Is this the Command Paper’s vision for the future of rail?

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Scotland: English-bashing or independence?
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727 Washwood Heath Road, Birmingham, B8 2LE
HE folly of railway finances was nowhere more evident last month than when Network Rail was fined £5 million for its failings over the Grayrigg derailment and the Elsenham crossing tragedy. Our President Alan Donnelly joined other union members protesting at this foolishness outside Preston Crown Court.

I find it appalling that money is taken away from the body entrusted with ensuring line and signalling safety – and in the process limiting work that could usefully be carried out – while those senior managers responsible walk away without a stain on their working record.

If one of our members was guilty of a breach of safety regulations, he or she would be penalised, perhaps dismissed. Yet Network Rail managers blithely admit their guilt for what the rail regulator described as ‘a preventable incident’ saying, ‘It was clear that the infrastructure was at fault and we accept responsibility.’ And then – nothing. That’s it as far as they are concerned. At the same time if one of our members passes a signal at danger, he or she will be personally held responsible. It is clearly unjust.

All these fines do is impose more cuts in Network Rail’s budget: which in turn means our railway infrastructure is further endangered.

That is why I urge all our members within Greater London to make sure they register a vote in the election for London mayor on 3 May; and for all our sakes, to put their cross next to the name of Ken Livingstone.

Mick Whelan,
General Secretary
Railway congestion makes union case

The chief executive of Network Rail has told the Commons transport committee that some of the UK railways are ‘as congested as the M25’. Sir David Higgins said that with 12 different rail operators using the West Coast Main Line, congestion was inevitable.

He told the committee that to hit 92% punctuality on long-distance routes, it would be necessary to regulate other services, a move that could come ‘at the expense of commuters’.

ASLEF general secretary Mick Whelan says that in view of this admission, the government should agree with the union’s view that high speed rail track should be extended to run from London to Scotland.

‘It also confirms our view that the McNulty report into rail is essentially superficial. It pokes around in the detail of existing systems, rather than seeking to provide genuine solutions to real problems like track congestion.’

Monument to Bethnal Green dead begins

Work has begun on a permanent monument to the 173 people, including 62 children, who died in the Bethnal Green tube disaster of 3 March 1943.

People rushed to enter the station after hearing war-time air-raid sirens and many were crushed after falling.

Tragically, it turned out to be a test. Now the Stairway to Heaven charity is producing a permanent memorial. Most costs are covered but the charity says it still needs £60,000 to complete the work.

Regional pay ‘could take £1.7 billion from local economies’

As the government threatens to impose regional pay onto public servants, the TUC has warned that the plans could

- drive down wages in the poorest areas of the country
- take billions out of local economies and
- accelerate the growing north-south divide.

The TUC says if these plans to hold back pay go ahead it will place a real strain on family finances and force them to spend less money in local shops and businesses, hitting the private sector hard.

It argues that reducing public sector wages by 1% would hit local economies by at least £1.7 billion a year, taking for example £200m out of the North West economy. Reducing public sector wages would hit local businesses and lead to more business failures and job losses,’ says TUC leader Brendan Barber.

The argument that nationally agreed public sector pay deprives the private sector is utterly refuted. The TUC says that the North East, the region with the lowest overall wages and therefore the cheapest place to recruit, also has the highest unemployment rate.

Brendan Barber insists, ‘Doctors’, nurses’ and teachers’ pay should be set by the job they are doing – rather than how wealthy their local area is.’

Network Rail fine ‘meaningless’

Mick Whelan says that the £1 million fine imposed on Network Rail because of the deaths of two school-girls at Elsenham station footpath crossing in Essex in 2005 is ‘meaningless’ because all it does, in effect, is to make less money available to ensure safe track and signalling.

‘The deaths of Olivia Bazlinton, 14, and Charlotte Thompson, 13 will long remain in our memories,’ Mick says. ‘But the fact is that a fine does, in effect, is to make less money available to ensure safe track and signalling.

‘Because Network Rail is a not-for-profit organisation, its shareholders do not suffer. Its managers do not suffer. In fact, only the travelling public is affected because there is less money to keep our railways safe.’

Mick says that until individuals are held accountable for safety failures, there is no compelling motivation for improvements. ‘We need to examine this whole situation carefully to ensure that the guilty, rather than the innocent, are punished,’ he says. ‘Merely shunting money from government to Network Rail back to government is meaningless.’

Judge David Turner QC at Chelmsford Crown Court concluded that there was a clear history of inadequate risk assessment and a failure to heed and act upon relevant information.

‘Narrow thinking, culpable corporate blindness and a complacency going beyond merely inefficient incompetency to entering the realm of criminal failure.

‘Surely if a judge is talking about “criminal failure”, it is only reasonable to define where that criminality lay – and to act accordingly,’ Mick Whelan says.

Mick Whelan found time to brief a visiting delegation of Chinese trade unionists on the UK rail system when they visited the UK last month. At the union’s St John Street head office, Mick welcomed group leader Qi Yonghong, who is the Chairman of the Kunming municipal federation of trade unions, along with union officials from the Wuhua and Panlong districts.

‘It was a useful and informative discussion,’ Mick says. ‘Whenever I meet union officials from other countries, I always feel that while our systems may be radically different, our basic goals are the same.’
More Boris bungling on driverless trains

Conservative candidate Boris Johnson has released his manifesto to remain Mayor of London. In it he continues with what Mick Whelan describes as his ‘increasingly paranoid sabre-rattling’ against trade unions. Mr Johnson says he won’t buy any new Tube trains with drivers’ cabs— and he wants even more stringent strike laws to prevent any union action objecting to his plans to introduce driverless trains.

‘Boris is allowing his own deeply ingrained prejudices to affect the safety of millions of Tube passengers,’ Mick says. ‘The travelling public is not interested in the Mayor’s dislike of trade unions or his violent objections to any challenge to his authoritarian views. They want a safe underground system.

Ken pledges are ‘reasons to vote Labour Mayor’

Mick Whelan says that the six key pledges from Labour’s London Mayoral candidate Ken Livingstone are ‘half a dozen more good reasons for Londoners to vote Labour in the May election.’

Labour Leader Ed Miliband stressed that central to Ken’s campaign is ‘to reduce the burden on London’s fare payers, across rail, tube, bus, tram and DLR.’ He said it would ‘make a real difference to the lives of millions of people across the capital by cutting the cost of living and putting money back into Londoner’s pockets and purses.’ The difference over fares between Ken and Boris Johnson was, he added, ‘unbridgeable.’ Ken will cut the fares, Boris Johnson has raised them above inflation every year in the toughest possible times.

The six Labour pledges are to:

- cut fares by 7% this year – saving the average Londoner £1,000 over four years
- introduce a London Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) of up to £30 a week to help young people stay in education
- reverse Boris Johnson’s police cuts and restore local sergeants
- introduce driverless trains onto the Underground is utterly ridiculous.
- help reduce rents and improve homes with a London non-profit Lettings agency
- tackle heating bills – through insulation

‘If he had not refused to meet the unions throughout his first—and hopefully final—term of office, we could have explained the obvious to him: that to introduce driverless trains onto our current network with its constant signal and points failures would be nothing less than murderous. To leave the whole system dependent in future on the hope that we will never have a computer failure on the Underground is utterly ridiculous.

‘And then on top of this, he attempts to make it illegal to disagree with him. May 3 will be a dark day for the capital if Boris is re-elected.’

BUY YOURSELF A STATION!

The relentless grind of advertising and sponsorship continues. We thought McDonalds sponsoring schools was as far as it could go—but now Madrid is starting to sell sponsorship rights to its stations! Is this going to happen in London? We do hope not, but Dan Milmo of the Guardian says he has a nightmare picture of the future where, ‘You’re at Oxford Phones4u Circus but need to be at South Bulgari Kensington in five minutes. What do you do? As any Bailey’s London Underground veteran will tell you, just hop on the Central Pepsi Line to We Will Rock You Holborn and get the Heinz Piccadilly Line.’

Madrid’s Puerta del Sol stop has been snapped up by Samsung in a month-long deal and renamed Sol Galaxy Note and there are strong rumours that Coca-Cola and Pepsi are considering similar deals.

CAMERON INVITED TO JOIN LIBRARY CAMPAIGN!

‘Buy your train ticket at the library or the post office.’ That is one of the messages in the government’s new plans for rail. Excellent idea? Perhaps. But like many of the government’s cunning political proclamations, it has a very obvious flaw. The government is pursuing a policy of closing libraries and shutting post offices. ‘In view of this, I am writing today to ask if Brother Cameron would like to back campaigns to oppose himself and his government, and keep libraries and post offices open,’ says Mick Whelan. ‘Logically, he should now join us in opposing public service cuts.’
World Pride comes to London

From London, the summer of 2012 is set to be one big huge celebration and none will be more colourful or more outrageous than World Pride. Unless you’ve been living in a bubble you’ll know that London was awarded the host city of the Olympics - but few people will know that it was also awarded World Pride.

From 23 June-8 July the LGBT community from across the globe will descend upon our capital city for a festival of art, culture and campaigning that will culminate with the biggest pride parade this country has ever seen on 7 July.

As well as celebrating the progress that has been made in LGBT equality, the event will have a serious side drawing attention to the countries across the world where homosexuality is still illegal and punishments range from imprisonment to the death penalty.

There are 41 in the Commonwealth alone and the campaign for the decriminalisation of homosexuality will feature strongly. To help achieve this a special World Pride Conference is being held with speakers from Jamaica, India and Kenya. Archbishop Desmond Tutu has expressed a wish to speak at this event.

As well as sending a delegation to the conference the union’s LGBT Representative Committee want to organise the biggest ASLEF turnout to a pride parade ever. They would like to invite all ASLEF members to come along and celebrate LGBT rights and show the commitment that our union has to equality.

A bus has been booked, the banners are in place, the music is ready and the cocktails are on ice! So if you’d like to join the party on 7 July and book your space on the bus, contact the union’s Equalities Advisor Lee James on ljamess@aslef.org.uk or ring her on 020 7324 2400. Spaces are limited so be quick!

Government response to school holiday plea

A letter to the Journal last month from Driver Dave Purvis of Eastleigh made the point that many drivers were unable to enjoy summer holidays with their children as they are told when to take their summer leave by their employers.

Dave also took up the matter through his MP, and has received a reply (of sorts!) from Nick Gibb MP, the Minister of State for Schools. He pointed out that ‘head teachers have the discretion to grant leave of absence in term time in exceptional circumstances’ and says the department has commissioned a review of attendance in schools which is due shortly.

‘It was nice to get a response,’ Dave says. ‘It just doesn’t seem to say anything!’

RMS 500 CLUB – READY TO EXPAND!

When the retired members’ section began the 500 Club in October 2011 we had 68 members and the prize money was £136. We have just had our sixth draw and the membership now is 108 with prize money increasing every month.

We currently have £1,234 in our fund, but for the RMS to be able to finance educational programmes and a weekend Forum we need at least 160 members.

I would say to appeal to all retired and working members to give us their support so we can continue the good work. It only costs £4 per month which can be paid by cheque or Standing Order. Forms can be obtained from Lee James, our Equalities Adviser, at Head Office.

Prize money is divided equally each month between the RMS and participants – so remember, the bigger the membership, the bigger the prizes!

- The winning number of the 500 Club draw last month was 35 and Driver C. Smith scooped the £216 prize money reports Alan Taylor of the union’s retired members’ section committee.
Whatever life throws at you
ASLEF will help to protect you.

As a ASLEF member you’re covered for:†

Free 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

ASLEF members and their families are covered for:†

Free 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.
Unsuitable gloves led to amputation

Northern Rail settled a £7,500 claim out of court last month in the case of a supervisor driver who needed to have part of his thumb amputated. It became infected by sewerage when he was provided with unsuitable safety gloves.

Darren Skelton from Wakefield ended up in hospital hooked up to an IV drip after his thumb became seriously infected. A split on the seam of a pair of fabric safety gloves left the skin exposed as he moved pipes which take away human waste from the toilet systems on trains. He needed surgery to remove part of his thumb and has been left with significantly reduced sensation and restricted movement in what has been left.

His union appointed Thompsons solicitor said staff had raised concerns about the suitability of the type of glove being used on a number of occasions but nothing was done. Staff are now provided with a latex-type glove and have been trained in which ones to use. The pipe connections are now also stored in buckets of sanitizing fluid.

Mick Whelan said every gardener or anyone who uses gloves to clean the house or the car knows not all gloves are the same. Five minutes thought about what was the best glove for the job would have avoided Mr Skelton suffering a serious infection and glove for the job would have avoided Mr Skelton suffering a serious infection and avoided surgery.

Northern Rail offered a £15,000 in compensation.

Train driver compensated for long term hearing loss

RIVER O’Callaghan from Merseyside, who had to leave the footplate for a year after his hearing was damaged by an explosion-like bang of a faulty door, has received £15,000 in compensation.

He was driving a Northern Rail train from Manchester to Liverpool at the time of the incident which left him with tinnitus in his right ear which meant he was unable to drive trains for almost a year. It began when the gangway door leading from the cab to the main part of the train burst open as he approached Trafford Park Station at 60mph.

Mr O’Callaghan tried to lock the door but the lock was faulty and it slammed again at Irland.

He was diagnosed with tinnitus - a constant ringing in his ear which can affect sleep and concentration. Happily following specialist treatment he has been able to return to full time driving duties.

ASLEF’s solicitors, Thompsons, argued that the door should have been fixed to prevent it from slamming open when the train was at speed. Northern Rail admitted liability and settled out of court.

ASLEF on Midlands and North West TUC

ASLEF’s delegation to the 2012 Midlands TUC in Birmingham consisted of Andy Botham (Derby) and Andy Wakefield (Nottingham).

The union’s motion on the implications of the McNulty report was composed with a similar motion from the RMT which heard a lively and well informed debate. Andy Bothamy was re-elected to the Midlands TUC Executive Council for the second successive year.

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新闻
Court appeals dilute the fundamental right to strike says
Gregor Gall,
Professor of Industrial Relations at the University of Hertfordshire ...

2010 was a bad year for the unions when it came to receiving justice in the capitalist courts. Readers may recall that British Airways was granted an injunction to stop cabin crew members of the Unite union from striking. Although it was later quashed on appeal, the damage to the momentum of the strike was considerable.

Months earlier ASLEF’s sister union, the RMT, was hauled over the coals by Network Rail and its strike was stopped. The ballot had to be re-run.

2011 seemed to be a better year. In March of that year, the earlier injunctions granted to London Midland (concerning ASLEF) and the Docklands Light Railway (concerning the RMT) were overturned. In the process, the Court of Appeal effectively ruled on the right to strike in these cases.

In what was welcomed by the unions at the time as an historic decision, the Court of Appeal finally recognised that common law confers no right to strike in Britain but that the European Convention on Human Rights does recognise the right to strike and Britain is contractually bound.

In particular, the courts are now instructed that they are not to invent new additional restrictions beyond those in the existing legislation. This means that the courts cannot continue to interpret and re-interpret the law so that it becomes ever tighter. Indeed, they have to look at the spirit of the law as it was passed in order to keep to the letter of the law.

Yet by the end of 2011 the decision of the earlier Court of Appeal did not look quite so historic.

TWO STEPS BACK
ASLEF was taken to court by London Underground in the final days of December. Even though the application for the injunction was refused, that London Underground decided to apply for one indicated that sufficient grounds for employers trying to get injunctions to stop strikes still remained.

There were six applications for injunctions in 2011 and four of these (including the ASLEF one) came after the Court of Appeal decision. While this was down on previous years (see Table below) and that is to be welcomed, it remains the case that employers still reach for the courts when faced with the prospect of effective industrial or strike action.

Indeed, as the Table shows employers threatening unions with the courts in a game of brinkmanship is equally widespread. The employers have the resources to see if the unions will blink first. Quite often, the unions do blink as the consequences of going ahead with a strike which can be shown to be unlawful are significant.

The rub is that employers who face industrial action but do not believe that it will in any way be effective do not bother to spend money going to court. In other words, there is a semblance of a right to strike either as long as workers do not use it or cannot make it pack a punch against their employers.

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<th>Year</th>
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STRIKES TOLERATED UNLESS THEY ARE EFFECTIVE
Take, for instance, workers in a biscuit factory. A one-day strike by them – or even a series of one-day strikes – is unlikely to have much impact on the employer’s business or become anything of a moral panic.

Why? Because there are likely to be sufficient supplies of the biscuits in the warehouse, at the distributors and on the supermarket shelves to see the employer through the action. There’s not likely to be much of a moral panic either when consumers can either buy other biscuits or go without for a few days. Biscuits are not an essential goods or service.

But it’s a completely different kettle of fish when the prospect of a transport strike takes place – especially one on the railways. This is because the strike has an immediate impact, there are seldom other substitutes or alternatives and the numbers of people affected is large.

And, of course, there is the so-called moral panic that the strike will cost businesses money and lost earnings. Well, there is if you read the Evening Standard or Daily Mail.

So the lesson is really striking is okay as long as it’s ineffective. You can now see why those unions like ASLEF, the RMT and Unite are disproportionately targeted by employers seeking injunctions when they contemplate taking industrial action.

With or without the Court of Appeal judgement, it’s not so much that there is no right to strike but no right to an effective strike.

Until there is the right in law to have an effective strike, then there will be little stimulus or reason for other workers to try to organise themselves in such an effective way as to mirror what the ASLEFs, RMTs and Unites of the union world are capable of doing.

When all is said and done, workers in Britain still need the repeal of all the Tories’ anti-strike laws from the 1980s and 1990s.
The 500 Club

Join the RMS’s new and exciting fundraising scheme

Pay a £4 stake each month and be entered into a monthly draw to be in with a chance of winning a cash prize!

Of the total monies collected 50% will help fund RMS activities and half will go back to club members as prizes.

The more members in the club, the bigger the prize!

The 500 Club is open to individuals, branches and district councils.

If you would like to join the club please contact Lee James at Head Office at ljames@aslef.org.uk or on 020 7324 2400.

WANTED

WOMEN MEMBERS interested in being sponsored to attend conferences as visitors

GET MORE INVOLVED learn more about the union and see how conferences work

UPCOMING CONFERENCES INCLUDE the unions annual conference, TUC women’s conference, labour party and TUC congress

CONTACT Wendy Hurst, Secretary of ASLEF’s women’s committee
Tel: 07788 153 932 or email wendy.hurst3@ntlworld.com

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OR you can also see us on Facebook: Now join on line @ www.repta.co.uk
Branch officers see the light in Lincolnshire!

E stepped squinting into the dazzlingly bright Grantham sunshine, eighteen train drivers from all over the UK, to make our way to Stoke Rochford Hall for the 2012 ASLEF Branch Secretaries Course.

Introductions dealt with, we were straight in to what was obviously going to be a busy week. Simon Weller, along with Marz Colombini and Nigel Gibson, led us through the structure and purpose of ASLEF, the role of individual Branches in the union, along with the administrative responsibilities of the Branch Secretary.

The course was about more than just admin training though. Guest speakers gave an insight into the ‘bigger picture’. Justice for Colombia gave a moving presentation which made clear why trade union membership should never be taken for granted. A talk from Mick Whelan, ASLEF General Secretary, left no doubt that the McNulty report is a big threat to all who work in the rail industry, and that drivers are in the cross-hairs of those in government pushing through the reforms. Reassuringly Mick demonstrated that there is a renewed determination in ASLEF to take on those who seek to devalue our profession, and that ASLEF is uniquely placed among trade unions to fight for its membership.

As we left on Thursday we did so with our eyes wide open to the challenges of the coming years and the importance of ASLEF and its individual branches in overcoming them.

Report from Jeremy Murfin, the Assistant Branch Secretary at Machynlleth

New deal DB Schenker drivers

FROM early summer to the depths of winter last year the union’s full Traincrew Council, with its Officer, regularly met DB Schenker management to discuss productivity items that would provide financial savings for the company and provide job security and financial recompense for our members on a 50/50 basis.

A lot of time and effort was put into this – and very little has emerged, reports Michael Finn.

It has become clear, however, that the current New Deal for Train Crew (NDFTC) does not meet the requirements of the company to run a constantly fluctuating timetable any more than it provides stability for drivers.

There are many reasons for this. The average turn length is too short, but the 5-hour turns have become an easy option for DBS.

Changes to the Personal Needs Break rules took a lot of unproductive hours out of diagrams but while they were initially productive, the recession then struck. Fixed rest days were agreed rather than them being based on turn length, which did benefit drivers.

But we’ve had difficulty convincing management that training will increase productivity and work allocation has been haphazard. Further, Voluntary Rest Working has now become a necessity for the running of the company. But can DBS Rail UK really run a £500 million business on volunteers? We believe it is time to review recruitment within the company - and to secure a clean pay award separate from productivity.

‘S’ STOCK TRAIN PREPARATION

ASLEF has accepted in principle LU’s proposed train prep procedure. The most significant part of the proposal is that walking times to the start point of the prep would be dependant whether the train is boarded from the front or rear cab although the train prep will always start from the back cab. Train prep times for 58 or 75’s will apply to the whole of the SSR irrespective of depot or siding location. Discussions are ongoing on the next step, which is to enter into detailed discussions on what goes into the train prep procedure.

ASSISTED DESPATCH/STOPPING SHORT OF THE STOPPING MARK

Some of you may have noticed in Traffic Circular No 8 that ‘The rules for assisting train operators to safely despatch their trains only apply where a train is departing a station. Assisted despatch is not required where a train stops short of the normal stopping mark on entering a station. Depending on the cause of the train stopping short the appropriate rules should be followed, informing the controller if required and the train operator should then fully berth the train and carry out platform duties.’ This was the result of a debate at our Council where it became obvious that different rules were being taught with regard to stopping short of the stopping mark. This rule will now apply throughout London Underground.

TRAINING OF NEW ENTRANTS TO TRAIN OPERATOR GRADE

We wrote to the Office of the Rail Regulator about the poor state of this new, condensed training course. At a Directors Meeting last month management admitted to mistakes with the first batch of courses and agreed entirely with the shortcomings we had cited. They also undertook to monitor the progress of drivers who had undergone this course.

IMAGE ASSURANCE - IN-CAB PTI SYSTEMS

The Safety Director agreed to a ‘without commitment’ joint review of this issue. Our aim is to establish the best practices of existing stocks that already have in-cab PTI equipment and propose their use on new trains. There is currently no method of assurance for the ‘S’ Stock on the Metropolitan Line and we believe this should be the first train to receive improvements.

New deal DB Schenker drivers

FROM early summer to the depths of winter last year the union’s full Traincrew Council, with its Officer, regularly met DB Schenker management to discuss productivity items that would provide financial savings for the company and provide job security and financial recompense for our members on a 50/50 basis.

A lot of time and effort was put into this – and very little has emerged, reports Michael Finn.

It has become clear, however, that the current New Deal for Train Crew (NDFTC) does not meet the requirements of the company to run a constantly fluctuating timetable any more than it provides stability for drivers.

There are many reasons for this. The average turn length is too short, but the 5-hour turns have become an easy option for DBS.

Changes to the Personal Needs Break rules took a lot of unproductive hours out of diagrams but while they were initially productive, the recession then struck. Fixed rest days were agreed rather than them being based on turn length, which did benefit drivers.

But we’ve had difficulty convincing management that training will increase productivity and work allocation has been haphazard. Further, Voluntary Rest Working has now become a necessity for the running of the company. But can DBS Rail UK really run a £500 million business on volunteers? We believe it is time to review recruitment within the company - and to secure a clean pay award separate from productivity.

‘S’ STOCK TRAIN PREPARATION

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Last month the government introduced a Command Paper to announce its plans for the railways, following the McNulty Report into the cost of UK Rail. Formally it is called ‘Reforming our Railways: Putting the Customer First’ and it sets out the government’s plans to drive through cost reductions of £3.5bn by 2018/19. The union has been busy assembling allies to lobby against many aspects of the proposals. The ‘top ten’ points we have argued are that

- The McNulty review was too limited in its scope
- There is no case or cause for trying to reduce labour costs
- Vertical integration is a flawed concept
- The development of freight must be encouraged and developed
- Passengers want to see staff on stations
- The idea of less regulation and control over TOCs is folly
- Fares must be affordable and simple to understand
- Safety is not negotiable and must remain our top priority
- Rolling stock procurement needs to be re-examined
- We must look again at the ownership of the railways

Save Our Railways campaign launched

The rail unions, along with the TUC and transport pressure groups, launched ‘Save Our Railways’ in Parliament on 20 March. The venue was chosen to bring the issue to the attention of national politicians and to explain the campaign aims to stave off the excesses of the government’s Command Paper on Rail and to make the case for a publicly owned and accountable rail service.

Mick Whelan, ASLEF’s general secretary, insisted that the government was embarking on a ‘sticking plaster solution’ with no concept of a long term strategy or vision for rail. He regretted that the opportunity to look at the industry dispassionately had been ignored.

‘Franchising and privatisation have been discredited as faulty models,’ Mick declared. ‘One has led to the fragmentation of our industry and the second has deprived it of investment. Why are our fares more expensive than on Continental Europe? Because they invest in their railways while our system creams off profits into the bank accounts of private investors.’

Mick insisted that staff cuts were wrong because ‘passengers prefer to talk to people than machines they don’t trust’, and that ‘alliancing’ was a new term for the old concept of having rail safety directed by the profit motive – a discredited system which had led directly to Potters Bar and Hatfield.

Frances O’Grady, deputy leader of the TUC, stressed the need for an alliance of ‘everyone concerned with the industry, including unions, passenger groups, local communities, local government, transport lobbying groups and politicians at every level.

‘We cannot leave rail to the ‘magic of the market’ as the Tories see it,’ she said. ‘The Command Paper is an attempt to save costs by introducing unproven and untested theories.’

Bob Crow said the RMT would continue to argue for a railway that was owned and controlled by the public. He declared that the only place TOCs invested willingly was in car parks where they could charge outrageous prices!

Manuel Cortes of the TSSA was followed by speakers from Unite, the Campaign for Better Transport and Maria Eagle, the Shadow transport minister.

‘Today has been the start of a campaign that is vital for the future of rail in the UK,’ Mick said at the end of the meeting. ‘The alternative is the vision of the previous Tory transport minister Philip Hammond: ‘a rich man’s toy’.

Save Our Rail was launched with Bob Crow (RMT), Frances O’Grady (TU C)’s top ten cam paigning points

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- We must look again at the ownership of the railways
The Command Paper calls for a more ‘cost-effective’ approach to safety. The obvious danger is that infrastructure management could be subordinated to commercial interests.

Cost efficiency is not of itself a risk to safety but in the context of ‘deep alliancing’ and vertical integration it is a serious concern to those who are familiar with recent disasters in our rail industry.

The Command Paper wants government to have less say in how rail is run, which is why it proposes devolving more accountability and decision-making to the train operators and local authorities.

The railway is a vital national service delivering economic, social and environmental benefits. It is abrogating central government responsibilities to champion foolish fragmentation.

The Command Paper claims to support rail freight growth, recognising its value in economic, environmental and safety terms. But its perusing of vertical integration is a huge threat and works directly against this stated aim. If passenger operators run the track, freight will inevitably become the poor relation.

The development of freight must be encouraged and developed

The Command Paper wants to take staff off stations and trains, to save money. It would drive customers away. Endless surveys show that ‘personal security’ and ‘availability of staff’ are two of the worst three areas of passenger satisfaction at stations. A sense of safety is vital to our industry. To diminish it in any way would lead to rail becoming less attractive – and profitable.

The idea of less regulation and control over TOCs is folly

under public ownership, the current national, not-for-dividend model is the most efficient way to manage the infrastructure. It provides economies of scale, an integrated approach and priorities investment in safety and maintenance.

We believe that ‘alliances’ and other ‘vertical integration’ models that introduce the profits motive into rail safety are morally and practically wrong. Regional Railtracks would pose a major threat to safety and maintenance.

The Command Paper’s proposals for a blank piece of paper – and I want you to play your part in making it a manifesto for the first-class rail system that the public deserves.’

But Ed said that it was wrong for public money to support train companies during loss making periods while taxpayers benefit little in profitable times.

Mick Whelan told Ed he could depend on hearing ASLEF’s views ‘loud, clear – and often’
Government rail restructuring threatens signals at red for freight

warns Philippa Edmunds, the Manager of the Freight on Rail campaign …

THE Rail Command Paper outlines plans for rail freight in paragraph 3.15. It says, ‘One of the key future roles of the existing rail network will be to continue to support the growth of freight services, particularly for inter-modal containers. Our strategy is set out in the department’s Strategic Rail Freight Network policy. We aim to fund a targeted programme of investment designed to make the best use of the existing rail infrastructure and to support continued private sector investment in the industry. Where there is a business case, and subject to affordability, we propose to increase network capacity to accommodate forecast freight growth. H52 will also release capacity on the existing network to enable more freight services to operate.’

This appears to offer strong support for rail freight’s value in economic, environmental and safety terms. On the other hand, plans to trial full vertical integration within the privatised model would be highly damaging. It raises fundamental questions on how services would be prioritised if the TOCs were in charge, conjuring up images of intermodal freight trains sitting at red signals waiting to come out of Southampton and Felixstowe Docks.

On the positive side, the Paper sets the scene for funding in the next rail spending round (HLOS) by recognising that to thrive and grow, rail freight needs the expansion of the Strategic Freight Network - including diversionary routes, gauge and capacity upgrades. It also highlights the need for the right planning policies to get terminals of all sizes and the need for protection of strategic freight capacity.

However, vertical integration in the privatised railway is a huge threat to rail freight. A fragmented model with more interfaces is no use for rail freight. Under the present model, separation of track and train must be retained to avoid passenger operators being put in charge of the track. The competition – road freight - does not face these complicated structures which will make it more difficult for rail to compete.

Singling out Anglia routes for vertical integration tests is very worrying for freight given the importance of freight services out of Felixstowe to the economy. Changes which could threaten performance and thus the value of the FOCs to supply reliable services to their customers could be very damaging to rail freight. In some parts of the country this model could lead to conflicts of interest. The proposals for the Wessex franchise could be equally worrying for Southampton port.

It is therefore disappointing that Government is to continue to support trials of full vertical integration, going much further than the ‘alliancing’ proposals - which themselves risk more interfaces and fragmentation.

The report considers a number of alternative structures for the infrastructure and train operator integration. The third option states that there is an option ‘to place responsibility for train operations and infrastructure management in an area in the same hands (table 4.1 paragraph 4.6). Later, the Report states ‘we agree that vertical integration could offer promising benefits in the longer term (paragraph 4.27).

This privatised model of vertical integration could reintroduce all the issues of unfair competition, as well as potentially put one government-funded train operator in charge of capacity allocation – something that current European and UK legislation is designed to avoid.

Although third parties have the ability to appeal to ORR in certain cases, an approach which relies on appeals and arbitration is unlikely to deliver the service which freight needs.

Regulatory protections for freight

The Command Paper says on page 45, ‘Both Government and the ORR are determined that any changes proposed to the structure of the industry continue to protect the interests of freight and other operators on the network.’

We believe it remains crucial that the system operator - Network Rail - keeps all the timetabling, possessions and maintenance planning central. A key question is at what level in the chain of these operations are responsibilities devolved locally.

OTHER RELATED ISSUES

Other issues of concern raised in the Command Paper include:

- Rail devolution consultation
  Questions remain on how to manage a devolved structure and what features would be retained centrally. At the moment devolution relates to specifying franchises. However were the DfT to start talking about devolving the network grant that is potentially serious for freight.

- Alliancing
  Although the proposals for Stagecoach South Western Trains consultation do not constitute vertical integration, it clearly moves in that direction and risks splitting up the national railway network resulting in more interfaces.

  It is vital that the DfT understands fully what is needed to protect rail freight interests. That is why Freight on Rail is organising meetings with the Department and other bodies to highlight the need to safeguard freight’s interests.

- More information about the work of Freight on Rail (to which ASLEF is affiliated along with DB Schenker, Freightliner, Direct Rail Services, RMT, TSSA, UNITE, Rail Freight Group and Campaign for Better Transport) can be found at the campaign’s website at www.freightonrail.org.uk
Training to offer positive trauma support

Sixteen ASLEF reps and two managers met last month in the relaxed and well-equipped surrounds of Virgin’s Talent Academy in Crewe to consider how to offer practical support to drivers who have suffered traumatic incidents.

The aims of the day-long course were to ensure we could all
- Identify what trauma is
- Understand why people react differently to traumatic events
- Provide first aid in emotional support to colleagues; and
- Consider individual coping strategies

HIS was the latest stage in a process that began in Derby, where last year the union and East Midlands Trains began positive and innovative work on aspects of safety work. They joined forces with the Samaritans and from this was borne a series of courses that will offer training to all ASLEF representatives on trauma support after an accident.

On average there are 200 suicides each year on the railway. We often call the driver ‘the forgotten victim’ of these incidents. The programme, organised for the union by ASLEF Education, is aimed at equipping all ASLEF reps to offer positive support to drivers involved in traumatic incidents.

‘In the past the approach has been well-meaning but amateur. Today we hope to make sure it is concerned and professional,’ said the tutor, Steve Tollerton, who works for the Samaritans.

The day-long course that all ASLEF reps will be offered was developed from talking to drivers and others in the industry, which ensures its relevance. We began with the fact that every time a driver is involved in a fatality on the line, they ask themselves the same question. ‘Could I have stopped it happening?’

Some of the reactions were quite startling, like the fact that he could recall in vivid detail the exact actions of the person committing suicide and even her clothes and shoes: which is quite remarkable given that he was driving at speed. Remarkably as well, he began to see in black-and-white, a condition that reversed only after he had some reassurance that he had done everything he could to prevent the death. This, Steve said is not unusual: the body shuts down unnecessary functions during a traumatic incident.

One common reaction is an almost obsessive concern that the driver sounded the horn. To non-drivers, this seems an irrelevance. No one is going to change their mind about committing suicide because they hear a train horn: but the drivers on the course identified with this right away. ‘This is how we are trained. We know how to react to situations.’

As we examined the case we began to see the huge array of people who are affected – family, track workers, victim’s family, managers, witnesses, fellow workers – and how easy it is to say something inappropriate or insensitive and what emotions the driver could be feeling.

SAME JOB, DIFFERENT PEOPLE

Our starting point was a true and detailed account by a driver who had experienced a fatality. It was a fruitful beginning, because it raised a host of questions and observations. We began to see how it affected this particular driver and how he reacted to others around him.

This is important, Steve says, to discover how the driver may be thinking, because we need to know this before we can offer constructive help. Effective ‘first aid’ can release pressure and help trauma victims to regain their perspective. We were also tutored in how to listen, when to encourage or even repeat what is being said to us.

All in all, we’ve come a long way since the only advice after a fatality was someone in the mess-room telling us to ‘get over it,’ pull yourself together’ or ‘don’t let it get to you’. And hopefully we will have moved much further down this road when all our reps have taken advantage of this course.

It’s a challenging day, but it’s always interesting and if you get a tutor like Steve it can also be very enjoyable. And it is definitely worthwhile.

Report by Chris Proctor
Israel is using rail to entrench illegal occupations

reports Hugh Lanning, Deputy General Secretary of the PCS union and Chair of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign ...

In 1967, Israel illegally occupied the Palestinian West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. Ever since, illegal Israeli settlements have been constructed, which now house over 500,000 Israeli settlers. Israeli-only roads and the Wall have carved up the territory, seizing more Palestinian land and destroying Palestinian communities. Now Israel is also using rail projects to facilitate its illegal land-grabs and its control over Palestinians living under its occupation ...

The Jerusalem Light Rail system is linking illegal Israeli settlements in Occupied East Jerusalem to West Jerusalem. It is a key element of Israel’s infrastructure projects to cement its hold on occupied East Jerusalem, tie the settlements even more firmly into the State of Israel, and attempt to make Israel’s illegal annexation of Palestinian East Jerusalem irreversible. Construction began in October in 2006 and the first of its lines is already open.

The strengthening of the occupation through rail has not stopped in Jerusalem. The Israeli minister of transportation, Yisrael Katz, plans to build a railway throughout the West Bank in an attempt to normalize and legitimise Israel’s hold on occupied East Jerusalem, and join us in building the new anti-Apartheid state of Israel. This illegal annexation is not recognised by the international community but the impact of this occupation is huge on the Palestinian population. Since 1967 Israeli authorities have removed the right to live in Jerusalem from at least 14,000 Palestinians born and raised in the city. The EU Heads of Mission have identified that the motivation of the Israelis is ‘demographic’ - ‘to reduce the Palestinian population of Jerusalem’. This is an apartheid policy as all Jews and Israeli citizens can settle in Jerusalem without restriction, regardless of any former ties to the city.

WHY SHOULD TRADE UNIONISTS SUPPORT PALESTINIAN RIGHTS?

GAZA
Life under occupation is brutal. For the 1.6 million Palestinians who live in the Gaza Strip, they live under Israeli’s blockade, in the rubble of homes destroyed during Israel’s last assault in 2008/9, with constant shortages of medicine and electricity. They are denied basic freedoms that we take for granted – the right to travel, to work, even to clean water – 90% of Gaza’s water is contaminated.

WEST BANK
For the 2.5 million Palestinians living in the West Bank, occupation means negotiating checkpoints simply to get to work and school. Since Israel illegally occupied the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in 1967, it has cemented its occupation. Palestinian land has been systematically seized to build the Wall which cuts deep into the West Bank, Israeli military bases and even a network of Israeli-only roads, which Palestinians are prevented from travelling on. Over half a million Israelis now live in the illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which control over 40 per cent of that occupied Palestinian land.

JERUSALEM
Jerusalem used to be a city where the three faiths lived peacefully side-by-side. When the state of Israel was declared the United Nations declared Jerusalem an international zone. However, most of the territory was claimed by Israel. In 1967 they occupied what remained - East Jerusalem. This illegal annexation is not recognised by the international community but the impact of this occupation is huge on the Palestinian population. Since 1967 Israeli authorities have removed the right to live in Jerusalem from at least 14,000 Palestinians born and raised in the city, according the UN. The EU Heads of Mission have identified that the motivation of the Israelis is ‘demographic’ - ‘to reduce the Palestinian population of Jerusalem’. This is an apartheid policy as all Jews and Israeli citizens can settle in Jerusalem without restriction, regardless of any former ties to the city.

PALESTINIAN REFUGEES
Seventy per cent of Palestinians live as refugees or internally displaced persons, and although this process started in 1948, Palestinians are still being removed from their homes and land today. Tens of thousands of Palestinian citizens of Israel are currently facing forcible removal from their lands in the Negev.

We urge all branches and districts to affiliate to the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and join us in building the new anti-Apartheid movement – for freedom, peace and justice for Palestinians.

For more information about the Palestine Solidarity Campaign please visit www.palestinecampaign.org
ROY CROSS A MAN OF MANY PARTS
It is with regret that I have to report the passing away in his 80th year of Brother Roy Cross who was originally from Frodingham depot.

Born in 1932, Roy left school at the age of 14, starting his railway career as an ‘oiler’ with the nick-name ‘Fat Lad’! He became a permanent passed cleaner within a week of passing out, before passing as a fireman and eventually a driver.

Roy remained at Frodingham for most of his time on the railway until a few years close to retirement.

It was a bit of a shock to us all when he transferred to Bridlington depot on the east Yorkshire coast and I believe he lived in Scarborough until a year ago when he became ill with cancer and returned to his home town in Scunthorpe where his children live.

He was at one time a keen radio operator, talking to people all over the world and teaching himself Russian, becoming quite fluent.

Being a true railwayman his main hobby was, of course, steam railways. For many years was a member of the North Yorkshire Moors Railway Preservation Society and he spent many a weekend driving steam as well as diesel locos and becoming a steam traction inspector. As far as I know Roy and his son Steve (a Doncaster driver manager) were second and third generation railwaymen.

Roy’s wife sadly passed away several years ago but is succeeded as well as Steve by two daughters. Our heartfelt condolences go out to them.

Rest in peace Brother. May you fund a full head of steam on your journey.

David A. Doherty, Immingham

KENNETH WILLIAM CHARLES WEST A LIFE ON THE RAILS
I have to report the sad death of retired member Driver Ken West at the age of 82. Born in 1929, Ken joined the Isle of Wight Railway as an Engine Cleaner at Newport Shed when he was just 14 years old. He progressed to Fireman and worked all the lines from Newport until 1957 when he transferred to Ryde and worked the 02 Class engine No. 24 ‘Calbourne’.

Ken drove the last train on the Cowes to Newport Line on 19 February 1966 when it was closed. He was the first person to drive electric trains on 21 March 1967 on the Ryde – Shanklin line, as well as being the first driver to stop at the newly opened Smallbrook Junction Station on 21 July 1991. He retired in September 1993.

Ken then volunteered to work at Isle of Wight Steam Railway where he was reunited with his beloved and preserved ‘Calbourne’. In August 2001 Ken was given special permission to welcome HRH The Duke of Edinburgh for a ride on the footplate when HM The Queen visited the Lottery-funded Coach Restoration Shed at the Isle of Wight steam railway.

We offer our sympathies to Ken’s wife Margaret, their children Elizabeth and Paul, and Ken’s four grandchildren.

Al Martin, Portsmouth & IOW Branch

TWO KINGS CROSS DRIVERS MOURNED
It is with sadness that I inform colleagues of the passing of two of Kings Cross’ finest - Fred Murray (at the age of 79) and Les Pretym an (who was 77). Unfortunately I was unable to get to Fred’s funeral, but I treasure the memories of working with him when two drivers worked the main line. Some of the lads’ did manage to turn out to pay their respects and support Fred’s family on this sad day.

I was able to get to Les’s funeral, where I was pleased to see ‘the speed bird boys’ had gathered to pay their respects. I say ‘speed bird boys’ as, like many of his friends and colleagues, Les had an active interest in aircraft. It was fitting that those who travelled around the globe with him in pursuit of the elusive planes were there to see him make his final landing and to support his family on this sad occasion. I have my own fond memories of my time with him working the main line. May they both RIP.

Peter Smith, Reporter, Retired Members Section

DAVE PARRY ONLY 58 YEARS OLD
Dave Parry died in early March after a short illness. Dave was only 58 when he died.

He had retired from Central Trains just under five years ago when the change in franchise brought us London Midland. He started his career at Saltley depot in the late 70’s and progressed from secondman to passed man and on to driver in the 1980’s. With the move of the passenger work in the later part of the last century to Birmingham New Street, he moved here with many others.

A quiet man who kept himself to himself he was an avid Birmingham City (Blues) fan and was also a supporter of Welsh Rugby. He is survived by his wife of 15 years, Linda. May he rest in peace.

Martin Bromage-Griffiths, Reporter, Birmingham New Street branch

FOUR DRIVERS MOURNED AT SALTLEY
It is with great sadness that I give notice that the following four drivers have passed away:

Jack Beanmen, who after retirement spent a great deal of his time at the Severn Valley railway. Howard Jones (84) who started on the Welsh Valleys before moving to Tedbury near Kemble as a fireman. He then moved to Tyseley and then to Saltley. Howard also instructed at Birmingham New Street Road Learning School. Away from the railway he served as a JP and was a member of the MAS committee for 37 years. Norman Reynolds (81) was a true Brum mie. He started at Tyseley, moved to Saltley and finished at Tyseley. He was very active as the secretary of Boardslay BRSA. Dave Parry (57) was Saltley through and through. Dave enjoyed rugby, watching his horses and a lot more.

All these drivers will be sadly missed by their families, loved ones, friends and work colleagues. May they RIP.

Adrian Harnett, Secretary, Saltley branch

ADRIAN BARTLETT WELL LIKED AND RESPECTED
It is with great sadness that on behalf of the Leytonstone branch I inform you of the passing of Brother Adrian Bartlett at the age of 55. Adrian, a well-liked member of this branch and indeed the whole of the Central Line, was a member of our ‘White City Breakfast Club’. He worked at Hainault for over ten years, having joined LUL in the early ‘90s from London buses where he was a mechanic.

Adrian, a single man with no children, lived with his brother and mother until her passing last August. He had been suffering from cancer for the past year and passed peacefully at the Farley Hospice in Witham.

Adrian mainly worked on the early shift as he always maintained that ‘it was better to come in early and get it over with! Adrian came to work, did his job and served the travelling public without fuss. He will be missed by all on the Central line.

Bob Tong, Secretary, Leytonstone branch
Good wishes and a fine night at Cardiff

It was with immense pleasure that the Cardiff branch welcomed our new general secretary, Bro Mick Whelan, to a social evening on Thursday 9 February. Mick brought union executive committee President Alan Donnelly along with him and we were also pleased to welcome our district officer, Stan Moran, and EC member Brian Corbett.

Both Mick and Alan addressed the branch with Mick outlining his hopes and aspirations for ASLEF in the coming years.

The highlight of the evening was the presentation of retirement certificates to two of our long-serving branch members, Brothers John Heenan and Lyn Gould. Both had given their whole working lives to the footplate grade starting in the steam days. John served for many years on the LCD in Cardiff Canton and later St David’s House.

An unexpected surprise for one member was the presentation of an appreciation certificate for services as an LCD rep. Brother Carl Nowell, who has retired on health grounds, was presented with the award as a ‘thank you’ for the many years he gave to the depot as the LCD Secretary.

After the ceremony members indulged themselves in the buffet and, of course, a little liquid refreshment.

We wish Mick all the best for the future and we know that he will serve us well in his new role as ‘the General’.

J. F. Bracchi, Secretary, Cardiff branch

Electrification created our branch, from the footplate staff of Camden shed, in 1966. And on 15 March this year it was re-electrified when over 50 colleagues – a third of our membership - gathered in the Exmouth Arms for our March branch meeting!

 Attractions were diverse, guest speakers, LLC nominations, and an opportunity to say ‘farewell and good luck’ to popular and respected local rep Bro Terry Philpott who is sadly leaving us for new challenges at Eurostar.

 Poignantly, the meeting was preceded by a minute’s silence in remembrance of Bro G Court, a founding father of the branch, former LCD ‘B’ member, who sadly passed away recently aged 90.

 Following routine business, we were treated to a vintage performance by Bro Tony West of the Retired Members section. Tony not only explained, but demonstrated, and indeed personified the value of the RMS. Using oratory skills and a political insight that are rarely encountered nowadays, Tony left us in no doubt as to the threats to our movement posed by the Lib/Con coalition. Some of what he said is reproduced below. It can only be hoped that Tony’s words were falling, like seed corn, on fertile ground.

 We also welcomed Bro Dicky Fisher, the newly-elected district secretary. Dicky introduced himself to those who hadn’t yet met him and thanked Euston for the support that he enjoys from this branch.

 The ‘icing on the cake’ was the unexpected arrival of General Secretary Mick Whelan. Mick, also no stranger at Euston, who proved that skills of oratory are not confined to the RMS! In a wide-ranging discourse he outlined the current situation within the industry and our union, particularly warning of the threats in the McNulty report.

 We had five candidates nominated for the LLC, so it looks as though we have some lively electioneering in store.

 Formal business over, we relocated to the bar downstairs in order to give Bro Philpott a good send off, with our heartfelt good wishes. Of course, debate and discussion continued long into the night! Thanks to Terry, and the staff at the Exmouth Arms for providing the buffet.

 Many thanks to all our speakers and to the tireless work of our branch secretary Bro Cliff Holloway. His efforts were appropriately rewarded by the excellent turnout at the meeting. Thanks to all of you who came.

 Electrification reached Euston in 1966, our branch was re-energised on 15 March 2012. We know about the ‘sparks effect’ on our railways – so let’s repeat it in our branches!

 Stuart Hammond, Assistant Branch Secretary, Euston

Wise words from Westy!

Many thanks to Euston branch for allowing me to give an update on the work of the RMS and our campaigning with the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) on a whole number of issues.

These range from this Tory-led government’s policies on the Health and Social Care Bill, the privatisation of the NHS, and the wholesale attack on the Voluntary Sector with cuts of some £75,339,481 planned for 2011/12.

The services that will be affected include Primary Care, Older People Services, Mental Health, Child Care, Young People Services, Dementia, Autism and Deaf and Blind Services to name a few.

I listened to some excellent reports from the Euston Welfare, LLC, Health & Safety and Company Council reps with the Chair and Branch Secretary running the meeting in a relaxed and disciplined manner.

Tony West, National Secretary, ASLEF RMS

New banner for District No 7 Council

District No 7 Council has commissioned a new banner which was revealed at its annual general meeting in March.

Almost all the 27 branches in the District contributed £30 each to have the banner made. On the front of the banner are listed all 27 branches in the District plus the ASLEF logo. On the back is the ASLEF logo plus, under the heading ‘Driving Towards Socialism’, some of the words of a poem written in 1819 by Percy Bysshe Shelley after the Peterloo Massacre of that year. They are, ‘Rise like lions from slumber/ In unvanquishing number/ Shake your chains to earth like dew/ Which in sleep had fallen on you/ Ye are many – they are few.’

Thanks to Phil Devonport, the Marylebone delegate and the Secretary of District Council, Ian Thompson and to Treherbert Branch for their endeavours in completing this brilliant project.

Bernard Kennedy, Chairman, District Council No 7 (and Bristol Branch)
Noble celebrations in Perth

Tam Noble with General Secretary Mick Whelan and the union’s Scottish officer, Kevin Lindsay

The respect for Tam was demonstrated by the number of members who attended and the warmth of their reception

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Brighton recognition for three leading lights

At the Brighton Branch meeting in March, presentations of long service badges were made by our Branch Chair Brother Steven Chatfield to David Eaton (10 years), Paul Horan (25 years) and Simon Weller (now the union’s National Organiser) also for 25 years’ membership.

On behalf of all our branch members, I would like to congratulate them on their awards and thank them for all the hard work they do for the Brighton Branch.

Mark Johnson, Secretary, Brighton Branch

It’s a change of role for National Organiser Simon Weller as he is presented with an award – his 25 year badge

BRIGHTON 8 MAY: The Brighton Motive Power and Sussex Motive Power depot will be holding an informal open afternoon for all active and retired ASLEF members who have been connected to Brighton and Sussex Motive Power Depots in the Brighton Railway Club, Belmont (off Dyke Road) from 14:00 on Tuesday 8 May. For further information phone Ivan Wilson (07949862393) or Paul Edwards (07894602991)

ENFIELD AND NORTH EAST LONDON 18 MAY: The Annual Enfield and North East London Re-union will take place at the Jolly Butchers at 168 Baker Street, Enfield EN1 3JS on Friday 18 May from 19:00 onwards. All ex-North East London Staff and other rail staff are welcome to come along and hear more tales from days of yore over the odd pint! Further details from Steve Jestico on 07788153711.

YOKER 26 MAY: The Yoker branch celebrates its quarter century with a dinner dance on Saturday 26 May at the Goodyear Social Club in Drumchapel, Glasgow. For information contact Alan Reid (07706 551 258) or Derrick Lowrie (07507 895 336).

OLD OAK COMMON 23 JUNE Meet-up for ex 1972 81A era Drivers/Secondmen at Reading - pub outside the station down the main side from 12:00 on Saturday 23 June. We will discuss the 40th Anniversary trip and meet up with old colleagues. Come along see who you recognise after 40 years! All welcome. For more details contact Bob Dorkings of the Barnham Branch at rdorkings@yahoo.com

ERTH branch’s open meeting on Sunday 4 March was primarily to acknowledge Brother Tam Noble’s remarkable achievement of 65 years’ membership of ASLEF. Surely this must be some kind of record?

Tam joined the union on 3 March 1947 in the long-gone depot of Galashiels before ending up at Perth. General Secretary Mick Whelan presented him with an Appreciation Certificate and Badge, a copy of the union history ‘Driven by Ideals’ signed by all the speakers - and a litre of rum!

The meeting was also a fond farewell to Brother Stuart Moran, who was working his last week at Perth before transferring to Oban depot. We would like to wish both our colleagues all the very best for the future and we hope to see them back at meetings as visitors.

The branch would also like to thank all our speakers - Mick Whelan, Simon Weller, Kevin Lindsay, Hugh Bradley and Ian Smith - for their contributions. In fact, this led one speaker to ask which other provincial union branch could muster its General Secretary, National Organiser, District Organiser, EC Member and a Trustee for a Sunday afternoon meeting! Answers on a postcard...

Thanks also to members who attended from branches in Dundee, Edinburgh No 2, Glasgow, Inverness, Motherwell and Stirling Caley, as well as the excellent turnout from Perth branch itself. The numerous retired members included our 87-year-old ex Branch Secretary. They all combined to make it a great night.

Grant Mutchie, Secretary, Perth branch

A decade of membership for Paul Horan

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These are the pages where you talk to us. We welcome your letters, either by mail to the ASLEF Journal at 75-77 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!

A SPECIAL PLEA FROM BAT MAN!

Since plans were announced to reinstate the Oxford to Bedford route and build a new chord connecting it to the Aynho to Marylebone line, the beard, glasses and elbow patch brigade have gotten themselves rather busy. Why? Because a hundred or so bats have been discovered in a short tunnel which goes under the Wolvercote Roundabout in Oxford. (Well, the figure is actually 97 now – as I’ve hit three of them!)

It seems this much-needed upgrade will be severely delayed, cost hundreds of thousands more, and be much less ambitious - because of the bats!

The southern section of line never closed. This is the route to Calvert Tip, Bicester MOD Depot, Kidlington Stone Siding, and it’s the route for the Oxford-Bicester shuttles. So how did these people find out about the bats in the first place? Do they go rummaging around where they shouldn’t be? Or do they have to be consulted? Proud hard working men once went into deep dark tunnels to make a living. Their communities were wiped out at the stroke of a Met copper’s baton, and Margaret Thatcher ‘consulted’ no one. Revenge on the coal miners was her only interest!

Before her we had Ernest Marples, a corrupt Tory transport minister with interests in road building. He got Beeching to rape the railways for him so he could make money tearing up the countryside building his roads. Oh it was all above board, his wife looked after his shares for him! Now we have to put things right, we have to reopen closed lines and upgrade the existing ones without too much hindrance, because we need to create jobs. New roads, cars, and mega trucks are environmentally far worse!

There are plenty of dark empty spaces for bats to go into around the magnificent buildings of Oxford, and if they don’t like any of those there is one in the London Mayor’s office, between two deaf ears with a nice mop of blonde hair on it to keep them nice and warm! However you will hear more of him from our friends on the Underground when he sets about tearing their way of life apart. It’s OK for a miner or tube driver to lose his home and way of life - but not a bat!

Driver Terry Tuite, Banbury Depot

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ONE CARDIFF BRANCH BADGE, which are individually numbered priced at £3 each, One ASLEF tie pin, priced at £2 each. One ASLEF tie clip/slide priced at £3 each. The price of P&P is £2 per order up to 5 items. My contact details are, Edwin Cox, 2 Skenfrith Mews, Celtic Horizons, Newport, NP10 8HF, 07811761656.

WOKING HOMES BADGE to raise money for this excellent charity and home for retired rail staff. Badges are £3 each plus £1 for postage on any order. Please make cheques payable to Woking Homes and send cheques to Woking Homes, Oriental Road, Woking, Surrey, GU22 7BE

A VERY LIMITED NUMBER (25) OF THE KING'S LYNN ASLEF BRANCH CENTENARY BADGE (2006) have been reproduced and are available at £10 inc. P & P from M Steele, 1 Rosecroft, South Wootton King’s Lynn Norfolk PE30 3WX or Telephone 07788 153954.

ASLEF TRAIN DRIVER collects ASLEF/railway badges, signs, shed plates, etc. Phone Mark on 01562 228432 or (mobile) 07789301551

FOOTBALL PROGRAMMES and FOOTBALL BADGES bought by collector. Please call or email with any pre-1965 programmes or other early football memorabilia. Martin Scott 07718 131622 Email: scottfootball@hotmail.com

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FAVERSHAM BRANCH (077) has finally launched its 25th Anniversary ASLEF/NUM badge. They cost £10 each including P&P. A few Faversham Branch Centenary badges remain available at £5 each including P&P. To order please contact the Branch Secretary, Steve Gurdler, 18 Hunters Way West, Chatham, Kent ME5 7HL. steve.gurdler@aslefonline.co.uk or 07941 110473

DRIVER COLLECTS BR33056 SERIES TRAINCREW / DRIVER MANUALS. Contact Lee on 07919127972 or e-mail lippydavies@blueyonder.co.uk

CITY OF LONDON BADGES, one 10-year and one depot badge. Depot badges are numbered 1-150. There are only 150 of each. Price £5 plus £1 P&P. All profits to City of London branch funds to acquire a branch banner. Further information or orders to Colin Dawson 01689 849 543 or 22 Hutchison Road, New Addington, Croydon, Surrey CR0 0BD.
A swinging retiree!
I spent 25 years on the railway from 1974 as Driver’s mate before being retired in 2000 when I got Post Traumatic Stress after a near miss. I found coaching sports to children improved my health. Later I went to college and university and taught sports movement and coordination to children with special needs.

I became quite respected in Berkshire where I worked in over 40 schools. However in 2008 I had to give this up after being involved in a bad car crash. I then developed a sports training aid for golf, cricket and swimming, meeting many of my sporting heroes like Devon Malcolm, Alex Tudor, Sir Clive Woodward, Jimmy Adams and Sir Ian Botham.

I stayed away from anything to do with railways including my old friends and colleagues until March when I attended a Cricklewood reunion at Bedford where I found at last I had gotten over my fears. I’d like to thank all those who made me feel very welcome and hope to keep in touch.

I’d happily offer ASLEF members a discount from my golf swing training aid if they’d like to contact me through the website www.myspgolf.co.uk

Gerry Crawford, Retired Driver

Hot reaction to warm soup
How do you change the political status quo? Armed revolution is a good enough idea, except it’s not terribly British, old chap. But we need something …

My sister helps out in a soup kitchen in Spalding. I’m not talking 1912 here. I’m talking 2012. I’m talking about a 21st century rich ‘civilised’ country that hands out charity-run soup.

Well, it’s very easy to conveniently pretend that you don’t know about the shit life that a lot of other people endure. But it’s time to stop putting your head in the sand!

In 1940, the Nazis wanted to enslave this country. They lost. But now the Chinese and the Arabs and the Germans and just about everybody else – with the support of moneyped people in the UK - want to enslave us. To use us and grind us under.

Well, just because the chief executives and managing directors like it, and the banks, money lenders, Chinese, Arabs, Germans and the ‘Right Honourables’ like it, doesn’t mean that you have to like it - or put up with it.

A trade union is about using its collectivism to make a better and fairer society where the odds are evened out. And where people aren’t dependent on soup kitchen charity.

We need an alternative socialist-minded political party to steer our society away from the selfish ‘sod you, Jack - I’m OK’ sort. Otherwise we’ll see our grandchildren ground into the dirt like a hundred years ago to satisfy the greed of others.

As for the Royals, well if we’re fortunate that Jubilee Day boat will sink and see the lot of them off!

Chris Dodd, Retired Member, Ilkeston

Proud thanks
On behalf of the union’s LGBT committee, I have to say a huge ‘thank you’ to ASLEF’s District Organisers, branches, members and our new General Secretary.

The eyes of the world will be on London this year with the Olympics, the Queen’s Jubilee - and World Pride. So we decided to hire a bus with a PA system and get a new banner for Pride.

Thanks to your generosity we now have a large part of the money we need. Many thanks to you all!

Darran Brown, Secretary LGBT Representative Committee

The May 1912 ASLEF Locomotive Journal gave some brief insights into important beginnings …

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The Rumblings of a Labour Movement
“Mr. Jack Andrews, of the West Ham British Socialist Party, gave us an address ………which was confined principally to the fact that the workers of the land must not put their trust in princes, either liberal or Tory, but in future rely entirely upon their own class representatives, if they wish to enjoy a brighter, fuller, freer, happier life.”

A Stuttering Start to Involving Women…
“It has been a most pleasing feature throughout these lectures to see the number of our lady friends and workers which has attended and assisted to make these social evenings a success. The satisfactory manner in which they have patronized the literature table, which has been full of labour books and periodicals, has been appreciated, and although the good effect may not be seen on the surface immediately, it foretells that they (the ladies), are beginning to realize their assistance is absolutely necessary in the workers’ cause, to help carry the banner of freedom and liberty to all whom it may concern.”

Article on 82 strike revived pressing memory
Reading the article about the 1982 strike in the April journal brought back memories. I was a driver at Baker Street on the Metropolitan Line, living north of Aylesbury.

Because there was no dispute on the underground, we were not called out in support of our brothers on the main lines, even though we knew that we would be next in the firing line.

This strike brought home to me how much the press lie. Half way through the strike there was a mass of media speculation that BR would be able to run a restricted service from Aylesbury to London because the roster showed that two NUR drivers would be willing that day.

I went to Aylesbury to see what would happen. At that time the entrance to the station was in a quiet side road. I stood on a slight rise overlooking the station entrance where I could see two people on the picket line, surrounded by reporters and camera men.

One of the NUR drivers appeared on his bicycle and the press – 50 or 60 of them - charged down the centre of the road straight at the poor guy. The NUR man saw this pack running towards him, did a quick U-turn and sped off. That was as near as BR got to running a train that day.

Later the news reports all said the driver had been frightened off by ASLEF pickets. I doubt that he even saw them. No, it wasn’t the pickets who kept him away that day. It was the press. But that was never mentioned.

I lost any trust and faith I had in the media that day. They lied about what happened, about something that I saw myself. I have never trusted them since.

Graham Martin-Royle, Hastings

A hundred years of union

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… AND THE CLASS WAR
“A Tory M.P. presided, well supported by many farmers and “country squires” from the neighbouring country. The usual toast list for “The King,” “The Factory” and “The Managing Committee” was given, and the necessary soap piled on to make the ceremony complete, yet, strange to say, not one word about the workmen who were to labour and produce the dividend. The result was that I simply called the chairman’s attention to that important fact: That one important gentleman had been left out of the toast list, and he was the workman; asking at the same time “If the workmen that were going to be employed in that factory were going to be paid the trade union rate of wages? The chairman could not say…. I was then immediately taken in hand by the manager, and ordered off the premises as an undesirable; and that for simply asking a plain, fair and honest question. Wake up! Christian England.”

Extracts selected and edited by Mick Holder
English kicking is not a basis for Scottish independence

says Tom Burns of the union’s Perth branch ...

The Scottish independence referendum will take place in 2014, a year of anniversaries. It is the 700th anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn (something Mr Salmond and Co will no doubt flog mercilessly in the run up to the referendum) - and it is also 80th anniversary of the founding of the SNP.

It seems curious that in 80 years the SNP has only come up with only one policy - independence from England. It has never put together a cohesive set of answers to the practical questions which they knew were going to arise - and this makes me suspicious.

The main questions around independence fall in to 3 categories: economic, political and constitutional. Let’s look at each of these in turn.

A LACK OF ANSWERS

The SNPs economic argument is based on a specific interpretation of one Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report which allegedly proves that Scotland would rank sixth (rather than the UK's sixteenth) of the world's richest nations. Even taking this at face value poses two obvious problems. First, there is the highly variable price of oil, which is a diminishing long-term resource. And second, it assumes there will be no economic downside with big business leaving an independent Scotland.

On the first point it is unwise to base an economy on oil, whose price has varied by 300% over the last 10 years. And secondly, it would be reckless to ignore the stated intention of many multinationals to relocate south of the border - leaving Scotland a trading outpost.

Many political questions remain unanswered. First, assuming the SNP retain Scotland’s position within the EU (by no means a given) it is reasonable to suppose that France and Germany would not find a way of Europeanising ‘Scotland’s oil’, and therefore the value of the asset? Second, would international business view Scotland as a stable place to invest with a First Minister obviously indebted to billionaires and celebrities?

QUESTIONS OF CONSTITUTION

The constitutional arrangements cause me most concern. The SNP has a strongly republican thread at a senior level (witness the many SNP MSPs who had ‘other things to do’ when the Queen last attended Holyrood). Yet Alex Salmond continually assures us that the Queen will remain head of state in an independent Scotland. He does not assure us that the Queen, her heirs and successors will be head of state.

Holyrood portrays itself as a paragon of democracy yet it is a single legislative chamber with no checks or balances. We could have a majority SNP government with a former SNP First Minister (Mr Alex Salmond?) as head of state – rubber-stamping every piece of legislation dreamed up in the chamber.

Thirdly what is uniquely bad about the United Kingdom? The SNP says it believes in a strong trade union movement whose slogan is ‘Unity is Strength’, they believe that Scotland should be a member of the European Union and should take its place as a member of the United Nations.

A FEELING OF ISOLATION

What is so bad about the UK that the SNP wants to break away? One question which is very hard to define is, ‘Does it feel right?’ We are asked to believe that ties of blood, marriage, language, history and currency, mean nothing - and that our European friends would indel our uniqueness more than our English brothers and sisters. This is patent nonsense.

The conclusion I arrive at – sadly - is that the SNP is not a nationalist party. It is an anti-English party whose raison-d’être is little more than a tea-towel slogan or a football chant. Otherwise why would the Scottish government have implemented a policy which discriminates only against English students wishing to study in Scotland? Why, after 80 years, are they unable to offer considered plans for legal, fiscal, diplomatic and military affairs in a post-independent Scotland? The First Minister talks up the ‘feel good factor’ around giving the English a kicking - but that is no basis on which to address the real problems facing all of the UK, not just Scotland.

DEVOLVE, DON’T SEPARATE

The real problem is that our Government, Civil Service and economy are built around London and the South-East. The long-term solution to this has to be very radical and must involve the removal of Government departments from London to every country and region of the UK. This would achieve a huge improvement – or a rebalancing – of transport, high speed internet, education, housing and general infrastructure because the relocation of highly paid civil service (and associated) jobs would ensure that this happened.

I believe it would also bring government closer to the people. In the post-Coalition reality of fixed five-year term Parliaments it is perfectly feasible for the Prime Minister to spend one year in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast and then one in an English region. There is no need for the Downing Street machine to be in Downing Street.

This blueprint forms the basis of a much more positive discussion to be held with the Scottish people in the run up to the referendum.
Prize Crossword No. 73 set by Zebedee

Solution to Crossword No 72 which appeared in the April 2012 edition of the ASLEF Journal. Congratulations to Mike Sullivan from Swansea


Thanks for all your responses to the 72nd ASLEF crossword in the April edition. If you complete this month’s crossword please send the solution to the Editor, ASLEF Journal, 75-77 St John Street, London EC1M 4NN by the 14th of the issue month.

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