

Fight for better pay and conditions!

What is going on with pay in our industry? It seems that the TOCs that make up the Rail Delivery Group, under orders from the DfT, are making a standardised pay offer, something like '0% on pay and any changes to Terms and Conditions must be self-financing'. This raises questions:

- If rail employers are moving towards standardised pay offers across the industry, why aren't the unions getting ready for national pay bargaining and a national dispute?
- Whether or not pay bargaining goes national, why on earth would we accept an offer of nothing? How does nothing even count as an 'offer'?! How about we talk about pay rises and/or alternatives such as better Ts and Cs?



It is important that we do not accept the 'unprecedented times' excuse, and do not buy into the idea that because passenger numbers are low and the industry is in financial trouble, the right thing to do is to keep quiet and accept what we're given (or in this case accept that we get nothing). The private owners do not seem to be hit by this 'financial crisis' and are certainly not giving themselves nothing!

And don't believe that if we accept no improvements in pay and conditions, then the employers won't cut our jobs. History is littered with examples of unions giving up the fight and collaborating with employers in return for being left alone, and they were never left alone for long. How many steelworks are open now and what is their future? How many Nottinghamshire mines are still producing coal?

We won't pay for the employers' crisis!

South Western dispute ends

The DOO (driver-only operation) dispute on SWR is over, with the fire there at the start extinguished in a prime example of what not to do with an active, angry group of workers.

The dispute started way back in August 2017 when management refused to agree to retain the guard and its role in train dispatch. As RMT said at the time, if you stop the guard controlling the doors, then it's a matter of time before you get rid of the guard completely.

RMT's leaders got sucked into a game of calling off strikes for talks, only for the talks to go nowhere and action to start again. Marching members up the hill only to march them back down disperses drive in any dispute.

But the action continued, culminating in strikes covering most of December 2019. At this high point, management were running scared after solidarity in two areas from ASLEF members, the strikers showed no sign of giving in, and donations came in from other workers.

However, the union then seemed to stumble and make the classic error of slowing things down. It moved from almost all-out strike to an overtime ban, giving the employer time to restart

its propaganda war. The second error was suspending the fight and entering a 'we're all in this together' mode at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

No serious attempt was made to rekindle the dispute. ASLEF and SWR took the opportunity to sign a deal to give drivers control of the doors. The final nail in the coffin was the RMT NEC's decision to put the last offer to a referendum with no recommendation, cancelling all planned action.

ASLEF screwed the guards for a bung for drivers, but RMT's leadership was also found wanting. The SWR experience shows that in any drawn-out campaign, management always have the advantage. This is a real-time example of the need for hard and fast reactions to threats, not long drawn out 'campaigns' aimed at frustrating and wasting the strength of feelings.

An exhausted and demoralised membership voted to accept the deal, which contained some sweeteners such as shorter working hours, but conceded that drivers will control the doors. This will make it that much harder to resist DCO (driver-controlled operation) on other companies. Even the ORR says that DCO is another name for DOO.

Capital Delivery faces jobs cull

Network Rail's Capital Delivery Eastern has told staff that up to one third of jobs are going. So much for 'Build Back Better'!

Capital Delivery Eastern is responsible for many big projects such as the remodelling of the track around Kings Cross. NR is cutting the very bit of itself that should deliver new infrastructure.

We hear that a lot of the jobs facing the scrapheap are in safety assurance. After the Stonehaven derailment, this is no time to dilute safety.

It is rumoured that NR is targeting jobs that are 'duplicated within the supply chain'. This could mean that the private rail contractors will do their own safety assurance without NR oversight.

Is 'Build Back Better' code for pumping public money into private firms' hands while paring down NR's role?

Projects now have to be developed under the buzzword 'SPEED' (Swift,



Pragmatic and Efficient Enhancement Delivery'), its tagline: to deliver projects in half the time while slashing the cost, equating to slashing jobs. Ordered by government, NR is sticking to the fiction that fewer staff speeds things up!

NR is also following government orders to 'cut red tape' and simplify planning processes, turning itself into a sped-up funding stream for huge contracts for Balfour Beatty, BAM, Atkins et al.

A recent Project SPEED conference saw big contractors given as much time as NR big bods. Much was said about how NR must empower the supply chain and recognise that contractors often know more about delivering projects. How convenient that when NR wants to cut jobs, it discovers that (contrary to the evidence) private companies it better!

NR Capital Delivery is under-resourced already. These jobs are not fat that needs trimming.

Rumour is that many jobs identified for redundancy are support level jobs: the lowest-paid people. As ever, top brass cull not themselves but the people who do the work. These are the entry-level jobs invaluable for opening up rail careers to people 'on the outside'. It's a very bad decision during a jobs crisis.

ScotRail: six of the best

ScotRail conductors have taken six Sundays' strike action. each as solid as the first, and on the last one, joined by ticket examiners. Quality Sunday time has been had by all.

The company has tried a poisonous campaign to portray conductors as harming key workers, ignoring the fact that conductors **are** key workers, and that if they had not taken away enhanced payments (while leaving them in place for drivers) then the action would not have been necessary.

But with no further strikes announced, it is hardly likely that the company will suddenly capitulate.

The union is turning up political pressure. With the Holyrood and local elections approaching, and Abellio's franchise coming to an end, it is of course important to up the political campaign. But we can take political and industrial action at the same time - it is usually more effective when we do!

Meanwhile, a new pay round looms and all grades have demands to pursue. United, we can win.



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