Make up your mind – for the most important election in a generation

TOSH McDONALD: Why I’m voting Labour
ANDY BOTHAM, TOM CORBIN and HOWARD KAYE: Fear and loathing on the campaign trail

NANCY PLATTS calls for a better deal for passengers
MICK YATES on life as a plough jockey

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Reasons why everyone should vote on 7 May

In line with our policy, we have worked incredibly hard to deliver a Labour victory. The need to protect and develop the NHS, and to look for a model that drives a real future for our industry, are paramount.

The doubling of the national debt whilst promoting the bedroom tax, zero hours contracts, Atos, the removal of free speech under the Lobbying and Transparency Act, not for the brown envelope mob but for trade unions and charities, attacks on the right of workers to take on employers at tribunal or after personal injury, and the planned removal of your right to strike – these are just a few reasons why everyone should vote on 7 May. Civil society as we know it has come under prolonged attack not to promote the greater good but because of dogma and it is time for change.

In this issue of the Journal you will hear why we support the party created by the trade unions. You will also see ordinary train drivers standing for parliament in the hope of making it a more representative house, with real life experience colouring the many and difficult decisions that have to be made. We wish all our members, standing or supporting in local or national elections, every success and applaud the time, effort and belief they have shown in fighting for their communities.

We await the outcome of an incident that has serious implications for the impact of a casual workforce in a complex industry. An operator has had its ability to run trains suspended, at least temporarily. We have long asked questions about how substantive employers or serial casual employers share safety information and micromanage rehabilitative or other plans, post incident, and do some take any action at all? Because it is unfair on drivers and companies that behave responsibly, and have robust systems in place, to suffer detriment if others do not.

Yours fraternally
Mick Whelan
general secretary
I want to be elected

MARK PRENTER, who works out of Waterloo, is standing for Labour in Twydall ward on Medway council

We are just a week away from the most important general election of our lifetimes. Important for us as train drivers and trade unionists – because of what the Tories plan to do to us – but important for everyone in Britain because it will determine the direction this country takes for the next five years.

I’m a train driver, staff rep at Waterloo, and standing as the Labour candidate in the elections for Medway council. Having always had an interest in politics I became involved in my constituency Labour Party, but was never confident enough to put myself up for election. But two years ago a branch circular advertised an ASLEF political school, and I applied. Some may ask why is ASLEF running a political school and the answer is simple. People say ‘all politicians are the same’ and ‘they don’t represent me’ as so many MPs get re-elected.

I knock on doors, I hear how many feel ‘they don’t represent me’ as so many MPs get re-elected. People say ‘all politicians are the same’ and ‘they don’t represent me’ as so many MPs get re-elected.

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We need your help. The Co-op is in your hands.

A formidable panel – including Diane Abbott, Labour MP for Hackney North & Stoke Newington; Jim Dowd, Labour MP for Lewisham West & Penge; Kevin Maguire, associate editor of the Daily Mirror; and Tosh McDonald, EC president – answered questions from a packed audience at Waterloo Nine Elms’ Question Time-style meeting at the Horse & Stables in Westminster Bridge Road. The meeting was organised by Steve Richardson and chaired by Marz Colombini, snapped here with our guests.

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KARIN CHRISTIANSEN, general secretary of the Co-operative Party, on why the future of the Co-op is in your hands

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QUINTINSHILL RAIL DISASTER

The worst rail crash in this country will be remembered on its 100th anniversary later this month. On 22 May 1915 three trains crashed at Quintinshill Bridge near Gretna Green in Dumfriesshire. At least 227 people, including Driver Scott and Fireman Hannan, were killed – the exact number was never determined – and a further 246 were injured when a troop train packed with soldiers from the Royal Scots, the oldest infantry regiment in the British Army, travelling from Larbert to Liverpool, collided with a local passenger train which had been shunted on to the main line. A Glasgow express ploughed into the wreckage moments later and gas in the lighting system of the old wooden carriages ignited and started a fire which engulfed two freight trains on a passing loop.

End of the line for Farmer Smith?

The future of steam trains on main lines is in doubt after the ORR launched an investigation into serious safety breaches at the West Coast Railway Company. West Coast is Britain’s biggest heritage operator, running 500 trains a year, including the famous Jacobite service from Fort William to Mallaig which was featured in the Harry Potter films. West Coast has been involved in a string of safety incidents, but the final straw for the regulator was a near miss at Wootton Bassett on 7 March when a steam loco, pulling 13 coaches, ran a red light and came to rest at a junction just moments after a high speed passenger train travelling at 100mph from Swansea to London had passed. West Coast is run by David Smith, a Yorkshire farmer, who, according to the Daily Telegraph, ‘runs it in an authoritarian manner and treats it like his own private train set.’

ASLEF activists join Mark to help get the vote out when they have a run-in with management. I’d like to extend a big thank you to all the branches and ASLEF activists, including GS Mick Whelan and EC member Marz Colombini, who have not only helped financially, but joined me on the doorstep to deliver my campaign material.
Brighton centre from Sunday 27 to Wednesday 30 September.

Wednesday 16 September and the Union Congress Burston, near Diss, in Norfolk on Sunday 6 September. The from Friday 17 to Sunday 19 July. The ASLEF’s annual assembly of delegates.

CONFERENCES

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.

Fares cheaper with rail in public sector

Season tickets for passengers would be 10% cheaper if Britain’s rail services were run by the public sector, according to new research by Transport for Quality of Life for Action for Rail. Eleven franchises are up for renewal in the next five years and the report says that if they were all returned to the public sector the benefits for this country would be enormous.

‘Before the end of this year it would be possible to introduce free off peak travel for children travelling with parents,’ according to the research. ‘From 2017 regulated fares – including season and anytime day tickets – could be cut by 10%. And from 2020 all fares could be cut by 3%.’

Mick Whelan said: ‘At a time when families are struggling to make ends meet, and the government talks of value for money, delivering a different model that could cut fares makes sense not only for the passenger but for the taxpayer, too. Let’s ease the burden on everyone by doing what the public are demanding.’

Off the rails

TIMOTHY BENTINCK, who plays David Archer in the long-running radio soap The Archers, has a secret sideline. He’s the voice of ‘Mind the Gap’ on the Piccadilly line in London. Radio is the poor relation to television and relatively poorly paid. The Archers is recorded in six day blocks, once a month, at the BBC studios in Birmingham and the cast fill the rest of their time with other work. Bentinck has just written a children’s book, Colin the Campervan (FBS Publishing, £5.99) based on the days when, as ‘a jobbing actor,’ and to save money, he would drive to Brum in his VW camper. Everyone else was in a hotel or B&B but I thought it would be more romantic – and more fun – to park in the field opposite the Pebble Mill studios and sleep there.’

THE LIST of dodgy political euphemisms gets longer. Joining ‘enhanced interrogation’ (torture); ‘collateral damage’ (deaths of innocent civilians); ‘extraordinary rendition’ (kidnapping by the state); and ‘economical with the truth’ (lying) NBC news anchor Brian Williams said he ‘misremembered’ (lied) when he claimed he was on a Chinook hit by an RPG in Iraq. Now Grant Shapps, the Conservative Party chairman, says he ‘overfirmly denied’ he had a second job as a ‘multi-million dollar web marketeer’ punting self-help guides such as Stinking Rich 3. Overfirmly denied? ‘I lied.’

MAY 2015

MICHAEL CASHMAN, Labour MEP for the West Midlands from 1999 to 2014, and now a Labour peer, was on top form at ASLEF’s Parliamentary reception. Recalling his days as an actor, best known for playing Colin – and for participating in the first gay kiss on prime time British telly – in EastEnders, he said: ‘I told the producer that Colin wouldn’t fancy Barry. “No, Colin, the problem is that you don’t fancy Gary [Haines, the actor playing Barry]. Get on with it!”’

SIMON WOLFSON, Tory peer, and boss of High Street fashion chain Next, thinks: ‘There are a lot of people for whom £6.70 is enough to live on.’ Because £6.70 an hour – just above the minimum wage – is what Wolfson pays his staff. He picks up a basic salary of £350 an hour – before bonuses – and is worth £112 million. Next made £782 million profits last year but Wolfson won’t pay his workers a penny more.

CLIVE HOLLICK, chair of the House of Lords’ Economic Affairs Committee, talking about HS2 on Today on Radio 4, opined, ‘the solution to the problems of overcrowding lie in pricing.’ The wealthy peer, who is close to Peter Mandelson, wants to price poor people off the railway.

500 CLUB: W Ronksley, with number 147, won the April draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £362. Well done, Bill!
Making a stand

ED D’BELL, Black and Ethnic Minority committee member for District 1, reports on the Stand up to Racism demo

ASLEF activists – including Floyd Doyle, Trevor Robinson, Lee James and DO1 Graham Morris – joined a march organised by Stand Up to Racism and Fascism to put across the message ‘Say no to Islamophobia, no to scapegoating immigrants, and yes to diversity’. An estimated 10,000 people joined the march in London, starting from the BBC. People came from all parts of the UK, including many trade union activists, supporters of LGBT organisations and Show Racism the Red Card, which highlighted just how diverse our country is. Unfortunately the march was interrupted by Britain First leader Paul Golding, and some of his cronies, outside a pub en route to Trafalgar Square but, with a large police presence, there was no trouble. Speakers included Diane Abbott, Labour MP for Hackney North & Stoke Newington; George Galloway, Respect MP for Bradford West; and the inspirational author and journalist Owen Jones. I took along our BEM banner, which did get a lot of attention!

QUOTE...‘On the basis of current polls, there is going to be no outright winner. We are going to see a coalition, or the first minority government since Harold Wilson in 1974.’ – Peter Mandelson

...UNQUOTE

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LONG MARCH BACK TO HATFIELD MAIN

Tosh McDonald, EC president, and Nigel Roebuck, DB Schenker company council, held the ASLEF banner high to show solidarity with miners at Hatfield main colliery as they marked the 30th anniversary of their return to work.

Running down a dream

District 3 Organiser COLIN SMITH reports on a smooth run in a new cab

Mick Whelan, as general secretary, and I, as lead officer, were invited to have a cab ride on Direct Rail Services’ new Vossloh engine (the name on the engine reminds me of ASLEF) at Crewe. We were both impressed with the smooth ride to Chester and back; the cab design has our drivers’ works council’s involvement. The console and the really wide windscreen are two major changes on which the council had input at the factory workshop. DRS made Mick and me welcome and the day went according to plan, thanks to Alison Hannah. We also discussed business plans and recruitment for the future.

New branch secretaries join Mick Whelan, Simon Weller and Marz Colombini on the steps at Stoke Rochford

Mick, Colin, driver Phil Taylor, operations director Jeff Marshall and managing director Neil McNicholas
London Pride

**DAVID JONES, LGBT committee member for District 7, calls on ASLEF drivers to march next month to mark 30 years of solidarity with the miners**

It’s the 30th anniversary of acts of solidarity between Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners and NUM members who fought the Coal Board, and the Tory government, in the bitter miners’ strike of 1984-85. The story is very well done in the film Pride, in which a group of young lesbian and gay people identify the struggle of the striking miners with the political oppression of the LGBT community in the quest for equal rights.

This event was hugely significant, with the NUM forcing through a major turning point for LGBT rights in this country. This is an appeal for ASLEF members to join the march in London on Saturday 27 June. As ASLEF members we can still today be very proud of the support our union gave the miners during that dispute. And as LGBT trade union activists we can be proud of the support our community gave the strikers, when the evil Thatcher government tried to starve the miners into submission.

ASLEF is liaising with those miners’ groups still in existence and the TUC has contacted LGSMT members to recreate this historic event. We are expecting the Tredegar band to lead the parade, reforming especially for this event.

It would be tremendous to see a massive ASLEF turnout for the march with as many ASLEF banners as we can muster on the day.

Last year the LGBT committee marched at Pride in Liverpool. Let’s make this year the biggest and best turnout to support your LGBT colleagues, and recreate the solidarity that was, and still is, our strongest tool in furthering workers’ rights. For more information please contact Lee James, ASLEF’s equalities adviser, on ljames@aslef.org.uk

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**SETBACK FOR HIGH SPEED RAIL**

A public inquiry in France has rejected plans for two new high speed TGV lines after concluding that €8 billion plans for 225 miles of new track between Bordeaux, Toulouse and the border with Spain were too costly, would primarily benefit rich people in big cities, and that the money would be better spent on improving the existing rail network.

More than 100 friends and supporters of the South Yorkshire Freedom Riders, campaigning against cuts in travel passes for old and disabled people, turned up at their birthday party rally in Barnsley. Tosh McDonald, EC president, and David Court, RMS, represented ASLEF – enjoyed a slice of birthday cake – and joined the chants of ‘Northern Rail, hear us say – Freedom Riders here to stay!’

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**If you don’t vote, you don’t count**

‘If you don’t vote, you don’t count.’ That was the stark message from District 8 Organiser Finn Brennan, who added: “Politicians only listen, and take notice, of people who vote. That’s why we need to sign up and make our voices heard, and select a candidate who can be elected Mayor of London, because he or she will be our boss.”

Finn was talking about ASLEF’s campaign to recruit members who live in London as affiliated supporters of the Labour Party – it won’t cost you a penny – at a London regional council meeting chaired by Ben Wallington, Metropolitan line driver – ‘He’s a House of Commons.’

Kelvin Hopkins, Labour MP for Luton North, and chair of the ASLEF parliamentary group, called in to say hello and Val Shawcross, London Assembly Member for Lambeth & Southwark, who speaks on transport for Labour, said “I’m looking forward to the day when we have a mayor who understands transport in London because Boris doesn’t have a good grasp of detail. When we pointed out he’d robbed Peter to pay Paul, he said, “Oh, did I?”

John Cryer, MP for Leyton & Wanstead, and new chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party, wants an Ed Miliband government to adapt John McDonnell’s balloting bill to roll back the anti-union legislation of the Thatcher-Major years which Tony Blair left on the statute books. And he added: ‘I was speaking in a church recently, and I knew they were all Tories, and when I said I wanted to renationalise the railway they all broke out in applause. It’s a popular policy, even with Conservatives!’

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The five are free – now end blockade

ROB MILLER, director of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, reports on a famous victory in the long campaign to free the Miami five from jail

A SLEF has been a valued supporter in the long-running campaign to free the Miami five from US jails. That’s why Mick Whelan was as delighted as we were with the announcement that the remaining three prisoners would be allowed to return home to their families in Cuba. The men, unjustly imprisoned for 16 years for trying to prevent terrorist attacks against Cuba, were finally released by President Barack Obama as part of a thawing in relations between the two countries.

As an affiliate to the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, ASLEF has strong links with unions in Cuba, and heard first hand from Juan José Polo Vázquez, general secretary of the Cuban Transport Union, when he visited Britain, how

Solidaridad: the Miami five, finally free after 16 years in prison in the United States

the US blockade impacts not only on Cuba’s ability to maintain its railways, but on every aspect of Cuban society.

Despite US willingness to begin talks, the blockade is not over. Although the US has made it easier for its citizens to travel to the island, and permits limited trade, core blockade policies remain in place. Ridiculous though it seems, Cuba is still on the US list of ‘state sponsors of terrorism’ and the US still illegally occupies Cuban territory at Guantánamo Bay. And just days after announcing the release of the Miami five, the US gave another $11 million to groups working for ‘regime change’ on the island.

ASLEF raised these points at the Scottish TUC in April, urging the trade union movement to keep up the pressure for an end to the blockade once and for all, to defend Cuba’s independence, and the country’s enormous achievements in health, education and social justice, free from US interference.

You can show your solidarity by affiliating to the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. It costs just £40 a year, and your branch will receive our quarterly 40 page colour magazine CubaSí, voting rights at our agm, regular briefings, advice on tours, materials and speakers for meetings and invites to cultural events and conferences. For details about affiliation, or a model motion, email Ollie Hopkins, campaigns officer, at campaigns@cuba-solidarity.org.uk or call him on 0207 490 5715.

QUOTE...

‘Enough of the dry politics of numbers. We need to discuss values and vision.’ – Will Hutton, author of How Good We Can Be: Ending the Mercenary Society and Building a Great Country

...UNQUOTE

Routledge on the right track

Paul Routledge, a former industrial correspondent on The Times, The Observer, and the Independent on Sunday, who now writes for the Daily Mirror, addressed our political course at Stoke Rochford Hall and wrote about it in his column: ‘I go back a long way with the train drivers’ union, ASLEF. So I was happy to talk about the media to an ASLEF politics course. My, how things have changed. The union is much smaller, but the education work is second to none. It’s good to see another union engaging in serious political activity. And there were two women on the course – another step forward.’

WORLD’S OLDEST RAIL TUNNEL

English Heritage has awarded the world’s oldest railway tunnel protected status. Fritchley tunnel was built in 1793 as part of the Butterley Gangroad, an early industrial revolution railway using horse-drawn trains to link the limestone quarries at Crich in Derbyshire with the Cromford canal.

The first new pre-series five car Class 800 intercity express train has arrived in the UK from Hitachi’s Kasado works in Japan. Rail Minister Claire Perry was at the Port of Southampton to welcome the first of 122 new electric and bi-mode locos being built for the East Coast and Great Western main lines.

HIGH COURT REVEALS THE APPEAL OF FREIGHT

The High Court has turned down an appeal by St Albans council against the granting of planning permission for the Radlett rail freight terminal by Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. It was a test case because of its position in the south-east of England where there are few potential sites with good connections. ‘We need road/rail transfer stations such as Radlett at strategic locations on our major networks to get long distance consumer freight onto the railways,’ said Philippa Edmunds, manager of Freight on Rail. ‘Terminals are the freight equivalent of stations for passengers.’

SHOCK AND AWE FOR ORR AND ORR

The Office of Rail Regulation became the Office of Rail and Road on 1 April. ‘In addition to our existing functions as health and safety and economic regulator of Great Britain’s railways we will start monitoring and enforcing the efficiency and performance of the strategic road network in England.’ And save on new stationery...

Tosh McDonald, EC president, spoke for ASLEF at a People’s Question Time panel organised by Unions 21. Photo: Steve Doran

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A better deal for taxpayers and passengers

NANCY PLATTS is Labour’s candidate in the key marginal seat of Brighton Kemptown, which the Conservatives won with a 1,328 majority in 2010. Here she explains why it’s vital to kick out the Tories on 7 May

I AM standing this month to become the next Labour MP for Brighton Kemptown. I used to work for the TSSA, where I ran a campaign with ASLEF and the RMT to stop the public private partnership on London Underground and Take Back the Track – the successful campaign to return Railtrack to public ownership. I’ve also worked for the London Fire Brigade and in the voluntary sector on campaigns to tackle fuel poverty and for healthcare charities including Breakthrough Breast Cancer and Diabetes UK.

I haven’t been to university, worked for a think tank, or an MP, or been a special adviser – I come from outside the Westminster bubble. And the reason that is relevant is because my views about the railways are based on real life. I travelled every day by train to work from the age of 18 so I have been ‘a long suffering commuter’. High fares, delays, breakdowns, leaves on the line, the wrong kind of snow – being stranded mid-journey or standing for the entire journey squashed into a carriage like a sardine – it is often said that we treat cattle better than commuters. You only have look at Twitter during the rush hour to witness the daily horrors and stress endured by passengers.

PUBLIC OWNERSHIP IS RIGHT
I have spoken to hundreds of people about whether they feel the railways would be better off in public ownership – and the question usually meets with a resounding ‘yes’. Why? Because people don’t believe the excuses given by the private sector, they don’t understand how fares can go up so often, and by so much, but they still can’t get a seat, and trains are still delayed and cancelled.

Opinion polls show there is huge support from the public, regardless of their political beliefs, for bringing rail franchises back under public ownership as they expire – even 60% of Tories are in favour of doing it (60% of Tories are in favour, 30% against; for Labour the figures are 71% in favour and only 8% against).

I did an interview about stealth fare rises on the Brighton to London line – hiked up by a massive £664 a year with our off-peak fare.

Nancy with Labour leader Ed Miliband and out and about campaigning on the streets of Brighton Kemptown

going up from £16.40 to a whopping £28.50 – and the journalist, who was getting some background before my interview said, ‘But tell me, really, where does all that money go?’

No wonder people feel cheated – instead of profits being re-invested in the railway they are going into the pockets of shareholders. But it’s worse than that – all this is being subsidised by the government – it’s taxpayers’ money, our money – to the tune of £4 billion a year.

BETTER THAN BRITISH RAIL
What people in Brighton say to me is they don’t understand how train companies can walk away with £300 million profits every year while they struggle with rising prices and stagnating wages. I believe in a policy to reduce rail fares by bringing the railway franchises back into public ownership, as each contract expires, so that profits are instead used to offset fare rises and invested in the network. Then it would help people out who are struggling with the cost of living.

This policy would fit in perfectly with Labour’s wider offer to put money back in people’s pockets and it wouldn’t cost us.

We have to be robust about the fact that we are not asking for a return to British Rail, but also remind people that many of BR’s problems, and reputation, came from a lack of investment. We’ve seen from the East Coast main line that the public sector can run an excellent railway – they returned more than £1 billion over five years to the taxpayer.

SCANDAL OF THE ROSCOS
The taxpayer now invests £4 billion every year in the network and that would continue whatever the ownership model. We would need to combine the benefits of a single system – like simpler ticketing and fairer fares – and today’s levels of investment. And return that vital extra £300 million to taxpayers that we so desperately need right now. Because £70 million means 1% off fares. A good service and affordable fares, that’s what passengers want – and that’s what I think they deserve.

I also want to see an end to the scandal of the rolling stock companies cashing in with vast profits when leasing trains to train operators. This increases the cost of running passenger services and means even more taxpayer subsidy.

If I get elected as the MP for Brighton Kemptown, my job will be to represent people and to campaign to get the best possible deal for them to improve their lives.

That’s why I put my name to a letter in The Observer in May last year asking Ed Miliband to return the railways to public ownership as one of our key policies. It’s why I went on the Radio 4 Today programme and it’s why it will be a priority if I am elected to Parliament.

It’s a better use of taxpayers’ money. It will mean a fairer deal for passengers. And it is a vote winner!

Nancy Platts was born and brought up in Bexley, south-east London, but now lives in Brighton. She has worked for the London Fire Brigade, the TSSA, and the Greater London Authority, as well as charities such as the Daycare Trust, Age Concern, the National Childbirth Trust, Breakthrough Breast Cancer and the Child Poverty Action Group. She stood against Caroline Lucas in Brighton Pavilion in 2010, losing to the Greens by 1,252 votes.
Please vote – and think before you make your mark

TOSH MCDONALD, ASLEF’S president, looks at the choice facing voters in the polling booths on 7 May

His is the most important election of my lifetime and we are being bombarded with opinion, propaganda and promises from commentators, all of whom have a vested interest for one party or the other (and the majority support the Tories); from politicians promising the earth; and from comedians, some telling us not to bother voting as ‘they’re all the same.’

In recent years politicians – of all parties – have left a lot to be desired and helped create a distrust of mainstream politics. But make no mistake, the section of society hurt most by a low turnout is our class (although we told that class is no longer an issue in Britain).

I also have an interest – and I don’t pretend otherwise. I am proud to be an active member of the Labour Party and proud that our great union is affiliated under rule, and remained so even during the New Labour years when it became very difficult to support some of the things that Progress, and the Millionaire Tendency, introduced. But the Labour Party today is a different animal to what it was the last time it was in.

The ASLEF JOURNAL

What I want to do is cut through the sweet talk and bullshit being rammed down our throats and examine the real choices facing us in a traditional class conscious way from the once powerful industrial heartlands of the north – with two aims. The first is to encourage you to get out and vote – make sure you are still registered, check by looking online or ringing your local office – and the second is, hopefully, to convince you to vote for our party – Labour.

The CONSERVATIVE PARTY does a fantastic job representing their class – the richest 1% of society – and transnational big business. This is the party that has given the successful publicly-owned East Coast back to the privateers even though it put £1 billion back into public coffers. A party that has seen the majority of our members now working for German, Dutch, French or American companies so our taxes subsidise, at best, taxpayers in other countries or, at worst, foreign-owned big business. How can we possibly support a party which appoints a scab as Secretary of State for Transport? A man who has grovelled and crept his way up through the ranks of the Tories as a traitor to his fellow miners, helping them destroy the industry in which he once worked?

The LIBERAL DEMOCRATS. It would be a special kind of blinkered fool who could still support this party of broken promises. They promised to vote against tuition fees but then introduced them as lackeys of their Tory masters. They cut millions of jobs in the public sector, along with pay freezes and robbing pension schemes, all for a few places around the cabinet table and a couple of chauffeur-driven limousines.

On the face of it the GREENS look quite attractive – especially when the only Green MP has introduced a bill to renationalise the railways. But you don’t have to scratch the surface very far to see the danger these ideologues pose for this nation. I have had the misfortune to share a platform with influential members of the Green Party and I thought things were looking up when one of them introduced herself as an eco socialist. But the policies she espoused were more national socialist than eco socialist. Don’t get me wrong; I want to see a reduction in carbon emissions, and believe it’s madness to have diesel trains running under overhead wires because small parts of a journey are not electrified. But the mad obsession with the elimination of all use of fossil fuels has more in common with the Nazis’ final solution than any socialist policy.

The Greens don’t understand what the fight in 1984-85 was all about. It was never about money, it was about saving the industry, and the communities. To happily close industries and communities just to stop coal being burnt – even though there are hundreds of years of the black stuff in Britain, and the carbon capture technology to make coal clean – is a massive waste of resources. The Greens aren’t eco socialists, they’re eco fascists.

UKIP are the worst of the Tories rolled into a small band of bigots proud to keep ‘the flame of Thatcherism alive’. Their policies – to the right of the Conservatives – would devastate the NHS, public services and welfare. They say ‘they’re not racist but spout blatantly racist remarks until, when caught on camera, they are disowned by the banker (and that’s not rhyming slang) their leader Mr Toad. They say trade unions are an unnecessary burden on business; yet we have had people pushing these extremists on union forums!

I have listened to Alex Salmond say the SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY would support a Labour government to keep the Tories out. What nonsense! This is the party, in government in Scotland, which, within two weeks of losing the referendum on independence gave away ScotRail to the Dutch state railway with undue haste and then did away with the BTP, merging it into Police Scotland to fiddle the numbers. Basically, there’s no difference between an English capitalist and a Scottish capitalist. Tories with kilts on!

I have stood on platforms with TUSC campaigners and find them to be good socialists and trade unionists. But they aren’t going to be elected. I’m reminded of my good friend and comrade Mick Rix, when he stood for Arthur Scargill’s Socialist Labour Party (the Last Refuge of the Damned) in Leeds and was beaten by not just the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat candidates but even by Ronnie the Rhino. A vote, however well intentioned, for any party other than Labour is a vote to keep David Cameron and George Osborne in Downing Street. So please get out and vote – and please think very carefully before you vote.
Fear and loathing: on the campaign trail May 2015

The general election on 7 May is, arguably, the most important since 1945. Three ASLEF members are standing for Labour. With a nod in the direction of Hunter Thompson’s gonzo classic about the battles between George McGovern, Hubert Humphrey and George Wallace for the right to run against Richard Nixon KEITH RICHMOND reports from the election campaign frontline

He perils and pitfalls facing candidates on the campaign trail were summed up rather dryly by Andy Botham after he put up a meadow board in Ashbourne on the edge of the Peak District national park. Andy, 48, a train driver for 25 years, is standing against Tory Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin in Derbyshire Dales.

‘It was massive, this meadow board, and there were four of us putting it up in what is a Tory heartland. Before we started I asked if we’d got permission and was told yes. So up it went. When I drove by next day someone had spray painted “Don’t” before “vote Labour” so I stopped and painted over “Don’t.” But then, later, when I got home I got a call from the farmer whose field it was in. “You’ll have to take it down, Andy,” he said. “We’ve been getting hate calls and people threatening not to do business with us because they hate Labour.”

The East Midlands Trains driver – described by Kevin Maguire of the Daily Mirror as a ‘top organiser’, Andy – can laugh about it now, although it wasn’t so funny at the time, but then Andy has been around the block a few times, thinks the glass is half full, not half empty, and has a good sense of humour.

He’s a local boy, born and brought up in Matlock, in the heart of the constituency, not a Conservative carpetbagger – apart from ten years ‘down south’ working freight trains out of Redhill he’s spent his life in the town – and he knows about transport from the driver’s cab at the front of a train, not by ‘driving a desk.’

‘Patrick McLoughlin must be worried because he’s been out on the streets here – people say it’s the first time they’ve seen him in 25 years – but he’s just his usual arrogant self. We shook hands at a hustings in Wirksworth. It was a firm handshake at the beginning – and a very limp handshake at the end.

Andy has had more than 3,000 individual conversations with constituents – 60 a day for 50 days – as well as speaking at public meetings. ‘Listening is the key. Stand and listen, don’t interrupt. Give people a chance to get it off their chests.’ There is an old adage that all politics, in the end, is local. And while a general election is different from a by-election, county, district or parish council election, because voters are electing a government, Andy knows that it’s often a local issue that matters most. ‘If someone is out of work, then employment is the issue; if someone in their family has cancer, it’s the nHS; if they have kids, it’s education.’

He’s put himself about – he even has his face plastered across the back of ten double decker leaflet to every home, so we’ve adopted a different strategy, setting up street stalls.

The count, in South West Surrey, is at the Edge, a leisure centre in Haslemere. Howard Kaye, 52, a train driver all his working life, and now a member of our executive committee, is standing against Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt, and has told him: ‘Jeremy, I’m putting a bottle of champagne on ice. Win or lose – but, frankly, I’m expecting a Portillo moment – when the result is announced between 4am and 5am on Friday morning, let’s shake hands and enjoy a glass of bubbly together.’ Hunt was livid. Partly because he is very rich and rather grand, but mostly because he doesn’t have a sense of humour.

It’s a tough nut to crack – in 2010, the Conservatives got 33,605 votes, the Lib Dems 17,287, and Labour 3,419 – and Howard is realistic. ‘Of course I’d like to win, but the definition of success here would be getting our share of the vote (6% last time) into double figures. But it’s important Labour puts up a plausible candidate in every constituency to give everybody, everywhere, a chance to vote for the party, because the aggregate vote, across the country, will legitimise Ed Miliband if he falls just short of an overall majority in Parliament.’

Howard has had lots of support from his family, colleagues in ASLEF, and local Labour Party members. ‘I really appreciate all the help I’ve had from comrades in ASLEF and local Labour activists. We don’t have the resources to hand deliver an introductory
Positive Vibe

TOM CORBIN has been surprised – and delighted – by reaction to his red tie, and red rosette, out on the doorstep in Wiltshire. Tom, 38, a train driver for 13 years, is standing against John Glen, the sitting Conservative, in Salisbury. In 2010, the Tories got 23,859 votes; the Lib Dems 17,893; and Labour 3,690.

‘It’s going well,’ he says. ‘People have been really receptive, and very positive, to what we have to say. Lots and lots of Lib Dem voters, people who voted Liberal Democrat last time, say they won’t vote Lib Dem again and are looking at Labour. And a lot of Conservative voters, too, have told me they are thinking of voting Labour for the first time.

‘Because they are fed up with David Cameron, they are fed up with austerity, and they are fed up with the Conservative cuts. They don’t want another five years of the same sort of thing. And, here in Salisbury, a lot of people are tired of the way the Tories run things. They want a change.’

Tom knows he has a mountain to climb but, in 2013, he was elected, against the odds, with his wife Caroline, onto the city council in Salisbury where he has lived and worked for 37 years.

‘We were elected because here, in Conservative-controlled Salisbury, people have been poorly represented by councillors who are out of touch with the needs of local residents. Salisbury still has a Tory majority – the county is very rural, and traditionally a Conservative area, but the city has strong pockets of Labour – but Labour has come from very poor election results in 2009 to a strong second voice for the city in 2013 and we are getting a very strong positive vibe here.

‘It’s been a privilege to be a councillor, and it would be an enormous honour to go to Westminster, and although it’s been quite a challenge the last few months have been the proudest period of my life. I’ve got a proven track record of representing people and this is an opportunity to come back at John Glen.

‘There’s a two-way choice at the general election, not just in Salisbury but in the country. Between a continuing Conservative government and the Labour alternative. That will, I think, concentrate people’s minds in the voting booth.’

If David Cameron gets back into Downing Street we are guaranteed another attack on our right to take action to protect our members; more attacks on pensions; and massive cuts in the public services on which our families rely.’ – FINN BRENNAN, District 8 Organiser

I Hear You Knocking but You Can’t Come in

The ASLEF crew hits Haslemere in South West Surrey to help EC member Howard Kaye

We met DOS Nigel Gibson, EC1 Marz Colombini and RMS national secretary Tony West at Waterloo before meeting Brother Howard Kaye at Haslemere in Surrey. We set up a street stall to hand out leaflets and engage with voters although we were not very well received as this is a Tory heartland. But we did find some friendly Labour faces during the day!

KHALID NASIM RANA, Gidea Park, LDC
Protecting the values in which we believe

TONY WEST says it’s time for a change on 7 May

THE most damning indictment of five years of coalition government is the level of poverty that exists in Britain, one of the richest countries in the world. Poverty is not defined simply by low income but by means of access to decent housing, community amenities and social resources. Someone who lacks these is, in a wider social sense, living in poverty.

There are 11 million pensioners in Britain and 3 million of them live below the poverty line. In a country with an ageing population the prospect of an increase in pensioner poverty is on the horizon. The image of pensioners sitting on the deck of a cruise ship with their grey hair glinting in the sunlight does not reflect the reality of what the vast majority of us are suffering.

This appalling state of affairs looks set to continue when you listen to George Osborne and his cuts, with £15 billion coming from pensions against market forces. ‘I’m voting Labour because I believe they will stop the privatisation of the NHS, and invest in the education system to benefit our children.’ – Dave Calfe, EC vice-president

missing every year through tax avoidance. In the last five years they have created the worst division between the haves and the have-nots for generations. I thought the Thatcher years were bad, but the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition has surpassed them for greed, selfishness and lack of social integrity.

As someone who has been in the Labour Party and labour movement all my working life, and retirement, that’s where my cross will stay. They are far from perfect, as history has shown, but the alternatives offer only deeper divisions and further damage to our moral and social responsibility to each other.

Whoever wins the trade union movement, with over 6 million members, is going to have to become more active and politically wiser. We have to protect the values in which we believe and to which we have aspired over our long history.

As a proud member of ASLEF I know we will, as active or retired members, play our part achieving our aims and aspirations. And best wishes to the three members of ASLEF – Andy Botham, Tom Corbin and Howard Kaye – who are standing as parliamentary candidates in this election.

THERE ARE THE 41 CANDIDATES ASLEF IS SUPPORTING IN THIS GENERAL ELECTION:

Dave Anderson, Blaydon; Richard Baker, Aberdeen North; Polly Billington, Thurrock; Caitlin Bisknell, High Peak; Andy Botham, Derbyshire Dales; Richard Burgon, East Leeds; Katy Clark, North Ayrshire & Arran; Tom Corbin, Salisbury; Neil Coyle, Old Southwark and Bermondsey; John Cryer, Leyton & Wanstead; Ian Davidson, Glasgow South West; Rowenna Davis, Southampton Itchen; Peter Dowd, Bootle; David Drew, Stroud; Lisa Forbes, Peterborough; Sheila Gilmore, Edinburgh East; Margaret Greenwood, Wirral West; Ricky Henderson, Edinburgh South West; Julie Hilling, Bolton West; Kelvin Hopkins, Luton North; Rupa Huq, Ealing Central & Acton; Cathy Jamieson, Kilmarnock & Loudoun; Sarah Jones, Croydon Central; Howard Kaye, South West Surrey; Stephen Kinnock, Aberavon; Ian Lavery, Wansbeck; Clive Lewis, Norwich South; Ian Mearns, Gateshead; Graeme Morris, Livingston; Grahame Morris, Easington; Matt Pennycook Greenwich & Woolwich; Nancy Platts, Brighton Kemptown & Peacehaven; Luke Pollard, Plymouth Sutton and Devonport; Jim Sheridan, Paisley & Renfrewshire North; Ruth Smeeth, Stoke-on-Trent North & Kidsgrove; Cat Smith, Lancaster & Fleetwood; Jo Stevens, Cardiff Central; Suzy Stride, Harlow; Karen Whitefield, Falkirk; Rosie Winterton, Doncaster Central; Kenny Young, Midlothian East.

AND THESE ARE THE 30 CANDIDATES TO WHOM WE HAVE MADE A DONATION:

Dave Anderson, Blaydon; Richard Baker, Aberdeen North; Polly Billington, Thurrock; Caitlin Bisknell, High Peak; Richard Burgon, East Leeds; Katy Clark, North Ayrshire & Arran; Neil Coyle, Old Southwark and Bermondsey; John Cryer, Leyton & Wanstead; Ian Davidson, Glasgow South West; Rowenna Davis, Southampton Itchen; David Drew, Stroud; Lisa Forbes, Peterborough; Sheila Gilmore, Edinburgh East; Margaret Greenwood, Wirral West; Ricky Henderson, Edinburgh South West; Kelvin Hopkins, Luton North; Cathy Jamieson, Kilmarnock & Loudoun; Sarah Jones, Croydon Central; Ian Lavery, Wansbeck; Clive Lewis, Norwich South; Graeme Morris, Livingston; Ian Mearns, Gateshead; Nancy Platts, Brighton Kemptown & Peacehaven; Luke Pollard, Plymouth Sutton and Devonport; Jim Sheridan, Paisley & Renfrewshire North; Cat Smith, Lancaster & Fleetwood; Suzy Stride, Harlow; Karen Whitefield, Falkirk; Rosie Winterton, Doncaster Central; Kenny Young, Midlothian East.

‘I’m voting Labour because I want a fairer society and a government that will keep our NHS safe, support our communities and put people before profit margins.’
– Marz Colombini, EC member District 1

‘I’m voting Labour to save the NHS, end austerity, and prevent the Conservatives destroying the public sector. I don’t want the Tories to sell off Britain while looking after their rich friends on tax avoidance; splitting the education system to benefit affluent areas; and risking our pensions against market forces.’
– Colin Smith, District 3 Organiser
The Chesterfield Job

KEITH RICHMOND talks to Mick Yates about Minis, Health Shield, a vintage ASLEF lithograph and life as a plough jockey

A FEW weeks ago Andy Botham, who’s standing against Patrick McLoughlin in Derbyshire Dales, organised a fundraiser in Matlock. One of the items up for auction was a vintage ASLEF poster signed by the afternoon’s speakers, including Tom Watson, Chris Williamson, Ian Lavery and Dennis Skinner. Kevin Maguire, who outshone Jeffrey Archer as event auctioneer, pushed the bidding up to £180 for the hand-coloured lithograph.

‘I handed over a cheque for £200,’ says Mick Yates, a train driver for 37 years, who took it home. ‘Before the auction I thought I’d like to have that hanging on my wall at home, and I was prepared to go to £200, so I lobbed in the extra twenty. Every little helps to get rid of the Tories!’

Mick, 53, was born in Chesterfield and brought up a few miles away at Shirebrook. ‘My mum worked in the hosery mills and my dad – christened George but known as Tim – was a train driver at Langworth and Shirebrook who got his 50 year medal. I had no idea what I wanted to do when I left school. It was the colliery or engineering around our way and I didn’t want to do either. Dad said, “What about the railway? I can’t get you a job but I can get you an interview.”’ I joined the union straight away. I had to, it was a closed shop! It was ASLEF or the NUR and dad said ASLEF.

PLOUGH JOCKEYS

‘I’ve been on freight all my life – British Rail, EWS, DBS – plough jockeys, we’re called, because the trains are slow. I’ve had the chance to drive passengers, but would sooner drive freight. There’s not so much pressure if there are delays, and more down time waiting at power stations, for discharge or load. I like going to work and I still enjoy driving.’

Minis as well as trains. ‘My first vehicle, in 1980, was a green Mini van. I owned it for 10 years. Spent all my money on it. Boy racer, bucket seats, alloy wheels, I worshipped that car!” Then I had kids, but couldn’t bear to sell it, so I dismantled it – I still own the registration, RRR 280F – and sold it for parts.

‘I’ve had four Minis. Got three now. They’re great fun to drive – remember The Italian Job. My lad came up to his 17th birthday, and I said I’d help him get a car, what do you want, and he said a Mini. Five years ago I joined the Robin Hood Mini Club, which was moribund, just four members, now it’s 70, all based in this area, all passionate about Minis. It’s not about making money, it’s about making friends.’

Jeremy Hunt, the Health Secretary, thinks health care is something out of which you should be able to make money. But Mick disagrees. For 30 years he’s been involved with Health Shield, a friendly society – it was the Transport Hospital Fund – started by railwaymen in Crewe. ‘It was a cashback scheme, you pay in, get money back, a way of putting money aside for medical costs, sold on the railway. He got involved as a result of the union, first as a rep – each depot had a rep – and then in 1989 was elected to the committee of management. Now he’s a non-executive director.

THEY CALLED ME RED MICK

‘Health Shield offers the best health cash back available. It’s a co-operative, so it’s not about profit, or surpluses, but serving the people. All the money goes back in. It’s growing organically, not through mergers, and it’s successful because it delivers for its 200,000 members. It’s the total opposite of what I do as a train driver, when my sole thought is driving that vehicle from A to B to C in the best possible way. With health care, it’s about thinking strategically, not immediately, looking a long way down the line. I want to keep the co-operative mentality, the soul of the movement, alive – so we don’t forget where we came from.’

Mick has never forgotten where he came from. During the miners’ strike Shirebrook continued to work. ‘The whole depot worked except for the LDC. Management booked the LDC into meetings every day, so they couldn’t be asked to move coal, so they couldn’t refuse. I was a second man, with Norman ‘Snowy’ Davies, and they were asking us to move coal from Thoresby and Ollerton. I said, “I’m not happy, the union’s instructed us not to move coal and we’re moving coal,” and Norman, who was a Tory – I liked his character, but not his politics – turned round and said, “Do what you think is right, not what everyone else is doing."

STAND AND BE DAMNED

It was through the union that he got involved in the Labour Party. ‘Shirebrook had a really good branch secretary, Tink Taylor, who inspired me. Mick joined the party in 1982 and was a Labour councillor on Shirebrook council from 1984 to 1996. He gave it up – he had children, was doing Health Shield, ‘and there are only 24 hours in a day’ – but now, with more times, has started going to meetings again. He got a lot out of a recent ASLEF political course at Stoke Rochford. ’Mark and Ed give you the skills – no preaching – to do the job. You learn how the system works.’ He’s set his sights on a seat on the district or county council and, in the future, wants to stand to become an MP or MEP. ‘Stand and be damned! Because the only way to change things is not to moan, but to get involved.’

Mick in front of the famous twisted spire of the parish church of St Mary and All Saints, Chesterfield; with his treasured Mini; and Michael Caine in The Italian Job.
Victoria’s the queen of legal eagle day

ANDY YATES, Cambridge branch and Abellio Greater Anglia LLR, reports on a legal training day for District 5 reps

EC5 Howard Kaye and 27 local level, company council and branch representatives from train and freight operating companies – AGA, East Coast, GTR, EMT, DB Schenker and Freightliner Intermodal – across District 5 attended a very informative day of legislative training organised by DOS Nigel Gibson. Gratitude is extended to the GM8 for use of their facilities in Stephenson Street, London, and especially to Victoria Phillips, a senior partner of Thompsons solicitors, for delivering the training so eloquently and for providing an abundance of supplementary hand out information. The training covered discrimination law, disciplinary and grievance, the Equalities Act, flexible working, ACAS approved codes of practice, case studies and checklisting, as well as the dreaded group activities and exercises to help embed the knowledge. While being encouraged by positive developments in employment legislation, this was tempered when hearing of the menacing erosion of other areas of employment protection by the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition, including employment tribunals, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme and health and safety at work. Discussion on a wide range of topics and experiences, such as positive discrimination and flexible working, added to a constructive and enjoyable day, for which we thank Nigel. Reps said they felt in an even better position to represent members as a result of this invaluable training.

ASLEF reps listen up to become legal eagles

Special evening

Grove Park were pleased to welcome GS Mick Whelan and EC1 Marz Colombini to our branch meeting and retirement presentation evening for Brothers Simon Hill and Carl Petersen. Mick gave members a thoroughly entertaining update, including taking questions on a variety of subjects, before handing over to Marz to complete the ASLEF News. Mick then presented Simon and Carl with their retirement certificates (and Simon with his 35 year badge). Simon, after many years as our much respected local rep, has decided to retire early, like Carl, to enable them both to attend many Retired Members’ functions! Mick congratulated them on their outstanding service, before the celebrations continued in the time honoured manner. Huge thanks to Mick and Marz for making it a special evening.

Ray Garland, branch secretary

DIDCOT – SATURDAY 2 MAY
RMS reunion from 12.00 at Didcot Railway Club. All past and present members and associates welcome.

BRIGHTON & SUSSEX – TUESDAY 5 MAY
Reunion for all retired and working members with a connection to Brighton or any of the Sussex motive power depots (Barnham, Bognor, Eastbourne, Hastings, Horsham, Littlehampton, Newhaven, Ore, Seaford, Three Bridges, Tunbridge Wells West and West Worthing) from 14.00 at the Brighton Railway Club, Belmont, off Dyke Road. Details from Paul Edwards (07402 478278) or Paul Horan (07868 757492).

OLD OAK COMMON – TUESDAY 9 JUNE
Anyone with any OOC history is welcome at the retirement section’s annual reunion from 13.00 to 16.00 at the AGV Club, Alwyn Gardens, Acton, London W3.

LEICESTER – SATURDAY 13 JUNE
Annual reunion at the Barley Mow, Granby Street, Leicester from 12.00. All retired and active members welcome. Contact Ray Worthy (07804 029149) for details.

TONBRIDGE – THURSDAY 2 JULY
Southeastern retired and working members’ reunion from 11.00 at the Royal British Legion, 26 Priory Road, Tonbridge.

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

Upcoming events

Jamie Glackin, chair of the Scottish Labour Party, sent us these two pictures. One (above) shows train drivers and firemen at Motherwell (including his great-grandfather Patrick, who had two brothers, Billy and Jimmy, who were also loco drivers) on strike in 1921; the other (top) ASLEF men (including his grandfather Edward) out on strike in 1953. Jamie is keen to find out more about Patrick and Eddie. If you have any information, please let us know.
Sign of the times

MIKE TANSEY reports on an enterprising couple who can help us help those who can’t hear

Barry and Mary Higgins, a husband and wife team from North Yorkshire, began teaching sign language courses 13 years ago. Both are rail enthusiasts and love travelling by train. Barry was born partially deaf, while Mary was just 18 months old when she fell off a stool, severely damaging her right ear, which resulted in 95% loss of hearing. Barry jokes that he doesn’t believe this because ‘Every morning I wake up she tells me I was snoring all night!’

For nine years the couple have been travelling across the country voluntarily teaching sign language to rail staff. ‘We like meeting people,’ says Barry. ‘Often, people don’t know how to cope with deaf people and that’s how the course can help.’ Barry and Mary understand the difficulties deaf and partial hearing people face when travelling. Barry’s jovial nature is testament to his bright and cheerful personality, which comes across in the courses he and Mary teach.

‘In one day, we teach 210 words in British sign language, all related to the railway. Numbers are essential to learn and so are the signs for tickets, ID cards, family cards, signal failure and late trains.’ The way Barry and Mary run the course is by relying on whispering and lip reading, ‘We want to put the students in deaf people’s shoes so they can get an idea how much of an impact hearing impairments have.’

Problems with a train’s speaker or indicator, or the change of a route or arrival time, can create huge upsets for deaf people. Not only might they miss their connection and have to fork out more money for a new fare, but their distress will also create problems for railway staff. That’s why being deaf-aware is so important for all of us, ‘Learning sign language helps increase staff morale because they learn something new and know how to cope better with situations involving deaf or partially hearing passengers.’

Joe McLaughlin, an ASLEF union learning rep at CrossCountry, has worked with Barry and Mary delivering sign language courses at Leeds station. ‘It’s fantastic to meet people who give up their free time to teach a valuable subject,’ says Joe. ‘And they deliver the class in such an enjoyable way.’

Standing out from the rest

It was a great privilege to have the GS attend Derby branch. Mick gave us an in-depth report on the upcoming general election, and the importance of returning a Labour government, offered his support to branch member Andy Botham who is the Labour candidate in Derbyshire Dales, and emphasised the importance of ASLEF members getting involved in local and national politics. Mick also spoke about the latest railway developments, including the debacle of franchise extensions, the problems with the Serco sleeper franchise, and protecting ASLEF members involved.

Presentations were made to Bro S Reader, LLC rep EMT, for long and loyal service; tankards were presented to Bro S Barnes and a medallion to Bro S Usher for his past service on the EC.

Having the GS attend our branch meeting and take questions from the floor shows how unique our trade union is.

What other union would afford its members the right to challenge the leadership to open and frank debate in the branch room? This is what makes our trade union stand out from all the rest -- and long may it continue.

Eamonn Tague, branch secretary

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

WHISTLING OF LOCOMOTIVES
Zeppelin raids on Britain, which began in January 1915, featured in the Journal 100 years ago. JRJ, in his column, writes: ‘Last night I was rudely awakened by a Zeppelin scare, and the calling out of special constables, and the clatter of men running to answer the call of duty. And above it all I could hear the whistling of locomotives and the rattle of trains, the one sound which never ceases in this country night and day, in times of safety or of peril.’

WAR BONUS FOR RAILWAYMEN
Nottingham branch reports this response to a pay deal: ‘Mr Gable gave a very able and interesting address dealing with the recent meeting of the joint executives and the general managers committee, which resulted in practically every railwayman in Great Britain receiving an increase of 2s or 3s per week in the shape of a war bonus.’

But Doncaster branch reports passing this resolution for the executive committee: ‘This branch expresses its dissatisfaction at the settlement resulting in the paltry war bonus of 2s and 3s in lieu of an increase in wages more commensurate with the increased cost of living.’

HEAD OF THE POLL
The Journal reports that the Labour Party, formed by the trade unions just a few years before, was enjoying some early success. ‘The Labour Party in Ardsley has done well again at the urban district council elections, and its candidates headed the poll in each ward in the recent election. Brother Barton Wild was re-elected head of the poll in the east ward, and Brother WH Heald secured the other seat at his first attempt.’

OPENING OUR ENTERTAINMENT
Mirfield branch reports: ‘I hasten to thank all the ladies for their valuable assistance, both the cutting up and at the tables, hard work and no return other than the knowledge they are assisting in a good cause. Mr Moore, at the opening of our entertainment, told the ladies it was up to them to see that their husbands joined the orphan fund, as it was they who benefited if the breadwinner was taken away. We had a pleasant and profitable evening together.’
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Joe Biggs
General Secretary
MIKE SELWOOD A CORNISH PASTY ON THE LATE ST IVES JOB

I first met Mike Selwood when he transferred to Penzance in 1987. He was a one off, an eccentric, and interesting. Whatever, he was a joy to work with. You knew you were in for a good day when he was your driver. A quick swim in the sea or an ice cream on the early St Ives job or a pasty on the late St Ives. Get him on the Falmouth and it was a trip to the local balti establishment.

As well as driving trains he could turn his hand to just about anything; he was a self-taught craftsman, particularly with wood. Numerous small items such as walking sticks and chessboards helped Mike graduate to larger projects. He enjoyed fishing and annual trips to the Scilly Isles which invariably included shore and boat fishing. He also loved playing darts; reaching a high standard, for the county in competition, and won numerous trophies. He played all the top players, most memorably, a game in 2001 against three times world champion John Lowe. Mike only narrowly missed out on winning after being the first to a double!

Naturally, darts and real ale go together, and they did for Mike; he loved a proper pint. After he lost Tish, his wife of 38 years, to cancer, eight years ago he decided to move away. To Bulgaria, in fact, though he returned regularly to catch up with family and friends. The Cornish contingent at Mike's funeral in Folkestone – a 700 mile round trip – was proof of his popularity.

Derek Winn, Penzance branch reporter

DOUG GARNHAM ALWAYS CRACKING JOKES

On a very cold February morning in Leatherhead we said a far too early farewell to a great friend and work colleague. Doug Garnham passed away just a few days short of his 57th birthday. He came onto the railway quite late in life, in the mid-1990s, after numerous other jobs, including the fire service and police force. He began his driving career at Farnham in 2006 and then, shortly afterwards, was diagnosed with asbestosis. Doug was a very friendly and likeable bloke, always cracking jokes with a cheery grin, and was upbeat to the end. He was very interested in history, especially the Second World War, and local history around Epsom and Leatherhead.

Doug was a passionate Chelsea fan and a group of his railway mates went with him on a tour of Stamford Bridge a short while back and had a fantastic time. Doug had three grown up children – Niki, Amy and Ben – who paid splendid tribute to their dad at his funeral. A drink was raised at the Star on Kingston Road, Leatherhead, to a truly wonderful bloke.

Steve West, Farnham

CLIVE CHIPPINGTON LIKED PRACTICAL JOKES

On 12 March I attended the funeral of Clive Chippington, affectionately known as Chippy. A very well attended occasion, seating for 100 people and the walls lined two to three deep. Chippy was a really great guy, who liked practical jokes, and also had a competitive nature. He was a very good darts player, and in later life took up golf at which he also excelled. Chippy, like most railwaymen, liked a drink and the company of his friends. He moved about a bit in his railway career, first at Parkeston, then Stratford for his driver’s check. When Stratford split he went to Colchester, finishing up at GB Railfreight.

Dave Pizzie, RMS

TERRY KENNA FIRM BUT FAIR

Terry Kenna developed kidney problems in September and, sadly, died a short while afterwards. He started at Gorton in 1951, moved to Monument Lane, and then filled a vacancy at Kingsbury in 1964 until the end of steam workings in March 1967, when he moved to Saltley. In 1968 Terry moved to Birmingham New Street where he went into management. He returned to Saltley in the 1980s as a manager, and many drivers recall what a good manager he was, firm but fair. Although he lived in March for his final years, Terry managed to attend every meeting of the British Transport Pensioners’ Federation held at the Tyeseye BRSA club on the first Tuesday of every month. Terry leaves a wife. They did not have any children and, as retired Saltley driver Don Magson says, Terry used to call his staff ‘his children.’ With this in mind, in his will he left £2,000 to Saltley welfare, £2,000 to New St welfare and £500 to the Eccentrics. Terry was a one off, a real character, famous for his ‘buncha ****’ saying when things went wrong, and will be sadly missed. Our thoughts are with the family he left behind. R.I.P. Mick.

Alan Dickson, chair, Folkestone

INTERNATIONAL

MICHAEL LILLY IT’S JUST A BUNCHA ****

It is with great sadness that I have to report the passing of Michael Lilly. Mick was a driver at Slade Green before moving to Dollands Moor and then to his last depot at Hoo Junction. Mick started his railway career in 1974 and was full of character, famous for his ‘buncha ****’ saying when things went wrong, and will be sadly missed. Our thoughts are with the family he left behind. R.I.P. Mick.

Dave Pizzie, RMS

PETER STREET A BIG MAN

Peter Street (1953-2014) had worked on the railway since 1975.

He started at Streatham Hill as a guard and moved to West Croydon in 1982 until it closed. He then moved to Selhurst where, in 1988, he qualified as a driver. Peter passed away in December last year after a long battle with cancer. A big man who, as his colleagues would often say, could moan for England; but he had a heart of gold and will be missed by us all.

John Ward, Selhurst

ROGER MORGAN RAILWAY YARNS

Former railwayman Roger Morgan passed away in his sleep in March. Roger started on the railway at Banbury steam shed as a cleaner before progressing to fireman, and second man. When he was made redundant, when Banbury was partly closed, Roger went into the building trade – he was a very good carpenter – but his interest in the railways continued. He became a member of the Banbury Railway Society, the Buckinghamshire Railway Centre, and the Banbury & District Model Railway Club. We will all miss his yarns about the railway.

Jim Browne, Banbury

OBITUARIES
Rewriting recent history
An interesting letter from Len Worboys (Journal, February). But when you allow someone to rewrite history so recently after the events took place, there will be people who can point out what really happened. Life for a full-time official was clearly different to that endured by drivers on South Eastern. While restructuring led to realistic salaries, older drivers would point out that this agreement took our conditions of service back several decades. After restructuring, the maximum number of weekly rostered hours at Connex South Eastern was 77. Most drivers found it hard to cope, many ending up exhausted. CSE introduced a section in its loss control reports for ‘drivers requesting relief due to fatigue.’ Sickness rates more than doubled, at some depots more than tripled, and the Railway Inspectorate carried out an unprecedented survey which revealed the extent of the problem. SPADs increased (from 36 to 49) in a year, against the national trend, which health & safety reps found was down to changes brought about by restructuring.

Drivers were kept in the dark about the realities of restructuring. Train crew supervisors were under strict instructions not to print and circulate our duties. One company council member said, ‘If drivers knew what they were letting themselves in for, they would have voted against.’ Although we never actually voted for. Out of all those eligible to vote, 49.9% (472 out of 946) voted for the proposals, of course, and the terms – just £68 million to be paid in premiums – look attractive.

Back in 2011 the company declined to take up an option to pay £800 million over three years to keep the franchise. Its reward was a cheaper extension. Now it’s got another, thanks to the government’s desire to stick with the incumbent while the line is electrified. No wonder shares rose 4%. The Shadow Transport Secretary, Michael Dugher, called it a ‘stitch-up’ that ‘makes a mockery of the current franchise model.’ He’s right, up to a point. The system has been shambling since the cock-up on the West Coast when FirstGroup got the gig but Virgin challenged the award. Yet Dugher would do everyone a favour by being clearer about what he means when he says he will put the current franchise system ‘in the bin’ and create a railway that is ‘more publicly controlled.’ He’s not talking nationalisation, that much is known, but wants a public sector operator, or bidder, in some form. We need greater clarity here.

Steve Grant, former District 8 Organiser

Battle for Britain
The battle for Britain on 7 May – the most important general election in which we have ever voted – could well be decided in Scotland where a resurgent Scottish National Party threatens to oust Labour as the party of Scotland. Let’s not stand on the fence; a vote for the SNP is a vote for the Tories. Listen to what the SNP is saying, and once you get over the emotional tug of home rule they are more right-wing than David Cameron’s blue rinse Conservatives. We in Wales face a similar problem with Plaid Cymru. But do not be deceived; make the choice that matters. Vote Labour. We need a United Kingdom with a Labour government in Westminster.

John Boreham, Carmarthen

Nigel’s dog whistle
Well done Karl Davis (Journal, April) for rebutting UKIP’s policies so succinctly. I live in south-east England, an area very much under threat from UKIP and its odious philosophy, where myths are propagated to promote policies only attractive to racists.

John Brooks, RMS

He says, she says, I say
I have just received a flyer through my letterbox. It’s from my would-be Labour Party Member of Parliament. He says if I vote for him he will freeze energy bills until 2017. I say if TTIP comes in and the NHS is privatised he won’t be able to do either. He says if I vote for him there will be tighter controls on immigration. I say that smells of UKIP. He says if I vote for him he
Grand Central and wept

My wife was travelling alone from London to Grimsby on her staff travel card, changing at Doncaster, and I told her she could catch any train as it was about midday on Thursday. From London she caught a Grand Central train and the conductor told her that her staff travel card was not valid on any Grand Central train, but used his discretion and let her go. After hearing this I phoned ATOC and they confirmed this is correct. This letter might warn others who could fall into the same problem. I find it strange that Grand Central trains are outside staff travel facilities, even safeguarded staff. Reg Wroodlidge, ex-Ramsgate

Staff travel facilities

I’m now in my 31st year of railway service. Ten years ago I left ScotRail where, due to seniority, my travel facilities, network and Europe-wide, were protected, and joined Direct Rail Services. My stay with DRS was short, 2 years 4 months, and I moved to Freightliner Heavy Haul. Reading Kevin Lindsay’s report (Journal, April) regarding safeguarding ScotRail staff travel on the sleeper service, which is no longer part of their franchise, prompted me to write. On behalf of all of us who lost all travel facilities after a short spell at DRS, what is ASLEF doing for us? I have a sister-in-law who has just started at ScotRail as a conductor, and she and her family have more travel facilities than me and mine. I also have a friend who has retired from ScotRail and joined DRS. He, too, has retained full travel facilities.

I feel I must speak out, not just for drivers like me, but for others who were not protected and joined after privatisation and have the same facilities as me, ie nil.

Scott Letham, FLHH driver, Dunbar

Thank you, Thompsons

I am writing to thank you for referring my case to Thompson solicitors following my accident in August 2013. It was very traumatic but Thompsons were first class in dealing with my claim and have just reached a satisfactory conclusion. My husband was always (and still is) proud to be a member of ASLEF, with very good reason. Your support over the years is much appreciated. ASLEF is truly a union for its members.

Deirdre Ralph

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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 847057 or jimbr0wne@yahoo.co.uk

COWDEN CRASH commemorative badges, price £5, to mark the 20th anniversary of the accident. Contact Mick Green at users4163@aol.com if you are ex-Norwood train crew.

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

Thank you, Brothers

A big, big thank you to members of Motherwell and Grangemouth branches DRS for their help and support during a difficult time. Especially Bro Ritchie Bamber (Carlisle) and Bro Barry McGrath (Motherwell TMD).

A special thank you to DO Kevin Lindsay (pictured) and Bro Tam McKendrick for their invaluable help, advice and support.

Scott Thomson, Motherwell TMD (DRS)

Deirdre Ralph

Depression and disaster

Following the Germanwings air disaster in the French Alps, has the time come to look at the driver’s ability to isolate the TPWS system? Here are two examples to consider. (1) A driver suffering from severe depression decides to crash a train, isolates the TPWS, passes signals and jumps. Surely it would not be difficult to implement some safeguards? The DsD system is possible, and the common factor is the driver’s ability to isolate the TPWS system?

(2) A terrorist, who has some training and has some training, crash a train, isolates the TPWS, passes signals and precipitates a crash. Surely it would not be difficult to implement some safeguards? The DsD system is possible, and the common factor is the driver’s ability to isolate the TPWS system?

Phil Murray, Birmingham New Street
We can afford to put some geraniums in the planter

On the eve of the most important election since 1945 KEITH RICHMOND looks for answers to the big questions of our time in some newly published books

A VID CAMERON and George Osborne, aided and abetted by Nick Clegg and Danny Alexander, have presided over a debilitating Age of Austerity during the five wasted years of this Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government. There was, they said, no alternative. But austerity, as Caroline Lucas, Green MP for Brighton Pavilion, points out in Honourable Friends? Parliament and the Fight for Change (Portobello, £14.99), is an explicitly ideological, not an evidence-based, or particularly rational, policy programme.

At HMRC, 300 people work in the affluent compliance unit chasing wealthy tax dodgers. At the Department for Work & Pensions, 3,200 chase wrongly paid benefits, only some of which are the result of fraud, and collectively are worth just a fraction of the taxes evaded by the very rich.

‘Books do furnish a room.’ – Anthony Powell, A Dance to the Music of Time

‘This is the sixth richest country in the world,’ argues Bill Bryson, author of Small Island. ‘We can afford to have things. When I first came here this country was much poorer, but much better looked after. Roundabouts had flowers in them and things like that. There is this mania that we can’t afford things, which is not true. If we could afford it then, we can certainly afford it now and, as a society, we can afford to put some geraniums in a planter.’

Lucas and Bryson understand the problems facing these islands, but neither has a practicable plan for what to do about it. The Greens, in particular, and especially their leader Natalie Bennett, know the questions, but not the answers.

Peter Hain, by contrast, spells out exactly what we need to do in his new book Back to the Future of Socialism (Policy Press, £19.99) which, with its echoes of Anthony Crosland, is designed to help the Labour Party regain its soul.

At the heart of Hain’s tract is the Keynesian argument that a country spends, not cuts, its way out of recession – remember the New Deal which dragged America, and the world, out of the Great Depression – and that public sector investment now means lower borrowing in years to come. ‘The right’s shibboleth that Labour governments spend more than they earn,’ he notes, ‘is perfidious propaganda.’

Hain explains that you have to prime the pump if that pump is to deliver.

A point underlined in Hard Times: Inequality, Recession, Aftermath by Tom Clark with Anthony Heath (Yale University Press, £9.99) which examines the fallout – ‘the staggering toll that economic insecurity has taken on individuals, families and communities’ – since the financial crisis of 2008.

In the 1930s the democratically-elected left-wing Republican government in Spain introduced social and economic reforms to improve life for industrial workers and peasant farmers. Conservatives – the rich, the powerful and the Roman Catholic church – were outraged and the army tried to overthrow the government by force.

Thousands of Spaniards rallied to the Republican cause, the coup failed and the country was plunged into a bloody civil war. The Nationalist army, led by General Franco, was backed by Falange irregulars and troops and weapons from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. On the Republican side, volunteers for the International Brigades answered Miró’s call to Aidez L’Espagne.

‘A room without books is like a body without a soul.’ – Marcus Tullius Cicero

A Spanish Civil War Scrapbook edited by Jim Jump (Lawrence & Wishart, £25) is a fascinating collection of newspaper cuttings, made at the time by Elizabeth Bickerstaffe, mother of former NUPE and Unison leader Rodney, which vividly brings to life, as history books sometimes fail to do, the war which paved the way for the Second World War.

If you’re off to Spain, and want to walk in the footsteps of the International Brigades volunteers, pick up a copy of Frontline Madrid: Battlefield Tours of the Spanish Civil War (Signal Books, £9.99) by David Mathieson, a former special adviser to Robin Cook, who writes beautifully, and with insight, and points out the paths less travelled as well as the more famous sites.

Donald Filtzer, in an essay on Soviet privilege in The Oxford Handbook of Communism edited by SA Smith (OUP, £95) suggests that the Soviet Union had the edge on communist China in the quality, and the quantity, of its political jokes. Leonid Brezhnev is desperately trying to impress his mother by showing her his party limousine, his government helicopter, and his three palatial residences. ‘Tell me, mama,’ he pleads, ‘What do you think?’ ‘Well,’ she hesitates. ‘It’s very good, Leonid. But what if the communists come back?’

In his popular Discworld series Terry Pratchett, who died in March at the age of 66, took on capitalists, sexists, religious fanatics and warmongers by making them look ridiculous. Perhaps his best-loved character was Death, an imposing skeleton of a Grim Reaper who rode a white horse called Binky. ‘Don’t think of this as dying,’ says Death. ‘Just think of it as leaving early to avoid the rush.’
Prize Crossword number 109 by Zebedee

Across
3 Unable to go wrong (9)
7 Row of joined houses (7)
8 Even more peculiar (5)
10 Besides (4)
11 Diminish (8)
13 Matt ————, actor (6)
14 Aimless (6)
16 Extremely robust (4, 4)
17 Peter ————, comedy actor (4)
20 Layers of spine cartilage (5)
21 Mends (7)

22 Teach without challenging (9)

Down
1 Fish (5)
2 Insects between grubs and adults (11)
3 Fault (4)
4 First batsman (6)
5 Jut out (8)
6 Confiscation (7)
9 Bulletin board thumbtacks (7, 4)
12 Smokey ————
13 Matt ————, actor (6)
14 Aimless (6)
16 Extremely robust (4, 4)
17 Peter ————, comedy actor (4)
20 Layers of spine cartilage (5)
21 Mends (7)

American Mexican star (8)
13 Periods of ten years (7)
15 Of gruff voice (6)
18 Someone fond of prying (5)
19 Proceeded at a fast pace (4)

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

Solution to prize crossword number 108 which appeared in the April edition of the ASLEF Journal

Across: 1 Transgress 8 Waylaid 9 Paste 10 Rout 11 Detached 13 Mason 14 Dixon 16 Dripping 17 Pair 20 Finch 21 Velling 22 Stonehenge
Down: 1 Tower 2 Any Questions 3 Slav 4 Rudder 5 Sephardi 6 Asphyxiation 7 Deaden 12 Snapshot 13 Modify 15 Uneven 18 Rogue 19 Wish

Congratulations to David Avery of Llandaff, Cardiff, who was last month’s winner.

Thanks for all your responses to the 108th ASLEF crossword in the April 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 May.

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