Millions inspired by our action on Tuesday
We are leading the way!

Tuesday’s strike was historic – the first coordinated strike between national rail and London Underground workers since 1989. TSSA is balloting members in Network Rail and various TOCs, and Aslef has live mandates or ballots in process across a variety of TOCs, and on London Underground. We should coordinate with Communication Workers Union (CWU) members working for BT and Royal Mail. They are balloting for industrial action over pay. The BT ballot opened on 15 June. The Royal Mail ballot opens on 28 June. Both will conclude in late July. Coordinated strikes across transport, telecoms, and the post can shake the ruling class in a way it has not been shaken for a generation. Civil service union PCS will ballot its membership over cost-of-living issues in September. Workers in education and health could also be balloted.

The tide of the class struggle has flowed in the bosses’ favour since the mid-1980s. We now have a real chance to begin turning that tide. We railway workers are leading the way for everyone else here. With coordinate action we can win for everyone.

It’s important that workers ourselves are able to participate in discussions about coordination where we are and not just leave it to our national leaders. Even if “head office” can’t pull off proper coordination, we can do it at the local level.

In Sheffield we should hold meetings between local branches of the different unions in dispute – rail, post, telecoms, civil service, etc. – to share ideas on strategy that reps and activists can then feed back into the democratic structures of their own unions. These meetings could develop into city-wide strike committees that could coordinate joint rallies and assemblies on strike days. We can make this happen ourselves, and the Sheffield Trades Council ought to help.

The last time there was mass coordinated strike action involving multiple unions in Britain was the 2011 strikes over public sector pension cuts. Then, the top leaders and bureaucracies of the unions remained fully in control, with the membership mostly passive, getting their marching orders from the top. We can’t let that happen again. We need to co-ordinate, meet and plan at the local level so that workers in the workplace can have control over the dispute. That’s not to say that we are predicting a sell-out in advance. And it’s not to say that members are always “more militant” than the union leaderships.

But the trade union bureaucracy is a layer within every union that has other interests on top of winning a good deal for members: namely the interests of the union as an institution, its finances, property, and staff. This doesn’t make bureaucrats “agents of the bosses”. But it does mean that, as struggles sharpen, they will feel under financial, legal and material pressure to be cautious. If and when that happens, we will need strong local organisation to pressure them from below and, if necessary, act independently of them.

LET’S ALL MEET IN FARM ROAD CLUB

It’s important for the success of this dispute for rank-and-file workers to be able to control its outcome. That means maximum transparency in negotiations - regular, detailed reporting from negotiators to the membership over how things are progressing.

That also means local workplace meetings open to all workers covered by the dispute. At Sheffield, two of our union branches both use Farm Road Club for our meetings. The big room of that venue would be an ideal place for us to have a big meeting with all rail workers in this fight – members of RMT, Aslef and TSSA or workers who haven’t joined a union yet – to meet and to discuss and vote on how WE want our unions to progress the dispute. We can then feed that back up the democratic structures of our respective unions.

We’re all fighting together, regardless of our different badges - we should all meet and put our heads together to make sure we all win together.

FREE THE BELARUS 11

11 Belarusian rail workers are in jail for opposing Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. They are heroes and need our support. Find out more online: bit.ly/FreeBR11

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.

www.workersliberty.org

Got a story you want to share? Write in! All contributions anonymous onguard.bulletin@gmail.com
Wrong routes
We've given lots of reasons for drivers not to cross RMT picket lines but here is one more. This image shows a mere 5 hour snapshot from Network Rail's incident database. In that short time, nine wrong routes were offered by scab signallers. That’s 9 drivers put at risk of taking a wrong route and being dragged through incident investigations and all the stress that entails. We've seen it time and again in disputes - undertrained, inexperienced and overworked scabs are not capable of maintaining the safe operation of our industry. As well as supporting the action of our colleagues, staying the right side of the picket line also protects us from the risk of moving trains over an unsafe network. We have no friends and very little protection on the wrong side of the line.

Who was Rob Dawber?

On Guard is keen on the beautiful new RMT branch banner that was given its first outing on our brilliant Tuesday picket line.

What makes the banner even more special is that it bears the face of our workmate and comrade Rob Dawber. Rob was a member of Workers' Liberty, the group that helps publish this bulletin. He also wrote for and edited Green Light, a bulletin like On Guard that came out in the 1990s and was a voice of the track workers in our area.

Rob was a track worker and a socialist who was born in 1956 and died – in fact was murdered – in 2001.

Rob Dawber was a victim of capitalist greed — one of many thousands of workers allowed to work with asbestos without proper protection long after it was known that asbestos is lethal.

Those responsible for his death were shown in court during Rob’s compensation case to have been perfectly aware of the risks Rob and other workers incurred on their behalf. They thought it too expensive to provide them with protection! Rob was a victim. But he was not a passive victim: he was there, on the railway, to fight the bastards. And he did, to the end.

Made redundant, he turned his hand to writing. Ken Loach has made a film, The Navigators — which Rob was able to view just before he died — of Rob's script about railway privatisation. In this class war by other means, on a different front, Rob was still fighting the greedy, callous, inhuman brutes who killed him. Let our Sheffield banner be an inspiration to everyone who agrees with what Rob fought for in life: socialism, a world ruled by solidarity and not profit. You can read more about Rob and his ideas at https://bit.ly/RobDawber

Public meeting
“Rail strikes: what’s next?”
Weds 29 June
6:15pm
Upstairs in the Uni Arms, Brook Hill
S3 7HG
Open to all rail and station workers and members of the public who support the strikes. We will hear different opinions about the strikes and how to win change for everyone.
Hosted by Workers’ Liberty