Solidarity Special

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ORGANISER

# Back the signal workers!

HE SIGNALWORKERS pay battle is turning into an all out confrontation between the Tory government and the trade union movement. Tory ministers have spelt out that they do not want to pay the signalworkers as that would represent a huge break in their public sector pay policy.

Tory backbenchers and papers like the 'Sunday Times' have called for strikers to be locked-out. Meanwhile the leaders of the TUC and Labour Party have equivocated and sat on the fence.

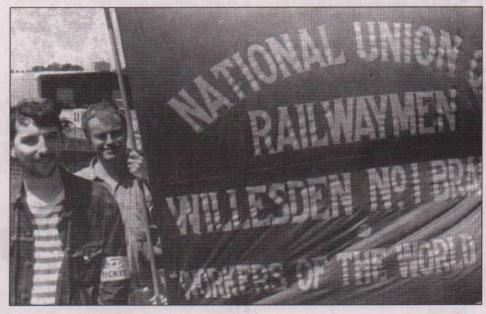
As the dispute continues the situation is bound to become more and more serious, especially as the action is set to escalate to two strike days per week at the end of July. The Tories will do their best to try and turn rail passengers against the strikers. It is up to socialists and serious trade unionists to do everything they can to rally support for the signalworkers.

We have to hammer away at the basic arguments.

#### 1. The signalworkers are putting forward a claim for an 11% interim payment to bring them into line with other railworkers.

They need it. Their average wage is just £183 per week. That is for a job that has become far more demanding and stressful as a result of productivity increases over the past few years. In some areas two signal-workers now do the job that was previously covered by 100.

2. Railtrack bosses are lying hypocrites when they say that there is not enough money to pay the strikers.



Bob Horton, the boss of Railtrack, pays himself the ridiculous sum of £2,335 per week for a three-day week.

That amounts to a 210% pay increase since last year!

The cost of the new Railtrack HQ of £7 million is twice what it would cost to settle the dispute.

The total cost of rail privatisation so far is now over £700 million which is made up of...

 £303 million on 13,114 redundancies and early retirements in the last two years so railworkers are forced to do the same amount of work with fewer people.

- £146 million for 'restructuring' in 1993/4
   whatever that is?
- £48 million in fees to outside consultants
   — lawyers, financiers and public relations advisors.
- £32 million to create Opraf the rail franchise granting body.
- £20 million to create Ofrail the privatised railway watchdog.

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Because of BR's gagging rule, which makes it a sacking offence for railworkers to criticise management, the articles in this special are all anonymous so as to avoid victimisation.

#### Their fight is our fight

### Getting rich from privatisation

IR CHRISTOPHER FOSTER has been appointed to Railtrack on a fat salary. He was a major adviser to Transport Secretary John MacGregor on how to privatise British Rail and particularly the idea that they should set up such a body as ... er ... Railtrack. He is also a director of the accountancy firm Cooper's and Lybrand.

Railtrack is to be in charge of franchising and so they decided to seek advice on how to make access charges in the newly privatised railway. They paid £1.6 million for the report from an accountancy firm and they chose ... er ... Coopers and Lybrand.

Undeterred by this government's concern with cutting public spending Coopers and Lybrand have taken the money and reported that the whole access charging and franchising question is very complex. They have suggested that Railtrack really need to commission a further report.

Perhaps Sir Christopher could offer some advice on this.

BRINGING THE "efficiency of the market" into the running of the railways is already producing some interesting results.

Instead of BR running the railways there will now be up to 90 separate organisations and companies trading with each other. Of this completely unnecessary breaking up of BR, 3 of the most important are to be run by people with railway experience of almost nil years. But they will be paid extremely well.

Roger Salmon is to become head of OPRAF (Office of Passenger Rail Franchising). He will have 175 staff and a budget of £10m a year. His other job is as a merchant banker.

John Swift, a Queen's Counsel, will become the Regulator, ensuring "fair competition". His salary is not known, but he will head a department filled with these types:

- · Chief Economic Adviser, up to £57,000.
- Economic and Financial Analysts, up to £41,000.
- Director, Freight Regulation, up to £49,000.
- Technical Adviser, up to £49,000.
- Assistant Director, Passenger Access and Network Licensing, up to £49,000.
- Assistant Director, Consumer Affairs, up to £49,000.
- Other Senior Appointments, up to

In total he will have over 100 staff in a dept costing £5m a year to run — and all of it completely unnecessary!

These two join the third main appointment already made, that of *Robert Horton* who is head of Railtrack. After being chased out of BP (with a £1.5m golden handshake), where he earned £787,000 a year and the nickname 'Hatchet Man', he joined BR as a two day a week vice-chairman on £28,640 a year. His pay has still gone up to £2,335 for a three day week.

## Labour must re-nationalise

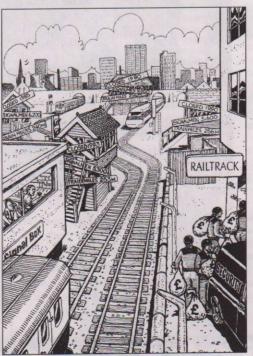
OU MAY HAVE noticed that Brian Wilson, Labour's new Transport spokesman, has made a few comments in the press on some of BR's more notable cock-ups in their privatisation frenzy. In case you don't know, Wilson got the job after Prescott did a somersault with back flip, and got promoted for fudging the union-link issue at Labour Party conference last year. Wilson has pointed out the logic that privatisation and breaking up the railways is a nonsense if we are to have a half decent transport policy for Britain (never mind what the effect is on the workers!) He has also stated that Labour will re-nationalise the railways if and when Labour come to power. This in itself is a good thing. However in the past 15 years the Labour Party leadership has talked about re-nationalising British Telecom, British Gas, and a host of other industries that were once in the public domain, but then as a general election approaches all this goes out the window as the Labour Party appeals to 'reason' and the middle classes. A few comments from Wilson is not enough. It must be a main plank of Party policy and a campaigning

priority now, that the railways will be renationalised — without compensation and under workers control.

The first step to achieving this is that our elected representative on Labour's National Executive Committee, Vernon Hince, actually does his job: represent the interests of RMT members in the political wing of our movement. He must fight to ensure that the Party leadership actively campaigns now around the issue of renationalisation, and that it is entrenched in Labour Party policy. Headway has already been made here; the P. Way S&T and OHL grades conference forced Hince reluctantly into accepting this position.

Indeed, Knapp on the General Council of the TUC should build and rally support for our case. Rail workers and rail users are vehemently opposed to rail privatisation. The Tory government is in continual crises in general and under extreme pressure over rail privatisation in particular. By strongly putting our case throughout the labour movement we can build a mass campaign of resistance to rail privatisation with the focus towards re-nationalisation under a Labour government. This could

## Public sector workers must unite!



"Is the Chairman still being paid in cash"

HE TORY GOVERNMENT clearly see the signalworkers' strikes as a threat to their public sector pay policy.

They are determined to approach the issue not in isolation — as a dispute only involving signalmen and Railtrack management — but from the point of view of how the outcome of the dispute will affect the balance of forces between workers and the employers across the whole of industry.

The labour movement should adopt the same class wide perspective!

In the first place we should try to link up all public sector workers who face pay cuts and job losses.

The public sector trade unions and the TUC should call a day of action including strike action on a weekday. This could be the first step in a mass campaign aimed at defeating the pay freeze and forcing a general election.

### the railways







Labour leadership candidates should state where they stand on the strike and re-nationalisation, in particular we want a clear commitment from John Prescot who is backed by the RMT and ASLEF as well as many ordinary trade unionists.

indeed provide the rallying point for all disgruntled and angry workers in other industries who think the Tories have had it too easy for too long.

We must continue putting the pressure on our leadership started by the Trackworkers grade conference on this issue; we must force Knapp, Hince and Co. into doing their job, representing the membership in both wings of our movement — the Labour Party and the TUC. We can make a start by ensuring that our delegates to

Labour movement bodies, including ward Party's and CLP's, fight to make Labour re-nationalise the railways.

Renationalisation should be without compensation to the parasites and asset-strippers who have made profits from an industry built up out of the pockets of the working class taxpayers and the sweat of railworkers. What's more the industry should be under the democratic control of the workers and users.

### TUC and Labour Party: Leaders? What leaders?

HE LEADERS OF the TUC and Labour Party have played a disgrace-ful role so far in the signals dispute.

Despite a clear call from the RMT executive for the Labour leadership to give "Unequivocal support" what we've heard is bumbling and evasive banalities rather than clear and unambiguous backing for the strikes.

The TUC have been even worse.

On July 5th they invited Tory Employment Secretary David Hunt and CBI boss Howard Davies to attend a conference on full employment. Thus providing these two representatives of the boss class with a platform to argue for low wages and casualisation. Hunt turned up for smoked salmon, strawberries and cream at Congress House just minutes after attacking the rail strikers and glorifying the scabs on BBC radio.

Miners' leader Arthur Scargill was dead right when he lambasted the TUC leader for their support for "social partnership" with the bosses: "This is no time to seek to have a cosy relationship rather than recognise that class struggle is at the heart of capitalism".

#### Management scabs prove you don't need managers

AILTRACK AND the Tory press are trying to claim that there is the beginning of a drift back to work. This is rubbish.

The strike is as solid as ever. The only place we know of where the RMT members work on strike days is Leicester. The rest of the boxes and panels are operated by managers, supervisors and non-union scabs.

Low-level managers and supervisors should remember that when they help Railtrack run services by functioning as signalworkers for the day they aren't proving that Railtrack doesn't need the strikers. They are proving that Railtrack doesn't need so many managers!

In a funny sort of way this just goes to show that the railways can't run without signalmen but managers and supervisors are superfluous.

We look forward to the days of workers' control of the railways.

### Organise the rank and file!

#### Build the Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union!

HE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN the successful signals strike ballot and the disastrous P. T. & R. ballot early this year tells you a lot about the RMT.

Despite the widespread concern amongst railworkers over job security the Knapp leadership did not want to win the P. T. & R. ballot.

As a result they did nothing to convince the ordinary members putting out just one letter, far too late in the day.

Contrast this to the signals ballot.

Good, imaginative publicity has gone out. And not just once. This was a real attempt by head office to ensure that every signalworker knew about the ballot and wanted to vote for action. We saw the result of this in the turnout and the majority for action.

There are two reasons for this.

Firstly, the left majority on the council of executives have taken a firmer hold of this dispute than they did over the P. T. & R.

Secondly, the signalworkers really want to have a go and are putting a lot of pressure on Hince and Knapp (who used to be a signalman himself).

A bit of a lead from the top is a very good development indeed, but what is absolutely vital is for the rank and file to take control of the union for themselves.

We have already seen how the CDFU can work as a useful place for exchanging information and sharing experiences. But it needs to become more than that.

We should try and build it as a fully fledged rank and file movement inside the union.

That means:

- \* It should take disputes seriously and aim to seize the initiative and build solidarity. After all, we won't always get the kind of lead we've had from the EC in future disputes.
- \* It should be based on the rank and file activists at local level.
- \* It should have clear and transparent democratic structures.
- \* It should not be the property of any one particular group or faction.

## Back the signal workers!

Continued from front page

3. The money that goes into the pockets of the private profiteers should be used to pay decent wages and provide a safe and efficient service.

Cost cutting for privatisation doesn't just effect signalworkers' pay packets it has also led to a run down in the service that everyone who regularly uses the railways is aware of.

4. A victory for the signalworkers will be victory for all trade unionists and working people.

The Tories are determined to hold the line against the signalworkers so that they can save their hated pay freeze policy. That's why the Treasury intervened to block a settlement last week.

A victory to the railworkers will blow a massive hole in that policy and show to workers in the public sector and elsewhere that the Tories can be beaten.

#### Build support groups

RMT activists at Waterloo station in London have set up a railworkers' support group with local trade unionists organised through the Southwark Trades Council.

The support group will be organising street and workplace collection as well as petitioning amongst rail commuters and messages of support to the strikers.

This activity should be repeated elsewhere.

## What other railworkers can do

· Don't do the job if it's unsafe.

Railworkers can use the provisions in the law that provides some protection for workers who stop an unsafe job. All train crews, track workers and others should refuse to go out if they think that the managers running the scab signal boxes are putting them at risk. When this has happened management have not known what to do.

The unions should make it clear that they will give official backing to anyone who takes such a stand. What's more we should ensure that refusals to work are collective actions. We should not allow management to pick off and intimidate individuals.

· Bring forward the pay battle and other issues.

It's great that ASLEF conference has rejected the measly 2.5% offer and decided to ballot for action on pay, the 35 hour week and the P. T. and R. which provides for job security.

The RMT should immediately start a national strike ballot over pay for the grades that have not yet settled. TSSA should ballot their signal supervisory grade members alongside the RMT's. This would make possible united action against top level management attempts to intimidate supervisors into running a dangerous skeleton scab service.

• Build strike committees. Make it an active strike.

Every RMT branch should set up an open strike committee made up of everyone who is prepared to do the work that needs to be done.

Levies should be set up and collected to finance a hardship fund. This would raise funds and raise the issues. It would create a direct bond between the signalworkers and the rest of the workforce.

Flying pickets must be organised to cover every scab box.

#### The fight for socialism

HIS SPECIAL ISSUE of Socialist
Organiser has been written by RMT,
TSSA and ASLEF activists who are also
members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty,
an open, democratic, Marxist organisation
which fights for socialist policies in the trade
unions and Labour Party.

The basic idea that the AWL fights for was summed up best by Karl Marx 130 years ago:

"The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself."

We want to see the labour and trade union movement transformed into a revolutionary force that can overthrow the Tories and the capitalist system they represent.

 The AWL thinks the trade unions are the single most important area for socialists to work in because they are the basic defensive organisations of the working class. It is one of our central aims to help build a new rank and file movement in the trade unions with the aim of transforming them into fighting and democratic orgainsations.

• We believe that so long as the Labour Party is the political wing of the mass labour movement, a serious revolutionary organisation can only be built in the struggle to transform it.

That means fighting for a Labour government and also being prepared to fight the government when it attacks — as it surely will — the working class

We seek to carry out this policy even though the Labour Party has banned our paper and expelled our comrades. To run away from the fight in the Labour Party is not serious revolutionary politics.

- We believe that the serious Marxist left can only make real progress by abandoning its remaining illusions in the Stalinist tyrannies that used to, or still do, call themselves socialist.
- Socialists are internationalists, not "little Englanders". We are for international workers' links and a workers' Europe. We reject the anti-European chauvinism of the left. Our slogan is "workers of the world unite".
- We are for a labour movement which is accessible to the most exploited and oppressed and which fights for the demands of black people, women, lesbians and gay men, as well as youth and people with disabilities.
- We are for a rational left which debates the issues that divide it while uniting in struggle against the bosses.

If you want to know more about our policies and activities write to:

AWL Rail worker c/o PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA



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