

spread merseyrail solidarity culture

A Merseyrail driver and union activist updates on the current situation and appeals for the solidarity shown on Merseyrail to become standard elsewhere.

Guards' reps are meeting with ACAS and the company, and there's been some suggestion of progress. The transport authority's U-turn, when it said it was prepared to back retaining a second safety-critical member of staff, has been significant. RMT now feels that it can get a deal, so is focusing on talks rather than striking. There isn't yet a significant call from the rank and file to return to action.

We have a strong culture of cross-union solidarity at Merseyrail: there's a history of us supporting the guards. When the guards' dispute was developing, senior local ASLEF figures made it clear they wouldn't cross picket lines, and that set the tone. Building that kind of solidarity elsewhere has been made very difficult by the role of local ASLEF leaderships, which has left a lot to be desired. Frankly, it's been shameful.

Their attitude has been: it's not our dispute, we'll fight when they come for us. But by that time, it will be too late. The risk now is of a 'dash for cash' across several TOCs, with bosses bribing drivers to sell their conditions and accept DOO. Unless the local ASLEF leaderships build the culture of solidarity and militancy we have on Merseyrail, it will be hard to resist.

This is a risk on Northern. Its network covers the old mining areas of northern England, and during the miners' strike, it would have been unthinkable for a unionised driver to drive a train moving scab coal. But now, unionised drivers are driving trains crewed by scab managers during another union's dispute.

There are also issues within RMT. ASLEF drivers at Merseyrail respect RMT guards' picket lines, but RMT members in other grades sometimes don't. We need a culture where everyone respects everyone else's picket lines, whether or not it's your union or your grade.

The news that Northern Rail [where guards' strikes are continuing on Saturdays] have been receiving extra subsidy is no surprise. We saw the same with Southern. This money is to help them beat the strikes. The drive to impose DOO is not only about making cuts on the railway, it's about smashing organised workers. With job cuts to signalling and station staff, guards are the last real power base for RMT.

If they beat the guards they will come for the drivers, and ASLEF, next. That's why ASLEF's current strategy of refusing to join the DOO fight, even in the way we have at Merseyrail, is so short-sighted.



drivers: don't sell your conditions!

Rumours reach us of TOCs preparing offers to drivers, aimed at heading off the possibility of united action against DOO. These offers may include a pay hike in exchange for selling conditions. This could mean agreeing to DOO, and maybe other changes too, like the working week, with TOCs moving to include Sundays in rosters. Bosses will try to replicate the experience of Southern, where ASLEF members accepted a shoddy deal after rank-and-file resistance was worn down after two initial rejections. It is vital that drivers stand firm against any attempt to buy our conditions. We would be selling out ourselves and our workmates in other grades. RMT guards are fighting a heroic struggle against DOO. There should

be no question of allowing ourselves to be bought off and stopped from joining that dispute by the promise of a salary bump. Greater Anglia recently used the chance of a 'harmonisation' process, integrating disparate T&Cs into a single deal, to make drivers an offer which included adding Sundays to the working week. ASLEF drivers overwhelmingly rejected the deal, by 90+%. Shamefully, the union leadership recommended that members accept it!

Let's extend the spirit of the Greater Anglia drivers who voted to reject: no to selling out our terms and conditions, no to selling out the guards, and let's ensure ASLEF properly joins, and sees through, the industrial struggle to push back DOO.

proper picketing preferred

There are picket lines and there are picket lines. A group of strikers shuffling nervously in a huddle, away from entrances to stations or depots, is not likely to have much impact.

Picket lines are most successful when they are lively, assertive, and mounted at the points where workers actually go into work. This allows pickets to have a conversation with workers coming in, and potentially turn them around.

At depots with multiple entrances and potential booking-on points, this might require some creative picketing, but it can be done. A single 'picket supervisor' can supervise multiple pickets, as long as they can access them in reasonable time.

Even the law states that the purpose of picketing is to communicate information and dissuade people from attending work. Do not be cowed by the anti-union laws.

The longer the picket line, the shorter the strike!



GTR: a view from the frontline

The Southern DOO strikes have been over for a while now. The next big battle will be over proposed cuts to platform dispatch jobs, likely to be targeted on Brighton mainline stations. Lots of managers have been trained as 'contingency' dispatch staff in the event of a strike. What will ASLEF drivers do?

On Great Northern and Thameslink, the picture is more peculiar. When it was West Anglia Great Northern, then First Capital Connect, management had a policy of avoiding strikes, so conceded almost any demand ASLEF made. RMT has little power, as guards and platform dispatch staff were cut in the '90s. So neither workers nor the employer have experience of a prolonged dispute involving strikes.

The whole point of the GTR franchise is to drive through DOO, new routes through the London core, and bring in new trains. So we have a cold war over the 717 units being introduced on the Great Northern metro route (which will no doubt at the end of this franchise be parcelled off as a new London Overground of TfL Rail route).

ASLEF health and safety reps have decided to use this introduction to fight DOO, and are pushing for more platform staff. But ASLEF on GN route have accepted DOO for nearly 30 years. They're objecting to things

they've been happy to accept until now. And the ASLEF full-timers won't touch it.

Normally this would be untenable for a union. They're not organising around this in the workplaces, just sending reps to meetings to object. But management have no concept of how to push back against it. So the 717s, which were due in November, are nowhere near introduction.

Rumours suggest that GTR will be given a two-year extension on its franchise, despite the new timetable fiasco in May. It seems that the franchising system is in such a mess the Department for Transport doesn't want to touch it.

Utter incompetence all round!

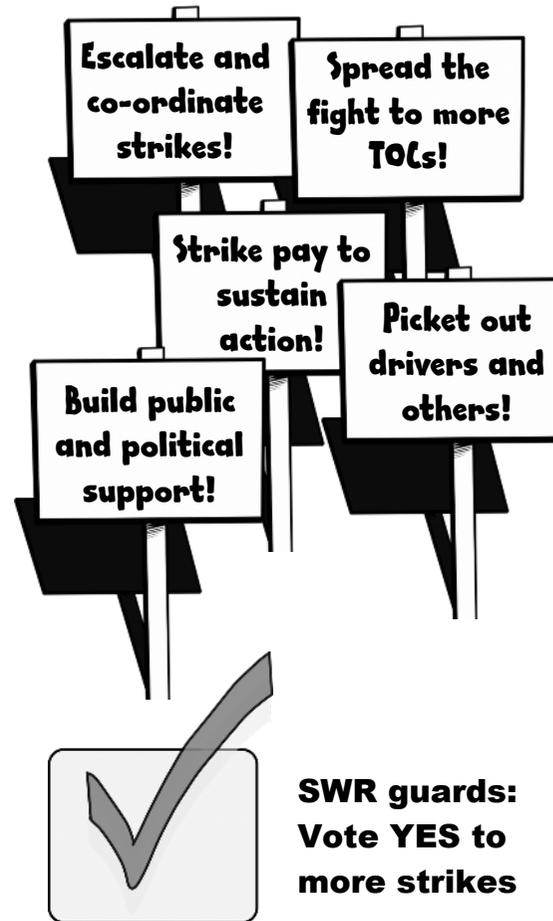
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off the rails

Keep the Guard on the Train!



**SWR guards:
Vote YES to
more strikes**

racists attack picket: fight the far right!

On 5 January an RMT guards' picket line in Manchester was attacked by far-right thugs connected to the 'Democratic Football Lads Alliance' and the rump English Defence League. An Asian striker was targeted, and called a 'nonce', 'child groomer' and 'paedophile'.

The attack shows that the DFLA and similar groups are not merely working-class football fans concerned about 'extremism' or child grooming, but far-right political forces violently hostile to the labour movement.

Fortunately this attack was only verbal, with no physical assaults or injuries.

There is an urgent need for the labour movement to organise seriously against the fascists, mobilising members under to confront the far right.

We also need a political alternative to the far right: working-class socialist policies on issues such as jobs and housing, where social despair creates conditions in which the far right grows, combined with defence of migrants' rights to tackle the nationalism of the far right head-on.