ASLEF SAYS

NO

To government spending cuts
To franchising folly
To attacks on employment rights

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Twelve months on the run!

I CAN hardly believe that it is a year since I wrote my first column as your general secretary. I said that in the first month I'd hardly had time to draw breath. Well, I still haven't! It's been a hectic year.

In my first few weeks I met Justine Greening, who was the newly-appointed Secretary of State for Transport. It was hardly worthwhile. She was off a few months later and her successor Patrick McLoughlin became the eighth person to hold this position in ten years.

Transport in London had a set-back with the re-election of Boris Johnson, who prattles on about driverless trains with the persistence and demeanour of a demented parrot. He was particularly vocal during the industrial action on Boxing Day – and we are no nearer a resolution now than a year ago.

Government policies on rail freight have been a constant challenge, moving seamlessly from distress to disaster. We have seen endless threats to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) provisions and we've played our part in Fares Fair campaigns highlighting the danger of rail becoming 'a rich man's toy'.

Then we worked hard to develop authoritative and coherent responses to the Command Paper which seeks to implement the cuts to rail services proposed in the McNulty Report. And hot on its heels came the Olympics where the media, for no particular reason, had hysterials at the thought that train drivers were to be properly compensated for additional flexibility. And then came the daddy of them all with the magnificent farce of the West Coast Main line.

Yes, it's been a busy 12 months – but I'm not complaining. Because I know when I speak for ASLEF I can rely on the backing of thousands of our activists who give up their own time to improve the working lives of their fellow drivers. To you all, many thanks. You've given me the best job I've ever had.

Mick Whelan, General Secretary
ASLEF joins TUC austerity protests

Members from around the country joined the huge TUC demonstration on 20 October in a mass protest against the coalition government’s austerity policies.

We accept that the UK has long-term economic problems but it is a question of how we deal with them. Chopping back on spending on public services is, we argue, the very worst approach – and leads only to further decline. The economy will not grow, incomes will not rise, and there will be almost no new jobs.

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber says, ‘If the government keeps on with big spending cuts and austerity we face a lost decade. Even on their own terms government policies are failing. To close the deficit we need a healthy growing economy that generates tax income. Austerity only leads to a vicious circle of decline.’

Protestors demanded policies that promote new and old industries rather than letting bankers slip back into the ‘business and bonuses as usual’ routine that began this economic crisis.

We need a different approach that will
- create jobs, especially for young people
- encourage companies to raise average pay, penalise big bonuses and invest in training and new industries
- crack down on tax evasion by big companies and the super-rich; and
- tackle the growing inequality between the super-rich and everyone else.

The message of the hundreds of thousands who marched on 20 October was stop the deep, rapid spending cuts. We need to reverse our decline - and build an economy that works for ordinary families.

‘We need a future that works.’

SHIREBROOK MEMORIES SOUGHT

Signaller Alan Wilson, who is ‘a train driver’s son, grandson and nephew’, is building a website about Shirebrook and has asked if ASLEF members have pictures, stories, information, staff rosters or other information about the depot. If so please contact him at 37 Hillside Road, Stratford on Avon, CV37 9EB, by phone on 07983 117 638 or by email at shirebrookdepot@aol.com

Euston protests part of global activities

Transport workers all over the globe organised a variety of activities at the start of the month to highlight the need for publicly accountable and not-for-profit rail as a global issue. The International Transport Federation of trade unions, to which ASLEF is affiliated, helped to coordinate the worldwide series of events.

‘ASLEF will take every opportunity we can to argue for a railway that provides decent services for passengers and secure well-paid jobs for rail workers,’ Mick said. He thanked those members who attended the Euston event.

This message was actually on the windows of the Welcome building opposite Euston station – but it could have been made to describe the franchising system!

Mick Whelan says, ‘I was delighted at how many of our members came to the demonstration, and I’d like to thank you all.

What maddens me about this crisis is that it is completely unnecessary. Debt has been worse than this before. And we know from the poverty-ridden 1930s what happens when governments cut and slash public spending.

‘Tax avoidance by companies and individuals costs the economy over £25 billion a year. A Robin Hood tax on financial transactions could raise £20 billion a year.

‘It is a simple question of whether the government chooses to tax the rich - or bleed the poor. We can borrow cheaply today, so we should do that - and invest productively so that our economy grows.

‘There is another way.’
Foreign lorry road user charging is ‘too little, too late’

The government is pressing ahead with time-based lorry road user charging for all foreign HGVs using UK roads – an estimated 6% of HGV vehicle miles. UK haulage firms have to pay to make journeys in other European Union countries, and the new toll will seek to raise funds from the estimated 1.5 million trips by foreign lorries on UK roads each year.

Philippa Edmunds, the manager of Freight on Rail to which ASLEF is affiliated, said the new rules are ‘too little, too late’. She said FoR was in favour of the principle of a lorry road user charging system for foreign lorries ‘to ensure fairer arrangements for the UK haulage industry’. However, she added, ‘charging them a maximum of £1,000 a year is not high enough to improve competition for UK road haulage. It will also be expensive for the government to administer and will place extra administrative burdens on UK hauliers.’ Philippa argues that it is a ‘missed opportunity to create a more comprehensive system which could reduce freight’s environmental footprint, improve working standards, road safety and support modal shift’.

Most European countries introduced a similar system about ten years ago. Motoring pressure groups have voiced fears that the change could lead the way to road-user charging for all UK car, van and lorry drivers - not just foreign heavy goods vehicles.

Young people could go busking, says Tory

Mick Whelan said he was ‘incensed’ at remarks made about youth unemployment last month by Folkestone MP Damian Collins. It appears this privately-educated Oxford scholar suggests young people could ‘go busking’ to start their careers. It is a callous echo of Norman Tebbit telling the unemployed to ‘get on their bikes’ and shows that the Tories haven’t changed one jot since the bleak Thatcher days. They have no contact with the real world.

OPEN VERDICT ON LATEST UFTON NERVET VICTIM

An open verdict has been delivered in the case of the death of a language teacher who was killed when he rode his scooter onto the tracks at the level crossing in May this year. It was the same place where suicidal motorist Brian Drysdale drove onto the track and derailed a train killing the driver and five passengers in 2004.

The coroner said there was not enough evidence to rule that David Montague had intended to take his own life.

Network Rail has promised to make a decision this month on the future of the Ufton Nervet level crossing. Local campaigners are demanding full barriers, CCTV or a bridge.

500 CLUB WINNER

The most recent winner of the Retired Section draw is T. Bird who scooped this month’s £238 prize money with the number 26, reports Alan Taylor. For more information about the 500 Club, contact Lee James at head office either by phone or by email to ljames@aslef.org.uk

COMPANY NEWS

In its September meeting the Executive Committee made the following decisions:

REST DAY WORKING
Was agreed in
Arriva Trains Wales until 29 December
First Great Western until 20 July 2013
Chiltern Railways until 27 October
First Transpennine Express until 24 November
Greater Anglia until 30 March 2013
Merseyrail until 29 December
London Midland until 29 December
CrossCountry reinstated until 26 January
LORL until 1 June 2013
DB Schenker – no sanction

PAY
Northern Rail pay for 2012/13 was accepted, and comprises 3.5% or £600 from April 2012 and 3.3% or £570 from January 2013.

EX-REMPLOY MAKE YORK BANNER

York branch’s new banner was created by members of the York Disabled Workers Cooperative (former Remploy workers) and Flying Colour Flagmakers. Branch secretary Malcolm Dixon says, ‘We’d wanted a new banner for some time and thanks to branch funds, a Head Office loan and members’ donations – now we’ve got one!’

The new banner was produced just in time for last month’s TUC March.

Stuart Mason

September saw a Class 507 Merseyrail train named after Stuart Mason, who died aged 57 this time last year, reports Bill Baxter. It ran on an inaugural journey from Southport as far as Formby. Stuart was an ASLEF member and Operations Inspector at Southport.

Stuart came to Southport in the 1980s after passing out as a driver at Newton Heath.

Swansea electrification confirmed

The union-backed campaign to ensure that the electrification of the Great Western Main Line (GWML) stretches to Swansea has been successful. Original proposals stopped electrification at Cardiff.

Transport Secretary of State Simon Burns told Parliament last month that the timetable for the completion of electrification of the GWML to Cardiff is before the December 2017 timetable change date and that Swansea will be electrified before timetable changes the following year.

The Valley Lines electrification project does not have a firm date as yet, but the minister said its expected ‘energisation would be in the calendar years 2018 and 2019’.
GS calls on members to petition MPs on employment rights

Mick Whelan, ASLEF’s general secretary, has urged union members to contact their MPs to ensure that they vote against a government proposal – contained within the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (ERR) Bill - to further limit employment rights in the UK and to water down the provisions of TUPE, the regulations that protect employees’ terms and conditions of employment when a business is transferred from one owner to another.

‘The UK is already the third least regulated labour market in the world,’ Mick points out. ‘The last thing we need is more deregulation.’

Last year the government doubled the qualifying period needed to claim unfair dismissal from one to two years. Business Secretary Vince Cable now plans to continue to make life at work more unstable with two new measures:

- He wants powers to cap compensation awards when someone has been unfairly dismissed to a maximum of a year’s pay (regardless of how much they have lost).
- He wants to replace ‘compromise agreements’ with ‘settlement agreements’ which would allow employers to offer employees a pay-off simply because their face doesn’t fit.

New tribunal fees will also price many workers out of being able to take unfair dismissals to court – especially in non-unionised work-places.

‘If you, like me, think it is ludicrous to think that the way to end a crisis of unemployment is to make it easier to sack people, then ask your MP to vote no to the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill when it comes to the House of Commons,’ Mick Whelan says.

ARRESTS AFTER PALLET IS THROWN AT TRAIN

Four men aged between 14 and 21 have been arrested after a train’s windscreen was smashed by a wooden pallet thrown from a bridge in Ferryhill, County Durham in August. They are suspected of trespass and endangering safety. British Transport Police said the train driver had a ‘remarkable escape’.

HAIR RAISING GUINNESS ATTEMPT

An Indian man dragged a 40-tonne train 2.5 metres along a track using a chain tied to his pony tail in a bid to set a new world record. Sailendra Nath Roy, 49, used a chain tied into his pony tail to pull the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway locomotive 2.5 metres in an attempt to get into the Guinness Book of Records.

ASLEF REPS LAW UPDATE

Any ASLEF rep in Districts 1, 5, 6 & 8 who would like to attend a day seminar on Employment Law changes (including Industrial Tribunals) on 27 November in Central London should contact their District Organiser to book or for further details.

Newcastle education event ‘a model’

Newcastle’s Central Station has become the ‘education station’ through a partnership between East Coast Trains and its trade unions. Last month over 40 staff were presented with certificates for their achievements in literacy, numeracy and IT by ECT’s Managing Director, ASLEF’s general secretary Mick Whelan and Northern TUC Regional Secretary Kevin Rowan.

‘I am delighted for the success of these learners, and I hope today’s ceremony will encourage those companies who have been reluctant to back similar initiatives to take up the example,’ Mick said.

MANCHESTER DRIVER AIR LIFTED AFTER HEART ATTACK

Manchester driver Dave Graham was air lifted to Hull hospital last month after suffering a heart attack while driving a train on the Scarborough branch at Weaverthorpe. Happily he was declared to be in a stable condition after medics drained a blood clot and put in a stent.

Dave was praised for ensuring his passengers’ safety after he managed to bring the service to a safe stop.

STANDARD OF LETTERS!

It is with a deep sense of shock that we report that London’s Evening Standard has printed a letter from ASLEF! As this is unprecedented in recent years we thought we’d share it with Journal readers. After all, it may never happen again...

‘Your interview with new Transport Minister Patrick McLoughlin (the ninth person in this post in ten years!) quoted him as being ‘relaxed about bonuses for transport workers to avoid strikes during the Olympics’.

This is misleading. A ‘bonus’ sounds like a freebie handout. We negotiated compensation for working longer hours with more flexibility. We earned it – which is a lot more than many of Mr McLoughlin’s board room banking friends can say!’

The French SNCF has begun a new tram-train service from Lyon Saint-Paul to Sain-Bel. It is hoped that ridership will double from present levels to 13,200 passengers a day by the end of 2012.

It is the first of three routes from Lyon Saint-Paul serving the city’s western suburbs that are to be converted to tram-train operation. Subject to obtaining the necessary safety approvals, Alstom Citadis Dualis vehicles are expected to begin operating to Brignais in December, using a new east to south chord at Tassin, followed by the route to Lozanne.

Pictured at the Newcastle event are Mark Wakenshaw, Julie Stedm an, Mick Whelan, Tony Paul, Dougie Stafford and the union’s Scottish officer Kevin Lindsay, who manages ASLEF Learning.

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- Criminal law representation (for work-related matters)
- Indus teral disease or illness
- Road traffic accident in injury
- Personal injury away from work
- Personal injury at work (including assaults)
- Special terms for clinical negligence cases
- Neighbourhood disputes, matrimonial and consumer non-work issues such as landlord disputes, wills and probate
- 30 minutes free telephone advice for any
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For more information call ASLEF on 0808 100 8009

*30 minutes free telephone advice for any non-work issues such as landlord disputes, wills and probate

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- Free will writing service
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- Employment law accessed through your ASLEF district organiser

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* Exclusions apply. Thompsons Solicitors is a trading name of Thompsons Solicitors LLP and is regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority.

www.thompsons.law.co.uk
Driverless Tubes still on the Boris agenda

Bathing in the adulation of the Tory Party conference in Birmingham, Boris Johnson repeated his promise to introduce ‘driverless’ trains onto the London Underground. Meanwhile back in London, LUL were vigorously denying that they have ‘any current plans’ for testing driverless technology. So who’s telling the truth? The short answer is ‘neither’ says Finns Functional Council rep Finnn Brennan ...

Currently three tube lines - Victoria, Central and Jubilee - have Automatic Train Operating systems (ATO) with drivers in the cab. The Northern and Sub-surface lines are being upgraded and will also eventually be ATO.

The next phase of upgrades is the ‘Deep Tube’ project. The objective is to develop a new train and signalling system for the Bakerloo and Piccadilly lines that will eventually be rolled out to all Tube lines. TfL’s funding agreement with the government stipulates that the prototype for this EVO train must be delivered in 2016. LUL say that this train will have a member of staff on board - but will not have a conventional driving cab.

Anyone who’s ever travelled on a loaded Underground train will understand what a truly stupid idea this is. Over the years we’ve been called motormen, drivers and train operators – but whatever the title we need to be able to access trains’ controls and observe the road ahead. In other words, we need a driving cab. The idea that the driver might be squashed into a corner preparing to tap 600 people on the shoulder to ask politely if they could move aside so she can deal with an emergency or disruption is utter nonsense. When we remember too, that the Bakerloo line runs over Network Rail infrastructure north of Queens Park, it becomes even clearer that the idea of a train without a cab is entirely politically motivated. It is designed to create soundbites for politicians, not transport solutions for London.

ASLEF POLICY IS CLEAR
ASLEF has made our position clear. We will do everything in our power to oppose any attempt to impose this foolish and dangerous nonsense. Our Test Train members have already voted overwhelmingly to refuse to take part in any testing of driverless technology, and our members on Transplant are equally clear that they will not carry out testing. There is no doubt that any attempt to introduce such a train without agreement would mean a combine wide dispute.

But we face major challenges much sooner than 2016. LUL’s Operational Strategy paper makes clear that they intend to attack our working conditions and agreements over the next few years in a drive for more flexibility. Although no open proposals have been made yet, we know their agenda is to reduce spare coverage, extend driving parameters and introduce overtime working. Driverless trains will be used as a threat in an attempt to soften us up for these attacks. We expect to be told that unless we are prepared to accept detrimental changes, then they will be forced upon us.

ASLEF has never been afraid of change or new technology – but we will never accept being bullied or threatened. We have worked and fought hard for our conditions and agreements; we intend to improve them, not see them weakened or undermined.

We have protected our members through days of steam, diesel and electrification. Whatever changes new technology brings in the future, we have the experience, the abilities and the industrial muscle to keep doing so in the decades ahead.

Our strongest weapon is an active and involved membership, so please do your best to attend your local ASLEF branch meetings and help shape our strategy for the battles ahead.

LUL’s Operational strategy paper and a presentation given to the Trains Council on the Deep Tube project can be seen at http://www.aslef.org.uk/information/115858/131512/8nov2011deep_tube_programme/

ASLEF demands ‘genuine’ review on rail franchises

Mick Whelan said that passengers and rail staff ‘demand and deserve’ to be heavily involved in a full-ranging and in-depth review of rail franchising. The latest minister for transport, Patrick McLoughlin, has promised a review into ‘the wider rail franchise programme’.

He will be judged by how independent and comprehensive that exercise proves to be,’ Mick said.

‘After the recent debacles on the East and West Coast Main Lines, this review must satisfy the public and rail staff that rail finances will be open, balanced and efficient. That is why it is important to involve both ASLEF and passengers. We are the ones who have been most affected by the various franchise fiascos,’ Mick insists.

‘Staff are unsure about who will be employing them, a situation not helped by the government’s plans to weaken the TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations). And passengers are obviously involved because they are the ones picking up enormous fare increases partly caused by franchise antics.

Mick points out that independent scrutiny of the current system are virtually non-existent.

‘Bids cannot be examined because of ‘commercial confidentiality’, he points out. ‘Add to that the fact that the department for transport has had over 400 jobs chopped in the search for ‘austerity’, and we have a formula for no proper overview of the processes.

‘Given those staff cuts, it is mere scapegoating to attempt to blame civil servants for recent disasters. There is a major difference between responsible cutting of red tape and providing a negligent service.’
Rail Delivery Group ‘puts foxes in charge of the coop’

Mick Whelan dismissed the announcement that the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) is to be formalised as a permanent body as ‘putting foxes in charge of the coop’. The RDG has been set up as a result of the McNulty report to ‘provide cross-industry leadership’. It is made up of TOCs, FOCs and Network Rail, Mick says. ‘Their task appears to be to approve of whatever they choose to do. The views of passengers and staff are considered of no value – they think we should be grateful for being allowed to observe proceedings. We’re not.’

The rail regulator ORR as it established the group conceded that, ‘A number of comments suggested that the composition of the RDG leadership group would not represent the whole industry and that proposals and decisions will be commercially driven with no protection for passengers and taxpayers.’ That is certainly ASLEF’s position. We believe it will be yet another undemocratic body imposing decisions on the railway in the interest of making profit rather than the passenger and taxpayer. ‘The union wants more leadership within the industry and a greater sense of direction and co-operation leading to a fully integrated rail network – but setting up this trade association made up of ATOC, the Freight Operating Companies and Network Rail is not the industry wide forum of stakeholders we believe is necessary.

‘We fear it means long term strategic decisions will go from the Department for Transport to the RDG, which means to a group of short term profiteers rather than an accountable government department,’ Mick says. ‘The people who know how to improve the railway are those who work on the network every day of the year – not folk who sit in boardrooms.’

40 years is a long time to fight for justice...

But that is exactly what the Shrewsbury Pickets have had to do, writes Barckley Sumner of the construction union UCATT.

Following the 1972 building strike, 24 construction workers were faced with trumped up charges - including conspiracy, unlawful assembly and affray.

Six of them, including actor Ricky Tomlinson went to prison for up to three years.

The Conservative Government of the time, the police and the judiciary were all involved in a conspiracy and subsequent cover up.

Earlier this year the Shrewsbury Pickets submitted papers to the Criminal Cases Review Commission, seeking to get their convictions overturned. However, the government still refuses to release all the papers relating to the cases.

Last month one of the pickets, Terry Renshaw, the baby of the group at 64, said, ‘We need to learn from the Leveson inquiry and the Hillsborough inquiry and get these papers released.’

Celebration time as the Bristol Metro looks like a plan on the way to becoming reality

Bristol promotes a Metro service

ASLEF, the TSSA and Transport for Greater Bristol have been celebrating attracting additional funding for transport and promoting the Bristol Metro, reports executive council member Brian Corbett.

A reception in the city attracted both a Labour and a Conservative MP as well as councillors, council officers and most of the candidates in the election for Mayor of the city on 15 November. We understand that they all support some form of passenger executive for the area – something that would involve working with the neighbouring councils of North Somerset, Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire.

Mike Norton, the editor of the Bristol Evening Post, opened the event, introducing the main speakers - Lord Richard Rossiter (former leader of the TSSA), Liberal Councillor Tim West and ASLEF’s National Organiser Simon Weller. The united message was support for an integrated transport system with the Metro as a main component for the Bristol area.

A new station (Portway) will be open soon and the re-opening of the Henbury loop and the Portishead branch is in prospect as well as an additional two tracks between Parkway and Temple Meads.

‘This progress is a tribute to the endless enthusiasm and professionalism of local transport campaigners and politicians,’ said Simon Weller as he thanked Mike Wheeler for organising the reception.
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open day
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Freightliner Heavy Haul is interested in applications from flexible, enthusiastic and self-motivated Train Drivers to be based in Hither Green, SE London, who will embrace the challenge of working for a company who places its continuing success on the importance of customer service and product delivery. All applicants must hold a UK driving licence as there is a requirement to drive company road vehicles. The job roles will also involve shift work including weekend and night turns of duty which may in turn require you to lodge away from home.

We are also seeking QUALIFIED train drivers to be based at Bristol, Peterborough and Rugby.

If you cannot make it to Freightliner Heavy Haul’s open day but would still like to apply/find out more information please contact us via email guttenl@freightliner.co.uk or phone 01270 452412.

**We are an Equal Opportunities Employer and welcome applications from all sections of the community**
ASLEF reps praise work of hazards organisation

This was the 23rd conference organised by Hazards, an organisation which campaigns and provides information on health and safety issues. I’ve been to seven of its conferences in the last decade and I can testify to its excellent work. There’s no better place to learn the craft of being an effective safety rep. The 400-plus attendees range from full-time professionals to new local reps which makes it rewarding from every point of view.

Hilda Palmer from the Hazards Centre welcomed us on the Friday afternoon with her usual enthusiasm and professionalism and introduced a plenary session that included contributions on a range of topics including the continuing struggle with the aftermath of the Bhopal gas disaster, using Hazards effectively and the opportunities of social networking.

The most impassioned speaker was Louise Taggart from FACK (Families Against Corporate Killers) who spoke from the heart, struggling to speak at times about her brother who died because of employer negligence. How organisations get away with taking lives is nothing short of a travesty and I’d urge you to visit the FACK website. The evening was spent networking with comrades from other unions.

We spent most of Saturday in workshops, which are the sessions I enjoy the most. Delegates could choose from topics that varied from Improving Inspections and Enforcement to Mental Health and Bullying and Harassment. We also chose one of the three ‘keynote’ meetings which covered the Löfstedt Report, Sickness or the Case for Regulation.

We spent the weekend in student accommodation that brought back memories of a stay in an eastern European hostel, but the assistance provided by the University staff was second to none.

I would encourage all branches to support and sponsor the Hazards Centre (www.hazards.org). The work it undertakes for safety reps is immeasurable and its contributions on a range of topics including: Work place support and bullying, International issues, Accessing public services, Health services and Sport.

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...and to be selected as one of the delegates to conferences are a great boost to professionalism and confidence.

First LGBT conference for Scots TUC

It’s not every day that you get to participate in a piece of history - but on the weekend of the 8 and 9 September ASLEF delegates, along with fellow trade union activists from all over Scotland, did just that when we took part in the inaugural STUC LGBT workers conference in Glasgow.

The two day event represented the official and long awaited creation of a formal LGBT structure within the STUC. Delegates debated a wide range of issues under a variety of themes including: Work place support and bullying, International issues, Accessing public services, Health services and Sport.

Delegates were also addressed by a number of guest speakers including Yvonne Strachan from the Scottish Government Equality Unit who in her address to conference stressed that the equality structure of the STUC was an ‘important step forward’. She went on to say that the government was committed to equal marriage and would continue to support organisations seeking to improve equality, especially equal rights in the workplace.

Phyllis Opoku-Gyimah, the executive director of Black Pride, once again demonstrated why she is such a conference favourite. In her address she stressed much about common issues that transcend race, gender and sexuality and received a rousing reception on saying that we are taking our place as part of the trade union movement.

ASLEF IN THE FOREFRONT

There was also an opportunity to participate in several workshops which provided the opportunity to discuss a variety of topics such as equal marriage, policy issues within the Equality Act, how we tackle homophobic bullying in sport, with an eye also to how we address subtle homophobic and racist language in staffrooms and finally, how we address homophobic bullying in schools.

As part of the weekend, conference elected its own committee to take forward its programme of work for the year whilst also nominating two delegates to provide an active voice with seats on the STUC General Committee.

On a personal note it was good to see the weekend run smoothly. As part of the initial advisory committee, I, along with my colleagues, helped advise the STUC on issues such as its constitution and what we wanted to see take place. It’s always satisfying to be part of a successful event!

Finally, it was great to receive the support and trust of my fellow activists with my election to the first LGBT Workers Committee - and to be selected as one of the delegates to the STUC Annual Congress.

I would encourage all branches to support and sponsor the Hazards Centre (www.hazards.org). The work it undertakes for safety reps is immeasurable and its contributions on a range of topics including: Work place support and bullying, International issues, Accessing public services, Health services and Sport.

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...and to be selected as one of the delegates to conferences are a great boost to professionalism and confidence.

Thanks to Alan Moss of Longsight Branch for the report.

Thanks to Craig Cameron, LGBT Representative Committee member for District 2 for this report.
PEAKING at a meeting at this year’s Labour Party conference in Manchester, shadow transport minister Maria Eagle conceded that the previous government had not been ‘bold’ enough in its approach to rail. She said she represented a fresh start, and had ‘a blank piece of paper’ on which to write Labour policy for the future – and Maria thanked the unions for sponsoring the research that had led to the ‘Rebuilding Rail’ document which had ‘provided important new thinking and helped to shape the debate’.

She was aware, she said, that the years since privatisation had been ‘a disaster for both tax payers and passengers. ‘Operating costs have doubled, subsidies have trebled and fares have rocketed,’ she points out.

‘We went along with the existing system when we were in government - when we should have tackled it,’ she said. She pointed to the success of the East Coast Mainline and insisted that its profits – and those of the West Coast franchise – must not be lost to private investors. ‘Now more than ever we cannot afford to give away public money,’ she insisted.

‘There is feeling in the country that we want a public railway. Rail reform is on the agenda.’

NOT WHY, BUT HOW
Our general secretary Mick Whelan welcomed Maria’s remarks – but wanted to move on the debate from ‘why reform’ to ‘how we reform’.

‘We know the ‘why’s’, Mick said. ‘They are defined in our ‘Rebuilding Rail’ report.’

Privatisation was supposed to bring about innovation. It hasn’t. Unless you include imaginative ways of talking about rail fare options.

It was supposed to save money. It hasn’t. The money that has leaked out of our industry in sub-contractors, dividends and other unnecessary expenditure adds up to 20% of train fare costs.

It was supposed to introduce competition. It hasn’t. It has just got us into ludicrous positions whereby we pay rent for rolling stock many times its market value.

It was supposed to reduce fares for customers. This January they could go up by 11%.

‘For franchise bidders, the system means that if you win you win; and if you lose, you win.’

Mick Cash spoke for the RMT pointing out the effects on passengers if proposed cuts to guards on trains and staff at stations went ahead, while Manuel Cortes insisted, ‘If the government accepts that rail franchising has failed, it has to accept that all its neo-liberal economics have failed,’ he declared. ‘If Labour brings the railway back into public ownership, the leaders of other unions will say bring the civil service, the NHS, the buses back into public hands. That is what they are afraid of – even if it happens to be right!’

It was suggested that we needed to make the changes to conform with European law. That was wrong. The EU doesn’t say the railways need to be privately owned, or that you need to divide track and train operators.

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‘For franchise bidders, the system means that if you win you win; and if you lose, you win.’

Mick Whelan with newly elected TUC general secretary Frances O’Grady and shadow transport minister Maria Eagle failed; he declared. ‘If Labour brings the railway back into public ownership, the leaders of other unions will say bring the civil service, the NHS, the buses back into public hands. That is what they are afraid of – even if it happens to be right!’

ASLEF general secretary Mick Whelan at the rostrum of the Labour Conference. ‘The unions and the Labour Party are two sides of a single coin,’ he says. ‘We have to keep reminding them of that fact.’ Photo: Andrew Wiard

Get on your bike!

When a fringe meeting held by sustainable transport campaign Sustrans tells you to get on your bike, it has none of the threat of the Norman Tebbit suggestion. The charity exists to champion ‘foot, bike and public transport’

Lillian Greenwood, MP for Nottingham South is a shadow transport minister responsible for these issues and argued that cycle training should be made mandatory in schools, as swimming is. She also insists that all new train carriages must have space for cycles and reiterated that Labour is 100% opposed to longer and heavier vehicles, a policy the union has advocated for a decade.
NEED TO RESPECT CONFERENCE DECISIONS

ASLEF’s work began before the conference delegates took their seats, with Mick Whelan briefing the Campaign for Labour Democracy about railway issues.

Mick spoke about the need for Labour to respect and implement policy established at conference or, he said, it became ‘a pointless exercise which disillusioned people more than encouraged them’. Kelvin Hopkins, the MP for Luton North, took up the theme, calling for an end to the ‘control freakery’ that had been the hallmark of New Labour.

Some two dozen local Constituency Labour Parties had submitted attempts to discuss the Virgin – First Group West Coast Main Line fiasco, but for some mysterious reason the Labour bureaucracy deemed that it was ‘not sufficiently contemporary’. The following day the suspension of the bidding process was announced!

Union at ATOC!

Mick Whelan became the first ASLEF general secretary to be invited to join the top table at an event organised by ATOC, the Association of Train Operating Companies. It led to one of the more interesting of the fringe meetings, because it involved genuine differences of opinion and some sharp debate.

Rumblings began when ATOC’s chief executive, Michael Roberts, challenged Mick’s assertion that the franchise model was flawed: No, he insisted. Private companies have a ‘strength of desire to deliver public services’ and the success of the system was shown by rising passenger numbers and high satisfaction ratings. Because people want to travel by train, he insisted, there is no need to change the model.

He also defended the Department for Transport not revealing details of franchise bids, successful or not, even after the contract is let, on the grounds that ‘commercial confidence must be respected’. TOCs, he said, do a good job and make a reasonable profit. ‘That’s business.’

‘It was interesting to hear views from another camp, and I enjoyed the debate,’ Mick said afterwards. ‘But I couldn’t help noticing that all TOCs have to join ATOC if they win a contract. The closed shop for unions was ended in the 1980s’!

What the delegates said …

COLLETTE GIBSON was nominated by District 7. These are her impressions of her first Labour Conference …

‘It was an enjoyable experience – but it certainly wasn’t a ‘jolly’! We were expected to be putting ASLEF’s views and defending its policies at all hours of the day and night. I think the union gets a lot out of Labour affiliation in terms of affecting opinions and advancing arguments.’

‘I was disappointed at how much of the conference was stage managed. It must have been devastating for local party delegates who came to put their point of view – only to find out they couldn’t. I’ve still got a very good speech I never managed to deliver in my bag if anyone would like it!’

‘I have to say that I was impressed by the head office people - who never seemed to stop.’

MARK PRENTER was selected to go to his first Labour Conference by District 1. This is how he summed up the week …

‘We spent most of the day in the conference hall taking in speeches and presentations, but then discovered that the more interesting and important stuff was going on outside - in fringe meetings, coffee bars and receptions.

‘I know this isn’t what everyone else seemed to think, but I was a bit disappointed with Ed Miliband’s speech. It was short on policy, and people seemed to concentrate on its theatre value more than its politics. Also, he said nothing about the West Coast mainline decision that was announced the previous day.

‘But it was an enjoyable and challenging week, and it’s important that we are here. At least it gives us a chance to affect decisions and help to make policy.’
Anne Maningas – snapping out of the normal!

There is very little about London tube driver Anne Maningas that is predictable: she specialises in being different. For a start, she doesn’t look old enough to be a tube driver. ‘I still get passengers tapping on the window asking how old I am!’ she chuckles. ‘And a couple of times when I’ve got out of the cab to check the platform, I’ve seen people stare at me, do a double-take and step back. ‘Suits me! I think. ‘You can wait three minutes for the next one!’

Acting outside the norm began at an early age for Anne. ‘When I was young the boys wanted to drive trains, so I thought, ‘Why not me?’ So I worked for four years as a station assistant at North Greenwich on the gates and the platform. It was bearable partly because I got on well with the traincrew there and they encouraged me to apply for a driving job.

‘That’s what I did, but by the time I’d finished training, the Jubilee had gone automatic and I ended up at Acton Town on the Piccadilly line. I got my keys last September when I was 23 – which makes me the youngest driver on the line!’

Bucking another stereotype, Anne has always been interested in science. ‘That helped with my training,’ she says, ‘especially when it came to braking systems and other technical stuff. But it was still tough, because they’d cut down the course time.’

She likes the logic of science and the set pattern of train driving. ‘There’s only one way you can do it.’

I mention that despite all this, someone like Anne would never have made the footplate in the days of steam: but of course I’d forgotten how unpredictable she is. ‘Oh, I’ve driven a steam train,’ she tells me. ‘In Australia. My partner’s family are from Victoria in Queensland and when we visited earlier this year, we took a trip on the heritage railway that runs from Maldon to Castlemaine. He told someone there that I worked on the railways in the UK, so I was identified as a ‘Pommy Sparky’!

‘I ended up at the front, shovelling coal. I was soot black by the time we finished, but I loved it. They put a hat on me and everything.’

I am still recovering from the image of Anne wielding an Ozzie coal shovel when she moves on to chatter about her upbringing.

Which is, of course, unusual. ‘My family are from the Philippines but I’m a Londoner. I was at school in Forest Gate. I never did art, but I was good at English. And music.

‘I played the piano a lot but I’ve rather given it up. Well, I haven’t got one! And it’s difficult to practice an instrument in a flat, so I play guitar these days.’

And then there is photography. Anne’s mother used to take photos and young Anne was fascinated. ‘I don’t know why I was so attracted to cameras. Maybe it’s because I have a terrible memory and I’m scared I won’t remember anything when I get old. This way I’ll always have a record.’

Her science teacher was so impressed at some of Anne’s photos that he took the rather risky step of asking her to take the pictures at his wedding. When that shot was a success, Anne picked up odd work as a photographer. ‘But I didn’t want it as a full-time job. It’s a risky way of earning a living, and I thought I might lose my love of it if it became my job.’

But when she started at North Greenwich, Anne began to make pictures of all aspects of Underground life, from the staff to the stations.

‘I got a thing about taking pictures of people asleep on trains. How can they do it? Of all the places to sleep – a noisy bone-shaker like the old Met stock, bending round corners throwing you into the person next to you? And they stay asleep! OK, maybe alcohol has a lot to do with it! It’s something of an obsession with me now.’

Inevitably she doesn’t go to a Spanish beach for her holidays like everyone else. Three years ago she was in Florida to catch pictures of the launch of what was supposed to be the final Voyager shuttle. She describes that event at the Kennedy Centre as feeling like ‘the rush of air that would come from standing next to a massive firework display’.

Her first days as an Underground driver were pretty scary. On her first day she was given the wrong signal and almost moved onto another line. Later that week there was an incident between two passengers and shortly afterwards Anne needed to brake violently when a well-refreshed man decided to sit dangling his legs on the platform edge. ‘And since then – nothing really. But I’m keeping my fingers crossed.’

Then, just as I think the interview is winding down, Anne tells me she’s being stalked by the Prince of Wales. By this stage I am beyond shock. ‘Well, not quite,’ she concedes. It seems that, like many an ASLEF member (!) she took up playing polo last year. ‘I read a book that talked about it and thought I’d give it a go. I play at Richmond and you get Royalty popping in now and again. I’d never ridden a horse before. It’s a great feeling when you see a long shot shooting off. Most of the others are a different class, but when you’re playing it doesn’t matter. It’s not cheap, but you can borrow a lot of the equipment except your hat and mallet and boots. I love it!

‘I’ve recently taken up shooting as well, popping off clay pigeons. That’s fun as well. Strangely, I find it relaxing. And I get that pesky Prince of Wales turning up there, too!’

It’s a pleasure talking to someone so open to new experiences with a real enthusiasm for life and a genuine satisfaction in her job and her various hobbies. Anne may not be a ‘normal’ ASLEF member. But then again, who is …?
A hundred years ago the ASLEF Locomotive Journal carried a number of reports by Organising Secretary H. Parfitt that showed the railway was a much more dangerous place in November 1912 than it is today ...

“I attended a Board of Trade inquiry conducted by Mr. Hornby at Ross concerning the fatal accident to a brakesman. As no fresh evidence was put forward the inspector could do no more than endorse the verdict of the coroner’s jury.

“I went on from Ross to Stourbridge and learnt that a woman had been killed while crossing the line near Dudley, two of our Stourbridge members being concerned. I therefore attended the inquest which was held on the next morning in an outlandish place near Dudley Port. It was proved the locomotive-men did their best to stop in the short time and distance at their disposal, and the jury very quickly returned a verdict of “accidental death,” no blame to anyone but the unfortunate woman herself.

“On the 18th, in response to a wire from the General Office, I went to Ditton Junction and inspected the scene of a terrible accident which occurred there the previous evening. The unfortunate fireman who among others was killed being a member of our Llandudno Branch.

“On the 24th I was called to Swansea in connection with a fatal accident to a ganger. Next day I attended an inquest held in Widnes in connection with the Ditton Junction accident. The jury found that “The deceased persons accidentally met their deaths by the derailment of the train, and that the derailment was caused by excessive speed.”

“On Monday 30th I made enquiries respecting a fatal accident which happened at Hollybush the Friday night previously. On Wednesday, Oct. 2nd, attended the inquest held at Tredegar in connection therewith, two of our members being concerned.”

By a splendid coincidence Anne snapped this commuter sleeping in summer … and six months later, dozing in winter!

Not your usual idea of the typical Tube driver!

Anne at the controls of a London tube … and left, on the footplate of an Australian loco!

Anne has an eye for the unusual – and the talent to capture it beautifully!
CHARLIE WARD PEACEFUL DEATH FOR 89 YEAR OLD
I have been informed by his niece that retired Kings Cross driver Charlie Ward, who was 89, passed away peacefully last October in the nursing home where he had lived for two years.

Charlie was, she says, a clever man who was very knowledgeable about current and global affairs, had a fantastic sense of humour, a truly warm heart, a love of music and always worshipped the sun! She writes affectionately that throughout her life her uncle’s ‘smile and lovely nature warmed her soul’. She still has his caps he brought from Newcastle and a jacket he gave to her many years ago! She is pleased to know that we, too, have never forgotten him. May Charlie R.I.P.

P. J. Smith, Reporter, Retired Members Section

DENNIS RANDALL PART OF THE HISTORY OF RAIL
It is with great sadness that we report the passing of Brother Dennis Randall.

Dennis began his railway career at Evercreech Junction on the Somerset & Dorset Railway in 1947 and finished up at Grove Park in 1995.

Strangely enough, Dennis witnessed the full circle of the railways progress from private companies to nationalisation - and then back to privatisation! He was a third generation railwayman, with both his father and grandfather being employed by the railways. His son David and grandson Mark also work on the railways, making up five generations of the Randall family.

Dennis spent the majority of his career as a Driver at Waterloo (Nine Elms), with brief spells at Peckham Rye, Wimbeldon Park, and finally Grove Park.

He was a true character of the mess room at Waterloo, one of those individuals who could never be replaced, and he had a career that could never be replicated in this modern era of employment.

Apart from Dennis’ love of the railways he also had another passion – he was a member of ‘The Westminster Abbey Company of Ringers’ otherwise known as a ‘campanologist’. Due to Dennis’s prestigious position he had rung the bells at St Pauls Cathedral and Westminster Abbey for many Royal events including weddings and funerals. Dennis was actually allowed to lie in state the night before his funeral service at Westminster Abbey as a mark of respect to his time served and his position within the campanologist fraternity.

We believe that he may be the only train driver to have ever had a service at Westminster Abbey and who lay in state as a mark of respect. Dennis was an ASLEF member through and through, a true gentleman and a brother to be proud of.

Martin Dye, Waterloo, Nine Elms

JERRY PINCHES TOUCHED BY YOUR GENEROSITY
It is with deep sadness to have to report the sudden death of Bro Jerry Pinches at the age of 52. A loyal and dedicated ASLEF member, Jerry was Secretary of the Derby Branch for 12 years. He carried out many union roles, including LDC secretary, Sectional Council delegate, and District Council delegate.

Unfortunately Jerry had to finish his railway career early following a serious stroke. The branch launched an all-branch appeal recently to assist him, and we collected nearly £5,000 which shows how widely respected he was within the ASLEF family. Jerry was extremely touched by the generosity you all showed and he will be sorely missed by everyone at Derby.

We send our deepest condolences to Jerry’s mum and the rest of his family at this difficult time. RIP Jerry,

Eamonn Tague, Secretary, Derby branch

GARRY PAULEY FOND MEMORIES
I first met Garry in 1980 at London Bridge and two years later we were on the picket line together for two weeks during the flexible rostering strike. We were one of the depots to go straight to the 7 to 9 hour shifts which promised 9 rest days in every 8 week block.

The staff side LDC, but mainly Garry, managed to get 10 rest days every 8 weeks which seems poor now but was a good deal then.

Garry left London Bridge and spent a short time at Hither Green then Slade Green, finally going nearly full circle to Waterloo where he ended his service having started at Nine Elms. We only exchanged Christmas cards in recent years and having not received one for two years I contacted Euston Driver Paul Collins, a near neighbour, who told me that he was not sure how or when but just that Garry had died. May he rest in peace.

Jeff Veale, retired member, Battersea

KEITH FORSTER MODEL ROSTER CLERK
Keith Foster was not an ASLEF member but I’m sure a lot of members remember him as he spent most of his spare time timing trains all over the country, even up as far as Scotland.

Keith died peacefully in hospital on 22 Sep at the age of 64. He was a lovely man and would always do his best to help you with any problems regarding getting time off or rostering issues and always asked politely when he wanted you to work your rest day.

Keith was an old fashioned roster clerk with his suit and tie, always on time and producing the daily sheets and rosters immaculately (with a little help from his mother on the odd occasion!)

Rest in peace Keith, We have fond memories of you.

Bill Baxter and staff past and present at Southport

WILFRED PITTS DIED AT 88
Wilf Pitts was born in 1924 and joined the railway during the war at Sheffield Millhouses. In the late ’50s he moved to Sheffield Midland. He trod the traditional route of cleaner, fireman, passed fireman and eventually driver for LMS. He was especially proud of having driven Sheffield’s ‘Master Cutler’. Wilf retired at the age of 62 after 45 years’ service. Wilf married Marie in 1947 and I was born two years later. He loved his two grandchildren, Lindsey and Scott. He took up breeding canaries and budgies as a hobby. Sadly his wife died in 2001 and I looked after him afterwards. After two years of ill health, Wilf suffered a stroke on 17 May and died peacefully in hospital on 3 June aged 88.

His funeral took place on 15 June with music by his favourite Pavarotti. Only one colleague attended and unfortunately he left before I could speak to him.

I don’t know his name but I will always remember him because when the curtain came round at the committal he said loudly, ‘Tara Wilf, my old work mate.’ I’m so sorry he went before I could speak to him.

Ann Morton, daughter
ASLEF’s newest branch opens at New Cross Gate

It was a great moment when District Organiser Graham Morris opened ASLEF’s latest branch at New Cross Gate. The meeting took place at the Shipwright Arms, London Bridge.

It was well attended and we had some lively debate, as a new depot it was good to see old hands and new drivers getting on so well.

Everyone was willing to take up positions at the branch - but there weren’t enough positions for everyone.

Dave Dhaliwal was elected chair of the new branch, and Jimmy Titchener its secretary.

Waterloo tour of Parliament

Over the summer, 18 members of the Waterloo Nine Elms branch spent an informative and enjoyable morning in the Houses of Parliament.

Our guided tour commenced in the 900 year-old Westminster Hall, which holds a central role in British history. It was here that Parliament and the law came of age. Over the centuries, the hall’s hammer-beamed roof has witnessed many historical events, including the trial of King Charles I.

We were shown the enormous paintings of the battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo that adorn the walls of the Royal Gallery. We saw the decorations, portraits and the wonderful stained glass windows in St Stephen’s Hall, and we were guided around the chambers of both the Lords and the Commons (they look much bigger on the telly!).

We then retired to the St Pancras Branch gave us as we set up New Cross Gate Branch – and those members who gave their time to get the branch started.

Tony Waters, NXG LDC Rep

Waterloo moves to Westminster

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Tony Waters, NXG LDC Rep

Upcoming events

- **MOTHERWELL CENTENARY 10 NOVEMBER**
  The Dinner Dance to celebrate the centenary of the Motherwell branch will take place on Saturday 10 November at the Colville Park Country Club at 19:00 for 19:30. Tickets are £12 and can be obtained from Branch Secretary Andy Jones by email at motherwells@aslef.org.uk or on his mobile which is 07767077907. Please notify any special dietary requirements.

- **GATESHEAD & NEWCASTLE 15 NOVEMBER**
  The annual Gateshead & Newcastle /NERSWA reunion will be held on Thursday 15 November at the Gateshead Railway Club from 13:00 onwards. All current and former staff are welcome and a buffet will be provided. For further information contact branch secretary Rob Porter.

- **HITHER GREEN 16 NOVEMBER**
  The next reunion will be held on Friday 16 November in the Hither Green Railway and CIU Club, Beacon Road, SE12 commencing at 18:00 hours. Everyone connected with Hither Green, past or present, is welcome. For further information contact branch secretary John Staggs.

- **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.

Port Talbot branch visits Labour History Centre

The Port Talbot branch has been affiliated to the Mechanics Institute in Manchester for many years and one wet Wednesday in September a group of us set out to visit the building.

We were somewhat disappointed to find that this once great and historic building now gets by renting out meeting rooms on a commercial basis and has been stripped of the vast majority of its internal treasures of Trade Union history. The rooms are still there, some with near modern stained glass windows and small displays, but the heart of the establishment was missing.

A staff member pointed us to the ‘Peoples Museum’ next to the River Irwell in Bridge Street. We (almost!) passed a Weatherspoons before arriving at this wonderful museum where we spent an enjoyable three hours.

It is a museum of social history packed with artefacts and pictorial portraits of the growth of the working class and its struggles, and chronicling the history of the Cooperative Movement, Fabian Society, Labour Party and Trade Unions. There is even a banner restoration / manufacturing room and of course a restaurant. The building is a refurbished pump house which used to pump high pressure water (steam generated) around Manchester to factories for power generation.

A visit to the Peoples Museum (whose website is http://www.phm.org.uk/) is a must for anyone with an interest in Trade Unions and / or Socialist history...and it’s free! All in all it was a great Branch day out.

D. Curtis, Secretary, Port Talbot branch
GS presents awards at Ipswich

Mick Whelan accepted our invitation to address the Ipswich branch meeting over the summer and laid out his visions for ASLEF and where he wants to lead the union. He felt ASLEF had been somewhat insular in the past and wants to start putting the case of the union and the railway industry in a more proactive way. Several initiatives were being put into practice, like closer working with the media, more autonomy for District Officers and an open union where members can access Officers’ diaries, union finances, union circulars and other useful information all delivered electronically.

Mick also spoke about pensions, developing a modern rail apprenticeship scheme and the ‘Rebuilding Rail’ research report that had been commissioned with other rail unions to combat the negativity of the McNulty Report and show how the railway industry can be managed and run viably.

Various topics were debated in a question and answer session and it was a plus to see the General Secretary not only delivering his beliefs but listening carefully to the concerns of the membership. We all felt that ASLEF is heading for a positive future under Mick’s stewardship.

The GS then presented service awards to Paul Ramsey (15 years), Damian Rudland, Jim Bloomfield, Alice Cooper, Jerry Harris and Mark Wade (35 years) and a retirement certificate to Bernie Murton after nearly half a century on the railway.

It was a successful afternoon and we hope to see Mick back in the future.

Chris Leeks, Secretary, Ipswich branch

Saltley recognises its union stalwarts

The long service and loyalty of a large group of Saltley branch members was recognised at two special meetings recently. ‘We were delighted to welcome our guests from head office and from the retired member’s section,’ said Branch Secretary Adrian Harnett.

The picture taken by Malcolm Kirk, shows (back row left to right) Colin Smith (DO No 3), David Hogg, Vince Cunningham, Andy Evans, Eddie Leech, Richard Beech, Michael Farkas (who is retiring after 45 years’ service) and Alan Roberts (who is retiring after more than 40 years on the railway). In the front row are Mark Nevey, Malcolm Kirk (RMS), Dicky Fisher (DO No 6), Mick Knowles, who is retiring, Dave Calfe (EC), Stewart Howells (retirement after 45 years), John Poxon, who is also retiring, and branch chair Mick Geary.

In a separate event on 17 September, District Organiser Colin Smith presented badges to three other drivers who are retiring. They are ...

Brighton branch Chair Steven Chatfield (left) collecting his certificate from his tutor

Brother Jack Wilson is presented with his 35-year badge by National Organiser Simon Weller

Saltley stars shine bright!
Kings Cross Reunion 2012

There was a good turnout of retired and working members for the Kings Cross annual reunion at the social club at Hatfield in August and we were pleased to see a number of welcome guests, including Nigel Gibson (new District 5 Officer), Dicky Fisher (new district 4 Officer), Tony West (RMS National Secretary), Ray Jackson (RMS Chairman), Alan Taylor (RMS Treasurer), Dave Weddle (ex RMS EC) and John Towner who has finally been converted and joined the Retired Members Section!

We were pleased to see ex-Newcastle man Jim Evans, who must be about 94, Jack Simson and Tom Jacobs who came all the way from Cornwall, and Charlie Jameson and Hugh Connelly who journeyed from Scotland.

During the festivities KX branch secretary Les Muir asked Tony West to make presentations on behalf of ASLEF to Lawrence Chung, Ian Daveney, Nigel Brown, and Barry Carson (10-year badges), Alan Williams (retired, 35-year badge), Keith Maer (retired) and Steve Lambert (40-year badge).

The RMS representatives took the opportunity to give information about the section’s 500 Club which is open to everyone. If you’re not in, you won’t win! Prizes are now over £200 a month. If you want to join, contact Lee James at Head Office.

Peter Smith, Reporter, Kings Cross branch

65 years of service

Pregnant people aren’t clones!

I am half way through my maternity leave - and I’d like to thank all the people who became involved in helping me to fight to be treated as an individual.

When I fell pregnant last year I was taken off active driving duties straight away. This was in line with CrossCountry’s policy. I questioned it. Why did I need to be taken off driving while I felt well and able to carry out my duties as a driver? I was told ‘This is the policy’ – and that was the end of the matter.

Well, it wasn’t - because a host of ASLEF reps got involved including my LLC reps, health and safety rep, Company Council, Collette Gibson from the union’s Women’s Representative Committee and General Secretary Mick Whelan. Thanks to them I was put back on limited driving duties when I was nearly 6 months pregnant, and continued to drive until I went on maternity leave four weeks before my due date.

My fight was for all female drivers. We are all different and deserve to be treated as individuals. One pregnant driver may feel she requires light duties, while another can feel able to drive for the full term. In fact, CrossCountry has now changed its policy to

(Continued on page 20)
allow this – and in addition our maternity leave has been changed to be more flexible to individual requirements. The Company Council thanked me for pushing the issue, and they say the new policy is one of the best of all the TOCs.

I know many people may not agree with what I fought for – but I ended up having a fantastic pregnancy - and a very happy healthy daughter.

Rachel Bowles, CrossCountry Driver, Bristol

Thanks - you made a difference

I am writing to thank the many ASLEF branches who generously donated to the recent appeal made on my behalf by Aylesbury branch.

I recently returned to work, albeit in a non-driving capacity, following a 12-month absence due to ill-health. Your generosity, and that of my colleagues at Aylesbury who contributed to two separate collections, helped my family and I through a very difficult time.

A special word of thanks to Stan Moran, Brian Corbett and at local level Russ Joy-Young and Andy Durack, whose efforts and hard work have enabled me to return to work.

Thanks once again
Bob Foster, Driver, Aylesbury

Put privs in pay claims

There has been a steady stream of letters in this column regarding priv travel, which probably reflects the fact that our ‘safeguarded’ brothers and sisters are now in the minority.

There are moves to improve our travel privileges and I signed the Parliamentary Early Day Motion to ‘bring back the boxes’, along with over 2,500 others – but progress on this issue does appear to be slow.

I cannot believe that to reinstate travel privileges to pre-privatisation levels would be a costly exercise for the TOCs and I feel the best way to achieve this end would be to include it in every franchise’s pay and conditions negotiations.

I feel sure there are many others in our union who will share this view and would like to see an integrated approach to reinstating priv travel adopted as policy at the Annual Assembly of Delegates.  

F. P. Chase, Driver, Crewe

Howard’s beginning

I would like to express my thanks for the great honour of being elected to ASLEF’s executive committee as the representative for District 5. I will do all I can to justify the faith you have shown in me. Many thanks to all those branches who supported me and to the members who voted for me.

Thanks also to the other candidates, Khalid and Steve, for their honest and open campaigns. I know they will continue to support the union in all our endeavours. I look forward to working with you all, and especially with our highly respected District Organiser Nigel Gibson.

I hope I will be able to achieve all you want and deserve. But if I don’t, I guarantee that it will not be for lack of commitment or effort.

Howard Kaye, EC member for District 5

Useful meeting

I’d like to thank the Freightliner Company Council, its lead officer Nigel Gibson and EC member Hugh Bradley for arranging a meeting at Crewe that involved all the local reps.

High on the agenda was communication (or rather, the lack of) although I accept this is not surprising when you consider how widespread we are on the intermodal side. But it was very interesting to hear everyone’s views on a wide variety of subjects and important to know we all sing from the same hymn sheet.

It all reinforced the need for future similar meetings, which we were told would be arranged. So, once again, well done boys - and we hope to see you again in the not too distant future.

Andy Bullock, LLC secretary, Freightliner, Birmingham

Gareth’s charitable generosity

I’d like to say a massive thank you to Brother Gareth Davies, a driver at East Midlands Trains in Derby. Last year I, with a team of Manchester drivers, organised a charity steam train – the Train of Hope – to raise funds for CLIC Sargent. Gareth donated a week at his superb apartment in the Algarve as one of our auction items.

This year we had another charity event that was reported on page 5 of the October Journal – the Top to Bottom Tractor Run, which raised funds for the Christie Hospital.

Cap in hand, we contacted Gareth again to see if he would offer a free week’s accommodation again. No, he said – I’ll offer two!

Sincere thanks Gareth from everyone involved.

John Young, Driver, Virgin Trains, Manchester

Thanks to the family

When I started my railway career 14 years ago the first thing I was told was ‘welcome to your new family’! At the time I didn’t understand quite what this meant – but over the years I have come to realise that it is a fact. Because of my colleagues and my union, the railway has become my family. I’m proud that we stand by each other, right or wrong. Drivers stand united through thick and thin.

I was recently involved in an incident which resulted in my leaving the industry. I was overwhelmed by the sincere support from all of my fellow drivers and my loyal union representatives. They ensured that through it all I could stand with my head held high.

This letter is to try to express how grateful I am to everyone who has supported me and to those who never gave up on me; my colleagues who had faith in me and valued my friendship and loyalty. If I tried to thank you all individually, it would take pages of this magazine, so I won’t even try. But you all know who you are. To each of you, my sincere thanks.

Last month I went to the ‘old man’s do’ at the Exmouth pub and was very emotional when the General Secretary made me a

### HOUSE OF LORDS NEEDS REFORM

I saw the article from John Monks in the September Journal but I think the House of Lords must be reformed. I’m sure many peers will breathe a sigh of relief not having to put ‘one’s job’ in the hands of the electorate. Tony Benn once said the Lords existed so that the leaders of political parties could have power over their MPs.

Jack Jones was a good model. He remained true to his class and turned down the offer of a peerage when Harold Wilson offered him one.

The failure of Lords reform means that people like Lord Archer can still vote on issues that affect us all even though he was imprisoned for perjury. And it’s hard to believe that David Cameron wants to reform a system when his father-in-law is a baron! Who wants to fall out with the wife’s dad?

P. Begley, retired member, Bedford

Jack Jones turned down a peerage
The ASLEF JOURNAL

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Whole passenger drivers improve standards, freight drivers plod around in unlit, unsafe yards with uniforms and kit that aren’t fit for purpose. Our training, refresher days, safety briefs and pnb facilities are a thing of the past. Our reps are suspended and ignored.

We are told our aspirations are

unattainable, we can’t use our procedure agreements in case it upsets management and we’re forced to compromise on safety. We’ve become driver/shunter/fitter/dogs bodies in the name of flexibility and keeping contracts.

ASLEF is losing membership and seems to be happy to get rid of the problems, saying ‘you know what you signed up for, and move to a passenger TOC if you’re not happy.’

We have to deal with freight’s problems by being the drivers and forcing up their personal standards. Let’s change things for the better, and not give up in the name of flexibility.

John Mullen, Driver, Carlisle

Freight drivers’ personal standards

I’ve been an ASLEF member for 32 years and I’m writing to you about freight drivers’ standards.

Over the last few years I’ve watched freight drivers’ terms and conditions being eroded in the name of flexibility, contracts and saving jobs. In my opinion this has had a detrimental effect on drivers and the personal standards they are supposed to accept while doing their job.

The mavericks used to be a minority, but now they are a majority and we need ASLEF from the General Secretary down to lead from the front. Let’s get behind freight drivers, get round the depot and branches and listen to them. Let’s stop allowing management to hide behind flexibility, contracts and the credit crunch.

ASLEF should be improving our personal standards. We freight drivers think we have a two-tier workforce with passenger drivers conditions, workplace environment, uniform and kit all miles better than ours.

While passenger drivers improve standards, freight drivers plod around in unlit, unsafe yards with uniforms and kit that aren’t fit for purpose. Our training, refresher days, safety briefs and pnb facilities are a thing of the past. Our reps are suspended and ignored.

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John Mullen, Driver, Carlisle

No NXEA privs

I would like to ask the Society to come to the aid of the retired members of what used to be NXEA.

When I retired I was allowed to keep my staff pass which allowed me free travel on any train where the company went. When the new company took over the first thing they did was to stop issuing those passes.

As NX had the franchise taken away by the government, I think this is an intolerable situation. Paying for fares which were free under NX, simply because of a government decree, is a disgrace.

We retired drivers need ASLEF’s assistance.

D. David Pizzie, retired driver, (disgruntled)

PUBLIC RAIL IS POPULAR, SO WHY IS LABOUR DITHERING?

The two-page Journal article (October 2012 edition) on bringing the rail industry back into public control more than adequately sums up the various stances being adopted by those for and against re-nationalisation.

I was, however, left puzzled by the remarks from Labour’s Maria Eagle, who detailed many of the many failings of the franchising process, but absolutely failed to state any support for putting rail back into public control. To be perfectly blunt, it’s only the minority parties of the Left and the Green Party who currently support our campaign for public ownership.

When asked about re-nationalisation at Labour’s conference, there was much squirming and no commitment whatsoever from Ed Miliband.

This really is a ‘no brainer’ for Labour. Public rail is widely supported by 70% of the country, it costs nothing to implement and puts the investment where it belongs, in the industry and not in shareholders’ greedy bank accounts. Yet for whatever reason, Labour seems stuck with its fascination with the economics of the free market and privatisation that dominated the Blair/Brown governments.

John Metcalfe, Driver, Carlisle

Letters

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Aleida March was born Aleida Guevara - a surname that you can’t ignore. You might view her father, Che, as a revolutionary hero, a demented villain or simply an image on your t-shirt – but you know who he was. Che was one of the huge figures of the last century. At last month’s TUC we were offered a short interview with Aleida, Che’s eldest child who was just seven when he died in Bolivia. Chris Proctor jumped at the chance ...

OU sort-of expect Che’s daughter to be dressed in fatigues with a beret on her head like the iconic picture taken by Alberto Kordo. Instead she is a cheery vivacious woman who is instantly warm and endearing - especially when she must be asked the same questions all the time – like did your surname mean you were treated differently?

‘I was brought up as any ordinary kid. Later I realised it was something to be proud of, a rallying call in some ways. But my mother taught us that we may be offered many things in life which we had not earned ourselves, and that we must not accept anything we did not deserve.’

I ask if, because of her background, Aleida hadn’t thought of being a politician.

‘I always wanted to be a doctor, like my father. I love it. I felt I was loved by the Cuban people and I'd done nothing to deserve it. So I looked for some way to repay them. Being a doctor is serving my people.

‘I have also been with Cuban medical teams in Nicaragua and Angola and worked with the landless in Brazil.’

She laughs and says, ‘I’ll tell you a funny story. When I got back from Nicaragua in the 80s, I went to Moa, a mining town in the east of Cuba. I realised that my father is thought of as something of a god there because of the work he did for them when he was the industry minister. A bus driver recognised me and asked where I was going. ‘Get on board. I’ll take you!’ he said. When I said it wasn’t on the route, he said, ‘That’s OK. This is your bus!’

Aleida’s usual affability disappears when she speaks of the 50–year trade boycott by the United States that includes medical supplies. ‘I treated a girl of eight for internal bleeding and I knew that there was a medicine in the United States that could have helped her. We had the money to buy it, but no one would supply it. If a company had sold it to us, the US government would have fined them. I find that foolish to think that one man can constrain a whole people.

‘You have only to look at the May Day celebrations when practically the whole island is out on the streets. It is silly to think they are coerced!’

I remind her that her father had written about the time during the Cuban revolution when he had to choose between being a doctor and a soldier. ‘Yes, Fidel mentioned that I could face the same predicament between medicine and politics. But happily I have not had that problem. I work in a hospital in Havana where I’m allowed certain time off for events and activities, but I’m still a member of staff.’

Aleida then gives me a language lesson in ‘being American’. This is because I ask if she harbours resentment against the Americans. ‘But I am American!’ she says. ‘We are all Americans from Canada to the south of Chile. It is just that you have no word for ‘a citizen of the United States’.

She says that anyway, Cubans can tell the difference between the US people and the activities of their government. ‘We welcome US people and empathise with them. We had 8,000 trained medical staff all ready to go to New Orleans when it was struck by Hurricane Katrina. But we were refused entry. The US government thought if it accepted Cuban help it would demonstrate how our public health care had developed. So they turned down our offer to help the sick.’

At the end of our talk I can’t help but laugh as I tell her this is the first time that anyone I have interviewed has stroked my arm and run her fingers through my hair. She thinks this is very funny. ‘I know you English stand a few metres away from each other,’ she says. ‘But this is what we do in Cuba. We touch people.’

Yes, I think. Yes. You do.

ASLEF is affiliated to the Cuba Solidarity Campaign who organised Aleida’s visit. For more information or for branch affiliations contact campaigns@cuba-solidarity.org.uk

ASLEF’s general secretary and national organiser met Che’s daughter at the TUC conference
Prize Crossword No. 79 set by Zebedee

Across
1 Take a casual interest (in) (6)
4 Satirise (4,2)
8 A rowdy party (7)
10 Inquiry; search (5)
11 Leap; rubbish-bin (4)
12 Raider (8)
14 Abandoned baby (9)
18 Test (of e.g. actor for job) (8)
20 Cross-dressed pantomime role (4)
22 Energy; phase of water (5)
23 Citizen army (7)
24 Modest; coy (6)
25 Coloured pencil (6)

Down
1 Cease (from) (6)
2 Landowner’s steward (7)
3 Simple board game (4)
5 Stress (8)
6 The Mystery of Edwin (Dickens) (5)
7 Literature written in a rhythmical style (6)
9 Where a soldier may be when under arrest (9)
13 Patron (of a shop) (8)
15 Frightful; pallid (7)
16 Serried ranks (6)
17 Keep in one’s possession (6)
19 Night-time fantasy (5)
21 Indistinct view (4)

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

Solution to prize crossword No 78 which appeared in the October 2012 edition of the ASLEF Journal

Congratulations to Mr L. Belton from Manchester

Down: 1 Lowly, 2 Isomers, 3 EWW, 5 Archetype, 6 Snuff, 7 Ringlet, 8 Mother-in-law, 12 Dedicatee, 14 Yardarm, 16 Regimen, 18 Boost, 20 Rangy, 23 Boa.

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