

An appeal from a UK rail worker for a joint fight of rail, bus and tram workers across Europe

Our correspondent
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The WSWs has been sent this appeal from a UK rail worker to their colleagues employed by state-run Nederlandse Spoorwegen (Dutch Railways). It calls for a joint fight against its privatised arm, Abellio, which is currently attacking jobs and working conditions across its private UK rail franchises.

Brothers and Sisters of Nederlandse Spoorwegen,

I work for the transport company, Abellio, on one of their private rail franchises in the UK. Franchises that Abellio runs or are partners in are seeking to introduce Driver Only Operation trains, threatening the future of hundreds of jobs. They are doing this with the full backing of the Conservative government of Theresa May. As you know the guard/conductor plays an essential safety role on any railway.

This strategy will put hundreds of conductors' jobs at risk, along with station staff, with an imposition of conditions on drivers which the trade unions have said many times will endanger public safety as proven in various situations.

However, it has become extremely clear to us that the rail unions that are supposedly there to support our jobs, our careers and future generations of workers are working with Abellio behind our backs.

I am appealing for support against the company and for a wider struggle by those who also work for Abellio on buses, trams and railways in the UK and Europe.

To provide you with some facts regarding the agreements reached by the Rail, Maritime and Transport workers union (RMT), during a wave of militant strikes over the last two and a half years with workers facing strikebreaking operations:

Abellio ScotRail franchise covers most rail services across Scotland which runs fifty percent of its services

as DOO, after a series of strikes the RMT pushed through a deal to hand the driver the responsibility to open the doors and the conductor close the doors as a prelude to the elimination of the conductor's role altogether.

At **Mersey Rail**, which runs services across the Liverpool city region, the RMT called off strikes by conductors resisting DOO. Drivers refused to cross picket lines even after their union, ASLEF, told them to do so. This solidarity was seen as the way forward by many colleagues. Abellio wanted DOO on their new fleet of trains. A joint statement with management and the RMT said a proposed deal was agreed in principle. It did not even guarantee a second person would be onboard trains—"In order to pay for a second member of staff on each train, additional funding will now need to be generated." This is a diabolical sellout, guaranteeing nothing.

Greater Anglia, covering much of the east of England into London, will from the beginning of 2019 deploy modified or new rolling stock on the Regional, Intercity and part of the Great Eastern routes. Train drivers will operate the doors and train despatch in what is called "normal conditions," with conductors retained for now. But arrangements are being put in place to ensure that where no conductor is available a train can run without one! The commitment to maintain the conductors post only covers the period of the current franchise agreement.

At **West Midlands Trains** which covers a huge portion of the network from London Euston to Birmingham and to Liverpool, the company and the union entered behind closed doors framework discussions in early 2018. They reached a framework

agreement on DOO in June. Rail union officials have been in Spain to look at new rolling stock that is DOO enabled, along with visiting other networks to see how DOO/DCO is operated.

Due to their £1 billion investment into the network, WMT have started to use extreme tactics against opponents of the union-management agreement to strip conductors of door safety operations. At WMT they trained up a strikebreaking force made up of managers and supervisors who are members of the railway clerical union TSSA, while the unions stand by and watch, it is a diabolical situation.

The RMT has refused to commit to a national strike and in each area we are being picked off one-by-one. The union's defence is that anti-trade union laws put in place by the Conservative government stop national action from being called. This is a smokescreen used to hide the unions' agreeing to help companies like Abellio force through the cost-cutting measures recommended by Lord McNulty in his business blueprint for the UK rail industry.

Among many other posts McNulty has held in the transport sector was chairman of the Rail Value for Money Study sponsored by the Department of Transport under the last Labour government. One of its recommendations following the privatisation of British Rail in 1996-97 was the removal of conductors, with single-manned trains to be the norm—slashing 20,000 jobs on the rail.

There is a real fighting spirit among rail staff, but all avenues of struggle are being closed-down by the unions. This is going on in the same company that we both work for. Abellio is the privatised arm of your state-controlled rail network. It is gaining experience in the UK in how to privatise, mount strikebreaking operations and intimidate workers in order to do the same against our colleagues working the Nederlandse Spoorwegen.

Abellio writes of its staff, "Every day 14,400 Abellio people provide safe, easy and reliable public transport for more than a million passengers on our buses, trains and trams and the passenger is at the heart of everything we do."

However, what we have seen in relation to the strike struggle begun by conductors in spring 2016 is that private rail franchises like Abellio are hell-bent on removing safe door operation from the guard and

forcing it on the driver, compromising passenger safety.

To stop these attacks, we have to fight together. Everything we won previously was won by workers fighting together. The unions are dividing us when what we need is the fullest unity. A unified stand by rank & file bus, rail and tram workers across the UK and Europe would tip the scales in all of our favour.

These are our experience and we want to hear yours! It is high time to discuss these issues that are affecting rail and transport workers everywhere.

It is important to realise the role the *World Socialist Web Site* has played in showing rank and file workers the REAL truth and exposing plans which are being drafted behind workers' backs in the transport sector in a systematic attack coordinated by the trade unions and transport companies. This must be a call to arms for us all. It's our jobs, our careers and our children's future at stake.

Abellio workers and rail, bus and tram employees across Europe should share and discuss this appeal widely.

contact us: email sep@socialequality.org.uk. We respect anonymity.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact