

off the rails

a platform for rank-and-file rail workers — spring/summer 2014 — 30p where sold

Fighting sexism at work



Inside: **Fighting sexism at work and in our unions;** London Underground jobs fight; **Northern Rail MDD dispute;** First Great Western; **Marxism at work: why bosses use casualisation;** Network Rail; **Fighting for LGBT rights worldwide;** Political strategy after the May elections; **Rail Gourmet;** more!

Fighting Tube cuts and closures

Solid strike action in February and April has forced London Underground to concede on some aspects of its cuts plan.

The strikes secured guarantees from management that no worker would lose salary as a result of any changes, a commitment they had previously been unwilling to make.

But the threat to 953 jobs, and 270 ticket offices, remains. As well as its industrial campaign, the RMT union is supporting a political fight against cuts and closures, linking up with disabled people, pensioners, students, and others through the Hands Off London Transport campaign coalition. Ticket offices closures and staffing cuts are deeply unpopular with London's travelling public, and the HOLT campaign can help turn up the political pressure on LU bosses and their political masters in Boris Johnson's City Hall regime.

HOLT plans a day of action on Friday 13 June, timed to coincide with what would have been Bob Crow's birthday, featuring

leafleting, demonstrations, and other actions at local station.

RMT is also sponsoring the "Listen to London" conference on 26 July, where labour-movement and working-class community campaigns will have a chance to feed into a consultation on the future of the Tube — a consultation that LU has, so far, steadfastly refused to organise, because it knows how unpopular its proposals are.

While there is still a lot of work to do to ensure that HOLT and the 26 July event fulfil their potential, they show how our unions can use public political campaigning to widen support. The fight against job cuts and closures on the Tube is not just an industrial battle over workers' economic issues, it is a political fight that goes to the heart of what kind of public transport we want in London.

Supporters of *Off The Rails'* sister publication on London Underground, *Tubeworker*, have been central to getting HOLT off the ground, and will continue to be active in fighting for a public political campaign alongside industrial action.



For daily updates from class struggle on London Underground, visit the Tubeworker blog at workersliberty.org/twblog, follow @Tube_Worker on Twitter, and add "Tubeworker Bulletin" on Facebook.

Crossrail

Crossrail will run across London — from Brentwood to the north east, to Abbey Wood in the south east and Twyford to the west. It will affect rail workers across many companies, geographical areas, grades and unions.

Off the Rails thinks that unions should be joining together to get the best possible working conditions out of Crossrail.

A lot of us have concerns that, rather than improving our conditions, Crossrail will make them worse. We have a lot of questions at the moment.

For example, it's less than a year until the the line between Liverpool Street and Brentwood is transferred from Abellio Greater Anglia to Crossrail. Yet those of us who work on that line still don't know what our terms and conditions will be. Will we lose our rail travel into Essex? Will we get TfL free travel? What about our pay and pensions?

A few years ago Crossrail committed to extending the traffic day and ticket office opening hours — but will Crossrail stick to that if London Underground succeeds in closing its ticket offices?

Some current First Great Western staff don't know who they'll be working for, whether they'll remain working for their

current employer or get transferred over to Crossrail.

On London Underground, reps have been assured that LU staff on LU terms and conditions will be running the major central London stations, e.g. Bond Street and Tottenham Court Road. But the plan is for Crossrail to have its own platforms, staffed by its own staff. Will these staff count towards the minimum numbers LU requires to keep its stations open? Or will this be another way of diluting the number of LU staff that LU employs on Tube stations?

Our reps who are going to meetings about Crossrail need to report back to us about what is going on.

Off the Rails thinks that reps should get together — across regions, grades, and even unions to share what we know about what is planned. In RMT, for example, we know that reps in different regions have been having separate meetings with Crossrail management but reps don't seem to be talking to each other.

By working together we could focus on achieving the best possible terms and conditions out of Crossrail, instead of being divided against each other.



What does UKIP really stand for?



Above: UKIP's Nigel Farage, with a fox-hunting chum. UKIP are a party of the rich, for the rich.

The 22 May local council and European election results do not make happy reading for socialists and working-class activists.

The rise of UKIP, now the second or third party in many local councils and outright winner in the European elections, should worry us all. Learning what UKIP really stands for, and telling workmates and comrades in your unions, is vital if they are to be opposed and defeated.

1. UKIP want tax cuts for the rich. They want to abolish inheritance tax and cut taxes for business. They would axe public services, reduce state pensions, and cut funding to schools and colleges.

2. UKIP want the health service fully opened up to the market. They would see hospitals closed, jobs lost and care sold to the cheapest bidder.

3. UKIP would end maternity leave. UKIP want the church to have a greater say in family policy. UKIP oppose gay marriage and

see LGBT equality as a problem. They want cuts to services to support disabled people and older people.

6. UKIP want to double Britain's prison numbers. In 2010 they called for the establishment of "boot camps" for young people.

7. UKIP deny that climate change is caused by human behaviour, they don't want to save our planet and don't want curbs on pollution and waste.

8. UKIP see Britain as a superpower that needs more missiles and war ships, rather than hospitals and schools. They will cut spending to public services to spend on war.

9. UKIP want to scrap paid leave for workers, scrap sick pay, and scrap maternity pay. UKIP are the party of rich businesses. They want a bonfire of employment rights and "would put an end to most legislation regarding matters such as weekly working hours, holidays ... overtime, redundancy or sick pay etc. and provide a statutory, standard, very short employment contract template."

10. UKIP scaremonger: two million UK citizens live or work in Europe and two million Europeans live or work in the UK. The recent poster campaign: "26 million unemployed in Europe want to come here and steal our jobs" is just whipping up fear and prejudice. It is arrogance to say that workers want to leave their jobs and families to move to Britain.

You could say millions of the unemployed in the north want to go to the south and steal jobs there!

• Abridged from an article in *Solidarity* 324, 14 May 2014. See bit.ly/ukip-stands for full article.

Rail unions and politics

Our unions' political strategies need a serious rethink. TSSA, ASLEF, and Unite remain affiliated to the Labour Party, but are meek and acquiescent within it.

When the Collins Report, an initiative sponsored by the Labour leaders to reduce the union vote inside the party, was voted on, our unions voted *for it!* Turkeys voting for Christmas in extremis. They don't want to rock the boat before an election year, so, unless forced to change course, our unions will be, at best, mildly critical of the Labour leaders' lack of backbone and their promises to maintain most Tory cuts.

The RMT was expelled from the Labour Party in 2004, and has since flirted with a variety of electoral initiatives without ever really developing a coherent strategy of its own. In the May 2014 elections, it ploughed hundreds of thousands of pounds into "No2EU", an electoral coalition which attempted to make arguments against Europe, and immigration from Europe, "from the left". No2EU gained slightly more than 30,000 votes nationally, a decrease of 121,479 from when it stood in 2009. *Off The Rails* believes the RMT/No2EU position on Europe is wrong – we don't think "independent" British capitalism, withdrawn from the EU, would be any better, and we don't think more immigration controls would be a good thing. Arguing against immigration simply plays into the hands of racists and nationalists like UKIP. UKIP is a much more viable option for anyone who wanted to vote "against Europe" or "against immigration", as No2EU's pitiful score shows.

RMT also supported the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition. In most places, TUSC

popped up a few weeks before the election, ran a paper campaign, and has since disappeared. In Southampton, a former Labour councillor who ran under the TUSC banner after splitting from the Labour Party after he voted against cuts retained his seat. Those who back TUSC out of disgust with the rightwards drift of the Labour Party have the right instinct, but paper efforts without ongoing roots in local working-class communities don't get us very far. Some argue that TUSC is building for the future, but at the moment its election results (and as it is almost entirely an electoral initiative, with little life between election times, this is all we have to judge it on) show diminishing returns. Instead of either going along with the Labour leaders, or throwing cash at dead-end election-only efforts, our unions should:

- Confront the Labour leaders (within the party where possible, including through use of unions' Parliamentary Groups, outside it where not) to demand they stand in 2015 on a programme of working-class policies, including rail renationalisation, and assert that we will force them to keep their promises in government!

- Stand and support left-of-Labour election candidates in local areas where their candidacy is properly linked and accountable to working-class struggles, such as Southampton.

- **Organise public, political campaigns for union policies: the "Action for Rail" campaign is a good initiative but should be expanded and radicalised.**

THIS IS A DISCUSSION PIECE. HAVE A VIEW? EMAIL US.

Why bosses use casualisation



Since 2008, 80% of all newly created jobs in Britain have been on zero hours contracts, where workers have no guaranteed shifts and have to work to the whims of their employer.

Casualisation and the erosion of job security are particularly big problems on the railway. In July 2013, an RMT report estimated only 10% of Personal Track Safety card holders were employed directly by Network Rail. The remainder are employed through agencies or are considered self employed for the companies purposes.

Casual workers have no job security. They can often be told at a moments notice that they are no longer required. The nature and the conditions of their work can change, and if they object they can be threatened with the sack. Organising to fight for better terms and conditions is an uphill battle as there may be

no stable workforce to organise, and workers who stick their head above the parapet can be easily victimised. It is easy to see why employers are so keen on casualisation.

Employers like to justify casualisation by saying it offers flexibility. This is true in a sense — but the flexibility is all one way. Bosses can decide on a moments notice what work will be done and by how many people. The workers have no say about how much or how little they will work. If they refuse shifts when they don't want them they may find themselves "overlooked" when they do. Because workers can be got rid of so easily employers can dictate their terms and conditions without having to be flexible at all.

Friedrich Engels, the Marxist writer who co-authored the *Communist Manifesto* with Karl Marx, observed in 1891 that as the numbers of the working class increased so



Marxism *at work*

did "the insecurity of existence". The bosses' ability to take on and fire workers as they please relies on there being a large, relatively well-educated working class that can perform the jobs required. It also relies on improvements in productivity forcing people out of work, creating what Marx called a "reserve army" of workers.

Marx also observed that capitalism creates situations where work controls the worker, not the other way around. In order to make the most profit a capitalist needs to employ people as productively as possible, only using them for exactly as much as they are needed. Rather than the person performing the task dictating how it should be done the

nature of the task dictates how the person performing it must live. "It is not the worker who employs the conditions of work, but rather the reverse, the conditions of work employ the worker."

We should demand an end to outsourcing; direct employment for all, and guaranteed hours.

Disputes like the STM security workers on London Overground, who campaigned for, and won, an end to zero-hours contracts, and the Hovis bakery workers in Wigan whose strikes forced bosses to give guaranteed hours, show that casualisation can be confronted through well-organised industrial action.

Ideas for Freedom 2014: Their Class War and Ours

3-6 July, University of London Union, central London

A weekend of socialist discussion, education, and debate

Across the world, capitalists are waging class war against the living standards and rights of workers and the oppressed. At Ideas for Freedom, we will be asking: how can we effectively resist and fight back? And how can we organise and educate to revive and strengthen our movement for the long term? IFF will include lectures, debates, workshops, films and plenty of space for objections, dissent and criticism. IFF will include lectures, debates, workshops, films and plenty of space for objections, dissent and criticism.

Sessions include:

- Activists from the Turkish rank-and-file workers' movement UID-DER on working-class struggle in Turkey after the Soma mine disaster
- How can the unions regrow?
- Will there be a Labour government? What should the left demand of Labour? With John McDonnell MP, James Elliott of NUS executive and Labour Students for Free Education and Jill Mountford from the Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign.
- Oppression and liberation: Marxism and "intersectionality"; The politics of sex and "sexualisation"; Building international solidarity for LGBT rights
- Learning from the Miners' Strike: the story of the strike, how the miners could have won, the strike and liberation politics (with a speaker from Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners)
- Introduction to Marxism sessions
- Plus speakers from the Lifeworks and Ritzy Living Wage struggles, NUS International Students' Officer-elect Shreya Paudel on defending migrants, RMT Women's Advisory Committee chair Becky Crocker and much more...

• Food and refreshments offered • Crash accommodation available • Free crèche



Fighting sexism



The famous Ford Dagenham strike helped win legal equality for men and women workers. But sexist attitudes still persist in many workplaces.

2015 will mark 100 years since the first woman joined the RMT's forerunner, the NUR.

RMT women will use this anniversary to take pride in 100 years of fighting battles to break down barriers to equal treatment in our industry and our union.

But the anniversary is also a chance to reflect on how far we've come compared to where we want to be. We are still a long way from being equal.

At work, we have to fight sexism. It's still too often assumed that we can't do our job as well as our male colleagues. One female engineer described how the annual interview to test her knowledge is an interrogation, while her male colleagues' interviews last five minutes!

Sexual harassment is still part of the workplace culture. Sometimes you can't go

into your messroom or book on for duty without someone commenting on your arse or thighs. We heard recently that one bloke walked into a messroom and told his female colleague, "Get your tits out". Of course, such comments are often a "joke" — or even a "compliment". But we'd rather have a bit of respect than a whole heap of flattery! We go into our place of work to do a job, on an equal basis to our male colleagues. We're not just here for decoration!

The sexism we still experience means it's necessary to have a union that stands up against discrimination and inequality. We need a union that will vigorously challenge sexism until it is eradicated.

So it is disheartening that, while women make up 12.5% of RMT's membership, we comprise 0% of RMT's leadership. RMT does not have even have one woman national

in our workplaces

officer or member of its Executive. Only one woman has completed a term on the RMT executive in the union's history, our comrade Janine Booth.

The all-male, all-white leadership is not representing women. As such, sexism, sexual harassment and sex discrimination in our industry is going largely unchallenged.

Women's issues sometimes feel ignored. We repeatedly ask to be included in RMT's monthly news magazine; we are told, "write your own articles and we will publish them". Do the shipping section have to write their

own material for *RMT News*? Why must we jump through more hoops than others to get our stories in print?

One of the saddest episodes in recent months was the publication on RMT's website of a poster advertising a boxing fundraising event for the RMT Widows and Orphans fund. It contained a cartoon image of a bikini-clad "ring girl", with a caricature of a woman's body shape — huge boobs and a tiny waist.

As well as perpetuating damaging false ideals for women's bodies, this image conveyed no respect for women.

Some women involved in *Off the Rails* wrote and moved a motion at RMT's women's conference that condemned the publication of such a sexist image on the RMT's website.

Women spoke about how they felt angry, let down, and ashamed of our union. The motion passed after a lot of debate.

Women in the RMT have always been strong. But now we're gaining confidence. It was a big step to speak out openly about RMT's publication of the sexist poster; none of us wants to criticise the union in which we take a proud and active part. But we want to be proud of a union that represents us; that fights as hard to eradicate sexism as it does against every other workplace injustice.

So in the coming year, RMT women and supporters of *Off the Rails* will be campaigning to increase women's representation, e.g. we'll feed into RMT's review of its internal structures. We will also organise events to highlight issues women face, such as marking 25th November, the UN day of action to eradicate violence against women.



Fighting sexism is everyone's responsibility

Taking on sexist attitudes isn't the job of women workers. All workers need to confront bigotry and prejudice in our workplaces. Off The Rails spoke to some male workers who'd challenged sexist behaviour at work.

"I walked into the messroom, noticed there was a picture of a topless woman on the wall. I thought 'I am going to have to do something about this. What am I going to do?' So I walked over, and took it off the wall, people looked at me, and I put it in the bin. Plenty of women had seen it... but had let it go. In the messroom there is a lot of banter, people have known each other decades, so there is an attitude of 'why mention it?', 'why make a big deal of it?' But that picture was just a


blatant statement, I had to deal with it, so I pulled it down."

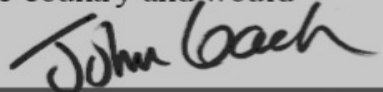
"A woman customer came through my station wearing a short skirt and a low cut top, and my colleague started coming out with 'they go out dressed like that and wonder why they get raped'-type stuff. It was just the two of us on the station, and I was able to confront him and argue with him about it. Other colleagues on the gateline make lewd, objectifying remarks when female passengers come through. In a way sexism about passengers is easier to deal with than about colleagues. In the messroom there is always the cover of 'it's just banter'. Someone talking about a passenger can't say, 'it's just banter' about someone they have never actually met."

Vote John Leach for GS!



"I am standing for RMT General Secretary, to lead a united, democratic, fighting, progressive union. I welcome the support I have already received from around the country and would welcome your support too."

 www.facebook.com/johnforGS



Toilet humour?

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, all public transport will have to be accessible by 2019.

The ageing "Pacer" DMUs (Classes 142, 143 and 144) cannot be made accessible without considerable refurbishment and the sacrifice of a good deal of the existing saloon space.

A rumour persists — and seems to be being confirmed informally by some NR managers — that on Northern Rail at least the solution to this problem is not to retire these decrepit units and replace them with decent, safe, modern rolling stock. Instead, the supposed plan is that the toilets will be removed altogether, thus complying with the accessibility laws. If you don't provide a facility, there's nothing to be accessed!

You only have to look at one of these units — never mind ride on or work on one — to realise they should have been retired years ago. If this happens, they're going to be even more uncomfortable for passengers and staff alike.

It would come as no surprise if an operator like Northern did choose to let its passengers and staff down in this way. It runs its services with mainly old, knackered and poorly maintained stock, raking in the biggest subsidy per passenger mile of any rail franchise and still paying millions to its shareholders.

If this goes ahead, RMT and ASLEF should refuse to operate the units. Passengers and staff deserve to travel with dignity on trains that are fit for purpose and accessible to all. This would be a big step away from that.

Rail renationalisation

ASLEF and TSSA voted to accept the "Collins Review" rule changes, which will lead to a drastic reduction in their (and all other Labour-affiliated unions') voting strength within Labour Party structures.

This outcome needs to be registered as a clear defeat for the unions but in public they counter by pointing to other 'positive' changes of tenth rate importance.

In private the thinking seems to be that the unions can't rock the boat before the general election. This is coupled with mollifying but nebulous chatter about how militant towards Labour the unions will be after the elections.

In early May, 30 Labour Party PPCs wrote a letter calling on their party to

intervene in the rail industry in the same way that it has said it will do, if elected, in the energy market. They point to the success of the not for private profit model (NFPPM) that has worked well on the East Coast line. Even Ed Milliband has made vaguely supportive noises about reforming the system whilst some senior people have said that NFPPM does not go far enough.

It seems that Labour policy on the railways is in flux at the moment so the unions need to be pressing them hard on this.

A campaign for Labour to adopt rail renationalisation, the policy of all the rail unions, has some chance of success.

Funding strikes to win

As government cuts proceed unabated, and employers tighten the screw to make us pay and drive up their profits, rail workers find ourselves fighting more and more disputes.

And those disputes are for higher and higher stakes, fought with seriousness and determination by both sides.

Just as a snapshot, we currently have disputes on (at least) First Great Western, Heathrow Express/Connect, several cleaning companies, Northern Rail, London Underground, London Midland, Balfour Beatty, and probably several more.

In many of these, the employer is fighting for keeps, throwing its whole weight into riding out strike action and refusing our demands. So we have to fight fire with fire. We have to throw our whole weight into our side too.

That means imaginative campaigning, appealing for support and solidarity to passengers and to the workers' movement, political pressure, resolute negotiation, and rank-and-file workers being informed and in control. It also means solid, sustained industrial action – and that will mean providing financial support to strikers so that we can keep going longer than the bosses can.

However committed workers are to a particular dispute, we can genuinely struggle financially. Unions often find themselves calling strikes for fewer days than they know would be effective because members have told reps that they can not afford more. Payments to alleviate hardship would enable

longer, more effective action – and would send an important message to strikers that the union recognises the financial hardship of taking action.



There has long been a reluctance in our unions to provide strike pay. The argument tends to be that 'striking is all about sacrifice' and 'we don't pay people to go on strike'. But actually, striking should be all about winning, and we can pay people to strike if we choose to. A more credible argument is that there is a risk in having people rely on strike pay and therefore vulnerable to backing out if the money runs out. But we can combine building support for our strikes with raising funds for them, which should keep the money coming in. And the more solid the strike, the quicker it will win.

All our unions have funds that they can use to support strikers. If they pursue a serious strategy to build those funds, then they will have enough available when it is needed. Alongside this, branches can run their own funds, less formally if necessary.

Strike pay is part of our arsenal of weapons in industrial battles. Let's use it.

Fighting for LGBT rights worldwide

In many countries across the world, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people are recurrently subjected to targeted killings, violent assaults, torture, and sexual violence.

Shockingly, in 2014, homosexuality is illegal in 76 countries around the world, and in 10 of these punishable by death or life imprisonment. In recent years, Russian President Vladimir Putin has overseen and promoted a vicious onslaught of state-sponsored homophobic legislation in Russia to distract the public from widespread government corruption and other social ills. It is now illegal in Russia to even say that you are gay, let alone talk positively about homosexuality! Russian LGBT activists have reported a dramatic increase in homophobic attacks since the anti-gay law was introduced, and attackers being protected by the police.

And in other parts of the world, human rights groups are also reporting a trend of worsening human rights violations against LGBT people. In several African countries, parliaments are advocating laws that would further penalise and even execute homosexuals.

On 7 January 2014, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan signed a law that makes gay marriage in Nigeria punishable by up to 14 years in prison. And already, LGBT rights activists are reporting mass arrests and beatings of gay people all over Nigeria. Dozens of gay men have already been

arrested in the northern state of Bauchi, after police drew up a list of 168 gay men who are now being hunted down. Within days, an Islamic court in Bauchi put 11 Muslim men on trial accused of being homosexuals, after they were arrested by local residents and handed to the Islamic police force.

The recent anti-gay witch-hunt is being used by political leaders to distract attention from other human rights violations and is seen as a calculated move to divert the focus of political debate in Nigeria from the endemic political corruption and unequal economy.

Across the world, LGBT people are routinely used by corrupt political forces as scapegoats for the social instability of the capitalist system, serving as a functional distraction from misgovernment, economic problems, rising food prices, and political tyranny.

The capitalist class purposely target LGBT people and make use of popular prejudices and ignorance as a means to foster division in the working class and divert attention from class-based issues.



First Great Western

RMT members have been challenging First Great Western for months over several issues that amounted to what the RMT called a “breakdown in industrial relations”.

In parallel, RMT members have been fighting an ongoing battle with First Great Western for the London Living Wage for Mitie and Rail Gourmet workers.

Following a strong yes vote for industrial action over the breakdown of industrial relations and a promise to pay the London Living Wage, the RMT has sent out messages to its members that both disputes are “settled”.

The dispute around the breakdown of industrial relations centred on: the unjust sacking of two people; an over-harsh use of the disciplinary policy and increasingly prevalent use of zero hours contracts on the First Great Western franchise.

The settlement includes a promise to come to an arrangement with the two individuals who were sacked. First Great Western has said it will stick to agreed disciplinary policies

in future. First also says it will negotiate over permanent employment with workers on zero hours contracts.

The London Living Wage will be paid to Rail Gourmet workers from this Summer and to cleaners working for Mitie from early 2015.

It is heartening to see that industrial action has forced some concessions.

But we need to be wary of First Great Western. It has a track record of breaking promises.

After pushing First hard with a strong 'yes' vote in favour of taking industrial action, we need to make sure it's not thrown away. First was especially vulnerable to industrial action just over a year away from the expiry of its franchise.

“I hope all will be well”, said one rep, “because it will be a lot harder for RMT to go to its members again for more strikes if First breaks its promise”.

We need to show First that we're ready to take action the instant First shows signs of backing out of its commitments.

Rail Gourmet

Strike action by Rail Gourmet (East Midlands Trains contract) workers has been suspended pending further talks.

A successful campaign of harassment, intimidation and misrepresentation by RG management had weakened the resolve of members to take action. A mainly young workforce with little experience of trade unions and without the steadying hand of the

two reps (suspended since January) largely responsible for getting the workforce in a position to take strike action in the first place aided management's efforts.

The union will need to talk to these members and come up with a strategy to counter RG's dishonest presentation of the union's case.

Northern Rail

RMT Maintenance Depot Drivers (MDDs) at Northern Rail's Heaton and Neville Hill Traincare depots are currently in dispute with the company over regrading.

In a press release from February, the late RMT General Secretary Bob Crow said:

"RMT firmly believe that the company has been disingenuous in their approach by failing to recognise the multi-skills and the hard work that this group of maintenance depot drivers bring to the Northern Rail operation.

"The union is clear that the job is complex and demanding, and that now is the time for the company to acknowledge that MDDs should be re-graded accordingly in recognition of their role and responsibilities.

"This dispute has been forced on us by the management's refusal to take the real nature of these jobs into account through the re-grading process and it is now down to them to rectify the situation. RMT remains available for talks."

The MDDs have taken strike action and are currently enforcing an overtime ban. The action certainly seems to have ruffled the company's feathers as they have been attempting to induce mainline drivers to carry out duties on the depot that would normally be carried out by the MDDs.

ASLEF is not recognised to represent MDDs and, to its credit, has made it clear to management that their members should not be used to cover MDD work. They have issued a circular to members instructing them so but some Leeds drivers *Off The Rails* has spoken to do not seem clear on where the dividing line is.

Come on ASLEF — you're right on this, but get the message out properly that you support this dispute and that your members will not be used to undermine this action!

In addition, in an email sent amongst Northern Rail management and seen by the RMT, a senior Northern manager praises his team for "covering up the technical failures"

that occurred during the industrial action.

"Technical failures" are a fact of life in the rail industry but to cover them up suggests a desperate management. Let's hope they come crawling back to the table soon.



Network Rail



Recently we have heard various bits of news regarding jobs reappearing after they were moved/ lost under the phase 2b/c re-organisation of Network Rail maintenance.

At the time we said that the cuts were akin to getting a dog to live without food — it works for a short period then the dog dies.

Welding jobs/teams were lost with the intention of using contractor/ agency staff to cover “routine” rail replacement. This has led to an increase in temporary and emergency speed restrictions with some of these going beyond the standard permitted.

Maintenance of points has also suffered. Under the old regime, there were dedicated teams whose sole concern was looking after points and nothing else. One of the benefits was that this gave a sense of ownership while also making the bosses more accountable. These teams were split up and, as we said at the time, this has led to an increase in faults across the whole system. There is some attempt to rectify this problem by the clever use of rostering, but it still leaves a major part of the system poorly maintained.

Even now, after more than 3 years, there are still items of equipment missing off the computerised data base which are only being maintained by the good will of the workers.

If the union had followed up our original strike ballot result with a well organised campaign and the use of industrial action then we would have a more reliable rail system and, better still, more jobs.

off the rails

- is a quarterly pamphlet, plus bulletins as needed for particular campaigns or disputes.
- is written by railway workers — all our reports are from the front line. Names are left off so that writers can tell their stories and express their views without fear of victimisation.
- is for all rail workers, whatever your grade, location or employer, whatever trade union you are in.
- aims to provide information to rail workers, support to our struggles, and a forum to discuss strategies.
- welcomes and will publish reports, comments and opinions from all rail workers.
- is fiercely pro-union, but is independent of the union head offices, so is not chauvinist about any particular union, and is free to criticise the unions' leadership when we feel it is necessary.
- has a statement of aims called 'Fantasy Union of Rail and Transport Workers': get a copy when you subscribe.
- is published by the socialist group Workers' Liberty, but aims to be a platform and an organising tool for all activists who share our basic outlook.
- can be sent to you in the post — send a fiver to the address below, or phone us to arrange subs for multiple copies.
- can be contacted at:
20E Tower Workshops, Riley Road,
London SE1 3DG, 07941-777632
off.therrails@btoopenworld.com
www.workersliberty.org/offtherrails