Andy McDonald: a public railway under Labour
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HEY say it’s peaceful at the eye of the storm but, let me assure you, it’s not. You quickly learn that the media, the government, and some of the public don’t care about the real issues. The media, with one or two interesting exclusions, pander to the rhetoric about nasty unions hurting working people. I am yet to hear many people defend us for standing up not for gain, but for safety, on GTR Southern.

And where is the public outcry for 1,116 freight train drivers facing uncertainty at DBC after years of loyal service?

The government has chosen not to intervene or investigate the issues that may put the viability of our infrastructure at risk and I do not hear a lot from the appropriate industry quangos. As for GTR Southern, having employed them to do their dirty work, and caused all the issues that face us, the government attacks our right to strike; something we never do lightly or without family, and personal, cost. They’re getting desperate when they claim we are seeking to bring down the Tories; we are simply reacting to issues not of our making. Apparently we have a pact with sister trade unions; we do not, we have a joint campaign and are not even both affiliated to the same political party and, of course, compete with them in several areas.

We understand that passengers, paying inflated fares for a service that was crap before any action was taken, are naturally upset. Evidence of full crews sitting around while trains are cancelled makes you wonder what the company is up to. But we are receiving far more messages of support and 73% of the public want a guard on every train.

I am never surprised at the solidarity and unity you are showing at this difficult time. The constant drip feed of lies that we are refusing meetings, or of offers being made, and of course taking us to court, is all designed to undermine that. Offers to meet if we suspend or cancel action are not genuine; going to ACAS to be told ‘let us complete what we are doing and then we can talk about how we normalise relationships’ is not an offer, and you would rightly castigate us if we pursued either of those avenues. This is not about DOO, but dwell times, and is a scenario likely to be repeated in other franchises in coming years.

Despite our challenges, may I take this opportunity to wish you a Happy and Peaceful New Year.

Yours fraternally
Mick Whelan, general secretary
Standstill on Southern when drivers walk out

SLEF members on Southern Railways went on strike on Tuesday 13, Wednesday 14 and Friday 16 December in a dispute over the company’s decision to try and force through driver only operation on the franchise. Drivers, who voted overwhelmingly for action – 87.3% to strike, and 95.6% for industrial action short of a strike, on a turnout of 77%, well above the government’s artificially high new threshold – will walk out again from Monday 9 to Saturday 14 January. Train drivers have not been doing overtime since Tuesday 6 December.

The strikes closed the Southern network – not one train moved – and, as the TOC refuses to employ enough drivers to fulfil its legal franchise commitments, the overtime ban has hit the company hard, too, forcing it to cancel dozens of services every day.

‘A strike is always the last resort but, faced with an intransigent management, our only option,’ said general secretary Mick Whelan. ‘We tried to reach a sensible, workable compromise with Southern in the interests of passengers, the company, and staff. We always believed it 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 properly negotiate.’

The company – with a desperately thin argument about EU laws on freedom of movement and the right of people to get to Gatwick Airport, described by the judge, Sir Michael Burton, as ‘novel’, a legal euphemism for ‘risible’ – took the case to the High Court, where it lost, and then to the Appeal Court, where Lord Justice Elias, sitting with Lord Justice Lewison and Lord Justice Lloyd Jones, backed our right to take lawful industrial action.

ASLEF officers were out in force explaining our action. The GS was interviewed by John Humphrys in the prestigious 8.10am slot on Today on Radio 4; by Jo Coburn on Daily Politics on BBC 2; by ITV News, Sky News and Channel 5 News. AGS Simon Weller appeared live with Steph McGovern just after 8am on BBC Breakfast; with Michael Crick on Channel 4 News; and with Jeremy Vine on Radio 2. DO1 Graham Morris was on BBC South-East and Radio 5 Live and EC1 Marz Colombini did BBC London and a phone-in on 5 Live, too.

Mick said: ‘Our critics, in the government, and in the media, do not understand that unions, especially this one, are membership-driven and that we articulate the voice and the concerns of all the train drivers in the UK. Bearing in mind that up to 80% of UK rail is now wholly or partially run by operators in other countries the court case, calling into question the right of British workers to strike, was perverse. Fortunately, the court saw sense.’

QUOTE…
‘ASLEF not on strike. If Southern actually had enough drivers in the first place they could run a service. #SouthernFail #DoingItOnTheCheap.’ – Simon Weller

DBC DEAL IN SIGHT

After long, and extremely difficult, negotiations with DB Cargo, an end to the uncertainty hanging over the future of 1,116 freight train drivers may be in sight. ‘The voluntary redundancy programme is coming to an end,’ said AGS Simon Weller. ‘And a new set of terms and conditions will be presented to the executive committee.’

TWEETS OF THE MONTH

南方公司是急于寻找其雇员的声音。
 Alan Jones, Press Association

数百名低薪、零时制、被剥削的工作者需要一个工会。但是那些因为工作而被解雇的人已经决定使用它。
 Paul Lewis, Money Box on Radio 4

普通人民不能自己组织自己以捍卫自己的权利。他们保持沉默，因为他们已经把他们，以及那些使他们积怨的人，排除在外。
 Barney Farmer

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Mick Whelan has written to Chris Grayling expressing concern about the merger of ATOC and the RDG to ‘provide greater clarity about the services offered.’ Mick wrote: ‘At the time of rail privatisation the remit of ATOC covered the provision of staff travel facilities and railway pensions. I am concerned that what is essentially a rail industry employers’ association, the RDG, will now administer these important areas and benefits for railway staff. This creates a clear conflict of interest.’

QUOTE…
‘The public, says Chris Grayling, wants to know who is in charge and do not understand the present system. They will probably not understand the new one, either. If public understanding were the main criterion for how the railways should be run, they would have been renationalised long ago.’ – Peter Wilby, New Statesman
Blood on the tracks

JOHN McDONNELL, the Shadow Chancellor, with a forensic examination of the Tory Party’s failed economic policy, launched a corrosive attack on the Conservative government at a lively District 1 Council meeting.

‘Austerity is not just a word. Austerity means freezing or cutting wages and cutting back on public expenditure. Has the debt been reduced? No; borrowing has risen. Has the deficit been eradicated? No, it’s £47 billion and rising.

‘In my constituency, of Hayes & Harlington, it’s meant blood on the tracks. The truth is that trickle down economics, the dominant economic theory of neoliberalism, hasn’t worked. They think that if you make the rich ever richer some of that will trickle down to poorer people. But it doesn’t work and it will not work. ‘The Tories may think that those people who are “just about managing” are an electoral demographic, but for Labour they are our friends, our neighbours and the people we represent!’

John was one of five inspiring speakers at the Waterloo Action Centre on 5 December. The others were Ben Griffin, a former SAS trooper and founder of Veterans for Peace; internet sensation Mark McGowan, aka Chunky Mark, the Artist Taxi Driver; and Vincent Reynolds and Vicky Phillips of Thompsons solicitors.

MEL THORLEY fondly recalls the days that other depots referred to Longsight as Maplins. ‘We still had a shed master and the 9A depot code, which was introduced in 1935, and replaced in 1973 by TOPS-friendly LO and LG, was used on all rosters until closure in 1994. If you phoned the shed and asked whether to start the shift at Piccadilly or Longsight the answer came 9A if that was the start of your diagram. One day a Tinsley man came for a Class 47 which had been stopped for wheel flats and visited our lathe. He strolled into the mess room and said, “So this is Maplins?” That’s what they called us on the Eastern. He asked me if it was an urban myth that we still booked on and off on a clipboard. I took him into the lobby, took the board off the nail, and showed him my entry that morning, then amazed him further by telling him that when we booked on, or off, the window man always looked away.’

PAUL ROUTLEDGE turned up at the Etihad stadium, home of Manchester City, to play walking football for a feature in the Daily Mirror proudly wearing his red ASLEF sweatshirt. ‘But they made me wear a proper strip.’ Incidentally, Paul seems to think we’re an old school version of Facebook. ‘Having read his stuff in the ASLEF Journal, I went to see Gregor Gall in Bradford, a very agreeable couple of hours.’

BOB DYLAN, criticised for being rude and arrogant for failing to return calls from the Swedish Academy when they awarded him the Nobel Prize for Literature, and for pleading a previous engagement on the big night itself, has a bit of previous on this sort of thing. Once, when a fan went up to him and said, ‘You don’t know who I am, but I know who you are,’ Dylan famously replied, ‘Let’s keep it that way.’

THE GAMES people play. Stephen Bush takes to task those who view politics only in the Westminster bubble: ‘They make the mistake of seeing the Labour leader as a poor player of the Parliamentary game rather than realising he is someone who altogether disdains it. This was the mistake his Labour rivals made when they attempted to remove him last summer. As the shadow cabinet resignations mounted, his enemies congratulated themselves on their skill at chess, blissfully unaware that Jeremy Corbyn was playing Scrabble.’

CLIFF BLACKWELL spotted this mini freight loco, sending it to the Journal with the dry observation, ‘Due to cut backs in the freight sector, a new eco-friendly loco undergoing trials?’

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: H Newbury, with number 119, won the December draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £390.

Off the rails

Meet Reg the shih tzu, ASLEF’s newest member. Well, OK, not really one of our members, but he certainly took a shine to our Retired Members’ Section – and this ASLEF tie – when the RMS met for their recent weekend forum at Low Hall.
The GS challenged Paul Plummer’s misleading letter to The Times

M
ICK WHELAN spoke out in response to a letter published in The Times on 21 November which was picked up as a news story and for a leading article in the paper. The tendentious contribution, from Paul Plummer, chief executive of the Rail Delivery Group, was co-signed by Martin Griffiths of Stagecoach; Mark Carne of Network Rail; Karen Boswell of Hitachi; David Higgins of HS2; Russell Mears of Freightliner; David Begg of Transport Times and ‘a further 20 names’ according to the paper in a clumsy but co-ordinated campaign to push DOO.

‘It’s a shame that Paul Plummer doesn’t know what he’s talking about,’ said Mick. ‘What Mr Plummer — who, with his background in accounting, has no operational experience of Britain’s railways — mendaciously refers to as ‘modern technology’ is in fact nothing of the sort; it is technology designed in the 1970s, and introduced in the 1980s, which is palpably unfit for the number of passengers we have in the 21st century.

‘What Mr Plummer disingenuously refers to as “smarter working” is, in fact, a desire to cut corners, and cut costs, and bring in zero hours contracts, in order to drive up profits for the privatised train operating companies that he represents.

‘As the trade union which represents Britain’s train drivers, we, too, believe in investment in the railways; but investment in what should be a public service, run properly and efficiently for passengers, businesses and taxpayers, not for the TOCs which, as we see every day on Southern Railways, are manifestly failing passengers as well as staff. We would be willing to debate this publicly with Mr Plummer, any time, any place.’

We sent a letter refuting all of Paul Plummer’s allegations but The Times, which acknowledged receipt of our response, chose not to publish it.

DfT ‘in bed with GTR’

Paul Davies, who wrote about the relationship between GTR and the DfT in the Journal (November), has launched a campaign on the 38 Degrees website for an inquiry into the conduct of Philip Rutnam, permanent secretary at the Department for Transport.

‘I’ve launched a petition I hope you will sign — and let’s hope we get 100,000 signatures because that will trigger a Parliamentary debate. Rutnam authorised falsehoods to the Cabinet Office to protect the cosy relationship with GTR-Southern.’

Philip Hammond, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, has announced plans to spend £450 million to trial digital signalling technology on Britain’s railways. They are part of the infrastructure spending set out in the Chancellor’s autumn statement on 23 November to achieve a step change in reliability and squeeze more capacity out of our existing rail infrastructure. ‘It will mean the end of the line for 500 Victorian signal boxes using hand levers and Morse code-style messages.

TOP OF THE STOPS

Waterloo, with 99.2 million passengers last year, is Britain’s busiest railway station, according to new figures from the Office of Rail and Road. The top ten includes Victoria 85.3m; Liverpool Street 63.6m; London Bridge 49.5m; Charing Cross 42.98m; Euston 42.95m; Paddington 35.7m; Birmingham New Street 35.3m; King’s Cross 31.3m; and Stratford 30.9m.

ANDY NOW BRITISH CHAMP

Andy ‘Powerhouse’ Pearson, a driver with South West Trains, who was featured as a key worker in the Journal (January 2016), won a category in the recent British Powerlifting Union championships. Just champion, Andy!

VIRGIN TRAIN HITS CAR ON CROSSING

A five-car Virgin Trains Super Voyager, the 16.41 service from Preston to Glasgow, struck a car at Cleghorn level crossing, between Carstairs and Motherwell in South Lanarkshire, on 3 December. The occupants got out before the vehicle was dragged 80 yards along the line. British Transport Police are investigating how the car came to be on the crossing.

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MARK’S TIME

Mark Daniels, of Barking main line, has been selected to stand for Labour in Rochford South at the elections for Essex county council in May. He joins Collette Gibson, of Gidea Park, who is standing in Bocking.

END OF LINE FOR THE TRADITIONAL SIGNAL BOX

The Class 395 Regency Javelin at Brighton on its whistlestop tour of Sussex and Kent to raise a few bob for the Royal British Legion’s annual poppy appeal
For valour

KEN GRAINGER on a memorial to a young railwayman who won a posthumous Victoria Cross for attacking a German machine-gun position and capturing 14 prisoners

In 2003 ASLEF sponsorship helped the Great Central Railway Society restore the Great Central Railway memorial to 1,304 Great War dead on the forecourt of the Royal Victoria Holiday Inn, Sheffield. After the restoration, the men listed on it were traced, but an omission came to light – Lance Corporal Thomas Norman Jackson VC of the 1st Battalion, Coldstream Guards, the oldest regiment in the British Army. Norman was born in Swinton, south Yorkshire, in 1897 and was a railwayman – an engine cleaner at Great Central’s Mexborough loco – before joining the colours in December 1916. On the morning of 27 September 1918 his company’s assault on a heavily-defended section of the Hindenburg line was held up by withering machine-gun fire. According to the citation, ‘L/Cpl Jackson was the first to volunteer to follow Capt CH Frisby across the Canal du Nord in his rush against an enemy machine-gun post. With two comrades he followed his officer across the canal, rushed the post, capturing two machine-guns, and so enabled the companies to advance. Later in the morning, L/Cpl Jackson was the first to jump into a German trench which his platoon had to clear and, after doing further excellent work, was unfortunately killed. He was buried in Sanders Keep military cemetery, Graincourt-les-Havrincourt, his headstone inscribed with the Victoria Cross he was posthumously awarded.

But why was he not honoured on the Great Central memorial? He probably was, but his name was lost when the crumbling original stone plaques were replaced by kupron bronze panels in 1925. The memorial has been amended, again with the generous support of ASLEF, and was unveiled in the presence of past and present Coldstream Guardsmen, the Lord Mayor of Sheffield, the Mayor of Rotherham, and the Civic Mayor of Doncaster.

KEVIN CURRAN writes: The GC memorial only survived the closure of Sheffield Victoria station in 1970 thanks to the timely intervention and dogged determination of ASLEF’s branch secretary, Sid Rimmington, formerly of Staveley loco. A book of remembrance, with the history of the railwaymen listed on the memorial, is viewable on request at the hotel reception.

The name of L/Cpl Thomas Norman Jackson VC (left) who ‘showed the greatest valour and devotion to duty, and set an inspiring example to all’ is unveiled in Sheffield (right)

RED AND ALIVE

Our recent town hall meeting between the business council and the LLC reps coincided with Wear Red Day – we all sported something red to show our support for Show Racism the Red Card and raised £70 for the education charity.

Andy Bullock, Freightliner Intermodal business council rep

LUCIO RISING

Lucio Buffone, Paddington branch chair, who was featured as a key worker in the Journal (in February 2015) has been elected to the board of the London Labour Party as LGBT officer.

COP SAYS BOMB CHARITY SHOP

An undercover policeman spying on trade union activists suggested they fire bomb a charity shop. The Morning Star has revealed that the cop – who used the alias Carlo Neri between 2001 and 2006 and is still a serving policeman – wanted to attack the shop on Elgin Avenue, west London, so that anti-Nazi campaigners would get the blame.

NEW TRAINS ON THAMESLINK

New eight carriage Siemens Class 700 trains have replaced 29-year-old Class 319s on the Wimbledon and Sutton loop and on stopping services to and from Luton and St Albans.

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**I want to be elected**

**OSA AIMIENOHO, equality and diversity rep, Waterloo Nine Elms, reports on the ASLEF political course at Stoke Rochford**

THINK it’s fundamental and imperative for members of a trade union to be seriously active in their constituency Labour Party. For ASLEF to have any impact in the policy making machinery, we need to get politically involved. The days of letting a political elite decide our fates have gone; we need to get in there and help shape not only Britain’s transport policies, but the political decisions concerning health, housing and education that have an impact on us, our families, and society.

I was overjoyed when Steve Richardson, my branch secretary, confirmed my place on this year’s political course as I have always been interested in a political career. As I drove into Stoke Rochford Hall, near Grantham, I felt euphoric. The ambience – and the views from the grounds – were amazing. The buzz was quickly deflated when I looked at the itinerary. This was no jolly. It was a work-intensive week including three 12 hour event-packed days.

The course started with a welcome from Tosh McDonald, ASLEF’s executive committee president, with his take on the current political climate. The trainers – Mark Walker and Ed Murphy – were fantastic, very knowledgeable and very experienced. They gave us an overview of local government and outlined powers and responsibilities. We then went on to deal with the all-important question of how to get selected and then elected. We heard from two ASLEF members, Andy Botham (cabinet member for council services, Derbyshire county council) and Alan Moir (convener of the development and regeneration committee, East Dunbartonshire council), who have both taken the leap of faith and successfully contested elections for Labour. The benefit of their experience was invaluable. We also had the opportunity to do a mock radio interview, prepare a motion, and election speech.

**HOW CHRIS GRAYLING COULD REDUCE DEATHS ON OUR ROADS**

Campaigners are calling on the government to commit to moving more freight by rail to help reduce the number of deaths caused by heavy goods vehicles. ‘Removing HGVs from the road network has a number of benefits, not least in making our roads safer, and reducing fatalities, improving our air quality and reducing carbon emissions and congestion,’ said Philippa Edmunds, manager of Freight on Rail. ‘Rail is the safer, greener alternative for long distance consumer freight traffic, but there is currently a suppressed demand for these services because of a lack of capacity on the rail network. The government must prioritise funding to the strategic rail freight network to help improve road safety and reduce congestion and air pollution.’

**CARRIAGES ‘NOT GOOD ENOUGH’**

New c2c train carriages on the Shoeburyness to Fenchurch Street route have been criticised for doing nothing to ease long-standing overcrowding problems on the line. ‘There are fewer seats and more luggage holding,’ said Peter Slattery of the Southend Rail Travellers’ Association. ‘Passengers shouldn’t have to stand every day.’

**STUDY OF RAIL SUICIDE HOT SPOTS**

Network Rail has asked a team of academics to study the communities around 32 suicide hot spots. The anthropologists will work on the ground to investigate what it is about cluster locations that attracts those who want to kill themselves. ‘Currently, most research is done by psychologists, who offer explanations at an individual level, and sociologists, who have societal explanations,’ said Ian Stevens, who runs Network Rail’s suicide prevention programme. ‘All the prevention measures we could have are in place at these stations but, unfortunately, still people come and take their own life. We need to understand the communities around these spots.’

The highlight of the course was meeting Daily Mirror journalist Paul Routledge, who provided an excellent insight into how to deal with the news media, and Kelvin Hopkins, Labour MP for Luton North, who offered a frank, warts and all, perspective from inside the Westminster bubble.

EC1 Marz Colombini’s closing contribution stressed the importance of ASLEF’s political engagement and left us feeling motivated and ready to take the next steps along the path. It was a tough course, at times heavy going, but an enlightening five days which left me no doubt about my political inspirations and aspirations. It has practically prepared me, and given me the confidence, to take up this challenge. I would encourage anyone with interest in pursuing a political career to attend the course.

**NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE BLASTS DFT**

The National Audit Office has issued a damning report – blaming mismanagement by the Department for Transport – on the electrification of the Great Western line. It says cost overruns, delays, and contract variations have cost passengers – and taxpayers – £330 million. The cost of the project has risen by £2.1 billion in three years to £5.58 billion. ‘This is a case study in how not to manage a major programme,’ said Sir Amyas Morse, comptroller and auditor general of the NAO.

**QUOTE...**

‘As far as I have seen Cabinet ministers, they are not more clever than other people.’

– Anthony Trollope, Phineas Finn

...UNQUOTE
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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.

TOUR DATES

22-23 November St Michael’s Irish Centre, Liverpool (0151 263 1808; www.stmichaelsirishcentre.org)
24-26 November Yorkshire rural touring scheme (venues tbc)
30 November The Place, Bedford (01234 718112; www.theplacebedford.org.uk)
1 December Square Chapel, Halifax (01422 349422; www.squarechapel.co.uk)
2 December The Hat Factory, Luton (01582 878100)
3 December Ruskin College, Oxford (01865 759600; www.ruskin.ac.uk)
26 January The Carriage Works, Leeds (0113 376 0318)
27 January Working Class Movement Library, Manchester (07949 635910)
28 January Working Class Movement Library, Manchester (07949 635910)
1 February The Lighthouse, Poole (01202 280000)
3 February Buckereell, Devon (01363 773660)
4 February Burton Bradstock village hall, Dorset (01308 897421)
5 February Cadeleigh parish hall, Devon (01884 853111)
7 February Swan Theatre, Worcester (01905 611427)
9 February Corn Hall, Diss (01379 652241)
10 February Pound Arts, Corsham, Wiltshire (01249 701628/712618)
15 February Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich (01473 295900)
16 February Old Fire Station, Oxford (01865 263990)
17 February Crampforn Theatre, Chelmsford (01245 606505)
22 February Blackwood Miners (01495 227206)
24 February Hen & Chicken, Bristol (01749 870078)
25 February Marine Theatre, Lyme Regis (01297 442138)
1 March Wortley Hall (07974531211)
2 March Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough (01723 370541)
3 March The Maltings Theatre, Berwick-on-Tweed (01289 336999)
4 March Blantyre Miners’ Welfare, South Lanarkshire (01698 454690)
5 March Eden Court, Inverness (01463 2334234)
The silent killer

Asbestos disease is the most prominent occupational disease risk in Britain.
IAN McFAULL of Thompsons solicitors explains why it is an ongoing problem for ASLEF members and what you can do about it.

ANY workers in the railway industry have been exposed to asbestos at some point in their career. From old railway workshops to decaying train compartments, the risk of having been exposed to asbestos is significant for a large proportion of the workforce. Many ASLEF members will be able to remember the days when asbestos was a common fixture in locomotive cabins across the country.

Asbestos is still the most prominent occupational disease risk and can lead to a variety of lung conditions, including the fatal disease mesothelioma – current predictions are that there will be around 2,500 deaths from mesothelioma in the UK this year.

Thompsons solicitors is the leading legal representative for workers suffering from asbestos disease and brought the first successful case for compensation to the House of Lords in 1972. The firm has since worked tirelessly to protect and assist workers right across the country who have been affected by asbestos-related illnesses.

One case of an ASLEF member who needed the help of his union – and Thompsons – is a train driver from Wiltshire who developed mesothelioma due to years of asbestos exposure in his job. This ASLEF member worked on the railways until he retired after 55 years’ service, having been employed as a cleaner, a fireman, and, finally, a driver for the former British Railways Board.

He was exposed to asbestos throughout this period, as it had been used to lag boilers and cylinders and between casings on the trains. He was never provided with protection from the dust, nor was he warned about the dangers to his health.

It was only after retiring that the 73-year-old sought medical attention with complaints of breathlessness. Upon medical examination, doctors diagnosed that he was suffering with mesothelioma. This devastating and incurable lung disease was due to years of asbestos exposure.

Thompsons was instructed to investigate a compensation claim, and succeeded in obtaining an out of court settlement for the member.

If you – or any member of your family – has been diagnosed with ill-health due to asbestos, contact ASLEF immediately, to access expert legal advice.

A compensation claim for an asbestos-related disease must be started within three years from the date when the person suffering from the condition first became aware of the diagnosis. It does not matter whether the exposure to asbestos took place decades or longer ago – a compensation claim is still possible.

The time limitations are strict, so contacting ASLEF and speaking to an expert solicitor for free legal advice as soon as possible after a diagnosis is vital.

Through your union, you have access to specialist legal support if you suffer from an asbestos-related illness, and lawyers who can investigate and pursue a claim on your behalf against those responsible for negligence in the workplace. For more information about the dangers of asbestos and any steps you can take, please visit www.thompsons.law.co.uk/asbestos-diseases.

Another brick in the wall

WULLIE SIMPSON, ASLEF Education project worker in Scotland, reports from the SUL conference in Glasgow.

THE ninth Scottish Union Learning conference, at the Marriott hotel in Glasgow on 8 November, was attended by Kevin Lindsay, ASLEF’s organiser in Scotland, Wullie Simpson, ASLEF Education’s project worker in Scotland, and the Scottish ULR education team.

The themes were organising union learning and developing workforce skills based on the fair work framework. Peter Hunter, chair of the SUL board, warmly welcomed everyone and thanked the Scottish Qualifications Authority and Skills Development Scotland for their support.

Jamie Hepburn, Minister for Employability and Training in the Scottish government, said it’s a great opportunity to recognise and celebrate the invaluable work that the SUL education programme does to support workers across Scotland.

There was a panel session on organising learning and sharing good practice followed by a presentation from Katie Hutton of Skills Development Scotland. We then moved on to the workshop sessions where ULRs chose between four options – organising union learning; equality and learning, how to make a case for equality in the union and the workplace; digital unions, an introduction to coding for the web; and organising learning for young and precarious workers.

Frances Higson, who has made such critically-acclaimed films as The Magdalene Sisters, Orphans, and Fridge, spoke about her pathway from leaving school and dropping out of college to becoming a film director and producer. Graeme Smith, general secretary of the STUC, applauded the SUL award winners and thanked everyone in attendance for their contribution to the STUC learning programme in 2016. Wendy Burton, director of Scottish Union Learning, thanked the Scottish government and all the trade unions for their input to Scottish Union Learning.
Andy: Getting Britain’s railway back on track

Andy McDonald, the Shadow Transport Secretary, tells KEITH RICHMOND how he sees the future of the rail network in Britain (and ‘fesses up to playing in a punk rock band at uni)

NDY MCDONALD’S political career was almost strangled at birth. Passionate, committed, and working behind the scenes, he applied to join Labour’s local government panel – a list of candidates approved to stand for the party come election time. ‘I thought I’d get to fight a safe Tory seat, and lose, and was happy to do that.’ Except he was rejected. Because, it was said, he had known links with the Militant tendency.

‘The previous decade, I had represented somebody alleged to be a member of Militant and, as I explained to the appeal tribunal, as a lawyer, I represent many people accused of many things, including murder, but that didn’t mean I’d done any of those things myself.’ John Burton, Tony Blair’s agent, said there was no case to answer. ‘So I was admitted to the panel and ended up fighting a safe seat. Being rejected by the party kick-started my political career.’

Andy, 58, has a dry sense of humour. He’s good company, as well as dedicated, and, as someone who became a Member of Parliament relatively late in life, a man without that sense of entitlement which infects some on both sides of the House. But why get involved in politics?

‘The trigger for me was 1979 – that’s when I joined the party – in response to Margaret Thatcher’s speech on the steps of Downing Street when she quoted St Francis of Assisi – “Where there is discord, may we bring harmony” – it struck a chord with me because I knew it wasn’t true.

HOME TOWN HERO ON TEESSIDE

‘I benefited greatly from the Labour governments of Harold Wilson and Jim Callaghan, growing up in the 1960s and ’70s, in a country created after the Second World War by the Labour governments of Clement Attlee. I went to school for free, to university for free, and was treated in hospital for free.’

Andy is a home town hero on Teesside. He was born and brought up in Middlesbrough in, for want of a better expression, an ordinary working-class home. His dad, a Scot, worked in shipyards and factories, latterly at ICI, his mum was a primary school teacher. The values instilled in him by his parents, and the teachers at his Roman Catholic school, of hard work, and caring for others, chimed with his nascent socialism.

‘It wasn’t much of a leap to the Labour Party! Jeremy says some wonderful things, like treat your neighbour like yourself, and that kind of compassionate and caring society is one I want to work for. I had a pretty orthodox Catholic upbringing, and try to live up to those standards. I’m a practicing Roman Catholic; and I know I desperately need the practice!’

Initially, though, he found the Labour Party ‘an uncomfortable place to be, more conflict than consensus, and that shocked and disappointed me. The values and principles of our wonderful movement were observed more in the breach than in the observance. So why didn’t he leave?’ Because the Labour Party is our best hope, our best bet, and even if we don’t get there that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t strive for it. Socialism is like Catholicism. You get up every day and you fail every day. But that doesn’t mean you abandon your values and your principles.’

THE TEAM AND THE TOWN

Andy loves football and Middlesbrough, back in the Premier League, are his home town club although his dad, from Clydeside, took him as a boy to Celtic, too. He remembers Steve Gibson, the Boro chairman, from sixth form at school, and understands what a team can mean to a town.

‘Middlesbrough, the team, is synonymous with the town and its people, a focal point to bind people together. We’ve had some terrific highs and lows, and injustices, like the three points deducted in ’96-’97 which led to relegation, and people like Ali Brownlee, Mr Middlesbrough, who died last February, the best friend people had never met. It might be intangible, but there is a bond, and we saw it when the steelworks closed, with that demonstration at Old Trafford, and the crowd singing a version of Lord of the Dance in language of primary colours to David Cameron. The Speaker in the House of Commons understood exactly what that terribly cruel government was doing to my community, what it could have done, and chose not to.

‘This government doesn’t get the concept of an industrial strategy, that’s why it doesn’t have one. It only pretends to understand the issues. Everything is about extracting value, that’s their mantra, that’s their obsession, next quarter’s accounting report. There’s no long-term strategic thinking.’

D’YE KEN JOHN PEEL

Andy loves music, too. He passed Grade 7 piano and, as a precocious 17-year-old, formed a sixth form band called Amaraz – heavily influenced by Carlos Santana and Steely Dan, with difficult time signatures and a brass section – and then, at uni, a spoof punk rock band, Nasty Media, with Paul Valley, who, ironically, went on to write for the Church Times, the Sunday Times and The Tablet. Paul came up with a version of D’Ye Ken John Peel, the Radio 1 DJ, not the 19th century huntsman, which Peely played incessantly, and which was ridiculously successful, so we ended up on tour with John Cooper Clarke.

‘I still love music – people like Al Green and Marvin Gaye – but haven’t caught up with technology. I have my vinyl and CDs but have run out of kit to play them on. But I do Spotify and am a bit of a crooner, on the quiet, with the PLP.

With a degree in law and a passion for music he had two choices of career – teaching, specialising in music, was attractive – but went down the legal path because he wanted to stand up for the weak and the vulnerable, to right
remember the success of East Coast in the public sector from 2009 to 2014. We will bring them back into the public sector as franchises come to their end, or a break clause, or companies volunteer to give them up, so it won’t be an expensive exercise.’

That’s for the future but, in the meantime, there are serious problems at Southern and in the freight sector.

DEEP, DEEP TROUBLE

‘These are desperately worrying times for the freight industry and this government doesn’t have its eye on the ball. It will let the market decide and that won’t work. DBS is not just about the workforce, and the men and women the company is trying to dump, any more than it’s just about shipping goods and aggregates. It’s about the infrastructure and the maintenance of the railway itself, which the government just doesn’t get, and if it doesn’t then we’re in deep, deep trouble.

‘DOO is political motivation writ large. I’m not criticising conviction politics, per se, except these are exactly the wrong ones, trying to look at workforce costs as the first line of attack to increase profits, with no thought of safety, and security, for passengers. There are serious disability issues, with people being trapped in trains and on stations. The DfT is making a complete mess of this but, as we know, Chris Grayling is motivated not by what is in the best interest of passengers, but in keeping suburban services out of the clutches of a Labour Mayor of London.’

Despite talk of an early election, perhaps in spring this year, Andy thinks, ‘She’ll bottle it, do a Gordon Brown, and go on to 2020. And that, he thinks, is good for Labour. ‘Don’t be under the impression, is good for Labour. ‘Don’t be under the impression, I’m not all negativity. We have the joy of our sons, and have met many remarkable people. ‘

FLAGSHIP POLICY ON RAIL

He got his present job ‘by dint of circumstances; the limit of my ambition was to be a half decent Member of Parliament’ but has embraced it wholeheartedly, quickly mastering a complex brief. ‘It doesn’t hold the fears it once did. When you’re at the dispatch box you’ve got a platform for your notes, it’s like being the lead singer in a band, you’ve got the mic, it’s easier than being a backbencher.

‘Public ownership of the railway – a flagship policy for Labour – resonates with people who know it’s the right thing. How stupid is it to allow tens of millions of pounds to leak from our rail network in the name of the free market? The reality is there isn’t a railway in the world which doesn’t run with significant public subsidy. Why on earth, on that basis, should we not do it? It makes sense, instead of this complicated and costly system we have at the moment which, as we can see, doesn’t work. Revenue on the railway comes from two sources – the fare payer and the taxpayer – and it’s not Richard Branson. This country needs to lose its Virginity.

‘There’s a great public appetite for public ownership of something, like rail, which belongs to the people. We want worker involvement in the management and day to day running, and

FACT FILE

Andy McDonald was born and brought up in Acklam, Middlesbrough, in 1958. He went to state schools before reading Law at Leeds Beckett University.

He worked as a lawyer, becoming senior serious injury solicitor at the Thompsons solicitors office in Middlesbrough.

Andy was active in local politics for many years, serving as a councillor for Westbourne ward, before being selected to fight a by-election after the death of Stuart Bell in 2012. Andy won the seat, increasing Labour’s share of the vote to 60.5%.

He was appointed Parliamentary Private Secretary to Shadow Attorney General Emily Thornberry in 2013 and then, after Ed Miliband’s reshuffle, PPS to Shadow Business Secretary Chuka Umunna.

Andy was returned to Westminster at the general election in 2015, polling 18,584 votes, well ahead of UKIP (6,017), the Conservatives, (5,388), Greens (1,407) and Liberal Democrats (1,220).

He became PPS to Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell and then, in January 2016, was appointed Shadow Minister for Rail by Jeremy Corbyn.

Andy was promoted to Shadow Transport Secretary when Lilian Greenwood resigned after the EU referendum in June last year.

He has been married to Sally for 30 years. They had two children, both born with special needs; Rory died at 16 and Freddie, 22, has just moved into independent living. ‘He’s very, very happy. It opened a new world for us, healthy and sound as we are. It’s not all negativity. We have the joy of our sons, and have met many remarkable people.’
When I get older losing my hair

BILL DALE of Chingford branch, a committee member of ASLEF’s Retired Members’ Section, reports on the annual RMS forum at Low Hall, Scalby, North Yorkshire

The Retired Members’ Section held its annual forum at Low Hall, owned by the Yorkshire area of the National Union of Mineworkers, in the village of Scalby. It was nice to see members who had never been before and I believe they enjoyed the experience. The RMS is hoping to hold an additional forum in another part of the country in 2017. This is only possible due to the 500 Club and it would be great to have more people in the monthly draw so if you can spare £1 per week remember it greatly assists your retired colleagues. Forms are available from ASLEF head office or RMS secretary Alan Taylor.

The chair welcomed everyone, asked for a minute’s silence for Remembrance Day, then the forum was opened by executive committee president Tosh McDonald.

PROBLEMS FOR FREIGHT

He reported on the problems facing our colleagues in the freight operating companies, with the loss of coal and steel traffic, and reminded us of our close links with the NUM; ever since ASLEF was formed in 1880 we have been involved in the movement of coal around the country. The freight sector, he said, is the worst he can remember, with drivers under threat of live redundancies for the first time.

ASLEF has always worked with DB Cargo, but the company has a new boss, and issued redundancy notices to staff so they would have to re-apply for their own jobs under new terms and conditions, and 391 drivers’ jobs in 17 areas will be lost for good, anyway. DB is also sacking drivers in Germany. The only bit of good news is that they run TOCs, too, moulded him to become an active member of the Yorkshire area of the National Union of Mineworkers, in the village of Scalby.

Our first speaker on Saturday was Chris Kitchen, general secretary of the NUM, who spoke warmly about the close relationship between ASLEF and the NUM, and the bitter miners’ strike of 1984-85. Although the Tories did their damnedest to destroy the industry, and the union, the NUM continues with 350 members, and 200,000 retired members, and is currently financially sufficient.

FIGHTING FOR DIGNITY AND JUSTICE

Chris said that good pits were closed, and seams never opened, on the grounds of profitability. It has some similarity with the NHS – costs are increasing, so privatise it. The government – well, taxpayers, you and me and the rest of us – is going to cough up £18 billion to build the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station in Somerset – although the National Audit Office estimates the strike price will actually be £29.7 billion – yet there is a wealth of fossil fuel underground to serve all our energy requirements for years. ‘With modern technology to burn it, and the will to mine it, we could have 21st century power stations at a fraction of the price of Hinkley Point C.’

Rodney Bickerstaffe, former GS of NUPE, and then Unison, gave an address that was both serious and light-hearted. One of his current passions is the National Pensioners’ Convention, set up by Jack Jones of the T&G and himself, which now has 1.5 million members, all pensioners fighting for dignity and justice. Some people are trying to divide young and old, blaming the old for the hardships we face today, and nothing could be further from the truth. The older generation still pay the government £40 billion each year in taxes and other savings. The people to blame are in the Conservative government, for looking after the rich, and making the poor pay more and suffer more.

On Sunday Tosh closed our forum. He talked about his background, and how it moulded him to become an active member of the trade union movement and the Labour Party.

RISE AND FALL OF TONY BLAIR

Tosh talked about the political rise and fall of Tony Blair, and Gordon Brown, and how the Labour Party lost members, votes and seats with its right-wing free market New Labour agenda. Following the departure of Ed Miliband the union went for Jeremy Corbyn as leader and Tom Watson as deputy leader. We have all seen what has happened since. Jeremy has resisted calls from Blairites in the Parliamentary Labour Party to resign, and is still there because of his beliefs.

Tosh also talked about Britain’s decision to leave the European Union – the executive committee backed Brexit – which of course is at odds with the Labour Party leader, but Tosh said he still believes it was the right decision.

A warm vote of thanks was given to all our speakers for their time addressing our forum.
EW Year, new you. This is, traditionally, the... when we go on a diet, give up the cigarettes and alcohol, dig out the lycra and hit the gym. It may not last – how many of us make it past the third week of January? – but look at Andy Wakefield. This time last year Andy, 49, and 5ft 6in, weighed 26st. Now he weighs 12st 4lb. His waist was 60in; now it’s 34in. His collar was 21 and now it’s 14½. Andy is living proof it can be done.

‘I started putting on weight when I started driving trains. It’s the sedentary lifestyle and the cakes, biscuits, and sweets. Every time I had a cup of tea, I’d have something sweet. I loved fig rolls; I’d eat a packet, no problem. Before I began driving I was 16st or 17st, but carried it well. I was healthy. But the LCC office here has a cupboard full of biscuits and cakes. Everyone brings a packet.’

HEART TO HEART

After a routine operation, Andy ended up with sepsis, a life-threatening condition. He was rushed to hospital, where it was touch and go, and complicated by his weight. Afterwards doctors ‘had a go at me’ and offered him a gastric bypass. ‘Which I flatly refused. But my other half was very upset. She realised how close I’d come. We had a heart to heart and she said, “Look, we need to do something, and I’ll do it with you.”’

They joined Slimming World, a club with branches all over the country. ‘After Christmas, of course, and at my first weigh in I was bang on 26st.’

‘I’m 50 next birthday and knew this was my last chance. I wanted to be an RFU level 2 coach, but didn’t look the part. My attitude was I really want to do this, once and for all, get back to my 16-year-old weight. My target was 12st 7lb and I hit that in December. People who are large – it’s not that they don’t know what they need to do to lose weight, it’s having the motivation, and having the support.’

Andy went on a strict diet (see box below for a typical day) and took a little exercise – walking, swimming, badminton, rugby or going down the gym – every day.

The discipline of being weighed, once a week, at a two hour Slimming World session, helped. ‘But I wouldn’t have been able to do it without Sarah. I needed her support. She makes the soups – we eat exactly the same food – and she lost 5st to get down to 8st 7lb. Their son James, 19, is in the RAF, but Adam, 13, tucked into spag bol and healthy lasagnes at home.

‘Around the three month mark, I’d lost 5st, and realised I was still eating plenty of food, and not feeling hungry. It’s about making choices. You can choose to eat chips from a chip shop or cook your own in an ActiFry. You can go to a Curry house for a takeaway or make a fat-free curry yourself. It was my lightbulb moment – I can still enjoy the food I like! I’m over the moon. My GP has taken me off the blood pressure tablets. Colleagues on the railway have been really positive and encouraging – although one or two have walked past without recognising me – and now I need to make sure I don’t put it all back on. The only downside is my clothes no longer fit – they’ve been bagged up for charity – but to any railwayman thinking of it, I’d say go for it, but you need support.’

Andy, who was born and brought up in Nottingham, has the railway in his blood – his father was a fireman on steam locos – but when he left school at 16 he joined the Royal Artillery. 24692526 Gunner Wakefield spent ten years – many as part of a six man Rapier air defence team – serving in Germany, Cyprus, and Northern Ireland during the Troubles. ‘I loved the camaraderie of army life. Army friends are friends for life. If I ever need any help, I know where to go.’

BAND OF BROTHERS

He did ‘bits and bobs’ for a few years, including a stint at Vision Express, where he met Sarah, a frame repairer, who has been his partner for the last 22 years, and then in 1999 decided, belatedly, to follow in his father’s footsteps.

‘Challie Mitchell’s son was working for me, I was being made redundant, and Challie said, “Come on, let’s get you on the railway. Here’s the application.” I started as a guard with Central Trains, took to it like a duck to water, and regretted I didn’t do it as soon as I left the army. The friendship – we’re a band of brothers here at Nottingham – it’s like the army. He was a guard for two years – ’I’d always wanted to be a driver’ – and after a year’s training passed out in 2003. ‘I’ve driven 15XS and 170s, coast to coast, Skegness to Liverpool, and lots of places in between.’

He’s well known on the railway for his magnificent moustaches. ‘I started five years ago – in November – and kept them.’ He’s a member of the Handlebar Club, founded by actor Jimmy – Whack-O! – Edwards in 1947. Andy has entered the British Beard & Moustache competition twice, coming second in 2014 and first in 2016. He was 11th at the world championship in Leogang, Austria, in 2015 and is hoping to go to world championship 2017 in Austin, Texas, later this year.

Andy has always been fit. He loves rugby, played hooker for 22 Light Air Defence, and now coaches at Long Eaton, which won an RFU president’s award last year. ‘Like the railway, and the army, it’s a family. We serve bacon butties, tea, coffee, and sausage and bacon cobs from 9am on Sunday while the kids are playing.’

He loves singing, too, and wowed delegates with his karaoke versions of Mustang Sally and Try a Little Tenderness at AAD in Southend in 2015. ‘22 Air Defence are the Welsh Gunners and you don’t not sing in a Welsh regiment. And there are rugby songs, of course...’

WHAT ANDY ATE

Breakfast: Overnight Oats. 50g oats mixed with fat free yoghurt and fresh berries and left overnight. 1pt cold water with lemon juice. Mid-morning treat: Slimming World light bar. Lunch: Home made swede and carrot soup swirled with fat-free fromage frais and sprinkled with paprika. Mid-afternoon: Apple; orange; cup of black coffee. Tea: Chicken with rice. No food after 6pm. Lots of water throughout the day.
Watty was presented with a steam train, and a bottle of Famous Grouse, to mark his 60th year in ASLEF. From left: EC2 Hugh Bradley, DO2 Kevin Lindsay, Wattyand Hussein Ezzedine

1992. Watty is the first member of Edinburgh No 1 to reach 60 years in the union, a remarkable milestone. I had the honour, along with the district organiser, of presenting him with an engraved coal train to mark the occasion. Watty’s recognition is well deserved but has been a long time coming – something for which I can only offer a sincere apology. For, along with the 60 year award, he belatedly received his 50 year medallion. Better ten years late than never! Unfortunately, the fact that he has been such a long-serving member was not picked up until last year, and though the medallion was finally struck it did not arrive in time for the 2015 event. The ten year delay was regrettable and for this I apologise, however as a result Watty has made a further mark on our union. To avoid this happening in future our branch submitted a rule change which was adopted by AAD in Aviemore which ensures that branch secretaries now automatically receive details of retired members along with the branch list. I’ll finish by wishing Watty all the best for many more years in the RMS.

Hussein Ezzedine, Edinburgh No 1 branch secretary

We’ll miss you, Steve

Steve Jestico, Chingford branch secretary, who has just retired, started his railway career at Ripple Lane in 1974 and, after a few months, transferred to Stratford as a second man. He remained at Stratford as a driver until 1985 when he moved to Chingford where he stayed until retiring. During his time here he was a health & safety rep for a number of years and also branch secretary, a post he held for 20 years, making him the longest serving branch secretary the branch has had. Steve is a loyal and proud member of ASLEF and always worked hard on behalf of the union and its members. His humour. Steve was an example to us all – what it means to be a trade union member and activist. He will be greatly missed by all his friends at Chingford and everyone who knows him. On behalf of all the members we wish him well and a long and happy retirement.

Alan Edwards, Chingford branch vice-chair

ASHFORD – THURSDAY 5 JANUARY
Southeastern retired and working members’ reunion from 11.0 at Ashford railway club, Beaver Lane, Ashford, Kent. Had to be this date – only one available – and don’t forget to dig deep when the raffle comes round as that’s what pays the bill! Remember this is your reunion; use it or lose it.

DIDCOT – SATURDAY 29 APRIL
Past, present and associates welcome at our annual reunion from 12.0 at the Staff Association Club, Station Road, Didcot.

BRIGHTON & SUSSEX – TUESDAY 2 MAY
Informal open afternoon for all retired and working members of Brighton or any Sussex motive power depot from 14.00 at Brighton railway club, Belmont, Dyke Road. Details from Paul Edwards (07402 478278) or Paul Horan (07868 757492).

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

Jeff and Bernie take centre stage

(from left) S Gooch, N Gibson, J Morgan, B Murton, K Higgins

DOS Nigel Gibson presented Bernie Murton with his 50 years long service award at a well-attended (42 members) Ipswich AGM on 6 November. Bernie started on the railway in 1965 at Ipswich and passed as a cleaner in 1966. He transferred to Stratford to get his second man check, moved to Ripple Lane in 1973 and then East Ham where he stayed until 1994 when he moved back to Ipswich, retiring in 2012.

Nigel presented Jeff Morgan with a Class 47 County of Suffolk model from the branch. Jeff has been an LDC rep since 1985 and finished his term of office at the end of last year. Jeff has been a big part of Ipswich branch for many years and, with his wealth of knowledge of union agreements, and the hundreds of letters he has written to management, has been a real asset to the branch. A true legend and we would all like to say a massive thank you to Jeff for everything he has done for us.

Nigel finished by presenting badges to K Higgins and S Gooch (45 years); and R Stevenson and L Barber (30).

Lee Barber, Ipswich branch secretary
Mick Holder turns back time to January 1917

Bravery in battle, the eight hour day, and the housing crisis were all topics in the Journal 100 years ago

DEVOTION TO DUTY
The editor reports: ‘Another of our members, Bro Stewart, of Bury, has won the DCM. Thus do locomotive men prove their mettle and devotion to duty either on the railways or on the battlefield. We shall require more of this spirit after the war, when we demand the eight hour day and the present bonus put on to our wages, which we must do at the earliest opportunity.’

LIKE BEGGING GOLD
Pax reflects on the housing crisis: ‘When the nation can vote credits of £400 million for war purposes, it can raise 10% of that amount surely to house its people properly when the war is over. Even 5% would do wonders, but £40 million spent on housing would thrill all England with delight, and it would not end in smoke. It would be a sound national investment. Getting houses is like begging gold. The shortage is getting more acute, house-building has ceased throughout the country, and the return of the boys will create a crisis. It will have to be tackled by the state, which means the electors, and I hope they will handle it effectively.’

A NEW ERA WOULD DAWN
On school reform: ‘This question of education affects the working-class vitally, for so long as they are content for their children to receive instruction in the three Rs, with a smattering of battles, so long will they remain the toils of a really educated class who are selfish enough to monopolise education like they do wealth. The stern cry of every democrat should be for a sound and all-round education to continue until children are 16 years old, with continuation classes (in the day time) until they are 18: with an open door to secondary schools and universities. Short-sighted men have told me they couldn’t possibly afford it, that their children must go out to work to supplement the family income. They forget that if all this exploitation of juvenile labour was stopped adult wages would go up rapidly, child slavery would be ended, and a new era would dawn. Because they forget this, workmen often stand in their own light, and compel the boy to follow his father’s struggle.’

BADGES, MEDALS AND TANKARDS

DO1 Graham Morris came to Slade Green on 1 November to present Tony Berry with a 60 year tankard; Len Huntley and Terry Rayner with 50 year medals; and Lionel Birkbeck with a 40 year badge. He also handed out badges to Phil Burch, (20 years), former LDR, at his last branch before he joins the RMS in 2017; Dougie Garrett (15); Bill Beattie and Gary Tapley (10). We also have one member, Charlie Smith (no 1419), who has 75 years of ASLEF membership but who, unfortunately, couldn’t attend due to ill health.

Richard White, branch secretary

The GS joins the Ashford railway club for an evening of badges and beer. Our GS Mick Whelan presented badges covering over 250 years of service to ASLEF. He made a passionate speech in support of our members. We are not interested in bringing down a Tory government but in looking after the interests of our hard-working members. While the TOCs and FOCs are solely concerned about profit, we are concerned about people: ASLEF equals strength, which is required to give our members the best possible safeguards for their future and their families. Other big guns in attendance were Graham Morris, Marz Colombini, Steve Burgess, Ali Hussein and Martin Brooks.

Rob Kilkie, branch reporter

A very good turnout at the Ashford railway club for an evening of badges and beer. Our GS Mick Whelan presented badges covering over 250 years of service to ASLEF. He made a passionate speech in support of our members. We are not interested in bringing down a Tory government but in looking after the interests of our hard-working members. While the TOCs and FOCs are solely concerned about profit, we are concerned about people: ASLEF equals strength, which is required to give our members the best possible safeguards for their future and their families. Other big guns in attendance were Graham Morris, Marz Colombini, Steve Burgess, Ali Hussein and Martin Brooks.

Rob Kilkie, branch reporter

The GS joins the Ashford train crew and presents Andy Hutley with his 30 year badge (right)
Ideas worth fighting for

Nearly start out of Euston, travelling to Manchester Piccadilly, to visit the People’s History Museum. It’s a national museum, based in Manchester, which proves that ideas have always been worth fighting for. Where citizens of all ages can visit and learn about the history of the fight for democracy in Britain.

The collection relates the history of working people in this country. It is the largest archive of political material in Britain, spanning working people’s demands for a better world to organisations that represented them.

Befitting the national museum of democracy, objects related to the fight for the vote make up a core of the collection. These range from early 19th century radical demands for the vote, through to the Suffragettes, to the lowering of the age limit from 21 to 18 in 1969.

The People’s History Museum is an internationally significant political archive and includes the complete holdings of the Labour Party and the Communist Party of Great Britain. Regrettably, there’s a nod to the Conservative Party, too, and early Liberal Party material is strongly represented as are organisations such as the Department for Work and Pensions, the Trades Union Congress and the Co-operative group.

The objects are hugely varied. The collection of 400 trade union and political banners is the largest and most important in the world – and includes the world’s oldest trade union banner, that of the Liverpool Tinplate Workers first unfurled in 1821 – and the museum is one of the world’s leading authorities on the conservation and study of such banners.

Other material includes sashes and a vast collection of emblems from a wide range of organisations. There are more than 2,000 political posters covering elections and campaigns such as peace and equality. Satire forms a strong part of the holdings, too, with more than 300 political cartoons from the 18th, 19th, 20th and now 21st centuries. There are 7,000 badges and tokens, too, from the late 19th century to the present day. The museum also holds 95,000 photographic images covering labour history, the Labour Party and general political history.

It was a thoroughly interesting and worthwhile experience. And entry is free!

Having worked up a considerable thirst examining the exhibits it would have been wrong not to see a little more of the city so we met up with, and were made very welcome by, comrades from District Council 3. Thirsts slaked, hunger set in but there was no need to worry because our merry group was enhanced by colleagues from Thompsons solicitors who guided us to a local curry house.

The afternoon and evening involved a spirited and comradely discussion amongst us all, particularly in regard to the desperate times on the freight and the troubles with a certain number of TOCs. An excellent and entertaining trip with friendships made and renewed. The members of District Council 1 would like to thank our comrades from District Council 3 and Thompsons for their hospitality and we have resolved to organise more trips in the future.

Steve ‘Grudd’ Gurdler, RMS and Faversham

Moving on to the best link

Salisbury drivers’ social fund held its annual retirement dinner and dance on 22 October to honour ASLEF members moving on to the best link. A wonderful meal and excellent DJ were provided by the staff of the Milford Hall hotel who worked hard to cater for the needs of 60 plus guests on the night. The retirees we gathered to say farewell to were Sister Valerie Coote and Brother David Glynn who both served ASLEF loyally for many years. Val served as Salisbury branch chair and one time AAD delegate. Dave was on Freightliner company council and then, when he returned to South West Trains, served ASLEF members as Salisbury LDC rep. Presenting them with their certificates and gifts we were very proud to have GS Mick Whelan and EC1 Marz Colombini. The evening was, as ever, well organised by our social chairman, retired Salisbury driver Tony Kovolewski.

Jon Coulton, branch secretary

Ship shape and Bristol fashion

The October meeting of Bristol branch was a special occasion as Tosh McDonald, ASLEF’s president, and Brian Corbett, District 7 Organiser, were in attendance and a number of members were presented with long service badges. Normal branch business was dealt with on the previous day so the presentations could take place without delay.

The national president gave a state of the nation speech which went down very well. Tosh talked about many topics, including Brexit, the Tory government, the dire situation our members are facing in the freight sector, re-franchising, electrification on the Great Western main line, and ASLEF’s opposition to any extension of DOO or DCO. He also covered many of the modern challenges train drivers face and concluded by stressing how important celebrations of long service are! Steve Butter and Richard Heath (both 15 years) were present to receive their badges with another 34 members choosing to have less formal presentations at their depots. A total of 570 years’ service in all! I would like to thank everyone who attended, especially our guests, along with retired members Grahame Nash and Bruce Parkin.

Bernard Kennedy, branch secretary
**ERIC WRANGLES**

**HERTFORD BOY**

Eric Edward Wrangles (1932-2016) died on 8 August at the age of 84. He lived his life in Hertford, starting at Hatfield loco before moving to Hertford East, eventually becoming a driver, retiring due to a medical condition and the closure of the depot. Eric always attended our functions at Hatfield, as a member of the RMS, and we had the pleasure of presenting him with his 50 year medallion. Unfortunately he had a fall, sustaining injuries from which he never recovered. May he RIP.

*Peter Smith, RMS*

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**JOHN BARNES**

**LOYAL MEMBER**

John Barnes, who fought cancer bravely for several years, has sadly lost his fight. He started on the railway on the platform on the coast then transferred to Eastbourne loco and, when steam ended, came to Orpington in 1967. He was a very popular member of staff, always cheery, and came to Tonbridge where he completed 50 years’ service. We are thinking of your family and friends at this very sad time. God bless you, John, you will not be forgotten. A very loyal member.

*Dave Weddle, Tonbridge RMS*

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**PETER JENNER**

**STEAM LOCONS**

The Jenner family would like to thank railway staff from Willesden, Watford, Bletchley, and other depots, who attended Peter Jenner’s funeral at Crownhill crematorium, Milton Keynes, Bucks, on 2 November. Peter started at Watford shed in 1950 as a loco cleaner. He progressed to passed cleaner and became a locomotive fireman in 1951. He was called up for national service in the army from 1952 to 1954. When demobbed, Peter returned to his railway job as a locomotive fireman at Watford. Peter became a passed fireman in 1957 and then a driver on the steam, driving many famous steam locomotives. Peter retrained as a driver when the London Midland region was modernised in the 1960s. He transferred from Watford to Bletchley in 1984 and remained there until he retired in 1997.

*Ian Jenner (Peter’s son)*

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**MESTON COLLIE**

**47 YEARS’ SERVICE**

Meston Collie has passed away at the age of 89. He had 47 years’ service. Sadly missed by all those who knew him.

*Brian Wood, Aberdeen*

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**FRED GAME**

**ONE OF LIFE’S GENTLEMEN**

Fred Game passed away on 23 October after a short illness. Fred joined Tramlink in 2006. Coming from a management background, he soon learned that, in the transport industry, it is wise to belong to a good trade union! Fred was one of life’s gentlemen, and no one had a bad word for him. He suffered a broken leg in 2009, and then worked in the Tramlink shop, until he was ‘let go’ for ill health in 2011. Fred’s funeral was in King’s Lynn on 18 November, followed by a celebration of his life in Wisbech. Our thoughts are with his wife, Maxine.

*Robert Sambridge, Croydon Tram/Light Rail No 1*
Old ‘uns on a jolly outing

D Blair (Journal, November), no relation to Tony, I hope, says the ASLEF stance towards West Coast Railways is pathetic. Well, I think he is the one who is pathetic with his comments aimed at modern railway staff and ASLEF officials. I have witnessed first-hand how unprofessional some of the old WCR gang are whilst out on steam trips with other drivers: instances include a wrong signal being taken at Kensington which caused delays and once, while stopped at Taunton on the way up to London, the driver remarked, ‘I’ve never stopped at Slough in the dark before, hope I find it.’ Understandable because, prior to working for WCR, I don’t think he worked over Western routes. But it doesn’t fill you with a lot of confidence.

On one website a WCR driver can be seen cutting a cake celebrating 60 years on the footplate; how old are some of these characters? To be working on a preserved railway is one thing, but being let loose on the main line is another! If those working over the age of 65 slip up and get fired it doesn’t really make any difference to them; they have their pensions so just go on to retirement, whereas those working for TOCs who unfortunately slip up can have their career ended. That alone should ensure they take a little more care with their decisions.

It was very fortunate that a disaster was averted at Wootton Bassett with safety equipment isolated. I would be very surprised if any TOC driver were to do this. If you look at the clip on YouTube of the loco involved working the train down that day, you notice five or six men on the footplate. When I was still working it seemed like the end of the world if anyone was caught with an unofficial person in the cab. On WCR is it a different set of rules? It seems more like a jolly boys’ outing.

The chap driving the Flying Scotsman on the Antiques Roadshow recently looked as if he would have a job walking round the loco, let alone walking back a mile to protect the train if necessary. Or does WCR have different rules for that, as well? I am sure passengers are not aware of what is going on. I would be surprised to see airline pilots, police, firefighters and the like working on well into their 70s. Stacking shelves is one thing, safety critical work another.

I started work at the age of 15 in 1965, same as D Blair, the only difference is I am now retired and enjoying it. For years ASLEF strived for better pay and fewer hours, now both have been achieved some to want to work until they drop, and not just on WCR. I have heard that, instead of taking retirement, some TOC drivers now want to go part-time. That is pathetic. Get out and let others have a chance to work on the railway, as we did, and try to enjoy what time you have left.

Ian Strath, RMS

Democracy in action

A certain amount of controversy was created following a resolution at a recent Shrewsbury emergency branch meeting which highlighted concerns at the apparent lack of progress on industrial matters and provision of information for our members working for Colas IM. I was dismayed when the EC reported on the resolution in circular 661/2016 as it stated that the res from our branch was identical to one from Bristol – clearly someone has been busy with a wooden spoon harnessing the anger of our members and making bullets for others to fire. Our res, among other things, moved a motion of no confidence and called for the resignation of Colas IM company council rep Sean Dunne.

Consequently, our ordinary November branch meeting at Shrewsbury was standing room only, even after we moved out of our usual room, known as Poets’ Corner, into larger accommodation to vainly try and fit everyone in. Our district organiser, Dicky Fisher, attended to address the issues arising from the res and the parts aimed at him and Sean. He spoke honestly, and passionately, and members listened earnestly to what he had to say. After hearing Dicky’s report, our Colas IM members were still angry, but now their anger was focused in the correct direction and the branch unanimously and enthusiastically reversed the previous motion and passed a motion in support Dicky and Sean.

The meeting was also attended by EC vice-president Dave Calfe and Neal Cooper and Bob Earlam from LM company council. All our visiting reps, along with ATW company council lan Duncan, make regular appearances at the branch, all are accountable, and listen to what is said.

The union structure works, it responds, it acts. Use it. It is our union. Don’t let individuals undermine it. All our officers, whether full time or lay officials, face an uphill struggle with the constant threat of legal action, court appearances, political and corporate pressure being bought to bear upon them. We as a trade union must not allow additional burdens to be placed on competent, honest, and hardworking officers because of churlish
All the world’s a stage

The EC president, Tosh McDonald, and a number of ASLEF colleagues went to see Dare Devil Rides to Jarama. First on 10 November at Barnsley Civic Theatre, which coincided with the 125th anniversary of Barnsley trades council, and where Tosh gave a rousing speech at a pre-show reception, and, second, at the Cast Theatre in Doncaster on 12 November. The production is absolutely brilliant, with a great deal of audience participation, and a mention of ASLEF at the end. Superb.

David Court, RMS committee

Tosh and Dave join the cast on stage

ASLEF should then very gently ask those individuals if they would be prepared to now retire in order to free up some desperately needed vacancies for our freight men and women in their hour of need. I know if I was one of those drivers working past retirement, and leaving would create a vacancy in my company, I wouldn’t think twice about finishing.

A Priseman, Birmingham XC

Another great weekend

Another great weekend forum at Scalby with the RMS. Unfortunately the AGS could not attend due to the serious situation in the freight sector but, in his usual informative and entertaining style, our president Tosh McDonald stepped into the breach. Well done, Tosh. Other speakers included the GS of the NUM, who was only 17 when the miners’ strike started in 1984. His experience made him very interesting. Lots of subjects were discussed. Strangely, the more we debated the more the ale flowed. Makes you proud to be a member of ASLEF.

Spike Jones, Brighton

Ready for the challenges

I would like to thank all those members and reps who have supported me throughout my term of office, both within our district and further afield. The district organiser’s role is one I took on in 2012 with a passionate belief in ASLEF as a vehicle for the good of its members and the wider labour movement and I am really proud to have been re-elected for a further term as of June 2017. I very much look forward to working constructively, with all reps and members, to take us forward, ready for the challenges we face, in the years ahead. Thanks again.

Nigel Gibson, District 5 Organiser

Shurely shome mistake

On page 10 (Journal, December) you printed a photo of the Prime Minister captioned Theresa May (far left), Should this not have read Theresa May (far right)?

Jeff Veale, RMS Battersea

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ASHION is a funny business. The tide comes in and the tide goes out, with the width of lapels and the length of skirts. British Rail, once a byword for tired jokes about curled sandwiches, has come right back into fashion. It’s amazing what 20-odd years of privatisation and profiteering can do. *British Rail Designed 1948–97* by David Lawrence (Ian Allan, £35) rides the crest of a wave of nostalgia for British Rail – a publicly-owned, publicly-accountable, fully-integrated railway network where the wheels and steels worked properly together – sweeping the country. It’s more about design than trains or, as the author, an associate professor at Kingston University and curator at the London Transport Museum, puts it, ‘A study of the crafting, operation and marketing of a national transport system, by which four steam-powered rail empires were transformed into a modern national enterprise.’ There are some fabulous images in this book – of posters, signage, timetables and uniforms, as well as railway stations and rolling stock – next to an informative rolling commentary.

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

*Shovelling to Success* by Peter Mee, who retired from Toton depot in 2007 after 50 years on the railway, during which he moved up the grades from engine cleaner to engine driver, offers a rich slice of nostalgia, too. Copies cost £6 plus p&p. Contact Peter on 0115 932 3566 or via christinemee15@gmail.com

*The Train Kept A-Rollin’* by Spencer Vignes (Soundcheck Books, £14.99) examines 200 years of train songs and their singers including, inter alia, Bob Dylan; Johnny Cash; Nick Cave; Jimmie Rodgers, the singing brakeman; Lonnie Donegan (Rock Island Line); Paul Simon (‘I’m sitting in the railway station’); and The Who (S.15). It’s a rattling good read which will have you rooting around for songs you haven’t listened to for years.

‘If you voted to leave the European Union, you’ve been swindled.’ That’s the explosive contention of TJ Coles, director of the Plymouth Institute for Peace Research, in *The Great Brexit Swindle* (Clairview, £10.99). He blames ‘free market fanatics in the Conservative Party,’ ‘a powerful group of globalists and financial traders,’ and the political ideology of neoliberalism. They have ‘a worldwide agenda that seeks to deregulate markets and maximise profits for global elites at the expense of working people.’ Brexit, he says, was funded by ‘mega rich hedge fund managers and billionaire businessmen’ who sold the voters a pig in a poke. Provocative stuff that won’t be on Nigel’s bedside table.

‘It’s strange that in the land of William Shakespeare and Philip Pullman there isn’t a notion that reading is part of our whole culture. We are divided into the haves and have-nots when it comes to literature. This is where it’s all going wrong.’ – Michael Morpurgo

*How to Win an Argument* (Princeton University Press, £12.95) is, as the sub-title has it, an ancient guide to the art of persuasion by Marcus Tullius Cicero selected, edited, translated (and, I think, updated) by James May (an American academic, not the laid back Top Gear presenter). Wicked strategies for effective speaking, and writing, and just as effective in offices, courts and *Question Time* today as they were in the Roman forum.

In *Disparities* (Bloomsbury, £19.99) Slavoj Žižek, the influential Slovenian cultural critic, and philosopher of choice for the liberal left, examines contemporary negativities, post-humanism, and the new realism of the 21st century. He also enjoys settling a few scores in an intellectual punch-up...

‘Any book worth reading by children is also worth reading by grown-up persons.’ – Arthur Ransome

Ted Hughes casts a long shadow over anyone who writes about nature though Jos Smith in *Subterranea* (Arc Publications, £9.99) brings John Clare to mind, too. He writes beautifully about ‘the storm beach knee-deep in plastic debris’, a ‘refuge of subterranean grudges’ and ‘badgers, / buried, fogging their sett with stink‘; the Torrey Canyon disaster – ‘Thick mist with chemical rainbow swirling about us / and the black rind on the water still as leather’ – as well as soldiers on Dartmoor, cows on Cadbury Hill, and the slow landscapes along the route of HS2. He has a passion, like Robert Macfarlane, for wonderful words – such as stugged, clitter, fossicking, foraminifera, and grimpen – to describe the wild, and sometimes despoiled, landscape of these islands and namechecks Black Ridge, Hangingstone Hill, the rivers Dart, Taw, Teign and Tavy; as well as William Wordsworth, Daniel Defoe, and Miranda from *The Tempest*. 
TRUMP-L’OEIL

Donald Trump was the least qualified presidential candidate in US history. Throughout the campaign, he showed himself to be a racist, a misogynist, a bully, and a narcissist. Yet he won. Mr Trump, a disliked candidate, was able to defeat an even more loathed opponent. New Statesman

Hillary Clinton lost to a megalomaniac sexual predator with the grammar of a 11-year-old, the attention span of a four-year-old, and the manners of a toddler run amok in McDonalds. Given a choice between a highly qualified woman and a spectacularly unqualified man, they chose Donald Trump. God bless America. Allison Pearson

The Third Way: born 1992, died 2016, buried alongside the hopes of Hillary Clinton. The Clinton name is central to the story of how moderates moving from the left into the centre ground conquered the world and held power for close to a generation. Bill Clinton won in 1992, Tony Blair in 1997, and Gerhard Schröder in 1998. John McTernan, Daily Telegraph

Trump is a neo-fascist. He boasts that he will ‘make America great again’ and his rhetoric consciously echoes Charles Lindbergh and the America First isolationists who agitated to keep the United States out of the Second World War. Jason Cowley

High-earning voters decided his racism and misogyny were not as important as lower taxes; lower-earning voters felt caring about industry was a good excuse to vote for a bigot who, a few years ago, said the automobile industry should be left ‘to go bankrupt’. Hadley Freeman

The heir to a small fortune made by dubious means, Trump was a prominent figure on New York’s social scene in the 1990s, known for his vulgarity, his divorces, and his improbable hair. Among his other crimes, he crowned Piers Morgan champion of Celebrity Apprentice. Helen Lewis

In the US, as elsewhere, the centre-left has become disconnected from the working-class voters it purports to champion. New Statesman

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Prize Crossword 129 by Tom Williams

Across
3 Room under the roof of a house
6 Accomplished
7 Stringed instrument
8 Blunt-nosed small rodents
9 Continental
12 A wanderer or gypsy
14 An inanimate object
15 Jewish Sabbath
18 Deceive or defraud
19 Informal party or gathering
20 To double-cross
21 Frock

Down
1 Ambassador
2 Shut
3 Printed display to promote goods
4 Body of soldiers
5 Cups and saucers
6 Money kept for future use
10 A plague like the Black Death
11 Sleeping garment
13 Mature people
14 Business magnate
16 Keep out of the way of
17 Join into one

Solution to Crossword 128
Across: 1 Conservative 7 Extra 8 Cent 10 Stick 11 Sport 13 Heroin 15 Chance 17 Basil 18 Sepia 19 Earn 22 Roast 22 Globetrotter
Down: 1 Cheesecake 2 National 3 Elastic 4 Vanish 5 Tack 6 Van 9 Translator 12 Constant 14 Embargo 16 Export 18 Snob 20 Awl

Congratulations to Angus Munro of Armadale, Bathgate, West Lothian, who was last month’s winner. The winner of this month’s Prize Crossword will receive Marks & Spencer vouchers to the value of £25

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

Thanks for all your responses to the 128th prize crossword in the December edition of the ASLEF Journal. If you successfully complete this month’s crossword please send the solution to the Editor, ASLEF Journal, 77 St John Street, Clerkenwell, London, EC1M 4NN by 14 January

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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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