



On Guard

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Black lives matter!

Workers unity against racism! Curb police powers! End the ethnicity pay gap!

On Guard supports the global protests against police brutality and racism.

The issues raised by the protests are not just problems in the USA. They affect us too. Britain has its own history of police violence against people of colour, with campaigns like the United Families and Friends Campaign highlighting deaths in custody. And just as America must reckon with its history of slavery and segregation, so must Britain confront a history of slavery and colonialism.

Police role

Although we're brought up to believe the police "protect us", their history shows that, as an institution, their role is more about protecting property than people.

We need adequate funding of mental health and community services to push back the role of the police.

Racism at work

Racial inequality is also something we experience directly in the workplace. According to Network Rail, 8.6% of the workforce is BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) and there is an 8.7% pay gap between white workers and their BAME co-workers. But, if outsourced workers were included, it would be much higher.

Outsourcing

Outsourcing itself can act as a form of discrimination; by outsourcing sections of the workforce with high concentrations of people of colour and migrants, such as cleaning, catering, and security, the majority BAME/migrant sections of the workforce are those with the worst terms and conditions.

Covid 19

BAME workers have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19. This is because BAME workers are more likely to be in higher-risk, frontline jobs, with inadequate PPE, as the tragic murder of Belly Mujinga shows.

Rail bosses

Some Rail bosses have spoken up in support of BLM; they should start by addressing racial inequality in their own company.

Organise

We need to organise. Our unions must support BLM protests, and help develop a wider working-class anti-racist programme that demands equality in jobs, housing, services, and education. We also need to confront far-right counter-protests, and persuade white working-class people drawn to them that their interests lie in common struggle with workers of colour, rather than the toxic politics of nationalism.

Rail unions must change

RMT has never had a black person, or a woman of any ethnicity, in any officer role (Regional Organiser, Assistant General Secretary, or General Secretary). In Aslef, TSSA, and Unite too, the higher up the union hierarchy you go, the fewer black and brown faces you see. Our unions must be more reflective of the workforces they organise. A good starting point is for BAME committees within unions to have more power to organise campaigns, rather than merely being "advisory".

Right to protest

We understand that some workmates

have concerns about large demonstrations at a time when virus transmission is still a risk, and welcome creative thinking about ways to take action whilst maintaining social distancing. But we also defend the right to protest, and think it's important to remember that it's failures of government policy that are to blame for the high death toll, not anti-racist protests.



Disciplined for challenging racism

Sherelle Cadogan, an Instructor Operator and Aslef member on the London Underground, has been given a 12-month suspended dismissal... for challenging racism! A manager posted racist comments on social media, including disparaging remarks about Black Lives Matter. Sherelle and others rightly, challenged this. The manager was reported for their comments, but Sherelle found herself disciplined as well in a countercomplaint from the manager! This is an extremely worrying precedent. We could all face disciplinary action for standing up to racism. Sign and share the petition to support Sherelle: change.org/p/support-sherelle

Do you have a story to tell? Contact On Guard (see address on back).



RAT WATCH

We've featured Snivelling Shapps in this column before but he and his Tory pals are back in the press, this time scuttling away from the sinking ship of rail franchising system. True to form, these cowardly rodents chose to try and bury the news on the same day that the government's chief medical staff announced the extent of the spike in coronavirus infections. Basically, they've extended the Emergency Management Agreements they have in place at all the TOCs and have decided to scrap franchising at this point, moving to management agreements instead.

Rather than just admitting that the idea of rail privatisation is in the sewer and that a public owned and operated railway is what's needed, Shapps and Co have just moved us to a different privatised model where their big business mates get to keep stealing money out of the industry that could be used to keep fares down and fund improvements.

Call the exterminators!

Stonehaven

Since our last issue went to press our industry was rocked by the horrific derailment of 1T08 at Stonehaven in which driver Brett McCullough, conductor Donald Dinnie and passenger Chris Stuchbury tragically died. Preliminary details coming out from the incident suggest that it was caused by failed earthworks resulting in a landslip that destroyed a section of the track. We hope to be able to publish more on the incident in future issues but for now we will publish the bank account details for those wanting to contribute to the joint fund for the families of the crash victims set up by RMT and ASLEF. We understand that the funds from both accounts will be combined and divided equally between the families.

RMT S/C 60-83-01 A/C No 33700050

ASLEF S/C 60-83-01 A/C No 45024685

Thirty staff members dumped by SSP

On Guard welcomes some familiar faces back to the station as the Costa and Pumpkin franchises reopen. At the same time, we're immensely angry about the 30+ staff that have just been unceremoniously dumped by SSP. We talked last issue about the scourge of Zero Hours contracts. The industry is experiencing upheaval now, with the end of franchising for Train Operating Companies and a move to management contracts. Politically it is the right time to make the case - the unions should be campaigning hard to eradicate these contracts from trains, trackwork and stations.

What are we not being told?

Northern Drivers recently discovered that ASLEF had been in talks with their employer under the Avoidance of Dispute procedures, and that the issues had thankfully been resolved to the satisfaction of the Company Council. Trouble was, the drivers have been told that the details would "remain confidential".

So: there's been something wrong and it's been sorted to the satisfaction of our reps but we're not allowed to know what's been agreed? What if we're not satisfied?!? How would we even know?!?

'Democratic, member-led unions' can't be democratic or member-led if the people elected to reps' positions can't or won't tell the people who elected them what is being done *in their names*. Something about this episode is embarrassing for the union, or the employer, or both, and that's why it's being covered up. If the company wants something covered up then you can bet it's something we ought to know about. If it's our reps that have made a mistake then we need to know that too.

There can be no democracy without accountability.

Unions: make management tackle Covid safety!

We keep hearing in the news about passenger numbers falling off a cliff edge but someone should tell these journalists about the crowded trains into and out of cities at weekends, the lack of social distancing and the poor compliance with face coverings that go with them! Guards have been given an app on their mobiles to report overcrowded trains but judging by the total lack of any visible response from the company, these reports are being completely ignored. This needs taking seriously by the unions and tackling, and we need to be kept informed of what they're doing to address it. It's not safe!

Speaking of which.....

At On Guard we don't generally support the 'policing' of face coverings by train crew except in the most obvious cases of unjustified non-compliance. If we make it our business to police this, we will inevitably end up making life even harder for the many people exempt from wearing them that have health conditions or disabilities that aren't immediately obvious. Not to mention making our own jobs much harder too. One exception to this approach might be for the irresponsible idiots in the 'anti-mask' movement, though. You might 'refuse to wear someone else's fear' but we might refuse to make you some other passenger's cause for anxiety!

On Guard is a rank and file socialist bulletin by and for workers of all grades and companies at Sheffield rail. It is published by socialist group Workers' Liberty .

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