



ASLEF

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NOVEMBER 2010

IS ED THE PLATFORM FOR A LABOUR RECOVERY?



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the mountain

14 IMMINGHAM leads
the local way

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A fair tax system – that's rich!

I HAVEN'T got any particular grudge against paying taxes - so long as I'm convinced it's a fair system. I think most people feel the same. It's a sociable thing to do, clubbing together to pay for things we need jointly, like health, education and security. It's all very logical and reasonable - so long as we all pay according to how rich we are.

Evidence recently has shown, however, that some of us don't pay our way. And who is that exactly? It's the very people who can most easily afford it – the very rich.

Figures produced for our civil service colleagues in PCS by the Tax Justice Network show that £25 billion is lost annually in tax avoidance - and a further £70 billion in tax evasion by large companies and wealthy individuals. They also suggest that another £26 billion is going uncollected. And before anyone cries 'More union propaganda!', a leaked Treasury document in 2006 estimated the 'tax gap' at between £97 and £150 billion.

Surely it makes more economic sense to hound the rich leeches who avoid tax than to harass the few poor people who claim excess benefits? I don't defend benefit cheats, but the amount they get away with pales into insignificance compared with the avoidance antics of the rich – and yet much more effort goes into catching the poor than the rich, despite the fact that benefit fraud makes up only about 1% of the total lost.

The logic would be to recruit additional tax gathering jobs and outlaw dubious 'tax havens'. So why won't the government do this, even when PCS estimates that each Tax Compliance officer brings in over £658,000 in revenue every year?

With a more vigorous approach to ensuring the rich pay their taxes, the need for public spending cuts would vanish and the entire £160 billion UK deficit could be cleared in a few years. So what's the problem? Is it anything to do with the fact that the rich are the Tory's friends – and backers?

Keith Norman
General Secretary



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**More than
just a union**

Still SQUASHing in the cab



The long road to provide driving cabs that are Safe, Quiet, User-friendly, Air-Conditioned, Specially seated and Healthy (SQUASH) continues to make progress in most areas. The latest developments include ...

GBRf: GBRf is to lease a further five Class 66 locos. Ten locos (including the new ones) are to be fitted with air conditioning and sound attenuation. By April next year the company should have 12 locos fitted with air-con and 15 fitted with noise attenuation from a fleet of 37. GBRf has undertaken to fit the balance by summer 2012.

NEEA: The EC adopted a report insisting that a full review involving our representatives needs to take place of all the DOO equipment as soon as possible. The company is being informed that if ASLEF's concerns are not properly addressed we will be in a dispute situation.

SWT: The fitment of air conditioning to class 455 units is due to commence this month, so that all units on South West Trains will then be fitted with air conditioning.

FCC: The class 319 units will be improved through two stages. Phase 1 will deal with the design and improvements to the drivers desk and cab switches, while Phase 2 will deal with the fitment of the COBRA seat to a test unit. The Company Council will visit the manufacturer and funds have been allocated for the fitment to all other units. Other improvements are awaiting the Operations Department agreement.

CAPSTAN DESIGN SEAT: The Capstan design seat, which affects units in LOROL, FCC, Southern and NXEA, are, the union says, 'not fit for purpose'. The seat design is proposed to be fitted to the current and future Electro-star fleet of Bombardier-built units. The EC has now written to all the companies involved that this seat is not acceptable and that an acceptable alternative must be found.

New Olympic event – musical chairs!

MUSICAL CHAIRS appears to be a new Olympic event with the news that David Higgins - chief executive of the Olympic Delivery Authority – is to join Network Rail as its new chief executive. He will be bidding goodbye to John Armit – the

Chairman of the Olympic Delivery Authority – who is a former Network Rail chief executive.

David Higgins will replace Iain Coucher at the start of this month on a salary reported to be slightly less than Coucher's £613,000 basic salary.



'Mr Higgins coming from the Olympic Authority gives a new twist to the expression 'take the money and run', said ASLEF general secretary Keith Norman.



Tories pledge on high-speed rail

PHILIP HAMMOND, the transport secretary, insists he will make high-speed rail 'the mode of choice' as he told last month's Tory conference that the government would take fast trains north of Birmingham to Leeds and Manchester and include a link between London and Heathrow Airport.

'This is undeniably good news if they stick to the pledge,' says ASLEF general secretary Keith Norman. 'I was, however, concerned that there was no mention of costings or timings in Mr Hammond's speech. I hope we can impress upon him the need to get the project up and running. So far the only concrete action is to begin a consultation in 2011.'

'We have delayed long enough – the UK's total of 68 miles (110 km) of high-speed track looks increasingly paltry as Spain is developing almost 4,000 km and

France 2,106 km.'

Keith also has concerns about where the funding will come from as the government hacks away at public spending and was 'disappointed that a link to Scotland appeared not to even be considered'.

Mr Hammond declared his party's support for the so-called 'Y' option in which one branch would go northwest via Manchester and another would go northeast via Leeds. He said the scheme would 'connect our great population centres and our international gateways, transforming the way Britain works as profoundly as the coming of the original railways did in the mid-19th century'.

However, he has internal problems as Tory MPs threaten to rebel against plans for the line to pass through the picturesque – and rather rich – Chilterns.



EUROSTAR EYES NEW TRAINS

EUROSTAR last month gave details of a £700m investment programme including an order for ten additional trainsets, and a 'complete redesign' of the existing fleet.

The new sets will seat more than 900 passengers, compared to the current 750 and be compatible throughout Europe. Reaching top speeds of just under 200 mph (320 km) they will cut the London - Paris journey to just over two hours, London - Amsterdam to under 4 hours and London - Geneva to around 5 hours.

Construction of the new trains is expected to begin in 2012, with the first coming into service in 2014

The other side of crossing death

'MY daughter was 32 years old and pregnant when she drove her little VW car slowly over a level crossing on 28 January 2008. Moments later she was dead, and my life was empty.'

This is what Gwen Bates told Keith Norman when she came to see him last month to explain her campaign for justice for her daughter's memory, to highlight the regular carnage at level crossings and to push for safer systems to be put in place.

Kay-Alexandra Stanley was a bright and involved young woman, an actress and drama teacher who, with terrible irony, had once been commissioned by the Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) to develop a play

used in schools to stress the importance of rail safety. She moved to Australia where her mother intended to join her before her tragic death.

'The investigation into the incident was carried out by Connex, the operating company,' Gwen says. 'Is it any surprise that I have no faith in its outcome?' The inquest, because under the Australian system it has been bundled with other similar cases, will not be concluded until 2013 at the earliest.

In the meantime, Gwen spends her days researching crossing accidents and seeking solutions. 'I would like to see a trial in this country of the Controlled Crossing Areas System (CCAS)



Gwen with GS Keith Norman. She asks, 'What better tribute can I pay to my lovely daughter than to make level crossings safer for others?'

which is being trialled in Australia. It's a system that basically stops the train if the gates are not properly closed, it costs about £75,000 for each one and it can be installed on railway land.'

As she had heard of Keith's deep involvement in level crossing safety, she asked to meet

him to see if the union would press for a trial of the system in the UK. 'People need to realise how many of these incidents take place all the time,' she says.

○ Anyone interested in Gwen's work can contact her on gwen.bates@blueyonder.co.uk



Peter (right) receiving one of the new ASLEF Education badges from Wigan union learning rep Graham Ibbotson

ASLEF education's in a league of its own!

'IT'S never too late to learn.' That's the message from 50-year-old Wigan train driver Peter Leyland. He'd been on the railways for over 30 years when he went along to a learning Open Day event at Wallgate station.

Peter says, 'I enrolled on the skills-for-life English course to gain self confidence and to help in report writing, due to the ever changing aspects of the train drivers' role.'

He's now passed English Level 1 and, along with four other Wigan drivers, has completed the Introduction to Plumbing Course. 'Apart from learning a lot, we were pleased to find we had a celebrity tutor - former Wigan and England Rugby League player Mick Cassidy! You never know where ASLEF education's going to lead you!' Peter says.

Standing up for Ken!

IT WAS standing room only when EC members Nigel Gibson and Dave Calfe saw ASLEF-backed candidate Ken Livingstone declared as the Labour contender in the race to be the next Mayor of London. The campaign which will end with the election in May 2012 sees him again battling old rival Boris Johnson.

The result of the ballot was announced by Acting Labour Leader Harriett Harman and saw Ken win over fellow candidate Oona King with a massive 68.6% share of the vote, leading among both party activists and affiliated union members. The announcement was met by rapturous applause and shouts from those who had gathered to hear the outcome.

Harriett Harman said, 'Ken is the decisive choice for Labour's candidate to stand for London mayor.'

In his acceptance Mr Livingstone was critical of Boris Johnson and his lack of engagement with the capital's trade unions. He added, 'The London election in 2012 will be the chance to send a clear message to



David Cameron and George Osborne that we don't want devastating cuts to our public services, fewer jobs and declining living standards.

'If you want them out - first vote Boris out!'

○ **SKIPTON GOES TO EUROPE!** Rail campaigners went to Brussels last month in a bid to win more support to restore the line from Skipton to Colne. Three members of SELRAP (Skipton-East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership) set off - by train, of course! - from Skipton to meet European MPs representing the North of England. They spoke at a presentation organised by Labour North West MEP Brian Simpson.

Two sides of labour law

While union friends tried last month to introduce a new law to defend union democracy, anti-union elements led by Boris Johnson and the CBI were trying to do the reverse. First, the TUC's **Brendan Barber explains why he supported the Lawful Industrial Action (Minor Errors) Bill ...**

MINOR ERRORS, MAJOR SETBACK FOR DEMOCRACY

The Lawful Industrial Action (Minor Errors) Bill was introduced in response to the recent succession of court cases against unions whose members have voted overwhelmingly in favour of industrial action – but which has been ruled unlawful by the courts because of very minor technical mistakes by the union. The TUC backed it last month because we believe it contained important provisions for working people in the UK.

The Courts have imposed injunctions stopping the action from taking place even though the vast majority of workers voted in favour of it. On each occasion, the technical error would not have affected the outcome of the ballot.

COMPLEX RULES FAVOUR EMPLOYERS

In the UK, in order for industrial action to be lawful, unions are required to comply with highly complex rules on balloting and on notices to be provided to employers, which are largely unprecedented in Europe or the rest of the industrialised world.

These rules place onerous obligations on

unions, making it almost impossible – or at least very difficult – to take lawful industrial action. They limit the ability of unions to represent their members' interests and mean it is difficult to have even-handed negotiations with employers. On repeated occasions, the ILO and Council of Europe have found that UK laws flout international human rights standards.

A BILL FOR FAIRNESS

The Lawful Industrial Action (Minor Errors) Bill seeks to reintroduce some fairness into industrial relations in the UK.

Section 232B of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 currently requires the courts to disregard accidental errors by unions when balloting members where the error would not affect the outcome of the ballot. However, as the recent cases have shown, minor breaches of either balloting rules or rules about notices can still mean that industrial action is treated as being unlawful and individuals participating in industrial action also lose all protection from dismissal for exercising their right to withdraw their labour, even if the vast majority voted in favour.

The Bill would amend this section so that any failure by the union should be disregarded where

- the union has substantially complied with balloting and notice rules and
- the failure did not affect the result of a ballot or a reasonable recipient's understanding of the effect of the notice.

The Bill is modest, focused and fair. It will



John McDonnell MP is sponsoring the Lawful Industrial Action (Minor Errors) Bill in Parliament. He says it would tackle the increasing practice by employers of using minor technical errors in the balloting process - which have no material effect on the outcome - to take unions to court in order to prevent them from taking industrial action.

mean that ordinary working people, who have voted overwhelmingly in favour of industrial action, will not have their democratic will overruled on technical legal grounds.

But Boris and the CBI want more restrictions on unions

Meanwhile, London mayor Boris Johnson and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) are calling for legislation relating to strikes to be toughened, because they fear what unions will do as they seek to protect members and public services from the effects of proposed government spending cuts.

Mayor Johnson called on prime minister David Cameron to introduce a new law preventing strikes which receive less than 50 per cent support. That is, if there are 100 workers involved, over 50 must vote for action.

On the face of it, this appears to be logical. But it is not. For example, in the recent General Election, the percentage of people voting in the UK as a whole was 65.1%. Further broken down, the figures reveal that 65.5% voted in England, 64.9% voted in Wales, 63.8% in Scotland and only 56.9% in Northern Ireland.

Of these, 36.1% voted Conservative, 29% Labour and 23% LibDem.

So if we apply Boris' 'logic' to the General Election, as the combined votes of the Tories and the LibDems did not amount to half the population

voting for them – less than 40% in fact – the government should be illegal!

But no one accused Boris of being reasonable, as he accused public sector bodies of plotting an 'apocalyptic vision' of politically-motivated industrial unrest over the coming years.

'But this is not about logic or reason,' says ASLEF general secretary Keith Norman. 'This is about an attack on free trade unions and the desire of the right-wing in this country to prevent workers defending themselves in face of the cuts they want to introduce.'



London's Mayor, backed by the CBI wants to restrict democratic decisions which applied to the General Election would make the government illegal!



Injured? An apology won't pay the bills, but compensation will.

Injuries can cost a lot more than accident victims initially realise.

Costs can include lost overtime, lost promotion, travel to and from medical treatments, special care needs and more.

The emotional costs can be just as heavy in their own way too.

Ruth Hart (above) suffered excruciating pain after accidental knee damage.

Says Ruth: *"I have never fully recovered. I became very angry about what had happened to me.*

So I contacted a firm of solicitors I had seen advertising about personal injury claims on TV. At first, they advised me that I might get £5,000.

But later said they didn't think I had a case"

Then Ruth was introduced to Thompsons Solicitors.

"The whole experience...was completely different to the other solicitors. I'm over the moon with the settlement and I didn't have to go to court."

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No surprises in Hutton pension report

says **Andy Viner**, ASLEF's candidate in the elections for the TFL Pension Consultative Committee

LORD HUTTON'S interim report on Public Service pensions holds no surprises - and could have been written months ago.

He starts his foreword with, 'The public sector performs functions that are vital to the security of our country, the success of our economy and the health of our society' - but that doesn't stop him suggesting that in the short term these workers should be made to pay more in contributions towards their pension. And remember, this is on top of the government's plans to introduce pay freezes and alter the formula for increasing their pensions from RPI (Retail Price Index) to CPI (Consumer Price Index) - both of which mean a lower pension in the future.

The government keeps harping on about the rise in the cost of pensions as more people retire. A lot of the schemes they are talking about do not have funds - they are called 'pay as you go'. For decades no provision has been made to pay for these pensions. If over the last 60 years, government money had been put aside, there would not be the cost now, because the money invested would cover the cost today. Even so, it is a fallacy to believe that a decent pension is not affordable. This is an ideology issue - not an economic tactic. If companies and rich individuals were made to pay what they owe in taxes, it would easily cover the cost.

Two other issues this report covers are

- making sure that pensions are not an issue for outsourcing work to the private



sector; and

- bringing into question final salary schemes as opposed to career average schemes.

This latter will not help the low paid. On the contrary, it just means they get less. The early years of employment, when pay is lower, will drag down the amount you would get as a pension when you retire.

The wrong questions are being asked. It is not that public service pensions are too good. Rather, it is that private companies have been allowed to degrade their pension schemes. This results in the state having to pick up the tab in pension credits and other benefits because they pay so little.

This report will probably not directly affect us in the rail industry. But indirectly it will, because it is setting the agenda and shaping the debate about pensions. It will influence policy makers and companies alike that do have defined benefit schemes by making our schemes stand out. That may be a factor in the changes to the tax rules to be introduced next April.

And just before I finish, ponder these facts about 'excessive' public service pensions

- The 'mean' pension paid to public service employees is £7,800.
- 65% of female and 40% male receive less than £6,000.
- 12 million people are members of a public service pension scheme.

The difference between CPI and RPI can be huge. A retired public servant on a £10,000 pension would this year have received an increase of £460 based on CPI, and only £310 with the CPI system.

Companynews

COMPANY COUNCIL ELECTIONS

The following members have been elected: East Coast Company Council Edinburgh Waverley Constituency; Bro R Wickstead, Edinburgh No.2 Branch; East Coast Company Council Gateshead & Newcastle Constituency, Bro P McCarthy, Gateshead & Newcastle Branch, DB Schenker Infrastructure Monitoring (former Serco) Company Council, Bro P Devonport, Marylebone Branch, Freightliner Heavy Haul Business Council (South & West), Bro M Lang, Bristol Branch, First Capital Connect Company Council Cambridge, Peterborough, Kings Lynn Constituency, Bro. P. Emmington, Cambridge Branch.

REST DAY WORKING

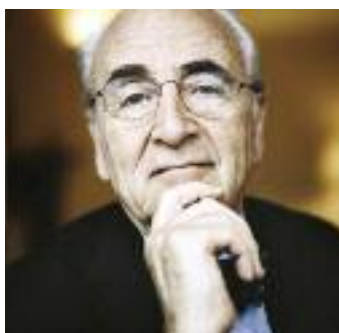
LONDON MIDLAND: ASLEF is prepared to sanction Rest Day Working until 27 November subject to continued monitoring by our representatives.



COFFEE PROTESTS COME TO KENSINGTON

Concerns over the treatment of Indonesian workers at Nestlé's Nescafé factory in Panjanga saw trade unionists protesting outside the Nespresso Café in London's Knightsbridge last month as part of a global campaign against the multinational company.

Young review 'a grave disappointment' says TUC



'Predictable but a grave disappointment.' That was the verdict of the TUC to Lord Young's review of health and safety published last month. TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said the report contained 'not a single proposal that will reduce the high levels of workplace death, injuries and illness. Every year in the UK over 20,000 people die

prematurely as a result of their work - and at any one time over two million people are suffering ill-health because of their jobs.

'Yet instead of looking for ways of preventing people being killed and injured, the report uncritically accepts the myths and preconceptions surrounding health and safety, and focuses on dealing with a compensation culture which

even the government accepts does not exist.'

The TUC says that by failing to challenge the myths around health and safety the report could actually make things much worse.

Lord Young, a minister in the Thatcher government, made a considerable part of his fortune lending on real estate in the UK and overseas.

TUC Congress: worthwhile event or waste of effort?

Last month **Simon Birtwistle** and **John Evans** were the union's delegates to the TUC Conference. The event was reported in the October edition, but we asked the pair to record their feelings about the event – and even to consider if it is worthwhile. This is what they said ...

We need to organise at every level

Simon Birtwistle argues that the TUC conference is vital ...

IS THE TUC Congress worthwhile? And if so, why? That's what the editor asked us to consider. 'What is it good for?'

The media - which most of us on the railway don't often pay for, but pick up during the course of our duties - does not offer much in the way of union news. Many members are happy to leave the union to get on with its business and often don't attend branch meetings. Modern life is time-consuming, so this isn't a criticism. It's a reflection of our times. So when do we get together? When do we communicate effectively? How do we find out

what's going on within our family, neighbourhood, town, the wider world?

THE UNION COMMUNITY

The whole thing about unions is that it is a community at local, national and international levels as well as being industry focused. You can't say you're not involved, because we all live in a community. Local issues frequently affect you more than national ones. Being in a union means someone is watching your back on a local and national level. But what about representing your interests on a national and international stage? This is why the TUC is important. It's how our union stays current

and keeps up with new or changing legislation. The TUC conference is where representatives and officials from all unions get together to steer the TUC in the direction that the affiliate unions wish it to head toward - and you are part of that.

The whole event is about the wider trade union community. I was proud to be an ASLEF delegate to this year's TUC. There, I met other like-minded people. The more I talked with other delegates, the more I realised how much we have in common.

The main theme which was repeated by speakers at conference and fringe meetings alike, were the devastating cuts expected in both public and



Simon Birtwistle
Photo: Andrew Wiard

private sectors as a result of the Con-Dems strategic spending review - which is expected at about the time you read this.

The Storm is coming and it will affect us all. How important is the TUC conference? I say it's vital.

Cut national, fund local trade councils

John Evans sees the point of the Congress – but asks whether the money could be better spent ...

IT costs hundreds of thousands of pounds to put on a TUC conference. It's not just hiring a hall, it's the expense of travel, subsistence, hospitality, printing, organisation and security to services tellers, staff and delegates. So could that money be better spent?

I say it could. For one thing, extra funds could be given to local Trade Councils to enable them to reach out to trade union branches and fund rallies in their areas.

Those of us who have

attended ASLEF's annual conference, the AAD, have seen how our union policy is made after delegates debate (some times for a very long time!) the motions sent to conference by branches. That's necessary as it allows everyone the chance to have their input and to evaluate all aspects of the motion before the decision is made.

NO VOICE OF DISSENT

But at this year's TUC, the General Council was in favour of all items that were put to the floor! During the whole four days there were only two items that did not get passed by a unanimous vote. The motion Simon Birtwistle moved on

behalf of ASLEF on freight and the rail industry had a single vote cast against it - but no one spoke against it. Why be there if you will not speak for your cause?

The TUC conference seems not to want debate in public but only to present the final position of the trade unions. All the debate has gone on behind the scenes at the General Council meeting before the conference or in the secret compositing meetings.

In which case why doesn't the TUC skip the pantomime and go the whole hog and have an American style 'state of the nation' day to present the TUC views and policy for the



John Evans
Photo: Andrew Wiard

forthcoming year?

I say let the trade unions do what they do best and get active in the local trade councils. We need to organise all the branches of the different unions at local level if we are to deal with the challenges we will face in the coming years.

Andy's charity hits the heights

A year ago **ANDY ROSER**, a Chiltern driver based at Stourbridge, appealed to ASLEF members to help his efforts for Macmillan Cancer Care. Here he tells us what has happened since ...

LAST October in order to raise money for Macmillan Cancer support I registered with the specialist operator Classic Tours to climb the highest point on the African continent, Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. When my local ASLEF branch heard what I intended to do, they arranged to

send a circular around the country to see if this could boost sponsorship.

I am staggered and delighted to say that 28 ASLEF branches responded - donating a total of £1,005.

I reached Uhuru Peak, which, at 5,892 metres above mean sea level is the summit of Kilimanjaro, on Friday 24 September - but this was only part of the experience. Just as important for me was hearing others' stories, learning about their chosen charities and making life-long friends.

I've now raised £2,600 for



'I wanted to thank you all for your generosity,' Andy says

Macmillan Cancer Support. My target was £2,946 - which would mean 50p for each metre of the mountain. If anyone's interested, the website I set up - www.justgiving.com/andyroser - is still active!

The whole experience meant a lot to me. It was a pretty tough challenge - but if it means Macmillan can provide for even one more person dealing with cancer, to me that will be priceless.

TUC concern at asbestos ruling

The TUC has expressed 'grave concern' at the uncertainty faced by hundreds of people dying from asbestos exposure following a Court of Appeal decision over compensation payments.

Mesothelioma sufferers will now have to wait while the case over their compensation entitlement is referred to the Supreme Court. Back in 2008 the High Court ruled that employers' insurers at the time of exposure to asbestos were liable to pay out on claims for mesothelioma. This has now been put in doubt.

The TUC is concerned that any decision which allows insurers not to pay compensation to people who were exposed, even where there was an insurance policy in place, not only undermines the whole principle of compulsory employers' liability insurance, but also denies thousands of people, and their dependants, justice.

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said, 'Over the years insurance companies have done all they can to avoid paying asbestos victims the compensation they are entitled to. They were more than willing to take the premiums when the victims were working, but only too happy to rush to court when claims are made.'



40 DIE ON UKRAINE CROSSING

Last month 40 people were killed when a bus tried to cross the track and was struck by a train south of the main regional city of Dnipropetrovsk in Ukraine. The ministry of the interior said the train had dragged the bus for 30 metres after the collision.

FARES UNFAIR

It looks like rail fares are in for severe increases after transport secretary Philip Hammond said savings of billions of pounds have to be made from the country's transport budget - and added that 'everyone would be expected to do their bit - including rail users.'

The Treasury wants to slash the transport budget - currently £15.9 billion - by between 25% and 40% - and a fare hike could be on the way. Transport Select Committee chair Louise Ellman warned that train tickets could increase by 10%.



Strike ballot at Arriva Wales

The union is balloting its 500 driver members employed by Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) for strike action, and also for action short of a stoppage, because of a 'totally unacceptable' pay offer. ATW pay rates are the lowest of all the UK main-line train drivers.

Negotiations with the company broke down after a series of meetings failed to make progress towards any reasonable offer. Soundings of membership opinion have been taken at a number of open forums and they have all confirmed drivers' anger with the company.

Branch reports spoke about members being 'appalled at the derisory pay offer for 2010' and 'fed up with the contemptuous attitude of the company'.

General secretary Keith Norman says the Executive Committee had no alternative except to ballot our members. He has written to the company detailing the union's position, informing them of the intention to ballot and cautioning ATW management about bullying and intimidation.

The ballot result will be announced on 9 November.

TRAIN GRAFFITI VANDAL JAILED

Southend Crown Court last month jailed a man for a year for spray painting trains in Essex. Using the tag 'Wear', he caused damage estimated at £45,000.

Robert Martin, 23, from Hockley, was arrested after a train driver raised the alarm after spotting him near to a train he had just graffitied at Southend Victoria.

Don't let it cost you your job!



Companies should bend to flexible hours claims



argues **Nigel Gibson**, EC member for District 5

I RECENTLY became aware of one of our members being declined the opportunity to work part-time or to job share in the driving grade. And what was the basis of the reason given by the company concerned? In simple terms - cost.

The company had calculated that our member would be just 44% productive rather than 50%, based on the requirement for assessments and allocation of Driver Managers for example. Believe it or not, they even complained that they would only be getting 50% usage from a uniform! I suspect that this case is not isolated and I believe we have to question the real motivation behind such a stance.

The driving grade is one which can facilitate both the needs of male and female workers through a period of parenting / caring with minimal cost and limited disruption to other colleagues. Whilst the Flexible Working legislation provides the right for an employee to 'request' - it fails to place any real responsibility on the employer. In the rail



industry where ASLEF interests lie, it is too easy for managers to establish a reason to decline such a request when it suits.

ALL OR NOTHING

Ultimately, if an employee is declined the opportunity to work flexibly it may well leave them with little or no option except to resign from the job with no recourse. All companies portray the glossy image of 'equal opportunities' to comply with legislation - but the reality is very different.

Our statistics indicate that female workers make up just over 3% of the driving grade. In addition, female workers are, in the significant majority of cases, also the primary carers for their children. This is not a reason to say that their employment should be valued

any less. So why has the rail industry failed to keep up with the times?

JOINT PARENTING

In the modern day world, both parents are encouraged to work whilst bringing up families - so it must be time for the rail industry to move into the 21st century instead of continuing to live in an era of steam with sweaty men covered in coal dust.

I realise that some people might question the necessity for agreements which improve options for flexible working - but I believe that we need to start treating this issue with a similar importance to those who are medically or competence restricted. Our union has always protected members who find themselves

in a position where their job and/or salary is in jeopardy.

Is being forced to leave your employment because of a refusal by the employer to change hours any different?

GAINS FOR ALL

Our grade is predominantly male and the emphasis on improving conditions for those in a minority may not always be at the forefront of our minds. Yet this issue is one which can improve the lives of all drivers regardless of their gender. We have always aspired to attain agreements which improve on the minimum standards that the law usually sets out on issues like sick leave, annual leave, redundancy arrangements or maternity and paternity leave. So why shouldn't we work to force these companies to improve opportunities for their employees, our members, to remain in the industry with a work/life balance arrangement?

If we are to be a progressive trade union we must utilise our negotiating skills to bring about a change in attitude towards the recruitment - and importantly the retention - of women workers. We must also recognise that there are members who have been left with no alternative but to care for elderly relatives whilst working.

We need to work to improve on agreements with the train and freight operators, building upon and extending the limited right to 'request' flexible working. If we succeed it will enable all our members, male and female, to retain their skill base as drivers whilst bringing up and caring for their families.



Government steps back from flexible pledges

THE Government has bowed to industry pressure by putting off a key coalition pledge to extend the right to request flexible working to all employees.

Currently parents with children aged 16 or under are legally entitled to ask their employer if they can work flexibly. The Tories had said they would extend the 'right to request' to all workers, regardless of whether they had children. Now they are only proposing to extend it to parents of children aged under 18.

ASLEF's Keith Norman says 'The law only offers the right to request flexible working - not the right to have it. I'd like to see the onus on the employer to provide reasons why flexible working could not be granted.'

How to fight the Government spending cut plans



ASLEF's Manchester Piccadilly branch organised a fringe meeting at Labour's conference last month, with MPs Kelvin Hopkins and John Cryer, Manuel Cortes of TSSA and ASLEF vice-president Tosh McDonald speaking about how to oppose the Coalition government's proposed cuts.

Branch secretary Peter Grant insisted, 'This is not a time for cutbacks in public expenditure. It is the moment for investment. Putting money into the railways preserves jobs and increases social wealth.'

'If we take franchises back into public ownership we – the public – can pocket the profits. If British Rail had been given those billions, we could now have a rail system with brand new trains, tracks and signalling.'

'Instead, we have the sight of the few becoming obscenely rich.'



LUTON MP: PRIVATE IS INEFFICIENT

Luton MP Kelvin Hopkins, who chairs ASLEF's Parliamentary Group, pointed to the success of European countries that retained public rail. 'Their fares are 40% lower, the Germans and Dutch are expanding into the UK and their project management is radically lower.'

He also welcomed Ed Miliband's recognition that unions are fundamental to a civilised society. 'We fight for the right of people to organise in Iran and Colombia – so why not in the UK? We must increase the 15% of unionised workers in the private sector.'

'Let the public, not the privateers, share rail profits'



MANUEL CORTES: MAKE IT SIMPLE

The TSSA's Manuel Cortes insisted that the arguments against the cuts were overwhelming, but they were often expressed in high-faluting terms no one understood.

'In simple terms, we have to ask ourselves, 'If you're short of money, would you decide to pay off your 25 year mortgage in a single year? Or course you wouldn't – but that is what the ConDem government is proposing. It's stupid,' he declared.

'We need to win the argument in our messrooms and front rooms, and then build alliances with local communities to oppose cuts that will lead to financial disaster.'

'The arguments need not be complicated'



CRYER: WE DON'T NEED TO FOLLOW EEC DIRECTIVES

John Cryer, former ASLEF political officer and now MP for Leyton, argued that the government's cuts agenda will run side by side with attacks on union rights. 'They can only get the cuts through if people do not have the protection that unions offer.'

And John condemned this government – and the last one – for hiding behind European directives to introduce privatisation. 'When the Spanish or German governments decided it would be bad for their rail services, they ignored European directives. We could do the same – and should.'

'Others can ignore EEC directives – and so can we'



TOSH: WE NEED LOCAL ACTION

Tosh McDonald insisted that we need to build mass campaigns within our communities to defend public services. 'Unions are seen as something remote. We have to change that.'

He stressed the need to encourage ASLEF members to play an active part in local government and councils. 'It is where we need to be.'

Tosh said investment in rail 'can create jobs in engineering and construction; develop other parts of the economy; and bring in taxes from workers who would otherwise be unemployed and need to be supported.'

'We need to build from the roots, not lecture from the top'



The 'just four' men! ASLEF'S delegation to the 2010 Labour Party Conference (from left to right) Simon Weller, Tosh McDonald, Peter Dodge

Razzamat

LABOUR'S declaration of the ballot result for Labour's traditional politics. The afternoon before the formal

First the Labour government's achievements, but then Gordon Brown appeared. It's remarkable how quickly political history from history even as his arrival was trumpeted by the media. He thanked everyone, told us how well he gets on with the public, responsible for Labour losing the last election. We all agreed it to be true.

After Harriet Harman had been roundly applauded, she announced in the three sections: MPs, constituency parties, to mounting tension that resembled a horse-race moment. She won it.

It was interesting to watch the former government's habit of 13 years by trotting away from television.

And well done ASLEF members for playing their part in the percentage of ballot forms – over a quarter.

CAN YOU HEAR?

Overheard at one less than gripping fringe meeting in a rather large room with a very poor PA system.

Chair: Can you hear me at the back?

Person at back: Yes, but I'm quite prepared to move if someone else wants to stand here.

CONCENTRATION

One of our number was seen to be dozing during an especially non-controversial section of the agenda. When this was pointed out later, he claimed that he always closed his eyes when he concentrates. 'Which,' he



Ed Miliband Labour Party Conference (left) and Cliff Holloway

ASLEF LIVE AND ON STAGE!

The ASLEF delegation all have good faces for radio, and proved this on the eve of conference after the election of the new leader. Our delegates took part in a live debate on Radio 5's Steve Nolan show which began at ten at night and went on until half past midnight. Simon Weller formed part of the panel, along with former minister Michael Meacher, John McDonald and John Mann with John Penaar throwing in his two-pennyworth.

UNION BACKS ROBIN HOOD!

Simon Weller urged the Labour Party to commit itself to introducing a Robin Hood tax on the financial sector. 'If a 0.05% tax was introduced on transactions such as foreign exchange, derivatives trading and share deals, it would raise billions to tackle poverty and climate change at home and abroad,' he declared.

Banks and other financial institutions had robbed the people of this country of countless amounts of money by their irresponsibility – 'and now is the time for them to make amends'.

The money could be used to stop cuts in crucial public services in the UK, and aid the fight against global poverty and climate change.



Peter works on speech and then the ASLEF message goes out to the nation on the telly!

NO U-TURNS ON GROWING RAIL

Speaking on 'Creating Sustainable Communities', Peter Dodgson declared that our railways are in a much better place today compared with 1997 thanks to Labour investment, but he added that the financial crisis has raised 'huge questions' about the ability of the private sector to deliver public services – especially in the railways.

'The railways were the Frankenstein monster of all privatisations and 15 years on they are more complicated and more unfathomable than ever,' he said.

He complained that while the rest of us tighten our belts the train operating companies are 'quids in'. 'Whatever happens, Stagecoach, for example, stand to make profits of nearly £200 million this year. In some cases rail franchises actually make more money when workers go on strike. You couldn't make it up!'

In line with Labour policy, Peter called for the East Coast mainline franchise to be retained as a public company and run on a not-for-profit basis rather than be re-let to the private sector.

He also warned about any stepping back from Labour's rail freight legacy which has seen a near 50% increase in the amount of freight transported by rail since 1997.

Stazz for the Ed boy

Ed's new leader owned more to the X-Factor than it did to the conference opened was devoted to the event.

With real and imaginary, were listed and then Gordon Brown's name disappeared from the limelight. He seemed a figure who barely appropriate Isaac Hayes song 'Soul Man'. He spoke to his wife and children and concluded by saying he was proud to have led the party and shook our heads in denial of this fact we all recognise

Ed was criticised for various imprecise achievements, the results were mixed for parties and affiliated organisations like unions. This led to a more than a political declaration. And yes, it was Ed who

Ed's ministers who backed David (most of them) breaking the news on cameras instead of making a bee line for them. Ed's part in the election. Our union returned the highest



Ed's decision, 'is not the best thing for a union as a main driver.' Whilst wishing to protect the union's anonymity, this will depend on a reasonable donation being made to the editor's mail box.

LABOUR'S NUMBERS UP

Harriet Harman told the conference that in the period between losing the election and the start of conference, some 36,000 people have joined – or re-joined, the Labour Party.

HIGH PRIORITY FOR TRANSPORT?

Andrew Pakes from SERA, the Labour Environmental Campaign, complained

that while transport is vital to ordinary people, government in the UK doesn't seem to recognise that fact at all. 'Why is the transport minister's job way down the pecking order in the UK when in Spain, for example, it is a responsibility given to the Deputy Prime minister?'

REBEKAH PETERSON

More good news for ASLEF as Rebekah Peterson was elected to the trade union section of the Labour Party's National Policy Forum - the member-led body that agrees Labour's policies.



Union delegates showed their support for their brothers and sisters in Europe who were protesting over attacks on pensions and conditions on the same day

The section of ASLEF's contact Directory which lists members who carry out public duties – as councillors, mayors, school governors or magistrates - used to be a lengthy affair. Sadly it has become smaller and smaller over the years. We seem to have lost our inclination towards public service.

One place where this trend has been reversed is Immingham, where ASLEF members provide three members of the parish council – Neil Castle, Dave Doherty and Dave Watson. Chris Proctor went there to meet the council's deputy leader, Neil Castle, to find out why he put himself forward for a position that is always time-consuming, sometimes challenging – and often thankless ...

Neil Castle: One of the Immingham three!

NEIL CASTLE is a quietly spoken and friendly man glad to welcome visitors to his town. He is Immingham through and through. He was born in the front bedroom of the house where his mother still lives.

'It was inevitable that I joined the railways,' he says. 'My father was a guard, my mother worked in the ticket office and my brother drives trains for Freightliner. When I joined in 1988 as a traction driver just about everyone had a rail connection.'

By 1992 he was a driver. With the break up of British Rail he worked on freight for Loadhaul and EWS, where he became an Instructor – 'the best job I had'.

'It wasn't just the hours, there was a real sense of satisfaction to see people with no idea emerge 18 weeks later as confident and competent drivers.'

However, that job dried up with cutbacks like the loss of the £10 million Royal Mail contract and 2001 saw Neil back on passenger work with East Coast.

So what made him want to be involved in local politics?

'I don't like sitting moaning,' he says. 'I've always thought if something's annoying you, you might as well do something to try to sort it out.'

'I like to be involved. I found myself joining the committee at my golf club and I'm the manager of the celebrated Locomotive FC who play in Grimsby and Cleethorps Division Six! It used to be all railway workers but gradually we were too few to scrape up a team.'

This desire to 'do his bit' culminated in him becoming a parish councillor at the tender age of 24. After a few years he decided not to stand again, but he rejoined last year.

'There were a number of local issues where I felt I could make a difference, so I stood for Labour. I can't abide Independent councillors. No one is independent. It just means they're not bold enough to stand up for what they

believe. If I was going to put myself forward I wanted to stand behind the flag.'

When he was adopted by the Party as their candidate in a by-election, his ASLEF Doncaster branch helped out with leaflets and a month's canvassing began.

'To be honest I don't like knocking on people's doors, and especially asking for something for myself. It's easier to seek support for someone else. It's also hard work, especially walking up long pathways to houses you know Tories live in.'

'On the other hand I think people respect you for facing up to them. It can be frustrating, though. There's not many undecided voters, and those who are won't tell you how they're going to vote. And I sympathise, actually. It's a private thing, voting.'

One thing that Neil chuckles about is that he was canvassing just around the time of the MP's expenses scandal. 'So they kept telling me 'we' were all the same! In fact, I get exactly and precisely nothing for being a local councillor. It can actually cost you money – and often the meetings coincide with Champion's League games!'

He's told people this so often he now makes a joke of it. 'I sometimes ask for a receipt when I buy a pint just to wind people up.'

Neil is convinced that working locally can be the salvation of politics. 'The things we deal with concern people in their daily lives. It affects them directly in a way national politics don't. That's how to bring confidence back into politics. The last national election was more about personalities – how people looked on the television. That's not politics. It's gossip.'

He also thinks the electorate are different now. 'I think they are more selfish. They ask, "What's in it for me?" rather than "What's good for the country?"'

'Local politics can seem low-level, and so it is. But it is concerned with things that matter to local people. It's more relevant to their communities and their lives than national politics.'



Neil says being a local councillor can take time – but it does bring the satisfaction of being involved

'Getting involved gives you a say in issues like what happens with allotments, parks, cemeteries and local planning issues. Parish councils give residents a voice. It's an opportunity worth taking up.'

One local problem that really matters to Immingham residents at the moment is air quality. The problem is the kind of coal that's imported now. It's not solid, it's like dust. So when it's not watered properly you get huge gusts of it flying through the air. It's an emotive subject that makes residents seriously unhappy.'

Neil believes that people aren't really apathetic. 'We've had 70 to 100 people at our council meetings because of pollution. There were even more when the council led a road



Neil (right) with retired ASLEF member Dave Doherty, his fellow Immingham councillor



You're never far from the railway in Immingham – this is the sign in the council chamber

block to complain about the number of lorries going through our town. People do care. They just don't know how to express it.'

Neil points to the fact that at the last count there were 101 social clubs, many of whom use the civic centre for their activities, to argue that people still have sociable and community inclinations. 'There are clubs and societies for drama, weight watchers, bingo, weddings, the British Legion, Lions – you name it. Underneath, people still want to be part of their community.'

He says a good example is the initiative last year to have the first 'Immingham in Bloom'.

'People responded in a really positive way. Everyone from shop-owners to school-kids got involved, and none of the flowers or hanging baskets were vandalised or pinched. I think we were really proud of how the town looked.'

So what does it mean to his personal life to be active locally?

'Being a councillor does mark you out. People approach you when you're out shopping with the wife asking, 'What's going on with this?' or 'Can't you do something about the other?' Often it is not in our power – like housing problems – but if I'm not directly involved, I usually know where they should go or who they can ask.

'And it does make you aware of your own behaviour as well because you're a bit in the public eye. And it rubs off on your children or step-children like mine.'

A parish council might seem small beer as Neil is the first to say. 'But that doesn't mean it doesn't have an important function. And maybe one of them is to help restore confidence in national politics.'



Neil and Dave with a portrait of Dave Watson, another Immingham council member who has served as mayor. Unfortunately Dave was driving trains the day we called

WHAT THE UNION WAS DOING 100 AND 50 YEARS AGO

100 years ago we got a glimpse of the railway town of Corkerhill - while **50 years ago** the advent of diesel was mourned ...

100 YEARS AGO

The Organising Secretaries' report by Jno. Drummond told of an open-air meeting outside Glasgow ...

"On Sunday, the 9th, I addressed the locomotive-men at Corkerhill (Glasgow & South-Western Railway). This is a railway colony, and is about five miles out from Glasgow. It is inhabited only by locomotive-men, and the institute as well as every other building in the village is the property of railway company. There is about 300 houses. I addressed an open-air meeting astride a wooden fence, and in

that uncomfortable position I addressed the audience for 80 minutes.

"At the close many of the A.S.R.S. came home from their meeting. One of the most prominent of them emphatically declared if the Associated met the A.S.R.S. and they did not give the locomotive-men an Executive Council of their own, and the control of locomotive matters, he would clear out of it and bring along 60% of the men at that station along with him."

50 YEARS AGO
The November 1960 edition

Toram Begg reported on 'a new breed of men' - diesel drivers ...

"With modernisation the British Transport Commission are doing something which George Stephenson did a century and a quarter ago – they are bringing to birth a new race of men. A race of men who will be subtly changed in character from the older generation "raised in steam". This change will not only affect the men themselves, but is bound to affect the Organisation which represents them.

"For there is no doubt that the A.S.L.E.& F. came to birth because the "Clay" of which we were made

was being thumped, and thumped good and plenty. We gradually evolved. We not only became a new race, we literally became a race apart. No one knew, or maybe nobody cared, about our problems. We became a mysterious breed outwith the normal things of life. Through the years the "Associated" battled to get us understanding and justice. No others cared a damn. Occasionally I'm forced to wonder if certain enginemen cared either. A few of them seemed content to abstain from normality.

Now all this is changed. I saw evidence of it around me as I watched Jim Stewart's diesels out of sight."

○ **Extracts selected and edited by Jane Pimlott**

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- learn about legal, financial and other issues

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JIM WHALEN SCOT WHO CAME SOUTH

FORMER driver Jim Whalen passed away on the 12 December last year at the age of 82. He was a great chap with a very dry sense of humour. You never knew if Jim was joking or not until his dead-pan face broke into a smile.

Jim came south from Edinburgh to get a driving position with his pal Dick Handyside who refers to him as 'a very good mate and friend'. Jim was second manning to Dick when the chance to move to Kings Cross came up. He asked Dick's advice, took it, and arrived in the Smoke.

Jim never forgot his roots and attended all the annual reunions. I went along to one as an RMS committee member and as I walked through the door I was greeted with, 'So what are you doing here?' - and there was Jim with a smile on his face.

Dick said that when Jim signed up for the route to Newcastle he must have been one of the only Kings Cross Drivers with route knowledge from London to Aberdeen, Perth, Glasgow and Carlisle.



Jim will be remembered for his very particular dead-pan sense of humour

Our thoughts are with Jim's daughter and all his friends and colleagues. May he R.I.P.

Mr. P. J. Smith, Reporter, Kings Cross Branch

DERBY BRANCH MOURN TWO LOYAL MEMBERS

IT IS with great sadness that I report the recent passing away of two loyal and dedicated retired members of Derby Branch.

Bro Bryan ('Bill') Cotton at the age of 71, and Bro Peter ('Pete') Bevan who was two years younger.

Bill passed away following a short battle with cancer. He was a loyal and proud member of this union and an active and regular member of the branch. In times of dispute Bill would be one of the first to stand on picket duty.

Bill will also be fondly remembered for his personal dedication into securing the future of the Derby branch of the LMRC for years to come.

Pete also passed away following a battle with cancer. Pete was another loyal member of the Derby branch and worked tirelessly in organising and running the Derby ASLEF Welfare.

I recently had the privilege to present Pete with his 50-year medallion, and I know how extremely proud he was.

Many new ASLEF members will not know that during the 1984-1985 miners' strike both Bill and Pete were instrumental in organising aid in the form of collecting and making food parcels and delivering them to the striking miners and their families.

We extend our thoughts to both Bill and Pete's family at this difficult time.
Eamonn Tague, Secretary, Derby Branch

ARTHUR ('ARCHIE') DOUGHERTY FORMER NAVY MAN

I have to inform you that Arthur ('Archie') Dougherty died on 29 August. He was 82 years old. The cremation took place on 9 September.

After his stint in the Navy, Archie became a driver at Tunbridge Wells West until its closure in 1985. He then moved to Victoria Central before transferring to Victoria Eastern.

He never married, and our thoughts are with his niece at this sad time.

**Ken Heydon,
Battersea branch**

ALBERT ATKINSON FORMER ASLEF OFFICIAL

IT IS with sadness that we have learned of the death of former Organising Secretary, Albert Atkinson on 25 September aged 91 years. As well as being a full time official, Albert was also President of the ASLEF Executive Committee in the early 1960s. He retired from the union in 1987.

Albert, who came from Manchester, was a well-respected former Organising Secretary in District No. 5 (District 1 before the reorganisation). He was a committed trade unionist, active within ASLEF and he also made a significant contribution to the wider Labour movement.

Our sincere condolences go to all his family. Albert's funeral took place at the East Chapel, Cambridge Crematorium, on 11 October and donations were requested to the Alzheimer's Reach Trust.

PATRICK TODD A LOYAL MEMBER SADLY MISSED

I AM saddened to advise you that of our most loyal branch members, Brother Patrick Todd, passed away at home on his narrow boat between 13 and 14 August. Pat was three months short of his 65th birthday, though he had chosen to work a year beyond retirement.

Before joining First Tram Operations Ltd as a Driver in June 1999, Pat had worked on the cruise liner 'Canberra' and had an interest in the Ffestiniog Railway. When ASLEF had a recruitment drive in Croydon in 2000, Pat was one of the first to sign up.

For three and a half years he acted as our first branch Chairman after a period of chairing a Croydon Drivers sub-committee under West Brompton Branch. Pat was a true vocal champion of ASLEF and drivers' rights. His skill as our Chairman astounded us, especially as it's unlikely that he had any prior experience for the role. He proved ideally placed for such an onerous task. His professionalism ensured that our meetings were always properly conducted.

During his time with the branch he wrote for the ASLEF Journal, met and consulted with the Executive Committee and found time to be our delegate at District Council meetings. In 2003, he led a delegation of our branch members to a meeting with colleagues at Manchester Metrolink, where we made many new friends. He never forgot their fight for recognition.

Pat presided over meetings attended by the General Secretary, the Assistant General Secretary, the National Organiser, our EC Member, Terry Wilkinson and District Organiser, Steve Grant, as well as visitors from other branches. Under his leadership, our small, young, branch amassed an astonishing eight commendations and accolades!

The Company also recognised his talents, and Pat was promoted first to a training role, then became a Controller in July 2004. No longer a full-time driver, Pat felt he had to relinquish his role as chairman and to mark his achievements the Executive Committee awarded him an ASLEF Loyal Service and Appreciation Award. Pat continued as our Assistant Secretary, Supervisors' rep, and Branch Reporter.

Our members have lost a good friend and colleague, and ASLEF has lost a sincere and dedicated Member.

Pat's funeral took place in Wolverhampton on 3 September. Many of his friends from Tram Operations, LUL, and ASLEF attended.

We would like to extend our condolences to all Pat's family and friends.

**Robert Sambridge, Secretary,
Croydon Tram / Light Rail No 1 branch**

Old hands at New Street presentations

AT THE July meeting of the Birmingham New Street branch it was an honour to have our District Secretary, Mick Whelan, along to make presentation honouring a total of over two hundred years of ASLEF membership.

After the usual branch proceedings, and congratulations to Mick Whelan on his recent re-election as District Secretary, it was time to present badges to ten of

our branch members. There were smiles all round (as you can see from the picture) as well as the usual 'banter' as the picture was taken! Unsurprisingly this was followed by members retiring to the bar where more tales of times past and present were recounted and enjoyed!

Martin Bromage-Griffiths, Reporter, Birmingham New Street Branch



New Street, fresh faces! Back row (from left) Gary Phillips (Soho DED), Steve Usher (Snow Hill), Rob Clayton (Snow Hill), Mick Naughton (Snow Hill) Middle row (from left) Haniff Takolis (Coventry), Danny Ayling (New Street) Harbrajan Gill (Tyseley), Jeff Williams (Snow Hill) Phil Baker (New Street) Front row (from left) Martin Bromage-Griffiths (Vice Chairman), District Sec Mick Whelan



Photo: Jim Rob Thomas, Artephoto, Bristol

Southall reunited in Bristol

ON THE 15 September Alan Taylor and I were happy to take up Roy Band's invitation to join him on the 0930 from London for the Southall Reunion. Roy has taken over the organisation of this event, which has decamped to a Wetherspoon's just outside Bristol Station called the Knights Templar.

At each stop along the way from Paddington to Bristol we were joined by other drivers and former drivers on their way to join their colleagues, enjoy themselves, rekindle old memories and see how everyone had fared since they last met. In the pub we discovered a number who had already made their way from Wales and other points North, East, South and West.

Richard ('GT') Melrick had organised a raffle as one of those present had donated a railway book as a prize. This raised £72 which was donated to the Railway Benevolent Fund.

Alan and I would like to thank all present for the warm welcome given to us, and I'm sure everyone present would like to thank Roy, Richard, the pub's duty managers Ian Bevan and Mandy Brumston for their hospitality and organising a photographer to record the occasion.

I look forward to the next event, which is open to all those retired or still working, which will take place on 16 March next year.

Peter Smith, Reporter, RMS

Stratford marks 35 years

THE Stratford September branch meeting was a lively affair with a number of important reports, the first from John Thorpe, the local level rep at NXEA at Liverpool Street, who spoke about additional unit work and explained members' determination to maintain the establishment.

Glen Underwood, the LLR at DB Schenker at Barking, reported on the forthcoming sandite diagrams and the need to create a new roster. Secretary Peter Dodgson gave a detailed report on current pay and conditions negotiations before

moving on to what he said was a brief report of the ITF conference in Mexico he had attended as the union's delegate.

Nigel Gibson, the EC member for district 5, had begun his railway career at Stratford. As the branch was close to his heart he was delighted that during the recent dispute on NXEA the support had been 100% solid. He reported that the Society's finances were in the black for the fourth year in succession, and that the head office properties had been sold for over £8 million. The priority now was to find new accommodation that is fit for purpose and



Branch Secretary Peter Dodgson's 35 years in the union was celebrated at the meeting with this presentation by EC member Nigel Gibson (right). 'Peter must have started on the railway very young' was the general consensus!

will enable us to continue to give the membership the service it deserves.

STEVE 'SKELLY' SKELHORN LOST TOO SOON

IT IS with deep regret that the Portsmouth & IOW Branch has to report that ex-driver Steve 'Skelly' Skelhorn has passed away at what is considered a young age. Skelly joined ASLEF at Wimbledon and remained loyal to the union throughout his railway career. He transferred to Fratton where colleagues instantly took to this chirpy 'Scouser' who was always ready to have a laugh and a joke with fellow colleagues. Skelly took every advantage of living his life to the full, whether it was socially, organising, playing golf or following the fortunes of Liverpool FC. Steve retired from the railway on medical grounds around 18 months ago. He continued to fight his illness and although he may have lost that battle, memories of this gregarious driver will live on with all those who knew him.

J Glazebrook, Secretary, Portsmouth & IOW Branch

Upcoming *events*

HITHER GREEN - 19 NOVEMBER

The Hither Green branch and Traincrew and Welfare Club are holding a joint retirement and presentation event on Friday 19 November at the Hither Green railway and social club on Beacon Road in Hither Green, London SW13 commencing at 1900 hours. Everyone connected with Hither Green, past or present, is welcome.



Ramsgate branch was honoured to present a 50-year medallion to retired member Roger Matthews at its last branch meeting, reports branch secretary Dave Bull

Old friends at New England

Retired Peterborough New England staff held the latest of their twice-yearly joint ASLEF and NUR reunions at the Parkway Club, New England on 8 October.

It was a well attended gathering, with over 100 people, including the Mayor of Peterborough, Councillor Keith Sharp, turning up to enjoy an excellent buffet lunch, booze and reminisce about the old times!

The next Reunion is scheduled for Friday May 6 next year. For details please ring Malcolm Bell on 01733 569507 or Mick Kisby on 01733 564099. All ex Peterborough railway staff are welcome.

Mick Fosker, retired ASLEF member, Martlesham



Some of the retired railwaymen, all ex-ASLEF New England staff – who made it to the event



Bristol in Hampstead. Back row left to right Luke Whaley, Steve Nicholls, Tony Marsden, Mark Gregory. Front row Richard Heath, Bernard Kennedy (Branch Secretary) Grahame Nash

Final visit from Bristol

In July this year the Bristol branch made its final visit to ASLEF's Arkwright Road headquarters, knowing that we have sold this building and are seeking another head office.

On behalf of the members who attended I would like to thank all the Head Office staff especially Dave Bennett who showed us around the various departments. Everyone found the tour of this great old Hampstead building most enlightening and informative. After our tour we were wined and dined in a local hostelry, which was much appreciated by all of the members.

Along with Bristol there were also colleagues from ASLEF's Southampton Northam and Weymouth branches.

Once again I would like to thank all the Head Office staff, and especially Dave Bennett for the interesting and informative tour.

Bernard Kennedy, Secretary, Bristol

Thanks for the visit

I would like to thank our EC member Nigel Gibson and Kings Cross Branch secretary Les Muir for arranging a District 5 visit to Arkwright Road on the 23 September. We all - Les Muir, Ian Harvey, Chris Luesley, Rob Rice, Graham Russell, John Ashby and myself - had a very informative day thanks to the enthusiasm of our tour guide Dave Bennett. I'm pleased to say there was an air of confidence and contentment from all the staff who work in this magnificent building.

Special thanks to Mick Whelan whose generous hospitality at the refreshment centre was most welcome after the visit.

Mick Carroll, Kings Cross East Coast

Head Office visit appreciated

On behalf of both Tonbridge and Orpington depots, I would like to thank everyone at Arkwright Road for arranging our Head Office visit on the 9 September.

Dave Bennett led us on a tour, explaining the history of the building and the infrastructure of the union headquarters. We were warmly welcomed by everybody and had an enjoyable meal afterwards at a local pub where we also had a photo opportunity with the General Secretary.

Many thanks for a great day.

Trevor Mitchel, Secretary, Tonbridge Branch



These are the pages where you talk to us. We welcome your letters, either by mail to the **ASLEF Journal at 9 Arkwright Road London NW3 6AB** or by email to **journal@aslef.org.uk**. Because of our space constraints, please try to keep your contributions as short as you can. This month we continue our **STAR LETTER feature**. The immensely lucky winner will pocket a rich range of ASLEF regalia!



Course memories

I'M AN ex-member of the London Bridge branch who was on the district committee. I want to thank ASLEF for giving me the foundation to grow. I've been on a number of ASLEF courses and recently attended an USDAW Organising Academy event at Wortley Hall - where one of the rooms is called ASLEF.

My kindest regards

Tony Strudwick, ex-London Bridge Central

Memory lane

IT WAS sad to hear about the death of Frank Waters (Obits, August edition) an ex-driver and a good friend who I first met at Peterborough Spital in 1953. I was only 17 when I moved there from Peterborough East and had little idea of the promotion and redundancy arrangements. I was lodging in the Midland Rod hostel at the time I met Frank, who I think was the branch secretary. His image was the flat cap and the front paunch!

I moved to Doncaster in 1957 after my National Service, eventually passing out on steam in 1965. I retired early as a T/Inspector at Gillingham in 1994 - but I never regretted a single minute of my railway career.

Robert ('Bob') Bradley, Retired member - Brentwood

Four more years of Tosh!

THANK YOU to the Branches and members of district 4 who have re-elected me as EC member until the end of 2014. It is a great honour to be elected unopposed after six years in office.

While every Branch nomination means a great deal to me, it was humbling to see nominations from branches that have suffered most from the downturn brought about by the economic climate - with numbers reduced, members forced to relocate or take voluntary severance and in certain cases reduced hours (£7,000 loss in earnings in some instances).

I have always tried to give you the support and representation you deserve.

While I have spent more time at the branches in the front line of the freight downturn - and I make no apologies for that - I

DRIVERS – NOT COMPANY MEN!

IT'S with some regret that I feel the need to write this letter, but I'm sure many of you will identify with what I have to say.

It seems increasingly noticeable to me that drivers who work for different TOCs often choose to ignore drivers from other companies, looking away and even snubbing each other.

Not so long ago we were one grade, one profession and one company. Now it seems that that unity has disappeared just because we wear

different uniforms - even though in many cases these men and women have previously worked alongside each other for many years.

Come on everybody! We should rise above this and treat each other with the camaraderie and mutual respect that is due to fellow drivers and ASLEF members. Regardless of the uniform we're wearing, we all do the same job with the same responsibilities.

**Dave Thomas,
Birmingham New Street**

have been unable to get to as many of the mainly passenger branches as I would have liked. That's something I aim to put right.

I look forward to attending our new Sunderland branch in the near future.

Thank you to all members and branches in District 4 for your loyalty, not to me but to ASLEF.

Tosh McDonald, EC Member (District 4) and EC Vice President

Education, education, education

I'VE always suspected that public schools only teach three things - dead languages, masturbation and politics. No prizes for guessing what the present incumbents of the seats of power are best at.

Somewhere along the way they forgot to mention that if elected they would regress this country back into the Dark Ages. A lot of people who voted for the puppet master or Clegg must be feeling duped. But I have good news.

This government is poised to kick so many ordinary working people, unemployed people, young people, children and grannies in the teeth that the Tories and their LibDem chums will never see the inside of Number 10 again.

This goes double for Cleggy. The last Liberal government was in 1915 and there

won't be another until the sun has exploded.

If only before the last election Labour leaders had listened to their electorate, understood they are not better than us and thought about the people of this country instead of themselves, we wouldn't be in the mess we are.

Listen in you Labour MPs. Read your history - and remember what you stand for!
Chris Dodd, (still) retired driver

You stood by me

I HAVE served 11 years with Croydon trams, eight as a driver and three as a Trainer/Driver. On 7 September 2008 I should have been training but I covered a duty as a favour. Unfortunately, although it was no fault of mine, I was involved in a horrendous accident.

A bus jumped a red traffic signal and collided with my tram, smashing into the left-hand side of the driving cab. The tram derailed causing major damage. It was out of service for a year.

I suffered major injuries, all on the collision side. I had broken ribs, torn upper torso muscles and ligaments and whiplash to the neck and centre back. A haemorrhage in my eye left me blind for 6 months, and losing part of my kidney resulted in Nephrotic Syndrome, the leaking of protein into my body, a condition which I still suffer, along with Post

Traumatic Stress.

All in all, it is taking a lot longer for me to heal than it did the tram, and sadly my employment was terminated this August, though I have fought tirelessly to regain my health. I didn't get a 'golden handshake' - or indeed any thanks for my loyal service to the company.

I would like to thank Konrad Turner for acting as my representative. He is the Assistant IR rep and a former chairperson of the Croydon Tramlink branch. I would not have stayed as strong or focused without his help through this extremely stressful period and I am grateful for his endurance, tenacity and friendship as I am to all my colleagues who have stood by me with friendship and support. I will miss them.

I would also like to say a personal thank you to Steve Grant, District Organiser, for his help during this trying time.

Alison Dungate, Croydon

Population is key to planet's problems

WHEN the August Journal spoke about 'saving the planet' it touched only briefly on the main problem - which is population.

The official UK population figure is 63 million which probably means around 70 million. We can't tell other countries what to do about controlling their population while we do nothing. Yet no government - even these coalition slash-and-burn

merchants - has the bottle to grasp the nettle.

The only way to discourage people from breeding is to cease paying them to do so - by stopping (not reducing) child allowances and all child-related tax incentives.

R.A.Sargeant, Retired Member, Derby

Thanks ASLEF, and goodbye

AS I have left the railway quite unexpectedly, I'd like to say my goodbyes to my colleagues. I have no regrets about coming to the UK from the Netherlands to drive trains but it is time to start a new adventure - in this case, a course in restoring classic cars.

Thanks to everybody who made my May Days and Tolpuddles so enjoyable, to all the friends I made at work, to Roy Luxford and John Doyle for their support and especially to Kevin Eade.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Carine Visser, ex-driver Brighton

One for the price of two

I READ with great interest Brother Byrne's letter in the October Journal advocating one union for all railway staff.

I have been a member of this union since 1950, and I respect everyone's right to belong to whatever union they wish. I realise I may be getting old and out of touch - but can anyone explain to me why a



Tasteful?

A LOUT WRITES

I discovered this brewery whilst taking a few days out in Swanage.

This letter is to confirm that I will remain a lager lout!

Cliff Blackwell, Retired member

train driver would see the need to belong to two unions, as Brother Byrne is?

If any brother with dual membership got involved in a serious incident involving grades, which union would represent him?

Ron Kettle, retired Driver

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FAVERSHAM BRANCH (077) has finally launched its 25th Anniversary ASLEF/NUM badge. They cost £10 each including P&P. A few Faversham Branch Centenary badges remain available at £5 each including P&P. To order please contact the Branch Secretary, Steve Gurdler, 18 Hunters Way West, Chatham, Kent ME5 7HL. steve.gurdler@aslefonline.co.uk or 07941 110473



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BRIGHTON ASLEF DRIVERS BADGE. Limited Edition of 300. All profits to fund branch reunions. Available for £10 including p&p (cheques made payable to 'ASLEF Brighton Branch No 35') from Mark Johnson, 51 Drove Road, Portslade, Brighton BN41 2PA or phone 07783 847228.

Play dramatises equality struggle



- a review by **Deborah Reay** of the Mikron Theatre Company's 'Striking the Balance' ...

LAST month I had the pleasure of attending a play called 'Striking the Balance' performed by the Mikron Theatre Company at the TUC's headquarters in Central London.

The play is set across three decades - the 1960s, 70s and 80s - and chronicles the story of three female bakery workers, Mary, Marge and Annie, and their fight for equality. It is inspired by the stories of the machinists from Dagenham, cleaners from Belfast, dinner ladies from Yorkshire and cooks from Liverpool whose struggle paved the way for the introduction of the 1970 Equal Pay Act.

It is 1968. Mary works on the production line, packing bread into trays alongside Marge and

Annie. Mary is pregnant, but because of the stigma attached to unmarried mothers, she pretends she's getting married. The bakery doesn't employ married women so she has to leave.

Fast forward to 1974. Mary



A travelling theatre with a theme of working rights

wants to go back to work and now that it is illegal for employers to discriminate against married women she approaches her old boss at the bakery. Bakery owner Mr Winner is shocked to find that he now has to abide by the Equal Pay Act.

'Has the world gone stark staring raving mad?' he demands as he realises he will have to employ married women and pay 'his girls' the same as the men. The 'Women's Rate' which he has used in the past has to go, but he is worried that the increase to women's pay will jeopardise the men's jobs. His solution is to move the men off the production line and into the warehouse - so he can continue to pay the women a lower rate. The women, with the

help of their shop steward, Stan, take on the might of the establishment.

The four-actor cast - Adrian Palmer, Gemma Ryan, Richard Loosemore and Rachel Cartwright - played several parts and a variety of musical instruments. The most memorable for me were Palmer's portrayal of Margaret Thatcher and Loosemore's excellent send-up of Alan Clarke.

I am not a big fan of plays where the cast suddenly bursts in to song, but these musical moments were well written and pertinent to the story. The tale of these three women is both poignant and extremely funny, so despite my prejudices, I persevered.

I'm very glad I did.



The cast at the TUC production

Theatre on the move

THE Mikron Theatre Company has been on the road for 40 years, bringing drama to people rather than being 'visited' and dealing with themes relevant to working people rather than the antics of the upper classes.

'We want to bring theatre back to the people,' says General Manager Peter Toon. 'It is the oldest form of entertainment and it belongs to them.'

To make it accessible, the company has taken its productions out on the road - or, more often, the canal. 'Apart from venues like the TUC, where Deborah saw us, we've toured the national waterway system on our Grand Union narrowboat, Tyseley, in search of our audiences. We've performed at canal and



Drama on the road ... well, the canal

riverside pubs, in village hall and community centres and at festivals and rallies,' he explains. 'We've even played in people's front rooms!'

The subjects of the plays they've written and performed include the industrial revolution, women's suffrage, hilltop farming, transport, Fair Trade and brewing - and they are very much part of their local community on the Huddersfield Narrow in Marsden, West Yorkshire.

In the summer months they often perform outside - where they face all manner of challenges apart from the weather - like passing dogs who cock a leg on the set mid-scene, music-loving cows who provide a chorus and once 'the memorable heckling from inmates of Reading Prison, when we were performing in the neighbouring abbey grounds!'

This year over 10,000 people have seen a Mikron show. Sadly, however, next year could be a different story because - inevitably - they find themselves without any formal funding. 'We'd love more union backing, like the help they gave for us to put on the TUC event,' Peter



All the land's a stage for the travelling Mikrons

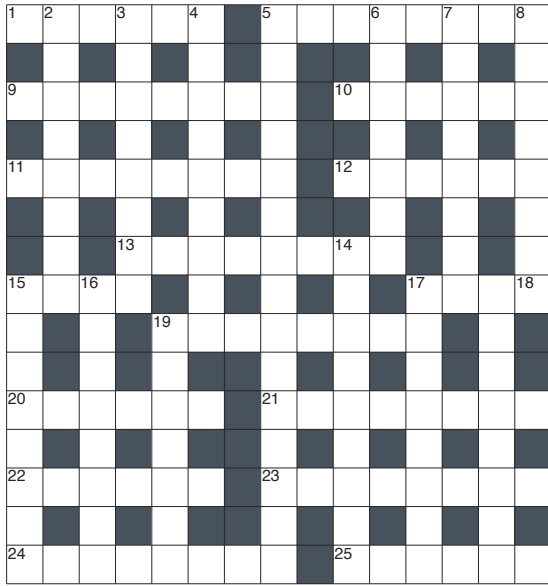


A bleak future for shows if funding isn't found

says. 'But if we don't get some formal backing we may have to sell our narrowboat, which would be a real blow.'

'If any ASLEF branches would like to get in touch to talk about productions, ideas or possibly backing our 'Ruby Appeal', we'd be delighted to hear from you. Our website is www.mikron.org.uk.'

Prize Crossword No. 55 set by TLC



CLUES ACROSS

- 1 One paying rent to a landlord (6)
- 5 Running flat out (3,5)
- 9 Beverage (3,2,3)
- 10 Oil (6)
- 11 Leave to posterity (4,4)
- 12 Reveal (6)
- 13 Compares favourably with past record! (2,2,4)
- 15 Heavenly Garden (4)
- 17 Religious denomination (4)
- 19 Find the highest point (2,3,3)
- 20 Confined resident (6)
- 21 Income from investments (8)
- 22 Harem attendant (6)

- 23 Shows aggrieved feelings (4,4)
- 24 Those with flaming locks (8)
- 25 Method of providing electrified circuits for a device (6)

- park! (6,3)
- 15 US train driver (8)
- 16 Inspected (8)
- 17 Firework (8)
- 18 Southernmost tip of S. America (4,4)
- 19 Ambassador (7)

CLUES DOWN

- 2 Well informed or tutored (8)
- 3 Uninterrupted period of operation (1,4 3)
- 4 Retaliation (3,3,3)
- 5 Connected ideas! (5,2,8)
- 6 Equivalent word (7)
- 7 Proof (8)
- 8 Shift rota (4,4)
- 14 Rough ride in Hyde



MARKS & SPENCER

The winner of this month's crossword will receive Marks & Spencer vouchers to the value of £25

Solution to Crossword No 54 which appeared in the October edition of the ASLEF Journal. Congratulations to **Peter Lewis** from **Wallasey**

- ACROSS** 3 Railways 8 Asti 9 Marylebone 10 Coke 11 Hols 13 Step 17 Nature 18 Ranger 19 Outer 22 Adam 24 Etui 25 Kensington 26 Tyre 27 Recently
- DOWN** 1 Ascot 2 Limehouse 4 Abyss 5 Leeds 6 Alone 7 Sleepers 12 Lied 14 Tenements 15 Onlooker 16 Fred 20 Tonic 21 Reign 22 Angel 23 Guard

Name.....

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

Thanks for all your responses to the 54th ASLEF crossword in the October edition. If you complete this month's crossword please send the solution to the Editor, ASLEF Journal, 9 Arkwright Road, London NW3 6AB by the 14th of the issue month.

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