

Step up the strikes!

Aslaf will strike on 12, 31 May and 3 June, and RMT on 13 May. That's good, but it will not be good enough to win. We need to step up the action.

RMT states that it has called the strike because the Rail Delivery Group reneging on its offer by insisting it will only deliver the Year One 5% pay increase if RMT settles its dispute and cancels the new industrial action ballot. It's right for RMT to oppose this, but if the RDG rows back on this condition, that would not mean that we had won. The offer itself is inadequate, and deserves to be rejected entirely. We need reinstated strikes that aim to win a better offer altogether.

RMT's Train Crew and Shunting grades conference last month saw delegates calling for escalation and for Saturday strikes, which may have pushed the Executive into calling the strike.

Whilst the return to strikes is welcome, there are still questions about what kind of action will be necessary to win the dispute. Aslef striking the day before RMT strikes (12 and 13 May) means that TOCs will face two consecutive days of disruption, but this is unlikely to budge the RDG. We will need an ongoing programme of sustained action to do that.

Rank-and-file activists in TOCs within RMT have recently begun organising to push for a more intense pace of action. Email the Change Course Campaign at changecoursecampaign@fastmail.org to get in touch.



Aslef strikes: a driver writes ...

So, we are the bad guys again?

After months of talks and 'no formal offer', parasites like Steve "£300k-in-2013-and-haven't-declared-my-salary since" Montgomery of the RDG (Rail Delivery Group), who are purported to be industry leaders, made an offer that anyone with basic knowledge of our industry would laugh at.

8%, with a whole puppet show of strings attached!

Let's look at one string: 'Sundays In'.

Sundays are not part of the working week for many train drivers. For years industry bosses justified not increasing the establishment of drivers to cover Sunday shifts as part of our working week, as it was cheaper for them to offer Sundays as an overtime shift with an enhanced payment.

Leisure travel has risen and there is more demand for Sunday services. But at the same time, staff goodwill has waned, resulting in fewer volunteers where Sunday cover is not mandatory.

Sunday shifts crop up on average once in every four weeks, and the Sunday shift allowance tops salaries up on average by about an additional 10%. Drivers have not received a pay rise

since 2019, so how could industry 'leaders' expect us to accept 8% with *any* strings, let alone Sundays In and the dozen other pieces of productivity and conditions sell-off included in the RDG offer?

The RDG are a bunch of bad actors, doing as they're told like good boys and girls. But we also know a lot of them have been cosyng up to the Labour Party behind closed doors, currying favour in case their current pay-masters lose their premiership.

The RDG bods are the people responsible for failing franchises like TransPennine Express, Avanti West Coast and West Midland Trains: is it any wonder that we are back where we started, having been made to negotiate with a collective of 'leaders' who frankly couldn't deliver pizza?

Aslef's leaders have perhaps acted too leniently in these talks; members have consistently delivered outstanding mandates for strike action. It's only right that in the face of this treatment, we push to have as much impact as possible. Let's visit and support our pickets then enjoy Eurovision and the FA Cup Final from the comfort of our homes or local pub!

TOCs: Analysing the offer

The TOCs' offer to RMT is the Dispute Resolution Process (DRP). It covers 2 years: 2022-3, (Year 1, last year), and 2023-4 (Year 2, this year).

To get Year 1's 5% rise, we have to enter the Year 2 process to restructure job roles, terms and conditions. The employers want to merge job roles into a single 'multi-skilled' station grade, and to overhaul policies on sick pay, attendance, rostering and more.

Currently, the 14 TOCs in dispute are all part of a national campaign; in Year 2 it will devolve to individual TOCs.

Year 2 trashes so many of our terms and conditions that we have to reject it. Then we won't get a pay rise or the DRP's guarantee on compulsory redundancies.

The companies could stagger imposing change, splitting us further. There may be more splits between engineering, stations and traincrew in each TOC.

If RMT members in a TOC don't accept the deal, they might get a derisory rise for Year 1 and nothing in Year 2. If members accept, the TOC can pay 5% for Year 1 and nothing in Year 2.

If, after the member consultation, RMT's NEC decides puts the DRP to a

vote, that would take us to June. If a majority in every TOC vote to accept, TOC-by-TOC talks on Year 2 would start by mid-June. The DRP states that its guarantees are conditional on restructuring being agreed within three months. This gives each TOC the ability to declare talks over by mid-September, that they will impose what they want, and we will have forfeited the 4% and the 'suite of guarantees'.

So by accepting the DRP, we risk ending up with an average of 2.5% for both years. We could seek to improve that through more strikes further down the line, but we will no longer have the benefit of a national dispute, so strikes could be fragmented.

Conclusion? Don't accept the current DRP. Reject it without a referendum, as it clearly does not meet our dispute demands. We are stronger together, and though we will have to go into TOC-by-TOC talks at some stage, it will be better if we force changes in the deal to increase the pay and reduce its detrimental changes before we give up the power of the national dispute.

Our best means of forcing further changes is through escalated national strikes.

Cleaners strike

Cleaners on six mainline rail contracts took strike again on 14-15 April, as they continue their fight for a £15/hour minimum wage, improved sick pay, staff travel passes, and improved pensions.

RMT cleaners have been fighting the battle for some time, with multiple rounds of action. Strikes have been a little stop-start, often with long pauses in between. The renewed strike needs to be swiftly followed up by escalating action.

One of the most positive things about the cleaners' dispute is that it has clear, positive demands. It is not defensive or reactive, but is rather an 'offensive' strike in pursuit of change. The latest union circular formulates the demand on sick pay as 'a company sick pay scheme of at least six weeks' full pay and six weeks' half pay.' That would be a step forward, but wouldn't it be better to demand across-the-board parity with the sick pay arrangements for directly-employed staff, as part of a longer-range push for in-house employment?

We need to think about how directly-employed workers at the companies involved, who cannot officially participate in their cleaner workmates' strikes, can support the action. Rail workers may wish to consider how safe it is to work on platforms, trains and stations that have not been properly cleaned.

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