

## HANDS UP FOR CHANGE! *by John Kennedy*

Well with a blistering start to the New Year and the LTDA putting out radio ads and now the Hands Up for a Taxi campaign anyone in the media or advertising field must think it is Christmas come early. I have to say under normal circumstances one would have to say well done! In fact I say well done to all at Woodfield Road for pointing out the obvious that we only charge a metered rate with no extras for passengers or luggage. What does concern me though is the latest articles that have appeared in TAXI newspaper knocking the RMT and its London taxi branch. What does the LTDA have to fear if it has done such an excellent job over the last 7 to 8 years? Why is the General Secretary so rattled by a democratic trade union that meets regularly and allows its members to turn up and discuss in detail issues that affect their jobs?

In recent years the London taxi trade has witnessed the explosion of licensed private hire/mini-cabs and with their new found status they have grabbed work that was once ours at an alarming rate. It appears that whilst the economy was booming the majority in the London taxi trade were happy to go to work and ignore the setting up of the satellite mini-cab offices. These offices were set up by Transport for London to deal with a perceived unmet demand at weekends in the capital. Illegal ranks now form outside venues and clipboard operators work the streets touting and searching for work that isn't lawfully theirs.

Now here is the million dollar question that is in my opinion rattling the cages of the LTDA and the union UNITE; what did these two organisations do to stop the introduction of these offices whilst they had the ear of the previous Mayor Ken Livingstone? This is a very simple question and one that they both choose to duck; instead the LTDA would rather spend inches of column space attacking the RMT and its London taxi branch. In a recent issue of TAXI newspaper they state that the RMT has a conflict of interest with tube and bus workers. If this was the case wouldn't this same conflict of interest apply to UNITE the trade union? They also seem to think that London taxi cab drivers compete with buses and the tubes, sorry but this explains a lot maybe they haven't woken up and realised that we compete with mini-cabs/private hire,

honestly when was the last time you saw a tube or bus tout a taxi passenger?

Now let's not mention Pedicabs to the LTDA or the union UNITE - they state they want to ban these dangerous objects but at the very same time want to allow a bill through Parliament that will give these objects ranks on the public highway? The only union doing anything regarding the threat of pedicabs is the RMT. Yes the LTDA did challenge in court but it seems they have lost the will to fight the corner they once stood proudly in. In fact let's be totally honest ever since that massive drive in on the 5th February 2009 what has the united trade group achieved? Approximately 7 taxi ranks with the majority within Mayfair and one in Soho. Before any of you say they got that chap off the Knowledge, go back and read the Evening Standard; it was George Vyse of the RMT who was quoted and it was the RMT London taxi branch that saved this trade from falling standards from within Transport for London, that's fact not fiction!

So with the Hands up for Taxi campaign well under way, I think it may well be time for a "Hands up for Change" campaign from within the London taxi trade.

Thank goodness that Eddie Lambert, David Vidgen and others who set up the RMT London taxi branch, for it gives you the self employed taxi-cab driver a say in your future by democratic means. The London taxi trade is not in a healthy state and we the drivers only have ourselves to blame but we can pull ourselves back from the brink by joining a truly democratic trade union and that is the RMT. We have a reach far and wide and the expertise to deal with complex issues like no other trade organisation in fact maybe that is why so many of them dislike us for we get results whilst others just

dither, follow and fail at every twist and turn. If the collective trade bodies are doing such a good job why is the trade in such a mess? Why do they celebrate the appointment of a taxi rank? What next a front page telling us all they have won a parking ticket appeal?

I say it's time for Change and its time self employed taxi-cab drivers put their hands up and voted for change and a better future for you and your family join the RMT London taxi branch and make a difference. [www.rmt.org.uk](http://www.rmt.org.uk)



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