RAILS IN WALES

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THE central pages of this edition are devoted to rail in Wales. It is where I was born and I will always retain a deep respect and affection for the land and its people. The most vivid memories of my youth (the publishable ones anyway!) centre around the working people of South Wales, principally my fellow workers on the railways – and members of the Welsh mining community.

I met many of my former work-mates last month when I went to a reception the Swansea branch kindly laid on to mark my 45th year as an ASLEF member. The gathering brought back many memories of distant, often happy, days, but we also – almost inevitably – spoke about the events of the mid-1980s when the Tory government vandalised the Welsh coal-fields.

A vindictive right-wing government was hell-bent on revenge on the miners for standing up to previous Conservative governments, and for representing values at the opposite end of the scale from their culture of individual greed. At enormous cost, which we are still paying today, they closed pits, destroyed an entire mining industry and left whole communities devastated and poverty-stricken.

It was a government that waged war on working people – and at its head was Margaret Thatcher.

A few days after I returned to London came the announcement that the government had agreed that it would be fitting to spend £3 million on a grand send-off for Thatcher when she finally passes on. Labour – my government – supported the idea of a formal, lavish and expensive State Funeral for the former Prime Minister. I could hardly believe what I read.

To be as fair to her as I can, Thatcher represented her class in a militant and single minded way. But she only ever represented a narrow section of society – the rich, the privileged and the avaricious. She held working people in contempt. She had no sympathy or concern for them. This alone, in my book, means she does not merit a State Funeral. Let her be mourned by her friends at their expense – not mine.

To ask the working people of this country to subsidise Thatcher’s funeral is an insult to the tens of thousands who were thrown out of work because of her, and the hundreds of thousands whose lives were made poorer because of her.

On a brighter note, I’d like to thank all our members who have been making such positive efforts to recruit drivers in London Underground. Thanks to Boris, there’s never been a better time to join ASLEF!

KEITH NORMAN
GENERAL SECRETARY
Britain on a go-slow!

IT SOUNDS like a news item from the 1960’s – but the UK is on a go-slow! The cost of oil – which hit a new level of 142 dollars a barrel last month - is leading for calls to decrease the speed of just about every vehicle in the UK – including trains, ferries, merchant vessels, buses and private cars.

Pilots and ships' captains have been ordered to go slow, train drivers have been asked to switch off engines and coast downhill and bus companies are training staff to drive more smoothly in order to cut costs.

EasyJet said it has cut flying speeds on some routes by 2% on the basis that 'if you take your foot off the gas slightly, you use less fuel.' BMI says it has cut average flight speeds by around 3mph.

Our industry is also taking steps to reduce the energy consumed by trains. The four FirstGroup franchises are training drivers to drive more smoothly between stops and prevent wasting fuel by sharp acceleration and braking.

Drivers on its TransPennine Express service are being encouraged to let trains coast down steep gradients, while some trains are running on two out of three engines. Automatic doors on new TPE trains are being programmed to close quickly in order to conserve cool air from air conditioning units.

The ASLEF Journal August 2008

Minister metres costs of rail electrification

IN THE feature on electrification in last month’s Journal we quoted Modern Railways calculation that the cost would be £400,000 to convert every kilometre of single track. This month inflation seems to have accelerated, and the doom and gloom merchants to be gathering like vultures.

When asked about costings in Parliament, transport minister Tom Harris said the amount has shot up from previous estimates by £100,000 a kilometre and that he considers realistic figures are now about £900,000 per single track mile, which is £500,000 a kilometre.

The current rail network is 15,795 km long. Of this, 5,250 km are currently electrified. This means 10,545 km require electrification. So the cost of electrifying the entire rail network would be about £5.27bn based on Mr Harris’ figures.

‘This is not small change, I admit,’ says ASLEF’s Keith Norman. ‘But considered with other government expenditure, it’s not insurmountable. Last year the government invested £6.3bn in the railways industry. Subsidies to the TOCs were £2bn alone.

‘Outside our industry, Trident will cost up to £20bn in addition to the £35bn we already spend on defence each year. ‘Also, it costs £24 million to build one mile of motorway. Therefore 5.3 billion would buy just 220 miles of motorway – say the distance between London and York. Last year the government spend on roads amounted to £7.5 billion.’

ASLEF welcomes progress on cab air conditioning

THE union is chalking up another Squash campaign advance with the news that air conditioning is to be extended in Tubes and cabs. The Circle and Metropolitan lines will be fitted with air conditioning as well as the District Line, which travels partly above ground.

The announcement came in London Underground's proposals to provide reasonable temperatures during summer months. This remains a major challenge on deeper lines such as the Northern and Piccadilly.

This summer it is intended to install about 40 industrial-sized fans at stations including Charing Cross, Bond Street and Bank, and a large number of station ventilation shafts and fans are being brought back into service.

The London Underground carries over a billion passengers a year and passenger demand continues to grow.

The State Pension at 100

THE State Pension is 100 years old this year, and the National Pensioners Convention thinks all the retired should be given the present of a decent retirement income to celebrate the anniversary.

Promises by the Labour Government to restore the link between the State Pension and average earnings will not be implemented until 2012 – and by then it is estimated that 3 million pensioners will have died without reaping the benefits.

One in five of today's 11m pensioners (nearly 2.5 million) live below the official poverty line, the vast majority being women. In 1891, 1.3m people were classed as paupers – of which 31% were over 60-years-old.

Today's State Pension is widely regarded as the least adequate in Europe. The National Insurance Fund currently has a surplus of £46bn, which is forecast to grow to £114bn by 2012. This money is primarily intended to pay for State Pensions, but today’s pensioners are being denied a higher pension because the Government is using the money to fund other expenditure.

ASLEF has persistently called on the government to improve State Pensions and restore the link. It is a disgrace that the fifth richest economy in the world impoverishes its pensioners in the way it does.

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<td>£90.70 a week: represents around 15% of average earnings</td>
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<td>Less than 16% of women receive a full State Pension</td>
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<td>The State Pension is not means-tested, but means-testing still exists for those who need additional income.</td>
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40 years since steam left the main line

The train that set out from Liverpool Lime Street at 0910 on Sunday 11 August 1968 – just 40 years ago - was the last of its kind. It arrived in Carlisle at 1529 and when it returned to Liverpool at 1959, the end of its journey also marked the end of the era of steam. It was the final main-line BR passenger train to be powered by this method. The demand for tickets for this final journey was huge, and the price of tickets reflected this – leading it to be dubbed the ‘Fifteen Guinea Special’.

The locomotive that hauled the train from Manchester Victoria to Carlisle - the Oliver Cromwell, a Britannia Class 70013 – was the last steam loco to be overhauled by British Rail. The final part of the journey from Manchester back to Liverpool was powered by the LMS Class 45110.

The steam train – for so long a part of Britain’s scenery – was no more, apart from privately owned heritage railways and charters. We had entered the age of diesel and electric power. The attachment of the public (if not always the footplate staff!) to steam was obvious from the fact that large crowds flanked the tracks of this final trip.

Rail history was also marked by the 11-coach train stopping at Rainhill, where it all began with Stephenson’s Rocket some 143 years before, and just up the line at Parkside, as a mark of respect to William Huskisson, who did much to promote the Liverpool And Manchester Railway, and who was tragically killed during the opening ceremony.

The two trains mentioned above have both been preserved. 45100 is on the Severn Valley Railway, while the Oliver Cromwell is part of the National Collection and is usually based in York. A rail enthusiast interviewed at the time was confident that this didn’t mean the end of steam. ‘They probably will re-think in a few years time,’ he said. ‘Steam is more a way of life… the engines, the people, it’s very colourful.’ He wasn’t right about the return of steam to the main line – but he was spot-on about its enduring attraction.

Now Europe moves on monster trucks

THE European Transport Federation (ETF) is geared up to oppose the threat of European legislators supporting Longer and Heavier Vehicles (LHVs) or ‘mega trucks’.

At the end of the summer, the European Commission will make a recommendation on the issue – despite the fact that most individual European countries, like the UK, have recognized the danger of LHVs.

Sabine Trier of the ETF says that at the European level there has been almost no public debate, which is why the organisation has set up a ‘No Mega Trucks’ campaign. Last month over 40 associations, including unions, had declared their support.

‘We are concerned that the European Commission might try to amend the European Directive on weights and dimensions of heavy freight vehicles,’ she says.

A major tool of the ETF campaign is the setting up of the website www.nometatrucks.eu, a cooperation of Alliance for Rail, Friends of the Earth Europe, the European Automobile Clubs and the ETF.

‘It would raise serious political questions if the European Commission attempted to reverse the British government’s recent decision to ban these monster trucks,’ said GS Keith Norman. ‘I cannot believe that the EC could be so provocative.’

Lincoln meeting causes disruption

A LACK of volunteers to work Sunday overtime in the Lincoln area last month led to the cancellation of a number of trains to Nottingham, Newark Northgate and Cleethorpes. ASLEF had called a special branch meeting in Nottingham to discuss Sunday working with the result that there were insufficient drivers to provide a full Sunday service. Tim Shoveller, the managing director of East Midlands Trains said he was ‘surprised and disappointed.’
Rail good, fares bad

EIGHTY per cent of passengers were satisfied with their train journeys over the last six months - a 2% rise on the previous figure. However fewer than half of rail passengers think their journey is value for money. A survey by the rail travellers’ watchdog Passenger Focus found that only 40% of customers felt the price of their ticket had been justified by their ‘journey experience’ - a 5% drop since autumn 2007. The poll also found just 34% satisfied with the way train companies had dealt with delays. 38% were happy about the availability of staff, a slight improvement on spring 2007.

One common theme, however, is that passengers are not happy with their stations, with just over half (52%) of those surveyed displeased with the facilities on offer. Discontent is much higher in Wales, where stations are managed by Arriva Trains Wales. Only 30% are satisfied with facilities and services at ATW stations.

Is Severn Energy number one?

WALES could play a major part in providing sustainable energy for the UK if plans go ahead to build a barrage over the Severn – an idea first mooted in the 18th century.

Experts have been working on a feasibility study on this massive project – which could, by using energy created by tidal flow, provide 5% of the UK’s electricity needs - since September last year. Their £9 million report is expected early in 2010.

The proposals, which include plans for a double track railway across the barrage, have the backing of senior politicians in Wales and Westminster, including Rhodri Morgan and Peter Hain. The ten-mile construction - from Lavernock Point, near Cardiff, to Brean Down in Somerset - would cost about £15 billion, but its supporters say it could generate as much energy as three nuclear power stations. They also point to the success of a similar barrage which has been operating at La Rance, near St Malo in Brittany, since 1967.

However there have been objections from environmental groups like the WWF, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and Friends of the Earth Cymru. They argue that different technologies with less environmental impact could be used in the Severn estuary without affecting wildlife. The estuary is a special area for conservation and provides food for more than 63,000 migratory and wintering water birds, representing seven per cent of the UK’s total estuary resources for wildlife.

Osanloo still in prison one year on

It was on 10 July 2007 that jailed Iranian trade unionist Mansour Osanloo was snatched off a bus in Tehran and taken off to jail. The International Transport Federation, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and Amnesty International last month pledged to do all they can to ensure that he is not forgotten.

His health, and especially his eye-sight, has given cause for concern. Last month, however, when he was expecting to be escorted to a hospital appointment he was taken instead for arraignment at the Intelligence Court.

Mansour’s ‘crime’ is attempting to organise the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company. The ITF insists that Iran’s ‘deliberate attempt to crush independent trade unions’ must cease.

Sat Nav blamed for level crossing collision

A DELIVERY man who drove onto a level crossing causing a collision with a train has blamed his sat-nav for the incident.

Graham William Foster was driving his van last month when his sat-nav directed him onto a road that was little more than a gravel track. His defending lawyer described the track as ‘a road to nowhere’.

Unfortunately for Mr Foster, ‘nowhere’ was a railway line. In his confusion Mr Foster attempted to cross the track rather than following the notices to ring a signaler to check whether it was safe to cross.

None of the passengers on the 16.24 Northern Rail train from Newcastle to Whitehaven were hurt although the driver was treated for shock. Foster was given five stitches in his arm and was treated for head injuries.

Magistrates have warned Foster that he should expect a custodial punishment and he may possibly find himself in front of the Crown Court. He will reappear in court later this month.

Still Squashing

ASLEF representatives at Southeastern have been making progress on the union’s campaign to improve cab conditions. The company’s staff magazine featured the issue on its front page, reporting four specific improvements. These were:

• Checking all driver seats for distortion within swivel joints, replacing swivel joints bearing plate washers with an updated part to improve lateral stability.
• Replacing or repositioning seat swabs to improve ergonomics
• Levelling cab seat base floors.
• Meanwhile National Express East Anglia has agreed to trial air conditioning on 4 Class 317 EMUs. A seat replacement programme and cab re-furbishment on class 90/DVT has been taking place but the trials for the fitment of cab cooling to 153 and 156 DMUs has slipped. The union is chasing this up.
Government backing for training

SKILLS minister David Lammy says that workers can now ‘go into conversations’ with employers knowing that they ‘have the backing of Parliament’. He says changes in the law will back up the ‘excellent work’ of union training representatives and other activists. ‘I see this as positive backing for the Union Learning Fund,’ he says.

He says around 300,000 trade unionists are taking advantage of various union schemes like ASLEF’s.

He fully supports attempts to ensure that drivers are given the opportunity to be kept up to speed with advances in technology. ‘I have no doubt new technology is the way forward for the sector,’ he told the Journal. ‘Training is a positive benefit for the employer as well, in terms of offering confident workers who are prepared for development and advancement.’

Airport-style security off for stations

GOVERNMENT plans to install airport-style X-ray machines in every London underground and mainline rail stations across the UK have been ruled out because of fears of passenger rebellions against journey delays, and complaints about personal privacy.

Trials concluded that airport-style checks would antagonise the public to the extent of being impractical. After the bombings of the London Transport system on 7 July 2005 the Department for Transport (DfT) tested various options for new transport security equipment for rail and London Underground networks.

Sniffer dogs were used in both London and Brighton.

The DfT says that screening equipment and dogs can be effective but concede that ‘100% airport-style screening is currently not feasible.’

Instead, at a few of the busiest stations this summer, passengers will have their bags scanned by X-ray machines about the size of a washing machine, and random stations will be patrolled by officers with bomb-sniffing dogs.

Tax refunds total £340,000

ASLEF members have been able to claim back a remarkable £338,399 in tax since we began an association with The Tax Refund Company, which places inserts inside three or four Journals year.

The tax refund secured for ASLEF members is £221,76.

David Davies, the head of the tax code assessment operation, says, ‘At the moment if you’ve paid too much tax you can claim it back with interest. Currently you can go back up to six years, but we’re anticipating a change in the law cutting this to four years.’

He says there are many reasons why you may have overpaid tax – not claiming all your allowances, an incorrect tax or payment on company benefits that no longer apply or have been calculated incorrectly.

The National Audit Office has reported that up to one in five people has an incorrect tax code – and that over £150 million tax is overpaid each year!

This ‘no refund, no fee’ service is available to ASLEF members by sending a stamped and self addressed envelope for an application form to The Tax Refund Company, Labyrinth House, 43-47 Middle Hillgate, Stockport, SK1 3DG.

It’s a consultant’s life!

ON 30 June, Theresa Villiers (left), the Tory Transport spokesperson, asked in Parliament how much the Department for Transport had spent on consultancy fees on the InterCity Express programme. Rail minister Tom Harris said the DfT had spent £9.4 million since the start of the project in 2005.

He did not say why, what on or if he felt the money had been well spent. ASLEF has very clear views on all these matters!

NETWORK RAIL CONSIDERS FIVE NEW ROUTES

Network Rail (NR) is undertaking ‘a review of the business case’ for building five new routes to the north and west of London as it seek to increase the capacity of the UK’s rail network. Chief executive Iain Coucher said many of these lines will be full up by 2025 if nothing is done.

The review has been forced on the company because of the growing popularity of rail travel. Passenger numbers have soared by 40% over the past ten years to 1.13bn journeys a year and NR says rail freight has increased by 60% over the same period. All the expectations are that growth will continue at this rate in the coming years, as motoring costs rise and environmental concerns grow.

‘We obviously support any initiative along these lines,’ says ASLEF general secretary Keith Norman. ‘It wouldn’t just provide more routes for intercity trains, it would have the added advantage of freeing up existing lines for freight services. Our only concern is delay. To be frank, I don’t see that anything needs to be reviewed, examined or considered. As far as I’m concerned, the case is well established. We should be getting on with it, not thinking about it.’

The union’s case is based on increased capacity and environmental considerations. Government figures show that average carbon emissions per passenger mile are 5.2kg for train journeys compared with 36.6kg for car journeys.

RETIRED MEMBERS POUND A WEEK

At its Annual General Meeting, the Retired Members Section decided that the annual subscription for the section will be increased to deflect rising costs to the union.

This was duly placed before the Executive Committee and the General Secretary was instructed to make the necessary arrangements to increase the RMS membership fee to £12 a year. The change will begin on 1 September. The first year of RMS membership remains free of charge.
Clean coal technology is the way forward

says Chris Kitchen, the Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers

I am aware that ASLEF is actively campaigning for further electrification of the railways as a way to provide a fast reliable environmentally friendly alternative to road transport. This I believe is a step in the right direction and something that should have been done years ago. The question remains how the electricity will be generated in a way that would meet the emission targets that our government has signed up to.

NEW VIEW OF COAL

There has been a significant change in the perception of the future for coal-fired power generation in Britain, in Europe and indeed globally.

There has been widespread recognition - reinforced by the predictions of international bodies such as the International Energy Agency and the European Commission - that coal will be used in increasing, not diminishing, quantities for power generation. This is particularly true in parts of the world including the USA, China, India and Europe, which have large resources of the fuel.

In parallel, it has become increasingly urgent to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide because of its impact as a greenhouse gas on climate change. Until quite recently in the UK, and indeed in Europe more widely, it was thought that coal generation could be dispensed with and replaced by gas fired generation and renewables. This has changed. It is now widely recognised - for example in the Stern Review - that, rather than being replaced, coal-fired generation needs to be cleaned up by the use of clean-coal technology and carbon dioxide capture and storage (CCS).

COAL CONVERSION

Clean coal technologies were previously considered synonymous with Gasification (IGCC) but now are seen to include a number of conversion technologies (including advanced supercritical boilers and fluidised beds as well as gasification) and a number of CO2 capture technologies (including post-combustion solvent absorption, oxyfuel firing and pre-combustion). All of these are likely to have a role in the plant mix since clean coal technologies are needed for existing plant (including recent plant in China, USA and Europe) as well as future plant.

The National Union of Mineworkers has been a keen advocate for Clean Coal Technology over many years as the way forward to reduce CO2 emissions not only in the UK, but also in the rest of the world. Global warming will not be solved by the UK alone. Indeed, the last figures I saw showed that the UK only accounted for 2% of worldwide CO2 emissions. By committing to and developing Clean Coal Technology as well as Carbon Capture and Storage we would be able to export the technology to other countries that are committed to coal fired generation of their electricity. This would play a useful role in helping reduce global CO2 emissions.

STOP RELIANCE ON IMPORTS

Security of supply for our nation’s energy is now being recognised as an issue we need to address. The ‘dash for gas’ at a time when we have reduced reserves of our own has left us over reliant on imported energy. Wind, tide and other renewable forms of generation are unable to provide a reliable base load. Over-reliance on nuclear energy brings with it unknown costs which will have to be passed onto the consumer or government.

The government must now look towards actually governing when it comes to energy and transport policy. Left to the markets it will never take a long term view as to what is in the best interest of our nation: it will only consider balance sheets and share holder dividends.

Chris Kitchen, who is 42 years old and married with one son, started in the mining industry in 1982 at Wheldale Colliery in Castleford, West Yorkshire. Active through the 1984/85 strike, he transferred to Kellingley Colliery in 1987 when Wheldale was closed. He was Kellingley Branch Secretary from 1999 – 2007 before his election as Yorkshire Area Secretary in June 2007 and National Secretary in October of the same year.

ASLEF IN THE CORRIDORS OF POWER

THE union’s political activity continues to develop reports political advisor James McGowan. We have submitted amendments to Labour’s ‘Partnership in Power’ policy documents which will help to develop the party’s next manifesto. We will argue for:

- an extension of the not-for-profit model to passenger train operations as franchises expire
- the development, with Network Rail, of necessary infrastructure enhancements to better integrate freight terminals with regions, ports and airports; and
- an extension of rail electrification.

We have made submissions to the All Wales Rail Group and lobbied a number of individual MPs to put forward union views. A useful meeting of the union’s Parliamentary Group was held last month and we’ve been represented at ‘partnership’ conferences on freight and an international transport union gathering.

Discussions have been held with transport ministers Ruth Kelly and Rosie Winterton and Transport Select Committee Chair Louise Ellman MP. We have also put ASLEF’s views to Scottish transport minister Stewart Stevenson and MSP Karen Whitefield.

‘The benefit of our political fund is that we are able to make ASLEF’s views known where it matters,’ says general secretary Keith Norman.
A proud history of fighting fascism

At this year’s annual conference, delegates decided to affiliate to the International Brigade Memorial Trust (IBMT). This was set up in 2002 to ‘educate the public in the history of the men and women who fought in the International Brigades and in the medical and other support services in the Spanish Civil War.’ Marz Colombini from the union’s Waterloo/Nine Elms branch is a great supporter of the project. We asked him to outline for us why he thinks it is important to remember events that took place in Spain back in the 1930s …

ON 27 February 2007 the European Court of Human Rights issued a judgment in the case of ASLEF v the United Kingdom. The judgment, which found in the union’s favour, was made following ASLEF’s decision to expel a member who was also a member of the right wing extremist BNP. It vindicated our union’s principled stand. This landmark victory, based on the principle of freedom of association, has paved the way for the UK’s trade unions to be able to rid themselves of right wing extremists and typifies the commitment of Britain’s working people to the battle against fascism.

This stance, taken by British workers, is nothing new. The fight against fascism has existed as long as fascism itself. In July 1936 a military uprising, backed by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, was launched in Spain by a group of military generals aiming to overthrow the newly elected centre-left Republican government. Desperate for assistance, the Spanish Republican government made pleas to the European democracies of Britain and France. These requests fell overwhelmingly on deaf ears, with European governments, including Britain’s, choosing instead to sign up to an international agreement of non-intervention.

VOLUNTEERS MOTIVATED BY PRINCIPLE
Shocked by the possibility of another European country falling beneath the shadow of fascism, and despite their own governments’ failure to act, thousands of anti-fascist volunteers from all over the world travelled to Spain to support the Spanish people in their fight against Franco’s right wing rebels. These volunteer battalions became known as the International Brigades. Amongst their numbers were 2,300 men and women from Britain and Ireland. The volunteers, predominantly working class and trade unionists, gave up their jobs in the docks, mines, shipyards and railways to leave these shores and their families in order to fight along side the Republicans in Spain or to tend to their wounded.

A LASTING MEMORIAL
In 2002 the International Brigade Memorial Trust was formed from the veterans of the International Brigade Association, representatives of the Marx Memorial Library, and historians specialising in the Spanish Civil War. Its aims include:

- To educate the public in the history of the men and women who fought in the International Brigades and in the medical and other support services in the Spanish Civil War.
- To foster good citizenship by remembering those who have fallen in the Spanish Civil War by preserving, maintaining and assisting in the construction of war memorials.

The Trust organises an annual memorial service at Jubilee Gardens on London’s Southbank. As well as serving as a memorial to those who gave their lives in Spain, the service acts as an important reminder that whether at Cable Street in 1936 or Lewisham in 1977, throughout WW2, before that in The Spanish Civil War or indeed our own recent victory in the European Court of Human Rights, the working men and women of Britain have a long and proud history of fighting the forces of fascism; a history that we quite rightly celebrate and commemorate.

THE MESSAGE STAYS THE SAME
In Spain the cry was ‘No Pasaran’, at Cable Street it was ‘They shall not pass’. But regardless of the language, the message remains the same. With the threat currently posed from the far right in the form of the BNP, it is perhaps more important than ever that we preserve and perpetuate that same proud history. It was with that in mind, that the delegates at this year’s AAD adopted a call for ASLEF to affiliate to the IBMT and be represented at their annual memorial service. At this year’s event at Jubilee Gardens on London’s Southbank, ASLEF was once again well represented. Our Waterloo branch’s Charley Martin and Steve Richardson laid a wreath in respectful memory of those who made the ultimate sacrifice in the battle against General Franco and his Fascists.

● For more information about the work of the International Brigade Memorial Trust and affiliation details, contact National Secretary, Marlene Sidaway at marlenesidaway@hotmail.com

Steve and Marz: moved by the memories

Steve Richardson lays an ASLEF wreath in memory of the International Brigaders

ASLEF’s banner with Marz Colombini, Steve Richardson, Dave Johnson and Charley Martin

The memorial at London’s Jubilee Gardens to the 526 British Brigaders who died, and all those who fought in the Civil War

Dave and Charley: a moment to reflect
The government has issued the draft of a new Equality Bill to cover employment in the UK. Much of our ill-informed and sensationalist media paints a picture of white men being shunted to the door in their droves to accommodate employing women or ethnic minorities. Such reports, says Victoria Phillips, are both ‘irresponsible and misleading’. Here she explains why...

The recent publication of the government’s Equality Bill sparked a (sadly unsurprising) outpouring of newspaper headlines predicting that white men would be sacked to make way for ethnic minority and women workers.

Internet talkboards and blog sites creaked under the weight of contributors outraged at the most hostile response from the media. It will allow - not force - employers to consider under-representation of certain groups within their workforce, such as women, ethnic minorities and disabled people, into account in the recruitment process.

The law does not currently allow employers to consider under-representation when choosing between two equally qualified candidates. This means that no matter how committed an employer is to making its workforce more representative of the wider community, it cannot legally have a recruitment policy which includes using under-representation as a method of selection.

There is no question that this new right for employers will allow them to deliberately choose a woman or ethnic minority candidate over a white man even though they may be less well qualified and suitable for the post.

If the result of allowing positive action is diverse workforces that better reflect the diverse community and society in which they are based and for which they provide goods and services, then the result should be of benefit to everyone.

GIVING TRIBUNALS MORE POWERS TO END DISCRIMINATION

Employment tribunals are currently restricted in what sort of recommendations they can make about an employer’s policies and practices. Generally the claimant needs to still be working for the employer and so would benefit directly from the advice the tribunal gives.

The Equality Bill will allow tribunals to make wider recommendations, such as that the employer introduces an equal opportunities policy or reviews its pay policies.

We saw a rare example of this when Virgin Cross Country managers were ordered to take disability rights training after ASLEF member Martyn Hazelhurst was not helped back to work after a work-related knee injury and operation.

The Equality Bill’s proposal will mean that whether or not the individual claimant had since left the organisation, those still employed there should benefit from the outcome of the ET.

Recommendations made by a tribunal should assist employers in improving their employment practices and avoiding further tribunal claims. If they do not, and they do face another claim, the tribunal is likely to take a tougher line with them next time.

DE-CLUTTERING THE LAW

Lawyers, union officials and union lay representatives alike find the UK’s discrimination laws incredibly complex. There are different laws and duties on employers covering race, disability and gender.

The various bits of legislation, rules, regulations and guidelines will be streamlined into a more simple Equality Duty which will also cover age, religion and belief, sexual orientation and gender reassignment. That’s a lot of issues to cover, and we should welcome any attempt to make the law in these areas easier to understand and apply, for the good of all trade union members.
AT THE end of April Wrexham & Shropshire (W&SR) started direct rail services from Wrexham, Shrewsbury, Telford and Tame Bridge Parkway to London Marylebone. Lesley Griffiths, Labour’s transport spokesperson in the Welsh Assembly, says he’s delighted.

‘After a 41 year gap, Wrexham has a direct service to London, seven days per week, with modern rolling stock. I’m especially pleased that the Welsh Assembly Government has contributed to this success by investing in the service depot that provides overnight accommodation and catering for the trains. This has created 50 jobs at Wrexham General station.

I hope this supplement will be of interest to all our members, because wherever we earn our living we have the common bonds of our profession – driving trains – and our union, ASLEF.

Keith Norman
General Secretary

These pages are devoted to ASLEF in Wales. In them, we want to explore how Wales fits into the UK since devolution, and specifically how we can best influence and improve rail within the principality. I admit to a particular interest. Wales is the ‘land of my fathers’ – and I want our union to play a full and effective part in its development. I am sure of one thing: there is much to be done as far as transport is concerned. The emphasis appears to be on getting people out of Wales by train rather than how they can travel within it.

I hope this supplement will be of interest to all our members, because wherever we earn our living we have the common bonds of our profession – driving trains – and our union, ASLEF.

Keith Norman
General Secretary

Cyfailleillion. Mae'r tudallennau hyn wedi eu ymrododdi i ASLEF yng Nghymru. Ynddynt rhwydwa'r llywyddiaeth a'r rhan dyddanol, ac yn bendant sut allwn dylanwadu a gwella'r gwasanaeth rheilffordd yn y tywysgo aeth. Rhaid cofio fod da i ddidgordeb personol. Cyrrwynwch y 'hen wlad fy nhadau' a'r rhywbeth i wneud eich unrhywbeth yr hynny y wnaeth yr hynny gratiaeth. Mae'r pwyslais wedi eu ganoli ar sut i symud ein trigollion allan o Gymru yn lle gwella'r gwasanaeth y tu fewn.

Rw'n gobeithio fydd yr atodiad hyn o dddidgordeb i'n aelodau i gyd, achos dosim oes ble rydym eu ennill i bywoliaeth, mae da ni i gyd gyrrw'r tren - gyrrw'r tren - a'n undeb - ASLEF

MIND THE GAP! WREXHAM-LONDON RUNS AGAIN… AFTER 41 YEARS

AT THE end of April Wrexham & Shropshire (W&SR) started direct rail services from Wrexham, Shrewsbury, Telford and Tame Bridge Parkway to London Marylebone. Lesley Griffiths, Labour’s transport spokesperson in the Welsh Assembly, says he’s delighted.

‘After a 41 year gap, Wrexham has a direct service to London, seven days per week, with modern rolling stock.

‘I’m especially pleased that the Welsh Assembly Government has contributed to this success by investing in the service depot that provides overnight accommodation and catering for the trains. This has created 50 jobs at Wrexham General station.

‘Politically, it has been a real team effort locally. My Labour colleague in Wrexham, MP Ian Lucas, has worked tirelessly to make sure people in London were persuaded of the potential for this franchise.’

ASLEF’s officer in the north-west, Colin Smith, says he’s ‘encouraged’ by informal meetings he’s had with W&SR to discuss recognition. Formal talks will now commence. Colin also reports, ‘Discussions are on-going to electrify (by the third rail system) the Wrexham to Bidston connection. This could lead to a major catchment area having a more frequent and efficient service, and possibly lead to more passengers using the connection to commute to London and increase passenger capacity on the W&SR. The key is to keep fares reasonable. When you consider the rising cost of fuel, this is a massive opportunity that government should support. I’m sure it has the backing of local county councils.’

ASLEF’s Stan in Western Mail

ASLEF regional organiser Stan Moran told the Western Mail last month that he ‘warmly welcomed’ the One Wales Coalition’s support for the Welsh rail network over the past year.

‘They are getting Wales moving again with significant infrastructure enhancements such as the reopening of the Ebbw Vale line, the new Wrexham London link as well as free travel for pensioners on the Cambrian Coast, Conwy, the Heart of Wales and Wrexham-Bidston,’ Stan said.

‘Rail is a vital tool in social and economic regeneration and the Assembly Government must do more to pressurise Network Rail into providing the infrastructure improvements Wales so desperately needs. We should be running trains on the south Wales main line at 125mph and have a 2 hour service between Swansea and London but we don’t because of lack of investment in the track. We should be pressing NR hard on this.’

Many thanks for the Welsh translation, provided by John Rossiter, Secretary of the Swansea branch

Published by the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen 2008
Rhodri Morgan, First Minister of Wales, explains his vision for rail in the principality …

We have ambitious plans for the future railway in Wales

‘IF you build it, they will come.’ That has been the guiding principle of Welsh rail policy since I came to office as First Minister in 2000.

Labour can be proud of our investment in rail. Those who doubt our commitment need look no further than the Ebbw Valley and the Vale of Glamorgan where we have reversed the Beeching changes of the 1960s by re-opening two new passenger lines.

Re-opening the Vale of Glamorgan line from Cardiff to Bridgend in 2005 opened up new public transport links to Cardiff Wales Airport, which came as the result of a £17m investment from the Assembly Government. The line was closed to passenger trains in 1964 although it remained open for freight and a relief passenger line without any stops when the main line from Cardiff to Bridgend and onwards to Swansea was undergoing maintenance.

This year saw the re-opening of the Ebbw Valley line for passenger services. Thanks to £30m investment from the Assembly Government, communities in the Ebbw Valley now have excellent access to job, shopping and leisure opportunities in Cardiff. There are 6 stops on this line: Ebbw Vale Parkway, Llanhilleth, Newbridge, Cross Keys, Risca and Rogerstone.

This is the age of the train. There is an insatiable demand for rail travel with rising petrol and diesel prices. The more stations or lines we open the more people want to travel by rail. Part of the reason is the cost saving, I spoke to someone on the new Ebbw Valley service who told me he was saving £140 a week on his commute to Cardiff. Instead of spending £165 a week on petrol and parking in Cardiff, he was now paying £20 a week ticket for rail travel!

The public demand for rail travel is clear. This year it was announced that Britain for the first time had a ‘billion passenger railway’ with record numbers using the service. The number of miles travelled on the rail network has reached a record-breaking peacetime high of 30.1 billion during 2007, capping a huge rise in popularity in which passenger numbers have increased every year for the past 13 years. Last year the network handled 1.21 billion rail journeys, the equivalent of 20 journeys for every citizen and a 7% rise on 2006. Traffic on the railways, meanwhile, has increased by 67.6% since 1994 when just 17.9 billion passenger miles travelled.

In 2005 responsibility for the Arriva Trains Wales franchise was transferred to the Welsh Assembly Government. We provide its funding and monitor its performance. Bringing power to Wales over the local railway services gives us the opportunity to bring better services to passengers and encourage modal shift from private to public transport.

Together with Network Rail we are continuing to invest. As promised in Labour’s 2007 manifesto we are putting more money in the Valley lines of south Wales. On 2 June this year we announced a £30 million project which will see significant de-bottlenecking improvements to Cardiff Central station, Queen Street station and the Cogan Junction area, including new signalling systems. The works will bring significant benefits to travellers across the Valleys commuter network for travel into the centre of Cardiff.

As promised in Labour’s 2007 manifesto we have increased the opportunities for pensioners to travel free of charge on Welsh railways. The Cambrian Coast, Conwy, Wrexham-Bidston and Heart of Wales lines all now offer free travel to pass holders. In parts of the countryside like these the train is the best way of getting around. Free rail passes complements our popular scheme for free pensioner travel on the buses. For us, the railways play an important social role in providing travel opportunities for the elderly.

We don’t want to stop there. We have ambitious plans for the future railway in Wales. By 2011 we plan to improve the links between trains and long distance coach services. Large parts of Wales are rural and not served by rail. If we can improve the links between coach and train services we could open up the railways to many more passengers. As with all our improvements we can be sure that more investment will bring more passengers to the railway.

EBBW VALE TO CARDIFF’S BACK AS WELL! The setting up of the Ebbw Valley Railway by Arriva Trains Wales has re-opened the line from Ebbw Vale to Cardiff for the first time in over 40 years. Trains have been running every hour since February. The project involved Blaenau Gwent Council, the Welsh Assembly Government, Network Rail, Arriva Trains Wales, Capita Symonds, Amey Rail, Caerphilly County Borough Council and Newport City Council.
**ASLEF IN WALES**

**‘NON-PROFIT’ IS BEST WALES RAIL MODEL**

says Peter Hain, the MP for Neath who between 1997 and 2008 served variously as Secretary of State for Wales, Leader of the House of Commons and Minister for Work and Pensions.

BY winning support from both Cardiff Bay and Westminster governments, Welsh transport can have the best of both worlds - and Welsh Labour MPs like me will continue to press hard for extra rail investment and better services.

Labour Welsh Assembly Government policies have seen funding to the Valleys line and the Heart of Wales line creating a more joined-up Wales. The Cardiff-Ebbw Vale line has seen six new stations created bringing these communities not only closer together but closer to Cardiff and the rest of Wales. This, together with UK investment in cross-border main lines, has seen a dramatic improvement in rail services not only within Wales but between Wales and England.

Of course ASLEF members in Wales already know very well the key challenges that we still face.

**WORK TO BE DONE**

High levels of cancellations and disruption to rail services, especially on the First Great Western line between Swansea and London Paddington which I use weekly, are reason to remember that the Secretary of State for Transport, Ruth Kelly, has been looking to rectify.

Rail fares are high for most people and this effects fair access and the use of rail instead of the car. Most fares in mainland Europe are substantially cheaper.

Despite Welsh Assembly Government investment in the Valleys line, Heart of Wales line and the re-opening of the Cardiff-Ebbw Vale line in February 2008, rail links off the M4 corridor remain poor.

We are still living with the legacy of the botched Tory rail privatisation and all it has meant. I believe that as rail operator franchises come up for renewal, the Welsh water model of a non-profit making company should be pursued. It operated in the South East for a while after a private train operating company failure. If we combine better integration of rail timetabling and strong central co-ordination, we could move towards a model where the public interest comes before private profit.

**COMPLEX TRANSPORT NEEDS**

Wales has very complex transport needs, from Cardiff’s rail shortcomings and rising road congestion to poor rail transport links between villages. My own fight to get a bus service returned to the isolated small village of Rhifawr in the Swansea valley underlines the need to link bus with rail to help communities thrive socially and economically. Bus provision is particular difficulty. I am aware from my constituents’ advice surgeries of dissatisfaction about their late-running. Clearly this needs to be remedied.

We must think hard about how transport can be better financed and presented to the public. I know that the senior citizen free bus pass system pioneered by the Welsh Assembly Government in Wales and later adopted in England has been a huge success.

**RAIL AND THE WELSH ECONOMY**

As Welsh Transport Minister from 1997 to 99 I pushed through public investment to get the Eurofreight terminal built outside Cardiff and I favour boosting this to get more freight off roads and onto rail. I am also pressing for the option of a rail link across the planned Severn Tidal Barrage from Weston-Super-Mare to Cardiff.

Welsh Assembly Government plans to improve rail access to Cardiff International Airport will also bring much needed synergy to an economy now strongly linked to the rest of Europe and beyond.

Climate change makes boosting our rail system even more of an imperative and an environmentally-accessed rail planning could drastically cut emissions from road transport.

**PUTTING THE PARTY RIGHT**

I’m convinced that only Labour can deliver these policies - and that means a radical overhaul of Welsh Labour’s organisation and policies so that they address Wales’ special challenges. This is something I argued in my recent pamphlet ‘Changing Wales: Changing Welsh Labour’ (see www.progressonline.org.uk) We must not take a single vote for granted.

There is no denying that support for our Labour government has been hit hard by the 10p tax change, retrospective vehicle tax hikes, Post Office closures, the credit crunch and increasing house prices. It is a difficult time for Labour and unions like ASLEF who support the party.

I don’t believe the majority of people in Wales or in Britain really want a Tory government – especially those of us who remember the brutality of the Thatcher years. Dynamic and progressive transport plans can be an important key in ensuring renewed support for Labour both in Wales and across the UK.
Siân James has been MP for Swansea East since May 2005. Having worked in the industry, she takes a keen interest in rail issues and earlier this year she began to Chair the All Party Parliamentary Group on Rail in Wales. We asked her why she set up the Group.

TO make my journey to Westminster, I rely on the First Great Western (FGW) service to and from Swansea. The past three years have been both interesting and frustrating. During my time working for several rail companies, I've made every excuse under the sun for late running services and overcrowding. Little did I think then that I would personally face the same problems and challenges!

Given my love of rail travel and somewhat limited inside knowledge, I decided very early on that I should campaign on behalf of my constituents to improve high speed rail services and from South West Wales. I therefore chose to focus my campaign on FGW's services. It was clear from my postbag and my own personal experiences that there were serious problems that needed attention.

FGW CONCENTRATED ON WRONG ISSUES

The main problem faced by FGW has been an apparent lack of commitment to long distance services. There has been an obsession with providing high frequency services from Paddington, to passengers who have journey times of less than an hour. This has caused overcrowding, delays and inconvenience.

2006 was a particularly bad year for the FGW service to South Wales and across their franchise in general. The Office of Rail Regulation reported that more than one in four trains ran late in and summer 2006, only 72.7% of FGWs high speed services arrived on time.

To make things worse the 2007 timetable included cutting out certain stations within the franchise. This meant delay and misery for thousands. Many passengers switched to alternative services – which created overcrowding on important commuter trunk routes. These problems led to widespread coverage in both local and national media.

NEW TIMETABLE, WORSE SERVICE

The new timetable is one of the biggest issues affecting my constituents. FGW decided to terminate the 15:15 London Paddington - Swansea service, at Cardiff. This had huge implications for all commuters along the South Wales mainline and caused a sixty minute gap in high speed services between Cardiff and Swansea during the weekday evening peak. Currently, there is no high speed service between 16:49 and 17:48 to Swansea and the key intermediate stations of Bridgend, Port Talbot and Neath.

As a result of this policy, local Arriva Trains Wales services, which are often two-car units, deal with considerable numbers of passengers travelling to West Wales destinations. This has caused more overcrowding and inconvenience. In frustration, many people returned to using their cars. Given the Government’s commitment to encourage people to use public transport, this is ridiculous.

GETTING THE GROUP TOGETHER

I’ve made vociferous representations on this situation and I will continue to campaign for restoration of the service to Swansea. Many of my MP colleagues recognised my work and approached me to raise issues of concern. That is why I decided to establish the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Rail in Wales. The group, which began meeting in February has four main aims:

- to promote dialogue between MPs with the aim of encouraging better understanding of the issues, difficulties and opportunities facing the rail industry in Wales.
- to exchange views on rail related matters.
- to invite outside speakers who can contribute to the above to address the group as and when appropriate.
- to offer the opportunity for those involved in the rail industry to meet legislators and decision makers based outside Wales.

The two-monthly meetings have been very well attended by MPs and rail industry representatives. We’ve met several train companies and rail bodies at one time and the Minister for Railways has recently given evidence to us about the government’s commitment to improving cross-border services.

Our most recent meeting focussed on the key role the trade unions have in the rail industry, something that has my complete support.

With Westminster now in summer recess, the Group time to reflect on the progress we have made and review the many challenges ahead in Wales. These include:

- the need to see a reduction in cancellations
- improvements in performance
- less overcrowding on services
- the need for future investment by Network Rail throughout Wales on line-speed and signalling
- potential electrification on both the North and South Wales routes; and
- the possible new rail link across the Severn Estuary.

The APPG is now the main forum for Welsh rail matters in Westminster. We will continue to campaign for the benefit of Welsh passengers and those who work in the rail industry.
CRICKLEWOOD STILL GOING - 25 YEARS ON

THIS photo shows some of the 40-odd former members of Cricklewood Branch at Bridgenorth on our 25th anniversary of the depot closure. It was a great turn out and much enjoyed by all who attended. I would like to thank Bob Hodson and G. Nash who keep the reunions going. It’s always nice to see so many old colleagues who have long left the railway. I should add that the people in the photo are the ones we managed to get out of the pub!

ROBERT WALKLEY - St.Pancras International

HITCHIN HELLOS AND GOODBYES

I AM sure I am speaking for all of the Hitchin Depot and, indeed the rest of the old GN Depots of FCC who know Bro. Pete Newbury.

Pete has recently stood down from the Hitchin LLR where he was Secretary for many years.

At our May Branch meeting we were pleased to have our General Secretary, Keith Norman and EC Member, Nigel Gibson as our guests. Keith presented Pete with an engraved tankard as a token of appreciation, from both us as his workmates and in recognition of his work for ASLEF. We were all grateful to Keith for giving an up-to-date report and especially for his views on our Pensions.

Also a very big ‘thank you’ to Pete on behalf of the Drivers at Hitchin, where, over the years he adapted better and quicker than most to the ‘new-age’ of computers and technology. He will be greatly missed by our Depot.

We all wish him a happy and healthy last couple of years service and a very long retirement. On a personal basis, thanks Pete - both as a work colleague and a very good friend.

Pete Baines - Company Council Representative – Hitchin

PRESTON 3 HAVE 141 YEARS SERVICE

THIS May saw the Preston Annual retirement function at Lostock Hall Catholic Club, where drivers Dave Peet, Norman Cookson and Dave Whitehead were presented with retirement certificates to celebrate their long membership and service to ASLEF.

They achieved over 141 years service between the three of them, which is quite an achievement these days.

The function was well attended by many of their friends and colleagues, who were all eager to wish them a long and happy retirement.

Thanks also Tony Cole and Paul Speirs for organising a successful and enjoyable event.

GRAHAM FAZACKERLEY – Secretary – Preston Branch

ST PANCRAS MOVES TO HAMPSTEAD!

REBEKAH PETERSON, the secretary of the St Pancras branch, wrote to the General Secretary to express the thanks of her branch for the visit to Head Office on 15 May. It was resolved at the June branch meeting that a letter should be sent.

Rebekah said, ‘All who attended had a very enjoyable time and were appreciative of the time given by the Head Office staff to talk. The building itself was much admired.’ She concluded thanking Keith personally for his generous hospitality ‘which concluded a thoroughly interesting, informative and pleasant day’.
PIZZIE PASSES THE POST

ON 21 June, the Liverpool Street Welfare & Social Club hosted a retirement function for Dave Pizzie, Liverpool Street Driver, who retired after 43 years and 7 months service.

Dave began at Stratford Depot in November 1964 and worked there until it closed in 1994. That is when he moved to Liverpool Street, working on the InterCity trains between Liverpool Street and Norwich for InterCity Anglia, Anglia Railways, One Railway and finally National Express East Anglia before his retirement this June.

During his career Dave served as co-opted LDC Rep at Stratford and was Chairman of the LDC at Liverpool Street for a while. Also, since being moved to Liverpool Street Dave served as Chairman of the Liverpool Street Welfare & Social Club for 12 years, and has been instrumental in ensuring the Club’s success and laying down strong foundations for its continual future.

The retirement function was well attended by many of Dave’s friends and colleagues, including many of his already-retired friends who came to wish Dave luck. The Club made presentations to Dave of gifts as well as a cheque for £400, before Andy Morrison presented him with his certificate from the Union for his long and loyal service.

All those present wished Dave well as he ventured off into retirement, although no doubt we will still catch up with him from time to time. Best Wishes Dave!

John Thorpe, Secretary - Liverpool Street Welfare & Social Club

ALAN WARBANK OFF FROM FRATTON

ALAN has seen a lot of changes during his long career – over 40 years - on the railway, among them seeing Fratton/Eastleigh change from being a large steam depots to what it is today.

Al has been an ASLEF member almost all his career. It is excellent to see such loyalty to a union, which may not always seem the best in the world, but when Al joined drivers were 100% behind ASLEF. This was a natural progression on the road to becoming a driver. Today when drivers join and either opt for cheaper unions or don’t even bother joining a union, they should take a leaf out of Al’s book in loyalty and commitment. People who are loyal and committed are sadly becoming the minority. The ‘I’m all right Jack’ syndrome is a sad reflection in society today.

It is with regret that Al has called time on his career. He is a private person who comes to work to drive trains, not because he has to, but because he loved the job and the railway life. Al will be missed as a regular member of ASLEF.

John Glazebrook Secretary - Portsmouth & IOW Branch

MOLINEUX MEETING OF MINDS

ONCE again the Wolverhampton branch has held a successful retired drivers’ reunion at the Molineux which included Dave Calfe and Mick Whelan from head office.

Around 85 guests attended this special occasion with a difference. Our branch chairman, Roy Goodhead, was passing into the ‘Gardening Link’ after 50 years on the railway. Also joining Roy in this link are Graham Sinnett and Terry Yeend. Between the three of them they have clocked up just under 150 years. The branch wishes them all a long and happy retirement.

Bob Hudson also paid tribute to Roy for his services to the union before he was presented with a 50 year medallion by.

Nigel Harkness – Secretary – Wolverhampton branch

TOP TURN-OUT FOR LEAMINGTON

LEAMINGTON SPA Branch were pleased to welcome Dave Calfe - EC member for District 6 - and Alan Griffiths - of the London Midland Drivers’ Company Council - to their Branch Meeting on 6 July. It was an excellent turn-out for this meeting with nearly one-third of the depot attending despite the atrocious weather.

Dave was invited to take floor first, and spoke on the following issues: discussions on the Pensions Commission and outstanding pensions disputes with TOC’s; pay talks; subscriptions and the ASLEF financial report; drivers remaining at work until beyond age 65; ASLEF opposing a different approach to Rules and the Rule Book, and other industrial relations issues.

Alon then followed up with more local issues, including posting of bank-holiday diagrams, discussions regarding the replacement of the SMED (points) system, rest-day working and violations on London Midland, the closure of Bletchley depot, the future of Leamington and Shrewsbury depots, harmonisation talks, and accommodation/welfare turns for drivers.

The Chairman and Secretary wish to offer their thanks to both Dave and Alan for their visit to Leamington Branch, and we look forward to welcoming them to further meetings in the future.

Nick Walker – Reporter – Leamington Spa Branch
"M sure members will recall the industrial dispute between the union and Silverlink back in November last year. After it was resolved, I still felt there were important items I’d like to clear up. No problem, I thought: after all, the Freedom of Information Act 2000 says ‘any person making a request for information to a public authority is entitled (a) to be informed in writing by the public authority whether it holds information of the description specified in the request, and (b) if that is the case, to have that information communicated to him.’ So I quoted the Act when I wrote to the Department of Transport (DfT) about a number of issues. Two of these were to ask if the Department supported Silverlink financially on the days when industrial action was taken, and if, as a result of the dispute any changes were made to the London Midland franchise (which took over from Silverlink).

That was in March. I thought it wouldn’t take long to get a response: after all, neither question was complex.

**INTERESTING REFUSAL**

In April the DfT told me that ‘an official’ and ‘a senior independent official’ had both decided not to answer my questions. Why? In both cases, they said, the information was ‘exempt from disclosure as it would be likely to prejudice commercial interests’. I could hardly believe it. I only wanted to know whether the taxpayer had subsidised the rail company to enable them to overcome the effects of (legal) industrial action. And the DfT wouldn’t tell me – for reasons I find entirely spurious.

In the first case, how could this information prejudice the commercial interests of Silverlink – when it no longer exists? And secondly, the amount of subsidy paid to franchises are supposed to be a matter of public record. The DfT is expected to detail all subsidies when it awards a contract.

Because of this refusal to answer my questions, I’ve now complained to the Information Commissioner. This is, it says, ‘an independent authority set up to promote access to official information’. I hope this will produce some more positive response. I’ll let you know. In the meanwhile it seems to me that government officials have a very different interpretation of the words ‘freedom of information’ than I do.

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**INFORMATION IS NOT AS FREE AS YOU’D EXPECT**

says executive committee member Dave Calfe

Arguments over peace at Stratford and a celebration of the 10-year old national health service – more cuttings from ASLEF’s rich history …

**100 YEARS AGO**

In the August 1908 edition of the Journal, Organising Secretary H. Parfitt describes a branch taking contributions – and a secretary unwilling to spend them on a Peace Conference!

“On the 28th I dropped in at the Stratford meeting. The secretary was fully occupied for nearly four hours taking contributions. In the absence of Mr.Thirtle, the chair was occupied by Mr. Hubbard, and the reading of minutes and correspondence commenced at 7.30. I pitied the gentleman who had that task. A vast amount of it related to the “Peace Society”, its aims and objects and its conference, which is to be held in London this year, the daily meeting thereof and the usual other “functions” connected therewith, the desirability of sending delegates thereto, and the necessity of providing cash therefore. “Am I to read all of this?” pleaded the gentleman with the pamphlet, counting the pages. “It is correspondence, sir,” smilingly replied the secretary, whereupon the reader “looked a lot”, but heroically resumed his task. Eventually he got through it and some other matters, then a discussion arose as to sending representatives to the “Peace Conference”. One member volunteered to go with the usual “provided”. Another thought that two should be sent. A matter-of-fact person inquired how the expenses were to be met? Horrible question! Some people delight in upsetting the harmony! Everybody looked at the secretary; he had heaps of money in front of him! Yet he said he knew of no fund for that purpose!”

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**50 YEARS AGO**

In August 1958 the Journal carried an article praising a decade-old NHS and reminding us of what a loss it would be to the country …

“Britain’s Health Service was nationalised ten years ago, on July 5th, 1948. Before then you could buy everything medical science had to give. Buy it – not expect it as a right. If you hadn’t the money, you did without expensive treatment – or became a students’ guinea-pig or a “charity patient”. There were, of course, devoted people who did try to provide an inclusive health service for poor people. But now we recognise that no surgeon or doctor or dentist should ever be in a position to withhold treatment because the patient can’t pay.

Does it seem strange to you that they should withhold treatment? It doesn’t seem strange in the United States, for instance……

The National Health Service is not perfect. Many valid criticisms can be made on details. But it is the best in the world and getting better.

So let us toast the National Health Service on its 10th birthday and wish it (and ourselves) Good Health.

● Extracts selected and edited by Jane Pimott
John Blow – a sad loss

IT IS with sadness that I report the sudden passing away after a short illness of retired Frodingham driver John Blow. He was 82.

John served for many years on what was then called the LDB and on the Branch Committee, becoming especially involved when the Flexible Rostering (Decision 77) dispute was in its infancy and implementation. John will be sadly missed by many people, friends and work colleagues alike – something that was reflected by the attendance at his funeral.

I always remember his very dry sense of humour. Once during an LDC meeting John told his Area Manager to ‘get stuffed’. Luckily the AM didn’t take this personally, and at the next LDC meeting he presented John with a packet of Paxo stuffings. John thought this was hilarious.

I have to thank John and my LDC colleagues for the education they gave me in my early years at Frodingham. Through them I acquired the proud socialist beliefs and pride in my working class roots that put me in such good stead as a councillor. I was privileged to have had such a role model.

Rest in peace, brother.

David A. Doherty  Reporter – Immingham branch

Colin Swettenham – train driver, model father

IT IS with great sadness that I have to report that my father, a retired member, Colin Swettenham has passed away aged 77 years.

Dad started at Stratford as an Engine Cleaner in 1948 and worked his way through the footplate grades, getting his driver’s check in 1958.

In 1963 he was made redundant so took a 14A move to Clacton where he remained until his retirement in 1993.

Dad was an active ASLEF man, serving as Branch Secretary, LDC Rep and also Health & Safety Rep for many years.

As an engineman myself, I feel greatly privileged to have had such a role model.

Andy Swettenham  Driver - St. Pancras

Mr Ivan George Amos – 42 year career

IVAN AMOS, who was born on 9 February 1923, worked on the Eastern region railway for 42 years. In his long career he witnessed the passing of steam and the development of diesel and electric trains. They were happy times for him.

Sadly Ivan passed away on 2 June. He will be sadly missed by family and friends.

Paul Amos

Richard ‘Dick’ Morton – a caring man

IT IS with great sadness that I report the death of retired driver Richard Morton at the age of 63.

Richard began his career at in 1961/62 at East Ardsley as an Engine Cleaner and then a Passed Fireman. In 1967, Richard transferred to Healey Mills because of depot closures. He became a registered driver in the late 1980’s until he retired because ill health in 2007. Richard had a kind, caring nature and was renowned for his dry sense of humour. He was a dedicated man, devoted to the footplate and his fellow colleagues. On behalf of the branch, I would like to pass on our condolences to Richard’s family and friends.

Richard Scott  Branch Secretary (Healey Mills)

Alan Baker – a popular character

FORMER Bath Road Driver Alan (‘A.J.’) Baker passed away recently, after a long illness. No further details are available at present.

Alan was a regular co-opted member of the Drivers LDC at Bath Road as well as being a regular branch attendee. He was also a very popular character, never missing an opportunity to ‘take the mickey’. Alan will be much missed by family, friends and work mates.

Bernard Kennedy  Bristol

Ken Chapman – his own man

YOU may have read recently the short Journal article about compensation for retired member K.L. Chapman. Sadly Ken has now succumbed to his illness.

Ken began his service at Redhill M.P.D. transferring to Three Bridges as a Fireman, before becoming a Driver at Caterham E.M.U.T. He spent the whole of his driving career at Caterham, and retired there in 1999.

Ken was not an active branch member but always gave his support to ASLEF on the many issues that required action from the rank and file membership. He was his own man, but was always willing to assist anyone who asked for help.

In the last few weeks of his life, as the cancer became intolerable, he was nursed at the Marie Curie Cancer Care Home in Caterham. As hard as he had tried to remain independent his strength failed him and the pain he was in caused him to seek the help of others.

Our thanks go to all the staff of Marie Curie for the comfort and support given so freely.

Roy Luxford  Southern

Eric Skues – an unassuming man

ANOTHER ex Tonbridge man has passed away.

Eric Skues was 86 so he had a good innings. He was well-liked although he was a very quiet and unassuming man. Eric had a talent for being able to turn his hand to most things – and managing to excel in most of them. He was a good and reliable ASLEF man.

Eric started his railway career at Tonbridge before going into the ‘Dual Link’ which meant he divided his driving between Tonbridge and Sevenoaks EMU Depot. He continued this until his vacancy for driving Electric Trains came up.

Our thoughts go out to Eric’s family at this time.

Dave Weddle  Reporter - Tonbridge RMS

Pete Bethell – loyal to the end

I AM sad to report the recent death of Pete Bethell at the age of 66. Born in Fulham and brought up in Putney, Pete started his footplate career at Stewarts Lane in 1957 later resigning then realising the footplate life was for him. In 1958 he started at Willesden shed, transferring to Hither Green in 1966.

Pete was a great gardener and fisherman who loved his boot-fairs, pastimes we often did together. He suffered poor health in the 80s and finished up in the restricted link until early retirement in 1993.

Pete stayed loyal to the end and never spoke to or forgave those who scabbard in the 82 strike; nor did he ever forgive Thatcher and her cronies for what they did to the miners and the trade union movement. He was a true ASLEF man! See you on the picket line some day Pete!

Ray Cooper – Retired Members  Section – Hither Green
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<th>BENEFIT</th>
<th>STANDARD PLAN</th>
<th>DOUBLE BENEFIT PLAN</th>
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<td>On accident or sickness</td>
<td>£50 per week</td>
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<td>On permanently unable to work and ill health retired</td>
<td>£5,000</td>
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<td>Death benefit</td>
<td>£5,200</td>
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<td>Children’s benefit for 1 child</td>
<td>£270 per 4 weeks</td>
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<td>Children’s benefit for 2 children</td>
<td>£360 per 4 weeks</td>
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<td>Children’s benefit for 3 children</td>
<td>£450 per 4 weeks</td>
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<td>Additional benefit for up to 6 children at no extra cost.</td>
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STEP 3 - Check out how little it costs to protect your family each week.

Affordable Family Protection from only £28.00 per week.

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<th>Your age now*</th>
<th>STANDARD PLAN</th>
<th>DOUBLE BENEFIT PLAN</th>
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<tr>
<td>16 to 29</td>
<td>£2.80 per week</td>
<td>£5.60 per week</td>
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<td>30 to 39</td>
<td>£3.30 per week</td>
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<td>40 to 44</td>
<td>£3.80 per week</td>
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*You must be aged between 16 and 44 to be eligible for this plan.

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ORDER YOUR 4 LEAF CLOVER PENDANT TODAY!
I AGREE with many of the points Andrew Milner made in his letter in the July Journal but if he knows anyone of my generation I suggest he asks them about the Tories and Beeching’s demolition job on the railways. Or their relationship with American hit man MacGregor. Or about British workers being bludgeoned by British police fetched in from all over the country. Or their removing the link between wages and pensions.

They made ‘nice little earners’ out of gas, electric and water, and they deliberately ran down the NHS.

With the greatest of respect, Andrew, my advice to you would be to try to get into management - because if the Tories get back in, you will be better off there than driving trains.

Good luck to you and all the other young drivers.

RON KETTLE – retired driver – Southend
A LITTLE BIT OF MOSCOW DOWN IN CORNWALL …

In 1924 the Great Western Railway, with the Great Western Housing Association, built two small housing complexes in Cornwall. Veronica Kelly of the Cornwall Audio Visual Archives (CAVA) spoke to residents and discovered how the estates came to be known as ‘Little Moscow’ and ‘Moscow Row’ …

THE people I spoke to gave a very vivid account of living in a railway house in a railway community. They explained how the houses were allocated and how tenancies operated.

This was on the basis of having shares in the properties and renting the remainder. A tenant needed a minimum of twenty-five shares to move into a railway house. If they couldn’t afford shares, they paid regular instalments on top of their rents for the required amount.

The weekly rent in 1926 for a parlour house was 8s. 3d. Most tenants chose shares and rent. When they gave up their tenancy, they were repaid their share capital. Interest on shares was paid yearly.

Everyone I spoke to remarked on the community spirit in ‘Little Moscow’ and ‘Moscow Row’. ‘Little Moscow’ even boasted its own concert party - which performed all over Cornwall. A child performer of the concert party remembered performing at the Truro British Legion and being rewarded with an Easter egg.

DRIVER BOWDEN MBE

Typical long time residents of ‘Little Moscow’ were the Bowdens. Bill started work as a railway cleaner and rose through the ranks to engine driver. He was a member of the estate’s housing management committee as well as being an active trade unionist and Labour Councillor.

After a stint as Mayor of Truro in 1959, Bill was awarded an MBE. His wife, Vera, told me, ‘I think the ‘Moscow’ label was because we were all Labour and many of us active in the local Labour Party.’

Another MBE, Muriel Boynes, grew up in ‘Little Moscow’ and returned there after marriage to a railwayman. The sense of belonging to a close-knit community was evident in all the interviews, but perhaps especially in Muriel’s. They all believed that living in a railway community created a sense of identity which distinguished them from other communities. One particular characteristic was the phenomenal number of ‘Moscow’ tenants who became local Labour Councillors, and as Muriel said, ‘I suppose the railwaymen were one of the first groups of union men in Truro.’

GENERAL STRIKE ACTIVITY

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GENERAL STRIKE ACTIVITY

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Prize Crossword No. 28
set by TLC

Solution to Crossword No 27 which appeared in the July edition of the ASLEF Journal. Congratulations to Sean Connolly from Llanelli.

ACROSS
3 Top Speed 8 Stan 9 SignalLamp 10 Menu 11Ride 13 Deter 17 Avenue 18 Encore 19 Rates 22 Seal 24 Atom 25 Amber Light 26 Open 27 Elevated DOWN 1 Steel 2 Insurance 4 Ounce 5 Salad 6 Exact 7 Departed 12 Deep 14 Escalator 15 Carriage 16 Fete 20 Table 21 Syria 22 Stile 23 Mower

Thanks for all your responses to the 27th ASLEF crossword in the July edition. If you complete this month’s crossword please send the solution to the Editor, ASLEF Journal, 9 Arkwright Road, London NW3 6AB by the 14th of the issue month.

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 £1,442,369 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.

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

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