State of the nation: all change on Scotland’s railways

KEVIN LINDSAY: The madness of King John
JO STEVENS: Tories hell bent on giving us a kicking
HUGH BRADLEY: Big three in foreign hands

MICK HUMPHRYS and CLIFF HOLLOWAY on the Top Link Men – the kings of the iron road
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British Transport Police should stay independent

Very time we take a step forward in operating as stakeholders to ensure there are robust measures in place to deal adequately with issues that affect our members and the travelling public – such as suicide and trespass – some short-sighted person impacts all the good work. This time it’s Michael Matheson, Justice Secretary in the Scottish government, who has announced that the British Transport Police in Scotland will be subsumed by Police Scotland. This after the Smith Commission devolved powers over railway policing to Holyrood.

Strange when we asked that decisions on the future of the ScotRail franchise be put on hold until publication of the Smith Commission report – to see what powers on transport were to be devolved – it was awarded immediately. And what, in relation to future BTP funding, did the franchise agreement commit to? You know the specialist skills the BTP possess in the world that is our non-standard railway system where the first priority is generally safety, rather than criminality, and the knowledge that needs. Is this the first stage in the dissolution of what is currently a UK-wide body that all the stakeholders I have spoken to want to remain operating independently in the interests of the industry, the travelling public, and the taxpayer?

Coincidentally, this is the Scots issue of the Journal and we had a presence at the first conference held by the new Scottish Labour Party leader Jim Murphy since the vociferous debate on independence. Those social and industrial issues that are being driven forward in Wales, London, and elsewhere, are those that impact on the people in Scotland and the realisation that a dip in oil prices made some of the economic claims of other parties unrealistic, and that a proper process that deals with the post-banking economic crisis whilst promoting the needs of working families, were all highlighted. Industrially and politically it is going to be an interesting few months!

Yours fraternally
Mick Whelan
general secretary
ASLEF makes its point in Parliament

MICHAEL DUGHER, the Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, in a powerful speech at ASLEF’s parliamentary reception at the House of Commons on 10 March, made one of his clearest statements of intent yet about the direction of travel for the next Labour government on Britain’s railways. Michael told a packed Thames Pavilion at Westminster: ‘Privatisation has failed. It’s time to put the franchise system in the bin. The Rail Delivery Group is an industry stitch-up.’

Our annual reception, hosted by Kelvin Hopkins, Labour MP for Luton North, and chair of the ASLEF parliamentary group, is a chance for EC members, DOs, reps and activists to put our views to MPs, peers, and other opinion formers. Kelvin called for ‘public ownership of public utilities’ while Mick Whelan, ASLEF’s general secretary, introduced Michael Cashman by saying, ‘We are mostly white, male, middle-aged industry but we work hard to change that every day.’

Michael, now Lord, Cashman was Labour MEP for the West Midlands from 1999 to 2014 and, before that, an actor, best known for playing Colin – and the first gay kiss on prime time British television – in EastEnders. ‘I am proud to be here today to help ASLEF celebrate 15 years of organising around equality because I remember, in the dark days, when ASLEF marched with us against Section 28.’

MPs who attended include Dave Anderson (Blaydon); Joe Benton (Bootle); Michael Connarty (Linlithgow & East Falkirk); John Cryer (Leyton & Wanstead); Louise Ellman (Liverpool Riverside); Peter Hain (Neath); Davey Hamilton (Midlothian); Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow); Julie Hilling (Bolton West); Sadiq Khan (Tooting); Ian Lavery (Wansbeck); Wendy Hurst (Newcastle Central); Ian Mears (Newcastle Central);

Clockwise, from top: Michael Dugher, Mick Whelan and Tosh McDonald; Kelvin Hopkins; Mick, Steve Cavalier and Michael Cashman; Mick with Floyd Doyle; Tosh with Tony West; Wendy Hurst, Rebecca Kaye and Jo Stevens.

Photos: Andrew Ward

QUOTE…

‘UKIP’s immigration policy? A general whinge about foreigners, and little else.’ – Mark Steel, The Independent

…UNQUOTE

DRIVING MORE PASSENGERS

New stats from the Office of Rail Regulation reveal that the number of passenger journeys in Britain reached a record 429.8 million between October and December last year.

CROSSRAIL BRINGS UP THE BODIES

Sixty archaeologists are excavating a burial pit at Bedlam, the old Bethlehem hospital for the mentally ill, now site of a new Liverpool Street station on the Crossrail line, which contains 3,000 skeletons, many of them victims of the plague. ‘It’s a unique opportunity to understand the lives, and deaths, of 16th and 17th century Londoners,’ said Jay Carver.

OLD TUBE TRAINS FOR MANCHESTER

Commuters in Manchester have been warned that rail chiefs plan to palm them off with old London Underground trains when they replace their stock of Pacers. Vivarail say the refurbished District line trains are a ‘cheap and viable’ alternative to new rolling stock but John Moorhouse of TravelWatch said: ‘Passengers, and the network, in the north-west don’t deserve 30-year-old cast-off Tube trains.’

QUOTE...

“We are taking big steps to enhance the attractiveness of Network Rail to minority groups. Diversity and inclusion aren’t nice to have, it’s not political correctness, they are powerful tools to help any organisation improve its performance.” – Mark Carne, chief executive, Network Rail

…UNQUOTE
Not for profit rail in Wales

JOHN BOREHAM reports from the Welsh Labour Party conference at the Brangwyn Hall in Swansea

OUR delegation was led this year by ASLEF’s general secretary who made time in his busy diary to attend this important conference at the Brangwyn Hall in Swansea, with James McGowan providing political support with his wealth of contacts and political nous.

The GS proposed the society motion on not for profit rail, seconded by our friends from the Co-operative Party. As a delegation we came under pressure to remit our motion as there was some concern over the wording, but after a discussion we decided to push on and move the resolution, and I am pleased to report that our motion was passed and becomes Welsh Labour Party policy going forward.

A not for profit railway in Wales would point the way for the rest of Britain.

The key speakers at conference were Carwyn Jones, First Minister of Wales and leader of the Welsh Labour Party; Ed Miliband, leader of the Labour Party; and Owen Smith, Shadow Secretary of State for Wales; who all spoke with conviction and

CONFERENCES

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 rally is at Burston, near Diss, in Norfolk on Sunday 6 September. The Trades Union Congress is at the Brighton Centre from Sunday 13 to Wednesday 16 September and the Labour Party conference is at the Brighton Centre from Sunday 27 to Wednesday 30 September.

Mick and John at the Brangwyn Hall authority. Their message was how important it is for Labour to win the general election in May – there is no place for second place – and how we have to guard against voter apathy, re-engage with our traditional supporters, and win the argument with UKIP.

Dave Doherty and Dave Watson join Gloria De Piero, MP for Ashfield, Rosie Winterton, MP for Doncaster Central, Labour leader Ed Miliband, Davey Hamilton, MP for Midlothian, and Tosh McDonald at a Doncaster North CLP supper club at the Trades Club in Donny.

500 CLUB: J Black, with number 90, won the March draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £362.
By the left – quick march

ASLEF activists were out in force, joining Labour Party members and trade union reps from the Midlands, the north, and London, at What’s Left, a fundraising afternoon for Andy Botham, East Midlands Trains driver and Labour candidate in Derbyshire Dales, at County Hall in Matlock.

‘It’s the train driver against the Fat Controller,’ laughed Kevin Maguire, associate editor of the Daily Mirror, who outshone even Jeffrey Archer as event auctioneer, ‘because the sitting MP is Patrick McLoughlin.’

QUOTe…
‘There is no accountability for poor service on Britain’s railways: weak regulation means rail firms only care about pleasing their shareholders. Passengers have been treated so badly, for so long, that any trust in rail firms has gone the way of the steam train.’ — Lucy Tobin in the Evening Standard…UNQUOTE

Mick wins the Great Debate

Just weeks after he addressed a Railway Study Association meeting at the London School of Economics, Mick Whelan ventured into the lions’ den again for Transport Times’ Great Transport Debate at KPMG on Canary Wharf. David Begg, chief executive of Transport Times, whose father was a train driver, and active ASLEF member — ‘He was Kevin Lindsay’s second man’ — candidly warned Mick over coffee to treat it as football teams do ‘a tricky away fixture.’ There were 125 delegates in Docklands, almost all of them fully paid up members of the privatisation club. But in the opening hour-long session, Mick saw off Michael Roberts, director general of the Rail Delivery Group.

Mick said: ‘When John Major privatised the railway he promised that competition would drive innovation and investment. But there is no competition — with the model we’ve got companies have protected routes — there is precious little innovation — the companies were against Oyster cards — and all the investment comes from the government. Fares have gone up, not down, to the point where passengers, even commuters who vote Conservative, are calling for a return of the railways to public ownership. I know why the TOCs like privatisation — there’s no risk, it’s all reward — but the model is broken. It doesn’t work.’

Michael Roberts claimed: ‘We have a model that works well. We don’t need major structural change. And we certainly don’t need any more public sector control. This model is the envy of the rest of Europe. It’s a great success story.’

To which Mick quipped: ‘So why haven’t they followed us?’

TROLLEY THROWN AT 100MPH TRAIN

A shopping trolley was thrown off a footbridge at Welwyn Garden City in front of a Thameslink train travelling at 100mph from Cambridge to King’s Cross. ‘It was thrown deliberately,’ said DS Alan Bardsley of British Transport Police. ‘It was only thanks to the skill of the driver that the train wasn’t derailed. It was wanton vandalism that put hundreds of lives at risk.’

GARY WALKS IN A HULL OF A PROTEST

Gary Wareing has resigned as a city councillor in Hull in protest against council cuts. Gary, who represented Drypool ward, said: ‘It’s not up to the Labour Party to deliver austerity for this Tory government.’ Gary, who is still a party member, and Tosh McDonald have both been re-elected to Northern Rail’s pensions committee.

ARGENTINA TO RENATIONALISE RAIL

Cristina Kirchner, president of Argentina, says her government will renationalise the country’s railways after 25 years ‘to improve efficiency and generate savings of 415 million pesos [$47.5 million] a year.’
Rich governing only for the rich

KEN LIVINGSTONE explains how, as an ASLEF member, you can help choose the Labour candidate for Mayor of London

THE general election in May is the most important for decades. The choice couldn’t be starker. The Tories have overseen the worst crisis in the NHS for decades. The Tory-led government has cut taxes for the richest while the cost of living for working people goes up and up. And now they want to cut public services back to the 1930s – to a time before the NHS even existed. If you want the clearest idea of the difference, take a look at Tory plans to make it even harder for trade unionists to take industrial action if they need to. They are planning to launch that attack as soon as the election is over. They truly are the rich governing for the rich and only the rich.

A Labour government would increase the minimum wage, build 200,000 new homes a year and, most importantly, save our NHS which can’t survive another five years of David Cameron. This election is about who this government is for – the Tories and their millionaire friends or Labour, who will fight for you and make life better for you and your family.

I will be out over the next five weeks, making the case to ASLEF members across London and I hope you will join me. But we can’t lose sight of what happens after the election here in London. Because Labour is about to choose its candidate to be Mayor of London. ASLEF members are vital to that decision. You can help decide who the Labour candidate is – which means you could be choosing who will be the next boss of the Underground and TfL. While I was mayor, I worked incredibly closely with ASLEF members to secure fair pensions, increase wages and fight off driverless trains. I know first hand the important role ASLEF plays in administration of the mayor. And it is not just at work that having a Labour mayor makes a difference – seven years under a Tory have seen housing costs sky rocket and transport fares go through the roof.

We must have a Labour mayor next time and, straight after the general election, we will be choosing a Labour candidate. Last year the party created a new way for trade unionists to have their say in Labour – by becoming affiliated supporters. As affiliated supporters, every ASLEF member who lives in London can vote to choose the next mayoral candidate for absolutely no cost. All you need to do is visit support.labour.org.uk and put in your details.

○ See page 8 for Mick Whelan’s take on the Labour link with the union movement.

Raise the scarlet standard high

Paul Routledge of the Daily Mirror (who was born and brought up in Railway Terrace, Normanton) shows the drivers his ASLEF credentials

Gary Boyle of Manchester Piccadilly; Graham Croucher of Bletchley; Angela Geddes-Smith of Birmingham New Street; Keith Gillett and Mick Yates of Worksop; Si Goode of Wolverhampton; Philip Hamilton of Farnham; Maeve Hanley and Robert O’Connell of Northern Line North; and Dave Johnson of Waterloo

Nine Elms attended the ASLEF political course run by Mark Walker of Cogitamus and Peterborough city councillor Ed Murphy at Stoke Rochford Hall in Lincolnshire. The intensive week, which involved practical sessions with Mark and Ed and talks by Paul Routledge of the Daily Mirror and Jon Trickett, Labour MP for Hemsworth, was a great success – see Robert’s star letter on page 20 – and is part of a project by GS Mick Whelan and NO Simon Weller to get more ASLEF members involved in the political process, onto councils and, eventually, into parliament.

Our funky black baseball cap will keep the sun out of your eyes. £5 (including p&p); email admin@aslef.org.uk or visit our online shop at www.aslef.org.uk
The Labour Party’s link with the trade union movement has been an historic relationship for more than a century. Trade unions formed the party to give ordinary working people a voice in Parliament as well as the workplace. That link is as important now as it was then and ASLEF is determined to ensure that the concerns of trade unionists are heard as the party shapes policy, and to provide the party with a bridge to the communities it seeks to serve.

‘The relationship is changing,’ said general secretary Mick Whelan. ‘That is why ASLEF is conducting a campaign to recruit members who live in London as affiliated supporters of the party.’ ASLEF members who live in London need to become affiliated supporters by 19 June to vote in the contest to select Labour’s candidate for Mayor of London.

‘It strengthens your voice as a trade unionist within the Labour Party and you will have a vote in future Labour leadership elections,’ added Mick. ‘The London Mayor is important as he or she will be chair of Transport for London and have significant influence over the development of the London Underground, Overground, and Croydon Tramlink.’

Reporting a problem

MICK HOLDER of ASLEF’s health and safety department tackles the question of using CIRAS or the machinery of negotiation

STATISTICS published recently raise questions as to why rail employees use the Confidential Incident Reporting & Analysis System rather than their union, and the machinery of negotiation, to resolve health and safety issues in the industry. CIRAS was set up as an independent body so anyone working on the railway with a health and safety, security, or environmental concern could feel free to raise it; for that concern to be treated seriously, in confidence, with no threat of victimisation by management.

CIRAS reports on each problem, the employee’s response, and any action taken. Great stuff, but it raises the question of why this has gone to CIRAS. Why has it not been dealt with by a local health and safety rep and put into the machinery if it’s not been resolved quickly? CIRAS says 75% of reports received have been raised locally before they were alerted and imply that that is where many stay as unresolved local issues don’t appear to climb to more senior management levels. They add that 13% of cases ‘that were reported internally first have not had any response from their company.’

It could be that h&s reps are not being involved in complaints about health and safety matters, or that after raising a problem it is not being pursued (the head banging the brick wall issue) and that the agreed structures for trying to resolve these issues, the machinery and union organisers, may not be being used as effectively as they might.

Many cases are not complaints that affect train drivers, but a good number are. It seems appropriate, after publication of the CIRAS statistics, to remind members that while CIRAS can be a useful vehicle, it should not be regarded as the first or only route to a safer environment.

Trade unions formed the Labour Representation Committee at a meeting in Farringdon in 1900. Their 29 MPs returned at the general election of 1906 elected Keir Hardie as leader and adopted the name the Labour Party.
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Tories hell bent on giving us a good kicking

JO STEVENS is Labour’s candidate in Cardiff Central, which the Liberal Democrats won with a majority of 4,576 in 2010. Here she explains why it’s so important to kick out the Lib Dems, and the Tories, on 7 May

WORK for Thompsons and we are immensely proud to act for ASLEF and its members. You’re a strong, progressive union that punches way above its weight. Your fight is our fight and we look forward to working with you long into the future. I attended AAD in Brighton last year fresh from having had a bit of a bollocking from the Labour Party for signing a letter to The Observer on 4 May, along with more than 40 other Labour parliamentary candidates, calling on our party to commit to bringing rail franchises back into public ownership on expiry.

It (the bollocking) was pretty rubbish as far it went. Because, let me tell you, it won’t stop me doing it again. Because I have spent the last 25 years working with the trade union and labour movement standing up for what I believe is right. And I’ve had plenty of time to think about the issue whilst sitting on First Great Western trains!

RAIL IS RELEVANT TO MILLIONS
I believe there is an unanswerable case for returning rail to public ownership. So I was really pleased to hear that Labour supports a change to the current system. And had Labour been in government now, we would have kept East Coast in public ownership. There is so much that we in the Labour Party could do in government, to support rail, and everyone who works in the industry. Rail is relevant to every single constituency in the UK and to tens of millions of people across the country.

A progressive and bold policy for rail can bring together trade unions, passengers, environmentalists, government, and business, to achieve a 21st century rail network that works for everyone. We want a rail industry with decent pay and conditions, reasonable fares for passengers, and high quality infrastructure and rolling stock, which keeps profit made for reinvestment. An industry that brings benefits far beyond the confines of track, trains and stations. Who could possibly object to that?

We know there is widespread public support. We know that even a majority of Tory voters support returning franchises to public ownership. The truth is that the current model is completely broken and Labour has the opportunity to fix it.

TAX CUTS FOR MILLIONAIRES
The general election in May is an opportunity to get rid of a coalition government that has, at its core, a mission to create the most unequal society we have had for a century or more. The Tories, supported by the Lib Dems, have been hell bent on giving us a kicking. The gap between the 1% at the top and the rest of us has been growing with tax cuts for millionaires and corporate welfare of £23 billion in housing benefit paid every year to private landlords who profiteer through rip off rents.

And selling off national assets like the Royal Mail at knock down prices to their mates – well, train drivers know exactly how it feels to be on the receiving end of that, don’t you?

Meanwhile, everyone else gets hit by a cost of living crisis with pay freezes, job insecurity, redundancies and families whose kids can’t get decent jobs or who come out of college with debts that make your eyes water. This is the first generation since World War Two who will be worse off than their parents. And lots of these young adults will, if the Tories get back in, end up with the choice of no job or a job on a zero hours contract.

The coalition introduced employment tribunal fees to price working people out of justice. It was a move designed to destroy trade union legal services and, ultimately, to destroy trade unions. It’s never been more important to be member; because people will not get access to justice without their union.

No one driving a train has the indignity of being on a zero hours contract, thanks to ASLEF. But be vigilant. Employers love a compliant workforce too afraid of the consequences to raise concerns about health and safety. Bad practices flourish. Unsafe practices go unreported. And a two tier workforce is created.

Ian Prosser, chief inspector of the railways, reported that Network Rail employing people working on the track on zero hours contracts has had a ‘negative effect not conducive to the development of a safe railway’.

This in a safety critical industry.

ZERO TOLERANCE OF ZERO HOURS
I want fairness – and dignity – at work and properly accessible remedies for people if things go wrong. A legal right for all workers to have a right of access to a union in their workplace. An end to zero hours contracts – zero tolerance of zero hours. A reversal to the CICA changes excluding train drivers from compensation for injuries suffered through tragic rail suicides. Restoration of enforceable rights after a year’s employment. And abolition of employment tribunal fees.

Jo Stevens is Labour’s candidate in Cardiff Central. She’s a director of Thompsons solicitors, the mother of two boys, and a Labour Party activist for 30 years. Jo was born in Swansea, brought up in Mold, and has lived in Cardiff for 25 years. She is a member of the GMB and Unison, a season ticket holder at Cardiff City, a member of Glamorgan county cricket club, and a supporter of Cardiff Blues rugby team.
All change on Scotland’s railways

District 2 Organiser KEVIN LINDSAY picks up a new shovel as he opens our special report and reflects on the challenges, old and new, facing drivers in Scotland

The madness of John Major’s privatisation has hit Scotland's railways with a vengeance in 2015. We’ve seen East Coast taken over by Stagecoach – even though they are calling themselves Virgin East Coast, and using Virgin livery, they are 90% owned by Stagecoach. This is the fifth private company to try running this franchise since privatisation. The only successful company was publicly owned but political dogma, driven by the Tories and the Lib Dems, has seen this UK asset sold off yet again.

On ScotRail we have seen our railway split in two with the Caledonian sleepers being handed over to Serco. This decision had a major impact on our members who worked for ScotRail and DBS. As Serco have no drivers they have subcontracted the work to GBRf; for ScotRail and DBS. As Serco have no drivers this led to our members being TUPEd over at Inverness, Mossend and Millerhill. Thankfully, they have subcontracted the work to GBRf; for ScotRail and DBS.

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Abellio were awarded the rest of the ScotRail franchise. But they have already subcontracted work out to DRS due to lack of diesel units. This decision again impacted on Millerhill members who previously worked a couple of Fife circle services but there was no consultation on this decision with ASLEF; they just made the decision and we have had to pick the pieces.

We have had some success with the latest two privateers to arrive in Scotland; they have both agreed to reciprocal travel facilities between the franchises which means our members who are not safeguarded don’t suffer the loss of their right to use the sleepers. But, bizarrely, they have asked for a delay in starting this year’s pay talks until mid-April. It would appear they don’t have much confidence in the present driver management team. The company council and I are determined to tackle the issues around the number of Sundays drivers are being forced to work and we will be pushing hard for 156 rest days with Sunday part of the working week.

I do find it astonishing that the Dutch government has been given the keys to Scotland’s railways when the Scottish government could have delayed the decision on awarding the franchise until after the Smith Commission had reported back with its recommendations on further powers for the Scottish parliament.

It’s high time that the railways of this country were in the hands of the people of this country. Regardless of anyone’s political leanings, it does not make any sense to give the contract to another European government to run our railway. As a union we have campaigned long and hard to bring the railways back under public ownership and we will work with the SNP government to get the powers to bring Scotland’s railways back under public ownership.

Before I wrote this piece I looked back at an article I wrote this time last year in the Journal. In it I said 2014 was a big year for us as a union. It was. But 2015 is bringing big challenges, too. As one of my LLC reps said to me the other day: ‘It’s the same shit, just a different shovel!’

We embrace new technology – as long as it doesn’t undermine our substantive role

HUGH BRADLEY, EC member for District 2, looks at some of the new initiatives which will affect the way we do our job

The introduction of GSMR, with ERTMS to be rolled out in the future.

We are seeing the introduction of tablets for DAS, TAS, and the eradication of a paper railway. We have EU train driver licensing and are seeing train driver training initiatives happening with outside agencies looking to provide this ‘service’ as they spot a lucrative market here.

We want to reassure our members that, although we embrace new technology, we will not see it undermine our substantive role and that any training will have to be negotiated with our representatives.

UR small craft trade union is now doing well. We have 18,300 members (up from 15,000 in 2000) with a further 2,230 retired drivers in our Retired Members’ Section. We are financially sound with drivers being well looked after by our representatives who have returned above inflation pay rises, ensured job security, and maintained terms and conditions in a safe working environment. All against a backdrop of economic recession and government austerity.

Every year throws up something different and, in the last year, we had the Scottish independence referendum, the Scottish Labour leadership election, the successful political fund ballot, the pension actuarial evaluation, and the ORR prosecution of one of our members.

And the challenges ahead this year? We have a general election on 7 May which is an opportunity to get rid of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government and their attacks on the working-class and the most vulnerable in our society.

We have ongoing discussions with ATOC in relation to our pensions, given this government’s implementation of the contracting out situation which could place additional costs and impact on our benefits as the employers try to recoup their lost NI benefit at the expense of their own employees.

We have to be ever vigilant with new technology and initiatives coming into our industry. We have seen the introduction of GSMR, with ERTMS to be rolled out in the future.

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Out with the old in with the new

ANDREW FERGUSSON, company council secretary, reports on ScotRail

OUT with the old, in with the new. The ScotRail franchise was handed over to Abellio on 31 March. Whilst some believe that the Scottish government missed an ideal opportunity to take the ScotRail brand back into public ownership, the Dutch certainly didn’t, and are now the custodians of Scotland’s railways.

Abellio have been quick off the mark, running roadshows up and down the country, with good turnouts from all staff, which have, I believe, been generally well received.

They have also used social media to its full advantage, setting up a mobilisation team to address and look to answer all questions being asked. It’s been interesting to watch this forum set up on Facebook and to see some of the concerns being asked by staff. It’s very clear that some have never been in this position before, with regards to TUPE, and it’s also very clear that Abellio need to resolve some of the concerns of staff, that quite clearly First haven’t, and will have a battle to restore some morale back into their workforce.

Whilst social media has been used in this case, I’d just like to reiterate that most of the questions could have been answered by our senior reps, who met with Abellio, which could have eased a lot of minds. I’m still firmly of the opinion that the branch room is the best forum for receiving relevant information.

Part of their franchise bid included the ability to run services seven days a week and, as pay talks are due as soon as Abellio take over, it will be interesting to see how they will manage to achieve this without a true four day week, with Sundays as part of that.

Last year was challenging, to say the least, with no RDW in the company from Monday to Friday as First did not require this facility. Abellio may well look on this differently, but would, once again, have to meet the criteria for RDW sanctions.

Avoidance of disputes seemed to be part and parcel with First; hopefully Abellio will be able to make more decisions with us at our level in the future.

A new depot will also be open at Tweedbank, with the opening of the Borders rail link, with route learning starting in June, and the depot opening in September, with the creation of 18 drivers who have already been recruited and are working out of Edinburgh in the meantime.

Pay talks, iPads and uniforms

RAB WICKSTED, company council secretary, reports on the departure of the East Coast from public ownership

VIRGIN Trains East Coast – a joint venture between Richard Branson at Virgin and Brian Souter of Stagecoach – took over the East Coast franchise on 1 March.

There are several meetings scheduled with the new company, with the company council, the most important being pay talks. Several issues need to be discussed regarding training for the new inter-city express programme trains, and the European Railway Traffic Management System in cab signalling, and as your reps we’ve already mentioned to VTEC that we need recruitment to accommodate all the training that will be required.

Another issue is iPads, which are hot on the agenda; this is an ongoing issue being addressed by the company council regarding any problems drivers encounter, the whole process of what is contained and developed within the iPad must come to the company council and we’ve made it clear to management that this is something we will continue to monitor. We will also meet on a quarterly basis to try to fix any problems we have.

Staff travel perks are also very important and we have been given assurances that, at this time, the current staff travel facilities will remain unchanged for the foreseeable future. The company has plans to issue new uniforms which will be rolled out by May 2016, and the company council will be in talks regarding this very important subject, especially after the fiasco of the current shirts causing reflection issues with instrument gauges on our trains, which could have been avoided if the original agreement to have trial wearers had been put into action. Let’s hope this never happens again. The company council will, of course, keep you informed of any progress made in the coming months.
Severe weather, Sundays and sanders
Virgin West Coast company council reps MARK FRENDE and JIM MORRISON report on Virgin West Coast

IN JANUARY we reached agreement with Virgin management to guarantee Sundays off prior to annual leave. We have discussed a severe weather policy with management; to date they have proposed a common sense approach to drivers who are unable to get to work due to severe weather conditions.

We are pleased that, at long last, the company is fitting smart sanders to our class 221 fleet and it is hoped that this will be completed by August 2015.

Virgin has announced that we are going to get a new style uniform and this should be ready in September 2016!

Kevin Lindsay and the company council have been invited to productivity talks; as yet we have not been informed about what management is proposing.

Recently, about one hundred drivers have been conducting a trial of an iPad, which incorporates a timetable advisory system (TAS), and the council is waiting for feedback from drivers on this equipment before we discuss this matter further.

Trying times but no driver was made redundant
CHIC BOLTON, train crew company council, reports on DBS

AT THE time of writing this report, the DBS TCCC, and the lead officer, have concluded all the facts and figures for the TUPE arrangements for all depots involved. However, and we hoped this wouldn’t happen, but due to the loss of the First ScotRail sleeper contract, the depots affected were Inverness, Millerhill and Mossend.

I wish to pass on my thanks to lead officer Simon Weller and the DBS promotion, transfer and redundancies sub-group which consists of N Roebuck, M Finn, R Hurst and M Maguire, plus all the local reps, for all their support and help through these trying times. I know it wasn’t a perfect outcome for all those involved but it was a good result with no driver being made redundant.

So finally on this topic, I wish to pass on to the drivers who have left DBS to go onto GBRf all the best for the future. As we now move forward, all the drivers left in Scotland now realise it’s getting harder to compete in the freight sector. We still have the coal that all the drivers connected with this flow provide an excellent service to the customer.

The next thing we have to do is to stabilise the work that DBS has left in Scotland with the MPV season just around the corner which is also connected to the Network Rail contract. Also, with us just signing the Malcolm contract, I know it’s not all roses out on the frontline and it could be another hard year but, with the resilience you all have shown in the past, we will come through this stronger and, even more importantly, together.

Social media, DAS and the XC pension pot
JOHN HAY, company council secretary, reports on CrossCountry

THIS time of year traditionally sees the council enter pay negotiations with the company and we are currently awaiting dates to discuss the pay award. The council are currently discussing the use of the driver advisory system with the company and developments are awaited on this. Average holiday pay is another item that we are currently awaiting discussions on. The lead officer has written to the company and we are waiting on dates.

The company are currently in negotiations with the DFT regarding the direct award with would take Arriva’s tenure up to 2019. The joint negotiating committee (ASLEF, the RMT and the TSSA) were involved in discussions regarding a social media policy and we have now submitted the policy for approval to the executive committee.

In the meantime we are kept busy with the everyday agenda of negotiating training for resignalling schemes, dealing with rest day working claims, general grievances and disciplinary matters.

This year also saw the triennial CrossCountry pension valuation which revealed a 5.5% shortfall in funding; this was dealt with by increasing contributions from 10.56% to 10.8% and increasing the recovery period until 2026.

A shortfall has been discovered in CrossCountry pension funding

Its not all roses on the frontline for rail freight at DB Schenker
Big three freight operators are now in foreign hands

HUGH BRADLEY, EC member for District 2, and a driver with Freightliner Intermodal, reflects on a difficult year for freight services in Scotland

IT IS with a sense of irony that, in writing an article about freight in Scotland, you cannot help mentioning a passenger service and the impact it has had on our Scottish DB Schenker drivers.

In May 2014 the Scottish government announced that the Caledonian sleeper service would be separated from the First ScotRail service and then awarded the franchise to Serco. DBS worked the sleeper service for First, providing drivers and locos; ScotRail also provided some drivers. Subsequently Serco, with no drivers and no locos, has contracted GB Railfreight to deliver the service.

For those DBS drivers involved in the transfer the uncertainty, and the small matter of their future employment, and location, was very stressful. The lack of information coming from the managements was astonishing and it didn’t help that, under TUPE regulations, the consultation period was only 28 days!

However, I have to congratulate the lead officer and DBS company council for their efforts on behalf of our members and for ensuring that drivers ended up at the location, and with the company, that they wanted. The new franchisee takes over on 1 April.

I represented ASLEF at a recent Scottish government rail freight strategy for Scotland workshop. This was a consultation exercise with associated stakeholders about the opportunities and challenges facing the rail freight sector in Scotland and its wider links with the UK.

We will have to wait and see how successful this will be but it’s a positive initiative recognising the importance of rail freight in Scotland with the Scottish government looking to play a role in developing and promoting a strategic freight network for the country. A full public consultation will take place this summer.

With the recent announcement that Freightliner is being acquired by Genesee & Wyoming, an American railroad operator, we now have the situation that our main freight operators are all owned by foreign interests: DBS is German; GBRf is French and Freightliner is now American.

At the same time Freightliner, as part of a British consortium including Network Rail and Serco, has secured a contract on one of the largest railway projects in the world, the 2,750km north-south railway project from Riyadh to Hudaitha in Saudi Arabia.

Closer to home, there have been some positive initiatives for our freight members arising from last year’s conference. Following an agenda item from Edinburgh No 1 branch a freight conditions code was adopted. This is an initiative to have some sort of uniformity across the rail freight industry and recognises the difference between freight and passenger drivers.

Following the recent taxi/private hire best practice policy the EC sub-group re-convened to formulate a policy for when members are required to drive road vehicles. This will assist freight members who have to do this as part of their duties.

Finally, the ongoing problem with Class 66 locos has now become a standing agenda item for the freight forums which are meetings with the FOC company councils and take place three times each year.

How we’re learning to tackle the digital divide

ALAN REID, ASLEF education’s project worker in Scotland, on driving workplace learning forward

ASLEF education in Scotland, funded through Scottish Union Learning, part of the Scottish TUC, will see the project reach our members across Scotland in the next year with the focus on the digital divide that exists in the workplace.

With new technology becoming more prevalent in the rail industry our members need to upskill and work with handheld devices will be at the forefront of our project in the coming year. We will roll out 4 Tablet and hand held device courses throughout Scotland; these provide information on how to stay safe online, social media dos and don’ts, and the legalities that go with this, opening apps and downloading information. This course proved popular with members last year and the information obtained from participants showed that doing the knowledge on new technology is essential to the driving grade.

With a new company in place from 1 April ASLEF will look to work closely on environmental awareness, equality and diversity, and getting unions into schools where we will work with young people to give them an understanding of the trade union movement and work opportunities in the rail sector, as well as the modern apprenticeship programme at ScotRail.

ASLEF will continue to provide workplace learning in partnership with Glasgow Kelvin College, which will include courses in Spanish, German, French, Italian and sign language. Basic computing and pension courses will also be available, as well as the popular earn as you learn scheme in conjunction with ScotRail.

We will also provide distance learning where courses can be completed from home and it’s not necessary to sit in a classroom. These courses are accredited and provided through Tribal; more information can be obtained from our union learning reps or the ASLEF website.

ASLEF education has a proud history in union learning for our members in Scotland and we are confident of this continuing for the coming year and beyond.
IFTY years ago, on 31 December 1965, Camden motive power depot closed, with the loco men moving lock, stock and barrel to their new depot at Euston. With this anniversary in mind, and with all the ex-Camden men now (or, at least, they should be) retired, the last two being the sons of loco men Alan Norman and Alan Clark, we thought it time to reflect on those who were once at the pinnacle of the footplate hierarchy – the top link man. The story of LNWR, LMS, and BR on the West Coast is well documented but what is not so much written about is this small band of elite locomotive supermen who existed at Camden and, for that matter, at other major main line depots.

RITE OF PASSAGE

During the 1950s and ’60s to be a regular long distance express driver or fireman was only bestowed on 10% of the most senior men at the depot and the long and arduous route to the top link was usually only achieved after more than four decades of working lesser freight, shunting and shorter distance passenger work. With sons following fathers onto the railway, and a good word put forward for a job, boys aged 14, 15 and 16 would start on the bottom rung of the footplate ladder as a loco cleaner. If they stayed for a couple of years they usually stayed for life. With at least the first two decades spent on the shovel they evolved into hard, practical men with skills earned through an extensive apprenticeship, learning their craft, finally reaching the top by seniority based on rite of passage. The adage, once set in stone, was one of ‘senior man, senior work’.

Before restructuring and salaries our hourly rate was universal – and very low – throughout the driver grade. With our living wage made up of night rate, weekend rate, bank holiday rate, overtime, rest day and Sunday working and, the greatest of all of these, the mileage bonuses, payable in the greatest element to the express passenger men.

A VIEW OF THE TOP

The mileage working for the top link at Camden was staggering, as can be seen from the LDC minutes taken on 13 February 1958 when, out of 116 drivers and 102 firemen, just 12 sets (a set was the term used for the footplate crew, a driver and fireman rostered permanently together, in a link, in strict seniority order) in the top link Number 1 worked through to Carlisle and Blackpool, with Carlisle being a distance of 301 miles. This equated to 12 hours 50 minutes of additional pay per shift; one week in the top link during the summer workings contained four such return lodge jobs. The financial reward, therefore, for long distance passenger work could be astronomical with nearly one month’s wages earned in a week.

A further eight sets in the special Link 5 signed all roads at the depot but would rarely pick up these high paying prestigious jobs with, as can be seen, from the extract taken from the minutes above, a further 52 sets working regular passenger jobs but never matching the top link sets; in context, however, 60% of Camden crews were on impressive long mileage!

Living locally, within a mile of the depot, was a condition of employment, often in railway-owned properties. These top link men socialised within their own tight knit communities with everyone knowing one another and were looked upon by most as the elite of the working-class but also, by some, as arrogant, selfish and aloof. Deals were struck in smoke-filled rooms and, as long as they benefited the top link men, little else mattered.

KINGS OF THE IRON ROAD

Once at the top, however, this position could be grabbed very cruelly away with failing eyesight being detected by the dreaded Edridge-Green colour perception lamp and/or a failed medical quickly resulting in exchanging your hand on the regulator for two hands on a broom cleaning the mess room or shed.

Clockwise from top: Camden motive power depot by Norman Wilkinson; the Edridge-Green lamp that ended many a man’s life at the top; the novel by John Braine and the film based on his book; LDC minutes; the depot from the north end

The end of steam was the first factor in the demise of the top link man, privatisation and restructuring probably the last, with equality throughout the grade within each TOC and, of course, the end of the mileage bonus, plus laws against any recognition of service.

A good or bad thing? We’ll let you decide. But we know where we stand. The status, awe, and respect for the top link men, who were the kings of the iron road, will not, in this day and age, like paraffin, smog, 78 records and Green Shield stamps, be seen again!
Yarn or two over a beer or three

The Stratford Thursday club, a gathering of the old boys, meets on the last Thursday of every month to share a yarn or two over a beer or three. It is a great tradition since the closure of the depot, and is a lovely opportunity for old colleagues and friends to meet. It was a pleasure to welcome EC member Howard Kaye and branch secretary Peter Dodgson on 29 January who presented four members with their 50 year medallions: Tom Bradley (1961), Alan Chambers (1962), John Rust (1962), and Dave Pizzie (1964), with the latter member being very diligent with the seniority list! Then, on 2 February, Stratford branch held their agm where reports were given from the LLRs at Liverpool Street and Barking. The secretary reported on the financial work the branch has undertaken in the last 12 months, including donations made to several worthwhile appeals. The agm concluded with a presentation of an ASLEF loyalty badge to A Humphreys (40 years), B Moore (40 years) and J Wall (10) also received badges, but those were presented at the depot.

John Thorpe, branch reporter

Good luck, Roger

Friends and colleagues joined Roger Fisher for his retirement booze up. Roger worked on the railway for 41 years before he decided to call it a day. Ma Egertons was full to bursting points with all who wanted to wish Roger a fond farewell, and best wishes for the future, along with invites of further drinks in time to come. No one wants Roger to think he will be forgotten, and we will certainly miss him in the mess rooms at Liverpool, Crewe and Euston. It was noted that none of the Virgin Trains management attended to wish Roger farewell and good luck. All is left to say is Roger, enjoy your retirement and we all hope it is a long one. Don’t forget to pop in and say hello from time to time. Because it’s been a real pleasure to work alongside you all these years.

Chris Todd, Liverpool

Peek practice

At yet another well attended branch, Buxton and Peak Forest welcomed Andy Hourigan, EC member for District 3, and Northern company council rep John Evans. Andy thanked the branch for supporting him in his election to the executive committee, and congratulated our member James Glew for making it as a delegate to AAD in Southend. He also resolved problems that Buxton NR drivers had with the recent pay ballot. John spoke about many things including MFA, sick pay, drivers’ line of promotion and long service awards. Thanks, Andy and John. We look forward to you both attending our branch again soon.

Paul Costello, branch secretary
Challenging violence against women on public transport

WENDY HURST of the Women’s Representatives Committee reports on a seminar about the British Transport Police’s Project Guardian

Dr EBBIE REAY and I attended a seminar run by the British Transport Police on violence against women on transport. The chief constable told us it takes many forms, such as touching, harassment, and leering and is as much about the behaviour and attitude of the perpetrators as well as being a criminal act.

Project Guardian is a BTP initiative to deal with these offences. It has been put in place to increase the confidence of women to report these acts as well as target known offenders. In 2011-12 the Safety and Security Survey of the UK transport system was conducted. They had a good response, although only 15% of the respondents were women; of those female respondents 95% said they have not or do not report crimes of this nature either because they are not taken seriously enough, or don’t know who to report them to, or how to report them, or because they are embarrassed or ashamed. Further to this analysis came the responses to a survey ‘name it, claim it, blame it’ and from this it can be seen that 98% of offenders of sexual harassment on women were men. Most offenders were 20-41, half of them were white British, and one in three were unemployed.

NO SET PATTERN
There is no set pattern. Some offenders are opportunistic (people who like to press and rub against you) who usually prefer crowds and will often select the person they wish to assault (typically blonde, blue eyes, mid 40s). Another type of perpetrator is the one who likes the quiet times, when they will not be interrupted, so they can expose themselves or masturbate in public. 85% of those that offend live within the London area and will travel an average of 8.5km to commit the offence. Ethnic offenders are often British nationals whose previous generations came from countries with traditionally poor attitudes to women.

The results of Project Guardian on the London transport system are encouraging; leading to a 41% increase in the reporting of incidences and a 39% increase in successful prosecutions.

IT IS HARASSMENT

Many women are unaware of what is classed as a sexual harassment crime. If it feels uncomfortable, and is persistent, then it is harassment. This includes wolf whistling, cat calling, lewd comments, leering, flashing, groping, public masturbation and sexual assault although this is not an exhaustive list.

Although other crime on the transport system has decreased, crimes against women have increased and 60% of the harassment reports from women occur on public transport. There are things being done but without the engagement of the public and passengers the task is so much harder. Please ensure that your mothers, wives and daughters have a small space in their phone; it’s the confidential BTP reporting text number.

Claire Perry, Conservative MP for Devizes, and Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport, joined journalist Reni Eddo-Lodge, writer and musician Bryony Beynon and Jacqueline Gray of Middlesex University at the BTP’s seminar.

Mick Holder looks back to April 1915 and life here on the home front

5/- MORE AND AN 8 HOUR DAY

Last month in the Journal we looked at some of the letters sent home from the fields of Flanders by members of the Associated Society doing their bit in khaki for king and country. Here on the home front the rank and file were going about their business as usual. Stratford branch reports: ‘Our programme for a 5/- per week increase and an eight hour day have been placed before the companies.’ Sowerby reports: ‘Since our respected general secretary was here last summer we have not yet had one single branch meeting without making a new member or members.’ Southport reports: ‘Special notices were sent out to our members to attend the branch meeting being called to consider the amended rules for the national insurance and the nomination of an organising secretary.’

SOLIDARITY AMONG WORKERS

Nine Elms Branch reports: ‘After branch business was transacted, a deputation of six delegates from the shed men on strike attended and stated their case in a very able manner. It appears the men had been agitating for a raise for the last 18 months, with no satisfactory result. The unanimity shown was a splendid object lesson of the improving solidarity amongst workers generally, whatever their creed or society.’

FELLOW FOOTPLATE WORKERS

New Cross reported: ‘Brother SD Smith desires to record through the medium of the Journal the prompt manner in which his claim for suspension pay was dealt with, and strongly advises all his fellow footplate workers to join a Society which has their own welfare so much to the front.’

JOIN THE FRATERNITY

A letter from FE Harris says: ‘Kindly allow me a small space in the Journal to express my heartfelt thanks for the manner in which the Society has taken up my case in respect to my accident, which has been the cause of me being removed from the footplate. Also for the promptness in paying me the incapacitation grant of £40, and the benevolent grant of £38. I should like to advise any young man who is not a member of an organisation of his own fraternity, to join at once.’
Politicians make policies for people who vote and if you don’t vote, your concerns may not be listened to. Look up by going to www.aboutmyvote.co.uk and have your say in how our country is run.

Deadline 20 April to vote in the general election on 7 May 2015. Register before then.

Don’t take the chance, complete the form anyway; it only takes five minutes and you can do it online at www.nvrd.co.uk. It takes just five minutes and you can do it online at www.nvrd.co.uk. Here’s how.

Whatever your issue – housing, unemployment, low pay, insecure work – show that you have a voice and are willing to use it. Register to vote today.

The next General Election is on 7 May. Make sure you’re registered to vote. In the 2010 General Election just 33 per cent of 18- to 34-year-olds voted, compared with 64 per cent of those aged 35 years and older.

Young people are the largest under-represented group on the electoral register. In the 2010 General Election just 33 per cent of 18- to 34-year-olds voted, compared with 64 per cent of those aged 35 years and older.

For one membership card and yearbook inc. P&P send £5.75. Extra cards for family members £4.00. Family membership two adults and all children up to ages 18 for £10.25 inc P&P.

Please send to: REPTA, 4 Brackmills Close, Forest Town, Mansfield, Notts NG19 0PB. Tel: 01623 646789

You can also see us on Facebook
DENNIS COOPER PLAYED IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE LDC

With a heavy heart I wish to announce the passing of ex-Stonebridge Park driver Dennis Cooper, aged 76. He joined his beloved wife Marian on 25 February after a short illness. Dennis started his railway career in 1955, at the tender age of 16, at Cricklewood steam depot as a fireman, moving to Willesden until its closure. He carried on his career as a fireman at Stonebridge Park, becoming a driver for British Rail and then EWS until his retirement in 2004. Whilst at Stonebridge Park he played an important role in the LDC and was on the welfare committee, both of which he was proud to be involved in. Upon retirement, Dennis kept up with his ex-colleagues at Stonebridge Park RMS for drinks and the occasional day out. At home, he was a keen gardener and enjoyed visiting family and, especially, his grandchildren. Dennis’s two children, five grandchildren, family and friends shall miss him greatly.

Maggie Cooper, Bletchley

RONALD CAREY NOT BAD FOR AN ENGINE DRIVER

The town of Northwich has paid tribute to Ronald Carey, who died aged 94 earlier this year. Ron followed in his father's footsteps and was a driver at the town's depot for 35 years, a span matched by the time he served as a local Labour politician. During that time he represented the town on the Urban District Council, the Borough Council and Cheshire County Council, serving as chair of county and borough, as well as becoming Mayor of Northwich and Deputy Lieutenant of Cheshire. He was quietly proud he had achieved this, as well as a British Empire Medal, commenting dryly, ‘Not bad for an engine driver.’

Dave Vaughan, Newton Heath

PHIL HARRIS CARING AND GENEROUS

It is with great sadness that I report the passing of Hereford driver Phil Harris at the age of 52. Phil started his career at Hereford, in the booking office, aged 17, then transferred to Reading as a guard and in 1989 became a driver. Phil moved back to Hereford in 1998 and later took over the role of branch secretary which he held until the amalgamation of Hereford with Newport. He continued as LLC rep and worked tirelessly, often in his own time, for the good of the depot and the men he represented. There was a magnificent turnout for his funeral on 6 March with colleagues of all grades travelling from Margam, Newport, Bristol, Reading, Paddington, Oxford, Worcester, Doncaster, Rotherham, Thornaby and Darlington as well as most of Hereford depot, station staff and numerous signalmen on the Marches route. Hereford is a poorer place with the loss of a caring, generous and intelligent colleague, fellow rep and very good friend.

Greg Brookes, Hereford LLC

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Greg Brookes, Hereford LLC

ROY GOLDLING PASSED ON KNOWLEDGE OF ART OF DRIVING

Roy Golding, always known as Ron by the guys at the depot, has died. Roy was a quiet, very likeable man, who came from a railway family (his dad Vic was also a driver at Stratford). He was a guy who looked after his fireman, a driver who came to work, did his turn of duty, and then went home, rather than socialise with the rest. But he passed on his knowledge about the art of driving to all his firemen, and will be much missed.

Dave Pizzie, Retired Members’ Section

PETER HARRIS DEDICATION TO FOOTPLATE SECOND TO NONE

Peter Harris, a retired Basingstoke driver, has died at the age of 79. He started his railway career in January 1951 and retired just ten days short of 50 years’ service. Apart from two years’ national service in the Coldstream Guards he spent his entire working life at Basingstoke depot. He was elected onto the LDC as a young man and served for 35 years, many as secretary. He was also branch chair and district council delegate. His dedication to serving the footplate crews at the depot was second to none. Peter was a keen gardener and grew fantastic flowers, many winning prizes in local competitions. He loved to go walking with local groups and was also a very good chess player, representing southern region BRSA in competitions around the country. When he retired he would still be seen at the station enjoying a cup of tea with the new drivers in the mess room, always interested in their perspective on the job. And he always stressed the need for good representation.

Jim Rowe, Retired Members’ Section

ALLEN FATHERS LOVED HIS JOB

It is with much sadness that I have to inform you that my very dear husband Allen JT Fathers has died. Allen worked as a driver on the railway for 50 years, and loved his job so very much.

Irene J Fathers, Ashford, Kent

JOHN CHEAL: FISHING AND SHOOTING

I wish to report the passing of John Cheal, who was 82. He started at Tonbridge, did his national service, mostly in Malaya, and when he returned to Tonbridge passed as a driver on steam. Then he went to Orpington, where he spent most of his career on the railway, returning to Tonbridge in the late 1980s. He retired when we lost our freight work and 20 drivers were allowed to go. His loves, apart from his family, were fishing and shooting (his family lived on a farm).

Dave W eddle, Tonbridge
Punch yourself in the face

While it is, of course, the absolute right of ASLEF members to vote for any political party they choose, voting UKIP is, for any trade union member, the equivalent of punching yourself repeatedly in the face with a vinegar-soaked knuckle duster. Let’s examine some issues raised recently in the Journal concerning this issue.

Some say UKIP’s two MPs make the party mainstream, although Mark Reckless and Douglas Carswell have only ever been marginal, pointless, jingoistic whiners carping from the rabid right-wing of the Conservative Party. They gutlessly shuffled their safe seats across the parliamentary divide for axe grinding self-promotion, and to speak of them as if they are a Syrizaesque vanguard is fanciful!

Comparisons have been drawn by Nick Clarke (Journal, February) and ASLEF Shrugged (Journal, March) with Australian immigration controls and the flow of people across the EU. Australia is larger than the entire European land mass. If I gained citizenship in Australia and worked in Victoria, but then had the offer of employment elsewhere in Australia, I would be free to take that up. Eastern Europeans are exercising the same right within the EU. Australia, like Europe, is essentially a combination of different states, the only difference being that there is a single prime minister. People move freely from state to state as they wish. Why that principle is acceptable for Australia, but unacceptable for Europe, is a mystery to me.

Migrant workers are not the problem. A lack of unionised migrant workers is the issue that needs to be pursued. Under the Thatcher, Major, Blair and Brown governments, unions were systematically maligned. Thatcher deregulated bus services, starting a race to the bottom. Bus companies now take a fortnight or less to train a driver, some companies employ drivers on minimum wage, and impose ruthless managerial regimes. Bus drivers, sadly, are expendable and, as in other industries, Thatcher’s toxic legacy means jobs go to the lowest bidder.

Unfair? Yes. Infuriating? Absolutely! The fault of Eastern Europeans? Not at all…

It was the obsession with free markets and cheap labour that caused this, not an overriding desire of subversive Poles to realise their dream of driving vans in Edinburgh or wiping down tables in Butlins. Nigel Farage says his party will keep the flames of Thatcherism burning bright’ so if anyone thinks this failed Tory would reverse the damage caused by Thatcher’s poisonous legacy I would respectfully suggest they stop for a moment and re-examine reality.

The EU is bloated and inefficient but it does a lot of good; EU arrest warrants, renewable energies, trade, regional grants, equal rights for agency workers, health & safety regulation, guaranteed breaks, maternity and paternity leave, etc, and UKIP want to abolish these. But I see saving the NHS, stopping the war on the vulnerable, opposing fracking and halting the poisonous Transatlantic Trade Investment Partnership as greater priorities than preventing someone from Lithuania driving a bus in Milton Keynes.

If you are tempted by UKIP’s slack jawed lullaby of jingoistic opportunism, just stop and think. The EU isn’t the problem here. The poor aren’t the problem here. Migrant workers aren’t the problem here. The problem is the endless stream of beige, professional politicos who we insist on electing who have sold us over repeatedly to their multinational sponsors.

Karl Davis, Hull

Give me a guard any day

I’d like to congratulate Steve Davies on his letter (Journal, March) and echo his thoughts on DOG. I, for one, would not welcome this at
In Thatcher's footsteps

I would like to remind fellow members of David Cameron's promise that, if re-elected, he and his far-right colleagues will attack workers' wages and conditions by attacking the trade unions as Margaret Thatcher did in the 1980s. Remember a careless X on the ballot paper can destroy years of work by past generations. Do not even think of UKIP because, behind their friendly front, lies a radical far-right movement more in keeping with the Fascists of the 1930s. Danger approaches in the shape of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership; have no fear of Europe or Russia, it's the United States of America that is our greatest enemy, out to destroy democracy as we know it. Please learn from history.

Ben Reading, Carmarthen

Thank you, Thompsons

I would like to thank ASLEF and Thompsons solicitors for all their help in aiding me with my compensation claim after injuring my knee at work. I would especially like to thank the Cardiff branch of Thompsons who guided me with advice during a difficult time.

Ben Reading, Carmarthen

Breath of fresh air

Re Peter Wilby's remarks (Journal, February) about Russell Brand's appearance on the BBC's Question Time, a programme serving the interests of capitalism, not the people, I think the opinions Russell Brand expressed were a breath of fresh air.

Reg Preston, Chertsey, Surrey

Joe Dunbar

There's something wrong with the dates in the Joe Dunbar obituary (Journal, March). I knew Joe, briefly, and did some front ending with him, and I didn't go into the footplate grade at Huddersfield until the end of January 1991. Joe did retire not long afterwards but I would put it at the middle of 1991.

Clive Standen, Huddersfield
In an evocative article that brings the age of steam back to life GERARD WALTON recalls the railway experiences of his father Bill, a fireman and driver at Saltley motive power depot in Duddeston Mill Road

When the Great Depression hit in 1929 dad passed out as a driver on Compound No 3 shed in the 1960s; a Class 40030 at Saltley in 1980; and a freight train approaching Saltley in 1962

Y DAD joined the London Midland & Scottish Railway at the age of 17 in 1925 as an engine cleaner and knocker up at Saltley. Locs he cleaned included the single wheeler 673, now in the National Railway Museum at York; he would burnish the handrails, buffers, and bands on the smoke box door with a fine emery cloth. He also had to coal the engines, hand filling tenders and bunkers alike, from a coal wagon alongside the tender loading tons every day. No wonder his arms were like Popeye’s before he became a fireman!

There were real characters on the shed, like Teddy Red Paint who went round the shed painting all the Midland Railway signs red and a chap whose eyes were always running painted The Weeping Driver. He became a porter at Widnes in Lancashire. He did that for a couple of years before returning to the Midlands as a signalman at Tile Hill. That was where he met Violet, his wife and my mum, because she would leave her cottage to cross the main London line at the level crossing near the signal box!

THE GENERAL STRIKE

On a picket line outside the shed on Duddeston Mill Road a scab was seen to drive engine No 512 across the bridge. The driver whose engine it was went berserk and had to be restrained by the other pickets, because he felt it was a personal insult to him, as his name was inside that cab.

A tram was taken out of Washwood Heath garage and came down the hill to Saltley gate driven by a volunteer. There was a riot as the tram was stoned and police waded in to deter the protesters.

During the strike the railwaymen used to attend meetings at the Labour Club in Highfield Road where any dissenters were dealt with outside. At the end of each meeting a railwayman would take up his violin and play the Red Flag and everyone joined in.

Dad progressed to passed fireman and his first long distance turn was to Canklow near Rotherham where he went to find a pub and was distressed to see something he had never seen in Brum; miners hanging around street corners without two halfpennies to rub together. ‘They couldn’t afford half a pint in the miners’ club,’ he said. Dad realised how fortunate he was to have a job on the railway, never forgot that scene, and voted Labour all his life.

When the Great Depression hit in 1929 dad was told his footplate days were over and, if he wanted a job on the LMSR, he would have to become a porter at Widnes in Lancashire. He did that for a couple of years before returning to the Midlands as a signalman at Tile Hill. That was where he met Violet, his wife and my mum, because she would leave her cottage to cross the main London line at the level crossing near the signal box!

PUT THE BLOWER ON

Dad moved to Fleetwood, and worked trains around Blackpool and St Anne’s, before returning, as a fireman proper, to Saltley in 1934, and moved up the links. He recalled one horrendous journey, with Charlie Batson, working from Bristol with SXP Jubilee 5611 Hong Kong when they entered the Wickwar tunnel at 85mph and the driver, in his wisdom, decided to close the regulator with the result that the fire roared out into the cab. It caught my dad’s overalls, and burned the driver on the side of his face. ‘It was very fortunate we only had half the fire hole open or we could both have been burned to death,’ said dad. Charlie, confronted in the mess room later, said ‘You always close the regulator going into a tunnel’ and was politely reminded that ‘You put the bloody blower on!’

In 1941 he and his driver took SXP Jubilee 5725 Repulse on a troop train from Newcastle upon Tyne to Bristol Temple Meads. Approaching Cheltenham they could see the sky ahead was red and were duly halted. Control said they were ‘on the red’ and had to report at every telephone on the way to Gloucester. The docks were ablaze, the bombardment was heavy, but they managed to clear Gloucester unscathed. On approaching Mangotsfield they could see Bristol docks getting the same treatment. They couldn’t get into Temple Meads, as the east end had been severed by the bombing, and had to proceed to the GWR station St Philip’s.

BOMBS RAINING DOWN

They didn’t know the road so a GWR driver, with an engine and three coaches, conducted the Jubilee, with 17 coaches on, into the station. At the terminus the driver said, ‘Go and find a pub, Bill, and bring us back some bottles.’ And they calmed their nerves by drinking a couple of bottles apiece while the bombs were still raining down.

Dad passed out as a driver on Compound 4P 1064 of Bournville shed and took up driving on the bottom links. He loved the railway, and was active in the union – president of the welfare fund – and shared his memories with me until he died in 1984.
Prize Crossword number 108 by Zebedee

Across
1 Act in disregard of laws, rules, contracts (10)
6 Waited in hiding to attack (7)
9 Stick found in papa’s tea (5)
10 Flight in an organised tour (4)
11 Lacking affection or warm feeling (8)
13 Constructive member of society (5)
14 Donna ----, 1980s US sex symbol (5)
16 The sound of a liquid falling drop by drop (8)
17 Couple (4)
20 Oscine bird (5)
21 Cover a way of living around the east (7)
22 Attraction on Salisbury Plain (10)

Down
1 Keep to trail with some hesitation (5)
2 UK radio debating programme (3, 9)
3 ----- defence, a chess opening (4)
4 (Nautical) steering mechanism (6)
5 A Jew of Spanish, Portuguese or North African descent (8)
6 The condition of being deprived of oxygen (12)
7 Make less lively or acute (6)
12 An informal photograph (8)
13 Alter, change (6)
15 Not balanced; isn’t that odd? (6)
18 Dishonest person in sport (5)
19 An expression of some desire or inclination (4)

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

Solution to prize crossword number 107 which appeared in the March edition of the ASLEF Journal

Across: 1 Columbus 5 Sail 9 Magical 10 Ocean 11 Blue 12 Gentian 14 Apathy 16 Harass 19 Rounded 21 Toff 24 Genoa 25 Braille 26 Last 27 Dewy eyed

Down: 1 Camp 2 Legal 3 Macbeth 4 Ultrasound 6 America 7 Leninist 8 Join 13 Madrigal 15 Alumnus 17 Actuary 18 Edible 20 Deal 22 Filly 23 Lead

Congratulations to Stephen McNally of Tonbridge, Kent who was last month’s winner.

Thanks for all your responses to the 107th ASLEF crossword in the March edition. If you successfully complete this month’s crossword please send the solution to the Editor, ASLEF Journal, 77 St John Street, London, EC 1M 4NN by 14 April

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