

# ***off the rails***

*a platform for rank-and-file rail workers - summer/autumn 2013 - 30p where sold*

## **Fighting casualisation**



## **Sack the agencies, not the workers!**

Inside: **How to fight casualisation**; Assessing the East Midlands Trains pensions fight; **Northern Rail**; cleaners' struggles; **Marxism at work**; **why we oppose immigration controls**; London Overground job cuts; **Working-class political representation**; more!

# Fighting casualisation



**T**his issue of *Off The Rails* focuses on the issue of casualisation, and how to fight it (and how not to fight it!).

On the centre pages, there's an article looking at the "Justice for the 33" campaign, and elsewhere we discuss the dispute against casualisation on Northern Rail.

Casualised forms of working are spreading around the railway industry like wildfire. Agency working, zero-hour contracts, temporary staff ... All are means for employers to plug gaps in coverage without forking out the cost of permanent staff with secure pay and conditions. There are now many engineering projects with more agency workers than direct employees. And we are seeing more and more in ticketing, gateline, security, admin and other roles.

Many are supplied by notorious companies such as G4S and Trainpeople – shady rip-off merchants who grab the money with little

concern for the service they provide and no concern for their workers.

Employers do not need an excuse to drive down our pay and our rights in order to maximise their profits. But if they did need one, they have the McNulty report and the 9% cuts to the Department for Transport (12.5% to Transport for London).

These developments pose a huge danger to railway workers. One hundred years ago, railworkers did not have guaranteed hours of work. They were at the mercy of employers and the hours they chose to hand out each week. Paying the rent or feeding the family was dependant on crumbs from management's table. One of the great wins of the historic 1919 national railway strike was the guaranteed week. The spread of casualisation threatens to set us back a century.

Agency working is increasing, but it is not new. Back in 1997, this publication wrote: "*Off the Rails* is in favour of taking agency workers into the union as a means of defending our conditions and improving theirs. The point is that if we don't take them into the union they will be used to undermine our conditions, something that is already happening. We need to start speaking to agency staff and work out methods of effective unionisation."

Our key demand has to be that





railway companies stop using agencies and give the agency workers permanent

employment. Kicking out the agencies must not mean kicking out the workers.

We can beat casualisation through a united fight across all grades and companies. We

have to avoid the trap of allowing the bosses to turn temporary and permanent workers against each other. Permanent staff need to remember that it is not the agency or temporary workers who we have an argument with – it is the employers (both theirs and ours) who are exploiting them and undermining us.

**And agency workers should not see permanent staff as a privileged elite, but as allies in the fight to get decent conditions and job security for all of us.**

## Cleaners' battles continue



The Tyne and Wear Metro cleaners' struggle for living wages, sick pay, and travel pass equality is now one of the longest-running disputes in the British labour movement.

They began a two-week strike on 9 July, and have so far struck for 19 (not all consecutive) days in their dispute.

Casualisation and outsourcing effects cleaners particularly badly, as it gives the bosses several layers to hide behind. The cleaners are employed by Churchill, who can pass the buck up to DB Regio, who run the Metro on a contract from its owners Nexus (who are still formally accountable to the local authority).

The exploitation that always accompanies outsourcing of this kind shows why we need publicly-owned, integrated transport systems where workers have the same employer.

London Underground cleaners employed by ISS are balloting for action short of strikes to oppose the introduction of biometric fingerprinting machines.

ISS wants workers to sign on using the machines. ISS has a history of using workers' precarious immigration status to intimidate them out of taking action, and has used deportation raids against union activists during industrial disputes.

**The workers will ballot for a boycott of the fingerprinting machines.**

# Domestic violence is a union issue

**E**very week, two women are killed by their partner or ex partner.

Many thousands more (and a smaller number of men) are victims of domestic violence. This is NOT an issue to be dealt with behind closed doors. It affects people at work and we need to take it up as a workplace issue.

Being a victim of domestic violence can affect how well you do your job, your timekeeping, your physical and mental well-being. But on a more positive note, going to work can be your means of escape, your opportunity to find support.

Transport workers are subjected to an alarming level of assault at work, often taking the hit for frustrations with our bosses' failure to provide a decent service. We have long demanded the right to go to work without being assaulted. But we also need the right to go home after work and not be assaulted.

RMT has circulated a model policy on domestic violence to employers. ASLEF also has a model policy, but it has been gathering dust for a while. Cross-Europe transport trade union body the European Transport Workers' Federation is also taking up this issue through the work of its Women's Committee.

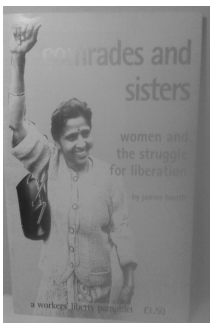
As a minimum, we need to fight for:

- no disciplinary action under MFA/Attendance policies for non-attendance and lateness caused by domestic abuse
- protection from abusers seeking you out at work
- time off that you might need to escape domestic violence, or to help a close friend or relative.

You might think that even hard-faced employers would not resist measures that provide a degree of protection at relatively little cost. But while some employers have agreed to discuss the policy, one or two major employers have resisted, arguing that their employees' personal lives are not their concern.

The idea that domestic violence is a private matter has been around for a long time. It helps to protect its perpetrators and disempower its victims. We can not tolerate employers taking such a stance – especially as they are supposed to have a 'duty of care'!

**We have to get the issue of domestic violence out from behind closed doors and into the mainstream of industrial relations.**



## Comrades and Sisters

**A Workers' Liberty pamphlet on socialist feminism**

**How does the struggle for women's liberation relate to the struggle for working-class liberation? Are "feminism" and "socialism" contradictory ideologies? How have working-class and socialist feminists organised in the past?**

**Buy online for £1.50 from [bit.ly/comradessisters](http://bit.ly/comradessisters)**

# Northern Rail



**R**MT decided not to call strikes on Northern Rail in a dispute over casualisation, after signing an agreement with management which offered some concessions on ongoing issues.

The company has agreed to changes or reviews on issues including concessionary travel and rostering systems. A communiqué from management to Northern Rail staff said the resolved items were “relatively minor in the scheme of things”.

The central issue in the dispute, however, was Northern Rail’s use of agency staff, through the Trainpeople and G4S agencies. Although Northern Rail has committed to not expanding the use of agency staff during the current franchise, they did not commit to taking on agency staff as direct employees when the current Trainpeople contract expires in July 2013. The union also agreed that Northern Rail may have to employ some agency staff on a shot-term basis, and that it would be involved in planning and consultation as and when this was necessary. Management’s statement boasts of how they successfully “resisted [union] demands” to employ the agency workers.

Workers voted by a 58% majority to strike over the issue, and while some activists felt that

the narrow majority and the failure of other rail unions TSSA and ASLEF to join the fight made the strength of any potential strike doubtful, *Off The Rails* that this does not justify endorsing an inadequate agreement.

One RMT activist told *Off The Rails*: “Sometimes you have to be honest and say that you don’t have the strength to pull off a solid strike, but that doesn’t mean you have to positively endorse a particular agreement with management.

“We balloted to strike against the use of agency labour and for the direct employment of all agency workers, and instead we’ve signed up to a deal that accepts agency labour and says the union will help management plan when to use it.”

**The RMT’s Executive agreed to endorse the deal with only one vote against.**

## G4S’s record of shame

**G**4S has grim record in many industries.

In 2010, G4S security guards working for the UK Border Agency killed Angolan refugee Jimmy Mubenga by forcing him into an unsafe position on his deportation flight. Following his death, the guards colluded with G4S senior management to write up and collate their accounts of the event. G4S is a company that only cares about profit. Its practises on its UKBA contracts led to innocent people dying.

**Who’s to say it won’t cut corners on the railway too?**

# No to immigration controls!

Right-wing media and politicians are whipping up a storm of fear over immigration. If we believe them, immigration is to blame for unemployment, housing shortages and low wages.

The Home Office even has a van driving round telling “illegal” immigrants to “go home or face arrest”.

Workers need to see through the lies peddled by the ruling class. Division based on nationality and immigration status only benefits our bosses.

“Within a year”, says a typical scaremongering Ukip leaflet, “29 million Romanians and Bulgarians will gain the right to live, work and draw benefits here”. *Off the Rails* rejects the language of fear and hatred targeted against foreigners and immigrants. If we look around our workplaces, many of us will see people from Romania, Bulgaria and many different backgrounds. Our problems at work cannot be pinned on the nationality of our colleagues. They can almost always be blamed on our bosses!

Bosses and politicians dress up immigration controls as protection for workers’ jobs, wages and housing. But immigration controls weaken the working class by dividing us against each other. Borders also create a section of the working class without legal rights, who are open to brutal exploitation, which worsens conditions for all workers. In 2008, cleaners in RMT on London Underground struck for the London Living Wage. Cleaning contractors who had employed ‘illegal’ cleaners while they were silent suddenly contacted immigration services to arrest and intimidate those now

standing up for themselves. Although the London Living Wage was won, union organisation suffered. No workers benefited from the crackdown; they had to put up with brutal treatment while the union rebuilt its strength. ISS cleaning contractor has recently employed similar tactics in response to an RMT strike ballot on London Underground.

*Off The Rails* believes that all immigration controls should be scrapped, and people should be able to live wherever they like. That seems radical, but countries in the EU have already abolished immigration controls for movement between each other and the sky hasn’t fallen down.

Immigration controls are a new phenomenon – the first immigration control was introduced in Britain in 1905. They haven’t been around forever.

The entire population of France, Germany, Spain, Greece, Portugal, and Italy already have the right to live, work and draw benefits here, as they have had for decades. Most choose not to.

The entire population of Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle have those rights in London. But those cities have not emptied out simply because there are no controls or restrictions preventing their populations from moving elsewhere. Would Britain be better if the government controlled where you could live and seek work?

There are 750,000 British people living in Spain who can get jobs or claim benefits there, and 200,000 in France. Should all the British people living abroad be “sent home”?



# Marxism *at work*

Freedom of movement is a basic Marxist principle. Our view is that, if wealth is free to travel across borders, then the workers who create the wealth should have the same freedom.

Unions need to defend the significant numbers of “migrant” worker members from anti-migrant racism in the workplace and in society. Unions need to send pro-immigration messages to counter the poison and division currently circulated by the ruling class, pinning the blame for unemployment, wage cuts and housing shortages on the bosses instead of migrants. Unions must fight for a levelling-up of conditions and for a working-class social programme that deals

with the problems by expropriating and redistributing the wealth of the rich.

Unfortunately, some in the RMT want to revive the “No2EU” electoral coalition which stood in the 2009 European Parliament elections. No2EU’s platform criticised “the so-called free movement of labour” and opposed the “social dumping” of migrant workers. The last thing we need is for the unions’ political voice to echo the anti-migrant right! We have nothing in common with the Little Englanders, Ukipers, and Tories who want to take Britain out of the EU and restrict immigration.

**We are stronger when we overcome division amongst ourselves to take on our bosses.**

## MYTH-BUSTING

Migrants contribute £2.5 billion more in tax than they claim in benefits.

In the year to April 2009 migrants from eastern Europe were 59% less likely to receive welfare benefits than UK natives; or 49% if they had been here for more than two years. They were 57% less likely to live in social housing.

Steve Nickell, economics professor at Nuffield College, concluded that it was “very hard to find a significant impact of immigration on participation or unemployment by region, by skill or by age... there is very little evidence that they are taking jobs that would otherwise exist and be filled by natives”.

Between 1997 and 2005 middle earners gained 1.5p an hour and upper earners 2p from the effects of immigration.

Wages of the lowest-paid (the worst-paid 5%) have suffered in periods of high immigration — but only by 0.7p an hour.

The effect for some groups of particularly vulnerable low-paid workers (who often were the previous wave of immigrants...) may be greater.

Immigration expands the economy and increases the total number of jobs. The government’s cuts in public services, the depression imposed across industry by the fall-out from the bankers’ binge up to 2008, and employers’ insistence on making sure of high profits and squeezed, speeded-up workforces before they will expand and hire new workers — all of those cost jobs.

# Justice for the 33!

Agency workers staffed the north of the Bakerloo Line and the south of the District Line since London Underground took over from Silverlink in 2007.

Wearing LU uniforms without earning LU wages, agency workers delivered outstanding customer service on flexible terms that suited LU's needs. When short of staff, LU phoned the agency, which got an agency worker to



keep a station running at the drop of a hat: the kind of flexible staffing solution that LU would like to replicate everywhere.

Agency workers dealt with persons under a train, but were told to pay for counselling out of their own pockets to deal with the trauma, whereas LU staff are provided with counselling. They delivered seven consecutive 100% mystery shopper scores over the Olympics, but received no Olympics bonus.

The agency workers grew tired of being treated like second class citizens. They were

emboldened by the 2010 Agency Workers Regulation, which promise equal treatment between agency and permanent staff. Unfortunately, the RMT was slow to recruit and organise them, so the agency workers took out a 'no win, no fee' claim for equal pay with LU staff.....a claim which is still running. The 33 are owed thousands in back pay, which Trainpeople has not coughed up.

A few people in the RMT, some supporters of Off the Rails, argued for the union to take up the cause of the agency workers and organised recruitment days to meet them. One local RMT rep played a critical role in signing the majority of the agency staff to the RMT. By late 2012, RMT was starting to talk about going for recognition with Trainpeople.

Then, in the ultimate expression of how dispensable "casualised" workers are to employers, LU announced it would terminate the contract with Trainpeople in January 2013. Workers got the news just in time for Christmas.

On 7 January, agency workers, RMT activists, accompanied by members of the London Assembly and Parliament held the campaign's first demonstration outside Wembley Central station with the slogans, 'sack the agency, not the workers'; 'used, abused and refused' and 'justice for the 33!' This has been followed by pickets outside the London Assembly and London Underground HQ, closing LU HQ twice! As we write, workers are holding daily pickets outside LU HQ to remind LU that the campaign has not gone away. After five months of poverty and



# Sack the agency, not the workers!

demoralisation, that's an impressive achievement, which we should all applaud.

Alongside the high points, the campaign has suffered setbacks. The early demonstrations pressured LU to meet the RMT; LU was reported to have promised LU jobs to all 33. However, the 'promise' (if it was ever made) was never realised. LU made all 33 sit an assessment and role play, which only six people 'passed'. The criteria LU used were dubious and mystifying to say the least.

LU evidently hoped to split the 33 workers apart and demoralise their fight. But LU underestimated the 33 if it thought it could make them go away.

Demonstrations alone will not win jobs for all 33. LU is digging its heels in. Although 33 workers could easily be incorporated into LU's staffing – LU is holding over 100 positions vacant at the moment – LU has made a point of principle of continuing to disregard their cause. The time is approaching when London Underground workers will have to decide whether they are prepared to strike to secure victory for the 33. The RMT Executive has consulted branches about their members' preparedness to strike – some branches have been slow to respond.

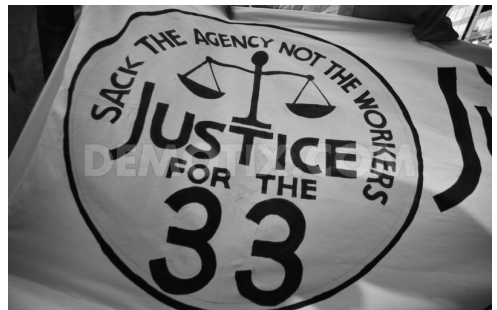
With casualisation spreading across LU, threatening further agency working, LU workers need to take action now to show that workers cannot be 'used, abused and refused' in the future. All LU staff must take a stand for permanent staffing. LU cannot be allowed to get away with treating workers as disposable trash. If LU gets away with it once,

it will try it again and again until none of us can feel secure in our jobs.

This campaign will leave a lasting lesson about how the trade union movement should respond to the needs and demands of agency workers. The RMT's initial reluctance about organising agency workers meant RMT was late in demanding LU to employ agency workers. RMT has not repeated the same mistake in its dispute over casualisation on Northern Rail, where it has coupled demands for an end to casualised working with demands for permanent jobs for agency staff.

Increasingly, employers take on workers casually through agencies, in the rail industry and the wider economy. Trade unions need to learn the lessons of the J33 campaign. Agency workers are capable some of the most courageous struggle the labour movement has seen in recent years.

**Unions should not marginalise or ignore agency workers just because employers treat them as second class citizens. Fighting for the needs and demands of agency workers is an essential task of the union movement today.**



# East Midlands Trains

## By an EMT driver

**T**he 2 to 1 result in the ballot for action short of strike on East Midland Trains by on-train and platform staff is a welcome reversal of previous failures to respond to management attacks.

The dispute is due to a breakdown in industrial relations which covers several issues. One of these was rostering during the shutdown of Nottingham station for 5 weeks worth of long time planned engineering work.

A few days before the start of the work bosses tried to impose an emergency

roster on a lot of staff claiming it was part of their T&Cs. It isn't: but maintaining that position is a desperate attempt to cover up EMT's woeful negligence in not making any serious effort to come to a similar arrangement with these staff like they did with train drivers (who are now working normally) months before. Going on past history management must have thought they could ignore everybody else. Imagine their surprise when they heard the ballot result!

**From 20 July, staff are refusing to work rest days and overtime and are working to rule which has caused numerous train delays and cancellations.**

# South West Trains



## By a South West Trains guard

**I**n the recent scorching temperatures

Southwest Trains staff have often had to work

out in the open in full uniform.

Guards can be required to work on trains without air conditioning for 5 hours or more without a break. Management judge whether it's hot enough to allow employees to take their ties off, and woe betide you if you decide to do so without permission. So who is it that can tell when you're getting too hot? Not you, that's for certain.

The heat is also highlighting the poor

condition of the Wessex route in general. First 20mph speed restrictions were instituted in numerous places to stop rails buckling, causing chaos in the evening peak.

Then a rail actually did buckle at Waterloo, shutting down all the Waterloo suburban platforms and causing complete meltdown across the network. There are certainly countries hotter than this with functioning railways.

**Millions are available for big projects like HS2 but heavily used sections of our rail network desperately need repair.**

- What has your workplace been like in the recent heatwave? Off The Rails wants your stories! Email us at [off.therails@btopenworld.com](mailto:off.therails@btopenworld.com)

# Assessing the East Midlands Trains pensions fight

## EAST MIDLANDS TRAINS

In the aftermath of the pension dispute some rank-and-file train driver members of ASLEF at Nottingham attempted to call the leadership to account over their undemocratic actions in settling the dispute against the clearly stated wishes of the membership.

This primarily consisted of seeking written explanation from the EC. With hindsight this was never going to be enough, they ignored our last letter for example. When they deigned to respond the answers we received included this timeless excuse for bureaucratic abuse of power: "In the middle of protracted and difficult negotiations it is not always possible to formally refer back to members and decisions can be and are taken in the full knowledge that they will be unpopular". Note the use of the euphemism 'unpopular' which does cover for the more honest but incriminating phrase, not what the majority of members want. No particulars of the "protracted and difficult negotiations" are given no definite reason is given for the

supposed deadline the negotiators were working to.

So, lesson learnt; in addition to the letters we should have immediately appealed against the EC decision to the AAD. Unfortunately by the time we realised this we were outside the time limit. If some of the more senior lay reps had played any part in the calling to account they might have been able to guide us on this but most of them have been completely silent; indeed the one who has had something to say still supports the right of the EC to make decisions without those decisions being in agreement with what the membership wants! I guess that's why he couldn't get a seconder for the person he nominated to be our EC member (somebody who acted undemocratically too).

We understand the difficulties and pressures that negotiating teams can come under. That is why we insist on having the safeguard of consulting the members. They do not face those pressures and their input guards against pressures that can lead negotiators to make bad decisions.

**If we learn only one thing from this dispute it has to be that to maintain any credibility in calling ourselves a member-led union we must ensure that, however difficult and protracted the negotiations may be, there has to be an understanding by all concerned that before a final decision is made, the members must have a say.**

# Democratise our unions!

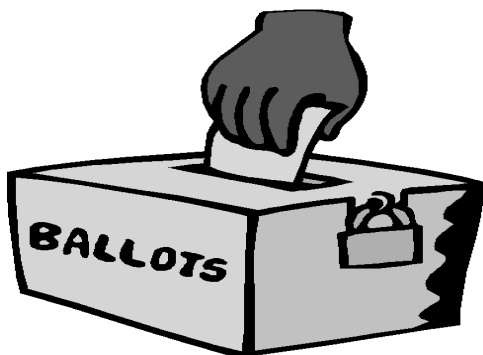
The RMT is currently conducting a root-and-branch review of its internal structures.

This means RMT members have a chance to say how they think their union should be organised.

Off The Rails has a charter called "The Fantasy Union of Rail and Transport Workers", which sets out our ideal vision for how unions should operate. The FURTW would be a union led from the workplace up, where members were engaged in deciding strategy and industrial action were controlled by those involved in them. It would also be an industrial union. You can read the charter at [workersliberty.org/fur](http://workersliberty.org/fur). The RMT's review is a chance to make the case for those principles in one of the main rail unions.

The Central Line East branch of the RMT has already agreed a submission (right) to the internal review along those lines.

**What do you think? If you agree, why not propose similar text in your RMT branch?**



## RMT CENTRAL LINE EAST POLICY

**We believe that:**

- the division between General Grades and Shipping & Offshore is obsolete and should be scrapped
- the national executive should be made up of representatives of constituencies that are coherent and roughly the same size
- there should be more structural accountability for union officials and representatives, at all levels, from workplace and branch to Company/Functional Council to the national executive
- reps should be elected by the members they represent
- action must be taken to address the under-representation of women and minority groups in the union
- the union must investigate and deal with complaints properly
- the union's communication with members must improve
- the union should recognise strike committees when we are in dispute, which should be able to submit resolutions on the strategy for the dispute, and should be consulted about any offer to settle the dispute
- the Annual General Meeting should be bigger and therefore more representative

# No job cuts on London Overground

Over 100 jobs on the London Overground network could be lost, as London Overground Rail Operations Ltd. (LOROL) seeks to move to “driver-only operation” (DOO).

The immediate impulse for cut is a 12.5% cut in central government funding for Transport for London, announced in George Osborne’s 26 June spending review. Moving towards DOO is also key recommendation of the McNulty Review into railway industry reform.

LOROL wants to implement DOO by December 2013, and, according to rail union RMT, plan to begin the process even if the new staffing arrangement has not been safety-certified.

A union statement said: “LOROL informed RMT that TfL have ‘exercised a clause in their contract’ giving only six months to implement DOO on the network by the December timetable and have even commenced this process without first achieving the necessary safety validation certification required as they seek to bulldoze it through regardless of the safety risks involved.”

The RMT has promised an “all-out political, public, and industrial fight” to stop the job cuts and began balloting London Overground guards in July. ASLEF has also opposed the cuts, but has not committed to balloting its members.

Cuts are also threatened on London Underground, where bosses plan to cut more

station jobs and close ticket offices. Activists demonstrated against the closure of Whitechapel ticket office on Monday 15 July. The union said that the plans to close Whitechapel’s ticket office “totally ignore the fact that the station serves an area which includes a busy market and a major hospital.

“The area is also known for its diverse local population, many of whom need to access staff support at an open ticket office rather than rely on ticket-issuing machines — machines that are vulnerable to vandalism.”

RMT members employed by LOROL will move into dispute over the cuts. LOROL bosses have tried to catch the union off-guard but threatening compulsory redundancies they have little intention of making. Their hope is that the union will focus its demands around opposing compulsory redundancies, leaving itself weak if LOROL withdraws the threat and proposes voluntary redundancies instead. The position from the start should be: not one cut!

Off The Rails believes there should not only be an industrial dispute against LOROL to stop the job cuts, but a London-wide political campaign against the 12.5% cut in TfL funding.

**The RMT General Grades Committee has passed policy committing the union to working with other labour-movement and working-class community organisations to build a campaign against the cut, including a demonstration on 8 October when Parliament re-opens.**

# Labour and Tories: two cheeks of the same arse?



Recently the Tories drew level with Labour in opinion polls for the first time in 18 months due to the UK Independence Party's national vote collapse.

The probability of a second Tory government is increasing. The Tories want to cut our industry to the bone. But what would Labour do with it? Would a Labour government be any better? How can workers in our industry and across society have a say in politics as the major parties gear up for the next General Election?

The Tories have wholeheartedly endorsed the McNulty report, which recommends sorting out the problems caused by privatisation with a hefty dose of more privatisation. But this report was commissioned by the previous Labour government, and the Labour Party leadership have taken no stand against it. Some back bench Labour MPs have called for renationalisation, but Shadow Transport secretary Maria Eagle has "welcomed" the report. Tom Harris, the Labour chair of the Parliamentary Rail group responded to McNulty by writing about the "frustration" TOCs feel at unions improving terms and

conditions for workers and the "challenges" Labour would face if the report prompted strike action.

The Labour Party leadership are saying nothing to indicate they would act any differently than they have in the past. They did not reverse privatisation when they took office in 1997. In fact Labour could almost certainly have stopped privatisation in its tracks in 1994 by merely publicly opposing it and scaring off investors. Labour did replace Railtrack with Network Rail, which is publicly-owned, albeit at arms-length from public control - but only did so when it became absolutely necessary.

However, it's wrong to say there are no differences between Tories and Labour on this question. The only voices in mainstream UK politics dissenting from the prevailing wisdom that railways should be run for profit are in the Labour Party, and this is not by coincidence. It is possible for the workers' movement to put pressure on the labour leadership and force them to act more in the way that ~~as~~ we want. Many Labour MPs are officially sponsored by unions, and can be pressured by them. Trade unions have a voice in official Labour Party structures such as the national conference, although over the last three decades these have lost many of their powers and been replaced by less democratic "policy forums". In 2004 Labour Party conference voted to back renationalisation of the railways, against concerted opposition from the Blairite leadership. Unfortunately, Party leaders

chose to ignore the vote.

A high profile public campaign by the trade union movement could perhaps force the Labour Party to back public ownership. That would be difficult because the leadership of all the major parties opposes us. But in the Labour Party we have channels — albeit inadequate ones — to put pressure on the leaders.

Within our industry, our unions should launch an offensive to pressure Labour to commit to reversing McNulty reforms and renationalising the railways after the next General Election. TSSA, ASLEF, and Unite members need to use their unions' affiliation to Labour to push this. RMT, no longer formally affiliated to Labour, needs to engage more with Labour using bodies such as the Labour Representation Committee, which fights for socialist politics within and outside the Labour Party. RMT needs to be open-minded to different tactics to achieve its aims. This includes supporting working-class, socialist candidates in elections where there is a genuine base of support and the potential of a real impact, but it may also include considering re-affiliation to the Labour Party to increase the pressure on the sell-out Labour leaders.

Labour leader Ed Miliband has announced proposals that would further strangle the channels for trade unions to shape Labour policy, an unjustified response to Unite's attempts to get its own people selected as parliamentary candidates.



Trade union influence in Labour is not a form of “corruption”. It's about working class people having a say in politics. As workers, we deserve more than

a vote for a boss-backed party once in five years; we deserve the chance to get involved in our unions' policy-making and for those policies to shape what a political party is standing for. That's democratic.

The current union-Labour channels are far from democratic. Instead, they consist of unions handing over cash without attempting to hold Labour leaders to account or impose union policies. But that's a reason to fight to improve, not to ditch, the link with Labour. While defending the union link, affiliated unions, such as TSSA, ASLEF, and Unite, need to go on the offensive for union policies within the Labour Party, even if that means forcing a full-scale split with Labour's MPs, unelected researchers, and policy wonks who want to disenfranchise the trade union movement.

**What better place to start than for a rail union campaign within Labour to reverse McNulty and fight for public ownership of the railways?**



**Off The Rails supporters have a range of views about the relationship between trade unions and the Labour Party. This article represents one view: what's yours? Write to us at [off.therails@bopenworld.com](mailto:off.therails@bopenworld.com)**

# Up the Republic!

**I**n 1894, Keir Hardie (a proper Labour MP), delivered a speech in Parliament during a special session given over for MPs to give messages of congratulations to the Royal Family on the birth of the prince who would grow up to become King Edward VIII. We think his words ring very true today...

"We are asked to rejoice because this child has been born, and that one day he will be called upon to rule over this great Empire. Up to the present time we have no means of knowing what his qualifications or fitness for that task may be. It certainly strikes me – I do not know how it strikes others – as rather strange that those who have so much to say about the hereditary element in another place should be so willing to endorse it in this particular instance. It seems to me that if it is a good argument to say that the hereditary element is bad in one case, it is an equally good argument to say that it is bad in the other. FROM HIS CHILDHOOD ONWARD THIS BOY WILL BE SURROUNDED BY SYCOPHANTS AND FLATTERERS BY THE SCORE (Cries of "Oh! oh!") and will be taught to believe himself as of a superior creation. ("Oh!" oh!") A line will be drawn between him and the people whom he is to be called upon some day to reign over. In due course, following the precedent which has already been set, he will be sent on a tour round the world, and probably rumours of a morganatic alliance will follow (Loud cries of "Oh!" "Order!" and "Question!"), and the end of it all will be that the country will be called upon to pay the bill."

## *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.
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