MARY CREAIGH
My blueprint for Britain’s railways

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O Say that the past twelve months have been interesting, industrially and politically, would be an understatement. But with the support of our representatives, officers, executive committee and, most important, the branches and our members we have successfully avoided many of the trials and tribulations in other industries and unions. We have been proactive on the challenges but must be increasingly vigilant in the coming months on the future of our pensions and the issues arising out of an unprecedented number of franchises, including the East Coast, being relet with indecent haste. With so many franchises coming up to or entering their last year, industrial relations is a minefield, as fear of losing means companies try to maximise profits while claiming the DfT has to authorise anything covered by our free collective bargaining agreements.

The European Commission’s Fourth Railway Package is a dangerous and misguided piece of legislation; McNulty said we were more expensive, by 40%, than the state-owned operators on the continent who now own most of the franchises in Britain. So who wants the UK model?

Living standards are under attack from increased petrol prices, heating and food costs while the opportunity to educate our children and enjoy dignity in retirement is being eroded on top of the wholesale destruction of the NHS and other services. With the government’s gagging bill and proposed investigation into Grangemouth not to look at the role of the billionaire who held the country to ransom – until he got a wage freeze for three years, £138 million of taxpayers’ money, and closed the pension fund – but the role of the trade unions in disputes.

This trade union has prevailed for 133 years and, with the strength and unity we have always demonstrated, it will continue, despite the challenges. So may I take this opportunity to thank you for what you do for ASLEF – and each other – and wish every one of you a happy and safe Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous New Year.

Mick Whelan, General Secretary
Tom triumphs in Sarum

OM CORBIN, an ASLEF activist, and Labour councillor in Salisbury, has been chosen to fight the Tories for the Westminster seat for this historic Wiltshire city, where he has lived and worked for 35 years, at the next general election.

On his Twitter account Tom proudly describes himself as ‘train driver, trade union activist, city councillor’ and now ‘Labour’s Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Salisbury.’

‘I was thrilled to be picked as PPC;’ he said. ‘And I’m looking forward to the battle ahead.’

Tom, who became secretary of ASLEF’s Salisbury branch in 2005, revealed in the Journal in August how the ‘inspirational talks’ of Simon Weller, now our national organiser, but then EC member for District 1, ‘finally overcame my disdain for the Tony Blair years and I became active in the local Labour Party’.

He was elected as a city councillor in May and has become a popular and hard-working member of the council.

Annie Rutter, who took over from Tom as branch secretary two years ago, said: ‘It was with a great deal of pride that I witnessed Tom beat the two other shortlisted candidates at the Constituency Labour Party hustings to become our PPC for 2015. It was on the ASLEF political course earlier this year that he became convinced he should aim higher than the council and stand as a parliamentary candidate.’

Tom knows he has a mountain to climb in 2015. At the last general election, in 2010, the Labour candidate polled 3,690 votes, coming a distant third behind Tory John Glen, who got 23,859, and the Lib Dem who took 17,893.

Alan Moir, a councillor in East Dunbartonshire, and a member of Polmadie branch, just lost out on a shortlist of six to become PPC for the marginal Westminster seat of East Dunbartonshire.

And Robert Smith, company council for DRS, and a member of Crewe branch, made the shortlist of three for the Conservative-held seat of Shrewsbury and Atcham.

Homage to Caledonia

A new report by rail expert Paul Salveson, commissioned by ASLEF and the Co-operative Party, is set to ignite the debate about the future of the railway in Scotland.

Mick Whelan, speaking ahead of the launch of A People’s Railway for Scotland in Edinburgh on 5 December, said: ‘ASLEF welcomes the Scottish Labour Party’s decision to consult on the future direction of its rail policy, not least in the context of the independence debate. We can never lose sight of the fact that Scotland’s railways are part of a national network with five cross border franchises operating into its major cities and I’m delighted that we have been able to build on the work we undertook in the Rail Cymru paper published in 2012.

‘As the second most heavily subsidised passenger rail franchise in the UK, ScotRail has demonstrably not delivered the levels of investment, service and value for money Scottish passengers and taxpayers deserve. Under the terms of devolution Scotland, and a future Scottish Labour administration, has the opportunity to rethink this failed model with some bold policy options.

ATOC hits the buffers

The Association of Train Operating Companies has lost its role as one of the voices of the railway in Britain.

Network Rail, together with the train operating companies, and freight operating companies, have agreed that the Rail Delivery Group will take on responsibility for policy formulation and communications on behalf of the industry.

Sir David Higgins, Network Rail chief executive, and RDG deputy chairman, said: ‘A better railway brings significant economic and social benefits to passengers, taxpayers and the public. The industry’s commitment to work more closely is delivering real improvements to safety, service quality and efficiency. A more effective, better resourced, RDG will help us achieve more for those we serve.’

Tim O’Toole, chief executive of First Group, and chairman of the RDG, said: ‘Greater co-ordination among the train operators, freight companies and Network Rail is the next logical step for the industry to evolve to the next stage of capability. The combination of resources will provide clear, unified leadership for the industry.’

Fourth Rail Package is highway to hell

Mick Whelan wrote to MEPs last month urging them to vote against the European Commission’s innocuous-sounding Fourth Railway Package – which would effectively force UK-style privatisation, and fragmented franchises, on continental Europe – when it came before the European Parliament on 26 November.

He pointed out that academic research, such as the Rebuilding Rail report by Transport for Quality of Life, and The Great Train Robbery by the Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change at Manchester University, conclusively proves that privatisation has failed to deliver on any of its promises.

Mick wrote: ‘These reports highlight the dramatic cost escalation as a result of fragmentation; an increasing burden on the public purse through direct and indirect subsidy to private train operating companies; passengers faced with the highest rail fares in Europe; and minimal private investment as profits are distributed as shareholder dividends instead of being reinvested in the service.

‘They also expose the myth that passenger growth has been due to privatisation and clearly show that the increase has been due to economic growth and massive public investment.’

The EC decided that ASLEF would again not send out Christmas cards this year but would, instead, make a donation to the Philippines emergency relief fund, and to the Samaritans.
Selling Britain short

Mick Whelan, ASLEF’s general secretary, and national organiser Simon Weller were joined by Bob Crow of the RMT and Manuel Cortes of the TSSA in a protest at Euston station last month to mark the twentieth anniversary of the passing of the Railways Act, which paved the way for the privatisation of British Rail.

Mick said: ‘Privatisation has proved to be a disaster for this country. It was a foolish, ideologically-driven policy by John Major’s government which has, each year for the last twenty years, sold Britain short. Private companies should be about investment and risk. But there is no investment and there is no risk.

‘The privatised train operating companies think the public should pay for the investment, while they make a private profit, and then shift that profit overseas. It’s a disgrace. It’s time to bring the railway back into public ownership.’

TUC general secretary Frances O’Grady said: ‘Rail privatisation has been a colossal market failure. Rather than bringing in the improvements and investment its cheerleaders promised, it has succeeded only in pushing up costs and increasing the burden on the British taxpayer.

‘We have a twenty-year-old system of corporate welfare with train companies reliant upon the public purse to turn a private profit. Virtually all of this ends up in shareholders’ pockets, rather than being used to improve our rail services.’

Protests against privatisation, organised by Action for Rail, were held at 30 railway stations up and down the country.

TOP TORY: THE CASE FOR HS2

Michael Heseltine, the former Conservative Deputy Prime Minister, has warned that future generations will judge those in power harshly if they fail to deliver a new north-south rail line. ‘HS2 is about our country’s competitiveness for a half century or more. It is about so many more people sharing growth that has, for too long, been concentrated in London and the south-east.’

MARY’S MODEL RAILWAY

While Mary Creagh, the new Shadow Transport Secretary, grapples with the complexities of an integrated transport plan for Britain – see our interview on the centre pages – it’s nice to know that her son Clement, named after the Labour leader, and great reforming post-war Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, has a much-loved Hornby model railway set on the floor of his living room at home.

500 CLUB: Tosh McDonald, with number 97, won the November draw, scooping prize money of £334.

OFF THE RAILS

JOHN HARRIS, writing in the Guardian, reckons ‘the approach of politicians to the railways is lily-livered at best; and, at worst, completely barmy.’ Consider, he says, the fate of the East Coast main line.

‘In 2006 GNER lost its contract when its Bermuda-registered parent company filed for bankruptcy. The franchise went to National Express, which soon defaulted on its payments. The Labour government created a not-for-profit public operator, Directly Operated Railways, which has run the service for the last four years with much success. Since 2009, DOR has paid £602 million into public funds; £200 million more than National Express, and £209 million more than Virgin, the franchise holder for the West Coast main line, managed in the same period. Its public subsidy is comparatively minimal; seven times less than that paid last year to Virgin. Its record on safety improvements is jaw-dropping: major customer accidents down 81% since 2009. Customer satisfaction and punctuality are at unprecedented highs. Now, of course, the government wants to re-privatise it. Which is where things get truly absurd. Across a whole range of public infrastructure, from power stations to water suppliers, via airports and bus companies, supposed free-marketeers are gleefully happy about state ownership of British assets, as long as it’s somebody else’s state that’s doing it. In the case of the railways, you end up with profits being skimmed off and invested in trains and tracks overseas.’

MARY CREAGH, the new Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, cycled from London to Brighton for the Labour Party conference in September – she caught the train back – where she bumped into Sir Dave Brailsford, performance director of British cycling, over a Team Sky power breakfast. ‘I thought I was doing well with porridge and a banana but they were having 5,000 calories!’ laughs Mary. ‘When I said I couldn’t get up Ditton Beach (see pages 12+13) Sir Dave said it was a food issue, nothing to do with my fitness. I wasn’t eating enough, apparently!’

ALEX CUNNINGHAM, Labour MP for Stockton North, has finally elicited the truth – despite previous government denials – that the Bullingdon Boys in the coalition Cabinet are planning to reintroduce cattle class for what the Tories see as the travelling plebs. Transport Minister Stephen Hammond, Conservative MP for Wimbledon, eventually admitted to Alex that new franchise bidders will be ‘free to consider such initiatives’ as third class travel on Britain’s railways for the first time in fifty years.

IAN LAVERY, a former miner, and now Labour MP for Wansbeck, forced another interesting admission from the hapless Mr Hammond. Ian got the Transport Minister to concede, reluctantly, that the publicly-owned East Coast main line is easily Britain’s most efficient train operating company – carrying a staggering 35% more passengers per kilometre than Richard Branson’s Virgin on the comparable West Coast route.

GREATER ANGLIA, which reported profits of £3.6 million in its last published accounts, made charitable donations of just £144 during that year. In contrast, East Coast main line, which returned £600 million to the taxpayer, gave £21,727 to charity (£20,000 to the National Rail Chaplains’ Service, £1,627 to the Railway Children, and £100 to the Railway Mission).
Class win for Mick at Congress House

MICK WHelan was best in Class last month when he won a hard-fought policy battle to get public ownership of the railway back on the Labour Party agenda. He was speaking at a manifesto memo session at the Centre for Labour and Social Studies’ first conference at Congress House in London on Saturday 2 November.

Owen Jones, the Independent columnist, who chaired the debate in the main hall, promised it would be a ‘fun session’. Which it was. Five guest speakers each got four minutes to make a pitch for a policy, followed by half an hour of questions from the floor, and, at the end, delegates voted on which one they wanted the Labour Party to adopt.

It was a lively debate, in a packed Congress hall, with Sabby Dhalu of Unite Against Fascism putting the case for equality; Ken Livingstone arguing for a proper living wage; Laura Pidcock, a Northumberland county councillor, defending the jobseekers’ allowance; and Francesca Martinez, the comedian and People’s Assembly activist, pushing an anti-economic growth green agenda for a happier world.

But, when the vote was taken, Mick’s barnstorming appeal to bring the railway back into public ownership won the day hands down. Or, rather, up. ‘Now we just need to get it into the manifesto,’ muttered Mick as he headed off for a very late bite to eat with Tom Watson, Labour MP for West Bromwich East, and Steve Cavalier, chief executive of Thompsons solicitors.

Pride and joy

It’s something of a busman’s holiday when Neil Moore, LLC rep for Corkerhill depot in Glasgow, sees his wife’s uncle. Because Jim Powrie builds replica steam locomotives at Kilwinning in Ayrshire and has spent five years making the Duchess of Gloucester (below) for his son Calum.

FOODIE HEAVEN

First Great Western has promised that 50 food items on its new on-board menu will be sourced from artisan food producers within 15 miles of the line from Paddington to Penzance. It’s part of the company’s bid to ditch the image of the curling cheese sarnie in its on-board buffet. ‘This is a window on the wonderful food of the West Country,’ said Jo Elliott of First Great Western. ‘We have taken the plunge and I urge all other train operating companies to, ahem, get on board.’

WHERE’S ERIC?

If there are any ex-Wimbledon drivers out there, or if you know any, especially if you know an ex-driver called Eric Holter, please contact Christopher Sneddon either by email (chris.sneddon1970@goolemail.com) or by snail mail (23 Caernarvon Close, Mitcham, Surrey, CR4 1XD).

Karate kid John just champion

John Marchadier, a driver with South West Trains, and a member of our Waterloo branch, won the gold medal at the European Shotokan Karate Championships in Sheffield.

We reported in the Journal in October how our veteran Karate Kid – you compete as a veteran at 35 – was going for glory after winning bronze at the world championships in Bucharest.

He lost in the semi-final, in Romania, to the eventual winner, from Italy. This time he got his revenge and beat the world champion in a thrilling final. And had the satisfaction of seeing his 11-year-old son Wilfred, a black belt, pick up bronze in the 10-12 year age class.

‘The difference was that physically I was in better shape physically I was in better shape than I was in Bucharest,’ said John, who won seven bouts to reach the final. ‘I knew the guy, and my strategy was to score the first point, get ahead, and then relax, to force him to come to me, and then counter-attack. Once you’re behind you have to open up.’

He had 55 people from his karate club in Deptford, south London, cheering him, and could hear his wife Martine and five-year-old daughter Kadiska urging him on, too.

‘That gave me a little more strength. I took a punch in the eye in the semi-final, so my vision was a little blurry, but it was a wonderful feeling to win.’

Next stop is the world championships in Brazil next June, followed by the European championships in Italy. We wish our champ well and will let you know how he gets on.

John (above) grabbed gold while his son Wilfred (right) won bronze
Isn’t it good, Norwegian wood

LEE JAMES, ASLEF’s equalities adviser, reports from the Norwegian train drivers’ union’s first women’s conference

AS SOON as I stepped into a water taxi for the final leg of our journey I knew that the first women’s conference of Norsk Lokomotivmannsforbund would not be a typical experience. Our destination was Stokkilen, a tiny island off the coast of Kristiansand, in southern Norway, owned by the union and used by members for holidays and training events. Its beauty, simplicity, and serenity – just sea, forest, six cabins and a communal shed in which to eat and drink – was breathtaking.

The NLF is a craft union, founded in 1893, with 1,600 members (every driver in the country bar one!) The union’s female membership – 72 – is a similar percentage to ASLEF but a large proportion play an active part. One of our hosts, Grethe Thorsen, should be congratulated on being the first woman elected to the NLF’s executive committee.

There’s a strong British connection because Norway’s first train driver was William Graham from Darlington. My companions across the North Sea were Julie Clegg-Haver, WRC member for District 3, and District 1 Organiser Graham Morris. Each of us spoke to conference: Julie on her experiences as a female driver in Britain; Graham on the effects of privatisation during the last 20 years; and I spoke about ASLEF’s gender equality work.

The agenda was varied and included discussion on an NLF study into equality, issues in the freight sector, and the European Commission’s fourth railway package. While the topics in the conference room were engaging and informative the highlight for me was speaking individually to the 21 female delegates. All were as keen to find out about ASLEF, and driving in the UK, as we were to learn about their experiences. Margaret Thatcher and the royal family were also popular subjects!

The issues for female drivers in Norway are very different to those for our female members; some of this is down to better legal protection. If you submit a flexible working request due to caring responsibilities companies rarely refuse to grant it. If you tell your company you are pregnant you can continue to drive until you start maternity leave; and maternity pay is far higher for far longer. Every union member is entitled to six days release per year to take an active part in the organisation. Perhaps most surprising, for me, is you can drive in high heels if you want to!

The hospitality of our hosts was exceptional. Our thanks, especially, to Rita Jørgensen and Gretha Thorsen. I hope the links between the female members of ASLEF and the NLF continue long into the future. Skål, ladies...

Power in the people

Mick Whelan, Byron Taylor, national officer of the Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Organisation, and columnist, agitation, activist and author Owen Jones joined Marz Colombini, EC member for District 1, and branch secretary Steve Richardson on the platform for a Q&A with members at a special Waterloo Nine Elms meeting. It was, Marz pointed out, two years to the day that Mick was elected general secretary to raise the union’s public and political profile. He’s achieved that – Steve pointed out that, as a small craft union, ‘we punch well above our weight’ – and now we want to get an ASLEF member into Parliament for the first time since 1972.

Owen – whose great-grandfather, a train driver, went on strike in solidarity with the miners in 1926 – condemned Tory attempts ‘to demonise the trade union movement, the biggest democratic movement in this country’ and called for more ordinary, working-class people in Parliament.

TULO exists, said Byron, to get trade union activists into Westminster ‘100 years ago the two main parties in Parliament, the Conservatives and the Liberals, both represented the same class. The Labour Party was created, by the trade unions, to break their monopoly on power. The Labour Party is our party – and it’s our job to reclaim it. ‘The next 18 months are going to be crucial. The Tories have money. But we have people. We have to motivate our people to get out there on the doorstep. Because there’s power in the people.’

MAKING CROSSINGS SAFER

Alan Woolnough, of King’s Lynn branch, gave evidence to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee on 21 October as part of its inquiry into safety at level crossings. Alan told MPs about his experience of a fatal incident and what happened afterwards, including the support he received from his company First Capital Connect. Alan’s contribution offered a train driver’s perspective during a highly charged session which included testimonies from the families of victims. The select committee will publish a report next year with recommendations for the government and Network Rail to consider.

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I was bruised and battered
I couldn’t tell what I felt

KATY PROCTOR, ASLEF’s website editor and conference organiser, reports on the 25th World AIDS Day on 1 December

Northern Rail has launched a number of employee forums to promote messages of diversity and inclusion. One of these, Trainbow, organises an annual Awareness Train which this year ran from Leeds to Nottingham and back. Back in Leeds, there was a ceremony at the station, followed by refreshments at the Hilton Hotel. Nicky Sapey, WRC member for District 4, was a train host; her role was to greet passengers and sell red AIDS awareness ribbons and cakes to raise money for a local charity, Skyline.

We’ve come a long way since AIDS first appeared in the 1980s. Then it was common for people to develop AIDS very soon after contracting HIV and, simultaneously, to be ostracised by colleagues, friends, and family out of fear and prejudice. Today, our immunity levels can be carefully monitored and the anti-retroviral medication now available is much improved from the days when it consisted of dozens of pills with dreadful side-effects. Although there is still no cure for the virus, it is possible to carry on living a perfectly normal life with HIV – to work, travel and have a family.

These changes have come about thanks to developments in medical research and years of awareness-raising campaigns. Activists have played a particularly important role in educating people, challenging stereotypes, and fighting discrimination. Unfair discrimination, discrimination at work, compulsory testing and breaches of confidentiality have now been legislated against, to protect employees.

People are much better informed nowadays. Previously common fears about touching, sharing utensils and using public toilets are now understood to be unwarranted. We also have a better understanding of the steps we can take to stay healthy, practice safe sex and strengthen our immune systems.

Progressive shifts in perception can be seen in the terminology used. We no longer say someone ‘is HIV’ since there is a lot more to us all than our positive or negative status. Instead, we say people are ‘living with HIV’, which better reflects the fact that this is just one aspect of their lives.

It has become less common to see people wearing red ribbons on World AIDS Day. We have achieved a lot in the struggle against HIV/AIDS and should not become complacent. The rising number of STIs, not only among teenagers but also among older people, shows that many of us are increasingly negligent when it comes to negotiating safe sex.

Globally, the funding available for HIV/AIDS research, prevention and care has reduced because it has dropped down the list of public health priorities. The United Nations’ target to achieve universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it has been missed, and there are still countries where it is the most marginalised groups in society who are most vulnerable to HIV.

Medical researchers constantly face new challenges and are now looking into the effects of long-term anti-retroviral treatment. Activists, on the other hand, are still working hard to tackle persistent challenges, like how best to address the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS. How common is it for people to talk openly about a positive HIV diagnosis as compared to a cancer diagnosis? The truth is, it’s still difficult to talk about HIV without fear of being judged and rejected.

Most of us don’t disclose our medical history to people we hardly know, and how much we share with others generally depends on trust. The contentious debate around criminalisation of HIV transmission is worrying because it demonstrates a lack of empathy with people living with HIV. Where legislation has been introduced it has led to tragic cases such as mothers and children being separated. This kind of legislation discourages people from getting tested and seeking medical care, in case it’s later used against them, and ignores the fact that we are all responsible for our own behaviour and actions.

A positive HIV diagnosis is no longer the same terrifying prospect as it was before but there are still serious implications. This is why it’s important that we continue to mark World AIDS Day – to remember the people who are no longer with us, celebrate medical breakthroughs, raise awareness and share information. Well done to train drivers, like Nicky Sapey, for their efforts to keep promoting World AIDS Day.

Point where East meets West

Constantinople, once known as Byzantium and now called Istanbul, is the place where, historically and geographically, East meets West. The city, which stands on both sides of the Bosphorus, straddles two continents, just as Turkey, traditionally an Asian country, now wants to join the European Union. The new Marmaray freight and passenger rail tunnel under the Bosphorus Strait forge a new link between Europe and Asia. The project, first conceived by the sultans of the old Ottoman Empire in the middle of the 19th century, was started in 2004. The first trains ran through the tunnel on 29 October.

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Suicide isn’t painless it hurts like Hell

KARL DAVIS, a driver with DB Schenker, has contributed a chapter to a new book of unsanitised narratives about the harrowing subject of suicide. Here he explains how he came to terms with what happened to him, and what should be done to help every driver on the railway.

Ten years ago I had an article published by the Guardian rebutting comments made by Jeremy Clarkson on the issue of rail suicides. This is an issue I feel passionate about, having suffered one myself, as well as representing ASLEF members at coroners’ courts. I was overwhelmed with the responses I received, not only from fellow drivers in the UK, but also from drivers right across the world. Alec Grant, a lecturer at the University of Brighton, and Fran Biley, associate professor at the University of Bournemouth, approached me to write a chapter for a new book they were editing with Judith Haire and Brendan Stone titled Our Encounters With Suicide, dealing with the issue of suicide for those left behind, a project to which I happily agreed to contribute. The Sun also asked me to write an article but I politely refused their offer.

TICK BOX CULTURE

The fact is, there is no standard to which a driver adheres as he or she recovers, no neat little form or matrix that can be maintained during the process, and that presents an unsolvable challenge within the tick box culture prevalent in today’s industry. There is no cross-industry consistency, and no clear procedures to be followed in terms of ASLEF reps being informed of incidents by companies or minimum expectations of a company’s chain of care structure, and this is frustrating. At times like these, a member needs certainty, they need procedure, and they need the support of his or her branch. The counselling services provided by the NHS, and GP services, are hopelessly under resourced and often delivered by health care professionals with little understanding of the trauma experienced. Following my fatality, I was sent away with a pat on the head, a prescription for anti-depressants and a referral to a counselling team that took more than seven months to offer me an initial consultation.

CHAIN OF CARE

Sitting down to plan my contribution to the book, I struggled to see the appeal of my own experience as a story. My reactions and recovery were, at times, embarrassing. They were mundane in places and bizarre in others. They didn’t fit in with what I thought was the right way to act, an impression reinforced by the managers who dealt with my return to driving. But reliving my experience of dealing with suicide was cathartic, and demonstrated how woefully ill-equipped just about every facet of the railway chain of care system is that drivers get hurled into after an incident.

A regular feature during my time working on behalf of ASLEF members as a branch secretary, as well as in other roles, involved intervening between overbearing and underskilled managers and already traumatised drivers suffering again at their hands.

DON’T BE AFRAID

As a final thought, re-reading my contribution to Our Encounters with Suicide left me feeling awkward and proud. It also pressed home the need for drivers and their families to know that there truly is no correct way to feel after suffering a fatality. Unfortunately, some of you reading this will be going through the aftermath of such an incident, and you need to know that, however you felt immediately afterwards, however you felt yesterday, however you feel tomorrow, is fine.

Don’t be afraid to lean on your colleagues, or your family. Accept the help offered. Most of all, don’t be afraid to smile. It took nine years, and an argument with Jeremy Clarkson, to make me realise that there really is no wrong answer, and that allowing yourself to feel good isn’t a crime. Contributing to this project, I hope others realise for themselves much quicker than me.

Contributing to this project, I hope others realise for themselves much quicker than me.
Ballots, funds and bangs for bucks

**ASLEF’s executive committee has called for a ballot on our political fund in July.**

**GREGOR GALL** explains the background to the ballot and the importance of the fund.

HE Trade Union Act of 1984 requires a trade union to ballot its members on whether it should continue with its political fund once every ten years. In the 1980s, and again in the 1990s, and 2000s, all trade unions voted for retention. A fourth round of balloting is now taking place, which includes ASLEF next year.

From 1913 until 1984, to use their resources for political purposes, unions were lawfully required to ballot members to establish political objectives as part of their rules and to maintain separate political funds in order to do this. Only unions with political funds could use these to support political parties.

**POLITICAL ACTIVITY**

In 1984, this legislation was extended by Margaret Thatcher’s anti-trade union Conservative government to require decadal review ballots on maintaining these funds. She argued that the members who had established political funds in 1913 were now dead and recent voting trends suggested support among union members for Labour was weaker than in 1913. Therefore, she believed, this relationship needed to be tested periodically.

Also, in 1984, the definition of political activity was changed to restrict the ability of unions without political funds to campaign on issues affecting them which were the result of government policy.

The results of the 1984 Act were resounding votes for continuing political funds in all 38 review ballots; and more than 20 unions, previously without political funds, and not affiliated to the Labour Party, voted to establish political funds for the first time as an insurance policy to protect their ability to campaign.

**TORY-DOMINATED**

What changed for many unions was that the third round of balloting took place under Labour governments. This meant it was no longer sufficient to call for a vote in favour of continued political funds as a vote against unwelcome Tory legislation – or to help get Labour into office.

Only two unions have voted against setting up a new political fund: the National Union of Journalists in 2004 and UNIFI, the finance union, in 2000. No union has voted against continuing its political fund. This is clear rebuke to the lawmakers behind the 1984 Act, and is all the more notable when unions have merged and the composition of memberships has changed over time.

No significant union has ended its political fund either. Certainly, when the FBU and the RMT ceased their affiliations to Labour, the continuation of their political funds was not in any doubt.

The present round of balloting is taking place during a period of sustained attacks on jobs, pensions, and terms and conditions of employment, in the public and the private sector, by a Conservative-dominated coalition with little sympathy for the plight of the working man and woman in this country.

**OPT-IN NOT OPT-OUT**

Many union members, and most trade unions, want to see Labour returned to office. But there is a feeling in some unions that the choice between Labour and the Tories is a little like the choice between Tweedledee and Tweedledum. An independent political voice is all the more important in standing up for members, and opposing anti-union legislation, whichever party is in office or opposition.

And, since Ed Miliband’s proposals to bring in an opt-in, rather than an opt-out, for the political levy, the ability of affiliated unions to spend money on political campaigning has drastically increased. For example, the GMB, in response to Miliband’s proposals, is cutting £1.1 million in funding each year to the Labour Party so it has more money in its political fund to campaign on political and industrial issues dearest to the hearts of its members.

**VOTE IN FAVOUR**

Inevitably, with union mergers reducing the number of trade unions, there will be fewer political fund ballots. One of the first unions to ballot in the fourth round was Prospect, a union for white collar workers, and not affiliated to the Labour Party. In March, 91.3% voted to retain the political fund. The turnout was 37.6%. Unite, Britain’s biggest union, which is affiliated to Labour, balloted in May with 87% voting in favour of retaining its political fund on a turnout of 17%. USDAW, the shop workers’ union, announced in September that 93% of its members (on a 11.2% turnout) had voted to retain its political fund; the highest vote in favour in the union’s four ballots since 1985.

Next year, as well as ASLEF, the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers’ Union; BECTU; Community; the CWU; the FBU; the GMB; the Musicians’ Union; the RMT; and Unity will all hold ballots. The PCS and Unison will do the same in 2015.

It seems there will be little problem in other unions renewing their political fund ballots. The more pressing challenge will be deciding how to use the money in a way that delivers a ‘bang for every buck’ spent. It looks to me as if Labour-affiliated unions will be moving towards being more like non-affiliated unions in prioritising their own independent campaigning.

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© Gregor Gall is Professor of Industrial Relations at the University of Bradford, Visiting Lecturer in International Labour and Trade Union Studies at Ruskin College, Oxford, and a visiting lecturer at the University of Hertfordshire.
MY BLUEPRINT FOR BRITAIN’S RAILWAYS

The new Shadow Secretary of State for Transport tells KEITH RICHMOND how she sees the future of the rail network in this country

At THE Labour Party conference in Brighton at the end of September, rumours were swirling around in the cool Channel breeze whipping in off the sea that Maria Eagle, the Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, and in position for three years, was about to be moved from her brief. It wasn’t clear where, and why, Maria might be going, and various names were being floated in the bars along the seafront as her replacement, including Chris Leslie, Vernon Coaker, and Jim Murphy. The announcement, when it was made by Ed Miliband, the Labour leader, in early October, came out of the blue. A straight swap with Mary Creagh at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Many people in the rail industry – in the train operating companies as well as the trade unions – were sorry to see Maria go. She was a hard-working shadow minister, always on top of her brief, and, even if she fell out with Ed Balls, the Shadow Chancellor, over her support for HS2, she was much-admired and well-respected for her determination to forge an integrated public transport policy not just to help Labour get elected at the general election in 2015, but to help build a better, modern, railway for a better, more prosperous, Britain.

KICKING IN THE COMMONS

Mary, 46 this month, was, for those of us in the rail industry, something of an unknown quantity. We knew she was big on badgers – she had seen off a couple of Conservative Secretaries of State at DEFRA and won a deserved reputation for giving first Caroline Spelman and then Owen Paterson a good kicking in the Commons, but no one knew about her interest in transport or her views on rail.

She has, understandably, kept her cards pretty close to her chest during her first few weeks in the job as she picks up the baton – and the briefing papers – from Maria and settles into her new job. But when we sat down in her office at Portcullis House on the other side of Westminster Bridge, by the Houses of Parliament on the north bank of the Thames, she was clearly across all the significant issues in her new brief, as well as being refreshingly candid, and keen to assure people that the party’s policy on transport will be run, on her watch, along the same lines as it was under Maria.

‘I want to reassure people,’ she said. ‘There will be no great lurch off in any different direction. Maria has done a lot of really important work, on issues such as regulation of bus services and on safer cycling, and I want to build on that, to build on her work, as we move forward to the general election.’

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

Privatisation, most people in Britain now believe, has failed to deliver on the promises made to the electorate by John Major twenty years ago. It’s led to higher fares, more overcrowding, and much older rolling stock. Even Margaret Thatcher, that arch-advocate of privatisation, slyly described the privatisation of British Rail as ‘a privatisation too far’.

As commuters, fed up with paying ever-higher fares, complain bitterly about being ‘ripped off’ by train operating companies treating them as ‘cash cows ready to be milked every day’, there is clearly an opportunity for Labour to offer something to what party strategists call their ‘target demographic’ in East Anglia, the south-east, and south-west of England.

‘My first three weeks in the job were dominated by the debate over HS2, by fares and by ticketing. The review took 18 months, it was launched in March 2012, and, after reading the original consultation document, and the final document, all 80 pages, 18 months later, it delivered inflation-busting fare rises for commuters. It delivered too little, too late.’

Mary knows, a month into her brief, that she will be the target for lobbying by special interest groups – by trade unions as well as train operating companies – but is clear that her position on transport is to see things from the point of view of the fare-paying passenger.

‘My starting point is how does it feel to be a passenger in the 21st century rail network, and is the taxpayer getting value for money? What is our vision for a transport system to best serve the people of this country?’
Mary Creagh talks about Labour’s plans for the East Coast (above left) and HS2 (above right) in her office at Westminster

Mary asked a Parliamentary question which revealed that just 452 stations out of 2,533 in Britain have step-free access via lifts or ramps. ‘That’s less than one-fifth of the stations in this country! How do I get my child, who is in a buggy, my friend, who is in a wheelchair, my neighbour, who is disabled, my parent, or six suitcases, onto a train? How do I use the railway station if it doesn’t have step-free access? People are being excluded from the railways, because they are not accessible to them. It’s a big problem.’

To underline her point about 19th century infrastructure in a 21st century economy, Mary tells the story of a station – ‘Westgate, because Kirkgate has been left to go to rack and ruin’ – in her Wakefield constituency. ‘There was no staff, no CCTV, no access to bus services because a bus couldn’t turn safely. Local people’s transport needs were being neglected by the operator, and by Network Rail. There was one rape and a serious wounding but, with Northern Rail, and Network Rail, it was a constant game of pass the parcel. It’s taken five years to stitch together a £3.5 million funding package to get the station we deserve. The car park has been resurfaced, there is a turning circle for local buses, and live CCTV if not staff. It’s been a long and complex journey, but my message is that “it’s good enough” is no longer good enough on our stations. Then it is not clear to me how to get the cheapest fare…’

### PASSENGER EXPERIENCE

Mary cycled to the party conference in Brighton – ‘from Islington, 62 miles, Ditching Beacon, I was sobbing up that hill’ – but caught the train back to the capital. ‘The machine at the station gives you standard return, I couldn’t work it out, bought a ticket for £23, but my friend paid £16, so I paid £7 too much. We have to sort out the nature and complexity of fares to make sure the consumer gets better value for money.’

It is, she says, all about ‘the passenger experience’. Fares have, under the Tories, and since privatisation, risen too far, too fast. ‘We’ve said a strict fare cap of RPI plus 1%. No flexibility beyond that, no averaging out. The rail companies failed to show the National Audit Office that they’re not just out to find more ways of making money out of passengers.’

Not though, she stresses, for party political advantage. ‘The Campaign for Better Transport has done analysis on marginal seats but I start from a principled position, that the commuter should pay a fair price and get a fair service. Labour Party policy will be how does that happen? Then we can look at the politics…’

As for private versus public ownership of the railway, Mary was clear: ‘The model does not seem to be working well for passengers at the moment. People are being asked to pay more, there is a lack of transparency, on rail franchises, they say, when you ask, that information is commercially confidential, so it’s difficult to come up with an alternative.

‘But we know there are huge problems with the franchising model. We now have the safest railway in Europe, but it’s not clear if that is a benefit of privatisation because that’s been delivered by Network Rail, which was brought back into public ownership. Privatisation has meant fragmentation, rail divorced from bus, and made it harder to implement an integrated transport policy. Maria’s work on integrated transport is crucial to the future.’

Mary was also clear about HS2 – ‘Labour’s brainchild, very badly served by this government, we need to sell the benefits and bring it in on cost – and the importance of freight’ – ‘We want to get freight off road and on to rail. That’s why HS2 is so important. Freight is the key to the success of the railway’ – and the Fourth Rail Package: ‘We don’t want to export the fragmented rail network to Europe. Germany and France don’t want it, anyway.’

This was the first major interview Mary had given since taking over the transport brief. It’s good to know that Labour’s policy is still on the right tracks.
Two train drivers tell KEITH RICHMOND of Happy Days after love blossomed on stage in Sheffield...

Two train drivers tell KEITH RICHMOND of Happy Days after love blossomed on stage in Sheffield...

A CTORS falling in love when they star in a production together is the stuff of showbiz legend. Theatres on Shaftesbury Avenue in the West End of London and, across the Atlantic, all along the Great White Way of Broadway have echoed to such heartwarming stories for as long as professional players have trodden the boards. It’s rather less common in the world of amateur dramas but this is the tale of two train drivers who found love when their eyes met across the theatre footlights.

Tim and Maria Wright first met during rehearsals for a Woodseats Musical Theatre Company production of Lionel Bart’s Oliver! in Sheffield in 2001. It was, fortuitously, their shared love of acting and, especially, of musicals which brought them together. She played Oliver’s mother while he was Dr Grimwig, and a policeman. As he remembers it, in one musical number, ‘Maria kept turning the wrong way – I was right! – and in the end I had to show her how to do it.’ In the stage version of the story, as in Charles Dickens’ original novel, a hungry young Oliver Twist asks the master for another bowl of gruel: ‘Please, sir, I want some more.’ Some of the magic of the musical rubbed off; Tim and Maria wanted more, fell in love, and got married in 2005.

SHOVELHEAD HARLEY

They both drive trains, and are active members of the union, but there’s another ASLEF connection when we meet before a performance of Happy Days: The Musical, based on the 1970s TV series about the adventures of Richie, Potsie, Ralph Malph and the Fonz, at the University Drama Studio in Sheffield. Because there on stage, in all its Wild One and Easy Rider glory, is a yellow-and-black shovelhead Harley-Davidson motorbike – which gets its curious nickname because the rocker box looks, allegedly, like a coal shovel – belonging to ASLEF’s vice-president Tosh McDonald.

‘Dolores – that’s her name in Happy Days, not what Tosh calls her – is stunning,’ says Tim. ‘She gets a gasp every night when she’s pushed out, shining and gleaming, she sparkles, her lights come on, and the audience goes “Ooh!” and later, when the Fonz talks to her, and tells her what he’s thinking, and the bike revs back, the audience loves it.’ Tosh’s shovelhead Harley is a star in its own right now; a couple of weeks after Happy Days it was back on stage in Lucy Prebble’s anti-capitalist play Enron.

BITTEN BY THE BUG

Tim, who’s Yorkshire born – at Hunters Bar in 1961 – and bred, started treading the boards quite late in life. As a boy he much preferred playing football and rugby but when his teenage daughter Gemma joined Splinters Theatre Group in Sheffield, on her way to a performing arts degree, he got roped in at the age of 39. ‘I wanted to support her, took her to an audition for the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical Oklahoma! at the Lyceum in Sheffield, and they were short of men so the musical director said “You’re doing it as well!” I’d been in the church choir as a boy, but suddenly I’d joined the chorus and, as one of the cowhands, I got a few lines as well, and I got bitten by the bug. The first time I walked out on stage in front of 1,000 people they all clapped and I thought, this is great! I got a real high! I wasn’t nervous, just excited.

Since then he’s done two shows a year for 13 years. Shows such as Guys and Dolls, Oliver!, The Pirates of Penzance, in which Tim played the police sergeant and Maria played Ruth, and which has a special place in their hearts as it was the first show they did after getting together, and Some Like It Hot.’ I was Daphne, the part played by Jack Lemmon in the Billy Wilder film, and spent 75% of the show dressed as a woman in high heels. My calves have never hurt so much!’ To which, and he’s going to get teased in the drivers’ mess room for this, Maria adds: ‘He’s got the most amazing legs, and in fishnets and leotards, his legs looked fantastic!’

Tim, who had been an office manager, transport manager, and done construction work, became a train driver in 2004. ‘I was getting fed up with what I was doing, looking for a different direction, and wanted to try something else. I applied at Hull, and passed the interviews, but lived too far away.’ He trained with Arriva Trains Northern and drives for Northern Rail ‘mostly from Sheffield to Leeds, Huddersfield, Donny, Lincoln, Scunthorpe, and York. I’m learning Hull and Cleethorpes.’

DRIVING A DESK

Coming out of Pontefract Baghill at 15mph earlier this year, he saw a dog running along the line in front of his train. ‘It was a giant Yorkshire terrier, running ahead of me for 400 yards, with me following at 5mph now and he wouldn’t get off the track. In the end I had to jump down and get him – I got bit for my trouble – put him in the cab, and took him to York and back. Nobody claimed him, nobody wanted him, so now he lives with us.’ A dog on the line usually ends unhappily. But this story has a happy ending. Tim and Maria took Frank, as they called him, after a friend, to the Lake District on holiday this summer and, at the Lakeland show at Torver, he won a first place rosette as best rescue dog.

Maria, who’s 48, joined the railway in 1990 as a signalman in a lever box at Sykes Spring.
Time for change

HASHIM MOHAMMED AHMED reports on the plight of workers on the railways in Sudan

HEN Sudan became independent, on 1 January 1956, the British left behind a good railway system known as Sudan Government Railways (previously Sudan Military Railways) with a fleet of 200 steam locomotives (main line and shunting engines) on a narrow (3ft 6in) gauge. They had a good number of well-trained, skilled drivers and enginemen. It takes about two years to become a driver and a further two years to reach senior driver.

Drivers got so used to working with steam locomotives that, in the absence of the engineer or foreman, they were able to deal with minor repairs in case of breakdown and successfully take it to its destination.

With the dieselisation of Sudan Railways, starting with English Electric, and subsequently diesel electric (General Electric, General Motors, Henschel of Germany), the Railways had to train existing drivers on the new technology as well as recruiting a new generation of drivers.

MILITARY COUP

Steam locomotives were phased out by the end of the 1980s and the Railways faced a severe shortage of diesel drivers and other assistant staff. Then, on 30 June 1989 the Muslim Brotherhood and National Islamic Front overthrew the democratically-elected government in a military coup.

They were antagonistic to the trade unions and labour movement, in particular Sudan Railways unions. They proscribed trade unions, confiscated their properties, closed their clubs, detained their leaders and active members, torturing and even killing some in cold blood. A ban was followed by government-appointed steering committees to represent the workers in government-guided organisations. A law passed in 1992 revoked all previous trade union laws. Trade unions were led by NIF members to the extent that the nominated president of the Sudanese Workers’ Trade Union Federation is a dentist who has nothing to do with railway workers, drivers’ issues and problems!

LEGITIMATE UNIONS

All done in the absence of the legitimate trade unions, whose members, and their democratically-elected leaders, were given the axe. The purging campaign resulted in the deterioration, and then the breakdown, of the railway transport system in Sudan.

In 1989 total manpower in the public sector was half a million employees. By the end of the year 9,000 government employees had been dismissed which 5,000 were Sudan Railways employees (all dismissed in one day!) including 3,000 skilled workers at the headquarters workshops in the Atbara railway town. The train drivers, a very important group, were no exception.

By 1993 10% of government employees (50,000) had been dismissed; 95,000 by 1995, and the purging was still going on! A report by the Committee for Defending the Economic Rights in 2000 said 300,000 Sudanese in all departments (60% of the public sector workforce) had been sacked. Part of the shortage was covered by loyal members of the ruling party; many with no qualifications or experience!

The shortage of skilled labour has turned Sudan Railways, once a great institution, into a shambles. The government started thinking of privatisation as a solution but this led to more confusion.

SKILLED WORKERS

What is needed is to reinstate all those skilled workers who have been dismissed and are still in a position to offer good years of service irrespective of their trade union activities. Then they need to be trained and retrained.

It is imperative that trade unions be reinstated according to a democratic law, allowing freedom of association; observing trade unions rights and the type or form and structure of the union they want, as well as the right to decide their own future.

This, coupled with the dismounting of the governmental trade unions, will lead to an important improvement in the railways and other departments as far as stability, production and economic conditions are concerned.

Hashim Mohammed Ahmed is a former general manager of Sudan Railways and one-time president-elect of the Sudanese Engineers’ Union.
Brothers and sisters in unity

Twenty quality reps attended District 3’s sixth annual safety seminar in Liverpool and 20 quality and further educated reps left. Our GS set the example in ensuring health and safety is at the forefront by eloquently opening our seminar. Mick spoke about the RAIB report of a Category A SPAD by a heritage rail operator at Stafford which sent shockwaves across those of us who execute our functions in a professional and diligent manner. He also spoke about fatalities, a delicate subject, but one which is no longer taboo, and we must do much more work to ensure our members get the best protection they deserve. To have our GS at this event shows the commitment of our union in ensuring its safety reps are trained to the highest standard.

Maggie Kelly, an ORR inspector, spoke about processes in place to ensure a safe railway and, importantly, to ensure the involvement of safety reps. She spoke about the benchmarks TOCs and FOCs are required to meet when the ORR undertakes compliance visits and how this should involve our reps. We all felt we had someone on our side should the need arise.

After lunch I delivered a workshop that gave us all a better understanding of why we carry out our role and what our aspirations are. Hilda Palmer, our friend and comrade from Manchester Hazards Centre, whose enthusiasm is infectious, spoke of how this government is trying to undermine everything we do and what we can do, collectively, to protect our rights. And, our District Organiser, Colin Smith, gave a rousing and, at times, emotional speech on health and safety and the tragic events at James Street in Liverpool and the profound effect they had on so many people.

Everyone left better equipped to carry out their roles and in the knowledge that there is a great support network for them. The seminar, once again, was what makes me proud to be ASLEF. Alan Moss, Longsight branch

Always a pleasure

District 5 Organiser Nigel Gibson said it was always a pleasure to attend Stratford branch as the Stratford depot was where he started his career. He has been involved with Freightliner Intermodal, Freightliner Heavy Haul, and GB Railfreight, so he knows the challenges the industry faces. Nigel presented long service badges to Steve Wicks (40 years) and Chris Nelson (35).

There are still drivers being disciplined for misuse of mobile phones; part of the problem is there is no industry standard. Make sure you don’t put your livelihood on the line by using your phone while driving.

Finally, the relationship between the trade unions and the Labour Party has become strained although, locally, it is working well. ASLEF has a strong bond with the party because, although we do not always agree with all their policies, it is the only political party that believes in workers’ rights. Peter Dodgson, branch secretary

Help for heroes

At the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month we remembered when, 95 years ago, the guns fell silent on the Western Front. Every year the Royal British Legion raises money by selling poppies and the people who sell those poppies do so in their own time on a voluntary basis. Roy Verity, who has served our industry, and been an ASLEF member, for over 40 years, is one such volunteer. He was at Chingford station every morning from the 27 October to 10 November with his father’s medals on show, chatting to commuters and kids from local schools to raise awareness of the sacrifice made by young men and women in the past. Every driver at Chingford would like to say a big thank you and let Roy know that we shall not forget.

Paul Cutmore

Tosh McDonald and Nicky Whitehead presented long service badges to Mark Thompson, Andy Sessford and Alex Cooke, as well as 125th anniversary (Skipton ASLEF 1887-2012) badges to retired members Ronnie Parkinson and Graham Stockhill. Tosh also presented the branch with an ASLEF plate to celebrate our 125th anniversary, which will take pride of place at The Railway Inn where Skipton branch meetings are held.
Re-open the Great Central

ASLEF members working for various freight companies gathered on a wet and windy Saturday morning at Peterborough for a freight forum weekend run by Districts 5 and 6. After a bite to eat it was down to business chaired by Martin Bromage-Giffins of District 6.

Kelvin Hopkins, Labour MP for Luton North, and co-ordinator of the ASLEF parliamentary group, talked about his work at Westminster and the GB freight route proposals – the plan to open up parts of the freight route proposals – the important rail freight route, adding new sections where needed. Kelvin stressed this is serious. One to watch with interest!

Stewart Langridge, operations director for Freightliner Heavy Haul, gave a fact-filled overview of the past, present and future of rail freight in the UK, plus some interesting info on Networks Rail’s contributions, followed by a lively and well-natured Q&A on subjects such as rostering, fatigue, freight expansion and proposed charges for track access.

Ian Bertram from the Office of Rail Regulation explained how the ORR works. The following Q&A carried more than a few questions on the recent Devon & Cornwall Railways incident and subsequent investigation.

Last, but by no means least, was our general secretary. Mick, as always, rallied the troops, reminding us how far we have come and some of the pitfalls that may appear. ASLEF is the only true train drivers’ union and we all need to work together to deliver our aspirations. A lively Q&A followed.

It was back down to business on Sunday with an all ASLEF top table panel including business council reps from DBS, GRBF and FLHH as well as ASLEF officers and EC members. Our chair for this session was Howard Kaye. The Q&A ranged across such subjects as membership applications, zero hours operators, arresting the race to the bottom, lack of conditions in some FOCs, does ASLEF need a freight charter, and are branches serving those members working in FOCs. The debates were quick-moving and all seemed to get their say. An expression of appreciation from all present for the whole event, and a hope that further such events can be held in the future.

John Davidson, Rugby branch

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John Davidson, Rugby branch

Mick Holder looks back through the pages of the Journal to December 1913 and a rail tragedy

CUMBERIAN RAIL DISASTER

FW Brewer, reflecting on the jailing for two months of Driver Caudle for manslaughter following the Aisgill train disaster in Cumbria, which saw the loss of 16 lives, including that of Sir Arthur Douglas, wrote: ‘It is quite conceivable that Caudle was convicted because he was indirectly responsible for the death of a distinguished personage – to wit, a baronet. Now, so far as a case like Caudle’s is concerned, we have no hesitation in saying that he was not guilty of criminal negligence, and not guilty, therefore, of manslaughter. Truly, in this matter, the law is an ass.’

Driver Caudle was distracted from driving while attempting to resolve engine running problems and missed red signals, running into the rear of an unexpected train.

WAVE OF AMERICANISM

‘Call if forgetfulness, or carelessness, or an error of judgement – describe it how you will, his mistake cannot be construed as manslaughter. We believe Driver Caudle was trying to do his best, under very trying circumstances, and that, at worst, he committed an unfortunate blunder.

‘We must next consider the question as to whether the conditions under which the men frequently have to work are, or are not, liable to indirectly bring about a disaster. Ever since the wave of Americanism passed over British railways, the companies have only one watchword: economy.

‘It is all very well for judges and coroners to preach safety to the rank and file; let the upper officials be asked whether they, without exception, always put that desirable condition first.’

RESOLUTION RE DRIVER

Brewer concludes: ‘It is a matter for regret that Driver Caudle and his fireman rejected the assistance of their union in the first instance. Great credit is due to Caudle and his fireman for not attempting to shirk at all at their responsibilities in the matter.’

Stratford branch reported: ‘A resolution re Driver Caudle was passed to be sent to the press and Home Secretary.’
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You can also see us on Facebook:
FRANK MCKENNA
TALKING RAILWAY TALK

After an active trade union career with ASLEF in the 1950s and 1960s my father, Frank McKenna, secured a TUC scholarship to Ruskin College, Oxford, to study Philosophy, Politics and Economics. One of his tutors was Raphael Samuel, the Marxist historian who, with Christopher Hill, EP Thompson, and Eric Hobsbawm, was a member of the Communist Party Historians’ Group, and, with his encouragement, he wrote A Glossary of Railwaymen’s Talk (1970).

Frank, who died last month at the age of 84, then qualified as a teacher and became a senior lecturer at South East London College in Lower Sydenham. During the 1970s he carried out research for his major work, The Railway Workers 1840-1970 (Faber & Faber, 1980) a social history of the railway industry in this country.

Born in Felling, Gateshead, Frank was the oldest of 10 children of Hugh and Bella McKenna. His father had been a miner at Hebburn Colliery, but was without work for many years. The family moved to Carlisle in the late 1930s and Frank always said the Second World War saved many from starvation.

Frank left school at 14 and, in 1946, started work as an engine cleaner at Kingmoor shed near Carlisle. He was fired by a burning sense of social injustice, which led him into socialism. In 1945, he had joined the Labour League of Youth and, on a camping trip organised for young socialists in the New Forest in the late 1940s, he resolved to move to London. In 1949, he secured a transfer to Willesden depot and joined the Young Communist League. He became a member of ASLEF, and was increasingly active in the Communist Party, where he stood out as a young, gifted and articulate working-class member. He was given an opportunity to write on railway industry matters and took courses with ASLEF and the Workers’ Educational Association.

Frank was an active member of both the anti-apartheid movement and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Between 1962 and 1964, he sat on the editorial board of Marxism Today, where he worked alongside Eric Hobsbawm.

From 1959 until 1967, he was the ASLEF rep for the Kentish Town depot and, after its closure, for Cricklewood. He was elected president of the ASLEF district council in 1962, but his hard left politics were not to the taste of many of his colleagues. Frank finally left the Communist Party in 1965, by which time he was exhausted by the bitter infighting for which the party was infamous. In 1967, he lost his union position in an election.

After retirement in 1991, Frank moved to Camberley, Surrey, where he was content to work on his allotment and support his family. His views mellowed over time and he was proud that his own children had been able to progress with education, employment and a fuller life than that of his parents. He is survived by me and my sister Laura, from his marriage to Sylvia, which ended in divorce in 1994; by six grandchildren and a great-granddaughter; and by three sisters and two brothers.

Stephen McKenna

JOHN GREEN
WONDERFUL MEMORIES

It is with great sadness that I share the loss of my very good friend and work colleague, John Green, who passed away, after a long illness, on 24 October. I first met John when I transferred from Hither Green to Grove Park in 1986. We became great friends and, even after he and his wife Pat moved to the Isle of Wight, after early retirement in 2001, my wife and I enjoyed visits to their lovely home. We have wonderful memories of funny, happy times. John will be sadly missed by his wife Pat, her two sons and their four grandchildren.

Rod Foster, retired driver, South Eastern

ALF RATHMILL
A ONE DEPOT MAN

With sadness I report the loss of retired driver Alf Rathmill at the age of 84. Starting on the loco at Dean Lane depot in 1943 at the age of 14 he stayed there until his retirement 51 years later. A depot character never short of a word, popular with all grades and a real family man; they are in our thoughts at this sad time.

S Black, Newton Heath RMS
Selling the family silver

The latest rise in the cost of gas and electricity is the price we all paid when the Thatcher government privatised the public utilities. It was obscene then, and still is. Basic needs for survival, water and energy, are now subject to the whims of profiteers and speculators. I remember the Tories’ own former prime minister, Harold Macmillan, telling the House she was ‘selling the family silver’ and he was right.

When the Labour Party came to power in 1945 it was faced with a bankrupt country but in six short years, from 1945-50 and from 1950-51, it brought about not only the NHS, which was their finest legacy, but recognised that energy, which was then mainly produced by coal, could not be left in private hands and nationalised the industry (they also did the same to the railways and, later, steel).

Gordon Brown’s radical answer to the financial crisis of capitalism, picked up by most of the world, was to virtually nationalise the banking system and he did that because we couldn’t afford the banks to fail. That is what the Attlee government did when the privately owned mines and railways were faced with bankruptcy, so what is the difference?

I remember John Prescott telling me, and hundreds more, at a meeting at Westminster Hall in the 1990s, that a future Labour government would take back the railways into public ownership. Well they didn’t do it, did they?

We need the sort of courage that brave Labour government, in my opinion the finest government of the 20th century, had in the dark days after the Second World War.

Len Worboys, RMS

Underground overtime

In response to District line driver John Hardesty (Letters, September and November) I, too, have brought up the subject of rest day working (overtime). All London Underground staff can work overtime, except drivers. Everyone can work overtime on TOCs, including drivers.

I’ve heard the old chestnut regarding safety, so how come it’s safe to drive a train travelling at 125mph towards Glasgow, but it’s not safe to drive a train at 40mph towards Golders Green? Then there’s the other chestnut regarding jobs. So how do you explain TOCs drivers working overtime? When I mentioned this subject to London Underground I was told to see the union, but I don’t work for the union, I work for London Underground. This policy is nothing short of a restrictive practice and I thought that was illegal?

Terry Baxter, Metropolitan line driver

Time off, not money

I have read the reply from Graham Dean, chair, trains functional council, in the November Journal and I am not happy with it. I don’t want to work rest days like District line driver John Hardesty but, talk about getting quick cash, ASLEF has just agreed £350 to work Boxing Day. Talk about money and 93% said ‘yes’ but I think we should have had time off work; like work Boxing Day and get two days off. Now you all know Christmas Day working will happen plus 02.30 finish soon. At my depot we have lost spare turns and nothing has been done. We want time off, not money.

Working New Year’s Eve was a one-off; 13 years down the line we are still doing a 24 hour service. Plus we are breaking the rules because passengers should not be under the influence and have alcohol in their system but we turn a blind eye. Why? Oh, yeah. It’s money in our pockets.

CW Smith, train op, Barking

Thatcher’s children

I feel sorry for Bro Forsyth (Letters, October Journal) for having to work with people who will sell their souls for a five pound note. When I was a fireman my depot didn’t work rest days but it still took me over ten years to get my driver’s job. No telling how long it would have taken had those drivers worked their rest days. But, then, they were men of principle. Still, the tax man must be over the moon with them.

I read with interest Collette Gibson’s
Time with my family

John Hardesty (Journal, November) has made some points re overtime that should be debated. He should not be bullied for his opinions. For all those dissenters of overtime, it is perfectly acceptable that overtime can be negotiated and agreed. It gives employees a chance to earn a little more cash. Those employees should also be applauded for working overtime as over 40% of their money goes straight back to the taxman!

I also hope John is aware of the consequences of working overtime where there is no agreement in place. ASLEF has negotiated four days on and three days off for employees to spend more time with their families. In reality, having gained a reduction in the working week, some employees see it as a way to spend more time at work! However, how an employee spends his rest day is up to the individual. John and all employees who wish to work overtime are perfectly entitled to, as long as they are working within a negotiated agreement. Me, I only work my rostered hours as I would rather spend the time with my family. My wife sometimes wishes I stay away and work my rest days!

John Glazebrook, secretary, Portsmouth & Isle of Wight branch

Link with Labour

Trade unionism and the labour movement developed and grew side by side through the 20th century. Both fought tooth and nail to secure the best possible outcome for the common man. In the closing years of that century, the Labour Party moved from the common man. In the closing years of that century, the Labour Party moved from the common man. In the closing years of that century, the Labour Party moved from the common man. In the closing years of that century, the Labour Party moved from the common man. In the closing years of that century, the Labour Party moved from the common man. In the closing years of that century, the Labour Party moved from the common man. In the closing years of that century, the Labour Party moved from the common man. In the closing years of that century, the Labour Party moved from the common man. In the closing years of that century, the Labour Party moved from the common man. In the closing years of that century, the Labour Party moved from the common man. 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On the write lines: Donald Wightman at Wolverhampton station with his novel take on the railway

Britain; and Engines of War: How Wars Were Won & Lost on the Railways established his reputation for riding the rails and, on the strength of his reputation as an expert on transport, he hopes to become Labour’s candidate to run for Mayor of London in 2016.

A book is a gift you can open again and again.’ – Garrison Keillor

Some people, not all of them on the right, loved to knock British Rail. Twenty years of franchises, and privatisers taking money out of the system, has made most passengers, and many politicians, call for the return of Britain’s railways to public ownership. So the publication of British Rail: The Nation’s Railway by Tanya Jackson (The History Press, £18.99), is timely. She takes us from nationalisation under the Transport Act of Clement Attlee’s Labour government in 1947 to privatisation with John Major’s Railways Act of 1993 and tells how British Rail transformed the industry from a state of near-collapse at the end of the Second World War into a modern, technologically advanced railway, despite being starved of cash.

Kevin Lindsay, ASLEF’s organiser in Scotland, takes up the theme in his essay, A Railway for People and Passengers, in Class, Nation and Socialism: The Red Paper on Scotland 2014 edited by Pauline Bryan and Tommy Kane (Glasgow Caledonian University Archives, £7.99)

Bland Encounter (Matador, £7.99) is a debut novel by Donald Wightman, a train driver from Bridgnorth in Shropshire. It follows the fortunes of Dave Bland, a middle-aged train manager on Mercia main line looking for a new life – and a new love – after the break-up of his marriage. He meets, via an internet dating site, Galina, from Russia, and her niece Irina, and ends up organising a football team of Eastern European hookers to service hundreds of trainspotters in town for a special heritage steam weekend. It’s saucy, not sordid – think Carry on Camping rather than Debbie Does Dallas – but underpowered and overwritten. Gentlemen of a certain age, though, should enjoy it.

A house without books is like a room without windows.’ – Horace Mann

The Trans-Siberian Railway united a vast, sprawling country, helped Leon Trotsky, with his famous armoured ‘train of the Proletrevoynensoviet’, lead the Red Army to victory in the bloody civil war which followed the revolution, and was instrumental in the Soviet Union turning the tide against Nazi Germany during the Second World War.

Wolmar has Russian blood in his veins – his father Boris fleetingly thought of fighting for his country in 1917 but fled to France instead – and knows how to tell a tale. He worked for the New Statesman, Independent, and Observer before turning his hand to books. Broken Rails: How Privatisation Wrecked Britain’s Railways; Fire & Steam: A New History of the Railways in

Whether you’re looking for a present to give, or receive, there are lots of railway-related books on the bookshop shelves this year. KEITH RICHMOND slips between the covers…

On the left: Skimpleshanks: the Railway Cat by TS Eliot, and Adlestrop by Edward Thomas – are well known, some not so well known. But it’s an excellent anthology and a chance to rediscover the joy of departures, arrivals, and all too brief encounters.

Leaves on the Line by Martin and Simon Tosheland (Portico, £9.99) is a light-hearted look at what we say, and what we really mean. It takes its title from that infamous station announcement, quoted here in full: ‘Virgin Trains apologises for the cancellation of the 16.15 service from Liverpool Lime Street to London Euston. The train has been temporarily incapacitated by leaves on the line. We would like to extend our sincere regrets to all those passengers who had hoped to travel using our trains today on their hugely expensive pre-booked seats. Instead, please feel free to lay siege to the next available service and see if you can squeeze yourself into a space next to the overflowing toilets.’
Prize Crossword No. 92 set by Zebedee

Across
1. Wrestling hold (8)
2. Rip (4)
3. Bad habit (4)
4. Dreadful (8)
5. Conundrum (6)
6. Peppermint camphor (7)
7. Part of service in which to pass the plate (7)
8. Characteristic of or peculiar to a woman (6)
9. Disruption (8)
10. Curved roof (4)
11. Cargo area (4)
12. Grand hand-outs (8)

Down
1. Britain’s longest river (6)
2. Use up (5)
3. Pale yellow slug of hooch reserve (5)
4. Place of pilgrimage (6)
5. A stand with short feet used under a hot dish on a table (6)
6. Contrite (6)
7. Twofold (4)
8. One-man sledge (4)
9. Car’s annual test (3)
10. A painting of a naked human figure (4)

Solution to prize crossword No 91 which appeared in the November edition of the ASLEF Journal

Across
1. Mandarin
2. Fork
3. 7 Ruin
4. 8 Valuable
5. 9 Sparse
6. 12 Snooker
7. 15 Perplex
8. 19 Blyton
9. 21 Ping-Pong
10. 22 Ugli
11. 23 Live
12. 24 Brethren

Down
1. 1 Morose
2. 2 Dinar
3. 3 Revue
4. 4 Nelson
5. 5 Franco
6. 6 Keeper
7. 10 Afar
8. 11 Soil
9. 12 Six
10. 13 Oval
11. 14 Kilt
12. 15 Propel
13. 16 Prague
14. 17 Entomb
15. 18 Indian
16. 19 Bugle
17. 20 Youth

Congratulations to Martin Twigg of Yatton, North Somerset who was last month’s winner.

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

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