounce managers into making concessions they cannot afford.'

In reality it is managerial belligerence which has often encouraged such a militant union stance, with a high proportion of strike ballots and strikes essentially reactive and defensive protests against managerial attempts to worsen conditions of work, unfairly sack staff and undermine collective union organisation. And even more offensive union attempts to obtain above-inflation pay deals only take place within a context in which employers (while advocating pay restraint among their workforce) extract sky-high profits and enjoy grossly over-generous salaries and pension deals

However, paradoxically there is no doubt the RMT's strike mobilisation approach has also been an important contributory factor (alongside a sustained membership recruitment campaign) to the reinvigoration of the union in recent years.

Thus, the sheer number of strike ballots that have been held, the proportion of members participating within them, and the size of the majorities in favour of action (with the odd exception) have all helped to bolster the union's bargaining position.

Through strike threats and the use of strikes the union has been able to provide visible, measurable and high-profile examples to members of the way in which it can 'deliver' improved substantive outcomes. In turn, this has boosted the self-confidence of workers and their sense of collective power, helped to attract considerable numbers of new union members (sometimes from other unions), and contributed to the health and vitality of union organisation generally.

Such an adversarial stance, and the benefits it has bestowed, stands in marked contrast with the more accommodative forms of trade unionism adopted by many other unions as part of their own organising approach, which has often left union organisation to wither on the vine.

Ralph Darlington is Professor of Employment Relations at Salford Business School, University of Salford. ■



LONDON: Cleaners demand London living wage



FIGHTING RAIL PRIVATISATION IN MALI

Mali is one of the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa, probably best known for its unique musical tradition personified by stars such as Salif Keita, who started his career as lead singer of the Super Rail Band founded in 1970 by Mali's national railways.

In fact, the railway is a central part of life in the landlocked country and the campaign to renationalise the network, following privatisation by the Malian and Senegalese governments in 2003, has taken centre stage.

The Dakar-Niger Railway connects the Malian capital

Bamako, the river Niger and the Senegalese port of Dakar. Built under the French colonial regime, it was the focus of a legendary strike by African railway workers in 1947, fighting for equal pay and the same rights as French railworkers.

Following independence in 1959 the railway workers' strike was celebrated as a turning point in the anti-colonial struggle by Senegalese writer Ousmane Sembène in his seminal novel *God's Bits of Wood*.

However, since the early 1990s Mali, along with many

other poor countries, has been forced to implement so-called structural adjustment programmes at the behest of the International Monetary Fund aimed at attracting foreign investment through privatisation.

A French-Canadian conglomerate, Canac-Getma won the concession to operate the Malian Railway Company in October, 2003 under the name 'Transrail', which led to large-scale job losses, wage cuts, falling health and safety standards and the closure of about a third of the rail network.

Redundant railway workers and their supporters founded the Citizens' Collective for Taking Back and Developing Malian Railways (Cocidirail) and the struggle to wrest their railway out of private hands began.

Assets valued at more than 105 billion francs (£127 million) were sold for seven billion francs (£8 million). This led to the dismissal of nearly 700 railway workers, the closure of 26 out of 36 local railway stations, condemning villages, towns and orchards bordering the railway line to economic death and desolation. Senegal and Mali themselves became



indebted up to 14 billion francs for the purchase of locomotives and rolling stock for the new private owners.

In its founding statement Cocardirail spokesman Mohamed Tabouré said: "Malian Railways has not been sold, but chucked out the window".

Today the crisis of the privatised rail concession has reached alarming proportions with non-existent investment that had been promised by the private owners and a derailment in August this year in Bamako causing serious damage to the track.

CAMPAIGN

Cocardirail chair Dr Tiécoura Traoré, a former director of the School of African Railway Management in Brazzaville and star of the Malian film *Bamako*, has denounced rail privatisation at public meetings throughout the country.

"Cocardirail is not a terrorist organisation, but it is ready to fight at a pinch, to remove the threat to reduce the people's living standards," he says.

Cocardirail believes that Mali's rail privatisation was a breach of the law and the Constitution, which require the National Assembly to approve any privatisation of Mali's national heritage.

In March 2005 the Malian Railworkers' Union (Sytrail), took strike action to defend collective bargaining arrangements and the principle of equal treatment for all employees and welcomed the solidarity shown by the Senegalese colleagues in their struggle to defend the working conditions of all railworkers.

In July 2006 Malian and Senegalese unions at Transrail took 72-hour strike action resulting in total paralysis along the Dakar-Bamako line.

Union officials were taken to

court by Transrail management who challenged the legality of the strike. General Secretary, Abdoulaye Sago and four of his comrades appeared before the judge, while activists gathered at the union headquarters.

Malian Trade Union Confederation secretary general Siaka Diakité said: "It is not for the employer or a court to determine the legitimacy of a union, unions owe their legitimacy only to the workers who elect them".

In June this year, Mali and Senegal admitted that the concession performed no better than the nationalised railways of Mali. For the five years the railway has been privatised Transrail has never met the investment programme that the franchise was conditional on and the privatisation agreement has been lapsed since March 31, 2004.

Cocardirail calls for Transrail

to be expropriated without compensation and renationalised and for support in the battle against Transrail, the World Bank and their own governments who have proven

"untrustworthy" because of the "vicious circle of public-private partnership". Sound familiar?

Cocardirail also calls for the reinstatement of all railworkers dismissed as a result of the privatisation - including Dr. Tiécoura Traoré - while resisting the systematic running down and mismanagement of the railways.

"Such a position can certainly be understood as a declaration of war by the World Bank and all globalisers and an expression of our national, popular sovereignty that Cocardirail calls on all Malians to defend," a statement said.

For more information E-mail: cocardirail@yahoo.fr Website: www.cocardirail.info

FIGHTING COLONIAL GLOBALISATION



Tiécoura Traoré stars in the award-winning Malian film *Bamako* which reveals how the World Bank enforces poverty, migration and privatisation onto the world's poorest nations

Melé (Aïssa Maïga) is a bar singer, her husband Chaka (Tiécoura Traoré) is an unemployed railwayman and their marriage is on the rocks. In the courtyard of the house they share with other families in the Malian capital Bamako, a trial takes place. African civil society is taking proceedings against the World Bank and the IMF, charging them with responsibility for the structural adjustment policies that have led to Africa's pauperisation.

Amidst legal arguments, eye-witness accounts and a stunning testimony from local singer Zégué Bamba, life in the courtyard goes on around the court proceedings. Chaka observes Africa's fight for its rights seated against a wall of the courtyard seemingly more

and more detached from the seething events around him.

Tiécoura Traoré, the actor who plays Chaka is famous in Mali for campaigning against the privatisation of Mali's railways. He has produced radio programmes, published a petition to MPs with tens of thousands of signatures, led a mobile demonstration with debates and meetings throughout the country questioning the legality of privatising a public service. now he is starring in a film that has just won the prestigious Lumière Award in Paris for the Best non-French film shot in the French language.

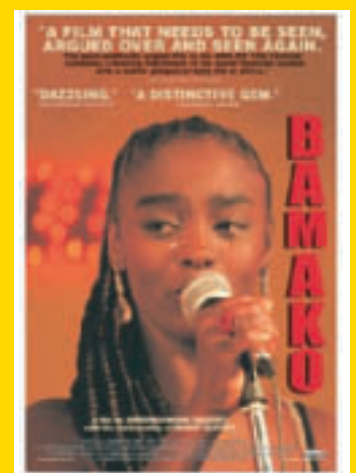
He has also taken part in building a new railway workers' union, SYTRAIL of which he was elected general secretary.

The first words spoken in the film by a court witness are: "The railways brought Africa its emancipation,... The World Bank is throwing all that out with the trash".

Another villager giving testimony says: "Life came to these villages because of the railway ... Now you are seeing the start of an exodus. The situation is distressing".

The counsel for the prosecution hits the nail on the head in her final summing up when she says: "A country that does not have its own means of communication, its own means of transport, cannot really be called a sovereign nation".

'Bamako' is an angry counterblast to all those who think the laws of economics are natural rather than man made.



The film score is also a magnificent treat for those who appreciate African music. This film reminds us how essential to African economies and culture railways have become and remain. ■

DEPTFORD BRANCH

nominates

JEFF SLEE

for Council of Executives
(South East Region)

and asks members to support

SKIPTON BRANCH

Supports

CRAIG JOHNSTON

for Council of Executives
(Manchester and North
West England)

Putting members first

EAST KENT BRANCH

Supports

GARY HASSELL

South East seat
Council of Executives

An Honest Man for the Job

WISHAW AND MOTHERWELL BRANCH

Nominates branch
secretary

GORDON MARTIN

For Council of Executives
Region one, Scotland

MANCHESTER VICTORIA BRANCH

Supports

CRAIG JOHNSTON

for Council of Executives
(Manchester and North
West England)

*A proven record.
Putting members first*

BRIGHTON AND HOVE CITY BRANCH

NOMINATES

**GARRY
HASSELL**

FOR THE COUNCIL OF
EXECUTIVES AREA 9

And seeks supporting Nominations

ORPINGTON BRANCH

nominates

GARY HASSELL

for Council of Executives
region 9

Support this trustworthy
candidate

Support this hard working
and capable candidate

CENTRAL LINE WEST

Nominates

STEVE HEDLEY

LT regional organiser

BLACKPOOL & FYLDE COAST BRANCH

Supports

CRAIG JOHNSTON

for Council of Executives
(Manchester and North
West England)

Working hard for all grades

Election of Council of
Executives member

MANCHESTER AND NORTH WEST

Skipton branch supports

CRAIG JOHNSTON

Putting members first

AYR BRANCH

Nominates branch
secretary

GERRY MCCANN

For Council of Executives
Region One, Scotland

LONDON AND ANGLIA EUROPEAN PASSENGER SERVICES BRANCH

nominates

MICHAEL LYNCH

Council of Executives
Region 10
Vote for this excellent
candidate

WORKINGTON BRANCH

Supports

CRAIG JOHNSTON

for Council of Executives
(Manchester and North
West England)

*Disliked by the bosses, dedicated to
the members*

CINQUE PORTS BRANCH

Nominates

JEFF SLEE

For Council of Executives
region nine

GLASGOW ENGINEERING

Nominates

GERRY MCCANN

For Council of Executives
Region one

Scotland

LONDON AND ANGLIA NOMINATES

MICHAEL LYNCH

Council of Executives
Region 10

The best candidate for the
job

CARLISLE BRANCH

Supports

CRAIG JOHNSTON

for Council of Executives
(Manchester and North
West England)

Fighting for your interests

SOUTH LONDON RAIL

Nominates

JEFF SLEE

For Council of Executives
South East region

DUMFRIES AND LOCKERBIE

Nominates

GERRY MCCANN

For Council of Executives
Region one, Scotland

LONDON AND ANGLIA WALTHAM CROSS AND DISTRICT BRANCH

nominates

MICHAEL LYNCH

Council of Executives
Region 10

Vote for this skilled and
experienced candidate

**LONDON ANGLIA &
MIDLAND ROAD
TRANSPORT BRANCH**

nominates

NIAL HANLON

For Region 10, Council of
Executives election
Urges members to support
this most able candidate

PETERBOROUGH BRANCH
Nominates

NIAL HANLON

Council of Executives
Region 10, General Grades
And urges members to
support for this excellent
candidate

**BLETCHLEY AND
NORTHAMPTON BRANCH**

nominates

MICHAEL LYNCH

Council of Executives
Region 10, London & Anglia
The members' voice

RAMSGATE WORKSHOPS

nominates

GARY HASSELL

For Council of Executives
region 9

WOLVERTON BRANCH

Nominates

NIAL HANLON

Council of Executives
election, Region 10, General
Grades

KINGS CROSS BRANCH

Supports

NIAL HANLON

Council of Executives
election, Region 10,
General Grades
A most worthy candidate

**HARLESDEN
ENGINEERING BRANCH**

supports

MICHAEL LYNCH

Council of Executives
Region 10, London & Anglia
The experienced candidate

NEASDEN BRANCH

nominates

NEIL HODGSON

London Transport regional
organiser
Looking to the future in
unity

CAMBRIDGE BRANCH

Nominates

NIAL HANLON

Council of Executives
Region 10, London and
Anglia

**GREAT NORTHERN RAIL
BRANCH**

Nominates

NIAL HANLON

Council of Executives
Region 10, General Grades
An excellent candidate

SUSSEX COAST BRANCH

nominates

GARY HASSELL

for Council of Executives
region 9
Support this candidate

EUSTON N01 BRANCH

Nominates

MICK LYNCH

For Council of Executives
region 10
And calls for support for
this excellent candidate

**COLCHESTER AND
DISTRICT BRANCH**

Nominates

MICHAEL LYNCH

Support for this excellent
activist

**SOUTH EAST ESSEX
BRANCH**

Nominates

MICHAEL LYNCH

Council of Executives
Region 10, London and
Anglia
Support this experienced
candidate

WARRINGTON BRANCH

Nominates

LOL JONES

For Council of Executives
member for North West and
North Wales
Time for change

**MORDON AND OVAL
BRANCH**

Nominates

NEIL HODGSON

For London regional
organiser

**LONDON AND ORIENT
ENGINEERING BRANCH**
supports

MICHAEL LYNCH

Council of Executives
Region 10, London & Anglia
A skilled and experienced
candidate

**WILLES DEN 4
ENGINEERING BRANCH**
Nominate

MICHAEL LYNCH

Council of Executives
Region 10, London & Anglia
Support for this dedicated
activist

**PICCADILLY AND
DISTRICT WEST**

Nominates

NEIL HODGSON

For London Transport
organiser. The best
candidate for the job

KEITH BRANCH

nominates

GERRY MCCANN

For Council of Executives
Region one
Scotland

BUILDING SOLIDARITY WITH ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN WORKERS

Following a decision at the union's annual general meeting this year, representatives from Palestinian and Israeli workers organisations have been invited to address next year's AGM in the Isle of Man

The RMT annual general meeting held in Nottingham earlier this year condemned the continuing Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and denials of Palestinians' human and national rights.

Delegates also agreed to build direct links with progressive and workers' organisations in both Israel and Palestine to promote international solidarity and peace between workers rather than supporting boycotts.

To this end, the union's executive committee has agreed to invite speakers from the Israeli Workers' Advice Centre, which organises Israeli Arab and Jewish workers in Israel, the Israeli transport union of the Histadrut and the Palestinian General Transport Workers' Union.

The AGM condemned the vicious circle of violence and the indiscriminate targeting of civilians, including Israeli military air strikes and the

economic blockade of Gaza, as well as the arbitrary murders of Israeli citizens by suicide bombers and rocket attacks.

The resolution noted that both the Israeli and Palestinian victims of the conflict are usually working-class people, including the eight railway workers killed in the Israeli city of Haifa.

The union has already hosted a visit from the Israeli Workers' Advice Centre and supported the work of the International Transport Workers' Federation which has developed a helpline project for Palestinian transportation workers designed to improve the passage of professional drivers at checkpoints and road blocks in the West Bank.

The union has resolved to support the right to self-

determination of the Palestinian people as expressed in numerous United Nations resolutions and for the right of return for displaced Palestinian people.

The union called for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli troops to the 1967 borders of the state of Israel and the right of Israel to exist in peace alongside an independent and viable Palestinian state.

In order to promote unity between Arab and Jewish workers and to oppose both anti-Semitism and anti-Arab racism the union also plans to set up a solidarity appeal to raise money and material aid for an appropriate workers' advice centre or other trade union initiative. ■

JUSTICE FOR PALESTINIANS

Lobby of Parliament -
2-6pm on Wednesday November 19 2008

A lobby of parliament is being organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, the Council for Arab-British Understanding and Jews for Justice for Palestinians on November 19 to mark the UN international day of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Previous lobbies of parliament have attracted a significant level of support from solidarity organisations, faith groups, trade unions and other groups. This broad support is very important in demonstrating to MPs and the British government the wide range of organisations calling for peace and justice.

This year the lobby theme will be Justice for Palestinians, and will take place from 2-6pm. MPs will be lobbied on issues including: ending Israeli occupation, ending the siege on Gaza, Israeli settlements, Palestinian self-determination and the EU-Israel trade agreement.

Please consider supporting the lobby of parliament this year.

If you require any further information contact
info@palestinecampaign.org



SOLIDARITY: The International Transport Workers' Federation has developed a helpline project for Palestinian transportation workers designed to improve the passage of professional drivers at checkpoints and road blocks in the West Bank.

MEETING CAL MAC MEMBERS

I recently had the pleasure of visiting many of our members who are employed on the Caledonian MacBrayne Hebridean and Clyde Ferries in Scotland and I found the experience extremely informative and constructive.

I joined the general secretary, national secretary Steve Todd and port committee chair George Lonie on the trip and we were able to visit eleven ships for meetings with members.

We also attended a special Oban branch meeting as attended by regional organiser Ian Macintyre.

There are many issues affecting seafaring members. The current pay negotiations were high on the list and were reported back to the members. Union negotiators were able to obtain the all-important views of members affected.

Also the never-ending threat of privatisation through the tendering of the services demanded by EU competition rules was discussed. These threats to our member's pensions and jobs and to the provision of these very important publicly-run life-line ferries for island communities are very well understood by our members who work on them.

Over £17 million of Scottish taxpayers' money has already been wasted on a tendering process in which Cal Mac was the only bidder after private sector rivals realised they could not squeeze enough money from the service.

That process was completely unnecessary, wasteful and damaging and the money



VISIT: Davie Whiteside and Brian Reynolds with John Leach, Bob Crow and Steve Todd



should have been invested in building even better ferry services for the island communities.

Yet, instead of an inquiry to the why so much public money was wasted on tendering, Brussels has launched an inquiry into the subsidies for Caledonian MacBrayne's lifeline ferry services.

This was prompted by a Scottish National Party MEP and immediately applauded by privateer operators who would like nothing better than to pocket public subsidies that are quite properly going to a publicly-owned and controlled

ferry company.

At the end of the day it should be no business of the European Union what or how much subsidy is paid by Scottish taxpayers to maintain their own lifeline ferry services.

We made it clear that the union will resist these attacks and fight to defend the ferry services as well as the jobs of our members who work on them.

I always enjoy visiting members in their workplaces as this face-to-face contact is invaluable for me as president and I know this view is shared by all our national officials. I also hope it is useful for the members that we meet.

I was particularly pleased to be able to meet RMT reps at Cal Mac. The day-to-day role these reps and, for that matter, all local reps in any work place is one of the most important features of our union. Our Health and safety reps, port committee members and the local branch serving Cal Mac members do an excellent job.

I know they do this crucial job mainly in their own time. Why? Because they understand that it is only through organisation and unity that workers can be properly represented and defended.

It is important to give as much support as possible to front line reps as, all too often, they can end up in the firing line from management. Often they are at the receiving end of management resentment at the union's determination to stand up against injustice and bullying and for staff to be treated in a decent manner or improved health and safety.

We have a number of cases at present, indeed at time of writing I shall be attending a branch meeting in support of a victimised rep and three other colleagues. We as a union need to give our full and total support to these reps. Whenever the boss comes for the rep they come for us all and our unity is our strength.

John Leach

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



ORPHAN FUND GAINS £25,000 AFTER FINES POOL GOES NATIONAL

RMT'S orphan Fund has benefited from a huge £25,325 as a result of the Lincs and Anglia Fines Pool going national at the start of 2008.

Executive member Dave Gott handed over the cheque to general secretary Bob Crow at Unity House recently, fulfilling the old pool's rule that any residue must go to the Orphan Fund.

The RMT Head Office Fines Pool – an essential insurance scheme against road-traffic fines

incurred in the course of professional driving work – has been operating since the turn of the year, continuing the work of the Lincs and Anglia fund, which helped tens of thousands of members during its 10-year history.

Still excellent value at just £5 per year, with a with a discount for people who join mid-year, details of the fines pool can be obtained from Vicky Bryce at head office on 020 7529 8882 ■



WIDOWS AND ORPHANS VISIT YORK

The London Widows and Orphans Fund committee would like to thank all those who bought tickets for the summer draw along with the grades conferences and annual general meeting delegates that raised money for the fund.

The committee took fund beneficiaries on a trip to York in August with the travel cost sponsored by NXEC and goodie bags from Rail Gourmet. Each family was also taken on a city bus guided tour.

Families also enjoyed a trip to Alexandra Palace as guests of First Capital Connect for a fun day including traditional fair rides, ice skating and the Moscow State Circus.

A trip has also been planned to Southend-on-Sea due to the generosity of RMT members.

Secretary Jim Stevenson



PLYMOUTH RMT FC OFF TO A FLYER



RMT bus driver members in Plymouth number 5 branch thanked the union for helping to set up their football team which is now competing in a local league.

Drivers' rep Pauline Harris was instrumental in setting up the team with self-styled manager and RMT union learning rep Paul Murphy and club secretary Paul Jeffery.

After a request for help from the company was rejected, the trio turned to the union for financial help to pay for nets, kits and the £100 fee to join the league.

So far the team has lost one game, drawn two and won one

and confidence is growing within the team. Their success has been tinged with sadness with the loss of branch activist Mike Stinchcombe who passed away at the age of 59. He had spent 38 years in the bus industry and will be missed by the members.

Club members now sell raffle and lottery tickets to build a social fund and are hoping to hold a Christmas dinner to celebrate the birth of Plymouth RMT FC.

For more information or to challenge the team to a match contact driver rep Pauline Harris through Plymouth No 5 branch. ■

CELEBRATING AT TOLPUDDLE



TOLPUDDLE: Bob Crow heads up the RMT marching band at this year's annual march in Tolpuddle to remember and honour the Tolpuddle Martyrs.

PEOPLE'S PUBS

Mike Penterlow kicks off a new series investigating pubs named after labour movement figures with The Martyrs Inn in Tolpuddle, Dorset

The labour movement was rekindled in 1834 when six agricultural workers from the village of Tolpuddle were transported for seven years for forming a union.

The farmers had cut wages from nine shillings to six shillings a week at a time when the average weekly family expenditure just to survive was nearly 14 shillings.

The Tolpuddle farmers agreed to increase wages to 10 shillings, but soon reneged on this and cut them back to seven shillings.

"The labouring men consulted together what had better be done, as they knew it

was impossible to live honestly on such scanty means," said George Loveless.

So, in October 1833, he and about 40 others - half the village's adult population - formed the Tolpuddle Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers.

Its rules specifically opposed any acts of violence or violation of the law.

This, however, did not impress the so-called upholders of the law, who charged six of the union leaders under the laws of sedition and treason. The actual charge was taking a secret oath.

The six in the dock were



George Loveless (1797-1874), his brother James (1808-1873), James Brine (1813-1902), Thomas Standfield (1790-1864), his son John (1813-1898) and James Hammett (1811-1891).

The jury was comprised entirely of hostile farmers and the men were not allowed to give evidence on their own behalf.

After the verdict, Loveless, who was a Methodist lay preacher, said from the dock that they had not injured anybody or damaged any property. "We were uniting together to preserve ourselves, our wives and our children from utter degradation and

starvation," he declared.

As they were taken to prison ships for transportation to Australia, he scribbled down the Song of Freedom, which went:

"God is our guide, from field, from wave, From plough, from anvil, and from loom; We come, our country's right to save. And speak a tyrant faction's doom; We raise the watchword, liberty: We will, we will, we will be free!"

A month after the verdict, over 100,000 people marched from Copenhagen Fields in north London - as depicted on the mural on the side of The Mitre pub in Copenhagen Street, N1 - to Parliament with a petition carrying 800,000 signatures demanding the men's release.

The home secretary Lord Melbourne refused to accept it, but the mass pressure could not be resisted indefinitely and, in March 1836, the men were pardoned. It was not until August 1839, however, that the last of the men returned to England.

He was James Hammett, whose grave is in St John's Church, Tolpuddle. ■

£25 PRIZE CROSSWORD

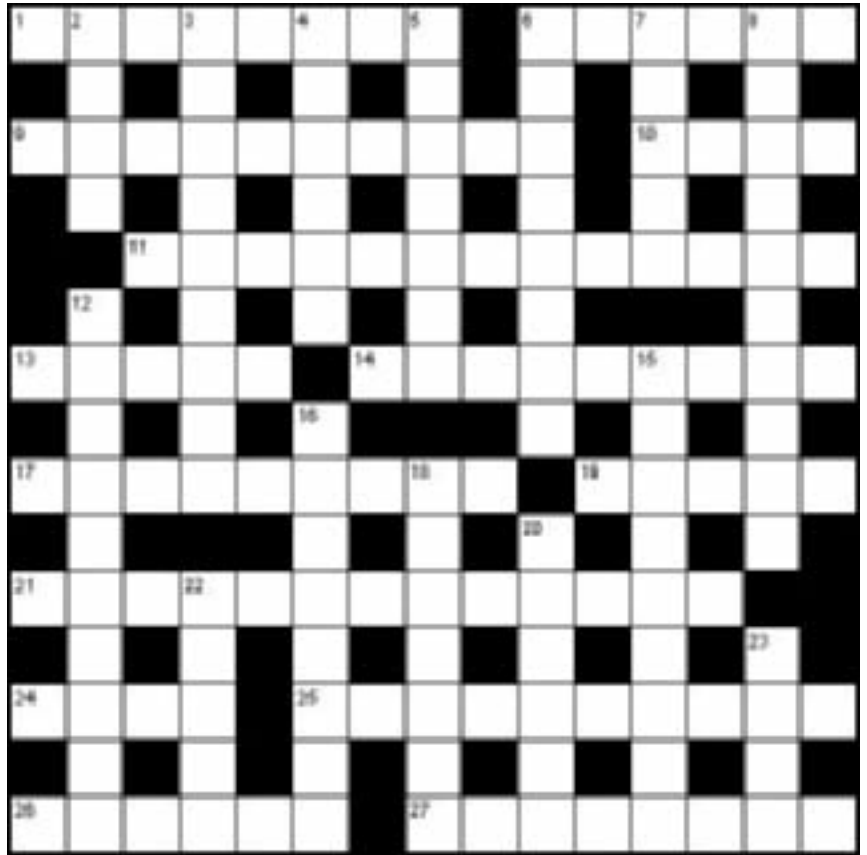
No. 48. Set by Elk

ACROSS

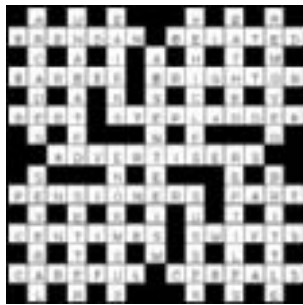
- 1 Where 9s struck this month (8)
- 6 Alter, change specification (6)
- 9 Walked out in 1 over rosters and transfers (10)
- 10 One over the eight! (4)
- 11 Those who stand to gain under will, for example (13)
- 13 Accommodation at sea (5)
- 14 Concord, reached with 12 (9)
- 17 Attend uninvited (9)
- 19 Blacksmith's block; bone in ear (5)
- 21 Drummer (13)
- 24 Nil (4)
- 25 Taken out, removed, got rid of (10)
- 26 Liverpool's Lime, London's Liverpool, or Birmingham's New? (6)
- 27 Hello, for example (8)

DOWN

- 2 Facial feature (4)
- 3 Citrus fruit (9)
- 4 Not awake (6)
- 5 Trying to lose weight (7)
- 6 Weapons thrown or fired (8)
- 7 One who gives (5)
- 8 It's at the end of your digit (10)
- 12 The other side of the table (10)
- 15 Access to colliery (9)
- 16 Least stale (8)
- 18 Leaving port; boating (7)
- 20 Power unit (6)
- 22 Replicate exactly (5)
- 23 Eager; sharp; weep (4)



Last month's solution...



RETIRED AND DEFERRED MEMBERS

Nominate

RAY SPITERI

TFL Pension Fund
ELECTIONS

The winner of prize crossword no. 47 is James Nugent of Old Coulsdon.

Send entries to Prize Crossword, RMT, Unity House, 39 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD by November 10 with your name and address.

Winner and solution in next issue.

TFL EMPLOYEES (EXCEPT LUL)

Nominate

DUNCAN DELVIN

TFL Pension Fund
ELECTIONS

LUL, METRONET, TUBELINES MEMBERS

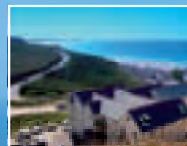
Nominate

RICHARD HEAD AND BRIAN VALENTINE

TFL Pension Fund
ELECTIONS

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year-round offers
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RMT Credit Union

Our Own Savings and Loans Co-operative

YOUR CREDIT UNION IS HERE TO HELP, NOT TO MAKE PROFITS – JOIN TODAY!

OUR OWN SAVINGS AND LOANS CO-OPERATIVE

Our RMT Credit Union exists to provide help and support to all our members for their savings and credit needs, not to make a profit.

By saving together, and lending to each other, we take the profit motive out of savings and loans. All the surpluses created by the Credit Union are recycled as benefits to members through cheap loans, and the ability to pay dividends on savings.

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

Loan term (months) 12.68% APR (1.056% per month)

Amount	12	24	36	48	60
500	44.58	23.70	16.77	13.33	11.29
1000	89.17	47.39	33.54	26.67	22.59
1500	133.75	71.09	50.31	40.00	33.88
2000	178.33	94.78	67.08	53.34	45.18
3000	267.50	142.18	100.62	80.01	67.77
4000	356.67	189.57	134.16	106.68	90.36
5000	445.84	236.96	167.70	133.34	112.95
7500	668.75	355.44	251.55	200.02	169.42

CHEAP LOANS

Decisions on interest rates are made by our members. This year our AGM decided to offer very cheap loans to members. This means we can now offer loans at 12.68 per cent APR, equivalent to 1.056 per cent per month on the declining balance. See our great rates below.

IT'S NEVER BEEN EASIER TO JOIN

All RMT members and their families and retired RMT members can join our Credit Union. You simply complete the form opposite. Under government legislation we have to check your identity and address but we can now do this electronically so you do not have to send any documents with your application.

MONTHLY OR FOUR-WEEKLY PAYMENTS

You can now also make your payments on a calendar monthly basis (28th of each month) or on a four-weekly basis which ties in with the pay cycles of many transport workers. The choice is yours so just indicate on the form. We take regular payments by Direct Debit although one-off additional payments can be made by cheque or cash. Members must make savings payments of at least £5 per month/four-weekly.

If you wish to join complete the application and return it to the RMT Credit Union at Unity House:

RMT Credit Union, Unity House, FREEPOST NW3706, London NW1 3YD

For assistance: Tel: 020 7529 8835

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RMT CREDIT UNION LTD.

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

MEMBERSHIP NUMBER

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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.





JOIN RMT IN PARIS TO SAY NO TO EU RAIL PRIVATISATION!



Join the RMT Eurostar train to the Paris protest supported by the European Transport Federation against disastrous EU rail directives.

Thursday November 13



The privatisation of Britain's railways under the model set out in EU directive 91/440 has resulted in attacks on jobs, pay, working conditions, pensions and safety and resulted in a less efficient, more expensive railway with tax payers' money being taken out of the network by private companies in the form of subsidies.



Now this model of privatisation, enshrined in various EU directives and EU rail packages, is being rolled out across the European Union despite growing opposition by rail workers.



RMT is joining rail trade unionists from across Europe to call for an end to the dangerous experiment of breaking up state rail companies and handing them over to the private sector.

If you wish your RMT branch to be represented return forms sent to branches to head office. Attendance at the conference can be taken from Branch Management Funds. Places are limited and allocation will be on a first come, first serve basis. For more information contact; info@rmt.org.uk or phone 020 7387 4771