

Thames Valley District Council of the RMT

AN OPEN LETTER TO RAILTRACK MANAGERS

Why Risk The Safety of Passengers, & Your Future?

In its desperation to run services Railtrack has put many of its supervisors and managerial staff into a terrible position. They have instructed them, some of whom **have no experience of working in a panel box**, to cover striking signalmen. Many of these managers have been uneasy about this. We know it is a fact that Railtrack are breaking their own rules putting people into boxes who have not worked on a panel in the past two years, and in some cases never. When challenged about this blatant disregard for safety they have told us they have 'no choice' because they have been threatened with the sack if they refuse to work.

However, we know there are managers on the GW who have refused to work and **have not been sacked**. Indeed how can they risk sacking anybody for refusing to do work for which they have not the experience, or which they have not done for a long time, in the midst of an industrial dispute? It would prove that they had been lying. It would be a public relations disaster for them, and they have already conjured up enough of those by their own ineptitude.

You should be aware, in any case, that under new legislation flowing from European Community Directives, any worker who feels that they or other people are in danger, has a **legal right to refuse to work**. They are protected against dismissal or disciplinary action for refusing to do so. This law has already been tested in a case where building workers refused to clear up a location where they believed asbestos to be present. Having been sacked for not working in such an unsafe area, **they were reinstated under this law**.

You are therefore legally and morally justified in refusing to carry out work which you are not competent to do. How many times have we heard management say 'if it's not safe don't do it'?

You can well imagine the anger of signalmen/women towards you. They have to work under the strictest of safety regimes, in which every mistake, even of a minor nature is investigated. In contrast you are thrown in the deep end, and Railtrack throws out of the window the regulations it imposes on signalling staff.

However, consider this: if **you** make a serious error, do you honestly think that Railtrack will defend you. If there is an incident resulting from your mistake they will seek to draw attention away from **their** responsibility and point the finger at you. **This will be the thanks that you get for doing work under duress, which you do not want to do**. You are not only risking the safety of the few passengers on the trains, but you are risking your own future.

A final consideration. There is a great deal of bitterness amongst signalling staff over the role you are playing. After the dispute is over you will have to try and work with them in the normal course of your duties. This will be very difficult, if not impossible, for they will not forget that you have been supporting a senior management which has offered them a package in which 25-30% of them will lose money: a management which

can spend £7 million refurbishing its office and yet refuse the just demands of the signalling staff.

We appeal to you to take up your legal right- do not do a job in which do not feel at ease. Those who have refused have not been sacked. Do not do senior management's dirty work- if you make a mistake they will make you pay the price.