That was then, this is now
35 years of union

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Insidious attacks on driver training

AM writing this from the 43rd International Transport Workers’ Federation conference in Bulgaria where the problems of the neoliberal agenda, driven by globalisation and transnational organisations, have been discussed. If we are to operate on behalf of British train drivers in the modern world we have to work with trade unions in other countries, in solidarity, as the impact of technology, and new working practices, often not in the best interests of workers, are in many cases being forced through internationally.

Last month in the Journal we raised the issue of TTIP which is a trade agreement with an agenda that promotes the wholesale privatisation of everything, seeks to prevent the return of public services to public ownership, and undermines the sovereignty of governments. Under one such agreement, when they introduced a minimum wage, companies promptly sued the government for their increased costs. What nonsense!

Closer to home, there seem to be several streams trying to weaken driver training. I am against a national curriculum for train driving and am yet to be convinced of distance learning as an acceptable model. Let me be clear – we will not accept any move to outsource training and will only recognise in-house training that has been negotiated and agreed with ASLEF. Any move to third party training will lead to industrial reaction of the strongest kind.

ERTMS is going to become an issue as some think the wholesale retraining of drivers, or introducing the necessary line side signage across the whole network, or appropriate speedometers, is not necessary. They are wrong.

We have spoken before about the broken model for our industry and the current round of temporary franchises and direct awards is testament to this. Some companies are saying the DfT is telling them what they can – and can’t – pay. Let’s make this very clear. We have free collective bargaining and if the companies are not willing to honour their agreements then they should get out of our industry – and stay out.

Mick Whelan, general secretary
We raise the watchword, Liberty

As the sun rose in Dorset on 24 February 1834, George Loveless, a Methodist lay preacher and farm labourer, kissed his wife Betsy and their three children goodbye and set off to work. He didn’t see them again for three years. Because, as he left his cottage in the village of Tolpuddle, George was served with a warrant for his arrest. He was one of six agricultural labourers – the others were his brother James Loveless; James Hammet; James Brine; Thomas Standfield and his son John Standfield – charged with making an illegal oath. Their real crime was forming a trade union to protest about their pay of six shillings a week.

The Tolpuddle Martyrs were sentenced at Dorchester Assizes to seven years’ transportation for having the temerity to stand up for themselves – and for standing together – to fight against poverty, austerity and injustice and to argue for better terms and conditions of employment. That is what trades unions have been doing for the best part of 200 years and why the story of Tolpuddle and its martyrs is at the heart of the history of the trade union movement in Britain.

And why a big ASLEF contingent, with banners, whistles and vuvuzelas, joined thousands of labour movement activists to hear Emily Benn speak movingly of what the festival meant to her grandfather Tony and listen to storming performances by Paul Heaton (ex-Housemartins and The Beautiful South) and The Men They Couldn’t Hang.

QUOTE…
‘Ed Milliband will this weekend run up the white flag over renationalisation of the railways. At Labour’s “national policy forum” he’ll kill off the one policy that finds favour right across the spectrum – from commuters to the rail unions. What a way to run a railway! Or a Labour Party, come to that.’ – Paul Routledge in his Friday column in the Daily Mirror

...UNQUOTE

This summer the Women’s Representative Committee ran a competition to design a new ASLEF women’s badge. The winning design, by Alison Morgan of Leeds branch, is based on an awareness ribbon in the Suffragette colours of green for hope, white for purity and violet for dignity. They cost £2.50 from head office.

CONFERENCES
The Burston strike school rally is at Burston, near Diss, in Norfolk on Sunday 7 September. The Trades Union Congress is at the BT convention centre, King’s Dock, Liverpool, from Sunday 7 to Wednesday 10 September. The Labour Party conference, the last before next year’s general election, is at the Manchester central exhibition centre from Sunday 21 to Wednesday 24 September.

SIMON URGES BACKING FOR TUC PAY DEMO NEXT MONTH
Simon Weller, ASLEF’s national organiser, is urging all branches to organise in support of the TUC’s Britain Needs a Pay Rise march and rally in London on Saturday 18 October. ‘This demonstration deserves massive support,’ said Simon, a member of the TUC’s general council. ‘The campaign slogan seems simple, but it defines an approach to the economy that can make this country a better place for working people. I hope masses of ASLEF members will be marching with Mick and me, behind our union banners, in London next month.’

THE POWER OF THREE IS HANDY FOR ANDY
The new executive committee member for District 7 (replacing Brian Corbett who resigned when he was elected as the new district organiser) is Andy Hudd (436 votes) who narrowly beat Bryan Davies (433) after a recount in a very close contest. Turnout was 42.7%.

SPENDING CUTS THREATEN RAIL SAFETY
Government cuts to Network Rail’s funding are putting the lives of passengers and maintenance workers at risk, according to a new report for the TUC’s Action for Rail campaign. Research carried out for the four trade unions behind AfR – ASLEF, the RMT, the TSSA and Unite – by the Working Lives Institute at London Metropolitan University found that safety is being compromised as a result of budget cuts, leading to staff shortages, less frequent inspections and the increasing use of workers on zero hours contracts.

ROMANCE OF RAIL
Rail is the most romantic form of transport – with one in 10 of us admitting to falling in love on a train – and many travellers saying they believe that rail is synonymous with romance. The survey, for East Coast, reveals that lots of passengers look forward to a Brief Encounter to spice up the working week.
Modern democratic trade unions need no outside interference

SLEF’s members have overwhelmingly voted to retain the union’s political fund. In a turnout that was the highest of any trade union political fund ballot, 80.5% of members voted to keep the fund. Mick Whelan, general secretary, said he was delighted by the result – and proud of the level of participation. ‘It is the essence of democracy that we all play a part and make our voices heard. It makes me proud to be general secretary of an active union with a participating membership. And I’m delighted that we have maintained our right to play the fullest part in our democratic society. Not to have a political fund would have limited what we can do to defend our members’ interests.’

Mick reiterated that the fund is not a piggy bank for the Labour Party. A political fund ensures we stay within the law when campaigning politically for issues like more investment in both passenger and rail freight, defending pensions, boosting economic growth, increasing employment, skills and training, paying for campaign materials, lobbying for and against policies in the UK and Europe, and exposing political attacks on workers.

‘The Thatcher government made it a legal requirement for unions to vote every ten years to continue to hold a political fund,’ said Mick. ‘This vote demonstrates that modern democratic trade unions don’t need outside interference to govern our own affairs. ‘I thank all our members for returning such a positive vote. It is another weapon in our armoury as SLEF campaigns against rail privatisation, for more freight on rail and broader campaigns against the privatisation of public services, against budget cuts, austerity measures and attacks on employment rights, in favour of High Speed 2 and opposing the European Union’s 4th railway package.’

Rail tales on film

Former ASLEF general secretary Lew Adams is appealing for volunteers to take part in a new short film archive being run by the Friends of the National Railway Museum. ‘It differs from the existing oral history project, and adds to it,’ said Lew. ‘A wide range of railway people talk about an issue for a few minutes while being filmed by a trained volunteer, who will come to you.’ The finished films will be donated to the museum in York where they will be available to see for free. The organisers, Railway Voices, want to hear from anyone willing to tell an interesting story based on a photograph or small artefact. If you want to play a part in the project, contact Railway Voices director Frank Paterson by email (nrm.friends@nrm.org.uk) or by phone (01904 636874).

After the success of last year’s badge Trevor Southgate, LLC rep, Ipswich, has produced a new badge for Poppy Day to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the Great War and raise funds for the British Legion. Price £5 plus £1 p+p from Trevor at 56 Leggatt Drive, Bramford, Ipswich, IP8 4EX. If you prefer to pay by PayPal, call him on 07798 857528 or email him on Suggj125@hotmail.co.uk

500 CLUB: Daniel Masrani, with number 165, won the August draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £372.

Off the rails

FRANK DOBSON, who is stepping down at the general election after 35 years as MP for Holborn & St Pancras, is one of the few Westminster warriors with a real (as opposed to contrived) sense of humour. After the privatisation in 1988 of Rover – another fire sale, like the Royal Mail, with the Tories selling the public purse short – Dobbo pulled the rug from under David Young, the hapless Trade and Industry Secretary, and had the Conservative as well as the Labour benches rocking with laughter when he told the chamber: ‘The price for Rover was so low that there is some suspicion that Lord Young thought it was a dog.’ Not that his own side was immune from his barbs; it was Dobbo who quipped: ‘The good thing about global warming is that Hazel Blears will be the first to go when the water rises.’

TORY suggestions that they will raise the bar before a strike is legal – demand 50% of those eligible to vote or whatever – have prompted laughter in many quarters. Karl Davis, a driver with DB Schenker, and ASLEF activist, wrote a piece for the Huffington Post, the online newspaper founded by Arianna Huffington, née Stassinopoulos, saying: ‘Several MPs can only dream of inspiring a 50% turnout in their constituencies. Some of the new police and crime commissioners were elected on turnouts not even close to 10%, yet sun themselves in the afterglow of so-called democratic legitimacy. And London Mayor Boris Johnson, a long standing supporter of efforts to neuter democratic trade unionism, was elected on a turnout of around 38%.

JEREMY PAXMAN, speaking at the Chalke Valley History Festival, and freed from the constraints of working at the BBC, confessed: ‘To be frank, I suppose I am a one nation Tory, yes. Look, Newsnight is made by 13 year olds. It’s perfectly normal when you’re young that you want to change the world. The older you get, the more you realise what a fools’ errand much of that is and that the thing to do is to manage the best you can, to the advantage of as many people as possible.’

WORK ON a new station at Ilkeston in Derbyshire has been delayed after the discovery of protected great crested newts. Andy Botham, who as well as being a train driver and company council rep is Deputy Cabinet Member for Economy, Jobs and Transport on Derbyshire County Council, has assured residents the station will open next spring. And then, in the interests of research into these amphibian creatures, he went to the pub…

JAMES VI of Scotland, the philosopher king who in 1603 forged the union between the crowns of Scotland and England, should have the last word on the referendum on independence this month. Four centuries ago he won over the doubters by declaring: ‘We are one island, one country, with a shared language; only out of malice would someone oppose union.’
What we can do with HS2

FRANCES O’GRADY, general secretary of the TUC, on the opportunities HS2 offers Britain

ANYONE who travels on the East or West Coast main lines knows that these parts of the British rail network are stretched to near capacity and in need of major investment to cope with growing passenger numbers. HS2 offers that investment, and more. It is a real opportunity to provide a major economic boost not just to London, but to the Midlands, the north, and the UK as a whole.

I was pleased to participate in the HS2 growth task force which has now published its report. We await a positive response from government to our recommendations as to how this massive infrastructure programme can deliver the maximum number of quality jobs in towns and cities up and down the country.

If we are to realise these benefits we need to start work now, joining up and simplifying transport and regeneration funding to ensure economic investment for growth in and around HS2 station sites and to create an effective integration of local transport networks. Development plans need to respond now to demands for a high quality, skilled workforce to take advantage of 25,000 jobs needed to build and maintain HS2.

Unions, of course, are ready to put our shoulders to the wheel, just as we did by helping to create the infrastructure for the hugely successful Olympic games in London in 2012. We worked with employers not just to deliver, but to ensure that the construction programmes were as efficient and safe as they could be. We need to build on that best practice for all our big infrastructure projects.

We want to make sure we have the right workforce to build, run and maintain HS2. That opportunity must be available not just to different areas of the country; we must make sure that inclusion and equality are built into our plans. Schools and colleges need to promote the opportunities in engineering and construction technologies and transferable skills that can provide the basis of a career for life.

Upgrading railway engineering and construction skills is a priority. Reaching the next generation is critical and an industry-led outreach programme linking the curriculum through university technical colleges needs to be in place by mid-2015.

Unions have welcomed the opportunities afforded by HS2. We are enthusiastic about ensuring these opportunities are realised. We are critical partners in ensuring this massive programme is delivered on time, to the highest standards of construction and safety. I am looking forward to working with the government, and HS2 Ltd, to develop a framework agreement that will outline exactly how we can do just that.

I would walk 500 miles

LEE JAMES, ASLEF’s equalities adviser, marched with Pride on Merseyside with drivers from around the country

The LGBT festival, now in its fifth year, is held in memory of Michael Causer, a gay Liverpudlian teenager murdered at a house party in 2008. The event is supported by his family and friends and, throughout the day, tributes were paid to him. The celebrations started with a rather damp march from St George’s Hall through the city centre to the waterfront. This was the biggest turnout ASLEF has had at a Pride event, and the banner attracted a lot of attention or, perhaps, that was just the noise from the whistles and vuvuzelas!

Once on the waterfront there was an array of stalls with ASLEF contributing to the north-west TUC’s effort. There was plenty of musical entertainment from the likes of Katy B and Heather Small. Unfortunately, during the Kylie tribute, we were hit by an apocalyptic rainstorm which left us running for cover and brought the day to an abrupt halt.

Thanks to Darran Brown of the LGBT Representative Committee for organising our participation, and to District 3 Organiser Colin Smith for his generous hospitality. A decision was made to move support of Pride events around the country and, I have to say, it was a wise one. Having attended London and Brighton, I found Liverpool to be far less commercial and more community focused. A symbol of what I believe Pride should be about, a celebration and expression of LGBT rights in our country and a chance to remember those who have been lost during our journey.

Rat takes the biscuit

A commuter at Sants, Barcelona’s largest train station, posted a video on Facebook of a vending machine with a rat inside, in full view of passengers, happily munching a packet of biscuits. One commuter said: ‘At least it shows the products are fresh.’ The rat was not available for comment.

QUOTE...

‘Large amounts of the profits of our railways – coming from British pockets, whether by means of fares or taxes – are going to foreign governments. That illustrates the absurdity of our current arrangements.’

– Natalie Bennett, Green Party

...UNQUOTE
End the Age of Austerity

ASLEF has submitted this motion to the Trades Union Congress in Liverpool this month: ‘The policies of the coalition government are sowing the seeds of a disastrous future for our country with an ever more brutal free market for labour and housing, the creeping privatisation of the NHS, punitive reforms to the welfare state and attacks on the wages and pensions of public sector workers.

‘The decisions of the current government have led to enormous increases in inequality for current and future generations in the UK and do nothing to mitigate the findings of a recent report from the OECD which predicts that the global economy in 2060 will be one stagnating in slow growth, huge inequality and threatened by climate change.

‘Congress is concerned that the UK’s economic recovery is based on the fragile pillars of consumer borrowing and the dysfunctional housing market. Congress believes that sustainable growth can only be delivered by a rebalanced economy and a structural adjustment programme which restores equivalence between corporations and trade unions.

‘Congress welcomes the findings of recent research by the International Monetary Fund which states that the ‘restoration of poor and middle income households’ bargaining power” can be very effective in reducing the probability of another major economic crisis.

‘Congress supports the TUC’s Britain Needs a Pay Rise campaign and demonstration on 18 October and calls on the general council to continue to campaign for a rebalanced economy underpinned by strong trade unions.’

QUOTE...

‘Mr Miliband would be crazy to bow to the left and the unions. Railway privatisation has been one of the unalloyed triumphs of the Major government. Railway passenger miles have doubled in the 20 years since privatisation. Not only is that increase stupendous, it came after years of little or no growth.’ – John McTernan, former policy adviser to Tony Blair, Harriet Harman and Julia Gillard

...UNQUOTE

Down in the tube station at midnight

We’re all familiar with the owners’ workshop manuals which Haynes, of Sparkford in Somerset, have been knocking out on most makes of car for nearly 50 years (their first, on the Austin Healey Frogeye Sprite, was published in 1966).

They’re not just for petrolheads, but for anyone who wants to get under the bonnet on Sunday morning, and they’ve sold more than 150 million of the things around the world.

Now, and with tongue only a little in cheek, they have produced London Underground: Owners’ Workshop Manual (Haynes, £21.99) in which Paul Moss breezily tells the story of the world’s oldest underground rail network from 1863, when the first section of the Metropolitan Railway opened, from Paddington via King’s Cross to Farrington Street, right up to the present day.

Lots of fascinating photos, and you won’t get your hands dirty.

A top Class act

ELLIE O’HAGAN of the think tank the Centre for Labour and Social Studies argues for the role of the state in the modern world

SOCIETIES across the world have a state of some kind: the question is not whether the state should play a role, but what sort of a role it should be. Neoliberals see the state as authoritarian: it is there to defend national sovereignty and protect private property and maintain social order but there is no role for the state in promoting sustainability, technological progress or social justice.

The financial crisis of 2008 seemed initially to be a crisis of neoliberal thinking, but we never got a serious debate about the role of the state in a post-neoliberal society. Five years after the financial crisis, and with an ecological crisis looming, it is time to ask how a modern state can play a major role in securing social and ecological justice.

‘That’s why the Centre for Labour and Social Studies has commissioned a series entitled In the Public Interest: the Role of the Modern State. It features policy papers and think pieces by leading academics and journalists on a range of subjects, including public ownership of the railways and other public assets, local government, and wage-led growth.

Andrew Cumbers and Roger Seifert examine the role of public services in the modern state. Cumbers uses the rail industry to show that privatisation has led to lower investment, even though public subsidy has increased, and shows how the UK is falling behind the rest of the world in its determination to proceed with privatisation.

Özlem Onaran suggests how the government should intervene in the market to end the fall in real pay and ensure that the economic recovery is wage-led. She argues that the free market trickle down theory is a myth, highlights interventions which benefit big business at the expense of working people, and argues for a role for the state in promoting collective bargaining.

James Murray looks at the need for a strong democratic local state and the need for the left to reclaim the concept of progressive public localism. His paper examines the changing role of local government, addressing why we need to move away from New Labour’s focus on the New Public Management model and what a progressive vision for local government should entail.

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Big Bertha, Bromsgrove and the steepest incline on British Rail

PHIL MARSHMAN, a retired Westbury driver, looks at Life on the Lickey

Bromsgrove lads there – a rather menacing looking individual (Richard Gibbons) and a tall thin kid (Ian Tipper) who looked as though a puff of wind would blow him over.

Of course, most of us were made redundant, and given the vacancy lists for all the BR regions. We didn’t have all line promotion then, and you could move to another region, but couldn’t put in a preference to come home. There was only one vacancy on Western region for a fireman (second man) and of the three of us who applied to go away I was the senior hand. My Westbury colleague went to Southampton docks as a second man, the other lad went from Exeter to Gloucester as a cleaner, and I got the second man’s job at Bromsgrove which I’d discovered

was at the foot of the Lickey incline, officially the steepest main line incline on British Railways, as it went straight up, at 1:37, for two miles. All they did was bank trains 24/7.

I don’t keep a diary, but I read in Life on the Lickey 1943-1986 by Pat Wallace (Brewin Books, £10.95) that I arrived there on 23 October 1967. Richard Gibbons turned out to be one of the most genuine blokes I’ve ever met, and Ian Tipper became one of the best friends I’ve ever had.

There are many stories in Pat’s book that I heard in the cabin (the proper railway name for a mess room because many of the first drivers had been sailors). We also heard quite a few that couldn’t be put into print! There are tales of working on Big Bertha, the LN ER Garrett, and other locomotives that were tried on banking to replace Bertha. Bromsgrove was a main line depot with regular work south to Gloucester and north to Washward Heath and beyond.

I went there the week the Hymeks (7000s, Class 35s) replaced what became the Class 37s, which in turn replaced the Class 35s when diesel hydraulics were withdrawn. There are good descriptions of the methods of working, banking with steam and banking with diesels and, for the benefit of civilians, many of our expressions are explained.

There are lots of railway photographs and pictures of people I worked with and reminders of names I’d forgotten. They always claimed they couldn’t understand my Wiltshire accent and Pat signed my copy: ‘To Phil, I still can’t understand what you are saying!’

Happy days…

If you want a signed copy drop a line to Pat Wallace, 16 Fox Lane, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, B61 7NL (with your dedication, return address and a cheque for £12.95, which includes post and packing) or ring him on 01527 832823.

Railway badges mark Great War centenary

For the last four years Mark Hardie, a high speed driver for Southeastern based at Ashford, has organised the annual poppy appeal for the Royal British Legion in his home town of Folkestone. As part of his fundraising, he has produced railway-related badges. This year, to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, Mark has made two – one featuring the silhouette of a British soldier, the other a Mark V tank. Each costs £5 (plus £1 p+p) from Mark at mark121hardie@gmail.com

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George Osborne has hailed HS3, the proposed high speed rail link between Manchester and Leeds, as the potential creator of ‘a great northern powerhouse’. The Chancellor is adamant that this proposed £7 billion project would reduce the journey time between these two key cities in Lancashire and Yorkshire by 20 minutes and enable the north ‘to take on the world’. Nick Clegg was quick to climb on board the coalition bandwagon, saying HS3 would create a new northern golden triangle of Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield. But are they right?

COLEEN SMITH, our District 3 Organiser, and NICK WHITEHEAD, our District 4 Organiser, reckon this new announcement is more about spin than speed

A SLEF has supported high speed rail ever since it was first mooted. Well, we would, wouldn’t we? Train drivers, obviously, believe in building more railway lines. But we’re not driven simply by self-interest. The increased popularity of rail means our lines, as well as our trains, are overcrowded: there is no room for more passengers, and no capacity for more freight.

The bottom line is that, regardless of speed, the UK needs more track. Our major reservation has been that the new track, quite literally, doesn’t go far enough. Instead of Birmingham or Leeds, this is an opportunity to drive the project up to Scotland. Not only could be on its way to Scotland, to

FISHING FOR VOTES

So what exactly was he announcing so dramatically? Was he really proposing a new high speed route? Or was he pointing out the blatantly obvious fact that existing rail links between the two cities are inadequate? Was he perhaps arguing that the current track should be improved? This sounds most likely, but it wouldn’t have sounded as dramatic as the announcement he made. Just more truthful…

Most likely he was fishing for a few northern votes with a bit of populist London-bashing. Conservative support in the north of England continues to decline, and Osborne’s statement looks like an attempt to show the Tories trying to increase prosperity beyond their traditional strongholds in the south. Hence he told his northern audience that it is ‘not healthy for our economy, not good for our country if the powerhouse of London dominates more and more’. In which case we might ask, as Labour’s Ed Balls did, why the government continues to do nothing about regional growth divides which have widened significantly since the coalition government took power.

In fact, the whole speed issue seems to be a bit of a diversion. At the moment, the fastest rail services between Leeds and Manchester, travelling at top speeds of 90 mph, take about 50 minutes. The Chancellor suggested HS3 could travel at 140mph on this route, cutting the journey time to half an hour. This is all well and good, and no one would decry saving 20 minutes. But what’s really needed are reliable, regular rail services across the north. Manchester and Leeds are currently linked by two inter-regional railways: the Calder Valley route from Manchester Victoria via Rochdale and the faster Standedge route used by First TransPennine Express.

LET DOWN PASSENGERS

It is interesting that ever since the last election, this government has let down passengers miserably; the Department for Transport has stalled and huffed about rolling stock procurement for these lines, and there are live suggestions of service cuts! But now, all of a sudden, the route is a priority. Just as the next general election hoves into view! Even the least cynical people would mark this down as convenient!

We think this is more about politicians trying to look good rather than a genuine proposal for a third HS line. In fact, Gorgeous George has since admitted he doesn’t have any details about finance, funding or timetables. He wanted, he said, ‘to start a conversation’.

It is more likely that what he really wanted to do was grab a headline. Real improvements in rail services in the north are as distant now as they have ever been.
The referendum – where we stand

On Thursday 18 September voters in Scotland will decide whether they really want independence or are in fact Better Together with the rest of the United Kingdom. Here District 2 Organiser KEVIN LINDSAY sets out the union’s position

VER the last few months many letters have been printed in the Journal about the forthcoming referendum in Scotland. Some for Yes and some for No. But also some making inaccurate points on how ASLEF reached the decision to back the campaign to remain part of the UK. The decision was taken at our Annual Assembly of Delegates, our conference, last year after a motion was submitted from Edinburgh No 2 branch. Every branch had a chance to amend the motion, or to mandate their delegate on which way to vote, but none did and the delegates voted in favour of supporting the No campaign.

BEST OF BOTH
ASLEF’s decision, I believe, was based on a vision of changing the way the United Kingdom, and not just Scotland, is run. The Scottish Parliament already controls and decides how schools, hospitals and our justice system are run. Our elected MSPs often choose to make different choices from our MPs. Scotland can thrive and grow with policies set by Holyrood alongside policies set at Westminster. This gives us the opportunity to have the best of both, a devolved parliament making Scottish decisions but also with the security of being part of a larger market place within the United Kingdom.

As trade unionists we all know the benefits of solidarity, of workers standing shoulder to shoulder to fight against injustice and defend our principals. When David Cameron and George Osborne attack public services and privatise the NHS in England it is not because they are English, it’s because they are Tories. I believe trade union politics is all about people, and not about what buildings politicians meet in. Westminster does not have a hold over people, it’s the politics of those within the building we must fight to change, for the benefit of all of us.

Devolution has been a success, but it was a devolved settlement, not a journey, for which the people of Scotland voted. But three of the main political parties are now guaranteeing more powers for the Scottish Parliament and this, again, strengthens the parliament and delivers greater local accountability.

WHAT SORT OF SCOTLAND
While many on the far left claim Scotland is, politically, a different country from England, the Nuffield Foundation report in 2011 concluded that in terms of being more social democratic in outlook than England, the differences are, at best, modest. Trade unionists right across these islands, in England and Wales and Ireland as well as in Scotland, want a more socially accountable government.

This referendum is not about the Tories versus Scotland, or whether Alex Salmond is the person to lead us, it is about what sort of Scotland we want to live in. The Scottish government has set out a vision of how it would govern Scotland following independence in the now much ridiculed white paper. Which has more questions than answers and promises to take the railway back into public ownership while selling the two Scottish franchises, just now, for up to 15 years. Extraordinary!

I want to live in a country that delivers for all regardless whether they live in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland; a country which delivers for the people, not one which claims to want Scandinavian levels of services but, at the same time, brags about cutting corporation tax. As trade unionists it would be wrong for us to turn our backs on others trade unionists across these islands because the fight for social justice is a fight which must be won right across the UK and not just in Scotland.

O Britain, from the Latin Britannia, and Britannicus, was what became, long after the Roman legions had left, England and Wales; while Great Britain refers to England, Scotland, and Wales (and meant an enlarged Britain rather than being a reference to any supposed status in the world). The crowns of England and Scotland were united in 1603 when James VI of Scotland became James I of England but, politically, the two countries were not united until the Act of Union of 1707 created the United Kingdom of Great Britain. The Act of Union of 1801 created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland which, in 1922, became the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
Bikes, beer, Marx & sparks, rock’n’roll and the railway

TOSH McDONALD joined British Railways 35 years ago. Here he reflects on the changes – good and bad – in that time and some of the inspirational characters he’s met in a life on the loco as a guard, driver and trade union activist.

STARTED on the railway in 1979 as a freight guard at Doncaster Carr locomotive shed. I became a local representative not long afterwards and remember looking in awe at the ASLEF reps at Carr loco at the time. I am talking about people like Martin Samways, Jack Housley, Martin Hicks, Mala Haith, Jim Leach and George Porritt, people who seemed to me, as a teenager, like giants. Physically, they were giants, compared with me at the time, but as I got to know them better, and spent time with them, I realised that they were intellectual giants, and giants of the trade union movement, as well. They lived and breathed and spoke politics (usually over a pint or two in the Trade Union and Labour Club).

LONG HAIR AND A HARLEY
The depot at Donny was run by ASLEF – this was in British Rail’s time – and ASLEF dictated what happened. They took the argument to management, day in and day out, proceeding, moving forward, and not waiting for management to come and attack them. I was so proud to know those people.

When I became a driver, and became a member of ASLEF, I hope the lessons they taught me gave me a good base to do what I could for the union. Because, when I joined the railway in 1979, I was a member of the National Union of Railwaymen. Obviously, because I was a freight guard.

It’s the right thing to be in the right trade union for the job that you do. And the right trade union for a train driver is, as it has been since 1880, and as it always will be, ASLEF.

We had a full-time officer in the NUR at that time who, I think it’s fair to say, wasn’t very keen on me. He didn’t like me very much. I can understand some of it because I had long hair, I would turn up to meetings on my Harley-Davidson, I had ragged jeans, I had oil under my fingernails and he didn’t like that.

But through those ASLEF reps I got to meet someone who became one of the biggest influences in my life, a man called Bill Ronksley, a former president of ASLEF, although at that time he was the full-time officer in District 4. Bill, maybe, saw something in me, because he took me under his wing and showed me the way forward. And for that I will be for ever grateful to Bill, a giant of ASLEF.

VISITING THE SOVIET UNION
I remember visiting the Soviet Union with Bill in 1988 and when, shortly afterwards, he retired, Doncaster branch organised an event for him with three giants on the top table – Ray Buckton, Arthur Scargill, and the biggest giant of all, Bill himself. This year he celebrated his 90th birthday – and 72 years of active membership in ASLEF. I think that is something we should all aspire to, and be proud of; that ASLEF has delivered giants like that and will continue to do so.

I remember Bill telling me it was British Rail and we had national agreements – that if, locally, you can go and get something better than the national agreement, do it. Then, hopefully, other people will catch up, move along and push forward. Take the argument to management. That was what Bill taught me and it is as true today as it was then.

With an unconventional (to say the least) upbringing I did get some lessons early in life. My mother left when I was three and I was with my father, Podge McDonald, a fitter and turner in the plant works at Doncaster. Podge was a character with his DA, love of Manchester United, rock’n’roll, Park Drive cigarettes and beer. He never did settle down; no wonder my mother left! Podge worked the door at the Top Rank in Doncaster in the evenings, I think it gave him the chance to enjoy some of the things he loved, but he also seemed to enjoy a fight even though he suffered from TB as a teenager and had lost a lung. I found Podge dead in his bed in 1972; he was 38 years old, and I was 11, and although I can’t say I got any politics from dad my love of motorbikes, music and beer must have come from somewhere!

THE DOOR AT THE TOP RANK
My grandparents looked after me after that and I do believe I had privileged life from then. My grandad, Davie McDonald, was born illegitimate in 1907 and had a hard life. He would tell me how the other kids teased him because he had long blond hair and looked like a girl. Eventually his grandmother cut his hair with tears running down her face as she did it.

Davie gave me my first taste of politics. He told me about the 1926 general strike (he never forgave the Salvation Army for scabbing by driving trucks and doing people’s jobs) and the brutality of the state. How he became a miner and had to keep moving south for work. He told me about trade unions and the struggle of the workers, the waste of life in the Great War, which
he saw as a fall out amongst privileged cousins, and the war against Fascism in Spain in the 1930s and the Second World War. How his half brother John was captured and tortured by the Japanese and was never able to have children. I remember my Uncle John visiting and hearing him scream in the night. And I will never forget the bollocking I got from him when, at 16, I got my first (legal) motorbike – a Yamaha FS1E – because it was Japanese.

PIT VILLAGE PETROLHEADS
My grandad told me with pride about the 1945 Labour government and its achievements. Nationalising the pits and the railways, building the National Health Service and council houses. Davie suffered a bad spinal injury when the roof caved in where he was working. He spent a big chunk of his compensation on a greyhound; my gran said he won a fortune on his own dogs and lost it on some other bugger’s horses!

No longer able to work down the pit, he finished his working life with a green card job in the plant works, sweeping up, so that makes me a third generation railway worker.

In the early 1980s I was living with some fellow petrolheads on Markham Road in the pit village of Edlington. Although none of us were miners, we enjoyed that community. The front and back gardens were full of choppers (either British or American, Uncle John obviously had an impact on me) and the street outside was full of air cooled VWs (don’t know what he’d have thought about that). We had some big parties with lots of bikes and loud music and never had any complaints. Folk would talk about our bikes, we always had a good time in the local pubs, and the miner next door kept us in coal during the winter. It was a real community. This being the 30th anniversary of the miners’ strike of 1984-85 I have attended a number of commemorations but the most moving for me was the one in Edlington. Yorkshire Main shut in 1985 and, like many pit villages, the whole community suffered. The pubs we used to go in are no longer there, the shops are boarded up.

PLEN'TY OF COAL TO BE DUG
As a freight guard, after the pit shut I worked a train out of that pit (probably the last one) made up of faulty wagons that had been left there for some time. The yard had been recently relaid and the pit shaft was new. There was plenty of coal still there to be dug, and those bastards, Margaret Thatcher and Ian MacGregor, knew it. And still they shut it.

Edlington made national news in 2009 when two brothers, aged 10 and 12, robbed, tortured and attempted to murder two other boys aged nine and 11. The then Mayor of Doncaster was criticised, and never sought re-election, children’s services came under attack for not protecting the kids, and the workers were blamed. I’m not saying these bodies were free from responsibility but the Tory government which shut the pit and tried to destroy that community must share the blame, along with their agents in the Coal Board and police.

BANNER IN THE LIBRARY
To end on a positive note, the community is refusing to die. The Yorkshire Main commemorative trust has set up a memorial garden to those who died, and has organised events so it is not forgotten. And the banner hangs in the library for future generations to see. People like Frank Arrowsmith, chair of the trust, continue to inspire me and I feel we are going to need all the inspiration we can get with the way this government is going and what they have in store for us if they are re-elected next year.
Public services for all or private profits for the few?

George Woods says it’s time to end the mania for privatisation and the chance for dodgy firms and vulture funds to plunder the public sector

ince May 2010, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government has embarked on the most dramatic and sustained policy of privatisations since Margaret Thatcher. Large chunks of the public sector have been carved up and repackaged ready for private sector profiteers. The NHS and the Royal Mail have both fallen prey to the free market dogma that insists that successful, profitable and much-loved public institutions be made to turn a profit for a wealthy few.

In July, Vince Cable was forced to order a special inquiry into the sale of the Royal Mail after it was revealed that the taxpayer – that’s all of us – had been royally ripped off to the tune of more than £1 billion. Of course, what most commentators missed is that 70% of the British public stood against the sale of the Royal Mail at any price. We didn’t care that we weren’t given the best possible share price so much as the fact that it was being flogged off at all.

The pace is quickening

It is true that this coalition is simply walking the path set down by previous governments when it comes to privatisation and outsourcing. But the pace of the public sell-offs under David Cameron, Nick Clegg and George Osborne mark this government out. And, if anything, the pace is quickening ahead of next May’s general election, which months of polling figures indicate the Tories will lose.

Of course, three decades of privatisation have been a disaster for the vast majority of the British public. It has meant the driving down of standards and the ramping up of prices. There is a reason why recent figures show that 97% of the British public believe the government is the best provider of health care, and why two-thirds want to see public ownership of the utility companies.

It’s why the same number want to see the full public ownership of the railways. Because nowhere is the failure of privatisation clearer than in the selling off of rail.

Set aside the botched system of sale that saw a few speculators make billions in a matter of weeks in 1994 and 1995. Looking at the railways now, in 2014, it is obvious that privatisation has delivered handsomely for the private interests running the railway (many of them state-owned companies themselves, albeit states other than ours). It also made a killing for the banks who snapped up the rolling stock companies and continue to ‘sweat these assets’ to this day.

Most expensive in Europe

But what did the British public get out of the deal? As we know, the amount of state subsidy sunk into the railway is many times higher than it was in the final decade of British Rail, as private sector investment in vital infrastructure and improvements has failed to materialise in any substantial way, leaving the bill to be picked up by the state. And, for passengers, they only need to buy a train ticket to see what the pledges of John Major’s government are worth. Major promised that privatisation would lead to lower fares! Commuters struggling to find the money to pay for the most expensive train journeys in Europe are, understandably, very angry.

The government’s response to this crisis is predictable: more privatisation! ASLEF has been involved at every step in the campaign to keep East Coast in public hands, and rightly so. If there is any case which demonstrates the coalition’s blindly dogmatic support for the market at the expense of the people, it’s their determination to hand a successful and profitable rail franchise – which has brought £1 billion back to the Treasury – into the grasping hands of the private sector.

It’s not just in the realm of transport, utilities and major national institutions that private interests are considered paramount. Outsourcing companies have extended their tentacles deep into vital local services. Recent research indicates that, under the present government, the amount of money spent on outsourcing contracts has doubled to a staggering £88 billion. It is clear that any rhetoric around austerity and a need to rein in public spending is missing the point. Because lucrative deals are being snapped up by shady firms such as Capita and G4S.

Turn back the tide

There is a different approach. It would be popular and efficient and would put the people, not the shareholder, at the heart of public services. We Own It is calling for a Public Service Users’ Bill, to turn back the tide on the landslide of dodgy outsourcing deals and put the British people in charge again. To find out more about the Bill, and why we need ASLEF members to get involved and be a part of it, visit our website weownit.org.uk

George Woods, who used to be a community organiser for the TSSA, is now campaigns organiser at the New Economics Foundation think tank and a director of the pressure group We Own It.
Measles make you bumpy and mumps will make you lumpy

BILL DALE of the RMS, Chingford branch, says it’s unhealthy the way the Tories are trying to privatised the NHS by stealth

S WE draw nearer to the general election in May 2015, we will see the manifestos and promises from the mainstream political parties as they seek to gain support from us the electorate. What we want are hard core promises that they will keep and deliver in office. Should they fail, empty rhetoric and apologies for not delivering are not an option.

The National Health Service has always been a high priority with promises from all the main political parties, with the added cliché ‘The NHS is safe in our hands.’ We need to take a close look at this statement with the dilemma the NHS finds itself in.

When the NHS was set up by Aneurin Bevan, Minister for Health in Clement Attlee’s Labour government after the Second World War, it was for medical need free at the point of delivery. In 1950, due to demand, it was in deficit by £398 million.

PRIVATE PROFIT
In the 21st century the NHS faces a crisis that could demolish the service. Currently it costs us, the British taxpayer, £100 billion a year to run the NHS, with hospitals built under PFI and PPI contracts by the last two governments taking a big chunk of that budget. The costs of these contracts is £97 billion, of which only £5.7 billion has been paid, leaving a terrible legacy for future generations. One in four trusts are £400 million in deficit, and services are being cut back with a requirement for a further £15 billion savings by 2015.

The Tories, together with many of those involved in the private health care industry, who have a vested interest, and those right-wing policy wonks still clinging to the wreckage of the free market, and the mantra that ‘private is better than public,’ and who believe companies should be able to make a handsome profit out of health, are proposing that we should have to pay a fee to GPs and hospitals before any service is given.

POSTCODE LOTTERY
Should this preposterous idea be put into practice, it follows, inevitably, that costs will go up, but an even more alarming proposal is that we should all be forced to take out an insurance policy to cover our future NHS needs. This is, of course, all in the name of privatising the NHS by stealth and denying many people, who could not afford such policies, health care in this country. Both proposals would return us to pre-1948 Britain or like America, before Obamacare, where they would check to see if you had health insurance before taking you to hospital.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence was set up by the Labour government in 1999 to get rid of the postcode lottery for treatment and care. Its remit is to make decisions and give guidelines on whether a drug or treatment should be available, based on a number of factors. Once NICE issues its guidelines NHS Trusts must find the money to make these drugs or treatments, proved to save or prolong life, available but many sufferers of serious illnesses are unable to obtain the drugs or treatment they need because of the cost.

Funding for a drug that NICE has not assessed or is being assessed may be obtained through the government’s Cancer Drugs Fund which is stretched due to demand. Again, funding for these drugs is on a clinical and benefit basis. What price life?

A recent Macmillan report said cancer patients treated on the NHS are dying too soon because they are being refused surgery, radiotherapy and breakthrough drugs and the chances of being cured hinge on where you live and your age which determines whether you are offered the best possible treatment. With the number of cancer patients expected to rise from two to four million by 2030, this is worrying for all of us and questions the reason why NICE was set up if we still have a discriminatory postcode lottery.

NO PRIVATISATION
All of us will, at some time in our lives, need the services of the National Health Service and it should be as Nye Bevan intended in 1948 – free at the point of delivery to everyone, looking after us from the cradle to the grave. That’s why we must ensure that political parties seeking our vote in May next year must have, in their manifesto, no privatising of the NHS.

The next Labour government must repeal all the Acts – some of which New Labour, shamefully, brought in – that outsource services and the care of patients in the NHS. It needs to streamline the service to the benefit of patients. With no dismantling or weakening of the principles on which the NHS was founded 66 years ago.

We all must do as much as we can to ensure the NHS remains a public service; we owe it to all those who came before us and to all those who will need it in the future. In the words of Aneurin Bevan, ‘The NHS will survive as long as there are folk with the faith to fight for it.’
The future’s not orange

West Brompton branch had Brother Brian Ingleton, a member based at Earls Court, attend to collect his retirement gift and certificate from District 8 Organiser Finn Brennan. Brian, who worked for many years on the District line, has been in ASLEF since 1992.

We wish Brian all the very best in his retirement and thank him for his long and loyal membership of our trade union.

We will miss seeing him in the Earls Court canteen, with his half eaten orange, sharing it so kindly with anyone sat on the same table. Splash! At his leaving drink on 19 July a lot of retired members and managers attended, some from as far away as Devon, including Dave Goddard, VK Patel and John Harris.

Greg Tasker, West Brompton branch secretary

50 up for Fred the Bed

Dave Weddle would like to thank Mick Whelan for taking time to attend the Tonbridge reunion and presenting an ASLEF medallion to Fred (the Bed) Lawrence, marking his 50 years’ membership of ASLEF. Fred was the last Tonbridge driver passed out on steam under British Rail and, living in Hastings, known as bedsit land, helped find accommodation for those who needed it, hence Fred the Bed. Well done, Fred! Tony West, national secretary of ASLEF’s Retired Members’ Section, Alan Taylor, treasurer, and I had the pleasure of being there; chair Ray Jackson was to attend but there was trouble at t’mill, ie Sheffield, so never made it. We were pleased to see the present Tonbridge branch secretary, Colin Pratt, in attendance; hopefully more working members will come along and join us on these occasions. Dave would also like to thank the ladies of the British Legion for providing the fine buffet.

Peter Smith, RMS reporter

Looking through someone else’s eyes

Back in April, Leigh Gibbings, from Blind Veterans UK, formerly St Dunstan’s, got in contact asking if I would be prepared to give a talk regarding the history of Brighton’s railways. He said he enjoyed visiting my website Brighton Motive Power Depots, a history of ASLEF in Sussex, and that the charity he worked for were doing a theme week on Planes, Trains & Automobiles for their residents, some of whom have totally lost their vision. (St Dunstan’s was founded in 1915, as a convalescent home and training centre for ex-servicemen who lost their sight on active service, and moved to Ovingdean near Brighton in 1938).

On 11 July Ivan Wilson, who had kindly travelled down from Scotland for the event, Mick Hawkins and I, all former LDC reps at Brighton, went to the Blind Veterans’ centre to give our first public speech on this subject. We were joined by Tim Wood, whose book, Southern Electric Driver, tells of life on the last of the old slam door trains on Southern region. We started at 7pm, and didn’t finish until gone 10pm. The veterans seemed very interested and asked lots of questions about life on the footplate, the railway in general, our trade and our union.

Paul Edwards, Brighton branch

Ivan Wilson, chair of Polmadie branch, with the big screen

Branch News

Upcoming events

- RAINHAM – THURSDAY 2 OCTOBER
  Southeastern retired members’ reunion from 11.00 at Rainham Social Club, 86 Station Rd, Rainham, Kent.

- CRICKLEWOOD – FRIDAY 3 OCTOBER
  The next reunion is at the RAFA Club, 93 Ashburnham Road, Bedford, from 12.00.

- MARYLEBONE – FRIDAY 10 OCTOBER
  Anyone associated with Marylebone branch – past or present – welcome at our annual reunion from 17.00 at the Thornbury. Details from R Gordon-Hill on 07956 025551.

- FRATTON – FRIDAY 10 OCTOBER
  The second official Fratton train crew reunion is at the Fratton Rail & Social Club from 12.00. Anyone involved over the years with Fratton, Portsmouth, or the Isle of Wight is welcome. Details from Gary White on 07798 706204 or 01329 221309.

- NORWOOD JUNCTION – 15 OCTOBER
  This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Cowden crash, where two members of Norwood Junction train crew, a Selhurst conductor, and a member of the public tragically lost their lives. As always, we will be laying flowers at Cowden. We will be travelling on the 10.08 London Bridge to Uckfield service. Afterwards there is a buffet at Selhurst railway club from 12.30. All ASLEF members are welcome to attend. Please contact the Norwood branch secretary (daniel @dbound.freeserve.co.uk) so we know how many of you will be attending.

Please send your branch news and photos to journal@aslef.org.uk
Cambridge branch welcomed Tony West to our August meeting to give members an insight into the role of the RMS. He explained how, for the first year, it’s free to retired drivers before an annual fee of just £15. He explained how the section attends district councils and branch meetings and sends a delegate to AAD. He also explained how the RMS has grown from 300 members in 1998 to more than 2,200 in 2014. A healthy debate and Q&A session followed before a vote of thanks was proposed by Andy Yates, and then we had reports from local level reps on XC, FCC and GA. Donations were made to the Ian Carder appeal, Friends of the NPC and the District 5 banner appeal. The branch extended condolences to the families of retired Cambridge drivers Fred Noble, 92, and Harold Jenkins, 83, who passed away in July. Our thoughts are with their families. The next meeting is Monday 6 October.

Martin Haylett, branch secretary

Friend and Brother – Nev never held back

After nearly 25 years on the railway, DI Neville Huntingford retires this year from Caterham depot in Surrey. Nev started his career at Orpington before relocating to Caterham in the early 1990s. Quickly progressing to Driving Instructor, he also became the depot’s LSR, a post he was proud to hold for 12 years. Always a lively debater in mess rooms throughout Southern Metro, Nev was a strong union man and never held back in dealings with management. As a well-respected DI, many a new driver has benefited from his experience over the years, as a solid turnout of over 60 at his farewell in Purley bears witness. With nine years served in the army prior to your time on the railway, Nev, you have served your country and your colleagues well. Friend to many, Brother to all, we salute you! And wish you many years of happy retirement near your family in Scotland, together with your dear wife Ann.

Trevor Hallett, Caterham

I had the great pleasure of presenting a cheque to the Rainbow children’s ward at North Middlesex University Hospital in Tottenham, north London, donated by drivers at King’s Cross after the closure of an old account held by the King’s Cross All Stars football team. Joe Gunter, who’s sadly no longer with us, set up the All Stars, and his wife was once a nurse at NMUH. So it’s nice to know the residue has gone to a good cause…

Peter Smith, King’s Cross

Thanks, Mike

On Wednesday 23 July I took my grandson to an RMS reunion for ex-Newton Heath men at the Millgate pub in Failsworth, Manchester. I should like to thank Mike Wood, who is standing down as chair, for a well-organised do. It was good to see many of my old steam firemen who I had not seen since moving to Gillingham in Kent to become a driver in 1972.

Brian Marsden, Sittingbourne

Mick Holder looks back to September 1914 and a world at war

WAR HAS UPSET EVERYTHING

Organising secretary J Bromley wrote: ‘I had been booked for a meeting at Crewe on Sunday 16 August but the branch was compelled to cancel on account of so many Crewe men having gone to fight for their country. The war seems to have upset everything. I understand that the war is taking its quota of our members. What a pity that the diplomacy of the bureaucrats and armament makers of Europe should cause the very flower of the world’s manhood of the workers to go out and fight their battles. If it were only they who caused war that were going to fight their quarrels out, I would buy a front seat ticket to see them at it; as it is I can only hope for a speedy termination, and that now we are in it we may be successful.

CONTROL OF THE RAILWAYS

‘But even from this the workers may learn some lessons for the time when normal conditions again prevail. For if it is beneficial to the nation for the nation to take a large measure of control of the railways, foodstuffs, &c, in times of stress, why should it not be also beneficial at ordinary times? And if, as the press tell us, it is now a scandalous place’ and has ‘claim ed such a large number of our men in removing troops from one point to another. ’ He said: ‘If we could only get the working men of the United Kingdom to throw the same energy and patriotism into the industrial war, if we could only see the enthusiastic rushing of volunteers to our recruiting stations for the industrial army of labour, as is being shown by the working men at the national military recruiting stations, how soon the existing hardships and evils existing in our conditions of life would disappear.’

HELLISH WHOLESALE MURDER

The Stratford branch secretary railed against ‘the hellish and diabolical wholesale murder which is now taking place’ and has ‘claimed such a large number of our men in removing troops from one point to another.’ He said: ‘If we could only get the working men of the United Kingdom to throw the same energy and patriotism into the industrial war, if we could only see the enthusiastic rushing of volunteers to our recruiting stations for the industrial army of labour, as is being shown by the working men at the national military recruiting stations, how soon the existing hardships and evils existing in our conditions of life would disappear.’
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RON MALLETT TELL YOU WHAT IT IS, BOY

Ron Mallett served in the Navy during the Second World War, on some of the most perilous maritime operations, including the Arctic convoys, and ensuring vital supplies reached Russia and Malta, for which he received the Arctic Star and Maltese Cross.

Ron began his railway career in 1946 as a cleaner, working his way up to driver on steam engines and then diesels. His driving career was cut short when, in his 40s, he was diagnosed with diabetes. But he was determined this would not end his rail career and became a panel man at the depot, eventually progressing to loco supervisor.

Many will remember Ron for his ‘Tell you what it is, boy’ catchphrase, his calm manner and his determination to continue to enjoy life despite his diabetes.

Dave Chable, Colchester

PETER HALLATT HELLO HAWAII

It is my sad duty to report the passing of driver Peter Hallatt of Sheffield. Peter started on the railway in 1962, working in S&T, and transferred to the footplate in 1964, becoming a regular driver in 1986. He was one of the great characters at Sheffield, with his infectious laugh and trademark Hawaiian shirt. He fully embraced the changing railway industry and welcomed all the new drivers, giving friendly advice and taking them under his wing. Peter was never fazed by any situation, having some difficult things to deal with while driving. And his humour – and shout of ‘Helloo’ – always cheered up the mess room.

Peter and Brenda visited a lot of exotic places before his retirement and his holiday stories gave us all a chuckle. He retired in 2009 and, just a few months later, found out he had cancer. He battled this horrible disease with dignity, and laughter, right up to the end, still attending functions with his usual enthusiasm.

His funeral was very well attended, with many having to stand, and the service was non-religious, with many lovely memories which brought laughter as well as tears, which Peter would have appreciated. Our thoughts go to his wife Brenda and children Joanna and Christopher.

Neil Hancock, Sheffield

GORDON STEWART GREAT STEAM MAN

Gordon Stewart, a great steam man, as fireman and driver of steam locomotives, footplate to his core, has died at 73. He started his railway career at Stirling before moving to Dunbar, Alloa, Grangemouth and Eastfield, finally retiring from Glasgow Queen Street, only with great reluctance and due to severe respiratory problems. Despite difficulty breathing, that made the shortest of walks a marathon of effort, he regularly attended branch meetings at Perth and Stirling and was always up for a few pints and a wee dram (or more) with fellow union members. Alas, Gordon’s bronchial troubles finally manifested as terminal lung cancer. The thoughts and deepest sympathy of our branch to his widow Mary, family and many friends.

Andy Brown, Stirling branch

My husband Edward Gordon Stewart passed away on 28 June. In 2007 he was presented with a badge for 50 years’ service on the railway. He was very proud of that.

Mary Stewart, Clackmannan, near Alloa, Clackmannanshire

FRED NOBLE CAMBRIDGE DRIVER

Frederick Maurice Noble, known as Sonny, has passed away at the age of 91. Fred, a Cambridge driver, died on 8 July and was cremated after a service at St Andrew’s in Cherry Hinton. A reception, attended by ASLEF members, was held at the Red Lion nearby.

JAMES STEADY GENTLEMAN JIM

Further to the obituary notices by Pat Steady (Journal, April) and KJ Anderson (Journal, May) Jim Steady, or Steady Jim, also known as Gentleman Jim, started on the railway as a cleaner at Colchester in Essex in 1952 before becoming a driver on both freight and passenger trains. Jim was a much-loved man, who never had a bad word for anyone, respected for his witty sense of humour and total professionalism to the job.

Dave Chable, Colchester

LAST JOURNEYS

Brian Warboy worked for British Railways all his life, except for two years’ national service. His uncle, Sam Price, worked on the railway and helped him get a job as a ‘fat lad’ greasing wagon axles at Woodend sidings when he was 15. He worked his way up, as a cleaner, a fireman on steam trains, a job he really loved, and finally a driver. Brian, who was 78, spent 42 years on the footplate, and although he learned to drive diesel trains, based at Retford, his first love was always steam.

Tommy Hawley OBE, ex-Langwith Junction and Shirebrook, worked tirelessly visiting schools to drive home the danger of trespassing on the railway. He was a church warden at Church Warsop and a legend for his ‘stand your spoon up in it’ coffee. Geoff Baggle, another ex-Langwith Junction and Shirebrook driver, died just short of his 90th birthday. Geoff, like Tom, retired on the closure of Shirebrook depot in 1991. Our thoughts and prayers are with all three families.

K Gillett, Worksop

FINAL DEPARTURES

It is with deep regret that I have to inform you of the passing of the following Stonebridge Park/Willesden steam shed retired drivers. Joseph Moore was one of several Joe Moores at Willesden and was nicknamed Joe the Greek due to his Mediterranean appearance. With a sharp wit, Joe enjoyed many a social function during his retirement with his friends in the IA Willesden Club. Victor Butler, a quiet, gentle man, will be missed by his large circle of family and friends, evident by the turnout at his funeral. Norman Roberts was a larger than life character who always made his presence known; he had retired to Spain where he sadly passed away earlier this year. Haydn Carter was a true gentleman in every sense, never a cross word with anyone. He was born in Swansea in 1926, transferring to Willesden in the early 1950s. Haydn will be missed by his wife Jean, daughter Helen and son-in-law Bob as well as all who knew him.

David Humphrys, Retired Members’ Section
Letters

We welcome letters, either by email to journal@aslef.org.uk or by Royal Mail to ASLEF Journal at 77 St John Street, London, EC1M 4NN. Each month the writer of our star letter wins a rich range of ASLEF regalia.

Power in Parliament
I have just read Mick Whelan’s impassioned plea for members to vote to keep the political fund (Journal, July). I had thought about withdrawing my contributions but, having read various pieces, I accept the fund is necessary for the union to continue its campaigning. However, if the union would distance itself from the Labour Party there would probably be no need for any concern over the ballot, as long as members were confident that the union was using their money to further our cause with the party that matters – the one in government!

How often does the Journal report on meetings with various Labour MPs when anything agreed makes no difference as they are not in power. Even when Labour make promises for when they win the next election, who is to say they will keep them? I’m glad to read in the July Journal that Mick and a delegation met with Patrick McLoughlin, Secretary of State for Transport; at last, a meeting with someone who actually has the power to change things in this Parliament!

Much of the public are wary of unions because of their past reputations and, as such, it is time to look to the future and stop harping on about how bad Margaret Thatcher was but, instead, work with whichever party is in power to make the railway a great place to work. Remember, many of us have not been on the railway all our lives and many of us are not Labour supporters. ASLEF rightly takes into account peoples’ ethnicity, gender, religion, etc, and maybe it’s time you took into account our diverse political leanings and stopped trying to force the Labour doctrine upon us.

Andrew Milner, CrossCountry, Birmingham

Reps and recruits
It will soon be 20 years that the freight sector has been in private hands. Many drivers are ex-BR but most will retire in the next 10 years or so. Our conditions have changed beyond recognition. We all have iPads, drive vans, many have no booking on time and, most significantly, some work from home, a fate which with the advent of 21st century technology may face us all in the near future.

We need to start a debate about how ASLEF organises itself in the freight sector and how we attract new recruits to become reps. Many FLHH and GBRF drivers have been allocated to branches dominated by passenger TOCs whose debates have no relevance to them or are anywhere near where they live. While some freight branches have the same small loyal following making it difficult to be truly democratic. This has made it very difficult to fill LLC positions for freight companies in certain areas and, with most of us older drivers leaving, we need to look to the future now and decide how we attract new reps and remain relevant to new recruits. One person one vote was rejected at AAD. Perhaps we need revisit this to ensure we still have reps in the freight industry in the future.

Paul Barber, Eastleigh branch

MDS bombshell
In April 2012, I was diagnosed with myelodysplastic syndrome, or MDS, a form of leukaemia. My chemotherapy treatment started in May, with the aim of having a stem cell transplant in January 2013. Unfortunately, that had to be postponed due to health complications. My transplant finally went ahead in May last year. This has been successful, so far. I’d like to thank Mick Whelan and the executive committee for their financial support; I’d like to thank Bill Goode (DCC) for the support he has shown me and my family during two extremely difficult years; and I’d also like to thank all the members of New Street branch and all the other members of all the other branches for your kindness. The words ‘thank you’ don’t seem to be enough.

Adrian Eggleton, Birmingham New Street branch

Solidarity in struggle
On behalf of our campaign for the reinstatement of free train travel for older people in South Yorkshire I would like to thank ASLEF for the fantastic support you are giving us, both through your local branches and from the ASLEF national conference. In solidarity...

Dave Gibson, chair, Barnsley Trades Council, South Yorkshire

Overtime on Underground
The question remains unanswered! My circumstances, or how I got the job, are irrelevant, Brother Grant. All manager grades DTSM, TOSM, TOM, GSM, DRM, earn more, all other LUL train operating grades, ie test train and engineering, earn more, in fact lots of grades in all sectors earn more, so please don’t mention the ones that don’t.

Lots of main line companies who allow overtime still have never ending recruitment campaigns – just look at Southern. Suggesting overtime cuts jobs, well, I see no evidence and, let’s face it, we all know what companies can claim against taxes! Longer hours? Is ASLEF not
Voters in Scotland have a one in a lifetime opportunity this month to change the constitutional governance of how Scotland is run, and the recent excellent contributions in the Journal from Paul Morris and Steven Nimmo, among others, have proved interesting reading. This is about far more than the current personalities or partisan politics at Westminster or Holyrood, but the start of a journey to a more progressive and democratic politics and society. After independence, no longer will Scotland be subject to rule by the House of Lords, a political chamber composed of unelected, politically appointed cronies, hereditary peers left over from the Middle Ages and bishops and bishops from the Church of England. Scotland will be governed by a more proportionally representative elected chamber of MSPs, living in Scotland, making decisions for the people of Scotland.

An independent Scotland, governed from the left of centre, can say no to the current political ideologies prevailing among the Tories, New Labour and Lib Dems, a neoliberal ideology that says unfettered capitalism, and the free market, is right and that profit maximisation must be paramount over everything the state does in transport, health and social care and postal services. An independent Scotland can say that public services will be run for the benefit of all, not in the interest of shareholders and profit takers. ScotRail could more easily want a four day week? To do this means increasing daily hours? As for fighting for jobs, is ASLEF backing our colleagues fighting ticket office closures? Now I know that’s a separate argument but, unless we show solidarity across the board, our future fights are doomed to failure! All other operating companies do overtime sanctioned by ASLEF so why can’t any driver on London Underground do the same? This is a clear case of discrimination are doomed to failure! solidarity across the board, our future fights are doomed to failure! and I refuse to be bullied or silenced by anyone. A simple answer to a simple question is all I ask! Oh, and the comment about people doing the job for £10k less, well, I’m sure there are people out there who would do my job for peanuts but, then, we know what happens when you pay peanuts! 

John Hardesty, Earls Court

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Honest Abe

Lincoln, appealing to the ‘better angels of our nature’, spoke in favour of the union

In his inaugural address, on 4 March 1861, President Abraham Lincoln tried to reason with secession-minded Southerners. He said: ‘Before entering upon so grave a matter as the destruction of our national fabric, with all its benefits, its memories, and its hopes, would it not be wise to ascertain precisely why we do it? Will you hazard so desperate a step while there is any possibility that any portion of the ills you fly from have no real existence? Will you, while the certain ills you fly to are greater than all the real ones you fly from, will you risk the commission of so fearful a mistake?’

Mark Dowd, Kirkdale, Liverpool

COWDEN CRASH

We have some commemorative badges, price £5, to mark the 20th anniversary of the accident in which two members of Norwood Junction train crew, a Selhurst conductor and a member of the public tragically lost their lives. Contact Mick Green at userg4163@iol.com and please state if you are ex-Norwood train crew.

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by Donald Wrightman is a laugh out loud comedy novel about risqué encounters on the railways. A donation from the sale of each book will be made to both the Royal British Legion and Help for Heroes. Paperback £7.99 ebook £3.95 from www.amazon.co.uk

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ENGRAVING: ASLEF driver based in Sunderland branch offers professional engraving at reasonable prices. I can engrave anything you wish, such as the ASLEF logo on a pint tankard which is pictured. For further details contact Paul Potts by email at ppotts1969@hotmail.co.uk

The Scottish Parliament at Holyrood in Edinburgh

become A People’s Railway as laid out in joint ASLEF/Co-operative Party proposals. While I have great sympathy for those who argue that we need these sort of policies in all of the United Kingdom, an independent Scotland can attain them in the near future, a horizon a long way off for the rest of the UK, while it is dominated by London and the south-east and an establishment not inclined to spread prosperity throughout the whole country. Scotland will take its place in the world as a small country, but a country at ease with itself, and without the need to feel it is still in charge of a long lost British Empire, a country looking to play its part, but without the need to feel it must be the world’s policeman or at the beck and call of a US President’s gung-ho drive for military intervention. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity and a new, better, more equal and more progressive society is within the grasp of the people of Scotland.

Julian Morison, Bournemouth

WORLD CUP 2014

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A SLEF J O U RN A L

and something I intend to keep fighting for over time sanctioned by ASLEF so why can’t any driver on London Underground do the same? This is a clear case of discrimination are doomed to failure!
Dirt track hero who lived on methanol and died shouting ¡No pasarán! to Fascists

A memorial to Clem Beckett, who died fighting for the International Brigades in Spain, has been unveiled in Oldham. KEITH RICHMOND looks at the life and death of a speedway legend

HERE is something special about speedway. About four men hurling anti-clockwise around a shale track on 500cc Jawa bikes, with no brakes, and one fixed gear, sliding around the bends of the oval circuits, putting their metal-plated left boots down on the dirt and wrestling their machines around the corners. And racing, of course. Over- and undertaking for four laps at speeds of up to 70mph. I’ve loved the sight and the smells and the sounds – the sight of the close quarters wheel to wheel racing, the extraordinary smell of the methanol the riders use for fuel, the roar of the racing engines and the noise of the klaxons in the crowd – since my dad took me to Tilehurst to see Reading Racers in the heyday of Anders Michanek.

There is something special about speedway riders, too – a courageous breed of men in one of the last of the authentic working-class sports – and they don’t come much more special than Clem Beckett who was born at Oldham in Lancashire in 1906 and became a blacksmith when he left school. But he found it hard to earn a living and, as he loved sports – and they don’t come much more special than Clem Beckett who was born at Oldham in 1906 and became a blacksmith when he left school. But he found it hard to earn a living and, as he loved

Beneath his leather jacket beat a heart of gold. A heart that throbbed in rhythm with the struggle of the working people.’ – George Sinfield

Clem switched to speedway, riding for Belle Vue Aces in Manchester, Halifax Dukes, and White City in London, when the sport was introduced to this country from Australia in the 1920s. As a young, politically-aware, working-class man, Clem joined the Communist Party and, appalled at the unsafe – and sometimes downright dangerous – state of the tracks, and the attitude of the promoters – careful about their money, careless of their riders’ safety – he set up the Dirt Track Riders’ Association, the first trade union for speedway riders.

In 1929 Clem and two fellow riders, Jimmy Hindle and Spencer Stratton, established the Sheffield Tigers at Owerton. Two years later, in 1931, the Auto Cycle Union shamefully suspended him after he wrote a critical article – Bleeding the Men Who Risk Their Lives on the Dirt Track – in the Daily Worker.

When speedway was first introduced to this country many greyhound stadium owners jumped on the bandwagon. Young kids were persuaded to race, irrespective of their experience, and many were killed or seriously injured. Clem played a major part in setting up a trade union for riders that stopped this lethal exploitation.’ – David Hallam

In the 1930s the democratically-elected left-wing Republican government in Spain introduced social and economic reforms to improve life for industrial workers and peasant farmers. Conservatives – the rich, the powerful and the Roman Catholic church – were outraged and the army tried to overthrow the government by force. Thousands of Spaniards rallied to the Republican cause, the coup failed and the country was plunged into a long and bloody civil war.

The Nationalist army, led by General Francisco Franco, was backed by Falangist irregulars and troops and weapons from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. On the Republican side, men and women from other countries – volunteers in the International Brigades – answered Miró’s call to Aidez L’Espagne. One of them was Clem. On 12 February 1937, manning a machine-gun on Suicide Hill, as part of a British battalion deployed to block the Fascist advance along the Jarama Valley, he was killed in action. He died, as he lived, under a slogan used by anti-Fascists ever since: ‘No Pasarán!’

Clem loved the dirty growl of his bike’s engine, the smell of diesel and hot metal filling his nostrils. He loved the thrill of the track, the rush of adrenaline as the back end of his ride slipped out, gunning the throttle and feeling the cool blast of wind in his face. But the race track owners regarded Beckett as a rebel because he unionised the sport.’ – Jon Tait

After a long campaign by labour movement activists, a memorial to the six volunteers from Oldham who died in Spain – Clem Beckett, Kenneth Bradbury, Harry Roland Heap, William Jackson, Joseph Maynard Lees, and Clifford Wolstencroft – was unveiled this summer at the parish church of St Mary with St Peter and blessed, in Spanish and English, by the Rev Derek Palmer. Tosh McDonald, a Harley man, was there for ASLEF.
Crossword 23

Prize Crossword number 101 by Zebedee

Thank you for all your responses to the 100th ASLEF crossword in the August edition. If you successfully complete this month’s crossword please send the solution to the Editor, ASLEF Journal, 77 St John Street, London, EC1M 4NN by 14 September.

FREE LEGAL ADVICE ASLEF also provides first class free legal advice – both for members and for their dependents. In the last year, ASLEF has recovered £6,769,848 in damages for all types of cases.

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Solution to prize crossword number 100 which appeared in the August edition of the ASLEF Journal

Across:
1 A two-wheeled horse-drawn carriage (6)
5 A modified leaf protecting an inflorescence (5)
9 American following Lincoln, keeping abreast (5)
10 Savoury dish - an uncooked portion? (7)
12 Ballet passage employed in disco dance (4)
13 Legendary (8)
16 A protruding abdomen (5)
17 Living quarters reserved for wives in a Muslim household (5)
20 At a home set in country (8)
22 Repulsive daughter refused by Richard (4)
24 Important aspect of a lock (7)
26 This man has stomach (5)
27 Full-bodied support (5)
28 Add up - think (6)

Down:
2 A correction (9)
3 An unspecified quantity (4)
4 Sufferer for a cause (6)
6 Meadow grass (3)
7 Fine delicate pottery (5)
8 “Let’s __ __ __ __ __”, David Bowie hit (5)
11 Heat again (6)
14 Time to leave street party - it’s getting noisier (9)
15 Very drunk (6)
18 Create goodwill by being close to the listener (6)
19 Accompanies frankincense (5)
21 Hornlike coverage in the animal world (5)
23 Computer architecture (4)
25 Gentle utterance to call someone’s attention (3)

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

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Congratulations to Dennis Ireland of Pinhoe, Exeter, Devon who was last month’s winner.

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