

# The *Red* Line

Written by Socialist Party members who are members, reps and activists in RMT

## Corona crisis-Full Pay and PPE now- No to 'unity' with the bosses

The spread of Coronavirus has turned the world on its head. RMT members, mostly carrying out key worker roles, are first and foremost confronting the demands of keeping an essential service running while seeking to ensure our own safety. Transport workers want to be able to help other essential workers to get to their workplaces but this can never be at any cost.

Some employers are not making sure that work can be carried out while observing social distancing. Basic stuff like soap and hand sanitiser is not always available to our members and many members who are either vulnerable themselves or live with people who are vulnerable feel under pressure to be at work. But there is also a growing problem of members who are being stood down from work. Some will be furloughed on full pay. Others will suffer a 20% pay cut. Self-employed members face surviving without pay at all, at least until the government sorts out some sort of payment. Many RMT members want to see widespread testing for Coronavirus of our workforce, so that anyone testing positive can be isolated and anyone who has been working with them can be traced. Testing is now crucial to stopping the spread throughout the population.

The issue of testing shows that in spite of Michael Gove thanking the trade union leaders for their help in dealing with this crisis, the truth is it's still 'them and us'. If you are

wealthy, if you are in the government or Royal family then you get tested without delay. Private Harley Street clinics can get access to labs and run tests but only a few thousand NHS staff have been tested out of a total of 1.2million.

### **Socialists demand:**

- ★ **Provide PPE wherever needed**
- ★ **Ensure safe distancing is maintained in all workplaces**
- ★ **Assist members who feel the need to remove themselves in face of unsafe working conditions**
- ★ **Full pay for all furloughed or laid off workers. Demand that employers make up any shortfall for all transport workers, including the self-employed.**
- ★ **All protection for workers to be provided in full in the maritime sector.**
- ★ **The immediate full nationalisation of the rail system and major bus providers.**
- ★ **Any company claiming the need to lay off or reduce pay must open their books to the trade unions and local community. Let's see where the profits have gone**
- ★ **Nationalisation of the big monopoly producers, banks and infrastructure providers with compensation only on the basis of need**

What this crisis has demonstrated is that not just the NHS but the whole capitalist economy cannot cope with a crisis. For the second time in 12 years the state has had to step in and bail out the rich and powerful. The same politicians and executives who tell us the state has no part to play in managing the economy quickly change their tune when their system comes crashing down around them.

This is why it has alarmed many RMT members that our union has signed joint statements with employers and the government declaring that we are working with the rail industry in the national interest or that we are closely collaborating with employers. It is misleading to suggest that we have one national interest that is the same as our bosses.

Look at the way some of our members have been treated in the last few weeks. Threats of job losses if we don't agree to furloughs on 80% pay, catering workers and engineers laid off with no pay while employers look to see what they can get off the government. Companies using the crisis to force through pay deals or attacks on terms and conditions that they could not have done without the current crisis.

But in the future the continuing class struggle will be seen even more clearly. In Italy there has been a strike wave in workplaces where workers believe they are not essential but are being made

to work so that the bosses don't lose out. And this is all before the economic impact is fully felt. It is likely that we will now experience an economic recession that will be worse than that following the 2008 banking crisis. Governments around the world have made massive spending commitments and they will want to present us with the bill. Austerity on massive scale will be proposed. Some employers will seek to make wage cuts intended for a temporary period into permanently lower wages. RMT is a fighting union with socialist politics. We must maintain this position and prepare members to fight back against the capitalist class. We have a difficult time ahead as we confront this virus and the government and bosses' response to it. But we also have to be ready to go on the offensive to fight for the socialist ideas that sit in RMT's rule book.

It will be difficult for the ruling elite to maintain their argument that the state cannot run public services when it has had to bail out the private sector. We should ask why control of our economy should be handed back to the ruling elite after hundreds of billions of pounds of public money has gone into maintaining it. There will be a reckoning after all this. Why was the NHS allowed to be run down so far that we can only test about a sixth as many people as Germany can? Why are social care workers risking their lives for minimum wage while their bosses make millions? When will workers who have suffered pay cuts to

get through the crisis be compensated? The crisis shows that just like 2008, private ownership of the world's dominant companies and financial institutions cannot survive inevitable shocks. A pandemic like this has been predicted for years. There is no excuse not to be better prepared. The only option is for the state to step in and take over.

The world's billionaires must not have it all handed back to them once it has been stabilised with public money. **What we need is a democratically controlled planned economy. The big monopolies, banks and infrastructure should remain in public hands and be democratically controlled for the benefit of the majority, not fatcat shareholders.**

That would ensure democratic control of public investment and working conditions in those sectors that dominate our economy .

### **Confront Tory Hypocrisy on anti-union laws**

Michael Gove has praised the leaders of the trade unions for their role in the coronavirus crisis.

That tells us something about the failure of the TUC and union leaderships to expose the responsibility of government for running down the NHS, social care and imposing the worst impacts on the crisis on the poorest in society.

The union leaders should be putting demands on the Tories to deal with the crisis but also to drop the proposal for minimum service levels. Anything short of this is pure hypocrisy from the Tories.

### **Social Distancing—a Network Rail rep writes...**

With the Corona virus lockdown and social distancing now in its third week of being enforced in homes, shops and on our streets, our Reps have been working tirelessly behind the scenes to get an agreement with the company to get a set of principles in place to protect our infrastructure members from contracting the virus.

After nearly a month of confusion for our members on how they can observe social distancing or protect themselves at work with correct PPE, our union now finally has a document agreed and signed by the company.

These procedures include measures to ensure social distancing in depots vans and worksites, correct PPE including face masks and goggles, minimising the amount of staff needed to carry out each task so that members are not exposing themselves or their families to risk unnecessarily and measures on how to stop any task if the necessary safe distancing protections cannot be adhered to.

This has taken a lot of time and effort to put in place and has not been an easy task, but this is just the start. It is now the job of our representatives to make sure that these policies are implemented and continue to be carried out at local level at every depot and by every manager to ensure that all of our members are protected as much as possible.

Network Rail's promise to its staff is "Everyone home safe every day" So why should any of our members be put at any more risk just to get the job done?

### **RED LINE SUPPORTERS ONLINE MEETING**

#### **What strategy needed to beat the bosses and defend jobs, pay and conditions during the Covid 19 crisis?**

Speakers: Rob Williams, Chair, National Shop Stewards Network. Plus Moe Munir, Unite rep London Buses (Personal capacity)

#### **An online meeting via 'Zoom', Friday 24th April 7.30pm**

All welcome text us for access code: 0794 100 3037

### **RMT AGS - Steve Hedley - Suspended**

Following comments he made on Facebook AGS Steve Hedley has been suspended from his duties by the RMT NEC.

Socialist Party members in our union understand Steve's hatred of Tory austerity and the misery it has caused for millions of working class people.

The current pandemic is tragically showing the effects of Tory policies. However, it is also a sensitive time, when millions are worrying about their own health and that of their loved ones, and some RMT members may have been offended by Steve's comments.

Steve's FB posts put his opposition to Johnson and his Tory govt in personal terms but the workers' movement's opposition to the Tories isn't personal, but because of their anti-working class policies, such as brutal austerity, the privatisation of the NHS and railway and transport network plus their anti-union laws which include those which are now planned to be targeted at rail unions like the RMT. However, the suspension is completely wrong. Steve has been to the fore of the union at a senior level, in resisting the massive pressure on us from the Tories, the TUC and other unions to join in the national collaboration during the Covid crisis.

Any capitulation to this, any pulling of our punches against the bosses at this time will have a far greater detrimental effect on our union and our members than comments made on Facebook.

The suspension should be lifted so that he can get on with fighting for RMT members as AGS.



**Agree with us? Join us or find out more, call/text 0794 100 3037**