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I often think that trade unions fail in one area: we don’t make enough of our successes. Part of the trouble is that by the time union negotiators – at local, branch, regional or national level – have come to an agreement, they are off on the next set of talks. So they don’t find the time to publicise what has been achieved. It’s understandable, because we’re all busy: but it is a failing.

Add to this the fact that the media are only interested in unions when we are threatening a strike or falling out with Labour, and our image is dour and negative. Well, I can’t speak for other unions, but ASLEF isn’t either of these things.

I am proud of our union’s achievements. At national level we have put freight on rail on the political agenda, we’ve raised the profile of corporate manslaughter laws, we are an authoritative voice on rail safety and we’re making cab conditions both an industrial and political issue. It’s a pretty impressive record for a small union – and I think it makes a convincing argument for specialised unions with specific memberships and concerns, especially at a time when others are forming mega-unions.

Our membership is growing and you will see on the centre pages how we are aiming to recruit other potential members. We’re doing it ‘ASLEF style’: that is, person to person, driver to driver. We don’t employ teams of organisers, and we don’t chase up people with hard-sell letters from headquarters. We don’t do ‘flash’: we do fact.

Other unions don’t seem to realise the special bond that unite our members. Train drivers are a family and ASLEF protects the family’s interests. I know there are other unions who would like to take us over, either individually or collectively, but they find it difficult to explain the advantages to us – basically because there aren’t any. We represent a tight group of professional specialist interests. We have nothing to gain from complicating life.

The fact is that other unions don’t want ASLEF members in order to improve drivers’ wages and conditions. They want to use our members’ industrial strength for their other ambitions. It’s not something our members are going to fall for.

In fact, I’m even beginning to see a positive side to the rough period we have been through over the past three years. It has made us re-examine our whole organisation, and ourselves – and I think we have emerged from it stronger than ever. Now we can benefit from a new period of stability to introduce technology and improve our communications.

I hope that when I leave my position as your general secretary in five years’ time, we will be more efficient, united and informed than ever – and that we’ve learned how to blow our own trumpets to advertise these facts to our membership and to the wider society.
Class 66 improvements – deadline issued

THE Executive has discussed cabs in Class 66 locos and identified the main problems as noise and vibration; cab ergonomics, including seating; and thermal comfort - air conditioning/cooling. It has taken the view that the best way to protect members’ interests is to give the companies a deadline for improvements.

It is therefore advising all companies with 66 locos that they will be in dispute with the union if they fail to bring forward acceptable proposals to improve cab conditions, including acceptable timescales, by 28 February 2007.

As an interim measure the union has agreed to accept the use of ear defenders where issued. (See article by Class 66 drivers on page 7)

C2C – progress after rest days turned down

IT IS no easy ride working for the top-performing TOC, says Mark Burrows of the C2C Company Council.

Management has been relying on an antiquated DRI to cut diagrams, while MFA and SMD issues abound and morale has sunk to ground level. Sound familiar?

Then the company had the audacity to request a rest day extension! But this, coupled with ‘people power’ protests at an ill-conceived winter timetable gave the union an opportunity to reverse management’s solidly inflexible approach. Harsh diagrams led to local level working with ASLEF health and safety reps – who involved the HMRI because of its warnings on fatigue.

After the EC was addressed by Andy Morrison and the company council, it declined the rest working request – and within 24 hours C2C had admitted to a breakdown in industrial relations and agreed to revisit rosters and diagrams. This led to progress on a considerable number of contentious issues including the cessation of night turns, the number of trips to London on Sundays, finishing times, travelling times for trainees and the calculation of establishment figures.

As a result of this progress, rest days have now been granted on a monthly basis until the forthcoming pay deal.

Rail fares will keep rising – minister

TRANSPORT Secretary Douglas Alexander said last month that passengers will ‘have to pay’ for improvements to the transport system. He said, ‘The UK is a relatively lightly-taxed economy and if we want to see the kind of investment that’s needed then we’re going to have to pay for it, either as tax-payers or fare-payers.’

He was reacting to a study by the Centre for Economics and Business Research which revealed that the average UK citizen spends more than 15% of their income on transport – nearly double the figure for other EU countries – including 3.8% on rail, bus and plane fares. The study also said that, compared with 10 years ago, commuters travel further to get to work and spend 20 minutes more in transit.

Unity wins the day in Northern dispute

ASLEF last month called off proposed industrial action on London Underground’s Northern Line after a driver was reinstated. It was quite a turnaround as the union had threatened with an injunction earlier in the week.

‘I am delighted that this decision has been reached,’ said General Secretary Keith Norman. ‘I just regret that it has taken so long.’

‘The disciplinary hearing didn’t take place until three months after the incident,’ says London Organiser Steve Grant, ‘and our member spent the Christmas period not knowing if he had a job. It was badly handled.’
Anger as driver is injured by hooligans

ANDY REED, ASLEF’s National Organiser, said he was horrified at an incident in December which left a freight train driver critically injured after hooligans threw masonry from a bridge in Worcestershire at a train travelling between Llanwern and Brierley Hill.

‘I am sure I speak for every train driver in the country when I offer our member and his family our deepest sympathy. It is unbelievable that people can be so callous, stupid and downright evil as to do something like this,’ Andy said.

‘There is no excuse for such behaviour. This could have killed the driver. The union is calling for the most severe sentences for this crime. This is nothing to do with high-spirits or festive excess. It is a case of irresponsible and criminal folly.’

A large piece of masonry smashed through Joseph Paxton’s cab window causing serious head and face injuries. He was treated in the Royal Worcester Hospital.

Early last month three youths aged 16, 18 and 21, were arrested on suspicion of causing grievous bodily harm with intent in connection with the incident.

Yellow card for FirstGroup

FirstGroup is in trouble - less than a year into operating its prestigious Greater Western Rail franchise. The company paid the government a premium of about £1 billion for the franchise but early last month its chief executive, Moir Lockhead, and managing director Alison Foster received a ‘yellow card’ warning from Department for Transport officials that unless services improve FirstGroup will lose the Greater Western franchise.

Since the winter time-table was introduced, cancellations hit over 60 a day and other services were replaced by buses. Keith Norman said that neither the union nor the public could accept perfectly

Driver suffers two fatalities in a day

AN Austrian train driver, ran over a teenage boy, then killed two policemen and a coroner who were attending the first accident on his return journey.

The three were in the process of collecting the youngster’s body from the track when they were hit by the same train driver, who had switched trains to make the return journey.

Hans Fichler, 45, was given a few hours to recover after his Eurocity train hit the 18-year-old while on the way to Bregenz.

After climbing back into the driving seat for the return trip he ploughed into the two policemen and an undertaker who were investigating the first death.

The train driver, who has been cleared of any blame, is being treated for shock.

DEALS ON WHEELS: Bob would offer RMT membership to anything that moves (well - almost anything)
THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE’S PRIORITIES FOR MEMBERS

In this column, NIGEL GIBSON, the executive committee member for District 5, outlines the main issues considered this month by the union’s executive committee.

FREIGHT In line with our Squash campaign, we are concentrating on the problems — seating, temperatures, noise and vibration — facing members working on Class 66 locomotives. We have demanded that companies using these locos propose improvements by 28 February — or we will be in dispute with them.

WEBSITES Recognising that most of our members now have internet access, we are determined to improve how we communicate. We set up websites during disputes with One and Great Western, and a number of company and district councils run their own sites. The EC has decided to run trial sites with South Eastern, One and EWS which, if successful, will be rolled out to all Company Councils to offer instant and up to date information directly to members.

The main ASLEF website has been upgraded, providing access to contacts, details about the union and its campaigns and offering a discussion forum in the ‘members only’ area.

FIRST GROUP INJURY PREVENTION PROGRAMME First Group has introduced a programme for its employees in the rail industry which insists our members carrying a passbook for managers to make entries in about employee’s safe or unsafe actions — and face disciplinary action if it is lost. This is totally unacceptable for train drivers whose safety is scrutinised in every circumstance and we will oppose its introduction in the strongest terms.

FREIGHT JOURNAL The EC will trial an ASLEF Freight Journal which will initially be issued six monthly.

ONE RAILWAY DISPUTE I would like to thank all our One Railway members for their solidarity during the recent dispute — 94.7% voted to take action. It is the first time we have balloted any of the three former companies since 1994. As well as the settlement, we have now established a principle that the pay gap must not increase where a franchise operates with differing conditions and rates of pay we should not allow the pay gap to increase.

HARMONISATION / INTEGRATION ASLEF does not accept that bringing terms and conditions and pay rates together within a new franchise is impossible. We will not talk about ‘what we have to give up’ to achieve this. Rather, we will concentrate on getting all members a four day week, full, 100% pensionable pay and eliminate unpaid time at work. We start from the basis that it is impossible to justify two rates of pay for the same job.

I believe we should conduct consultation exercise to determine members’ views before we begin discussions on managements’ wish lists. As the franchise map continues to change, harmonisation will affect increasing numbers of ASLEF members.

THE COMING YEAR The Executive Committee is committed to bringing about changes that will improve the day to day life of our members. I look forward to working with you on the many and varied issues which we will face during 2007.
A GROUP of Freightliner drivers have sent this account of their working conditions, and it makes a convincing case for instituting a Squash Campaign ‘Worst Cab of the Year Award’.

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Then came our company – Freightliner – who at least proved their ‘spin-doctoring’ credentials. Freightliner said cab conditions was ‘a difficult and emotive subject’. So what exactly does that mean?

There is nothing ‘difficult or emotive’ about sitting in the cab of an appallingly designed Class 66 locomotive. There is just pain, distraction and inconvenience.

Where shall we start?

How nice it is to get into a one hundred degree cab in the summer, sitting yourself down in a filthy (literally wet) sweat-soaked seat that rocks laterally and vertically. And that’s before you’ve moved. (I’m assuming here, of course, that you’ve not covered yourself in grease as you tried to enter the cab). Then you have your ears battered by the illegal noise levels and your spine is treated to a rough massage by the continuous vibration and jagging motion of the diabolical ride provided by those ‘amazing self-steering bogies’.

All in all, it’s a truly memorable experience for the drivers involved.

Of course this is a ‘difficult and emotive subject’ for the managers involved. Why? Because they wouldn’t tolerate their offices being in such a state, so they simply don’t want to understand the issue.

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Let’s look for a moment at the quality of the driver’s – or even the second man’s – seat. Either or both may be marked with an ‘X’ on the base plate to indicate that it is (in technical terms) ‘knackered’. But this may not be the case as management has now stopped marking them because drivers constantly report them in the repair book. (Incidentally, you’ve almost certainly got grease on your jumper or your shirt by now, as most seats include this ‘extra’).

After this you will be alerted as to whether it’s raining. If so, you’ll notice water pouring through the roof (upper headlight) or the window frame. Both, if you’re lucky. This arrival of water is quite helpful in removing the copious amount of rust that’s present on some locos.

Also, if you like the smell of public conveniences, you will be pleased to find it mixes with the windscreen washing fluid and the already-stagnant water gathered in the front of the loco to produce this perfume.

It is not a good idea to try to let some fresh air in. If the driver’s side-window doesn’t fall out due to the corroded frames, you will probably do yourself a mischief trying to force it open.

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This column is prepared as general advice and should not be relied on without taking specific advice about your situation. If you think you may have a legal case act quickly, there are strict time limits for bringing most claims. Call 0808 100 80 09 the details of her claim will be passed to a solicitor who will contact her and discuss the accident in more detail before assessing the chances of obtaining compensation.

If the solicitor considers the case worth pursuing, your wife will either be asked to contact a lawyer from the Thompsons office closest to you, or she may be interviewed over the phone. Her solicitor will discuss the accident and any evidence that can be relied on without taking specific advice about your situation. If you think you may have a legal case act quickly, there are strict time limits for bringing most claims. Call 0808 100 80 09.

This month we’ve selected some of the questions that we’ve heard about help me to do this?

The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations come into force on 1 October and create a new right for employees who are approaching normal retirement age to request that their employer allow them to continue working beyond retirement age. However, the right is only one of request and the employer is under no obligation to grant the request, or even to provide reasons why it has been refused. The right is also only available to employees, not the broader category of workers. There is a process that must be followed by both the employee in making this request and by the employer responding to it. This starts from the obligation on the employer to notify the employee of their intended date of retirement and their right to request, in writing, to continue working beyond that date.

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If your employer refuses your request, you can appeal. But unless your employer has failed to follow the correct procedures, there is probably little that you can do. Because the process that must be followed is fairly complex, it is important that you consult your union rep before embarking on your request.

Pursuing a personal injury claim for a pavement trip need not be difficult but your wife’s ability to do so does depend on whether negligence by the local authority can be proven. It will be necessary for your wife to show that the accident was foreseeable, because, for example, the paving stone was broken and a hazard, and that it could have been prevented if the local authority had properly maintained the pavement.

Your wife has the right to use the ASLEF legal service which covers members’ families for non-work place accidents at no cost to them whether or not the claim succeeds. Doing so will substantially reduce the “bother”, though there are things she can do to better enable her solicitor to assess whether the claim has a reasonable chance of succeeding and to make the claim run more smoothly.

There are strict time limits for making a personal injury claim. This is usually three years from the date of the accident. However, the earlier that your solicitor can start investigations the more chance there is of achieving compensation. Medical evidence and witnesses to the accident are more difficult to obtain and trace as time goes by.

It is a good idea to make notes about what happened, where and when. Your wife should also visit her GP, if she has not already done so, so that details of her injury and treatment are on her medical notes. Photographs of the injury will also be helpful.

Keep receipts relating to any expenses incurred as a result of the injury, including travel to and from the GP or hospital, prescription charges and any other payments made as a direct result of the accident.

Once your wife has contacted ASLEF’s solicitors Thompsons through the free phone number 0808 100 80 09 the details of her claim will be passed to a solicitor who will contact her and discuss the accident in more detail before assessing the chances of obtaining compensation.

If the solicitor considers the case worth pursuing, your wife will either be asked to contact a lawyer from the Thompsons office closest to where you live so that she can give a statement and other key details, or she may be interviewed over the phone. Her solicitor will attempt to settle the case by putting forward an offer of compensation. However, insurance companies often take a long time to do this, so your wife should be prepared to wait some time for any compensation.

Also, insurers often put forward offers that do not reflect the nature of the injury and losses sustained. Your wife’s solicitor will not recommend that she accept any offer of compensation that is too low.

Q I would like to work beyond my normal retirement age. My employer does not allow this. Will the new age discrimination legislation that I’ve heard about help me to do this?

Q My wife recently tripped over a paving stone and severely bruised her leg. I told her to sue the council but she says it will be a lot of bother. Is it a difficult process?
The relevant part of the scheme was mainly designed to compensate drivers who suffered injury through witnessing suicide victims on the railway.

The CICA have a minimum requirement that a member bringing a claim under the scheme must have seen a medically qualified person at least once and their injuries still affect them in some significant way six weeks after the incident. If you can show that, you should be able to be awarded at least the minimum award of £1000.

It is wise to get the effects of the injury noted somewhere official (your GP, counsellor or somewhere at work) more than six weeks after the incident, if you are still affected. The CICA can take evidence from any significant aspect of your life if you can show that it was affected more than six weeks after the incident, for example at work or in your personal life.

Denis’ criticisms of the CICA’s bureaucratic methods are well founded. However, once a member makes an application with relevant details of the incident, they should leave their representative to deal with any issues or requests for information. As Denis says, you should not become the victim of a system failure or the CICA’s bureaucracy.

The CICA are undoubtedly slow, but they do have time standards for dealing with claims which your representative should be aware of – and should ask them to enforce. There is no requirement for a minimum time off work or a minimum loss of earnings before the CICA will make an award.

A train driver, who as Dennis puts it “gets back on his bike”, but who has seen a doctor at least once and who is still affected in any significant way more than six weeks after the incident, should qualify for their minimum award of £1000.

In summary, I would make two principal points:

- A member should go to their doctor or counsellor at least once if they have been affected and make sure there is evidence somewhere of the significant effect the incident has had on them for more than six weeks after the incident.
- Although a member has two years from the date of the incident to lodge a claim, they should not delay in doing so and once your claim has been lodged, let the CICA and their representative take the strain of proving the case and, I hope, bring about a successful conclusion.

Thompsons have specialist CICA lawyers who regularly act for members. They have also produced a leaflet to explain the basic workings of the scheme for all ASLEF branches which are available from their Publications Department, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London, WC1B 3LW.

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ASLEF WELCOMES ‘GOODS AND SERVICES’ EQUALITY

This month is Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender History Month, reports Sharon Allen, the union’s Equalities Advisor. It is appropriate therefore to report on new legislation concerning the provision of goods and services in a non-discriminatory way ...

ASLEF celebrates LGBT History Month by welcoming the new goods and services legislation

Early in 2007, the Government will introduce regulations to make discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services on the grounds of sexual orientation illegal.

This followed a large-scale campaign by LGBT organisations and trade unions (including ASLEF) to make sure that the continued inequality faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in accessing goods and services was brought to an end.

During 2006, the Government announced its plans for the regulations and held a three-month public consultation, finishing in June.

There was a very large response, and as a result of this, the laying before Parliament of the proposed regulation was delayed from the initial proposed date of October 2006, and it is now understood that it will come into force in April 2007.

Once the regulations are in force, for the first time in the UK, people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual will have the same protection of the law against discrimination when they try to access goods and services as is available to anyone else (except for transgender people – an omission that the Government has undertaken to remedy in the promised 2007 Single Equality Act).

During the campaign to bring about change to the law, numerous shocking examples of prejudice by service providers ranging from hoteliers to health service practitioners were brought to public attention. In the face of such evidence, there could be no doubt that this legal protection was needed, and the Government recognised this and acted accordingly.

The next step is to ensure that the regulations achieve the objective of full equality, without allowing any ways out for those who would continue to discriminate because of their prejudice against lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and trans people.

Ever since the announcement of the proposed regulations, there have been powerful voices raised in opposition. A campaign of letter writing, lobbying, sermons and full-page advertisements in newspapers has been underway in the UK, designed to pressure the Government off its chosen path.

The arguments being used in this campaign are a crude mixture of scaremongering (including some misrepresentation of what the regulations actually say) and bigotry (aimed at undermining what they do really say). Their objective hinges on the call for anyone with religious objections to homosexuality to be exempted from the law, so that they can continue legally to discriminate on grounds of sexual orientation, where for other citizens such discrimination is illegal.

ASLEF believes that Ministers must stand firm in defence of equality, and must resist these calls for widespread exemptions. It is the view of the trade union movement that no one should be denied any public service because of their sexuality, or for any other irrelevant reason.

The advocates for religious exemptions rely on fear, prejudice and ignorance in their campaigns. Their whole approach is based on the view that lesbians, gay men and bisexual people, their relationships and families, and their lives, should not be treated as of equal value.

In bringing forward regulations to outlaw discrimination in the provision of goods and services on grounds of sexual orientation (and, in due course, gender identity) the Government will be putting in place one of the final pieces in the legal jigsaw, by which people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual (and, later this year, transgender) will benefit from the same protection as any other citizen against unfair discrimination.

Lesbians, gay men, bisexual and trans people have always paid the same taxes, abided by the same laws, and made as great a contribution to our society as anyone else: but until now, they have not been treated as equals. Now is the time to bring that disgraceful situation to an end.

All services provided to the public must be provided without discrimination.
Wales is famous as the country where the world’s first steam locomotive hauled a load on rails. The Penydarren locomotive, built by Richard Trevithick (1771-1833), made its historic journey between Penydarren, Merthyr Tydfil and Abercynon just over two centuries ago.

And today is another exciting time for Wales’ railways.

Two big factors are driving recent changes – world-wide moves to tackle climate change and devolution of power. In Wales both are directly connected.

Wales finally got its National Assembly in 1999, after a closely fought referendum, in which a crucial role in the Yes campaign was played by the trades unions. Transport was one of the areas devolved – and that includes a growing number of responsibilities for railways which I exercise as Minister. The Assembly’s first ‘constitution’ – the Government of Wales Act 1997 – also gave us a clear duty to promote the environment.

Since then the Welsh Assembly Government’s involvement in rail services has grown and grown. Last April, the Assembly Government took over responsibility for all Arriva Trains Wales services within Wales, as well as those between Wales and England. A new Transport Act gives the Assembly Government the power to plan a more co-ordinated transport system. We have already published a draft Wales Transport Strategy, setting out our vision for an effective, integrated transport system.

So Wales has a wide range of powers, and we are determined to make the best possible use of them. The Assembly Government is already making a real difference – and Arriva Trains Wales is performing ahead of its contractual performance targets.

Wales is also now seeing an expansion of rail services – after decades of cuts. Last year, I opened the new Vale of Glamorgan passenger railway, which links Cardiff and Bridgend via Rhoose and Llantwit Major, with a dedicated bus link to Cardiff Wales Airport.

Construction has also begun on the new Ebbw Vale Railway project, which includes six new railway stations.

This is another excellent example of the public sector working in partnership to deliver physical improvements to the Heads of the Valleys, which include some of the UK’s most disadvantaged communities. We are committed to more investment, improved services and greater customer satisfaction in the railways in Wales.

This expanded use of railways is good news for everyone concerned with the sustainable development. The recent report by Sir Rod Eddington emphasises that all forms of transport should pay for damage caused to the environment. The trend towards ‘green taxes’ is clear enough in Chancellor Gordon Brown’s Pre-Budget Report to MPs.

That puts a new premium on enhancing the role of our railways. Wales already moves much more heavy goods by rail than the rest of the UK, in part because of our industrial background. There is also a good story to tell in terms of greater passenger use. The Valleys Line alone, for example, has seen year-on-year passenger increases of 10 per cent.

As Transport Minister, and the grandson of a train driver from west Wales, I aim to meet increasing demand with extra capacity and additional services – and ensure 21st century Wales is renowned as a land where railways have a great future as well as a celebrated past.

Andrew Davies is a graduate of Swansea University, where he also trained as a teacher. A member of the Transport & General Workers’ Union, he also worked for Ford and in public affairs before his election to the Welsh Assembly as the Member for Swansea West in May 1999.
IN SEARCH OF THE MISSING 2 0 0 0 ...

Last month 25 activists met at union headquarters in north London to draw up plans for recruiting 'the missing two thousand'. The seminar took to the task with good-natured and well-informed enthusiasm. These are some of their conclusions ….

WHY ARE SOME PEOPLE RELUCTANT TO JOIN THE UNION?
● Personalities can be a factor…
● Sometimes it's a simple question of people not getting on.
● Companies can be unhelpful … companies used to encourage union membership, but now trainees are often 'advised' there is no reason to join while they are on probation.
● We don't ask people why they leave … when employees leave a job, the company always gives them an 'exit' interview to find out why they are going. We should make a point of doing the same with union membership.
● We don't always approach new potential members at training schools, although this is the prime time to sign people up … which is because we don't have an agreement with all companies to allow the union time to speak at training sessions – which is something we must remedy.
● Not everyone has a union background … the Thatcher years are still taking their toll and many younger entrants don't have a trade union tradition.
● Some people are members of other unions … we should ensure that drivers coming from in-line promotions are aware of our view that train drivers belong in ASLEF.
● We don't ask people to join … it's a fact that sometimes potential members are not approached or made to feel welcome.
● Sometimes we make assumptions that are quite wrong … like not feeling it's worth approaching ex-forces people - who often turn out to be our best reps!

We don't tell them the advantages of joining ASLEF … which we need to start doing efficiently and quickly.

WHAT DO WE HAVE TO OFFER?
The central message here was, 'We don't blow our trumpet enough!' We are 'more than just a union' …

● We are engaged in campaigns that really matter to our members - including
  ● Freight on Rail
  ● Rail safety and corporate killing
  ● Squash campaign for improved conditions in driving cabs
  ● Level crossing safety

In each of these we are making significant inroads, and we've specialised in bringing other groups and individuals along with us. For a small union, we have a strong voice.

Also, we are proud of our internal democracy. We involve all our members in decisions on their pay and when we are told of deficiencies, we strive to put them right. We are small enough for everyone to be involved and specialised enough to understand all our members' problems.

HOW DO WE RECRUIT?
The groups identified three types of recruitment activities – personal, informal and formal. These were some of the guidelines they felt we should employ to best attract and retain members …

ONE TO ONE RECRUITMENT
● Be prepared… people know if you're wafting - especially train drivers! So make sure you've got facts at your fingertips, or admit that you haven't.
● Make sure you know how to progress a membership application … often a person is willing to sign the dotted line, but we've forgotten the form for the signature. Have this information ready and to hand.
● If you're talking to someone who was a member but left … see if you can discover why they left before you meet up, and see how/why circumstances might have changed since they gave up membership.
● Don't for the lord's sake be aggressive … we want people to be part of the ASLEF 'family', so speak to them in a polite, friendly, comradely way.
● Be yourself … look smart, but don't go all 'suited and booted' like a double-glazing salesperson - they'll mistake you for management! Be what you are - a train driver seeking a bond with a colleague.
● Listen to what they say … don't talk at them, hear what they want and see how ASLEF can provide it.
● Make sure you know the advantages of the benefits of union membership.
● Find about local issues … they are the things that matter most.
● Don't be in a hurry … what you're doing is important. Put time aside for it.
● Give them a list of contacts at different levels of the union … show them we're organised, don't just tell them!
● Stress that ASLEF is the only professional and efficient union devoted only for

For information or advice about recruiting colleagues, contact one of ASLEF's 'More than just a Union' campaign co-ordinators: Nick Craven GNER, Leeds Branch Office, Edgerton House, 101-105 New Briggate, Leeds LS1 6SA; Perry Calvert South East Trains, Dagenham; Keith Norman and Andy Reed from union headquarters and down to business (right)
train drivers.

- Supply them with the new ASLEF members' packs. They are full of interesting information.

USE THE UNION’S LOCAL ORGANISATION

- Make sure there are lists of ASLEF reps around the depot. Let's not hide our light under a bushel (whatever that means?)
- Publish the names of the union's 'recruitment champions'
- Identify a map of the workplace everywhere is different, some drivers meet regularly while some work in an isolated fashion. Decide how to ensure everyone can be approached.
- Encourage every ASLEF member to recruit - not just the reps! We have 18,000 potential recruiters, all of whom have a personal interest in a strong united union with the highest possible density of membership. Ask people to ask their mates the simple question: 'Are you in the union?' and then, 'Why not?'
- Some reps are good at recruiting - and some aren't! Tell the ones who aren't to leave the job to someone else!! Never make the mistake of thinking that just because someone is not active in the union, they are not loyal. Not going to branch meetings doesn't mean drivers don't know what side of the fences they are on.
- Make sure our notice-boards are up to date. This means clearing them out, and making them look different. Even if you change the information, if they were full last week and they are full this week, they don't look different. They look the same: full!
- Tell everyone about ASLEF’s successes, both local and national. We have much to boast about.
- Don’t go in for negative campaigning – other unions might annoy us, but attacking another organisation doesn’t make our own more attractive. Our selling point is simple - we only recruit drivers, we only represent drivers’ problems and desires more than we do.
- Insist on a procedural agreement to attend management training schools on ASLEF's behalf.
- Use the web site - and ask members to sign out of having emails from the union rather than asking them to sign in.
- Don’t think recruitment is the job of the district or branch official. Make it the job of every ASLEF member.

POWER POINT!

The reps took time to look at a presentation of ASLEF’s main selling points which has been put onto a memory stick so it is easily portable.

- Make sure that if you are giving a presentation like this, you know what you are saying - rather than just reading it! And remember - if you're bored, your audience is asleep!

CONTRIBUTIONS: ASLEF’S

ACHILLES HEEL OR FAIR VALUE?

Despite our quality representation and resources a criticism sometimes levelled at ASLEF representatives is that our subscription rates are not as cheap as other rail unions. This may be the case but in real terms the amount we contribute has gone down.

Under the ‘glory’ days of BR the membership contribution was 1.25% of a mainline driver’s annual wage; on average this has reduced to 0.75%.

That still doesn’t answer the criticism that others are cheaper – but unions with flat rate 'one size fits all' contribution are only deluding themselves that this is fair and progressive.

Why should a low paid platform worker, cleaner or even guard subsidise a much higher paid member? They pay the same contribution - but as a proportion of their earnings there is a huge difference between the £12,000 for an RO1 grade platform worker (not a great deal higher than the BR days of a decade ago) and a drivers’ salary in excess of £34,500.

ASLEF has a three scale contributions system based on your salary. This means trainees on scale 3 with ASLEF pay nearly a third less than an RMT member. Proportionally, even the average RMT member’s contributions are higher than ours.

We recognise that different groups of members are on different rates and it’s only right that our contribution levels reflect that. Rather than play gesture politics we feel it’s more important to deliver, at the price of less than half a cup of coffee a day, good value and, crucially, meaningful results for our members.
LOANS FOR ASLEF MEMBERS

Stay on top with an affordable flexible loan...

...just make a quick call to 0800 24 30 24*

or click away and apply online at

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- Do you have all sorts of credit in lots of different places?
- Do you want to make just one affordable monthly payment?
- Do you need a loan from £10,000 to £100,000 for any purpose with a repayment period from 5 to 25 years?
- Call or apply online now – we are not a call centre – our friendly experienced staff can usually confirm your loan in principle straight away.

Interest rates from 6.7% - 10.7% APR. Our typical rate is 8.9% APR. More than 66% of our loans are written at 8.9% or less.

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THINK CAREFULLY BEFORE SECURING OTHER DEBTS AGAINST YOUR HOME. YOUR HOME MAY BE REPOSSESSED IF YOU DO NOT KEEP UP REPAYMENTS ON A MORTGAGE OR ANY OTHER DEBT SECURED ON IT.

For a written quotation, write to Arrow Finance, Freepost, Solihull B92 0BR. We are professional finance brokers, trading as Arrow Finance since 1983. We arrange loans up to 125% of house value (less existing mortgage balance). Loans are secured against your home and subject to status including credit scoring and property equity.
ASLEF campaigns to remove stress on franchise, the SMD steering group and expectations under changes to members in isolated working locations, the pressing issues, including access to Bro Mahmood to driving duties. having just secured the re-instatement of Billy Goode. He went out on a high, Council rep, handed over ‘the flame’ to and dedicated service as Company smoothly and efficiently.

THE December Branch and our AGM meeting took place on 13 December. A good number of members turned out to hear guest speaker Dave Calfe from the EC. Bro Bill Goode took the Chair and Sis Angie Butler moved the meeting through the business and election of officers smoothly and efficiently.

Len Sidebotham, after 14 years of loyal and dedicated service as Company Council rep, handed over ‘the flame’ to Billy Goode. He went out on a high, having just secured the re-instatement of Bro Mahmood to driving duties.

Dave Calfe gave an update on several pressing issues, including access to members in isolated working locations, the need to ‘get back to the grassroots’, our expectations under changes to the franchise, the SMD steering group and ASLEF campaigns to remove stress on individual drivers. He also stressed the correct use of union machinery and exhausting official procedures before turning to industrial action – an issue with which we have often been at odds with our sister unions.

Keith Norman and Mick Whelan joined us for a number of presentations – the first being to ‘Gentleman’ Reg Gardner. I once saw Reg throw a ‘paddy’ at the Booking On Point at Saltley. He clearly said, ‘Oh, I don’t think that’s right’ and went as far as raising an eyebrow and even muttering. Honest!

‘Spud’ (Paul) Taylor is a very popular bloke with his deadpan wit and infectious laughter. He is already missed after his sad and premature retirement due to ill health. Keith presented them both with framed ASLEF certificates and crystal fruit bowls engraved with the union logo.

Ashley

IT WAS a pleasure to welcome the Retired Drivers of the Edinburgh No2 Branch to the Annual ‘Auld Man’s Do’ which was held in the Beechwood Bowling Club on 8 December.

Once again the ‘do’ was well attended. The most recent retired driver on the night was Driver ‘Alfie’ Searle who retired with 38 years membership in ASLEF. He was presented with a retired member certificate and an ASLEF commemorative plate by the District Organiser, Kevin Lindsay and Branch Secretary, Rab Wicksted.

The Branch welcomed our district EC member Hugh Bradley, Kevin Lindsay, RMS Secretary Ray J. Jackson, P. J. Smith the RMS Reporter and the ‘auld man’ himself - Tony West. Tony has attended many a function in our Branch and enjoyed all of them (although whether he can remember them the next morning is another matter!).

The Ladies’ Section of the Beechwood did us proud as ever, providing an excellent meal for which we are all sincerely grateful. Thanks also to the bar staff J im and J ean and all the committee at the Beechwood Bowling Club. Brother James Hogg made a donation of £60 to the retired section, which Ray accepted with thanks. It was also pleasing to report that another ten members joined the RMS (Retired Members Section) on the night (well done, Ray and Co!).

This function has now been going for at least 35 years and it has been my pleasure to have organised the last 15 in my capacity as Secretary of the Edinburgh No 2 Branch.

I’m sure we all hope the function will continue for many a long year. Many thanks to everyone who made it a success in 2006.

Rab Wicksted Secretary - Edinburgh No2 Branch

GS AT BIRMINGHAM NEW STREET TO CELEBRATE 300 YEARS’ SERVICE!

The Branch welcomed our guest speaker Dave Calfe from the EC. Bro Bill Goode took the Chair and Sis Angie Butler moved the meeting through the business and election of officers smoothly and efficiently.

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Branch News

BARNBURY WELCOMES NATIONAL ORGANISER

ON Tuesday 21 November 2006 we at Banbury Branch were pleased to welcome to our branch my friend and one-time colleague (of Battersea Branch) and now I'm pleased to say National Organiser Andy Reed,

There was, as usual, a good turn-out of members, including, I'm pleased to say, retired Banbury Branch Secretary, Bro M Clifton.

Andy spoke after the usual branch business had been concluded. He began on an optimistic note, saying that although the union had been through a very tough 3 years, he was convinced it was now at an end with ASLEF now striving to achieve 100% membership within the Driver grade. This apart, his own current priorities included the misuse by management of SMD and progressing out claim to improve staff travel for non-safe-guarded staff, especially as many TOCs oppose it. As regards pay, Andy pointed out that many pay deals were around 3.5% without strings. He also gave updates on the union’s three main campaigns on freight on rail, the railway pension scheme, and cab conditions and answered questions on Central Trains remapping and the possible use of age discrimination rules to attack conditions of service. Finally he presented 3 of our members - Dave Mollington, Brent Seddon and Ernie Allen – with badges for numbers of years service.

We'd like to thank Andy for taking time out of his busy schedule to attend our branch.

Jim Browne
Health & Safety Rep and acting branch reporter - Banbury

IT’S PANTO TIME AT KINGS CROSS

ON behalf of all the children and parents I would like to thank Kings Cross Branch Committee – and especially Jo Gunter – for arranging Kings Cross Branch Annual Children’s Pantomime and Party.

It was convened at Stevenage where the children saw Dick Whittington and were treated to a sit-down meal afterwards. The Committee, helpers, mums and dads, suitably choreographed by Jo, all mucked in to ensure the children were well catered for.

Once the youngsters were fed and watered they waited in anticipation the arrival of Father Christmas. Once Santa had arrived Jo and Les Muir invited the children to come up and receive their presents from him. This was carried out with much excitement and banter as the wrappings on the presents were attacked with excitement and the contents discovered.

I’m sure we would all like to extend a vote of thanks to Sylvia Quigley who once again brought and wrapped the presents for us, and to Steve Lambert for transporting the presents to Stevenage.

Before I finish, let me remind you of three dates for your spanking new 2007 ASLEF Diary:

● On the First Friday in March, June and December there is Bandy’s get-together in the Lucas Arms in Greys Inn Road at 12.00. All welcome,

● 11 May 2005 will see a Retirement Celebration at Hatfield at 12.00 for friends and colleagues of Tony Dent, Lawrie Manson, Paul Begley and Ian Twells,

● On the last Friday in August there will be the Kings Cross Reunion at Hatfield at 12.00.

Peter Smith
Reporter - Kings Cross Branch

TWO DOWN IN HITHER GREEN

TWO more retirements from our depot recently. Firstly Dave Gilmour who started in the operating dept at North End Sidings in Dec 1958, transferring to Hither Green in March 1960. Dave is one of life’s nice guys. He always has time for a cup of tea and a chat and was loyal to the last. Although only 62 he could not wait to get out of the industry. Hither Green will not be the same without him!

Next Stan ‘The Man’ Parsons. Stan started at Hither Green in March 1957 and spent all his working life on the footplate at Hither Green. He is another of life’s characters and part of the furniture here. Once again, he’s been loyal to the end - so here’s wishing you both all the best in the future and don’t forget to keep in touch.

The next reunion will be Friday 4th of May at 19.00 at the railway club Beacon Road, Hither Green. See you all there!

Ray Cooper
Hither Green

LES MUIR and Mick Moran getting ready to put Father (Goldie) Christmas back in his box for another year at the Kings Cross Annual Children’s Party on 16 December.

NATIONAL ORGANISER Andy Reed presents Barnbury members Dave Mollington, Brent Seddon and Ernie Allen with badges for long service

IT'S PANTO TIME AT KINGS CROSS

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As we look through the pages of ASLEF’s Locomotive Journal 100 and 50 years ago, we see that women’s equality still had some way to go in 1907 - while charging for NHS prescriptions was considered barbaric half a century ago. What do we think today?

100 YEARS AGO …

In February 1907 ‘Labour Notes and Notions’ called for men to sympathise with ‘the motherhood of our race’ after the female half of the population amazed our Journal by their willingness to stand up for their rights …

…….Even the women have joined up to the fighting line! All praise to them. It is true some good sleepy people have been shocked at their boldness in defying Law and Order. But, all things considered, they have clearly demonstrated the truth of what some of us have long thought, and which is well expressed in the old maxim – “He (or she) who would be free, himself must strike the blow.” Surely, when we consider how cheap woman’s life is today; how she is over-worked and under-paid; robbed of all womanhood in the struggle; surely it is our duty to sympathize and help to our uttermost in any movement that will brighten and ennoble the lot of those who are, and are to be, the motherhood of our race.”

50 YEARS AGO …

In February 1957 L.A.Pavitt, the National Organiser of the Medical Practitioners’ Union, told the union Journal that the whole medical profession was opposed to charging for NHS prescriptions …

“Doctors are inclined to be individualists. It is significant, therefore, that the whole of the medical profession is united in condemnation of the new charges for N.H.S. prescriptions, introduced last December. …To make patients aware that doctors have nothing to do with prescription charges, the Medical Practitioners’ Union issued a notice to 26,000 family doctors……

“Why are doctors so incensed? First, because as family doctors they know the economic facts of the home, and object to having a barrier placed between them and the sick persons for whom they accept responsibility. A man is ill? Then the doctor wishes to make him well and to be free to give the treatment needed. He does not want to cut his treatment to fit economic circumstances or to spend his energies in working out costs to see if items on a multiple prescription form can be bought for less than 1s……

“…The doctor knows only too well the consequences of additional anxiety on people already suffering. When a large family suffers from a common infectious disease, it means more than “only an extra shilling”. And those proud aged pensioners whom the doctor visits in their single room. Many would go without food rather than recover money from National Assistance – to them still the “Poor Law”.

(Extracts selected and edited by Jane Pimlott)
OBITUARIES

JIM BURGESS – A MAN OF STRONG VALUES
WITH sadness I report the death following illness of J im Burgess, at the age of 75. He was a ‘Newton Heath’ man from 1949 until he retired in 1995.

Jim was a well respected man of strong values. He was greatly attached firstly to his family and then to his working life. He enjoyed life to the full – and drove a steam engine on his 70th birthday.

Like all men of his age group, Jim was always supportive of his branch, particularly in times of need – a regular occurrence in his time of service. It was a testament to his contribution both to his local community and to his ’rail brothers’ that so many turned out for his funeral. Our thoughts are with Jim’s wife and family in their time of loss.

S. Black RMT – Newton Heath

MICK KENNEDY – WELL-LIKED AND RESPECTED
IT IS with great sadness that I have to report the death of Michael (Mick) Kennedy. Mick was not only a work colleague, he was also a very dear friend to myself and many others.

Mick was born in Preston in 1943 and started on the railway straight from school at Carlisle in 1958. With many others, he moved to Willesden in 1962 to ’get his job’ as a fireman – which is where we first met.

I moved to Hither Green in 1966 to get my driving job, and lost contact with Mick for a time. Our paths crossed again when he came over to Southern for a short time at Charing Cross.

Mick later returned to Stonebridge Park (Wembley) where he rose to footplate inspector.

Mick was well-liked on and off the job. He enjoyed a round of golf - and a round or three afterwards! He and I, and four other former Willesden firemen would meet up when time allowed, either at each others’ houses or an alternative ‘venue’ – or just speak on the phone. In his local watering-hole, because there were a number of Micks, he was known as ‘Mick the Train’.

In the 1990s his health gradually deteriorated. He was first diagnosed as having cancer of the throat, and later the colon. Also, he had to go to Guy’s hospital in London for dialysis three times a week.

Despite having several operations for the cancer, it eventually returned to his throat. Although unable to speak, he fought to the end, finally passing away on 18 December at Guy’s.

He was cared for around the clock by his loving wife Helen, his son Carl and daughter Clare. Mike will be sadly missed by his family and by all his friends and acquaintances, not least myself. Rest in peace, Mick.

Peter R. Bethell retired driver – Hither Green and former Willesden fireman

VIC PRICE – A FIVE-FOOT GIANT
IT IS with great sadness that I have to report the death of Vic Price after being diagnosed with cancer during the later part of 2006.

A native of Dwyfryn Arudwy in Gwynedd North Wales, Vic commenced his railway career as an engine clearer at Machynlleth on April 61. But it was as a fireman during the difficult post-Beeching era of the mid 60s that continued footplate employment meant a move away.

It was in Cricklewood depot that he settled down to London life. Many new friends were made and after passing for driving under the tutorage of great characters such as Joe Smiddy. He became one of the team of instructor drivers who helped guide many a young driver (myself included) through the myriad of diesel traction knowledge required at that time.

There were good times and needless to say after a hard day’s electrical and mechanical studies Vic would always find a suitable place of refreshment for his eager pupils.

The closure of Cricklewood depot in 1983 provided the opportunity to move back to Machynlleth on a redundancy transfer clause. Vic returned to live in Dwyfryn where he got married. He lived there for many years with his wife Ann, daughter Suzanne and his step-sons. For a long time Vic was our only instructor and it was not unknown for pre privatisation management to defer to his judgement on many day to day railway issues. ’Vic will sort it out’ was the common phrase especially in 1988 with the introduction of Radio Electronic Token Block (RETB).

Vic enjoyed firing and driving the summer steam specials that ran on the Cambrian in the late 80s. Outside work he took great pleasure in fishing and gardening and could often be seen on his trackside allotment near the station at Dwyfryn.

He was also responsible for the award-winning hanging basket and tub flower displays on the platform at Machynlleth station.

He was a keen follower of air shows where he could indulge in his passion for photography.

’Vic Bach’ as he affectionately called may not have been a tall man – he was only four foot eleven – but he was a giant amongst men. He is deeply mourned by his family and all the railway men and women of Machynlleth and Pwllheli depots and also the many other staff on the Cambrian.

How we are left to explore the uncharted lands of ERTMS without the wisdom and guiding hand of V. C. Price.

I hope we do his memory proud.

Er Cof Am, Victor Clive Price 1944 – 2007
Paul Adams Machynlleth branch

New ASLEF Regalia for 2007!

ASLEF thermal mugs
These well-made thermal flasks are practical and smart and show where your loyalties lie. Just your cup of tea at £5

ASLEF woolly hat
Get ahead with the new ASLEF Woolly Hat sporting the ’More than Just a Union’ slogan – just a fiver.

USB flash drive
These attractive memory sticks have a capacity of 128MB. They come with a USB cable, a key ring attachment and a lanyard at a cost of £10

BUY ALL THREE FOR £17 – A DISCOUNT OF £1 PER ITEM!
DAVID ‘NOT-A-SPOTTER’ NORMAN!

DAVID NORMAN never had a chance. ‘I was brain-washed,’ he claims. Thanks to his dad’s background and interests, David was always going to have a life on the railways. And so it proved: David qualified as a driver when he was just 21 years and one month old - which probably makes him the youngest person to do so. (And I’m sure Journal readers will let us know if this isn’t the case!)

David recently discovered that in 1871 his great-great-great-grandfather came from Surrey to Derbyshire (where the family now live) to work as a plate-layer on the construction of the railway that was to run between Westhouses and Mansfield. 122 years later, in 1993 David’s father was the ganger who clipped the same track out of use. There is living history in this story, and in this family. But there’s also a great contentment.

The satisfaction comes from, in Dave’s words, ‘Having your hobby as your job.’ It’s an experience shared by his brother, Robert, who works on Huntingdon Station for First Capital Connect. And his sister Louise, a rail clerk who’s engaged to an EWS driver at Healy Mills. Then there’s sister Charlotte – the family rebel! ‘She’s reading English and History at Chester University and wants to be a teacher,’ Dave says in disbelief.

The rail tradition stretches as far as the inevitable nick-name. ‘They might not know I’m David Norman at work,’ he concedes. ‘They all know me as ‘Tiddles’.’

We met at Dave’s dad’s house, so he can show me his heritage. It is jam-packed floor to ceiling with books on rail - time-tables, diagrams, bound magazines, old maps showing closed lines – anything to do with the industry.

The pair frequently take train trips to just about every point of the compass. They run up to Inverness, down to Devon or across to North Wales. When they go on holiday they always find time for a train trip. ‘We’ve been on trains in Ireland, Germany, Holland, Portugal … you name it.’ The best, they agree are in Austria – and the worst were in Romania. ‘They weren’t just filthy – we also got fined for having the wrong ticket – which is hardly surprising as no one spoke the language!’

I wonder aloud if this might sound a bit like train-spotting – but Dave is aghast at the suggestion. ‘No, no – we’re not ‘spotters’ he says. ‘We’re ‘bashers’.

One winter the pair of them took a train that drove through a blizzard from Inverness to Kyle of Lochalsh and back - when they were the only passengers. ‘Got a bit hairy, that one,’ they agree. It seems ‘bashing’ also involves ‘some consumption of alcohol’!

So, in his time off, Dave goes to work. ‘I’d hate a job where I dreaded hearing the alarm ring in the morning,’ he says. ‘I love it.’ He was trained by Arriva, but never drove for them – because they were taken over by Northern. He qualified in October 2004 after a couple of years as a conductor in Sheffield. ‘I’ve never wanted to do anything else,’ he says. ‘When I left school at 18 I bombarded rail companies with applications. I knew one of them would give in and offer me a job!’

Dave exudes contentment with his lot in life. ‘I like working shifts – I even like nights. And I really appreciate the countryside around here as I run up to Lincoln, York, Leeds or Huddersfield.’

‘I enjoy all the banter in the mess-room - which will be just as well when people see this article! If a driver and a guard come in together, you can always tell the driver. He’ll be the loud one! This industry runs on banter and tea, but it’s all good natured. We’re all part of a rail family.’

It’s true – but some more than others, Dave…!!
LETTERS to the EDITOR

YOU TELL US

These are the pages where you talk to us. We welcome your letters, either by mail to the J 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!

EWS Company Council: ‘Training criticism was unfair’

I’D LIKE to set the record straight about Bro Gary Hart’s letter to the December ASLEF Journal. The 25a Supplementary Session is not an RST examination: it is a visual check which is carried out on or around the train. It’s what a driver does when he prepares a locomotive before going off shed, a passenger driver would do before going off a depot. The EWS Company Council, and especially the Traction and Training Sub Group, had a difficult time in these negotiations, especially as the company initially sought a watered down RST examination involving a five day course with some 340 power-point slides. They wanted drivers to be issued with gauging tools, pin hammers, and socket sets so they could crawl under wagons to carry out examinations - and issue all repair cards.

We deflected almost all these proposals and emerged with a 25a Supplementary with only 86 power-point slides.

It must be stressed that a driver is only looking for catastrophic failure when carrying out these checks.

Further, drivers will not be disciplined, as Bro Hart claims, for missing Horseshoe Clips, Scroll Irons or Hanger Pins any more than they are now if they miss something of a catastrophic nature on a loco prep - and it is not part of a drivers’ duty to sign a TOPS List.

Item 14 of the Drivers Duty List (page 52 of ‘The New Deal for Traincrew April 2006’) Enhanced Safety Examination of own train including in service running’ was fully explained to local reps by the negotiators and TCCC - and accepted in a ballot of the EWS membership.

Bro Hart should also read Head Office Circular No 598/2006 - which gives details of ASLEF’s EC accepting the 25a Supplementary Session on the recommendation of the Traincrew Company Council.

Bro Hart seems to have incomplete information and should perhaps have raised his concerns with the Company Council before writing to the J Journal. As a Driver Instructor as well as a local rep, he should really be aware of the contents of training courses!

M. Finn Secretary - ASLEF EWS TCCC (on behalf of the TCCC)

ASLEF’s useful advice

I AM writing to place on record the superb representation I received from Thompsons Solicitors recently when complications arose immediately following the death of my mother. They instructed Michelle Boldeau to act for me – and she did so in a constructive, focussed and caring manner. The details are still too distressing for me to contemplate but I can state that, with Michelle’s excellent guidance, the matter was brought to a swift and satisfactory conclusion.

I occasionally hear people questioning the value of their ASLEF membership. If they had lived through what I did they would realise how fortunate they are to have that backing available.

Thank you again. I enclose a donation to the ASLEF Hardship Fund.

R. W. McMillan

Wolverhampton

I’ll stay in political fund

I HAVE received your recent letter and on reflection I have decided to stay in the union’s political fund. I had thought it was just created to bankroll the Labour Party, and on recent performance they simply do not deserve it.

However, as I now know it is used for other reasons, I am content to carry on contributing. I just hope ASLEF can take more interest in London Underground members, as we hardly seem to get any space in the Locomotive Journal.

M. Moloney Lincs

Dammit

I READ with alarm an item on page 4 of the December 2006 ASLEF Journal. The picture accompanying the report has a caption saying that the ‘Merseyrail fleet needs attention’.

I would argue that it has already had attention - because if the photo is to be believed, the 508 has had a cab transplant from a class 142!

Andy Parr Class 142 Appreciation Society (twinned with The Nodding Donkey Animal Sanctuary) - Newton Heath Branch

Safety first - or profit first?

WHEN First took over the Thameslink franchise in April 2006 they promised improvements. In fact, the first thing they did was to withdraw our 319 units from Selhurst depot, thus leaving Cauldwell depot (with its one shed with four roads capable of holding one 4-car unit on each road) to maintain 60-odd 319 units.

As a result, an alarming number of our cabs are now suffering from severe noise problems.

I call this ‘cost-cutting’ - not ‘improvement’!

It is my belief that if we continue to drive these deteriorating cabs then the wind noise will lead to hearing problems which could lead to drivers failing medicals and having to suffer the consequences of this happening.

Therefore instead of

A matter of course

I WOULD like to take this opportunity to thank the members of Yoker branch 259, District Organiser KV Lindsay and the other branches within District 2 who nominated me to do the TUC Diploma in Occupational Health & Safety. This was a year-long course for Safety Representatives who had completed the TUC Safety Representatives courses stage 1 and 2.

As a course it was intensive and time-consuming but it was also enjoyable, informative and interesting. In addition, it gave me the opportunity to meet and forge friendships with like-minded trade unionists from many sections of the Scottish work force.

Incidentally, I would like to congratulate ASLEF on its superb web site: no matter what subject I was researching, I found useful information on the site to help me with my course work.

The hard work was all made worthwhile when I graduated in November. I will never forget the ceremony in Paisley Abbey - so, once again, thank you for giving me this opportunity.

Derrick Lowrie Tech IOSH – ASLEF Safety Representative
Get rid of rail parasites

I WAS incensed by the latest ludicrous comments of Network Rail’s Chief Executive Mr Armitt. Last month he advocated the replacement of trains with buses and taxis. How can a man in his position put forward a cynical and financially influenced policy that directly contradicts the government’s transport and environmental policies?

In his job he should be championing the railways and extolling their virtues - not advocating the use of road transport.

It is irrelevant that a number of trains load under their capacity. The railway is a public service and should be operated in accordance with that objective.

This industry has played host to a number of greedy self-indulgent parasites (certain managers) for too long. Here’s a message to them all: “Either embrace the industry and accept its service principles or go back to your friends in the City and fleece somebody who’s daft enough to allow you!”

Ian McAdam

Workington’s cycle event successful

THE Workington Branch would like to thank ASLEF branches, retired members and District Councils for their overwhelming generosity they showed in supporting our coast-to-coast cycle ride in aid of the Cancer and Leukaemia Ward Patient Comfort Fund at the Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle. We were overwhelmed by the response across the country and the many personal donations we received.

It was wet and windy for the cycle ride on the 3 December 2006 - but we were used to getting wet driving 153 units and trained for uneven ground as we bounce up and down all day driving 142 units!

More seriously, our colleague who has Leukaemia is now waiting to go in for his final treatment of Chemotherapy and we all hope it will go OK and that he gets good news at last.

Once again, many thanks to everyone. As a branch, it has made us more aware than ever of what ASLEF is all about.

G. M. Armstrong

Secretary - Workington Branch

Freedom of expression?

I HAVE been a member of ASLEF for six years. I, and a vast number of friends and colleagues believe that many of the political policies put forward by the BNP would be beneficial to the country in general. If however we dare to express ourselves freely as per our human rights, we are threatened with expulsion from the union and are branded racist and extremist by the union leadership.

I am getting tired of this rubbish touted by people who are themselves more extreme in their views than the BNP have ever been. I call it double standards. I think it’s about time the union restricted itself to matters concerning the rail industry, instead of wasting time and members money on fact finding missions to their comrades in Cuba, or printing the biased rubbish we see so often in the Loco Journal.

If you have political aspirations, stand for Parliament. I will laugh as you lose your deposit. The Labour party only tolerate unions because of the funding they receive through the political levy. If they didn’t get that, they would laugh at you as well.

Steve Sunley

NOTE: The General Secretary – who is also the editor of the Journal has, because he is debarred by rule from responding to individual members - written to the Secretary of the relevant branch expressing his pleasure in being leader of a union that treats all its members equally regardless of race, creed or colour and recording his distaste for the sentiments contained within this letter. It is, however, published in accord with the union’s policy of openness and transparency.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

To advertise in the ASLEF Journal please contact Sarah Francis on 020 7317 8600 or sfrancis@aslef.org.uk

25th Anniversary of the ‘Flexible Roster’ strike badges - 1982-2007 are now available, £7 each. £2 from every badge will go to the NSPCC. Contact Ipswich branch secretary Andy Derrett on 07902294355 or ‘one’ Anglia LDC rep Trevor Southgate on 07798857528.

BOURNEMOUTH LOYALTY BADGE: The Bournemouth branch is offering a limited number of loyalty badges, struck following the 2006 dispute with SWT. For more information on this rare collector’s item please contact Driver ‘Hans’ Kristian Jendesen, Flat 42, Burlington Mansions East, Bournemouth BH5 1AT. First badge donated to head office, others on first come, first served basis. Price £5 including p&p. Cheques made out to Mr. K. Jendesen

TRAIN DRIVER requires all ASLEF badges, strike, depot closure & small railway items. Prices negotiable. Please call 0208-569-7381 or 07930-419850

ORLANDO VILLA FOR RENT details: www.thehavenvilla-florida.co.uk or TEL.: 0208 441 8526.
LAST month Channel 4 showed a documentary film about the 638 documented attempts on the life of Fidel Castro. Although the proposed murder of a head of state is a serious business, some of the attempts were so ludicrous as to be really amusing.

The week after the programme a major character in the film - former American diplomat Wayne Smith - spoke at Latin American Weekend in London. ASLEF's Tosh McDonald and Simon Weller were among the 1,000 delegates and activists who listened to a remarkable story...

STOP HAVING A POP AT FIDEL! PLEADS EX-EMBASSADOR

As Head of the American Interests Section in Havana, Wayne Smith was effectively the US ambassador to Cuba. Last month he spoke at a Latin American conference in the UK, voicing his opposition to US policy towards that country. A major part of his motivation is that he is a loyal American who finds his country's policy 'plain stupid and very embarrassing'.

'People ask me why, when I’m nearly 80 years old, I still keep working for normalising US relations with Cuba. It’s because I decided 25 years ago that I would keep complaining until we'd done not just the right thing – but the sensible thing. Our policy towards Cuba is stupid. We should just have normal relations and let everyone get on with it. Our current policy gives the Cubans a daily opportunity to have a go at the US. It is ridiculous.'

Wayne sort-of retired 25 years ago. That is, he could not stand working for Ronald Reagan’s administration. 'It was the worst ever - until Bush,' he says. 'Under President Carter we were moving towards reasonable relations with Cuba. After all, why not? The Cold War was over, they were no sort of military threat - Carter thought it was time to engage with them.'

Then Reagan rode in and the atmosphere changed overnight. The rules had changed and the Cuban embargo was tightened. 'Faced with this, early retirement seemed the answer,' Wayne concluded. He says there was recently an even better chance to improve US-Cuban relations. In the wake of the Twin Towers, Cuba offered medical and any other assistance and pronounced itself utterly opposed to acts of terrorism. Bush ignored both olive branches.

Wayne Smith is astounded at the continuing inefficiency of the US administration.

'In May 2004 Bush got some crazy Cuban exiles in Miami to produce a 'Plan for Cuba' which offended just about every Cuban on the planet - left, right, loyalist, dissident. No one likes the idea of being told what to do by a gang of American exiles.'

By july 2006 even the Bush regime had realised the Plan needed revision. Accordingly a 90 page 'Sequel' played down the American occupation angle and explained that they had 59 million dollars to fund people who wanted change in Cuba. But Wayne Smith despairs that this is almost as ineffective and irresponsible. 'Who wants to be seen as the agent of a foreign power, paid to bring down their own government?'

But instead of sitting down and talking about normalising relations, America plots on. They have even publicly earmarked a new leader for Cuba - US Cuba Transition Coordinator Caleb McCarry!

'It has to be time to stop the nonsense and start talking constructively,' Wayne Smith groans. 'It's embarrassing.'

For those who missed the Channel 4 film, the 368 documented ways the CIA and its chums tried to see off Castro over the past 50 years have included some wonderful moments. For example they tried:

● Putting poisoned powder in his boots
● Filling a television studio with LSD
● Poisoning his diving suit
● Filling a shell near the place he often swam with explosives
● Poisoning his cigar
● Exploding his cigar
● Shooting him at a base-ball game
● Throwing him an exploding soft-ball
● Poisoning a milk-shake
● Having an ex-lover add poison to pills he was prescribed
● Invading the country
● Blowing up the podium when he was speaking in Panama.

You really couldn’t make it up!
FREE LEGAL ADVICE ASLEF also provides first class free legal advice - both for members and for their dependents. In the first six months of this year we have secured £1,442,360 in compensation claims! Call the helpline on 0808 100 8009

EMERGENCIES If you are an ASLEF member who is arrested or being interviewed by the police and need legal assistance - day or night - you can call the members' Emergency Hotline on 07980 996159.

SACKINGS OR OTHER PROBLEMS AT WORK Harassment, discrimination or bullying? If your local, branch or district representative is unavailable, call the Industrial Relations department at union headquarters (020 7317 8600) or email info@aslef.org.uk

ASLEF’s legal services - your rights for their wrongs!

Prize Crossword No. 10 set by TLC

Solution to Crossword No 9 which appeared in the January edition of the ASLEF Journal. Congratulations to Mrs. J. Mangham from Doncaster in Yorkshire


Thanks for all your responses to the ninth ASLEF crossword in the January 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 end of the month.

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