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Rail strike is averted

Donal Greene

1994

Dear Comrades,

One minute to mid-night on Friday 15th April and the rail strike is averted. SIPTU left it to the last minute leaving the company sweating it out. The unions never had problems with negotiations. The strike notice was only served after the company suspended workers for not accepting new training arrangements which they were being forced to take or face being suspended. The company had repeatedly refused to enter negotiations because this productivity deal had been on the table for three years.

The mass media could not hide from this one. It was to be the first national rail strike in over 40 years. But they hid the facts about the dispute and concentrated on one single issue — claims that the drivers earn up to £20,000 a year. A similar claim like this was used against workers in the Waterford Glass dispute. It attempted to portray the drivers as privileged workers and thus divert public support from their cause. They failed to mention the 70–80 hours work per week or spending 4–5 hours on a train with no toilet facilities often endured by the drivers.

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If the productivity deal goes ahead drivers will be asked to operate trains without guards, in other words do two peoples jobs. The guards will be re deployed to other depots and most likely do other jobs than their own. Drivers could lose their mileage allowance which they earn for long distance runs and also work a five out of seven day week. Saturday and Sunday would become ordinary days and overtime lost.

On Friday at lunch time the company organised, against their will, 17 temporary Draftsmen and Engineers to go down to Rosslare to be used to man the port, tying up boats, erecting the gang plank, and collecting tickets. None of the staff had been trained to do these duties. The company were prepared to put passengers safety at risk in order to maintain profits. Fortunately this did not go ahead. In the short term the workers have won and the company are on the run. Watch this dispute closely. It may develop into massive strike action.

Donal Greene

TEEU member, Irnroid Eireann