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A freedom too far?

THE General Election is upon us and I will continue to support and vote for Labour. I have lived a great deal of my life under harsh Tory governments - and leopards don’t change their spots. Labour remains the best party to deal with the problems we face.

But - unlike some sections of the press and media - I wouldn’t dare to tell our membership how to vote. It is your decision, although I encourage all of our members to use their vote and hopefully vote Labour.

Regarding the press, the BBC seems to have found a new ‘Eric and Ernie’ in the shape of journalists Andrew Pierce (Daily Mail) and Kevin Maguire (Daily Mirror and friend of the Labour Party). This unlikely coupling appear regularly on the BBC expressing their views on anything and everything. They are both from a ‘profession’ that exposed MPs expenses – and rightly have plenty to say on the subject.

But surely, as the BBC is funded by licence payers, we have the right to know how much of our money these two get for their BBC double act? How much do the editors of the Sun, Mirror, Mail and the others get? The so called ‘profession’ is quick to expose others - but what about themselves? When will we read in their columns full details of their pay and expenses? When Hereford elects a Communist MP I suppose.

Covered by qualified privilege they write what they like and bury retractions in the bottom left hand corner of page 23 when they get it wrong. It particularly upsets me that journalists and writers wait until somebody dies before printing allegations about their private lives – knowing the allegations cannot be refuted from the grave.

Freedom of the press is one thing. Freedom to criticise everybody else while protecting your own is another.

Keith Norman
General Secretary
ASLEF backs £10k vandalism reward

ASLEF has welcomed the offer of a £10,000 reward for information about vandals who attacked three trains on the weekend of 20 March. Network Rail and CrossCountry have put up the money to help track down vandals who put concrete blocks, tyres, wooden pallets and sandbags on the tracks near Wilnecote station in Tamworth, Staffordshire. ‘The persons who did this are not just vandals – they are potential killers,’ says ASLEF general secretary Keith Norman.

‘It is only good fortune that means there were no fatalities last week. These irresponsible thugs need to be hunted down. As it is one of our train drivers suffered from shock. It could have been so much worse.’

Keith welcomed the proposed rewards and urged anyone with information to contact the British Transport Police on 0800 40 50 40.

Rail freight will benefit from HST

Transport minister Lord Adonis wrote to the Times last month supporting rail freight and recognising its right to any released capacity resulting from high-speed rail.

He said, ‘It is right to emphasise the necessity to shift freight from road to rail. The proposed high-speed line from London to Manchester and Leeds, by taking long distance services off the existing lines, would free up rail capacity for freight trains on three of the busiest freight routes in the country - the West Coast Main Line, the Midland Main Line and the East Coast Main Line.

‘The increase in rail capacity brought about by high-speed rail is of benefit to both freight and local rail services, as well as long-distance passengers.’

SCOT MP CALLS FOR BARRIERS ON CROSSINGS

Jamie Stone MSP has tabled a motion at Holyrood calling on the Scottish Government to direct Network Rail to install barriers at Scotland’s 23 un gated level crossings.

Three people died on a crossing at Halkirk in his constituency last September.

He says he tabled the motion after a meeting of MSPs, Network Rail and railways police which he said merely listed a ‘familiar list of excuses’ with no acceptance that barriers should be installed.

In the same week Rev Kenneth Walker, a Church of Scotland minister who served the Halkirk parish for 27 years, branded Network Rail bosses ‘callous and self-righteous’ because of its attitude towards safety at level crossings in the Highlands.

GS CALLS FOR END TO PUBLIC BNP FUNDING

The general secretary has written to the European Ombudsman and Anti Fraud Office as well as EU Parliamentary officials, calling for an investigation into the BNP’s ‘apparent misuse of public money.

Keith recently discovered that the BNP are using vast sums of money from the EU to fund staff running their general and local election campaigns. ‘I am outraged that I, and members of my union, may be funding a dangerous, fascist and racist political party,’ he said.

WATERLOO STATIONARY

When Eurostar moved from Waterloo to St Pancras on 14 November 2007, ASLEF asked what plans there were for the empty abandoned platforms at overcrowded Waterloo Station.

In Parliament last month Transport Minister Chris Mole repeated that, ‘It has always been the Department for Transport’s intention to bring the former Eurostar platforms at Waterloo back into use for domestic passenger services.’

This imprecise statement was backed by news of firm definite commitments: a series of theatrical performances will be staged there next summer and autumn!

ALSTOM BOSSES HELD IN FRAUD CASE

Three directors of French transport and infrastructure group Alstom have been arrested in company offices in Ashby de la Zouch and Rugby on suspicion of corruption probe.

The Serious Fraud Office believes bribes had been paid to win foreign contracts.

Engineering firm Alstom produces everything from trains to power stations and its sales for the last nine months of last year amounted to £12.9bn.

CLIFF HANGER IN THURROCK

Cliff Holloway, secretary of ASLEF’s Euston branch, has been selected as the Labour candidate for the Aveley and Uplands ward in Thurrock’s 6 May election. ‘Cliff is an active and committed unionist who would make a first-class councillor,’ says Keith Norman. ‘If you can do anything to help his campaign, I urge you to do so.’
The union has made a major breakthrough in our SQUASH campaign with an agreement on Freightliner Intermodal (FLIM) and Freightliner Heavy Haul (FLHH) to provide cab cooling equipment on all the Class 66 locomotives in the Freightliner group.

Lead officer Andy Morrison says, ‘I got a phone call last month from the company’s General Rail Manager. He wanted to talk to me about the progress of the air-cooling trials on the 66s in both Intermodal and Heavy Haul.

‘He told me that the company was satisfied that the trials had been successful and that they now wanted to begin fitting the units into locos across the fleet.

‘The only stipulation was that he wanted confirmation that the units involved were acceptable to the company were reluctant to fit any more units without the union’s agreement that they were fit for purpose.

‘I have to say, I was delighted. The 66s have been the worst example of poor cab conditions. It’s been a long haul but I felt we had made real progress at last - and I willingly recommended agreement to the executive committee.’

TRIALS SATISFACTORY
Before doing this Andy had final talks with Keith Martin, the health and safety rep at Intermodal at Eastleigh. Keith has represented the union working closely with Freightliner engineers throughout the trial. He was very positive about the effectiveness of the air cooling equipment after a few minor complaints had been resolved.

Keith’s careful assessments provided; an increase of 1.5% from 5th October 2009; and an increase of 1.5% or the August 2010 RPI plus 0.5%, whichever is the greater from 4th October 2010.

Research into repetitive strains after Carpal Tunnel success
THE union’s groundbreaking case in Swansea County Court where we won compensation for three drivers suffering from Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS) has led to a frenzy of activity from the train companies.

Research is now being carried out by RSSB into the implications of the decision. Academics and industry insiders will be looking at risks and considering how often and for how long a driver needs to be exposed to ‘sub-optimal’ driving conditions before risks become significant. Specifically it will examine repetitive strain injuries, deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and whole body vibration risks. Within this they will need to consider the European Directive on protection against musculoskeletal disorders.

In the South Wales ruling the judge found that Arriva Trains Wales had failed to comply with Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER) requirements to undertake a sufficient risk assessment in respect of use of cab controls to assess the drivers’ working conditions for risks to health and safety or to put preventative measures in place.

The other TOCs and FOCs now realise that they will be liable if they do not put these measures in place – and hence the research. Initial findings will be ready in six months but more detailed research will continue beyond this.

It will also put in place guidance on how to undertake individual risk assessments.

‘The outcome of this research will be important for ASLEF,’ Keith says. ‘It will also move our Squash campaign along successfully as it must lead to improved working conditions for train drivers.’
Tory call for Tube strike ban

BORIS JOHNSON, the mayor of London, says he wants a Tory government to deliver a strike ban on London Underground rather than seek an agreement with the unions, as he had previously undertaken. ASLEF general secretary Keith Norman says the move is an attack on basic civil liberties. ‘A ban on the right to strike is a feature of the most extreme authoritarian regimes,’ Keith says. ‘It gives a dire warning of what we can expect if the Conservatives are elected.’

Before he was elected Boris Johnson said he wanted to come to an agreement with tube unions by which we would agree in principle not to go on strike in exchange for an independent arbitration in the case of a dispute on pay and conditions. However, he has now changed his tune. He told the London Assembly yesterday that he is now banking on legislation, rather than negotiations, to achieve his aims. He said there was ‘every prospect’ he would be able to ‘develop something’ when the Tories are elected.

He said, ‘The single biggest obstacle to a no-strike agreement is that we do not have the right government in Westminster.’ This is a major change of direction from his earlier suggestions that he wanted to negotiate an agreement. Now he regrets that because there is ‘the wrong government’ he does not have ‘the legislative power to institute such a proposal’.

‘It is remarkable that Boris is talking about coercion without even raising the subject with ASLEF,’ Keith says. ‘I will certainly discuss this with him when we meet later this month.’

Unfortunately the Mayor cancelled the meeting. His Private Secretary wrote to Keith to say that he had learned that ASLEF had given notice of a dispute with London Underground and, ‘It is the Mayor’s stated policy that he will not meet with trade unions in circumstances where there is an on-going dispute.’ Keith says this seems like a

Pre-election briefings

The union held pre-election mobilisation events in Dagenham and Leeds last month to listen and encourage members’ backing for Labour. The Barking and Dagenham meeting heard from ASLEF-backed MP Jon Cruddas, our former political officer John Cryer (who is Labour’s candidate in Leyton) and District Organiser Andy Morrison before beginning a wide-ranging debate. The Leeds meeting concentrated on ASLEF members’ concerns in the run up to the election. Speakers were former Transport Minister Rosie Winterton, Labour candidate for Colne Valley

Debbie Abrahams, EC Member Tosh McDonald and District Organiser Nick Whitehead.

Is this Thatcher in disguise?

very strange policy. I’m sure Londoners would expect their Mayor to use his influence to attempt to keep London’s transport running in a time of crisis rather than having the blanket policy of opting out,’ he said.

LONDON TALK ON MOSCOW METRO

The London Transport Museum is putting on an hour-long public talk and short film about the Moscow Metro at 18.30 on 11 May to mark the 75th anniversary of the opening of the Russian underground. London Underground played a big part in developing Stalin’s ‘Big Red Metro’. Tickets – normally £8 – are available to TFL drivers for £5 and can be booked in advance on www.ltmuseum.co.uk or 020 7565 7298

Debbie Abrahams, EC Member Tosh McDonald and District Organiser Nick Whitehead.

Rosie Winterton MP speaking at the meeting in Leeds

SHORT STATS

- In the last 30 years rail fares have increased by 50% in real terms compared to motoring which has decreased by 17%.
- The cost of the average fare on UK one-way domestic flights has fallen by 35% since 1997.
- Average season tickets and day returns in the UK cost almost twice as much as the next most expensive European country.
- Prior to privatisation the taxpayer spent about £1.6 billion on the industry. Last year state subsidy to the industry was £5.2 billion, notwithstanding the huge profits many train operating companies continue to make.

SELLING CROWN ESTATES

THE union has written to the Crown Estates about its proposals to sell the leaseholds on up to 1,500 London Crown Estate properties.

Keith Norman said, ‘You will be aware that many London Underground staff are housed within the Estate’s properties, many of whom are ASLEF members. My members are very concerned that the sale of the leaseholds could lead to a dramatic rise in rents as well as undermining the provisions to provide housing for key workers, particularly transport workers.’

He stressed that it is essential that housing is provided for key workers, particularly transport workers.

BLOCKHEADS WEREN’T CHILDREN

WE tend to mutter ‘ruddy kids’ when we hear of some idiot throwing objects onto railway lines. Sadly it isn’t just kids. Last month two men – Ashley Leedham, 18, and Richard Hamilton, 22, both of Tamworth – were charged at Nuneaton with railway obstruction, burglary and criminal damage. They are accused of hurling concrete blocks onto the line by Wilnecote station on 18 March.

SELLING CROWN ESTATES

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Injuries can cost a lot more than accident victims initially realise.

Costs can include lost overtime, lost promotion, travel to and from medical treatments, special care needs and more.

The emotional costs can be just as heavy in their own way too.

Ruth Hart (above) suffered excruciating pain after accidental knee damage.

Says Ruth: “I have never fully recovered. I became very angry about what had happened to me.

So I contacted a firm of solicitors I had seen advertising about personal injury claims on TV. At first, they advised me that I might get £5,000. But later said they didn’t think I had a case.”

Then Ruth was introduced to Thompsons Solicitors.

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Germans show the way on driver training

ASLEF Education Project Worker Chris Nutty recently visited Germany to look at driver training in that country. This is a summary of his report ...

IT IS not an accident that Germany has risen to become a world leader in manufacturing and finance following the devastation of the Second World War. It has been achieved by training people to a high standard - and implementing a high standard of basic education.

The first surprise of my visit was when I went to a very ordinary looking college in the suburbs of Frankfurt. It had 2,000 apprentices studying the normal subject you would expect - car mechanics, carpentry, robotics - and train driving! The three-year train driving course includes other rail industry subjects like train conductors’ duties and ticket sales. As with all German apprenticeships it also includes modules on politics, religion and ethics.

The college employs two trainers for the train driver apprenticeships. One of the three designated rooms contains a large model railway which is used to demonstrate the principles of rail operations. As with any apprenticeship, the trainee drivers divide their time between the college and, mostly, gaining hands-on experience. The apprenticeship is one way of becoming a driver in Germany - another method exists for older candidates.

STATE OF DB ART

I also visited the state-of-the-art Deutsche Bahn (DB) Driver Training Centre at Fulda. Centre manager Reymund Weitzel showed me around the facility which contains no less than five high spec train simulators. Three are regional trains and the other two are ICE trains - Germany’s 300 kph flagship.

I was invited to undertake a training session in one of the very realistic top-of-the-range ICE simulators which gives excellent feedback on under braking and acceleration. It was the first time I had used a simulator in my 30 years of driving trains, and I was impressed. It was a fantastic aid to driver training.

I also met a group of mature trainee drivers who, I learned, must have completed a year’s training in mechanics or electronics before DB will take them on as drivers.

I think the German’s train driver’s apprenticeship is an excellent route for young people to enter the industry and gain a nationally recognised qualification at a high level. The only nationally recognised qualification for train driving in the UK is to take an NVQ at level 2. While this is a good qualification I’d recommend, I believe the German apprenticeship at level 3 is more appropriate for our grade.

It was a worthwhile study visit that will give the ASLEF Education Project the opportunity to look at the German model of delivery and see where it fits alongside the UK system.

Chris’ study visit was sponsored by a Clive Jenkins European Study Bursary. This is run by the TUC for union members to visit Europe to study and report on an aspect of trade unionism, industrial relations, training or employment education.

The bursaries cover travel and subsistence only. They do not cover loss of earnings. For more information about these bursaries please visit www.unionlearn.org.uk

Tory smears learning fund

FRANCIS MAUDE, the Shadow Cabinet Office Minister, last month made the bizarre claim that trade union learning fund (ULF) grants amounted to ‘money laundering’. He said taxpayers’ money was ‘funnelled into the Unite union and then put straight back into Labour’s coffers.’ He said he was ‘horrified’ to find that Unite was ‘the biggest beneficiary’ of the scheme - although this is not surprising as it is by far the biggest union.

But anger overcame logic in Mr Maude’s outburst. He called the learning fund ‘a real racket, with taxpayers’ money being round-tripped into Gordon Brown’s re-election fund’.

‘The Union Learning Fund was set up in 1998 in order to encourage union reps and members to improve their education and training,’ says Keith Norman. ‘That is what it is used for exclusively in our union, and I am sure the same is true of Unite.’

Tom Wilson, director of unionlearn which administers the fund confirmed that, ‘ULF has been held up to Ofsted inspection and all ULF projects are subject to independent audit.’

Perhaps Mr Maude would be advised to put his name down for a ULF course on the law – because he’s likely to be getting a call soon from Unite’s solicitors!
Tory win would devastate trade union laws

London Mayor Boris Johnson’s call for a strike ban on London Underground gives a clear indication of Tory plans for trade union members should they win the General Election says Victoria Phillips, Head of Employment Rights at Thompsons Solicitors ...

OHNSON was always going to seek ways to curb LUL unions’ ability to take industrial action. But he talked during his election campaign about doing it by agreement – agreement in principle not to go on strike in exchange for independent arbitration in disputes over pay and conditions.

Having a chance of reaching such an agreement would have required Johnson to initiate talks with union leaders. Now he has raised the possibility of legislation to bring in minimum turnout thresholds for industrial action ballots.

This would mean that a majority of union members eligible to vote would have to vote yes – not just those actually taking part in the ballot as is currently the law. It would put an effective stop to strike action.

Tory advisors have also suggested that industrial action ballots should be counted separately for each employer. Currently a union is permitted to count up a ballot across a number of workplaces and a number of different employers, in certain circumstances.

Ending that right would again put a stop to strikes in many sectors and industries where there may be several employers.

When pressed by Greater London Assembly members as to why talks with unions had not commenced, Johnson revealed that he was banking on a Tory government to ‘develop something’ around no-strike legislation.

That would be going even further than the above changes to balloting arrangements.

National legislation simply to stop London Underground workers from going on strike may not be high on David Cameron’s ‘to do’ list. But with Boris Johnson bending his ear, he’s unlikely to rule it out.

Cameron has said little about what he would do to further shackle trade unions or take away the employment rights that working people have gained under Labour.

That may well be a calculated admission – he wants working people’s votes.

His ‘union envoy’, the former Labour European MP Richard Balfe who defected to the Conservatives, has claimed that confronting the unions would be counter-productive.

But Cameron has said enough about deregulation and Europe for it to be clear which direction he will take.

‘SIMPLIFY’ MEANS SOMETHING DIFFERENT

The Tories’ business policy document pledges to ‘simplify’ employment law by making it ‘easier to hire people’. But if it’s easier to hire people, it follows that it must also be easier to fire them.

I have written before about the Conservative’s plan for getting rid of what they consider to be the most burdensome of regulations. The ‘Star Chamber’ to approve new laws and the ‘one in one out’ rule. That approach to deregulation can be read across to employment rights. Anti-discrimination and unfair dismissal laws – which protect many ASLEF members - would likely be prime targets to be removed in favour of something that the business lobby asks for.

The British Chambers of Commerce, an influential organisation within Tory circles, has called for a three year moratorium on any new employment law.

While this would probably put the UK in breach of its obligations under EU law, Cameron says he will seek a ‘full opt-out’ from the Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR), which sets out the whole range of civil, political, economic and social rights of European citizens and all persons resident in the EU.

‘They foresee a future in which the CFR ‘cannot be made to apply in Britain.’

So they could ban with impunity strikes in essential services or even across all the public services - and impose all manner of other restrictions on trade unions’ ability to organise or be recognised.

How the Tories think they will achieve a total opt out when its status requires that such a move is ratified by all 27 EU member states is however unclear.

Also within the Tory Europe policy is the statement that they will ‘restore national control over those parts of social and employment legislation which have proved most damaging to the British economy’.

‘They say they would seek guarantees over the application of the Working Time Directive in our public services, such as the fire service and the NHS’. Last year they opposed a maximum 48-hour working week for UK workers with dire warnings of risks to patient safety arising from ‘inflexible working hours for NHS doctors’.

Change the application of the working time directive in essential services and it will happen in the transport sector next – but only after the unions’ ability to fight it has been curtailed by a raft of new anti-union laws.
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Everyone is consulted – except rail workers!

Nigel Gibson, the Executive Committee Member for District 5, has been looking at consultation on franchises ...

The Department for Transport recently announced its consultation process for letting the franchises at East Thameside (currently C2C), Greater Anglia (currently NX East Anglia) and East Coast. The list of people to be formally consulted includes ATOC, Travel Watch, the Corporation of London, BAA, Passenger Focus, Renaissance Southend, TfL and a host of governmental bodies. Not included are the people who work there.

There is not a single mention of any trade union being consulted. Yet surely, as workers within the industry, we have a real contribution to make. Our members deal with the day to day problems faced in the industry and within these franchises. We’re the experts on problem services and late night trains; we have representatives with the expertise and understanding of timetabling and diagramming which far out-match many company ‘Train Planners’.

Why shouldn’t we be entitled to put across a view from the perspective of our members? For example, ASLEF has been seeking to eradicat ‘Look Back’ DDO working for ten years, yet lack of funding is always used as the excuse. Meanwhile our members continue to suffer from physical injuries because ‘passenger focus’ and franchise agreements dictate that the resurfacing of Audley End Car Park is more important! I believe such things should be made an obligation of any company taking on a franchise. Investment in the Rail Industry should include workers as well as those using the railway.

The DfT has indicated that it wants longer – possibly ten-year – franchises, albeit with the right to address poor performing companies. Current rail companies are no friends of the employees. If there is no commitment to invest in their workforce for such lengthy periods this helps anti-union companies to drive their agendas forward at our expense.

Some may argue that we shouldn’t participate in the process because of our policy to see a publicly run, publicly accountable railway. While I respect that view, I believe it would be a disservice to our members not to participate and at least attempt to use the process to their benefit.

We should therefore give the DfT the benefit of our views – whether they ask for them or not.
RECENT EVENTS SIGNAL A LACK OF SAFETY CONCERN

LAST month a report was issued about an incident at Moreton-on-Lugg near Hereford. Why was it significant? Because it showed that in some places on our railways we still have sub-Victorian signalling systems – which is a scandal in our fast speed, high tech, technology-rich society.

Meanwhile less than 100 miles from Moreton, at Machynlleth, our members are supposed to be testing the state-of-the-art European Railway Traffic Management System (ERTMS). They are doing their best, as we report below – but under trying circumstances which is making progress slower than a Victorian hansom cab.

A safe signalling system is a prerequisite for a safe railway – and unless passengers have utter confidence in safety, all the other initiatives and investments are utterly pointless. Signals are serious. We need to be serious about them.

Keith Norman, General Secretary

VICTORIAN SIGNALS BEHIND MORETON CROSSING TRAGEDY

AST month a woman was killed when her car was hit by a train on a level crossing in Herefordshire. Jane Harding, 52, died on the crossing near the village of Moreton-on-Lugg. The level crossing has barriers and lights and there is a signal box nearby.

The first report from Network Rail discovered that, ‘The signalling and level crossing controls at Moreton-on-Lugg do not have any form of approach locking, allowing the level crossing barriers to be raised immediately after the signals are replaced to danger and even with a train approaching.’

What does this mean for train drivers and for the general public? Quite simply that as there is no interlocking arrangement, there is the possibility that the signal for drivers can be green while the barriers are raised. This is an astonishing situation.

Is it honestly too much to ask that these functions be linked so that it is impossible for the barriers to be up when a train is approaching?

At Morton-on-Lugg on that fatal morning it was left to the signalman. In a moment of human error he thought the train had passed, and so he opened the gates. One moment of error – the sort of mistake everyone will make once in a while – and a woman lies dead on the crossing. The signalman, desperately unfortunate himself, was taken away by the police.

Keith Norman says, ‘I would like to think that no ASLEF member would have to work without some form of fail-safe. It is wrong that signalers should have to – and it is a danger to us all, train and car drivers and passengers alike, that they should have to.’ At Moreton the signaler was not relieved from duty for more than three hours after the accident, which has to be unacceptable.

The system whereby a signalman actually pulls a large lever with no interlocking was the first signal technology used on the railways. It is inconceivable that it is still in place in over 200 UK locations.

A LACK OF CONCERN

What action does Network Rail (NR) intend to take? One recommendation reads

‘Network Rail to consider reviewing the potential for improved interlocking arrangements at Manually Controlled Barrier (MCB) crossings in semaphore signal areas to reduce the risk of human error by the controlling signaler.’

ASLEF says this is not enough. The time is well passed for reviewing improved interlocking. It must be installed. Now.

As a country we have to ask ourselves, ‘How is it that we can find money to bail out the banks - but we can’t find it to close, replace or upgrade level crossings - which we know are killers?’

So given that level crossings are the greatest risk of injury or death on the railway – why is a programme of closures or upgrades not in place? NR claims poverty. It claims that to close or upgrade a level crossing can cost up to a £1m.

This is unbelievable. What are they using – golden barriers?

‘This death was the direct result of having 19th century technology on a 21st century railway,’ says Keith Norman.
ASLEF ACTIVITY

CONTACT WITH NETWORK RAIL
The General Secretary has written to the head of Network Rail expressing our serious concern about the implications of a lack of interlocking systems on signal boxes throughout the rail network. Keith said, ‘I find it difficult to comprehend there was no interlocking at the Moreton-on-Lugg signal box to prevent the barrier opening while a green signal was showing.’

‘ASLEF’s observer on Network Rail’s formal investigation into the incident informed me that the report states ‘there is no approach locking which would prevent the barriers being raised with a train approaching, nor is there any timeout facility which would require a predetermined interval to elapse before the level crossing barriers could be raised after replacing signals to danger.’

INFORMING OTHER UNIONS
While we argue that level crossings are either closed or upgraded, we are working with the TUC to get the information on the proper use of level crossings out to all those who use them in the course of their working day.

We have given presentations at the TUC to, among others
- postal workers (CWU)
- bus and lorry drivers (UNITE)
- NHS, local authority, energy and water staff (UNISON)
- refuse collectors and other local authority workers (GMB)
- firefighters (FBU)
- police (Police Federation)
- delivery drivers (USDAW)

CHANGES IN THE LAW
Our union is fully involved in the reform of level crossings law within the Law Commission (for England and Wales) and the Scottish Law Commission.

MEANWHILE IN MACHYNLLETH ...

The state of the art European Railway Traffic Management System (ERTMS) is being trialled at Machynlleth – but our drivers are distinctly dubious about the ‘hesitant’ progress. ‘If this is the future, I’m ruddy glad I’m retiring,’ one member said.

There are two major issues – safety and talks about an allowance for handling the new system. But the clear priority is safety.

The Machynlleth drivers say what is actually happening and the official reports of progress do not sit easily with each other. ‘One problem is that the new system is fitted to 158s. It’s like putting a Rolls engine into a Mini. It doesn’t fit,’ they say.

The consensus is that ERTMS will be safer – when it works. ‘But it doesn’t work all the time. One member said 99% of the time it will be efficient.

‘We’re not interested in 99% of the time. We’re interested in the other 1%. That is what safety is about.’

There are fears over glare which means it is difficult to see the ERTMS screen both in sunlight and in the dark. In Continental European trials the DMI (the screen or DMI - Driver Machine Interface) is set back – regressed – but it isn’t possible with the 158s which are old stock.

The real solution is to provide new trains but no one is forking out for this, and the delays would be considerable. Although the costs of the project continue to rocket into the millions, one driver told us, ‘I was sitting at home the other evening trying to cut up a cardboard box to fix the glare problem. It’s moving into farce when this is happening.’

Various solutions are being sought, like examining levels of tint on the glass, but so far only tints too dark or too light have emerged.

‘Even if this is overcome, you still need to open the window of 158s when the sun shines.’ A sliding blind is being tried for this.

‘The only solution for a genuine trial is clearly to replace either the train or the screen. Otherwise we’re just fiddling around.’

The glare problem continues at night because reflections prevent the driver being able to see out of the window. ‘In this area it is a disaster if you can’t find a braking point or respond to request stops.’

‘I’m sure ERTMS will be brilliant on long straight runs. But when there are open crossings or request stops it is worse than useless.’

There was disbelief recently when Network Rail painted up (very nicely) the mile posts. ‘This would be very handy - if the speedometer was not marked out in kilometres!’

The situation isn’t helped either by rumours that the new system will be used in the future to cut back on the need for route knowledge. Management has said it will not deskill the job into ‘the foreseeable future’ – but the suspicions remain.

On the positive side company council secretary John Boreham has assurances from management that the trial ‘will not be signed off until it is accepted to be fit for purpose’ and he will be submitting the case for an allowance as part of this year’s pay claim. He is also very willing to involve Machynlleth drivers in all practical aspects of the trial.

There will be a full risk assessment on driving posture generally following the Carmarthen Court decision about repetitive injuries, which will obviously include drivers with ERTMS in the cab. A consultant agronomist will be filming drivers’ posture in every type of cab in the ATW fleet. Management has undertaken to rectify the exaggerated drivers’ posture whilst driving at night with ERTMS when the brightness of the DMI screen is resolved.
Interview

Andrew Adonis on rail, the Election and the Lords

Chris Proctor went to meet Lord (Andrew) Adonis, Secretary of State for Transport, just before the minister embarked on his General Election campaigning visits to 50 constituencies – all by rail. On the day they met, the media was full of reports of Andrew calling for Lib Dem supporters in marginal constituencies to vote Labour in order to keep the Tories out. This was our starting point …

CP Do you think your call for tactical voting will have any success?
LA I start from the position that it is clearly important to have a Labour government. I see basic similarities between Lib Dem voters and Labour supporters. We share ideas about public services, we’re pro-rail, we want fair taxes and political reform and we’re both pro-Europe.

The Tories are in a different place. They don’t share these values. So where a Lib Dem can’t win, surely their voters still want the government to share their progressive policies. So I called on them to vote Labour.

CP Do you think voters have that level of political sophistication – won’t they just vote on the usual tribal basis?
LA I believe that people have a rational approach to politics. They know and understand the fundamental issues. I believe there is only a tiny minority of voters who want to go back to the 80s and to the Thatcherite policies that electing the Tories would produce. The progressive majority – and that includes many Lib Dems - are behind Labour.

CP Tell me about your own journey from the Liberals to Labour.
LA I was a councillor in Oxford for the Lib Dems when I was in my twenties. You have to remember that at that time Labour and the Lib Dems were even-stevens in terms of support. I favoured a mixed economy and an independent deterrent, and Labour was utterly split on both issues at the time. But both parties were attractive to a social democrat like myself and it was no great step to join Labour under Tony Blair.

As a social democrat I wanted to support a party which was capable of implementing its vision. So my choice was between Labour – who could – and the Lib Dems – the third party that couldn’t.

So I’m now practicing what I’m preaching.

CP Do you worry for transport if the Tories are elected?
LA If the Tories are elected, transport services will be cut. Seriously. That is inevitable because they want to introduce faster and harsher cuts in public spending than we are proposing. That will mean less public transport, and hit the railways especially hard. That is because rail needs sustained long term investment. Labour has vastly increased spending on rail over the last 13 years. A Tory win would mean service cuts, end infrastructure improvements and throw into question Labour’s other proposed improvement programmes.

It’s obvious that they can’t cut public services and support new projects. It’s one or the other.

CP How do you react to Conservative allegations that your department – the Department for Transport – is too ‘hands-on’ and tries to run the franchises?
LA It’s not true. We don’t want to micro-manage the industry. But we do want to set minimum standards.

The public puts £3 billion a year into the railways and has a right to know what it is getting in exchange. To impose no minimum standards would open the whole industry up to blatant profiteering at the expense of standards. That won’t happen while I am Secretary of State.

The Tories need to understand how franchising works. It is a system of regional monopolies and monopolies need to be regulated in the public interest. If the Tories dropped minimum standard conditions it would lead to unreliability across the service with reduced ticket office hours, stations and services.

CP Do you support the Labour Party manifesto welcoming franchise bids from not-for-profit, mutual or cooperative enterprises?
LA I welcome it. There is no reason why all franchises should be in the hands of private companies. If we get a good bid from a not-for-profit enterprise I’ll treat it seriously. I hope it will happen.

Network Rail works on this basis, and no matter what criticisms it has levelled at it, it’s an improvement on Rail Track.

CP As a peer, how do you feel about calls for the abolition of the House of Lords?

LA I support electoral reform and an entirely elected second chamber. I’d really like to be involved in an election myself now. The current system of appointment and inheritance in the Lords is outdated and wrong. I am part of it, yes: because you can’t deny the existence of something just because you don’t like it.

The key issue is that all representatives must be publicly accountable.

“IF THE TORIES ARE ELECTED, TRANSPORT SERVICES WILL BE CUT AND THAT WILL HIT THE RAILWAYS HARD”

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The key issue is that all representatives must be publicly accountable.
May 2010

Keeping Track

WHAT THE UNION WAS DOING 100 AND 50 YEARS AGO

100 years ago jackets were being removed to further a political discussion - while 50 years ago the ASLEF Journal took ‘a peep below ground’ …

100 YEARS AGO
Councillor G. Mabberley wrote to the May 1910 Loco Journal all ready for a scrap …

Sir, - I notice in the April Journal that some individual, under the name of “Full Sail”, has made a most cowardly attack on myself and what he terms my change of policy. Now let me say at once that I have not changed my policy at all, and if he will change his policy and let your readers and myself know who he is, I shall be very pleased to answer his most scurrilous charges.

Now, “Full Sail”, change your policy, and be a coward no longer. Come out into the light of day, and I will meet your base charges in no uncertain manner, and I will then invite you to a meeting of Associated men and Corporation workers, to whom I have had the pleasure of rendering yeoman service this last three years. I am certain then that you will go full sail out of that meeting a wiser but sadder man, and you will have learned a lesson you will not very soon forget.

COUNCILLOR G. MABBERLEY

50 YEARS AGO
D.K. Pullen in the May 1960 Journal took a ‘peep below ground’ at our London Transport Branches …

“Men in the Line of Promotion to Motormen on London Transport face a set of workday circumstances very different from those of their colleagues on the main lines. The negotiating machinery is very different. The disciplinary code on the L.T.E., with its formal Disciplinary Board, is rather more rigid. Working conditions may be comparable (thanks to the constant vigilance of our active Officers within L.T.E. Branches, and to the policy of A.S.L.E.& F. down through the years) but there are many wide differences.

Recently there has been a good deal of interest shown, mutually with Southern Region Motormen and L.T.E. members, in the affairs of Electrical Branches. Joint meetings of Branches have been held from time to time and in this way there has been a most useful exchange of views.”

Keep an eye open for next month’s Keeping Track. 

Excerpts selected and edited by
Jane Pimlott
ON 18 March Longsight Branch was honoured to visit the ASLEF Head Office for a day that will be fondly remembered from start to finish.

Our group had representation from all factions of our branch - our Branch Secretary, Vice Chair, Women’s Consultative Committee Member, LLC Representative, Safety Representative, Retired Member and Local ‘Farmer Giles’ member, Mr Davies!

We were met by Dave Bennett from the H&S department. Dave proved an excellent host and provided us with a wealth of information on our tour. The Executive Committee welcomed us into the EC Room and gave us all an insight into the work carried out by our national colleagues. We then visited various departments within Head Office where all the staff took time out of their busy schedules to accommodate us.

Scotland’s District Organiser Kevin Lindsay was ably standing in for the General Secretary who was on holiday and he made us all feel very welcome and his hospitality was very much appreciated.

There was an issue later on in the day when my A.L.C.B (Alcohol Limit Circuit Breaker) tripped - or it may have been the Woodward Governor. A full reset was carried out by one of the members and normal operations were resumed in Monroe’s back in Manchester later in the day.

We’d like to extend our sincere thanks to all those who accommodated us on the day, leaving us extremely ‘Proud to be Union’. A wonderful day indeed.

Alan Moss, Longsight Branch

Longsight on the loose in Hampstead

ON 1 April I treated myself to another trip on the Javelin - this time to Ramsgate, to join the lads for the second of four reunions this year. While we were there Dave Bull took the class of 2010 in to the car park of the Red Arrow club for a group photo (above). On behalf of everyone who attended I’d like to thank the Committee who ensured we were well fed - and the club for their hospitality and insuring we didn’t go dry!

The next two reunions will be at Tonbridge on 1 July and Rainham on 7 October. Come along and support these meetings - and dig deep when you support the raffle to ensure we’ve got funding for these occasions.

Peter Smith, Reporter, RMS

PENNY FOR WEYMOUTH’S THOUGHTS

AT our February Branch meeting, Weymouth was honoured to have two guests from the union’s Retired Members Section - Clive True and Dave Penny.

A good meeting was had by all and we would like to extend our thanks to Dave Penny - the proud recipient of a 50 year medallion - for his sterling work as a LDC rep when he was a Driver at Weymouth.

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40 YEARS OF WINGNUT!

TOMMY CHAPMAN - affectionately known as ‘Wingnut’ throughout his railway career - arrived at Fratton in early 1990 from Guildford. Here he started a new lease of life on a personal and professional basis. Tom is well known for helping new drivers, especially with his second-to-none knowledge of route learning and his willingness to listen to anyone’s problems.

Tom has recently been planning for the future with regular visits to his luxury penthouse apartment on the Costa Del Sol.

Throughout his 40 year career, Tom remained a honest and loyal member of ASLEF, even in the face of personal adversity from the ‘gutter press’ in 1982.

Tom was presented with his 40 year badge by Martin Dye in Fratton Mess.

Gary Daish, LDC, Fratton

ASLEF recognises Tom Chapman’s 40 years of union membership
Rugby inspects the family silver

On a cold and very wet February morning six bedraggled men stood outside an imposing building in Hampstead, North London, posing for photographs. You could hear the odd moan questioning whether standing in the rain taking snaps was a brilliant idea. This was the beginning of the Rugby Branch visit to ASLEF Head Office at Arkwright Road.

Dave Bennett met us, outlined the day’s itinerary and led us on a tour of the building. Our first stop was the EC room where after introductions and explanations of the EC’s work, we had a constructive debate about the many challenges facing the freight side of the rail industry. This went on longer than anticipated but we left with some insights into industrial relations in the current economic climate.

We began our visits of the union’s departments with Finance, where I handed over the branch annual statement and where once again we spent longer than we’d anticipated. Exactly the same happened in Policy and Communications. By this time the itinerary and timetable had become a distant memory.

The fixtures and fittings of the building are truly impressive and the craftsmanship of the wood panelling, doors and stained glass windows were awe-inspiring. The visit was perhaps tainted with a hint of sadness as this was probably the last time most of us would see the building as ASLEF’s head office.

I for one am proud to be a member of a union that has all the infrastructure, finances and resources that ASLEF has to offer, with the support of dedicated people who have a wealth of experience when dealing with a wide range of problems facing our members. Yes we have problems and fall outs as most families do, but - as with most families - you talk and try to make changes from within.

It has never been more important to be part of a strong union than it is today, and our visit to Arkwright Road has only reinforced my belief that Union is ASLEF.

Alexander Lakic, Secretary, Rugby branch

Is this picture a good idea? some asked …

Upcoming events

- **TATTENHAM CORNER, CATERHAM AND PURLEY**
  Drivers and other rail staff from Tattenham Corner, Caterham and Purley are invited to a reunion at the Foxley Hatch pub in Purley on 28 May from 1700 onwards. You’re welcome to come along and meet friends old and new. For more information contact Danny Nash on 07971 77 58 16.

- **ENFIELD AND NORTH EAST LONDON REUNION**
  This reunion will take place on 4 June from 1930 onwards at the Jolly Butchers Pub on Baker Street, Enfield, Middlesex. All staff, especially former Enfield Town Staff and ex staff from Chingford, Hertford and Bishops Stortford are most welcome to meet up with old friends and share a jar or two and old tales! For further details contact Steve Jestico, secretary of the Chingford branch.

- **RAMSGATE**
  The next two reunions will be at Tonbridge on 1 July and Rainham on 7 October.

- **BR COALVILLE – 10 OCTOBER**
  Sunday 10 October will mark the 20th year since the former BR Depot at Coalville closed. A reunion will take place at Hugglescote Working Men’s Club on that day. For further details contact Driver Mick Geary on 07507 338 296.

- **HITHER GREEN – 18 JUNE**
  The annual Hither Green Reunion - which is arranged jointly by the Hither Green branch and the Welfare and Social Club - will be held on Friday 18 June at the Hither Green Railway and Social Club, Beacon Road, London SW13 commencing at 1900. Everyone associated with Hither Green, past and present, is welcome.

- **KINGS CROSS**
  The next two scheduled reunions of the Kings Cross branch (Bandy’s Do) are on 3 June at the Lucas Arms in Gray’s Inn Road and on the 27 August at the Hatfield Social Club on Great North Road, Hatfield. Both events commence at noon.

Snowbound Javelin delivers medals to Ashford

On 14 January Tony West, Alan Taylor and myself braved the snow and ice to test the Javelin service from St Pancras to Ashford to attend the Ashford 2010 reunion. As they say - no problem! Left on time and arrived on time in 37 minutes with two stops. What a service!

There were a few friends missing due to the weather, which is a shame as we had the added attractions of representatives from ASLEF head office, the Company Council and Ashford Branch – in the form of Secretary Perry Calvet.

On behalf of the general secretary, Tony West presented 50-year ASLEF medallions to Bob ‘Winkle’ Williams, Brian and Eric Long. Tony did his stuff, having gleaned some information to read out the pedigree of each recipient. Once again we were made welcome by those hardy fellows who were determined to be there. Many thanks to the Committee for all their efforts.

P.J. Smith, Reporter, Retired Members Section
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!

**Franchises? good plan!**

I’D LIKE to congratulate the ASLEF leadership for their decision, published in the previous edition of the Journal, to become active in the franchising process. Of course, it is unlikely that the government would allow us as a trade union to be instrumental in running a franchise, but I do applaud the move towards such a campaigning strategy.

I feel vindicated as I proposed exactly the same strategy when standing for election to the Executive Committee last year. I spoke on this issue at a number of District 1 branch meetings and the idea was well-received.

It makes sense that the communities who are served by the railways are allowed to have a stake in the direction in which their operation is taken. ASLEF is just such a community – of highly trained, proud and professional train drivers who know where their operation is taken. ASLEF is just such a community – of highly trained, proud and professional train drivers who know where the current system is going wrong through our own daily experiences.

Cooperatives running franchises would remove the embedded obsession with profit, profit and more profit, and instead allow a greater focus on investment in and improvements to operations, safety, ergonomic cab design, social responsibility, customer care, pay, terms and conditions, and so on.

This is also guaranteed to garner substantial press interest if handled the right way, not only from the screaming doom merchants in the Daily Mail et al, but also from the more sympathetic news outlets.

I have been saying for a long time that ASLEF needs a higher media profile than we have currently. Bob Crow is not the voice of ASLEF needs a higher media profile than we have currently. Bob Crow is not the voice of ASLEF needs a higher media profile than we have currently. Bob Crow is not the voice of ASLEF needs a higher media profile than we have currently. Bob Crow is not the voice of ASLEF needs a higher media profile than we have currently. Bob Crow is not the voice of ASLEF needs a higher media profile than we have currently. ASLEF needs a higher media profile than we have currently.

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It was with great personal disappointment that I was removed from driving duties in 2005, owing to being diagnosed with a degenerative eye condition. This meant I lost my DVLA License too. I’d be lying if I said that it wasn’t a traumatic time for me.

With the support of John Hay and Mick Williams (now retired), I was finally transferred to a ‘non safety critical’ role, with conditions that this pair had negotiated in the past, including remaining on my Driver’s salary.

Unfortunately this accommodated role changed last year and I was unable to do the duties. In February, I finished on ill health retirement at an early age, but I remain hopeful about my future.

Can I take this opportunity to say a big thank you to John Hay and the rest of the Cross Country Company Council, for all their support and the representation that I’ve received over the last five years? I am happy that my situation is now resolved and resolved fairly.

I felt safe and secure in the knowledge that I was receiving quality protection from a quality union. My best wishes and thanks are also due to all my colleagues who supported me over these difficult few years, even if some of them didn’t fully understand what was going on, and I wish all my railway friends the very best for the future.

David Glover, ex Driver, Preston and Newcastle

**THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT – AND FAREWELL**

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David Glover, ex Driver, Preston and Newcastle

**Franchises? no thanks!**

HAVE I missed something here? Reading last month’s Journal, I began to think the union was seriously thinking about bidding for a rail franchise.

Surely, the best cooperative that the railway could be franchised to is the one where the taxpayers of this country are the cooperative owners - and the franchise is managed by the elected government. Call me old fashioned, but I don’t see it as the purpose of a trade union to become embroiled in any kind of business. That’s a capitalist responsibility. A trade union’s responsibility is to progress the best interests of all its members against the monied interests of the capitalists.

The founding fathers of our union never had the intention of joining the capitalists, and there’s something very wrong when such intentions are even thought about – especially if it is serious.

It’s such a ridiculous prospect anyway. What would happen when the first manager – an ASLEF member - has to sack the first driver – an ASLEF driver - to protect the interests of the franchise holders - who are ASLEF members?!

As soon as the first penny of the union’s funds are spent on the franchise, we are all part owners should it be awarded. Any profit made belongs to all of us - not just the franchise employees.

And who shares out any bonus? A manager
would ask for a larger share than a driver - and I'm sure the drivers would agree with that! And if they didn't want the Society, as the franchise holder, sanction industrial action against themselves on behalf of their members? We'd look daft on a picket line telling each other to get back to work.

Still, one thing's for certain. If a Labour government is re-elected, it would never agree to anything as radically as socially and democratically as a cooperative getting a franchise. The thought alone would be enough to make them return their stolen expenses!

If Maggie Thatcher wasn't ga, ga, she would be laughing her wig off!

Hmmm… perhaps I haven't missed anything really. After all - it is the April issue.

Chris Dodd, Driver

Is less really more?

I READ with interest the report in the March Journal regarding the planned introduction of automatic doors on London Underground. It reads, 'ASLEF believes that the more the design of a train takes away tasks and decisions from the driver, the greater becomes the risk of him or her making a mistake.' Steve Grant says that the management case in support of the introduction of Automatic Door Opening (ADO) 'makes all sorts of unconvincing assumptions'.

Could someone tell me what statistical evidence ASLEF sourced in order to reach the conclusion that the less a driver has to do, the greater is the risk of them making a mistake?

M. J. Bristow, Brighton

Sad time for Socialists

AT the recent meeting of Skipton branch a letter was read out from the local Labour party asking for donations toward campaign funds in Ripon and Skipton constituency and the nearby Keighley constituency.

Of the 16 members present only 4 voted to donate funds whilst 12 voted against.

I suspect that there are a number of reasons for this but the main one, I think, is that the white working class feel let-down and betrayed by the Labour party. The MPs expenses scandal didn't help, especially with three Labour MPs challenging their part in it in court.

The Labour Party today is nothing like the one that I joined 40 years ago and I do think that the lower paid in Britain have been betrayed by the Labour party.

In order to get elected I think that Tony Blair decided that the 'middle class' vote was preferable to the 'working class' one. This has led to the collapse of Labour's traditional electoral base. The party can no longer rely on the core support of the 'working class'. How many 'working class' MPs do you now see in the Labour Party? Very few.

Even I have begun to question my continued membership because I think that it's high time that the trade union movement broke its ties with 'New Labour' and starts to invest in a new party of the working class and lower paid.

In my view the old argument that 'it's better to stick with what we've got' doesn't hold water anymore. We need a clean break.

The trade unions formed the Labour Party – and it's about time that we started again with a political party that shares our views and aspirations.

Martin Exley, Skipton branch

Those damned phones

OUR members put themselves into a grave situation every time they attend work. I'm not talking about the risk of SPADs or derailments or suicides or cars jumping lights at level crossings: I'm referring to those damned mobile phones that all train operating companies insist on giving us when we take to the driver's seat. They can cost out members their livelihoods.

For years now, the company I work for – Freightliner HH – encouraged us to use mobile phones to keep in touch with customers and with each other. It did this to keep the job running smoothly and delays to a minimum.

But now there's been a complete about-face. The company is now threatening these same people with dismissal for using mobiles: quite a few drivers have been given final warnings. I find this totally unacceptable and I believe both ASLEF and the HSE should lead a campaign to get rid of these life-wrecking instruments.

It's no good the companies saying that they have guidelines on the use of mobiles. That's like giving a terrorist a Kalashnikov - but saying he can only use it in self defence!

The railways ran very well before these blasted things were introduced, so we can do without them.

Please don't print my name because I fear retribution if you do.

FLHH driver

ASLEF puts a smile on my face

I WOULD like to express my thanks for the support I received from ASLEF recently.

I had an accident at work in March last year. It was my first real experience of how well ASLEF looks after its members. I received much support from my Company and Local Council and Health & Safety reps that thinking about it still puts a smile on my face and makes me feel proud to be part of such a great union. I have now received compensation with the help of Thompsons Solicitors.

Special thanks to DFC Kevin Langley for taking a stand for me when I needed all the support I could get, to Barking branch chair Andy Hymas, who took time out to help me with all the necessary paper work, and to Health & Safety Rep Derek Norman, who continuously kept in touch and advised me throughout.

M Malik, Barking driver

Begging the question

REPLYING to Neil Milligan's article in the April Journal about Norman McKillop, or Toram Beg as he was also called, a visit to the Scottish Register Office reveals that he was born in Edinburgh on 20 February 1892 - not 1924.

The engine that Neil helped to turn at Eastfield was almost certainly A3-60100 'Spearmint' which was Norman's regular locomotive.

David Dobie, Retired Member, Edinburgh No 2

Safe crossing saves money

WHEN I was on a Trans Siberian railway holiday I saw ramps like the one you see in some car parks, appear when the barriers were down. This stopped drivers crossing in front of a train, thus preventing the possibility of an accident.

Unmanned crossings might seem a labour-saving device - unless you count the cost of things like Emergency Service call-outs, trauma to our colleagues, hospital treatment, clean ups and delays.

Kevin Christie, Retired Driver

Off to Oxford!

I WRITE this letter to personally thank the General Secretary and the Executive Committee for their support in regards to the degree course I have been offered by Ruskin College in Oxford. The funding that ASLEF has provided is a great help and I would also like to give my thanks to Andy Morrison and Nigel Gibson for the assistance they have shown.

I have decided to study for this degree in International Labour and Trade Union Studies to help ASLEF continue to be one of the best and strongest unions in Britain. I hope by doing this I am showing my dedication to our union.

Mark Daniels, Barking Mainline

Not a racist or a fascist

I HAVE been meaning to respond to Simon Weller's article in the December Journal which urged all branches to affiliate to the Labour Party. This is one ASLEF member who won't be voting for them when the time comes.

You only have to look at the record of Gordon Brown when he was Chancellor. He stole from the pension funds, so now my pension value has dropped although we used to have a pension holiday when there was a
Not my letter

I AM sorry I have to reply to you about a letter in the March Journal that wrongly appeared under my name. First I would like to apologise to the three drivers named in the letter. I have no problem with any of them and I believe somebody at the depot is trying to use my name to bully them.

The letter also referred to the DFC election I took part in. I accepted that I had lost the election and was happy to go into early retirement. However because of the sad individual who wrote the offending message (and who must have too much time on their hands) I would like to point out two things. Firstly an election that does not have one member, one vote as its guiding principal will always have problems - and secondly when the person involved in the election process is also in the election questions will be left.

Bob Morse, Paddington

Oz cost

MICK CLARKE’S comments about the high cost of living in Australia (Letters, March) are incorrect.

I visited all the states in a 14-month period during 1988/89 and I’ve lived in Queensland since 2000. My experience is that the cost of living (apart from lager) is a lot cheaper than the UK. But you don’t need to take my word for it. I’ve been interested in emigrating you can get free literature showing price comparisons for both countries from Australia House.

David Rollins, (Ex Top Shed driver), Brisbane Queensland

Back down route 66

I’m responding to the letter from the DCS Traction Training Sub Group in the April Journal which commented on my previous letter.

I wrote to the Journal after suffering years of insults, sarcasm and threats over reports I’ve put in about 66s over the years. I’ve written in nearly every loco repair booklet, contacted four LDC reps, three production managers, senior and regional management, energy executives, maintenance departments, health and safety reps and the Health and Safety Executive. Isn’t that enough?

Yes, the new seats are a great improvement but they do have higher vibration levels due to thicker cushions - hence my remark that water-based anti-vibration mountings would help to alleviate this.

However the window tinting has not been removed by sliding windows, and while I accept it’s fair comment about the blistering, the sticky mess left behind needs removing. The film was a great idea.

The cabs have nobody booked to clean them, but my complaint wasn’t about litter - it concerned a general lack of basic hygiene. Also, the mods mentioned on 66035 are ones I suggested/fought to get.

Finally I would like to thank brother Keith Newman for his letter thanking me for my previous letter – and for allowing the Journal’s Letters Page to be used for the purpose for which it was intended.

Phil Garner, Assistant Secretary, Knottingly branch
MICHAEL FREDRICK BLACKBURN
AN INSPIRATION

MICHAEL (MICK) BLACKBURN began as a secondman at Stratford Loco in mid-1972. His father, Tom, was a Driver Instructor in the same depot and Mick was expected to follow in normal footplate family footsteps. However, Mick’s career was to take a different direction.

Mick was an ardent activist from the earliest days. Politically astute, he was always ready to assist any working people in dispute – Grunwick, the miners (twice), postal workers, Wapping – you name it, he was there.

During the turbulent 70s and 80s he challenged for just about every branch and rep position in Stratford. His thirst for knowledge was insatiable and his desire for influence was relentless.

While most secondmen were reading pulp novels or the tabloids, Mick would be reading ‘Das Kapital’. Rather than the Rule Book or BR 33056, he would be into ‘Engines and Men’.

Although he was first and foremost an ASLEF train driver, along with Len Mills (later a District Secretary), he helped form the Stratford Rail Branch of the Communist Party of Great Britain - which grew to have a healthy membership.

Before long the writing seemed to be on the wall for Stratford depot and this, along with family circumstances, influenced his decision to move to Shrewsbury depot. As expected, his rise was swift within ASLEF at branch level and within District 6.

After serving on the Central Trains DFC, Mick succeeded Fred Orton Jones as District Secretary in 1999 and two years later he succeeded Tony West as the union’s Assistant General Secretary.

Mick Blackburn never really left ASLEF, or ASLEF never really left him, as he went on to work within the civil engineering sector of London Underground. He maintained his old friendships but his family increasingly became his priority.

Mick was a truly inspired political thinker, a ruthless negotiator, skilled orator and a truly persuasive organiser. He was one of the least photographed officers in our Journal, but a glance at any AAD report shows that he was a remarkable man.

In November last year Mick was diagnosed with terminal cancer and given three weeks to live. In the event he lived for eight. He watched his last West Ham home match in a wheelchair.

To his wife Penny and to young Mill, Amy, Saul, Jamie and Tom, we extend our deepest sympathy at this unexpected and unfair tragedy. It has touched us all and we share in their sad loss.

P. J. Dodgson, Secretary, Stratford branch

MICHAEL MILLER FRIEND AND PHOTOGRAPHER

MIKE - BR, RES and EWS Bristol – has lost his battle against illness. On 15 March, a large gathering of colleagues and friends said their farewells at Haycombe cemetery in Bath. The mourners from all sectors were swayed by Drivers and associated grades from Mike’s RES days – and were more in number than the chapel could hold.

Several speakers touched on Mike’s photography skills and how he had passed on to them his knowledge of the subject. His railway and shipping photographs were a testimony to him.

A great friend to all, Mike will be sadly missed by colleagues and friends alike. Condolences go to his wife Diane and all his family.

Graham Bellamy, Retired Members Section

JIM STEWART ONLY 55

IT IS with sadness I inform readers of the passing of former Yoker driver Jim Stewart – Stewarty, as he was known – who took early retirement over two years ago. He liked a bet on the horses and football coupons and enjoyed a small refreshment.

Jim passed away at the young age of 55 at the Marie Curie hospice at Springfield after a short illness. Our thoughts are with his family at this time.

Alan Reid, Secretary, Yoker branch

DRIVER GARY SPENCER PROUD OF HIS UNION

IT IS with great sadness that I inform you of the death of Driver Gary Spencer who passed away in his sleep on 8 March.

Gary’s death has come as a great shock to all who knew him and especially those who worked with him at Transpennine Express. Tributes have come from drivers at Virgin West Coast, Northern and Arriva Cross Country.

Gary started his career at Newton Heath. He moved to Bury for his driving position and when the depot closed he moved to Manchester Victoria. On that depot’s split he became one of the founding fathers of the RRE depot at Manchester Piccadilly.

Gary was proud of his union and of being a member of the footplate fraternity. He will be sadly missed by all who had the privilege of working with him. Our condolences go to his wife and family.

Peter Grant, Secretary, Manchester Piccadilly No 1 branch

FOUR SOUTH COAST DRIVERS PASS ON

IT IS with sadness that I relate the passing away of four retired South Coast drivers. The funeral of each was well attended.

Norman Tendall’s funeral took place on 10 February. His rail career started in the late 1940s at Brighton and he retired at Littlehampton EMUT depot. Norman was 83 years old.

Lew Churche has also died aged 83. Lew’s railway career centred on Brighton and he retired from West Worthing EMUT depot. His funeral took place on 24 February.

Harold Stokes was buried at Chichester on 10 March. He began work for the railways at Horsham Motive Power depot before moving first to Wallington EMUT depot and finally to Bognor Regis EMUT depot. Harold was 81.

Stan Jannaway’s funeral took place on 11 March at Worthing . He began at Bognor Regis MPD before moving to Brighton Motive Power. He ended his career at Littlehampton EMUT depot.

I’m sorry I don’t have details of start and retirement dates for these former colleagues.

Ian Munro, Retired Driver of Brighton, West Worthing and Barnham

WORKERS’ MEMORIAL DAY - 28TH APRIL 2010

THE purpose behind Workers’ Memorial Day has always been to “remember the dead: fight for the living” and unions are asked to focus on both areas, by considering events or memorial to remember all those killed through work but at the same time ensuring that such tragedies are not repeated. That can best be done by building trade union organisation, and campaigning for stricter enforcement with higher penalties for breaches of health & safety laws. For more on those events that are happening up and down the country visit www.tuc.org.
Salford’s treasury of working class history

THE Working Class Movement Library in Salford records over 200 years of organising and campaigning by ordinary men and women. It’s a unique collection that provides a rich insight into working people’s daily lives as well as their thoughts, hopes, fears and the roles they played in the significant events of their time. Lynette Cawthra tells us the background to the collection – and invites us along to see it for ourselves …

THE Library started as the personal collection of passionate trade unionists Ruth and Edmund Frow. ‘We both had a small library of political and historical books, about a bookcase each,’ Eddie said. The collection kept expanding until there were books from floor to ceiling in every room. Trade union emblems and banners hung on the stairs and commemorative china, prints and other memorabilia filled all the remaining spaces.

Every holiday was spent scouring the country in a caravan, looking for new material. Ruth described a typical holiday budget as ‘£6 for food, £6 for petrol and the rest of our £20 for books’.

The couple entertained visitors from far and wide who had heard about the collection and Ruth was always ready with tea and home-made cakes to welcome and encourage.

A NEW HOME
In 1987 Salford City Council generously offered to house the library in Jubilee House, originally built as a home for district nurses in 1899. Now it holds tens of thousands of books and pamphlets - and archives, posters, banners, photographs, cartoons, badges, tapes and more. All these items record working class history from the viewpoint of those who made it – ‘history from below’, instead of conventional history’s recounting of the doings of kings, queens, generals and political leaders.

The collections cover areas such as
- politics of all shades, and campaigns from Chartism to the General Strike and more recent protests
- important activists, such as the papers of Benny Rothman who headed the 1932 Mass Trespass in the Derbyshire Peak District which to the creation of our national parks
- trade unions – people banding together to improve their working conditions.

RAILWAY MATERIAL
There’s a great deal of railway-related material, including ‘Railway Reviews’ from 1880 to 1969; there’s the Beeching Report – and an 1879 pamphlet entitled ‘Our railways: should they be private or national property?’. There are also cultural items like the programme of an ASLEF Smoking Concert at the Oakfield Tavern, Croydon in 1904 to which ‘all Railwaymen off duty are earnestly invited’.

And there’s an ASLEF certificate presented to Driver Wilson Howarth in 1911, with his photo and press cuttings telling the sad tale of his death on 12 June 1932, when his loco overturned outside Wardleworth Station in Rochdale. The LMS Railway paid his widow £250 compensation.

YOU’RE WELCOME TO VISIT
The Library displays are open to everyone, Tuesdays to Fridays, 10 till 5. There’s no charge. If you want to come on a tour of about an hour, ring 0161 736 3601, or email enquiries@wcml.org.uk. Union branches and individuals can also support the Library by becoming Friends; details at www.wcml.org.uk/donations.

The support of all who appreciate our working class heritage, and wish to see it preserved and promoted, is vital to the Library’s future.

- The author, Lynette Cawthra, has been Library Manager at WCML since 2006.
Prize Crossword No. 49 set by TLC

Solution to Crossword No 48 which appeared in the April edition of the ASLEF Journal. Congratulations to Bill Jones from Birkenhead

ACROSS
3 Loch Ness
8 Lena
9 Kensington
10 Stye
11 Aims
13 Smash
17 Ankara
18 Norman
19 Nurse
22 Aden
24 Airy
25 Night Shift
26 EPN S
27 Surprise

DOWN
1 Keith
2 Takeaways
4 Oasis
5 Hands
6 Extra
7 Sunshine
12 Meal
14 Marinated
15 Earnings
16 Enid
20 Roger
21 Enter
22 Aches
23 Brent

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

Thanks for all your responses to the 48th ASLEF crossword in the April 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.

ASLEF’S legal services – your rights for their wrongs!

FREE LEGAL ADVICE ASLEF also provides first class free legal advice – both for members and for their dependents. During 2009 ASLEF recovered £1,946,190.45 in damages for all types of cases. Call the helpline on 0808 100 8009

EMERGENCIES If you are an ASLEF member who is arrested or being interviewed by the police and need legal assistance – day or night – you can call the members’ Emergency Hotline on 0800 587 7530.

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
Stay in a quality 4 star Inn with fantastic rooms & sea views (dog friendly). Come and play on the best courses in Wales and sample the scenic views of Gower at the same time.

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