

RMT *news*

Essential reading for today's transport worker

SCOTRAIL EQUALITY FIGHT

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WORKING FOR YOU

RMT membership helps you at work and saves you money

RMT has developed a number of benefits to save members money. This includes negotiating access to savings and special offers from our approved partners.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The union has a dedicated team of elected officers and local reps to serve your interests negotiating with employers on issues from pay, hours of work, pensions and working conditions. They are supported by a team of researchers to formulate pay claims to obtain the best negotiated terms for you.

CAMPAIGNING

The union has a political fund to run campaigns and provide a political voice to benefit members' interests in the workplace. RMT has a very active parliamentary group which raises issues of concern for members at Westminster, the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly.

PERSONAL INJURIES

Personal injury claims cover if you suffer an accident in work or outside work. RMT underwrites settlements that would not be provided by no-win, no-fee companies. Call 08457 125 495.

INDUSTRIAL DISEASES

Members who have suffered an industrial disease will receive free legal support to make a claim. Such claims are underwritten by the union and members will not have any deduction from their settlement unlike claims run by no-win, no-fee companies. Call 08457 125 495

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Should a member find themselves unfairly dismissed, discriminated against or have any claim which has reasonable prospects of success at an Employment Tribunal, RMT will provide

legal representation and pay the fee. Even if the union is advised that the claim is unlikely to succeed, members who make a claim are eligible to receive free legal advice.

ACCIDENT BENEFIT

Payable if you have an accident at work or on the way to or from work. Accident benefit is only payable if you have been off for three days or more.

Accident must be reported to branch secretary within 26 weeks in order to qualify for accident benefit.

RETIREMENT BENEFIT

Payable to any member who retires over the age of 60 or aged 55 if retired through redundancy or resettlement. Ill health retirement is also payable; proof of this must be sent with application for retirement benefit.

TAX AND WILL PREPARATION

The union can provide a personal taxation service and will preparation service.

DEMOTION COMPENSATION

Payable to any member who is experiencing loss of wages through being permanently demoted or downgraded as a result of illness or injury.

Payment of £300 provided that member reports this to branch secretary within 12 weeks.

ORPHAN FUND

The beneficiaries of this fund would be any child of a member or spouse if the member dies in service or if a members' spouse dies and the member has responsibility of the children.

Benefit is paid while a child is

in full-time education up until the age of 22. Payment is made quarterly and the rate is £12.00 per week for children up to the age of 16, then £12.75 per week from 16 to 22.

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www.rmt.org.uk/member-benefits/fines-pool

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A Death Grant of £600 is payable to the nearest relative or legal representative if a member dies through any cause prior to retirement.

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EDITORIAL



GETTING ON WITH IT

It gives me great pleasure to introduce you to this first issue of RMT News since my election as your general secretary.

The members magazine is a crucial part of the communications process in our member-led union and, along with our website, social media platforms, a direct means of contact.

I am committed to working with the unions Comms team to explore and expand every avenue to keep you fully informed in what we know are going to be tough times ahead.

The post-COVID attack on jobs, pay, pensions and working conditions is gathering pace as expected with Network Rail and the ferries sector right in the front line. The union has moved onto a dispute footing at Network Rail where we know that thousands of jobs are on the block, agreements and working conditions are threatened with being ripped apart and the safety culture is at risk of being undermined.

I have no doubt that the train operators are eyeing up similar moves and London Underground are already opening up a major battleground with the union with an attack on the Night Tube Drivers grade. With the continuing uncertainty over the Transport for

London budget there will be more where that came from and we have to be prepared and ready to take the action required to push back the cuts agenda.

Ferries have already taken a hammering on jobs and the move by the opportunist and notoriously anti-union Irish Ferries outfit into the Port of Dover signals that the bandits in the shipping industry are far from done yet.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the dire projections about future passenger numbers on our transport services, including our buses, as the country moves out of lockdown are being deliberately exaggerated to fuel a cuts onslaught. Well, we are onto that.

In the coming weeks and months the unity in action of this trade union will be the absolute foundation on which we have to build the defence of our members, their livelihoods and their futures. The threat we now face really is as stark as that.

I am personally proud that you have given me the honour of leading this trade union from the front as we face that threat together. Each and every one of us now has a key part to play. Let's get to it.

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RMT TO FIGHT PLANS TO ABOLISH NIGHT TUBE TRAIN DRIVERS GRADE

RMT will fight plans by London Underground to abolish the Night Tube Train Drivers grade – if necessary through a campaign of industrial action.

LU propose to axe the grade this month in a cash led move aimed at shunting staff around the combine at will that will threaten the jobs of

200 Night Tube staff and destroy the work life balance of 3,000 Tube drivers.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said that London Underground's proposals to rip up an agreement that protects 3,000 Tube drivers work life balance has caused uproar in the depots amongst drivers.

"This breach of trust by an

out of touch management abolishes the part time jobs of workers – mainly women – who want them.

"This is the thanks that Tube drivers have been given for keeping the service running through the Covid pandemic.

"With some 200 jobs facing the axe we have

been left with no other choice but to prepare the ground for industrial action.

"In the meantime we are calling on the re-elected Mayor of London to intervene to pressure tube bosses to see reason and protect the jobs and working conditions of these hard working staff," he said. ■

BALFOUR BEATTY BALLOT

Union ballots members working on the Central Rail Systems Alliance in fight for pay justice

RMT is preparing to ballot members for industrial action over its refusal to offer a fair pay award for members working on the Central Rail Systems Alliance (CRSA).

The CRSA is an alliance of Network Rail, Balfour Beatty, Atkins and TSO working on UK track renewals. RMT members are incensed that in spite of working tirelessly throughout the pandemic to maintain operations, in often difficult

circumstances, the company has mothballed their 2020 pay claim.

Meanwhile, the company's top two directors received a huge £1.8 million in bonuses between them for the same year.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said that RMT has declared a dispute over the disgraceful treatment of members working for Balfour Beatty on the Central Rail

Systems Alliance.

"Having contributed to strong performance levels for the company during the pandemic they are being given a kick in the teeth with no pay increase for 2020.

"And while Balfour Beatty refuses to deliver a fair pay award for its workers the company's top two directors have managed to trouser a whopping £1.8 million in bonuses alone between them

for the same year. It's clearly a case of double standards for a company which claims it has no money to fund pay awards but can still conjure up fat bonuses for its bosses.

"RMT is determined to achieve a just and fair award for its members and has been left with no other option but to enter into dispute and make the necessary preparations for an industrial action ballot of its members," he said. ■

SCOTRAIL EQUALITY FIGHT

RMT launches petition demanding action that Scottish government backs pay justice and equality

RMT has launched an on-line petition demanding that the government back pay justice and equality for Scotrail workers following Dutch state-owned operator Abellio's failure to treat all grades of workers equally in respect of rest day working arrangements.

The petition, which can be signed from the RMT website, is calling on Edinburgh to put pressure on Transport Scotland and the ScotRail operators to play fair by their staff out there on the frontline throughout the COVID pandemic.

The company has extended an enhanced payment rest day working agreement for one grade of workers, drivers, until October 2021, but has refused to negotiate an equivalent payment for other grades. RMT ScotRail conductor and ticket examiner members have voted to take industrial action, in two separate disputes.

Ticket examiners are joining ScotRail conductors in industrial action on Sundays and the union has plans to ballot engineering grades over the same issue of workplace justice on enhanced payments.

The union insists that all grades of ScotRail staff are essential workers who deserve pay equality. The ScotRail franchise continues to be full



funded by the Scottish government under the terms of its Emergency Measures Agreement and RMT's petition is calling on the Scottish government to commit itself and Abellio ScotRail to meaningful talks with RMT to address this blatant inequality.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said that all grades of ScotRail workers are essential workers who have worked tirelessly throughout the Covid-19 pandemic to keep Scotland's rail services running.

"All RMT ScotRail Conductor and Ticket Examiner members are seeking parity between grades. It is a kick in the teeth for these workers, that despite their commitment throughout the pandemic, Abellio is refusing to treat all grades

equally and is instead preoccupied with issuing provocative statements criticising its own workforce.

"It is high time that the Scottish government stepped in and committed itself and

Abellio to meaningful talks, and this is what RMT's petition is calling for.

"These essential workers deserve pay justice and equality," he said. ■



EAST MIDLANDS RAILWAY STRIKE ACTION

RMT has launched three days of strike action this month following a second well supported industrial action ballot of members on East Midlands Railway.

East Midlands Railway imposed different contracts

that include a reduction of £5,500 in the first year of employment and are also rostering additional hours expected to be worked that are explicitly against the terms and conditions.

RMT general secretary

Mick Lynch said that the union had been left with no choice but to call strike action on East Midlands Trains.

"Despite clear demands from RMT, East Midlands Railway have refused to stop

enforcing these inferior contracts for some train guards which have been resisted for years and the patience of members has now reached its limit," he said. ■

FLOATEL VICTORY: Picture shows the platform 'Floatel Superior' off the Norwegian coast



FLOATEL VICTORY

Union wins jobs and pay increase for UK ratings at offshore accommodation company Floatel

Following a long RMT campaign Swedish offshore accommodation company Floatel has agreed to sign an ITF agreement with Swedish trade union SEKO as instructed and will employ UK Ratings in 36 out of 39 positions on the vessel Floatel Victory.

In addition, the pay and employment conditions of the 17 UK catering Ratings onboard will be covered under the Caterers Offshore Trade Association (COTA) national agreement to which the RMT is a signatory. The pay for Motorman and AB grades on the ship have also been uplifted, in line with the RMT's demand.

In 2019, the Union raised concerns over low-cost crewing on Floatel's fleet, particularly the Bermudan-flagged Floatel Victory after it had been awarded a contract by INEOS in the oil and gas sector of the UK continental shelf (UKCS).

Bermuda is a Flag of Convenience register. Filipino ratings on Floatel's ships are paid below the National Minimum Wage, have no access to National Insurance or auto-enrolment pension schemes and lack other basic employment rights which should be automatically enforced for UK seafarers.

The INEOS contract for the Floatel Victory was due to start

in 2020 but was postponed by the Coronavirus pandemic until April 2021. Following further discussion with Norwegian Union IndustriEnergi, it was confirmed that the company intended to crew the vessel with Filipino ratings.

As a result, the RMT national secretary Darren Procter met with Floatel to inform them that they should comply with the ITF Offshore Policy by signing an ITF agreement with their local ITF affiliate, the Swedish seafarers union SEKO. The employer was also reminded that since October 2020, the UK National Minimum Wage is the legal base for seafarer pay on the

UKCS.

RMT also requested that Floatel negotiate with RMT over crewing on their vessels whenever they win contracts for work on the UKCS.

There is more work to be done to improve Ratings' pay and conditions on Floatel and other vessels working in the offshore sector but these contractual improvements put seafarers well above the exploitative rates advertised in the sector by unscrupulous crewing agents.

The inclusion of the catering crew under RMT's national collective agreement for offshore caterers (COTA) is also a major step forward.

RMT DEMANDS MEETING OVER IRISH FERRIES THREAT TO JOBS IN DOVER

RMT has written to the Irish Ferries managing director Andrew Sheen to demand a meeting to discuss the impact on local seafarer jobs of the Irish Ferries plan for a new Dover-Calais service.

Irish Ferries currently operate roll-on roll-off ferry services between Dublin and Holyhead and Rosslare and Pembroke with predominantly eastern European resident crew recruited by Matrix Ship Management of Cyprus.

Hundreds of Ratings in Dover were made redundant in the middle of the pandemic by P&O Ferries and Irish Ferries entry into the Cross

Channel ferry market has been welcomed by local politicians and port representatives.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said that RMT and other ITF-affiliated unions had long held concerns over the impact of Irish Ferries' business model on local seafarer jobs and skills, trade union rights and maritime safety standards.

"We regret that, to date, Irish Ferries, a member of the UK Chamber of Shipping and of the International Chamber of Shipping, has not engaged with RMT on these important issues.

"A successful recovery in ferry passenger numbers and

freight volumes in the summer seems to have driven the Irish Continental Group's decision to expand their ro-ro ferry operation into the Channel. Following the major job losses amongst local seafarers in Dover last summer, the arrival of a new ferry operator should be cause for optimism amongst Ratings and Officers in Dover and the UK.

"We would be very concerned, however, if Irish Ferries intend to continue using the low-cost crewing model on Dover-Calais services. Whilst this seems likely as the Isle of Inishmore is undergoing a re-fit ahead of

deployment in the Dover straits, it would be extremely helpful if we could meet to establish the crewing, safety management and other regulatory details of your company's proposals for cross channel ferry operations.

"RMT has met with local and national politicians to discuss these plans. It is important, therefore, that the union and our members hear from Irish Ferries on their proposals for this key strategic route on which UK seafarers will continue to work and to be trained for generations to come," he said.



RMT RAISES CONCERNS OVER SERIOUS OFFSHORE INCIDENT NEAR SHETLAND

RMT has responded with concern over the Health and Safety Executive's response to a serious safety incident in the offshore decommissioning sector.

In 2020, a video was circulated of an accident that occurred during decommissioning work carried out by the contractor, Ocean Kinetics on the Buchan Alpha rig in waters off Shetland. A thousand tonne structure suddenly fell several feet, seriously endangering the safety of Ocean Kinetics and all other staff on the job.

The Health and Safety

Executive's investigation into this incident found that Ocean Kinetics' de-ballasting of the structure broke the law, specifically the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015.

However, in an unusual step following an investigation which established that health and safety laws had been broken and caused this incident, the HSE has only of issued Ocean Kinetics with a "Notice of Contravention" and a fine for an undisclosed amount.

The HSE can take other actions in these circumstances, such as issuing a Notice of Prohibition but Ocean Kinetics admission of guilt and in-house reforms to risk management appear to have prevented the regulator from taking any stronger actions.

RMT general secretary, Mick Lynch, said that the deeply troubling incident had sent shockwaves amongst offshore contractors.

"Ocean Kinetics clearly tried to decommission the Buchan Alpha on the cheap, massively increasing the risk to workers' safety and damaging

standards in the UK decommissioning sector.

"Ocean Kinetics failed to protect the health and safety of employees but HSE could only acknowledge that the law was broken. The government's Energy White Paper announced a review of the environmental impact of North Sea de-commissioning but the Ocean Kinetics case shows that stronger regulation by HSE of worker safety in the growing offshore decommissioning sector must be an absolute priority too," he said.





BUS CUTS CRISIS IN ENGLAND

RMT warns of impending bus cuts crisis as survey reveals most English Councils will be forced to cut funding for local bus services

An RMT survey of cross-party local councillors across the country has revealed that a cuts disaster looms for Britain's bus network unless the government takes far more radical action than is set out in its National Bus Strategy.

The survey of councillors at Local Transport Authorities in England, outside London, found that 67 per cent thought that their Council would be forced to cut funding for local bus services in the future, with two-thirds of those citing lack of Central Government funding as the reason.

In the deregulated bus market, cash strapped local councils are forced to subsidise any socially or economically necessary routes that the commercial operators do not deem profitable, yet they are still banned from setting up their own municipal bus company.

The government's recently published National Bus Strategy has committed to reviewing this ban, and RMT is demanding that the ban is

reversed as a matter of urgency.

Just 12 per cent of councillors thought that the bus operators in their area would not cut commercial services in the future, and it is clear that the government must take action to prevent the commercial bus operators decimating services as they seek to maximise profit when the Covid-19 Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG) comes to an end.

If the government does not take action to prevent cuts to local bus services, it will be disastrous for communities across the country and for the environment. In the survey, a massive 84 per cent of councillors had concerns about the impact of bus cuts on local people and communities, including concerns about the impact on elderly and disabled people, public health, job security, inequalities, disadvantaged communities, and climate change.

RMT believes that the National Bus Strategy has so

far failed to provide local authorities with sufficient certainty around future funding for bus services, and it must urgently give local authorities a long-term funding settlement that is ring-fenced for local bus services and reverse the illogical ban on new municipal bus companies.

END BAN ON MUNICIPAL BUS COMPANIES

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said that local bus services were a lifeline for many and had a vital role to play in connecting communities, preventing social isolation and reducing pollution and carbon emissions.

"Yet RMT's survey of local councillors shows that unless the government provides sufficient funding and certainty for local authorities, many will be forced to cut support for socially and economically necessary services, which will be devastating for local communities.

"Bus use has already been

hit by the COVID – 19 pandemic and it is clear that the commercial operators will have no qualms slashing services once emergency Covid-19 funding comes to an end and we need urgent action from the Government to prevent the impending cuts crisis.

"Bus services are a sustainable and low-carbon transport and have a vital role to play in our fight against climate change, with COP26 just months away, the government must get serious about creating a first-class local bus network that provides a viable alternative to the car.

"The government must urgently reverse the ban on new municipal bus companies, and provide all local authorities with sufficient, ring-fenced, national funding to enable them to provide the local bus services their communities need.

"Our bus network should be run as a fundamental public service, and not for commercial gain," he said. ■

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UNION CALLS FOR ROLLING STOCK INVESTIGATION

RMT says discovery of cracks in Hitachi trains exposes dangers of extended rolling stock maintenance cycles

RMT has called for a full investigation following the discovery of cracks in Class 800 Series Hitachi trains. The vast majority of GWR's fleet and a significant number of LNER and TransPennine Express trains have been taken off the network to undergo a full and rigorous inspection, after checks of the Hitachi fleet this month first identified cracks on part of the chassis of some trains.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said that Hitachi needed to ensure the highest safety standards and properly investigate and rectify the

issues.

"This situation demonstrates once again that it is reckless for the rail companies and the Department of Transport to move the industry to diluted, risk-based maintenance regimes which extends maintenance cycles on rolling stock or on the infrastructure, whether that be on the mainline railway or on the tube and metro services, to cut costs and strip out staff.

"The railway needs to be maintained rigorously and to the highest possible standards to protect the travelling public

and the staff and that will remain RMT's key demand."

The government has also asked the rail industry to urgently set out a comprehensive plan to resolve prolonged disruption following the discovery of cracks in Class 800 Series Hitachi trains.

Hitachi will also be expected to set out a comprehensive inspection regime guaranteeing that safety is prioritised, building on the work that is already underway.

The independent safety regulator, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), will be

closely involved in overseeing this work, providing confidence to staff and passengers, while also helping to ensure any issues are rapidly resolved.

The rail industry has also been asked to set out a plan for how it will manage capacity, by moving rolling stock and proposing where alternative trains can be sourced and to deliver a clear rail replacement schedule, including additional bus and coach services that will be in place to help alleviate disruption.



TRAGEDY: A crane is brought in to the site, following the derailment of the ScotRail train which cost the lives of three people, near Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire, Scotland.



CARMONT TRAGEDY INTERIM REPORT

Union calls for a well-maintained railway which require a hands-on approach to maintenance and improvements

Following the Rail Accident Investigation Branch's interim report on the tragedy at Carmont on August 12 2020, where six vehicles of a passenger train derailed after striking a landslip, killing three and injuring six, RMT believes that the RAIB seemed to be taking Network Rail's commitments on expertise at face value.

It has been eight months since train driver Brett McCullough, conductor Donald Dinnie and passenger Christopher Stuchbury were killed after the Aberdeen to Glasgow Queen Street service

crashed at Carmont, south of Stonehaven.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch stated that the tragic loss of life and damage at Carmont sets out that there are clear deficiencies in Network Rail's approach to the effects of severe weather and its effects on the ageing rail infrastructure.

"Network Rail must learn from this incident and take the necessary steps to ensure that they are preventing incidents from happening.

"That means a robust and regular inspection, maintenance and

improvement programme that means our railway infrastructure is fit for a future where extreme weather may become more regular and more challenging.

"We need a well-maintained railway that will need a hands-on approach to maintenance and improvements and not just leaving matters to predictions and forecasts.

"Rail resilience issues are a serious concern to RMT and we have tried to engage with Network Rail in Scotland in a proactive manner to ensure the safety of the travelling

public and railway staff," he said.

As part of the investigations, two independent expert taskforces – one on earthworks and one on weather – has set out more than 50 recommendations, including greater focus on drainage initiatives, upskilling workers, looking at organisational design and culture, and reviewing commercial contracts and services.

The RAIB is due to publish the findings of its own independent investigation later this year. ■

SWEETHEART: First Group Plc plans to restart paying huge dividends to shareholders whilst workers across the railway face a two year pay freeze.

SWEETHEART DEALS FOR PRIVATE RAIL COMPANIES

RMT calls for full inquiry into backroom deals as another rail company fleeces tax and fare payers

The government has been conducting backroom deals with train operating companies that allow them to break their franchise contracts with minimal termination fees following the collapse of the contracts, according to the union.

At the same time the government is presenting these companies with risk free direct awards which is a "licence to print money" whilst they are preparing to pay out huge dividends to their shareholders.

For instance, First Group Plc plans to restart paying huge dividends to shareholders whilst workers across the railway face an across the board two year pay freeze and it has now been reported that First Group has come to an agreement with The Department for Transport on the termination of its TransPennine Express franchise for a final fee of £6

million, which is around £50 million less than first assumed.

Both the DfT and First Group are now negotiating a direct award to run to May 2023 with a possible extension of two years.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said that it was scandalous that as heroic rail workers were facing a two year pay freeze these fat cat train operating companies have been given the green light to print money whilst paying out eye-watering dividends to shareholders.

"Instead of taking this failed franchise into public ownership, as we have seen with other failed franchises in Scotland and Wales, and indeed with Northern Rail and LNER in England, we are seeing government scrambling to save what is left of railway privatisation regardless of the cost to the taxpayer.

"This is nothing short of a great railway racket cooked up

between the DfT and a small cabal of transport companies to keep the utter failure of railway privatisation on life-support whilst rail workers have their pay frozen and passengers continue to be ripped off," he said.

The union is writing to the National Audit office and an immediate transparent inquiry into how these backroom deals were conducted and to ensure the railway and transport system works in the interests of passengers and rail workers and not just a small group of very wealthy shareholders.

The union also has accused the government of deceiving the British public and transport workers with a Queen's Speech that made no mention of their planned cuts agenda across rail and bus sectors.

Network Rail is currently planning cuts that would result in thousands of job losses by

this September and a wholesale dilution of safety standards, including a halving the frequency of safety critical maintenance work.

Mick Lynch said that this Queen's Speech was the government's opportunity to commit to a historic mass investment in public transport to drive our country forward out of the Covid-19 crisis whilst leading in the fight against climate change in year of the vital COP26 conference.

"Instead, we've got a paper-thin speech that masks the reality of their cuts agenda across our railways and bus sectors.

This Queen's Speech confirms where this government's priorities lie and it clearly isn't with passenger interests and the heroic key transport workers that have kept our country moving throughout the Covid-19 pandemic," he said.

GREEN FREIGHT POLICY NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE

Rail freight continues to fall despite government commitments to lower greenhouse gas emissions

Following the publication of new government figures to boost freight support RMT said that the government policy to increase green freight transport in advance of COP26, the UN Climate Summit due to take place in Glasgow in November, was not fit for purpose.

Official government statistics show that the percentage of freight moved and lifted by rail has fallen continuously for the last 10 years whilst road freight has increased during the same period.

As a result, the union said that the government must

show much greater ambition to create a huge modal shift from road to rail and water as part of the green economic recovery and to meet emission reduction targets.

The government also set a new legally binding target to cut the country's greenhouse gas emissions by 78 per cent by 2035, figures released by the Department of Transport reveal that rail freight companies received funding from the taxpayer to move more freight in the pandemic whilst cutting jobs. At the same time coastal shipping companies continue to ignore environmental subsidies which

could provide work for UK seafarers made redundant during the crisis.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said that the government's strategy to build back better from the Covid-19 crisis and to slash carbon emissions simply does not tally with their plans for massive cuts to railway budgets.

"We need the ambition, capacity and skills to massively increase the volume of freight moved by rail and water every year, yet the government's own statistics show that piecemeal funding to rail freight continues whilst the government plans huge cuts

to jobs on our railway and refuse to intervene to protect seafarer jobs.

"Transport workers are green workers. In the year of COP26 the Government has to get serious about using public money to cut pollution, increase jobs and deliver carbon free public transport networks across the UK as soon as possible," he said.

The COP26 summit is designed to accelerate action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

RAIL FREIGHT USAGE FALLS: North Rail-freight terminal, Port of Felixstowe, Suffolk





STAFF OUR STATIONS

Station grades conference backs campaign against the closure and de-staffing of ticket offices across the network

Delegates to the union's national industrial organising conference of station and associated grades conference zoom meeting called on the union to step up the Staff our Stations (SOS) campaign.

Ross Marshall, Central Line West urged the union to ensure every region elected a SOS officer to co-ordinate activities and hold public meetings with invited guests.

"We need a national SOS committee that meets four times a year comprising on the stations grades liaison committee, regional SOS officer, the org unit and senior figures in the union," he said.

Delegates also backed a call for the union to write to all train operating companies regarding the closure and de-staffing of stations.

Tim Thomas, Central and North Mersey said that the travelling public had a right to feel safe when travelling on the rail network but this was not happening at present.

"This pandemic has allowed the TOCs to run riot and continue to close and de-staff stations yet a recent survey showed that over 70 per cent of the travelling public felt safer when there is a member of staff at the station.

"The railway is a hotspot for vulnerable people at this present time with suicides and crime across the rail network at an all-time high.

"Stations need to be staffed from beginning to end of service for us to make passengers feel safe travelling knowing there a member of staff present if an incident occurs," he said. Conference delegates reiterated its complete opposition to the de-staffing of stations.

Rotimi Ajayi, Paddington said that some companies are closing down ticket offices before the last trains and after the first trains or with just one person in the station.

Delegates also offered support and solidarity to RMT members at Lewisham station on Southeastern. They have suffered a series of attacks, abuse, and assaults, often Covid-related.

Jon Gutteridge, Lewisham Southwark and District said that in one incident in February, a member was spat at in the face, and others were verbally abused.

"Members at Lewisham report that they have suffered 37 incidents of assaults and threats in the last two years, and these are continuing to happen.

"It is a disgrace that Southeastern have not taken adequate measures to protect their staff. Delegates also supported the actions taken by his branch and regional organiser Eddie Dempsey over this issue including a protest outside Lewisham station supported by local Labour councillors and the trades council.

Delegates also called for risk assessments to be strengthened taking into account the risk of assault

including an end to lone working which leaves workers vulnerable.

Jose Partington, Blackpool said that such attacks were appalling and lessons should have been learned after the death of Belly Mujinga after being spat at by a passenger.

Delegates called on the union to write to all train operating companies regarding the number of staff who have been advised by the government to shield during this pandemic.

Conference heard how members across the country were suffering cleaners working for Churchill's were being forced required to shield during the Covid 19 pandemic but had not been put on furloughed pay and they cannot claim statutory sick pay or claim universal credit.

Chris Cuomo, Orpington branch said that some

cleaning staff were shielding due to vulnerable relatives and they needed help not to be penalised.

"This group of workers are low paid workers and badly treated by their employers," he said.

Cleaning member Bella Fashola said that she had been not able to work since December due to her circumstances but the union had got her money to live on.

Conference also called for support for protests against new legislation known as the 2021 Police and Crime Bill being proposed by the government.

Sameera McKenna, Bakerloo called for solidarity with the Kill the Bill protests and called on the union to pledge full support.

"Should this Bill pass, it will make protesting very restrictive for the stations grades conference and all

other groups of workers.

"With planned attacks coming from the government on our employment, the need for protest from station staff is now more than ever," she said.

Andy Budds, Leeds said that the legislation would give the government the right to decide what is a disruptive demonstration and what is not.

"We need to educate people that our rights were not given to us but hard-won and if they are taken away it would be hard to win them back," he said.

Delegates also backed closer co-operation between the station grades conference and the supervisory grades conference.

It was proposed that the 2023 conferences of both grades should take place in Hertfordshire at the same time and venue and a joint plenary session should be held.





UNITY THE KEY

Unity is required for the battles ahead, newly elected RMT general secretary Mick Lynch tells Morning Star industrial reporter Derek Kotz

Mick Lynch is no stranger to the sharp end of the class struggle.

The newly elected RMT general secretary was effectively starved out of the construction industry in the 1990s, a victim of the blacklisting that robbed so many decent trade unionists of their right to earn a living.

He is also a veteran of battles against the kind of right-wing gangster trade-unionism that saw his former trade union – the notorious EETPU – kicked out of the TUC for sweetheart-dealing with some of the very bosses who were doing the blacklisting.

It was being forced out of construction that brought the west-Londoner onto the railways and into RMT.

"I went into Eurostar to hide and earn some money for six months," he says.

More than two decades on, having built Eurostar's RMT branch from scratch to being one of the union's biggest, and having been elected twice as assistant general secretary, he finds himself in the hot seat.

Lynch can be forgiven for wryly raising an eyebrow at the suggestion made recently by one of the Star's down-market rivals that he is regarded in the union as a "centrist."

"I am not a centrist," he says with a sigh. "In my community I am regarded as a radical and a leftist, but of course these things are relative."

"What I am, though, is in the mainstream of where our

members are.

"They want a strong, disciplined union that is ready to fight when it's appropriate and to use all the weapons at our disposal.

"That means professional discussions and negotiations, but it also means that you are properly organised and ready to use industrial action when the members call for it and when we need to," he says.

For Lynch, far more important than such labels are the struggles that will define RMT in the coming years, and he is under no illusion about the severity of the challenges facing the union and the working class in general.

"We are entering a very dangerous period, and the union has got to be ready," he says.

Under his leadership, RMT will be "at the cutting edge of the trade-union recovery," he says, and he hopes that its example will help inspire confidence and a like-minded militancy across the movement to thwart attempts to make working people pay for the Covid crisis.

Lynch's election campaign focused on unity and industrial organisation – the twin prerequisites that he believes will allow the union to counter the aggressive agenda already being set by government and employers.

It was an approach that clearly struck a chord with members, as he won comfortably against three credible rivals, all of them also established elected officers.

"The ruling class is going to

use covid as a smokescreen for permanent changes in the workplace, and that means driving down wages, driving down conditions, attacking pensions and diluting safety," he warns.

"On the maritime side we have already had attacks from the major ferry companies around the UK seeking to strip out terms and conditions.

"Stena Line is seeking to take away our sick-pay agreement, a basic attack on an established and important condition.

"We've got Irish ferries now seeking to run a low-cost ferry service across the Channel which will undermine the decent agreements we have with the other providers.

"It's a straightforward Ryanair-style attack – moving to the lowest cost-base possible, in this case using imported cheap labour, which is a direct attack on everybody's terms and conditions.

As with the fire-and-rehire battles seen in British Gas, British Airways and increasingly elsewhere, it is a race to the bottom that must be resisted, he says.

"Offshore, the oil industry has retrenched and has enormous issues because of the carbon transfer, and we've got to make sure that workers have a just transition.

"We don't want to see the offshore and onshore wind industries – our alternative energy – becoming a low-cost-base, minimum-wage environment where people are vulnerable and exploited."

But, he says, there is "a real danger" that the green economy could also be used to shoehorn gig-economy terms and conditions into what should be a new engineering base for the country.

RMT members in the bus industry, too, are seeing attacks on their pay and conditions, including pay freezes, "so we will be demanding above-inflation pay rises and intend to

organise our members to challenge that."

On the railways, Lynch points to plans being introduced through the government-sponsored Rail Industry Recovery Group "to try to force the unions to buy into an agenda of cuts and what they are calling modernisation."

"They are seeking to do that through dilution of safety standards, which will lead to fewer people on track, fewer people on trains and fewer people on our stations."

The union has already declared that it is on a "national dispute footing" with Network Rail after it revealed that it would be seeking huge job cuts on the back of a 50 per cent reduction in safety-critical work.

Some of the many subcontractors in the industry are being pushed towards gig-economy status, with its variable and tenuous engagement structures and umbrella tax companies and the like.

"There are challenges in every one of our sectors and we have got to make sure that these pillars of the union are properly represented and fully organised so that we can respond to them.

"Each of those pillars deserves the support of the others and the union as a whole, so that no sector or grade is left behind, and there isn't a 'Cinderella' part of our union.

"That is what industrial trade unionism is, and it forms the very foundations of RMT.

"I am going to be focused on industrial organisation, so that we seek to fulfil our basic philosophy as an industrial union – that every worker should be in the union and that we represent every worker in all our sectors.

"That is my ambition: to grow the union and make sure that every worker is a member, every member is an activist, everyone is covered by an

RMT agreement – and all are ready to support the union's position when it comes to engaging with the employer, up to and including industrial action."

"I think we are in a good position to make those transitions – but it won't be a one-off: we must constantly be able to adapt to deal with whatever is in front of us, and that means all members being informed on all of the issues in front of them."

On the political front, Lynch says that he has made it clear that he will not be seeking to reaffiliate the union to the Labour Party.

"We will support the Labour Party when it does good things and we will be critical of it when it does bad things – but I am very concerned about its direction of travel.

"Clearly it is in the interests of everyone in the working class to have a strong and powerful Labour Party, even if we don't support everything it does."

But, he says, under its current leadership – "if that's what you can call it" – the party has turned into "a passive blob," and the recent election results were "an embarrassment to anyone in the labour movement."

"On a class basis we need people who can defend our interests in the town halls, in the parish councils, and all the way through the regional and national assemblies, the new mayoralities and in Westminster," he says.

But, he adds, the party needs to adopt some "permanent principles" – around public ownership and public housing – "not what they call 'social housing,' but publicly owned housing, through the councils, that gives our people affordable, high-quality homes.

"It should also defend the education system, the welfare state and the NHS and oppose privatisation and imperialist war.

"Those four or five things are permanent positions that should be on a permanent pledge card: do that, and you can build on the particulars in any period to put the detailed policies out."

Lynch has enormous respect for his predecessor, Mick Cash, who had the difficult job of taking over the reins of the union in the wake of Bob Crow's tragic early death in 2014.

"The union has grown significantly under Mick Cash's tenure, and his achievements should not be forgotten.

"I am extremely grateful for his legacy and so are the vast majority of our members.

"It has been a stressful period for the union. There are some people who didn't agree with Mick Cash's position, and some who just didn't think he should be the general secretary – but the members did, and he won two elections by massive margins".

Lynch sees his own election as a "turning point".

"It gives us an opportunity to reset, to focus on the things that unite us, and on the vast majority of things in front of us, that are put there by the employers, the industry and by circumstance, we are agreed.

"I have also made it clear that I intend to build on the unions well established equalities work and ensure that RMT is a welcoming, inclusive and supportive environment for every single member who wants to play a part regardless of race, disability, age, gender or sexual orientation.

In a widely welcomed move, one of his first acts as general secretary was to place before the national executive a unity statement, which was endorsed unanimously by its members and by all the union's officers.

"We are going to be united and we are going to take the union forward, and all pull together in the same direction," he says.



DISABLED MEMBERS MEET BY ZOOM



Disabled members advisory declares that workers have the right to accessible workplaces as standard

"Where previously we were Luddites or militants in the eyes of the media, suddenly we were key workers, we were heroes," Disabled Members Advisory Committee (DMAC) chair David King said as he opened the 2021 RMT disabled members' conference. "But we have been treated with the utmost disrespect."

The impact of the pandemic on Britain's transport sector - and in particular, on disabled workers - was front and centre of the two-day online conference. Karen Mitchell, Newcastle and Gateshead called for the union to remain vigilant over the impact of "long Covid" - and whether the condition would be covered by disability discrimination law in future. "We're going to get a lot of people who were not disabled before all this kicked off who will be considered disabled after it," she said. "As much as [the pandemic has] affected everybody, it's affected disabled people more than anyone else."

In one of his final conference appearances before handing over the union leadership, outgoing RMT general secretary Mick Cash told delegates: "I think the world is going to change, and I think attitudes have changed as a result of seeing what's going on in the pandemic. We've all realised how we're very much interlinked and we have to rely on each other. It's not just chief executives that keep this country going, it's not Prime Ministers, it's ordinary workers on the front line".

Conference overwhelmingly endorsed a motion asserting

that "disabled workers have the right to accessible workplaces as standard" - and not just on request. This is one of two motions that the conference voted to send to RMT's AGM. The resolution called for the "as standard" principle to be reflected in union materials and campaigns. Charlotte Foster-Lewis, Finsbury Park said: "Reasonable adjustments for individuals are plan B, and plan A is an accessible workplace."

Explaining that the motion reflected the "social model" of disability which RMT supports, DMAC secretary Janine Booth said: "Instead of trying to fix people, fix the environment. Make the workplace accessible. Then it is a better workplace for everyone, and disabled people don't have to make an issue out of being disabled."

While supporting the motion, Karen Mitchell said there was still a need for disabled workers to speak out and demand changes "rather than leave the onus on [employers] to know what they want".

Delegates also voted to support strengthening the RMT's involvement in the TUC Disabled Workers' Committee. This would include consulting the DMAC on nominations to the committee each year, nominating RMT members for other committee positions, and proposing that the TUC creates an additional seat for disabled workers from smaller unions on its general council. Jennifer Aggrey-Fynn, Euro Passenger Services suggested the union could learn from its successes in nominating members to other positions on



the TUC Race Relations Committee.

Another resolution adopted by the conference raised the alarm over "the proposed axing of the Working Time Regulations". Delegates asserted that the Tory government's move "will have an adverse effect on disabled workers", through medical conditions being exacerbated by additional working hours and stress. Colin Stewart, Plymouth No. 1 called on the union to "lobby parliament to keep this in place and stop any further hardship to disabled workers".

In the conference's second submission to AGM, members expressed concern that the government is "flouting" Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations in the provision of rail replacement services. Christopher Reilly, Reading asked: "How many times have we been aware of a

rail replacement service turning up and it's a coach with no disabled access?"

Highlighting the complacency of bosses towards this issue, Ian Oldham, East Midland Central said: "They were all in the pram at one stage. I think they should go back in the pram and see how they get on."

Delegates took part in a live link-up with a London demonstration to free Osime Brown, a 21-year-old black autistic man set to be deported to Jamaica, a country he left aged four. Janine Booth said: "This case illustrates very well the intersection between discrimination against disabled people, neurodivergent people and young black men in the justice system. This is the Windrush scandal happening all over again, for a new generation of black people". ■

RETRAINING FOR RATINGS

Maritime charities extend funding for retraining until end of year

The Maritime Charities Group (MCG), Trinity House, Nautilus Slater Fund and the Merchant Navy Welfare Board have announced the extension of the MCG Retraining and Redundancy Bursary Fund until the end of this year.

The fund, which is administered by the Marine Society on behalf of MCG, provides extra cash for training and refresher courses and is aimed at merchant seafarers who've lost work due to Covid-19 and want to stay in

the industry. 48 applications have been approved since the fund was launched last November and over £20k awarded in grants, but another £20k is still available.

Chair of MCG, Commander Graham Hockley LVO RN explained: "The fund was due to close at the beginning of May but with furlough coming to an end in September and many jobs under threat, the need for this kind of support hasn't gone away. With no government funding available

for seafarer retraining, it makes sense to extend the scheme."

The charities want to spread the word, especially to ratings, ferry crew and female seafarers. Commander Hockley continued: "The response so far has been really good but less so from ratings, ferry crew and women. Our message to these groups, and to any other UK-based seafarer who's lost work due to the pandemic, is that the MCG bursary could help you

get back into employment or retrain for a new role in the industry. It covers everything from certificate renewal to writing job applications, from retraining to interviewing skills. Just go to the Marine Society website and apply today."

Applicants can claim up to £500 towards training or qualifications of their choice. To find out more about the MCG Redundancy and Retraining Bursary Fund and how to apply go to

marine-society.org/redundancy-fund



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TUC publishes guidelines for a safe return to work and calls on employers to update risk assessments

The TUC has published a report warning that as hospitality and non-essential shops prepare to reopen in England infections could rebound if workplaces are not Covid-secure.

The study, titled *A Safe Return to the Workplace*, sets out a number of steps that the TUC wants ministers and employers to take to keep people safe at work and to prevent another spike in workplace infections.

These include: making sure that employers update their risk assessments to include what is now known about the importance of ventilation. Employers should allow as much work as possible to be done outside; they should

invest in ventilation systems; and they should enforce social distancing as well as the wearing of face masks. Employees who can work from home should continue to do so until June 21 at least.

Decent sick pay for all
A new TUC poll of private sector employers has revealed that of those who intend to use workplace testing, 28 per cent pay statutory sick pay of only £96.35 per week. The TUC is calling for this to be increased to at least the rate of the real Living Wage and extended to the two million low-paid workers who do not qualify for it currently.

Giving staff paid time off

to get vaccinated. The TUC is critical of a recent poll which reveals that less than half of the firms surveyed (45 per cent) gave their workforces paid time off to get the job. The TUC has the view that employers should be encouraging staff to get the vaccine but having been vaccinated should not be a condition of employment.

The TUC is calling on employers who are considering a Covid-status passport scheme to consult with recognised unions at sectoral and workplace level, but such a scheme will, the TUC points out, only work if employers provide decent sick pay.

Cracking down on bosses

who risk workers' safety. Despite thousands of workplace outbreaks, not a single employer has been fined and prosecuted for putting staff in danger. The TUC notes that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has still not amended its much-criticised designation of coronavirus as a "significant" rather than a "serious" workplace risk, which means that inspectors' enforcement options are limited.

The TUC wants the government to take a much tougher stance with companies who flout health and safety rules, as well as provide the HSE with a long-term funding boost.



RMT RETIRED MEMBERS' CONFERENCE

Retired members call for a campaign of education to challenge digital exclusion which is putting elderly people at a disadvantage

RMT's 2021 retired members' conference met in unprecedented circumstances for senior citizens across the globe. Describing the conditions of the pandemic, advisory committee chair Tony Donaghey said: "Older people in particular have been affected more than anybody else."

"That's not to underestimate the importance of all our people. Retired people, in unity with others in our country, will have to continue the struggle - and that includes RMT retired members," he said.

He also outlined the challenges placed on older generations by the transition to virtual meetings. "In terms of digital exclusion, elderly people have been ignored to a large extent. Adult education and retired people's education is almost non-existent. That's why we have to up our gear and continue the struggle that's going on - also in unity with the younger generation. Digital exclusion has excluded elderly people in terms of our everyday living, because it precludes older people from communication over everyday issues".

With the emphasis on cross-generational unity, it was fitting that delegates heard from RMT young members representative James Lynch. "We are probably two of the most important generations in terms of how we help each

other.

"That's the main positive we've learned from this pandemic in the context of our union," he said.

Delegates overwhelmingly endorsed a motion calling for the NEC to "organise a review of how our retired members could potentially be involved in further promoting RMT and progressive policies". Oliver New, London Transport retired members said: "We need to look at different ways to encourage branches to be active, without getting into strange disputes over the technicalities and the constitution. We need to get stuck in." Lesley Finlayson from the same branch added: "We've got a wealth of experience".

Conference also called for the union to publicise contact and meeting details for retired members' branches, including in the RMT diary and on the union's website. Frank Murray, London Transport retired members said: "We do need to get more publicity. A lot of people are complaining 'I don't know this branch existed'." He said that his own branch had "recruited a lot of people since this branch started, and with more publicity we could recruit a lot more".

Delegates agreed to composite two motions on digital exclusion and voted to take them forward as one to the union's AGM. The



combined resolution calls on the NEC to support the National Pensioners' Convention's campaign "to end digital poverty and exclusion" through both training and access to free broadband.

Andrew Warnock-Smith, North West and North Wales retired members said: "Older people have been discriminated against unless they have a digital connection. This campaign is that the government should be providing assistance in training, and in an ideal world the government should be providing free broadband and free laptops to all people, but at the very least to the over 75s".

But he also cautioned: "There are some older people who are not interested or don't want to be involved in digital inclusion, and they shouldn't be discriminated against. There should still be the ability for paper forms to be used, there should be the ability to pay in cash and there

should be the ability for people to go into banks".

Delegates congratulated the NEC on the union's campaign to renationalise the railways. A motion adopted by the conference noted that elderly people in particular "depend on a safe, reliable, accessible and affordable public transport system". Arthur Richardson, Wessex retired members said: "Leaving the EU has created a position where we're no longer bound by European Union directives and hat retired people of course need is a better integrated public transport system".

In another motion to be submitted to AGM, delegates endorsed a call for a new Act of Parliament to guarantee social care as part of the NHS. Tony Donaghey said: "The way old people have been dealt with in this pandemic is absolutely atrocious. That is irrespective of whether they went into hospital, or in care homes"

While supporting the



Frank Murray

motion, Oliver New cautioned: "I do think we've got to be careful - there's yet another government reorganisation of the NHS going on under the banner of integrated care."

Delegates heard from Bianca Todd of the Ron Todd Foundation which works to relieve poverty though providing education and resources. Outgoing RMT general secretary Mick Cash

told the conference: "Overall, looking back over the last six years as general secretary and almost 20 years as a full-time officer, we've made great strides over that period. Coming out of this where we are in a better position for the future is the next challenge for us. I'm confident we can survive this if we keep united and we keep relevant".

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Members can do this via the RMT website, telephone the RMT helpline above, or writing to the membership department at RMT head office, Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD.

President's column

LOOKING FORWARD

Well we have our new general secretary Bro Mick Lynch and I am excited about the future I hope we as an organisation can move forward together as the last year or so with the pandemic and organisational difficulties have been stressful for all.

I really do hope Brother Mick Cash has a long and prosperous retirement I am sure when he is refreshed, and getting under Dawn's feet we will see him engaging as a retired member or in another role connected with the movement.

He has a lot of talent and he did his best to guide our union through some extremely difficult times, it's been a difficult time for him but I know he enjoyed most if not all the hurdles that came his way and I wish him well and look forward to meeting at social events for a drink or two, take care and be kind to yourself brother.

I have been to conferences where I'm asked how I have found the role as president and sadly sometimes the response is not what folk expect to hear. I am extremely proud to be your national president and I have always tried to do my best but, I am also still me with opinions and views which some think I should not address, well that wasn't in the job description when I applied and over 30 years of membership gives me a right to an opinion just like everyone else and as a democratic union I would like to think that was acceptable.

I have accepted the criticism and views of others graciously and accept we all see things differently but we must still work to make our union the best it can be and that sometimes means accepting each other's view is it not?

If we don't personalise our opinions it makes debate and

disagreement easier to listen to. I know our general secretary also wants a new phase and future for our organisation to join forces as we have an onslaught of attacks across the whole of our members workplaces. Nowhere is exempt so I along with your general secretary and elected national executive members intend to get on with that job.

As lockdown restrictions come to an end we must be ready as workplace activists and members start engaging and making our workplace colleagues aware of the intentions of what lies ahead and recruit non-members to make defence of the terms and conditions that we have inherited are left in tack for future generations. That is a responsibility of all of us. The time is now and it's not up to someone else it's up to you!

We are not sure at this stage



how these attacks on jobs, pay, and conditions will be rolled out but we do know because of our involvement in RICF meetings that is there is millions of savings to be made via the government who allowed privatisation to rob the industries we work in of the profits which should have been re-invested to make our services the world's best.

However, that never happened and now investors want more so they think we the workers are fair game to take our pensions, our earning and our working weeks so join up, stand up and FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHTS!

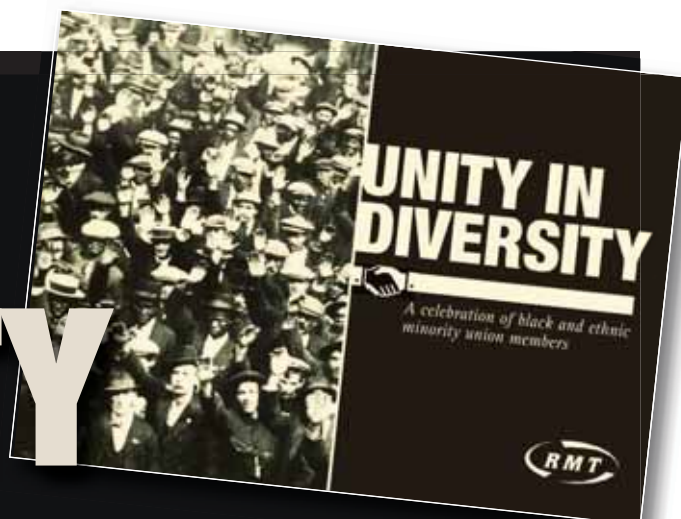
Solidarity
Michelle Rodgers

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

A celebration of black and ethnic minority union members

RMT published a pamphlet to mark the 25th anniversary of the union's black and ethnic minority members' advisory committee and its annual conference.

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ORGANISING CATERING WORKERS



This year's RMT hotel, catering and ancillary organising conference discussed issues facing the grade

With a disproportionately large number of members furloughed or stood off from duty, the Covid recovery was central this year's hotel, catering and ancillary grades conference.

"Once again I think we've proven our worth," conference president Derek England said. "Not just on trains, but on buses, and hotels where we have members. I call upon these industries to ensure they recognise our work and value us."

RMT senior assistant general secretary Steve Hedley said that the pandemic had "shown once and for all that you are key workers, you are essential workers". He added: "If you are an essential worker, you want the rewards that come with being essential worker. You don't just want a clap on a Thursday night, you want decent pay, decent conditions and a decent pension."

He said that the union's new national campaign to protect catering would be crucial for securing the future of jobs. "I want every region where we have catering members active to be setting up meetings," he told the conference. "It's absolutely essential that we start now in organising this grade properly. The situation prevailing out there now is that they are on the front foot and they are going to be attacking us."

Mandy Evans, Swansea No. 1 called for branches to "get our mapping done" of the catering membership in order to make this campaign as effective as possible. She said: "We are front line, we are out there, and we do a damn good job. When we talk about

a national push, lets go together, lets fight and lets get what we deserve."

Following a resolution from the 2020 conference which was endorsed at AGM, NEC member Bill Rawcliffe reported that work was underway to investigate the long-term health impacts of operating catering trolleys. "It is a major problem with these trolleys, they're unbelievably heavy and it's long overdue something's done about it," he said.

As well as the current national campaign to protect catering, delegates voted to revive the Bring Back the Buffet campaign to press for the return of physical buffet cars. Mandy Evans said: "Back in 2018 we started the campaign with the rollout of the new IETs, and over the last year it's been proven that that buffet would have been a massive advantage to Great Western."

"We were out campaigning and there was quite a bit of activity, and all of a sudden it died a death. This resolution is asking about a review of where we are with the national campaign, and to bring it back, and try and get some kind of facility - if it's not a buffet car, a shop - on the GWR fleet, and across the railway and maritime fleet."

Graham Roberts, Plymouth No. 1 said: "The majority of catering staff have been stood down because it's been unsafe to walk down the train. If we had a buffet we'd have been operating under the same system as any other shop in the country. Catering runs at a loss as they're always telling us, but it's losing even more if we're not doing anything."

Delegates also resolved to organise "to be one step ahead of the employers and not allowing them to dilute this grade". The successful motion from Swansea No. 1 called for the union to press employers for double manning, accurate recording of Covid-related absences and regular risk assessments. Mandy Evans said: "As we go forward, a lot of the grade feel this will be a beating to us as we recover. The sentiment around this is, we have carried right through Covid, we have been frontline, and this goes to every single worker in the industry."

Another resolution called for an end to employers' freezes on filling vacancies. The motion noted that this had resulted in "the long term and continuous cross covering of other catering roles". Conference president Derek England said: "This shows the absolute betrayal by management and the DfT of their loyal staff and the general public. These vacancies are not even being filled by staff in their overtime, they're just being left vacant."

In a motion from delegates voted to send to AGM, the conference raised concerns that "resolutions passed by delegates have been lost or not tabled in front of the appropriate bodies". Sarah Griffiths, Wolverhampton said: "Given the time, effort and cost of putting on this conference along with the time given up and commitment made by delegates, we feel this not only undermines the conference, but also the integrity of the union as a whole."

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The conference's second submission to AGM calls for the union to press for additional payments for new technology given to catering workers.

Martin Dean, Leeds City said: "On LNER during Covid the counteract the loss of the trolleys the company purchased an app similar to what you see in Wetherspoons."

"It's a bit unfair on us as catering workers that we're being penalised for embracing technology. This comes from a man that thinks TikTok is something a clock does on a wall and Twitter is something birds do," he said.

Jean-Paul O'Donoghue, Swansea No. 1 said: "This is going ahead on Transport for Wales and it's important that we get this in now, because it's in development with TfW".

Delegates heard presentations from message was echoed in a presentation from Richard Williams of the RMT legal department and Alan Pottage of the organising department, who said: "People turn round and ask what industrial power the catering grades have. If you get organised and you use that collective strength, it doesn't matter what job you do if you're prepared to fight". ■

A TUMULTUOUS JOURNEY

Conrad Landin talks with RMT member Abdul Mkith about his new book on escaping slavery and exploitation to become an offshore worker

The oil fields off Scotland's east coast have always bubbled with fascinating stories. But before Abdul Mkith's colleagues met him, it's unlikely they had ever heard anything like his.

Born in Sylhet, Bangladesh, "a beautiful place, magical place", he was brought to Britain aged 10 by a friend of his father's - who was so close to the family, Abdul considered her his relative. The family was in trouble after politicians took against Abdul's father, a village elder. "Politicians started fighting with my dad, things went wrong in the country. A lot of people respected my dad - but a lot of people didn't like him".

The next few years would be a tumultuous journey. His relative's apparent benevolence was in fact an act of child trafficking. When he was discovered during a drugs raid in the Scottish Highlands aged 14, he had suffered years of slavery and torture. For Abdul, an offshore cleaner and RMT member of eight years standing, the biggest miracle is that he survived to tell the tale.

And tell it he has, in a successful memoir, *The Locket and a Five Taka Note* - the title reflecting Abdul's sole possessions on his arrival in Britain. It tells the story not

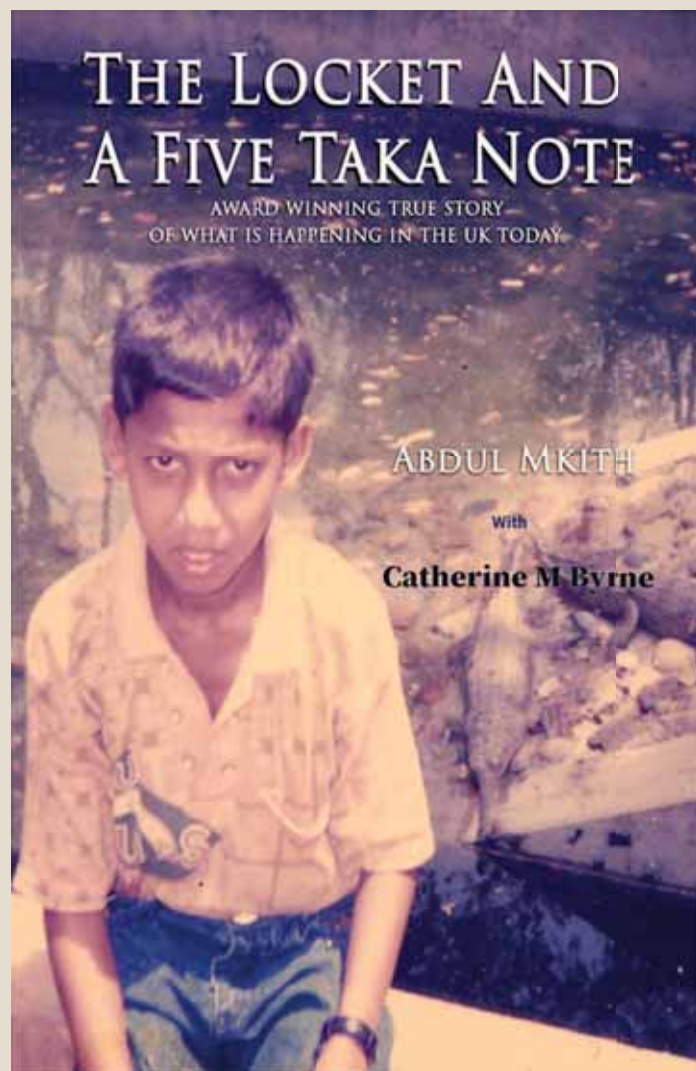
only of his childhood suffering - but his survival, recovery and continued struggles with his mental health.

Abdul was then brought up by foster parents in Wick - the northernmost tip of Scotland. Having missed out on years of school, he had a lot of catching up to do. And the years of abuse had left a heavy mark. "I started writing because there were so many things going on in my head. I couldn't focus anymore. I was learning English and my teacher said: 'maybe you need to write it down'. I said: 'I cannot write'".

But Abdul's teacher suggested that he record his memories and thoughts, and then suggested turning it into a book with the help of novelist Catherine M Byrne. "She asked me questions, the book was [finished] in a year, and she said: 'I want to take this book out, it's going to help a lot of people'".

Abdul's 'relative' had assured his family he would get a better education in a place of safety. His parents let him travel to Britain on the basis he would come back in "six months, a year, it's not a big deal". But the reality was very different.

Abdul had originally been put to work in a restaurant - pocketing his wages, of course. It was there he was



introduced to drug gangs and a man told him: 'you're going to come with me, I'll take you to Bangladesh, I'll educate you', and everything else. 'We'll make you a passport, take you to Bangladesh, [you

can] see your parents.' I thought, great news, maybe he's a nice guy - I was about ten years old. So, I went to him. And then my life started going to hell from there."

It was not just his own

treatment that was dark. Abdul was put up in houses where he witnessed rich, powerful men "have sex with young girls". Locked up for periods of ten days or more at a time, he watched comings and goings through a hole in his door. "They would put me on a bus, with someone sitting behind me, and they would tell the bus driver 'this is my son, going to see his mum and auntie in Scotland', or Brighton. They'd give the bus driver 50 quid and say 'let him off at that stop'. Another two guys would be sitting behind me, and I would be carrying drugs in a bag. I was going round all over the country, pretty much. I always had to come back to that house." He would witness "white, middle-aged guys" come to the house for "group sex" saying 'if you give me young girls, young European girls, Asian girls, I'll give you £100,000, for one night. Even now, when I see things, when I hear things, it's triggering me". One girl he met told him her parents were alcoholics and she had run away from home after being abused by her father. She was then exploited with the promise of rewards.

It was only years later that Abdul learned that his 'relative' had used him in as pawn in negotiations. When he was able to make contact with his birth family again, he was overwhelmed with it all. "I feel sorry for my dad. He sold everything he had looking for me. One brother went to Australia looking for me because they told him Abdul had been sent there, then the United States, one lie after another.

With a little encouragement, Abdul believes victims of trafficking and exploitation will be able to rebuild their lives. "I had nothing but I've built everything myself. Drugs is an easy route for anybody, but it's hard to come out of it. The only way to come out is in a box. Speak to people who can



help you, don't trust any people. [You] just need a little push in the right direction."

He says people trying to break out of similar situations needed support and patience - and not judgment for the life they have been forced to lead. "They think all society hates them, they will never get a job, they will never get a good lifestyle and the government doesn't help those people very much. They feel very isolated, they will get depressed and go back to that route again. So, the only thing I would say is give them some time".

He feels "quite lucky" with his employer and colleagues and praises his colleagues for

the support and solidarity they have offered him. "We have a good laugh, a good carry-on, it's good in here." But across Britain, he says racism and exploitation are present "every day". While he believes RMT does a good job of representing and supporting workers, he believes the union could do more to publicise what it can do to help people facing bullying at work.

"The union is good but there's not enough advertising [of it] going on. People these days want to know what they're getting." With more reassurance from the union that victims of bullying will be supported, Abdul believes more people will speak out.

"Helping people helped me with it. So much human trafficking, workplace bullying is going on in this country. I never knew those things before. I thought the country was beautiful. I know what I've been through in my life, [but I thought] maybe it's just me. And then I found out so many people went through, and are going through, the same. When they're phoning me saying "I read your book, thank you for telling your story, I feel stronger".

* *The Locket and a Five Taka Note* is available in paperback and Kindle editions from Amazon.



OBITUARY

REMEMBERING TONY

It is with deep regret that the union must inform members of the passing of Brother Anthony "Tony" Santamera last month. As a deeply committed member of the union, he will be deeply missed by the trade union movement and all that knew him.

Prior to retiring in 2003, he had over 38 years of loyal service to the National Union of Seamen/RMT and served as National Secretary from 1989.

Tony was a leading activist in the NUS regularly attending the meetings of the union's maritime branches and Biennial General Meetings

(BGM), proudly hosting the 1986 BGM in Liverpool's town hall. His influence and encouragement of his fellow workers and those in the sector at the time is still felt today and a number of whom were subsequently elected as officers of this union.

Throughout the early 1980's Tony was instrumental in ensuring support was given to other disputes including steel workers, construction, miners and dockers, proudly declaring that not one ounce of coal was conveyed to the Isle of Man during the 1984/85 miner's strike.

When elected National Secretary, Tony committed to

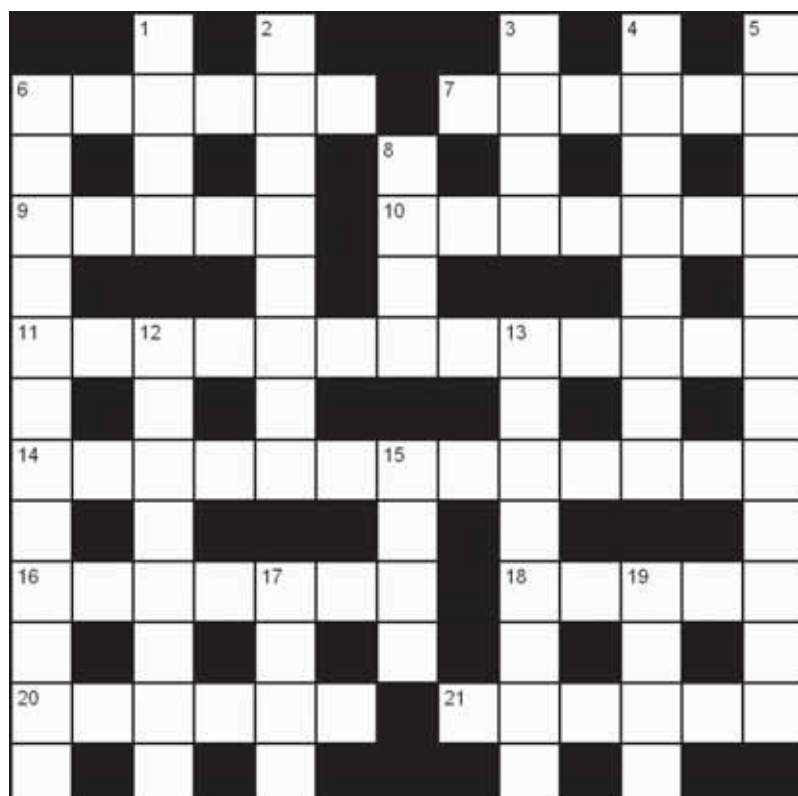
ensuring that the remnants of the P&O recognition agreement was resurrected following the 1988 dispute and a campaign of recruitment and organisation was undertaken. In the aftermath of the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster, followed by the loss of those on the Piper Alpha, Tony worked diligently to ensure that the UK's Maritime Coastguard Agency were pressing for improvements to safety standards on ferries, bulk carriers and offshore platforms.

Additionally, he was instrumental in forcing government to implement a

career-based training strategy to encourage young workers into the shipping industry as well as protecting the MNRPF, with appropriate legal action being taken to ensure the remaining companies were still accountable.

Furthermore, Tony was a community activist, taking part in the People's March for Jobs in 1982, the Chair of the Care Ashore charity for several years and worked hard to support the formation of the Liverpool Retired Seafarers with Brother Jonnie Cooper, which still exists today. A full appreciation of Tony's life will appear in next month's edition of RMT News. ■

£50 PRIZE CROSSWORD



Last month's solution...



Send entries to Prize Crossword, RMT, Unity House, 39 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD by June 12 with your name and address.

All winners will be announced at a later date as the Unity House offices are currently closed due to the pandemic.



Crossword sponsored by UIA

ACROSS

- 6 Woollen hat (6)
- 7 Recluse (6)
- 9 Embarrass (5)
- 10 Underwater projectile (7)
- 11 Dispiriting (13)
- 14 Bacteria (13)
- 16 Virtuoso artist (7)
- 18 Woollen fabric (5)
- 20 Tidy (6)
- 21 Toward the inside (6)

DOWN

- 1 Laughing ditch (2,2)
- 2 Advanced (4,4)
- 3 Twelve months (4)
- 4 Person with memory loss (8)
- 5 Determined (6,6)
- 6 Flattery (12)
- 8 Celestial body (4)
- 12 Astronaut (8)
- 13 Thrilling (8)
- 15 Impend (4)
- 17 At that time (4)
- 19 Stylish elegance (4)



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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** ☐

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

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Your signature

Date

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Reference Number

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Date

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- If you request RMT Credit Union Ltd to collect a payment, confirmation of the amount and date will be given to you at the time of the request.
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