Michael Dugher – the future for Britain’s railways under Labour

LUCIO BUFFONE: The driver from Planet Rock

STEFANO FELLA on the EU: It’s not time to walk away

CHRISTIAN WOLMAR: Let’s be big and brave

EXCLUSIVE: How Maggie broke the law to beat the miners by Nicholas Jones
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The railway system has been hitting the headlines for all the wrong reasons at the start of this year. The annual increase in fares, on the main line, and the tube in London, has met with disapproval not only from the travelling public but from employers and certain politicians recognising it is not sustainable, and also questioning the quality of service.

As stakeholders, we recognise the need to maintain and, hopefully, improve the infrastructure but the nonsense at Finsbury Park and Paddington does nothing for all of us who are identified with the railway. The responses to both situations were baffling and concerning. Mark Carne told the Transport Select Committee the issues at Finsbury were due to installing untested hardware – which raises more questions than it answers. Paddington, apparently, was down to eight hours of checks being required on the work done. Do you not check work as it’s completed, or build in the time needed as part of the project? And we have seen, once more, the privatised train companies seeking to blame drivers for their failure to have enough resources to cover their services.

One thing the rail industry continually fails to recognise is that it is the staff who take the abuse – the gripes and the groans – over fare rises. Operating staff are equally inconvenienced by failures such as Finsbury Park and Paddington as they might like to get home in the hours they expected, too.

Companies bemoaning their lack of drivers might want to address their own failings. Because how much worse would it be without the goodwill of those drivers who cover a company’s shortfall? Would the TOCs like to publish the additional hours and days worked by drivers that hide the true situation and shortages? Maybe, instead, they could let the travelling public, and the world, know that they are grateful for all you do in sometimes difficult circumstances. That’s why I want to thank you for everything you do to maintain the safe operation and services of our railway system.

Yours fraternally
Mick Whelan, general secretary
Commuters north and south deserve rail fit for purpose

KEITH RICHMOND talks to Shadow Transport Secretary Michael Dugher about the Labour Party’s plans for Britain’s railways

MICHAEL DUGHER, the Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, has pledged that a new Labour government will deliver on HS2. Although the party is, officially, committed to the project, and Andrew Adonis, made a life peer by Tony Blair and Transport Secretary by Gordon Brown, talked up high speed rail at conference in Manchester last year, doubts persist that a future Labour government will give it the green light.

Mainly because Ed Balls, the Shadow Chancellor, has said: ‘There will be no blank cheque from me as a Labour Chancellor for this project, or any other project. The question is not just whether a new high speed line is a good idea or a bad idea, but whether it is the best way to spend £50 billion for the future of our country.’

Mr Dugher, speaking to the ASLEF Journal at the Trades Club in Doncaster, said: ‘We are absolutely committed to HS2. Why? Because it’s not about speed, it’s about capacity. It’s a huge capacity issue.

‘In my own constituency, of Barnsley East, teens going to Meadowhall in Sheffield are waiting at Elsecar station, there are very few trains, and when they arrive they are Pacers, with two knackered old carriages. Commuters in the south deserve a railway fit for purpose and so do commuters in the north.’

Mr Dugher also hit out at Tory plans to make it harder for workers to strike in ‘core’ public services. Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin says a strike would need the backing of 40% of those eligible to vote, rather than, as at present, a simple majority of those choosing to vote, to be legal.

‘40% of the electorate? Some Tory ministers can only dream of that sort of vote. And what about that waste of money, police commissioners, who got nowhere near that? It’s total hypocrisy by Conservative ministers, sabbating against the unions and working people, and shows the Tories haven’t changed one jot.

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Michael Dugher, a Donny boy, speaking to the ASLEF Journal in the railway town where the Labour Party has its roots. Pic: Andrew Wiard

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TOCs like Alice in Wonderland

Southern’s 7.29 service from Brighton to London Victoria, where it is due to arrive at 8.35, has been dubbed the ‘Train of Shame’ after being late every day last year. But that is only half the story. Because the privatised train operating companies have a unique definition of late. It varies from TOC to TOC, train to train, and service to service, but often a train is only deemed to be late if it is more than five minutes late.

‘If a train is late, but late by two, three or four minutes, then it is deemed by the train companies not to be late!’ said Mick Whelan. ‘It is their very own version of Alice in Wonderland. Remember Humpty Dumpty in Through the Looking Glass saying “When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.” Hundreds of thousands of passengers are being ripped off – paying inflated prices to keep the privatised TOCs in profit and their shareholders in clover – and are fed up with arriving late and being told that the train is not, officially, late. When it is! That’s why many passengers – especially commuters paying more than £5,000 a year to get to work – will be voting for MPs at the general election who promise to bring the railway back into public ownership.’

CONFERENCE

The Welsh Labour Party conference will be held at the Brangwyn Hall in Swansea from Friday 13 to Sunday 15 February. The Scottish Labour Party conference is at the Royal Concert Hall in Glasgow on Saturday 7 March. The Scottish TUC is at Ayr racecourse from Monday 20 to Wednesday 22 April. ASLEF’s annual assembly of delegates is at the Park Inn, Southend, from Tuesday 12 to Friday 15 May. The Durham Miners’ Gala is on Saturday 11 July. The Tolpuddle Martyrs’ festival, near Dorchester, is from Friday 17 to Sunday 19 July. The Burston strike school Gala is on Saturday 11 July. The Tolpuddle Martyrs’ festival, near Hastings, Horsham, Littlehampton, Newhaven, Ore, Seaford, Three Bridges, Tunbridge Wells West and West Worthing – will be held from 2pm on Tuesday 5 May at Brighton Railway Club.

500 CLUB: E Rhodes, with number 44, won the December draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £362.

Off the rails

ALAN BENNETT, whose plays include The History Boys and The Madness of George III, and whose series of dramatic monologues for the BBC, Talking Heads, feature on the GCSE syllabus, has hit out at government plans to reprivatise the East Coast main line.

The playwright, elevated in recent years to the status of national treasure, is a regular traveller on the route. Writing in the London Review of Books, he said: ‘There is no way this can be presented as being in the public interest – it’s putting yet more money in private pockets already well lined from previous deals. It’s ideology masquerading as pragmatism. I have always thought Richard Branson a bit of a pillock and presumably – if they’re as gay-unfriendly as they ever were – Stagecoach isn’t much better. The Prudes and the Pillock. I look forward to the logo.’

KEITH FLETT, left-wing activist, invertebrate letter writer to newspapers and magazines, and unreconstructed beardless from London N17, was much smitten by the facial hair being sported in January by ASLEF’s general secretary, Mick Whelan. Keith, a leading light in the Beard Liberation Front, bumped into Mick, and Steve Cavalier of Thompsons solicitors, in a north London pub after the Tottenham v Chelsea game, and promptly tweeted: ‘As @Kevin_Maguire gave in to clean shaven revisionism blf has urged @MickWhelanASLEF to keep his beard @BeehiveN17.’

DAVID TROUGHTON, who also sports whiskers as master cobbler Simon Eyre in The Shoemaker’s Holiday in the RSC’s revival at the Swan in Stratford, is given a brilliant battery of insults to deliver by Shakespeare’s rival Thomas Dekker. He condemns the lovely Cicely – ‘She has a privy fault, she farts in her sleep’ – but probably the best is this double Dekker treat: ‘Fishery-pashery! Go snick up! You gibble-gabbling trullibubs!’ Employ it next time negotiators from a TOC or FOC start spouting David Brent type management gobbledegook.

PETER WILBY was in waspish mood in his New Statesman column on the BBC’s decision to invite Nigel Farage and Russell Brand on to the same Question Time panel. ‘Brand, for all his pretensions as a philosopher and political analyst, is essentially a clown and his clashes with Farage revealed that the two belong in the same category. They created a riotously entertaining programme but showed neither is fit to join a serious legislative body.’ Ouch…

ED MILIBAND got under David Cameron’s skin when he told the House of Commons, ‘You brought a whole new meaning to the phrase conviction politician,’ and then added, after a Pinteresque pause, ‘when Andy Coulson went to jail!’
I would walk all the way from Boulder to Birmingham

LIZ COCKS reports on the first joint meeting of members of our three representative committees – Women’s, BEM, LGBT – and the RMS in Brum

H ere was an air of anticipation, and expectation, as members from all four corners of the country, and from ASLEF’s three representative committees – the Women’s Representatives Committee; the Black and Ethnic Minority Representatives Committee; and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Committee – joined delegates from the Retired Members’ Section at the Comfort Inn in Birmingham to share ideas, initiatives and experiences.

The day was divided into five sessions to focus minds on moving the equality agenda forward, within the union and the wider rail industry. The room was split into three groups with all committees in each while trying to separate district reps, with national organiser Simon Weller and equality adviser Lee James moving round the room to assist the discussions.

We began by looking at what we have, and where we have come from, what is working in the current structures and, importantly, what isn’t, and how that can be improved. It was felt that a new tack is needed to move the equality agenda forward and make it meaningful to all members. It was decided that an equality charter should be looked at and we should have some aims for what the ASLEF equality structure stands for.

Many ideas and suggestions were shared, including a session on how the RMS can assist in pushing the equality agenda. It was decided to hold a joint chairs and secretaries meeting twice a year to share the work of each committee, as many issues involving equality do not affect only one group and the opportunity is available for shared involvement and resources. There are varying degrees of acknowledgement of equality reps at TOCs and FOCs, and we feel industrial reps could make better use of branch equality reps when dealing with companies.

We were joined by the general secretary, Mick Whelan, and district organisers Nigel Gibson and Brian Corbett in the afternoon. They joined group discussions on pushing the equality agenda, challenging negativity, and recruitment and organisation of branch equality reps.

For those who read this and say equality issues don’t affect me, it’s important to know that it’s not whether you fit into one of the current representative groups; it’s awareness that, with the continuing change to our political and working landscapes, you could find that equality issues will affect you at some point in your life. That’s why we need to work together, and integrate, and develop reps and future reps to keep this union as strong as, historically, it always has been.

QUOTE... ‘If one morning I walked on top of the water across the Potomac river, the headline that afternoon would read, President Can’t Swim.’ – Lyndon B Johnson

...UNQUOTE

Thomas the Tank Engine goes back to the future

Two Thomas the Tank Engine-type locos at the heart of an historic steam railway have been given a ‘new-old’ makeover as the line celebrates its 150th anniversary.

The two original engines on the narrow gauge Talyllyn Railway in Gwynedd, which inspired the Rev Wilbert Awdry to write his Thomas the Tank Engine stories, are now a striking Indian red, just as they were in 1865 when the railway, which runs from Tywyn on the coast to Nant Gwernol near Aberynolwyn, was built to carry slate. The line, saved from closure in 1951, was one of the world’s first preserved, heritage, volunteer-run railways.

The locos have been running in black but, after examining the archives, enthusiasts at the historic railway decided on a new paint job to return the engines to their original colour.

RSSB survey reveals speed restrictions rarely exceeded

The Rail Safety and Standards Board has published the results of its survey into compliance with permanent, temporary and emergency speed restrictions.

The survey – there were 566 respondents, 493 drivers from TOCs, 60 FOCs, 13 OTMs – reveals that PSRs, TSRs and ESRs are only ‘rarely’ or ‘sometimes’ exceeded.

The RSSB report concludes: ‘The main reasons given for a driver exceeding the designated speed were lack of knowledge about where the speed restriction is; issues with memory and attention; fatigue; signage missing or incorrectly placed; confusion because of the number of signs in complex areas or the number of in-cab warnings such as AWS; and inconsistency in the braking distances between the warning and commencement boards.’

QUOTE...

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...UNQUOTE
Tackling UKIP and the far right in Scotland

**PAUL PATMORE** reports from the STUC black workers’ conference in Cumbernauld

This year’s chair, Gozie Joe Adigwe of Community, welcomed delegates to the 18th annual black workers’ conference and STUC general secretary Grahame Smith spoke about the ramifications of the referendum on independence and voting patterns in Scotland ahead of the general election in May. Mots ranged from challenging UKIP and the far right and race equality in Scotland to independence and voting patterns in Scotland ahead of the general election in May.

ASLEF in action at the Westerwood Hotel in Cumbernauld, North Lanarkshire

organising black workers and I was asked by Unite to second their motion to raise awareness of health and safety issues among ethnic migrant workers with language difficulties.

ASLEF’s motion to conference – red card for slashed budgets – condemned the SNP government’s decision to cut funding for Show Racism the Red Card from £120,000 to £60,000. This will have a detrimental effect on the invaluable work they do in communities educating children, and adults, against racism, sectarianism and bigotry.

Thirty years ago, there was an enormous gas explosion at a pesticide plant in India owned by Union Carbide. More than 20,000 people died, and half a million were injured, in the Bhopal disaster. Conference condemned the fact that although, today, 150,000 people are still struggling with serious medical conditions as a result of the explosion the company, now owned by Dow Chemicals, has never paid appropriate compensation.

Rolling out the rolling stock

The first Class 800 trains made by Hitachi for the intercity express programme are on the high seas. Running tests and onboard training are due to start in the spring, a few months before the firm opens its new factory at Newton Aycliffe in County Durham.

Alistair Dormer, chief executive of Hitachi Rail Europe, said: ‘I’m immensely proud the first shipment is leaving our factory. Our engineering teams in the UK and Japan have been working exceptionally hard to ensure this train will be ready for testing in the UK from April.’

The new plant in the north-east will make 110 Class 800 and 801 IEP trains for Great Western, running via Bristol to south Wales from 2017, and for the East Coast from 2018.

Made in Japan: locos being loaded on the dockside in Kobe main line the following year. Twelve will be made at Kasado in Japan.

To travel hopefully

Commuting is something many people dread. Especially when they see how the privatised train operating companies are plundering profits from the public purse – it’s the taxpayer who coughs up for investment in infrastructure and rolling stock – as well as pushing through ‘rip-off’ fare rises each year so passengers here now pay more than anyone else in Western Europe.

But commuting, according to lain Gately, is something to be celebrated: ‘For the last century and a half, he writes, ‘it has given countless people the opportunity to improve their lives.’ In his new book Rush Hour: How 500 Million Commuters Survive the Daily Journey to Work (Head of Zeus, £16.99) he examines the past, present and future of commuting, from the railway boom in Victorian Britain to Elon Musk’s sci-fi vision of a supersonic hyperloop whisking workers the 354 miles from San Francisco to Los Angeles in 35 minutes.

Iain, a good-natured travelling companion, tells how schoolgirls are targets for salarymen looking for a close encounter in ‘super crush loaded’ carriages on the Tokyo metro while 97% of ‘super dense crush loaded’ trains on the Mumbai Suburban Railway run on time, even during the monsoon season.

RailWAYS ADD VALUE

A new report by the Community of European Railway & Infrastructure Companies examines the economic footprint of railways in the European Union. It analyses the impact of railways in terms of employment, exports, gross added value, and other key economic indicators. Four case studies – two on high speed rail (Paris-Lyon-Marseilles and Milan-Rome), one on passenger stations (Manchester Piccadilly), and one on freight (the shuttle system at the Port of Gothenburg) – reveal the wider economic benefits of rail transport. The report concludes: ‘Rail transport is a major pillar of the EU economy and an important contributor to the development of a smarter, more sustainable, and more competitive economy.’

Architecture & Morality

English Heritage has published a list of the most architecturally beautiful railway stations in Britain. The EH top 10 includes Paddington, Newcastle Central, Windsor & Eton Riverside, Carlisle Citadel, Huddersfield, Monkwearmouth, Battle, Wolferton, Great Malvern, and St Pancras.

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Help for drivers after a fatality

**IAN STEVENS**, programme manager for suicide prevention at Network Rail, reports on the British Transport Police’s fatality hotline for drivers

The rail industry, with the active support of ASLEF, is working hard to reduce the number of suicides on the network in an attempt to minimise the trauma they cause to drivers as well as rail colleagues and railway users.

It’s in the interests of everyone to manage these incidents as quickly and efficiently as possible, when they occur, so the correct level of support can be given to all involved and normal train working can be resumed.

The British Transport Police fatality hotline for drivers was set up, with the backing of ASLEF, in 2010 to do just that. We still support its use to this day recognising that with what has happened before speaking to a police officer. We would encourage everyone to use it but, of course, respect the decision of individuals who do not.

To help drivers deal with issues around fatalities with which they may be involved Network Rail, in conjunction with ASLEF, East Midlands Trains, and the Samaritans, has produced an informative leaflet entitled *Journey to Recovery*.

**QUOTE...**

‘Businesses have a responsibility to pay their taxes, respect their customers, and treat their workers fairly.’

– Ed Miliband

...UNQUOTE

Platform for learning

**EMMA PENMAN** reports on her education forum in Farrington

A forum was held at head office in London for ASLEF union learning representatives at South West Trains. Ten out of 14 depots were represented, giving the ULRs a platform to discuss issues from their locations and to share information.

The day was supported by company council representative Shaun Seymour, who added valuable insights on developments within the company. As ASLEF education project worker, it gave me a unique opportunity to speak to the ULRs as a group, to share new resources, and to make plans for our future activities. Keep a look out for promotional open days across the depots throughout 2015!

**LIKE IT OR LUMP IT**

The Conservatives, in an election year, have found themselves on the wrong side of the argument over soaring rail fares. The *Daily Mail*, which traditionally backs the Tories, took the Transport Secretary to task after his comments on the New Year price rises. The *Mail* reported: ‘Patrick McLoughlin was accused of telling passengers to “like it or lump it” despite the fact that rail travel is more expensive in Britain than most other countries. Mr McLoughlin said: “I think you know what the price of commuting is if you want to take that journey on.”’ The cost of season tickets rose by 2.5%, taking the price of an annual season ticket above £5,000 for many commuters. Some routes have seen prices increase by 30% in the past five years:

**CHEERS, RICK**

Immingham branch bid a fond farewell to Richard Blyth on his retirement after 41 years’ service with a celebratory drink at Wetherspoons in Grimsby. ’Rick was active in ASLEF for many years and held positions including LDC rep, h&s rep and branch sec’ said branch secretary Andrew Mackenzie. ‘We wish Rick and Jan all the best.’

**CAN’T YOU HEAR THE WHISTLE BLOWING?**

South Yorkshire Freedom Riders, who are campaigning against cuts in travel passes for pensioners and disabled people, have submitted a blueprint to the transport authority for the restoration of free travel. It proposes a short window of free bus travel for pensioners and the disabled every morning, the introduction of a £10 ‘free travel’ rail card, and the use of some of the authority’s unspent reserves of £12.2 million. ‘The total cost of fully restoring free bus and rail travel in the area is just £600,000,’ said Tony Nuttall. ‘Unless older people are supported to get out and be part of the community, they will become more isolated and suffer more illness.’

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standing up for you
Maggie, the miners and the secret state

Nicholas Jones, who reported on the bitter miners’ strike of 1984-85 for the BBC, reveals how telephone taps, secret surveillance and illegal activity by the spooks helped the Tories beat the miners

O MANY telephones were tapped during the 1984-85 miners’ strike that an anxious Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robert Armstrong, took steps to ensure that no mention was ever made of the extent of the eavesdropping. The success of Margaret Thatcher in hushing up the bugging of phones by the security service M15 has only been revealed now after the release, under the 30 year rule, of the 1985 cabinet papers in the National Archives.

Action to prevent public disclosure of the role of intelligence officers was personally approved by the Prime Minister. At one stage government-appointed lawyers were on the point of being advised to withdraw legal action over the hunt for the miners’ money if awkward questions were asked in court.

Armstrong’s intervention in February 1985 to cover up the role of the security service in the pit dispute was significant because later that year, in a Channel 4 documentary, former M15 officer Cathy Massiter blew the whistle. She revealed there had been illegal bugging of the telephones of political activists and human rights campaigners during the late 1970s and early ‘80s.

No legal justification

Throughout the year-long pit strike Arthur Scargill and other leaders of the National Union of Mineworkers believed their phone calls were being intercepted and their movements closely monitored.

Cabinet papers reveal that Mrs Thatcher was warned on 1 February 1985 of the dangers if it leaked out about what the security service was up to. She was told by the Cabinet Secretary that while intelligence gathering could be justified to counter threats from foreign governments, there was not the same legal justification for the interception of telephone calls within the UK during the course of an industrial dispute.

Details of the information gathered by interception and secret surveillance during the strike has been withheld from the documents released by the National Archives. As a result there is no indication of the precise purpose of intelligence operations or the outcome of co-operation between M15 and the police. But occasional references confirm the role of the security service.

As the strike intensified, and the government feared it was losing the war, interception of telephone communications became so extensive that the intelligence agencies were able to identify instantly the staff at union headquarters in whose names NUM money was being moved out of the country for safe keeping.

When the government began legal action to seize £8.5 million transferred to banks overseas lawyers advised that a case involving the sequestrators be abandoned in case the scale of surveillance was revealed in open court.

Codename Tuscany

When I made Codename Tuscany, a programme about the hunt for the miners’ money, broadcast by Radio 4 in 1986, I was told that tip-offs by bankers had pointed the way to Nobis Finance in Luxembourg. In fact, it was snooping by the intelligence services that helped sequestrator Brian Larkins, a partner in Price Waterhouse, the accountancy firm given secret, unprecedented, and unlimited indemnification by Attorney General Sir Michael Havers, to find the cash.

A note by Deputy Treasury Solicitor Gerald Hosker reveals that government-appointed lawyers in Dublin had warned it might be necessary to make ‘a tactical withdrawal’ as the Irish judge was likely to probe the source of information given to sequestrators.

Armstrong warns the Prime Minister she needs to be cautious and think through the consequences if the extent of the intelligence gathering should become public knowledge. Her papers show she heavily underlined that paragraph and a note from her principal private secretary, Robin Butler, reinforced Robert Armstrong’s caution.

Mrs Thatcher’s papers contain another tantalising reference to the role of the security services. With a return to work on the horizon, Bernard Ingham offered advice on how the government should handle what he feared would be a ‘messy’ end to the strike. The Prime Minister’s message should be that her government ‘only did what unfortunately it had to do...in the interests of law and order and democracy’. But, in a brief sentence, Ingham hints at the extent of the surveillance and other secret counter measures: ‘I do not believe anything more should be done covertly while the strike is collapsing’. The key word there, of course, is ‘more’.

Significant disclosures

One of the significant disclosures in Mrs Thatcher’s cabinet papers is how she intervened personally to tell chief constables to ‘stiffen their resolve’ in the face of picketing. Within days the police had introduced road blocks on motorways to stop flying pickets heading for working pits in Nottinghamshire and other coalfields in the Midlands.

Mrs Thatcher’s former foreign policy adviser Charles Powell says allegations that the Soviet Union and Libya were providing funds to the NUM meant there ‘was a security issue and it was perfectly legitimate to investigate it’. But Lord (Roy) Hattersley says the cabinet records show there was a cover up. ‘Phone tapping in an industrial dispute is a contradiction of a free society.’ And Kim Howells, the former Labour MP who was a South Wales NUM official during the strike, says he knew their phones were being tapped: ‘We went along to too many operations where the police were already there to believe anything different.’
A window of opportunity for radical change

The franchise system for Britain’s railways is expensive and complex and inherently dysfunctional. Rail expert and London Mayor hopeful Christian Wolmar says it’s time to stop repeating the same mistakes and change the pattern.

The franchising process in the rail industry has always been unsatisfactory. It is complex, expensive and breaks up an industry that should be integrated as, traditionally, railways have been right across the world. The fiasco over the West Coast franchise in 2012 highlighted all the inherent contradictions. It was the attempt to create a longer franchise that led to heroic overbidding by FirstGroup and, consequently, the scrapping of the process. Yet short franchises are blamed for the lack of investment from operators. Essentially, all the crisis did was prove that neither short nor long franchises make any sense.

THE BEAUTY OF THE IDEA

There was hope for a time that the Labour Party would understand this. The noises coming out of Westminster suggested that a radical approach might be taken. Maria Eagle, the then Shadow Transport Secretary, was bullish in private about beefing up the role of the public sector. The announcement last year by the Conservative-led coalition that Network Rail would have to go onto the government’s books only increased speculation that Labour would take the plunge and go for the renationalisation of the railways.

The beauty of the idea was that it would not cost anything. Back in 2004, Alistair Darling, the then Transport Secretary, misled Labour Party conference delegates by suggesting that such a move would cost £22 billion, a figure he never explained and was certainly a fantasy.

Simply allowing franchises to run out and handing them to a public sector body would not only be cheap but also popular. Moreover, it would not require any legislation. Under the Railways Act 1993, public sector bodies are not allowed to bid for franchises, but the legislation does not make bidding a legal requirement. No franchise process, no private involvement. Simple.

Last summer it became clear that Labour would not take this step. The word from Ed Balls’s office was that stopping the franchising out of the operators would be ‘anti-business’, whatever that means. It would be seen as Old Labour and backward-looking. Yet shadow ministers have been quick to heap praise on East Coast which has been very successfully run by the government owned (and accurately named) Directly Operated Railways for the past five years.

Maria Eagle’s successor, Mary Creagh, spoke out strongly in favour of retaining the franchise in the public sector, but the government, embarrassed by a successful publicly-owned franchise, put it at the head of the queue to be sold off, even though several other franchises had to be let to single bidders because the Department for Transport is not deemed competent enough to run several bidding processes simultaneously.

There ensued lengthy talks between trade unions, shadow ministers, and members of Labour’s policy review committee at the party’s policy conference in Milton Keynes and a compromise was thrashed out. This involves a vague commitment to review the franchise process and a commitment to allow a public sector bidder in future franchising processes.

CHANGE IN THE LAW

However, this approach is fraught with difficulties. Whereas, oddly, allowing the franchises to slip back into the public sector would have been possible without legislation, it will need a change in the law to allow a public sector bidder. Moreover, creating an organisation to bid for franchises will be expensive and difficult.

Typically, bids cost £5 million or more, and involve an expert staff of 20 or so for several months. Given there are normally three or four bidders in each process, the likelihood is that the public sector one will lose in most deals with the consequent accusation that this is a waste of public money. Ironically, the public sector bidder could be competing against other state owned bidders from France, Germany and the Netherlands who have relatively cheap access to capital and are experienced at running railways in the UK.

EXPENSIVE AND COMPLEX

The worst aspect of this is that Labour is perpetuating a franchise system that is expensive and complex, and is inherently dysfunctional, as the West Coast fiasco showed. For many years, I have been asking ‘What is franchising for?’ and have never received a satisfactory answer.

That’s because the question is unanswerable. No other country in the world has imposed this radical model of contracting out all railway services to the private sector. Over the 20 years of privatisation, there have been regular crises in the franchising process and yet the answer has always been to repeat the same mistakes. It is a shame that Labour has not been brave enough to change that pattern, especially as it would be electorally popular.

There is, however, a window of opportunity. If Labour is in government after 7 May, it must be held to its promise to review the whole franchising process and, conceivably, it may be open to the possibility of radical change. But don’t hold your breath.

Christian Wolmar is a writer and broadcaster who specialises in transport. He was on the staff of the Ham & High, New Statesman, London Daily News and The Independent and has written as a freelance for most national newspapers and many magazines. His books include Fire & Steam: How the Railways Transformed Britain; Blood, Iron & Gold: How the Railways Transformed the World; Subterranean Railway: How the London Underground was Built and How It Changed the City For Ever; Broken Rails: How Privatisation Wrecked Britain’s Railways; and Stagecoach: A Classic Rags to Riches Tale from the Frontiers of Capitalism. He is seeking the nomination to run as the Labour candidate in the election for Mayor of London in 2016. You can follow him on Twitter @wolmarforlondon or visit his website www.wolmarforlondon.co.uk
THE FUTURE FOR BRITAIN’S RAILWAYS UNDER LABOUR

Michael Dugher, the new Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, tells Keith Richmond how he sees the future of the rail network in this country

THE appointment, by Ed Miliband, of Michael Dugher as Shadow Transport Secretary just before Christmas was as interesting as it was important. Partly because Dugher is a rising star in the Labour Party, partly because he has the ear of the Labour leader, and partly because – for those of us who work in the rail industry – he comes from a railway family.

Dugher was born in Doncaster Royal Infirmary, in the heart of that old railway town, and says with pride: ‘My dad’s dad, my grandad, worked on the railway, at the old plant works in Donny, from the day he left school at the age of 14, except for doing his national service, until he was 55. My dad worked on the railway, too, at Gresley House, a famous name for railway people. He was made redundant in the first Tory recession in the early ’80s, got a job as a clerk on the railway, and became a technical officer, on the civil engineering side, working, after privatisation, for Balfour Beatty, and commuting from Donny to Shenfield, one of the more ludicrous aspects of privatisation. My brother works on the railway in Donny, both my sisters are married to railwaymen, and both my great grandfathers were railwaymen in Donny, too. One became chief clerk and the other was a union rep in the plant workshop.

PROUD OF WORKING-CLASS ROOTS

‘As a kid, we didn’t have a car for years, we didn’t need one, we went on day trips on the train to Cleethorpes and York, and spent our summer holidays in Scarborough. Employees were looked after better in those days, and got free travel, for the family. In the late ’80s, when I was a teenager, my dad saw an ad in Rail News – one of my jobs was to take his copy to his dad when he’d finished with it – for a holiday on a caravan site in the south of France and he realised we could get the train all the way – the main line from Donny to King’s Cross, then down to Dover, across the Channel, and coughettes over night to Argèles. We had some brilliant holidays down there and the funny thing was the site was full of British railway families, and the air, to a railway kid like me, was peppered with familiar acronyms like C&W and STO.

‘It’s this background which meant he leapt at the chance of taking on the transport brief when Miliband reshuffled the seats around his shadow cabinet table in November and moved Mary Creagh to International Development. ‘I felt really privileged to be asked by Ed to lead on what is a really, really important brief for the country and, as someone who comes from a railway family, I was pleased to get the chance to repay the trust he has shown in me to make the changes necessary for the people who use, and work in, the industry.’

FIGHT WITH ITS OWN PEOPLE

Dugher, 39, elected to Parliament in 2010, is described by people who know him, and like him, as ‘talented, hard-working, and practical’ and, by those who don’t, as ‘a political bruiser.’ The Tories, interestingly, regard him as one of Labour’s ‘most effective attack dogs.’

‘He is something of a rarity – even in the Labour Party – as a politician who is fiercely proud of his working-class roots. There aren’t many working-class MPs in Parliament any more and Dugher’s left-wing politics were forged in the pit village where he grew up in the shadow of Yorkshire Main colliery.

‘My dad’s family were railwaymen but my mum’s side were factory workers and pit workers, they came to South Yorkshire looking for work. Growing up in Edlington, I saw what the Thatcher government did to areas like ours, the hugely traumatic impact, the division it caused, the anger, what she was doing to working-class, industrial, communities. It was a government picking a fight with its own people and we paid a terrible price. I grew up a few miles from Barnsley, and pit villages like Grimethorpe, where Brassed Off was set, and I feel a huge personal connection with where I represent. You don’t forget where you came from, and the people who put you there.’

Privatisation, most people believe, has failed. Polls show that passengers are fed up with paying the most expensive fares in Europe – tired of being treated by the privatised train operating companies as ‘cows to be milked and sheep to be sheared’ – so TOCs can make a private profit, at public expense, from what should be a public service.

‘The government’s starting point is that everything is fine. I don’t think everything is fine. We are still dealing with the consequences of the mess that privatisation caused. We have to do something to change that, because the railway doesn’t work for the passenger. The people who have the least voice are those who rely on the service. Also the people who work in the industry, ASLEF members, people who care about the industry and see at first hand the nonsense in the system as it stands.

WE NEED BIG CHANGES

‘That’s why we need big changes to the way we run our railway. The government has the ironically named Rail Delivery Group, stitching up the industry for themselves, and the passenger has no voice. The passenger has to have a voice. The other day I went to buy a ticket, it wasn’t complicated, and the person in the ticket office, who was really helpful, couldn’t advise me. We need a simplified ticketing system and a statutory right for passengers to be able to buy the cheapest possible fare. And after inflation-busting fare rises, year after year, we have got to do something about fares. A strict cap on fares on all routes.’

And what about public ownership?

‘I have huge affection for the railway, but I’m not a romantic, not in any aspect of my life, and not for the British Rail model, in the 1970s, but there does have to be far more public accountability.’

But no one is suggesting a return to British Rail. That’s a canard put about by the TOCs so they can cream off £1,000 profit on every £5,000
Michael Dugher was born at Doncaster in 1975 and brought up in Edlington, a pit village in South Yorkshire, where the colliery was closed in 1985.

He went to St Mary’s Roman Catholic primary school in Edlington and McAuley Catholic High School in Doncaster, read politics at Nottingham University (he still follows the trials and tribulations of Nottingham Forest) and was national chair of Labour Students.

Michael was research officer and then head of policy at the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union – he is still a member of Unite – and then a special adviser to the last Labour government, working as a spad for the Minister for Transport, Secretary of State for Defence, and Leader of the House.

He spent a year as UK director of government relations at EDS (now Hewlett Packard) before moving back into Whitehall as special adviser to the Labour government’s chief whip, Geoff Hoon.

Michael worked in Downing Street from 2008 to 2010 as chief political spokesman for Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

He was elected as MP for Barnsley East in 2010 with a majority of 11,090 over the Liberal Democrats.

Ed Miliband made him Shadow Minister for Defence Equipment, Support and Technology and then his Parliamentary Private Secretary.

Michael was appointed to the Shadow Cabinet in 2011, first as Shadow Minister without Portfolio, then Shadow Minister for the Cabinet Office, and then Shadow Secretary of State for Transport.

He is married to Joanna. They have two daughters and a son and live in Birdwell, a village just south of Barnsley, in the heart of his constituency.
HE trade union movement in Britain embraced the vision of a social Europe put forward by European Commission President Jacques Delors at the end of the 1980s. Other factors also helped to change minds across a previously hostile Labour movement.

The experience of the Mitterand government in France in the early ’80s – forced to abandon a socialist programme in the face of a flight of capital from the country – led to a reassessment of strategy across the European left. The conclusion was that a socialist – or interventionist – social democratic programme could not work if implemented in one country alone. Centre-left parties needed to co-ordinate action to intervene in the economy, with European institutions the obvious place in which to do this. Labour Party policy documents at the time refer to the EU as a necessary counterweight to the strength and influence of transnational companies and the internationalisation of capital.

**LAST HURRAH FOR SOCIAL EUROPE**
The evolution of the social dimension as a counterpart to the single market also provided an impressive body of European employment law, enforceable in member states, covering, among other things, equal pay, anti-discrimination, maternity rights, equal rights for part-time and fixed-term workers, regulation of working time and paid holidays.

While one of the Labour government’s first acts in 1997 was to reverse Britain’s opt-out from the social chapter, this was a last hurrah for the social Europe approach. The Blair government shifted to a traditional British approach to the EU which emphasises liberalisation of markets. It blocked moves from other centre-left governments to steer the EU in a more social democratic direction through co-ordinated intervention to boost economic growth and employment. It also sided with centre-right governments to block proposals to strengthen workers’ rights. It was only after concerted pressure from trade unions that the Brown government lifted the UK government’s block on the EU agency workers’ directive in 2008, and in a diluted form with loopholes that UK employers have readily exploited.

**NEO-LIBERAL BIAS**
Things have got worse since the financial crisis, with the emphasis on austerity – particularly the severe conditions imposed on struggling eurozone economies like Greece – breeding further disillusionment. Proposed trade agreements – such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership – could herald further liberalisation, undermine European employment and environmental standards and make it impossible to reverse the privatisation of utilities and public services, from rail to the NHS.

Euro sceptics on the left complain about the neo-liberal bias in EU treaties which makes it difficult for national governments to intervene to support industry and promotes competition at the expense of the public interest in former publicly owned sectors such as rail and post. But the answer for the labour movement in Britain is not to walk away from the EU. As the campaign against TTIP has shown, there is a pan-European civil society that can be harnessed to find a new direction for the EU. Trade unions need to work together, through the ETUC and other European and international federations. Though much criticised, the EU’s institutional structure means that decision-making can be challenged in a way that is not possible under more conventional international trade agreements.

The European Parliament now has the power to amend or veto EU decisions, including legislation and international trade agreements, making it a vital front in the battle against TTIP. EU legislation has been approved by the Council of Ministers of government representatives from each member state.

**ACTION TO ADDRESS POVERTY**
National governments remain in control of EU decision-making. They need to be challenged by trade unions and civil society in each member state and at the EU level to ensure the decisions they take in the EU are in the interests of working people. The unemployment figure in the EU is around 25 million – this includes around a quarter of young people – and 120 million Europeans are living in, or at risk of, poverty. The over-emphasis on liberalisation which favours big business needs to be replaced by a more balanced approach which combines policies for sustainable growth and action to address poverty and social exclusion with respect for the environment, quality employment creation and protection of workers’ rights.

A European framework through which economic policies can be co-ordinated to achieve these ends, acting as a counterweight to the global nature of transnational companies and financial markets, should remain an aspiration for organised labour and progressive political parties. Acting together through the EU (the world’s largest economy), European states are better placed to influence global economic developments and institutions, and to tame the excesses of global finance and transnational companies. The EU is an imperfect system. But trade unions and progressive forces must work to improve it, not walk away.
Last night a DJ saved my life from a broken heart

His voice, known to millions of music fans – he’s presented programmes on Absolute, Capital, Planet Rock and Xfm – will soon be telling passengers why they are arriving late at Paddington. KEITH RICHMOND spins the wheels of steel with DJ turned train driver Lucio Buffone.
Elvis has left the building

Alan Donnelly, our longest serving EC president, has now left the railway industry. Members of Edge Hill branch are proud to say ‘He was one of ours.’ A good farewell drink session was held in Ma Egertons attended by the GS and many members from various districts. During his time as a member of the society, Alan held many positions, including branch committee, LLC rep, h&s rep and company council, before becoming EC member for District 3 and then EC president. Branch meetings will never be the same as reports by Alan often sparked heated debate; questions were answered in great depth (and occasionally by Alan with his usual wit). Alan would be the first to admit he didn’t get on with everybody – you can’t please everyone all of the time – but he had the members’ interests firmly at the forefront. Edge Hill would like to express our sincere thanks to Alan for his service to the society, and to our branch, and to Sandra, his long suffering wife, for putting up with it.

Paul Stannard, branch chair

You’ll never walk alone: Alan and Sandra with the GS

Cambridge blues

Cambridge branch welcomed EC member Howard Kaye, DO Nigel Gibson and Greater Anglia CC Alan Edwards to our agm. One of the main topics was the prosecution of King’s Lynn driver Scott Walford and the ASLEF response regarding the failure of setting up the GSMR radio. Howard spoke about standing against Jeremy Hunt in South West Surrey in May; Nigel talked about the Greater Anglia pay award; and Alan gave us an insight into the Crossrail/GA depot split at Chingford. All meetings this year will start at 17.30 at the Fountain Inn (who always provide a very fine buffet).

Martin Haylett, branch secretary

The next reunion will be at the RAFA Club, Ashburnham Road, Bedford from 12.00.

EASTLEIGH – SATURDAY 14 MARCH
All drivers, second men, shunters, guards and railwaymen welcome from 12.00 to 18.00 at the Railway Institute near the station. Details from Peter Morris (01962 866186).

CRICKLEWOOD – FRIDAY 20 MARCH
The next reunion will be at the RAFA Club, Ashburnham Road, Bedford from 12.00.

GLOUCESTER – SATURDAY 28 MARCH
All active and retired members associated with Horton Road or Barnwood depots are welcome at the Fountain Inn, Westgate Street, Gloucester from midday. Contact Jerry Matthews (07500 800195) for more information.

RAMSGATE – THURSDAY 2 APRIL
Southeastern retired and working members’ reunion from 11.00 at the Red Arrow Club, Newington Road, Ramsgate, Kent, CT11 0QX.

Please send your branch news to journal@aslef.org.uk

We presented Peter with afternoon tea for two at the Ritz, a hamper, a book about East End railways, flowers for his mother, a cheque for £620, and a framed picture of his career at Tilbury, Stratford and Liverpool Street. It recently came to light that two retired members – Dean Chaudhri, who retired under ill health from West End railways, and Phil Spice of the Retired Members’ Section.

Fountain Inn (who always provide a very fine buffet).

Please send your branch news to journal@aslef.org.uk

THANKS, BOYS
Leamington Spa welcomed Dave Calfe, EC member District 6, and Vic Waite, Roy Woodward and Phil Spice of the Retired Members’ Section. Dave spoke about national issues, focusing on recent GSMR problems, the investigations of the ORR, and proposed rule book changes relating to train radios; and the Good Old Boys of the RMS gave a brief account of their activities. We are a small branch, and their actions were greatly appreciated by us all.

Nick Walker, Leamington Spa branch
Ashford branch welcomed GS Mick Whelan to its badge presentation evening. After an enlightening speech, Mick presented long service awards to 11 members including Iain Bond and Kevin Andrews (35 years), Mick Bradley (30) and Ron Gummer (25) and DO Graham Morris made a special presentation to Perry Calvert, former branch secretary and company council.

Robert Kilkie, branch reporter

Top day at the Millgate

A superb turn out of retired and active staff at the Millgate for the annual 105 reunion. A moment of reflection for our colleagues who passed away in the last year was observed. Great to see ex-drivers from other TOCs along with ASLEF retired officers Terry Clarke and Harry Whitehead. Usual excellent buffet and booze. Thanks to compere Doug Oxer and John Pat, words of farewell to Mike Wood for his organisation of 13 years. John Pattinson and Andy Gee step into his shoes.

Sam Black, Newton Heath Retired Members’ Section

One of our own

Another wonderful, well-attended, reunion for retired Derby drivers began with a blessing from our new railway chaplain, Ralph Coleman. We are extremely proud to have Andy Botham, one of our own, running against Patrick McLoughlin in Derbyshire Dales. Andy encouraged others to get involved in local politics; EC vice-president Dave Calfe gave a report on the latest developments in ASLEF and the industry; and 50 year medallions were presented to Phil Scott, Ernie Brown and Stan Mathews.

Eamonn Tague, RMS

LIVELY Q&A

Many thanks to DO Nigel Gibson, and Daren Morgan, FLHH business council rep, for attending our branch meeting. Buxton & Peak Forest branch consists of two FOCs and one TOC. It was a chance to hear the latest news on pay, pensions, and Class 66 cab noise. There was a lively question and answer session, buffet and drinks.

Paul Costello, branch secretary

EQUIPPED WITH BALL BEARINGS

The editor notes new technology: ‘The first locomotive in the world to be equipped with ball bearings has been built in Sweden, and will be keenly watched by locomotive engineers throughout the world. So far the engine has come up to its designer’s expectations, and in a trial trip took 360 tons, over a one per cent grade, at 37.3 miles per hour, and not less than 62.2 miles per hour over level track with a maximum speed of 78.93 miles per hour. The engine is a compound with a Schmidt superheater.’

KITCHEN CARS & DINING CARS

Kitchen notes, too, this month: ‘There has been running for the last few months the first all steel passenger vehicles to be used on any British railway. These are kitchen cars attached to dining cars on the joint stock of the Great Northern, North Eastern and North British railway companies, on their express trains between London and Edinburgh, and are intended as a precaution against fire, for whilst the trains are lighted by electricity, gas is still used for cooking.’
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PAUL WINSTANLEY
CHOCOHOLIC AND
RACONTEUR

Paul Winstanley (1944-2014) was born and brought up in the old mill town of Oldham in Lancashire and, after leaving school, it was to a cotton mill, rather than Lees shed, that he went for his first job. His next gig was at Park Cakes, ‘as a sampler’, his mates joked, but in 1961 he found, as so many of us have, his true vocation on the railway.

He began his career as an engine cleaner before moving to Newton Heath, which serviced Manchester Victoria and the central line timetabled routes. The Heathens, descendants of the old Newton Heath Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway Club, out of which Manchester United grew, had an allocation of 126 steam locos, from the humble bread vans to the massive spaceship 9Fs, and Paul was soon firing them. In 1984 he transferred to Longsight, and worked south under the wires, and then chose CrossCountry to see out his 48 year railway career, which ended in 2009.

He worked to Euston and then, as an XC man, to Birmingham New Street, and was known from London to Preston, and from Edinburgh to Penzance.

Paul was a great collector, including cigarette cards and, his last discipline, tea pots, and a confirmed chochoholic – Maltesers being his favourite. There was a massive turn out for his funeral, led by Mary, his partner of 25 years. Paul was a great raconteur, to professional standard, and a rep for the Railway Engineers’ Assurance Society, and many people have happy memories of receiving the expenses for their 10 year endowments.

Mr 99.9% – Paul, when questioned over some assertion or other, was wont to say he was ‘99.9% certain’ – he was also known as Two Tellies because of his wrestler’s stance – was a wonderful workmate, and we were all privileged to have shared a mess room with him.

Mel Thorley, Longsight

LEE BATT
FOOTPLATE FAMILY

Sadly, I have to report the passing of Lee Batt, aged 49. Lee came from a footplate family, becoming a second man, then driver at the famous Ripple Lane depot and then a driver at East Ham working on C2C after Ripple Lane closed. Lee enjoyed his time at East Ham but the work was a bit mundane compared with the hustle and bustle of the freight work he was used to, so sadly he left the industry to try his hand at other things.

Lee loved his football and was an avid West Ham supporter and a keen fisherman. The funeral was well attended and everybody was invited back to the Conservative club at Dagenham for a spot of refreshment, reminiscence, and a chance to celebrate Lee’s life. Our condolences to his parents Maureen and Johnnie and his family and friends.

Cliff Blackwell, Tilbury branch chair

MICHAEL LOCKHART
TRAMWAY ACROSS FENS

Michael Lockhart was born at Heacham in Norfolk and died on 8 November 2014 aged 87. He was from a railway family, and his father was killed in a railway accident when Michael was just one. Michael started on the railway in 1942 at Hunstanton, went to Wisbech to work on the tramway vegetable collection across the Fens to Upwell, and then in 1953 moved to Kings Lynn where he became resident in the Hamden club and worked with driver Bert Cull in the No 1 link. He passed for driving, became relief foreman in 1959, and went into control as diesel controller, then foreman at the top shed. Transferred to Old Oak as foreman, he ended his time in control at Liverpool Street and retired at 65.

PJ Smith, RMS

REG FEETHAM
STANDING ROOM ONLY

Another of our colleagues has moved into the top link. Reg Feetham, originally from Staveley, moved to Peterborough depot and lodged in the local hostel.

It was while he was there that he took a shine to one of the girls that worked there, and convinced her to marry him, and together they raised a fine family.

Eventually, as depots closed, Reg came to King’s Cross. He and Bob Bull came up with the idea of having an annual reunion and took it to the branch who gave it their backing.

Reg (1943-2014)

I am pleased to say it continues to this day.

Unfortunately, Reg, due to illness, had to retire, but while in health he would be willing to help not only his work mates and family but also his neighbours.

It was standing room only at his funeral; his family said how proud they were of their dad, may he RIP.

Peter Smith, King’s Cross

JIMMY BATE
ASLEF STALWART

Jimmy Bate, who has died at the age of 76, was born and bred in Oldham. A lifetime railwayman, Jim started at Oldham Werneth goods yard in 1954 before moving into the loco grades at Newton Heath in 1956 until retirement. A staunch member of ASLEF through branch and LDC positions of chair and secretary at busy times – flexible rostering, depot closure, move to Manchester Victoria, opening Trans Pennine depot at Manchester Piccadilly – as well as starting the 105 Club retired drivers’ reunion. Jim was also active in his local Labour ward in Oldham Lees, always seeking honesty and fairness in his contributions.

Out duty, Jimmy was on the road as a biker until an accident stopped this hobby. Retirement brought more time at Lytham on the Lancashire coast and a yearly Mediterranean cruise with his wife Jackie with whom are all our thought on her sudden loss.

Sam Black, Newton Heath RMS

BRIAN PULHAM
PATHFINDER

It is sad to report the passing of retired driver Brian Pulham, an original Ripple Lane pathfinder, who started his days at Plaistow on the steam and then moved on to the new diesels at Ripple Lane where he enjoyed his craft by going to all sorts of different places, off the beaten track, with the freights. Brian enjoyed his fishing trips and, on many occasions, took the lads out in a boat off the south coast for a bit of worm drowning. I am sure had bait digging been an Olympic sport Brian would have won gold, as he was very good at it, and I seem to recall he held a licence to charm the worms out of the mud off Southend and Canvey Island. He also enjoyed his family and tending his garden and vegetable patch. Brian took early retirement to look after his ever growing family. Our condolences go out to his wife Kay and family and friends.

Cliff Blackwell, Tilbury branch chair
Letters

The value of a driver

Thank you, Bro Chapman, for a letter (Journal, December) I have waited 20 years to read. I’d like to take the opportunity to recognise the men and women who negotiated DRI, and brought drivers’ salaries into the 21st century.

Several attempts were made to consolidate drivers’ salaries while we were still a publicly-owned industry, the last in the early 1990s by Derrick Fullick and his team. The nearest they could get was a national consolidated annual salary of approximately £15k which, of course, was unacceptable. Money was available for restructuring the industry, but there was little left after the signal(wo)men settlement.

While we were, are still are, bitterly opposed to privatisation, it would be wrong not to recognise how it changed the whole prospectus in relation to the value of a driver. As a national union pay was negotiated then by the general secretary, EC president, and one other EC member at the RJNC. This body, which approved the objectives of the future Driver Restructuring Initiative at its very last meeting, vanished with privatisation, to be replaced by company based councils. These councils were charged with all negotiations and this presented ASLEF with a huge challenge, to which I must say everyone involved rose magnificently. Negotiations were handled by the councillors, led by a district secretary (now termed district organiser) and set before the EC for ratification before going to a vote (a simple majority) of the drivers.

As District 1 Secretary I was lead officer in negotiations with five companies. A driver’s basic pay at the time was in the region of £12k, although in real terms it was around £20k, made up by Sunday working, overtime, mileage and driver only payments. None of these incrementals were pensionable so when a driver retired his or her pension was in the region of £8k. Our object was to consolidate the incrementals into a salary of £20k plus.

Some sacred cows were sacrificed, with the object of restoration, in line with the last RJNC agreement, for an eventual 37 hour week. It was not until the first two District 1 DRI agreements (SWT and SE) were accepted by good majorities that I realised the purchasing power a driving position now created. For example, at Victoria drivers from three companies (South East, South Central and Gatwick Express) shared a mess room and nearby stood SWT. The companies discovered a driver could now move to another company with such ease that, in most cases, they didn’t have to move home, with signing on points within minutes of the depots to which they wanted to move. Traction and route knowledge became another driver asset.

Those who followed us have done a magnificent job by eventually fulfilling the objectives of that RJNC agreement. But I hope it will be recognised that, without the pioneering DRI negotiations, salaries and pensions would not be where they are today.

Salaries and pensions have taken a huge step forward so one must ask why there was such bitter opposition in some quarters. It was related to seniority, which has always been a major factor in train drivers’ history, especially in promotion and redundancy. In the steam era it was important to gain experience through promoting through the links, and today’s drivers would find it hard to believe that there was no such thing as driver training for a fireman to become drivers and, when the time came for a fireman to pass out for driving duties, he only had three chances and if he failed he was out.

Links were devised in order of seniority and, in most depots, the top links enjoyed the most lucrative work not opposed by any of the then drivers or firemen, for they all had that to look forward to as they progressed. This practice carried on long after steam had gone but could not survive in an age where everyone has the right to equal pay for equal work.

It was understandable that there was resentment that, after working the best part of their lives waiting for their time at the top, the top no longer existed, but that didn’t make it right for they way some of those pioneers were treated. We are what we are today because of all those prepared to take the first step, and I raise my hat to all of them.

Steve Barnes (third from left) and his partner Jackie with Lost Boys Nick Davidson, Tony Dobson, Joe Wray and Mick Forecast and a model of the Class 87 loco the City of London support during the relevant industry enquiries which were very positive and enlightening affairs.

Further matters are in the hands of Thompsons solicitors. Steve Barnes, Driver Instructor, Virgin

DICKY, ALAN, THE LOST BOYS AND SURVIVING 25,000 Volts

Since Tony Dobson’s news report on the Lost Boys’ presentation (Journal, January) I have made steady progress; I am now on a daily dressing routine, with my partner Jackie getting bandaging practice, and have a hospital visit once a week for physiotherapy. I have been very unlucky – or lucky – depending on your point of view; I guess not many people survive 25kv and live to relate the tale. My thanks are due to Dicky Fisher and Alan Moss for their guidance and

Steve Barnes (third from left) and his partner Jackie with Lost Boys Nick Davidson, Tony Dobson, Joe Wray and Mick Forecast and a model of the Class 87 loco the City of London

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The annual Annesley Christmas party and get together, organised by Chris Ward, a former fireman, at the Broomhill Inn, Hucknall, Notts, was a tip top day of camaraderie and memories. His website, www.annesleyfireman.com, is a wealth of information on all things Annesley, a 100% ASLEF depot closed in 1966 by the Beeching cuts.

Denis Parker, RMS

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Looking in from outside

Now that the UK Independence Party has won another seat is ASLEF prepared to let them have their say, instead of all the pro-European rhetoric we hear in the Journal? Because I believe a lot of ASLEF members want out of Europe and I, for one, would like an equal platform. I live in Western Australia and think it's better looking in from the outside. We as train drivers are fortunate that the Eastern Europeans can't easily take over the duties of our members like other industries have seen at a cost to the British working public. I've had to jump through hoops with visa applications, medicals, etc, at great cost to myself and the company to bring a needed skill here. The same should apply in Britain and I believe UKIP will achieve this.

Nick Clarke, retired member, Bunbury, Western Australia

Thank you very much

I want to say thanks to all the branches that supported me; thanks to all the members who voted for me; and thanks to the company council I'm leaving behind after 14 years. Thanks, too, to Gary Boyle, who fought a fair fight. And, especially, I want to wish Alan Donnelly good luck (especially on the golf course). His are big shoes to fill.

Andrew Hourigan, EC member District 3

Congratulations, Mark

I would like to congratulate Mark McMullen on his election to the LU Trains Health & Safety Council. In what was a long and hard fought election which was always conducted in the best spirit I got to know Mark and I'm sure he will be an asset to the council. I look forward to working with Mark who will have my full support in what will no doubt be challenging years ahead on LU. I would also like to thank all the branches on the combine for being unfailingly welcoming and look forward to visiting the branches again in the future.

Julian Vaughan, East Finchley h&s rep, London Underground

Sally forth

Tosh McDonald (Journal, September) and Ray Barty (Journal, January) both talk about the Salvation Army and what they do. Like many other passed cleaners and firemen, at 18 I was called up to do my national service. I was sent to camps at home and abroad and, wherever I went, there was always a Sally Army lady in the NAAFI ready to give you a sheet of paper and a stamp to write home. There was never any mention of religion. God bless every one of them!

Ron Kettle, retired driver, Southend

JOURNEY TO AULD REEKIE

The Retired Members’ Section reunion in Edinburgh

On behalf of the RMS delegation, a big thank you to Edinburgh for the invite to their annual retired members’ reunion. This was my first time to attend, also probably my last time to travel on the East Coast main line under government control, which has made £800 million profit for the Treasury and now been franchised in a rush ahead of the general election, anything to stop a future Labour government keeping it under state control. That said, we had a warm welcome with first class hospitality and, in the company of friendly comrades of our union, shared both nostalgia and the future of the railway and, of course, politics. The evening also included long service badge awards and retirement certificates presented by both the general secretary and officers of the union; congratulations to the recipients.

Bill Dale, Chingford branch

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To advertise please phone 020 7324 2400 or send an email to journal@aslef.org.uk

BANBURY branch 103 has a number of badges for sale at £5 plus p&p, proceeds to Katherine House Hospice for looking after Brother Chris Farmer during his final months. Contact Jim Browne on 07717 874707 or jimbr0wne@yahoo.co.uk

I hand make and hand paint BESPOKE CUSHIONS (40 x 40cm) depicting railway engines or carriages or any other form of transport of your choice. Feather pad included, £40 each. Call Abi on 07954 659849 or email me at adm.uk.me@btinternet.com

HAMPTON 150 limited edition mugs (100 made) to mark 150 years of the railway coming to Hampton. £5 plus £3 p&p. Cheques, made payable to Network South East Railway Society, to 100 Whitley Road, Eastbourne. BN22 8ND.

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

ISLE OF WIGHT 150th rail anniversary commemorative badge. £4.99 inc post and packaging. Contact Fratton driver John Glazerbrook on 07823 881495 for details.

COWDEN CRASH commemorative badges, price £5, to mark the 20th anniversary of the accident. Contact Mick Green at userg4163@aol.com if you are ex-Norwood train crew.

LONDON UNDERGROUND 25 year strike badge to commemorate the successful wildcat dispute of 1989. £5 inc p&p, call Jim on 07903 617771 or email him at jim.mc1@tiscali.co.uk

PROFESSIONAL ENGRAVING at sensible prices. I can engrave anything you wish, such as the ASLEF logo on the pint tankard. Contact Paul Potts by email at pppotts1969@hotmail.co.uk
Management claim just a red Herring

JOHN HERRING who, under the pen name John Eldon, has just published his memoirs, has enjoyed a colourful career on land and sea. Here he reflects on his battle with management at Croydon Tramlink

HAVE always been an articulate person, prepared to fight my own corner; but, sometimes, we find ourselves up against the ropes and being eyed up as a punch bag and this is what happened to me.

After leaving the Royal Navy in 1987 I worked largely in the London Transport industry and had, at first hand, observed the ruthless and greedy policies of directors at the red bus company where I was employed and where loyalty counted for nothing.

These were people where self, self, self was the rule of the road; their motivation was to become overnight millionaires and to hell with anything, or anybody, that got in their way.

So, at the age of 59, I chose to opt out of management and commenced training – a difficult learning curve – to become a light rail operator, eventually qualifying in my new chosen profession at Croydon Tramlink. This was at a time and place where industrial policies were determined exclusively, and quite costly, by a road transport trade union.

ROCK THE BOAT

Rather inevitably, and rather quickly, I became involved in disciplinary processes and the warning signs of job insecurity started flashing before me. Was I a bus driver? Or was I in a profession where we had to comply with railway regulations as well as road transport laws? In reality, it was, obviously, a task needing to comply with skills akin to Underground or heavy rail. I decided on the latter and, with 20 or so other men and women who had opted to shelve our ties with road transport, we decided to rock the boat and establish contact with ASLEF.

THEY WILL DEAL WITH YOU

That was my personal choice; and what a pertinent choice that proved to be. Fast forward five years, 18 months before reaching state retirement age, I was detailed off to attend the company’s medical centre for my annual assessment. There, from an upstairs window, I was asked to remove my spectacles and read a vehicle number plate parked an appropriate distance away. I failed that test, which is a mandatory element of a PCV drivers’ eyesight test, and was promptly told by the doctor, ‘Well, sorry Mr H, but you have almost certainly completed your final tram driving duty, take yourself back to the depot and they will deal with you.’

Those were the words which made me come out fighting. On arrival I was told I was on immediate sick leave until a hearing was programmed and was promptly stood down from professional duty, obviously with no support from their supposedly mandatory and intransigent policies. That was, for me, quite devastating news. I had always had the rather masochistic aim of staying in full time work until my 65th birthday, and I had to challenge this career-threatening medical problem.

There was only one trade union that could help me, and that certainly was not one solely applicable to the bus business! So I promptly made my way to ASLEF head office seeking professional guidance on the job security of railway drivers, namely those with manageable eyesight problems. And that is where I was told the very satisfying news that so long as I was not colour blind, and when wearing my spectacles I could meet the appropriate visual needs of rail operatives, that I could in fact meet the eyesight standards for inter city 125 and cross Channel drivers.

GOOD NEWS

ASLEF were accordingly determined to represent my plight and, by arrangement, were more than happy to dispute eyesight standards with Croydon Tramlink management, and the rest of this story was, for me, good news. Croydon management reviewed their policies and I was promptly re-instated on the duty list where I satisfyingly stayed until my 65th birthday.

For me, the moral of this story is clear: believe in yourself. But also trust a professional trade union to give you the individual support you might, on occasion, need.

In The Herring Fleet, John describes his 29 years in the Royal Navy, and his subsequent career in civvy street, including a five stint, from 2002 to 2007, as a driver with Tramlink. All proceeds from the book, which costs £13, including post and packing, are going to the Royal Naval Benevolent Trust. Cheques should be made payable to the RNB T and sent to Corrine Day, RNB T, Castaway House, 311 Twyford Avenue, Portsmouth, Hampshire, PO2 8RN.
Prize Crossword number 106 by Zebedee

Across
7 Manufactured in large quantities (4, 8)
8 Naturalistic portrayal (7)
9 Is aware of (5)
11 Sofas, couches (7)
13 Garden terrace (5)
14 Noise a horse makes when refusing to move? (5)
16 .. your steps, go back the same way (7)
18 Conned, tricked (5)
19 Most minute (7)

21 Not elected by the people (12)

Down
1 Kept in jail (10)
2 Tibet’s continent (4)
3 Fairy, elf (6)
4 Expression of sympathy (13)
5 Become cheered or encouraged (4, 2)
6 Citrus-flavoured brew (5, 3)
10 Ship’s funnel (10)

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

Solution to prize crossword number 105 which appeared in the January edition of the ASLEF Journal

Across: 1 Hideout 5 Libel 8 Voice 9 Angelic 10 Frenetic 11 Atom 13 Nudity 15 Sorrow 18 Tier 19 Dictator 22 Inspire 23 Dough 24 Lodge 25 Tote bag
Down: 1 Have fun 2 Drive 3 Omelette 4 Tragic 5 Logo 6 Bolster 7 Locum 12 Dot to dot 14 Dressed 16 Warthog 17 Silent 18 Trill 20 Thumb 21 Aide

Congratulations to Paula Rands of Borehamwood, Hertfordshire, who was last month’s winner.

Thanks for all your responses to the 105th ASLEF crossword in the January 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 February

Aslef’s legal services – your rights for their wrongs!

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.

Emergencies If you are an ASLEF member who is arrested or being interviewed by the police and need legal assistance – day or night – you can call the members’ Emergency Hotline on 0800 587 7530.

Sackings or other problems at work Harassment, discrimination or bullying? If your local, branch or district representative is unavailable, call the Industrial Relations department at union headquarters (020 7324 2400) or email info@aslef.org.uk

More than just a union
Here’s another benefit of being a member of ASLEF

- Save as much as 34% off1 AA Breakdown Cover on our online prices at enrolment and 20% at renewal every year2
- More dedicated Patrols than any other UK breakdown service3
- We repair 8 out of 10 vehicles at the roadside4
- Members are rewarded with enhanced breakdown benefits at renewal

To join, call

0800 048 0075
Quoting reference F0751

Breakdown Cover

1. Applies to Family Roadside & Relay cover at first year only. Other levels of cover are available and varying discounts apply. Offer only available to ASLEF members by calling the number given, quoting the stated reference and paying annually by direct debit under a recurring transaction arrangement. Renewal offer available to new Members for their first 12 months of Membership only. Offer not available in conjunction with any other offer/discount or on any other product/service. Details correct at time of issue. 2. Renewal offer available to ASLEF members who are existing AA Members, or who join under the enrolment offer, and will be available at each renewal date until they cease to be ASLEF members or the withdrawal of this scheme. 3. Mintel – UK Vehicle recovery report, September 2013. 4. Based on AA Case Repair Rate Dec 13-Jan14.

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