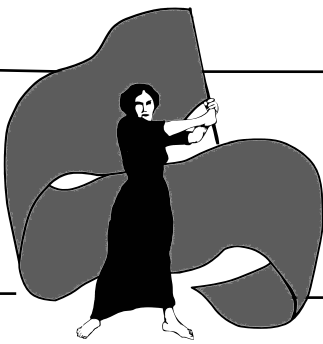




On Guard

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Reform: not on our side!

The far-right is on the rise globally and in the UK. It is an existential threat to the labour movement, black and brown people, women, and LGBTQI people. The far-right riots and pogroms of August 2024 and the increased hostility and attacks on trans people exemplify this.

Reform showed contempt for workers recently by voting against a bill calling for: immediate protection against unfair dismissal, entitlement to sick pay, restrictions on zero-hours contracts and a partial ban on 'fire and rehire'. In a similar vein their proposed tax cuts would benefit the rich the most and are as well thought out as Liz Truss' disastrous plans which Nigel Farage was a big fan of. Reform's leaders also deny the consequences of anthropogenic climate change and its councillors want to scrap net-zero policies. This is on top of them whipping up hysteria and antagonism directed towards migrants, Muslims, and trans people.

Despite this, Reform has growing popularity among trade union members. Following the

general election in 2024 a survey initiated by the TUC found that 10% of union members had voted for Reform and 26% had considered voting for them. It is not uncommon to hear even of trade union reps who openly say they would vote Reform.

As trade unionists we need to look reality squarely in the face and acknowledge that there are working-class people who vote Reform as an anti-establishment vote, and many are persuaded by far-right ideas. They are persuaded that the problems they face are due to immigration, trans rights, EDI, efforts to mitigate climate change, or by other narratives peddled by the far-right, rather than real-terms pay cuts, cuts to the NHS and other social services, cuts to social housing and a deteriorating natural world.

These decisions were not made by migrants in boats or trans people going about their lives, but by politicians imposing the interests of bosses and the wealthy. There has been notable positive opposition to recent proposed cuts to

winter fuel allowance, to the two-child benefit cap, and most recently to cuts to disability support. By stepping up this resistance, we can win more and push back against the far-right threat.

The Labour Party has responded to growing far-right activity and Reform popularity by tacking to the right - increasing immigration raids, cutting welfare support, welcoming the Supreme Court ruling and more.

We need a response rooted in the labour movement and unions that not only stands up for migrant, LGBT+, and women's rights but also fights seriously for broad class demands like £15/hr minimum wage, secure jobs and housing, affordable energy, all to be paid for by taxing the rich. And that final demand, if Labour proposed it, would further reveal as fraudulent Reform's claim to be a friend of the workers. As trade unionists we need to hold our union leaderships to account and seriously fight on these issues.

Hull Trains Dispute: More sustained action an improvement

The Hull Trains dispute remains ongoing, and ASLEF has now ramped up to longer periods of action, although still occasionally cancelling days at the 11th hour. One such day was Monday 14th July, when the company announced a list of services they were cancelling due to industrial action, only to find that there was no industrial action and they'd failed to pick up the email informing them of this. They didn't manage to reinstate all the cancelled services - not the most competent look for their management!

The union has also just secured another mandate to continue the strike action for another 6 months - the rebalot taking place due to the Tory Trade Union Act 2016, legislation that Labour is dragging its feet on repealing.

More good news is that ASLEF has now begun funding the HT strikers via its fighting fund, and has circulated an appeal to branches for donations to help maintain this. We hope they will extend this appeal to the wider movement sooner rather than later, but this is a good start for ensuring the action can continue as long as is necessary to win the reinstatement of the sacked member.

A New AGS

This year's RMT conference saw the announcement of the election of the union's new Assistant General Secretary, filling the vacancy created by Dempsey's unopposed election to the

role of General Secretary. The election was won by Daren Ireland, formerly a regional organiser in the North West.

The losing candidate was Primrose Jeanton, currently the NEC representative for the union's London & Anglia Region. Had Primrose won, she would have been the first woman, and the first black person, to hold a national officer position within the RMT. That the union's "top table" remains exclusively white and male is a serious issue.

Despite these concerns many activists, including members of Workers Liberty (the organisation that facilitates the production and distribution of this bulletin) backed Daren over Primrose because we felt his record showed him to be a more independent voice, less aligned with the current head office leadership, and therefore better able to help open space in the union for critical and dissenting voices, including those from underrepresented backgrounds. As with all elected officials, Daren must now be judged on his record.

What is On Guard?

On Guard is a rank-and-file socialist bulletin, published regularly, written by rail workers, for rail workers, of all grades, and all unions. It is published by the socialist group Workers' Liberty, but is produced in editorial meetings open to all workers. Supporters from outside the rails can help with public distribution. workersliberty.org

Several delegates rightly commented on the fact that the AGM itself was overwhelmingly white and male. RMT needs serious reflection on how to improve diversity and equality within the union.

Sprinters (still) too hot!

The recent bout of hot weather once again shone the spotlight on Northern's oldest units and the unacceptable lack of adequate cooling in the driving cabs (and the saloons, for that matter!).

158s have aircon, but on many of the units it doesn't work even close to well enough to keep staff or passengers comfortable in high temperatures, and 150s have nothing apart from windows to open and dirt-cheap ultra-noisy electric fans.

Never forget, we need to be comfortable to concentrate properly on working a train safely. If we can't cool a cab down (or in some cases, can't even switch off heat sources fitted in the cab!) then we can't focus on working safely - it's no different than when they send units into service in winter with no working heater. Get it in the repair book and get it failed, no need to stand for unreasonable working conditions!

Got a story you want to share? Write in! All contributions anonymous

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