

**Swindon RMT Secretary, Martin Wicks**  
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**To the General Secretary  
Council of Executives**

**13.07.94.**

Dear Brother,

at its meeting of 12.07.94. Swindon branch discussed the signalling dispute. I have been asked to make some points which the branch considers to be important in terms of progressing the dispute.

We are of the opinion that we have not made enough of the safety aspect of boxes being operated by managers who have either no experience of working in a panel, or else have not done so for two years. It is of course correct to approach the HSE and the Railway Inspectorate with cases. As far as we are aware, however, they would appear to be refusing to check up on individual cases, accepting Railtrack's blanket assurance about 'competent staff'. This is quite clearly a political decision. If they were told about a management of a particular factory breaking the regulations they would check it out. They would not take the word of the management, they would send in an inspector.

In refusing to do so in relation to the operation of signal boxes **they are in effect taking the side of the management and the government.** In our opinion this issue should be raised in parliament by our sponsored MPs. Why do they not make sample inspections of boxes on strike days, to examine whether our information is correct, to see whether certificated staff are working, and to check whether or not Railtrack is adhering to its guidelines?

We should demand that they do this. If they refuse, as they have done so far, then this quite clearly raises a question mark over their supposed independence. Of course, we are aware of the fact that the HSE has been staffed by government appointees, headed by Sir Frank Davies (another three day a week man). However, we should draw out in public the fact that they are not carrying out an independent role unless they check out the evidence which we have presented to them.

So far as the dispute itself is concerned, we believe it is crucial to **stop the trains running.** We should seriously consider calling on our health & safety reps, for on-train staff, utilising their right under the law to stop work if they believe they or other people are in danger. If the union backs them up then they will be prepared to instruct their members not to work when there is evidence that Railtrack is using managers to run the boxes who are not competent to do the job. We cannot allow the situation to continue where management get into the routine of running more trains. It is doubtful whether they could increase the number significantly, but nevertheless, for the morale of our members, it would be crucial if we could manage to stop the trains and push the management back in a number of areas.

Of course we must ensure that any action resulting from the health and safety reps is collective action. Management may well attempt to victimise individuals, therefore the union must issue guidance to them, and be prepared to organise action to stop any attempted victimisations. We believe this is crucial for the dispute.

We would also ask whether or not we have approached ASLEF formally in relation to the safety question. There is evidence of drivers at the local level being sympathetic towards our staff, but they are obviously not going to refuse to run trains unless their union says it will back such action. If we were support action by our staff, eg. senior conductors

then it would give more weight to any request for drivers to utilise their health & safety rights.

Martin Wicks