FRANCHISE: Parties agreed – but did they mean it?

SQUASH: Full steam away from grubby cabs
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Red reaction and ruddy rucksacks

usually political parties put a manifesto to the electorate and then we have a vote. This time we voted - and a week later the Conservatives and their Lib Dem mates crept into Downing Street and then started writing their manifesto! Either way it looks as if we’re stuck with a few years of government by the privileged classes, lording it over us with their insufferable arrogance and slimy superiority.

It’s all been too much for me. To take my mind off it, I’ve decided to devote this column to rucksacks.

A few years ago the only people you saw swinging a rucksack were hikers or mountaineers. Inside their bags were tents, sleeping bags, provisions and spare socks. Now every Sunday stroller has one strapped to their back.

What’s inside them? What do you need to carry apart from your wallet and a pair of glasses? I know my wife can stock a handbag regardless of its size, but she’d be hard pressed to bulge a rucksack.

I wouldn’t object if they kept their baggage to themselves. But they don’t. Half the space in an average London tube is taken up with rucksacks, all of which are swung round with less attention to public safety than a vampire at an open level crossing. These public hazards are not carried by tourists or marchers - but by Mr and Mrs Average swinging down to the shops.

We see all kinds of common complaints and government initiatives about people who are obese, but at least they don’t poke me in the face with their stomachs. I’d double the fare for anyone with a rucksack on a train and charge them with obstruction for walking down the road.

Trains drivers are exceptions, of course. We’ve got to carry lamps, fault books, tea-making equipment, food, keys, diaries, mobile phones, yellow vests and publications. We’ve got an excuse. The rest haven’t.

Keith Norman
General Secretary
Tram referendum after action threat

DISTRICT organiser Steve Grant says threatened industrial action by ASLEF members on Croydon Trams has been suspended and a revised offer has been put to members in a referendum. The offer consists of a 2% salary increase from 4 November last year, the abolition of the lower first-year rate for new-entrant drivers and a £350 payment in lieu of the benefit of the half-hour reduction in working week.

It also includes an increase of RPI plus 0.5% (or £525 whichever is the greater) from 4 November this year, the removal of the lower holiday entitlement for new-entrant drivers, a reduction from a 38 to a 37.5 hours working week and the equivalent of three days additional annual holiday.

Finally the offer incorporates an increase of RPI plus 0.5% (or £440 whichever is the greater) from 4 November 2011 and a reduction from a 37.5 to a 37 hours working week.

Go to Tolpuddle – virtually, everyone can!

THE TUC is calling on as many trade unionists as possible to get along to this year’s Tolpuddle Martyrs festival, held in the Dorset village from 16 – 18 July. Star turns at this year’s event will be Tony Benn, Billy Bragg and Adrian Edmondson with his band the Bad Shepherds.

A new website has been set up to promote Tolpuddle’s festival and museum and to provide a comprehensive guide for visitors. The address is www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk. It features a virtual tour of the village including ‘visits’ to James Hammett’s grave, the Memorial Arch, Thomas Stanfield’s cottage and the ancient sycamore tree where the Martyrs met. It also tells the inspiring story of the six Dorset farm workers and the national campaign to pardon them after they were sentenced to seven years transportation to Australia in 1834.

Matty: ASLEF’s most experienced campaigner!

MATTY DALEY was out campaigning for Labour at last month’s General Election. Nothing surprising about that, you might say – except that Matty is 89 years old! He retired as a driver in 1983, having begun his railways career in 1935, working for LNER and then British Rail.

Matty, who was an active member of ASLEF and has been a Labour supporter since 1940, says, ‘I must have covered a few miles over the last few weeks and barely missed a day’. His walking the streets is all the more remarkable as he is waiting to have two knee replacement operations!

PLEA TO FREE IRANIAN FILM MAKER

Hands Off the People of Iran (HOPI) to which ASLEF is affiliated, is campaigning for the release from jail of film director, Jafar Panahi. He was arrested by the Iranian authorities on 1 March as part of the crackdown on sympathisers of the mass democratic protests that has rocked the country over the past months.

Panahi’s most famous film in the West is ‘Offside’, the story of a group of women attempting to sneak into a football match. (Women are banned from football matches in Iran). Hollywood film-makers including Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese, Robert De Niro, Robert Redford and Francis Ford Coppola have put their names to a petition calling for the release of Jafar Panahi.

For more information on the campaign, visit Hopi’s website at http://hopoi.org

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SQUASH: keep it clean!

THE union is calling on members to report every grubby cab in the repair book. The aim is to impress on management that our call for clean cabs is a serious issue for ASLEF members.

‘At the moment managers think they don’t need to do anything because they are not deluged with complaints,’ says Keith Norman. ‘We want members to start the deluge.’

The union argues that there are two important principles involved – safety and status.

‘For too long our drivers have accepted that cab conditions will be unpleasant. Perhaps it dates back to steam days – but those days have gone.

‘Driving modern trains is a very different profession, and those who do it are entitled to respect and dignity. Our working space should be of the same standard as skilled professionals in any other industry.’

Unclean cabs are also unsafe cabs – a point confirmed recently when an ASLEF member on London Underground was paid ‘substantial’ compensation after the company ignored complaints from members and reps about dirty and hazardous train cabs. Our member needed an operation after his finger was slit open by a piece of broken glass left in a train cab. Obtaining compensation is a success – but securing clean safe cabs is the victory we want,’ Keith declared.

The union wants to reach agreements with all employers about

- standards of cab cleanliness
- a regular cleaning programme
- provision of regularly emptied bins
- regular maintenance of air filters
- provision of cleaning cloths.

‘We want every member to back these demands by reporting every grubby cab to management in the repair book – and to let your health and safety reps know you’ve done it,’ says the general secretary. ‘If we all do this, we can show management that ASLEF train drivers won’t tolerate dirty and potentially hazardous working conditions – and impress on them that cab cleanliness is a real issue for drivers.’

The union has called on members to ‘Make a stink about a grubby cab!’

ASLEF stalwarts take their places for a ride around the park

ASLEF members and families backed last month’s march and rally to demonstrate their support for a non-privatised health and care service.

Organised by the TUC and the National Pensioners Convention, the event was supported by a variety of groups who fetched banners along supporting their own non-political agendas. Thousand turned out from all over the country, gathering at Temple Place on the Thames Embankment in glorious sunshine. There was a real carnival atmosphere as the march continued along the river to the Houses of Parliament, round and along Whitehall and up to Trafalgar Square. ASLEF’s National Organiser Simon Weller was among the speakers at the rally.

Peter Smith, Reporter, Retired Members Section

ASLEF’s Rocket Men!

SIX of our retired members were invited to the opening of the Science Museum’s ‘100 Years of Science’ celebrations – and snapped up the offer when we heard they had brought the replica of Stevenson’s Rocket from York Railway Museum to provide rides for the public over the Easter weekend reports P. J. Smith

Alan Taylor, Brian Tagg, John Robson, Dave Weddle, Mick Macmillan and myself rose from our beds to be in London’s Kensington Gardens by 0930 for the Press launch.

James May, as presenter of Top Gear, opened the proceedings, inviting the public to visit the Science Museum to see the original Rocket and other important exhibits.

May last year saw a celebration of 150 years of the famous Cornwall bridge

THREE YEARS – OR A SUNDAY MORNING – TO RESTORE SALTASH BRIDGE!

NETWORK RAIL has announced three-year plans to ‘strengthen, restore and repaint’ Isambard Kingdom Brunel’s Royal Albert Bridge at Saltash. It estimates the cost of the ‘most complex’ refurbishment in the bridge’s 150-year history to be in the region of £10m.

Rail enthusiasts have pointed out that in 1928 the Great Western Railway undertook a major refurbishment of the bridge which involved replacing the main girders supporting the 15 approach spans on both banks.

And how long did the operation take – with manual labour – 72 years ago? The entire span was replaced in a 5-hour Sunday morning possession!
ASLEF won a ‘highly commended’ award in Supporting Learners at a ceremony at the TUC’s London headquarters last month.

Star speaker at the Union Learning Fund Award Ceremony was comedian Lenny Henry. Lenny himself became an Adult Learner in 2001 and went on to secure a degree in English Literature at the Open University. This year he added a Masters degree.

A recent Leeds University survey reveals that 55% of employers say their employees have improved their qualifications thanks to union-led projects. Two-thirds said there had been a benefit to the organisation and 80% said there had been a benefit to individuals.

Conference told ASLEF education is under threat

HE ASLEF Education conference was held a month before the General Election – and began with warnings from chairman Kevin Lindsay and district organiser Mick Whelan that the Union Learning Fund is under severe threat as ‘Labour is the only party interested in work-based education’. It would be a sad affair if funding was cut for our highly successful learning which began in 1998 and now boasts over 1,000 learners and over 2,000 members receiving guidance from union learning reps (ULRs). The project has also been available to assist drivers threatened with redundancy by helping with CV writing and interview techniques.

Despite this dour warning there was a real sense of purpose from the 60 delegates who heard from a range of speakers and took part in three workshops at a positive and well-organised event.

Thompsons solicitor Catherine Scrivens gave a detailed talk on the new legislation giving the ‘right to request’ time off for training/learning – but ASLEF Learning Agreements with companies are sometimes stronger than the legal minimum.

Julie Freeston gave an excellent workshop about the ASLEF-supported online learning programme Alison.com. It offers a variety of subjects on-line and is ideal for those who don't have time to attend training classes and want to learn from home.

Chris Proctor, who edits the Journal for the general secretary, gave a detailed and fun workshop on what makes a good read - and what bores the pants off people!

Thanks are due to Shirley Handsley, the Project Co-ordinator, for all the work she did to ensure the event ran smoothly, and to Sarah Laurie for her hard work on the day.

I've been involved in the ASLEF Education project for 18 months and although it's been hard work at times I've enjoyed it and I'm pleased with the successes we've had at Lincoln.

Mark Reynolds, East Midland Trains Union Rep

TUC award for Julie Freeston, Project Worker, Tracey Figg, ULR London Underground and Mick O’Shea, ULR East Coast

RADICAL BOOK OFFER

Housmans ‘radical’ bookshop now offers a 10% discount on all new books purchased in-store if you show your ASLEF membership card.

Housman’s is based at 5 Caledonian Road next to King’s Cross station, where it runs regular events. Details of these can be found at www.housmans.com or by calling 020 7837 4473.

£2 BILLION ROLLING STOCK GRAVY TRAIN

ASLEF has expressed dismay at the news that HSBC bank is planning to sell its rolling stock company HSBC Rail for £2 billion, possibly to a consortium of private equity bidders. The bank purchased the train leasing company for around £700 million in 1997 and owns around 4,000 trains, approximately one third of the UK’s total rolling stock.

‘We’ve always known the rolling stock companies have been the cash cows of rail privatisation,’ said general secretary Keith Norman ‘but profits of £1.3 billion for HSBC in just over a decade show just how scandalous the mismanagement of public assets was.’

NETWORK RAIL TO INVEST £530 MILLION IN NORTHERN HUB

Network Rail (NR) has announced plans for a £530m investment package for the north of England which it says will ensure

- Faster services between Liverpool, Chester, Manchester and Manchester Airport and Sheffield, Leeds, Hull, and the North East
- New inter-regional/trans Pennine services allowing six trains an hour between Leeds and Manchester with 43 minute journey times
- Major restoration and improvements to Manchester Victoria, making it a major interchange for the north
- Increased capacity for freight by doubling the number of paths from the west coast main line to Trafford Park, and making it possible for larger containers to move across the network.

The down-side is that NR still has to ‘win funding’ for these ideas – and implementation would only start from 2014. More details can be found at www.networkrail.co.uk/north
Peak time extension ‘Rockets Fares’

RAIL watchdog Passenger Focus has accused some of the UK’s biggest train operators of introducing ‘astronomical’ fare rises by extending peak-time hours. It says some fares have nearly quadrupled since last year as a result. Despite train companies saying the number of people affected has been ‘tiny’, a BBC survey revealed that over 180 trains a week have been rescheduled as ‘peak-time’ this year.

If train companies re-designate trains as ‘peak’ they avoid needing permission from the regulator to increase fares.

One train affected by the rises is the 0950 Virgin Trains service from Birmingham to London. Last year this train was ‘off peak’ until the TOC extended ticket restrictions for more than an hour a day — and as a result one commuter, Antony Ray, has seen his ticket price more than triple. As a result of the changes, his fare from Telford to London has rocketed from £45 to £158 for a return journey.

Last year, taking the 0915 from London Euston to Manchester, returning at 0855 the next day, would have cost £66. Now that Virgin has extended its peak hours, the same ticket costs £262.

‘It is vital that rail travel does not become the preserve of the rich or the business traveller,’ says Keith Norman. ‘For a host of social and environment reasons, rail must be a public, and not an exclusive, service.’

ASLEF active in hall and fringes of STUC

OUR union played a full part at last month’s STUC conference in Dundee, both in the main hall and at two important fringe meetings, reports Jim Baxter.

Hugh Bradley was first to the rostrum calling for the reinstatement of the link to earnings for the national pensions, closely followed by Kevin Lindsay who spoke directly after Nicola Sturgeon, the SNP Scottish Government’s Deputy First Minister.

Ms Sturgeon spoke about the investment the Scottish economy but Kevin, in a passionate and heartfelt speech, reminded the minister that her party and government had withdrawn funding for both the Glasgow Airport Rail Link (GARL) and the Edinburgh Airport Rail Link (EARL). ‘Each of these projects would have injected millions into the economy, safeguarded jobs within the construction and rail industries — and created a modern cohesive transport system in both cities,’ he declared.

I moved the motion supporting the Labour MSP’s Bill to extend the Emergency Workers Act to cover all those who work with the public from the fear of assault in the workplace, while Chris Barrie spoke on the emergency motion to fight the BNP at what was then the upcoming General Election.

ASLEF was also prominent at two fringe meetings. We hosted a lunch-time fringe on Labour MSP Hugh Henry’s proposed Emergency Workers Act (Scotland). Hugh stressed the need for legislation to ensure all workers should be able to go about their business without the fear of assault. Kevin Lindsay was a guest speaker at Unite Against Fascism’s fringe meeting where he spoke of ASLEF’s pride in being the first union to expel BNP members, and establishing the right of other unions to do the same.

Kevin Lindsay in full flow at the UAF fringe meeting

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Simply replacing conventional trains with trams means only one thing: the murder of a branch line, says driver Wayne Larman. He looks at the St. Albans Abbey to Watford Junction branch line (‘Abbey Flyer’) to argue that to be desirable, light rail needs to offer more …

Light Rail needs to offer more to be acceptable

The March Journal highlighted the good work done by Bletchley branch and the EC with regard to the Abbey Flyer. I believe replacing the existing system with light rail is madness.

The Abbey line began in the mid-19th century offering an access line for constructing the Midland Railway, heavy goods supply, tourism, an industry test line and a significant commuter line. Now its five intermediate stops provide passengers with important connections to the West Coast Main Line.

NO IMPROVED SERVICE

However, the paper makes it clear that it does not expect any additional delivery services to the existing stations - so no trams will come off the railway onto the streets to serve local people – which is their only possible long-term benefit.

The fat controller egoism of Herts County Councillors means they can’t resist the lure of owning their own railway, although they have as much experience of running a railway as organising trips to Mars. But of course, they’ve got their (useless, incompetent, overpaid) consultants, haven’t they?

SAFETY SLIPS

And what about safety? The line has a half barrier level crossing and two foot crossings.
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Recently, we’ve seen a bewildering array of new names for unions emerge. Of the new fangled union names, Accord, Advance, Amicus, Aspect, Community, Prospect, Surge, Unite, Unity and Voice are some of the most obvious.

If you didn’t have your wits about you, you might think these were names for organisations that sell life assurance or pensions.

By contrast, twenty or more years ago, the names of unions did, as the Ronseal advert says, what they said on the tin. This meant they stated what the union was and who it represented.

So most unions were called something like the ‘National Union of’ such and such. And, the term ‘worker’ was also freely and frequently used in their titles.

The unions with these new fangled names overwhelmingly tend to be products of recent mergers where both constituents saw the need to start afresh with a name that was previously not the property of either.

Adapting to Mergers

But mergers of 20-odd years ago didn’t lead to such weird and wonderful names. Rather, the names kept to the traditional mould. The Manufacturing, Science and Finance union, Amalgamated Electrical and Engineering Union, Graphical, Paper and Media Union and National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers were all formed from the merger of two unions each in these times.

Unison, created from three unions in 1993, did break the mould here. At least, it has the benefit of now being known for what it is. But there is ambiguity in the new name or at worst, confusion. To use a horrible marketing term, the value of the ‘brand’ is lost.

So with these new names, it’s not immediately clear who the unity and collectivism should be with, what these should be for and what they should be against.

For example, the unity and collectivism could be between members and employers, in the form of a partnership. Of course, in the main, that has not been the intention but to increasing large number of non-union, prospective members, this would not necessarily be apparent because the names could lend themselves to many different interpretations.

Aslef’s an Interesting Case

Now the name Aslef is an interesting case. Few beyond the union’s own membership will know what the acronym actually stands for. If they did, they’d probably think it a bit bizarre. They’d say, ‘So where are the firemen these days?’ But that is not a problem because Aslef is widely known as ‘Aslef – the train drivers’ union’. Not only does this mean that it is for train drivers only - but that it is the premier union for train drivers. All this is helped because Aslef has been around for so long and with a proud history.

In other words, it has developed and sustained its ‘brand’ which is better termed identity. The identity of the union also tells us something about its purpose – to improve the terms and conditions of drivers.

Clarity is Best

At least some unions have stopped short of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The GMB no longer stands for General, Municipal and Boilermakers’ union as it once did. The union kept the GMB bit and added the suffix ‘Britain’s general union’. Similarly, the CWU ceased to stand for the Communication Workers’ Union, instead becoming ‘CWU – the communication union’ where the CWU is not an acronym any more.

Today, trade unions no longer really exist anymore because most are unions of many trades and none. This is because of changes in technology and skills. But that does change the fact that they are still unions – unions of workers, of wage-labourers.

And because unions are on the back foot, there is no point trying to soft soap prospective new members. Unions need to be bold and proud in equal amounts about who they are and what they are. Such clarity is going to be desperately needed in this brave new political world that we are now living in.
Franchising

HURDLES TO JUMP IN FRANCHISING STAKES

ASLEF would like to see full re-nationalisation of rail – but right now it’s unachievable. That is why the Executive Committee launched an employee-led co-operative bid for the East Coast Mainline (ECML) franchise. If we believe the politicians we should be in with a good chance. After all, the Tory manifesto said they want ‘workers to gain ownership of the services they deliver through co-operative models’. Labour said it would ‘welcome rail franchise bids from not-for-profit, mutual or co-operative enterprises’. Nice words. But in practice the current franchising system presents near insurmountable hurdles to an employee-backed bid ...

BIDDERS

- need to prove they have ‘substantial experience of running passenger transport operations’ - but haven’t ECML staff got a lot more ‘passenger transport experience’ than a multinational accountant?
- are required to have ‘health and safety standing’ – and in their terms, we don’t (even though ASLEF has led the development of rail health and safety policy!).
- need to provide detailed information of their balance sheets - in which case, how come in the last three years both GNER and National Express have both defaulted on their franchise obligations?
- have to show ‘a proven track record of service delivery and financial management’ which amounts to between 70%-80% of the bidding score – so new bidders are hugely handicapped.
- face assessment scores which are only 20%-30% concerned with passengers and other stakeholders – surely these are wrong priorities?

- need to show three year’s results of ‘targets, trends, comparators and causes with sufficient scope to demonstrate capabilities’. So new companies (or ideas) need not apply.
- have to put up some £18 million for a performance bond facility and a season ticket bond. It hardly encourages co-operatives, does it?
- YET FRANCHISE WINNERS DON’T HAVE TO ensure good industrial relations – because they can claim any revenue lost because of a strike back from the taxpayer.
- offer staff travel facilities in co-operation with other companies
- adhere to standards for important issues such as cab conditions.
- have any contact with or loyalty to the rail freight industry.

These are some of the follies of franchising - and a trend, comparators and causes with sufficient scope to demonstrate capabilities’. So new companies (or ideas) need not apply.

CO-OPERATIVES

O-OPERATIVES of different kinds have operated in Britain since the mid-1800’s. From the original Rochdale Pioneers of 1844 to the more complex structures required by more recent co-operatives, all have shared the principle of democratic member control and equitable distribution of profits, or reinvestment in the co-op.

The London Borough of Greenwich has had a Co-operative Development Agency for 25 years. This is how some local co-operatives operate and are structured to serve their members and the wider community.

THE GREENWICH COMMUNITY FOOD CO-OP (GCFC) provides quality fresh fruit and vegetables at affordable prices on housing estates where there is limited access to fresh

RAIL CO-OPERATIVE ON THE GO!

T

HE Go! Co-operative aims to provide open access rail services linking main lines to smaller market towns. Its first route will run from Yeovil Junction to the Midlands, via Yeovil Pen Mill, Frome, Westbury, Trowbridge, Melksham, Chippenham, Swindon and Oxford. Alex Laurie explains the background …

It’s an experience we’ve all had: you need to go somewhere, but your local station has too few trains, or they’re at the wrong time, or don’t connect to other services … for one reason or other, you realise you’ll just have to drive. In 2007, I decided I’d just have to sort out the extra trains myself.

Considering I had no experience of public transport, this was a bit arrogant. But I noticed Hull Trains ran passenger services without being part of a franchise. And – being a co-operative development worker – I’d noticed that a couple of co-operatives had raised enough finance from their members to buy and operate multi-million pound wind turbines. So I thought, ‘Why not have a rail service run by dissatisfied passengers like me?’

GETTING LUCKY My first good fortune was stumbling across a workers co-op in the field of public transport consultancy called Transsept. They thought the idea was worth pursuing – and the Co-operative Fund had some money earmarked for researching new co-operative ideas. Also the Financial Services Authority (FSA) had just announced improvements to the way co-operatives could raise investment from the public. Perhaps most importantly, I started meeting people from around the rail community who wanted to be part of the idea. These were people with a deep-seated love of rail – often with one foot in the professional world of rail engineering or management and
produce. It operates like any other greengrocer - but it is a Community Co-operative where the Directors are unpaid members of the community and no profits are distributed to external shareholders.

GREENWICH CREDIT UNION is a saving and loans financial co-operative with each of its 4,000 members having an account. Like all co-ops, the Board of Directors is elected on a one-member-one-vote basis. Uniquely, credit unions provide inexpensive credit to many people who are not able to access normal lending services or as an alternative to institutions that charge exorbitant interest rates. Credit unions have a few employees operating their high street shops but all decisions are taken by the members, such as a credit committee that approves loans or a supervisory committee who check the accounts. Credit Unions are regulated by the Financial Services Authority and their rules conform with the Industrial and Provident Society Act (IPS).

GREENWICH LEISURE LIMITED (GLL) was created in the early 1990’s in response to central government threats to jobs and services in many of the borough’s leisure centres. Today GLL provides affordable leisure and fitness facilities through more than 70 centres. All its financial surpluses are reinvested to provide long-term benefits to its customers, employees and the local community. GLL is guided by a board of trustees, which is appointed annually at the general meeting. The board has representatives from a number of stakeholders including customers, council and the workforce – something we believe creates empowerment, enthusiasm and ownership at all levels of the organisation. It also enhances the commitment and motivation of staff which results in improved customer service.

Co-operatives are sustainable businesses operated by workers, the community and other relevant stakeholders. They attempt to run efficient businesses but stress benefits to users and members rather than the conventional approach of maximising profits. Their democratic nature makes it possible to establish ethical and community principles. Of course co-operatives face particular challenges. Two of the most common at the start are obtaining enough capital to operate at an efficient level and being recognised as a serious organisation that others will do business with.

If you are interested on co-operatives and how they work, visit Co-operatives UK at www.co-operatives-uk.coop

Another in the heritage rail movement (perhaps better described as the ‘independent railways’ – because behind the steam and nostalgia are people thinking hard about the future of public transport), I also hooked up with other transport activists.

A TEAM IN PLACE A team was coming together that included both prospective passengers and prospective workers: we realised that we were not a workers co-op or a consumer co-op, but a bit of both (with a limited, but significant, role for investors).

Again, at just the right time, Co-op Party activist Tim Pearce invited me to a conference called ‘Social Enterprise and the Railways’. I laid out my ideas to this audience, and Tim agreed to become the new co-op’s chair. Go! Co-operative was born.

CROSS ABOUT THE COUNTRY We felt that getting to London was rarely a problem – the difficulty was travelling cross country, from the south to the midlands. But we didn’t just want rail – we wanted a real public transport co-operative, with bus routes, linked light rail and even car pools.

In April we went public, with a share offer document describing a credible route – from Yeovil to Birmingham, via Melksham and Oxford. We invited people from along the route and beyond to join an ethical, democratic co-operative to develop the idea. At launch events in Yeovil, Trowbridge, Swindon and Oxford, we met a host of enthusiastic rail travellers.

DOING IS MORE FUN THAN COMPLAINING It’s fair to say that we’ve met a cooler, more sceptical response from public transport planners and industry insiders. This is only realistic: but for all their doubts, no one has been hostile or obstructive, and often they have gone out of their way to assist.

As the co-operators in Mondragon, Spain, like to say: we build the road as we travel. Ours is a longish road, and I don’t expect a train in Go! Co-operative livery to be rolling until December 2011 at the earliest. But there is an important point to be proved here: getting involved in the delivery of a service you need is so much more fun than complaining about it.
Two years ago Reading driver Anita Gilbert began to suffer from severe headaches and problems with her sinuses. Six months later, aged just 40, she was diagnosed as having an incurable tumour on the brain. It is a tragic story - but she is facing up to her situation with a dignity and stoicism that is a lesson to us all …

It’s 19 years since Anita Gilbert began working on the railway. She worked as a guard for a year before passing an aptitude test and beginning driver training.

‘Stan Moran, now our regional officer, was on the same course. He told me I wouldn’t make it as I was too quiet. Well, he’s not much of a clairvoyant. 19 years down the track and I’m still here. Just.’

A cloud passes over her face before she resumes her story.

‘Women were still an oddity on the footplate but in those early years being a woman actually helped with passengers. People gave you a bit more respect. But I think that’s changed over the years. People don’t care so much now. They swear at you no matter who you are.’

Anita has spent her railway life at Reading. ‘I never wanted to move away, doing the routes to Paddington, Oxford, Henley and Marlowe.’

Her grandfather was employed part-time by British Rail until he was 80, which must be some sort of record.

‘When I told him I was going to be a train driver, he didn’t believe it!’

Anita was pregnant with her first child when she took up driving, which made her quite an unusual sight.

‘I remember one passenger telling me I shouldn’t be on a train ‘in that condition’. I’ll always remember that. He was twice as fat as I was!’

Anita’s first child, a son who’s 17 now, was born before she did her rules. It was, she conceded, a busy time. Her daughter is four years younger.

And just before Christmas two years ago, shortly after her illness was diagnosed, Anita’s link with the railways got even closer when she married Chris, another Reading driver who she met when she became his instructor. He’s now father to their five-year-old son, Billy.

‘Our wedding was wonderful. It was supposed to be a small do but about 90 people turned up, including plenty of Reading drivers.’

GETTING ON WITH IT

She says her illness has been tough on Chris, ‘But he just gets on with it. It’s all we can do. The drivers at Reading were quite wonderful after I was diagnosed. When I finished my first course of treatment they paid for us all to go to Euro Disney. I even got a ride in the cab with the Eurostar driver. It’s the sort of kindness you never forget.’

When Anita first began to feel ill she started dosing herself with Night Nurse. ‘I remember saying at the time, ‘Oh, well – this will kill or cure’. It’s a phrase that keeps coming back to me now.

‘Then I had a fit and I thought I’d got epilepsy. I had my reflexes tested at the hospital but then I was sent home. A day or two later I was in an ambulance, an emergency case.’

Anita then had weeks of tests and examinations, like the CAT scan that she says is ‘like being put into a washing machine’.

At the end of the tests she had to face up to the worst news anyone could hear. ‘They found a grade four tumour and said it was terminal.’

It is difficult to hear, even now. It pulls you up. How can you deal with that?

‘Yes, of course I was frightened, scared, upset. But everyone’s going to die one day. It just seems I’m going to go earlier. But you can be hit by a bus or have a heart attack any time.’

Anita was told that although they could
June 2010

Keeping Track

operate and take away some of the tumour, they couldn’t get it all. They said it was like a weed in the garden where you couldn’t get to the root. It will always be there, and the treatment, including chemotherapy, is slowly weakening her.

IT IS ALWAYS THERE
‘The terrible thing about it is that it never leaves your mind. You can’t escape it.’
It was partly to take her attention away from this constant preoccupation that Anita

wanted to return to work. Obviously not fit for driving, last October she began working in the office for three hours a day.
‘It was good to see everyone again and management couldn’t have been kinder. They’ve kept paying my wages while I’ve been ill. There has been such kindness.’
That backing has been so important to her in these dark days. Times that got even worse when a couple of months ago she had a

seizure in the office and had to be rushed to hospital again. The problem was that her body was getting used to the medication she was taking, which means she needs increased dosages all the time. ‘I rattle when I walk now,’ she says, a sad smile on her face.
‘At least I’m glad I didn’t have this seizure in front of my children. It must be so worrying for them, to see their mother with her body out of control.
‘They have to know what’s wrong with me, but I wish they didn’t have to go through this. ‘How do I deal with it? There is nothing else I can do. I think of how little time I have with Chris and my children and I worry about how he’s going to cope when I’m not here. My mother cries every time she visits. I hate to see her cry.
‘I think back about all the silly things people argue about. Even at work – things like rest days and who gets which turns. Things I realise now just don’t matter.
‘I could cry every day – but you also see the best in people – my family, and the people at Reading depot. And you realise how wonderful it is to be alive.’

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

WHAT THE UNION WAS DOING 100 AND 50 YEARS AGO

100 years ago
a new union organiser told of his first days on the job – while 50 years ago a weekend school dismissed the possibility of anti-union laws …

100 YEARS AGO
In the June 1910 Journal, Organizing Secretary J.Bromley reported on opening the Sheffield branch …
“On Saturday, May 7th, I closed my last regulator for the Great Western Railway Company, having completed nearly 20 years’ service for that company and with scarcely a black mark.
On Saturday, May 8th, I set out on my new duties, leaving London en route for Sheffield, to open a new branch there…..After reading out the names of 11 new members with more than sufficient transfers to form a branch, I declared the branch open and gave its members some advice for the future…..I afterwards had an interview with one of our members, who had a couple of days previous been removed from the Great Central Railway footplate for not understanding a heap of skeins of dirty wool. A most unpractical and useless test, which I understand is abolished by both the Army and Navy. I stayed in Sheffield on the Monday long enough to further advise in view of his case being re-opened.”

50 YEARS AGO

Len Hill wrote an account of a District 3 weekend school in Babbacombe in the June 1960 edition …
“Seventeen interested members attended the week-end school at the Oswalds Hotel, Babbacombe. J.B.McCartney, LLB. (W.E.A. Tutor) spoke on “Attack on Trade Union Power”. He referred to policies followed by the National Press in relation to conditioning the public and trade unionists to the idea that the trade unions are continually indulging in irresponsible strike action. A closer examination put the picture in proper perspective; lost time by strikes in Great Britain being less than two hours per man a year …
“Mr. McCartney then suggested that there would not be an all-out attack on trade union power by legislation (this would be too obvious), but by decisions in the Courts.”

Extracts selected and edited by
Jane Pimlott

“ANITA HAD TO FACE UP TO THE WORST NEWS ANYONE COULD HEAR… THEY FOUND A GRADE FOUR TUMOUR AND SAID IT WAS TERMINAL”

ASLEF leaders spoke of their great respect and sympathy for Anita’s struggle
Rail Freight needs long term commitment to overtake road haulage

argues J P Morgan
Intermodal Driver, Ipswich Depot

WAS heartened and relieved to see last month’s ASLEF Journal give higher profile to the rail freight business. We often feel like the poor relations. I fully endorse the article by EC member Hugh Bradley which echoes my own sentiments about the absurdities of rail freight privatisation. The ‘economic downturn’ brought home some hard truths, especially, as Hugh says, the impact of the ‘dog eat dog’ mentality. It’s utterly absurd to see the freight companies undercutting each other for the 8% of UK freight that goes by rail. I haven’t got a problem (within reason) with being economic and efficient – but the focus should be on the road haulage industry rather than fighting over the ‘scraps’ in rail freight.

However, any efforts in this respect will be fruitless unless there is real political ambition and willpower to transfer freight from road to rail – and I don’t see any politician with a real interest in, and understanding of, our industry. They may ‘talk the talk’ and be ready with a sound-bite – but that’s where the ‘promotion’ and interest ends.

Since privatisation rail freight has been a business of diminishing returns. This is partly through natural processes, but also from the effects of the economic downturn and Britain’s ever-dwindling manufacturing and heavy industry base.

Ed Burkhardt’s promises of ‘massive expansion’ for rail freight when he set up EWS seem a sad and hollow memory. The real irony is that the one rail freight business he allegedly didn’t want – intermodal – is one of the few successes.

The Wagonload network is all but abandoned, and in East Anglia if we weren’t carrying ‘boxes’ on rail, there is precious little else.

The South West, North Wales, large parts of Scotland and even NE England are effectively rail freight ‘deserts’. Meanwhile pathing is becoming almost farcical, with some of our diagrams producing average journey speeds of 20 – 30 mph for Class 4 trains. Pathing and times are a major issue if rail freight is going to be truly competitive with road haulage in particular.

The timescales given to achieve major infrastructure improvements – often 10 to 15 years – are other causes of pessimism. Who is going to be ready to make such massive financial commitment for a business as volatile as rail freight? Even in the 1960s the ‘hump’ yards were redundant before they had been completed.

A classic case is the ‘mothballed’ route from Oxford to Milton Keynes which was proposed 20 years ago (under ‘Regional Railways’). It was to be reopened as an important strategic alternative passenger and freight railway. As usual nothing happened. Yet if the route had been reopened, it would now be reaping real dividends.

Yes, Chiltern Railways has now committed to reopen from Oxford to Princes Risborough, but the remainder of the line leading to Milton Keynes and the massive conurbations of the south and west Midlands remain dormant for the foreseeable future.

I offer my sincere support to the union’s campaigns on rail freight – it’s just a shame it’s taken 15 years and a severe recession to raise the profile of our business.
JAMES DUNCAN
SCOTLAND TO STRATFORD

JAMES DUNCAN passed away on 2 April at the age of 78. A good number of former colleagues gathered on the bright spring morning of 20 April at Harwood Park to celebrate his life and to support James’ wife Ena, sons Neil, Iain and Colin, daughters Carol and Fiona and his daughters-in-law, son-in-law and grandchildren.

Like many of his colleagues, James came south from Scotland in 1968 when dieselisation reduced the number of men required there to run the service. He took up residence in Hatfield where a new estate had been built and a number were allocated to railway employees. James spent the rest of his railway career at Stratford.

He was a great chap, a fountain of knowledge to his family, friends and colleagues and a pleasure to work with. We send our condolences and hope that James may RIP.

Peter Smith, Reporter, ASLEF Retired Members’ Section

RICHARD W (‘DICKIE’) HOPKINS
HAPPY HOPI

I am sorry to report the passing, on 18 April, of our good friend and workmate Dickie Hopkins.

Dickie was just 14 when he started work on the Great Western Railway as a messenger boy, before joining the Loco as a cleaner. On appointment to fireman, he was sent to Old Oak Common and it was from there that he did his Army Service in the Royal Engineers. When he was released he returned to do his firing at Cathays until dieselisation, at which point he was sent to Radyr.

On becoming a driver he again went to Old Oak Common, and then returned to Cathays until the depot closed.

He then transferred to Cardiff Canton where he spent the rest of his career.

After his retirement ‘Happy Hopi’ was a regular at our Friday afternoon club. He loved to organise and play skittles and join in everything going on.

He will be sadly missed by all who knew him. Fridays will never be the same again.

The funeral was well attended by his many friends and workmates, old and young, paying their respects and offering their condolences to his widow Joan, his son, daughter and their families.

Cyril Sedgbeer, Retired Members’ Section

LOLL TAYLOR
FATHER, DRIVER, MBE

IT is with great sadness that I inform you of the death of my father, ex-Doncaster Driver Loll Taylor MBE, at the age of 74.

He retired through ill health in 1994 after 44 years service, having gone through the ranks of cleaner to top link driver. He was disappointed when heart problems meant him being grounded to shed and pilot work, stopping him doing the mainline work that he loved. However he moved on to doing the Timekeeper’s job at Doncaster station and Relief Foreman’s job at Carr Loco before truly finding his calling when he became the Schools Safety Liaison Officer, teaching school children throughout Yorkshire about the dangers of trespassing on the railways. This led to him being awarded a MBE for services to the Rail Industry, which made us all very proud.

I remember how excited the family were when he was picked to be the Fireman on the Flying Scotsman’s ill fated tour of America. Unfortunately this wasn’t to be as British Rail management decided they couldn’t spare a passed man.

Loll was liked by all who worked with him. He will be remembered for his love of a game of cards. Many a driver and secondman lost their loose change to him at ‘Hearts’.

His good sense of humour never left him. After a recent heart operation I asked him what the Doctor had said. ‘He told me not to bother buying any new shoes’ was Loll’s reply.

He was always a loyal ASLEF member and a true Labour man. There aren’t many drivers left at Doncaster from his era but he will be missed by everyone who had the pleasure of his acquaintance.

David Taylor, Doncaster driver

STOBART PROFITS RISE WITH RAIL

Carlisle-based transport giant Stobart Group has announced a massive leap in pre-tax profits – up by almost 60% in a year. Profits for the last financial year rocketed to £36.8 million, compared to £23.1 million profits in the previous year. Turnover increased to £447 million – a 3.9% annual rise.

A spokesman for the firm said the figures underlined the success of his firm’s ‘multi-modal’ haulage model, weaving together road, rail, sea and air transport.

GB RAILFREIGHT FOR SALE

The UK’s second-largest rail freight operator, France’s national railway and the Channel tunnel operator have all emerged as potential bidders for GB Railfreight, one of the UK’s largest rail freight companies.

FirstGroup has put GB Railfreight, which it bought in 2003, up for sale. Initially FirstGroup said it wanted to keep GB Railfreight, which it bought as part of its acquisition of Aim-listed GB Railways, within the group.

DISAPPOINTING DUTCH LHV TRIALS

A mid-trial review of Longer and Heavier Vehicles (LHV) in Holland reveals that Dutch drivers so far have few objections to these mega-trucks (which have a maximum weight of 60 tonnes (as opposed to 50 tonnes for regular trucks) and a maximum length of 25.25 metres (as opposed to 18.75 metres).

However, this may change during the Third Pilot trial (the so-called ‘Experience Phase’) which began on 1 November 2007 and will end in a year’s time. The purpose of this Third Pilot is to study the effects of an increasing number of LHVs in the Netherlands, in terms of traffic safety, traffic management and modal split.

‘I expect attitudes to change as more LHVs hit their roads, ’ says ASLEF’s general secretary Keith Norman. ‘It is easy to be relaxed about something you seldom experience. Only about 150 of the 1,000 Dutch car drivers in the survey have actual experience with an LHV, such as trying to overtake one. It shows a very weak case if this is the best the road haulage lobby can come up with.’
The union’s conference, its Annual Assembly of Delegates (AAD) takes place this month and despite assurances that it is ‘just like a big branch meeting’, it is intimidating for any new-comer to stand up in front of 67 other delegates to speak on behalf of my branch and two others.

Happily Simon Weller, our National Organiser, ably assisted by Finn Brennan, a self-confessed conference old stager, arranged two courses – one in London and one in Liverpool – to help novices like myself to understand how to play a role at this key event.

The first thing we found out is that ‘the big guns who run the union’ are us – delegates from branches around the country, and each one a train driver. If you went to a branch meeting in November or December, you will know that your branch has been able to submit motions to the AAD. On the course, we learnt how these are grouped so that all motions on similar subjects are debated at the same time. More importantly, we learnt how to oppose or support issues within the rules of conference debate. We were encouraged to speak early (‘break our duck’) and the course gave us some confidence when we come to do the real thing.

This course went a long way to equipping us to play an active role in this year’s conference. I’d recommend it to anyone intending to be a delegate.
The TUC has called on trade unionists not to buy goods produced in Israeli settlements – colonies illegally built on Palestinian land in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It wants the EU to ban imports from these settlements and urges UK supermarkets not to stock them. What lies behind these demands? Hugh Lanning, deputy general secretary of civil service union PCS explains …

WHY WE WANT A BAN ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENT GOODS

Visiting the Occupied Palestinian Territory is always a shock. Being stopped at checkpoints, watching Israeli soldiers threaten, harass and turn back Palestinians trying to get to work, school or even hospital. Surrounded by illegal Israeli settlements on stolen Palestinian land. This is daily life for Palestinians living in Occupied Palestinian Territory. And the worst incidents take place when international visitors aren’t around. Ambulances stopped from crossing the checkpoint to take desperately ill people to hospital. Palestinian women forced to give birth at checkpoints. Fire engines forced to wait whilst buildings burn down.

And it was Gaza that shocked many into action. Seeing men, women and children dying on the streets of Gaza City in December 2008 and January 2009. The UN team, led by Richard Goldstone, told the world about Israel’s war crimes. About Israel shelling UN buildings with white phosphorus. About hospitals, schools and medical clinics destroyed. About families who were shot at by Israeli soldiers whilst fleeing their homes carrying white flags – and who were then told to keep moving, and leave those who couldn’t to bleed to death. And although it isn’t headline news now, the suffering continues. Israel’s blockade, which prevents essential food and medicines from getting in, and even desperately ill Palestinians from leaving, is destroying life in Gaza. Israel’s occupation of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem – Palestinian land taken by force in 1967 – has never been ended.

And whilst reports keep being issued about ‘peace talks’, the Israeli government continues to lay siege to 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza, expel Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem, and authorise settlements to be built in the West Bank.

LIFE IN THE SETTLEMENTS

Almost half a million Israeli settlers live in what are called ‘settlements’ – colonies that are illegally built on Palestinian land in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Water that is desperately needed by Palestinians is taken to fill private swimming pools for the settlers. Water that is extracted from Palestinian land is used to water fruit, vegetables and fresh herbs grown in these illegal settlements – which can then find their way to a supermarket shelf near you.

Israel’s control over the West Bank and East Jerusalem extends to almost every part of Palestinian daily life there. Due to the extensive network of settler roads and restrictions on Palestinians accessing their own land, Israeli settlements control over 40% of the West Bank. Israel’s land confiscation has left Palestinians without agricultural land, a large part of the economy. For example in the Jordan Valley over 95% of the land is now controlled by Israeli settlers and military. Many Palestinians have little alternative to working in the settlements. Kav LaOved, which organises Palestinian workers in the settlement industrial zones, have documented dangerous working conditions and breaches of health and safety in settlements. Accidents because of faulty machinery. Sick pay which is rarely given. And pesticides which are sprayed without protective clothing.

DON’T SHELF INJUSTICE

The government has said repeatedly that the settlements are illegal. The United Nations has passed resolutions calling for them to be removed. As settlements, and profiting from settlements, are illegal under international law, the export of settlement products must be banned.

Trade unionists have a proud record of standing up against injustice. And the decision of the TUC to take action is very important. We all have a duty not to economically help those who are carrying out illegal acts.

What we are asking you to do:

- Write to your MP asking them to ban settlement goods – you can use the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) website to contact them.
- If fruit, vegetables or herbs are labelled ‘West Bank – Israeli settlement produce’, don’t buy them
- Take action locally with others in your ASLEF branch – PSC is calling for a local day of action on 26 June. You could give out leaflets to other branch members, ask PSC to send a speaker to your branch, or arrange a visit to your MP.
- Join the Palestine Solidarity Campaign – and get your branch to affiliate too. For more details: www.palestinecampaign.org
Letters

These are the pages where you talk to us. We welcome your letters, either by mail to the ASLEF Journal at 9 Arkwright Road London NW3 6AB or by email to journal@aslef.org.uk. Because of our space constraints, please try to keep your contributions as short as you can. This month we continue our STAR LETTER feature. The immensely lucky winner will pocket a rich range of ASLEF regalia!

A FRESH START FOR LABOUR?

HOPEFULLY Martin Exley's letter in the May Journal about the union's links with Labour will provoke debate, although I disagree with what he says. I'm neutral on whether unions need a clean break with Labour – but I'm convinced a fresh start is needed.

As a 'new entrant' driver, I have only recently joined the traditional working class! While some aspects of the workplace are a culture shock, it is obvious that the working-middle-class and the traditional-working-class share similar aspirations about the employment relationship and the provision of social basics such as health, housing and education. New Labour's great (and possibly useless) innovation was to harness these common interests to get into power (and then to forget who were supposed to be the masters).

Bro Exley said the Skipton Branch will not fund Labour campaigning because the 'white working class feel let down.' For goodness sake! The whole working class has been let down – white, pink, brown, traditional and wannabes like me.

Talk of a 'white working class' and a new political start could be read as a brief for the BNP, which I'm sure was not Bro Exley's intent. This so-called 'white working class' is a demographic artefact arising from the right-wing media, stirring prejudice and division within the working class to divert attention away from the agendas of their paymasters. We should not recognise a 'white' working class except to seek to eliminate distinctions through education.

It may seem trivial to pick on Bro Exley's criticism of the Labour MPs challenging their part in the expenses scandal in Court. I have little sympathy for wrong-doers, but I am desperately concerned that Parliamentary Privilege is not eroded by the Executive. Parliamentary Privilege protects representatives from vindictive legal attacks for standing up to the Executive – and that is why Parliament itself should be dealing with the wrongdoers.

My hopes for a fresh political start are that Parliament calls the Executive to account, rather than shuffle to their appointed lobby like cows at milking time. We need representatives from all parties who will stand up to the Executive, to party machines and to the media, prepared to cause a sufficient stink that they really do need the protection of Parliamentary Privilege.

Vince Littler, Driver, Bedford

Are Lib Dems more in line?

THE Lib Dem manifesto for last month's elections said they want to reopen thousands of miles of railway lines and open hundreds of stations – which seems to me a commonsense policy on our increasingly congested island. Labour reneged on Tony Blair's 1997 promise to re-nationalise the railways.

Labour also took us into a war which still has our brave servicemen and women killed along with thousands of innocent civilians, while Nick Clegg also called for the scrapping of Trident replacement. Many in ASLEF supported Jim Devine's opposition to Trident (Journal, May 2007).

Shouldn't we therefore send our political fund to a party more in tune with ASLEF values?

Kris Jendesen, Salisbury

Highly commended

I'VE recently left the railway industry after 35 years. My final job was as a driver for Cross Country.

I would like to thank the ASLEF union at every level, from the LLC level, to Nigel Ryder at the district and Colin Smith's good professional representation. They should be highly commended for what they have achieved for myself and my family. It is thanks to them that my case turned out favourably.

Thanks as well to Cross Country management for the sympathetic way they dealt with my situation.

Ian Blogg, ex-Driver, Leeds Cross Country

Journal down memory lane

WHEN you're retired you don't have much to look forward to – but you have plenty of memories to make up for it.

I enjoy reading the Journal each month and helping my wife with the crossword but usually the first thing I look at is the Letters page. Seeing a letter from someone I knew in Cross Country at Leeds brought back memories. I recently read one from Nick Clark ('Nobby') who is now in Australia and it reminded me of what a real character he was. Good luck to you, Nobby!

This month I saw a letter from Dave Rollins, formerly of King Cross, who I see is also in Oz. Dave was on the executive of the Mutual Improvement Classes at the same time as I was.

David Darwin, ex- EWS, Worksop

DOO support

I WAS disappointed that our EC went against the union's own policy by backing Driver Only operations (DOO) on Scotrail services. Not long ago all traincrew knew each others' roles, respected each others' responsibilities and relied on each other as part of a team operating the train safely. By backing DOO the safe running of services is diluted.

The Operations 'experts' can throw as many risk assessments as they like at DOO, but if you're on your own, and something happens to the driver – like a fatality, collapsing or being hit by a brick through the window - you're left high and dry.

I was in a major derailment and a collision with a train on the opposite running line (Crosby Garrett 1999) so I know all too well the benefit of teamwork.
between the driver and conductor.

Our EC has played into the hands of the privateers for whom the railway's safety comes a long way behind the driver to make profits. They should hold their heads in shame.

John Metcalfe, Northern Rail Driver, Carlisle

Why ADO is no go

I REFER to M. J. Bristow's letter 'Is less really more?' in the May Journal.

The Automatic Door Opening (ADO) issue is not about statistics, rather a rationale based on current ingrained practice – and the effect of reversing a driver's normal routine. This has been discussed for over two years.

From the outset, our objections have been that should there be an incident on the platform and there is a need to prevent the passenger doors opening automatically, as ADO would do, the driver will have to prevent this by pressing a door closed button. This would be the complete opposite to what the driver does now – where he or she routinely makes the decision to open the doors at a station and, should a situation on the platform arise, take no further action to keep the doors closed.

Also, we felt that London Underground (LU) did not fully appreciate the effect of reduced driver vigilance that ADO could introduce, even though their standard for design and development of rolling stock cabs warned that systems and equipment within the cab should not underload the driver as the likelihood of human error, and subsequently the risk to passengers, would increase. LU is progressing towards more automatic train operation (ATO) in the Underground system. Our belief remains that the introduction of ADO will further underutilise the driver and increase the risk of him or her 'switching-off' at a crucial time.

Kevin Croissant, LUL Health & Safety Council

Toram's miles of smiles

I am indebted to David Dobie for providing Toram Beg's date of birth - 20 February 1892 - and his regular engine's name of 'Spearmint' (May Journal). I remember Toram writing of his beloved engine this way – 'The weary miles are merely smiles on this one!'

Thank you, Driver Dobie, for your efforts to ensure that details are correctly recorded for future ASLEF historians. There were some great men in the steam era – and Norman McKillop was among them!

Neil Milligan, ASLEF General Secretary 1987/90 – Pelmadale Branch

Out of step

I HAVE become more and more out of step with my union. This has again been brought to the fore by a so-called 'productivity' deal brokered on my behalf by our Company Council.

Let me say right away that I accept the company-wide ballot for this deal was conducted openly and fairly, and I was in the minority in opposing it.

The problem is that it should never have been negotiated. It is bad enough that there is a wide variation of pay for drivers across the industry, but it is immoral to see it accepted within the same TOC.

When I worked in a bus company I saw productivity deals which introduced lower rates for new starters with the potential progression to the 'proper' rate. The same argument was used to sell this deal – that it only applies to those who start after the deal is signed and they will know the score when they accept the job and it rewarded loyalty. In the bus industry, the lower rates became the norm. The same will happen here.

This deal means newly qualified drivers will effectively lose £17,000 over two years. Why? If they are qualified they should be paid the same as everyone else. I thought it was the thin end of the wedge when my post qualifying rate for a year was £2,000 less than other qualified drivers. I was told it was part of a 'one-off' deal that saw large increases for existing qualified drivers – but it would never be extended. What short memories we have when it suits us.

I accept that newly qualified drivers are subject to more monitoring, we also accept it is all right to see them as less competent – and therefore worth less than a driver with more service.

I and others must decide whether to withdraw from ASLEF in protest at these outrageous deals, which cause disunity and will bring trouble in the future.

Peter Flett, Skipton

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Paypal and email enquiries to scottfootball@hotmail.com Mobile 07718 131622

CITY OF LONDON BADGES, one 10-year and one depot badge. Depot badges are numbered 1-150. There are only 150 of each. Price £5 plus £1 p&p. All profits to City of London branch funds to acquire a branch banner. Further information or orders to Colin Dawson 01689 849 543 or 22 Hutchison Road, New Addington, Croydon, Surrey CR0 0BD.

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KENT AREA NUM-MARYLEBONE ASLEF 25TH ANNIVERSARY (1984-2009) BADGES £5 each plus £1 p&p. Last ten available. All proceeds to Justice for Miners. Contact L. French at 55 Mill Road, Gillingham, Dent, ME7 1HW or phone 01634 576058 for details.
The London Transport (LT) Museum last month hosted a talk about the Moscow Metro, marking the 75th anniversary of the Russian capital’s underground system but also pointing out the system’s close and strong links with London …

Talin’s ‘Big Red Metro’ is not only the most magnificent underground system in the world – it’s also become one of Moscow’s major tourist attractions. Last month’s talk by Oliver Green, London Transport Museum’s Research Fellow, showed what an astonishing achievement the Metro was, and explained the key role of the London Underground in shaping its construction.

We were also shown a short 1942 Ministry of Information film, ‘A Tale of Two Cities’, which compared the wartime experience of Londoners and Muscovites - when Underground stations in both cities doubled as civilian bomb shelters.

ADVERT FREE ZONES

The huge prestigious Moscow Metro project was designed with two purposes in mind. It was built at a time when the threat of war hung over Europe and was envisaged as a place people could be protected from air-raids. But it was also intended to show the world that the Soviet Union could create a modern transport system for its growing capital city just as well as any Western capitalist state. The Metro’s elaborate architecture and design reflect the confident propaganda of the Stalinist state.

Images of Soviet Communism from Lenin to Stalin, soldiers to sportsmen and farms to factories, fill the palatial underground halls – in contrast to the consumer advertising of the capitalist west. The official style was socialist realism, which portrayed working people benefiting from the communist state.

PALACES FOR PEOPLE

Created as ‘palaces for the people’ with chandelier lighting, marble columns, sculptures, mosaics, paintings and stained glass, the elaborate Moscow Metro is one of the few successful and lasting monuments of Stalin’s modernisation of the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Overseen by Operations Manager Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev, later the Soviet leader, it was also the first of many overseas metro projects which were advised by London Underground (LU) as consultants.

Quite incredibly the first line was created in two years, often having up to 75,000 working on it at any one time. The Moscow soil was very difficult to tunnel as it is made up of very different mixed components.

As an interesting aside, women were engaged as train drivers both on the Metro and main line trains from the very beginning, but in 1983 they were all taken off the footplate - on the grounds that driving trains caused women fertility problems!

LU MANAGING DIRECTOR DECORATED

The Soviet authorities had no experience of underground railway construction and so they turned to LU for advice. LU’s Managing Director, Frank Pick, provided a detailed engineering report in 1932 before work began. When Stalin opened the first Metro line on 14 May 1935 , Pick and his colleagues were not only invited – they were awarded the ‘Honorary Badge of the Moscow Soviet of Workers, Peasants and Red Army Deputies’. You can still see the letter in the rich treasure that is the LT Museum.

MOSCOW METRO: FIGURES AND FACTS

The Moscow Metro

- spans almost the entire Russian capital
- is the world’s second most heavily-used metro system (after Tokyo’s twin subway)
- was opened in 1935
- is well known for the ornate design of many of its stations, which contain outstanding examples of socialist realist art.
- runs for 298.8 km (185.7 miles) along 12 lines servicing 180 stations
- carries over seven million passengers on a normal weekday and averages 6.6 million passengers a day
- is a state-owned enterprise
- continues to expand – two new stations were opened in the week of the LT Museum talk.
Prize Crossword No. 50 set by TLC

Solution to Crossword No 49 which appeared in the May edition of the ASLEF Journal. Congratulations to Fred Jones from Merseyside

ACROSS
1 Bayswater
8 At the Controls
11 Rays
12 Coral
13 Anti
15 In House
17 Satchel
18 Factual
21 Roux
22 Laird
23 Idea
26 As Blind as a Bat
Aperitifs

DOWN
2 Ache
3 Sucrose
4 Annuals
5 Ears
6 Stay the Course
7 Clinch the Deal
9 Train Fare
10 Milligram
14 Queue
15 Start
19 Learner
20 Warrant
24 Flop
25 Calf

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

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More than just a union

Thanks for all your responses to the 49th ASLEF crossword in the May edition. If you complete this month’s crossword please send the solution to the Editor, ASLEF Journal, 9 Arkwright Road, London NW3 6AB by the 14th of the issue month.
Haven have.

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