

Britain: Train drivers refuse to move supplies for war vs. Iraq

Our correspondent
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In a courageous stand, a group of rail workers based in Motherwell, Scotland, have refused to drive a freight train loaded with military supplies for the British government's war against Iraq.

Details remain sketchy as the British press, save for two articles in the *Guardian*, has all but blacked out news of the boycott. The train drivers union ASLEF has also remained silent on the protest and have refused requests for information.

According to accounts in the *Guardian*, however, the train—which is owned by the English Welsh and Scottish Railway (EWS)—was due to be moved on January 8. Among EWS's contracts is the supply route to the huge NATO munitions store at Glen Douglas, on Scotland's west coast, where missiles and other arms are buried within a hillside.

The drivers' protest forced EWS and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to initially delay and ultimately cancel the contested service. As the drivers were the only workers at the Motherwell depot trained to move a freight train over the route, EWS and the MoD were forced to offload the train's contents into trucks and complete the journey by road.

EWS initially denied that the protest had taken place, claiming that "commercial issues" had caused the train's cancellation. The MoD for its part cited poor weather conditions.

Their claims were refuted by *Guardian* journalist Kevin Maguire, who said that his contacts in the industry had confirmed EWS had contacted leaders of the drivers' trade union, ASLEF, to put a stop to the workers' protest. Maguire said he had been informed that EWS management had told ASLEF the boycott was illegal, and the union could face court action unless it was ended.

Further contradicting EWS and the MoD's claims,

Maguire said he had been told by one of the workers' supporters that their action was motivated by "conscientious" objection to the Blair government's war drive. Up to 15 workers at the depot are said to have supported the drivers' stance and are considering taking other forms of anti-war industrial protest.

The importance of the Motherwell freight load was highlighted by the route taken by the British aircraft carrier, Ark Royal. The carrier set sail to join US forces in the Gulf from its base in Portsmouth, southern England on January 11. Its first port of call was the Glen Douglas base, where it stopped for supplies. A large police operation was mounted to secure the route between the munitions store and naval dock from anti-war protesters.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact