



On Guard

Merseyrail Drivers Show the Way!

On 13th March, all traincrew at Merseyrail stuck together. Despite a circular from ASLEF advising members to work normally (which the union does to protect its legal position rather than to encourage its members to cross picket lines), all Merseyrail Drivers refused to cross the picket lines and the only trains to run anywhere on that franchise that day were driven by Traction Inspectors.

So what happened to the Drivers?

Were any of them disciplined? Did any of them get threats from trigger-happy managers looking to intimidate people? Of course they didn't. Merseyrail management have left them well alone. They know that if they touch a single ASLEF member they will end up dragging ASLEF into the dispute and they don't want that. And all the while, the RMT's negotiating position is massively strengthened by the solid unity between workers.

Workers United

Respect for picket lines is a long-established trade union principle that can play a huge part in making strikes effective but is getting harder and harder to uphold due to a complex web of anti-union laws, coupled with lower trade union membership and less workplace militancy. On the railway, though, it is still relatively easy and is much safer when we do it in numbers.

No victimisation

Our unions can still be relied upon to defend us when we are victimised - Northern ASLEF Drivers who respected the RMT picket line that day have received no disciplinary action, despite threats. We've all heard the slogan "the workers united will never be defeated". All workers at Northern have an interest in seeing that Guards stay on all trains, either because their job security and quality of working life depends directly on trains having two Safety Critical staff on board or because heavy defeat for traincrew grades will have a knock-on effect for how they are treated later and the strength of their unions to fight back.

- **Keep the Guard on the train!**
- **Railworkers stick together!**
- **Join the strikes or respect the picket line!**



Merseyrail RMT picket line. 13th March. No driver crossed the line. No one was disciplined.

Northern Rail Strike Solid: now build for 8th April.

Northern rail RMT held a successful strike on the 13th March with very little scabbing and, in some depots, none at all. Trains had to go out with managers on them to operate the doors.

On Guard has heard reports that a DTM who was providing scab labour operating train doors decided to falsely accuse a driver of speeding. As we understand it, the driver told him to choose what job he was doing - manager or scab door operator - and if it was going to be manager then he'd need to find some more traincrew or the train wasn't going any further. This is an example of why it is better to stick together at work. We all look after each other but the depot side of the picket line belongs to management. Scabs and managers can't be trusted to look after each other, other workers or even the general public - they only act in the company's interests.

Solidarity

Stick together to keep us all safe. Stay out on strike day, or refuse to cross the picket line. They can't spy on you or grass you up for making a mistake if you're not there.

The Rich and the Poor

According to Adam Corlett of the Resolution Foundation, the current parliament [2015-20] is likely to go down as the worst on record for loss of income and for the the biggest rise in inequality since the end of the 1980s. The toxic mix comes from low wage growth and a great wave of pre-programmed cuts in working-age welfare benefits.

Child poverty

Theresa May's government feigns concern for the worse-off but introduces ferocious cuts in health and social care and education, the escape route for the young out of poverty. The percentage of children living in poverty, which rocketed from 18% to 33% in the Thatcher years, then decreased from 34% to 27% in the Blair-Brown years, has been rising steadily since 2010 and is set to rise further.

Profits

Meanwhile profits are rocketing. The rift between the worse-off and the top 1% is increasing faster than the gap between us and the routinely-prosperous top 10%. The grinding increase in inequality has cumulative effects.

Even in death

Death rates have been falling for decades. But then about 30,000 more people died in 2015 than in 2014, a 5.6% increase. That is the biggest annual leap for 50 years. January 2017 saw another peak almost as high as that in 2015. And no recent winters have been specially cold.

Homeless

The estimated number of homeless on the streets in England has increased each year since 2010. The autumn 2016 total was more than twice as high as 2010's.

Organised working class

The strength of trade unions stopped inequality increasing for a generation after 1945. But then, in the 1980s, the neoliberal, union-battering, market-worshipping assault of Thatcher and Reagan pushed inequality up again.

Capitalist dynamics

Inequality continued to rise under New Labour, only more slowly, and mostly between us and the very top incomes, with some modest relative improvements for the very worse-off. Now the inbuilt dynamics of capitalism are being mobilised again, helped on by the government, and by a long period of world capitalist depression.

Fight back

Unions must rebuild. And labour-movement political activists must set their sights, not on palliatives like New Labour's, but on the replacement of the whole mechanism of class exploitation by a cooperative socialism based on equality rather than profit.

What is On Guard?

On Guard is a monthly socialist bulletin by and for rank and file workers at Northern. It is published by socialist group Workers' Liberty.

We will be featuring a lot of updates and articles on Driver Only Operation, but welcome content on any issue from Northern workers themselves.

Got a story for On Guard?

We welcome reports and comments from all rail workers.

Contact us:

onguard.bulletin@gmail.com

Rat Watch

Sheffield Traincrew Messroom is supposedly being refurbished but the progress is slow. *On Guard* has heard reports that rats are being seen all over the outside spaces at the moment, making the existing space a potentially unhygienic (not to mention overcrowded!) place to spend our breaks. Let us know where and when you've seen rats round the messroom - send reports and/or pictures. Let's help the Health and Safety reps keep the pressure up on management to deal with the problem properly!



Human Beings or Company Property?

Rail workers, like any others, work in order to earn the money we need; to eat, to live and to enjoy ourselves. But our jobs get in the way. Even when we are not on duty we have to keep ourselves fit for work; watching what we eat and drink and making sure we get enough sleep. Our managers treat us like company property, ringing us when we're off duty, invading our headspaces with talk about the job when we're trying to rest. Incident investigations get dragged out for months so we can't switch off for worrying.

Our shift patterns mean we lose out on social and family life: school runs, parents evenings, football matches, birthday piss-ups, evenings out or evenings in with our partners. All because we have to come to work to live.

How many Saturdays do we miss because we're rostered to work, have no leave left, can't get a swap? How many social occasions do we lose out on? How many football matches we could've been to?

At *On Guard* we work for a socialist society - one where labour, resources and leisure time are shared much more equally, rather than concentrated in the hands of the bosses. We must take as much of OUR free time back from them as we can. 8th of April represents an opportunity to do just that. Take part in the strike or respect the picket line. Visit the RMT members and give them a bit of support - then the rest of the day is YOURS!