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I REMEMBER my pride in being a Labour Party member in 1997. The party had promised that if it was elected it would restore trade union rights to GCHQ. It was elected - and it immediately did exactly what it said it would. At last, I thought – democracy in action!

I’m still proud of being a member of the Labour Party: whatever its faults, it is still the ‘only show in town’ when it comes to representing working people. The Conservatives look after the rich, the Lib Dems look out for themselves and Labour looks to improve the lot of those who work for a living. The problem now is that there is a gulf between the government and the party – as in the case of trade union rights.

When Thatcher introduced her anti-union laws, the Opposition was incensed. When she abolished union rights at GCHQ, it was incandescent. When she took away the right to strike from prison officers, it resolved to reverse this decision. And it did.

But last month ‘justice’ minister Jack Straw announced his intention to re-impose the strike ban because prisons are an ‘essential service’. This is the same phrase the right-wing French President is using in his efforts to ban rail strikes!

Our party and the government no longer appear to share the same basic values.

I’ve invited the prison officers’ union to put its case in this edition of the Journal (see page 12) – and it has done so with vigour - but also with regret. No trade unionists wants to criticise a Labour government. In fact, we wouldn’t if it would act like a Labour government.

Some of this anger with the government has led members to look again at their payment of the political lobby – because they think ASLEF sends money to support a government that lets them down. We do not. Most of our political fund is spent pursuing our claims and objectives in a public arena. I can assure you now that it’s not meekly handed over to the Labour Party at national level.

If we didn’t have an adequate political fund we would be prevented from a lot of the lobbying work we carry out to benefit our members. It is a sad conclusion that ASLEF’s political fund is spent in search of Labour values – but often that means the money doesn’t go to Labour.

KEITH NORMAN
GENERAL SECRETARY
Northern trial new cab seats

THE union is working on a number of issues with Northern Rail regarding our SQUASH Campaign report Craig Theaker, Rob Porter and Neil Anderson from the company’s Cab Improvement Group …

ASLEF reps have been shown a seat currently being trialled in Scotrail for the 158. A static test has begun with a view to a 10 week running trial. A static trial of the planned 156 Driving Seat/Desk Mod/DSD Mod went well, despite a few hitches. Further ‘tweaks’ are needed with panelling timescales of around a month. The union is confident that the DSD Mod is a massive improvement with its position. It is hoped that drivers will respond to a questionnaire to give the Fleet Department a much better overview of what is required.

Complaints about drivers’ seats fitted to Class 153/155 units revealed half were fitted with universal Class 15x seats. Railpart have offered a more suitable seat which is fitted to Class 153/42. So far feedback has been very positive; an order has been placed for 27 seats and will be fitted ASAP. A case is being made to relocate the master switch in the big cab on the 153s to provide more leg room.

48 pedestal seats have been fitted to the Class 142 Drivers seats (FNW), but there are still problems with the movement on the pedestal, failure of the quick release handle and seat base breaking. This is being rectified and a new handle has also been manufactured.

Modifications on the 142 cabs include LED lighting in the cab instruments, an additional sunblind, resurfacing of the desk surface with anti-graffiti coating, checks to ensure cab panels fit and lock, repainting, upgrading cab locks and including sliding vents in cab doors.

Management agreed that the lack of draught-proofing would be treated as a priority and confirmed that lagging is available as a temporary measure until a proper solution is found. Cab fans have been put into all 142s and 156s and there is a commitment to speed up the fitment of outstanding Heaton based units. The Group is also working on a Cab Protocol agreement which will eventually appear in the cab.

Northern Rail is meanwhile producing a Cab/Train Standard that will be a statement of intent to ensure that the cab/train is up to the specific standard required.

First Capital Connect have planned fitment for Spot air cooling on 319 units which will begin on 3 March and be completed on 30 June, says Tony Farmer of the FCC council.

Holiday rail disaster adds to Pakistan woes

AS IF the beleaguered people of Pakistan had not had enough suffering of late, at least 56 people died after an overnight express train packed with holidaymakers derailed in the south of the country.

Another 150 passengers were injured when 12 out of the 16 carriages came off the tracks as the train travelled from Karachi to Lahore. The accident happened at about 2 in the morning, leaving hundreds of passengers to claw their way out of the wreckage in total darkness. Many of the 900 people on board were travelling home for the Muslim holiday of Eid.

Fuel duty facts published

The Campaign for Better Transport (CBT) has published a factsheet demonstrating that we do not pay excessive amounts of fuel duty, a constant claim of the road lobby. The document shows that

- Fuel duty has not been increasing in line with inflation since 2000 - with the small increase in Oct 2007 the first in years
- Tax, as a percentage of fuel, has not been this low since 1993
- Higher fuel prices are down to high oil prices not because of fuel duty
- The real cost of motoring has fallen in the past decade, while the cost of taking public transport has increased

The facts are available on the CBT website at http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/campaigns/climate_change/roads/facts

New MP motions on monster trucks and Woodhead Tunnel

THE union is asking members to urge their MPs to sign two Early Day Motions (EDMs).

One – EDM 506 - has been submitted by Heywood and Middleton MP Jim Dobbin and reads: ‘That this House notes the environmental benefits of rail freight over other transport modes; recognises that an average aggregate freight train can remove up to 120 HGV lorries from the road network; supports Government steps to encourage modal shift from road to rail; and is therefore opposed to the introduction of longer and heavier goods vehicles onto the UK road network that could weigh up to 60 tonnes and be as long as 25.25 metres.’

EDM 459 - raised by Graham Stringer (MP for Manchester Blackley) concerns the Woodhead Tunnel, which the union wants to see protected for rail use. National Grid plans to run cables through the disused rail tunnel – but if it did, the strategic rail route of the Woodhead Tunnel would be lost permanently to both freight and passenger trains between Sheffield and Manchester. The union believes that would be a mistake, because reopening the line could be used as an alternative to the congested road routes for both passenger and freight traffic.
Compensation for Arriva Trains driver forced to retire

A train driver who has been forced to retire from his job after severely injuring his back at work has been awarded compensation by his former employer, Arriva Trains Wales.

Driver Martin Syms, 51, from Porth, Rhondda Cynon Taff, received nearly £80,000 from the company after ASLEF, along with Thompsons Solicitors, took up his case.

At the time of the accident Mr Syms was chatting with colleagues during his break. He was sitting in a plastic moulded chair in the mess room on platform 7 at Cardiff Central Station. As he moved backwards in the chair, it collapsed - causing him to land heavily on his back.

Commenting on the incident, Mr Syms said, ‘Initially it was a shock and then I began feeling discomfort and pain very soon afterwards. I thought that by resting my back for a few days it would be OK, but the pain just got worse. I couldn’t move, I couldn’t drive my car and the pain made me feel sick. Although I took painkillers, they didn’t seem to offer much comfort and when I returned to work it was very difficult. The pain was intense and I began feeling numbness in my right leg.’

After visiting his doctor, Mr Syms underwent a series of hospital visits and investigations to determine the exact nature of the pain and discomfort. Despite physiotherapy and injections, the pain intensified. He was eventually forced to retire from driving trains.

ASLEF District Organiser, Stan Moran, said, ‘Health and safety issues are not just about what happens on the track or within trains. If chairs in the mess room are defective, they have the potential to injure people as has happened in this case.’

Register for DOO injury claims

THE union’s executive committee has asked our solicitors, Thompsons, to set up a database of back, neck and shoulder accidents or injury claims from members employed by companies operating Driver Only Operation (DOO) ‘Look Back’ work.

The union is concerned about potential problems with this work and wants to isolate cases so it can be carefully monitored. The EC will be regularly informed of the extent of difficulties.

District organiser Andy Morrison says the matter has been raised on a regular basis both at the ONE company council and Joint Safety Committee meetings. It is also being progressed by health and safety reps on the company’s West Anglia and Metro divisions.

Andy says that the fact that ONE is to be represented at future talks by its directors of Operations and Safety ‘indicates that they are now realising the seriousness of resolving these matters’.

He stresses that members working on these duties who feel any discomfort to the back, neck and shoulders should make a point of reporting them to the company.

DRS take on 18 trainee drivers

IN A break from the norm of recruiting qualified drivers through normal channels, DRS has initiated and fulfilled a promise to recruit and train 18 new drivers.

For a relatively small freight operating company this recruitment drive has increased the driver complement by almost 15%.

Initial talks with the company council ensured that 8 internal employees (5 trainmen and 3 other staff) were successful in applying for the trainee driver vacancies. Among them is Direct Rail Services’ third female driver.

The other 10 trainees are new to the industry. They are to be congratulated for reaching this stage – as they faced competition from over 1,000 other applicants!

As a company council we feel enormously satisfied by this initiative, with everyone gaining something. 18 people will become train drivers, the company has the satisfaction of watching these trainees flourish – and the union has 18 new members after our successful recruitment day.

We would like to welcome them all to our profession – and wish them a long, happy and safe career in train driving. (Report from the company council)
FGW say yes to action, but no dates set

ASLEF members in First Great Western have voted overwhelmingly for industrial action, but because of ‘significant progress’ in negotiations, the executive committee has not set dates for strikes. ‘It is a ringing endorsement of the union’s position that 75.4% voted for strike action,’ said district organiser Stan Moran. ‘Of our 800 members in the company, 576 returned ballot papers. Of these 442 voted for action.’ However, the union’s executive committee says that finally - ‘meaningful negotiations’ are taking place, and it has therefore held back on naming strike dates. ‘This is in order to allow every opportunity for the dispute to be settled to the satisfaction of both sides,’ Stan says. The problems with the company have centred around mismanagement, failure to apply agreed disciplinary procedures and grading issues – all of which contributed to a serious breakdown in industrial relations.

US PLANS ‘GREEN’ LOCOMOTIVE

The BNSF Railway Company, which is a unit of railroad operator Burlington Northern Santa Fe Corp, said last month that it has entered a partnership with Vehicle Projects LLC to develop a hydrogen fuel cell switch locomotive (which is a shunting loco in English).

The project is under development and set for field testing later in the year. The company claims that the vehicle could also be used as a mobile back-up power source in disaster relief efforts. ‘While it’s not a proven technology and the project is still in its infancy, we believe investments like the fuel cell switch locomotive are important for the advancement of new technology,’ a spokesperson for BNSF said.

HONOURS?

Among those receiving gongs in the Queen’s Honours List at the end of last year were Ian McAllister, the Chair of Network Rail who was knighted for his ‘services to Transport; Roy Malcolm Wicks, Director-General, South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive, who got an OBE for his services to Public Transport; and Graham Ernest Smith, the Planning Director of English, Welsh and Scottish Railways, who was given an MBE for his services to the Rail Freight Industry. It is with some relief that we report that no ASLEF officials were mentioned in despatches!

10% FOR GERMAN DRIVERS?

Deutsche Bahn, the railway operator which has taken over EWS, agreed rises for all grades of 4.5% from last July. It is, however, currently negotiating with a splinter union what seems likely to be a 10% rise for engine drivers.

DIRECT RAIL SERVICES JOINS FREIGHT ON RAIL

Freight on Rail is pleased to announce that Direct Rail Services (DRS) has joined the campaign group, ‘Freight on Rail’, a partnership between the rail trade unions, the rail freight industry and Campaign for Better Transport who work together to promote the social, economic and environmental benefits of rail freight.

SOUTHERN REST DAY WORKING:

ASLEF is prepared to sanction Rest Day Working on Southern until 31 January 2008 subject to continued monitoring by our representatives.

FIRST GREAT WESTERN REST DAY WORKING:

ASLEF is prepared to sanction Rest Day Working on One Railway until 29 March 2008 subject to continued monitoring by our representatives.

FIRST CAPITAL CONNECT REST DAY WORKING:

ASLEF is prepared to sanction Rest Day Working on First Capital Connect until 29 March 2008 subject to continued monitoring by our representatives.

FREIGHTLINER INTERMODAL REST DAY WORKING:

ASLEF is prepared to sanction Rest Day Working on Freightliner Intermodal until 27 December 2008 subject to continued monitoring by our representatives.

DIRECT RAIL SERVICES REST DAY WORKING:

ASLEF is prepared to sanction Rest Day Working on DRS until 31 March 2008 subject to continued monitoring by our representatives.

C2C PAY 2007: Members in C2C voted by 75% in favour of a 3 year pay deal which will increase drivers salaries by 4.5% in Years 1, 2 and 3.

REST DAY WORKING:

ASLEF is prepared to sanction Rest Day Working on C2C until 26 April 2008 subject to continued monitoring by our representatives.

COMPANY COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Bro B Corbett, Bristol Branch has been elected to the First Great Western Company Council Constituency 1. Bro M Ward, Hull Branch has been elected to the Hull Trains Company Council. Bro B Kennedy, Bristol Branch has been elected as EWS Company Council Representative, former Wessex Constituency. Bro C Blackwell, Tilbury Branch has been elected as Freightliner Heavy Haul, Local Representative, South 2 Constituency.

ONE RAILWAY REST DAY WORKING:

ASLEF is prepared to sanction Rest Day Working on One Railway until 29 March 2008 subject to continued monitoring by our representatives.

COMPANY NEWS
Direct from Jersey - Great Value Spring Gardening Offer

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INTERNATIONAL RAIL WORKERS’ ACTION DAY

The International Transport Federation (ITF) has this year designated 6 March ‘International Rail Workers’ Action Day. ASLEF intends to join the initiative with a few activities with the theme ‘Don’t Take A Chance With Our Railways – Make Rail Public’.

Planning is at an early stage, but will include producing a leaflet to distribute to the public with details of the amount of money that goes to subsidise private firms, and how much leaves the industry as part of franchising. We will also be seeking support for retaining at least one operator in public hands for comparison purposes.

Discussions are taking place as to how we can best catch the public eye, with the idea of gambling a favourite. We will be producing large playing cards for volunteers to sport as sandwich-boards and organising eye-catching ideas with large dice.

It is hoped that we can mount activities outside London as well as inside the capital.

NEW INITIATIVES FOR TRAINING UNION REPS

The union has seconded Julie Weekes from the TUC’s Dunstable College to boost the union’s training programme. She is currently engaged on drawing up a union education programme after consulting reps throughout the union. ‘The aim is to involve more members and encourage more activism,’ says general secretary Keith Norman. ‘We want to make it clear what we want from our reps, and to ensure that they are confident in any role they adopt.’

In line with this, the union has developed a new course to be called ‘Getting Active in ASLEF’. It is aimed at new workplace representatives and branch officers, and any members who are interested in getting more involved in the union.

‘The aim will be to run friendly informal course to develop skills and build confidence – and they can also count towards formal qualifications,’ the general secretary says.

Employers should usually give time off for the courses – to be held in London, Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Warrington, Colchester and Glasgow – and where necessary ASLEF will pay receipted travel or subsistence expenses.

For more information contact Julie Weekes at Arkwright Road or by email at juliew@aslef.org.uk

TUC SUPPORTS CAMPAIGN TO STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST IRAQI WOMEN

The TUC is supporting a campaign launched in January by the Iraqi Women’s League (IWL) Co-ordinating Committee against violence against women in Iraq.

The TUC urges members to sign up to the online petition at www.athevar.org/camp/i.asp?id=111

Details are accessible on the union’s website.
Clive Jones retired in December after 46 years on the footplate. Clive occupied just about every position a lay member of ASLEF can hold, from local rep to EC President. He witnessed massive changes to the railway industry and here he reflects on almost a quarter century of union activism . . .

MY time in the union saw unprecedented transformation in our industry. ASLEF, despite the accusations of our detractors, played an active part in these changes even as it strove to protect the pay and conditions of its members.

I've felt times of great optimism - and times of absolute despair when promises weren't delivered. Our railways have consistently been used as a political football by politicians who didn't have a clue what they were doing – stand up, Mr Major! Our continental neighbours haven't had to suffer such interference – and it shows! If a fraction of the money squandered on rail privatisation had been given to the state railway we would have a transport system second to none.

PUBLIC SERVICE IS NOT 'OLD-FASHIONED'

Supporters of a nationalised railway are sometimes accused of being 'old fashioned' – but I believe that those who think that all state industries are inefficient and all private industry are wonderful are the 'old fashioned' ones. Of course some state industries were inefficient – but so were, and are, many private companies. And financial arguments are only part of the story - the detrimental effect of a fragmented railway on the safe running of our industry is well documented.

It's almost comical to see private companies in deep financial trouble (usually self-imposed) begging governments to bail them out. These were the same companies that previously condemned governments for interfering in private industry!

The truth is that the railway infrastructure in Britain would have collapsed if the Labour Government had not nationalised the railways after the Second World War.

A FALSE FREEDOM

To those who say that privatisation has given us higher living standards I say - beware of the 'free market forces'. They can work against as well as for us. Most of our salary increases were secured by selling conditions of service that a succession of AADs held sacrosanct – things like 12 hour shifts, flexible breaks, single manning of HSTs and increases in continuous running. On the positive side, it is heartening to see back on the agenda improvements in pensions, leisure travel, driving cabs and safer and healthier working practices. It is a recognition that higher salaries are not everything.

I feel particularly strongly about Free Day Working. It must be always a short term measure used to allow training, facilitate recruitment or for other exceptional circumstances. It must never be considered the norm, or tolerated alongside compulsory redundancies.

THE ASLEF FAMILY

I've been involved with ASLEF since I was 16, and always looked upon this union as my extended family – but even family members have their differences! We usually match our boasting of being a professional trade union, but sometimes we fail to achieve the standards we set. I've always accepted that constructive criticism within the union is needed if we are to improve our representation.

I'm equally convinced that to join a general union would be a backward and dangerous step. ASLEF must retain its specialised representation, which is why I was pleased to see last year's AAD make the necessary steps to secure the union's financial footing. We need to ensure we manage our finances properly – and I especially hope we never again have to give large sums of money to the legal profession just to be told the bledin' obvious! I also hope we can hold onto Arkwright Road, a rich part of our heritage.

HOPES AND THANKS

I hope that one day the UK will have the transport system it needs and deserves. The opening of St Pancras International and the expansion of rail freight into Europe and beyond gives me some hope. As an optimist I believe that one day politicians and voters will recognise that an efficient and integrated transport system is vital to our economy and well being – and provide the finances to deliver it.

It feels strange to have retired from an activity that has occupied most of my life. I don't feel old enough for retirement. But I've joined the Retired Members' Section, so I won't be disappearing over the horizon!

I would like to thank the members and colleagues within ASLEF for giving me the privilege of representing them. It's something I'm proud of, and I hope I've been a good ambassador for the union. I'd like to thank them for their friendship and support, and to express my thanks to my wife and family for their patience, sacrifice, and understanding.

Clive at the 2007 AAD and inset - Clive in his youth - looking like Elvis
17 long years – the case of driver Morgan

In last month’s edition we reported that – after 17 years – Driver Bob Morgan’s conviction for manslaughter had been quashed. But how can it take almost two decades to secure justice? And how do you set about trying to remedy something like this after so long? We asked Gary Rubin of Andrews Angels Solicitors – whose persistence and tenacity played such a major part in the successful outcome. This is what he told us….

I FIRST met Bob Morgan in 1997 when I was part of a team representing Peter Afford, the driver involved in the Watford train crash of the previous year. The Watford signal, like T168, had been passed at danger 4 times previously. Peter’s defence was that the railway infrastructure was the underlying cause of the crash.

It was clear from the judge’s summing up that he was not enthusiastic about the defence – and the media were baying for blood. Despite this, it took the jury little more than an hour to acquit him. I thought then that the similarities to Bob’s case could lead to our being able to prove Bob’s innocence.

Understanding of the causes of SPADs increased as a result of the Southall and Ladbroke Grove Public Inquiries in 1997 and 1999. Ladbroke Grove involved another multi-SPAD signal - SN109 had been passed 8 times. Lord Cullen’s report exonerated Michael Hodder, the driver of the SPADing Thames Train - and pointed the finger at Railtrack and its signal.

HOPEFUL SIGNS
The tide was beginning to turn. No longer would the driver be automatically blamed for passing signals at danger. However, it was not until 2007 that Network Rail (formerly Railtrack) was eventually convicted of breaching the Heath and Safety at Work Act 1974. Fining the company £4m, the judge said that where there was a multi-SPAD signal it was the signal that was the common factor - not the driver.

By late 2004 I believed there was enough evidence to put forward a positive case for an appeal for Driver Morgan – and Bob instructed me to proceed.

HELPFUL EXPERTS
It took time to get the case into shape, especially as everyone involved gave their time free of charge. This included industry experts Roy Bell, Peter Rayner, Professor Groeger and Dr Murphy – whose evidence had helped Peter Afford, Larry Harrison (who was acquitted of manslaughter in relation to Southall) and ASLEF at the public inquiries.

Then Alan Cooksey, the former Deputy Chief Inspector of the railway inspectorate (HMRI) came forward. He had originally investigated the crash for the Department of Transport – and he too was convinced Bob was not guilty.

HURDLES TO JUMP
We needed a special hearing of the Full Court of Appeal to get permission to Appeal. This was for two reasons - we were nearly 17 years out of time to lodge an appeal - and Bob had pleaded guilty at his original trial. It was a long hearing and it was touch-and-go as to whether we would succeed - but – on 22 March 2007 - we did.

When the prosecution saw the fresh evidence - setting out the understanding we have today of the causes of SPADs - they decided not to oppose the appeal. In quashing Bob’s conviction Lord Justice Latham said, ‘Clearly, something about the infrastructure of this particular junction was causing mistakes to be made. This was an accident waiting to happen.’ This was our case in a nutshell.

JUSTICE AT LAST
Immediately after the hearing a reporter asked Bob how he felt. ‘Overwhelmed was his reply. He was not the only one. After this long struggle it was hard to believe we had achieved our goal. Everyone from the legal team to the ASLEF delegation, present in court on that emotionally charged day, would agree the sense of achievement was truly ‘overwhelming’.

Bob’s name was cleared just a month before his 65th birthday, when he bids farewell to the railway. I’m sure we will all wish him a long and happy retirement. He deserves it!
THE new London Transport Museum opened last November after a major transformation which cost £22.4 million and took 2 years to complete. It received a £9.4 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and significant funding and sponsorship from Transport for London, TubeLines, National Express Group and Network Rail.

The number of items on display has increased three-fold from the previous Museum, and the displays have been updated to bring the story of London’s transport and its impact on our city into the 21st century. Lively exhibitions explore the powerful link between transport and the growth of modern London, culture and society since 1800. Visitors will encounter the world’s first Underground steam and electric Tube railways and meet characters from the past such as financiers and the first female bus driver. They can even tunnel under the Thames and shelter during the war. In the Metro-Land Gallery, visitors can relax in a recreated 1930s suburban living room and discover how our commuter lifestyles changed so dramatically between the wars.

TRANSPORT MAKES THE CITY
A brand new World Cities gallery highlights pioneering transport systems around the world and features footage collected through a call for content made by the Museum on Facebook. The gallery reinforces the fact that transport is the lifeblood of cities.

A new design gallery has been created to showcase the ‘crown jewels’ of the Museum’s collection and explores how transport has given the city its unique cultural identity. The stars of the show include Harry Beck’s original artwork for his groundbreaking London Underground map, cutting edge graphic design, branding, vehicle design and architecture. The collection includes many firsts and breakthroughs in design; now famous worldwide. The legendary poster archive will be on display throughout the Museum, and in themed temporary exhibitions in the new CBS Outdoor Gallery.

For the first time, London Transport Museum will not only look at the past and present but will also interpret transport futures. This new content has been developed in response to audience research commissioned by the Museum to inform the new exhibitions. A public programme of events and exhibitions will also be developed and will help establish the Museum as a platform for debate.

THE CITY IN 2055
Current and future transport developments are highlighted while visitors are given the opportunity to imagine what it might be like to live in London in 2055, based on the lifestyle choices we are making today. Visitors to the new Museum will end their visit with an improved understanding of the challenges of congestion, population growth and climate change and feel empowered to get involved in London’s future. The galleries are full of interactive exhibits for young people and adults alike. For children there is a new learning zone and interactive play area. The Museum’s popular stamp-card collecting trail is back, and there are countless other attractions including Tube train simulators, play vehicles and action packed interactive exhibits that are fun and informative.

People can finish their visit by relaxing with a coffee and snack, or one of the themed transport cocktails – the ‘Routemaster’ and the ‘Metropolitan Mixture’ - in the Upper Deck café bar.

The Museum’s pioneering work with young people has been funded by the Luke Rees-Pulley Charitable Trust, which promotes safe travel and aims to inform the next generation on the importance of public transport. In all, nearly 100 organisations supported the Museum’s redevelopment.
FREE TRADE
‘Essential service’ no excuse this time

Trade unions expected improvements in their rights when Labour was elected in 1997. ‘Things can only get better’ was the anthem of New Labour — but it hasn’t happened for trade union freedoms. Last month saw further restrictions on our movement both in Europe — with the Viking and Laval ruling — and in the UK with Jack Straw’s aim of making strikes illegal in the prison service. These are reports from Colin Moses of the Prison Officers’ Association and Victoria Phillips, the union’s legal advisor from Thompsons Solicitors . . .

NEW LABOUR, NEW LIES
It is essential that trade unionists across the United Kingdom take notice of the way New Labour is attacking the trade union rights of POA members - and the effect these attacks will have on the wider trade union movement.

In 1994 the Conservative Government criminalised strike action by Prison Officers under Section 127 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act.

Whilst in opposition, the Labour Party consistently opposed the introduction of this Act. Indeed, Tony Blair, when Leader of the Opposition, wrote to the POA promising to ensure that prison officers were treated in the same manner - and with the same working rights - as other public servants. He also promised to halt the expansion of prison privatisation. Since coming to power, New Labour has reneged on both these major issues.

Pressure from the Labour Government forced the POA to sign up to a Voluntary Agreement, to remove the criminality of industrial action from the statute books. However, due to abuse of this agreement by the employer, supported by government, this agreement was withdrawn. A new joint industrial relations procedural arrangement (JIRPA) was introduced which gave the government the same protections of Section 127 of the Public Order Act. Unfortunately, due to the employer abusing the new agreement, again supported by government, the POA found themselves being taken to court on a regular basis and were left with no option except to give notice to withdraw from the JIRPA.

NO PROTECTION, NO PRIVILEGES
The government constantly tries to justify this unfair legislation by saying that prison officers, under the 1952 Prisons Act, have all the powers of a police constable. However, it is a fact that the government constantly ignores those provisions of the Act, especially relating to prison officers having, in the same legislation, all the protection and privileges of a constable. We have none of those protection or privileges.

Despite repeated guarantees by the Labour Party – both in government and in opposition, it has been proven that they cannot be trusted to uphold their promises.

The Labour Party was borne out of the trade union movement and it now dishonours the memory of all the men and women throughout the history of our movement. This unwarranted attack on the POA cannot go unchallenged.

AGREEMENTS ‘DISAPPLIED’
In 2005 the Government ‘disapplied’ section 127 for public sector officers in England, Wales and Scotland, following the POA signing the new Joint Industrial Relations Procedural Agreement (JIRPA), a no strike agreement. Since then the Prison Service Management Board has continually undermined the JIRPA to the point where, at national level, it was almost inoperable. That is why we withdrew from it.

On 29 August 2007, in an attempt to make the Prison Service and government realise the true nature of the problems in our prisons, the POA membership took the ultimate actions and went on strike. The impact of this action was significant, but, the support from the public in general and our sister unions was magnificent. Obviously the employer and government were not too impressed.

AS BAD AS THATCHER
In the first sitting day of Parliament in 2008 the Secretary of State for Justice, Jack Straw set out his intention to reintroduce Section 127. The amendments he suggested to the Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill amount to an even greater attack on union rights - not only of prison officers, but of all staff working in, or who could potentially have any effect on, the ‘normal working’ of a prison. It all adds up to the most fundamental attack on trade union rights by any government since Maggie Thatcher.

As a Labour Party member, I am disgusted that this government has abandoned its roots to the extent that it is aiming to re-criminalise prison staff and other workers. They have been shown to be untrustworthy, dishonourable and downright dishonest.

The POA will not be bullied. We will remain a free and independent trade union - and one which will exercise its basic and human rights. We will continue to fight, continue to campaign and continue to highlight this government’s attacks on trade unions.

If necessary we will take the plight of this union to the European Courts.
More worrying still was the ECJ ruling a week later that the right to take industrial action is restricted because of an employer’s right to provide services in other member states, which is pretty much the same thing as establishing their business in other EC countries, is limited to action aimed at achieving only the minimum terms and conditions which are prescribed by law (such as the minimum wage or minimum holiday entitlement).

LEGAL ACTION
A Latvian company, Laval, posted workers from Latvia to work on building sites in Sweden. It was unable to reach agreement with the Swedish building and public workers union over pay so the union began a blockade of Laval’s sites in Sweden.

The Swedish Electrician’s Union, none of whose members were employed by Laval, joined in with sympathy action. Laval took legal action to declare the industrial action unlawful, arguing that its freedom to provide services in another member state was infringed because the pay rates sought by the Swedish unions exceeded those set down by the European Posted Workers Directive.

The ECJ agreed. While it said, as in the Viking decision, that the right to take industrial action is fundamental, it said that action intended to achieve terms and conditions above those minimums provided by the Posted Workers Directive was not justified.

DECADES-OLD UNION RIGHTS BRUSHED ASIDE
This is absurd. The European Court’s decision runs roughshod over trade union rights which have been almost universally recognised throughout the EC for many decades.

How can it be a fundamental right to take industrial action when that right is over-ridden by the employers’ right to establish itself or to provide services in another member state?

The ECJ said that while the right to take industrial action is a ‘fundamental’ right, any industrial action aimed at protecting jobs and terms and conditions should be ‘suitable for ensuring the achievement of that objective’.

In other words it gave licence to courts to scrutinise the objectives of industrial action and whether a union has other means of achieving its aims which would be ‘less restrictive’ of the employer’s right to establish itself in any EC country that it wished.

This has worrying implications for trade union rights and freedoms.

GERMAN train operator Deutsche Bahn planned to bring drivers over from Austria during the strike by German drivers over pay.

The new European Train Drivers Certificate, which is being introduced in 2009 under a European Directive aimed at ‘liberalising’ the market for the operation of international passenger trains may be helpful to any rail company looking to break a strike by bringing in workers from across state borders.

And two legal rulings by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) at the end of last year might also be useful to employers looking to undermine collective agreements with trade unions.

The cases, known as Viking and Laval, both involved claims by employers that their rights as companies were infringed by industrial action taken by trade unions after foreign workers were brought in on lower pay.

NO FLAGGING FROM EMPLOYERS
Viking Line, the shipping firm, tried to avoid collective agreements with Finnish trade unions and to cut jobs and terms and conditions by ‘re-flagging’ a ship called the Rosella, which operated under a Finnish flag.

Viking sought to operate the Rosella under a ‘flag of convenience’ in Estonia and bring in Estonian crew on lower pay.

Following a request from the Finnish Seamen’s Union, the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) issued an instruction to affiliates to boycott Viking’s activities.

Viking brought proceedings in the High Court in London (where the ITF is based), arguing that its rights to freedom of establishment – to operate wherever it wants – under European Community law were infringed by the industrial action.

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COMMISSIONS UNDERTAKEN FOR ORIGINAL OIL PAINTINGS AT COMPETETIVE PRICES

ARTIST
Frederick James Taylor
Guild of Railway Artists (Assoc. Member)
Guild of Wiltshire Artists

These pictures of my work show samples of oil paintings produced from black/white and colour photos. If you have a favourite photo or locomotive that you would like painted specifically for you, then please contact me to discuss your requirements.

Although I specialize in painting trains, I also undertake a wide variety of other subjects including aircraft, portraits, animals, landscapes etc. To find out more about my work, please log on to my website.

CONTACT DETAILS:
Tel. 01793 871004     Mob. 07740 516238
Email. reikifred@aol.com   Web. darknesstolight.co.uk

9F at Willesden circa 1963
GWR Dean Class at Brinkworth
The Princess Royal
King Edward I
Northam loses 120 years of experience

NORTHAM Branch has seen the end of over 120 years service, with a social event on 30 September to celebrate the retirement of two of its members - Bro J Smart and Bro D Rickard - who, along with Bro A Taylor, who retired in April, made three in the year.

It was nice to see such a large turnout, with a number of colleagues from other depots attending, along with many faces from the past. An excellent afternoon and evening were enjoyed by all, with plenty of eating, drinking and reminiscing.

I would like to thank District Organiser Graham Morris, for attending and making the presentations – and I am sure I speak for all Northam members in wishing our newly retired brothers long and enjoyable retirements.

Mick White Branch Chairman

(The Journal would like to apologise for the very late printing of this item)

The Wolves back Harry ‘H’ Rowe!

AROUND 100 people from all grades in TOCs and FOCs gathered for a surprise get-together for ‘H’ in The Great Western in Wolverhampton. The purpose was to show Harry our support in his fight against cancer of the oesophagus - and to present him with a cheque for £1,725 which had been collected from colleagues at many Midlands depots. A big ‘thank you’ must go to Gaz Clark for leading the collection.

During the speeches Harry was overwhelmed by the generosity shown and the many friends who had gathered. Although it could be a while before Harry gets the ‘all clear’ – we just wanted to let him know that he’s not alone in this battle. We’re all behind you. 100%.

On behalf of the Wolverhampton Branch I would like to thank all contributors and well-wishers for the great support you’ve shown to Harry.

Nigel Harkness Secretary - Wolverhampton Branch

Wesley – Orpington trailblazer departs!

WES SMITH, who as far as I know was the first black driver on Southeastern, has retired after 44 years service.

I was at Orpington Depot when the vacancy sheet came out in 1971. It announced that a certain ‘W. Smith’ had got his Driving job at Orpington - and who arrived but Wesley!

He began his railway career at Ipswich, and after a spell at Stratford he arrived at Orpington. Always a loyal ASLEF member, Wes was a lovely man to work with and we all wish him a long and healthy retirement with his lovely daughters.

Dave Weddle RMS Committee

‘Auld mans do’ for number 2!

IT’S MY pleasure to report back to you the Annual Retired Drivers night – known in the Edinburgh No 2 Branch as the ‘Auld Mans Do!’ – which was held on 30 November in the city’s Beechwood Bowling Club.

The one driver to retire this year was Brother Jimmy Harrold after 45 years service – he’s pictured here receiving his certificate from Kevin Lindsay, the Lead Officer for Scotland.

The other drivers have all been members of the RMS since leaving the job, and they’ve all achieved 50 years medallions by remaining in the Retired Members Section. This achievement underlines the advantages of being in the RMS.

To have one Driver receive a 50 year Medallion is great, but to see 7 Retired Members achieve this is incredible. They share a total of 350 years service between them.

The night was enjoyed by members of Edinburgh No 2 Branch and 3 members of the RMS - Ray Jackson, John Housley and Peter Smith. We’re grateful for their attendance.

We would also like to thank the bar staff and members of the Ladies’ Section of the Club for all their hard work in preparing our meal for the night. Many thanks to them all for their sterling and well-appreciated efforts.

It’s a useful time to remind colleagues that it’s well worth £10 a year to retain ASLEF membership in the RMS - so that you too can have the opportunity to qualify for one of these sought-after medallions. The full ‘roll of honour’ is Jimmy Harrold (45 years) with 50 year medallion holders Bros Sandy Begg, David Dobie, Willie Elder, Jimmy Hogg, Albert Ogg, Jock Sinclair, and Tam Watt.

Sadly Tony West couldn’t attend because of a family illness. Our thoughts were – and are – with him. Cheers, Tony!

R. Wicksted Secretary/ Organiser – Edinburgh No 2

The ASLEF Journal February 2008
Greetings and a farewell from Toton

TOTON Branch continues to hold well-attended branch meetings. EC member Dave Calfe travelled to the final Sunday meeting of 2007 and gave a full report on a number of topics.

He spoke first about some complaints about members’ subscriptions but made a good case as to why they needed to be raised. This has come home to us in the Toton area recently. One of our long-serving ground staff had a discipline problem and he had no support from his fellow workers and little from his union. He felt he was alone and resigned from the company. The point is that if he had been an ASLEF member, it would have been a different scenario. I pointed out to him that when an ASLEF member in the South Yorkshire (Doncaster) area was being picked on, he received the full backing of his fellow workers and his issue was brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

So – fellow members! – not only did he have good union back-up, but his fellow workers were right with him. That is why this union is so strong – and I think we get good value for our subs.

Bro Calfe also raised the issues of the new franchises which had just been awarded, and discussed the impact this would have on members. He went on to talk about the German take-over of EWS and the possible impact this will have on the company. The branch was grateful for Dave’s report.

Our company rep Bro Hurst gave a good report on his meeting with EWS concerning the German take-over. Branch members are very worried and concerned at the prospect of job losses and of other freight companies under-cutting EWS. We accept that we are living in a competitive environment, but members raised serious concerns that EWS’ good safety record could be undermined by cost-cutting.

A prime example of the effects of competition is that a local power station close to Toton has just been ‘open accessed’. As a result two other companies have been awarded contracts, and EWS has had to re-negotiate its current one. This has led to the withdrawal of the ground staff and drive-only will now operate. However, the other companies’ drivers (who are, incidentally, mostly ASLEF members), examine their own trains. One immediate problem is that there is no lighting or proper walking routes – and they are not going to be provided. Our dilemma is that if EWS drivers complain, their company could risk losing its part of the contract. It is a sad case of conditions ‘rounding down’ rather than ‘rounding up’.

The branch asks the EC to monitor this very closely – because it could lead to job losses and even companies going out of business.

Other local issues raised by Brother Hurst were dealt with.

Before I conclude this report, I’d like to say that as I’m getting close to retirement I’ve decided to step down from my union positions. I urge our younger members to keep up this union’s traditions. For all its faults I have been proud to be a member of ASLEF: there is no better union in the country.

My own highlights were attending union courses, especially at Beatrice Webb House – and meeting and knowing Ray Buckton – the greatest GS we ever had - Assistant General Secretary Don Pullen and Organising Secretaries Kirk and Pinches. There are many more I could name. I’m also proud to have attended ASLEF’s centenary celebrations at Arkwright Road and meeting Bill ‘Compo’ Owen. There have been few low points but I recall the return to work in 1982, seeing the coalminers bullied into submission and witnessing a previous general secretary taking disgraceful legal action against my union. Thanks to you all. It’s been great.

Mel Saville Toton Branch

Arnos Grove welcomes President to Xmas bash

I HAD the pleasure of being invited to the Arnos Grove Branch annual Christmas get-together, where all members are invited to come and meet their working and retired colleagues. It is too easy to come to work, do your shift and leave with minimal contact with other colleagues – but branch meetings and socials help to bridge the gap. It allows you get to know your fellow workers and depot representatives and air your views – as well as having a laugh and joke.

This year was an especially good one as we had the pleasure of the company of ASLEF Executive Committee President Alan Donnelly, Vice President Tosh McDonald and EC members Terry Wilkinson, Nigel Gibson and Hugh Bradley. We were spoilt for choice.

We were entertained by a band made up of two working London Underground drivers and a couple of their friends.

Alan Donnelly gave a short speech, and had the pleasure of presenting an ASLEF Retirement Certificate to Kiril Umargadonwilla. After we had welcomed Kiril into the union’s Retired Members Section, we all got down to do what we do best - enjoy the hospitality!

Peter Smith Reporter – Retired Members Section

 Arnos Grove Christmas bash
The Journal of February 1908 had a nugget which included lighting, Latin and lyrics – while 50 years ago coal was carefully considered …

100 YEARS AGO

In the 1908 Journal ‘E.R.’ reported on the Canklow Branch AGM …

“The annual meeting for the election of officers was held at the White Swan Hotel on 29th December in a beautifully decorated room, with electric light and all modern improvements. The election of officers was carried on in quite a spirited manner. Few changes were made; the least expected came when Brother Hill declined to stand again for chairman. Of course the Millman case had to come up, and also a letter from our President…..

“…..Let us take a lesson from the Millman affair. This man allowed himself to be placed in office without the members being acquainted with the fact. He got in according to rule, ‘pro re- nata’. Let us then start the New Year with the perfect understanding that what is wanted all round is ‘principa non homines’. We cannot all be branch officers, general secretaries, E.C. men, or representatives upon the conciliation boards. But we can all be better than worse for knowing that -

“Victory may be dearly won,
Brave he who gained the foremost place;
Yet bravest may, when it is run,
Be he who ran the losing race.”

50 YEARS AGO

L.E. Skellern of the London Midland Region had coal on his mind in his article in the 1958 Journal …

“The steam locomotive in every decade has depended for its existence – more or less – on coal. Its character has been blemished or upheld by the quality of coal used, and in the halcyon days of locomotive history the “top-link” drivers could be “choosy” about coal, and punctual running time was kept if the coal supplied was of best quality. And samples of bad coal were produced to account for time lost with passenger trains – an excuse that was not permissible in the case of freight train working.

“Recently the Ministry of Power announced that fourteen million tons of coal were used annually by the railways in locomotives and electrical undertakings; and when the steam locomotive was extinct it would reduce the consumption of best quality coal by twelve million tons each year. Next to householders, the railways are the highest consumers of large coal. Which reminds us of the boiler.

The design of a locomotive boiler has undergone more changes in the past fifty years than any other part of the engine.

Maintenance is important and the condition of the firebars, ashpan, dampers, brick arch and smokebox should be assured.

Extracts selected and edited by Jane Pimlott
IT IS with deep regret that I have to inform members of the passing of Shrewsbury’s Branch Secretary; Bro Graham Tomkiss [aka Tonka / Tonky] on 17 December, aged 54. Graham was diagnosed as being terminally ill with cancer in November and bore his illness with incredible courage and dignity. Our thoughts are with his wife Doreen and their three grown up children Shaun, Kevin and Shelly.

Tonky was one of the most lively and vibrant people I have ever met. A gentle giant of a man with a big booming voice, who was full of boundless energy at all times of the day. As soon as he arrived for work, he would be in full flow, usually to be heard long before he was seen. There was no chance of catching 40 winks when Tonky was at work.

Tonky was a master story teller who loved nothing better than ‘playing to the gallery’. Often the anecdotes would revolve around the same sort of theme- usually a bacchanalian resulting in Graham inadvertently causing offence to a local dignitary with ‘hilarious consequences’. It didn’t matter that you could guess where a story was heading [although not the arrival time!]. The delivery would be faultless and a joy to behold – because Tonky loved telling stories as much as the people enjoyed listening to them.

At social events he was always the first choice of speaker. He was a larger than life character. Once met, he was never forgotten. His death has affected a great many people to an unprecedented degree partly due to the great shock of losing someone so full of life, humour and energy at such an early age.

He joined the railway in 1976 on Shrewsbury Platform, became a guard (and rep) in 1980 and joined ASLEF when he transferred to the footplate line of promotion in 1988. He attended various forums and courses and served our members as Welfare Fund Secretary, LLC Secretary and – for 15 years - as Branch Secretary. He took the role seriously. No one ever found him wanting.

Tonky and Doreen took great pride in staging functions for our retired members. They always ensured that those who carried the torch before us were reassured and respected; it was important to him that the ‘premier link’ knew that we still proudly carried the banner. Even in hospital he expressed this pride and love for our grade, union and branch. He told us to look after the branch after he had gone. We will Graham.

The funeral on 4 January at Emstrey Crematorium, Shrewsbury, was – predictably - packed. Hundreds of mourners travelled from all over England and Wales to pay their last respects to one of the great railway characters. Many had to stand outside because there was no chance of catching 40 winks. In hospital he expressed this pride and love for our grade, union and branch. He told us to look after the branch after he had gone. We will Graham.

On behalf of Shrewsbury Branch I would like to thank District Organiser Mick Whelan and EC member Dave Calfe for their support for Tonky and his family during his illness, for visiting him in hospital and attending his funeral. Thanks also to everybody who came to the funeral and the wake at The Abbey; to those who covered work at various depots to enable others to attend; and to all who donated money and their best wishes. I would also like to express our appreciation for the marvellous support from various ASLEF Branches, in particular, Wolverhampton, Machynlleth, Nottingham and Birmingham New Street. Our gratitude is also due to London Midland for providing coach transport to the crematorium and for magnificent efforts in getting release for Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton drivers to attend. So well loved was the man whom we gathered to say goodbye to.

Most of all I wish to thank Tonky for so many years of great fun, fraternity, support and integrity. The mess rooms of the Midlands will be a sadder, emptier – and quieter - place without him. God bless you Graham and may you rest in peace.

ALAN GRIFFITHS Secretary - London Midland Company Council

IT IS with sorrow that I have to inform you of the sad passing of ‘Wee Wullie’ Anderson – the last branch secretary and LDC rep of the old Grangemouth branch and depot. Wullie was one of the life’s big characters packed into a small frame.

My own abiding memory of him is his race to catch a pint in the railway club just before closing time after a back shift. In his rush for ‘a pint and a wee hauf’ he would have outrun Linford Christie being carried by a pack of cheetahs!

Once he was pulled up after a derailment – Wullie had been going through at 25 mph stretch at 25 and a half mph (honest!). He was asked what might have happened – and how it was the back half of the train hadn’t remained with the front. Wullie conceded that he ‘might have been going a wee bit cheery’!

But joking aside, Wullie was an ASLEF man to his core. He passed on his beliefs to the next generation of train drivers, including myself. I can think of no better tribute to this ASLEF stalwart than to pass on these same convictions to another generation.

Our thoughts go out to his family at this sad time.

Bro T. McKendrick
Grangemouth Branch

IT IS with sadness that I have to report the passing away of retired engineman G. Patheyjohns at the age of 84, and of G. Matthews aged 90.

On behalf of the branch I would like to convey my condolences to both their families.

Nigel Harkness Secretary - Wolverhampton Branch
MEETING THE HIGGINS CREW

MEETING the Higgins family is like taking a stroll through the rich railway history of Crewe, the town where they live. Family folk-lore has it that, escaping from Roscommon and the Irish famine, a 13 year old boy named O’Higgins alighted onto the platform in the 1870’s. The young lad had a job at Kew Gardens, but mistook ‘Crewe’ for ‘Kew’. He got off the train, found a job on the railways - and never left the town again.

His son Jack was born in 1900 and followed his father’s footsteps, starting work on the footplate in 1915. He would continue in the industry until he retired fifty years later, by which time his son, Terry had already joined – in 1954. Last month Terry came up to Arkwright Road to be presented with a badge commemorating half a century of ASLEF membership. And just to bring us up to date, Terry’s son Tim has worked on the railways for the past 26 years, and like his dad who was on the LDC, has been one of the union’s local representatives.

‘This industry has been my life,’ Terry says. ‘I wouldn’t have had any other.’

Terry is more than a rail enthusiast: trains have been an integral part of his life. He retired 4 years ago when his knees made it an effort to get up to the cab of the EWS trains he was driving. (Tim suggests he wore them out praying for a Sunday!) – but the railways weren’t just something he did at work. Pictures of trains hang on the walls of his house; his shed is packed with model trains; his garden is alive with railway memorabilia.

He spends Sundays at the South Cheshire Model Engineering Society at Nantwich, running the model he bought 5 years ago from a specialist builder in Bristol. He also plays an active part in the city’s Rail Heritage Centre.

Terry says that even their holidays were spent on trains. 30 years ago, when he was 11, the whole family set off for Spain – dad, mum and 3 children. ‘We used my privilege pass and I remember it cost 55 guineas!’ his dad recalls.

I wonder if either of them considered other work and Terry says he did, for a while. ‘I remember a local farmer offered me £2 for a 70 hour week. The railways offered 59 shillings for 44 hours. That ended my career in agriculture!’

Tim says, ‘When I joined, as a ‘box-lad’, you were half expected to work on the railway if your father had. You knew the work, the shifts and the sheds. One of my first memories is going with my grandfather to pick up his wages on a Friday. He handed in a ‘check’, went to a box like a booking office and was passed his wages in a tin!’

One of the models on Terry’s shelfs is of a train which he remembers firing to Perth when he was just 17. ‘I shovelled 11 tons of coal into that Duchess in 8 hours. I couldn’t stand straight!’

It took Terry 29 years to get into driving. ‘Promotion was slow in those days,’ he says. ‘You could only transfer within a region. You had to wait your turn. Later, I could have got driving work if I’d gone down south – but I didn’t want to up-root the family.’ Terry’s wife was brought up in a railwayman’s cottage just next to the station. It was different for Tim, who transferred to Manchester to take up driving work before finding a vacancy with Freightliner back in Crewe 19 months later. ‘I was lucky enough to join just as a lot of men were leaving the job,’ he says.

Oh, and I should also mention that Terry’s uncle – Frank - finished up as a Chief Inspector while his brother John did 48 years as a fitter! His sister’s husband is also a retired driver. ‘The whole family would have starved if it hadn’t been for Stephenson!’ he jokes.

Before I leave Terry drives me round the town to show me some of the railway’s old haunts, like where ‘The Sheds’ once stood - five miles of industrial buildings that manufactured rolling stock for generations.

‘Rail is a way of life rather than a job,’ he says. ‘It has its own loyalties. Like – I don’t like football. Can’t stand it. So when Tim was 11 and wanted to go to Leeds to see United, other drivers took him along.’
use their boxes - so the cost to the TOCs to issue all drivers with boxes cannot be that high.

Bro Daniel Hogg Battersea Branch

Staff travel – an abuse

I’m pleased that staff travel facilities appears to be back on our agenda. This is not a moment before time - given that more than 50% of the membership, myself included, have joined since 31 March 1996.

Like Mr McGrady of Toton (December Journal) I am also employed by EWS and have never received any free or reduced rate travel, except when on duty and travelling ‘pass’.

Often, even this relies on producing a valid diagram, the goodwill of conductors, or the wearing of a high visibility vest! Clearly this is a situation that is far from ideal and cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely.

We often read in the Journal about how the union is proud of its history and its achievements. But I’m afraid I have to ask, ‘Where was ASLEF in 1996 when this scandalous anomaly was allowed to creep in to our industry as part of the disastrous privatisation process?’ Was there no combined campaign then from all the rail unions to safeguard existing employment rights for future employees?

I don’t remember hearing about one at the time, and I remember wondering why the rail unions seemed to be powerless to act.

As a result, we now see open discrimination by having 2 classes of employee, depending purely on the date employment commenced. As it’s illegal to discriminate on the grounds of race, sex, size and age, I believe it could be unlawful. I would like the union to seek legal advice as to whether a legal challenge could be launched to establish equal travel concessions for all rail employees regardless of when they joined the railway.

Even if it ended up in the House of Lords of the European Courts, I’m sure the case for equality would be upheld. So how about a concerted campaign and a legal challenge, preferably jointly with the other rail unions? This could be a great opportunity to correct one of the worst employment legislation abuses of modern times. It’s long overdue!

Tim Stedman Stratford

Cookie the cat’s loco!

ABOUT 20 years ago a stray cat adopted the gaffer’s office at Tyesley. It always found the warmest and most comfortable place to sleep. Over time it became loved and fussed by almost all the workforce, who paid for its food.

One weekend contractors came in to seal the workshop floors. The cat licked the paint which was highly toxic and was taken seriously ill. The men and management spent many hundreds of pounds on vet’s bills trying to keep it alive - but to no avail.

Bryan Stanyer, a senior supervisor, in memory of this well-loved cat named a loco after it! So anybody who works on to Tyesley or passes on the main line and sees the 08 named ‘Cookie’ now knows why!

Denis Wootton retired shed driver

No time for moggies

I WAS astounded to find a letter on the letters page of the January Journal about ‘Dougie the King’s Lynn moggie’. Surely this space could have been used up with a letter regarding a more pressing issue? I honestly think Dougie should have been put on the back burner (no pun intended).

At EWS drivers are struggling with SQUASH and maybe impending job losses. As regards SQUASH, my company has come up with lighter trousers and cold water at each depot in the summer if the temperature reaches over 27 degrees. The union has said we don’t need to work in a cab of that heat. Therefore I now have to carry a thermometer along with my publications, my lunch and my hard hat if I’m on ballast. You need to be a weightlifter when setting out for a days duty.

I read of Freightliner’s response to the same campaign and commend them on the way they have tackled this issue. It’s strange that the UK’s largest freight company can’t follow suit, bearing in mind we have had a cab environment team in place for 3 years. The Class 66 I drive has not improved in the slightest. In fact it has deteriorated as it has got older. I ask my company council and EC members to try to address this issue and get a speedy result.

David Beddoo Edinburgh

A share of Wortley

ASLEF member Albert T. Smith recently asked a question about Wortley Hall shares, as he had bought some in the early 1950’s. Wortley Hall is a ‘not for profit’ organisation, organised and operated by grass roots trades unionists, so the shares do not pay a dividend nor do they increase in value.

For those people who have not visited the Hall for a number of years I can report that it is in good health thanks to the support of many trades unions and trades unionists. All bedrooms are en-suite and people can come for a week end or short break.

Have a look at our website www.wortleyhall.org.uk or drop me a line at Wortley Hall, Wortley Village, Sheffield S35 7DB.

Brian Clarke Political Secretary

Thanks from Brian Jones

I WOULD like to place on record my sincere gratitude to the membership who have allowed me the privilege of being their representative on First Great Western (FGW) Drivers Divisional Council over the past 6 years.

The job of DDC rep comes with its own unique set of pressures and the key to coping with them was to know I had the unwavering support of my own Swansea High St branch.

The DDC has faced those unique pressures in dealing with such issues as:

● Rest day working and the inherent problems of trying to manage the agreement.

● A Competency Management System that is very hostile towards driver grades.

● Harmonisation and the

Eastleigh and Cricklewood meetings

THE ‘Eastleigh Old Boys’ will be holding their reunion at the old BRSA Club in Eastleigh on 8 March from noon until 1800 – and the Cricklewood reunion on 14 March at the Great Western Railway Club in Bristol, also begins at noon.

Free travel not expensive for companies

LAST month it took me 6 and a half hours to drive to Manchester to visit family, sitting in traffic jams on the M25, M42 and M6. I grew increasingly irritated that, as a driver for Southern, I was forced to use my car. Unless I book months in advance with Virgin, the fares are far more than the cost of diesel. I am of course entitled to 75% off the standard open return - but as this is well over £200 it is no good to me and my family.

My frustration is compounded by the common sight in mess-rooms of ‘protected staff’ proudly showing their unused boxes! We all do the same job - yet we’re not entitled to the same privileges. In my experience many drivers don’t
I REGULARLY travel up to Newcastle on my privilege pass – but when my wife comes with me, it’s cheaper to drive than take the train. Here’s a breakdown:

Two ‘privilege’ return tickets London to Newcastle: £124.50 – 600 miles driving @ 7 miles per litre = £86

As an employee of Go-Via I can travel to Crewe for free. From there the privilege return to Newcastle for 2 people is £57.10. However it involves over 6 hours travel and at least 3 changes.

My Gatwick Express brothers at Battersea currently have ‘boxes’ on National Express East Coast - but will lose them when the franchise changes to Go-Via. They lost their boxes on Silverlink when Go-Via gave leisure staff travel to everyone on the London Midland franchise - but they’ll get them back when Go-Via takes over Gatwick Express.

Confused? You should be! The current system is a farce. Drivers who want to use their travel will find it easier and cheaper to get the train to Poland than Scotland!

I would encourage everyone to back the ASLEF campaign to improve driver travel concessions -and end the nonsense in 2008.

BATTERSEA BRANCH

Dave Woodford

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**CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS**

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

**ASLEF-NUM BADGES**  - newly struck to support the Justice for Mineworkers campaign. These double-sided badges cost £5 plus £1 p&p and are available from Ray Cooper at 94 Clonmore Ave, Oprington, Kent BR6 9IQ

**STRAFTORD BRANCH** has produced a badge to commemorate the closure – after 167 years - of what was once the UK’s biggest depot. All profits to branch social and welfare club. A limited amount of badges are still available at £6.00 each + £1.50 p&p. Contact Barry on his email barry.moore360@ntlworld.com or his mobile 07900-132-192

**ASLEF TRAIN DRIVER** collects ASLEF/Railway badges, signs, shed plates, signalling items, etc. Phone Mark on 01562 746537 or (mobile) 07789301551

**COLLECTOR** requires ASLEF-Coalville NUM 1984/5 strike badges. Will pay £125. Also selling chrome and gilt badges for Wath and Mexborough at £10 the pair. Contact Barry Jones on 01709 588648 or 25 Windermere Close, Mexborough, South Yorkshire S64 0PT.

**DIESEL HYDRAULIC ITEMS** wanted by collector. Anything considered, especially speedos, power handles etc. Rob 01822 843 150

**DORLAND CENTENARY BADGE** A limited edition of numbered badges were produced to mark our 100 years these are £5 each Plus P+P. The badges are available from Branch Secretary Steve Deen (dover.aslef@vigin.net)

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Expression of discontent

The First Capital Connect Company Council has asked that this letter be printed:

We wish to reply to Brother Richard Clark’s letter in the January edition of the Journal. The discontent expressed by him in the January Journal should be put into context.

The Hamonisation of Drivers

Mike Jose

Swansea

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Change of address form

Name.................................................................
Address........................................................................
................................................................. Postcode........
Phone.................................................................
Branch.................................................................
Membership No........................................................
Employer.................................................................
**DOES ANYONE KNOW ABOUT POSTCARD APPEALS AFTER TRAIN ACCIDENTS?**

**DRIVER** Barnes from Derby sent us this remarkable picture and wondered if any of our members had encountered anything like it before. It appears to be a postcard recording an accident which was used as a method of appealing for assistance for the wounded and families of the dead. On the right hand side it seeks ‘subscriptions on behalf of the relief fund’.

It dates from 1909 and commemorates a ‘terrible accident’ that occurred at Sharnbrook near Bedford, Midland Railway about 4 a.m. Thursday Feb 4th. It explains that Arthur Coope, the Driver of the Manchester Express Engine 388, and John William Hawley, his fireman, had both been killed.

This loco had been in a collision with Birmingham Engine 3698, whose driver (Allcock) and fireman (Wallis) had ‘jumped off and escaped unhurt’ although their guard, William Henson had been ‘severely shaken’.

The report says that the Express Goods train from Manchester to London, travelling about 60 miles per hour ‘dashed into a Goods Train’ that was standing in the station. The bodies of the two dead men were not recovered until 13 hours after the incident.

Do any of our rail historians know anything about the use of postcards to raise funds in this way? Has anyone got an example of any other similar items?

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**ANY HOME FRONT HEROES?**

A TV firm that is hoping to make a series ‘celebrating the bravery and dedication of Britain’s civilian workforce during wartime’ has asked the union for assistance. The aim is to produce programmes for UKTV History called ‘Home Front Heroes’.

One of the documentaries they are planning will be called ‘The Railways At War’ and will look at the importance of the railways – and especially the civilian men and women who worked on them.

They are hoping that ASLEF will be able to help in finding any retired railway staff - especially drivers and firemen - who were working on the railways during the Second World War.

If anyone could assist, the company that is developing the idea is called Testimony Films (www.testimonyfilms.com) They specialise in oral history documentaries, and over the last 15 years they have made a number of award winning films. If you’d like any details, have a look at their website – and if you could lend any assistance please contact Lizi Cosslett on her email which is lizi.cosslett@testimonyfilms.com

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**JOIN UP! SAYS LEFT AUTHOR**

By coincidence, Tribune magazine last month published an article from their archive written by Animal Farm author (and former Tribune editor) George Orwell. Entitled ‘The Home Guard and You’ it represents a left-wing rallying call to join up. This is what the celebrated writer had to say ...

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**THE Home Guard is far from being “fascist”. At this moment, it is a politically neutral organisation which is capable of developing in several quite different ways; and which direction it takes will depend ultimately on who belongs to it. It is worth recalling how the Home Guard came into being and the peculiar history behind it. Seven months ago, at the most desperate moment of the war, when Belgium and Holland had been over-run, France was collapsing and the general public expected England to be invaded immediately, Anthony Eden appealed for local defence volunteers. He got a quarter of a million volunteers in the first 24 hours and another million in subsequent months. One only has to compare these figures with, say, the number of votes obtained by “Stop the War” candidates at by-elections to see what the common people of this island feel about Nazism.

But there were other features about the formation of the Home Guard that were less admirable. After the applicants had sent in their names, a skeleton organisation was formed in which, so far as it could be managed, all commands down to section leader were given to people from the middle and upper classes. When the volunteers were called up, it was to find a corps of officers who had been chosen by no democratic process. Need I point out the decisive difference that could be made if left-wingers in appreciable numbers joined the Home Guard? Labour missed a big opportunity by not urging its members to join at the beginning, but now the opportunity is repeating itself. The Communists, ILP and their kind can parrot: “Arms for the workers”, but they cannot put a rifle into the workers’ hands; the Home Guard can and does. The moral for any socialist who is reasonably fit and can spare a certain amount of time is obvious. It is important to join now.

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**Selections from Tribune can be accessed online at www.tribunemagazine.co.uk**
Thanks for all your responses to the 21st ASLEF crossword in the January edition. If you complete this month’s crossword please send the solution to the Editor, ASLEF Journal, 9 Arkwright Road, London NW3 6AB by the 14th of the issue month.


CLUES ACROSS
3 Railway workers (8)
8 Persia was the former name of this country (4)
9 They check your tickets on the train (10)
10 Reverberating sound (4)
11 Inquisitive! (4)
13 …. Redgrave, 5 times Olympic Gold Medallist (5)
17 Name of a prince (6)
18 Heavy weights (6)
19 Surpass at sport, etc (5)
22 Signal ‘hello’ or ‘goodbye’ (4)
24 Broad ribbon worn on a dress (4)
25 Occupants of a carriage (10)
26 Garden where Adam met Eve (4)
27 Valuable gem stones (8)

CLUES DOWN
1 Parallel rails on which trains and other rolling stock run (5)
2 Evidence of ASLEF membership (5,4)
4 State of bliss! (5)
5 Small cuts (5)
6 Wear out (5)
7 Hitchcock was the master of it! (8)
12 Not the front or the back (4)
14 American state (9)
15 Detach one carriage from another (8)
16 Volcanic mountain (4)
20 Test the flavour of food (5)
21 Musical play (5)
22 Earning a living (5)
23 Leading rail union (5)

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