

Cuts approaching: time to fight!

The start of talks under the aegis of the Rail Industry Recovery Group (RIRG), a body convened by the Department for Transport including Network Rail and the Train Operating Committees, has prompted varying set of reports.

Newspaper reports would have us believe that the talks are a prelude to cuts, saying an 'agreement' has been signed by the four main rail unions (RMT, Aslef, TSSA, and Unite), according to which 'voluntary redundancies will be sought throughout the railway to close the funding gap from an 80% decline in passenger revenue since the start of the pandemic.'

In other words - a fait accompli. The purpose of the talks is to manage the cuts, not negotiate on whether there should be any at all.

RMT's own press release clarifies matters somewhat. The union says that, although it feels it has to participate in the RIRG, it will be doing so on the basis of demanding: a Job Security Agreement to cover the whole rail industry; no pay cuts and or pay freeze; defending and improving pensions; ending casualisation, outsourcing, bogus self-employment and zero hours contracts; bringing outsourced work in-house; a common contract; full travel facilities; and entitlement to enter and remain in the Railways Pension; agenda, including an integrated publicly owned railway as a solution.

RMT says it is 'not committed to acceptance to any of the particular measures, changes or proposals set out or that may arise in the process.'

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Cuts approaching *continued*

The whole basis of the 'Recovery Group' is an attempt by the Tory government and rail industry bosses to bind the unions to a cross-class, 'all-in-this-together' model of 'recovery', whereby all of us — bosses and workers — have to 'make sacrifices' and 'tighten our belts'. We know what this rhetoric means: bosses retain their high salaries, and workers bear the brunt.

Unless a union was in a position to ballot for national action immediately, boycotting the talks would likely be a futile gesture. But they must not be allowed to become a quagmire in which unions get bogged down by arguments — from bosses or conservative bureaucrats inside unions — that we can't possibly begin ballots for actions whilst RIRG talks are still ongoing.

Seeing the press is already presenting this as the trade unions collaborating with job cuts, the unions will need more than clarifying statements to prove that this is not the case. They will need high-profile campaigning and assertive industrial action. Without this, the RIRG will become a trap for our unions and therefore for us.

It would be a mistake to wait for the cuts to start. Instead, we can boost our chances of defending our jobs and

wages by beginning preparations for ballots in every rail industry company affected by proposed job cuts and the pay freeze. And our most effective starting position is not opposition merely to compulsory redundancies, but opposition to all job cuts, by any means. Deleting the job of someone who has taken voluntary redundancy means depriving of a future worker of employment, and increasing workload for those remaining.

An informed and empowered rank and file can keep our unions' feet to the fire and maximise our chances of success. A good start to this would be for all the unions involved in the RIRG to report to members what was discussed immediately after every meeting of that body.



Sleeper action going strong

Caledonian Sleeper staff held an eleven-day strike in June for better pay and conditions. Nightly pickets were well supported, and linked with each other via Zoom. Action is continuing in the form of an overtime and rest day working ban.

Serco's Chief Executive's pay rose to £4.9 million last year. Serco has paid out £17 million to its shareholders. But then Serco turns round to us and tell us we're not getting a penny.

This shows contempt for a workforce which has given 100% and more. Serco is claiming that their hands are tied and that it is the Scottish Government which makes the decisions. But that did

not stop it paying millions to its Chief Executive and shareholders!

Throughout the pandemic we were at work, while management stayed at home. And now it will cost Serco more in train cancellations than it would cost them to give us a pay rise.

Our members come to the picket lines when they can. We keep in touch by e-mail. As long as we keep the e-mails going, that helps keep us together.

There has been no movement by management during the strike. They are not interested in talking to us. So we are going to have to find a way of making them.

SWR accepts green light to attack

After the unions settled their dispute with South Western Railway over driver-only operation, the company has taken advantage of the situation by further attacking workers, proposing to remove the Rail Operator from the dispatch process. The RO will only monitor the PTI at every station other than Waterloo and Reading (where they will use CD/RA).

RMT is rightly opposed to this, but can surely not be surprised. Thus far, it plans to write stern letters to the company and the ORR, but has made it clear that a dispute may follow and that information will be given to SWR members.

When you give ground to the employer, it comes back for more. The union will be fighting a rearguard action, but action is exactly what is needed.

EMR summer of strikes

After previously taking strike action in May, guards on East Midlands Railway are striking every Sunday from 27 June to 15 August, resisting the imposition of worse contracts.



Road accident report

In April 2020, a Controller of Site Safety working for contractor AmcoGiffen was killed at Roade in Northamptonshire.

The RAIB has now published its report, which finds flaws with performance monitoring and appraisal arrangements, the system of work in place for the site, and with efforts to ensure compliance with safety rules.

Read a fuller analysis on the Off The Rails blog, along with regular updates on the campaigns covered in this issue and the new issues that regularly arise for railway workers.

www.workersliberty.org/blogs/rails

For stories from London Underground's frontline, check out Tubeworker's blog:

www.workersliberty.org/twblog

off the rails

- is written by railway workers
- is for all rail workers, whatever your job, employer or union
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