PEACE TRAIN
Rail links the two Koreas

Political Funding – who pays? 17 years on – justice for ‘manslaughter’ driver
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2008 finds ASLEF’s finances in a healthier condition than at any time in the last 12 years. That is how long it has been since we were able to put money into an investment account at the end of the year. This was one of my major targets when I became your general secretary and I am delighted that – together – we have achieved it.

Within ASLEF we spend much of our time mulling over our marvellous heritage and our proud history. No one has more pride in this union’s past than myself – but my primary mission has been to concern myself with its future. I am now confident that we have put our finances back on track – and our future as a strong and independent union representing train drivers is assured.

In some ways it feels strange that I have been so concerned with the union’s income and expenditure. It is certainly not what drove me to join, and become active in, ASLEF. I became a trade unionist because it was the right thing to do. I felt a solidarity with my work-mates that could best be expressed within ASLEF, and I wanted to pay my share towards the union that represented my profession: I wanted the strength and confidence of belonging.

My views haven’t changed over the years. These are still the ideals that motivate me to want to work as your general secretary. But over the years I have discovered that a strong union needs more than high principles. It needs strong organisation – and that means it needs hard cash.

In the three years since I became your general secretary I have lived in a constant state of anxiety about our finances. We had enough to turn over – but not enough to face anything unpredictable like the cost of a national strike or a major rail enquiry. Of course, none of us want either of these things to happen – but the best organisations are those that even have contingency planning for the unthinkable.

This year we will be able to put over £200,000 into the bank. This is the result of handling headquarters finances professionally, cutting back on unnecessary expenditure, eliminating expenses without full receipts – and, of course, your acceptance of a small rise in subscriptions.

I am grateful to you all for the part you have played in ensuring that ASLEF’s future is as bright and certain as its past.

KEITH NORMAN
GENERAL SECRETARY
Freightliner SQUASHES up!

FREIGHTLINER has placed an order for 30 new state-of-the-art locos, including air-conditioned cabs – and has detailed progress on the improvements it is making to its existing 66 cabs. The company’s Production Director has assured Keith Norman that it is ‘more than happy to involve ASLEF as much as possible in the ergonomics of any new cab design’.

‘I am delighted,’ said Keith. ‘Freightliner has responded in a positive way to the concerns the union has raised in our Squash campaign – which called for radically improved cab conditions that are safe, healthy and modern.’

The company has ordered 30 locomotives from American firm GE Transportation Systems which is making its first foray into the UK market dominated by EMD. The new GE design will offer lower emissions as well as AC traction and rheostatic braking making it, according to the company, ‘10% more efficient than previous locos’.

Freightliner says the new locos will not only improve the carbon footprint but will be able to move more payload per train than ever before.

It points out that ASLEF has ‘singled out the Class 66 cab environment as being particularly poor in terms of noise, vibration and ride comfort’ and is confident that the new – Genesis – fleet will bring new standards of comfort to freight train drivers’, with air-conditioning fitted as standard. Full consultation with the union is guaranteed.

As far as existing 66 locos are concerned, the company has promised improvements in three areas – seats, blinds and air cooling.

One cab of Heavy Haul (66584) has been fitted with air suspension seats, a feature that will be fitted to the other (66584) cabs and a loco from the Intermodal fleet in the near future. There has been a delay because of a design issue with the plinth.

New blinds will be fitted to the two locos with the new seats for trials and feedback.

An air cooling system has been bench-tested for tier one locos, but there is still a design issue for the tier twos. The Group has assured the union that regardless of progress on the tier twos, the new cooling system will be fitted to a tier one loco for trials in the early summer.

‘We have to accept that the time scales for change cannot be delivered as soon as our members would like,’ Keith Norman says. ‘But Freightliner have shown themselves committed to improvements in cab conditions and has pledged itself to genuine consultation as this is developed.

‘Freightliner has shown the way. We will be looking to other freight companies to match these initiatives.’

GS TAKES THE PLEDGE!

ACCESS to education and training for Head Office staff took a boost last month when Keith Norman signed up to the ‘Skills Pledge’ on behalf of ASLEF as an employer. This is a voluntary, public commitment to assist all employees to develop their basic skills and work towards relevant qualifications.

‘Signing up to the Skills Pledge ourselves puts the union in a stronger position to get employers to commit to it,’ Keith said.

Rail Union Learner representatives seeking more information about the Pledge should visit http://www.train2gain.gov.uk/skillspledge/

Decline halted – now rail needs improvement’ - Dunwoody

GWYNETH DUNWOODY MP – a senior member of the ASLEF Parliamentary Group - says that investment in railways over the last decade has ‘repaired’ a system that has been declining – but insists that there is some way to go before Britian has a rail network of which it can be proud.

Gwyneth was speaking at the 2007 Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) Rail Industry Conference. ‘We should welcome the improvements enthusiastically,’ she said. ‘Railways are fundamental to our development and they are capable of producing the high class system of transport we desperately need.

‘People are happy to use the railways, but the companies still have to get the basics right – including a high standard of health and safety. They must not assume that customers will accept continuing to be pushed into overcrowded carriages - because they will not. They will find an alternative’.

Gwyneth – who chairs the Commons Transport Select Committee – is adamant that capacity is the key. ‘People will be concerned if they are having to fight to get a seat while at the same time paying as much for a return ticket as it costs to fly across the Atlantic. Then once we begin to get the capacity, we’ll still have to work out how to make passengers comfortable. They’ll want to pay for tickets using their mobile phones and move at greater speed - and that’s going to provide us with challenges.’

At the same conference, John Abbott from the Rail Safety Standards Board, said that fatalities on the railways are at an all-time low, despite massive growth over the last 10 years. He warned, however, that, ‘Our railways will be used more intensively and that will expose workers to more risks. We need to tackle this.’

He says the priorities must be the safety of construction staff, controlling abusive behaviour from the public and the prevention of criminal acts such as vandalism.
17 years on – justice for ASLEF man convicted of manslaughter

THE Court of Appeal last month quashed a train driver’s 17 year old conviction for manslaughter.

Bob Morgan, a train driver and ASLEF member, was convicted of two counts of manslaughter on 3 September 1990. He was sentenced to 18 months in jail, of which 12 were suspended, after he had admitted passing signal T168 while it was red – an event which contributed to the Purley train crash of 4 March 1989.

However, the original conviction had not taken into proper account the fact that this signal was dangerous. It had been passed at danger on four previous occasions - by different drivers – between 16 October 1984 and the Purley tragedy. This occurred again on 6 June 1991. Since the fault with the signalling has been remedied, no trains have passed T168 at danger. At the trial neither the prosecution nor the defence were aware that signal T168 was a ‘multi-SPAD’ (regularly passed at danger) signal – which is why Bob was advised to plead guilty. Today a signal with this history would be immediately assessed for risk and action would be taken to remedy the danger. This did not happen in 1989.

The accident happened at 13.39 when Bob Morgan’s train, travelling from Littlehampton to London, crashed into the back of a train travelling from Horsham to London. The Littlehampton train careered off the track, down the embankment into gardens below. 6 people died and 80 were injured.

ASLEF general secretary Keith Norman, said he was proud that the union had stood by Bob Morgan throughout his 17-year ordeal, ‘I am delighted that Bob has been vindicated. It was important not only for his peace of mind and reputation, but for all other UK train drivers. Today’s verdict should ensure that no train driver in the future will have to face such a terrible ordeal.

‘We have established that where safety issues – like badly sited and unsafe signals – contribute to an accident, the driver will never again be the single person held to account – which is what happened in Bob’s case.

‘Over a period of several years, drivers found it difficult to see the signal in question – a fact proven by the number of different drivers who passed it signalled at danger.

‘The tragedy for Bob and his family was that no one in management admitted their inefficiency or neglect. Instead, they slunk away, happy to leave Bob to carry the can for them all. There was no consideration of corporate responsibility – simply the desire by managers to escape blame by pointing a finger at an individual. Bob paid the price for the inefficiency and carelessness of layer upon layer of management.

‘We can never undo the harm Bob has endured - but we can admire the dignity with which he bore the burden of the last 17 years.’

Poll shows preference for public transport investment over roads

AN opinion poll by YouGov last month revealed that 62% of respondents favour the government spending money on improving public transport rather than building new roads.

The poll was commissioned after the publication of an RAC Foundation report urging building more roads on the grounds of it providing ‘economic benefits’ and having a ‘negligible impact on climate emissions’.

The evidence shows both assertions are incorrect. The Eddington Report said that in mature economies there is ‘considerably less scope’ for transport improvements to deliver economic growth than previously – and the government’s current major roads programme would increase carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions by 752,100 tonnes a year.

Road transport currently contributes 25.7% of all UK emissions - and it’s rising.

EUROSTAR DOES ITS BIT FOR THE PLANET

Eurostar says where it is unable to eliminate emissions from a train journey, it will offset them at its own expense. The company is investing in an Indian wind farm in Tamil Nadu and a small Chinese hydropower plant in order to displace fossil fuels, helping to upgrade engines in Philippine mini-taxis and improving the brick-kilns in Nicaragua.
Benn brightens RMS meeting

THE Retired Members Section Annual General Meeting was held at Arkwright Road on 20 November. Top marks to ‘the awesome twins’ Ray Jackson and Tony West for helping to make our section an integral part of ASLEF for many years to come. We now have a membership of over 1,700 – and growing!

It’s not possible to give an extended report for each of the 13 speakers on the agenda – but I make no apologies for giving preference to Tony Benn. Whatever type of audience he addresses, he enraptures his audience with his forthright philosophy of the past – and, even more importantly – his vision for the future. Without the likes of Tony, many more would have left the Labour Party over the past six or seven years. He alternated serious analysis and one-liners, keeping everyone either spellbound or laughing their heads off!

I especially enjoyed his quips about, ‘Why not send all our old age pensioners to India?’ It would be much cheaper’ or ‘The Labour Government is like a Church of England audience whose pews are mainly full of non-Christians’ or ‘There may be over 300 Labour Members of Parliament - but there’s not many socialists!’

It is a measure of how far our party has moved to the political centre that our next speaker - John McDonnell MP - could not obtain enough votes from MPs to challenge Gordon Brown for the Party Leadership.

My own analysis from John’s figures is that 1.2 of the 3 million pensioners living at or below the poverty line do not claim Pension Credit – even though this could give them up to £5 a week more when combined with council tax relief. The government has certainly not made efforts to publicise this benefit – choosing rather to get rid of 40,000 staff in the Department for Work and Pensions!

It is also a sad fact that this Labour government has transferred to the private section 8 million more jobs than the Tories in a similar period.

Tristram Sterry reported that Thompsons Solicitors had obtained some £4 million in compensation for our members in the past 9 months. That alone should convince every working driver who is not in a union to join ASLEF as soon as they can. The news from Colin Skitmore from our pensions management people was not so bright: there are no surpluses. People receiving pensions will continue to do so, but it does beggar the question of where the money has gone.

After addresses by Tosh MacDonald, EC vice president and Andy Reed, national organiser, 5 motions were passed which will go to the 2008 ASLEF AAD.

Graham Turner
Retired Members Section

High hopes at Low forum

THE Retired Members’ Section held its Forum at the National Union of Mineworkers’ Low Hall near Scarborough in November. Chairman Ray Jackson reported that the RMS now boasted over 1,700 members before national secretary Tony West reported on the Section’s relations with outside bodies such as the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) and the GMB union, and its activities in campaigns like the Pensioners Charter. The RMS represented ASLEF at the NPC conference and the Pensioners Parliament at Blackpool.

Tony pointed to the unfairness of a rise in pensions of £3.50 when MPs get their £65,000 wages topped up with £155,000 expenses!

He also reported that a rise in RMS subs to £12 was under consideration – reflecting increases to working members’ subs – and pointed out the advantages of direct debit payments. Funding for other activities could come from raffles.

Other speakers at the forum were District 4 organiser Nick Whitehead, Bill Ronksley (whose contribution on the Spanish Civil War led to an interesting debate), Leeds branch secretary Pauline Cawood – speaking to us in her roles on ASLEF’s and the TUC’s womens’ committees - and Steve Kemp the outgoing NUM general secretary. They were followed by ASLEF’s vice-chair Tosh McDonald, its Organising Secretary Andy Reed – Gary Fabian, the headquarters advisor whose last AGM this was before his own retirement.

Pauline Cawood stressed how unfortunate it is that we need our different consultative groups. ‘It is a sorry state of affairs that we need legislation to stamp out discrimination within society and the workplace,’ she said. ‘It is a stain on our way of life that we need laws to prevent discrimination in this day and age.’

Andy Reed said it was important to map out a vision for the RMS’s work streams – including recruitment, financial matters, awareness and offering support and guidance to members. ‘You have an integral role to play in shaping the destiny of our union - and I will encourage and fully support you,’ he declared. ‘The equalities structure is one of the central parts of my work, and you are an essential part of that.’ Andy said he was meeting a firm to discuss credit unions and would give an update at a later stage.

Finally thanks were extended to Steve Cottingham of O.H. Parsons for his firm’s assistance in financing the forum.

Peter (P.J) Smith
ASLEF RMS reporter
Burmese rail worker ‘framed’ says ITF

THE International Transport Federation (ITF) wrote last month to the head of the Burmese junta to protest against the framing of railway worker U Tin Hia on trumped up charges that include possession of explosives – in fact the wire and tools he uses every day in his job as a railway electrician!

The ITF says that his arrest on 20 November has ‘everything to do with his role as a free trade unionist, and nothing to do with the farago of invented charges the regime has used as an retroactive excuse for arresting him for’. U Tin Hia had organised railway workers’ protests against the military government.

ITF general secretary David Cockroft commented: “These charges are a complete fantasy, a desperate attempt to come up with some way to justify targeting all those who disagree with Burma’s government of thugs.”

This train is carrying hopes of peace

LAST month the first train ran between North and South Korea since 1950. ‘It is a fine symbol of the role that a railway can play,’ said Keith Norman. ‘It underlines the fact that we, as drivers, are engaged in bringing even warring communities together. It underlines the importance - and civilising effects – of our calling.’

The first train to cross the demilitarised zone along the 38th parallel - said to be the world’s most heavily fortified border – was a 12-car freight train laden with construction materials. Technically the two Koreas remain at war – but the new route has been seen as a massive boost to optimism. Lee Chul, president of Korea Railroad, said he hoped that South and North Koreans could travel together by rail to cheer on joint Olympic teams in Beijing next summer.

‘Though we start with a cargo train, it will lead to a passenger train service and will soon be linked to the continental trains,’ Lee told reporters.

The railway link has symbolic meaning as it is a first step toward removing the Iron Curtain dividing the nation. A deserted locomotive in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) has long been the symbol of national division and the Cold War. It is also significant as it serves the practical purpose of expanding economic exchange and easing tension between the two Koreas.

Cargo trains will run daily on weekdays between the South’s Munsan Station and the North’s Panmun Station, just north of the heavily-fortified DMZ.

ASLEF CHANGES LAW The Queen’s Speech for the new Parliament said that the government intends to produce an Employment Bill (they have dropped the name ‘Employment Simplification Bill’ – presumably as the title would offend Trade Description legislation!).

While it is expected to repeal the statutory dispute resolution procedures, this is unlikely to happen before 2009. As yet there is no indication of what the government intends to put in their place. The main provision in the Bill will be the right for trades unions to exclude or expel members who belong to particular political parties, such as the BNP. This follows ASLEF’s victory in the European Court of Human Rights.

GERMANY THROWS OUT ROAD TRAINS German transport ministers have rejected proposals that would have allowed 60-tonne roadtrains onto their roads. The decision has been welcomed by the Community of European Railways, which hopes that the German government will now raise the results of its studies and appraisals at European level, so that an ‘appropriate decision’ can be taken at European level.

RAIL GROWS IN CHINA The Chinese mainland now has 78,000 km of rail, making it the world’s third-biggest network after the US and Russia. Its projected spending on railways in the five years to 2010 is more than triple that of the previous five.

NOW DEUTSCHE BAHN WANTS CHILTERN RAILWAYS Rumours in the City have it that Deutsche Bahn AG, which last summer bought EWS, is planning to buy Chiltern Railways from Laing Rail, which is currently looking for a potential buyer. Chiltern Railway operates four tracks, among them the strongly frequented line between London and Birmingham as well as London and Aylesbury.

Naked explorer speaks for Railway Children

EXPLORER Benedict Allen is giving a lecture in aid of Railway Children at the Royal Geographical Society in London on Wednesday 6 February. The author, explorer, TV presenter-filmmaker and public speaker, is best known for his arduous expeditions to remote corners of the globe, where he immerses himself alone in indigenous communities. Tickets are £15 and can be bought from www.railwaychildren.org.uk or by sending a cheque payable to Railway Children to Railway Children, 1 The Commons, Sandbach, Cheshire CW11 1EG

ASLEF condemns excessive rail fare increases

ASLEF general secretary Keith Norman predicted ‘an immense sense of outrage’ at the news that some rail fares are to increase by up to seven times the current rate of inflation.

‘Today’s announcement flies in the face of the government policy of attracting people to rail,’ he said.

Some commuters face rises of up to 14 per cent when train companies bring in the rises in early January, while the average rise will be 6.8 per cent.

‘These rises are almost unbelievable when statistics show that since Labour took power, there are 42% more passengers but only 20% more seat capacity and the number of trains have only increased by 5%,’ Keith added.
WHILST visiting the Kings Cross S.O.P I came across Lawrie Manson, then the Great North Eastern Railway Company (GNER) Council rep for Kings Cross who rather enigmatically asked me to follow him.

Leading me to another part of the building, we came across a new construction, which on entering – and much to my surprise – revealed a brand new Driving Simulator. We met Simulator Manager Paul Larney and Operations Manager for GNER, Paul Boyle, who proudly said the company had invested millions in constructing simulators at four locations in the UK – Leeds, Newcastle, Edinburgh, and Kings Cross.

I was then given a tour of the facility and an explanation as to what it did. Their bold claim was that the simulator was able to completely replicate all driving conditions a driver faces during his tour of duty.

The first thing I was impressed with was the Fault Finding Station. At this station it was possible to replicate, with an interactive, visual and audio display, all faults and failures a driver could encounter. All this at one location! It’s a far cry from my days crawling around a loco or trudging up and down a training unit, putting right faults craftily put on by our instructors. Although there is no substitute for a hands on session on a working loco or train, this simulator replication is hugely instructive, at a time when training is at a premium due to stock availability.

Next I noticed the driving position. It is a full size, fully functioning Class 91 driving console, facing a very large interactive display. All the visual and audible indications of a 91s cab have been replicated. This is mounted on wheels so it can be unplugged and moved to one side to be replaced with an HST driving console and vice versa.

Paul Boyle then took the controls and we set off for a virtual journey toward Peterborough, with Paul Larney manning the instructor’s position, where he can set all the conditions a driver may encounter en route.

On arriving at virtual Stevenage Paul invited me to takeover. I familiarised myself with the controls, catching up with the modifications made in the last seven years – and then off to Peterborough!

I was amazed how quickly I adapted to what was initially an alien environment. The moving visual display was very realistic, making you feel that you are actually moving. The changing aspects of the signals, speed boards and emergency speed indicators, the vigilance device AWS indications, the sound of the cooling fans, the audible rumble over points and crossings, all set a truly life-like scene. The uncanny thing was, when Paul Larney asked me to turn off the main line to make a stop at the virtual Huntingdon station, as we swung through the 40mph lead, the mind creates the sensation of moving and you sway as you would on a real train. When we set off again, Paul set me up with a couple of signal aspect changes and speed orders to see if I had remembered what I had been doing during my 50 years service on the footplate (the last of which with GNER).

We finally arrived to make a perfect stop at virtual Peterborough (well someone’s got to blow my trumpet). It undoubtedly was a most moving and real experience.

May I thank GNER, their Operations Manager Paul Boyle, Simulator Manager Paul Larney and Lawrie Manson for making my ‘trip’ possible. I’d also like to thank Driver Manager Collin Fisher for some of the information and the pictures.

PETER SMITH Kings Cross branch
HEALTH AND SAFETY NEEDS LEGAL TEETH – NOT IoD ‘ENCOURAGEMENT’ says our legal advisor Victoria Phillips of Thompsons Solicitors

LATEST Health and Safety Commission (HSC) statistics paint a depressing picture of a modern economy failing to adequately protect its workforce. Ironically the statistics were released the day before the warehouse fire which killed four firefighters and the outcome of the Ufton Nervet crash.

The HSC statistics themselves were preceded by the new voluntary code published by the Institute of Directors (IoD). It is difficult to see how a voluntary code for directors is appropriate in a country where last year 2.2 million people suffered from work-related illnesses and 241 people were killed at work.

‘Reminding’ directors that it is their responsibility to lead on health and safety and make it an integral part of their organisation’s culture is all terribly British. But try explaining to the individuals and families whose lives have been wrecked by an accident caused by an employer’s negligence that the boardroom chose not to heed the reminder.

Take London Underground, which an employment tribunal found had ‘wilfully and deliberately’ flouted health and safety law by refusing to allow ASLEF member Paul McCarthy to inspect four tube lines.

Paul had a duty as a health and safety rep to check that the Tube was a safe working environment for everyone - yet his bosses decided not to comply with the law which gave him the right to carry out that duty.

If senior managers in LUL can flout health and safety law in this way, what a hoot a voluntary code of practice would be?

Codes of practice don’t make workplaces any safer – we need statutory guidelines and laws to provide teeth.

Health and safety is not a voluntary issue to be taken up by the conscientious.

It is to be hoped that the tribunal’s ruling against LUL will have driven that point home. If it hasn’t then perhaps a prosecution by the Health and Safety Executive for compromising employee safety, which ASLEF has called for, would.

A recent Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) survey showed that the more firms invest in safety specialists, the safer they become. This was hardly revelatory - but it was timely. There was nothing ‘staggering (as one researcher put it) that ‘on average, the more qualified in health and safety the line manager in an organisation is, the less the accident rate.

The survey does, however, highlight the farce of ‘encouraging’ directors to take health and safety on board.

Legal duties, such as under the Corporate Manslaughter Act, should be imposed on directors with responsibility for health and safety. Training and investing in safety specialists should be among those duties. Health and safety reps like Paul must be allowed to carry out their duties.

And investment in safety measures, such as the obstruction warning devices ASLEF called for after the Ufton Nervet inquest, should also be a duty.

Where there has been a failure to carry out these legal duties and an accident or fatality occurs, there should be punitive damages – fines so big that they really will hurt.

‘Family Members Scheme’ ensures £23,000 damages for driver’s wife

SUSAN PAYNE, whose husband is a LUL driver, has secured £23,000 compensation through the union’s free ‘family members’ legal help scheme which is handled by Thompsons Solicitors.

In May 2004 Susan Payne was visiting the General Office at Golders Green Underground Station to discuss a job vacancy. She said, ‘As I was leaving the office, the door was opened by an employee. Access was via a door which sat on top of a step. As a result I walked through the door and fell down the step, injuring my ankle and my face. The step was a hazard as there was no warning. This is not the first time someone has been injured in the same spot.’

Representing Mrs Payne, Angela Smart, the lawyer who represented Susan, said, ‘Had it not been for the ‘Family and Friends’ scheme which ASLEF offers its members, Susan Payne would not have secured the compensation she deserves for the injury caused by London Underground’s negligence. London Underground has a duty of care not only to its employees but also to lawful visitors to its premises.’

‘The Judge accepted that whilst many employees may have passed over the step without incident, they would be familiar with the layout of the office. Hopefully it will force London Underground to ensure that all premises are safe in future,’ she concluded.
In June 2006 I was hit and injured by a builders lorry at a roundabout whilst on my motorbike.

My insurance company just took the £200 excess off me and paid for the repairs. Because the lorry driver denied it was his fault the insurance company didn’t bother trying to reclaim it so the buck would have stopped with me. I could have lost my no claims discount and never seen my excess again.

Thompsons took up my case, free of charge, all part of my ASLEF benefits and I not only got my £200 back and my no claims bonus re-instated, they got me a cheque for £3,000 from the lorry drivers insurance company, for my injury.

Thompsons provided me with a free claims service and 100% of my compensation.

Me? I’ll stick to ASLEF and Thompsons.
JUSTICE FOR COLOMBIA (JFC) has published a remarkable book of photographs of that country, taken by Sam Green over the past two years. Entitled ‘Resistencia: Portraits of Colombia’, it is extraordinary because it shows two very different sides of this South American country. On the one hand, it is a land of incredible natural beauty – and on the other, many of its people face a daily struggle against poverty, human rights abuses and armed conflict. These photographs show their struggle for justice being played out against the background of a spectacular green and fertile land.

This contrast is what makes these focussed photographs so poignant. They spell out that Colombia is no arid, deprived and baked plain – and this makes the tragedy even more unbearable. This is a wealthy land where people live in poverty; its people are warm and welcoming, and yet they live with torture and murder; its peasant farmers are driven from the land they love. This conflict and waste is the driving message of these images.

‘Resistencia’ is not a book to lay on your coffee table and turn pages as you relax: it is a work to make you want to stand up and fight.

Thanks to Justice for Colombia, Sam was able to take his camera into one of Colombia’s notorious prisons to photograph prisoners jailed for their opposition to the Colombian regime – but he also spent time in rural areas.

CAMPESINOS

Over ten million people, mainly peasant farmers (‘campesinos’) live in the Colombian countryside where the conflict is most intense and living conditions are most difficult. Millions have been forced from their homes by paramilitaries – leaving Colombia with some 3.6 million displaced people.

70 years ago less than a third of Colombians lived in cities. UN figures suggest that now 75% of the population are urban dwellers – mostly living in desperately poor conditions, often in the shanty-towns that surround Colombia’s major cities.

MILITARY - OR AID?

It is against this background that Justice for Colombia is calling for an end to UK military aid to Colombia. JFC asks how guns and military training will help neighbourhoods without running water or electricity; and how arming paramilitaries is supposed to assist street children, the homeless, prostitutes or drug addicts.

The UK government refuses to put a figure on the military aid it extends to Colombia or to put caveats on it to ensure it does not support human rights abuses. The Colombian trade union movement has repeatedly called for an end to UK military aid and argued that instead, resources be invested in social areas of need.

Copies of ‘Resistencia: Portraits of Colombia’ can be obtained from Justice for Colombia publications at 9 Arkwright Road, London NW3 (email info@justiceforcolombia.org. They cost £15 each, plus £2.50 p&p.
STATE FUNDING OF PARTIES ‘BACK ON THE AGENDA’

Towards the end of last year Labour became entangled in allegations about donations. These mainly concerned contributions of £663,975 given to the party by north-east property developer David Abrahams. Not wanting the extent of his donations to be made public, he gave money to some colleagues who passed on the cash to Labour in their own names.

It didn’t seem an earth-shattering national revelation at the time – even though it clearly breached the regulations about donations to political parties that Labour had introduced in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendum Act 2000. The government had committed itself to transparency over gifts, insisting that the names of donors and the amount they gave were public knowledge.

There was clearly a breach of the regulations and certain politicians looked distinctly uncomfortable. It was a bad day at Labour’s office – but the party reacted with something resembling blind panic. Within days the government was talking about caps on all donations – and suddenly state funding of political parties was back on the agenda.

We asked Labour MPs Alan Simpson and Alan Whitehead for their opposing – views on state funding . . .

YES STATE FUNDING MAKES SENSE

THE looming crisis in the funding of political parties is not just about who donates to whom and how. Party membership is a fraction of what it was a couple of decades ago, yet the number of elections parties fight - and expenditure on them has never been higher. To pay for this ‘funding arms race’, parties increasingly rely for funds either on corporate donations, or on the support of a small number of very rich individuals. Neither is healthy for politics in the long term.

The present government has done much to make party and election funding more transparent and accountable. Donations over £5,000 must be listed and the donors identified. Donations from overseas are banned, and the amount each party can spend during a General Election is capped. These reforms are quite right, but give the media a field day when ever a donation is declared. Other ‘loopholes’ remain exploited, like the Conservatives use of ‘front’ companies to channel anonymou s donations, and the effective ‘buying’ of key local electoral contests by channelling national money into local parties and thereby avoiding overall limits. Clearly, to provide a reasonably level playing field - and to counter continuing abuses - we need an overall cap on what parties can spend between elections. We should also respect the different ways parties are constituted – it is no business of the state to define how parties should be organised internally. Trade Union affiliation to the Labour Party, for example, should be clearly distinguished from donations.

But sooner or later all parties will find it impossible to fund their activities at present levels, particularly between elections. ‘So what?’ you might say. You might even think that the disappearance of parties from the political scene would be a good thing. I disagree. Having political parties able to present different policies is essential to a healthy political process. To do this, parties need funding - and the proportion of funding between parties should not be grotesquely unbalanced.

For all these reasons I think we should now look seriously – but carefully - at state funding for our political parties. I don’t support a block grant ‘handout’ to the main parties - that would stifle active membership and could ossify parties at historical levels of support. Funding needs to be related to party activity – perhaps a grant for each party member recorded or, as a recent Inquiry suggested, a fixed sum for each vote cast, assigned by the voter in the polling station.

Some people will baulk at spending taxpayers’ money on party political activities – but the state already pays up to 40% of Party costs between elections, and up to 60% at elections. This funding is not really transparent and accountable. It goes out in blocks - far better in my view to be up-front about it. Parties would still need to raise a substantial proportion of funds - but we would know that when it comes to an election it would be argument, organi- sation and work that would win - and not the power of the wallet.

ALAN WHITEHEAD has been MP for Southampton Test since 1997. He is a former minister in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Among other responsibilities Alan is a member of the Standards and Privileges Select Committee. He is actively interested in education, local government, the environment and transport.
THE AGENDA

CURRENT STATE FUNDING
The state already provides money towards funding political parties in 4 major ways

SHORT MONEY
This is provided to Opposition parties in the House of Commons. It was introduced in 1975 on the suggestion of Edward Short – hence its name. It is available to fund Parliamentary business, travel and associated expenses and the costs of the Leader of the Opposition’s office. In 2005/6, the Conservative Party received over £4 million, and the Liberal Democrats around £1.5 million, Other Westminster parties received lesser amounts, dependent on votes cast and seats won.

CRANBORNE MONEY
This plays the same role as Short Money, except it applies to opposition parties in the House of Lords. It is named after Viscount Cranborne who introduced it in 1996. In 2005/6 Conservatives received around £425,000, Liberal Democrats around £210,000, and Crossbenchers around £38,000.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT GRANTS
This £2 million a year has been provided since 2002 to enable parties to develop long-term policies for inclusion in their manifestos. In Great Britain the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats receive £458,000, eligible Northern Ireland parties receive about £155,000, the SNP gets £162,000 and Plaid Cymru receives about £151,000.

INDIRECT STATE FUNDING
The state also pays towards election expenses including Party Political broadcasts, free postage for an election mailing (amounting to over £20 million at a general election) and the free use of public meeting rooms like schools and town halls.

NO
A BAD USE OF TAXES

THE argument for state funding for political parties is driven by laziness or panic. Imagine the position of a government that tries to argue it cannot afford to pay decent pensions, cannot end fuel poverty by the legal due date of 2016, cannot meet public sector pay awards in full and cannot deliver its promises to halve child poverty by 2010, but can find taxpayers’ money to pay for its own election campaigns. This is more like a suicide note than a strategy.

There are things that the state can do to create more of a level playing field for elections, but none of these require a shift into state funding or a cap on trade union contributions.

The Tories may back state funding but only to break the union link. If they do so, any future Tory government could scrap the state funding, go back to its private donors and leave Labour politically stranded. Trade union funding is the only clean money in the electoral process. Every union has had to ballot its own members for the right to have a political fund and make political donations. It has a democratic mandate and an open public audit.

Labour should apply this legislation to the bosses as well. Big corporate funding of the Tory party should be something to be taken out of distributable profits and require a shareholder mandate. If shareholders wish pay the Tories rather than themselves, let them. Not many will.

For those who personally bankroll the Tories from offshore tax havens, we should simply roll the spending on target seats to the overall national spending limits to be applied to all political parties. These should also be made the subject of full public disclosure; with a failure to do so resulting in the potential disqualification of the candidate/MP themselves.

Where the state could intervene is in a formula for party broadcasts in and between elections. These could be made free as a requirement of the BBC, and as a condition of commercial broadcasting licenses. They would have to be internally financed by the commercial broadcasting sector rather than taxpayer-funded.

Traditionally the Tories have always had access to preferential sites for billboard advertising during general elections. Commercial customers who are their friends simply hand over their site bookings. The inequality of access to billboard sites could be addressed by local authorities having to draw up an equitable distribution of sites between the parties.

Today’s crisis comes out of the Labour party getting caught up in acts of concealment and dishonesty. None of this applies to the link with the unions. To get out of the mess, Britain does not need to create a welfare state for political parties. We need to root out dishonesty. This may be embarrassing to some of our own ministers but it will be the Tories who would howl most about an honest and transparent system.

State funding would just cloud the issue.

ALAN SIMPSON has been the Labour MP for Nottingham South since 1992. Born in Bootle, Liverpool in 1948, the eldest of seven children, he has lived and worked in Nottingham for the past thirty years.

Alan is a leading campaigner on the environment, the economy, anti-poverty and industrial democracy.

OVER TO YOU …

We hope you’ve found the MPs views interesting – but the views we really seek are those of ASLEF members.

That is why in April last year we put this question on the front of the union website: ‘Should the tax payer finance political parties?’ The result was unambiguous: 81% said ‘No’, 15% said yes and 4% weren’t sure.

Later this month we’re going to ask the same question on our website again to see if your views have changed since political party funding became an issue again.

It will be on the front page of our site: www.aslef.org.uk - Please log on, join in – and tell us what you think!
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Didcot praise for Stan

THE Didcot branch has written to pass on its ‘sincere thanks for the able assistance provided by Bro Stan Moran for his excellent work in securing a successful outcome of the two recent disciplinaries at the depot.

‘There was a unanimous vote of thanks – and rightly so. It is at times like this that we can see the benefits of belonging to a strong and united union.

Without Stan’s assistance we would be two drivers less at Didcot today.’

A union feast at Jubilee East!

THE September and October meetings got through a lot of business, starting with a Train Functional report from Dave Fieldwick. Dave reported on the latest position regarding attendance, grievance and disciplinary procedures, and was followed by Jason Wyatt from the Train Safety Council whose report covered Bardic handlamps, noise surveys, electronic notice boards and new uniform bags.

The Branch sent a letter of support to the CWU who were at the time in dispute with Royal Mail. This followed a report from our representatives on the Medway Trades Council - Phil Dye and Mike Beck. The pair had also helped with a CWU leafleting campaign in the local area. The council is also setting up a transport sub committee to look at public transport in the Medway.

Gary Comfort reported on the efforts of Louise Sinon to raise money to send a dying child to Disneyland. The Branch agreed to send a suitable donation.

Gary also reported on the efforts to find an alternative Branch room and also a timetable review. He asked train staff to report any late running to him which result in late meal reliefs and overtime.

Phil O’Brien reported on consultation meetings with Instructor Operators about supplements to the rule book, problems arising out of the manning of trains for the Jubilee, Northern Lines upgrade work and a new log book for Instructor Operators.

Finally, although Branch meetings are fairly well attended - there is always room for improvement! There are always lively debates and Gary Comfort, our chairman always ensures that business is dealt with expeditiously so that we finish on time. Usually before time, in fact - so that people have time to relax and socialise after the meeting has ended.

Mike Beck Reporter – Jubilee East

GILLINGHAM MEET AGAIN This picture is of the Gillingham ‘A Team’ – the good folk who work behind the scene to ensure that everyone who attends the Gillingham Reunions have a good time. Last year’s event was up to the usual high standard.

This year’s first reunion is at Ashford on 17 January and is followed by one at Ramsgate on 3 April, at Tonbridge on 3 July and at Rainham on 2 October.

Peter Smith Reporter – RMS

John Jones – brave and timely action at Birkdale

I FELT duty bound to write to you about an act of bravery by one of my fellow drivers at Southport on 19 November 2007.

Driver John Jones arrived at Birkdale station on his way to work. While he was waiting for his train, John noticed a male passenger staggering along the platform. He thought to himself that the man was going to fall off the edge of the platform – and sure enough he did – just as a train was approaching at a distance of about 100 yards.

The driver of the train managed to pull up short of the man on the track. John then jumped down and, just as the stranger was about to put his hands onto the third rail to pull himself up, John dragged him away and then got him safely back onto the platform.

John then went to see if the driver of the halted train was all right – but found that he was shaken up by the incident. John rang the signalman to see if the control office wanted him to drive the train to the next station, Southport. The control office readily agreed and thanked John for his actions.

Personally I think he deserves more recognition for what he did – and even a commendation for his act of bravery.

Bro W. Baxter - company council representative at Southport

Free from Government!

No one can pretend that employment law is easy, so when the government produces a free handbook, it’s usually worth having! That is why the union is advising branches to snap up a copy of ‘Individual rights and responsibilities of employees: A guide for employers and employees’ - which has been updated to reflect the latest changes in employment law.

This guide outlines employees’ and workers’ individual rights and responsibilities and the corresponding obligations for employers. It covers contracts, pay, dismissal, parental legislation, other time off, anti discrimination law and other statutory employment rights, complaints and remedies.

It is available from the BERR Publications Orderline (0845 015 0010, quoting URN 07/1416). Or you can order it online at www.berr.gov.uk/publications/index.html

Alternatively, you can download it for free on: www.berr.gov.uk/files/file34566.pdf.

Mayor urges Londoners to register their vote

LONDON mayor Ken Livingstone has written to the union to ask that we make every effort to ensure that all our members and their families are registered to vote. ‘We want to make sure that everyone has their say in the future of the capital,’ Ken says. ‘However a major challenge to this objective is that Londoners are much less likely to register to vote than anyone else in the country, according to recent research by the Electoral Commission. Black Londoners and those from ethnic minorities are three times as likely as white people in London not to register to vote. This is a major issue for the capital – which has the highest proportion of residents from ethnic minority groups of any region in the UK.

Further information can be obtained from www.londonelects.org.uk and material can be downloaded from the Electoral Commission at www.dopolitics.co.uk/toolbox

The ASLEF Journal January 2008
MY article about the 4-day week had the desired effect of starting a debate. It’s strange that although it has been ASLEF policy for years, many people treat it as a taboo – both in negotiations with management and in discussion with members. My aim is to provide a forum for an informed debate.

I think Steve Smith (Grove Park) missed the point when he wrote to the September Journal. I wasn’t suggesting the 4 day week would stop redundancies in the freight sector – that comes from freight operators bidding against each other for the same contracts rather than working together to win new contracts for the industry.

I argued that a true 4 day week (156 rest days per year) can create vacancies in most TOCs and FO Cs that our members caught up in the profit driven world of rail freight can fill if their employers lose contracts. Most FO Cs have members all over the country.

We could also, incidentally, follow other economic models. Is it right that something as critical to the national economy as freight transport is left to the mercy of the market? Should its aim be the best service - or the biggest profit?

HARMONY AT NORTHERN RAIL
Andy Parr (Newton Heath) seems to be led by perceptions of other people’s conditions rather than facts. It is not true that ex-FNW drivers in Northern Rail have a 4 day week and ex-ATN drivers in Northern work a 5 day week. Barrow is the only former FNW depot with a 4 day week but, without Sunday work they have 156 rest days per year. All other depots work Sundays over and above the so called 4 day week - and importantly over the 35 hour week. So Bro Parr’s depot works one Sunday in five (4 in 20 weeks) – which is a 4.2 day week. If a Sunday turn at his depot is 8 hours, then both the 4 day week and the 35 hour week become myths.

Equally only one depot on the former ATN part of Northern has a 4 day week. Doncaster has 156 rest days a year (including Sundays) and is within the 35 hour week. There is a day off for each Sunday worked.

All depots on the former ATN have a protected minimum number of rest days giving an average about the same as Bro Parr’s 4.2 day week. Local reps at many depots, negotiating links locally, have increased rest days above the guaranteed minimum. Whatever the figures at any former ATN depot the 35 hour week is unaffected as Sunday is part of the 35 hour week and jobs have been created. I think that also takes care of the 25% extra commuting myth, FNW do not have a 4 day week and ATN do not have a 5 day week so in reality there is no additional commuting.

Former FNW drivers benefit from a fixed number of rest days (104) not altering if the hours in the diagrams vary - which is why we must strive for 156 rest days. It is also a fact that ex-ATN drivers have a higher rate of pay as Sunday is part of pensionable pay. This means you get paid for Sundays every day. If you are on leave, sick and even from the day you retire to the day you die and if your partner out lives you they get paid for your Sundays until they die, not to mention any dependent children.

GUARANTEE REST DAYS
Percentage pay rises are worth more because of the increased rate of pay given to former ATN drivers for bringing Sundays into 35 hour week and creating jobs for others.

Former ATN drivers also get 5 weeks rostered leave plus 9 floating days leave, amounting to 31 per year with Christmas and Boxing Days. If we could guarantee 156 rest days to that we would only have to work 169 days a year. The most important benefit former ATN drivers enjoy is that any driver who falls medically has their rate of pay protected regardless of the alternative work.

Les Gibbins of Cleethorpes must have been affected by the 11 hour shifts he’s done in the past! Four 11-hour shifts mean a 44 hour week. I know brother Gibbins often criticises the long shifts he has to work (max 10 hour on TPE) unless he is working on his rest day then all of a sudden 10 hours is fine. Of course he is not on his own. When DRI was introduced in ’97 the most vocal opponents of Sunday in the working week were the very people who worked more Sundays than the Pope!

Let the debate continue.
100 YEARS AGO
The 1908 Journal report from Organising Secretary H. Parfitt looked back to an earlier era when horses were used as well as steam to pull the train...

"...I visited Wadebridge...where the London and South-Western Railway have about 20 locomotive-men stationed...I decided to try to form a branch...

...the inhabitants proudly boast that the Wadebridge Railway was the second to be opened in the Kingdom...those who managed railways in those days had a better knack of accommodating themselves to circumstances, or rather of cutting the garment according to the cloth, than the bumptious, overpaid persons who manage our railways now-a-days. Managers then were resourceful men! For instance, when there were only sufficient passengers to fill one vehicle the cumbersome steam engine was dispensed with and two horses were hooked on in front in its place. The chairman of my Wadebridge meeting used to ride the front horse on such occasions, and being then the "leading man" as Miss Terry would say, he was paid at the magnificent rate of 6d a day....

...Wadebridge claims to be the originator of the "Halt", about which we hear so much to-day. "Halts" were numerous on the Wadebridge Railway before some of us were born; the passengers demanded them, and got them, wherever a plentiful crop of mushrooms or blackberries could be seen."

50 YEARS AGO
In the January 1958 Journal, Footplate Philatelist Trevor M. Roper recommended stamp collecting as the ideal way to unwind after work...

"After a "sticky" day on the job, we, like the many others who contribute their quota towards the complicated business of railway operation, are glad to get home.

For me, after a meal and a "spruce-up", always accompanied by the inevitable cup o’tea, another sticky business starts - stamp sticking!

Yes, for out comes my album of stamps upon the table, and a brief glance through it shows me kings, queens and emperors, with their crowns and regalia; soldiers, sailors and airmen with their machines and ships; the humble peasant tilling the land; and innumerable phases and facets of this vast and uneasy world that we live in today.

Also, apart from what I can actually see before me, there is the inward vision of what I can’t physically see -of what lies beyond; the wonders of far-away places - from Bolivia to Burma, Tibet to Togoland; from the trail of the gold-diggers in the West to the desert roads of the East. All these can be viewed in the mind’s eye through my stamps.

Maybe it is the touch of romance in it which brings this hobby down from the polished tables of the kings, emperors and rajahs to the plain wood tables of more humble folk; which consoles the invalid and helps to solace the troubled minds of the depressed, by shutting out for a short whiles the everyday problems of the outside world. Perhaps that is the reason why there is a hobby in stamps."

Excerpts selected and edited by Jane Pimlott
Working hard? feeling sleepy? Have your say about fatigue!

THE Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB), supported by ASLEF, have commissioned a research project into fatigue and shift work of freight drivers and trackside workers.

QinetiQ, an independent science and technology company, are carrying out this study. The project follows on from a successful study of passenger train drivers that was completed in 2004.

The aim of the study is to find out about the patterns of work within freight and infrastructure environments and what influences fatigue. Using this information, we hope to be able to make a positive difference to how fatigue affects you at work. But we need your help!

Over the coming months QinetiQ will be contacting a number of companies and requesting help with the study.

WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR YOU?

You may be asked to take part in a focus group, or to fill in a questionnaire or a diary. It’s really important that we find out what is happening in the workplace, so we want to gather information from as many of you as possible.

The time you contribute to the study could range from a few minutes a day writing down what hours you’ve worked and how tired you feel, through to 20 minutes to fill in a questionnaire about your general patterns of work and how this affects you. We can assure you that all responses will be anonymous and will be treated confidentially.

If your company has agreed to participate, more details about the study will be available in the coming months. If, in the meantime, you would like to know more, or want to request to take part, please contact either
Alison McGuffog on 01252 394160 or on her email at amcguffog@qinetiq.com or Karen Robertson on 01252 393339 or by email at karobertson@qinetiq.com

SQUASH BACKING FROM RIAC

THE Railway Industry Advisory Committee (RIAC) has welcomed ASLEF’s survey of its driver on cab ergonomics. The survey - which concentrated on thermal comfort, air-cooling, design of older cabs, seating, noise and vibration - was part of the union’s SQUASH Campaign and aimed to provide ASLEF representatives with a guide on where to concentrate their efforts in seeking improvements on cab design. Now the union wants all TOCs and FOCs to conduct ergonomics studies of their cabs.

RIAC, which is overseen by the rail regulator – the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) - welcomed the information and backed union calls for ergonomically designed cabs. It has asked the union to supply the survey results by class and by fleet. ATOC (the Association of Train Operating Companies) has agreed to consider the survey results. Union safety advisor Dave Bennett was told that ASLEF’s cab ergonomics survey he presented at the October meetings would be drawn to the attention of the HMRI’s topic strategists.

7 YEARS FOR RAIL VANDALS

JOSEPH PAXTON spent 5 days in hospital after two men hurled a 45 lb brickwork slab into the path of the freight train he was driving 18 months ago. He was knocked unconscious and the train continued for three quarters of a mile, passing through Kidderminster station, until a safety mechanism brought it to a halt.

Last month Daniel Ratcliffe, 17, was sentenced to seven-and-a-half years and Kevin Clee, 19, jacked for six after they both admitted a charge of criminal damage.
LIFE IN THE LOOP

by ‘Tommy Ring’ on the Circle Line

ONCE upon a time, London had 3 Circle Lines. The Outer Circle ran from Broad Street to Mansion House via the North London Line, Willesden Junction and Olympia (then Addison Road). The Middle Circle went from Aldgate to Mansion House via Edgware Road, Latimer Road and Earls Court. Finally, the Inner Circle followed the route of today’s Circle Line – and was the only truly circular line. The first two finally packed up in 1940 after bomb damage.

The Circle is a ‘sub-surface’ line (as opposed to a deep-level ‘tube’ line). As the railway was just beneath roads for much of the distance, drivers could see the daylight in many parts. It also included the first modern passenger underground railway - built between Paddington and Farrington.

For about 100 years, Circle Line trains were operated by both Metropolitan and District Railway – later Line – crews. Now the Circle and Hammersmith and City (H&C) lines are operated as a separate London Underground business unit.

THE INS AND OUTS

Incidentally, trains running clockwise are called Outer Rail trains, while ones running anticlockwise are called Inner Rail trains. Metropolitan Outer Rail trains were numbered 201, 202, 203 and so on, the zero also imitating the letter O; whilst the Inner Rail ones were numbered 211 and above, so the figure 1 imitated the letter I. Clever, eh?!

District trains were numbered 101 and 111 etc, but the last number was arranged so that, Met or District, the trains went around and around in the right order – 201, 202, 203, 204; 111, 212, 113, 214. Not a lot of people know that!

Some Underground drivers disliked the monotony of the Circle Line. A maximum 8 trips were possible on one shift, divided by a meal break. Sometimes the driver handed his train to a relief for the 48 minute circuit and then took over again. I thought it gave a chance to unwind if I went one way for a few hours, had a meal and then went the opposite way.

QUARTER CIRCLE

Actually, it was possible to do 8½ trips. How? Well, if Circle Line trains went round and round permanently, the wheels and axles would wear unevenly – so they were turned around from time to time. They did this by ‘escaping’ from the Circle at Edgware Road and becoming a Whitechapel train running via Victoria to Aldgate East. At the closed St Mary’s station it turned left to Whitechapel, becoming a Hammersmith and City train which went via Hammersmith to the Depot.

There was an (unproven) theory that a Circle Line driver passed more signals in a shift than if he drove from London to Edinburgh. Anyway it is rather academic as drivers never worked through from London to Scotland in normal circumstances! However it is true that there were many more signals years ago than there are now.

TIME WARPS!

St James’ Park station, on the south side of the Circle, is also the Underground’s HQ. It was used for the first service trials of dot-matrix train indicators. At first, these would show 1 CIRCLE LINE 1min as a train arrived. The next time around, it might show 1 CIRCLE LINE 2mins and the third time 1 CIRCLE LINE 3mins. This used to get me wondering. Was this a proof of the theory of relativity? Was I somehow slipping forward or back in time? Was I on a different plane? What if I arrived (relatively!) at the same time as a District train that was in a different time zone? Would the collision be real or relative?

Now you know what going round in circles can do to a driver’s brain!

PLANS TO SCRAP THE CIRCLE

The Circle Line has always been popular with the public and has survived for over a century – but LUL now wants to scrap it in its current form. They have proposed an amalgamation of the Hammersmith and City and Circle services into a ‘pan-handle’ format and a ‘tea-cup’ shaped service. If the second was implemented it would seem to lead to all passengers between the north and west sides having to change at Edgware Road. I can’t see how they could avoid overcrowding the footbridge and possibly causing chaos. It works well, and I hope it remains in its current form for another century.

I enjoyed working on the Circle. It was always busy and so there was always something to see. Happy days!
Moggies in the Fens

YOU asked in the last Journal about depot pets. We at Kings Lynn have had a cat for about the last 25 years. First there was a black-and-white she-cat – who was named ‘Dougie’ after the then station supervisor. Two people were always there - Station Supervisor Dougie Hudson, on 12hrs or a rest day, and the cat! Sadly, she was put to sleep some years ago. At around the same time that Dougie was nearing her end, another cat appeared at the station and had kittens. Some of the kittens disappeared and the Cat Protection League took the rest away - but after a while the last kitten was brought back after being chipped and neutered. She was named Victoria by staff and she was popular with the passengers too. Sadly, she was found dead by the station about 4 weeks ago. Nobody has found out what caused her death, but she never ventured far from home, the station.

So at the moment we have no cat. But the retail manager for the Fen line has said that Kings Lynn wouldn’t be the same without a station cat, so arrangements are in hand to find a successor to Victoria and Dougie.

Bernard Rolfe Driver - Kings Lynn

Is ASLEF still backing Freight on Rail?

HAVING just received my 2008 ASLEF diary I was thumbing through and noticed that the rail maps at the back - which have always appeared there during my time in the union - have been replaced by Motorway maps.

What message is this sending out? I believe that the diary should reflect the fact that we are trying to convince people of the environmental and safety benefits of carrying freight by rail. As a rail union, the diary should represent our trade and the rail maps do this (as well as being very useful when travelling around). The road maps could be from any cheap-skae diary from the local newsagents. Please can we have our rail maps back for next year?

Martin Scott Driver - Woking

Keeping in touch

I TOOK early retirement in August ’06 after completing 41 years service on LTS and C2C (and having a train named after me)!

I am now a member of ASLEF’s Retired Members’ Section and I was pleased to read in the October Journal that Bob Lilly is happily alive and kicking. Well good for you, Bob! Keep it up! - It’s so nice to see my old colleagues are still going strong – and if it wasn’t for the Journal I would never have known.

Dave Davis Retired Driver

Green comes to town!

ON behalf of the members of the Hither Green Branch who visited Arkwright Road recently, I’d like to say thank you to everyone at Head Office who made the day interesting and enjoyable.

Gary Fabian gave us - and colleagues from Skipton branch - an in-depth tour of the building and the staff in the various departments - despite their busy working schedules - explained what they did, and answered our numerous questions.

We were accompanied on our visit by retired member and former EC member John Davies. The EC, officers and general secretary all signed a copy of the union history - ‘Driven by Ideals’ – and presented it to him. It meant a great deal to John and I’m grateful to the EC for arranging it.

Once again, thanks to all concerned for an enjoyable and successful day.

John Staggs Secretary - Hither Green Branch

South Wales shunters

I’VE recently received complaints both from fellow ASLEF members and RMT people about the Driver Operative’s positions in Cardiff. Tulio Sidings in South Wales.

It appears that, with ASLEF’s agreement, the Shunters at Cardiff Sidings have been sent on a 3-week training course at Doncaster to make them up to Driver Operators. They work the remote-controlled diesel shunters based at Cardiff Sidings. Since becoming DO’s I am aware that they have also joined ASLEF.

The complaint being made to me centred on these individuals working outside their job title by being booked out as Shunters on Engineering sites at weekends and working Auto Ballasting machines etc.

I have to ask whether it's the mandate of ASLEF that ALL Driver Operatives should do this work - or are these individuals being misused by EWS? It has to be one or the other, and we cannot afford to create a precedent here where the company can force all Driver Operators to do this type of work.

This is potentially a dangerous situation and we need guidance from head office as soon as possible.

Bro S. G. Parry - Newport - South Wales

Transnet in the dock

AN article in the October Journal refers to ASLEF’s meetings with the German rail union Transnet over the acquisition of EWS by Deutshe Bahn.

In recent pay negotiations in Germany, Transet, who are a general rail union, completely stitched up the Train Drivers and their union the GDL. When the drivers went on strike Transnet were actively opposed to the action and organised scab drivers in an effort to undermine the GDL.

This behaviour is hardly surprising considering that Transnet’s General Secretary sits on the board of Deutshe Bahn. Transnet are also vehemently pro-privatisation. Are these really the type of people ASLEF should be doing business with?

Mick Portch East Ham Branch

Thanks for support

WE would like to thank all your members who supported and attended the National Rally for Trade Union Freedom in October.

The rally and demonstration were great successes, with both the main room and the overspill rooms full. We apologise for the length of time it took to get through security. This is always a problem with a Lobby of Parliament.

The Trade Union Rights and Freedoms Bill has not gone away – and it’s not going to!

Steering Committee - United Campaign to Repeal the Anti-Trade Union Laws

4-day week debate

I WOULD like to respond to Les Gibbins’ letter in the October Journal.

Firstly it will not be a 4-day week on TPE but an average of one over a roster cycle as is our 35 hour week and not a physical 4-day week. So if we work Mr Gibbins 4x11 shifts over a roster cycle of 28 weeks (Cleethorpes drivers’ roster), we might be a tad over a 35 hour week average which would be slightly more draining than Mr Gibbins envisaged. So it boils down to an understanding of the agreements you actually work to now – and not ones you used to work at Blackpool (exFWN)! As for being bought up to work 8-hour days, we haven’t had a standard 8-hour
DISHARMONY AND DISCONTENT

PARTS of the December issue of the Journal highlighted to me two areas where our great union seems to be out of touch with some of its members. I can see the point Bro Gibson was making on page 6 regarding harmonisation and the opportunities that it possesses for our members. In reality, however, the results are very different! I’m a driver for First Capital Connect (Bedford branch).

Our recent harmonisation with GN has left every driver I’ve spoken to disappointed and disillusioned with the union and the company. Our deal was pushed through on a vague promise as to how our new conditions would benefit us – but in reality we seem to be in a worse position than when we started. We’re more productive than ever, we have more unsociable work than ever in some of the depots and half the ‘good’ conditions we were promised have never come to fruition.

I would urge any other driver who finds themselves faced with harmonisation to deal with it cautiously and with much trepidation. It would be great to live in ‘Bro Gibson’ world where everybody benefits - but it doesn’t happen that way. When we come up against company negotiating teams, I’m afraid the driver is always going to come off worse because we just end up with the worse conditions from the two companies!

Secondly I have an issue with the ‘items of good’ in the Squash campaign (middle pages). I was amazed to read that FCC are trialling air conditioning in 319 units – because basically they’re not! They’re trialling ‘spot’ coolers which are ineffective and significantly cheaper. God forbid the poor company has to spend money to improve our environment! Unfortunately after speaking to my health and safety rep I’m informed ‘something is better than nothing’ so the green light will probably be given for the installation. But if it doesn’t work so we might as well have nothing.

Come on ASLEF get in touch with your members because a lot of us are really unhappy!

RICHARD CLARK
Driver – Bedford

day since the 1982 strikes over flexible rostering (7-9 hour shifts). On the subject of long shifts Mr Gibbins was unfortunate to be rostered five 10 hour shifts on the trot (three off spare turns). He complained that he had earned and needed his 5 rest days - but after having one off was soon back in the saddle on the same 10 hour shift (RDW). So if Tosh McDonald or any of the other EC members who are released to allegedly fight the drivers’ cause and you have a long shift to cover, fear not (RDW) regardless of the TOC or FOC you work for.

Al Stringer Cleethorpes

The wrong cab

The letter from ‘Driver John Voce’ reminded me of a better time on the railways - when train managers would talk over problems with drivers rather than seizing on the discipline route.

I retired from Railfreight just as the era of ‘driving from the wrong cab’ was being brought in. It was OK for me to propel a train over a quarter of a mile in length in and out of sidings - but after shunting it into place one day, I kept in the same cab where I could see the shunter in charge. The young Traction Inspector appeared from nowhere and insisted that I was driving from the wrong cab. I asked him to leave the footplate whilst I had finished the move and after some encouragement he did. Later he returned with another driver to relieve me of my duty.

My treatment echoes that of Driver Voce. I was suspended without pay and issued with a ‘Form 1’ charge sheet. Later I went with an ASLEF rep to a face-to-face meeting with the top manager and emerged with a single charge put on my record.

As I young fireman I was taught by some very good drivers, the old ‘Millhouses’ men who instilled into me a basic self confidence – and the honesty to admit if I genuinely had done wrong. I also had ASLEF, a brotherhood which has never lost sight of our responsibilities to each other.

C. B. Crookes RMS - ex Saltley

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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, Orpington, Kent BR6 9IQ

STRATFORD 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.

NEW! ASLEF LGBT Badges are now available for sale. If you wish to purchase one send a cheque made payable to ASLEF for £5.00 (this includes postage and packaging) to the Equalities Adviser at ASLEF Head Office.

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

DOVER 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@virgin.net)
As soon as the driver saw the flag he cut the steam, reversed the engine and opened both whistles to attract the attention of the guards at the front and rear, while the fireman applied the brakes. The train was fitted with a continuous brake, worked by a wheel and a cord. But travelling at over sixty miles an hour the five hundred yards was covered in a mere 15 seconds. The engine, tender, guard’s van and one carriage got over the break in the metal fairly well, coming to rest upright alongside the line. But the rest of the train buckled. To quote a report by the Strand magazine of the time ‘the remainder of the train, dislocated by the sudden check and derailment of the first part, came to terrible grief, the coaches tumbling over each other and falling into the field below the bridge.’

**SUSPENSE FOR WRITER**

The solitary exception was the carriage in which Charles Dickens was travelling. In his own words, ‘I was in the only carriage that did not go into the stream. It was caught upon the turn by some of the ruin of the bridge and hung suspended and balanced in an apparently impossible manner.’ Dickens climbed out of the window and saw the bridge had gone. He calmed down a guard, who was running around wildly with blood coming from his head, and together they began to free some of the trapped passengers.

Dickens happened to be carrying a bottle and a half of brandy with him and began administering it to the wounded. One man with a gashed skull so severe that the author could barely look at him, took a sip, said, ‘I am gone’, and promptly died. The author then gave more to a woman lying against a tree who he described as having ‘blood running over her face, which was lead colour’. She was also dead the next time he passed her.

In all ten people died on that seemingly tranquil and sunny day. The ganger who misread his timetable was imprisoned for six months. Shortly after his release he wrote, ‘I don’t want to be examined at the inquest and I don’t want to write about it. I could do no good either way, and I could only seem to speak about myself, which, of course, I would rather not do….’

Dickens died five years later from a second stroke, having suffered increasingly severe mental illness.
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EMERGENCIES If you are an ASLEF member who is arrested or being interviewed by the police and need legal assistance – day or night – you can call the members' Emergency Hotline on 07980 996159.

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

ASLEF more than just a union

Prize Crossword No. 21
set by TLC

Solution to Crossword No 20 which appeared in the December edition of the ASLEF Journal. Congratulations to Mick Dodd from Dover in Kent.

ACROSS
3 Sandwich 8 Taxi 9 Green Light 10 Stag 11 Yard 13 Title 17 Havana 18 Useful 19 Parks 22 Halt 24 Iron 25 Thameslink 26 Iris 27 Waterloo

DOWN
1 Party 2 Piggy bank 4 Not high up!(3,4) 5 Well ventilated (4) 6 Take a rest (4,1,8) 7 Former US boxer (6,7) 9 Low cost travel (5,4) 10 Amazing (9) 14 First class transport! (4) 15 One more time (5) 19 Love makes the world … (2,5) 20 Said to be the lowest form of wit (7) 24 Seen in the sky at night (4) 25 Mix, blend (4)

Thanks for all your responses to the 20th ASLEF crossword in the December 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.

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

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