

RMT *news*

Essential reading for today's transport worker

THE GREAT MONEY TRICK



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www.rmt.org.uk

WORKING FOR YOU



Use the QR code to join to get help at work and save 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

EMPLOYMENT TRIBUNALS

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.

RMT CREDIT UNION

Accessible savings and affordable loans from RMT's Credit union.
www.rmt.org.uk/about/credit-union

ONLINE SHOPPING DISCOUNTS

Shop online with RMTrewards.com and earn cashback savings from hundreds of retailers, like B&Q, Argos and Tesco. It's free to join, plus you'll get a FREE £10 Welcome Bonus in your online account! (Terms and conditions apply)
www.rmtrewards.com

FINES POOL

if you drive a company vehicle as part of your job you can join the RMT fines pool for £7 per year. The Fines Pool will reimburse members for any speeding fines, related court costs and lost time to attend a court hearing.
www.rmt.org.uk/member-benefits/fines-pool

BEREAVEMENT BENEFIT

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

CASHBACK PREPAID CARD

Fancy cashback on your everyday shopping? Use your RMT Prepaid Plus Cashback card at over 50 partner retailers, including Sainsbury's, ASDA and Boots, and earn unlimited cashback! It's different to a credit or debit card - you can only spend what you load so there's less chance of getting carried away.
www.rmtprepaid.com

FREE £5,000 ACCIDENTAL DEATH COVER

As a benefit of your RMT membership you can register for £5,000 Free Accidental Death Cover. Cover is for UK residents aged 18-69. 12 months free cover. Annually renewable and always FREE. The Cover is underwritten by Advent Insurance PCC Ltd – UIB Cell.
www.rmtprotect.com

HEALTH CASH PLAN

For a small monthly premium you can claim cash-back on dental, optical and therapy treatments. Visit
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CROSSWORD

EDITORIAL



THE GREAT MONEY TRICK

One of the recurring features of the privatisation of transport services has been the trick of turning public money into private profits for shareholders.

In fact, profiteering at Avanti has been celebrated with the now infamous power point slides extolling the virtues of the rail Service Quality Regime which rewards train operating companies without the need of any investment, 'free money!' as they gloated.

The rolling stock companies (ROSCOs) which own the trains have also seen profits treble and dividends of over £400 million without having to do any building or commissioning of trains.

Meanwhile the government has told Network Rail to make dangerous cuts to maintenance and is demanding that rail workers accept pay cuts. The proliferation of transport jobs being outsourced to sub-contractors has notoriously resulted in downward pressure on service quality as outsourcing companies look to reduce labour costs and maximise profits by cutting staff and increasing workloads.

As a result of these grotesque levels of profiteering millions of working people are desperate

for a change of government. Labour has promised to outlaw fire and rehire, ban the majority of zero hours contracts, strengthen collective bargaining rights and repeal anti trade union legislation.

RMT along with the other trade unions must ensure they keep their word and implement a full programme that benefits working people. Such policies would benefit all transport workers, but in particular those on casual or deeply exploitative contracts of employment such as contracted out cleaners, security, catering, infrastructure and other workers.

As an independent trade union, we will not give Labour a free pass to do whatever they like.

We need to build a broad alliance that can hold Labour to their promises and to make sure they deliver a working-class agenda when they are in office.

This includes bringing all outsourced contracts back in house, public ownership of the railways and a statutory charter for seafarers which is a Labour Party commitment, and we should push for public ownership of bus services.



CAMPAIGN: left to right Scottish regional council secretary Jim Gray, NEC member Willie Strang, Colin Symth Labour MSP, Mark Griffin Labour MSP Mary-Jane Herbison, Richard Leonard Labour MSP and RMT parliamentary convenor, RMT regional organiser Mick Hogg and Pam Duncan-Glancy Labour MSP.

NO DOO ON SCOTRAIL

RMT launches strike ballot on Scotrail over plans to introduce Driver-Only Operation

Over a hundred conductors on Scotrail are being balloted for strike action over Driver Only Operation (DOO) trains which will close on April 11.

Bosses at the Scottish government-run train company have said that Barrhead and East Kilbride routes can run services without a second member of staff at the discretion of the driver.

Convenor of the RMT's Scottish Parliamentary Group Richard Leonard MSP told a rally that guards on trains were not an added extra.

"They are an essential part of running a safe and accessible railway, providing assistance to passengers and life-saving help in the case of an emergency.

"It is not good enough for the Scottish government to wash its hands and say it is an 'operational matter' for ScotRail. The government now

owns ScotRail, so it is fully responsible for how this public transport service is run," he said.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch warned that Scotrail were trying to sneak through DOO via the backdoor by putting train drivers in a difficult position, giving them the power to decide whether a train runs or not without a second staff member on board.

"It is important for safety and the comfort of passengers that a second person is on these Scotrail services and we will resist all attempts to endanger our members jobs.

"The Scottish government needs to make an intervention to stop DOO on the Barrhead and East Kilbride routes taking place.

"Members will be incensed at the behaviour of Scotrail bosses and we are confident they will deliver a strong

mandate for strike action," he said.

The company has proposed to maintain the driver and conductor model of operation on the Barrhead and East Kilbride route. However, this comes with the following caveats:

- The driver will operate train doors - this means the driver will be responsible both opening and closing the doors.
- The conductor would remain on those services and focus on customer service duties, including but not limited to, proactive revenue collection and customer assistance. The conductor would play no part in the opening and closing of doors.

Scotrail has also offered to increase the ticket examiner staff numbers on the SMA

services. However, the company has stated that "there may be occasions when the driver considers it safe to proceed without a second member of staff available. The decision will always be made by the driver".

The union responded that it was clearly a direct attack on the safety critical role of the guard and a dilution of the responsibility and importance of a safety critical second person on board Scotrail services.

"The introduction of DOO is not only a breach to existing agreements, but also an open attack on Scotrail members who undertake a vital service for vulnerable passengers and all Scotrail users.

"I urge members to vote 'YES' for strike action and industrial action short of a strike," said Mick Lynch.



TUBE PAY WIN

Union wins significant uplift for lowest paid and seven per cent across other grades

RMT's victory in the pay dispute with London Underground (LUL) has delivered increases of up to 10 per cent for our lower paid members and an average pay rise of seven per cent across all grades.

This put massive pressure on Arriva Rail which runs London Overground services and on Transport for London which increased an imposed pay settlement for 2023 to broadly match the settlement on LUL for its 6,000 staff.

The LUL settlement followed weeks of discussion on how to use £30 million of additional funding for the pay round, which was made available by the Mayor of London, in return for a suspension of strike action.

In the run-up to strike action RMT pointed out that every member working for LUL generates £17,500 for the London economy based on what the Chambers of Commerce believe is lost as a result of strike action.

RMT regional organiser Jared Wood said that the planned action showed that all

grades play a critical role in keeping the tube going.

"RMT members in control centre functions were first to take action, over the weekend on 6/7 January, followed by action on different days by service controllers and then the bulk of operational and engineering members

"In the event the start of the action proved enough and the mayor made an offer to RMT of additional funding to reach an agreement on our pay.

"The strategy of imposing five per cent, which was only accepted by one other union, backfired spectacularly and managers who had been told to insist that no more is available were suddenly instructed to re-open talks," he said.

The eventual agreement gives an additional flat-rate consolidated increase of £1,000 on top of the 5% that was imposed. In addition, lower paid members receive an additional £400 or £200 consolidated. LUL has also starting the process of restoring discounted travel on



WIN: Engineering train drivers at Ruislip depot on January 6.

the mainline.

The offer does however highlight a problem in the way LUL treats those members on banded pay. The bands were not increased by the full award.

Further the increase to bands at the top was capped. This has the effect that a small number of members will receive the award as a non-consolidated payment. This is

something the union will return to in the 2024 claim.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch congratulated members on LUL as the settlement was a huge achievement.

"Increases average seven per cent across grades and achieving, for the first time in many years, a flat-rate element to the pay award that benefits the lowest paid most," he said. ■

LONDON OVERGROUND PAY WIN

RMT has won a significant pay rise for London Overground staff working for Arriva Rail London following the threat of strike action.

Workers overwhelmingly voted in favour of accepting the latest offer in an e-referendum which means the dispute is now settled and all planned strike action has been

cancelled.

RMT members have won a 6.5 per cent uplift for last year on all pay and allowances or a minimum payment of £2,000 for anyone with a salary of under £30,000.

They have also gained an uplift for this year on all pay and allowances of February RPI 2024 or a minimum

payment of £1,750 for anyone with a salary of under £32,000.

As well as an uplift next year on all pay and allowances of February RPI 2025 or a minimum payment for anyone earning less than £33,750, which will be negotiated in February 2025 as inflation forecasts become more accurate. All payments are

backdated to the relevant pay anniversary.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch congratulated London Overground members for showing such tremendous resolve in this dispute.

"Strong organisation and the threat of strike action has once again yielded results," he said. ■

NORTHERN TRAINS WORKERS STRIKE

Contracted out gateline workers at Northern took further strike action on March 16 in a dispute over pay, union recognition and working conditions.

RMT members working for Carlisle Support Services on the Northern contract set up picket lines in Manchester, Leeds and Wigan.

Among the demands of workers is the ending of zero hours contracts and the removal of the Timegate app which has failed to accurately calculate pay and leave allowance.

Carlisle Support Services who runs the contract for gateline workers at Northern do not provide sick pay, holiday pay and provide significantly lower wages to their staff compared with the rest of Northern.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said that the company had shown no regard for their staff.

"We will continue our industrial campaign until we can reach a negotiated settlement.

"Ultimately the only long-term solution is to end contracting out and bring the gateline contract back in house with all the benefits of direct employment from Northern," he said. ■



SOMERSET RALLIES AGAINST BUS CUTS



Union backs campaign to stop First Bus slashing services across the county

RMT members have united with Somerset bus campaigners in a bid to halt swingeing cuts to vital routes.

Following the successful demonstration in Yeovil, Somerset Bus Partnership organised another rally in February to oppose the significant service reductions on the 25 bus route with buses every three hours instead of two.

Three other bus routes are also affected, with the 54 and 58 service from Taunton to Yeovil and Yeovil to Wincanton facing the axe altogether. The 28 bus service from Minehead to Taunton is also facing a

reduction to its timetable.

The rally took place in Wiveliscombe Town Square and people were encouraged to attend the rally via the bus from Taunton which stops at Norton, Cotford, Hillcommon and Milverton and arrived in Wiveliscombe before moving on to Dulverton.

Cuts to local bus services will be devastating for local communities and companies like First Bus should be putting passengers before profits.

David Northey from Somerset Bus Partnership said that it was important to get members of the public involved "to show that actually, the bus

services really matter to them".

RMT regional organiser Barry West said that the bus services were a "vital and critical link" and the cuts could have an impact on jobs in the area.

"We want to support these people in these local rural communities.

"Many people who depend on these are vulnerable, the elderly and the disabled," he said.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said that First Bus must heed the calls of the local community and halt the cuts to services that are being proposed.

"Deregulation and privatisation lie at the heart of the disintegration of local bus services over the years.

"Passengers and bus workers must be prioritised with local authorities being given sufficient ring-fenced funding from the government so they can deliver the bus services their communities require via a publicly owned municipal bus company that also owns its buses and depots.

"RMT will continue to support this campaign until decent bus services are provided for the people of Somerset," he said. ■

CHURCHILL CLEANERS MESS ROOM WIN

Churchill cleaners on the GTR contract have finally won the right to decent messroom facilities at Caterham Station.

This follows a nine-year campaign, including a site

visit by RMT health and safety reps in December 2022 which showed that the condition of the facilities safety regulations.

Following discussions with the employer and the client, it

has now been agreed that GTR will fund full renovation works starting in April 2024.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch described this as a great win for Churchill members.

"This campaign really showed how determination and long-term strategy combined with collective action can win a better working environment," he said. ■



Packed young members conference discusses industrial unity

Industrial unity must override any petty differences within the union, was the message from RMT young members conference in Wigan recently.

Up to 50 delegates were in Wigan for the annual conference where young members from across the railways and maritime industries decide their priorities for the coming year.

Keynote speaker RMT senior assistant general secretary Eddie Dempsey gave an in-depth speech about the need for tolerance within the union and respect for people's differences while trying to maintain and foster unity.

"We need to get our people in our organisation wherever they work into a position where they can and are prepared to take effective[strike] action if they need to.

"We recruit somewhere up to 14,000 new members every

year in order to stay still. There are new people coming in and our organisation changes all the time.

"The activist layer of the union who are really engaged have to stay closely in tune with our members and where they are at, so, you to have a great amount of tolerance.

"I have my own strong political beliefs - lots of people do. But we must recognise that others have different ideas, so we have to build unity in a way that doesn't alienate people. We have to be kind to each other, understand where people are coming from to bring them along with you," he said.

Mr Dempsey recalled times as an activist where he worked with a member who had totally different views but the same determination to work for the benefit of the members.

"We live in a time where differences between people

are highlighted so sharply in debate and online. In the union we organise people on the basis they are workers and that is it.

"I think being the union is the strongest way to build unity with people.

"But taking part in a strike and being in comradeship with people from those different backgrounds and cultures, will bring them along and change their minds, I've seen it happen time and time again," he added.

Mr Dempsey also warned that the mainstream media and employers try to exploit differences between the lay union membership and the elected leadership of RMT.

He said to laughs from the audience: "They describe people like me as a baron. A baron?"

"They portray us an evil group of people sitting in head office moving chess

pieces on a board and all the members dance to our tune and do whatever we think but that is not how we work".

Reflecting on how industrial disputes play out, Mr Dempsey said that strike action was "tactic" and not an end in itself.

"In industrial disputes, we of course have the ability and willingness to take strike action as well as taking a step back and negotiating," he said.

Expanding on the need to be adaptable and the fact rail companies are indemnified against losses by the government, he added: "We need to be able to change our tactics. It is taxpayer money - they spent billions subsidising these companies during our disputes.

"Our cleaners who were contracted out also saw their employers indemnified against losses.

"The Transport ministry is

directly responsible for the industrial relations environment in those contracts," he said.

Other speakers to address conference included SOAS professor of economics Costas Lapavistas and Stop The War organiser Grace Roisin.

Professor Lapavistas cited statistics showing declines in manufacturing and a rise in services jobs over the past four

decades.

"I've been in this country for 45 years and I've never known it in a worse situation.

"Basically, growth has been going down every decade and the worst decade was the 2010s, an appalling decade – and this one is shaping up to be worse. It's obvious that Britain needs shaking from below.

"Trade unions are the only part of society that seems to have some life in it. The top is plugged in immobility and it needs to be shaken and it needs radical proposals from below," he said.

And Ms Roisin praised RMT for its stance against Israel's war on Gaza where the union has spoken on Palestine solidarity platforms.

Delegates at conference also debated motions on diverse topics such as a graduate membership rate where they want "a new membership rate titled 'apprentice/graduate' that is the same as RMT's lower membership rate. Conference also elected a new chair in Sarah Cundy and vice chair Freddie Seale. ■

ORGANISING THE WORKPLACE

This year's young members conference included a workshop run by LU Fleet Functional Council rep Rhys Harmer dealing with how to organise at the workplace and how to plan for ballots for industrial action.

Delegates came up with ideas on what an organised

workplace looked like including issues such as democracy, unity and workers having a voice in work. This can be improved with high levels of membership, reps being accountable to their members and information being available to members regularly.

Following on from a discussion on what practical things activists and reps can do to organise their workplace, the group discussed four real workplaces; an engineering depot, outsourced cleaners, station grades and an oil rig on what issues there would be locally

and how to deal with them.

Rhys Harmer said that it led on to a discussion on how to win a workplace ballot.

"There were great, fresh ideas that opened up debate and difference of how to approach the workplace issues we see on a day-to-day basis," he said. ■

BIDVEST CLEANERS TAKE 48-HOUR STRIKE ACTION

RMT members working for Bidvest Noonan on Alstom NTL and TPE contracts took strike action recently in Glasgow and Manchester.

The cleaners are taking action over pay and working conditions having rejected

the latest offer from the company.

The RMT members will also be taking industrial action short of strike by not undertaking any biological hazard cleaning.

RMT general secretary

Mick Lynch said that it was always a major step to take strike action when trying to agree a negotiated settlement.

"But for some of the lowest paid workers on the railway network, it is even

more of a sacrifice.

"Bidvest Noonan need to understand that our determination and support for our members will continue for as long as it takes to reach a deal," he said. ■



STRIKE: Members at Manchester Traincare Centre, Longsight who work on the Alstom Northern Trains and Transpennine Trains contracts



FIGHTING FOR SIGNALLING WORKERS

RMT signalling and operating grades meeting in Devon vow to resist anti-union laws

RMT senior assistant general secretary Eddie Dempsey warned signal workers meeting in Torquay that the Tory government had brought in new anti-union laws specifically to target rail workers.

"The Tory minimum service levels legislation is designed to force workers to break strike action which they may well have voted for.

"As a result, this vicious legislation will have consequences and amounts to a direct attack on the health and safety of rail workers.

"What could be more stressful than being handed a work notice demanding that you break a strike that your friends and workmates are taking?

"That is dangerous and undermines the right to withdraw your labour and threatens the safety of rail workers and the general travelling public," he said.

He explained that Network Rail planned to make £1.2 billion worth of cuts over the next five years to renewals expenditure which would also have a negative effect on safety and performance.

"The government intends to abolish the Track Renewal Service (TRS) within Network Rail, cut maintenance work on track, signalling and other assets at a time of extreme weather events such as the one which caused the Carmont 2020 rail disaster," he warned.

He also outlined how



TRIBUNAL: Eddie Dempsey presents Alexander Seal with a tankard following his long battle for justice after being sacked by Network Rail (see page 26). Alex recently won an employment tribunal after a two-year struggle. He now works on the award-winning South Devon Railway, a heritage line which runs along the stunning valley of the River Dart between Buckfastleigh and Totnes.



RETIREMENT: RMT assistant general secretary Eddie Dempsey presents retirement plates to Dave Filby, Dave King and Paul Mallinder.



RETIREMENT: Eddie Dempsey presented Phil Boorman with a retirement plate after 41 years service to the union. Phil received a prolonged standing ovation for his huge contribution to conference and the union. He served in many positions including acting as president and secretary of the signalling grades conference at the same time.

Network Rail was morphing into a commissioning body rather like Transport for London.

"Rail privatisation has clearly failed as most railways are now run under the auspices of the Department of Transport, but the private companies still get their profits.

"Therefore, big changes are coming at Network Rail and we need to be aware and respond accordingly," he said.

Network Rail national lay council RMT reps Mark Bellenie and Matt Bentley gave in-depth reports on the many issues facing Network Rail signalling and operations members including rosters, re-grading and an update on the need to ensure that workers did not exceed 60 working hour per week.

"The employers seem to be cutting corners to save money in some areas and this needs to stop.

"We know what the solution is, employ the correct number of staff," he said.

Network Rail RMT national

lay health and safety reps AJ Yates and Chris Knibbs also gave a full report on issues facing the grade including track possessions and the impact of the controversial Modernising Maintenance programme on operations.

"The union did not agree to the Modernising Maintenance programme but it is going to backfire and its impact will be felt for years," warned Chris Knibb.

Speaking for the union's national executive committee and fellow signaller Steve Conway said that members can be very proud of what the union had achieved over the last year in the national dispute.

He pointed out that the government had spent billions to indemnify the employers in a failed attempt to break the union.

"The reality is that we took on a vicious right-wing Tory government and prevented the extension of DOO, stopped ticket office closures and today we remain united and ready to fight," he said. ■



DART: Conference delegates visited the Dart Valley Railway, possibly the only heritage railway that can operate with all full-time staff due to its popularity all year round with its steam trains, boat trips and paddle steamers. The line lets you enjoy the delights of Torbay to Kingswear taking passengers across the glorious South Devon coastline along the River Dart.



DEBATE: RMT national lay council rep Mark Belleine leads a session of questions and answers following an in-depth report back.



RMT WOMEN UNITE

Union's women conference met recently in Poole at the Royal National Lifeboat Institute College

Donna Jones, Poole and District Bus welcomed delegates to the packed conference explaining the significance of the venue as this year marks the 200th anniversary of the RNLI, an important national institution based in the town.

Jessica Robinson, Darlington No 1 called on RMT's women members to fight to prevent the re-election of the Conservative Party in this year's general election which she argued was part of the wider struggle to defend women's rights.

"The rise of the far right in Europe and across the globe is troubling, and all evidence suggests that the Tory Party is leaning further and further towards adopting a far-right ideology.

"They no longer bother to hide their rampant racism, xenophobia and transphobia, and it is only a matter of time before open misogyny once again becomes the norm.

"A covenant of the far-right ethos is 'a woman's place is in the home' – how will our hard-

fought equalities fare under a UK government heading further and further in this direction?" Jessica asked.

Marie Harrington, Piccadilly & District West, added that what was needed was "clear, easily accessible guidelines for any member who wants them.

"This will empower every single member to have those conversations with their colleagues in order to confidently and articulately educate them on how best to use their vote, and thereby protect all members from any further shifts to the far right within the UK," she said.

Marie also told delegates about The National Black Women's Justice Institute findings that black women are disproportionately at risk of sexual violence, with nearly one in five black women being survivors of rape and 41 per cent experiencing sexual coercion and other forms of unwanted sexual contact.

She told delegates about the TUC Race Relations Sub Committee's ground-breaking research on the issue.

Calling for RMT to initiate complementary research on this issue promptly Marie said that this should be carried out in collaboration with the Black & Ethnic Minority Members' Committee and, most importantly, with the Black women for whom it is intended.

Jessica Robinson, in her position as Women's Committee chair, gave a report of the Committee's work over the last year. She talked about the international work and her experience as a delegate to a recent International Transport Federation conference in Senegal.

She outlined some of the appalling experiences of women transport workers in other countries and how they were organising and fighting back.

Guest speaker Cllr Sue Aitkenhead, who represents Poole Town, gave delegates a background to the local political situation where she is one of two Labour councillors.

Talking a little about the local geography she outlined

how important public transport is to the local economy.

"Thank you for being the lifeblood of our local community and running our public transport," she said.

Sue told delegates about the fight to become a Labour councillor in a Conservative stronghold and gave an emotional account of how it was RMT who paid for the leaflets that helped her win the election, and thanked delegates to great applause.

Jas Breyal, national executive committee, reported on the progress of last year's resolutions. There was a discussion on flexible working and the forthcoming changes to legislation that is being introduced. From April this year changes include the right to make a flexible working request from the first day of employment instead of having to wait for 26 weeks of service. Employees are also allowed to make two requests to change their working arrangements per year rather than the one that was the case previously.

Delegates made it clear that

flexible working was very much a women's issue and gave accounts of how it was commonplace for staff to be refused their requests or be given what they have asked for on condition of a wage reduction.

Jess Webb, national policy department, led a lively workshop on the Women's Charter and gave a presentation of the responses from a recent survey of female members.

RMT health and safety officer Sarah Friday called on delegates to recruit more women as health and safety reps as they are currently under-represented. She said that the TUC was also running a campaign on the issue.

RMT assistant general secretary John Leach told delegates that the conference was an integral part of the union. He reported that the

union had recently been through the biggest disputes in its entire history with the recent national strike actions on the train operating companies and Network Rail.

"It was so heartening to see new people on our picket lines," he said.

John outlined the current situation with negotiations on pay. He told delegates that if the negotiations fail then the union would have no choice but to be back in dispute. ■



RMT assistant general secretary John Leach addresses conference



A NEW DEAL FOR WOMEN

RMT delegation to TUC women's conference calls for women's voices to be heard

RMT's 13-strong delegation joined 300 women trade unionists at the 2024 TUC women's conference. Delegation lead Jessica Robinson, elected to the TUC Women's Committee, moved both successful RMT resolutions – safety of women and girls on public transport and recruiting women seafarers.

The motion on safety, composited with one from ASLEF, focussed on the violence faced by women transport workers and the survey carried out by RMT at the end of last year.

Jessica Robinson was commended by other delegates for a powerful opening speech, referencing the varied selection of insults and abuse she receives from

men on every Saturday evening shift on the railway and berating employers for leaving women feeling that there was no point in reporting assaults.

RMT delegate Martha Ejizu made an impassioned speech on empowerment and inclusion of a more diverse collection of women in the trade union movement and Mandy Evans spoke on the closure of the steelworks in Port Talbot. Annila Saghir earned applause when speaking on her work on period poverty and menopause policies, referencing Avanti West Coast's patronising 'menopause kit' given out to women.

"It's ironic that a consistently failing franchise is



offering me a paper clip to 'keep it all together' – theirs must be huge!" she said to applause.

There were constant references to sexual harassment scandals occurring within the trade union movement itself, culminating in a fringe panel discussion from MeTU headed by RMT's

Mel Mullings. The ongoing theme of women not being heard or taken seriously even within our own movement, particularly Black women, was something that all trade unions must combat with examples of working toolkits for trade unionists and the banning of Non-Disclosure Agreements exemplified by CWU. ■

RAIL CUTS WARNING



Rail Cuts Cost Lives rally outside the House of Commons in London

MPs and rail workers warned of dire consequences of over a billion pounds worth of cuts to track renewals work on the railways during a rally outside parliament.

RMT senior assistant general secretary and lead officer for Network Rail Eddie Dempsey said that union members were warning there was not enough staff to do the job.

"The staff they have are suffering heavily from fatigue and are overworked which is not what you need in a safety critical industry.

"Our members tell us that safety standards are falling and that the condition of railway assets are in decline.

"I take no pleasure in saying this but 9 out of 10 of our members are saying they are fearful that we will see another major railway incident in the next two years as a result of these cuts".

Mr Dempsey pointed out that passengers may not see the immediate impact of these cuts, but it will become more

noticeable down the line.

"What we need is a publicly funded railway at the right level of investment that is safe for passengers and workers alike. And critically we need to see it in public ownership," he said.

Other key facts in the survey of Network Rail members include over three quarters of Network Rail workers think the railway is less safe than it was two years ago.

Over 94 per cent believe that performance and reliability will worsen during the next five-year period.

Anonymous RMT members working on Network Rail have spoken out about their worries about NR cuts.

One said: "I am a rail testing team leader and already since modernising maintenance has started there have been more broken rails in the last six weeks than we have had in years. That is not just on my route but all over the country. Our training centre...is getting broken rails brought to them to for

inspection every week now".

Another said: "Planned cuts have staff morale at an all-time low as it's us who maintain the railway and management aren't listening to us about the seriousness of cutting maintenance schedules and diluting skill levels on jobs. It's front-line staff that will carry the can for any serious incidents!!!"

Several Labour and independent MPs attended the rally against Network Rail's plans which will also see in-house track renewal service cut at a cost of 500 skilled jobs.

Cuts to maintenance and renewals work across the network, leading to a less safe and less reliable service is also widely expected.

Speaking at the rally, Hayes and Harlington MP John McDonnell recalled the disasters at Southall and Paddington, near his west London constituency, earlier this century.

"We are on that slippery slope again and we must not tolerate going back to those

bad old days," he said.

Gateshead MP Ian Mearns warned that the planned cuts could "potentially cost lives".

"We need to have a railway that is safe for the public to use," he said.

Wansbeck MP Ian Lavery praised RMT's campaigning for workers across the industry.

Islington North MP Jeremy Corbyn said that Network Rail's plans would mean fewer staff working on railway repairs and maintenance, risking both safety and delays to services.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said that the cuts, if they go ahead, would make the railways less safe and further impact on the performance of the network.

"Cracked rails are being reported alongside extreme weather events which have led to disasters like Carmont in 2020.

"It is vital that we maintain the pressure on the government to deliver the right funding package for our railway infrastructure," he said.



NO TO RAIL CUTS IN SCOTLAND

Scotland's First Minister was urged to come clean over rail infrastructure cuts as RMT members rallied outside the Scottish parliament Holyrood recently, writes Conrad Landin.

Humza Yousaf was challenged by Richard Leonard, the convener of the RMT parliamentary group in the Scottish Parliament, who highlighted the "£315 million cut to Scotland's safety-critical rail infrastructure spending", along with 70 redundancies and a further 80 jobs put at risk.

The Scottish Government's funding settlement for the next five-year Railway Control Period 7 (CP7), from 2024 to 2029, will see Network Rail Scotland's budget for vital railway infrastructure work cut by £315 million - 13 per cent - compared with the previous five-year period. Though rail infrastructure in Scotland remains under Network Rail control, the infrastructure budget is set at Holyrood and not at Westminster.

At First Minister's Questions, Leonard asked:

"Which is correct: the Government's assertion to Parliament that rail infrastructure spending is rising, or the view of experienced railway workers who insist that Scotland's rail infrastructure budgets and jobs are being axed?"

Mr Yousaf said that his government "appreciated and shared" the union's view "that rail safety should absolutely be prioritised" but insisted: "We do not agree with its assertion that rail infrastructure funding is being cut".

Outside the Scottish Parliament, RMT members held a 'Rail Cuts Cost Lives' rally urging the reinstatement of the £315 million cut.

RMT assistant general secretary Eddie Dempsey said that historically rail cuts had been catastrophic yet history was repeating itself.

"We are now seeing a £1 billion real terms cut in terms of core renewals work on the railway in Britain.

"Network Rail is not going to carry out a single yard, inch or foot of track renewals work



PROTEST: Eddie Dempsey, Monica Lennon and Gordon Martin

over the next five years. They are going to do some renewals work but only by private contractors at a far greater cost and far less efficient rate.

RMT Scotland regional organiser Gordon Martin also said that the cuts were a serious matter.

"When things go wrong on the rail infrastructure, they go spectacularly wrong and unfortunately people lose their lives such as at Carmont near Stonehaven, where people lost their lives due to infrastructure

failures.

The derailment at Carmont occurred on August 12, 2020, causing the deaths of driver Brett McCullough, conductor Donald Dinnie and passenger Christopher Stuchbury. Its immediate cause was a "washout" following heavy rainfall. Network Rail admitted a series of failings - but got off with a fine of just £6.7 million.

Monica Lennon MSP, who serves on the Scottish Parliament's transport committee, commended RMT for its campaigning to keep members and the public safe.

"It's frustrating that you have to stand outside Parliament, time and time again, fighting for policies and investment that is absolutely common sense," she said.

Scottish Labour transport spokesman Alex Rowley told the rally: "If we are serious about getting more people off their cars and onto public transport then that public transport needs to be of the highest standard and it has to be safe". ■



THE GREAT MONEY TRICK



How government and privateers collude to drive down standards to keep up profits

The basket case of rail privatisation has been getting a lot of media and Parliamentary attention recently, exposing the cosy relationship between rolling stock companies (ROSCOs), poorly performing private train operating companies (TOCs) and a Department for Transport (DfT) which is desperate to keep them in the game at all costs.

Extraordinary power point slides leaked onto social media from an 'all managers call' at Avanti West Coast has exposed the company gloating at the government's open cheque book relationship with the company.

In the slides, titled, *"Roll up, roll up, get your free money here"*, the managers joke that the company can get easy money through the Service Quality Regime without having to pay for it with any investment, rounding off by crowing that the government doesn't even expect them to deliver high scores in return.

RMT has also called upon

the Transport Secretary Mark Harper to reverse Avanti train service cuts which will mean there will be no direct train between Shrewsbury and London from June 2024.

Moreover, Avanti also intends to make its onboard catering cashless for passengers which means that passengers can still buy onboard tickets but will not be able to order food or drink in the same way.

These damaging decisions have been taken according to Avanti to "reduce public subsidy and put the railway on a more sustainable financial footing", including removing 200 staff since it took over the franchise.

This is all despite the fact that the publicly-subsidised company has paid out more than £24 million in dividends to shareholders in the last two years.

With the abolition of rail franchising and the phasing in of new contracts, the government and the taxpayer directly pay to lease the trains from the ROSCOs which own

them. In the last five years, the ROSCOS have jacked up the cost of their leases by around 66 per cent so that it now represents around a quarter of TOC spending.

As a result, the ROSCOs, mostly owned by banks around the world, have handed out more than £400 million in dividends to shareholders (see below).

Under the new National Rail Contracts, the government also pays the TOCs a management fee, composed of a Fixed Fee element and a Performance Based Fee (PBF) element.

The performance element is generally two thirds of the maximum that can be earned. To earn its maximum a TOC must hit agreed 'benchmark' scores on their Operational Performance, Customer Satisfaction, Service Quality Standards, Financial performance and Business Management.

Every reporting period, the TOC is required to submit reports and data demonstrating its performance

against the different headings. The reports are then used to create an assessment of the TOC's Performance Based Fee for each year.

Whatever the TOC earns in the form of a PBF is then added to the Fixed Fee, paid out along with the Contract Payments the next year and may be distributed as a dividend by the company. In their most recently available accounts, TOCs paid out £132 million in dividends to shareholders last year.

According to senior civil servant Conrad Bailey, speaking at the Transport Select Committee recently, this system is supposed to drive quality in services by providing incentives for success. But that's not how it's working.

As Avanti's slides show, TOC managements believe that they can make the system work for them and their profit margins. As Avanti joked, in reality, it's easy money: *"But wait – do they want 100% compliance? No! 7, 8 or 9 out of 10 is asked for across the different areas of our customer*

experience portfolio...And here's the fantastic thing! If we achieve those figures they pay us some more money – which is ours to keep – In the form of a performance-based fee!!”

WE HAVE STANDARDS WE CAN LOWER

So what happens if the targets prove too tough? The DfT simply lowers them. As the Financial Times reported in February, at least one operator has had its benchmarks significantly lowered because it was proving too difficult to meet them. The National Rail Contracts give the Secretary of State the power to vary the targets by agreement with the operators at any time and that's exactly what happened to Govia Thameslink Railways.

In 2022-23, Govia failed to hit its benchmarks 100 per cent of the time on the condition of its stations. This measures things like the condition of lighting, seating, shelters and

canopies, lifts, escalators and ramps, toilet operation, car and cycle parking and vegetation. Govia also missed 85 per cent of its benchmarks on the information it provides at its stations. This measures things like Customer information screens/displays, help points, posters and frames, its public address system, signage and the information it provides during delays.

Finally, it triggered contraventions of its contract in relation to the cleanliness of its trains and stations. Significantly, station and train cleaning on Govia is outsourced to sub-contracting cleaning company Churchill. Outsourcing notoriously results in downward pressure on service quality as outsourcing companies look to reduce labour costs and maximise profits by cutting staff and increasing workloads.

These failures should constitute contraventions of

Govia's contractual requirements as it would negatively affect Performance Based fee scores (and therefore profits margins) and might even form grounds for terminating the contract.

Instead, the DfT, which faced a concerted campaign back in 2022 by the union calling on it not to award the contract to GTR, bailed the company out yet again by lowering its benchmarks.

In 2023-24, with the agreement of the DfT, the benchmarks were lowered on four of the five headings that were causing Govia problems, making it appear to have improved when in fact the standards it is supposed to meet have simply been dropped.

In the process the DfT is helping Govia avoid embarrassing contractual penalties and make it easier to win their profit awards. For passengers, of course, it means

that Govia is being rewarded for its failure to keep passengers informed, or to keep its stations and trains well maintained and clean.

Questioned on this in Parliament by Labour MP Fabian Hamilton, the DfT helpfully explained that the whole regime only works if the TOCs can hit their targets.

As Mr Hamilton observed “normally, if you lower the performance standards there is a better chance of actually exceeding them and gaining the bonus” to which the DfT replied: “They are designed to be set each year so that they are a fair and reasonable test for the operators that drive them to be a good and efficient operator”.

This arrangement keeps the private companies in the game and perpetuates the fiction that they are efficient operators which embodies the trick of turning public money into private profit. ■

ROSCO 'RACKET' ROLLS ON

The private rolling stock companies (ROSCOs) that lease out trains for Britain's railway have seen profits treble in a year, with more than £400 million paid in dividends, up from £122.3 million the year before, official figures show.

The rolling stock companies paid out a total of £409.7 million to shareholders and profit margins rose by 41.6 per cent in 2022-23, according to the rail regulator Office of Rail and Road (ORR), as the rest of the railway has been instructed to make huge cuts and freeze pay.

Financial analysis by the ORR revealed that although the total in leasing costs paid by train operators fell slightly last year to £3.1 billion, it is still almost 30 per cent higher than five years ago, in a period when overall rail industry staff costs remained static.

Since the collapse of

franchising, train operating companies contracts are now structured for the government to make up the shortfall between revenue and costs, meaning taxpayers are now effectively paying the £3.1 billion spent last year on leasing trains, almost a quarter of total industry costs.

Moreover, the Department for Transport has not renegotiated lease payments to rolling stock companies, despite demanding that Network Rail and train operators find huge savings through cuts.

The three rolling stock companies are Eversholt, Porterbrook and Angel Trains. They were created at privatisation with the controversial sell-off of state-owned British Rail trains, and still lease most passenger and freight trains.

According to the *Guardian*

newspaper they have paid cumulative dividends of around £2 billion in the last decade and the highest-paid directors earn almost twice as much as the chief executive of Network Rail, Andrew Haines.

According to its latest accounts, filed last year, Eversholt, a subsidiary of Li Ka-shing's Hong Kong firm CK Hutchison, paid dividends of £40.7 million in 2022, while its chief executive, Mary Kenny, was paid over one million pounds.

Porterbrook, owned by a group of shareholders led by Luxembourg-based insurer Allianz and Canadian pension fund AIM, paid dividends of £80 million in 2022, while chief executive Mary Grant was paid £1.2 million.

Angel Trains, majority-owned by the Canadian pension fund PSP, paid dividends of £124.6 million,

and chief executive Malcolm Brown received only £900,000.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said that the firms neither built nor commissioned trains but were taking huge profits.

“If a traditional company invests, researches and spends its capital, then they've got the right to make a return – but the rolling stock leasing companies don't do that. They are a middle person between essentially now the taxpayer and the manufacturers.

“These fancy financial instruments and leasebacks are just another version of PFI, which have been a disaster for our hospitals and local councils. It's legal, but there is a racket going on, where the structure of rolling stock leasing has just created massive dividends and massive profits entirely without risk,” he said. ■

HEALTH AND SAFETY FIRST

RMT's 2024 health and safety conference warns that cost-cutting can kill



Over 200 delegates attended RMT's annual health and safety conference meeting in York which was held amid the campaign to prevent Network Rail's planned cuts of £1.2 billion.

RMT senior general secretary Eddie Dempsey warned that the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) funding for Control Period 7 (CP7) underlined Network Rail's plans to cut over a billion of renewals funding in England and Wales and £315 million of renewals funding in Scotland when compared to CP6.

"The union has launched a campaign to restore renewals funding before the Network Rail delivery plan for CP7 begins in April.

"We have held days of action leafletting hundreds of

stations and surveyed over 1,000 members who work in Network Rail in maintenance grades to expose the damaging effects of these cuts.

"It is not surprising that we have discovered that there are critical shortages of staff and a rapidly declining safety culture and the knock-on effect of that is a rapidly declining state of safety for the travelling public.

"We have got an underfunded railway that is awash with contractors and private spivs, we've got a regulator that to call 'asleep at the wheel' is too kind; they're comatose! And that is a very toxic mix," he said.

Eddie emphasised the importance of the conference and outlined how the union was also working on other

campaigns including working in high-temperatures, issues around toilet dignity, and staff assaults.

"Frontline workers are also facing increasingly violent assaults, stabbings and attacks with weapons of all kinds and we are working toward an industry wide campaign group exposing how the BTP are under resourced and understaffed," he said.

He also spoke about the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act and how for the "last forty years the neo-liberal economic model that we've got is absolutely hostile to the presence of trade unions everywhere, absolutely hostile to the state-ownership of our public services and what that has meant is an absolute decline of one of the main

pillars of upholding that legislation and that is the presence of a fully-trained Health and Safety representative.

"If you do not have a trade union in your workplace then no act of Parliament that can really look after you," he warned.

Phil Liptrot, head of personal injury at Thompsons solicitors gave a legal assessment of the 1974 Act and its purpose and impact. Phil explained that he believed that the Act had become too fragmented and subsequently diluted by the proliferation of sub-contractors.

RMT president Alex Gordon told delegates that union itself was born from a fight for health and safety at work, particularly given the carnage

of the railways in the 19th century.

"If there is one thing that our union was formed to do, it was to organise workers to ensure that greedy employers were not able to put the cost of human life so cheaply that they wouldn't invest in occupational safety procedures. Indeed, the big fights that took place in the earliest days of the rail industry were around safety and safe working procedures.

"Safety was intrinsic to the foundation of our union," he said.

He warned that the Tory government's Minimum Service Levels Act was an attack on health and safety in the workplace as it undermined all the current legislation and will create unsafe working environments.

"The Minimum Service Levels Act gives the government the ability to requisition workers and to order them to work and to cross a picket line that they will have voted for," he said.

RMT Health and Safety Officer Sarah Friday and health and safety Rep Kierin Offlands spoke of the need to recruit more women and young members to health and safety representative positions. Whilst numbers are improving, the union has launched campaign literature, posters and videos for the website and social media to try and better represent member demographics in these vitally important roles.

Local Labour MP for York Rachael Maskell applauded RMT for "holding employers to account" and promised that a Labour government would repeal the Minimum Service Levels Act.

She also responded to criticism from delegates of The Health and Safety Executive and the Office and Road and Rail (ORR).

"The HSE has been hollowed out from what it was meant to be, so I understand your plea and we do need to reimagine their roles to be



Eddie Dempsey



Phil Liptrot



Paul Price



Neil Sutherland

able to uphold the law.

"With the ORR, we need a Transport Act, but there is too much of an overlap between them and Network Rail and I agree that the ORR has gone soft," she said.

She said that the RMT Parliamentary group of MPs would put pressure on the government regarding cuts and that she would also speak to the shadow transport team.

Conference concluded with the presentation of the award for Safety Rep of the Year 2024. The two runners-up were Nigel Holden and Paul Price whilst the main prize was scooped by Neil Sutherland. However, the Lifetime Achievement Award went to Paul Price. ■



Kierin Offlands



MIND THE ETHNIC PAY GAP

Well-attended black and ethnic members conference calls on employers to tackle the ethnic pay gap

Delegates to the black and ethnic minority conference meeting in Birmingham called on the union to put pressure on employers to produce ethnicity pay gap reports, deal with racism within their workplace.

Over 60 delegates attended the conference, one of the highest in its recent history, which passed a range of motions including on antisemitism, Islamophobia and calling for the ending of the illegal occupation of the Chagos Islands.

Moving the unanimously passed motion on the ethnic pay gap, Wale Agunbiade, East London Rail branch said: "When I go to talks with the employer, there are regular

talks about the gender pay gap but there are zero talks about the ethnic pay gap.

"When you don't address them then people think that it is not a problem.

"Just in 2022, the biggest pay gap was black and ethnic minority people. They were earning 5.6 per cent less than then their white counterparts.

"It will take 40 years for these gaps to close so we need to ensure these companies act. They claim to care about equality and diversity, let's push them to make sure it happens," he said.

Mr Agunbiade also noted that staff had reported to him that managers at rail companies have said black

and ethnic minority staff members cannot go any higher in the company because "we have reached the level of ethnic people at that level".

The motion called on the union to "write to companies where we have recognition to conduct a ethnicity pay gap report and to involve our union in any research and report.

"We propose that the RMT advisory committee is provided with any information gathered and collated about these companies as well as a comprehensive list of the responses of the companies that have been approached."

Delegates also highlighted attitudes of senior managers

in various contracted out rail companies where accusations of mistreatment along racial lines and even differing wage levels were raised.

The conference went on to discuss anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in the context of Israel's bombardment of Gaza.

Delegates condemned antisemitism but pointed out it must not be used as a means to deflect legitimate criticism of the Israel Defence Force and the argument for boycott, disinvestment and sanctions against the state of Israel.

Moving the successful motion, Shoaib Malik from Liverpool 5 said that critics of Israel policy towards

Palestinians such as “students, human rights organisations and professors” had been tarnished with the brush of antisemitism for political reasons.

“We’ve seen the rhetoric of the government that Palestine demonstrations are hate marches,” he said.

Other speakers made comparisons with apartheid South Africa and sanctions placed on them and said that free speech should not be undermined when speaking up for the Palestinians.

Further motions were carried on combatting Islamophobia, solidarity with

the people of the Chagos Islands and dealing with the sexual harassment of black women in the workplace.

Conference called on the union to officially adopt and recognise March 15 as international day to combat islamophobia and work engage with other civil organisations and trade unions to recognise and adopt it as an official day.

On the Chagos Islands continuing occupation by Britain, conference agreed that the union should ask RMT’s parliamentary group members to lobby the government and their own

party to return the Chagos Islands to Mauritius and demand that the exiled Chagossians are able to resettle in their homeland.

Conference called on the union to campaign for the decolonisation of the Chagos Archipelago and organise a fringe meeting at this year’s TUC Black Workers’ conference in April in London and invite a speaker from the Chagonissan Voices Organisation.

“Finally, this Conference calls on the General Secretary to submit a motion on this matter to the TUC Black Workers’ Conference.”

Assistant general secretary John Leach praised the conference organisers for a packed-out event with a high number of delegates from across the country.

Referring to the recent national strike action on Network Rail and the train operators he added: “We’ve just had the biggest dispute in our union’s history and many of the people involved it was the first time they been really active.

“They got involved in a union doing something to fight injustice and using their power as workers to deliver,” he said. ■

President’s Column

SOLIDARITY FOREVER!

We welcomed Thierry Nier, General Secretary of the CGT Railworkers’ Federation from France in February. Thierry met with RMT’s National Executive Committee and left us in no doubt that his members face a crisis caused by rail privatisation and anti-union laws in France. RMT and CGT recommitted our unions to work closely together in future.

RMT’s spring conferences are in full swing. First out of the blocks was RMT’s Health & Safety Advisory Conference in York where a record 180 RMT Health & Safety Reps took part from across rail, bus, underground, and maritime sectors.

I was pleased to address this Conference and participate in a panel discussion on the Health & Safety at Work Act, on its 50th birthday. RMT’s National Health & Safety conference and Advisory Committee are working to encourage more RMT Women and Young members to stand for election as Health & Safety Reps in their workplaces.

There is no better benchmark for measuring equality in our union than RMT workplace representatives who are the real face of our union as far as most workers are concerned.

We must and will eliminate barriers that prevent members from wanting to step up for election to represent their fellow workers.

The current demographic of RMT workplace reps is an ageing one. This brings valuable experience, but also inevitably means an entire generation of RMT Reps now in their late 50s, will take retirement over the next five years.

Something similar occurred 30 years ago as British Rail and London Underground reeled from Tory privatisation and cuts to public transport.

In 1992, British Rail gave notice it was withdrawing from the 1956 collective bargaining machinery, which gave strong negotiation and representation rights to reps in Local Departmental Committees and Sectional Councils. This was replaced with company-by-company bargaining to pave the way for rail privatisation.

At the same time, London Underground announced a ‘Company Plan’ designed to divide their workforce and bring in new working practices.

RMT’s culture of solidarity, purpose and militancy gave a new generation of young reps

the confidence to resist waves of attacks on transport workers from bosses of privatised rail, bus, and tube firms back then. We will do the same job today.

RMT’s Young Members’ Conference in Wigan and National Women’s Conference in Poole this year both discussed organising new RMT workplace reps. Their success is a measure of how our union will represent and defend transport workers in the next period.

I was proud to be able represent RMT alongside National Secretary, Darren Procter, at the Congress of the Maritime Union of Australia in Adelaide last month. Seafarers and waterfront workers were the first to grasp the power of international solidarity.

Britain’s trade unions developed due to solidarity from Australian trade unions. The London Docks Strike began on 12 August 1889. By 30 August, 150,000 workers were on strike. They had no funds, but money poured in from Australia. First, £250 from Brisbane Seamen’s and Wharf Labourers’ Unions, followed by £500 from Sydney wharfies. In all, Australian unions contributed £30,000 to strike funds to ensure a victorious



outcome to the 5-week strike.

This new unionism was a breakthrough moment, organising semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Union membership grew from 750,000 in 1888, to over 2 million by 1899.

In 1896, dockers’ leaders Ben Tillet and Tom Mann established the International Transport Workers’ Federation.

Today’s ITF has launched a Palestinian Union Solidarity Fund, with the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions delivering lifesaving essential supplies for our Palestinian siblings in Gaza through international humanitarian organisations. You can donate to the fund here <https://www.itfglobal.org/en/campaigns/palestine-union-solidarity-fund>

Alex Gordon

BELATED JUSTICE FOR RAIL WORKERS

Matt Foot of the legal charity APPEAL exposes the wrongful convictions of rail workers quashed posthumously this year

On January 18, 2024 two rail workers, Saliah Mehmet and Basil Peterkin, framed by racist and corrupt British Transport Police (BTP) officer, Det Sgt Ridgewell had their unsafe convictions quashed posthumously at the Court of Appeal.

The two men worked for British Rail at the Bricklayers Arms Goods Depot in South London in the 1970s. Mehmet had worked at the depot for eight years after escaping from war torn Cyprus to live in London with his wife where he was raising a family. He was very proud of his work as a porter in the depot. Basil Peterkin also had a family in London and had previously worked at Bromley Rail Station before moving to the Depot.

In 1977 they were accused of conspiring with a number of other black and Turkish Cypriot employees with re-labelling mail parcels, directing them to new addresses, and then selling their contents for profit. They were convicted at the Old Bailey and sentenced to nine months in prison. They have both since died (in 2021 and 1991 respectively).

The cases against them were based on what turned out to be corrupt police evidence from DS Derek Ridgewell, along with DC Douglas Ellis and DC Alan Keeling, who in 1980 were convicted for stealing from the very same depot, £364,000



VICTORY: Onur Saliah, Janice Peterkin, Lilieth Jones, Winston Trew (Oval 4), Basil Peterkin (junior), Matt Foot, Arda Saliah, Regu Saliah

worth of items. They went to prison for seven years, six years and two years respectively.

When Saliah Mehmet and Basil Peterkin worked at the depot in the 1970s they would have been members of the National Union of Railwaymen as the depot was a closed shop. There were nearly 600 NUR members working at the major parcel hub, which covered 26 acres. The union's Divisional Officer was former RMT general secretary Jimmy Knapp.

However, Mehmet and Peterkin and their co-accused had no chance against the brutal racist operations of Ridgewell and his squad.

Ridgewell had years of practice of fitting up black people. When Ridgewell was based on the Underground he established the 'mugging' squad. Ridgewell's corruption was extensive having been responsible for other miscarriages of justice including convictions in 1972 of the Oval Four and the Stockwell Six. He was renowned in the calypso bars in South London with the song: "If the muggers don't get you, Ridgewell will".

In 1973, a BBC Nationwide documentary exposed his fitting up of young black men. In the face of complaints, The BTP relocated him on the same rank to BTP

headquarters. The following year he was placed back on public duty in South London, which allowed to get back to policing his old haunt at the Bricklayers Arms Depot.

Appeal

Henry Blaxland KC, representing the Mehmet and Peterkin families, submitted to the Court two 'systemic failures' that seriously aggravated this case. Firstly, that Ridgewell was not sacked by the BTP in 1973, after the Nationwide documentary. Secondly the BTP failed to review Ridgewell's files following his conviction in 1980, which would have saved decades of misery for these two men and their families and



VICTIMS OF RACISM: Basil Peterkin, Saliah Mehmet

the other nine men who have had the convictions quashed in the last few years.

Lord Justice Holroyde said that in his judgment he saw 'considerable force' in the appellants' submissions regarding the BTP. He went on to say both the men were innocent and posthumously quashed their convictions, saying, "We cannot turn back the clock. But we can, and do, quash the convictions".

Outside the court Mehmet's eldest son, Regu Saliah, said what his father "was put through over those years left a traumatic legacy that stayed with him his whole life.

"The injustice he suffered he never managed to comprehend - but even harder for him was knowing that his incarceration left my mother and I penniless and homeless in 1970s London," he said.

One of Basil Peterkin's daughters, Janice, said that he didn't deserve to spend time in prison.

"He was a law-abiding citizen and a family man. He was unfairly targeted and framed by the ex-policeman Ridgewell who was clearly racist and corrupt. Our dad was not given the chance to prove his innocence either at trial or when he appealed,"



MISCARRIAGE: Bricklayers Arms Goods Depot

she said.

At the legal charity APPEAL, we are supporting the families call for a simple reform. If a police officer is imprisoned there should be an automatic independent review of their files for wrongful convictions, imposed at sentence.

We also demand an independent review of Ridgewell's files given that in 2021 the BTP said they "have not identified any additional matters that we feel should be referred for external review". Had the BTP had their way

these wrongful convictions would have remained forever.

@ Matt Foot is Co-Director of the legal charity APPEAL which seeks to overturn wrongful convictions. He represented the families of Saliah Mehmet and Basil Peterkin. If you have any information about Det Sgt Ridgewell or his squad please contact him - matt@appeal.org.uk

RMT News also welcomes any memories from those who worked at the Bricklayers Arms Goods Depot. ■

OFFICIAL RMT BRANDED MERCHANDISE



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OFFSHORE HELICOPTER TRAGEDY KILLS ONE



Union warns that reintroduction of Super Puma helicopters would poison industrial relations

RMT has sent condolences to Norwegian colleagues after a S-92 helicopter ditched into the sea off the coast of Norway on February 28, while in training for oil firm Equinor, killing one crew member.

Six people were recovered from the crash and taken to hospital in Bergen and the other five crew members have "varying levels of injuries", according to a statement from operator Bristow.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said that it was sad news and the union's thoughts were with the families of all those affected by this tragic event.

"We will not speculate about the causes of this tragedy and is seeking information from the Norwegian authorities as this aircraft model is a critical part of the UK fleet taking workers to sites across the UK sector.

"We are also liaising with our Norwegian colleagues in our sister trade Union Industri Energi," he said.

The tragedy occurred shortly after proposals were announced for the possible reintroduction of the Super

Puma helicopter by Airbus to offshore oil and gas operations.

Last year was the tenth anniversary of the last fatal Super Puma incident in the UK sector, which claimed the lives of four offshore workers, including RMT member Sarah Darnley.

33 offshore workers and helicopter crew died and 65 were rescued from the North Sea as a result of Super Puma helicopter accidents between 2009 and 2016.

Mechanical flaws in the gear box of the Super Pumas were found responsible for some of these accidents but the regulatory response from the Civil Aviation Authority and the Tory Government has been far too weak.

RMT alongside other offshore unions and MPs on the Transport Select Committee called for a public inquiry into the helicopter in 2014 but the Conservative-led government refused to comply.

RMT has warned that the reintroduction of the Super Puma would poison industrial relations.

"Any confidence built up since 2016 amongst offshore workers over the safety of the helicopters will disappear if they are expected to travel to and from installations on Super Pumas.

"The fact that the industry is even entertaining the reintroduction of the Super Puma is not only an insult to the memory of offshore workers and crew killed by this flawed machine, it shows how the highly profitable oil and gas industry continues to exert dangerous and unregulated

commercial pressure on offshore helicopter operators in the North Sea.

"The S-92 model which has assumed the bulk of the Super Puma work is ageing and investment is desperately needed.

"We will be seeking meetings at the highest levels of the industry and we will work with other offshore trade unions to fight these dangerous proposals to bring back Super Pumas," said Mick Lynch.



SAFE?: A memorial unveiled in Turoy near Bergen, western Norway in 2019 to 13 victims of the fatal crash of a Super Puma helicopter in April 2016. 33 offshore workers and helicopter crew have died and 65 were rescued from the North Sea as a result of Super Puma helicopter accidents between 2009 and 2016.



A PEOPLE'S CALMAC!

Union demands publicly owned lifeline ferry services that works for all

RMT will be holding a series of local meetings as part of the campaign for affordable, reliable and quality lifeline ferry services in the west of Scotland.

The current crisis engulfing Caledonian MacBrayne services, threats of unbundling the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services (CHFS) and generally attacking the very principles of public transport presents a danger to jobs, conditions, services and apprenticeships.

CalMac's current contract expires on September 30 this year and RMT's policy is for a permanent direct award of the next contract to CalMac.

RMT general secretary Mik Lynch has welcomed the fact that a direct award is the SNP government's preferred option.

He also welcomed Scottish Labour's public support for direct award of the CHFS3 contract to CalMac, to protect public sector jobs, training, services and conditions from an expensive tendering process that would encourage the likes of P&O Ferries and Serco to bid for a £1 billion plus lifeline public sector contract.

"Everyone accepts that CalMac needs reform, as well as new vessels and harbour

berths but you will never attract the staff to operate these lifeline services when local business interests are hijacking legitimate public concerns to denigrate Scotland's public ferry company," he said.

The People's CalMac campaign demands a direct award to CalMac Ferries in order to put communities and passengers before profit.

This requires more investment to ensure reliable, frequent and extra lifeline ferry services and fairer ferry fares, including commercial freight.

There needs to be a stronger voice for communities, passengers and workers as well as more apprenticeships and preservation of trade union agreements which have delivered industry leading terms and conditions of employment.

CalMac Ferries is a national asset, employing nearly 2,000 skilled seafarer, port and clerical staff to deliver lifeline services on 29 routes, operating 34 publicly owned ferries from nearly 50 harbours on the Clyde and Hebrides network.

Yet the average age of the CalMac fleet is 26 years and cash starved local authorities own nearly half the harbours on the CHFS network. The Scottish government's vessel



and port procurement failures have inflicted a destabilising loss of resilience and capacity over the last six years which is jeopardising the future of public lifeline ferries.

"Like the passengers, RMT members at CalMac know full well that privatisation would destroy the stability, quality, safety and employment standards integral to lifeline public transport services.

RMT is on a campaign footing to protect our members' jobs and terms and conditions at CalMac and we welcome public support from passenger groups, local businesses and the trade union movement," said Mick Lynch. The union is organising meetings in Oban, Brodick and Barra in the Outer Hebrides this Spring as well as a People's CalMac fringe meeting at the Scottish TUC on Monday April 15, Caird Hall, Dundee at 5.30pm.



CAMPAIGN: RMT regional organiser Gordon Martin addresses the People's Calmac meeting in Oban. RMT Scotland Regional Council president Dan Henderson chaired the meeting.

LEGAL

SIGNALLER WINS UNFAIR DISMISSAL CASE



A Bristol Employment Tribunal recently upheld a claim by long-standing RMT member and signaller Alex Seal for unfair dismissal and wrongful dismissal against his former employer, Network Rail.

The RMT legal department represented Alex who had over twenty years of service with Network Rail and was most recently employed as a signaller in the Exeter panel box. As a signaller, Alex was acutely aware of the potentially devastating consequences of poorly planned work and he began to feel under increasing pressure to grant what he considered to be unsafe line blockages.

Alex tried his best to draw his employer's attention to the safety concerns he had,

but felt he was criticised and pressured to be more accommodating in granting line blockages in the future. For example, during 2019, Alex declined to grant a line blockage on safety grounds. This prevented work from being carried out and cost the business money.

He was placed on a Development Action Plan as a result. After this experience, Alex was absent from work for a few months suffering with a deterioration to his mental health. He took the step of raising his safety concerns with his line manager in writing. He did not receive a response. Alex returned to work in early 2020 but felt that his concerns remained unaddressed. He continued to raise his concerns via

various means, including Work Safe and Close Calls.

Alex was eventually dismissed following allegations of gross misconduct. He had made some comments at work regarding safety concerns which he had. These comments had been borne out of frustration that had built up over a number of years. Alex described becoming desperate and felt pushed to the limit. He felt that there was no way of stopping something terrible happening, due to what he considered to be poorly planned work. He described that at the time he made the comments for which he was dismissed, he was crying out for help.

Alex pursued claims for whistleblowing, unfair

dismissal and wrongful dismissal against Network Rail for over 18 months. He was supported throughout by his union representative Wayne Dixon. Wayne also gave evidence to the Employment Tribunal that Alex was a conscientious signaller who was clearly passionate about the safety of the railway and that he needed help, not to be dismissed.

It was clear to Wayne that the language used by Alex had been due to his anxiety and increasing frustration. Alex faced difficult cross-examination but gave his account honestly and succinctly during the five-day hearing. The union was pleased to learn that Alex is now happy in a new and rewarding role on the South Devon heritage railway. ■

EMPLOYMENT TRIBUNAL LEGAL SUPPORT

If you need advice regarding a potential employment tribunal claim contact the union

If you are experiencing difficulties in the workplace and need advice regarding a potential employment tribunal claim in the first instance, ensure that you contact your local RMT representatives or regional organiser. Then complete an L2 – Request for Legal Assistance (available online) and send it to your regional office with all supporting documentation.

RMT's legal department, which is now firmly established

and employs four solicitors, deal with virtually all cases from assessment to the case's conclusion at a tribunal for our members across England and Wales. The legal department has also submitted claims to the Employment Appeal Tribunal.

The in-house legal department continues to advise and support members in their work-related criminal cases in the Magistrates Court. This often involves defending

members against false allegations made by the public of assault, false allegations of theft and alleged driving offences. Furthermore, it continues to offer tailored advice and support for bus and taxi drivers, in respect of their licensing issues, licensing appeals before the Magistrates Court, driving offences, and in respect of appearances before Traffic Commissioners.

The legal department will continue to strive to deliver a

first class service to all members. It is committed to provide a strong service to assist the union through the ever-changing legal landscape. Its successes have grown yearly.

Additionally, RMT members benefit from access to personal injury lawyers where 100 per cent of compensation is kept by members, access to a basic will service and special terms for conveyancing, probate, powers of attorney and family law related matters. ■

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"Any income RMT receives from these products goes into our dispute fund."

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SOUTH EAST AWARDS

The annual general meeting of the RMT South East Regional Council Rainham in Kent attended by delegates from 17 branches included the presentation of a 40-year badge to the regional secretary and Network Rail area rep Adrian (AJ) Yates by national president Alex Gordon.

RMT regional president Ivor Riddell said that AJ had given stalwart service and served the union with integrity, honour and courage.

"Always on hand to offer advice and the benefit of his experience, he is held in great esteem across the region and nationally amongst the signalling fraternity," he said. ■



EDINBURGH FAREWELLS

Edinburgh No1 and Portobello District branch paid tribute to three long serving members including retiring branch secretary Graham Buchanan, who completed 34 years in the role, Alan Pottage who has recently retired from the organising unit and branch chair Alex Hogg.

The branch welcomed new officials Joanne Dutton and Mark Nothard to the roles of chair and secretary. ■



DARTMOUTH STALWART

Retired RMT activist David Whittaker recently dropped into RMT regional office in Newton Abbot.

David was the last Dartmouth branch secretary until the Branch sadly closed in 2023 after Stagecoach Bus

closed the depot.

RMT regional organiser Barry West said that he was a hard-working and dedicated branch official who had made a huge contribution to the union. ■



STOCKPORT AWARD

Stockport branch hosted a special celebration for Tommy Mather who has been an NUR/RMT member for 55 years and a stalwart of the union in the Manchester area on the rail maintenance side.

He was the main area council rep for Network Rail maintenance grades and worked on the S&T. Tommy had represented thousands of

members from British Rail, BRIS, Jarvis, First Engineering and NWR. Tommy had previously been presented a 50-year membership badge by Mick Cash at the Manchester AGM in 2019.

"We all wish Tommy all the best for a long and happy retirement," said RMT general secretary Mick Lynch. ■



PRESENTATION: from left to right Manchester South branch Michelle Rodgers, Tommy, Stockport branch secretary Bob Cross and Mick Lynch.

LEEDS AWARDS

Footballing legend and TV presenter Chris Kamara presented long service awards to Leeds City branch members recently.

Chris has travelled on the east coach mainline from Wakefield to London for the last 25 years and is a big friend of the branch.

He handed out 12 25-year badges to Shaun Wilkinson,

Mick, Williams, Henry Stratford, Maria Brown, Michael Nichols, Andy Gregory, Mohammed Khan, David Philips, Nimu Jiwanji, Paul Doyle, Joanne Wainwright, David Townend, James Emmott, Neil Fox and two 40-year badges to Timothy Garforth and Lyndon Harker.



LETTERS

MSK IS A SERIOUS ISSUE FOR BUS DRIVERS

Dear editor,

After reading the article in January/February edition RMT News (Most bus drivers suffer MSK problems page 8) I felt I should respond as someone that has worked as a bus driver for over 44 years and suffers with MSK and use a support cushion on my seat to take some of the vibration.

The article is correct that every driver suffers in some way with MSK to some degree and bus designers do not seem to have an idea of what is needed in the cab and how long some of us are sat in it.

Engineering firm Chapman Seating did make a seat that was better than others with a lumber support that could be adjusted but when seats were refurbished they were taken out as they were worn away!

Seats are placed on a solid pillar that sends every bump and vibration up through it to the seat and, with the appalling state of our roads, that means you feel every pot-hole and speed hump and you can be going over the same ones many times a day. Moreover, some buses feel as though they have no suspension at all.

The layout of cabs can be different on different vehicles. Cash trays can be placed on the cab door meaning continual turning when checking for blind spots and some seats used to have a handle that could be used to 'swivel' the seat but they seem to have gone now.

We may only have two-foot pedals for accelerator and brake but they can be at different positions so that you can be stretching for one of them or they are under the steering column that has a large "block" under the steering wheel that your knee knocks against or once more gets the constant vibration.

Lorry drivers and coach drivers seem to have better made seats and when I put this to the companies I get told that lorry drivers have their own vehicle but surely the seat has not been made to measure? I am glad that the union has finally mentioned the problem as bus workers have been raising this issue at conferences for years.

Regards

Phil Coakley, Poole and District branch

MURAL FOR ASQUITH



Kent artist Voyder has created a giant mural painted of National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) Asquith Xavier railway worker who successfully defeated British Rail's unofficial colour bar nearly 60 years ago with the help of his union.

The colour bar at Euston station was finally defeated on August 15, 1966 when the West Indian guard was finally allowed to start work after initially being refused a job. This relatively small victory led to changes in the law including a ban on discrimination in the workplace in the new Race Relations Act.

The artwork of Asquith Xavier has been created in Luton Arches close to his former home in Chatham, Kent.

Camealia Xavier-Chihota, his granddaughter, said that it was "heart-warming to see this mural just a stones throw from where I grew up".

Ms Xavier-Chihota said: "Voyder has perfectly captured his bravery, dignity and strength of character, incorporating key landmarks in his life including the hills of Dominica, Euston Station and Luton Arches.

"My grandfather's contribution to our society has undoubtedly shaped the way we live today and I'm proud to see it being celebrated and immortalised so that his achievements are not forgotten or lost in time."

Asquith came to Britain from Dominica as part of the Windrush generation. He had started work for British

Railways in 1956 as a porter, working his way up to rail guard at Marylebone station. However, following the closure of the Marylebone main line as part of the Beeching rail cuts, guards were no longer required and were being transferred to stations like Euston.

However, Mr Xavier, an experienced guard, received a letter telling him that he had been rejected for a job at Euston. Mr Xavier showed the letter to local NUR branch secretary Jimmy Prendergast. Jimmy was a life-long anti-fascist who had fought in Spain with the International Brigades and had served in the RAF during World War Two.

Jimmy knew that fellow NUR member Tony Donaghey – who was to become RMT president many years later – had been offered a guard position at Euston. When Tony was informed by Jimmy about this blatant racism and the treatment of his friend Asquith, he withdrew his application in protest and took up a guard's position at St Pancras.

Jimmy led a local delegation to union headquarters and then NUR general secretary Sid Greene contacted the British Rail Board about the racist policies being practised in their name which had been a longstanding problem.

The Asquith Xavier mural was commissioned by Arches Local, a community group aimed at improving the local neighbourhood in Chatham.

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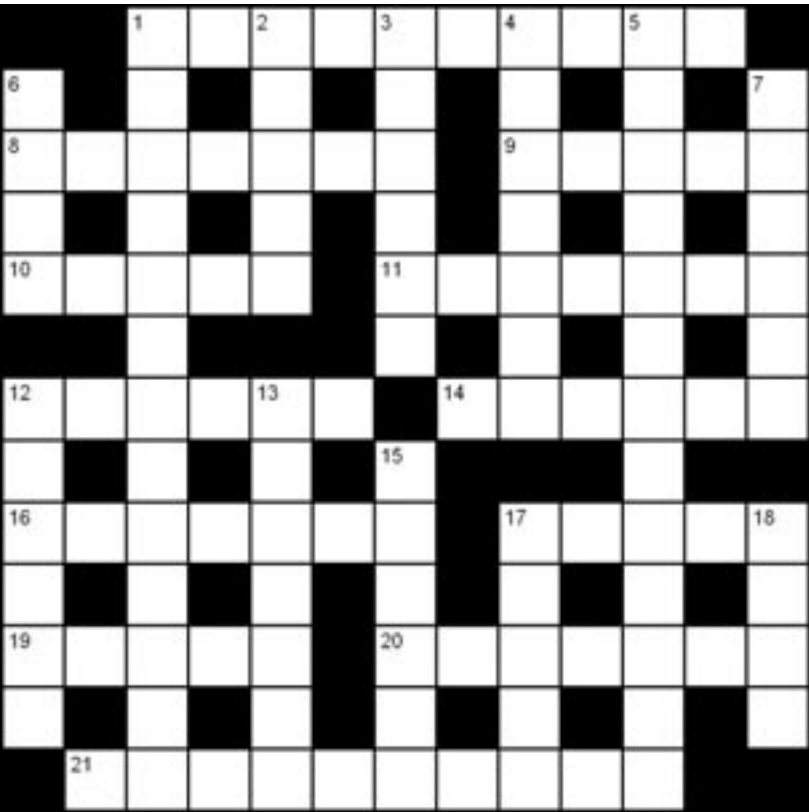
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Last month's solution...



Send entries to Prize Crossword, RMT, Unity House, 39 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD by April 26, 2024 with your name and address.

Last month's winner is Robert Hunter-Dorans, Inverness.

Please supply bank account details and sort code to receive your prize quickly.

ACROSS

- 1 Agreed upon (10)
- 8 Locate (7)
- 9 Irritable (5)
- 10 Bind again (5)
- 11 Hold spellbound (7)
- 12 Frightening (6)
- 14 Bold (6)
- 16 Three tiers of oars (7)
- 17 Gold coin (5)
- 19 Animal life (5)
- 20 Beat (7)
- 21 Collection of songs (10)

DOWN

- 1 Fashionable (2,2,6)
- 2 Cover (5)
- 3 Long pin (6)
- 4 Unfasten (7)
- 5 Fizziness (13)
- 6 Emperor (4)
- 7 Incidental activity (6)
- 12 Designated limit (6)
- 13 Come before (7)
- 15 Group of seven (6)
- 17 Loincloth (5)
- 18 Abound (4)



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Employer		RMT Branch	
Job Description			

4 Mr ☐ Mrs ☐ Ms ☐ Miss ☐

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28 April 2024

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