

SOCIALIST

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Solidarity Special

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Back the signal workers!

THE SIGNALWORKERS pay battle is turning into an all out confrontation between the Tory government and the trade union movement. Tory ministers have spelt out that they do not want to pay the signalworkers as that would represent a huge break in their public sector pay policy.

Tory backbenchers and papers like the 'Sunday Times' have called for strikers to be locked-out. Meanwhile the leaders of the TUC and Labour Party have equivocated and sat on the fence.

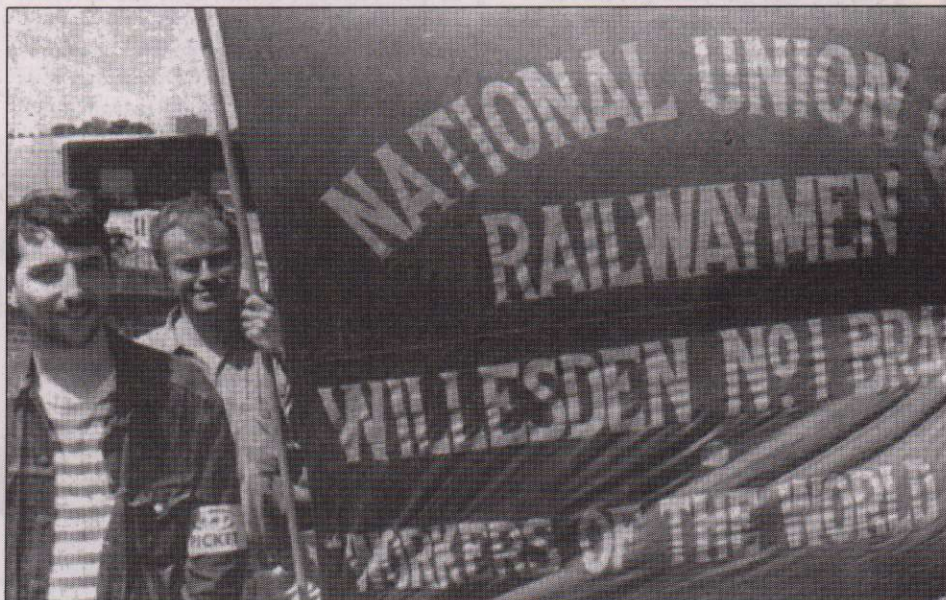
As the dispute continues the situation is bound to become more and more serious, especially as the action is set to escalate to two strike days per week at the end of July. The Tories will do their best to try and turn rail passengers against the strikers. It is up to socialists and serious trade unionists to do everything they can to rally support for the signalworkers.

We have to hammer away at the basic arguments.

1. The signalworkers are putting forward a claim for an 11% interim payment to bring them into line with other railworkers.

They need it. Their average wage is just £183 per week. That is for a job that has become far more demanding and stressful as a result of productivity increases over the past few years. In some areas two signalworkers now do the job that was previously covered by 100.

2. Railtrack bosses are lying hypocrites when they say that there is not enough money to pay the strikers.



Bob Horton, the boss of Railtrack, pays himself the ridiculous sum of £2,335 per week for a three-day week.

That amounts to a 210% pay increase since last year!

The cost of the new Railtrack HQ of £7 million is twice what it would cost to settle the dispute.

The total cost of rail privatisation so far is now over £700 million which is made up of...

- £303 million on 13,114 redundancies and early retirements in the last two years so railworkers are forced to do the same amount of work with fewer people.

- £146 million for 'restructuring' in 1993/4 — whatever that is?
- £48 million in fees to outside consultants — lawyers, financiers and public relations advisors.
- £32 million to create Oprafr — the rail franchise granting body.
- £20 million to create Ofrail — the privatised railway watchdog.

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Because of BR's gagging rule, which makes it a sacking offence for railworkers to criticise management, the articles in this special are all anonymous so as to avoid victimisation.

Their fight is our fight

e the railways



Labour leadership candidates should state where they stand on the strike and re-nationalisation, in particular we want a clear commitment from John Prescott who is backed by the RMT and ASLEF as well as many ordinary trade unionists.

indeed provide the rallying point for all disgruntled and angry workers in other industries who think the Tories have had it too easy for too long.

We must continue putting the pressure on our leadership started by the Trackworkers grade conference on this issue; we must force Knapp, Hince and Co. into doing their job, representing the membership in both wings of our movement — the Labour Party and the TUC. We can make a start by ensuring that our delegates to

Labour movement bodies, including ward Party's and CLP's, fight to make Labour re-nationalise the railways.

Renationalisation should be without compensation to the parasites and asset-strippers who have made profits from an industry built up out of the pockets of the working class taxpayers and the sweat of railworkers. What's more the industry should be under the democratic control of the workers and users.

TUC and Labour Party: Leaders? What leaders?

THE LEADERS OF the TUC and Labour Party have played a disgraceful role so far in the signals dispute. Despite a clear call from the RMT executive for the Labour leadership to give "Unequivocal support" what we've heard is bumbling and evasive banalities rather than clear and unambiguous backing for the strikes.

The TUC have been even worse.

On July 5th they invited Tory Employment Secretary David Hunt and CBI boss Howard Davies to attend a conference on

full employment. Thus providing these two representatives of the boss class with a platform to argue for low wages and casualisation. Hunt turned up for smoked salmon, strawberries and cream at Congress House just minutes after attacking the rail strikers and glorifying the scabs on BBC radio.

Miners' leader Arthur Scargill was dead right when he lambasted the TUC leader for their support for "social partnership" with the bosses: "This is no time to seek to have a cosy relationship rather than recognise that class struggle is at the heart of capitalism".

Management scabs prove you don't need managers

RAILTRACK AND the Tory press are trying to claim that there is the beginning of a drift back to work. **This is rubbish.**

The strike is as solid as ever. The only place we know of where the RMT members work on strike days is Leicester. The rest of the boxes and panels are operated by managers, supervisors and non-union scabs.

Low-level managers and supervisors should remember that when they help Railtrack run

services by functioning as signalworkers for the day they aren't proving that Railtrack doesn't need the strikers. They are proving that Railtrack doesn't need so many managers!

In a funny sort of way this just goes to show that the railways can't run without signalmen but managers and supervisors are superfluous.

We look forward to the days of workers' control of the railways.

Organise the rank and file!

Build the Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union!

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN the successful signals strike ballot and the disastrous P. T. & R. ballot early this year tells you a lot about the RMT.

Despite the widespread concern amongst railworkers over job security the Knapp leadership did not want to win the P. T. & R. ballot.

As a result they did nothing to convince the ordinary members putting out just one letter, far too late in the day.

Contrast this to the signals ballot.

Good, imaginative publicity has gone out. And not just once. This was a real attempt by head office to ensure that every signalworker knew about the ballot and wanted to vote for action. We saw the result of this in the turnout and the majority for action.

There are two reasons for this.

Firstly, the left majority on the council of executives have taken a firmer hold of this dispute than they did over the P. T. & R.

Secondly, the signalworkers really want to have a go and are putting a lot of pressure on Hince and Knapp (who used to be a signalman himself).

A bit of a lead from the top is a very good development indeed, but what is absolutely vital is for the rank and file to take control of the union for themselves.

We have already seen how the CDFU can work as a useful place for exchanging information and sharing experiences. But it needs to become more than that.

We should try and build it as a fully fledged rank and file movement inside the union.

That means:

* **It should take disputes seriously and aim to seize the initiative and build solidarity. After all, we won't always get the kind of lead we've had from the EC in future disputes.**

* **It should be based on the rank and file activists at local level.**

* **It should have clear and transparent democratic structures.**

* **It should not be the property of any one particular group or faction.**

Back the signal workers!

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3. The money that goes into the pockets of the private profiteers should be used to pay decent wages and provide a safe and efficient service.

Cost cutting for privatisation doesn't just effect signalworkers' pay packets it has also led to a run down in the service that everyone who regularly uses the railways is aware of.

4. A victory for the signalworkers will be victory for all trade unionists and working people.

The Tories are determined to hold the line against the signalworkers so that they can save their hated pay freeze policy. That's why the Treasury intervened to block a settlement last week.

A victory to the railworkers will blow a massive hole in that policy and show to workers in the public sector and elsewhere that the Tories can be beaten.

Build support groups

RMT activists at Waterloo station in London have set up a railworkers' support group with local trade unionists organised through the Southwark Trades Council.

The support group will be organising street and workplace collection as well as petitioning amongst rail commuters and messages of support to the strikers.

This activity should be repeated elsewhere.

What other railworkers can do

• **Don't do the job if it's unsafe.**

Railworkers can use the provisions in the law that provides some protection for workers who stop an unsafe job. All train crews, track workers and others should refuse to go out if they think that the managers running the scab signal boxes are putting them at risk. When this has happened management have not known what to do.

The unions should make it clear that they will give official backing to anyone who takes such a stand. What's more we should ensure that refusals to work are collective actions. We should not allow management to pick off and intimidate individuals.

• **Bring forward the pay battle and other issues.**

It's great that ASLEF conference has rejected the measly 2.5% offer and decided to ballot for action on pay, the 35 hour week and the P. T. and R. which provides for job security.

The RMT should immediately start a national strike ballot over pay for the grades that have not yet settled. TSSA should ballot their signal supervisory grade members alongside the RMT's. This would make possible united action against top level management attempts to intimidate supervisors into running a dangerous skeleton scab service.

• **Build strike committees. Make it an active strike.**

Every RMT branch should set up an open strike committee made up of everyone who is prepared to do the work that needs to be done.

Levies should be set up and collected to finance a hardship fund. This would raise funds and raise the issues. It would create a direct bond between the signalworkers and the rest of the workforce.

Flying pickets must be organised to cover every scab box.

The fight for socialism

THIS SPECIAL ISSUE of *Socialist Organiser* has been written by RMT, TSSA and ASLEF activists who are also members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, an open, democratic, Marxist organisation which fights for socialist policies in the trade unions and Labour Party.

The basic idea that the AWL fights for was summed up best by Karl Marx 130 years ago: "The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself."

We want to see the labour and trade union movement transformed into a revolutionary force that can overthrow the Tories and the capitalist system they represent.

• **The AWL thinks the trade unions are the single most important area for socialists to work in because they are the basic defensive organisations of the working class.**

It is one of our central aims to help build a new rank and file movement in the trade unions with the aim of transforming them into fighting and democratic organisations.

• We believe that so long as the Labour Party is the political wing of the mass labour movement, a serious revolutionary organisation can only be built in the struggle to transform it.

That means fighting for a Labour government and also being prepared to fight the government when it attacks — as it surely will — the working class.

We seek to carry out this policy even though the Labour Party has banned our paper and expelled our comrades. To run away from the fight in the Labour Party is not serious revolutionary politics.

• We believe that the serious Marxist left can only make real progress by abandoning its remaining illusions in the Stalinist tyrannies that used to, or still do, call themselves socialist.

• Socialists are internationalists, not "little Englanders". We are for international workers' links and a workers' Europe. We reject the anti-European chauvinism of the left. Our slogan is "workers of the world unite".

• We are for a labour movement which is accessible to the most exploited and oppressed and which fights for the demands of black people, women, lesbians and gay men, as well as youth and people with disabilities.

• We are for a rational left which debates the issues that divide it while uniting in struggle against the bosses.

If you want to know more about our policies and activities write to:

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