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THE BILL IS BACK by John Kennedy, Chair RMT London taxi branch

The Bill that seeks to give pedicabs/rickshaws ranks on the public highway has been revived in both Houses of Parliament. Soon we shall know the date of the 3rd reading in the house of Lords and we shall see who in the London taxi trade actually cares about our right to “ply for hire” and safety of members of the public.

It is sad to say that many papers are printed from various trade bodies and they all tell you of their opposition to pedicabs/rickshaws but when push comes to shove they appear to have no plans to petition against this Bill which will lead to pedicab/rickshaw “RANKS” on the public highway. So we must ask what was the point in handing out leaflets at the Chelsea Flower Show, informing people of the dangers of these death traps, when this Bill will create “RANKS” which will lead the public into believing that these objects are in fact licensed. Sorry, Steve McNamara, but you really couldn’t make this up! Time for the United Trade Group to stand up for taxi-cab drivers and seek a BAN of pedicabs/rickshaws from the public highway, time for the trade to stand together and unite against this daft piece of legislation, time to petition against this Bill and Clause 19 for what have we to fear other than failure.

Yes the worst outcome here is we fail to persuade parliament that the voluntary registration scheme will fail and lead members of the public into believing that pedicabs/rickshaws are a licensed method and mode of transport. Alan Fleming, past Chair of the LCDC, successfully petitioned against the No.1 Bill - let’s hope the LCDC do the same this time around.

RECRUITING MINICAB DRIVERS

In recent months the RMT have been accused of recruiting mini-cab drivers and having links to private hire - we do not - yet the very organisation that does this holds a 20% stake in a radio circuit that takes bookings for cars, look at the circuit’s website if you don’t believe me. We recently released a statement from our General Secretary Bob Crow assuring the trade that we do not seek tachographs or limits to working hours, yet still this isn’t good enough for some. The truth is this trade is in decline because selfish individuals put their needs above the many thousands of taxi-cab drivers. The trade is fragmented and disunited and the if three trade bodies of the United Trade Group think that slating the RMT at any opportunity will save our jobs we are all in serious trouble.

Take the recent announcement regarding the suspension of satellite mini-cab offices, is this a victory? Certainly not, for we’ve spoken to the Director of Taxi and Private Hire and he assures us that TFL have no plans to close these offices for they form part of the safer travel at night programme. The bar and club owners like the revenue they receive from these offices and therefore they don’t require taxi-cab ranks outside their venues. What a mess, created under the noses of the very people who attack the RMT and its London taxi branch. The only solution to the satellite mini-cab office problem is a trip down to the High Court and “we collectively” ask a judge to decide if these offices are in fact legal. In fact let’s go one step further and ask Transport for London and the Taxi Private Hire directorate

to join in. What’s the worst that can happen, we lose and we find out once and for all that these offices are legal or maybe we win and stop the decline of the finest taxi trade in the world.

I actually think it is the fear of failure and the subsequent onslaught from within that holds this trade back. Well we’re used to getting slated and called names by people who should know better but you have to laugh at the keyboard soldiers who hide behind false/fake names and continue to pass very odd comments but don’t have the bottle nor intelligence to put their actual name to a comment on an RMT blogsite they allege to despise. So we need to take a step forward to ensure that our trade survives this present economic and regulatory crisis, if we fail we know where we stand but if we win we would remove the shackles of fear that for too long have bogged us down.

May I take this opportunity to thank the editors and owners of three trade papers that deserve a special mention that is the Taxi Globe, Taxi Cab News and The Cab Driver - you have always allowed myself and others to voice our opinion on matters that affect the wider trade. Some would like to shut up what they call dissenting voices but without independent papers this trade would be a far worse off place.

Look out for the new newsletters that will be coming to a rank near you soon. We thought about a trade journal but have decided that the trade has enough papers/journals and we produce our own in house version for the RMT, so the compromise is a London and Heathrow monthly newsletter keeping members and potential members informed of the issues affecting us all.

TWO COLLECTIONS RAISE FUNDS FOR MAGICAL TAXI TOUR

During the past few months, the cab trade has been feeling the effects of the recession and so particular thanks go to all of those who donated generously at the two collections held recently to raise funds for the Magical Taxi Tour. Each year a huge sum of money needs to be raised to finance the annual trip for children with life threatening illnesses to Disneyland Paris. This



comes in many different guises; cab drivers who do marathons, corporate sponsorship, fund raising event, raffles and of course collections on taxi ranks.

The committee would like to say a big thank you on behalf of the children to everyone who dug deep in their pockets at both City Airport and Wimbledon taxi rank recently.