

Exclusive - Ghost Signalmen Phone Railtrack Hotline.

Railtrack managers have once again shown how in touch they are with the industry they are supposed to manage. A report in the Swindon Evening Advertiser quotes them as saying that on the first day that their 'hotline' was set up, '40 Swindon signalmen' rang in to speak to the 'top man' himself, Mr Martin Reynolds.

Perhaps these were ghost signalmen, or Mr Reynolds has been hallucinating (admittedly the weather has been unusually hot and humid), since there are only 25 men and women in the two Swindon panels! Surely they should have learned by now, if you are going to lie, try and make it plausible. As TGWU leader Bill Morris has said: "Frankly, I wouldn't put these people in charge of Thomas the Tank Engine".

Strike Fund - Local Trades Unionists & Railworkers Show Their Support..

Money has already started coming in from local trades unionists, in response to an appeal issued by Swindon Trades Union Council. Thamesdown Council workers union UNISON has donated £100. NCU Clerical (British Telecom) has pledged £100. As well as collections being organised on a weekly basis amongst railworkers, other trades unionists are doing likewise in workplaces around the town. The first money from these has come from union members in the National Environment Research Council - over £30. £25 received from Swindon depot.

More than £70 has been collected in Railtrack's holy citidel, 125 House.

RMT AGM Calls for Renationalisation.

The RMT AGM passed a resolution from Swindon branch, calling for a future Labour government to renationalise the Rail network within the first year of being reelected. Frank Dobson, Labour transport spokesman, speaking to the AGM, made a commitment to renationalise "the entire network".

The resolution calls for a transport policy which aims for a "fundamental shift from road to rail".

Choking Your Way to Work.

The recent environmental scare, with an unprecedented outbreak of asthma caused by the toxic smog, largely resulting from exhaust fumes trapped in the atmosphere, shows the environmental importance of bringing about "a fundamental shift from road to rail".

The growth of the rail network is not only necessary for the social needs of much of the population, it is a necessity if the environmental conditions created by "the car economy" are not to get much worse. The government's privatisation plans are likely to create a shift the other way - from rail to road. That is yet another reason why renationalisation is a measure which is in the interests of the overwhelming majority of the population: a transport system to serve human needs rather than to create money for the already rich, at the expense of the service users and rail workers.

Inspectors - Terrified About Safety Implications.

In an article in last Sunday's 'Observer' the paper reported that Inspectors they had spoken to (who had been threatened with the sack if they refused to work Signal boxes during the strikes), had told them that they were incapable of handling the signals properly, and were terrified about safety implications.

The Observer's investigation had uncovered evidence that:

* Inspectors who supervise signalmen, have been ordered to operate signals for the first time in their lives.

* Certificates of competency normally awarded to signalmen after a *minimum* of three weeks training in a new box, are being handed to inspectors on their first day. Some have refused to sign.

* Uncooperative inspectors are being verbally threatened with the sack, given strong hints in writing that continued non-cooperation will damage their careers.

The Observer has the names of seven inspectors from Crewe who were sent to man boxes in Rugby, Bletchley and Willesden. Only one had previously worked in his 'strike box' - in 1989. Some had not operated a signalbox for years.

The Observer points out that their sources of information **are not striking signalmen but Railtrack Inspectors and Managers**. Some were RMT members but others were in the TSSA or not in a union at all. They agreed to talk provided their names were not quoted, for fear of the sack.

The Observer asked Railtrack to provide evidence that the inspectors from Crewe had previously worked at the boxes in question. **Railtrack was unable to do so.**

This is just the latest evidence indicating that Railtrack are prepared to risk passenger safety in order to try and break the strike.

Jobs For The Boys.

Two men with strong links to the Tory Party, neither with any experience of the railways, have been appointed as part-time members of the BR Board. One is former Chair of the West Midlands Toy Party, the other is a director of the Bank of Scotland, whose chairman George Younger is former Conservative Defence Secretary.

£500 Attendance Money - Railtrack Strikes Again.

In yet another gaff it has emerged that non-executive members of the Railtrack Board - those who attend the occasional meeting - receive £500 for each meeting they turn up to. This is on top of their £10,000 salary for which they do very little. Not bad attendance money - over three times the basic weekly salary of the lowest paid signalling grade! As ever, 'one law for the rich, one law for the poor'.

Ass Gen Sec Election.

Swindon Nominates Bob Crow. Swindon RMT has nominated Executive Committee member Bob Crow for the post of Ass General Secretary. The election will take place in the autumn.

Civil Engineers (Works)

Bristol Area Tries It On Again. Management of the CE Works Department have very kindly offered to let workers transfer to the PWay section (so they will have "more secure jobs!")- **with a wage cut**. They say that Railtrack is not giving them money to do their work.

The RMT is demanding they stick to the PT&R agreement. If the work disappears, they have to find them suitable alternative work, at their existing rates of pay.

Could management by any chance be looking to save on redundancy money at the same time as cutting their wages bill?