ANDY HOURIGAN on Action for Southern Africa
GREGOR GALL writes an open letter to Theresa May
DAVID HILLMAN: why we need a Robin Hood Tax
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Where decisions that affect us are made

It is sometimes easy to fall into the trap of the railway bubble, especially with some of the toxic government-driven organisations we are forced to deal with. Refreshingly, the TUC reminded us about all the other issues that affect our families and our futures. Naturally, we were involved in debates about strategic investment and railways, the future of freight, supply chains, apprenticeships and the selling off of railway land.

Steel workers were present and the continuing uncertainty for their futures, and families, moved delegates; the striking GTR Southern conductors also got a huge response due to malicious treatment by a poor employer. Testimonies from teaching unions and those in the NHS make it clear that this government is creating a society for the rich, attacking social mobility and access to healthcare. From every sector the impact and effects of austerity give evidence to the lie of the Big Society; it is clear there is a real battle for all our public services. In Manchester they are talking of sacking 1,250 firefighters so they can alter their contracts and we will support the FBU in the coming battle.

We sometimes get questioned as to why we devote so much time and effort to politics. It’s because that’s where the decisions that impact on our industry and our lives are made; trade unions were set up to give workers a voice in that process. We have seen, recently, the impact in the freight sector of political decisions on coal and steel and the rewriting of agreements in the ITT process to sponsor forced change of hard-won agreements.

The campaign is over and the Labour Party leadership has been decided (again). Now it’s time for the party to come together to challenge a Tory government that needs to be confronted, especially in relation to the future of the United Kingdom outside the EU.

I met with Chris Grayling, the new Transport Secretary, and raised our concerns over the safe operation of the railways. It would be misleading to report that he shared our views on current policies which we oppose, and know are driven by the DfT, and told him we shall continue to contest.

Simon Weller, ASLEF’s assistant general secretary, has been re-elected to the TUC general council and deserves to be congratulated. I also send congratulations to Richard (Dicky) Fisher on his re-election as District Organiser No 6.

Yours fraternally
Mick Whelan, general secretary
For all, not a few

ICK WHELAN, in a barnstorming speech at the Burston strike school rally, condemned Theresa May for claiming that the Conservative Party is a One Nation party and said that’s as bankrupt as David Cameron’s idea of building a Big Society.

The GS, who spoke immediately before Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, pointed out that Cameron’s Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition was simply looking for camouflage for their cuts – like libraries – in public services. And May is only governing on behalf of the few, not the many.

Mick, ECS Howard Kaye, DOS Nigel Gibson, and RMS secretary Les Muir joined hundreds of others in the labour movement in Burston, near Diss, in Norfolk to celebrate the longest strike in British history. It began in 1914 when two teachers, Annie Higdon and her husband Tom, at the village school, were sacked for taking the side of the farm labourers, and their children, and for standing up against the landed gentry and the despotic right-wing rector of the local parish church.

Sixty-six of the 72 children at Burston school walked out to join the Higdons’ strike school, initially in a tent on the village green, which ran until Tom died in 1939.

‘Tom and Annie, and the parents and the children in this village, showed the courage and solidarity and concern for ordinary working people that is still, today, at the heart of the trade union movement,’ said Mick to loud cheers and applause.

Passengers are paying more and getting less

Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and Shadow Secretary of State for Transport Andy McDonald joined rail union leaders at London Bridge to protest at the steep rise in fares under the Conservatives. New research by the TUC shows that fares have increased at double the speed of wages since 2010. Fares have risen by 25% in the last six years, while average weekly earnings have only grown by 12%.

Mick Whelan, general secretary of ASLEF, said: ‘Passengers and taxpayers will wonder why they must pay more for an increasingly poor service. When will the government and the Department for Transport listen to those impacted by daft decisions and what is patently only good for the vested interests? Are we back to pricing people off the railway as a solution to overcrowding and inability to deliver?’

Frances O’Grady, GS of the TUC, said: ‘Passengers are paying more and getting even less. Fares go up while trains remain overcrowded, stations are unstaffed, and rail companies cut the guards who ensure journeys run smoothly and safely. Enough is enough. It’s time for rail services to be publicly owned, saving money for passengers and taxpayers alike. Instead of increasing fares and cutting staff, we should be building an accessible, reliable train service that Britain can be proud of.’

FRISHER KING
Dick Fisher has been re-elected unopposed for a second term as District 6 Organiser. ‘I would like to thank all those who nominated me,’ he said. ‘And look forward to continuing to work hard for all our members.’

KAY’S ON BOARD
Kay Carberry, assistant general secretary of the TUC from 2003 to 2016, has joined the board of Transport for London. London Mayor Sadiq Khan is keeping a pledge to involve trade unions in the supervision of TfL.

REGULATOR CALLS REVIEW
The ORR has called for a review of the rail line crossing at Halesworth station, described by Network Rail as ‘the most dangerous crossing in East Anglia’.

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TWEETS OF THE MONTH

Load…money boss of low pay zero hours warehouse symbolises a capitalism working against everybody else. Kevin Maguire

If we don’t respect democracy we stand for nothing. I’m supporting the membership and Jeremy. Ian Lavery

Nice line from James Nesbitt. Describes himself as the drinking woman’s George Clooney. Alastair Campbell
We found love on the iron road

Andrew and Alaina Laker made the Evening Standard last month – one of the relatively few times in recent history that London’s evening paper has run a positive story about train drivers – when it celebrated the couple’s high speed relationship.

‘Forget Olympic champions Jason Kenny and Laura Trott,’ trumpeted the Standard. ‘Britain’s fastest couple are Andrew and Alaina Laker, the high speed train drivers who fell in love on the railway. The pair have notched up half a million miles between them at 140mph on Britain’s only domestic high speed rail route.’

The couple, who live at Broadstairs in Kent, and have clocked up 28 years on the iron road, work for Southeastern on the line between Ramsgate and St Pancras International. ‘The railway is a huge part of our lives,’ said Andrew. ‘It’s where we fell in love, and where we spend the majority of our time,’ Alaina added: ‘I love driving, and would encourage more women to consider the role. It’s great that Andrew and I have the same job. It means we can discuss our day’s work together and help each other become better drivers.’

Angry commuter hacks station display board

A disgruntled passenger hacked into a public display board at Blackfriars station to vent his (or her) anger in novel fashion. An image of the prank, posted on Reddit, shows the board displaying a Bing search page entitled ‘Thameslink are s***’.

Some commuters wondered, online, how someone had managed to hack into the board while others were more concerned about the hacker’s choice of search engine. ‘Seriously,’ wrote Kraven 420, ‘Who uses Bing?’ Another user replied: ‘Thameslink, apparently. Explains a lot!’ A Thameslink spokesman said: ‘This display board has been hacked by a person or persons unknown. We are investigating how it was possible for this to happen.’

GTR proudly promotes the Thameslink are s*** search page on Reddit

Tony Chater, who has come in for a lot of flak for his new commitment to a publicly-funded National Health Service after saying, when he worked for big pharma – the pharmaceutical giant Pfizer – for five years that he was in favour of PFI and ‘more choice’ for patients which is a euphemism for back door privatisation of the NHS. Owen’s aides have rather ruefully taken to quoting Marx – Groucho, not Karl – ‘Those are my principles and, if you don’t like them, well, I have others.’

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Robert Lea, industrial editor of The Times, whose business commentaries are thoughtful, well-informed, and well worth reading, offers this take on the Southern dispute: ‘The genesis of this summer’s Southern railway fiasco, as admitted by the train operator, has been a threefold cock-up of poor Department for Transport stewardship and Network Rail planning and a shortage of train drivers lured away to better terms and conditions elsewhere.’ After slamming the ‘scandalously poor leadership of the DfT’ he concludes: ‘There is a breakdown in trust between the DfT, Southern’s management, and the unions. True leadership lies in providing viable solutions. The new ministers at transport need to start leading.’

Jessica Hynes, who starred as Cheryl in The Royle Family, Siobhan in W1A, Daisy in Spaced, and as Mrs Jackson in the new film of Swallows and Amazons, was recently asked who she would most like to invite to a dinner party. Without hesitating, she quipped: ‘The Conservative Party. So I could poison the lot of them.’

Andrew Pierce, writing in the Daily Mail, reports that the Three Brexiteers are spending more time on a turf war with each other than negotiating Britain’s exit from the European Union. ‘David Davis and Liam Fox can’t stand each other,’ he notes, ‘and Boris Johnson doesn’t trust either man.’

Michael Jordan, who starred as Cheryl in The Royle Family, Siobhan in W1A, Daisy in Spaced, and as Mrs Jackson in the new film of Swallows and Amazons, was recently asked who she would most like to invite to a dinner party. Without hesitating, she quipped: ‘The Conservative Party. So I could poison the lot of them.’
EC3 ANDY HOURIGAN reports on ASLEF’s new competence development plan best practice document

ASLEF’s competence development plan best practice document, which has not been reviewed for eight years, has been refreshed. There have been two previous versions – and most TOCs and FOCs embraced the framework – but, for the first time, it is being shared with specialists and industry leaders who have contributed.

The evolution of competence development has caused much angst among drivers. There is still a bitter taste from the bad old days when companies abused a points system to condemn drivers and, ultimately, manoeuvre them out of their job. Companies attached discipline to safety of the line events as a way of controlling standards. Drivers were given points for unrelated matters such as not wearing ties, or name badges, or ‘walking aggressively’. There were some real horror stories which would give Stephen King a run for his money.

Slowly, we started to turn the development of drivers into a more scientific practice which involved actually looking at incident identification and concentrating on issues by way of corrective action plans. This proved that the way some companies automatically disciplined drivers was outdated. Nevertheless, it was tough to convince the industry that a more focused and investigatory approach to an incident should invest in the driver, rather than edge him or her out of the job prematurely. If there are operational events, drivers need a support mechanism to develop and restore competency in a fair, focused and consistent way.

Competence development has caused angst

The policy consists of four key stages: investigation; identification; assessment; restoration of competence and review. Competence is defined by the RSSB as ‘being adequately knowledgeable and skilled to be able to perform a specific act or task to an agreed level or standard’. In the new guidelines, it is recognised that a CDP is not always required if there has been an operational event. And there are some which we feel should not mean a driver is automatically placed on an action plan. Violations are treated under a very different procedure.

The CDP process is not a method of disciplining a driver and should be used to regain a driver’s competence and confidence. If a driver has complied with the rule book, and there is no pattern forming, then some of the incidents currently regarded as safety of the line events should not need monitoring. These include station over runs, accepting a wrong route, stopping short of a station, stopping out of course, TPWS intervention within tolerance levels, failure to call, AWS failure to cancel, and DSD activation.

A driver’s CDP should be individual, and tailored to the driver’s requirements, not lazily constructed as an off the shelf fix. It has to be relevant, dealing with identified contributing factors. Monitoring should be reasonable, relevant and agreeable and not automatically involve managers riding out with drivers or OTMR downloads, and should be for no longer than two (instead of the current three) years as there is no evidence of benefit from that extra year.

These are just a few of the changes to the ASLEF CDP best practice guide. We have worked closely with the RSSB, which agrees with the content, and company council chairs and secretaries will be invited to a seminar on 12 October so the changes can be incorporated in the negotiating machinery. The document will also be in our online library.

SOUTHERN PASSENGERS TARGET DFT

Commuters on Southern Railways – the company critics call Southern Railways – have launched a crowdfunding drive to pay for legal action against the Department for Transport for the way it has mishandled the failing franchise. Stephen Trigg, chair of the Reigate & Redhill Rail Users’ Association, said: ‘It is important for the government to be held to account for these problems.’

SOUTHERN PASSENGERS TARGET DFT

KEY ROLE OF RAIL FREIGHT

Freight on Rail manager Philippa Edmunds has welcomed Transport for the North’s intermodal freight strategy which confirms the key role of rail freight to the region. She said: ‘A combination of rail freight network upgrades and changing UK freight distribution patterns, which favour the north of England, mean that industry should have the confidence to invest in new equipment and build a series of multi-modal rail freight terminals which will link to other regions.’

RAIL LINE REOPENS

Services between Folkestone and Dover Priory, suspended on 24 December, have begun again after a nine month £40 million project to repair the sea wall. First train to use the repaired line was the 05.47 from Folkestone to Dover on 5 September.

ARE YOU READY, EDDIE?

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Women at work on Waterloo bridge

Diamond bridge

English Heritage is considering a bid to put a blue plaque on Waterloo bridge – also known as the ladies’ bridge – acknowledging that it was rebuilt, during the Second World War, by women workers. You can watch Karen Livesey’s 30 minute film about the project at www.theladiesbridge.co.uk

QUOTE…

‘To the wider public – which, sadly, doesn’t include those attending Corbyn rallies in already safe seats – Labour has simply become something life’s too short for, a rolling resignation from the top flight that couldn’t be less watchable if it were managed by Tony Pulis.’ – Marina Hyde in The Guardian

…UNQUOTE

Marz Colombini models ASLEF’s Ken Loach film T-shirt – with a Harvey Smith to the Tories’ anti-Trade Union Act – based on the iconic image from the famous Ken Loach film. £10 (inc p&p); email admin@aslef.org.uk or visit our online shop at www.aslef.org.uk

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Red card for racists

ALAN REID reports on an initiative to make football grounds more friendly whatever the colour of your skin

HOW Racism the Red Card Scotland is holding a fortnight of action from 7 to 21 October which sees football clubs throughout the country delivering a strong message to supporters to kick racism out of the game.

ASLEF has been very supportive of the campaign, hosting events, and sending a donation from AAD in Edinburgh, as well as branch donations. We have again sent a generous donation to help fund the fortnight of action; it will help SRtRC print the red cards, visit schools to educate schoolkids, and organise events where former footballers and SRtRC staff explain about eradicating bigoted attitudes.

Nicola Hay, SRtRC’s campaign manager, pictured above accepting our cheque, was delighted that ASLEF has again stepped up to the plate to support the hard work they do. She said: ‘The backing we get from ASLEF never ceases to amaze us.’

MOVING MAINTENANCE IN-HOUSE WILL SAVE £80M SAYS MAYOR

In a move to save Transport for London tens of millions of pounds, the TfL board is bringing maintenance work on the Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines back in-house. The announcement is part of Sadiq Khan’s drive to cut waste, improve efficiency, and pay for a fares freeze for the next four years.

The Mayor of London said he was proud to be bringing Underground maintenance work back into the public sector.

For the past 13 years Amey has been contracted to manage maintenance work across the three lines – a legacy of the Public Private Partnership between Tube Lines and LU – but that will be terminated at the end of next year, the earliest point the contract allows.

The move is expected to save at least £80 million over the next decade in expensive management fees.

Tougher laser laws are needed says CAA

Andrew Haines, chief executive of the Civil Aviation Authority, and former First Group MD, has called for anyone carrying a powerful laser pointer to be arrested. Laser attacks on aircraft, and trains, have soared in recent years. ‘There is no legitimate reason for an individual to have one of these in public,’ he said. ‘Why does Joe Bloggs need a laser that can pop a balloon at 50 miles and cause permanent damage?’

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PASSENGERS LAUGH AT ‘POND LIFE’ JIBE AFTER ROCKS THROWN AT TRAIN

Passengers on a packed South West Trains service between Bournemouth and Waterloo heard an announcement explaining that the reason they were delayed near Southampton was because ‘individuals’ had thrown rocks at the train and smashed a window. They laughed when the train began moving again, and he explained: ‘We are running 10 minutes late, ladies and gentlemen. This is all down to, if you will forgive the profanity, a couple of d***heads throwing rocks at the train just before Southampton airport.’ And passengers cheered at Winchester when the announcer – it is not clear whether it was the driver or a guard – called the perpetrators ‘pond life with the intellectual capacity of a flip-flop’.

QUOTE...

‘Strike action is looming at Royal Mail and the Post Office – and quite rightly, too, because the proposed cuts in pensions are equivalent to someone losing £200,000 or £300,000 over the course of their retirement.’ – Patrick Collinson, money editor, The Guardian

...UNQUOTE

All about people, people in the public transport industry, people like you...

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Pride in ASLEF

DARRAN BROWN takes pride with ASLEF in Donny…

DONCASTER Pride on Saturday 20 August was Donny’s 10th and a Pride unlike any I’ve been on, from Sydney to London, Manchester and Brighton. They were no barriers, no big police presence – just two police officers and four CPSOs – no stewards, no floats.

The parade started promptly at 1.15, only 15 minutes late, and that’s still on time by Pride standards. So with our banners held high, ASLEF holding pride of place at the very front of the union section, followed by the NUM, Unison and Unite, off we set.

Now picture this. A busy market day in a northern working-class town and – wallop – around 200 brightly dressed people waving rainbow flags, some in full drag, and a number of trade unionists marching, down past the fish market, past the fruit and veg stalls, right though the main shopping street. It was fantastic! Shoppers stopped and watched, some videoing, some waving, most just looking at this wonderful spectacular passing by.

Then the rain came – and did it rain – within minutes we were soaked to the skin but it did hold off until the very end of the march. We packed up our banners and flags and trotted off to one of Doncaster’s finest drinking establishments for some much-needed refreshment and the usual mix of the day’s events, politics, and who’s drinking what.

So I’d like to say a huge thank you to those members who came along and supported ASLEF, some of whom travelled many, many miles. Thank you Alison Miller, Nicky Sapey, Julie Clegg, Romolo Lanzi, Shaun Upton-Lambert and all those other drivers and friends who turned up. A special thank you to Tosh McDonald for giving us the opportunity to go along and show support for a local Pride event; also for Tosh’s open, continued and committed support for the LGBT community, which includes a good few ASLEF members.

…and TOM CORBIN takes pride with ASLEF in Sarum

Salisbury held its very first Pride event on Saturday 30 July. It was extremely well supported with several hundred turning out to say it doesn’t matter who you are, we should all be accepted as we are. There was a strong local trade union presence and also support from numerous businesses and organisations such as the church community, police, fire brigade and, most notably, Salisbury’s Serve On who work in the local community and, when the need arises, national and international disaster relief. The march meandered around the streets of Salisbury, culminating in a party that stretched across several of the city’s pubs which had, fortunately, predicted the big turnout and laid on extra provisions.

All night long

The Night Tube was finally launched in London on Friday 19 August by Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London. Finn Brennan, ASLEF’s organiser on the Underground, said: ‘It is good news. A world-class capital city like London deserves a world-class public transport system and if the previous mayor had been less confrontational, and prepared to listen to staff and trade unions, instead of playing political games,

London could have had an all-night Tube service much sooner.’

Finn added: ‘The stance ASLEF took last year means that more than 200 new jobs for drivers were created with trade union rates of pay and working conditions, as well as agreed improvements to the work/life balance for existing staff that are now starting to be delivered. It’s a demonstration of what a determined, professional, trade union can achieve.’

Mick Whelan joined the general secretaries of the major trade unions in signing an open letter backing Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party: ‘We have all known Jeremy for many years. He has supported us, stood on our picket lines, celebrated our successes, and campaigned alongside us for trade union rights. Jeremy’s pledge is to rebuild and transform Britain so no one and no community is left behind. His commitment to introducing sectoral collective bargaining, and mandatory collective bargaining for companies with over 250 employees, would transform and rebalance industrial relations fit for the 21st century. For more than three decades Jeremy’s track record and socialist credentials make him the choice for leader of the Labour Party. We need a Labour government committed to workers’ rights, social justice, government investment in our manufacturing sector, and public sector, and good quality jobs. Jeremy campaigns for all of these and is the person to lead the Labour Party into government to make them a reality. Jeremy is the only choice to get the job done.’
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www.thompsons.law.co.uk/aslef
Theresa May’s 10 point plan for Britain

Commentary

On the eve of the Conservative Party conference in Birmingham

GREGOR GALL writes an open letter to the new Prime Minister, and Tory leader, Theresa May

Dear Theresa

As you are now the ‘mother’ of the nation, a great responsibility falls upon you to look after the families contained within it. This is a role that you clearly indicated you wished to play because, on the morning of Monday 11 July, when you launched your bid to become leader of the Conservative Party and, thus, Prime Minister, you set out what seems, on the face of it, really quite a radical agenda.

By the afternoon you were PM in waiting after your only challenger, Andrea Leadsom, pulled out. And, by Wednesday evening, you’d been installed as Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury of the United Kingdom. It is inconceivable that the views you expressed on Monday could have changed by Wednesday.

So now, with the end of your critical first 100 days in office approaching, let me remind you of what you said and what is now expected. As my area of expertise is industrial relations, I shall confine myself to areas of work and employment.

You said you want a society, a country, a democracy and an economy that ‘works for everyone’. You said that many suffer from economic insecurity, and from lack of control over their lives. You highlighted the fact that corporations are not accountable to their stakeholders, do not pay anything like their fair share in taxes, and pay their executives exorbitant salaries.

As you said, ‘If we are going to have an economy that works for everyone, we are going to need to give people more control of their lives. And that means cutting out all the political platitudes about stakeholder societies and doing something radical.’ You added that there is ‘a duty to put something back… a debt to your fellow citizens… a responsibility to pay your taxes’.

Indeed, you said, ‘Under my leadership, the Conservative Party will put itself – completely, absolutely, unequivocally – at the service of ordinary, working people. It is why we will make Britain a country that works for everyone.’

You’ve created great expectations with these words. So here are my suggestions for how to take your views forward. I offer them because your speech that day was supposed to be only the first of many you were to make this summer and, therefore, you did not have the opportunity to flesh out your ideas.

But I also offer them because any ideas and views need to be developed and made operational – and as soon as possible if they are not to disappear into the ether of ‘motherhood and apple pie’. So let’s start with some basics.

1. Make the pitiful national minimum wage a decent wage. It is why we have a minimum wage. If you want any more ideas, you could do it for the bottom.

2. Fees for workers making employment tribunal applications were introduced by your predecessor. They have resulted in a massive decline in applications. Abolish them.

3. Make the pitiful national minimum wage into a genuine living wage to show how you differ from David Cameron. And provide the resources for full and effective enforcement.

4. Give resources back to the Health & Safety Executive so that workplaces are visited by inspectors more than once every seven years. Workers should expect to return home from work alive and well.

5. Stop the likes of Uber from classifying workers as self-employed in order to avoid paying tax and national insurance by ending bogus self-employment.

6. Ban zero hour contracts and give workers a minimum number of hours they can expect to work so they can earn a decent living.

7. Introduce a maximum wage so no executive earns more than 10 times the salary and benefits of the lowest paid member in their organisation.

8. Allow workers by law to have their unions engage in sectoral collective bargaining so that the terms and condition of workers of one company are not in competition with those in another in a race to the bottom.

9. Make good on your proposal to have employees represented on company boards by implementing the Bullock committee’s recommendation in 1977 that workers have equal representation to management on these boards.

10. Provide employment rights from day one so employers have no material advantage in sacking newbies and then taking more on in an endless cycle of exploitation.

If you want any more ideas, you could do no better than look at the Institute of Employment Rights’s recently launched Manifesto for Labour Law.

Returning to the apple pie metaphor, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, so let’s see you crack on and deliver on your promises. If you don’t, you’ll end up like your predecessor – spouting platitudes and doing nothing other than letting the rich and powerful become even richer and more powerful.

Yours sincerely

Gregor Gall

Gregor Gall is Professor of Industrial Relations at the University of Bradford, Visiting Lecturer in International Labour and Trade Union Studies at Ruskin College, Oxford, and a visiting lecturer at the University of Hertfordshire. His research on the use of injunctions by employers in industrial disputes is published in the British Journal of Industrial Relations – a copy of which can be obtained by emailing g.gall@bradford.ac.uk
ASLEF in action

SLEF sent five delegates – Mick Whelan, general secretary; Simon Weller, assistant general secretary; Dave Calfe, EC vice-president; Paul Cutmore of Chingford; and Ian Thompson of Treherbert – to the 148th Trades Union Congress in Brighton from Sunday 11 to Wednesday 14 September. Executive committee president Tosh McDonald, EC members Marz Colombini and Howard Kaye, district organisers Finn Brennan, Dicky Fisher, Nigel Gibson and Graham Morris, and Southern company council reps Kevin Eade and Paul Donnelly, all attended as visitors.

The slogan for congress – Jobs, Rights, Investment – was embraced by delegates organising to build a Britain of which we can be proud. ‘We want great jobs for everyone,’ said TUC general secretary Frances O’Grady. ‘And we’ll get them by building a stronger, fairer economy.’

Delegates from 52 unions, representing 6 million members, gathered on the south coast for this annual parliament of the union movement. There were lively debates on good services and decent welfare; jobs, growth and a new economy; transport; health; education; fair pay and a living wage; housing; employment and trade union rights; human rights; health and safety; equalities and diversity.

As well as the motions on the conference floor, and a plethora of fringe meetings every lunchtime and evening, congress offered an opportunity for ASLEF reps to meet and greet activists from other unions who face similar challenges in different fields. ‘We’re all doing the same job – representing members – while trying to make this country a better place in which to work and live,’ said Mick Whelan.

Does privatisation deliver? Er, no!

Does rail privatisation deliver the best deal for passengers and taxpayers? That was the question posed at – and the title of – an Action for Rail fringe meeting, chaired by Sharon Sukhram, on Monday night. Perhaps not surprisingly, the answer was no. ‘We cannot afford not to bring the railways back into public ownership,’ said Andy McDonald, Shadow Secretary of State for Transport. ‘The tired old curled up British Rail sandwich stories just don’t cut it any more. We should be focusing on success stories, such as the East Coast public ownership model, and replicating it.’

Paul, Lianna, Sharon, Anthony, Andy and Alan

Other speakers on the platform included Paul Nowak, deputy general secretary of the TUC; Lianna Etkind of the Campaign for Better Transport; Anthony Smith, chief executive of the passenger watchdog Transport Focus; and Alan Benson of Transport for All.

You say you want a revolution

Mick Whelan made a passionate speech in defence of the achievements of the socialist revolution in Cuba – the work of Fidel and Raúl Castro – and of the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela – of Hugo Chávez – at a solidarity meeting for those two countries in the conference centre on Monday night. Other speakers on the platform included Teresita Vicente, the Cuban ambassador; Rocio Maneiro, the Venezuelan ambassador; and Steve Turner, assistant general secretary of Unite.

Backing Jeremy

Tosh McDonald, in a barnstorming speech at a Labour Representation Committee fringe at the Friends’ Meeting House on Monday night, explained why ASLEF backs Jeremy Corbyn.

‘When Ed Miliband resigned the EC looked at the candidates, and this was before Jeremy said he would stand, and there was no one we could back. They were like the seven dwarfs, people committed to the discredited policies which saw our party lose 5 million votes from 1997 to 2010. Then Jeremy said he’d stand and we had a candidate we could endorse enthusiastically. Because he’s a man of principle who believes in the policies in which we believe, a man who has enthused a new generation, a man who they say is unelectable but who keeps winning elections. We backed Jeremy in 2015 and we’re backing him again in 2016.’ Other speakers included John McDonnell, the Shadow Chancellor; Matt Wrack, general secretary of the FBU; Manuel Cortes, general secretary of the TSSA; and Ronnie Draper, general secretary of the Bakers, Food & Allied Workers Union.

Mick with the mic in Brighton

Simon Weller spoke at a Trade Unions Against the EU fringe meeting in the Old Ship Hotel on Tuesday lunchtime.
Central

ONGRESS reaffirmed its commitment to public ownership of the rail industry in a wide-ranging transport debate on Wednesday morning. Simon Weller led the way – followed by the RMT and the TSSA – in a three-pronged attack on the government, the Department for Transport, and the privatised train operating companies, talking about the failures of Southern Railways, the problems with freight, and how the DfT has come up short.

Speaking from the podium, this is how he introduced himself: ‘Simon Weller, assistant general secretary of ASLEF, and a train driver for 20 years, 15 of them at Brighton, my home depot and my home town, and I stand in solidarity with my workmates at Brighton and at Southern. Let’s be absolutely clear, this is not a spat over pay, or t&cs, this is about trying to destroy decent jobs. After the McNulty report it was clear they wanted driver only operation, to get rid of the traditional guard’s role, with safety responsibilities. This is all about money and profit and the on board supervisor is not guaranteed to be on the train.

‘My daughter is 25 and her generation is scrabbling to find work on zero hours contracts. On Southern we still have proper, decent jobs yet this government is trying to destroy them. The DfT is funding this, and the DfT is taking us on. Time, comrades, we put our hands in our pockets and assist our brothers and sisters on Southern.’ Simon also laid into the Conservative government for its failure to help ease – and, over coal, to directly cause – the problems in the freight sector.

‘We are witnessing the slow death of freight on rail, with operators cherry picking the work – fight amongst yourselves to get the most profitable work. The decline of coal and steel traffic is so severe that the very future of the industry is at risk. Freight is the only part of the railway which is fully privatised, and receives no government support, and once capacity declines it cannot quickly be reversed.

Paul Cutmore called for a modern industrial strategy – with a place for workers in the boardroom as well as at the sharp end – for Britain in the 21st century.

He said: ‘Congress, everyone in this hall knows that management doesn’t know best. It’s never been clearer. Just look at Mike Ashley or Philip Green! More worker involvement in business and industry is long overdue. In fact, it’s essential if we are to dig ourselves out of the hole we are in. ‘We urgently need to build a more sustainable economy and industrial base. We need to move away from financial services, a housing bubble, and credit-fuelled spending. We need a plan to rebuild industry. We lead the world in high-tech sectors like pharmaceuticals and aerospace but we need to reignite our manufacturing base and widen the supply chain. A 21st century economy needs an industrial strategy rooted in the knowledge and experience of workers and their representatives.

‘The industrial strategy which led to the historic nationalisations of 1945 was delivered through democratic workplace structures where workers were involved in making decisions and shared their deep insight and understanding of their industries. In 1977 the Bullock report recommended that companies with more than 2,000 employees should have a representative of labour for each director who represented capital. It was a good idea which was, unfortunately, shelved by the Callaghan government.

‘ASLEF believes it is time to revisit these ideas and create a new model of industrial co-operation. The Prime Minister’s pledge to get more employees on boards is welcome. But the devil will be in the detail and the Tories have never shown any interest in social partnership. Genuine workplace democracy must give labour an equal footing with capital and ensure that worker representatives have real influence.’

Don’t sell public land to private developers

Dave Calle, speaking from the podium on Monday morning, made a passionate case for Congress to adopt motion 63 which calls on the government to build affordable homes and opposes the sale of public land for speculative build houses only a few can afford. ASLEF has seen plans to offload land owned by public bodies – including Transport for London and Network Rail – to build homes inaccessible to all but the very rich.

‘Many workers, from all sectors, cannot afford to live in their own community, where they work or grew up. Which means they live far away from their workplace and extended family; have longer days at work; and less time with their families. This undermines the fabric of our communities. We live in uncertain times – but one thing is certain. Getting a grip on Britain’s housing crisis is one of the most important policy issues our parliament faces. It’s a crisis that is about our communities and the people that live there. Railway houses only a few can afford.

So you think management knows best? Look at Mike Ashley and Philip Green

Paul speaking from the podium on Monday

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‘Railway
A sharp decline in rail freight capacity would be disastrous for the future of the British economy across the supply chain. Rail is vital to a balanced freight sector and essential to the maintenance, health and safety of the entire rail network.

‘We want public ownership of the rail freight industry, to better facilitate sustainable and long-term growth in the sector, and to secure future rail freight capacity, just as we want public ownership of the rest of the railway industry. Because firms, as well as passengers, and workers, are suffering from the short-termism of Britain’s privatised railway.’

‘Congress, there is no one party but a one party nation’ – Angela Rayner, Shadow Education Secretary

‘The damage goes far beyond the steel industry. It affects my industry with a decline in rail infrastructure work and a lack of freight operators’ work. Network Rail buys approximately 120,000 tonnes of steel per annum for rails directly from the steel plant in Scunthorpe. It is deplorable that our trains are owned and run by foreign governments, but let’s ensure they still run on British-made rails.’

THE ASLEF crew stayed at the Old Ship on the seafront, where our annual assembly of delegates was held in 2014. AAD met in the ballroom where the Italian composer and violin virtuoso Niccolò Paganini played in 1831. Five years later Paganini opened a casino in Paris, the failure of which ruined him financially. Ironic, then, that after Andrew Lloyd Webber lost a wager with his brother Julian over the result of a Leyton Orient game, he settled the debt by writing Variations on a Theme by Paganini for the cellist, who played on the chart-topping original album with guitarist Gary Moore, keyboard players Don Airey and Rod Argent, bass guitarist John Mole, drummer Jon Hiseman and flautist Barbara Thompson.

TUC RE-ELECTED TO GENERAL COUNCIL

Simon Weller was re-elected to the general council of the TUC on Tuesday afternoon. He polled 271,000 votes and topped the poll in his section. On Wednesday morning Simon was also re-elected to the TUC’s executive committee.
Time for a tax for the people not on the people

Like the original Robin Hood, he’s even wearing Lincoln green. DAVID HILLMAN, director of the Robin Hood Tax campaign, explains why it’s time, again, to take from the rich and give to the poor

The Robin Hood Tax campaign, comprising trade unions like ASLEF, charities, and green groups, works for a tax on banks that would raise billions of pounds to tackle poverty and climate change, here and abroad. With no sign of Austerity Britain abating, and the recent European Union referendum highlighting deep divisions in our standard of living across the country, surely the time has come for a tiny tax that would benefit the many, not the few?

More than a million people who support the Robin Hood Tax agree with this simple, yet highly effective, idea whose benefits are huge. Such a tax, set at a fraction of 1% on deals by finance firms, not ordinary people, could raise tens of billions globally – and at least £8 billion here in the UK.

HELP THE MOST VULNERABLE
This is substantial and much-needed revenue. £8 billion could prevent cuts to the vulnerable, the NHS, and could also create jobs if invested to stimulate the economy. The statistics are compelling: it would take less than one week of funds from a Robin Hood Tax in the UK to pay for the salaries of 2,000 new police constables, 2,000 newly-qualified nurses and 2,000 teachers. Just one day of revenue from a sector that can clearly afford it earned a lot more than they had declared on their tax returns. The same could be true of an FTT here in the UK aimed at high finance.

FIGHTING TAX AVOIDANCE
Beyond the immediate, and obvious, revenue benefits, an FTT could play an important role in the fight against tax avoidance. The recent release of the Panama Papers revealed a vast seam of hidden information about the secret world of people and companies. Voices from all corners of the political spectrum are, finally, calling out for action to clamp down on tax dodgers – people and companies that use our resources, and infrastructure, but want to avoid paying their share.

Greater taxation of financial transactions has the important fringe benefit of giving greater oversight to tax authorities. They would gain a vital new source of information on the size and direction of financial flows. For example, in Brazil information provided by their domestic FTT proved extremely useful to tax authorities in identifying those who had earned a lot more than they had declared on their tax returns. The same could be true of an FTT here in the UK aimed at high finance.

So how politically possible is a Robin Hood Tax? There are encouraging signs. In Europe we are excitingly close with Germany, France, Italy and Spain, along with six other countries, set to finalise an historic FTT deal in October. There has also been important progress in the United States with the FTT named as official Democratic Party policy for the first tim e. This was due to the valiant campaigning efforts of Senator Bernie Sanders who proposed a Wall Street Speculation Tax to pay the college fees of less well-off students.

TAX FOR THE 21ST CENTURY
The FTT is a tax for the 21st century. It possesses elements that make it immune to the avoidance problems that plague other taxes and, by improving transparency, would be a new and effective weapon in the fight against tax dodging. If we want a tax fit for the digital age which could raise billions to help tackle the stark economic and social inequalities we now face then one thing is clear – the Robin Hood Tax is an idea whose time has most come.

For more information, or to get involved in the Robin Hood Tax campaign, please visit www.robinhoodtax.org.uk
Are you so blind that you cannot see?
Are you so deaf that you cannot hear his plea?

ANDREW HOURIGAN, EC member for District 3, reports on Action for Southern Africa, successor to the Anti-Apartheid Movement, which works for peace, democracy and development in southern Africa

HEN Nelson Mandela walked out of Victor Verster prison in 1990 and then, four years later, led the African National Congress to victory in South Africa’s first democratic, multi-racial, general election it wasn’t the end, or even the beginning of the end, of the struggle. But it was the end of the beginning.

That struggle goes on today, and every day, which is why ASLEF recently affiliated to Action for Southern Africa, the successor organisation to the Anti-Apartheid Movement, which campaigns for justice, rights and development in the region.

FREE OF POVERTY
‘Action for Southern Africa was established in 1994,’ says senior campaigns officer Sunit Bagree. ‘We support the people of southern Africa in their efforts to achieve a region free of poverty, based on human rights and equality for all. As a democratic, member-led, campaigning, non-governmental organisation, ACTSA encourages individuals and civil society organisations in the UK and beyond to stand in solidarity with those struggling for rights and justice in southern Africa.’

They work hard to eradicate poverty, push for sustainable development, and promote democracy on the continent. They want to improve women’s rights in the region, particularly in Zimbabwe and Swaziland. And they still campaign for those who suffer from the poverty and injustice caused by apartheid.

ACTSA currently has two major campaigns: Justice for Southern African Gold Miners and Democracy for Swaziland. In addition, the organisation works on a broad range of other issues (especially trade, HIV/AIDS and LGBT rights), often as an active member of civil society coalitions, and is also active in Angola and Zimbabwe.

JUSTICE FOR MINERS
Tens of thousands of mainly ex-gold miners across southern Africa have silicosis, an incurable, debilitating disease, caused by exposure to silica dust, which makes the sufferer more likely to contract tuberculosis. It is preventable, by putting health and safety measures in place, but the owners and managers of apartheid South Africa’s gold mines treated black miners as cheap and expendable labour, to be exploited then discarded when ill. This injustice is compounded by the scandalous refusal of the mining companies to accept responsibility and provide decent health care and compensation.

In March a settlement was announced on behalf of 4,365 claimants against two mining companies, Anglo-American South Africa and AngloGold Ashanti. The companies will put 500 million rand (£27m) in a trust fund. Former miners who have a medical, and have silicosis at or above a certain level, and are able to demonstrate they worked for either company for at least two years, will receive compensation. While welcome, this is a closed settlement, and not the comprehensive industry-wide arrangement that ACTSA, and the trade unions, want.

Two months later, the High Court in South Africa certified a class action against 30 mining companies (including Anglo-American and AngloGold) on behalf of 30,000 ex-miners. If the class action succeeds it will effectively lead to an industry-wide compensation scheme for those with silicosis and TB. ACTSA called on the companies not to appeal against the ruling, and to negotiate with representatives of miners and ex-miners. Regrettably, the mining companies did not heed ACTSA’s call, but the High Court refused the companies leave to appeal, prompting them to petition the Supreme Court. ACTSA will continue shaming the companies for their behaviour and campaign for decent health care provision and compensation.

RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY
ACTSA campaigns for human rights and democracy, and against poverty and inequality, in Swaziland. King Mswati III, Africa’s last absolute monarch, has been on the throne since 1986. His extensive powers include the ability to appoint the prime minister and members of the judiciary, and two-thirds of the upper house, as well as the right to veto legislation. The current constitution fails to respect democratic norms, and many laws undermine basic freedoms, especially those of women.

The country’s largest opposition party, the People’s United Democratic Movement, is banned. Trade unions and CSOs seeking to promote human rights are systematically oppressed. As a result of mismanagement and corruption the economy is in a dire state, with 63% of the population living below the poverty line, and wealth concentrated in the hands of the royal family and a tiny elite close to the king.

MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE
In June ACTSA published two briefing papers: Swaziland’s Downward Spiral: The International Community Must Act Now and Women’s Rights in Swaziland. These led to meetings with the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, the Commonwealth Secretariat, and MEPs. Real and lasting change will only come about through the actions of its people and their representative organisations. ACTSA has called on the king to enter into meaningful dialogue with his political opponents and all sections of civil society.

The men and women calling and organising for human rights to be upheld, and democratic norms adhered to, in Swaziland want and need international solidarity. ACTSA relies on its members and supporters. It does not get any support from the UK government.

If you would like to become an individual member of ACTSA you can join online at www.actsa.org/page-1026-Join_actsa.html or by calling 020 7186 0750. If your branch would like to affiliate it can do so at www.actsa.org/page-1436-Affiliate_to_ACTSA.html or call 020 7186 0750. For further information please visit www.actsa.org
Standing up for fairness

A WELL-ATTENDED August meeting welcomed Les Muir, Alan Taylor, Tony West and Ernie Whitfield from the RMs committee, as well as retired Exeter drivers, and former reps, Richard Westlake and Rodney French. The RMs talked about their important role in ASLEF, a growth in membership, which should be encouraged, enabling engagement, even in retirement, as part of a proactive union; and how retiring drivers are automatically enrolled, with the first year free (it’s just £15 after that). They receive the Journal and carry on with their years of membership of our union. When you leave the driving grade, it doesn’t mean you have to leave ASLEF; turning up at branches, or district meetings, attending demonstrations against, say, NHS cuts, campaigning for improvements in workers’ rights, lobbying your MP or writing to the Journal, are all a way of contributing. RMs members reflected on how the railway culture, and the job, have changed from when they were drivers, and how ASLEF, whatever your political point of view, will always stand up for fairness; not only for train drivers, but for all people, at home and abroad. That is why the Journal has articles about justice for Colombia and the fight for freedom in Spain; to make us aware how workers across the world fought governments and employers, and are still fighting today. That is why ASLEF affiliates to these campaigns and groups.

Richard, a Devon county councillor on the Devon & Exeter railway project working party, explained that the awards of SWT and GWR franchises in the next couple of years will be crucial in how the region develops, and the pivotal part ASLEF can play in the development of railways in the south-west. He also announced that, after 35 years serving the public in Exeter and Devon, as a Labour councillor, he is stepping down next year to enjoy retirement.

Branch chair Jon Morton summed it up perfectly with the words, ‘If it wasn’t for old drivers, standing up to bosses, striving for better t&cs, and struggling for improvements in working conditions and pay, today’s drivers would be a lot worse off.’ That is why it is important to keep battling, and never give in. Not just for yourself or for the colleagues you work with, but for members in the future. As train drivers, we never know when we may end up in an unfortunate position, needing the support of fellow workers or ASLEF reps, but if the foundations have been laid, then that support can be relied on.

Long service badges were handed out by Tony West, with special mention to Andy Snowdon, who achieved his 45 years. Well done, Andy, here’s to (hopefully) achieving your part-time link; you deserve it! Ryan Howe, Exeter

Sitting (left to right) Steve Wade (10 years), Andy Snowdon (45), Ernie Whitfield (RMS) and Ricky West (branch sec).

Do you have a young family? Can you help Mencap?

Mencap is doing some research into how better to engage with fathers when delivering projects and services. Namita Srivastava, the charity’s campaigns and policy officer, says: ‘We’re looking for volunteers to participate in a 20-30 minute telephone interview about fathers’ experience of accessing services, not just in learning disability, but in health, social care and education. I will be asking what experience fathers have of accessing services for their children, about the barriers they face, and any problems or issues in meeting fathers’ needs.

‘We are always looking to improve the way we deliver our projects and services. We want to engage with all carers better, including fathers, because men do not traditionally access Mencap projects and services as much as women.

‘We want to conduct short telephone interviews with fathers so we can understand their needs better. All interviews will be confidential and anonymised in our final report. And I can promise that your participation will not affect any services that you currently make use of.’ The research will be used, she says, to develop policy in the organisation and to help promote projects and services to the families that most need it.

Namita adds: ‘Mencap is the leading voice of learning disability. Everything we do is about valuing and supporting people with a learning disability, their families and carers. We work in partnership with people with a learning disability, and all our services support people to live life as they choose.’

If you are prepared to participate, or would like further information, please contact Namita Srivastava on 0207 696 5502 or by emailing namita.srivastava@mencap.org.uk

Upcoming events

- **RAINHAM – THURSDAY 6 OCTOBER**
  Southeastern retired and working members’ reunion from 11.0 at Rainham Social Club, 86 Station Road, Rainham.

- **PETERBOROUGH – FRIDAY 7 OCTOBER**
  Booz’n’Chat meeting at the Parkway club, Maskew Avenue, Peterborough. £5 in advance, £6 on the door. Call Malcolm Bell on 07884 43242 or fletton.brick@btopenworld.com

- **MARYLEBONE – FRIDAY 28 OCTOBER**
  Annual reunion from 16.30 till late at the Allsop Arms, Gloucester Place, London, NW1, round the corner from Marylebone station. ‘This year is extra special,’ says Patrick Houghton, ‘with retirement drinks and festivities celebrating long service. Anyone associated with the branch – past or present – is welcome. It promises to be a good night and we’ve tipped off the pub so they’re fully stocked up on real ales’!

- **Please send your all branch news, reports, features and photographs to journals@aslef.org.uk**
Battling bosses who jeopardise safety in pursuit of profit

ALAN MOSS of Longsight branch reports on this year’s Hazards conference at Keele University

WAS fortunate enough to attend the 2016 Hazards conference at Keele University as an ASLEF delegate with my comrades Nigel Thompson from Wolverhampton branch and Paul Blackham from Knottingley. We were joined by more than 350 health & safety reps, all wanting to be enthused with a weekend of education, networking and campaigning.

The conference opened with the plenary where we were welcomed by my friend and comrade Hilda Palmer who talked about the challenges we face with the Trade Union Act and employers who disregard safety, and the lives of their workers, in the pursuit of profit. We had a minute’s silence to remember all those whose lives have been lost through the negligence of employers, not just in the UK, but worldwide.

SAFETY AFTER BREXIT

We then heard from Hugh Robertson of the TUC about protecting workers’ rights following Brexit and ensuring we still work with our fellow safety reps in Europe, and worldwide, to ensure that best practice is shared.

The following day was the part of the weekend that enthralled me the most, the workshops. My comrades who host these give up their time to impart their knowledge to those who attend. There is a plethora of workshops to choose from; I always choose workshops about current issues and issues I envisage could impact on our industry. The first was prioritising action; during the workshop it quickly became obvious that the issues high on everyone’s agenda were stress in the workplace and zero hour contracts, both factors in our industry with fatalities, and fears around redundancy in the freight sector, exacerbated by open access operators utilising exploitative zero hours contracts.

Another workshop I attended was resisting resilience and wellbeing; this is happening in the rail industry as we speak and it’s important that safety reps monitor its use and ensure it is being used to benefit our members and not as a tool to deem employees not fit for their roles. It is tied in with employers’ occupational health and is a real cause for concern. There are some pro-active beneficial schemes, such as assistance and counselling following fatalities, assistance with rehabilitation following accidents at work, and some immeasurable work around mental health, but wellbeing schemes should be fully explored by reps before members are involved.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

In addition to the workshops we all attended a campaign meeting to highlight current campaigns and issues. I attended a Unite workshop on the draconian conditions endured by workers at Sports Direct in Shirebrook. The union is doing sterling work highlighting the issues faced by workers at this workshop – such as sexual harassment, daily body searches (in your time, not theirs!), bullying and intimidation, being paid less than the minimum wage, and, of course, zero hours contracts – all to line the pockets of Mike Ashley and his greedy, bloated, odious shareholders. The Unite campaign is slowly working and their high profile activities will give these workers the dignity and conditions they deserve. What also annoys me is that the factory in Shirebrook is built on the site of a former colliery, a place where trade unions stood proud and workers had fair pay and fair conditions.

The weekend and its activities seemed to be over far too quickly, with new contacts made, ideas shared, and successes exchanged; it was left to the reps to ensure the knowledge they gained is taken back to the workplace and used to benefit our members and ensure their safety in the workplace at all times.

I’d like to thank my branch, and the executive committee, for supporting my attendance.
To you we speak, you numberless Englishmen, To remind you of the greatness still among you Created by these men who go from our towns To fight for peace, for liberty, and for you.’

Clem Beckett and Christopher Caudwell were two such men. Moved by most Spaniards’ determination to defend themselves against Franco, Hitler and Mussolini, they crossed the Pyrenees to fight for democracy and against Fascism in Spain. Clem ‘Dare Devil’ Beckett, the rugged speedway star, and Christopher Caudwell, poet and literary critic, were unlikely friends; but a common cause brought them together and they fought and died at a machinegun post covering their battalion’s retreat at the Battle of Jarama in 1937.

Commissioned by the International Brigades Memorial Trust, Dare Devil Rides to Jarama tells the story of the British and Irish volunteers in the brutal Civil War in Spain, capturing the idealistic hopes and dreams, raw passions, fear and anger in a powerful new drama which features stirring songs, poetry and flamenco dance.
SIMON KERPNER  
RULES ARE RULES
It is with great sadness that I have to report the loss of Simon Kerpner on 30 March. He was 51. Simon had fought a brave and difficult battle against a brain tumour. Simon was a career railwayman, starting off in 1984 on buffet cars. He became a guard and, eventually, a driver and joined ASLEF in 2008. It was apparent that he enjoyed all the jobs he did on the railway and was fond of repeating a few well-known phrases like ‘rules are rules’ and if anyone was caught smoking in his buffet car they would be in serious trouble! Simon loved Thumbs up from Simon
his cars, his golf and his holidays in Ibiza. He always insisted on keeping his car in pristine condition. If anyone knew did not take similar care they would be suitably admonished! Wonderful, moving tributes were made by Phil Humphries and Stuart Brain at his funeral, attended by 300 family, friends and work colleagues. Afterwards we went to Kendleshire Golf Club for a balloon release. Everyone attached a message for Simon to the balloons, which drifted, appropriately, towards the railway line. Simon was taken from us far too soon and will be much missed by his family, Cherilyn, Charlene, Paul, and colleagues.
Bernard Kennedy, Bristol branch secretary

HAROLD BRIDGMAN  
LAUGH AND A JOKE
Harold Bridgman, ex-Barrow Road and Bath Road, passed away on 30 March aged 87. Harold was a Midland man, starting his footplate career at Barrow Road in Bristol as a cleaner towards the end of the Second World War. He moved through the links, gaining promotion to fireman and, finally, driver at Barrow Road. Harold was a lifelong socialist and ASLEF stalwart. He served time with distinction on the LDC at Barrow Road and, when Barrow Road closed in 1965, transferred to Bath Road with all the other ex-Midland men. He worked at Bath Road until he retired in 1993, just before the depot split. Harold was a very popular person who enjoyed a laugh and a joke. I can remember working with him many times, either in the cab or in the mess room, and going home with a sore diaphragm from laughing so much! He will be much missed by Stella, his family, friends and workmates.
Bernard Kennedy, Bristol

REG STEVENS  
LEAVE IT WITH ME COCKER
Because his school was bombed during the war Reg ‘Leave it with me, cocker’ Stevens started his railway career as a knocker upper at Kentish Town; when it closed he moved to Cambridge Street, St Pancras, before becoming an engine arranger at Euston in the mid-1960s, a loco inspector at King’s Cross and, finally, an assistant area manager at Dagenham Dock on the LTS looking after train crews at Ripple Lane and Tilbury Riverside. Retiring from BR he found a niche working for Southend council where, ironically, one of his duties was looking after the pier railway which had gone backwards, going from electric traction to diesel power (as they say, that’s progress). Reg was a larger than life character who enjoyed a pint and a puff on the old pipe

GUS WRIGHT  
LOYAL MEMBER BADLY MISSED
Brighton branch is sad to announce the loss of retired member Bro Gus Wright, who died on 27 July at 90. Gus started his footplate career as an engine cleaner at Dorchester loco shed, on the old Southern Railway, in 1944. He progressed through the various footplate grades and, in the late 1950s, was one of a number of locomotives that transferred to Brighton because of the closure of lines around Dorchester. In 1962 he moved to Brighton Motormen’s depot where he remained upon amalgamation of Brighton number 1 and 2 branches until retirement in 1991. Gus was a loyal member of our society and will be sadly missed by his colleagues.
Paul Edwards, Brighton

ARTHUR WILSON  
GREAT EXPECTATIONS
Arthur ‘Tug’ Wilson (23 December 1932 to 15 June 2016) came from a railway family and began his career at Plaistow steam depot working alongside singer, songwriter and chirpy Cockney rock’n’roller Joe Brown. When Plaistow closed he moved to Ripple Lane where he remained, becoming the mess room’s horizontal sleeping champion. Tug was a staunch ASLEF and Labour supporter, becoming Deputy Mayor of West Ham, and was a bit of a lad, judging by the size of his family. Two sons have carried on the family tradition by becoming drivers (Tony at Clacton and Steve at Freightsitter Tilbury Dock). He was into allotments but his real enthusiasm was treading the boards in amateur dramatics. It was said he auditioned for, and got, the part of Pip in the film Great Expectations but, sadly, forgot to send the acceptance letter off. Tug retired from the railway just after the ASLEF 1982 campaign, moving to Darsham in Suffolk for a quieter life. The funeral service at Weeleys crematorium in Essex was a full house; we all went on to the Railway Club at Clacton to celebrate his life with a glass of ale.
Cliff Blackwell, RMS Tilbury

JIM LACEY  
BIG PERSONALITY
Little Jimmy Lacey was small of stature but big of personality, and one of the nicest guys you could meet. He started his loco career at Stratford as a cleaner in 1964, progressed to passed cleaner and fireman, and got his driver’s check at Orpington where he worked until he moved to Stonebridge Park. He will be missed at our monthly old boys’ meetings; he’d become a regular over the last year or so. A fond farewell from all at the old boys’ club you’ll be missed.
Dave Pizzi, RMS

GEORGE FRY  
GREAT SENSE OF HUMOUR
A large congregation gathered to say their final farewells to George Fry (left) who commenced his life on the footplate at Neasden where he came through the ranks to become a driver. On closure George moved with the work to Cricklewood and then St Pancras. When Thameslink withdrew their work he elected to move to Bedford where he remained until retirement. Always cheerful, and easy to get on with, complete with a great sense of humour, he was a pleasure to work with. He moved from St Albans to Mogerhanger to be near his immediate family but ill health dogged his final years, stoically tolerated until the end.
Bill Davies, RMS Bedford

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

Do you remember Ted?

I am writing to ask if any readers of the ASLEF Journal have any memories of my grandfather, Edward Prior, who was an engine driver based at Camden sheds until he retired in 1967. Thanks to research by former branch secretary Mark Herron and archivist Mick Humphrys I found out that Edward (everyone called him Ted) was 19 when he joined Camden branch on 18 September 1921. Ted worked his way up from fireman to driving the main LMS line to Carlisle. He also, as required, drove the royal train when, even though driving steam, he wore a tie and white shirt. Throughout his working life he took pride in his appearance and his boots and peak cap were always brightly polished. In later years he drove diesel engines but did not like them. His father-in-law, Walter Freestone, was also a driver and was awarded the British Empire Medal for driving through the Blitz. Edward was married to Louie and had two children, Jean and Charlie, who are both still in good health. The family lived in Egbert Street, Camden, before moving to Watford. Ted died from leukaemia very shortly after retiring from the railway. Louie was convinced it was related to exposure to asbestos and received a small compensation from British Railways after a lengthy process. It’s a long time ago, but if anyone has any memories of Ted, I’d love to hear them. You can write to me at Abbvorvägen 125, 66340 Hammarö, Sweden, or email me on neill@telia.com

Neill Dronsfield, Hammarö, Sweden

Principles and power

In response to Bro Len Worboy’s letter (Journal, September) whilst I appreciate his lifelong Labour supporter, even he must admit that, under the current PLP, the party has lurched way too far into the trap of Conservatism with its support of big business above all other interests. Part of the reason people love Jeremy Corbyn is because he is perceived as honest and principled with a progressive agenda. Does Len not see that the last election was lost because Labour was not radical enough? What could they offer when they were busy voting through cuts to welfare, bombing foreign countries, privatising everything in sight and jacking up fees for students? Everyone saw that Ed Miliband, although he was trying hard, could not break the shackles of neo-liberalism and the Blairites. So they voted for a new leader who would… Labour lost Scotland because the party had turned into Conservative Light. They didn’t offer what the Scottish people wanted and appeared to be taking the Scots for granted. So Labour lost most of their MPs through a combination of intransigence and arrogance. Hopefully, under Corbyn, some of this can be healed. The SNP, like UKIP, threatens independence on a daily basis.

Compromising, to achieve power, is one thing. Sacrificing the principles upon which your party was founded is another thing entirely! If you’d known then what you know now, would you have approved of what the Labour Party became under Tony Blair and, more importantly, would you have voted for it?

Chris George, New Street branch

Don’t despair, Len

Len Worboys (Journal, September) criticises ASLEF’s position during the EU referendum and Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership of the Labour Party. He says ASLEF’s position on rail nationalisation is rational but unachievable without Labour in power. But we had Labour in power for 13 years under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown and all we got was more privatisation. Unless Labour is led by Jeremy Corbyn, or someone with similar policies, then rail nationalisation will remain a pipe dream. And nationalisation would not be achievable within the European Union, especially when the Fourth Railway Package, which effectively lays out the franchise system we have in the UK as the model for the rest of Europe, is introduced. Jeremy’s leadership is not perfect, but he has dragged the terms of debate back within our party was founded is another thing entirely! If you’d known then what you know now, would you have approved of what the Labour Party became under Tony Blair and, more importantly, would you have voted for it?

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The greatest risk to train drivers and passengers is from the misuse of level crossings by members of the public. All road/rail crossings are equipped with some combination of physical barriers, either remotely or automatically controlled, and red flashing lights usually accompanied by an audible warning.

Users are made fully aware that a train is about to pass… But in country areas some crossings are far more basic and consist of little more than self-operated gates and a Network Rail notice board with information concerning the correct method of crossing. I have driven trains over rural routes and encountered dangerous practices at remote crossings. My last near-miss was potentially catastrophic as a JCB driver attempted to cross in the path of my train after failing to contact the signaler for permission to access a field on the other side of the line. I am certain I am not alone and that many other drivers can relate similar instances of either a near-miss or a collision.

Network Rail has done a lot of good work in recent years by closing many little-used crossings and continually monitoring an assessing others in an attempt to make them as safe as realistically possible. But the biggest problem is that crossing users may be lulled into a false sense of security believing, wrongly, that, due to the infrequency of trains, telephoning the signaler for permission to cross is unnecessary.

I ask all drivers who observe any misuse at any type of level crossing to report it to Network Rail and their TOC to maintain an accurate record of repeated problems at specific crossings with a view to appropriate action being taken either by Network Rail or the British Transport Police.

Steve Davies, FGW, Westbury

Tom, Tom, turn around

When Jeremy Corbyn was a candidate for the Labour leadership he was recommended by ASLEF as the best man for the job. I thought he was, too. ASLEF also told me that Tom Watson was the best man for deputy leader. But what have we now? Jeremy Corbyn standing firm for a new political agenda, fighting off the backstabbers, and Tom Watson saying he should resign for the sake of the party! Will
Give your rep a chance

Through the auspices of the Journal I am very pleased to announce my early retirement. Those close to me will be aware of the personal issues I have experienced over the last eight months; these were among the reasons for my decision (and it was mine alone) to retire from the railway.

Although, at times, I have been critical of ASLEF I have also been a loyal member, adhered to policy, and was honoured and privileged to act as an elected rep in many positions, including branch secretary, company council, branch chair, hs, district council and LDC. In all these positions I gave my colleagues my 100% best; there is no other way to repay the trust that has been bestowed on you.

Unfortunately the fabric of ASLEF is being undermined by a minority of our membership. I find it difficult to comprehend why so many managers now want to be drivers and ASLEF members, especially when they have no intention of helping their colleagues and endorsing the very meaning of a union, ie togetherness. It is noticeable the cancer (not a word I choose cheaply) is creeping in at a rapid rate bypassing representation on such important issues as MFA, safety of line and driver experience of being accused of this. It cannot be fair for these people to refuse representation; where is the transparency? It is unfair to limit this despicable action to just ex-managers as I am sure there are drivers doing secret arrangements. Yet they carry out their treacherous business like burglars in the night and say nothing when a work colleague who is, shall we say, not quite flavour of the month, gets beaten with a big stick, even threatened with their livelihood, for making the same human error that others have made. Ex-manager or not, I firmly believe no train driver ever made a mistake on purpose. I have first hand experience of being accused of this. It cannot be fair for these people to refuse representation; where is the transparency? It is unfair to limit this despicable action to just ex-managers as I am sure there are drivers doing the same, and the numbers are spreading; the companies just love this power.

It does no justice to hide behind ‘personal’ reasons, your rep is trustworthy to protect confidentiality, and I would wager a tidy sum that most managers have been informed of your ‘personal’ reasons. Taking in a rep just makes it a level playing field for all drivers so they can all be treated the same.

I wish all true railway staff a rich and incident-free career. Finally I want to thank everyone for the magnificent collection and presents, cards and messages of good luck I received on my retirement. I also want to express my gratitude to all those who attended my retirement do. It’s been a hoot. Take care and please give your rep a fighting chance; you are very fortunate to be in an industry that allows you this entitlement.

Paul Flanagan, Bournemouth XC

Pestilence, famine, floods

During the EU referendum Boris Johnson called the Remain campaign Project Fear. That was a massive understatement. Refugee camps at Dover, the word ‘war’ was mentioned and, ludicrously, the Danes would no longer send us bacon for breakfast (I think George Osborne came out with that sizzler). I was waiting for Biblical pestilences, floods and famine. In all my 70 years I have never felt so unrepresented. I have been a lifelong supporter of the Labour Party, sometimes a full member, always paid the subsidy through ASLEF, but, sadly, the party has become self-perpetuating, looking after the interests of career politicians who are remote from the workplace and the needs of working people.

Denis Parker, Retired Members’ Section

Let’s get into physical

The elementary laws of flight are taught from the outset during private flying training; more so for professional aviation. Understanding these principles helps develop good habits from the start. I submitted a proposal to the RSSB three years ago saying train driver training should include some basic physics regarding rail operations. The proposal was rejected.

When I read incident reports, they reveal errors associated with non-technical skills, rule book non-compliance, and errors of judgement, occasionally with some reference to a scientific mathematical calculation, normally associated to signal spacing, or braking performance, referenced to a group standard.

Initial training includes rule book matters, occupational psychology issues, and criticism of our judgement, known as driveability, but no science. I think an elementary understanding of physics would have saved some drivers’ reputations and, possibly, their employment. So why is a basic understanding of physics absent from our training? Reasons given are not all learners have a preference for mathematics, the extra cost would not outweigh the benefits; and it cannot be sold to the TOCs and FOCs.

I complained to the ORR who said that a European directive known as statutory instrument 2015 No 1758 includes a section on general professional knowledge which includes basic physics. I think, with ERTMS, they do not see the need. The job description has already changed from driver to operator in one sector of our industry. But, in my opinion, train driver training should consist of not just driveability but the basic physics of motion.

Nige ‘Bomber’ Harris, Plymouth

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GLASGOW branch 125 year celebration badge. £4 including p&p. Contact ASLEF’s Glasgow branch secretary John McCue at johnmccue1970@msn.com

ON LOAN from British Rail hard enamel badge. Individually numbered, brooch fastening. £6 + £1 p&p from josephhuddington@gmail.com

OAKS MEMORIAL commemorative badge honouring 361 miners killed in an explosion at the Oaks colliery near Barnsley on 12 December 1866. £3 from remembertheoaks@gmail.com

LONGSIGHT badges to mark 125th anniversary. £5 + £1 p&p. Also a bespoke tie at £8 + £1 p&p. Contact Jim Hopkins on 07810 564804 or jimmyhopkins@hotmail.co.uk for details.

BESPOKE CUSHIONS Hand made 40cm square cushions of railway engines and carriages. £50. Call Abi on 07954 659849 or email me at adm.uk.me@btinternet.com

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Well, it takes a red headed woman to get a dirty job done

As the leaves fall and the nights draw in, Keith Richmond reviews some of the best books for the autumn

The novels of Carl Hiaasen – they include Tourist Season, Double Whammy and Strip Tease – are usually placed on the shelves marked crime fiction but that’s a shame because although (often spectacularly inventive) crimes are committed in his books they are not, in any meaningful sense, whodunits. Hiaasen, 63, an investigative reporter and now a columnist on the Miami Herald, writes wittily and incisively about the political and moral corruption of his native Florida and the mindless destruction of the environment.

His books are rattling good reads but also brilliant – and savagely funny – exposés of corporate greed in the sunshine state. He has tackled plastic surgery (Skin Tight), lotteries (Lucky You), loss adjusters (Stormy Weather), property developers ( Sick Puppy), agribusiness pollution (Skinny Dip), Medicare scams (Bad Monkey), celebrity culture (Star Island), and theme parks – how he hates Disney! – and in Basket Case wrote brilliantly about the follies and foibles of rock’n’roll through the prism of a red headed hustler going by the name of Roach Patrol, and an imaginative razor-toting red head of a hustler going by the name of Bungling Nighthawks in ’80s Manhattan which, as with Ted Hughes, is realistic rather than romantic. She tells the story of the falling rain / that rises to the light and falls again; observes ‘the same old choirs of hours / returning their summer clothes to the earth’; and admits there are ‘not many of us left / living on the fluff of green of the last little floes of the earth.’

A mind needs a book as a sword needs a whetstone, if it is to keep its edge. – George RR Martin, A Game of Thrones

Jay McInerney shot to fame with his dazzling first novel, Bright Lights, Big City, a pitch-perfect evocation of hedonistic coke-crawling nightlife in ’80s Manhattan which drew comparisons, entirely warranted, with F Scott Fitzgerald. He wanted to call his new novel Thin City – his publisher preferred Bright, Precious Days (Bloomsbury, £18.99) – but he’s back on familiar territory, in Gotham, with Russell and Corrine Calloway, the ambitious yuppies we first met in Brightness Falls in 1992 and caught up with again after 9/11 in The Good Life.

Russell and Corrine are now turning 50, looking back as well as forward, and taking stock. McInerney, 61, has a great ear for dialogue, a terrific eye for the telling (often sartorial) detail, and a wonderful way of capturing the mood, the magic, and, yes, the madness of a particular moment in time. He writes like a dream, too. In many ways Bright, Precious Days is like Vanity Fair; McInerney, like Thackeray, creates characters about whom we care in an accurate, and affectionate, satire on contemporary mores.

This country has produced a number of great nature poets – William Wordsworth, Thomas Hardy, Robert Browning, Gerard Manley Hopkins and John Clare spring immediately to mind, among many others – and Alice Oswald, who won the TS Eliot Prize in 2002 for Dart, her book-length poem tracing the river in Devon from its burbling beginnings at Cranmere Pool all the way down to the sea, is heir to this great tradition.

In Falling Awake (Jonathan Cape, £10) Oswald, 50, who has worked as a gardener since reading classics at Oxford, has an empathy with the tastes and textures, sights and sounds, moods and music of the countryside which, as with Ted Hughes, is realistic rather than romantic. She tells ‘the story of the falling rain / that rises to the light and falls again; observes ‘the same old choirs of hours / returning their summer clothes to the earth’; and admits there are ‘not many of us left / living on the fluff of green of the last little floes of the earth.’

The UK has already lost 343 libraries in the past six years. We cannot afford to lose another. – Damian Barr

‘All political lives,’ said Enoch Powell, ‘end in failure.’ Nick Clegg, 49, in Politics (Vintage, £20), tells how he took the Lib Dems from 57 seats in Parliament in 2010 to just eight in 2015 after five years of coalition. Calamity Clegg, who lost people’s trust when he broke his pledge on tuition fees, claims he was a moderating influence on David Cameron – ‘we portrayed ourselves as a political prophylactic, rather than an agent of change’ – and admits ‘I did not cater for the sheer brazen ruthlessness with which the Conservative Party would hoover up any good news.’ Ed Balls, 49, in Speaking Out (Cornerstone, £20), says the reason he failed to become Labour leader was because ‘David Miliband became the Tony Blair person and I became the Gordon Brown person and Ed Miliband somehow managed not to be the Gordon Brown person, which I could never understand.’

At least they weren’t assassinated or executed. Ian Davidson traces The French Revolution (Profile, £25) from the liberating ideas of the Enlightenment – when Wordsworth wrote Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven! – to Terror and tyranny and the deaths of Marat (in his bath) and Danton, Desmoulins, Robespierre and Saint-Just (on the guillotine).

‘Never trust anyone who has not brought a book with them.’ – Lemony Snicket, Horseradish

THE ICECAPS ARE MELTING AND ELVIS IS DEAD

LAST December, Donald Trump claimed that President Obama planned to let 200,000 Syrian refugees into the United States in 2016. Obama promised that he had no such plan. Trump’s response was to say that it didn’t matter what Obama said, because he [Trump] still believed his own figure and, what’s more, so did his Twitter followers. The true figure, thus far, is about 2,800.

It’s to nail this kind of argument that I wrote the screenplay for the film Denial, based on Deborah Lipstadt’s excellent book History on Trial, an account of the legal action brought against her in the High Court by David Irving for calling him a Holocaust denier.

People on the internet like to claim that everything is a matter of opinion and all opinions are equally valid. But they’re not. It’s pseudo-democratic bullshit. As Lipstadt says in our film, ‘The icecaps are melting. And Elvis is dead.’

Opinions backed up by fact have more value than those that aren’t.

There are not two available points of view about whether the Holocaust happened. There is something called historical truth.

Trump is not post-factual. He’s non-factual. So is David Irving.

Reasserting the principle that freedom of speech does not include non-factual. So is David Irving.

Historical truth.

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Trump is not post-factual. He’s non-factual. So is David Irving.

Reasserting the principle that freedom of speech does not include non-factual. So is David Irving.

David Hare

Solution to Crossword 125
Across: 1 Scarlet 5 Park 7 Rip 8 Ancestor 9 Exact 10 Lots 13 Acre 14 Nest 18 Each 19 Hoist 21 Home brew 22 Boo 23 Wren 24 Harvest Down: 1 Sergeant 2 Applause 3 Lean-to 4 Tackle 5 Peseta 6 Room 11 Scribble 12 Beetroot 15 Tavern 16 Church 17 Shower 20 Hour

Congratulations to George Taylor of Radcliffe, Manchester who was last month’s winner. The winner of this month’s Prize Crossword will receive Marks & Spencer vouchers to the value of £25

You can see more of Tom Williams’s crosswords, word games and puzzles at wordgames.co.uk

Thanks for all your responses to the 125th prize crossword in the September edition of the ASLEF Journal. If you successfully complete this month’s crossword please send the solution to the Editor, ASLEF Journal, 77 St John Street, Clerkenwell, London, EC1M 4NN by 14 October

ASLEF’s legal services

If you are being harassed at work, bullied or discriminated against, and if your local, branch or district rep is unavailable, call the industrial relations department at union headquarters (020 7324 2400) or email info@aslef.org.uk. If you are arrested or interviewed by police and need legal assistance – day or night – call the members’ emergency hotline on 0800 587 7530. ASLEF also provides first class legal advice free for members and dependents.

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