

A platform for rank-and-file rail workers

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South Western Railway guards: don't give in to bosses' bullying!

On the eve of the strikes, SWR bosses sent every guard an intimidating letter, suggesting workers or the union could be liable for any losses incurred during the strike. An RMT guard wrote an open letter in response.

Dear all,

I am writing in response to a letter, which you will have received by South Western Railway (SWR) to your addresses this week. This is nothing, but scaremongering nonsense. Firstly, let's be 100% clear, this is legal strike action. It was completed legally with a ballot and two weeks notice. This strike action is to protect your job and terms and conditions.

SWR have not guaranteed a guard on every train, the last framework stated that a train could go without a guard on board in "extreme circumstances." Southern Railway had stated this as well, with their OBS grade. Now over 50% of their trains run regularly without a second member of staff on board. There was a deal in

front of Acas, which has been withdrawn by SWR and First Group up in Aberdeen. SWR are citing that they withdrew the deal because RMT told their members about it. That is complete rubbish. SWR are being peddled by the Department for Transport (DfT) because strikes will be a critical part of this General Election.



Don't cross the picket lines. Don't listen to the scaremongering.

SWR are scared that we are walking out because they don't want their middle managers being bogged down in a months worth of paperwork in January. Therefore the people at the top of the business are bullying their workforce into trying to cross pickets.

All that SWR are entitled to do are withdraw pay for not signing on for a shift. Because of this legal strike, SWR cannot take any legal action against you personally.

In the letter they have graciously given us some scary sounding bullet points.

They say that thousands of people will be disrupted. If you look, our core routes are running with buses on ones that are not and alternative transport available. People won't be disrupted. Our lives will be when we're all made redundant.

You will not be paid. But you will receive hardship payments and any annual leave, which you are booked on. Please see your local guards rep and tell them what you are booked to work. Help us to help you.

You are entitled to swap shifts as per the 1999 GRI agreement. 6.4 Exchange of Duties. Please don't listen to this false threat.

If your rules and assessments are due in December, that's not your problem. You will just come back to work on the 3rd of January to normal circumstances.

No legal action will be taken against you as a person or employee of SWR. It is illegal to take legal action against employees during legal industrial action.

Please take no notice of this letter from SWR. It's four pages of wasted trees.

Support the strikes. Spend December with your families this year. Don't cross the picket line. ☐

**Yours faithfully,
An RMT member and guard**

Close to victory on WMT?

Strikes due to continue on West Midlands Trains (which operates as West Midlands Railway and London North-western Railway) every Saturday throughout December have been suspended, and RMT is putting a new deal to a referendum of its members, with a recommendation from the NEC to accept.

The deal guarantees a second safety-critical member of staff on every train for the life of the franchise, and protects salary and annual leave entitlements. Although the driver will control an in-cab door release button when a train arrives in platform, guards retain a central role in dispatch, assessing the platform and controlling the closing of the doors prior to departure.

Although, as one activist put it, the degree of control given to the driver could be seen as "an inch down the road to DOO" - it is only an inch. Bosses who would prefer to see the role of the guard scrapped entirely have been forced into a significant concessions.

The solid strikes by guards on WMT, which began on 16 November, have been bolstered by several Aslef drivers refusing to cross picket lines, which has undoubtedly been significant in forcing this new proposed settlement from the employer. Prior to these WMT strikes, Merseyrail was the only TOC where Aslef drivers had respected RMT picket lines.

If the deal is accepted, which it is likely to be, it could put pressure on South Western Railway bosses to make similar concessions. ☐

DOO resisted on Merseyrail, but the fight isn't over

RM T is announcing a "major breakthrough" on Merseyrail, after negotiations produced a new offer including a method of train dispatch which retains control of the doors for the guard, in line with RMT policy.

The union says the "fine detail" still needs working out, but the fact that it has suspended the strikes it planned for every Saturday through November and December is a pretty conclusive signal that the RMT NEC believes the dispute is now reaching its endgame.

Make no mistake: defeating the company's attempts to impose DOO will be a huge achievement on its own terms, and is something that would not have been achieved without the solid industrial action workers have taken, backed up by solidarity from Aslef drivers. Merseyrail workers should be congratulated for this exceptional resolve, and other workers can take inspiration from yet another reminder that direct action really does get the goods.

But before we pop the champagne, we need to examine any strings that might be attached. Previous deals have included completely unacceptable strings, such as offsetting the cost of retaining guards' jobs by cutting cleaners' jobs. These offers should never have made it out of the talks; the fact that RMT NEC spent any time considering offers that were an affront to the basic principles of industrial unionism was frankly a waste of time that slowed momentum.

Those proposals are now gone, but more recent proposed settlements, including the most recent, included a plan to put new starters on worse terms and conditions - longer hours for less pay - than existing guards. With negotiations on the "fine detail" of the offer ongoing, RMT reps will have to push to get those strings removed. But without the additional pressure and leverage of looming strikes, they only have persuasive words to rely on. It will now be extremely hard to reinstate action, having called, and then suspended, strikes twice in the last month alone.

It's a difficult argument to ask existing workers to make sacrifices, by losing pay on strike days, for workers who aren't even on the job yet, but the alternative - accepting a deal that screws over future staff to protect the conditions of current ones - risks undermining union organisation on the job going forward. If a two-tier deal is accepted, you can guarantee that mischief-making managers will be pouring poison in the ear of new guards from day one:

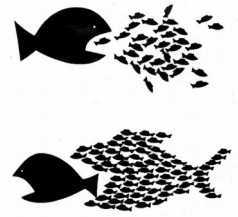
Ultimately the decision on where to go next has to be led from the shopfloor, on the basis of whether workers feel confident to fight on. But if the bosses do insist on strings, then a discussion must be had about extending the exceptional resolve workers have shown so far to fight for those strings to be cut. □

off the rails

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- is for all railworkers, whatever your job, employer or union
- provides information, support and a forum to discuss strategies
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- is fiercely pro-union, but independent of union head offices

Northern: stand firm against DOO!

On 26 November RMT announced that Northern Rail guards had voted "nearly 95%" in a ballot to approve further negotiations on "changes to the operational mode" to implement the promise made by Arriva Rail North via ACAS in February 2019 of a "conductor on every train... for the remainder of the franchise".



There is no clear timescale for the talks. The general promise is surely a victory, compared to what the company wanted. But there is a problem. RMT has agreed that drivers, rather than guards, will close train doors, only the guard tells the driver when to do that by pressing a buzzer.

As one guard commented in October: "There is the small matter that the buzzer is not live while the doors are open. But in case they get a technical fix for that, the bigger question is: why would the company get the guard to press something to tell the driver to close the doors, when they can just as easily have them press something to close the doors themselves? The only answer to that question is that their longer-term aim is to scrap the guard".

For now most guards have concluded that this is the best they can hope for. Aslef, the main drivers' union, is still refusing to have drivers take on the job of closing doors. A good number of drivers see no reason to take that work from the guards. Others may be tempted by the company offering them extra money for it. But if Aslef holds firm, Arriva Rail North could yet be forced into leaving the guards' jobs intact. □

Proper pickets preferable

As we all know, there are picket lines, and there are picket lines.

A group of strikers shuffling nervously in a huddle, away from the actual entrances to stations or depots, isn't likely to have much impact.

Where picket lines are most successful is when they're lively, assertive, and mounted at the points where workers actually go into work. This allows pickets to have a conversation with workers coming in, and potentially turn them around.

At depots with multiple entrances and potential booking-on points, this might require some creative picketing, but it can be done.

Strikers shouldn't be cowed by the anti-union laws. One "picket supervisor" can supervise multiple picket lines as long as they can access them in reasonable time. □



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