DTRH May statement

We have further information which we think is important to share with our members and the wider public. If you haven't read our previous statements please head to our website here to get some background. [LINKS]

For those without time to read the whole post, key information is BECTU and SLEN are actively now **advising** against working for, going to, or supporting DTRH for a multitude of reasons listed in detail below, please feel free to share this post to colleges friends and others.

When the organisers contacted our branch in December 2022 they claimed that no one was owed any money from any of the festivals previous to 2022. We already knew that this was not true. When it was pointed out to them that at least one company was owed thousands of pounds from Festival and Beverage (the company now back running this year's festival) the response was “oh yes - except for them there is no-one else”. They also promised to contact that company and sort out payment terms. The company received two emails with all the usual excuses of why they could not pay. Then no response. A further email eventually was responded to with more excuses. That company is now going to seek redress through legal means. We have also found other companies that are owed from multiple previous festivals. It is disappointing that the organisers were willing to mislead us in our very first conversation. Sadly this attitude of continual non payment followed by excuses and empty promises seems to be the business model they follow.

When BECTU and Musicians Union officials met with organisers in march they were told ticket sales were at 2000 and that the break even figure was 4000 with a capacity of about 5000 in total. We believe that those 2000 sales will have brought in at least £400,000. We were also told that any company that agreed to work this year would have their money up front. This clearly has not happened and with the amount of money that has been brought in so far from ticket sales we see no reason production companies should have at least been confirmed and paid by now. We know of a number of companies enquiring about this directly with the organisers and are yet to get any proper answers or any real payment plans.

Also at this meeting the union officials were told that DTRH would allow SLEN reps would be able to do safety and wellbeing visits to the site. This offer has now been rescinded.

Recently DTRH posted adverts for volunteers to help at the festival. To do so volunteers need to pay a deposit to the festival to ensure that they complete their volunteer roles. Other unions have already written about their disagreement with such a system which is not an unusual thing to happen. We do not agree with this practice However in many cases the money is held safely and securely outside of the festival organisers. In the case of Glastonbury it is Oxfam who holds the money. For DTRH the money is being held in a company called Volunteer Heros(sic). This company was set up in January 2023 by one of the people running the volunteers for the festival. Organisers have claimed that this provides an “unconnected” place to store the money. We completely disagree that this company is unconnected.

The Scottish Volunteer Charter states that volunteering is a “choice undertaken of one’s own free will and a choice not motivated for financial gain or for a wage or salary” and that if there is any “any compulsion, threat of sanctions or force, then any such activity is not volunteering”. We believe both of these points are being ignored in the demanding of a deposit.

We also have serious concerns about the roles the volunteers are being asked to fill. In the advert DTRH are asking for people to build fences, construct marquees, work in catering, and build roads. Also during the festival to work behind bars, stewarding, park cars and to fulfil technical backstage roles. All of these jobs require specific training, insurance and PPE amongst other requirements and break many of the other volunteer charter statements concerning using volunteers to undercut pay and conditions of service, to reduce contract costs or to bypass minimum wage legislation. Using volunteers in safety critical roles is something that the organisers told officials at the March meeting that they would not do this year. Clearly they have changed their minds.

BECTU official Paul McManus contacted DTRH to discuss what we perceive as an increase in the use of volunteers since last year and our safety concerns. The response can only be described as a vitriolic rant, claiming our stance was “nonsensical” and that we need to “do some research and frankly wake up and realise we would have to target the entire industry”. We are aware this practice takes place across industry and this is something we intend to address. He also claimed that this is “far from exploitative or morally indefensible” and that our organisation is “clearly completely ignorant of what has been standard practice for years”. Bectu will be checking with HMRC and Scot Gov to see who is correct.

We are well aware of the issues onsite last year. Catering was inedible and people refused to eat it. There was only one water outlet for much of the build due to the supply being tapped from a Scottish Water outlet without the company's knowledge or permission. One of the SLEN committee was on site with a headline band (who have still not been paid) and saw a number of H&S concerns including heavy plant moving across public areas with no escort while the festival was open. DTRH claimed that these issues were down to the lack of professionalism and ability of the production team they brought in - something we completely refute as we know many of the people working there. They worked under extreme pressure and were not supported by the organisers in any way.

We also know that the capacity of the festival was cut a number of days before the show as a condition of DTRH receiving a licence due to safety concerns of the emergency services.

The organisers have refused to answer our questions on how ticket sales are going or about the upfront payments for people agreeing to work the festival. In the meeting in March The organisers assured us that if the festival was not going to at least break even this year then they would not hold it. Considering all the other promises and assurances that we have had which have been broken or not followed through we can only doubt this promise as well.

At this point we are now advising members, non members and artists to avoid this festival. We would call on any acts who have agreed to play to seriously consider whether they want to play at a festival which owes so much money. The organisers seem to be making as many excuses as possible to not even start paying people back or holding good on their promise of upfront payment. Many acts from last year are owed tens of thousands of pounds and ultimately made a loss playing the festival due to having to pay their crew etc.

No one wants to see a festival not happen. We work in this industry to provide entertainment and excitement for as many people as possible. It saddens us that we feel the need to advise people not to work at Doune The Rabbit Hole. But with total debts from last year of over £800,000 which we now do not believe the organisers will be able to pay back however much they claim they want to, we feel we have no choice.

In an article on the STV website in March the organisers said that the financial failure of Doune The Rabbit Hole 2022 was their fault. SInce they have taken moral responsibility for the massive debts they incurred in 2022, maybe he should take financial responsibility as well and dip into their own pockets to repay the debts this financial mismanagement has caused.