We can work it out – Labour in Liverpool

MICK WHELAN: One of the party’s most precious assets

SIMON WELLER: You’ve lost the trust of passengers and staff

TOSH McDONALD: There will be no extension of DOO

Iron Man who helps refugees  GTR’s close ‘n’ cosy relationship with DfT  The train drivers’ union since 1880
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Race to the bottom with freight on rail

We have long spoken about the effects of government indecision (and poor decisions) about rail freight; the failures to protect the supply chain, the taxing of coal, the lack of a coherent policy on steel and the future of Britain’s manufacturing base. Freight has become the poor relation of the proclaimed privatised success that equates footfall (which is really population growth) as the determining factor in not having an integrated transport or industrial strategy. In every company in the sector there is a tale of woe. An unparalleled race to the bottom, and increased casualisation, mean margins and contracts in many traditional areas are now unviable.

This culminated in news that impacts on men and women the length and breadth of the country – the mess that is DB Cargo has issued redundancy notice to all its drivers. Its intention, apparently, is to shed 391 men and women and bring back the others on significantly worse terms and conditions. Our officers and reps are in talks and we look forward to the Transport Minister condemning this process and all stakeholders – including Network Rail and the TOCs – questioning the future viability of the core infrastructure, never mind much-vaunted improvement schemes. Our thoughts are with all those, in all grades, hit by this decision, their families and futures. We shall, as we always do, use every tool at our disposal to challenge and mitigate the proposal and the damage this will do to our whole industry.

The house of cards that was, and is, privatised freight was always fragile; giving away the assets required to maintain the infrastructure, then setting up government subsidised companies to offer false competition in a captive market, was always dangerous. Placing the burden of maintenance at the whim of overtime, around core traffic flows, that impact on other sectors dependant on that infrastructure, in a penalty-driven world, was never likely to work. False competition thrives and is sold off as a worldwide recession hits. Streamlining, redundancy, and decreased opportunity compounded with government decisions on coal and steel – you have real problems.

There are times when you do not want to be right but when you have a foreign operator, whose home company is having financial issues, we should expect these problems. That’s why we are calling on our government to support our industry and work to protect the jobs and contracts that exist.

Yours fraternally
Mick Whelan, general secretary
Ballot for action on Southern

SLF is balloting our drivers on Southern for industrial action after last-ditch talks at head office on Monday 17 October failed to resolve the problems at the heart of this dispute.

‘We have genuinely sought to reach a compromise with Southern,’ said general secretary Mick Whelan. ‘We have always been prepared to talk to the company, and we have always been of the view that it is, or should be, possible to do a deal – as we did with ScotRail – but it takes two to tango and the company has not been prepared to negotiate. They want to impose, not to discuss. They have dug in their heels and forced us to ballot our members.’

Our trade dispute with the company is that there should be no introduction and/or extension of new driver-only operated routes on Southern without the agreement of ASLEF.

Labour has accused Southern of disregarding concerns over safety. Shadow Transport Secretary Andy McDonald said the long-running dispute about the role of guards – which involves the RMT as well as ASLEF – should be settled through negotiation, not by legal action.

‘Nobody wants to see these strikes go ahead, least of all the staff,’ said Andy. ‘But the way to avoid industrial action is for all parties to get back round the table and reach a negotiated settlement, not by launching legal challenges.

Southern is also a director of the supposedly independent organisation which oversees rail safety. A leaked memorandum from the Rail Safety and Standards Board, published in the Morning Star, reveals that the RSSB backs Southern’s continuing attempts to remove guards from trains despite the role they have played in helping passengers after accidents.

The documents show that Southern operator Govia Thameslink chief executive Charles Horton is also a non-executive director of the RSSB, which is funded by the rail companies – and took an active part in discussions about removing guards from trains despite the fears of passengers.

The memo is a research brief giving details of the RSSB’s views on ‘increased profitability for train companies’ if guards are removed and driver-only operation is introduced. The briefing, which lists Horton as a participant in the discussions, says: ‘Adopting a strategy of guards’ redundancies delivers the greatest economic benefit.’

The unions believe the company wants to put private profit before passenger safety.

Conflicts of interest

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MPs tell Southern to ‘get a grip’

The House of Commons Transport Select Committee has urged ministers to ‘get a grip’ on monitoring rail franchise agreements – citing especially the suffering of Southern passengers. MPs said evidence from passengers was dominated by the problems at GTR and considered whether the company is now in default of its contractual obligations due to the number of train cancellations. ‘In normal circumstances, this would be grounds for termination of the contract.’

The DfT’s claim that no other operator could do a better job in the circumstances was no longer credible, said the committee. On parts of the national rail network, passengers struggle daily to get the service they deserve, citing overcrowding, delays, complex ticketing and a lack of access for disabled passengers.

‘Passengers now contribute more than 70% of the industry’s real income,’ said committee chair Louise Ellman. ‘But, in too many places, passengers are badly serviced by the train operating companies.’

The report recommends an automatic compensation scheme be set up to refund Southern passengers directly without the need to make a claim. The DfT said: ‘Simply changing the management or taking the franchise from GTR would not address the issues and would only create uncertainty and cause further disruption.’

OOOPS! RED FACES OVER PR DISASTER

Southern had a full scale PR disaster on its hands last month when the company begged beleaguered passengers to tell the RMT how they feel about the strikes. The plan – which senior management thought was ‘an absolute hoot!’ – backfired spectacularly. Southern tweeted: ‘Tweet @RMTUnion & tell them how rail strikes make you feel!’ Hundreds of passengers responded, but not in the manner management hoped. Simon Cox: ‘I dislike unions but I dislike incompetent management more.’ Ferdinand Kingsley: ‘You’re a shambles and this is embarrassing. I hope you lose your franchise.’ Ursula Doyle: ‘I support the RMT. You, on the other hand, are a disgrace.’

NETWORK RAIL FINED £4MILLION

Network Rail has been fined £4 million for breaches of health and safety laws which led to a fatality at Gipsy Lane pedestrian level crossing near Needham Market, Suffolk. Olive McFarland, 82, a former film star who appeared with Sean Connery in The Frightened City, was killed while using the crossing by a train travelling from London to Norwich on 24 August 2011. An ORR investigation found that Network Rail had failed to act on substantial evidence that pedestrians had poor visibility of trains when approaching the crossing, and were thus exposed to an increased risk of being struck by a train.

Darran Scully, a driver with GWR, from Reading branch, is snapped chatting to Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, and Matt Harrison and Matt Rodda from Reading CLP, in Liverpool. Please turn to page 11 for our special report on ASLEF at the Labour Party conference.

TWEETS OF THE MONTH

In light of the Commons Select Committee’s report it is beyond comprehension that Southern instantly rejected union’s settlement offer this week.

Andy McDonald

@SouthernRailUK You brought this on yourselves. We, your customers, are suffering. Let’s be radical. Employ more staff. Martin ‘Snazzy’ Cox
**Iron man in action**

ICKY WHITEHEAD and his wife Mandy did the Brownlee super sprint triathlon in September – a swim of 400 yards in the lake followed by a 13k bike ride and a 3k run – in the grounds of Harewood House near Leeds to raise funds for DBA UK, a charity which helps people with Diamond Blackfan Anaemia. ‘We have friends whose young daughter Christie is suffering from DBA,’ said the District 4 Organiser. ‘We’ve been in training for the last six months and I finished in 1 hour 16 minutes and Mandy in 1 hour 38. Not bad for two middle-aged fatties! We have raised just over £700 so far, and donations can be made on www.justgiving.com/fundraising/NickandMandy or on the DBA UK site.’

**Riding the rails for free**

The European Union is considering giving citizens a free Interrail pass for their 18th birthday. MEPs believe an Interrail ticket – a month-long pass costs up to €479 – would be one way of stemming anti-Brussels sentiment and help the free movement of people across the continent. The scheme would cost about €3 billion.

**CONFERENCES & RALLIES**

The Scottish Labour Party conference is at the Concert Hall in Perth from Friday 24 to Sunday 26 February. The Welsh Labour Party conference is at the Venue Cymru in Llandudno from Friday 24 to Sunday 26 March. The Scottish Trades Union Congress is at the Macdonald Highlands hotel, Aviemore, from Monday 24 to Wednesday 26 April. ASLEF’s annual assembly of delegates is at the Marriott Royal Hotel, Bristol, from Monday 22 to Thursday 25 May. The Durham Miners’ Gala is on Saturday 8 July. The Tolpuddle Martyrs’ festival, near Dorchester, is from Friday 14 to Sunday 16 July. The Trades Union Congress is at the Brighton Centre from Sunday 10 to Wednesday 13 September. The Labour Party conference is at the Brighton Centre from Sunday 24 to Wednesday 27 September.

**500 CLUB:** A Weston, with number 22, won the November draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £384.

**Off the rails**

NORTHERN RAIL, a company which could do with a bit of good publicity, has no idea how to go about it. Last month ASLEF wanted to field a train driver on ITV Yorkshire’s early evening news magazine programme. Presenter David Hirst was keen to talk to someone at the pointy end of the train about level crossings – sadly, in the news again after a couple of incidents in that part of the world – and it’s a subject on which we are all – TOCs, trade unions, passenger groups and government – singing from the same song sheet. But when the driver ran it by Northern, the company dithered for three hours and then said no. ‘We have to protect the brand,’ Northern inexplicably wittered. ‘The driver would need a chaperone. We would need to know the questions in advance. And, anyway, we would prefer the programme to interview one of our media-savvy directors.’

KEVIN MAGUIRE was on wicked form with his Commons Confidential column in the New Statesman – which, along with Nicholas Lezard’s Down & Out feature, is invariably the best thing in the book – after the Conservative Party conference in Birmingham. ‘Paraphernalia sold at the conference tat stall included a £30 cushion with a print of John Major’s bespectacled countenance. Imagine my shock at the suggestion by a ribald Parliamentarian that the item would make the perfect gift for Edwina Currie. “She’s probably sat on his face before,” he chuckled.’

JOHN LE CARRÉ, in his recently published memoirs, The Pigeon Tunnel (Viking, £20), tells how he was talking, in the mid-1980s, to Nicholas Elliott, Kim Philby’s closest friend in MI6, about his confrontation with Philby in Beirut in 1963. Le Carré asked Elliott, ‘Could you have had him sandbagged, and flown to London?’ To which Elliott dryly, and probably truthfully, replied, ‘Nobody wanted him in London, old boy.’ A little while later Philby fled to Moscow, where he lived until his death in 1988.

DAN JARVIS was offered, and declined, the defence portfolio in Jeremy Corbyn’s recent shadow cabinet reshuffle. Action Dan said ‘No’ as he fancies a run at the Labour leadership after what he believes is ‘policy-light’. ‘We’re told, by Conservative travellers on the right prefer a team player and the former Para is known to be what his Progress chums charitably describe as ‘policy-light’.

THERESA MAY and Philip Hammond talk about government intervention and a new industrial strategy for Britain and we’re told, by Conservative commentators, that it signals a cutting edge, post-Thatcherite, bid for the centre ground in the 21st century. But when Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell make the same case, they are condemned by the same scribes as old-fashioned, neo-Stalinist, Old Labour lefties. Ho hum…”
Briefing members on GSM-R review results

GERALD RILEY, operations specialist at the Rail Safety and Standards Board, reports on a review into the effectiveness of managing failures in GSM-R.

The Global System for Mobile Communications – Railways, a subsystem of the European Rail Traffic Management System, is now the normal method of communication on the railways of Great Britain and is highly reliable. However, in November 2014, following representations from ASLEF, the Office of Rail and Road requested the Rail Safety and Standards Board to lead a comprehensive review of the contingency arrangements for managing failures that occur within the GSM-R system.

The purpose of the review was to evaluate the effectiveness of the current arrangement and, where necessary, recommend amendments that were supported by a suitable and sufficient assessment of risk.

The approach included the establishment of a cross-industry group, which included representation from the ORR, Network Rail, the Association of Train Operating Companies, the TOCs, and the trade unions, as well as subject matter experts. This group oversaw the detailed safety risk modelling, evaluated the effectiveness of proposed operational responses to system failures and, subsequently, made recommendations to publish new or amended Railway Group Standards, including the GERT 8000 rule book.

The safety risk modelling that supports the new and revised RGSS was critical to the success of the project. It enabled the risks associated with each proposed operational response to a failure in the GSM-R system to be quantified. As a consequence of this approach, which included sensitivity analysis, the ORR is satisfied that the original intent of the project has been realised.

ASLEF also requested that the group review the rule regarding the use of GSM-R on the move; the outcome of this has also been included in these rules.

The RSSB has held four briefing sessions for a company council and health & safety rep from each TOC and FOC to attend and understand the changes and how they should be implemented in company contingency arrangements.

There is now a transition phase where the new and amended RGSS need to be embedded within contingency arrangements and briefed to operational staff. This is a process that is to be concluded by 3 December.

Naming rights

Spurs want Transport for London to change the name of White Hart Lane, the London Overground station near the football club’s ground, to Tottenham Hotspur. Chairman Daniel Levy has long been envious that the team’s north London neighbours, and local rivals, have an Underground station called Arsenal – which was Gillespie Road until the name was changed in 1932 – and is lobbying Transport for London hard. Arsenal are, at the moment, the only London club to have a station named after them – premier league rivals West Ham used to play at the Boleyn Ground, served by Upton Park Tube station, in East Ham; the West Ham station is named after the area, not the club. TfL wants £12 million to change the name but Levy, a famously tough negotiator, believes he can do a deal for far less than that.

Century Underground

Three members of Hammersmith & City branch, with more than 100 years’ service between them, retired recently - Dennis Browne (40 years); Alex Mayers (36); and Keith Fowler (31). ‘The branch would like to wish them all a long and happy retirement,’ said Simon Blakeley.

DO8 Finn Brennan, Keith Fowler, Dennis Browne and EC8 Terry Wilkinson

I AM A MAN NOT A DOG
I AM DANIEL BLAKE

I, Daniel Blake, the new movie by Ken Loach – a great film director, and a great friend of ASLEF – opened on the back of a social media campaign drawing attention to this powerful speech.

QUOTE...
‘Chris Grayling likes to say he is a rarity among modern Transport Secretaries: he actually wants to be Transport Secretary. Which tells you all you need to know about his predecessor, Sir Patrick McLoughlin, whose four year policy vacuum ended in the current chaos and crisis on Southern Railway.’ – Robert Lea in The Times

...UNQUOTE

Marz Colombini models ASLEF’s Kes tee-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

EC president Tosh McDonald is not often spotted in a pulpit, but he made an exception for a Durham Miners’ Association service dedicated to the memory of Thomas Hepburn, founder of the Northumberland & Durham Pitmen’s Union at St Mary’s church, Hetworth, near Gateshead.
What improvements will be delivered by ScotRail – and when?

SLEF has called on the SNP government to release its improvement plan for ScotRail. Kevin Lindsay, our organiser in Scotland, said: ‘It’s high time the Scottish government let us know what is going on and published the improvement plan. There is nothing to be gained by keeping it secret and we think passengers, and staff, have a right to know when we can expect to see improvements.’

The SNP government at Holyrood issued an improvement notice to ScotRail on 17 September due to the company’s poor performance. One in three trains is late and, on some routes, more trains turn up late than arrive on time. There is a chronic shortage of trains, and carriages, which has led to unprecedented levels of overcrowding. This puts frontline staff at risk from angry commuters, especially our members on DOO trains, where Abellio fails to provide a second person on the train.

Kevin added: ‘Full details of the improvement notice – including what penalties Abellio is facing because of its poor performance – should be published. Remember Abellio is making more than £1 million profit a month from passengers on ScotRail.’

Star driver

Samantha Butler, a driver instructor with London Overground, has won an outstanding personal contribution award in Rail magazine’s national rail awards. The citation said: ‘A proud mother of two and governor at her local school, Samantha was promoted last year as a result of her professionalism and commitment to the highest standards. Samantha is universally admired by her colleagues and is described by operations director Stuart Griffith as “a star driver with an exuberance that shines through in whatever she does. Her strong desire to make a difference to our industry is truly commendable.”’

She is also a key member of LOROL’s women’s group that seeks to promote a diverse and inclusive workforce, and visits schools in her own time to talk to young people about the opportunities available to them in the rail industry regardless of gender or ethnic background.

STRUCTURAL CHANGE: Andrew Adonis is stepping down as chair of the National Infrastructure Commission, which becomes an executive agency in January. Sir John Armitt is standing in for him until a replacement is appointed.

ON THE BALL

ASLEF members – and banners – in the crowd at Dulwich Hamlet’s ground

ASLEF sponsored the Ryman Isthmian League Premier Division fixture between Dulwich Hamlet and Bognor Regis Town at the Champion Hill stadium on Saturday 8 October in honour of the south London International Brigaders who fought in Spain. ASLEF and International Brigades Memorial Trust banners were displayed inside the ground and hundreds of trade unionists took advantage of the ‘£4 entry on production of a union membership card’ discount to swell the crowd from an average home attendance of 850 to just over 2,200. Dulwich Hamlet lost 1-3 – but £317 was raised for the work of the IBMT.

QUOTE...

‘Hillary Clinton? She is flawed and she is female, and that’s fine by me. She is not my champion but she is the enemy of my enemy – and of yours, too. I will cheer as she hammers Donald Trump.’ – Laurie Penny in the New Statesman

UNQUOTE

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Hydrogen bomb

Alstom has launched the Coradia iLint, its hydrogen-powered emission-free train, which uses onboard hydrogen fuel cells to produce electrical power for traction. The loco is identical to the diesel-powered Lint 54, except for the cells on the roof, but as the only by-products are condensed water and steam it is, says the company, ‘a far more environmentally-friendly alternative to diesel traction.’ The firm hopes to sell the new unit, which will be made at Salzgitter, near Hanover, to German regional railways in Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Baden-Württemberg and Hesse. ‘Electrification is very expensive,’ said Nick Westphalia, Alstom’s managing director, UK & Ireland. ‘The capital costs are only appropriate for key arterial routes, and we need to look at something different for other lines.’

SEE YOU IN COURT

Train companies now have to comply, in full, with the Consumer Rights Act. This means that if passengers are unhappy with the (often derisory) compensation offered (a fraction of what the TOCs receive from Network Rail) they can pursue a claim through the courts. TOCs used to have an exemption, but this brings the rail industry into line with other travel sectors and was welcomed by the Consumers’ Association. ‘Back in April, we expressed our disappointment to the government when it said it would be seeking to delay applying the Act to rail until October 2017 so we’re pleased it is now putting passengers first. Now we want train companies to make it easier to claim for delays and compensation.’

TRUST IN TOCS PLUMMETS

Trust in train companies is tumbling, according to a survey by Which?, and there is growing discontent among passengers over continuing cancellations and delays. ‘Our research reveals that just 26% of people now trust train firms – down by 7 percentage points in the last 12 months – while distrust has risen to 30%.’ Which? concludes, ‘To restore faith, we want more done to ensure there is better compensation for long-suffering passengers. In December, we made a super complaint about the compensation system. The rail regulator agreed with us, and we’re now monitoring progress on changes. But we want the government to go further and make the regulator introduce a system that ensures passengers who suffer persistent short delays or overcrowding can make a claim. We want to ensure the industry is held to account by introducing legislation for a new ombudsman that rail firms must join, so passengers’ complaints are properly heard and resolved.’

COWS KILLED ON LINE IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Hundreds of passengers had to be evacuated after a train hit and killed 11 cows at Stilton Fen between Peterborough and Huntingdon. The line was closed, in both directions, for four hours. A spokesperson for Network Rail said, ‘Passengers were evacuated with the help of the emergency services but, thankfully, there were no injuries to passengers or crew.’ Cambridgeshire Fire & Rescue praised ‘the driver, who had a horrible scene unfold in front of her but remained in control and seemed extremely competent.’

AFRICAN EXPRESS

Ethiopia, a landlocked country, has opened a new £2.7 billion 460 mile railway line from its capital, Addis Ababa, to Djibouti on the Red Sea. The line, built and funded by the Chinese, replaces a colonial-era track that had fallen into disrepair, and cuts the journey time from Addis Ababa to the sea from three days on bumpy roads to 12 hours by rail.

VTEC wants drivers

Virgin Trains East Coast is recruiting new drivers ‘who have what it takes’ for ‘this exciting and rewarding career’. The announcement by VTEC coincided with delivery of a new fleet of Azuma trains.

QUOTE...

‘A strategic error of near Biblical proportions was made to go into Iraq in 2003. There wasn’t a clear plan for what happened next so we really had no option but to muddle through. And the muddling through is largely responsible for the ongoing vicious unrest in that part of the Middle East.’ – General Sir Richard Dannatt, former Chief of the General Staff

UNQUOTE
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After pop up shops and restaurants – a pop up rail depot

PHILIPPA EDMUNDS, manager of Freight on Rail, which promotes the economic, safety and environmental benefits of rail freight, offers an early end of term report on the state of freight.

The rail freight industry in Britain continues to innovate and maximise use of existing rail capacity as it develops new and existing markets after the steep decline in coal traffic this year.

We’ve had pop up shops and pop up restaurants and now DB Cargo and Cemex have opened a pop up construction rail depot to serve the growing construction market in north-west England and reduce the number of HGVs transporting materials from the picturesque High Peak countryside. This is noteworthy as it demonstrates that terminals of this nature can be set up quickly, dispelling the myth that terminals take a long time to plan and build; this one was installed in weeks on land adjacent to the West Coast main line using a ready-made weighbridge and office. The temporary site, at Warringdon in Cheshire, will handle around 125,000 tonnes of aggregates each year, transported from Dove Holes in Derbyshire, on two weekly services, with each train carrying around 1,540 tonnes. Up to 150 HGVs would be needed to carry this load by road.

ReCycled materials

Another initiative is the building of new European standards compliant box wagons from a significant proportion of recycled materials by Freightliner. It’s the first UK rail operator to build and use a new fleet of wagons made using parts from redundant coal hoppers for its new contract with Tarmac, one of the UK’s largest users of rail freight. As Freightliner needed a fleet of modern high capacity box wagons, unavailable in the UK, it has adapted its perfectly serviceable, but redundant, HHA coal wagons in partnership with Greenbrier Europe.

Direct Rail Services continues to run a daily service six days a week for a leading supermarket between Daventry and Scotland as well as six day services to Wentloog and Purlett via Barking and back to Daventry. DRS offers secondary distribution from Mossend to Inverness. DRS now uses Class 68 locomotives which are more fuel-efficient than the Class 66 loco and thus have lower emissions. DRS’s dual fuel Class 88 locos, currently being tested, will also be ideal for the Daventry to Mossend and Daventry to London services as they can use electric traction, and reduce CO2 emissions even more, as well as making more efficient use of the network.

SuPpressed demand

In May Freightliner launched its 23rd daily service from Felixstowe, increasing the total number of daily rail services in and out of the port to 32. The service will operate to and from the Freightliner rail port at Doncaster after development work has finished and, in the interim, it will be serviced at the DB Cargo site in Rotherham. Two months later, GB Railfreight started the 33rd service out of the port on the same route, demonstrating the scale of the demand for rail freight services which offer a fast, reliable, safe, and less polluting alternative to HGVs.

In total, rail services out of the port remove around 2,300 HGVs from the congested A14 corridor each day. There is suppressed demand for more rail freight services, especially in consumer traffic; every rail path that is available out of Felixstowe port can be used by rail immediately, demonstrating how the current funded and planned upgrades to the Felixstowe branch line, which will generate an additional ten daily paths, are crucial.

Despite shortages of capacity on the trans-Pennine route, GB Railfreight has secured extra rail slots to service its biomass services from the new Liverpool specialist biomass terminal to Drax power station, showcasing sustainable, reliable and affordable energy. The TN freight strategy, for which Freight on Rail ran a rail freight workshop, highlights how trans-Pennine rail routes need a serious upgrade, including electrification, to revive ports in the north.

Another crucial initiative is the DfT rail freight strategy, currently being written in partnership with rail freight operators, RFG, Freight on Rail, and key rail freight customers. The new Rail Minister, Paul Maynard, is responsible for this strategy, which is key to giving the sector the confidence to invest, as it demonstrates the level of government support for rail freight and future funding for upgrades on the network.

A key objective of the strategy is to show to what extent rail freight is already a crucial element of the supply chain as well as its potential to expand its market share. Road and rail freight complement each other and it is crucial that both modes play to their strengths to offer an integrated supply chain solution to customers who are mode agnostic. In particular, rail freight is best placed to provide long-haul trunk services for consumer products (container traffic) as well as the traditional bulk services.

Shift to rail

The strategy looks in detail at how to maximise use of existing capacity, how to safeguard strategic capacity in the future, how to work with Network Rail to support the development of the virtual freight route which is vital to protect rail freight interests across the national network in our increasingly devolved world. It also explores the importance of the next round of freight track access charging, taking into account all the economic, social and environmental benefits of rail freight, compared to HGVs, to UK plc. Freight on Rail is campaigning strongly to get the market distortions between HGVs and rail taken into account so that rail freight can compete more fairly with HGVs. Otherwise the economy and the public, who overwhelmingly support a shift to rail, will lose out.
Jeremy Corbyn was re-elected Labour leader on the eve of party conference. Jeremy won 61.8% of the vote, while Owen Smith got 38.2%. That’s a greater margin of victory than he achieved last year, and a result which emphatically endorses his mandate from the membership.

‘Like most people in the Labour Party, and the whole labour movement, I am absolutely delighted that Jeremy Corbyn has been re-elected,’ said Mick Whelan.

‘It’s now time for everyone – especially those in the Parliamentary Labour Party who have spent so much of the last year undermining Jeremy – to get behind him, to turn their fire on the Tories, and to get ready for a general election which could be just around the corner.

Labour, under Jeremy, offers a real – and positive – alternative to the failures of the last six years. Over the last twelve months, Jeremy has shown he is not just the man to lead Labour, but the man to heal the divisions in our country, and the man to build a better Britain fit for the 21st century.

He only does mass meetings

Tosh McDonald raised the roof with a typically combative speech to a packed Campaign for Labour Party Democracy fringe meeting at the Yacht Club on Saturday night. He provoked knowing chuckles when, celebrating Jeremy’s victory in an unnecessary – and expensive – second leadership election pushed by the right-wing Blairite rump of the party in Progress, the friends of Tony behind Owen Smith, Tosh laughed. ‘And they had the temerity to say that Jeremy Corbyn can only do mass meetings!’ Tosh urged, ‘Everyone now needs to get behind our elected leader.’ On another issue, he argued, ‘There is no place in our movement for racism or bigotry or anti-Semitism. But they should not stop us from speaking out about the plight of the Palestinians.’

MICK ELECTED TULO CHAIR

Mick Whelan was elected chair of the Trade Union & Labour Party Liaison Organisation on Saturday. ‘I want to thank all the trade unions who supported me,’ said Mick. ‘It’s a great privilege for me, and for my union, to hold this position.’ TULO co-ordinates the activities of the 14 trade unions which affiliate to the Labour Party – AsLEF; BEcTU; the Bakers, Food & Allied Workers’ Union; Community; CWU; FBU; GMB; Musicians’ Union; NUM; TSSA; UCATT; Unison; Unite and USDAW.

NO NUKES

Tosh McDonald spoke at a CND fringe, Stop Trident, in the performance space at the Bluecoat building on Sunday night. Others on the panel, chaired by Kate Hudson, included Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell; Shadow Health Secretary Diane Abbott; and Stephen Pound, MP for Ealing North.

Strawberry fields forever

A SLEF sent four delegates – Mick Whelan, general secretary; Tosh McDonald, EC president; Steve Richardson, a driver with South West Trains, from Waterloo Nine Elms branch; and Darran Scully, a driver with GWR LTV, from Reading – to the Labour Party conference in Liverpool from Sunday 25 to Wednesday 28 September.

Simon Weller, assistant general secretary; executive committee members Dave Caffe, Marz Colombini, Andy Hourigan, Andy Hudd and Howard Kaye; district organisers Dicky Fisher, Nigel Gibson and Colin Smith; and local reps Billy Baxter, Peter Cashman, Andy Clarke, Tom Corbin, Paul Hart, Peter Mason, Alan Moss and Danny Payne attended as visitors.

Collette Gibson of Gidea Park branch, who works for MTR Crossrail, attended as a delegate for Braintree constituency Labour Party and Becky Kaye went as a delegate for South West Surrey CLP. Ed Mayne, a trainee driver with SWT, member of Waterloo Nine Elms, and Labour councillor in Hounslow, attended as a visitor, too.

Kerry Cassidy of Labour Party who works for MTR Crossrail, attended as a delegate for Braintree constituency Labour Party and Becky Kaye went as a delegate for South West Surrey CLP. Ed Mayne, a trainee driver with SWT, member of Waterloo Nine Elms, and Labour councillor in Hounslow, attended as a visitor, too.

Steve, Becky, Simon, Marz, Darran, Collette, Tosh, Mick and Howard (above) and Theresa, Collette and Kerry (right) wait for a ferry across the Mersey

Penny Lane is in my ears and in my eyes: Tosh at the CLPD fringe

With the radio on

Mick Whelan was interviewed at length by Theo Usherwood, political editor of LBC, about the future for the Labour Party, and Britain, in the radio station’s makeshift studio at the conference centre on Saturday afternoon.

Andy Clarke, Tom Corbin, Paul Hart, Peter Mason, Alan Moss and Danny Payne attended as visitors.
Precious asset

ICK WHELAN gave a rousing speech at the Trade Union Group of MPs and Unions Together reception on Monday night.

He said: The trade union movement has always been an anchor for the Labour Party in times of trial and tribulation. The unions supported the party through the painful upheavals of the 1930s and 1980s. That’s what friends do. They support each other when the going gets tough and I believe Labour’s affiliated unions must remain an anchor for the party as we emerge from what has been a difficult period.

‘The link between the party and the trade union movement is one of our most precious assets. It’s the channel through which the views and experiences of millions of working men and women are heard across the Labour Party. From the branch to the GC to the shadow cabinet to the leader. The link keeps us rooted in the issues which matter to working people.

‘Jeremy’s election as leader was a landmark for the Labour Party and for British politics. It’s led to a re-energisation of Labour’s grassroots and a re-alignment of national debate. We must remember that the Labour Party has always been a broad church. From the Bevanites and Gaitskellites in the 1950s and ‘60s, to the debates of the 1980s, our party’s strength has always been in the range of social democratic views we embrace.

‘That is all the more important today because now is the time to unite as an opposition and attack this Tory government with everything we’ve got. Now is the time for a workplace rights agenda to help rebuild our economy. Now is the time to build a strong Labour policy programme which pledges to build millions of houses, to renationalise the railways, and to end the privatisation of the NHS. Now is the time to remember we are all Labour because we want to fight injustice and inequality. Colleagues, we must stand together and build for the future to secure a Labour victory at the next general election.’

Others speakers included Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn; Ian Lavery, MP for Wansbeck; and Jo Stevens, MP for Cardiff Central.

Public service not private profit

ANDY MCDONALD, the Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, told a packed Action for Rail fringe meeting at the Hilton hotel on Sunday lunchtime that, under the Tories, we have ‘lost the connection between public service and public transport.’

He promised that a Labour government, under Jeremy Corbyn, would restore that connection by bringing Britain’s railways back into public ownership. He described Southern as ‘an appallingly run franchise’ and said the DOO dispute is, primarily, about passenger safety in a safety-critical industry. ‘Chris Grayling may not be bothered but he will be when the first passenger, with a bag trapped in the door, is dragged along the platform.’

Mick Whelan brought the house down when he opened by referring to a meeting in the neighbouring room. I nearly walked into the room next door, about dying with dignity. The trouble is the railway isn’t dying with dignity. There’s no forward planning, no vision, no ambition. The old jokes about curled sandwiches on British Rail have been replaced by new jokes – except they’re not jokes – about the train operating companies taking out toilets, and taking out seats, so they can cram more people, standing up, onto their overcrowded trains, to make even more profit at the public’s expense.

Ian Taylor, director of Transport for Quality of Life, revealed new research showing the real cost to passengers and taxpayers of John Major’s ill-conceived privatisation. ‘The cost of the fragmentation of our railway is £290 million each year; and the cost of profit leakage – from our railway network – is a staggering £275 million every year. A fully integrated, and publicly-owned, railway will solve problems for passengers as well as for those who run the railway.’

Other speakers at the meeting, chaired by Paul Nowak, deputy general secretary of the TUC, included Manuel Cortes, general secretary of the TSSA; Mick Lynch, assistant general secretary of the RMT; and Diana Holland, assistant general secretary of Unite.

MARKING THE MOMENT

Mick Whelan chaired a Justice for Colombia fringe meeting on Tuesday night. The event – called Marking the Moment: Peace in Colombia – celebrated the landmark peace agreement between the government of Colombia and Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia or FARC).

Labour will take back control

Andy McDonald, the Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, underlined the next Labour government’s determination to take Britain’s railways back into public ownership during the transport debate on Sunday afternoon.

He said: ‘We are clear about this. We will put an end to Britain’s rip-off railways so, as private contracts expire, the routes will return to public ownership, so profits can be re-invested to improve services and hold fares down. Because passengers, not profit, should be at the heart of Britain’s railway. Let us have the same confidence as other countries like the Netherlands, Germany and France. Labour will take back control of our railways.’

Picture this

Kerry Cassidy, selfie queen, wasted no time posting this picture with Jeremy Corbyn – ‘Painting the town red on a Saturday night’ – on her Twitter account @ladytraindriver. Along with ‘Pleased to meet the lovely Angela Rayner, a genuine inspiration to all working-class women’ and ‘Welcome to the media circus’.

Later, when Kerry said she was off to meet ASLEF colleagues for dinner, she was told, ‘Aslef? That sounds like Aslan. Where’s
Leader who believes in public ownership

Tosh McDonald, speaking in the transport debate on Sunday afternoon, said: ‘I have to be careful what I say, conference, because Southern have a couple of injunctions out against ASLEF, as they are taking on our sister unions industrially, and taking us on in the courts. But we stand in solidarity with the RMT and the TSSA in saying there will be no extension of DOO as it is wrong for our industry.’

Tosh also told the conference hall: ‘It is great to have a leadership which believes in the public ownership of the railway because we all know that privatisation doesn’t work. Take the East coast. We all know that privatisation doesn’t work.’

Tosh also moved a composite motion about defending and promoting public services in the debate on the economy on Monday afternoon.

Off message

ASLEF delegates were media magnets in Liverpool. Mick Whelan was interviewed by Victoria Derbyshire on BBC News immediately after the announcement of Jeremy Corbyn’s re-election on Saturday; Tosh McDonald was interviewed by the Sunday Times; and Mick and Tosh were both interviewed by The Independent. Mick was also quoted in The Guardian, the Financial Times, Morning Star, Manchester Evening News, Northern Echo, Leicester Mercury, Belfast Telegraph and, er, The Sun about Jeremy as well.

WHEN Marz Colombini, Andy Hudd, Nikki McDonald and a few others from the ASLEF train crew turned up to support Tosh at the CLPD fringe on Saturday night, there was consternation at the door about whether we were in the right place. ‘The Yacht Club?’ said Marz. ‘Now that’s not a very proletarian place, is it?’ The swanky venue on the waterfront was, however, packed with the gills with left-wingers celebrating Jeremy’s re-election.

ED MILIBAND began his speech at the Open Labour fringe at the Quaker Meeting House on Sunday night – building a 21st century left – with a rather good gag. ‘I came up by train without a reservation. I wondered if, in the interests of party unity, I should sit on the floor?’

ANDY McDonald has a nice line in dry wit, too, as he showed at the Labour Transport Group fringe on Monday night. ‘The Pacers we have in the north were offered to the Kosovan government a few years ago and they just said, Are you joking? Don’t you think we have enough problems here already?’

CHRISTIAN WOLMAR was in wicked form at the LTG, too. ‘It all began to go wrong with the invention of the motor car’, he opened. ‘Before that, transport policy was collective. About buses and trains. Then, as my new book shows, it became all about car growth…’ He also candidly confessed on Tuesday that he was leaving Liverpool – by train, of course – a little early so he could stop off in beer town and watch Burton Albion play Queen’s Park Rangers in the Sky Bet Championship, otherwise known as the boulevard of broken dreams.

COLLETTE GIBSON was well impressed when the journalist, author and activist Owen Smith came over to the ASLEF train crew in Pizza Express on Tuesday lunchtime. ‘If only I were twenty years younger,’ she muttered. ‘And a different sex…’

PROGRESS has been accused of many things, but never let it be said that the Blairite rump of the Parliamentary party has no sense of irony. Its Tuesday lunchtime fringe meeting asking ‘How do we re-energise progressive centre-ground politics?’ was held at the Liverpool Comedy Club.

QUOTE...

‘All political parties face the timeless dilemma of how, if at all, to balance their principles against the desire for power. Some, like New Labour, tilt almost totally towards the latter. Others, like Corbyn’s Labour, care only for integrity. While both are perfectly coherent intellectual positions, only one is electable – though, as the calamity now unfolding Labour suggests, a terrible price will eventually be paid for jettisoning core beliefs which forged the movement in the first place.’ – Matthew Norman in The Independent...

...UNQUOTE
It’s been a hard day’s night

AFTER a hard day at conference – and every day at conference was a long, hard day – Jeremy Corbyn still found time to come to a joint ASLEF/Co-operative Party reception held at the Hard Day’s Night hotel on the edge of the Cavern quarter in Liverpool.

The hotel – with statues of the fab four on its façade – is just around the corner from the original Cavern Club, long closed, and several pubs, clubs, bars and shops touting for tourists by trading under the Cavern name.

Music at our reception was less homage to the Beatles, more tribute to Northern soul, and a couple of members of the EC, whose tastes lean more to heavy metal thunder and blue collar rock, opted to sit out the dancing in the officially designated quiet room...

Bottom up not top down democracy

Steve Richardson spoke from the podium – ‘first time delegate, first time speaker’ – on Tuesday morning ‘proud to second this emergency motion moved by our principled comrades from the TSSA.’

He said: ‘We need to remove top down democracy and avoid more damaging publicity. The proposed NEC rules changes are too important, and far too dissimilar, to be treated as a single item. It is absurd that they have been treated as a take it or leave it package, given that the proposals range from incumbents not having to seek nominations in the event of a leadership challenge; to new affiliations; to the explicit ruling out of councillors’ ability to support illegal budgets; to new policy powers; to, of course, the NEC’s proposal to extend our administrative body by adding one front bench member of the Scottish Parliament, and one from the National Assembly for Wales, each to be nominated by their respective leader.

‘The Collins report was an attempt to reduce trade union influence in the Labour Party and so is this proposal to extend the NEC. We in ASLEF enjoy bottom up democracy and we in the Labour Party should be entitled to the same. I have listened to, and been inspired by, speeches arguing for a fairer, more equal society. Now it’s time to campaign for individual members and affiliated organisations to be fairly represented in the Labour Party.’

Record passenger numbers are nothing to do with privatisation

Mick Whelan set the record straight – and gave the lie to some of the lines the RDG has been spinning during the party conference season – in a passionate speech at a Labour Transport Group fringe chaired by Chris Clark at Circo on Monday night.

He said: ‘The government, and the private rail operators, tell us that growth in rail, and record passenger numbers, are down to 20 years of privatisation and the investment and innovation it has introduced.

‘But record passenger numbers are due to changes in the economy, and society, which have nothing to do with privatisation. They have more to do with house prices and the distance people are willing to travel to work, changing family structures and wider lifestyle shifts.

‘Research shows that poor public transport services prevent people from accessing key local health, welfare, education and social services. It reinforces social exclusion. Little has been done to improve accessibility, cost, and the safety of transport links.

‘While poor public transport negatively affects the employment and education opportunities of jobseekers, young people, lone parents, older people, and people with disabilities, high rail fares are a problem for people in work, too, with transport poverty – when people pay more than 20% of their income on travelling to and from work – a growing issue.’

Other speakers included Shadow Transport Secretary Andy McDonald; London Labour MEP Lucy Anderson; TSSA GS Manuel Cortes; Unite AGS Diana Holland; and journalist and author Christian Wolmar.

FANNING THE FLAMES

Simon Weller poured a little diesel on the dying embers of a Rail Delivery Group fringe meeting – entitled Britain runs on rail – chaired by Sophy Ridge of Sky News on Monday lunchtime. The panel – Josh Hardie of the CBI; Paul Plummer of the RDG; Nick Forbes, leader of Newcastle city council and Labour’s Local Government Association group; and Anthony Smith of Transport Focus – had served up platitudes to a restless audience before Simon, speaking from the floor, ripped into the top table for failing to seriously address the problems of freight on rail in Britain. ‘Freight has collapsed,’ he said.

‘The number of drivers in the largest company is down from 3,000 to 1,250. Freight is the only part of the railway that is fully privatised, red in tooth and claw, with the companies cherry picking the best jobs.’

Turning to the failures of Southern Railways, Simon told a brutal truth: ‘You have lost the trust of passengers and staff.’

It was quite a contrast to the panel’s earlier discussion, in which Paul Plummer claimed ‘Privatisation is a great success story’ and ‘passengers get great value for money.’ Although Josh Hardie got a dry laugh when he said, ‘When Northern Rail and Manchester United made the same profit there was speculation as to which was the least popular with the people in Leeds…’

CITY BUILT ON SLAVES

Liverpool was a city built, in the 18th century, on the back of the slave trade. It overtook Bristol and London to become, as the International Slavery Museum, part of the Merseyside Maritime Museum on Albert Dock, candidly admits in its permanent exhibition, ‘the capital of the transatlantic slave trade.’

William Matthews, writing in 1794, believed: ‘The people of Liverpool, in their indiscriminate rage for commerce and getting money at all events, have nearly engrossed the trade.’

More than 1.5 million Africans were moved, in manacles, and as cargo, on ships owned by Liverpool’s merchant adventurers, to the Americas. ‘They will remember that we were sold, but not that we were strong,’ said William Prescott, a former slave, in 1937. ‘They will remember that we were bought, but not that we were brave.’

QUOTE...

‘A left-wing leader of a divided Labour Party, a woman leading the Tories – it’s like 1979, with the prospect of four successive terms of Tory leadership. Congratulations to all at Momentum.’ – Guido Fawkes

...UNQUOTE
Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free

Rodrigo Freeman Lopez, a driver with London Midland, was so moved by the plight of the men, women and children in the refugee camp at Calais that he went across the Channel to help as a volunteer. When he’s not working with the dispossessed Rodrigo runs marathons, tackles triathlons and, as he tells KEITH RICHMOND, is now planning to run a 250 mile trail race round the Thames Ring next summer

SLEF members have a long history of standing up for those less fortunate than themselves. It’s part of the beating heart of our trade union. Train drivers banded together in 1880 – in unity is strength – for protection from employers, like the Great Western Railway, who had just increased the working day for drivers and firemen from 10 to 12 hours while simultaneously slashing wages. But, over the last 126 years, members also have a tradition of standing up for those less able to help themselves.

Rodrigo Freeman Lopez was coming back to Britain with his wife Anna and their children Bella, nine, and Katie, four, after a three week family holiday in France, Spain and Portugal when they saw the refugee camp – known as the Jungle – in Calais. It looks like a third world shanty town – 9,000 impoverished men, women and children squeezed into a few acres, living in tents and improvised accommodation, without proper sanitary facilities, existing on one hot meal a day served by charities such as Calais Migrant Solidarity.

PEOPLE ARE DESPERATE

‘I didn’t realise the size of the camp,’ says Rodrigo, 37, who works for London Midland Trains, driving Class 350s from Euston to Rugby out of Bletchley. ‘So many displaced people, in such a place, and I wanted to help.’ He went with a group of ten volunteers for three days in October – working in the warehouse every morning, helping with the distribution of clothes, and with the carpenters building makeshift homes in the afternoon – and on a subsequent trip, in December, in the kitchens providing meals for people living in the camp.

‘I’d like to go again. These are people who are desperate, who want to work, and who only want to be given a chance to do something with their lives.’

Rodrigo was born and brought up in São Paulo, the biggest city in Brazil, but came to Britain at 19 to improve his English. ‘London was cold but I loved it!’ He studied for a BA in Management, and then an LLB in Law, at Birkbeck, University of London, and says dryly, ‘My wife thought I’d be a rich lawyer, not a train driver addicted to running!’ He worked in hotel and catering while studying, spent seven months as a guard, and then trained as a driver with Silverlink Metro at Watford Junction, getting his key in 2005.

A REAL BUZZ

‘It was a sedentary lifestyle. I was driving during the day and studying at uni at night and I put on weight. One day, when my favourite jeans wouldn’t fit, I decided to do something about it and started running.’

Initially without the concept of competition but Rodrigo found he enjoyed it and began taking it more seriously. He ran his first 10k race at Wembley and then, in 2008, his first marathon in New York. ‘I got a real buzz and I was hooked. Although I was sick when I finished!’ Since then he’s run 15.

But when he picked up an injury his doctor suggested he swim or cycle – less pressure on the legs and feet from pounding the pavement – and ‘I decided that if I was swimming, cycling and running then I might as well put them all together, in competition, and do a triathlon.’ He did his first, at Olney in Buckinghamshire, in 2010 – ‘I remember the water in the lake was very cold’ – and hasn’t looked back.

Last month he completed an ultra-marathon in Greece – 153 miles from the foot of the Acropolis in Athens to Sparta via Corinth, Nestani and Tegea following in the footsteps of Philippides in 490BC – in 34 hours 21 minutes, finishing 125th out of 400 starters.

And, as if that’s not enough, he’s now planning to run the Thames Ring, a 250 mile trail race in June that starts in Goring and does a big anti-clockwise loop, via Reading, Henley, Windsor, Staines, Syon Park, Uxbridge, Rickmansworth, along the Grand Union Canal, by Berkhamsted, Tring, Leighton Buzzard, Wolverton, Stoke Bruerne, Daventry, Cropredy, Banbury, Nethercote, Oxford and back to Streatley.

A LITTLE BIT CRAZY

‘So how does he do it?’ ‘You can have all the fitness in the world but it’s really about having a strong mind, rather than a strong body. Having the desire to finish.’

He knows some people ‘think I’m a little bit crazy’ – although running and cycling, and marathons and triathlons, are far more popular than they were 20 years ago – but Rodrigo is a well-grounded man. ‘I run four times a week; cycle three times a week; and swim twice a week. I train consistently, but I’m not out exercising all the time! And it’s very social. I’m a member of the Leighton Buzzard triathlon club and we talk as we run.’
Vitality, energy and stamina

ARDIFF branch was delighted that the Retired Members' Section committee made a first visit to the principality and I can vouch, on behalf of the branch, that it was a well and truly entertaining trip. RMS secretary Les Muir took to the floor for a very informative, and sometimes emotional, presentation outlining how pensioners in Britain find themselves struggling to make ends meet in our country, which is one of the five richest nations in the world. Les explained that 2.5 million pensioners are struggling to afford the essentials of life in the 21st century. ‘Struggling to survive,’ he said. ‘Living on pensions delivering rates well below the poverty line.’ The RMS upholds the aims and objectives they have set themselves by campaigning not only for the aims and objectives the government which, having changed pension legislation last May, has left pensioners finding that they are worse off than ever.

We might sometimes forget that the RMS are pensioners themselves but they have the vitality, energy and stamina to campaign not only on behalf of ASLEF’s retired members but on behalf of all pensioners who, as Les said on more than one occasion, ‘are being treated appallingly’. The branch was very appreciative and thanked the RMS for all their hard work and dedication fighting on behalf of our retired members. Their undertaking didn’t go unnoticed and the branch made a small donation to help towards the great work they are doing on behalf of all pensioners.

Also a big thank you to committee members Alan Taylor, the RMS treasurer, and former AGS Tony West. Garry Heath, branch secretary.

No shovels or picks in the Hall of Steam

A great gathering of 8A Edge Hill men, and some from neighbouring depots, at the Hall of Steam hostelry at Liverpool Lime Street station. No shovels or coal picks were allowed. However, great banter flowed as to which locomotive driver knew that the reversing wheel was not only used for going backwards, but an easement on the fireman trying to maintain a good fire and steam for the line ahead.

Colleagues chattered non-stop while glancing at the open door of the pub, observing the next visitor. ‘Who’s that?’ Once familiar faces, and girths, now deceptive, all led to a little amusement, to boot! The exceptions were the obvious gardeners, well sunburnt, physically fit, and in fine fettle from eating their own fresh produce.

It must be placed on record that Brother Geoff Connerty played a key role organising this event. That indicates the years covered because Geoff was rostered with me frequently as second man, as I was with his father, Big Bill Connerty, shovelling coal. Brothers George Hayley, Steve Mahoney and Peter Bracken should also be mentioned in dispatches, too.

A splendid event, scheduled from 1pm, but this old fella disappeared after 5pm, unable to stand the pace. A great gathering which, we hope, will only get bigger in the future.

W Potter, Liverpool

Upcoming events

- **RIPPLE LANE – FRIDAY 2 DECEMBER**
  Our Christmas gathering will take place at the LT Club, Hornchurch (District line) station, from 13.00 hrs. Everybody welcome for a reminisce and quaff of ale.

- **NORWOOD JUNCTION – SUNDAY 4 DECEMBER**
  Annual branch retired members’ buffet at Selhurst Railway Club. Our agm takes place at 12.30 with the buffet starting about 14.00. Details from Daniel Bound.

- **HITHER GREEN – WEDNESDAY 7 DECEMBER**
  Annual reunion from 12.0 at the Greyhound (a Wetherspoon pub) 205 High Street, Bromley, Kent, BR1 1NY.

- Please send your all branch news, reports, features and photographs to journal@aslef.org.uk

In memory of Gary

A fitting tribute was paid to ex-Manchester Piccadilly driver Gary Spencer, a loyal ASLEF member who joined the driving fraternity, and the union, in September 1985. Drivers based at Manchester Piccadilly employed by TransPennine Express have this year formed a golf society and our first tournament was for the Gary Spencer Memorial Trophy. Gary leaves behind his beloved wife Angie and his son Conner. Angie was invited to this year’s presentation evening to hand the trophy to this year’s winner, Billy Price, a conductor based at Manchester Airport. TPE donated £200 to the tournament, with the remaining funds being donated by members of train crew who knew and worked with Gary. A fine tribute to a loving husband, devoted father and loyal ASLEF member.

Steve Hill and Dave Evans, Manchester Piccadilly No 1

Sunshine at the Millgate

Sunshine greeted a full house at the Millgate, in the heart of Failsworth, where retired Newton Heath and Manchester Victoria drivers, and other grades, met up with wives and friends and former colleagues for the annual retired drivers’ reunion. There was an excellent buffet plus, of course, the alcohol raffle. Active and retired Newton Heath staff, plus other Manchester TOCs, are always welcome. Our thanks to Andy Gee and John Pattinson for the organisation and to the branch, and 105 members, for their continued support.

Sam Black, Newton Heath RMS
From the Wall of Death to the Battle of Jarama

**CHRIS NUTTY** reviews Townsend Productions’ touring version of *Dare Devil Rides to Jarama*, Neil Gore’s new play about the speedway star Clem Beckett, and the poet and critic Christopher Caudwell, two friends who joined the International Brigades to fight Fascism in Spain.

The story of a speedway rider who went off to fight in the Spanish Civil War sounds like the basis for the sort of larger than life ripping yarn of which Michael Palin would be proud. Yet that is the true life story of Clem ‘Dare Devil’ Beckett, depicted in *Dare Devil Rides to Jarama*, which is currently touring the UK.

Clem was born in Oldham in 1906 and played takes up the story from his time as a young man on the fairgrounds, riding a motorcycle on the Wall of Death, and on to his successful speedway career. Clem rode for White City, among other teams, and was instrumental in setting up Sheffield Tigers in 1929, a team that still exists today. Clem became politically aware, as we would say these days, while mending looms in Lancashire mills; he had witnessed poor working conditions and the struggle of trade unions to fight for workers’ rights.

**BANNED FROM RIDING**

He joined the Communist Party and formed a union for speedway riders in response to the dangerous riding conditions – and the lack of concern of the hard-hearted promoters of the sport – they faced at many tracks. He fell out with the sport’s governing body, the Auto Cycle Union, which was letting down riders by not being tough enough on track owners for poor safety standards. This resulted in Clem being banned from riding in Britain; he moved to Germany, and Denmark, where he met his wife Leda. Back in the UK Clem was active in the mass trespass at Kinder Scout in the Peak District in 1932. We now take walking these hills for granted, but we should remember the struggle that Clem and his generation had to gain free public access to these places.

It isn’t all doom and gloom, though; the play cleverly depicts these events through songs and poems as well as dialogue, twisting and turning as the story of his life unfolds. There’s a nice nod to George Formby along the way, another Lancashire lad with a liking for motorbikes.

On to the Spanish Civil War, a brutal conflict after General Franco’s right-wing Nationalists fought to take control of the country from the democratic Second Spanish Republic. The war lasted for three years, from 1936 to 1939, and claimed more than half a million lives. Franco was backed by Hitler and Mussolini, while the Republican government was denied support because of various non-aggression pacts. It was left to the International Brigades of volunteers to come to their aid. Britain’s brigade was made up of communists, socialists and trade unionists and included many household names such as George Orwell, Jack Jones, Ralph Fox and James Robertson Justice. But the legitimate, left-wing, Spanish republic fell under fascist dictatorship.

**EXHILARATING EVENING**

The sad thing is that Clem’s story has many parallels with today’s world; austerity, persecution of those of different ethnicity, or who stand up for their rights; the rise of nationalism and the extreme right across Europe. For those with an interest in motorcycle sport the clever sets in the speedway scenes remind us of every speedway or dog track to which you’ve been. Neil Gore’s writing is both poignant and entertaining, and both he and David Heywood’s character portrayals are brilliant.

The play stands up in its own right as a fascinating piece of theatre, and even if politics or motorcycles are not really your thing, I would recommend an exhilarating evening. The play’s programme contains more information about the story and a small, but interesting, exhibition from the International Brigades Memorial Trust accompanies the play on its rounds.

**Mick Holder turns back time to November 1916**

The war bonus, and who’s paying for it, and the working day were all topics in the *Journal* 100 years ago

**POCKETS OF THE PEOPLE**

The editor writes: ‘Our members will now have been enjoying the increased war bonus for some weeks and, while the majority will most likely look on it as a trade union victory, may we draw their attention to where it is a failure. We refer to the fact that our Society first set out to endeavour to get the government to use a firmer hand with the profiteers so that the cost of living could be brought down, to the advantage of the whole of the working people of this country. The result, to put it in a nutshell, was that the government refused to control the profit-mongering of their friends, but offered to take some more from the pockets of the people and give it as a sop to the railwaymen. While we are profiting by the further taxation of the common people, can it be said to be a victory for the people, or any portion of them, over the profit-making classes? Think it over.’

**AMERICANS WIN 8 HOUR DAY**

The editor congratulates ‘Our American railway friends on having won this battle for the 8-hour day which, by Act of Congress, will come into force in the new year. The railway companies suggest that the 8-hour law will cost them £15,000,000 in increased wages per annum, but the unions say the sum will not exceed £4,000,000. In any case, we think the companies may be able to afford it, if only out of past profits, for we note that the late Mr James Hill, the American railway magnate, left an estate worth some 30 million dollars.’ President Wilson said: ‘The 8-hour day has the judgement of society in its favour, and should be adopted as the basis for wages, even where the actual work to be done cannot be completed within 8 hours. The railroads which have already adopted the 8-hour day do not seem to be at a serious disadvantage in respect to their cost of operation compared with the railroads that have retained the 10-hour day.’

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DARE DEVIL RIDES TO JARAMA

A new play by Neil Gore

‘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.

No to TTIP - a 12-song CD featuring contributions from...

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STEVE KINGSTON FIGHTER TO THE END
It is with great sadness that I have to inform you of the passing of our Brother Stephen Kingston who passed away peacefully at home, surrounded by his loving family, on 3 August. Steve – Kingo to his mates – was just 50 years and had fought a brave, year-long battle with lymphoma; one he ultimately couldn’t win. Always positive, always a smile, always rather ask how you were than talk about his own health. A real fighter to the end.
He was with DB Schenker cargo at Peak Forest for less than 12 months when he was diagnosed in 2015 (he previously worked for Northern Rail at Manchester Victoria) and due to his limited service on the freight side ill health benefits were at a minimum. A national appeal to branches was sanctioned by the EC and a cheque from the hardship fund sent to Steve.
I would like to pass on the sincerest of thanks on behalf of Steve’s family to all branches that contributed. I know how humbled Steve was by the donations, and the well wishes sent with them, as well as the cards and phone calls he received. His wife and children are also eternally grateful for the way you helped them through this difficult time.

Steve’s funeral service was held at St Agnes Church in Reddish on 12 August. It was standing room only, packed out with family, friends and colleagues, showing what a popular and loving bloke Steve was. This service was followed by a burial at Gorton cemetery and a wake at the Lazy Toad in Droylsden. The pub was packed and many a glass raised in memory of Kingo.

Paul Costello, Buxton & Peak Forest branch

JAMES NORTHEY THE RIVER GANG IN SOMERSET
Ex-Launceston, Taunton and Bristol Bath Road driver Jim Northey passed away on 8 July 2016. He was 80. Jim was a Western man, starting his career at Launceston in Cornwall as a cleaner. He joined ASLEF in 1955 and remained a loyal member for 45 years. He was promoted to fireman and moved to Taunton to take up this position. During his time in Somerset a gang of fellow firemen and cleaners decided to have a night out in Burrowbridge. Whilst there the local youths took a dislike to this invasion of their manor. A confrontation and altercation took place with the Taunton lads coming off worse and ending up in the River Parrett! From here on in they were known as the River Gang!
Jim moved back to Launceston until the depot closed in the early 1960s as part of the Beeching cuts. He moved to Bristol Bath Road diesel depot as a relief driver, eventually getting his driver’s job in 1985. Jim progressed through the links to the top links, ending up working for Great Western HSS following the depot split. He retired in 2000 after almost 50 years in the driver’s job in 1985. Jim progressed through the ranks as cleaner, fireman and, finally, driver in the mid-1950s. He became an instructor driver in the late 1980s, towards the end of his railway career, and many drivers of my seniority benefited from his vast railway knowledge. Roy retired in the early 1990s before the depot splits and privatisation.

Bernard Kennedy. Bristol

ROY CORDY
Roy Cordy, a Great Western man working at St Philip’s Marsh and Bath Road depots, died on 15 April at the age of 87. He progressed through the ranks as cleaner, fireman and, finally, driver in the mid-1950s. He became an instructor driver in the late 1980s, towards the end of his railway career, and many drivers of my seniority benefited from his vast railway knowledge. Roy retired in the early 1990s before the depot splits and privatisation.

Bernard Kennedy. Bristol

PAUL BARBER TOP GEEZER
I knew Paul for 20 years, and got to know him a lot better after we both ended up working for CrossCountry; we had some great laughs together, and he was there for me when I needed a friend. After my move to Bristol we kept in touch and would regularly hook up for drinks in Brighton. Paul and his wife Maria were due to visit in June but a week before I got a phone call saying he had been diagnosed with lung cancer. I arranged to meet Paul in the Basket Makers a couple of weeks later, where we sat in the sunshine talking about the troubled times that lay ahead, and all sorts of other shite; we had a great few hours, exchanged gifts and said our goodbyes. Little did I know it would be for the last time. The next seven weeks passed with texts and phone calls, then all of a sudden it ended with a phone call while I was in Plymouth. Paul was a very private person; he didn’t want a funeral but wanted his body used for medical science. The speed his death happened stopped him from having his wish so he had the next best thing, as Maria, said ‘Bowie-esque’. All the best Paul, you will never be forgotten, top geezer.
Andy Gregg, Bristol

WILLIAM DAVENPORT
Bill Davenport, who began his life on the footplate at Newton Heath in 1953, moving to Manchester Victoria as a driver instructor, and who then retired to Poole in Dorset, has died at the age of 84.
Sam Black, Newton Heath RMS

MALCOLM TAIT
Retired Doncaster driver Malcolm Tait passed away after a short illness at the age of 71. Malc was a friendly bloke, a good mate, with a wicked sense of humour, who could find the best in any situation. He was also a dedicated and knowledgeable railwayman, working as a shunter, guard and driver in a 40 year career.
K Beresford. Doncaster branch secretary

ANDREW MUIR
Andy Muir, who started his footplate career in November 1947 at Newton Heath shed, later moving to Manchester Victoria, has died at 86.
Sam Black. Newton Heath RMS

SID BROWN RUN ONE IN FOR YOU
Bedford depot was shocked by the sudden demise of Sid Brown, one of the Polmadie 8 who came here when made redundant 20 years ago; he was the last remaining after the others graduated back to Scotland.
Sid was a very popular, unassuming man who came to work, got on with it and went home. For a very short time he joined GB Railfreight at Wellingborough but found it not to his liking so returned ‘home’ to Bedford.
After a period of ill health he came back as a shed driver where he was always willing to ‘run one in for you’ much to the liking of his colleagues. Our thoughts are with his family back in Glasgow where he was laid to rest.
Bill Davies. RMS, Bedford

Sid: One of the Polmadie 8

JAMES NORTHEY THE RIVER GANG IN SOMERSET
Cornish dragon
Ex-Launceston, Taunton and Bristol Bath Road driver Jim Northey passed away on 8 July 2016. He was 80. Jim was a Western man, starting his career at Launceston in Cornwall as a cleaner. He joined ASLEF in 1955 and remained a loyal member for 45 years. He was promoted to fireman and moved to Taunton to take up this position. During his time in Somerset a gang of fellow firemen and cleaners decided to have a night out in Burrowbridge. Whilst there the local youths took a dislike to this invasion of their manor. A confrontation and altercation took place with the Taunton lads coming off worse and ending up in the River Parrett! From here on in they were known as the River Gang!
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Jim had green fingers; his garden was his pride and joy. He was also a great animal lover, especially his cat, who followed him everywhere. He will be much missed by his wife Joan, daughter Teresa, family, friends and former work mates.
Bernard Kennedy. Bristol branch secretary

CORNISH DRAGON

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Sam Black. Newton Heath RMS

November 2016 I The ASLEF Journal 19
Remember Paddington
I wanted to write and offer my voice in support of your dispute with Southern on the anniversary of the Paddington train crash 17 years ago. As a survivor of the crash, in which 31 died, and countless others were burnt and injured, I am only too aware of the role of the guard/conductor. Colin, our guard, helped many people and in my eyes was a hero, directing many survivors to safety. What did the drivers do you may ask?
Sadly Brian Cooper, 52, a father of three from Hayes in Middlesex, the driver of the Great Western intercity train, and Michael Hodder, 31, a father of two from Reading, Berkshire, and the Thames Trains driver, were both immediately killed which, for me, underlines the deep importance of guards in the event of a serious incident. We must not forget, either, that the incident was caused by ignorance of 100 years of safety lessons; is, by bad management, disrupting franchise for the drivers do you may ask?

Barry Vaughan, Kingsbridge

Rush to single manning
I find it impossible to understand the rush by Govia Thameslink Railway to enforce single manning on electric trains to take hundreds of people in up to 12 coaches to Gatwick and perhaps on the Brighton route – hardly a branch line – as well accompanied by only one GTR employee – the driver.

It begs the question why GTR – with its High Court high-handedness – is risking injury or death to trusting passengers; is trying to single man train sets in arrogant ignorance of 100 years of safety lessons; is, by bad management, disrupting franchise conditions by cutting services; and is bringing unfruitful, but provocative, actions against employees.

Barry Vaughan, Kingsbridge

What a legacy we leave
May I say thank you to Bros Chris George and Robert O’Connell (Journal, October)? Although they disagree with me, and without seeming to be patronising, I respect their sincerely held views. However, it is not right that we lost power because we were not left-wing enough. Ed Miliband was left, maybe not left enough for some of you, and the trade union movement’s choice for Labour Party leader. It was our failure to nail the Tory lie that we were the architects of the financial crises that led to the electorate refusing to trust us with the economy.

With all foreign workers – a nasty policy that has frightening undertones of the darkest days in European history back in the 1930s and ’40s. The nasty party is clearly alive and well.

This country doesn’t work for everyone as Theresa May suggests. It is deeply divided; the rich and powerful are protected, whilst the rest of society is attacked and weakened, and that’s exactly how the Tories like it.

John Metcalfe, Carlisle
movement at the expense of free trade with the EU, reflected in the fall of sterling to a 35 year low, and it won’t stop there. What a legacy we leave our children and grandchildren...

Len Worboys, RMS, 63 years in ASLEF

Denis, menace and media

Did Denis Parker (Journal, October) really believe the headlines in the national press saying that £353 million spent on the EU would go to our wonderful NHS if we left? Perhaps the other promises or threats from Nigel and Boris swayed his thinking? Does he not realise the refugee camps in France are only there because of an agreement between the British and French governments? That as soon as we leave the EU the French are well within their rights to stop policing the Jungle as it is called? So it wasn’t really Project Fear – Mr Parker’s term, not mine – but someone trying to get some realism through to the readers of the Daily Fail, Daily Excess and The Scum.

Stuart Parry, RMS

When the facts change...

Given Diane Abbott’s recent outburst about anyone who voted for Brexit is a racist – she said ‘People who complain about freedom of movement will not be satisfied because what they really want is to see fewer foreign-looking people on their streets’ – maybe ASLEF should consider its position, given it backed the vote to leave the EU? Some months ago I thought Jeremy Corbyn was a breath of fresh air but, to quote John Maynard Keynes, ‘When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?’ I think we have to face the fact that Labour may well be out of power till 2030!

Simon Jackson, Tonbridge

This poison is pathetic

I have been a member of ASLEF since 1965. Yes, those of you who can count will realise that I have been a member for more than 51 years, which means I am over 65. And I bet you know what’s coming? Yes, you’ve guessed it! I work for that deplorable company West Coast Railways, the only train company in Britain that has incidents – SPADs, overruns, failure to call, opening doors on an eight coach train that’s standing in a four coach platform, etc, etc – that no other company has. This poison towards WCRC is pathetic. Do those people like Mick Whelan and Tosh McNabron – sorry, MacDonald – who want to close West Coast Railways not realise it is staffed by fully competent time-served footplatemen sadly missing on the modern railway?

D Blair, Hartlepool

The Laughing Cavalier

How nice it was to socialise with my former workmates at the King’s Cross branch annual reunion and tell a tale or two. Sadly missed, the hearty laugh of Jack Crate – the Laughing Cavalier – who attended reunions regularly until he passed away last year. The majority of members who attended were former BR drivers; I fear a great division could open up in future years if train drivers of all ages don’t mix together at social events and branch meetings.

P Begley, Bedford

Did you work a Class 40?

Did you work on Class 40 diesel locomotives? I am a signalman with NR although my father and grandfather were both drivers – my father was ASLEF for just under 50 years and my late grandfather for 42 – and I’m looking for information to add to my website www.class40motherlist.com. Stories, pictures, workings, anything at all to do with these engines. You can email me at scooterboy229@aol.com or write to me. Alan Wilson, 37 Hillside Road, Stratford on Avon, Warwickshire, CV37 9EB

Those Tory Brexiteers

The ASLEF Journal (September) refers to Michael Gove as one of the ‘Tory Brexiteers’. The three government ministers heading Brexit negotiations are David Davis, Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union; Liam Fox, Secretary of State for International Trade; and Boris Johnson, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. Michael Gove has no position in Prime Minister Theresa May’s new cabinet.

Stephen Norton, RMS

Thank you Stuart and Phil

Thanks to all my friends and colleagues for their support during my recent illness. My wife and I particularly wish to thank my LDC reps, Stuart Armour and Phil Mielieszko, without whose help I wouldn’t be on my way back to the driving seat.

Antony Cornwall

Thank you, Thompsons

I was a driver at Grangemouth, with 46 years’ service, and would like to thank you very much for all your assistance with Thompsons solicitors in obtaining a settlement for my asbestos claim. The cheque for £9,000 is greatly appreciated.

Patrick Connochie, Clackmannanshire

Lucky European number

My apologies. I scribbled an incorrect reference regarding driver training in my letter (Journal, October). It should be statutory instrument 1798 not 1758.

Nige ‘Bomber’ Harris, Plymouth

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

DAVE EAST has some badges to sell to raise money for preservation and repainting of Phase One 4 CIG 1753 named Chris Green in August. £5 + £1 p&p. Please send cheques payable to Network South East Railway Society to NSERS, 41 Highfield Road, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP1 6DD.

GWR NIGHT RIVIERA SLEEPER badge £7 + £2 recorded postage from Greg Burton. PayPal payment to intercityexpress25@hotmail.co.uk

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.com 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

SALTLEY 023 branch badge. £4 inc p&p. Contact Michael Clatworthy by email saltleybranchsecretary@live.co.uk or by mobile on 07786 338650.

PROFESSIONAL ENGRAVING at sensible prices. I can engrave anything you wish, such as the ASLEF logo on the pint tankard. Contact Paul Potts by email at ppotts1969@hotmail.co.uk

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

PD (Paddington depot) badge £5 + £2 recorded postage from Greg Burton. PayPal payment to intercityexpress125@hotmail.co.uk

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

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November 2016 | The ASLEF Journal 21
Covering up

Paul Davies, managing director of a management consultancy, reveals the cosy relationship between Govia Thameslink Railway and the Department for Transport

HERE is undoubtedly a cosy relationship between the Department for Transport and Govia Thameslink Railway but perhaps more worrying are the attempts to cover up this unhealthy alliance – now orchestrated at the top of the civil service and including the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Jeremy Heywood, and the government in the form of the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Ben Gummer.

We all have an interest in this – because it appears that the government, and the DfT, are using the relationship with GTR to bully the train company’s staff and, as the service deteriorates, to blame the unions to cover up an unhealthy relationship between civil servants and a private company.

WEB OF FALSE INFORMATION

I started to unravel this cosy relationship, between Govia and the DfT, over what seemed to be initially a fairly trivial matter – the Independent Penalty Fares Appeals Service. Parliament required that if penalty fares were introduced, there should be an independent appeals service. But it turns out that IPFAS is anything but independent – in fact it is run as an integral part of Southeastern Trains – owned, like Southern, by Govia. To cover this up the DfT and its Permanent Secretary Philip Rutnam created a web of false information including the statement that IPFAS was a separate business unit and then ‘an arm’s length subsidiary’. Even though he knew neither statement was true, Philip Rutnam has refused to respond to requests to correct them.

Nick Bisson, then Director for Rail, eventually admitted that every time a penalty fare appeal is turned down, executives of Govia personally benefit financially – with the blessing of the DfT. A DfT official also admitted that if an appeal is upheld, Govia’s executives profit unfairly, that is, it is run as an integral part of Southeastern Trains – owned, like Southern, by Govia. To cover this up the DfT and its Permanent Secretary Philip Rutnam created a web of false information including the statement that IPFAS was a separate business unit and then ‘an arm’s length subsidiary’. Even though he knew neither statement was true, Philip Rutnam has refused to respond to requests to correct them.

This is when I started to smell ‘something rotten in the state of Denmark’. I seemed to be scratching on the surface of a major scandal – if the DfT were prepared to help Govia’s executives make money secretly here – what else was going on?

I started to dig deeper and found that David Brown, chief executive of Govia, on a base salary of £2,160,000, used to be head of London surface transport – and a colleague of Philip Rutnam. I saw that the contract to run Thameslink wasn’t actually a franchise – but a management contract. This meant that Govia could do what it liked but faced no financial risk – it just got paid.

WORST PERFORMING COMPANIES

Charles Horton, who had run Southern Trains, and then Southeastern, both among the worst performing train companies for passengers, now runs GTR – which is absolutely the worst performing company. Peter Wilkinson, who worked with Govia to win the GTR contract, is now employed by the DfT – on a salary of £265,000 – to manage that contract which is, clearly, a conflict of interest. Wilkinson then set about insulting the staff to exacerbate an industrial dispute as a way of disguising the appalling service that GTR provide. No one outside the DfT, and civil service, believes Govia should be allowed to run Thameslink – but Rutnam is determined to protect Govia, and Brown and Horton, at all costs.

I got nowhere with my complaints to the DfT, so I wrote to the chief executive of the civil service, John Manzoni. He refused to do anything about the falsehoods authorised by Rutnam, on the grounds that this was government policy on the railways, and that my complaints had already been dealt with. I began to see that there was an active cover up of the unhealthy relationship between GTR and the DfT, which extends to the very top.

I wrote to Sue Gray, director general of propriety and ethics in the civil service, who eventually agreed to investigate if Rutnam had endorsed a falsehood to the Cabinet Office and the public to cover up the cosy relationship. Twice I had to formally complain about her prevarication – her repeated failures to report back – with no response. She finally wrote back at the end of July rejecting my complaints without mentioning what the complaints were about! Sue Gray, you might not be surprised to learn, has also been at the DfT – and is a former colleague of Philip Rutnam.

I wrote to Sir Jeremy Heywood complaining about the cosy relationship between Govia and the DfT. I received a letter back, on behalf of Sir Jeremy and Mr Gummer, which denied...
WHAT’S LEFT?

THIS should be a defining moment for progressive politicians. The economic orthodoxy has failed.

Mariana Mazzucato, Professor in the Economics of Innovation, Sussex University

Since 2010 Tory and UKIP masters of misdirection have performed an extraordinary mirror trick by directing fury away from the right-wing economics that caused the poverty, austerity and food banks we see, towards poor people, here and abroad – immigrants, welfare claimants, disabled people.

Ros Wynne-Jones, Daily Mirror

Politicians in all parties pay lip service to Disraeli’s ideal of one nation. But almost nobody believes that Westminster speaks for the common values of our nation any longer and, without that, democratic politics is inert.

Marc Stears, chief executive, the New Economics Foundation

In the sunny Blairite days it was possible to believe that everyone would be a winner. That belief became unsustainable after 2008. The economic crash discredited the Blairites and disoriented the Labour Party.

Gary Gerstle, Paul Mellon Professor of American History at Cambridge University

There is a growing divide of social values in British politics which splits the left’s core electorate down the middle and Labour, at present, has no effective strategy to address it. The young embrace immigration and diversity as beneficial while older voters are more attached to old forms of national and local identity and see immigration and diversity as a threat.

Robert Ford, Professor of Political Science at Manchester University

The left was rooted in big factories, and an even bigger working-class, in cohesive nation states, all of which have become irrelevant.

Neal Lawson, chair, Compass

The idea that Jeremy Corbyn’s mass rallies augur well for Labour’s electoral prospects reminds me of what I call the John Peel mistake when, circa 1969, he wondered why one of his favourite albums was not in the charts. ‘Everyone I know’s got a copy,’ he said. Back came the reply, ‘No. You just know everyone who’s got a copy.’

John Harris, The Guardian

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Prize Crossword 127 by Tom Williams

![Crossword Image]

Across
1. Elite university city
2. Fang
3. A hoard of riches
4. Firearm with spirally grooved barrel
5. Wealthy
6. Gap or cavity
7. Sharp and sour
8. Sleeveless cloak
9. Flat-bottomed boat
10. Slight tinge or hue
11. Back tooth
12. Assembly of spectators
13. Wipes furniture with a cloth
14. Get-up-and-go

Down
1. Freshwater mammal
2. Wood varnish (6, 6)
3. Twice as much
4. Rear of a boat
5. Maker or seller of sweets
6. Sewing cotton
7. Garden tool for weeding
8. Humour
9. Short flat-bladed oar
10. Extremely small
11. Spire
12. Desire
13. Fishes
14. Soaking
15. Termite
16. Flat-bottomed kettle
17. gap or cavity
18. Wipes furniture with a cloth
19. Back tooth
20. Assembly of spectators
21. Wipes furniture with a cloth
22. Get-up-and-go

Solution to Crossword 126

Across: 1 Pocket money 7 Plot 8 Penguin 9 Tie 10 Spire 11 Desert 13 Fishes 16 Sharp 18 Eel 19 Raisins 20 Aide 21 Sagittarius

Down: 1 Palace 2 Cattle 3 Expert 4 Minus 5 Nourish 6 Yankees 11 Desires 12 Soaking 13 Fiesta 14 Salami 15 Exodus 17 Point

Congratulations to John Cooper, of Burbage, Leicestershire, 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

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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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