

# No Pay Freeze!



**R**ail minister Chris Heaton-Harris has written to Train Operating Company bosses to tell them there is ‘no budget’ for any further subsidies to increase workers’ pay.

TOCs are private companies and can set their own pay policy, but this is as close as the government can get to imposing a pay freeze on rail workers. TOCs will no doubt jump at the chance to tell us their hands are tied and there’s simply no money.

Heaton-Harris’s letter says current subsidy levels are ‘not sustainable’. Rail Delivery Group said: ‘It would be unfair to

increase the burden on taxpayers by funding rail industry pay rises, and we would only consider increases in exceptional circumstances.’ But we know that there is plenty of money for other things, such as huge payments to private companies to mess up Covid track and trace.

Strike ballots on Scotrail and Merseyrail have returned ‘No’ votes in recent weeks, showing that rail workers do not yet have the confidence to fight for a pay rise. This is perhaps understandable given the avalanche of propaganda that we are lucky even to have a job. But if we accept no pay rise, this does nothing to help those who have lost their jobs — rather, it makes life harder for all workers.

Strong leadership from our unions can build confidence and lead us to a point where we can fight back and win. **No TOC will defy the government on this matter of its own volition; if the pay freeze is to be broken, it will be because workers’ action forces concessions. Rail unions must meet as a matter of urgency and seek to agree a coordinated strategy.**

## Vote John Leach for RMT General Secretary

— empowering rank-and-file workers to fight back and win —

# network rail report

## No backdoor job cuts!

Last year, Network Rail imposed a costly reorganisation, 'Putting Passengers First'. It created new regional structures, devolved some centralised functions, deleted some job roles and created others. It displaced people, but did not intend to cut headcount overall.

Then Covid came along. NR panicked about money and decided not to fill many of the posts it had created. NR had frozen recruitment prior to the reorg, and now it seems that pre-existing vacancies will not be filled unless deemed 'business critical'.

There isn't any logic behind which posts are filled or not. Many people now cover jobs spanning illogical and unmanageable geographical areas. A lot of work affecting the reliability and safety of the railway isn't being done.

If we accept this, we make it easier for Network Rail to cut jobs by the back door. RMT and Members of the Scottish Parliament have questioned NR about unfilled posts. We need the same for the whole of Network Rail. No scrapping job without a fight!

## 'Don't get your hopes up!'

Pay talks for all grades start in February, but Network Rail has set the tone by emailing us that TOCs are freezing pay and money is tight.

The pay rise for ops and maintenance was due in January, so NR has already dragged its heels. At the first pay talks on 11 February, the company told bands 1-4 that it will freeze pay for 21/22 and probably won't have money to pay the rise outstanding from 2020, saying this is being pushed by the DfT. TSSA is preparing for a dispute.

Our need for a pay rise won't go away because of the Covid crisis. In fact, with many household members losing jobs in other industries, there is even more need. Don't swallow the company's line that they can't afford to give us a rise. We can't afford to not get one!

## Do black workers matter?

Network Rail has published its 2020 ethnicity pay gap report: a bit better than NR's first report last year but still showing big problems.

The ethnicity pay gap is the difference

between the average hourly pay of black and minority ethnic workers and that of white workers. This year, Network Rail's median pay gap is 5%, down 2.3% on last year, but still higher than the UK average of 2.3%.

One reason for the small improvement is the slight rise in BME staff in the top two quartiles (those paid over £22.82ph). NR notes that if there were more BME workers in lower-paid grades, the pay gap would be worse.

The biggest problem revealed by the report is that BME workers are under-represented in operational and maintenance roles, making up only 5.6% of the workforce (compared with 13% of the population).

Despite the current situation, the railway is still one of the few places where working-class people can get relatively secure, well-paid, unionised jobs. Across the economy, BME workers are concentrated in low-paid jobs and are 47% more likely than

white people to be on zero-hours contracts. NR must make depots and signal boxes more representative and inclusive of diverse working-class communities; it needs to look at its recruitment practices.

The unions must consider: Is there subtle discrimination that contributes to BME workers' low representation? What can we do about it?

## Happy New Year?

The Chief Executive's New Year's message to staff was a warning about financial challenges, rail reform and uncertain times ahead.

As of January 2021, NR employees have a 'No Compulsory Redundancy' agreement. 2019's pay deal, agreed by RMT, kept this agreement only until December 2020. When the agreement was made, *Off The Rails* said it was a huge mistake for RMT to sell job security for a pay rise. Now we face an even more uncertain future, this mistake could have even worse consequences than we feared.

This is the time for all rail unions to pursue the return of a guarantee of No Compulsory Redundancies. It would be better still if our unions pursued a fight for no job cuts at all.



## *our fantasy union*

**O**ff The Rails sets out a blueprint for a ‘fantasy union of rail and transport workers’ that is democratic and effective. Read it in detail here: [www.workersliberty.org/OTR/fantasy](http://www.workersliberty.org/OTR/fantasy)

## *improving RMT’s rules*

**O**ff The Rails is supporting three rule change proposals to this year’s RMT AGM:

1. to add trans rights to the union’s equalities rule.
2. to establish ‘dispute committees’ to facilitate greater input from members involved in a dispute into how that dispute progresses.
3. To allow people on unpaid employability schemes with transport employers (usually young, disabled people on one-year schemes) to join RMT for free.

We hope there will also be other progressive rule changes on the agenda. Please lobby your branch’s delegate to support these.

## *new on our blog*

**T**he Off The Rails blog keeps you up-to-date with rail workers’ struggles and gives you a platform for your views and reports. It covers lots of topics, and has sections for: driver-only operation, pay and conditions, health and safety, equalities, Northern Rail, Network Rail and our local bulletins in Sheffield and Nottingham. [www.workersliberty.org/blogs/rails](http://www.workersliberty.org/blogs/rails)

## *off the rails*

- is written by railway workers
- is for all rail workers, whatever your job, employer or union
- provides information, support and a forum to discuss strategies
- welcomes reports and opinions
- is published by socialist group Workers’ Liberty, and is open to all activists who share our basic outlook
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