

RAILWORKERS' VOICE

KEEP THE GUARDS ON OUR TRAINS – VICTORY TO THE RMT STRIKERS!

AS WITH the CalMac ferries struggle, the SSP has no hesitation in taking sides with the RMT guards/conductors. We offer 100% support to railworkers taking this courageous action – to halt Abellio bosses in their dash for Driver Only Operated trains (DOO/DCO), whereby the safety-critical role of guards/conductors is abolished.

This is a showdown to stop the dilution and destruction of public safety for the maximisation of profit. The SSP pledges to do all we can to help not only stop the pernicious, creeping extension of DOO, but to demand its reversal – to demand guards back on EVERY train!

RMT members have shown their passion for safety by the scale of vote for industrial action. Workers don't risk wages by striking for the hell of it. They only resort to strikes because the bosses refuse to budge in their crusade to cut costs and recklessly gamble with passengers' safety. In a huge 75% ballot turnout, 75% voted for strikes, 93% for industrial action short of strikes. These votes rip to shreds even the repressive thresholds planned by the right-wing Tories in their (anti-)Trade Union Bill. It shows union members are not for backing down.

This is not even a strike about pay, or jobs – although both would be hammered in the future if Abellio and those in charge of the Scot Rail franchise get away with it, replacing guards with lower-paid Ticket Examiners. This strike is about public safety.

Abellio bosses try to dismiss the risk to safety involved in their extension of DOO, and try to downplay the statistics on accidents on DOO trains. But accidents do happen, regardless of how often. And only a fool would call for abolition of the fire brigade service just because s/he hasn't had a fire in their house! Only a fool – or somebody whose sole aim is to maximise profits, and to hell with the risk to life and limb.

And DOO trains also escalate the threat to the wellbeing of elderly or disabled passengers; women facing abuse or sexual assault, especially on late night trains; passengers taking seriously ill – in addition to near-disasters like Falls of Cruachan derailment in 2010.

Bullyboy Abellio Bosses

The RMT has repeatedly offered negotiations – before, during and since the strike ballot, even on the weekend before the first strike. Abellio bosses have blanked the RMT, showing no sign whatsoever of wishing for an agreement. They were caught red-handed coercing and conscripting an army of scabs to defeat industrial action by those defending public safety – recruiting strikebreakers mostly amongst managers. They bombarded RMT members with junk mail, used Yammer and other social media to bypass the union, trying to bamboozle and bully workers into submission. These tactics backfired spectacularly, only serving to harden the resolve of the conductors/guards to resist abolition (or even dilution) of their safety-critical role.

Other unions and individual trade unionists must stand up for the RMT strikers. This fight is about running a safe public transport system, and indeed about resisting the wider scorched earth policy of the privateers: cuts to maintenance; closure of ticket offices; slashing of station and platform staff; cuts to catering... all in pursuit of profit.

Demand that the Scottish Government stands up for ScotRail workers

Scotland's MSPs, and the Scottish Government itself, have a critical part to play in this struggle for public safety before profit. They should be bombarded by demands to Keep the Guard.

It's the Holyrood government which issues the franchise, through Transport Scotland. That franchise includes extension of DOO as an aim. That franchise also allows Abellio to seek indemnification off the Scottish Government for loss of profits through strikes – which they provoked in the first place! That's what their predecessors, First Group, did back in 2010, in collusion with the Scottish Government of the time, when RMT members were fighting DOO on the Airdrie/Bathgate line.

The SSP calls on the Scottish Government to plainly and publicly declare support for those defending public safety – the RMT and its members. Abellio has declared war on safety; it's time to take sides! The Scottish Government should openly refuse any indemnification to Abellio; they should instead fine Abellio for causing and provoking disruption to transport services. They should use their powers as the elected government to strip Abellio of the franchise, and take our railways into public ownership – and then extend safety AND create jobs by not only Keeping the Guard on our trains, but putting guards back on existing DOO trains.

The SSP is determined to build support for the RMT's defence of safety – to defeat the profiteers in their butchery. And we see this as a vital step on the road to democratic public ownership of transport.

As the RMT announced their plan of action, **MICK HOGG**, RMT Regional Organiser for Scotland, spoke to SSP national trade union organiser **RICHIE VENTON** about the key issues behind the strikes

Members have voted with the passion they feel about their safety critical role on the trains. This union is driven by the members, not by union officers. Members recognise that this franchise means profit made will be redirected into the Dutch state owners of Abellio. That shareholders are quids in at the expense of the guards' safety role.

The madness of scrapping the guards is driven by Abellio, on behalf of Transport Scotland, on behalf of the Scottish Government.

The RMT are not having it! We will fight this to the death. If it means ScotRail trains grinding to a halt, so be it.

This battle is all about running trains safely, not about us wanting more money. We are fighting for members' jobs, but also for public safety.

Driver Only Operations has had its day. There's been a catalogue of incidents with passengers caught and dragged along the track, trapped between trains, crushed.

The drivers should be left to do their job, drive, not look left and look right because there's no guard on their train.

The quicker this franchise nightmare and DOO madness ends the better. This is a fight to the death.

A CONDUCTOR'S VOICE

I feel I have to make a statement on the impending strike action by ScotRail conductors/guards. Please bear with me, as it's an issue close to my heart. This dispute is not about pay or conditions or jobs, it's about the safety of the travelling public. It is the intention to shift to what is called Driver Controlled Operations.

This means that control of the power-operated doors on all electric train services, and the decision that it is safe to depart the station, and all other safety issues, will rest solely with the driver. The second member of staff will be for revenue duties only, they will not be safety trained. They are Ticket Examiners.

At the moment all diesel and some electric services have a second safety-trained person on board, the conductor. Conductors are responsible for much more than checking and selling tickets. We are responsible for the safety of passengers and of the train.

In case of emergency using our training and knowledge of the routes we work to ensure that, should the worst happen, we can ensure that the public is protected, and where necessary be evacuated quickly and safely. [On DOO trains] if the driver is incapacitated, or has to carry out train protection, passengers will be left to deal with the situation on their own.

When a train arrives at a station, the conductor ensures the train is correctly positioned before opening the doors to allow passengers on and off. Whilst this is happening, they will be watching people ensuring they are safe, paying particular attention to the area between the train and platform, and also the access points to the platform in the case of late runners.

When the doors and 'platform interface' are clear, they close the doors and carry out a final all round check that the area is clear and that it is safe to proceed, and will close their local door and signal the driver that it is safe to leave. They will remain at their local door watching for hazards until the train is clear of the platform.

On Driver Only trains the driver relies on cameras that look down the side of the train, or mirrors positioned on the platform, to see that the doors are clear. These provide a very narrow field of view, and do not allow the same view that someone standing on the platform has.

The biggest difference with DOO or DCO trains is that, if there is no second member of staff available, the train will go regardless, meaning disabled or elderly passengers will have no assistance, and there will be no one patrolling the train to nip any trouble in the bud.

It took six months to train me as a conductor, and I have to renew my license every two years, and it is a job I take much satisfaction from doing, as do my colleagues.

Personally, I feel that the Managing Director of ScotRail is the front line of defence for the people who can stop this immediately. Transport Scotland have already stated that this is an issue between Abellio ScotRail and the RMT. True, but to a small degree. It matters not a jot who operates the ScotRail franchise, this issue of operating DOO/DCO trains is part of the franchise requirements, and must be brought into operation. This franchise agreement is drawn up by Transport Scotland, the Scottish Government's transport arm. So hiding behind two layers of defence is the current administration at Holyrood.

This is purely down to money, and at a time when passenger numbers are at an all time high, trains and stations are busier than ever, to save money our politicians want to achieve this by expanding an operating method which is not safe.

In recent weeks, a wheelchair-bound passenger had to be helped off a train at Livingston North by the taxi driver who had come to pick him up! Worse still, a passenger suffered 'life changing injuries' when he fell between the platform and a moving train. These are just two incidents on DOO trains.

Our elected parliament is playing with safety in the name of cost savings. If you read this all the way through, thank you for taking the time. I don't want to strike, no one does, but we are fighting on behalf of train passengers all over the country.

35 reasons to keep the guards

THE GUARDS' duties are about far more than opening and closing train doors – important as that is for safety.

Conductors/guards are trained in at least 35 different skills that include track safety; risks with electrified lines; signalling systems and regulations; station duties and train dispatches; train defects; dealing with fires, suspicious packages, on-train incidents; dealing with train accidents or evacuations...



The SSP stands for:

- victory to the RMT – defend safety, not profit
- Keep the Guard – demand guards on all trains
- build industrial and political solidarity for strikes
- demand Scottish Government strip Abellio of franchise – take ScotRail into public ownership
- a £10 living minimum wage now – for all over 16 – equal pay for women
- a maximum 35-hour week, with no pay losses – and a 16-hour minimum working week to combat insecure, casual labour
- an independent socialist Scotland that puts people before profit



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