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# Swindon RMT Bulletin

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## Railtrack Attempt To Slash Jobs.

If anybody imagined that 'peace' had broken out with the signing of an agreement between the RMT and Railtrack they have been quickly disillusioned. In the Bristol area alone management are proposing to slash 23 jobs, including six in Swindon A panel. This is a strange way to show that we have the same interests as them, as they tell us so often!

Why have they moved so quickly? They are faced with a big financial crisis resulting from their stupidity; the money they wasted in trying to break the RMT. They are desperate to cut wage costs, more so because they were forced to concede a great deal more than they wished in the restructuring package.

They are proposing to create nine of their beloved MOMs (potential future scabs, of course) who are supposed to be darting about over the area from incident to incident.

Whilst they have not produced a document yet, it would seem clear that they are quite prepared, purely for financial reasons, to reduce the manning of boxes to an unsafe level. This is not a local issue. It has implications in relation to safety on a national level. We will oppose these proposals and pursue the issue through the national union.

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## Signal Workers Gains.

Against all the odds the signal workers came out of the long dispute with Railtrack with some significant gains. The original restructuring package would have meant 30% of the staff being *worse off*. The management wanted to turn Sunday into a normal working day and to dispense with days in lieu.

Not only did we ensure that every member gains financially but we also maintained overtime rate for Sundays and the choice of days in lieu or an enhanced overtime rate for working bank holidays.

The overall package was certainly a compromise. Railtrack got some of their 'flexibility' in terms of signal workers doing other jobs. However, when you consider that the union was faced with not only a gung-ho pro-privatisation management, but a

government which tried to use the RMT to whip up an anti-union campaign, we did well to make the gains that we did. The original package would have cost Railtrack £4.3 million whereas this one cost them £8.7 million.

The anti-union legislation presented a real obstacle because the union could not bring out other rail workers without falling foul of the law. We also faced a Health & Safety Executive led by government appointees which assisted the management by their acceptance of *reduced standards of safety* on strike days.

Despite all the talk of sacking strikers the management and the government did not dare risk it for fear of the dispute escalating. Railtrack and the government *failed*

in their efforts to break the RMT. The union has been strengthened by the dispute. We recruited 400 new members amongst signalling staff.

Privatisation is a project which cannot work without worsening the service provided and the conditions of service of the workforce.

All the new businesses are seeking to cut their costs in the hope of attracting franchisees. The message of the signalling dispute to all rail workers is that if we are prepared to fight then we can defend our interests. What we need to do now is step up our organisation within each of the

businesses so that we are able to successfully resist the attacks which all rail workers face, whichever business they work for. The action of the signal workers has provided an impetus to such resistance. In the Great Western zone we need to ensure that the links between panel boxes, developed during the dispute are maintained. Unless we have a solid zonal and business organisation, Railtrack management will impose their will on the local level. We must not sit back and allow them to take the initiative. We have to get organised to block Railtrack's next moves.

### **Exel Logistics Lose Woolworth Contract.**

Exel Logistics has lost the contract which they have run for Woolworths. The firm which will take over is Wincanton. RMT members are obviously worried as to their future. The new legislation TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) will apply. This means that Wincanton will take over the staff who currently work for Exel. They will have to take them over on *their existing wages and conditions of service*. They will also have to take over the negotiating agreements which existed between Exel and the RMT.

There are many concerns amongst the staff over pensions and continuity of service. These and other issues will be discussed between the union and the new company. We will insist that TUPE *fully* applies. However, people are concerned that once they are working for the new company there will be attempts to reduce their wages and change their conditions of service. Any changes have to be negotiated. The RMT will resist any attempt to worsen wages and conditions.

The RMT is seeking urgent meetings with Exel and Wincanton.

### **Strike Fund.**

The signal workers strike fund, thanks to the efforts of local trades unionists raised £2,300. Donations from union branches included £200 from the UCW, £100 GPMU, £100 Thamesdown UNISON, £100 UNISON Thames Water, £100 British Telecomm NCU (Clerical branch).

Twenty local trades unionists helped with a town centre collection which raised nearly £250.

Workplace collections were organised amongst others in Rover, Thamesdown Council and the National Environment Research Council. Over £100 was donated by Swindon Trades Union Council delegates.

ASLEF donated £25 from their branch and individual drivers contributed to the weekly collection in Swindon Freight depot. £150 was collected in 125 House.

Our thanks to everybody who contributed.

### **Bob Crow Elected AGS.**

Bob Crow, who was nominated by Swindon branch has been elected to the post of Assistant General Secretary. He defeated the sitting candidate Tony McGregor. The vote was: Crow 10,339, McGregor 5,402.