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Network Rail: Creeping guiltily in the right direction?

NETWORK RAIL said last month that it was consulting the rest of the industry about taking over the management of more stations and providing rolling stock as well as continuing to take charge of the track. It was music to my ears. It sounded like exactly the steps ASLEF wants put into place to begin securing an integrated rail system. Suddenly, it seemed, a hint of sanity was in the air.

This development backed up the news (reported in last month’s Journal) that senior Network Rail figures had been speaking to Labour ministers in Scotland about taking control of both train and track in Scotland – a plan that had the blessing of Labour (and ASLEF) north of the border.

Were we heading for a bright new future? It seemed so. I began to believe that Network Rail was coming to its senses after the departure of John ‘Let Them Take Taxis’ Armitt. (For those worried about John’s well-being, Tessa Jowell has appointed him Chairman of London’s Olympic Delivery Authority. He should be able to struggle along on the £250,000 a year he’ll be picking up for working a whole 3 ½-days a week).

It emerged later that the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) had asked Network Rail to examine taking over more stations, including Newcastle and York. This is logical, given that Network Rail already owns Britain’s railway stations and manages a significant number, including most of London’s main line terminuses, Birmingham New Street, Manchester Piccadilly and Glasgow Central. It is difficult to see any advantages in the current system whereby the train operating companies (TOCs) manage and maintain other stations. Network Rail can also take a longer-term view of investment in stations than short-term franchise firms.

The position with train leasing is clearly unsatisfactory - a fact underlined last month when the ORR referred the train leasing companies - Roscos - to the competition commission (formerly known as the Monopolies Commission). Surely it makes sense that reasonable profits - rather than the current excesses - from train leasing should be ploughed back into rail rather than paid to private shareholders?

Network Rail then began to panic and felt obliged to put out a statement that it ‘wasn’t trying to recreate British Rail’. Perhaps it isn’t - but the questions it has raised has justified pushing the issue back onto the agenda. If the regulator and the non-profit-making Network Rail both feel there is merit in a publicly accountable body owning the track, running the stations and leasing the trains - then frankly there isn’t much left for the TOCs to do.

Network Rail might feel bad about it - but it’s doing the right thing.
Train leasing companies in competition probe

KEITH NORMAN, ASLEF’s general secretary, said that last month’s news that the train leasing companies – Roscos – are to be referred to the competition commission is ‘just another bizarre scene in the rail privatisation farce’.

‘By their nature, private companies make as much profit as they can. The way to stop excessive money being taken out of rail is to take the industry back into public control,’ he said. ‘Anything else is tinkering.’

The Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) is referring the train leasing companies – Roscos – to the competition commission for a full inquiry. The Department for Transport asked the ORR to look into the situation last June.

The referral will be unwelcome news for the three companies who have dominated the market since privatisation - Angel Trains (part of Royal Bank of Scotland), Porterbrook (part of Banco Santander’s Abbey subsidiary) and HSBC Leasing. They currently charge train operators around £1 billion a year.

It’s best not to hold your breath while the enquiry goes on - it is expected to take about two years. Meanwhile the Roscos have told the government that while the investigation is under way they would be ‘unlikely’ to write leases for new trains or extra carriages for existing ones if uncertainty is created over their likely returns. That is – guarantee our profits or we won’t play ball!

Keith says he also finds it remarkable that the DfT is worried about a lack of competition - because, he points out, privatisation has meant that passengers have none at all. ‘If you want to go from London to another city, you have no choice of rail company.

‘It is time to stop applying plasters and admit this particular patient is dead.’

SAFETY STATS Workers in the UK are 11 times more likely to be killed by their job than by homicide.

In the last four years the Health and Safety Executive has reduced its staff by 10%.

Last year courts awarded an average fine of just under £30,000 for health and safety offences. The average figure for breaches of financial regulations was £216,000.

The watchdog for financial regulation receives more funding to deal with 23,000 firms than HSE receives to deal with over 300,000 firms.

SOUTH EAST RAIL BOOM Figures issued last month show that in the last quarter of last year passenger numbers grew by 9.6% on Southern and 6.4% on Southeastern.

SQUASH – positive moves from Southern

The Southern Drivers Functional Council reports a number of improvements secured from the company to improve conditions in its cabs. Council Secretary Roy Luxford says that by July all the Mark1 Chapman type driver’s seats on 377/171 units will be replaced with new Bombardier type seats and all driver’s seats will be refurbished to an ‘as new’ standard. All the seats will have the swivel mechanism removed which Roy says will make them more stable - and the seat heater element will also be taken out as it has been causing pain to some drivers.

A noise survey is to be carried out to identify and reduce the sounds that cause discomfort. Southern is also in the process of designing and making an appliance for the DSD pedal to ensure a more comfortable driving position.

SOUTH EAST RAILWAY

This picture shows a GNER express train passing the scene of the tragedy at Great Heck that happened on 28 February 2001. It was taken inside the commemorative gardens that were created close to the scene of the accident.

I and a group of friends and colleagues from Newcastle recently visited the gardens to pay our respects to the 10 men who died and the 71 people that were injured on that tragic day. The gardens are a beautiful but poignant tribute to those who died.

During the visit, as a group, we took the time to stand in silence and remember those who are sadly no longer with us. After some kind words from Mark Newton we left a floral tribute at the gardens.

Time may be swiftly passing us by, but our hearts and thoughts are still with those who so tragically lost their lives on that day.

STEVE WAKELAM GNER Driver - Newcastle

BANGLADESH RAILWAY

Three simultaneous bomb attacks on a railway terminal in Bangladesh in early May, with militant slogans claiming to be from al-Qaeda found at two of the sites. One man was hurt in the blasts, which triggered panic among commuters who evacuated railway terminals.

Thin metal sheets scribbled with slogans were found at the bomb sites in Dhaka’s Kamalapur and Sylhet terminals. The third blast was in the railway terminal of the south-eastern city of Chittagong.

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TUC Black Workers’ Conference: Slavery, BNP and Gun Crime

This year’s TUC Black Workers’ Conference was held in Bristol to commemorate 200 years since the abolition of slavery. Bristol became a wealthy city because of the slave trade.

ASLEF’s delegation comprised of Pat Blake, Laurence Campbell, Floyd Doyle and Paul Patmore. Floyd moved an ASLEF’s motion on globalisation and the detrimental affects of global warming on the third world – which was carried unanimously.

Pat Blake seconded a motion from Community calling for the TUC to take steps to ensure that migrant workers are advised about UK unions and encouraged to join once they are in work. This motion was also carried unanimously.

ASLEF’s Emergency Motion on Gun Crime was adopted by the TUC Black Workers’ Committee as a statement and Laurence Campbell moved the statement to Conference.

Our final contribution at the rostrum was from Paul Patmore who spoke on an Amicus amendment to the RMT’s motion on the BNP.

The amendment congratulated ASLEF on our successful case at the European Court of Human Rights. Paul said that ASLEF had drawn a line in the sand and it was up to other unions to follow suit. This motion was carried, as amended, unanimously.

Brendan Barber, the TUC General Secretary, gave his support to a national slavery memorial day. He condemned ‘institutionalised racism in our society’ that means black people are less likely to be able to access training, and are more likely to be unemployed than white people.

Congratulations are due to Floyd Doyle who was elected onto the TUC Black Workers’ Committee.

Electricity meters fitted to trains in green rail trials

THE Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) plans to make the UK rail network more energy efficient by using greener fuels, introducing electricity meters on trains, and making more widespread use of regenerative braking systems.

Meters are being fitted on a trial basis to the cabs of a number of electric trains to allow train operators to monitor the amount of power being used per service. The system is due to go live in a Virgin Trains Pendolino in J une, and is likely to be followed by trials on First Capital Connect and Southern operated rolling stock.

Trials are also being run throughout the year to test blended biofuels on diesel passenger trains, which if successful will see initial roll-outs within 18 months.

The blended fuels involve testing traditional diesel with varying amounts (5%-20%) of seed-based oils, such as rape seed. These will undergo initial live tests on the network over the summer, with Virgin Trains testing a high diesel/seed oil ratio (20%) on one of its Voyager services.

Plans are also in place to extend the number of electric trains with regenerative braking - a scheme that returns between 15%-20% of the power used on each train back to the National Grid as re-useable energy.

Call to protect and re-open disused lines

REOPENING many rail lines across the country is essential to improve public transport and tackle rail overcrowding, according to campaign group Transport 2000. The ASLEF-linked group has published a list of 37 lines that should be considered for reopening, as part of its ‘Growing the Railways’ campaign.

The Conservatives have also called for the protection of Britain’s disused railway lines from development to ensure they can be re-opened ‘one day’.

DESIGN A NEW ASLEF PLATE!

The union has always been proud of its regalia – and the plates it has produced over the years have proven popular and collectable.

We have produced them in real English china, and numbered each item. Supplies of the current plate are on the point of running out and we’d like to design a new one that perhaps looks more modern and a little less “busy” – and we’d like YOU to design it for us.

We’re not looking for a finished design from you. We’d like some sketched ideas that we can give to a professional to produce. If you’d like to mark your union on the union’s next plate, please send your ideas to the Journal at 9 Arkwright Road, London NW3 6AB by the end of this month.

The person to send us the design we use will be awarded with a splendid prize - which we haven’t thought of yet - but it will be good. Honest!
COMPANY NEWS

FIRST SCOTRAIL FLEET DRIVERS PAY 2007
The Executive Committee accepted a pay offer for First Scotrail Fleet Drivers for a 4.56% salary increase.

ONE RAILWAY 2007 PAY REVIEW
The Executive Committee accepted an offer providing a salary increase of 5.1% or £1,664 without 'strings'.

GB RAILFREIGHT – REST DAY WORKING
ASLEF is prepared to sanction Rest Day Working on GB Railfreight until 27th October 2007.

DRS – REST DAY WORKING
ASLEF is prepared to sanction Rest Day Working on DRS until 28th J July 2007.

FREIGHTLINER INTERMODAL – REST DAY WORKING
ASLEF is prepared to sanction Free Day Working on Freightliner Intermodal until 31st December 2007.

NORTHERN RAIL – 2007 PAY REVIEW
The Executive Committee accepted an interim payment of 4.6% or £750 subject to satisfactory progress on discussions concerning Harmonisation.

HULL TRAINS – REST DAY WORKING
ASLEF is prepared to sanction Rest Day Working until 30th July 2008 subject to continued monitoring by our representatives.

RAIL FREIGHT CAN’T COMPETE WITH THIS …

Recent police checks on road vehicles transporting dangerous goods found that as many as half were breaking the law, many because of mechanical defects.

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) crackdown took place towards the end of March, with 25 forces around the UK stopping a total of 505 vehicles. Dangerous liquids, solids, explosives and gases are transported the length and breadth of Britain every day, with the majority travelling on the country’s motorway networks and busy ‘A’ roads.

Of the vehicles that were stopped, 252 (50%) were found to have committed offences. Thirty one vehicles (12%) received a prohibition notice for mechanical defects - affecting brakes, tyres, lights etc - and a further 12% needed to be taken off the road immediately.

Three vehicles were carrying goods not in accordance with the Carriage of Dangerous Goods & Use of Transportable Pressure Equipment Regulations 2004, while others were found to be overweight.

It really does make you wonder – who are the railways run for, exactly?

GERMAN BRAKE IMPROVEMENTS CONDEMNED!

The publicly owned German rail system operator Deutsche Bahn (DB) has fallen foul of the European Rail Freight Association (ERFA) and the Rail Freight Group (RFG). The problem is that DB wants German government finance to replace cast iron brake blocks on their wagon fleet with quieter ones. The forces of the ‘free market’ complain that this should not happen – because then DB would have a modernised wagon fleet at Government expense – a benefit which is not available to other wagon owners. Therefore, other companies are seeking to prevent improvements to a braking system.

It really does make you wonder – who are the railways run for, exactly?

TRAINEE RAILHEAD OPERATIVE/TRAIN (WOMAN)

Starting salary: £17,955 per annum increasing to £18,451 after completion of training + Company Bonus up to £6000 and £4000 Relates. To be based in latteron or London - Elstree is subject to new business contracts.

You will be required to undertake relevant training and assessment. With DRS’s training and/or training programs in order to be competent to carry out fully qualified duties. You are required to accept DRS management requirements. Ideally having knowledge of the rail industry, you will eventually be responsible for carrying out information/warranty data associated with the movement of our specialist freight. This will include onboard, checking and train preparation. With the ability to adapt to a working environment with minimum changes. Also, the highest standards of handling and safety in your working area.

To support the movements you will be required to carry out road vehicles driving and attending duties. You will also work on driver training. You will undertake power test to ACRS, Certificates and TPS. Alternatively, you will be required to undertake the above.

If you feel you have the relevant skills and knowledge for the above positions, and would like to apply please contact the Recruitment section on 01228 406682 for an application form and further details. Previous applicants need not apply.

QUALIFIED TRAIN DRIVERS

Salary: Basic £31,220 per annum increasing to £33030 per annum upon satisfactory completion of probationary period. + Company Bonus up to £6000 and £4000 Relates. To be based in latteron, Sevenoaks, Cheshunt, Cheshunt, London and Elstree is subject to new business contracts.

We are looking for experienced professional drivers working as part of a small and dedicated team. As well as driving and giving a hand on the loading of our wagons.

Closing date: Monday 4th June 2007 at 12 noon
ASLEF ACTIVE AT STUC

ASLEF was at the forefront of many of the motions debated at the 110th STUC Congress in Glasgow, speaking on transport, devolved powers, globalisation and prescription charges.

ASLEF was also involved in the General Council motion calling for support for the Labour Party in Scotland in the Holyrood elections. Our district organiser Kevin Lindsay successfully called a point of order to challenge the chairwoman’s attempt to curtail this debate. He then spoke in favour of the GC statement, which was carried.

Bro J Baxter gave a very passionate speech denouncing the BNP in Scotland, while the district organiser joined other Scottish union officials in a photo shoot publicising the campaign to Stand Up and Speak Out Against Poverty.

I’d like to thank the ASLEF branches who nominated me - Edinburgh No 2 and Glasgow – and express my gratitude to my fellow trade unionists for their hospitality over the 3 days. Finally my thanks are due to Kevin Lindsay, J. Baxter (Motherwell) and EC members Hugh Bradley for freindship and comradeship at the congress. Roll on Inverness.

CHRIS BARRIE
Chairman - Edinburgh No2

FIRST GROUP CHALLENGED OVER ANTI-UNION ACTIVITIES A member of the US Teamsters union who works for FirstGroup said the company’s share-holders meeting in Aberdeen last month that the company has reneged on a commitment to ‘stamp out anti-union behaviour’ in its subsidiary in the United States.

A report by academics has found that First Student, which operates more than 20,000 yellow school buses, is still using anti-union tactics. It accuses the company of engaging in activities intended to ‘create an atmosphere of fear and distrust to prevent employees forming a union’.

Last year, the UK’s largest public transport operator faced an embarrassing shareholder revolt at its annual meeting and First Group chairman Martin Gilbert was forced to promise that the group would ‘do everything in its power to stamp out anti-union behaviour’.

The EGM in Aberdeen was called to approve FirstGroup’s £1.8bn takeover of Laidlaw, which operates Greyhound buses in the US. The company is also seeking a majority stake in a publicly-owned Dutch bus company Connexxion, valued at about £270m.

Employee shareholders will address the meeting and provide examples of intimidatory behavior by managers at bus depots where employees are seeking union representation.

EXECUTIVE RECOMMENDS PETER HAIN FOR DEPUTY LABOUR LEADER The executive is recommending that ASLEF members who are also members of the Labour Party vote for Peter Hain as Deputy Leader. Keith Norman says the decision was made on the basis of Peter’s attitude towards the union/labour link, his commitment to consultation with, and involvement of, ordinary Party members - and his persuasive abilities that we saw to such good effect in the Northern Ireland Irish peace process.

‘I am very grateful for ASLEF’s backing,’ Peter said. ‘I have long had warm fraternal relations with the union and I look forward to that continuing.’

Peter was the first candidate for the deputy leadership to make it onto the ballot paper when it was revealed that he had 48 nominations from Labour MPs. At the time of going to press it was unsure whether the union’s favoured candidate for the Leadership – John McDonnell MP – will challenge Gordon Brown.

China gets a move on

CHINA’S first locomotive capable of travelling at 300 kilometers per hour is scheduled to enter service at the end of the year. The CRH-3, the latest model in the China Railway High-speed (CRH) series, is expected to come off the production line at the end of the year. About 80% of its parts and components are produced in China. The aim is to have 700 CRH trains in service by 2010.

Relief for rotating Bulgarians!

THE GUARDIAN reported last month that our sister union in Bulgaria – KNSB – has secured a deal with its management that means Bulgarian trains are being fitted with rotating chairs which enable drivers to pee out of the window ‘without having to stop or get up from the controls’! Steve Grant, who spotted the item, suggests we sent them details of our Squash campaign!

Beware Branson baiting!

CHRIS DODD says he isn’t going to be rude about Richard Branson any more – as he now realises the full extent of the bearded knight’s reach. Chris was travelling from Birmingham on a Cross Country service, and was asked to show his Status Pass.

As a 30-year railwayman, he has a pass valid for All Companies, All Stations, First Class.

‘I showed my Status Pass to the ‘trolley dolly’ and she asked if I wanted a drink. I accepted the offer and then she asked me if I’d like a biscuit! I said that would be very nice. ‘But then she then told me that my Status Pass did not entitle me to a biscuit, only a drink! It looks like I’ve been paid back for slugging old Dickie off!’
TUC PRAISES ASLEF AT RAIL UNION LEARNING CONFERENCE

TUC Assistant General Secretary Frances O’Grady praised ASLEF’s Union Learning Reps (ULRs) for their ‘professionalism and enthusiasm’ at last month’s third national Rail Union Learning Conference.

The conference, at London’s Institute of Education, was well attended by learning reps from all three trade unions involved in the project (ASLEF/RMT/TSSA) and from various train and freight operating companies.

The meeting gave Learning Reps a chance to meet their counterparts from other unions and companies to discuss developments in different areas, compare progress and compare and share new ideas.

The variation from company to company is massive - some companies don’t have any Local Learning Agreements in place, while others are far advanced. It would be a positive step to secure some consistency across the TOCs and FOCs.

Much of the day was spent in practical workshops on issues such as Money Matters and Communication Skills. ASLEF media advisor Chris Proctor ran the Communications Skills Workshop, encouraging delegates to explore a variety of methods to get over the RUL message.

Andy Reed, ASLEF’s National Organiser, ran the workshop for ASLEF delegates on ‘Bringing Learning into the Union’. He stressed the importance of developing skills-based learning and members being able to access education and training for their professional and personal development - but he also highlighted the need for employers to fund training as they are the eventual beneficiaries of any training delivered.

It was a useful and thought-provoking day and we’d like to thank RUL and ASLEF head office staff for bringing another very successful conference to fruition.

The conference, at London’s Institute of Education, was well attended by delegates on ‘Bringing Learning into the Union’. It really improves your appreciation of the lives and ideas of local trade unionists and radicals – but the tutor says it’s also useful to find out how to research your family’s activist history or that of your workplace.’

The tutor – Bill Whitehead – says it provides a useful balance to ‘ordinary’ history which ‘tends to be about what our lords and masters did to us’. ‘Instead it will concentrate on events when working people took the upper hand.’ Taking action against employers is, he says, part of a proud tradition.

‘Some towns are famous for their working class traditions – like Tolpuddle, Clydeside, Burston and Orgreave – but most towns have similarly heroic pasts. This course will help you find out what happened to ordinary people in your community, using contemporary materials, public art, oral histories and local archives.’

If you’re interested in the course, contact Bill on 0870 066 0854 or by email at bstewart@ruskin.ac.uk

FIND OUT WHERE YOU LIVE WITH RUL!

THE variety of courses that Rail Union Learning (RUL) can put you in touch with is quite remarkable. It is always ready to offer courses on basic skills, languages and the use of computers – but this is only the start. It’s well worth getting in touch with your local learning rep to find out what is available.

One course that is on offer this summer is an opportunity to find out how best to research the history of your local area. The course will be held at Ruskin College in Oxford from the evening of 16 July until after lunch on 18 July. Called ‘How Red Was Your Town?’, the full cost is £200 but this is reduced to £36 for people who don’t have higher education qualifications.

ASLEF’s Chris Nutty has put his name down already. ‘I’m looking forward to it,’ he says. ‘It really improves your appreciation of your area if you know something of its history. I’m particularly interested in knowing about the lives and ideas of local trade unionists and radicals – but the tutor says it’s also useful to find out how to research your family’s activist history or that of your workplace.’

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FIRST NEW-STYLE BRANCH SECRETARY COURSE … REPORTS FROM THE FRONT …

The first new-style branch secretaries’ course took place last month – and we asked participants to reflect on their experiences. The consensus was that everyone had gained from the event – and had appreciated the opportunity to meet colleagues and share experiences …

TUESDAY
‘Tuesday began with an exploration of the job of branch secretary, involving a discussion of the role in dealing with branch membership, the organisation of branch finances, the arranging of branch business and the role of the Secretary in acting as a District Council delegate.’

ALAN DONELLY

RONALD GORDON HILL – MARYLEBONE

THURSDAY
We were given a lot of information about equality issues by Sharon Allen, the union’s equality advisor. She highlighted ASLEF’s landmark victory over the British judicial system in expelling people belonging to organisations like the BNP. Sharon left us with a clear sense of duty to be vigilant in our mess-rooms so that equality becomes a natural attribute of our character. We were left to ponder the TUC card reading, ‘All that is needed for evil to triumph is for good men and women to do nothing.’

After an excellent lunch we looked at how to write a resolution and examined the structure of a motion before watching a DVD about learner reps. We were encouraged to select one in each branch to assist members who wish to tap into life long learning.

CLIVE CHOWN – SALISBURY

MONDAY
‘After some initial confusion regarding the start time, the course began with Keith Norman introducing the week. Then course tutor Julie Weeke’s confident opening gave a taste of things to come. A series of light-hearted introductions to the group was followed by a brief account of ASLEF’s history by Youssef Cockbaine. This led to a quiz highlighting the fact that you never know quite enough. ASLEF’s shared values were promptly followed by a talk from Nigel Gibson on what it meant to him to be a branch secretary. This led to questions from the floor highlighting the lack of opportunity for branch reps to meet and question members of the executive committee from other districts. All in all, it was a very informative opening day.’

MARK MCMANUS – SOUTHEND VICTORIA

WEDNESDAY
The course discussed finances in a session led by the union’s head of finance, Tony Yates-Watson. He gave an informative talk on the content and schedules for the branch annual statement and answered our questions in a productive way.

Youssef Cockbaine ran us through the ASLEF web-site before we turned to a section on international issues, led by Justice for Colombia’s Liam Craig-Best. If anyone had doubts about the importance of unions helping each other in this rapidly shrinking world - they were dispelled in this session. Youssef then addressed the subject of globalisation, stressing that Youssef’s example of ‘Proud to be Union’ was a call to become involved and avoid having a secular approach.

The importance of a European element was emphasised by the example of companies now looking abroad for drivers - with Holland being a case in point.

CHARLES J. GILLARD – AYLESBURY

FRIDAY
On the final day we concentrated on recruitment, beginning with group exercises working on identifying potential members we planned to recruit to Aslef within our workplaces. Then we considered the best approach to take and put this to the test in role-play format. In the report back we listed some important ‘do’s and don’ts’ including the importance of being prepared to listen, being open and honest, and promoting the advantages and benefits of Aslef. A telling point was that while it is possible to sell ASLEF like an insurance policy, the real insurance is standing together in unity.

EC member Simon Weller gave an informative address on one-to-one recruitment, giving us much useful information and many tips to think about. We were also given a handout covering his points, which had been the result of an EC sub-committee’s consideration.

REBEKAH PETERSON – ST PANCRAS
Dinner ladies are finally served with just deserts

Last month a group of Merseyside school dinner ladies won their fight to prove that their local authority employer victimised them - because they were pursuing equal pay claims! The dinner ladies were represented by Thompsons, ASLEF’s lawyers. Vicky Phillips, head of employment rights at Thompsons, reports.

Threatened for claiming equality

Victories like that secured by a group of Merseyside dinner ladies remind us how important it is to have a trade union behind us when we campaign for equality for women workers.

The House of Lords agreed with the women and their trade union (the GMB) that letters sent to them and their colleagues by St Helens Borough Council while the equal pay claims were on going were intimidating.

The 36 women, along with 473 others, claimed equal pay with male road sweepers in 1998. The majority accepted the terms of a settlement offered by the council – but the remainder took their claim to an employment tribunal and won. The tribunal awarded them £560,000 for their equal pay claim.

Blaming the victims

Just two months before their claims were to be heard a senior council official sent two letters, one to the women and the other to all the catering staff, claiming that if they continued their claims and were successful, there would be ‘a severe impact on all staff’. It warned of redundancies and said there was a danger that the claimants might deprive children of school dinners. The Law Lords said this was ‘effectively a threat’ to the women and was ‘a classic case of blaming the victims’.

Inevitably, perhaps, the women did experience some hostility from colleagues who feared for their jobs and their ability to pay for their children’s lunches.

As the Lords said, equal pay claimants are ‘particularly vulnerable to reproach’ and the letter, containing as it did an indirect threat, was as likely to deter an employee from enforcing her claim as a direct one.

Resisting blackmail

For the women the letter felt like blackmail. It took a lot of courage to keep going and I am certain that without the backing of their union and Thompsons’ legal representation, they would not have been able to.

The case should send all employers facing equal pay claims a clear message: that no matter how anxious they may be to settle, they cannot exploit the vulnerability of lower paid women workers in their efforts to do so.

All these women did – and women members of ASLEF have done exactly the same in the past – was exercise their legal rights to claim equal pay for the jobs they did for their employer and the community. Yet they were made to feel they would be personally responsible for the council’s claimed ‘financial difficulties’ if they were successful.

Time to end the pattern

Women workers have suffered injustice in the labour market for centuries. It’s not just pay equality of course. After all, many women railway workers still aren’t provided with such basics of human respect and decency as proper toilet facilities. But there is still an unacceptable gender pay gap - 37% for full-time workers, nearly 40% for part-timers.

Unions have, with a combination of collective bargaining and legal action where necessary, secured significant improvements using the Equal Pay Act which provides a mechanism by which women workers can establish that their work is ‘equivalent’ to that of male colleagues and the right to claim equal pay.

That the victims of the injustice of unequal pay are then victimised for pursuing that right is a disgrace.

The House of Lords’ judgment confirms what we as trade unionists know: that employers cannot negotiate with the trade unions and their solicitors by all means to avoid litigation for all parties - but they cannot intimidate individuals and expect to get away with it.

Reminder: Claim deadlines

Finally, I’ve had a number of enquiries recently about deadlines for pursuing legal claims. There is a clear distinction between personal injury and employment rights cases.

As far as personal injury is concerned, your claim must be lodged within three years of the date of the accident or knowledge of work-related disease. The earlier the claim is able to be commenced by your solicitor the better, as evidence, including medical and witness evidence can go very cold very quickly. The stronger and fresher the evidence, the more likely the claim is to succeed. Ring the ASLEF helpline on 0800 100 8009 for further advice.

As regards employment rights cases - such as unfair dismissal and discrimination - the claim must be lodged with an employment tribunal within three months of the event that led to the claim. Discrimination cases can be regarded as continuing over a long period where the discrimination continues. If in doubt, contact your ASLEF rep.
CUBAN LEADER VISITS ASLEF

The General Secretary was pleased to welcome Manuel Montero to ASLEF’s headquarters recently. Manuel is head of the European section of the Cuban Confederation of Workers (CTC) and called into Arkwright Road on his way to address the Scottish TUC.

As the European head of the CTC, Manuel is responsible for relations between European and Cuban unions on a national level, as well as facilitating links between Cuba’s 19 national sectoral unions and their UK counterparts. He said he hoped ASLEF would strengthen links with our sister union in Cuba.

One of Manuel’s key messages was to encourage trade union members to counter the negative US propaganda about Cuba by visiting and seeing for themselves what the country had achieved.

‘To find out more about trade union tours, contact your sister union in Cuba. Alternatively contact ASLEF’s travel club for details of flights from around £429 - or seven night packages from around £599. Call the ASLEF Travel Club on 01789 261112 or email info@completeworld.com’

To discover what you can do to counter the blockade, contact the Cuba Solidarity Campaign on campaigns@cuba-solidarity.org.uk or call 020 7263 6452.

‘It is unacceptable for the police to arrest peacefully demonstrating trade unionists and to scatter hundreds of other demonstrators by using tear gas,’’ declared ETUC General Secretary J John Monks.

‘Apparently the press was also prevented from covering the event by the police.’

The ETUC’s members include Turkish trade unions and the organisation is concerned about the turn political events seem to be taking in Turkey at the present time.

LONDON MAYOR BACKS TUC CALL FOR ANNUAL SLAVERY MEMORIAL DAY

Mayor of London Ken Livingstone is backing TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber’s call on the Government to introduce an annual day to remember the victims of the UK slave trade.

The mayor called the transatlantic slave trade ‘one of the most horrific crimes in human history’. ‘Over 10 million people were forcibly transported and subjected to utterly inhuman conditions, and several million people were directly murdered. Hundreds of millions of people lives remain affected by the legacy of this terrible crime to this day,’ he said. He wants a Slavery Memorial Day to help educate young people in one of the most odious episodes in history, and illustrate the horrors which gave birth to the poison of anti-Black racism.

‘Critics who argue that such memorial days serve no purpose are misguided,’ he added. ‘The Holocaust Memorial Day has played a valuable role not only in marking the holocaust but also in educating new generations, and challenging anti-Semitism.’

ANGRy AT TURKISH ARRESTS

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) expresses its strongest disapproval of the arrest of Turkish trade union leaders and several hundred trade union activists commemorating the 30th anniversary of a deadly May Day in Istanbul that left 34 dead.

WHO WAS ‘OUR’ COLUMBIAN?

Some readers have asked for more information about the Colombian trade unionist whose name Keith Norman held up outside that country’s embassy (report in the May Journal). As you can see from the picture his name was Jose Gregorio Izquierdo. Jose was the president of the Workers’ Union of Public Services of Arauca, a city on Colombia’s northeast border with Venezuela.

Just after half past six on 13 September last year Jose was driving his motorbike when he was intercepted by ‘unknown assailants’. Some words were exchanged - and then he was assassinated. Only a few days previously a teacher was murdered only yards from the spot where Jose was killed.

Requests have been made for a thorough investigation into the killing but the nature of Colombia at present means that it is unlikely that anyone will be brought to justice. Jose was married with three children.

TRADE UNIONISTS - including ASLEF - gathered outside the Barclays shareholders’ meeting at Westminster in protest at the bank’s refusal to continue handling the accounts of two London-based Cuban organisations.

This is the result of pressure placed on the bank by the United States in order to enforce its blockade of Cuba. Barclays conceded this rather reluctantly with a statement saying, ‘We operate in a number of jurisdictions around the world and that requires careful monitoring to ensure compliance with different regulations.’ Translated, this means the US government has told them not to deal with Cubans.

Protesters argued that this blatantly disregards UK sovereignty and contravenes British laws which insist there is no discrimination on grounds of race or nationality.

● For more details contact the Cuba Solidarity Campaign at 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG or email office@cuba-solidarity.org.uk

The ETUC’s members include the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), the General Confederation of Labour of Spain (CGT) and the European Confederation of Free Trade Unions (EFIT), which give birth to the poison of anti-Semitism.

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One of ASLEF’s main arguments for increased investment in - and use of - rail is that it is the least polluting form of transport. Our case is based on the fact that global warming and climate change are established facts - and not sensational media reports.

Here we examine the reality of what is happening to the planet - and what we can do about it. First, we asked environmental campaigner and friend of the union Alan Simpson, MP for Nottingham South to write a few words on a subject close to his heart.

RE-CYCLING OLD POLICIES IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH

The newspaper headlines sounded impressive. ‘Brown goes Green’. It was only when you looked at the detail that it became clear the only green element he was announcing was in the recycling of existing government policy commitments.

The specifics of this particular announcement related to a promise to build five new eco-towns sometime after 2016. This is the date when the government will require all new housing to be carbon neutral and will deliver 100,000 eco-homes. The real question, however, is what happens to the existing 25 million homes?

The contrast between Blair and Brown is not one between spin and substance. It is between spin and surface. Lift the lid on most of Gordon’s policies and they only tackle a fragment of the real problem. Invariably they do so in ways that are monstrously complicated and incomprehensible.

The real contrast with his housing commitment is to be found in Germany. Currently, Germany has between 40 and 60 of its major cities all committed to becoming energy self-sufficient before Gordon delivers his first eco-home. It is a serious programme rather than a token gesture.

CARBON CREDIT NIGHTMARE

In Britain, if your home generates surplus energy to go back into the grid, there is a huge bureaucracy involved in claiming carbon credits for this surplus. Once you have done so you discover that the price you get paid is peanuts and the banks take a big slice out of any carbon credits. In Germany they have a much simpler approach. Citizens get paid four times the market price of any clean energy they supply – and they do so for a guaranteed period of 20 years. No wonder German households are putting solar panels on almost everything that doesn’t move. Even the cat isn’t safe if it has a long sleep.

RAIL SHOWS THE WAY

So too in transport. Those who are advocates of public transport policies know that the carbon emissions per passenger mile are two thirds lower when the journeys are made by rail rather than plane. It just hacks you off to discover that it is probably three times as expensive to choose rail travel. We end up subsidising pollution rather than carbon savings.

I looked at the figures for carbon emissions for the whole of Britain’s rail, tram and tube network. In 1984 they were responsible for 5.2 million tonnes of carbon emissions. Today the figure is 5.3 million tonnes. In almost a quarter of a century it is the only transport sector whose overall emissions have remained static. You would have thought that it was a ‘no-brainer’ for any government to use this as the basis for a dramatic expansion of the national network, a reversing of price disparities and a massive redirection of freight onto rail. Can we find any of this in the policies emerging from the Treasury? Not a jot.

Gordon prefers gestures to grand plans.

TRAMS ON RIGHT LINES

In Nottingham, we have just been given permission to build lines 2 and 3 of the Nottingham tram network. It is a popular, profitable and extremely successful venture. The trouble is it has taken the best part of a decade to secure the go-ahead. A long time ago, I went to look at the new trams when they were being built in Derby. I was really excited about their design and the fact that they used their breaking systems to actually generate energy that went back into the system. I was puzzled that I didn’t seem to be unleashing the same sort of enthusiasm as my own from the tram makers. It was only when they offered me some international comparisons that I understood the lukewarm enthusiasm.

In Portugal, the city of Porto had begun designing their tram proposals at the same...
time as Nottingham. By the time Nottingham had completed line 1, Porto had a whole city network. I looked across at Karlsruhe, Nottingham’s twin city in Germany, and they too had a whole city network in place. Like almost everywhere else in Europe, the response had been to engage with a serious problem by coming up with a comprehensive solution. This is what we have to do on climate change.

FAILURE NOT AN OPTION
Scientific reports become more alarming each time one is produced. The latest gives us five years in which to begin to make dramatic changes to the way we run our society and economy. We can do this, but we have to dive in and swim rather than paddle around the edges of change. Even China has now introduced feed-in tariffs for citizens to sell energy back into the system. They are also talking about telling industry that if companies do not meet the annual climate change targets, they will forfeit the right to raise money on the capital markets.

Governments will find themselves besieged by problems of energy supply, water management and food security. Market incentives will be completely inadequate to deal with the scale and pace of changes that are required. Elsewhere governments are recognising that they have to govern and lead and direct this change. If we fail to do so in Britain, we will be well and truly in the Brown stuff.

IS CLIMATE CHANGE REALLY HAPPENING?
All the scientific evidence points to the conclusion that that the world is warming:
- Over the past 140 years the earth's surface temperature (over land and sea) has increased on average by 0.6 degrees Celsius - with the greatest increases occurring the second half of the last century.
- This rise may appear small - but it is scientifically significant and has dramatic impacts on climate. For example, Northern Europe is predicted to become wetter and the Mediterranean drier.
- The 1990s were the warmest years in recorded history.
- Since the 1950s scientists have observed the retreat of mountain glaciers, a shrinking of the Artic ice cap and a lengthening of the freeze-free season.
- Warming increases evaporation and precipitation - and both aggregate rainfall and occurrences of heavy precipitation events' at European latitudes - the principal cause of flooding - have increased in recent decades.
- There is evidence that the frequency and intensity of storms is increasing in certain areas.

WHAT CAUSES THESE CHANGES?
The facts point to global warming being caused by increased levels of greenhouse gases - attributable to human activities:
- Carbon dioxide is the main contributor. It is responsible for 80% of emissions from industrialised countries.
- The gas is released into the atmosphere primarily from burning fossil fuels like oil, petrol and natural gas.
- These emissions are growing because the world population is growing and our society makes increasing demands for transport and energy
- Other ‘greenhouse gases’ - which arise from a range of industrial and agricultural sources - are Methane, Nitrous oxide, Hydrofluorocarbons (HFC’s), Perfluorocarbons (PFCs) and Sulphur Hexafluoride (SF6)
- These greenhouse gases absorb infrared radiation in the atmosphere. Doing this changes the dynamic balance between energy arriving from the sun - and energy escaping.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF WE DO NOTHING?
The future cannot be predicted with absolute certainty in any sphere. However, the most logical estimates reveal that doing nothing about gas emissions would lead to:
- a global increase in temperature rise of between 1.4 and 5.8 degrees Celsius by 2100
- Flooding in low-lying coastal areas
- Wetter, warmer winters and dryer, hotter summers in the Northern Hemisphere
- More extreme weather conditions worldwide (storms, drought, heavy rainfall)

IS THE UK MEETING ITS COMMITMENTS TO THE KYOTO AGREEMENT?
- Britain remains on track to meet its commitment under the Kyoto Protocol - to cut emissions of a wider basket of greenhouse gases by 2012 - but only because we don’t include pollution from aviation and shipping industries in the calculations!
- 10 years ago the UK said it would produce 20% less carbon dioxide by 2010, as well as generating 10% of its electricity from renewable sources. It will not hit the first target - and probably not the second.
- Despite these failures, we have now committed ourselves to two - more stringent - targets. Firstly, a legally binding 60% reduction in CO2 by 2050, and secondly an EU pledge for 20% renewable energy (not just electricity) by 2020.
- Some commentators have seen a clear relationship between the warm words being spoken - and the hot air that results!

(Thanks to the Carbon Trust (www.carbontrust.co.uk) for additional research)
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Dismissal threat leads to packed Shrewsbury meeting

FOLLOWING the dismissal of Bro Tony Stickells - a member of ASLEF’s Shrewsbury Branch employed by Arriva Trains Wales - an extremely well attended Emergency Branch Meeting took place last month with EC member Bro Dave Calfe in attendance.

Many members attended the branch for the first time, the roll-call of apologies was unprecedented in my 22 years experience - and the strength of feeling about the matter was unprecedented. The Branch was well represented not only by members employed by Arriva Trains Wales but also from Central Wales showing their 100% support for our comrade in his hour of need. The Chair, Bro Steve Carser welcomed the EC Member and an informal discussion on the dismissal began.

It was suggested that as Bro Stickells was relatively new to the Driver Manager role and had set up a brand new depot (the Arriva Trains Wales section of our Branch) he should have been given extra support and training rather than disciplinary action. He was effectively a newly Post Qualified Driver Manager looking after a newly Post Qualified Driver Depot. The specific allegations leading to Bro Stickells’ dismissal were unclear, but it was a fact that Bro Stickells was off duty when the alleged events took place. One member believed that an anonymous fax and an email were sent to Arriva after Bro Stickells’ suspension and that no attributed complaints had been made by anyone present. The Branch was concerned that the precedent could be set that any member could be dismissed or disciplined on the basis of an unsubstantiated anonymous and malicious letter, phone call, email and/or fax.

The Executive Committee Member assured the Branch that Bro Stickells had the best possible representation available in District Organiser Bro Mick Whelan, adding that the branch had a moral obligation to demonstrate the level of support for our colleague. The branch’s unflinching, resolute and whole-hearted support is expressed in this resolution which was adopted unanimously:

“That this Branch absolutely deplores the actions of Arriva Trains Wales in the dismissal of Bro Tony Stickells and calls for his immediate reinstatement.

Further, we call upon our Executive Committee to give our Trade Union’s full support to Bro Tony Stickells using all means available to achieve a successful outcome to this matter including such industrial solutions as the Executive Committee deem necessary.”

ASLEF membership is an integral part of being a train driver in this country and I am proud that our rank and file members have shown themselves to be true and loyal union members. The message to the train operating companies is clear: you cannot take unjust and disproportionate action against any ASLEF member without taking on our entire membership. ASLEF members at every level will stand shoulder to shoulder with Bro Stickles.

Alan Griffiths Secretary - Shrewsbury Branch

EASLEIGH ENJOY REUNION AND PLAN FOR 2008! On 10 March this year the Locomotive Institute at Eastleigh played host to the annual Eastleigh Railway Reunion. The hall was packed with members old and new, including - among others - drivers, shunters, traction inspectors, guards, platform staff and crane drivers!

It was a pleasure to see senior men sharing a yarn or two with those not quite so senior at an event that offered the chance to catch up with those who have retired or moved to pastures new.

Retired member Pete Morris organised the event and laid on a sumptuous buffet - but in true railway fashion nearly all of it had gone by the end of the day! Peter asked me to remind all current and retired members (irrespective of grade) that you are all welcome to attend next year’s ‘bash’. It will be held on Saturday 8 March 2008.

Keith Bayliss Secretary - Eastleigh Branch

Presentations at Bristol’s April branch

LOYALTY REWARDED: from left to right, Bernard Kennedy (Branch Secretary) Stan Moran (District Secretary) Brian Corbett (Branch Chair) Bob Kent (with Retirement Certificate) Andy Reed (National Organiser) Bruce Parkin (45 year badge) Mick Gould (20 year badge) and Scott Steven (5 year badge)

BROS Andy Reed and Stan Moran attended Bristol branch’s April meeting. Stan gave a concise report covering D & A policy, FGW TCCC, FGW Pay, Harmonisation, PT&R and FGW SMD

Policy. Andy reported on Network Rail fine for Ladbroke Grove, Purley Disaster/Corporate Manslaughter, Union finances, members returning to ASLEF from RMT, Education, National

SCHOOLS, SCHOOLS organised within districts, RUL Project, Local Elections, European Court decision on TU Membership, SQUASH Campaign, the proposed Freight On Rail/Integrated Transport Lobby of Parliament and proposals for a new SMD Policy to fit all TOCs/FOCs and turn current policies around.

Both guests answered questions from the members and afterwards were given a vote of thanks.

Andy then made presentations to Bob Kent, retirement certificate, Bruce Parkin, 45 year badge, Mick Gould, 20 year badge and Scott Steven, 5 year badge.

Congratulations to all four loyal members. This indeed was a special occasion, a fact reflected in the high attendance.

Bernard Kennedy Secretary - Bristol Branch
AT THE meeting of the Portsmouth Branch on 17 April we had the great pleasure of presenting Bro Barry Moore with his retirement certificate after 27 years of service. Barry was also presented with a model train in recognition of the time and effort he gave as a Local Level Representative and for his contributions to ASLEF Portsmouth Branch. Barry was a well liked and respected Driver at Fratton Depot. He had a great sense of humour - which was tested to the full when he was used to check car passes when medically downgraded. Although he never quite mastered the forward and reverse position on the new Desiro trains, his sense of humour always carried him through. Barry will be missed by all at Fratton Depot.

John Glazebrook Secretary - Portsmouth Branch

LESS MOORE FOR POMPEY

GS TURNS OUT AT WEMBLEY!

AT A joint Branch meeting of Wembley Park and North Greenwich on 29 March 2007, we had the pleasure of the company of the General Secretary, Keith Norman and National Organiser, Andy Reed.

Because of the new train staff depot at Stratford, the North Greenwich Branch is to be re-badged ‘Jubilee East’ to reflect the Branch sphere of influence. Gary Comfort gave a brief report on the new depot and also on the new ‘Welcome’ letter aimed at new staff. Four new members at Wembley Park depot were welcomed to the branch.

Gary then took a long leap across a couch and in landing he managed to break the glass case certificate of honorary membership for Phil Dye which the General Secretary was due to present! He’s been advised not to bother about the long-jump for the Olympics! Keith Norman said it was a first for him to present a smashed gift!

Phil, who is retiring on medical grounds, saw the funny side of the incident and agreed to a further presentation at Head Office. I don’t think Gary will ever live it down.

The General Secretary reported on meetings held with Tim O’Toole regarding ‘Business for the Future’. The Company expects an increase of 300 - 400 staff as services increase. He went on to open discussions on the SQUASH campaign about cab conditions, head office accommodation, main line management attitude to level crossing problems, Bro Bob Morgan, relations with RMT, the LUL pay deal, TSSA, and union opposition to driverless cabs. Keith was thanked for his interesting report.

Andy Reed reported on ASLEF recruitment, Society finances, ASLEF representatives, increase in workload at Head Office, East London Line closure and possible transfers to the Main Line, and Society recognition of LUL certificates for work as train drivers.

Steve Connolly, Secretary of the Wembley Park Branch, said that discussions would take place with the RMT about how best to combat management - before moving on to present Phil Dye with a cheque and to wish him all the best for the future. Phil Dye suitably replied.

To finish the evening, members of both branches joined Keith and Andy for a bit of socialising and the usual ribbing that normally comes about from these meetings.

Mike Beck

AND FINALLY ....

This picture was sent to the Journal with the suggestion that it portrayed one of the new dynamic breed of rail managers taking a fresh approach to route learning. Any other ideas of what it might demonstrate should be sent to the Editor ... !
Looking through the pages of back issues of ASLEF’s Locomotive Journal, 100 years ago we find words of wisdom about the close link between a driver and his fire-man, while 50 years ago smoke and grime was the hot topic at a weekend school....

100 YEARS AGO....

In June 1907, Ut Prosim gave advice in ‘Chats on the Locomotive’ about how a driver should treat his fire-man....

“We will, to begin at the beginning, start with the embryo fireman, when he has, by being registered, emerged from the chrysalis state of cleaner to that of a full-blown fireman, at least a fireman in name if not in the true sense of the term. Of course, there is a vast difference in adaptability of young firemen, some adapting themselves to circumstances in a very short space of time, and as naturally as a duck takes to water, while others require to be handled in a very careful and patient manner.

The driver should in this case remember that there was a time when he himself required the self-same instructions, and that the relationship between the two is commenced as it can be continued.

Let the driver also remember that a “request” is given as easily as a “command”, and is quite as effective in ordinary circumstances. Their turn commences with booking on duty, and the young fireman should be resolved from the start that as far as in him lies he will never be late on duty. To do his work properly he cannot afford to be late, and at best it is a deplorable habit, by which not only self-respect is lost but also the confidence of your superiors.”

50 YEARS AGO....

In June 1957 W. Bagnall gave an account of the union’s weekend school at Babbacombe, where a main speaker was from the Socialist Medical Association....

“A danger foreseen is a danger half avoided” runs the French proverb. This could have been aptly described as the text for at least two of the lectures at D.C.3 Weekend School at Babbacombe on April 27 and 28. Dr. Hugh Price of the Socialist Medical Association, who specialises in diseases of the respiratory organs, was there to tell of the hazards with regard to dust, smoke and grime, all components in high percentages in our daily life on and among the engines and the “atmosphere” they create.

“.... Graphic illustrations of lung sections of people who had had these very conditions told fully the story of the fight of the lungs to maintain themselves under abnormal conditions. Dr Price made us conscious that we MUST make some effort to guard our people against the possibilities of these terrible diseases that ARE caused in the main because of foul atmosphere.

Mr. John Williams, 17 years a lawyer in “Blood and Bones” (his version of the Workmen’s Compensation machinery) stated that locomen come fourth in the list of dangerous occupations.”
HUGHIE WRIGHT NOBLE (1924-2007) - A HERO

WE ALL knew Hughie Noble of the Clan Macintosh as a great guy, a pleasure to be with, a real Scotsman - and a gentleman.

Hughie’s life is like a best-seller. Until the age of 19 he was a dairyman near Aberdeen, before joining the Royal Navy serving on HMS Wellesley as an Ordinary Seaman. He was promoted to Able Seaman and transferred to HMS President 111, and later to HMS Caggala. Later he was seconded to an armed merchantman in charge of guns.

He served in the Mediterranean and the Baltic Straights on the North Atlantic fleets to Russia, where submarine, ship and air attacks were an everyday occurrence.

Last year the Prime Minister presented him with the Arctic Star Medal to add to The North Atlantic Star, the War Medal, Italian Campaign Medal, and the 40th, 50th and 60th Anniversary Russian Convoy Medals.

He devoted his time between working and raising a family of five, who blessed him with five grand children and two great grand children. He never forgot the children of a tuberculosis hospital in the Russian naval port of Murmansk, where he earned the name of ‘Santa-come-early’.

After leaving the service he joined the railway at Aberdeen progressing from Fireman to Driver, working on the whisky runs in the Scottish Highlands. He even drove the Orient Express.

In the 60s with the onset of dieselisation, Hughie transferred to Kings Cross, spending time in Ilford Hostel before being allocated a house at Hatfield.

He met most of the Royal family at a host of Naval occasions, including the Queen’s Garden Party - and was even mentioned in the Queen’s Speech!

At 82, Hughie was given the funeral he had earned. The British Legion and Merchant Service provided a guard of honour and all his family, friends and former service and work comrades gathered at St John's Church at Hatfield to pay their respects and voice their own accolade to him, and say thank you. He gave so we may live in a free country.

May he rest in peace.

Peter (PJ) Smith
Reporter - Kings Cross Branch

GEOFF KERR - DIED AT JUST 47
It is with great sadness that I report the sudden death of Inverness Branch member Bro Geoff Kerr who has died at the age of 47 while out jogging.

Geoff started his railway career at Dundee as a second man before becoming a driver at Perth Depot. He moved to Inverness as a driver team manager and latterly was accommodated on platform duties. Throughout his career he was a proud ASLEF member.

Our thoughts are with Geoff’s wife Linda and their family.

Anthony Fraser
Secretary - Inverness Branch

KENNETH CRAWLEY (1925-2007) - A FULL LIFE KEN (‘Don’t put your bag on the table!’) Crawley earned his nick-name while a pilot driver at Bounds Green Depot. Anyone daring to put their bag on the mess-room table would be strongly reprimanded by Ken.

Born and bred in Enfield, Middlesex, Ken attended Chase Side then Enfield Central schools. Aged 15 he went to work in a small local sheet-metal firm. Three years later he received his call-up papers.

He joined the Royal Navy where he served on Corvettes and Minesweepers as an Ack-Ack Gunner. His tours of duty included escort on the North Atlantic Convoys to Russia, on D-Day he was on the lead mine sweeper flotilla clearing the way for the Normandy Landings. Later he served in the Mediterranean and VE Day found him in Trieste.

The devastation he saw at first hand in Hamburg left a lasting impression. In his words: ‘There was not a brick stood on brick.’ We shared a view of war as senseless waste.

After the Navy, Ken was made redundant, so he applied for a job on the railway at Hornsey Loco, where he progressed to Driver. People think re-cycling is a new thing, but Ken believed you ‘only scrapped it if you couldn’t mend it’. He also loved modern technical advancements.

We send our condolences to his wife Doris, their 3 Children and 8 grandchildren and thank all the friends, relations and colleagues who turned out to support them at Ken’s funeral. He was another who served so that we may live in freedom. May he rest in peace.

Peter (PJ) Smith
Reporter - Kings Cross Branch

BRO KEVIN WEST - SEA AND RAIL
We would like to pay tribute to one of our brothers at Aylesbury, Kevin West, who sadly lost his battle against cancer and has passed away.

Kevin served at Aylesbury from March 1991 until he took early retirement in December 2006 due to his ill health. We will be remembered by his colleagues at Aylesbury for his love of the Navy - which he spoke about often to his colleagues. He loved to tell a joke, but we will also remember him sitting in the mess room doing his crossword.

We would like to pass on our deepest sympathy to his wife Jane and to other members of his extended family.

J im Gillard
Secretary - Aylesbury Branch

TINK TAYLOR – GREAT RESPECT
It is with great sadness that I have to inform our membership of the passing of Brother Thomas Arthur Taylor who finally lost his long and courageous battle against a brain tumour. ‘Tink’ as everyone knew him was held in great respect and was a stalwart of the Society even in retirement and with his illness.

Tom started his career as a cleaner at Langwith in 1949 following 2 years National Service in the army and a brief spell at Barrow Bill. He moved to the newly-opened Shirebrook Depot in 1966.

He became active within the Society, and took on the responsibilities of a local rep in the early 70s and became Branch Secretary in 1978. He held this position throughout the troubled years of the early 80s up to the depot’s closure in 1991 when he moved to Worksop.

On his retirement he became actively involved in the Retired Members Section.

His funeral was a testament to the respect in which he was held. Some people were unable to get into the church for the service.

He was a proud and loyal servant of ASLEF to the last and our thoughts and prayers go out to his wife Audrey and all his family.

K. Gillett
Secretary - Worksop branch
IT'S A bright sunny day in Skipton – just the place to meet Martin Williamson, because the weather suits his disposition and the place is clearly his natural surroundings. He grew up in North Yorkshire's wide open spaces and for the last two years Skipton's been his work base, too, where he works as a train driver for Northern.

Martin's had a variety of jobs since he hurried out of school at 16, and it was quite a journey to find what he wanted to do. 'I think it's even better because I had a few false starts on the way.'

Martin's naturally a quiet man and says this article will be a bit of a surprise for his work-mates. But he says the banter he expects is one of the pleasures of the job. He's always enjoyed it – from his first job when he became an engineering apprentice at nearby Crosshills. 'I was there for ten years,' he says, 'I served my apprenticeship for five, and then I worked in every department, from the factory floor to the drawing office.'

So – with a new wife, a fresh mortgage and a steady job – he decided to give it all up. Luckily Barbara encouraged him - instead of pointing out that this was financial folly!

The pair somehow got through the next four years living off baked beans as Martin worked for his degree in graphic design in Leeds. 'During college holidays I did – well, anything! I spent a few months sticking labels on paint tins. Times like that make me appreciate what I've got now.'

He specialised in three-dimensional animation and spent a few weeks in London working with the makers of Spitting Images. 'I enjoyed it, but animation wasn't fashionable just then – and the only way I was going to get on was to move to London. I realised just how rich I was to have the Dales on my doorstep. I have only to walk a few yards from my home to be in one of the most beautiful and peaceful places in the world.

'I can hardly believe sometimes that I get paid to drive a train out to places like Ilkley and Ribble Head!'

But there were more twists before Martin took to train driving. After college he had a shiny new degree – but no job. So he began some part-time work for Help the Aged. They quickly spotted his potential and moved him into their public relations department – where he once persuaded 600 people to line-dance across the length of the Humber Bridge!

But it was a constantly demanding life with masses of travel and eventually he found work as the marketing manager of Craven College in Skipton.

So what did he know about marketing at this time? Martin's face breaks into a broad smile. 'It wouldn't have filled the back of a postage stamp!' he confesses.

But he's not the sort of man to fail – and he didn't. That period of his life ended only when fate intervened: this time in the form of a nasty liver infection that led him to reassess and re-evaluate his life.

'I saw an advert in the Yorkshire Post for train drivers and went along quite naively thinking a few people might apply – in fact there were about a thousand of us at the interviews in Leeds! But happily for me I was one of the lucky ones.'

Except that during his training – involving a 60-mile round trip to York - he was fetching home just half his previous wages. It was back to the 'beans on toast' for a while! He also then discovered that his father's uncle had been a signalman on the Settle to Carlisle line and a great grandfather had worked for Midland. 'That sense of tradition is another reason I feel content with my work and I like the responsibility and the feeling of working on a necessary service. The hours can be inconvenient, but from the first moment I stepped into a cab I felt at home.'

And to crown it all not only is Barbara - who's now lecturing in a college in Bradford - relieved that beans on toast are finally off the menu – Martin's also got approval from his 13 year old daughter, Emily.

'She says it's much cooler to be a train driver than a marketing manager! So that's swung it really ...!'

Would you be prepared to be featured in future editions of this column, or know someone who would be a good subject? If you do, please let us know at the ASLEF Journal, 9 Arkwright Road, London NW3 6AB or journal@aslef.org.uk
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 ournal 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!

Professional publicity

I THOUGHT other ASLEF members would be interested in a resolution passed at our branch last month about the union’s approach to the media at the time of the derailment at Grayrigg. It reads:

‘We would like to put on record our praise for the way that our union represented itself after the recent derailment at Grayrigg. We believe that the comments of the Cardiff branch in the April Journal are totally uncalled for and way over the top. Unlike other union leaders who came out ranting and raving without knowing the true facts, this branch totally supports the actions of all officers concerned. They showed that we are a very professional union that has the interest of our members at heart - and that we are not just out to score cheap points without reflection.’

- John McCue Secretary - Glasgow

Come in number 3 - your time is up!

I couldn’t believe the article in the April J ournal from Scotland’s First Dictator - sorry, Minister - blowing his trumpet about New Labour’s achievement and goals on transport. This is the man who recently stated in Holyrood and on national TV that our sister union’s striking signalmen should go back to work. It’s the same man who in 2002 accepted a £5,000 pay rise from the Senior Salaries Review Board for MSPs - but told striking ASLEF drivers who were looking for the same that we were being greedy and hurting Scotland’s economy. Laughable - or what?

So why did the J ournal give a full page to a man who clearly has no respect for the working man’s right to strike - or even to complain about our pay and conditions? I think it’s shocking - but then, maybe it was to coincide with the elections, eh, Jack?

For the record I am a Labour supporter - but I’ve no time for the New Tory.

- Alan Reid Yoker

Thanks ASLEF - I’ll be back!

HAVING just recently retired early after 42 years on the footplate I would like to thank all of my fellow members of ASLEF for their messages of goodwill and the presentations made to me.

Throughout my membership I have always been well supported by the union and its members not only as a representative, as a Branch Secretary and at LDC and Company Council Level, but as an individual member. It was a comfort to me that I had ASLEF’s backing throughout my career.

I think it is important to remind ourselves of probably one of the finest agreements signed by any trade union in this country - the 1965 Manning Agreement that kept so many of us in employment and in earnings following the demise of steam. That one agreement kept a generation of us on the footplate and protected many others whose promotion was thwarted by redundancy caused through the contraction of the railway industry.

I am delighted that our union offers the opportunity to maintain links through the retired members section. It’s an option I fully endorse - and I look forward to participating in.

- Bill Davies Bedford Branch

Four didn’t follow!

I’M sending you my subscription for the Retired Members Section and thought I’d say that I quite like reading the J ournal each month - especially anything to do with the era of steam.

- Bill Monteith Recovery Ward - Bridgwater Hospital!

‘I was only worried about the speed cameras!’

DESPITE the sweltering conditions I am pleased to report that I completed the 2007 Flora London Marathon in an elapsed time of 6h 28 mins. Whilst this is not in the Paula Radcliffe bracket I think that it was a fair effort given my previous running history. Also, I kept stopping at red traffic lights and slowing down for speed cameras. Had I realised that they did not apply to me on the day I am confident that I could have given the race leaders a run for their money!

Can I say a big ‘thank you’ to all those who were kind enough to sponsor me. I have so far managed to raise nearly £1,200 for the RNLI. If you have not yet paid the amount that was pledged could you please do so ASAP so that I can get the money off the RNLI. You can either send it to me at Bridge Farm, Penzoy Avenue, Bridgwater TA6 5BT, see me personally at work or out and about. If you are at SDC then you can give it to Alison Monteith in Finance.

Some of your responses to my last begging e-mail have only just arrived on my computer. Please accept my apologies for not having responded sooner.

Once again, thank you very much. It was an experience that I will never forget. As the aches and the pain subsided I am horrified to find that I am contemplating doing it all over again. I am sure I could do it quicker now that I understand the rules!

- Bill Monteith Recovery Ward - Bridgwater Hospital!
I’m proud to tell you that my wife and I have recently celebrated our Diamond Wedding anniversary – despite my working all those years, mainly on steam! I have a fine family of four sons – none of whom unfortunately followed in dad’s footsteps. Best wishes for more ASLEF success in your efforts for our fraternity.

W.V. King
Worcester

Well organised, Mick!

I’D LIKE to thank Dave Tyson and Tony Patterson on behalf of the representatives from Central Trains, First Capital Connect, Midland Mainline and Silverlink who attended the pensions seminar at Peterborough. They offered lucid information and explanations about this complex subject. Thanks are also due to Mick Whelan, District 6 Organiser, for arranging the seminar.

A.T. Farmer Secretary – FCC
Company Council

ASLEF support invaluable

I AM writing to express my sincere gratitude to the local representatives, members of the company council and any other ASLEF union officials who helped and advised me during my recent problems at work.

I know everyone worked tirelessly in obtaining a satisfactory outcome but a special mention should be made for Brothers Kevin Eade, Roy Luxford and my local rep Paul Overington.

If it were not for all the support of my fellow union members, I am sure I would no longer be a train driver.

C. Booth
Brighton

Double standards

I was quite saddened to read the self-righteous self-congratulatory responses to ‘the BNP letter’ you published in the February Journal.

I think it’s quite ironic that many people are incensed about an ASLEF member supporting a neo-Nazi political party – yet no-one seems to mind Keith Norman asking for support for Tony Blair and his Government.

Let’s remember that the BNP can only dream about shipping people they don’t like or agree with off to concentration camps. Tony Blair’s government has actually done it – at Guantanamo.

Let’s also remember that America has recently passed an act allowing ‘aggressive interrogation’ – torture by any other name, and this government is in bed with these people. This union remains very tight lipped about it.

Yes – the BNP are despicable in their views and all support should be discouraged wherever possible. But let’s not lose sight of what is actually happening. Let’s deal with human rights abuses that are being perpetrated right now by our own government and its allies. Let’s take a more assertive stance and stop turning a blind eye.

Craig Thomson
GNER
Edinburgh

I don’t believe my ears

The April Journal reported on positive moves from operators on 66s. But there was one omission – no mention was made about in-cab noise levels which has always been my biggest health and safety concern with these locomotives. Did the companies provide any feedback on the noise problem?

When I worked at EW&5, they said the noise levels were ‘perfectly acceptable’. However, two locomotive engineers have told me that noise and vibration are inevitable with cabs that are welded to the same underframes that a 140 litre turbocharged 2-stroke diesel engine is directly bolted to.

There are no engine mounts you’d expect in a car: no big rubber pads or resilient mountings to absorb some of the vibration. It’s just metal bolted to metal – at least from the point of view of an untrained eye. The next time any Class 66 Drivers are in the engine room during preparation duties check this out for yourself. The engine bedplate is apparently bolted straight onto the underframes. So when you are driving a 66 under heavy load a lot of the noise seems to be coming from under the front desk. This is the noise and vibration travelling through the underframes, straight underneath the noise absorption panels on the cab walls and into your ears. In North America the latest locomotives from EMD are offered with an optional ‘isolated cab’ which sits on special mountings to greatly reduce the noise and vibration problem. I found the ASLEF proposal that drivers use ear defenders when provided rather ambiguous. Are the companies going to issue ear defenders specifically for use when driving? Will this be passed as safe by the HMI / RSSB? A colleague at another depot was recently ridiculed by a supervisor for daring to put on ear defenders. It would be helpful if ASLEF could make a clear statement on the use of ear defenders.

I have to add that many of the problems are caused by driver and shunters – ASLEF members – who dump rubbish on the floor and put their boots on the fascia of the instrument panel and the inside of windscreen; wrecking sun-blinds and other unsocial activities.

Cameron Tyre
Motherwell

319s are not this plush!

I’d just like to correct you about the pictures of the cab interior which you published on page 8 of the April Journal.

You say that the photos are of a 319. In fact, they are of a 377.

I’ve never seen a 319 look anything like that plush!

K. Moore
Selhurst

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

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

NEW! ASLEF LGBT Badges are now available for sale.

If you wish to purchase one send a cheque made payable to ASLEF for £5.00 (this includes postage and packaging) to the Equalities Adviser at ASLEF Head Office.

CLASS 90 locomotive Tie Slides, Cufflinks & Badges, available in high quality gold & silver plate. Tie Slides £5, Badges £3.50, Cufflinks £9.00, Postage £1.00 per order. Contact Brian Aitkenhead on 07957403679 or at 19 Pine Close, Rendlesham, Woodbridge, Suffolk, IP12 2GD.

COLLECTOR requires ASLEF-Coalville NUM 1984/5 strike badge. Will pay £200. Also ASLEF 1982 strike badges, centenary and closure badges. Also NUR badges. Desperate for Bedford 1982 strike badge in chrome or gilt; Portsmouth 1982 strike and Doncaster 1982 gilt strike badge. Contact Barry Jones on 01709 588648 or at 25 Windermere Close, Mexborough, South Yorkshire. S64 0PT.

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 & centenary. Also interested in other British Railway badges, small signs & 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.
Margaret has been painting for four years after a chance encounter with an artist on a beach in Antigua when she and Bill were on holiday. She'd painted when she was in her teens, and when Luis, the Antiguan, offered to prepare a canvas for her, she produced a beach scene in acrylic. Luis was so impressed he offered to put her work into his shop - and Margaret was so encouraged that it re-kindled her enthusiasm for art. She now paints every week at the studio of John Frederick Black, a well-known artist in Rushden, and now a family friend – and she's active in his Fellowship of Professional and Amateur Artists (FPAA).

One week as she was off to her art session she casually asked Bill if there was anything particular he would like painted. Fighting off the urge to say 'the front room' he fished out a copy of the magazine 'Steam World' which had a photograph of the Austerity on the cover. 'How about painting that?' he asked.

Margaret immediately thought it was an interesting and challenging subject. It would be difficult to catch the colours and texture of steam but if it could be done it would be an imposing and dramatic painting. That's what she set out to do – and when she'd finished, Bill could hardly believe his eyes.

'I thought it was marvellous,' he says. 'I'd always appreciated her painting, but I though this one was quite extraordinary. 'I'm sure that it will bring back memories of their everyday work to all ASLEF's more senior members. 'I'm very impressed with her talent and the painting has given me great pleasure.'

And Bill wasn't alone. When they sent a copy of the painting to the original photographer, John Houghton, he wrote back in glowing terms saying he thought it 'captured the atmosphere very well'. Margaret explains, 'I used watercolour because it is a 'quicker' more translucent medium than oil, acrylic and gouache - but you only get a few chances to change anything with watercolour. I entered it in a local village show – and ended up polishing a silver 'Best in Show' cup for a year!' Bill then realised he was onto a good thing and he says he began the quite lordly activity of 'commissioning paintings'! Some of the results of this are to be seen on this page.

So has Margaret taken to only painting trains? Not a bit of it. 'They are a fascinating subject but I think I'd get stale if I didn't paint other subjects as well,' she says. 'In fact, most of the things I love lend themselves to painting - nature, open spaces, distant horizons, animals and gardening. I'm never short of a subject to paint.'

'But having said that, at the moment I'm working in oil on another steam scene. It's not finished yet, but it shows two Stanier Pacifics, one with the Royal Scot headboard. It's modelled on some photographs I took on the Severn Valley Railway at Bewdley.'

But Bill doesn't really need pictures to remind him of the railway, because he regularly talks about his working life 'on and off the footplate' to a whole range of local groups, from gardening and stroke clubs to archeological societies and women's institutes. 'I speak about my experiences in a job I loved – but I also relate some of the tales I've been told over the years. Or, at least, the ones that are suitable!'

Bill says it is extraordinary what talents are hidden within people and thinks it's sad that they are not always recognised or used. So maybe he could take up painting himself, I suggest. 'I might,' he says. 'Someone's got to do the front room!'
ASLEF’S legal services - your rights for their wrongs!

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 more than just a union

Prize Crossword No. 14
set by TLC

Solution to Crossword No 13 which appeared in the May edition of the ASLEF Journal. Congratulations to Mr A Brindley from Hants.

ACROSS
1 Liverpool 8 Mile after mile 11 Rage 12 Ocean 13 spur 16 Ignores 17 Disdain 18 Follies 20 Magical 21 Rail 22 Agent 23 Amen 26 Sergeant Major 27 Seashells

DOWN
2 Iced 3 Effects 4 Pre-paid 5 OHMS 6 Diagonal lines 7 Clapham Common 9 Train fare 10 Crinoline 14 Trail 15 Usage 19 Signals 20 Manatee 24 Ogle 25 Fail

Thanks for all your responses to the thirteenth ASLEF crossword in the May 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.

CLUES ACROSS
3 Fast train on a short run (8)
8 Sign of fatigue (4)
9 Springs, shock absorbers, etc (10)
10 Lose one’s footing (4)
11 View (4)
13 Gives in (5)
17 Compact computer (6)
18 Swerved (6)
19 Type of cheese (5)
22 Boast (4)
24 Make money (4)
25 Longest lock on the Thames (10)
26 Fuel (4)
27 Came off the track (8)

CLUES DOWN
1 Keeping the train on track (5)
2 Checked carefully for faults (9)
4 Emblem of 11 November (5)
5 Greek column (5)
6 Not travelling first class (5)
7 Best seat at the boxing match (4-4)
12 Head of the Catholic Church (4)
14 Reason to pull the communication cord (9)
15 Got off the train (8)
16 Finished (4)
20 Beneath, opposite of 16 down (5)
21 Perfect excuse (5)
22 Brass wind instrument (5)
23 Foot pedal (5)

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

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Address..........................................................................
......................................................................................
............................................Postcode...........................

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