

KEY WORKERS UNITED

No 16, July 2022, Norwich

JOHNSON'S GONE! BUT RIGHT NOW WE NEED TO BUILD THE MOVEMENT!

RAIL COMPANIES MAKE £500M A YEAR IN PROFITS, BUT DOMINIC 'FILL YER BOOTS' BOOTH

(ABELLIO, GREATER ANGLIA) SAYS 'TRAIN FIRMS SHOULD GET BIGGER PROFITS' (2021)

SUPPORT RAIL STRIKES ON 27TH JUNE & 18TH, 20TH AUGUST (RMT),

30TH JULY (ASLEF), 27TH& 30TH (TSSA)

BT CHIEF EXEC PHILIP JANSEN GETS A 32% PAY RISE (2021)

SUPPORT BT ENGINEERS STRIKES ON 29TH JULY & 1ST AUGUST (CWU)

SOMEONE ONCE SAID that 'a single spark can start a prairie fire'. Rail workers have sparked a renewal of the trade unions' ability to challenge the employers and a vicious Tory government. And the 'prairie fire' has spread to barristers,

doctors, BT engineers, teachers, crown post office workers and Churchill rail cleaners on GTR, Network Rail. HS1 & S.E. Trains, (for example in King's Lynn) who want £15 an hour.

There is a new and militant mood

amongst many workers who are sick and tired of the hypocrisy, greed and callousness of their bosses. Time will tell if a new rank and file movement will emerge but the current strike wave will certainly educate a new generation of militants.

RAIL NOTES

THREE YEARS AGO we accepted a 0% pay rise, two years ago we accepted a 0% pay rise. But this year they came to us with a 0% pay rise plus over 2500 redundancies, changes to terms and conditions. An increase from 28 weeks of nights to 39 weeks of nights. An increase from 32 weekends worked to 39 weekends worked. Currently for a night shift we get time and a quarter, for a weekend turn we get time and a half. They wish to cut both of these to time and a tenth. So that's a 15% pay cut on every night shift and a 40% pay cut on every weekend turn. But they want us to work more of them.

This is their modernisation they talk about. Not technology, we embrace technology and have seen more and more of it in recent years.

They also wish to fire and re-hire the operative grades and bring them back under a new job title but on £9000 a year less. They also want them to use their own vehicles to get to work sites, this when fuel is at its highest. They will also be pooled when currently they are part of the team. The press are painting this to be about pay above all else.

It is not. But now we've said sod them we are going to demand better. I wish everyone could see past the government controlled media smear.

HELLO EVERYONE, BRITISH RAIL BARNEY HERE

THE FIRST national train strike for decades has happened, and is still ongoing. It will be a tough, long road but one that needs to be won. DfT are after everything rail staff have. It is completely wrong and rail staff need to keep their terms and conditions intact. Three RMT strike days in June and two ASLEF in June and July were well supported, by staff and the public alike.

As I write this, Johnson has resigned. He hates the RMT with a passion and wants to see all trade unions gone. To see him going makes Barney a very happy man. Maybe the Government, or what's left of it, might sort a deal out. Be nice if they do. Keep well everyone. Keep fighting.

Kind regards, Barney



RMT picket lines at Norwich, Birmingham New Street and Edinburgh Waverley stations

Potters Bar: the Past in the Present

TWENTY YEARS AGO this month was the Potters Bar rail crash. On the 10th May 2002, a train from King's Cross to King's Lynn derailed at 97mph. The last carriage flipped, hit a bridge, and wedged between the platform and station buildings. Seven people were killed. 76 people were injured.

The subsequent inquiry found a set of points had separated when the train passed over them. The bolts had come loose. Yet the records showed the points had been fully inspected just nine days earlier by Jarvis PLC, the private railway maintenance contractor. Jarvis claimed the points must have been sabotaged. The investigators found no evidence of sabotage. They did find the other points in the area had similar maintenance deficiencies, which "arose from a failure to fully understand the design and safety requirements." In short, private maintenance firms were paying too little attention to training and safety. Jarvis concocted a cock-and-bull story to cover their backs. They were eventually prosecuted in 2010.

Two years before Potters Bar was the Hatfield rail crash. One of the rails had metal fatigue – a series of small cracks that weaken the metal. On the fateful day of 17th October 2000, the rail finally fractured. A GNER train travelling from King's Cross to Leeds derailed at 115mph. The restaurant car separated from the rest of the train and collided with a gantry. Four people were killed, more than 70 were injured.

Private contractors Balfour Beatty were responsible for maintaining the track. On 13th Nov 1999 – 11 months before the crash – Railtrack's Head of Track wrote to the Head of Safety and Risk Management: "The balance between commercial drivers and safety are currently overwhelmingly towards the commercial. The culture in the

Company is currently such that Zone Track Engineers are in fear of losing their jobs if they do not accept non-compliance."

Four days before the crash he wrote, "the significant increase in broken rail numbers and growth in traffic is increasing the risk of derailment"

People knew this would happen. Senior management were warned this would happen, but they quite literally put profit before safety. In both cases, the private contractors eventually admitted their guilt, and paid £millions in fines and out-of-court settlements. In October 2002 Network Rail took over safety responsibility for rail infrastructure - track, points, signalling. For over a decade, Britain's railways had the best safety record in Europe. But from 2019, government demanded that £3.5 billion be cut over the next five years.

Network Rail now plans to cut the wage bill by £100 million a year. That's 2,660 rail maintenance jobs. Analysis from the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) shows that equals 670,000 fewer maintenance hours – a 34% reduction. Analysis by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) shows that bringing all the outsourced services back in house would save £115 million a year. But for some reason, this option is not being taken.

Lethal crashes make the headlines. But we typically experience poor rail maintenance as delays and cancellations. Twice last week I had to go to Leeds. In two return trips I experienced two trains cancelled, and two delayed because of signalling faults. Cutting safety is a false economy. The true cost of all those delays to passengers and freight will be huge. We can't run Britain as a pound-shop country.

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Whatever would Gerrard say?

by JOHN SILLETT

THE 20TH CENTURY historian A. L. Morton said of the 17th century diggers, whose leader was Gerrard Winstanley, that "their foresighted anticipation [were] the essentials of our own socialist conceptions". That being so, and Winstanley is held in high regard by many different strands of left thought, what would he say about today's problems facing the workers movement.

First let's consider the tremendous winning fight back by so many groups of workers as well as the employer attacks on us that have not been won yet. I think Winstanley would say that we need to actively link all those struggles together. The root cause is the same, increased exploitation to active greater profits for the corporations and rich. In 1649 there were many digger communities set up and supporters travelled the country to explain what they were doing and start other settlements. Instinctively many groups of workers are linking up today, making real the slogan "unity is strength" in the face of the predicted employer onslaught. The TUC needs to do much more, although there is no substitute for rank and file organisation. Workers solidarity backed by community action can be a real basis for a radical new force in society.

Then there is the world sleepwalking to world war. Both MI5 and the FBI are the most recent to cultivate an anti-China narrative as an axis forms around the Russia Ukraine war. Winstanley would have had discussions with those in the "Leveller" movement, and where there was a big influence in the "New Model Army", about refusing to fight in Ireland. Leveller pamphlets said, rightly, that they had no quarrel with the ordinary people of Ireland. The expedition to Ireland they argued would strengthen the masters who enslave us at home. We need to take inspiration from that when we consider what's developing now.

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