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Lessons From Kings Cross

Relatives of the 31 people who died in the Kings Cross fire met at the Underground station on 18 November to mark that day in 1987 when fire engulfed the building.

After Kings Cross, rules were enforced about smoking, wooden escalators were replaced, station staff training was improved, underground communications were reassessed and a new set of safety regulations for sub-surface stations was introduced.

I like to think these measures were some small consolation to the families of the dead; that changes that made the Underground safer for others could compensate a little for their losses.

But it irritated me to hear London Underground's Chief Operating Officer complaining that the unions, and specifically the RMT, were 'all wrong' to 'politicise' the event by calling for the withdrawal of plans to cut staffing levels and extend maintenance schedules.

To my mind it was perfectly reasonable. Was it cynical of me to write at this time to the Mayor of London asking him to halt proposed public spending cuts of nearly £65 million which could mean the closure of 30 London fire stations? I think it was entirely appropriate.

Boris' reply was non-committal, saying he hadn't finalised the budget because of 'uncertainty' over the level of government funding.

I've raised the issue of the reduction of fire and ambulance services nationally on a regular basis, most recently at a meeting of union general secretaries and the rail regulator, the ORR. It is a real matter of concern to ASLEF that between them, the government and McVultry could leave us with no station staff, no fire-fighters, no ambulances and nowhere to take the injured anyway.

These issues are so serious and impact so directly on our members, I offer no apologies for raising them in any way and any place I can. It would be disrespectful to the Kings Cross dead for me to do otherwise.

Mick Whelan, General Secretary
Scots and Midlands took to the streets in austerity demos

Last month we only reported ASLEF’s attendance at the London TUC demonstration against austerity because the November edition went to press the day after the 20 October rally. Mick Whelan would like to thank our members who turned out in remarkable numbers to back the marches and rallies.

Kevin Lindsay, the union’s Scottish officer, said that one in 16 train drivers in Scotland came to the event in Glasgow.

‘It was inspiring,’ he says. ‘If every union had responded as positively as we did, the march wouldn’t have finished yet!’

‘Of our 17 branches north of the border, 14 were represented. I was very impressed that we had members who made the effort to come from the West Highlands and Inverness.’

Calls for North Wales line electrification

ASLEF general secretary Mick Whelan said the Tory Welsh Secretary David Jones is ‘talking a lot of sense’ when he supports electrification of the main rail line in north Wales. ‘When it comes to developing railways, we have no political prejudices,’ Mick says. ‘North Wales is one of the most transport-deprived parts of the UK and that affects its ability to develop industry and jobs as it should.’

Clwyd West MP Mr Jones said Whitehall must be ‘receptive to making progress’ on funding a £300 million investment for electrification and a faster train service.

‘It would be utterly wrong to leave North Wales as the poor relation when there are now firm plans to electrify the main line between Swansea and London,’ Mick says.

Welsh government Transport Minister Carl Sargeant agrees. ‘I want to see north Wales properly connected to the electrified rail network around Liverpool, which has the potential to bring benefits to the economy of the region and rail services,’ he said. ‘By boosting the economy we can also help tackle poverty, which is one of my key priorities.’

EUROSTAR BEGINS £700M REFURB

The first Eurostar train has gone into refurbishment, marking the start of a £700 million fleet overhaul programme which is due to be completed in 2015. The company is to refurbish its entire fleet of 28 trains and purchase 10 new e320 trains as part of the upgrade.
Will Don be the last driver to be compensated for suicide trauma?

The government is resolved to press ahead with watering down the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme (CICS) - and effectively exclude train drivers from being able to claim compensation for the trauma caused by witnessing a suicide. This is Don Stewart’s story, which ASLEF feels underlines the justice of drivers receiving some acknowledgement for incidents of this kind …

Donald Stewart, 29, from Pontypridd, had only been driving trains on his own for 18 months as he drove along the line between Merthyr and Cardiff. As the train rounded a bend, Don suddenly saw a suicide victim lying by the track with his neck on the line. He applied the emergency brakes – but he was helpless. He could only watch as his train hit the man.

Following the incident Don suffered from flashbacks and nightmares in which he was unable to control a train. He was off work for a year dealing with the psychological impact.

Don received substantial counselling whilst off work and made a full recovery. He’s now back on the footplate, working as normal.

ASLEF referred him to our lawyers, Thompsons, to make a CICS claim from the government fund which compensated victims of violent crimes. At the time, railway workers could claim some compensation for the trauma of seeing someone commit suicide in front of them, and the horror of the aftermath. In the event, Don was awarded £4,400.

EYE WITNESS

Don told us, ‘After this horrible experience I suffered flashbacks and nightmares that were always the same: I was unable to control the train. I was worried that I might lose control during a normal journey. ’

‘I now know first-hand how traumatic these types of incidents are and believe they should continue to be recognised by the CICS. I am appalled that drivers who might go through what I did and be banned by the government from getting any compensation for the horror.’

ASLEF general secretary Mick Whelan agreed. ‘There is nothing we can do to prevent suicides, and drivers are first on the scene in extremely gruesome circumstances.

‘CICS payments never compensated for the strains of these incidents, but at least it was an acknowledgement of what drivers endure. To remove these provisions is petty, vindictive and mean.’

A government-dominated parliamentary committee last month agreed a new CICS which excludes injuries caused by trespass on the railway and reduces awards for many other types.

‘It looks as if this callous government has got its way, and that Don might be the last person to receive even the relatively small amounts that CICS awarded.’

Also see the article from Victoria Phillips giving the background and implications of the decision to limit CICS on page 11.

Private rail investment down

Rail privatisation and franchising was ‘justified’ by the Major administration because it would, the Tories said, attract desperately-needed capital into the railways. Now figures from the regulator, the ORR, show that private investment in UK rail is actually dropping.

In the first quarter (April to June) of 2012/13 private investment was £81 million, compared with £103 million, £113 million and £158 million in the previous three quarter years.

TAX SERVICE NETS £457,260

ASLEF members who have used our tax code review service have now had total tax refunds amounting to £457,260. The average refund is £206.90.

The firm we use is PTS (Marketing) LLP, Labyrinth House, 43-47 Middle Hillgate, Stockport, Cheshire SK1 3DG

500 CLUB

The winning number in the 500 Club draw this month is 113, which is held by C. Hardcastle who took home prize money of £244 reports Alan Taylor of the union’s Retired Members’ Section. For more information about the 500 Club contact Lee James at head office either by phone or by email to ljames@aslef.org.uk

THANKS FOR ‘CHRISTMAS CARD’ DONATIONS

The union made charitable donations rather than send out Christmas cards this year. The Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre at Epsom has thanked us for the £500 sent by the union, saying ‘Without donations such as these, those injured in conflict would not be able to benefit from items that make their lives a little more comfortable.’

The Railway Children thanked us for a similar donation which they say will be used ‘to continue our work in the UK, East Africa and India’.

The Child Poverty Action Group were grateful for our donation of £100 especially as funding from the Legal Service Commission for the free advice line that assists over 2,500 cases a year has been ended.

Link with Andy Morrison’s Harwich Labour Party

The union has formed a link with the Harwich Branch Labour Party to honour the memory of Andy Morrison, our national officer who died in February. Andy was a Harwich Town Councillor for 20 years and mayor of the town on three occasions.

ASLEF’s Nigel Gibson, Mick Whelan and Terry Wilkinson with Harwich Constituency Labour Party Chair Charlie Powell and Andy’s wife Pam and daughter Beth
Scots derailment: Union calls for action

ICK WHELAN last month called for rail safety modules to be introduced into UK schools as it was confirmed that last month’s train derailing in Inverkeilor was the result of vandalism. British Transport Police officers found an obstruction at the scene which they said they believed to have been placed there deliberately.

‘An understanding of the dangers and potential tragedies on railway lines at a young age is vital,’ he says. ‘It needs to be embedded in our young people.

A miracle that the train remained upright when it was derailed

that no one was killed in what he called a ‘calous and cowardly’ attack on the 08:04 CrossCountry service from Edinburgh to Aberdeen which came off the tracks at about 09:45 at Inverkeilor in Angus with 36 passengers on board.

‘It was only good fortune that the train remained upright,’ Kevin said. ‘We could have been talking about a common vandal deliberately inflicting a major loss of life.’

Franchising in wonderland

Recent questions in Parliament have made the franchising process seem curiouser and curiouser.

On the one hand, when Kelvin Hopkins MP asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff have been employed each year by Directly Operated Railways, who run the currently nationalised East Coast Main Line, he was told the numbers were five in 2010, four in 2011 and three in 2012.

This seems very reasonable. Nationalisation, it seems, is an efficient option. It contrasts starkly with the answer given to Katy Clark when she asked about the cost of consultants to advise on various franchises. She was told that up to 23 October:

- The West Coast franchise (which has got precisely nowhere) had paid consultants £490,810 for technical advice and £439,000 for legal advice.
- The Great Western franchise had paid consultants £432,627 for technical advice and £241,398 for legal advice.
- The Essex Thameside franchise had paid consultants £189,180 for technical advice and £98,740 for legal advice.
- The Thameslink franchise had paid consultants £462,418 for technical advice and £136,080 for legal advice.

‘Every time I think I’ve got a grip on the absurdities of franchising, more appear,’ says ASLEF’s general secretary Mick Whelan. ‘No wonder rail speculators have the look of Cheshire cats.’

TUBE IS 150 YEARS OLD
The first London Tube train ran on 13 January 1863 – which is 150 years ago next month. Long queues formed at each of the seven stations that ran from Paddington to Farringdon, the present home of ASLEF’s head office.

London Transport Museum say about 40,000 people travelled on the inaugural day and that within six months 26,000 people were using it every day.
Whatever life throws at you
ASLEF will help to protect you.

We offer a range of services to ASLEF members
including legal advice and representation on:*  

- Personal injury at work (including assaults)
- Personal injury away from work
- Road traffic accident injury
- Industrial disease or illness
- Criminal law representation (for work-related matters)
- Free will writing service
- 30 minutes free telephone advice for any non-work issues such as landlord disputes, neighbourhood disputes, matrimonial and consumer issues
- Employment law accessed through your ASLEF district organiser

We offer a range of services to ASLEF members and their families, including legal advice and representation on:*  

- Personal injury away from work
- Road traffic accident injury
- Special terms for clinical negligence cases
- Reduced rates for conveyancing and family member wills

For more information call ASLEF on 0808 100 8009

* Exclusions apply. Thompsons Solicitors is a trading name of Thompsons Solicitors LLP and is regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority.
Immingham’s rail history celebrated in new museum

‘It’s always a pleasure to see people who appreciate our railways and their history,’ Mick Whelan told enthusiasts who are opening a museum in Immingham that will celebrate the railways role in their town. ‘Rail is a valuable national asset and it is right to appreciate what it has done in the past and to appreciate the vital part it plays today.’

Mick was in the Lincolnshire town to add ASLEF’s support for the rail heritage centre that is due to open at Easter next year. The driving force is retired academic John Trevitt who says he wants young people especially to have pride in their community. Part of that is an understanding of how the town has grown – and a main reason, he says, is the Great Central Railway.

‘We want the museum to be a celebration of the people who worked on the rail and the docks and in the area. And because its industrial history is so short, we hope children will find it easier to become interested and involved in their own town - and from that, in history in general. The museum will have all kinds of interactive tools to help them.’

The founders stress that they want the exhibits to show the lives of ‘the real people’ who worked in the town rather than lists of dignitaries who owned it.

Immingham’s first steps to becoming the UK’s largest deep-sea port only date back 100 years. It was in 1912 that King George V opened the dock – part funded by the Great Central Railway – that transformed what was then a tiny port on the Humber Estuary, home to only a couple of hundred souls.

ASLEF IN THE COMMUNITY

Prior to this Immingham had enjoyed only a brief moment of fame. In 1608 the Pilgrim Fathers, who were to form the Plymouth Colony in present-day Massachusetts, used the town to make their escape to the Netherlands in search of religious toleration. But there is little trace of the old town today: the modern port is the town’s heartbeat, centre and focus.

‘We are asking people to donate artifacts from the last hundred years, or to share their memories with us,’ John Teveitt says. ‘We rely on this, as we have to balance the books ourselves.’

They asked ASLEF along at this stage to see what encouragement or aid we could offer and Mick said he was pleased to be invited. ‘We have a number of ASLEF members involved in the community here,’ he says, among them Neil Castle, the town’s mayor, and Councillor Dave Watson.

He heard from one person whose grandfather had worked on the building of the dock and even died there in an industrial accident, while some rail families had first been part of exporting coal from the Yorkshire pits, and later part of the process of importing coal from abroad after Thatcher had destroyed the collieries.

‘I wish the project every success,’ Mick said. ‘I’m sure ASLEF members in the area will give it their backing.’

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{exhibit.jpg}
\caption{The general secretary Mick Whelan with ASLEF members Neil Castle, the Mayor of Immingham and Councillor Dave Watson}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{docks.jpg}
\caption{This is the outline of the planned docks, opened officially by Royalty in 1912 …}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{layout.jpg}
\caption{… and a century later the original layout can clearly be seen}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Castle.jpg}
\caption{Neil Castle, Mick Whelan, Nicky Whitehead and Tosh McDonald view the exhibits}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Barcelona.jpg}
\caption{The last of the A60s makes its final run}
\end{figure}

Birkenhead trams halted after 150 years!

Heritage trams were suspended in Wirral last month because of fears over safety.

Birkenhead was the first place in Europe with a street tramway, with the first journey on 30 August 1860 taking passengers from Woodside to Birkenhead Park.

The heritage trams ran from Woodside ferry terminal to the Wirral Transport Museum.

Maggie may – but Rod does!

Play with train sets, that is. Now 67, the old rocker says, “I go upstairs every day and play with my trains. If I’ve been up there too long (wife) Penny (Lancaster) will call up and say, ‘Darling! Time to come down!’”

And now he sobs at football matches as he watched Celtic beat Barcelona.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Celtic.jpg}
\caption{The oldest Tube train on London Underground made its final journey on 26 September after more than 50 years in service.}
\end{figure}

The A60s are being replaced by a new generation of walk-through, air conditioned trains which are being introduced on 40% of the Tube network.
Wanted: Working Classes in Parliament

In Doncaster in 1899 railway worker Thomas R. Steels proposed that the TUC should sponsor Parliamentary candidates who would support working people. And who would be better candidates than trade unionists themselves? The subsequent conference led to the formation of the Labour Party ‘to represent the interests and needs of the urban proletariat’. And who better to do that than those who believe they are born to rule. Prime examples are the ‘to the manor born’ Prime Minister David Cameron and his chum George Osborne, who is (really!) the heir apparent to the baronetcies of Ballentaylor and Ballylemon.

Osborne’s fore-fathers wallowed in. They didn’t boast about baronetcies, but about the post-War years when a Labour government introduced the NHS, founded the welfare state, nationalised the pits and the railways, and built council houses. The Tory toffs would never be able to understand why I think I was privileged.

But I have to say that few of the delegates to Labour’s conference looked particularly working class. More Marks and Spencer than Marx and Engels!

The Labour Party has lost five million votes since the 1997 election, and I’m sure that is because we have moved further and further away from our natural allies, working people, in an attempt to capture the votes of ‘middle England’. Those missing five million votes haven’t been picked up by other parties. Instead, traditional Labour supporters have stayed away, feeling there is no one to represent them.

The Bradford West by-election in March proved to me that voters will turn out if they are offered traditional Labour policies. George Galloway won a 56% share of the total vote while the ‘New Labour’ candidate at 25%, got less than half his vote. Doesn’t that say something?

The Labour conference often looked like a lecture hall rather than a debating chamber, with nice neat chaps and chap-esses speaking in clipped accents. Shadow ministers were followed by prospective parliamentary candidates and other worthies. And then there were the youth delegates. I welcome this in principle. But they all looked like mini New Labour MPs with neatly combed hair, smart suits and prepared speeches. This isn’t the real world. Out there we are more likely to see young men and women with brightly coloured hair, jeans, t-shirts and tattoos. Wearing suits for them means you are off to a wedding, a funeral – or the dock in the magistrates’ court!

We don’t just need bold new policies to attract working class people back into the Labour fold. We need working class candidates in all their rich diversity to advance those views, rather than the career politicians that became the norm under New Labour. The unions have a major part to play in this. Next February ASLEF will hold its first designated political training course to offer our members the support and skills to enable them to represent our class at all levels of local and national government. Every union should do the same.

If we are to win working people back to Labour we need policies that they support and representatives who, coming from their communities, understand their concerns and desires. I won’t insist on them wearing clogs – but I don’t want them excluded for not having been to Oxford or Cambridge.

But perhaps I should declare an interest. I consider that I’m from a privileged background. I was brought up by my grandfather, a miner born in 1907. He and my grandmother moved south to find work in the Yorkshire coalfield. When he suffered a serious back injury he secured a ‘green card’ job on the railway in Doncaster.

They didn’t tell me stories about Kings and Queens. The history I learned was about the 1926 General Strike, soup kitchens and the brutality of the state that Cameron and

OU only needed to glance around the party conference this year to see that Labour has moved a long way from the ‘cloth caps and clogs’ image. But look at the members of the Con-Dem government and you’ll see that class and privilege are still cherished by those who believe they are born to rule. Prime examples are the ‘to the manor born’ Prime Minister David Cameron and his chum George Osborne, who is (really!) the heir apparent to the baronetcies of Ballentaylor and Ballylemon.
Fighting for a future for freight

Nigel Gibson has recently taken responsibility for three freight companies - GB Railfreight, Freightliner Intermodal and Freightliner Heavy Haul as well as two passenger companies. Before being elected a national officer earlier this year, Nigel drove passenger trains for Greater Anglia. So how is he adapting to life on the freight line - and how does he see the challenges ahead?

As a member of the union’s Executive Committee for over seven years before becoming District 5 Organiser, I was obviously aware of the problems facing our members in the freight sector, but now I find myself immersed in the details of those challenges. Rail freight has economic, environmental and social advantages over the alternatives, and should be guaranteed a bright future. But life isn’t always logical, and it would be foolish to underestimate what lies ahead.

I was grateful to John Mullen for writing about his experience in the freight industry in the last Journal. I applaud John for this and agree with his sentiments. Absolutely core to John’s letter is that freight members must not be seen as ‘second class citizens’ who are somehow ‘greedy’ or ‘unwilling to change’. That’s simply not true.

Like John, I have heard too often that freight drivers ‘know what they signed up for’. It’s a tired old remark – and if ASLEF takes money for people’s membership, it has to deliver quality representation.

The rail freight industry is a different world to that of the Train Operators. These companies have had their foundations firmly established from British Rail. A Machinery of Negotiation was in place in 1956, the 1992/1994 Procedure Agreements laid down the ground rules for negotiations and the ‘Purple Book’ provided the basis for principled agreements. We’ve recently looked at this issue within some freight companies and secured some improvements which I believe will allow our elected representatives to do their job more effectively on your behalf.

BUILDING THE MEMBERSHIP, NOT EXTENDING THE HOURS

I believe we have to rebuild the solidarity of our membership. We have become fragmented to some degree, largely due to some freight companies operating from remote locations. We now have trained reps to update the ASLEF company-specific websites (in ‘Company Councils’ on the front page of the ASLEF site www.aslef.org.uk) and provide members with access to useful information including newsletters, minutes of meetings, terms and conditions and contacts. Unlike most passenger companies, some freight Local Reps cover a vast geographical area. That’s why we are looking for volunteers to act as an ASLEF ‘point of contact’ (APOC) – to work with and support the Local Rep, providing a two-way communication process and offering members face-to-face ASLEF contact.

I accept what is being said about companies booking drivers to work hours that exceed those within the contract of employment. ASLEF will continue to take this up with the companies. But as members we must also ensure that we know our own terms and conditions, including when we have the right to challenge – and even refuse – work allocations outside agreements.

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM AND COLLECTIVE AIMS

I have often heard in the last couple of months that we want – and need - a Free Turn / Rest Day Working agreement. The reality is that if a company is covering its work, it has no incentive to negotiate any such agreement. Free Turn / Rest Day Working is voluntary and where there is no agreement, it will be for the individual to make a decision based upon their conscience.

I also hear tales, and see entries on web forums and Facebook, that are all too often fictitious or disproportionate. I want to make sure all ASLEF members have the information to do their jobs. It is easy to be critical or make empty promises, a common trait of a rogue organisation with no bargaining rights. The key is to make sure that our criticism is constructive, enabling us to build new ideas and thoughts together.

Since privatisation, the freight companies have consistently used the argument that ‘contracts are won and lost on flexibility and versatility of its staff’. Whilst that may be partly true, it remains the union’s responsibility to know where and when to draw the line and say ‘enough is enough’.

Since taking over these duties I have visited a number of branches and met most of the reps in the three companies for which I have responsibility. From what I have heard, I recognise that there is a demand for change, for improvements in working standards and for fairness. Change will not take place overnight and it will not be given to us. It will only be secured by hard work, by supporting ASLEF representatives and backing the union in its efforts to drive the agenda forward for members in the freight sector.

Tories end criminal compensation for train drivers

Parliament has watered down the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme (CICS) so that train drivers who witness track suicides will no longer be entitled to any recognition of their trauma - and removes many other injuries caused by acts of violence from its scope. Victoria Phillips, Head of Employment Rights at Thompsons Solicitors, looks at the background to this vindictive decision ...

Any of us thought the government had reconsidered watering down CICS when a committee of MPs failed to agree to changes in September. Tories on the committee joined Labour in opposing them.

Justice secretary Chris Grayling claimed to have ‘listened to the views expressed’, but he clearly didn’t hear. Instead he reconstituted the committee, and used the Tory votes in the House to force through amendments to the Scheme by 275 to 231 on 12 November.

So ASLEF member Donald Stewart (see page 5) could be one of the last members to receive any sort of payout, although claims already submitted under the old scheme will continue.

The government has no problem throwing our money away on bungled rail franchise tenders (the cost to the taxpayer of its bungling of the West Coast mainline franchise is £40 million and rising). But when it comes to ordinary people, it searches for peanuts down the back of the sofa. It claims that removing the lower tariff bands from CICA, halving the value of the middle bands and removing claims resulting from railway suicides could “deliver savings to the taxpayer of about £50 million a year”.

We think it is substantially lower than that.

Nothing for the innocent

The government’s real motivation is undermining protection for innocent victims, not saving taxpayers’ money (unless paltry savings from CICA changes are used to fund tax breaks for the rich). It is doing exactly the same thing in the way it is changing the way that personal injury cases are funded.

Ministers and their friends in the insurance industry and business have stoked hysteria about the ‘compensation culture’ and ‘health and safety’. By working sections of the media into a frenzy about people getting massive payouts for slipping over in supermarkets, tripping over pavements, or hurting themselves at work, they have been able to fuel demands for it to be more difficult to make claims.

These stories are not true. The government’s own Compensation Recovery Unit statistics show that while road-accident related injury claims increased by 43% to 790,999 between 2007 and 2011, employer liability (workplace accident) claims were down by 6.6% to 81,470. They have fallen year on year.

Yet as a result of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act, which from next April will change the way that civil litigation is funded in England and Wales, people injured in workplace accidents, or who develop industrial diseases, will find it hard to get a lawyer to take on their compensation claim, unless they can pay lawyers fees themselves or they are a trade union member.

No win, no fee – no more

The Act effectively ends the NO WIN, NO FEE – NO MORE system that has been a lifeline for workers injured in workplace accidents or industrial diseases, or who develop industrial diseases.

And ironically, because most road traffic accident (RTA) claims involve rear-end shunts and so are usually uncomplicated, it is unlikely that the reforms will do anything to reduce their number.

Ministers say they don’t want to stop the victims of workplace accidents and industrial diseases claiming compensation, but they refused to exempt such claims from the Act.

The plans won’t save the taxpayer any money. We will just see more injured people reliant on the NHS and benefits when compensation for their accident would have helped pay for their care and rehabilitation.

Only the insurance industry will benefit from the changes because it will have to pay out less as people will not be able to claim.

ASLEF and Thompsons are working on ways in which claims can still be supported. But if any union member, or member of their family, thinks they have been injured through no fault of their own, they should not delay in contacting their union’s legal service. Claiming now could make all the difference.
CROSSENGS – MORE PLANS AND SOME ACTION

Last month the West Lodge user-worked level crossing between Newcastle and Carlisle became the 600th to be closed since 2009. Network Rail gave a presentation to the ASLEF executive committee recently to outline their continuing efforts to make crossings safer. Dave Bennett, the union’s safety adviser, reports …

ETWORK RAIL (NR) has employed 106 new managers whose sole responsibility will be to look into level crossing problems and solutions. They realise that they had too few staff to deal not only with level crossings, but also issues like trespass and vandalism. The result was risk assessments and surveys that were sadly lacking.

Staff training is to be given a boost, moving away from the tardy one hour to a more realistic four weeks. Their equipment is also to be reviewed, with hand-held devices taking over from traditional paper methods. Hopefully this will make the risk assessment process easier.

NR is also moving into the present century in terms of technology. It is moving to digital CCTV with ‘smart’ capabilities, which will mean that traffic levels can be gauged much more accurately. They will no longer have to depend on a hard-pressed NR manager going out on a wet Wednesday for half an hour to do a traffic survey. The new-style CCTV will also be used to read number plates of offenders who jump lights or weave round barriers.

There is a delay at the moment because the measure needs to be approved by the Home Office and they are dragging their heels – but the fact that the innovation can also be used to identify motorists without tax or insurance may spur them into a decision!

Current plans are to install around 300 fixed cameras, so if each caught five offenders a week that could add up to £200 million a year. ASLEF would like to see any money raised by these methods used to improve safety at level crossings – preferably by getting rid of them.

In the next Control Period the aim is to spend £250 million on closing and upgrading crossings, with the target of at least 500 closures.

Another significant step forward is the introduction (with the Transport Police) of 13 mobile enforcement vehicles at crossings.

Other significant developments include:

- At Upton Nervet plans are advanced to replace the crossing with a £2.3 million bridge.
- The local council has offered to pay half of this, and the proposal has the support of both local MPs, John Redwood and John Benyon.
- AOCLs (Automatic Open Crossing, Locally Monitored) will disappear in 2014 and be replaced by low cost barriers.
- Meetings are due between NR, ASLEF and involved TOCs to discuss options on the Fens.
- The union anticipates different results for ‘low risk’ level crossings from a fully-trained dedicated crossings manager. This will hopefully end vandalism.

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The posters reflect the fact that working-class men in the 30-50 age bracket are most at suicide risk

Acceptance of the fact that life is not going to improve.

‘The aim was therefore to produce images that the target group of 30-50 year old men will identify with’, they explain. ‘That is why we chose a boxing trainer, a soldier and a workman for the second phase.’

The Samaritans can be contacted on 0845 79 90 90 90 or by email at jo@samaritans.org - any time of day or night.

A platform for The Samaritans

The Samaritans have teamed up with Network Rail in a UK-wide project aimed at reducing suicides on the railways by 20% in the next five years. A central tool is the ‘We’re In Your Corner’ public awareness campaign that drivers will have seen at stations across the country.

Research showed that working-class men in their 30s, 40s and 50s are most at risk of suicide, which is reflected in the publicity. The Samaritans hope that it will help people working in suicide prevention to understand more about this group and reach out to them.

The Samaritan research also revealed that:

- most men don’t like to talk – or at least admit to it
- to a lot of men talking about their problems can feel like an admission of defeat, that they aren’t able to solve them on their own
- as men get older, they can get ground down, their ‘fire’ can go out, that they no longer have a rage inside them, but rather a depressive

The conference attracted some of the industry’s main health and safety spokespeople...
situations like the crash at Sewage Lane, a location deemed ‘low risk’ on the basis of inaccurate traffic pattern statistics.

- On the Anglia route at Wareham, ‘Wavetrain’ technology is being tested. This uses the vibration of an approaching train to turn on a solar powered warning sign at User Worked Crossings (UWC).
- Global Positioning Systems (GPS) are also being evaluated at UWCs to locate trains in long sections. If GPS was used on the train, the signaller would know its location if he or she was called. There are, however, difficulties when more than one type of stock is in service.
- Another innovation is using automatic gate opening/closing at UWCs. This cuts down the number of times a road vehicle driver needs to cross the line to open and close gates.
- There is an on-going examination of the potential of using treads and transponders rather than train whistles, to warn of approaching trains.

NR acknowledge that at some crossings, it may be necessary to impose speed restrictions. This is unpopular because gates are down longer, something that may affect the number of trains and lead to unacceptable delays for road users.

The union agree with NR that there are problems with the use of whistle-boards. It is unsafe in ASLEF’s view to impose a whistle ban between 23:00 and 07:00 – but that is what has been agreed between the industry and noise abatement pressure groups.

ERTMS AND CROSSINGS

It was decided not to involve crossings in the Cambrian trial of ERTMS as it would have added an additional layer of complexity. One satisfactory conclusion of the exercise is that NR accept that operations managers and train drivers need to be more involved.

ERTMS can be linked with crossings if they are seen as an ‘end of movement’ authority. The train stops irrespective of whether there is a fixed or moving block. Investigations also continue on possibilities of using fixed smart CCTV and obstacle detectors.

The executive committee were encouraged by what appears to be a new rigour in Network Rail’s approach, but are also mindful that 95% of the risk at crossing comes from the actions of road users. That said, there is unquestionably a risk to manage.

INVolvement at Every Level

I felt this was the best presentation of the day as it showed ASLEF reps taking a very pro-active attitude on the kind of issue we safety reps are involved in every day.

It contrasted with a session about non-speaking safety mascots from an expert from Bilbao. I’m sure their work is invaluable - but not riveting for this safety rep at least!

The Network Rail presentation concerned ‘best practice’ and specifically a joint initiative to provide safety leadership at all levels. I found the basis of the ideals refreshing, summed up as they were in the phrase, ‘We want everyone to return home safely every day.’ That’s a pretty good basis for us all to work on, simple and achievable.

To ensure that the content of future events is relevant, I hope ORR will approach safety reps to ask what we want from the conference. But that word of criticism aside, it was a useful and positive event. It was interesting, too, to hear that most of the continental European media do not share the British gutter-press’ tainted obsession with undermining what we do.

Thanks to Kevin Lindsay for nominating me, and to the other ASLEF delegates for the part they played in the conference.

- Report by Alan Moss, Longsight branch
Martin’s Peak Challenge raises £2,000

Over the summer (but without traditional summer weather!) MARTIN BARTER of our Bedford branch set out on the ‘Three Peak Challenge’ to raise funds for the Railways Children charity. He sent us this account of a couple of days that were difficult and exhausting – but in the end, successful. With the help of ASLEF branches around the country, he raised over £2,000 for the Railway Children charity. Here he tells us of the gruelling days he undertook to relieve you of cash!

The Railway Children’s ‘Three Peaks Challenge’ involves climbing Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon in just 39 hours. I undertook the challenge to raise funds for the charity’s work, helping vulnerable children who live on the streets.

We left London on a Thursday in June on a specially chartered train. In total there were 44 teams doing the challenge, with four people per team, all from the railway industry and its suppliers. As we travelled through Chester, past Conway Castle and along the North Wales coast, it dawned on me that what started as a great idea might actually be harder than I first imagined!

After a short journey from Bangor station, we arrived at the foot of Snowdon at 21:50 in the drizzling rain. Most of the ascent was not too heavy going, but as darkness set in it was difficult to see the tracks clearly. If one team wandered slightly off the track, those behind followed like lemmings. This wasn’t a major problem but it did affect our timing.

EARLY SLIP

We reached the top of Snowdon in just 2 hours but just as we did, the wind picked up and the rains became very heavy. I had expected this sort weather at the top, but not all the way down the mountain as well. Descending Snowdon got harder by the minute because visibility was very poor. About two-thirds of the way down, I slipped on a rock and twisted my knee.

The descent took 2 hours 15 minutes but I was concerned about my knee. Do I seek medical advice and risk being ruled out - or see if I can walk it off on Scafell Pike? I chose the latter.

We left Bangor at 04:02 and within minutes most people on board the train were asleep, sitting or lying in every position and location possible! My only recollections of the journey are damp clothing, damp boots and non-stop heavy rain outside. I later found out that 5½ inches of rain fell that day in Cumbria.

At Ravenglass we changed onto a steam railway for the 40 minute journey to Dalegarth. From there it was a 5 mile walk to Brackendale before the ascent of the next peak: Scafell Pike.

WATERLOGGED

After a mile or two there was little point trying to avoid the puddles. The brooks had turned into flooded streams and the fells were waterlogged. All this took its toll on my knee and I was in a great deal of pain. Many individuals pulled out at this point but I borrowed some walking poles, took some painkillers and started the ascent.

My team soon got bored with my slow pace and went on ahead. More people dropped out as conditions worsened the higher we went. But I kept remembering a wonderful sponsorship letter from ASLEF’s Perth branch and it spurred me on, thinking ‘You can’t quit now, bruv’.

At the last checkpoint, 600ft from the top, the event organisers and mountain leaders had to stop us and turn us back. With 50mph winds and heavy rains, we were doomed not to finish the smallest of the Three Peaks.

THREE HOURS AT RATTY’S!

Back in Ravenglass, our train to Fort William was delayed so we had a three-hour wait in the Ratty Arms. A welcome respite - but perhaps not ideal preparation for the climb of Ben Nevis, 9 hours’ later! Nevertheless, we departed the Cumbrian coast around 20:00, tired and damp but quite merry.

I woke up somewhere after Rannoch Moor as the sun was coming up and the true beauty of the early morning Scottish countryside could be seen. The wonderful views were only interrupted by the chorus of loud snoring from within the coach.

FOUGHT WILLIAM

We arrived in Fort William shortly before 05:00 and drove to Achintee. The starting point here is about 20 meters above sea level, so it’s about a 1,324 metre climb up Ben Nevis. The first part wasn’t too arduous but halfway up the drizzle set in and with the steep zig-zagging path, it was soon difficult to bend my leg.

At last the path straightened out, meaning the top was close. The surface looked like a lunar landscape. Safely through the thin layer of slippery snow I reached the summit at 09:08.

My first thoughts, after completing the challenge, were of disappointment for not reaching the peak at Scafell Pike. But with everyone in the same boat and with many falling by the side, I soon realized all the effort wasn’t wasted.

The money we raised will go to saving children from suffering abuse and exploitation and I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the fundraising effort. I would also recommend any ASLEF member to try the Railway Children annual Three Peaks challenge. It’s not easy - but there is a tremendous sense of achievement and it is for a very worthwhile cause.
Railway Children is a charity which fights to change the lives of children living on the streets in the UK, India and East Africa. An estimated 100,000 under 16’s run away from home each year in the UK. Children run away for all sorts of reasons, but those who do often haven’t thought about where they’ll go, how they’ll get money or how it might affect their family. Railway Children work with young people who are forced to leave homes where they suffer poverty, violence, abuse and neglect. They try to reach them before they suffer further abuse and exploitation on the streets, and also provide support and guidance to parents. To learn more about the charity, and how to give your support, visit www.railwaychildren.org.uk

The specially chartered Railway Children train near Spean Bridge

Spirits raised on the train that offers respite from the challenge – for a few hours at least …

The people behind the organisation of the event are called Global Challenge. They organise fundraising challenges across the UK including hill walking, canoeing, cycling, orienteering and raft building. For more information visit www.globalchallenge.uk.com

The interior of the specially chartered train looks more like a launderette than a railway carriage!

Martin recalls ‘damp clothing, damp boots and non-stop heavy rain’

While almost none of those responsible for the current economic crash have had to face paying for it, ‘Nota Bene’ reported a more satisfactory outcome to a similar situation in the December 1912 ASLEF Locomotive Journal - even if it wasn’t justice enough for him …

“There is nothing more difficult to obtain in this world than justice. Seldom is it that the punishment fits the crime. A poor, homeless man, with no friend, will sometimes get a comparatively long term of imprisonment for the paltry offence of sleeping out. If a beggar asks for some hot water with which to make tea, he stands a chance of getting several days’ hard labour. But a man who wants these things more than I do, mustn’t!”

In the same edition, Nota Bene also offered two slightly conflicting views on the women’s struggle …

“I regard Mr. John Burns as one of the most conscientious and straightforward members of the Government, but it is impossible not to feel amused at what occurred on the occasion of his opening a chrysanthemum show at the Battersea Town Hall recently. He was repeatedly interrupted by suffragettes, all of whom were eventually turned out of the building.

“Afraid that the suffragettes might molest him, he allowed his bodyguard to follow him as he walked along Lavender Hill to his house in Lavender Gardens.”

And on the other hand …

“Success to the British Federation for the Emancipation of Women. This praiseworthy organisation has been formed for the abolition of sweated female labour, and for the suppression of the white slave trade. When the wretched pay that thousands of poor women workers receive is taken into consideration (pay which has the effect of increasing the white slave traffic), it will be seen at once how widespread is the necessity for immediate and incisive action.

Extracts selected and edited by Mick Holder
ADRIAN (‘ADE’) BROADBENT A SAD LOSS FOR WOLVERHAMPTON

It is with deep regret that I have to announce the passing of Adrian ‘Ade’ Broadbent at the age of just 52 on 7 September after a short illness.

Ade started on the railway at Bescot in 1978 as a secondman. He passed as a driver in 1982 before getting his driver’s position at Bescot in 1985. On 5 October 1998 Ade became a driver at Wolverhampton working for Virgin trains. Although they were a little faster than what he was used to at Bescot, Ade took to it like a duck to water.

Ade enjoyed the walking club outings to the countryside with his colleagues and he was a keen West Brom fan. Ade rarely complained about anything and was always ready to help others where he could. When he was on duty, you could always find him in the vicinity of the messroom snack machine. Pork scratchings was one of his favourites, but he always said he also ate fruit pastels for his ‘five a day’.

When he was diagnosed as terminally ill many of his colleagues from around the Midlands came to visit Adrian in hospital and give support to Karen, his partner of some 17 years who he only managed to marry in critical care. I asked Adrian whether he’d managed to consummate the marriage which brought a smile to the face of a seriously ill colleague. Although we knew he would not be here long, it was still a shock when that sad time came, especially as I’d seen him for the final time only a few hours before.

Ade’s funeral was well attended by around 120 people, with the wake being held at Walsall Football Club which was fitting as it was next door to Adrian’s first depot, Bescot.

God bless you, mate. You are sorely missed.

Nigel Harkness, Secretary, Wolverhampton Branch

MICHAEL A. (MICK) FLYE RAILWAYS THROUGH AND THROUGH

It is our sorry duty to inform members of the untimely departure of Mick Flye who had a heart-attack while on duty at Crewe Station on the evening of Sunday 21 October at the age of 61.

Mick lived and breathed the railway and his passing has left a huge chasm in the lives of all who knew him. He was the epitome of the train driver, a diligent professional who was always ready to share his wealth of knowledge with others.

Young Michael had to cross the border from North Staffs into Cheshire to begin his career at SB Crewe South Shed on 13 February 1967. He fired steam locos until the depot closed to that form of traction nine months later. He then second-maned diesel and electric turns at ‘The Bungalow’. When steam returned to the main line at Crewe in the 80’s, rumour has it that his name was top of the list, he got back on the shovel, but then had to put it away and leave it to the RES lads, because BR’s RFD was his choice. He served on the LDC for this freight depot.

RFD was eventually sold to EWS and Mick wore their uniform before taking the opportunity to join Virgin Trains.

Mick’s railway enthusiasm continued away from work. He was a keen railway modeller, possessing a fine layout (not a train set!!) and was a UK member of the ‘American Flyer Model Group’. October 2011 found him back ‘on the footplate’ of a full-size steam loco when he took his turn to drive and fire a Derby 4 on the Worth Valley Railway.

He also had a great passion for travel, especially the United States, and he always joined Longsight branch’s Aviation Group outings to places like Berlin, Krakow and Prague.

At his funeral on 1 November at Bradwell Crematorium, all the seats were taken, and over 100 people stood for the service. Virgin Trains provided two Motor Coaches and afterward former colleagues from Euston, Crewe, Chester, Manchester, Holyhead and Preston congregated at the Crewe NUR Club where many stories were regaled about our lost brother.

Mick is survived by his partner Jane, his two sons and a daughter.

ROY ‘LEN’ HILL HONORARY DOCTOR OF LAW

Roy Kenneth Leonard Hill, known as Len, a valued retired member of Laira depot, has died at the age of 88.

Len worked at Laira for many years as a cleaner, fireman and driver and was respected by his colleagues. He described himself as a ‘committed socialist, trade unionist and ASLEF member’ who held every office locally, including branch secretary and chairman of shop stewards from 1951 until his retirement in 1974.

Len’s accomplishments were extensive. In 1966 he was Deputy Lord Mayor of the City of Plymouth and from 1969 to 1994 served as a Justice of the Peace and as Bench Chairman.

Len was passionate about his community and was justly rewarded for his hard work and what he gave back to his community. In 1982 he was awarded the CBE by Prince Charles, which he considered a great honour. In 1998 at the age of 74 he was made an Honorary Doctor of Law by Exeter University.

R. J. Thomas, retired member

KENNETH PETER OXLADE SALISBURY, NORWOOD AND REDHILL

It is with sadness that I report the passing of my father-in-law, retired driver Kenneth Peter Oxlake, who passed away on Sunday 4 November after a long illness. He was 84.

Kenneth started his railway career at Salisbury before moving to Norwood and ending up at Redhill M/T.

He will be sadly missed by all his family and friends.

D. Hogben, retired driver

Nigel Harkness, Secretary, Wolverhampton Branch
Upcoming events

- **NORWOOD JUNCTION 16 DECEMBER**
The annual Retired and Ex-Norwood members Christmas Buffet will be held on Sunday 16 December at the Selhurst Railway Club. The AGM starts at 12:00 and the buffet at 14:00. All members and their families are welcome. For further information and to confirm numbers, please contact branch secretary Daniel Bound.

- **WEEKEND SCHOOL DISTRICT 5 – 23/24 FEBRUARY**
District 5 is holding a Weekend School on 23 and 24 February at the Arundel House Hotel in Cambridge. The subsidised price of £75 includes buffet lunch, evening meal and bed and breakfast.

  Speakers will include general secretary Mick Whelan, and top-level speakers from Thompsons solicitors, Justice for Colombia, the Labour Party and the TUC with others still to be confirmed.

  For details please contact Nigel Gibson by email at ngibson@aslef.org.uk or by phone on 0788 675 4069.

710 years service celebrated at Bristol branch

The November Meeting of Bristol Branch was indeed a special occasion as a number of members were presented with long-service badges and retirement certificates.

The normal branch business was dealt with earlier in the day so that the presentations could take place without any delay. General Secretary Mick Whelan, National Organiser Simon Weller, District Secretary Stan Moran, executive committee member Brian Corbett and WRC member Collette Gibson were all in attendance.

Before the presentations took place the General Secretary and National Organiser both gave ‘state of the nation speeches’ which went down very well. Mick talked about how quickly his first year as General had gone and described the various items which had kept him busy. Simon’s talk included the recent DBS dispute and advice on using social media and avoiding the associated pitfalls.

The General Secretary then presented long-service badges to Gavin Turner (5 years) Mark Tatterton (5 years) Wayne Davey (10 years) Scott Steven (10 years) Jeremy Woodrow (10 years) Steve Butcher (10 years) Stuart Priday (10 years) Nigel Antolic (15 years) Ken Sargeant (20 years) John Neillville (20 years) Richard Mackie (20 years) and Brian Hellyer (25 years).

Retirement certificates were presented to Charlie Holloway and Ken Sargeant. There are a further 40 branch members who are due various long service badges, but who opted for less formal presentations at their depot.

The final presentation was very special, with Bruce Parkin being awarded a 50-year medallion.

I would like to thank everyone who attended, especially the guests I mentioned above. You all contributed to a brilliant and memorable night! About 40 members were present to make this one of the best attended Bristol Branch meetings in years.

Bernard Kennedy, Secretary, Bristol Branch

Portsmouth bids Bon voyage to the Duke

It was a great honour to be present at the retirement presentation for Steve Duke. Steve, who sadly has had to retire early for medical reasons, was presented with a framed retirement certificate and an engraved coal train.

Steve was a popular driver and the meeting reflected this as a large group attended to say their farewells. At the end of the meeting, Steve was taken out for a farewell drink. This became a lively affair which culminated in Steve demonstrating just how bad he was at pool towards the end of the evening! He’s now taking a well-earned rest, with plans he says to ‘annoy the wife and go on a cruise in the Med’!

Steve’s smile and laid-back attitude will be sorely missed at the depot. We wish him and his family all the best on his retirement.

John Glazebrook, Secretary, Portsmouth & IOW branch
YOU’D THINK THE GOVERNMENT HAD BETTER THINGS TO DO THAN ATTACK YOUR RIGHTS AT WORK.

IT’S NOT AS IF THE COUNTRY was exactly short of issues. We face urgent problems like a stricken economy, record youth unemployment and the gap between the super-rich and everyone else. Yet the government is devoting precious time and energy to attack, of all things, rights at work.

A stealthy series of changes that add up to a wholesale assault. Already an extra year to wait for protection against unfair sackings, with reduced maternity rights and more dangerous workplaces in the pipeline. These sly attacks have nothing to do with getting the economy moving. They come from the same people who fought the minimum wage and paid holidays. By doing away a bit at a time, they hope no-one will notice. But we have, and you should too.

Visit the website to find out more, and tell ministers they’ve been rumbled.

VISIT WWW.STOPEMPLOYMENTWRONGS.ORG.UK TO FIND OUT MORE
Liverpool safety event ‘improves every year’

Last month saw the fourth annual Safety Seminar organised in Liverpool by ASLEF’s District 3. Aimed at providing up to date information and developing skills, the event attracted 19 reps from a variety of TOCs and FOCs reports Alan Moss of our Longsight Branch.

We were delighted to welcome Mick Whelan, the first time a General Secretary has attended our seminar and an indication that in ASLEF, safety starts at the top!

Virgin Trains Safety Director Peter Bowes and his colleague David Johnson spoke about a project they are working on to reduce fatalities on the West Coast Mainline in a session that offered an insight into best practice for progressing safety issues.

Lunch was an opportunity to network (with the exception of two reps who spurned the buffet in favour of an ‘oriental carry-out’ -

The afternoon featured our comrade Hilda Palmer from the Manchester Hazards Centre speaking about the formidable challenges that safety will face from this government. Hilda was followed by a session where reps tabled current problems and issues and gave the group an opportunity to share experiences. These exchanges between experienced and new reps is always one of the seminar’s successes.

District Organiser Colin Smith led the final session on the role of the RSSB and how reps can use the plethora of information it produces to execute their functions in a professional manner.

I’m confident that we all benefited immensely from the seminar and I’d like to thank all the delegates whose contributions ensured the day was an overwhelming success.

Plymouth tributes to long serving Branch Secretary

Early in 2012 Plymouth Branch Secretary Mark Fitchett informed the membership of his intention to stand down at the end of the year after completing 25 years as the Branch Secretary. Mark explained that due to personal reasons he needed to spend more of his free time with his family but promised to remain active and support the Branch when he could.

Immediately, Branch members at Plymouth rallied round to mark his achievements and service. Unknown to Mark, the General Secretary accepted an invitation to attend the October branch meeting to pay tribute to his long and loyal service.

Mick Whelan first gave a detailed and informative account of his strategies for developing and advancing the union. Then he presented Mark with a certificate and badge that in ASLEF, safety starts at the top!

Mick’s hard work, professionalism and friendship have been greatly appreciated by the members of this branch and indeed the union as a whole. Thank you, Mark!

Mark (centre) is stepping down, but promises he’ll still be around!

The biggest thanks however, go to Mark himself. He has given outstanding service to the membership over the years and is well-known across District 7. He will be a very hard act to follow but, in true Mark style, he has pledged to offer whatever support he can to his successor.

Mark’s hard work, professionalism and friendship have been greatly appreciated by the members of this branch and indeed the union as a whole. Thank you, Mark!

Miles Bidgood (who arranged the event) and Assistant Branch Secretary John Ashton on behalf of all members of Plymouth Branch and are now known as Dim and Dum!)

Members of the Plymouth branch gathered to honour a well-respected branch secretary
These are the pages where you talk to us. We welcome your letters, either by mail to the ASLEF Journal at 77 St John Street London, EC1M 4NN 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!

Thank you all

May I use the columns of the Journal to pay thanks to ASLEF officials Colin Smith (District Secretary) Richie Cash (ATW Company Council rep) and Kevin Ederle (Holyhead branch secretary)?

In November last year I fell victim to a rare but extremely painful condition that requires medication that prevented me from carrying out my driving duties. The likelihood of my returning to work was slim in the extreme so I was retired on an ill-health arrangement at the end of July after 39-and-a-half years of footplate service at 60 years of age.

The fact that I was able to receive an ill-health settlement was due solely to the representation I received from the officials named above. Without them I feel it would have been, ‘Thank you Bob, goodbye – and shut the door on your way out!’

If anything proves the value of a good trade union, this does. Please find enclosed a cheque for an ASLEF charity as a mark of my appreciation.

Bob Higgins, Retired driver, Holyhead (formerly Southport and Swindon) branch

Well done, FGW!

Along with the District Officer, I would like to place on record our sincere thanks to all the FGW branches that sent resolutions to Head Office, and to all the members who showed their support in the recent case of a member who was involved in an incident, and we believe was treated differently from the norm.

I am pleased to report that the case has now been resolved. Thank you all once again. Unity is strength!

Brian Corbett, Executive Committee members, District 7

Only a hypocrite could criticise our voter turn-out!

So the police minister says that the newly elected Police and Crime Commissioners have a ‘clear and legitimate mandate’ to take up their new positions.

This - despite the Wiltshire police and crime commissioner receiving the support of less than 7% of the electorate!

Let the Tories (and others) never again claim that a member’s vote for industrial action in a union ballot lacks legitimacy based on voter turn-out!

I am afraid this type of hypocrisy is typical of all politicians.

Barry Finn-Hurst, Driver, London

Thanks from Donna Grove

My name is Donna Grove, widow to driver Gayvn Grove who passed away in June. I am writing to you to thank everyone within ASLEF for their support and the wonderful obituary Graham Croucher wrote for the Journal in September.

Staff within Northampton and Bletchley have provided a support network for myself, Lexie and Connor and I can’t thank everyone enough for all they have done for my family.

Gayvn loved his job and he would have been proud to have witnessed the support you have offered. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Donna Grove

Keeping hold of Privs

I wish to add my support to the letter in the November Journal concerning ‘No NXEA Privs’. I retired 18 months ago and at present I am allowed free travel on all services operated by First Capital Connect. As the franchise is up for re-franchising in the near future, and if First Group are unsuccessful in their bid to retain this, I will lose my entitlement to free travel on all services currently operated by First Capital Connect.

In which case, perhaps someone could enlighten me about how it is that staff who retired under GNER or National Express (who previously operated the East Coast main line presently run by the Government) still retain free travel on all East Coast services?

G Kerwin, Retired Driver, Peterborough

PAY RESTRAINT, PLEASE!

Having recently noted drivers commenting on our working conditions on the television and in the press, could I plead for a more measured response?

I heard someone recently saying, ‘I get to see plenty of daylight during winter’. Well not at Wolverhampton, we don’t. A polar bear would enjoy more light. And when somebody is quoted as saying, ‘The pay is excellent’, they should consider what that means to our negotiators - and remember that a reasonable salary is a very recent phenomenon. Perhaps we should raise the long and varied hours we work which often precludes ‘time with the family’. Then we find our pension fund is trotted out without any reference to how much our deferred wage scheme costs us, how the stability has been achieved and the meagre pensions many of our members retire on after up to fifty years’ service. Let me suggest that reduced life expectancy (evidenced by the obituary columns of the Journal and our experiences in depot) and the incidence of medical conditions are topics more worthy of comment.

I am all for pride, aspiration and interaction with our passengers but I would like to see ASLEF responses that reflect the effort we put in and the dignity with which we carry out our duties.

Rob McMillan, Wolverhampton Branch

Gordon gone with thanks

Having decided not to stand for appeals rep for District 2, I would like to thank the membership for the trust and support they have shown in me over the years I have done the job. I feel honoured to have been able to serve the union at this level, and to have helped steer the union through some of its darkest times, from the revolt at EC level, through the Brady and Trum times and now back into calmer times.

I would also like to thank all the office staff who helped over the years, with a special
IS THERE NO END TO THE 66?

I can’t believe that 13 years since these locos first appeared on our rails, we are still going on about unresolved issues to do with the cab environment. It’s no wonder that I, and many of my fellow members on the freight side, feel we are the ‘poor relations’ when it comes to working conditions.

I can’t imagine any of the passenger drivers having to put up with the noise, draughts, heat and ride quality that we have to for so long. I’m sure, when I was a driver at Kings Cross and the 365 networkers were being tested, they were rejected by ASLEF because the vent in the cab roof whistled at high speed! So why, when ASLEF knew there were issues with the 66s, did the union allow further numbers of the class to be delivered some five years later with the same faults?

I think ASLEF should have told the FOCS that no new locos would be moved until existing issues were resolved. To their credit, Freightliner is now fitting an aftermarket air con system, and some locos have been fitted with new ‘bouncy’ seats, but these are only being fitted when the original breaks.

As for the noise, Freightliner have admitted that some locos exceed the H&S noise regulations, but they are still looking for a solution. How about plug-in ear defenders? These could have the AWS, NRN etc relayed through them - and that way we could at least hear the thing when you get a call!

Come on ASLEF, get these things sorted out before we’re all crippled, deaf - or both.

Robin Vaughan, Driver, Freightliner Intermodal Eastleigh

Comfort from the union

I wish to express my appreciation for excellent union service I recently received through representation by ASLEF in the person of Gary Comfort at Jubilee Line Stratford Depot.

Throughout the entire process of taking up the issue on my behalf to its eventual resolution, Gary was exemplary in his support and showed great tenacity to vindicate me of all accusations from particular manager involved and management in general.

Gary is a true union man that stands tall among the entire Jubilee Line Train Operators. Many thanks to him and to the union in general.

I’m proud to be in ASLEF!

Toyin Sodunke, T/Operator, Jubilee Line

Letters

To advertise in the ASLEF Journal please phone 020 7324 2400 or send email to journal@aslef.org.uk

MOTHERWELL 100 REGALIA: To celebrate its centenary, Motherwell Branch has produced commemorative badges (£5), ties (£7 for blue, blue clip-on or maroon) and brochures (£2.50). Cheques to ‘ASLEF Motherwell Branch Centenary Fund’ and further information from Andy Jones on 07767077907 or motherwellbs@aslef.org.uk

ASLEF/ROYAL BRITISH LEGION ‘POPPY BADGE’

This limited edition badge has been produced to raise funds for the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal and my local RBL. Anyone wishing to purchase, please send a cheque for £6.00 (P&P included) payable to Trevor Southgate at 56 Leggatt Drive, Bramford, Ipswich IP8 4EX or email Suggy125@hotmail.co.uk

QUALITY LIMITED EDITION ENAMEL BADGES COMMEMORATING 30 YEAR SERVICE OF THE CLASS 455 UNITS.

These badges are available in red or blue and are priced at £5.00 each inclusive of P&P. Please makes cheques payable to ‘Woking Motive Power Social Fund’ and send to - 4 Westwhey, 29 Bylefleet Road, New Haw, Surrey. KT15 3JQ

ENGRAVING: ASLEF driver based in Sunderland branch offers professional engraving at reasonable prices. I can engrave anything you wish, such as the ASLEF logo on a pint tankard which is pictured. For further details contact Paul Potts by email at ppotts1969@hotmail.co.uk
There when I needed them – How the Railway Benefit Fund helped one driver when he was taken ill

AUL BREEN, from Aberdeen, is a train driver for ScotRail. He had worked for the railways for 29 years when, in March 2010, he was taken seriously ill. When he suffered a brain haemorrhage and was rushed into surgery, it was discovered that he was suffering from an aneurysm in the brain.

Unable to work despite missing his colleagues immensely, concerned his wife would have to give up the job she loved and with his youngest son about to head off to university in Edinburgh, things were looking bleak for Mr Breen and his family. But there was light at the end of the tunnel, thanks to the Railway Benefit Fund.

The Railway Benefit Fund is a charity set up to support railway people and funded entirely by donations from those who work on the railway. It is the UK’s only charity dedicated to providing help and support to members of the railway family and, while like the rail industry itself it has changed since its inception in 1858, its objectives remain the same. Quite simply, it aims to be there for members of the railway community when they are in need.

Today it reflects the needs and concerns of those working in this rapidly changing industry, offering wide-ranging assistance to active and retired railway people and their dependents.

With the help of his wife and a friend, it was to the Railway Benefit Fund that Mr Breen turned.

I THOUGHT I WAS HELPING OTHER PEOPLE, BUT ALSO ENDED UP HELPING MYSELF

‘Because of my aneurysm I can’t talk for long,’ Mr Breen explains. ‘I can walk short distances with a stick and have had physiotherapy on one hand, but if I go out I need to use a wheelchair because I

The RBF stepped in when conductor Chris needed help with funeral costs after the sudden deaths of his younger brother and sister

have double-vision and I could fall over.’

The RBF was able to provide him with a grant to help adapt his bathroom to suit his needs, including changing the layout and installing disabled facilities. Before he needed their help, Mr Breen was a regular contributor to the RBF and he would encourage other railway workers to do the same.

‘I used to give a little every month to the RBF,’ he says. ‘I found out about it through a friend and colleague at work, George, who was also my union rep. I thought it was a good idea, although I never thought I’d need it myself. I thought I was helping other people, but also ended up helping myself.’

The assistance the RBF provided made a huge improvement to Mr Breen’s life. ‘It was good not having to worry about everything,’ he shares. ‘I miss my job very much, and I know my wife loves her job – I was worried she would have to give it up but she could keep working.’

Of course, nobody believes the worst will happen to them, but as Mr Breen’s story goes to show, circumstances can all too often change without warning. That is why the RBF is appealing to all members of the railway family to ensure it can help providing help wherever it is needed.

The charity now receives more requests than ever for help with domestic crises, financial difficulties and unexpected hardships. Grant amounts vary and are carefully assessed to ensure not only that appropriate assistance is provided where needed, but also that supporters’ contributions are put to the best possible use.

It is only through donations from rail workers that the charity can continue to provide this help.

YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN YOU’LL NEED HELP

For anyone thinking about making a donation, Mr Breen has a clear message: ‘Do it! You never know when you might need it.’

He is keen to thank the RBF, the railway industry in general and particularly his workmates, who have been ‘outstanding’ to his wife and children.

There are many ways in which you can help the RBF continue providing this vital assistance. Become a member, a supporter, or make a one-off or regular donation. You could even undertake some fundraising activities with your friends, family or colleagues.

For more information, visit the RBF website, www.railwaybenefitfund.org.uk
Prize Crossword No. 80 set by Zebedee

Across
1 Cut (5)
7 Client (8)
8 Praise (5)
10 Rife (10)
12 Cooking vessel (8)
14 Floating marker (4)
16 The Taurus animal (4)
17 Cocktail wine (8)
20 Able to be filled with gas (10)
23 Dispossess (5)
24 One of the Channel Islands (8)
25 Rage (5)

Down
1 Billie Jo _____ - singer (6)
2 Exhibition (4)
3 Dumb (4)
4 "The 39 _____ " Hitchcock movie (5)
5 Headstrong (9)
6 Crusoe’s companion (6)
9 Body organ (5)
11 Trained (9)
13 Primate (3)
15 Saunter (5)
16 Card game (6)

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

Solution to prize crossword No 79 which appeared in the November 2012 edition of the ASLEF Journal

Congratulations to Ian Brien from Ramsgate in Kent

Across: 1 Dabble, 4 Send up, 8 Shindig, 10 Probe, 11 Skip, 12 Marauder, 14 Foundling, 18 Audition, 20 Dame, 22 Steam, 23 Militia, 24 Demure, 25 Crayon

Down: 1 Desist, 2 Bailiff, 3 Ludo, 5 Emphasis, 6 Drood, 7 Poetry, 9 Guardroom, 13 Customer, 15 Ghastly, 16 Massed, 17 Retain, 19 Dream, 21 Blur

Thanks for all your responses to the 79th ASLEF crossword in the November edition. If you complete this month’s crossword please send the solution to the Editor, ASLEF Journal, 77 St John Street, London EC1M 4NN by the 14th of the issue month.

FREE LEGAL ADVICE ASLEF also provides first class free legal advice – both for members and for their dependents. Over the past three years ASLEF recovered £7,969,622.96 in damages for all types of cases.

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 7324 2400) or email info@aslef.org.uk
Don't stay silent, talk to CIRAS*
the rail industry's confidential reporting system

WHAT IS CIRAS?
CIRAS is an alternative way for rail industry staff to report safety concerns confidentially. If you've tried company channels, or don't feel that you can, CIRAS offers another way of reporting.

WHO CAN REPORT?
CIRAS is available to anyone who works in the rail industry, whether you're operational staff, office based, on-site, trackside, overground or underground.

“Confidentiality has never been compromised”

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