Southern Railways - anatomy of a strike

Getting rid of guards: what passengers say

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Mick: where’s the concern over a dishonourable employer ripping up agreements?

The last bastion of truth and integrity

HAVE never understood the politics of envy but always supported the ethos of aspiration, fairness, dignity and respect. As an organisation we have never subscribed to Margaret Thatcher’s claim that we are a society of individuals but have campaigned on all the issues that impact on us and our families, from the NHS to social care to dignity in retirement, education, and investment. This, of course, after we have undertaken the union’s primary role over terms and conditions, wages and safety. The 136 year history of this craft trade union is one we are rightly proud of, but I’m not sure those who are not in a union understand.

Polling and research shows people want a well-invested, safe and affordable green-integrated railway that works for the travelling public, the taxpayer, the freight sector and those who work in it. Strange, then, when we raise issues affecting the freight sector and the future maintenance of our infrastructure, there is no government support and those stakeholders we speak to are incredibly reluctant to say publicly that they share our concerns. Well, we won’t shut up in the light of hundreds of job cuts and the government’s trite response that ‘the market will assert itself’ will come back and haunt them as confidence seeps from the sector.

Even odder, given the many messages of support we have received, is the media frenzy over the dispute on GTR/Southern. Where is the concern over a dishonourable employer ripping up agreements and dragging us to court? Where the concern over Peter Wilkinson’s claims in Croydon that he would orchestrate this dispute? We hear nothing from ministers about that. Nine months of court action and we eventually go on strike, and highlight the company’s reliance on our goodwill and overtime to run its service, and the whole world wants to end the right to strike! Desperate Tory MPs claim the strike their policies caused is political – the last refuge of the inept – while a baying media calls us anti-worker.

Trade unions are the last bastion of truth and industrial integrity in the UK. We fight to make the lives of our members, and their families, better. We will never apologise for that but we do empathise with those impacted by our action. And, every day, the solidarity and unity you show inspires me.

Yours fraternally
Mick Whelan, general secretary
Passengers blame Southern as train drivers strike again

SLEF drivers on Southern Railways went on strike on Tuesday 10, Wednesday 11 and Friday 13 January in the continuing dispute over the company’s controversial decision – which rail industry experts say has backfired badly – to try and force through driver only operation across the region. Members, who voted overwhelmingly for action – 87.3% to strike, and 95.6% for industrial action short of a strike, on a turnout of 77% – have also not been working overtime since Tuesday 6 December.

The strikes closed the Southern network – the company was forced to plead with passengers not to travel – and an attempt to bus some commuters to stations on adjacent franchises, Southeastern and South West Trains, was also a flop, with rows of empty coaches parked up at stations.

Passengers explained on social media: ‘Why do I want to add another three-quarters of an hour to my journey each way? I want Southern to run the service it promised to provide. I want a guard on every train. It’s time the company sat down with the unions and did a deal.’

GS Mick Whelan said: ‘We greatly regret the industrial action we have been forced to take. We don’t want to inconvenience passengers, nor do our members want to lose money, but we have been bullied by an intransigent management which has not been prepared to negotiate with us.’

DO1 Graham Morris said: ‘There is mass support among drivers for the strike, and morale is holding up well. The vast majority of passengers are still on side, too, because they want a second safety-critical role on the train they are taking.’

WHAT A WASTE OF MONEY
Mick Whelan has responded to news that GTR/Southern, after losing in the High Court, and in the Court of Appeal, is seeking leave to take its case to the Supreme Court. He said: ‘What a waste of time and money! The High Court, and the Appeal Court, have already ruled that our industrial action on Southern Railways is entirely lawful. Instead of dragging this out, and wasting everybody’s time and money, the company should be sitting down with us and trying to resolve the issue.’

RAIL FRANCHISING IS IMPLODING
National Express has sold its Essex Thameside rail franchise to Trenitalia, the Italian state railway, for £70 million. The company has run the route between London, Tilbury and Southend since 2000 and was awarded a 15-year contract in 2014. ‘This is an astonishing development,’ said Mick Whelan. ‘Never before has a British rail franchise been directly transferred from one private operator to another in the privatised era. National Express defaulted on its East Coast franchise in 2009 and it clearly overbid for the Essex Thameside franchise in 2014. The difference is that Chris Grayling has let them off the hook and allowed them to walk away from their liabilities to British taxpayers. Rumours abound in our industry about other rail operators who have overbid. Will they be allowed to sell their franchises, too?’
**Wilkinson and DfT in conflict of interest row**

ETER WILKINSON, the controversial civil servant who is paid £265,000 a year – considerably more than the Prime Minister – as director of rail passenger services at the Department for Transport, has been exposed by an investigation in The Guardian for an apparent conflict of interest.

Under the damning headline Civil Servant Gave Southern Rail To Client Of His Firm, Lucas Amin and Rob Evans revealed how Wilkinson, who ‘awarded struggling Southern Rail its franchise, made the decision to award the contract while owning a large share in a consultancy firm that had been advising its parent company.’

Wilkinson played a key role in handing the Southern, Thameslink and Great Northern franchises on a plate to GTR in 2014. But he was, at the time, a director and the main shareholder of First Class Partnerships, a consultancy which had Govia as a longstanding client. Wilkinson was also involved in awarding a 15 year franchise – the Essex Thameside service – to c2c which, The Guardian revealed, had also paid handsomely for the services of First Class Partnerships.

According to The Guardian, an internal inquiry by DfT officials concluded that Wilkinson had a ‘clear conflict of interest’. Wilkinson refused to comment.

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**Cyclists ‘not road users’ says Transport Secretary**

Chris Grayling, the Secretary of State for Transport, has been accused of showing ‘an astonishing lack of knowledge’ of his brief after arguing, in the House of Commons, that cyclists do not count as ‘users of the roads’. The gaffe came just a month after Grayling, who has complained about bike lanes, knocked a cyclist off his bike.

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**Off the rails**

LUKE POLLARD is a director of a company called Field Consulting, which used to trade as Corporate Reputation Consulting, and which boasts it ‘specialises in helping clients with controversial issues’ such as, well, GTR/Southern. Now there’s a company with controversial issues! Luke was also, in a previous life, Labour and Co-operative Party candidate for Plymouth Sutton & Devonport in 2015. He asked for our support and we made a £250 donation in the hope he would win this marginal seat (he lost by 523 votes to the Conservative Oliver Colvile). Luke also attended our Plymouth branch which stomped up another £250. How generous of us! This was, of course, before he had his Saul-like conversion on the iron-road to Damascus and decided to work for a firm which represents Britain’s worst train company, the one trying to force us to drive trains – and passengers – in a way they know isn’t safe. We are, naturally, extremely pleased to have helped him reach where he is today – working for a firm which charges Southern £250 an hour to, er, improve its tarnished image. Well done, Luke...

MEL THORLEY, Longsight legend, and purveyor of many a good yarn about life on the permanent way, found this photo in his bottom drawer. It’s from Pictoria, a magazine for British Rail staff in Greater Manchester, and accompanied a story about how, on Monday 13 May 1991, the Longsight driver on docket 172 arrived at Altrincham at 16.04, to form the 16.10 2H26 to Alderley Edge via Stockport, and how he joined up with the Altrincham guard on docket 860 ‘fresh on’ at 15.55. ‘Normally,’ the magazine notes, ‘this passes off daily with no more than an exchange of greetings, but this, for the first time, brought together the father and daughter combination of Mel and Paula Thorley,’ Looks good but Mel now admits, ‘I got hammered back at the shed for wearing the hat. Some feared I was a management plant!’

BORIS JOHNSON put his foot in it – not for the first time – when, after picking up an award at the Spectator’s annual end of year bash, he boomed, ‘Brexit means Brexit. And this government is going to make a Titanic success of it!’ Cue gales of laughter – and hoots of derision – as the Foreign Secretary rummaged through his Latin lexicon for a less unsuitable image of a cherished policy hitting the rocks of reality.

NIGEL FARAGE, who has tried, and failed, seven times to become an MP – at Eastleigh in 1994, Salisbury in 1997, Bexhill & Battle in 2001, South Thanet in 2005, Bromley & Chislehurst in 2006, Buckingham in 2010, and South Thanet (again) in 2015 – was billed on Fox News as Leader of the Opposition in the United Kingdom. As Madonna might say, we are living not in a material, but a post-truth, world...

500 CLUB: A Miller, with number 200, won the January draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £390.
ASLEF in action

SLEF activists were out in force on Tuesday 3 January protesting about another savage fare increase for hard-pressed passengers on Britain’s railway network. The new round of rises – designed by the government to keep the TOCs in clover – means commuters are now paying up to 14% of their income just to get to work.

Rail fares have shot up twice as fast as wages over the last ten years. Analysts blame the privatisation – and fragmentation – of Britain’s railways and the train companies’ determination to bring in ever higher fares to make even bigger profits.

Commuters in this country now spend up to six times as much of their salary on rail fares compared with passengers elsewhere in Europe who benefit from publicly-owned railways. People travelling into London, for example, pay £387 a month, compared with just £61 in Paris or Rome.

New research by Action for Rail shows that UK workers on average salaries now spend 14% of their income on a monthly season ticket from Luton to London (£387) or 11% of their income on a monthly season ticket from Liverpool to Manchester (£292). In contrast, similar commutes cost passengers only 2% of their incomes in France, 3% in Germany and Italy, and 4% in Spain.

Frances O’Grady, general secretary of the TUC, said: ‘Years of failed privatisation have left us with sky high ticket prices, overcrowded trains, understaffed services, and out of date infrastructure. Private train companies are milking the system, and the government is letting them away with it.’

Mick Whelan, Dicky Fisher and Mick Cash hold the ASLEF banner at King’s Cross (above) while Rosie Winterton, Labour MP for Doncaster Central, joins Kev Beresford, Pat Carroll, Dave Court, and Tosh and Nikki McDonald outside Donny station (left)

Mick Whelan, who was at King’s Cross with Shadow Transport Secretary Andy McDonald, talking to passengers fed up with paying more to swell the profits of the privateers, said: ‘It is scandalous that the government is allowing the privatised train companies to make even more money for providing an ever poorer service. This new price hike –well above the rate of inflation – is indefensible and designed to punish passengers. Fares have now soared 25% in the last six years. ‘The train companies see passengers as sheep to be fleeced but it is shameful that the government is going along with them. No wonder so many commuters, many of them Tory voters, are saying they’ve had enough. We have the most expensive railway in Europe and the train companies, aided and abetted by this Conservative government, are making it even harder for people to travel when so many families are only just about managing.’

THE ANSWER, MY FRIEND, IS BLOWING IN THE WIND
All electric trains in Holland are now powered by wind energy, according to Nederlandse Spoorwegen, the Dutch state railway. ‘Since 1 January, 100% of our trains are running on wind,’ said NS spokesperson Ton Boon. ‘One windmill running for an hour can power a train for 120 miles.’ NS runs 5,500 services each day.

QUOTE...
‘Chris Grayling, in effect, destroyed the probation service and he is now in trouble as Transport Secretary. Last summer, he ran Theresa May’s Tory leadership campaign. How did she win?’ – Helen Lewis, New Statesman

UNQUOTE

Fit for purpose

Phil Hodgkiss, a fitter/workshop manager working for a private railway company at Barrow Hill, overhauling and maintaining a fleet of heritage traction diesel locos, spent 28 years working for British Rail at Tinsley traction depot in Rotherham from 1970 to 1998. ‘During my time with BR we had a few adventures, in and around the depot, so I wrote about them in Life and Times of a Railway Fitter.’ All 800 copies of the first print run sold out, so Phil has had another 200 printed. It’s a good read, with some fascinating photos, and offers a rare window into what is now another world. Price £10.95 plus £2.99 p&p (cheques made payable to Phil Hodgkiss) from 3 Laurel Avenue, Arkwright, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, S44 8BT.

Badge of honour

Euston branch commissioned a special badge last year to mark 50 years as an ASLEF branch – 1966; a vintage year for more than one reason, to 2016 – and to fund a new branch banner. ‘Sales to branch members have already covered the cost of production,’ says Cliff Holloway; ‘and all further sales are now pure profit.’

At our December meeting we decided what’s the point of a banner if we have no union?

Given current events in our industry, we decided that all future sales of this limited edition little beauty will go to the ASLEF hardship fund.

Dig deep for the hardship fund

If you would like one, send a minimum donation of £10, in addition to, and not instead of, your branch collection to the hardship fund, with an SAE, and currency or cheque payable to Cliff Holloway, 30 West Road, South Ockendon, Essex, RM15 6PH.

‘Hopefully, wearing this badge will be a symbol of us pulling together in support of colleagues, especially on Southern, fighting the most ferocious attack on drivers and railwaymen in a generation.’

Stay warm and dry this winter with our smart new black waterproof jacket. Price £30 (inc p&p); email info@aslef.org.uk or visit our online shop at www.aslef.org.uk
DOO – more crime on rail

DAVID GOULD reports on three submissions the union has made on behalf of members

ASLEF submitted three pieces of evidence – consultations and responses – over the festive period covering a variety of topics that affect our members. The union responded to a British Transport Police consultation on how the BTP should organise its criminal investigations business area. We explained that, if the industry continues to shed station staff, and on-board train staff, through a push for more driver only operated trains, then it will only increase the potential for more crime on the rail network and may well stretch the force. We also called for members involved in suicides to be treated as the victims of a crime.

ASLEF submitted evidence to the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Select Committee inquiry into the future world of work and workers’ rights. We pointed out that, whilst the railway has managed to avoid the increased use of casual labour throughout the rest of the British economy, this is becoming an increasing problem on the railway with smaller freight and charter train companies. We explained that, in a safety-critical role such as driving trains, this could have terrible consequences, especially if there is a lack of route knowledge or the hours worked are not recorded.

The union also responded to a Ministry of Justice consultation on Reforming the Soft Tissue Injury Claims Process about whiplash injuries. The government is seeking to increase the amount of damages which must be claimed through the small claims court from £1,000 to £5,000. Despite the misleading name, the new law will cover all injuries, including workplace injuries, and will mean that many more cases will come under the small claims court's jurisdiction. The problem with this is that you cannot reclaim your legal costs from the other party if you win your case. This means that whilst large insurance firms will have expert lawyers working on their behalf, claimants are unlikely to be able to afford them, and, if trade unions pay for solicitors, they will not be able to reclaim such costs. In our submission we explained, 'There are no benefits from these changes other than boosting the profits of the already extremely profitable insurance companies. Claims in the cases that would be newly covered by the small claims court are down, suggesting the whole premise of the need for change is entirely false. In preventing cost recovery from many more cases that would come under these rules, due to the 500% increase in the compensation limit, the government will force many people to represent themselves against large companies that will have legal professionals working for them. Alternatively, they will simply not be able to afford assistance. In either case, access to justice will be reduced.'

Heart unions week – a play on the old I Love New York campaign launched in 1977 and much imitated around the world – played a key role in the campaign against the Trade Union Act last year. 'We reminded the wider public of the value of trade unions, focusing on workplaces, reps and ordinary members,' says Frances O'Grady, general secretary of the TUC. 'We showed the real difference unions make – winning equal and decent pay, saving jobs, offering learning opportunities, and making workplaces safer and fairer.' The TUC is planning another week – from 7 to 14 February – of activities this year.

China says its trans-Eurasian rail service is cheaper than sea and air

The China Railway Corporation has launched a new 200 container block freight train service from China to the UK. It leaves Yiwu Xi station in Zhejiang province and arrives, 18 days and 7,456 miles later, at Barking in east London via Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Poland, Germany, Belgium and France.

Tea and coffee tastes better in a red and white ASLEF mug! Price £3.50 (inc p&p); email info@aslef.org.uk or visit our online shop at www.aslef.org.uk

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A TRAIN driver hailed as a hero for preventing disaster by bringing his loco to a safe halt despite suffering a serious heart attack at the controls has raised £10,000 for two charities. David Graham, 53, who lives in Childwall, Liverpool, and works for TransPennine Express, would have died had it not been for the prompt actions of a hen party of nurses on board his train and then of the Yorkshire Air Ambulance.

A seven-strong team of drivers and guards from Virgin Trains, Northern Rail and TPE, all based at Liverpool Lime Street, took part in a 63 hour charity train journey across Europe to raise funds for the British Heart Foundation and Yorkshire Air Ambulance. David, with Paul Fletcher, Stephen Gamble, Andrew Iles, Stephen Walker, Stephen Ward and Marc Wood travelled from Lime Street to Paris, Munich, Venice, Milan, Zurich, Basel, Berlin, Cologne and Brussels.

David was working the 9.48am service from Scarborough to Liverpool when he suffered severe chest pains, and later lost consciousness, on a remote stretch of track near Malton in North Yorkshire in 2012. He managed to bring his train to a halt safely, after which the guard on board raised the alarm. Nurses from the Royal Preston Hospital returned from a hen party treated him on the floor of his cab before the air ambulance took him to Hull Royal Infirmary.

‘I will be forever grateful to both charities for the part they played in both my rescue and recovery,’ said David. ‘And I want to thank all those who kindly donated to our challenge in support of these two very worthy causes.’

RULES CHANGED TO GUARANTEE TOCS MAKE BIGGER PROFITS

The government is changing rail franchise contracts to ensure that the privatised train operating companies achieve ‘sufficient profits’. The amended contracts will result in four of the next seven passenger franchises being delayed by a year. Peter Wilkinson, managing director of passenger services at the DfT, told a City bank that the department will ease rail franchise finances to support train companies because of the economic downturn.

Mick Whelan said: ‘I really do wonder what it will take for the DfT to accept its rail franchising system has failed. I am frankly amazed that the DfT is seriously suggesting using even more taxpayers’ money to prop up train company profits on the day passengers are being hit with inflation busting fare increases.’

He added: ‘The government’s failure to develop a credible and coherent rail policy is desperately disappointing for those of us who care about Britain’s railways. It’s really bad news for passengers, staff, and investment. You can’t control what you don’t own. This demonstrates that we need an integrated and publicly-owned railway now more than ever.’

Silver Shadow surfs 75mph Mersey train

Police are hunting a man caught on camera surfing the top of a train travelling at 75mph. The man, who told onlookers he was the Silver Shadow, was seen climbing onto the Merseyrail train at Rock Ferry station in Wirral on 11 December. A few minutes later he was captured on CCTV on top of the train passing through Bromborough Rake station, waving at passengers. He later told staff he was from Birmingham. Police slammed the stunt as ‘nonsensical and idiotic’. BTP added: ‘One slip and he could have been killed, and endangered the lives of those on the train. It isn’t cool, or funny, it’s dangerous.’

Golden years

Andy ‘Powerhouse’ Pearson, a driver with South West Trains, featured as our key worker in the Journal (January 2016), is the 125kg class British Powerlifting Union – ‘I weighed in at 112kg bodyweight’ – after three

Just champion

magnificent lifts. He did 255kg squat; 185kg bench; and 280kg deadlift. ‘That’s a total of 720kg!’ in the BPUS championships at Bristol leisure centre.

Silver Shadow (right) surfing the top of a Merseyrail train (above)

Must do better

The Consumers’ Association’s magazine Which? says the government – and the train companies – aren’t doing enough to make sure passengers can claim compensation for delayed or cancelled journeys. Vickie Sheriff, director of campaigns, said: ‘It’s good that more people are claiming compensation. The train companies are finally starting to take long overdue steps to tell passengers what they are entitled to, and how to claim, but one year on from our super complaint more needs to be done. It must be easier to find out how to get compensation and make a claim. The regulator should take action if train companies do not make progress quickly and the government must introduce a new mandatory ombudsman so that passenger complaints are properly heard and resolved.’
The government is trying to take away your right to free or affordable legal representation if you’re injured at work or anywhere else.

Why? They’re prioritising #FeedingFatCats

If government plans go ahead, nearly one million people will lose their right to free legal representation. Meanwhile it will cost the NHS and the government at least £150 million of your taxes every year and fat cat insurers will be rewarded with multimillion pound profits.

Visit www.feedingfatcats.co.uk to take action and stop the government #FeedingFatCats.
AST year was a terrible year for rail freight, especially for the drivers who lost their jobs at DB Cargo, but there are some encouraging signs for the future – if we can make the case for network upgrades and affordable rail freight access charges as terminals start to come on stream.

The two key deep sea and construction markets continue to expand. Deep sea traffic grew by 7% in Quarter 1 of 2016/17, the highest level since 1998; and 4% in Q2 compared with the corresponding quarters in the previous year. Overall, it has grown by 30% in the last 10 years and is forecast to grow fourfold by 2043 – if the network is upgraded and additional road/rail transfer points obtain the necessary planning permission.

Construction traffic increased 2.2% in Q1 and 8.3% in Q2 against the previous year with the sector realising 25% growth since 2012.

**KEY STRATEGIC CORRIDORS**

Freight on Rail has been working with the Department for Transport to illustrate the potential to transfer significant HGV traffic to rail on key congested strategic corridors if capacity becomes available, on the basis that road upgrade funding could be diverted to targeted rail freight upgrades instead, on congestion relief grounds. So far, the results have been encouraging and research shows that, nationally, a quarter of the traffic from the largest HGVs – five axles and above – is on trips of 180 miles plus, some of which should be captive to rail.

Figures for strategic corridors, with parallel rail lines, emphasise this potential for modal shift. Daily flows of M6 corridor analysis shows 9,500 of the largest HGVs on the route. On the A14, just outside Felixstowe, each day 4,863 out of total of 5,632 HGVs (that’s 86%) are in the largest category.

Removing even modest numbers of HGVs can reduce congestion significantly because HGVs occupy considerably more road space than the average car, and need longer braking distances, and are slower to manoeuvre, and therefore cause considerably more road congestion.

In congested conditions, each single percentage increase in traffic causes a several percentage increase in congestion. A large HGV is equal to four passenger car units in congested conditions. The DfT estimates the cost of congestion is £0.99 per lorry mile on our most congested motorways.

**DEDICATED TERMINAL**

Strategic Rail Freight Interchanges are an intrinsic element of shifting more freight to rail as they enable rail to compete in the consumer market by reducing the transhipment costs between the modes and reducing the competitive distance for rail below 150 miles. For example, Daventry SRFI removes 23 million lorry miles per year, largely from strategic road network.

Developers want to invest in SRFIs as the growing number of proposals, such as East Midlands Airport, Etwall Common near Derby, and Four Ashes near Stafford, demonstrate; and the first phase of iPort, including a 35 acre dedicated rail freight terminal on a 337 acre green field site at Doncaster, is now under construction.

Congestion, air quality violations and increased attention in cycling safety are changing urban logistics policies. So I have been engaging with key city authorities to explain that rail can offer the long distance trunk haulage element of consumer urban deliveries, for onward transhipment into low emissions vehicles, if consolidation centres and terminals are rail connected. Similarly, more aggregates terminals are needed in our major cities to facilitate the greater use of rail for construction projects so this message is being broadcast and related to the need to build more housing with the simple statistic that each train can carry enough materials to build 30 houses.

Government is for ever changing rail freight companies could marginalise rail freight. We will be highlighting the problems for freight and working to ensure that rail freight is taken fully into account.

We continue to make the case for affordable rail freight access charges emphasising how rail freight must be compensated for the market distortion which sees HGVs pay only 30% of the costs they impose on society. These two will be high on our agenda when I meet the Rail Minister this month.

I am still on the DfT rail freight strategy steering group committee and am pushing for revised road rail comparison CO2 and air quality figures. I am stressing that figures need to be representative and based on actuals, not best in class, nor from manufacturers’ data or modelling. For example, the Euro VI engine should be compared to Class 70.

**DANGERS OF LSTS**

Our joint campaign with the Technical Advisers’ Group, a local authority representative organisation, to get the DfT to recognise the serious dangers that 71ft longer semi-trailers pose on urban roads continues. During normal right- and left-hand turns the LST rear out-swing is more than double that of standard full length 44 tonne trucks, and even the company carrying out the trial evaluation for the DfT says it cannot judge the safety of these LSTS in urban areas yet.

We forced the DfT to host another LST demonstration at which it did not allow the truck to do the full turning manoeuvre. So my tracking colleagues from TAG used modelling software and data collected during the demo to simulate the full turn movement, up from 1.7m to 3.3m.

The graphic at the top of this page shows the effects of a LST standard left-hand turn as the truck does not really look very different from the standard 44 tonne lorry – until it starts manoeuvring.
Anatomy of a strike

ASLEF drivers on Southern Railways began taking industrial action in December. But the antecedents of this strike go back almost a year. KEITH RICHMOND examines the background to a bitter industrial dispute with no end in sight

Last month, as at the end of last year, Southern Railways ground to a halt. That is what happens when train drivers walk out. No driver, no train. ASLEF represents 96% of the train drivers in England, Scotland and Wales and members don’t cross picket lines. So when drivers go on strike – as on Tuesday 13, Wednesday 14 and Friday 16 December and then again on Tuesday 10, Wednesday 11 and Friday 13 January – the train company is unable to provide the service it promised to deliver in its franchise application. Also, drivers have not been working overtime since Tuesday 6 December and, as Southern refuses to employ the number of drivers it knows it needs, it has been cancelling one in four services on non-strike days, too.

Hundreds of thousands of passengers have been left frustrated and, on occasion, bewildered. Most blame the hapless senior management at what commuters call Southern Railways; some blame Chris Grayling, and his predecessor at the Department for Transport, Patrick McLoughlin; very few blame the drivers, or their union, because they know this is not a strike for more money, a shorter working week, or better terms and conditions, but is action for the safety of the rail network. And the vast majority of passengers – 73% in a survey carried out by Opinion in May last year – want a guard on every train.

TRAIN DRIVERS ARE MUPPETS

This dispute began, effectively, one year ago, though officials at the DfT and managers at GTR had been planning it for some months before that. On 18 February 2016 Peter Wilkinson, a controversial figure who earns £265,000 a year as director of rail passenger services at the DfT, got up at a public meeting in Croydon, south London, hosted by Conservative MP Gavin Barwell, and said he was looking forward to ‘punch ups’ with trade unions over his plans to force changes to rosters.

He said: ‘I’m furious and it has got to change – we have got to break them. They have all borrowed money to buy cars and got credit cards. They can’t afford to spend too long on strike and I will push them into that place. They will have to decide if they want to give a good service or get the hell out of my industry.’ Croydon councillor Jeet Bains tweeted: ‘Peter Wilkinson absolutely hammering train drivers. Called them puppets.’ Wilkinson’s comments were so bizarre that Sameena Rizwi was forced to deny claims that her boss was drunk when he got up to speak.

As well as his inflammatory language, Wilkinson told a string of porkies – claiming drivers earn £60,000 a year basic and have the same ‘fire break’ rest stops as when trains were run on coal – but he had, deliberately or inadvertently, revealed what he, the DfT, and GTR intended to do.

We wrote to Patrick McLoughlin seeking clarification of Wilkinson’s comments and asked if they reflected government policy. McLoughlin – who, like his Rail Minister Claire Perry, refused to meet us to hear our concerns – did not deny that Wilkinson was speaking for the government.

NO MORE DOO

ASLEF is opposed to driver only operation in all its forms, including driver controlled operation and driver door operation. We believe this method of operation is less safe for passengers, and staff, and we will not agree to the introduction and/or extension of DOO, DCO or DDO. We will, however, honour agreements already in place while we seek to change them.

Gavia – a partnership between the British bus and train company Go Ahead (65%) and the French private sector transport operator Keolis (35%) – got a seven year contract in 2014. Having merged Southern, Thameslink, Gatwick Express and Great Northern it is the largest rail franchise in the UK.

It is not a conventional franchise, but a management contract, in which the government, not the company, takes all the financial risk – GTR is paid to run the franchise and the government takes the fare box. That made it the perfect vehicle, Wilkinson told McLoughlin, to force through changes – ‘we’re going to have punch ups and we will see industrial action and I want your support’ – because the company would not suffer a loss of revenue through industrial action.

In March GTR/Southern notified us of its intention to introduce 12-car DOO on Gatwick Express on 9 April. We informed the company, our branches and reps, that there was no agreement between the company and the union for this nor had the company sought to negotiate its implementation with us.

On 9 April a member refused to drive the new formation Class 387 train as DOO. The company claimed we had induced members to breach their contracts and instructed us to inform drivers that they were contractually obliged to operate these new trains. Our members were clearly not contractually obliged to operate these trains and when we did not instruct our members the company sought an injunction against us, which the High Court granted on 22 April, saying it regarded the communication of our understanding of agreements to members as ‘inducement’. We were required to notify members that they were expected to drive 12-car DOO trains on Gatwick Express. The court did, however, acknowledge our right to campaign in a ballot for industrial action.

OVERWHELMING MANDATE

The result of that ballot, announced on 23 May, was an overwhelming mandate for action but the company sought – and on 2 June was granted – a further injunction, challenging the validity of the ballot on the grounds that it relied on our alleged inducement of its members. The High Court also instructed the G5, AG5, EC and all reps to hand over their electronic devices to be searched for evidence of inducement of members.

GTR announced it was going to do the same on Southern and when last-ditch talks at head office on 17 October failed to resolve this dispute – the company refused to negotiate and would only dictate – we balloted drivers who again voted overwhelmingly – 87.3% on a turnout of 77% – to strike, with 95.6% voting for action short of a strike.

The company, which briefed journalists that ‘the law courts are not a happy hunting ground for the labour movement in Britain’ then took us to court. But the High Court, and then the Court of Appeal, both ruled that our strike is entirely lawful.

Peter Wilkinson, Patrick McLoughlin, Chris Grayling, the DfT and GTR/Southern have all worked very hard to get where they felt they wanted to be. They are attacking us because they see train drivers, and their trade union, as the enemy. And passengers as collateral damage.
Getting rid of guards is a big step back for passenger safety

Passengers want a guard on every train. Every time they are asked, that’s what they say. And that’s why the company – and the government – are on the wrong side of this argument. Here are just some of the letters and emails that have been pouring into ASLEF’s head office praising the stand we are taking over the introduction of driver only operated trains on Southern Railways.

Taking guards off trains is foolhardy, Mr Grayling

Dear Chris Grayling

I feel compelled to write to you having listened with interest to you on Radio 2. Whilst I agree with many of your views on many issues, the blame for this Southern fiasco lies squarely with the government, and the government can, and should, sort it out. Pronto.

I am not a Luddite (I’m a 37-year-old teacher of Design Technology, and engineer by training) and, in most cases, I can see some value in automation. As an engineer, that was my specialism. Automated supermarket checkouts, and warehouses, yes. But taking guards off trains – and, make no mistake, that is what this is about – is foolhardy.

The guard, as you know, performs two very important roles. Should the train crash, and they do from time to time, the driver is likely to be dead or incapacitated, and the guard takes charge of the train and the safe exit of passengers. Also, on a day to day basis, it is the guard who lobs the drunken lout off a train, answers questions on journeys, and gives the service a human face. I, for one, feel safe knowing a guard is present.

Now Southern claims no one will lose their jobs and an on board supervisor will still be on the train – this, as the wise man said, is utter tosh. As soon as they can, contractually, they will throw out at the first opportunity as they fail to run a reasonable service even when there is not a strike on and, ultimately, with the government, who have had months to sort this out and done the square root of diddly squat.

Tony Goddard

Professional and dedicated

No passenger is more dependent on Southern Rail than me. I live next to Plumpton station and do not drive. As the bus service has been cut to a bare minimum, the bus service is often overcrowded, especially at weekends. The ticket office has limited opening times and the machine is not reliable. The guards, on the other hand have, without fail, over the 10 years I have lived here, been 100% helpful, courteous and friendly. Worse customer service is provided on every other route I use. South West Trains say where the guard is but if the train is full you can’t get there. And Thameslink is hopeless, with no on-board announcements and no one usually available at all. The safety issues are obvious; I have a colleague who fell between the train and the platform and was only saved by passengers being able to quickly tell the guard. I know how professional and dedicated the guards are, having seen them almost every day for the last 10 years. Getting rid of guards is a big step backwards for passenger comfort and safety.

Dr Jane Thomas, Plumpton Green

It cannot be safe

As a rail user I am concerned to hear guards are to be removed from trains. It cannot be safe to have only one person (the driver) on a train full of passengers. If the driver should be taken ill or suffer a heart attack or a head-on collision who would now take charge of injured, confused, and disoriented passengers? Passengers would be climbing out on to live tracks and oncoming trains. This cannot be right, and just for the sake of saving a little money, none of which will go to improving services, or fare reductions, but to line the pockets of shareholders and fat cat director pay packets.

Ken Bashorun

Broke, bored and fed up

My son wonders why you are striking just before Christmas when it annoys the travelling public. Surely it would be better to strike after the holiday period when passengers (or what Southern calls customers) are broke, bored, fed up and probably wouldn’t mind taking a few days off work. Now that’s the way to win the hearts and minds of the travelling public!

Geraldine Cowan, Crystal Palace, London

Selfie cards and banners

South Yorkshire Freedom Riders discussed the ASLEF dispute with Southern Rail at our Christmas social. We like a bit of militancy with our socials. We agreed to support your campaign and trooped outside the Jump club with our selfie cards and banner to take a picture (see above). Please let your members know that we appreciate the support that ASLEF has given our campaign and we want you to know that our

Prioritise passenger safety and jobs over profit

Just a quick note of support for you and your cause – and admiration, too, for sticking to your guns in the face of public ignorance and prejudice, and against a rail system that is one of the most expensive in the world, whilst recording record profits, year-on-year, since privatisation. Your determination to prioritise passenger safety and jobs over profit is fantastic, and I realize many of you must be keenly feeling the pinch in lost wages. Rail companies have a duty to provide a safe, efficient, affordable service to their customers; they also have a duty of care to their employees. I’m grateful to you for standing up against one of the most execrable private companies operating in England today. Best of luck.

Dr Sara Crangle, Reader, School of English, University of Sussex

Sara: Stick to your guns

As an engineer, that was my specialism. Automated supermarket checkouts, and warehouses, yes. But taking guards off trains – and, make no mistake, that is what this is about – is foolhardy.
A message of support
I’m writing to send a message of support from the National Shop Stewards’ Network. We’ll continue to support the action by your members on Southern Rail and try to build support for you in the union movement. We visited your picket line at London Bridge last Friday. We have a website, Facebook group, twitter and a weekly e-bulletin – all are available to trade unionists to publicise disputes, events etc. Please feel free to use these platforms. In solidarity…
Rob Williams, National Shop Stewards’ Network national chair, London E10

Wheelchair users need guards on trains
You are currently being lambasted by the government over the current dispute. I have written to my MP, the Minister for Transport, and the Limbless Association, pleading the need for guards on trains to help wheelchair users travel and keep them safe. I have pointed out that although special arrangements can be made for assisted travel such arrangements are often not honoured, which means the wheelchair user cannot travel. Best of luck with your dispute.
Charlie Ward

One man buses on railway
As a member of a railway family, I have seen many changes in the railway network over the years, and been affected by them since the 1960s, including my dad being made redundant in 1972. My generation expect guards to be on trains and for services not to become one man buses across the network.
Bill McKelvie

Is it time to go Dutch?
I am a huge supporter of trade unions, and wish you a successful resolution. I lived in Holland for many years and recall a bus and tram strike in Amsterdam where the services continued as normal but no fares were taken. Result? Happy travellers and a swift resolution to the dispute. Could that work here?
Becky Morris

Slipped between carriages
A friend of mine on a late night train to Wivenhoe from London slipped and fell down between the train carriages at Wivenhoe on a self-administered door opening and closure train but managed to climb out just before the train moved.
Margaret Ferrari

Grayling makes me sick
My father was a proud ASLEF member for nearly 40 years and it makes me sick to the stomach listening to Chris Grayling attack decent hard-working and conscientious railway staff. We all know this is just a continuation of what Margaret Thatcher started years ago. We are witnessing now what happens to de-unionised workforces. Good luck and stay strong.
Mike Blakeston

Banning strike action is anathema to me
As a pensioner who frequently uses trains late at night to return from theatre trips I would very much like there to be a conductor on the trains from Chichester, Brighton and London as I live in Worthing. I would also like there to be staff on the Worthing station late at night. To suggest banning strike action on the railways is anathema to me.
Jenny Fielding

Impossible for disabled to travel without a guard
My mum is a wheelchair user, with countless of others, and it’s impossible for us to travel without a guard on the train. It is also a legal requirement under the Equality Act for public transport to be wheelchair accessible. Have Southern Railway considered this legal requirement or are they intending to discriminate against wheelchair users and others with disabilities who need support from a guard present on all trains?
Gemma Giles

Maximising profits
Has Southern management ever asked its customers what they would like? Most passengers I know wish to travel in safety, especially at night and/or in bad weather conditions, with professional staff on board who will look after us, on the train and on the platform. It is unreasonable to add more responsibility on to drivers, just to maximise profits. They do a great job as it is. Hope you succeed!
Chris Reynell

Mick and Eddie and grace under pressure on PM
Dear Mick,
Well done for your interview on the PM programme on Radio 4. I respect Eddie Mair, but his questions and treatment of you seemed very biased. Your dignity and pace and calmness were impressive! The media and the government are avoiding the point that your action is a last resort and about doing the best for people. I can’t imagine the pressure you’re under, nor the level of personal abuse you must endure. Thanks for everything you do.
Alison (Unison member)
The good, the bad and the ugly

GS Mick Whelan reflected last month on how it felt to be caught in the eye of a political, industrial and media storm. Now KEITH RICHMOND looks at how ASLEF, and our industrial action on Southern, have been covered in print, on television, on radio and online.

THE BAD

Mario Ledwith in the Mail tried to make our industrial dispute political with a story about Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and EC president Tosh McDonald – Corbyn Led Standing Ovation For Strike ‘Comrade’ (2 January) – while Lucy Osborne – who cheerfully admitted ‘the editor doesn’t like strikes, strikers or trade unions’ – wrote ‘ASLEF has banned its members from doing overtime’ (5 January) even though it was explained to her that members had voted overwhelmingly for an overtime ban. She also deliberately got the general secretary’s salary wrong (7 January) by including pension provision and NI contributions despite being provided with the correct figure.

Patrick Foster, swallowing an inaccurate briefing by the DfT, went big on Union Leader Warns Of 10 Years Of Unrest in the Daily Telegraph (13 December) while Robert Mendick, chief reporter of the Sunday Telegraph, took Mick to task for Disingenuous Claims Of Firebrand Union Boss Behind Rail Strikes (8 January) although he did concede, after attacking what the RMT said about an ORR report into DOO, ‘ASLEF’s response was rather more slick.’

The Sun (22 December) tried to make something of nothing with Unionists’ 2 Days Off Rails while the Evening Standard splashed with Rail Strike Boss Off To Work By Car (6 January) – a risible story which prompted Mark Ellis of the Daily Mirror to laugh ‘Man has lift with wife shock!’ – and went with Strike Bosses Accused of Being Dictators (12 January) above quotes from Tom Tugendhat, Tory MP for Tonbridge & Malling.

The cartoonists had a field day too, with Mac in the Mail (15 December) and Adams in the Telegraph (19 December) imagining Jeremy, Tosh and Santa at Christmas.

THE GOOD

Conrad Landin interviewed DO1 Graham Morris for a piece which appeared in the Morning Star under the headline We Are Determined To Win - Passenger Safety Too Important To Risk, and The News Line, the paper of the Workers’ Revolutionary Party, splashed on Southern Are Bullies! (both on 11 January) after talking to Graham on a picket line at London Bridge. Driver Only Safety Claim Blown Apart By Accident by Morning Star news editor Will Stone (12 January) with a picture of an incident on an FGW service at Hayes & Harlington underlined our point that the traction interlocking system doesn’t always work.


Our officers have been working hard to get our message across. Mick was interviewed by John Humphrys on Today on Radio 4; by Richard Westcott for BBC News; and by ITV News; Sky News; C4 News; C5 News; by Sally Taylor on BBC South Today by Eddie Mair on PM on Radio 4; by Nick Ferrari on LBC; and on Daily Politics on BBC2.

AGS Simon Weller talked to Vanessa Feltz on BBC Radio London; became a frequent guest on the breakfast and drive time shows on BBC Sussex and BBC Surrey; appeared on BBC Breakfast with Steph McGovern; talked to Jeremy Vine on Radio 2; and Michael Crick on C4. Graham Morris was interviewed by Radio 5 Live and Helen Catt, political editor of BBC South-East, while EC1 Marz Colombini talked to BBC London and went live, at length, on 5 Live.

AND THE UGLY

BBC South-East disingenuously claimed that ASLEF was invited to take part in a debate on the dispute recorded on Sunday 8 January and broadcast on BBC1, in the south-east, the next day. We weren’t. Michael Gravesande, the executive producer, invited Charles Horton of Southern; Huw Merriman, Tory MP for Bexhill & Battle; Caroline Pidgeon, Lib Dem member of the London Assembly; and Mick Lynch of the RMT to be on a four-person panel. We were offered a chance to sit in the audience. Lauren Worrall, the assistant producer, promised we could sit in the front row and added: ‘I guarantee you will get to ask a question.’ It is, of course, the corporation’s call who it invites to be on its panel though – given that ASLEF was the union on strike – it was a perverse editorial judgement. Quentin Smith, editor of BBC South-East Today, subsequently rang to apologise but continued to maintain the fiction that an opportunity to sit in the audience was ‘an invitation to participate in our debate’.

We live in a free society, with a free press, which has had, for 300 years, the right to be partial, and the right to be wrong. But in a post-truth world where the alt-right embraces fake news, it was sad to see Auntie, in the south-east, turn its back on Lord Reith and sell the licence payers short.

Imagine Ennio Morriconne’s distinctive score as you cast your eyes over some of the stories in the papers.
Trains, planes and automobiles

ASLEF union learning rep CHRIS NUTTY reports on a recent study visit he organised to look and learn about manufacturing and new technology in Germany

UR week long programme of visits began at the Technik Museum in Speyer, a town in Rheinland-Pfalz, a 40 minute train trip from our base at the Ibis hotel in the station buildings at Heidelberg. The museum, like its counterpart at Sinsheim, in Baden-Württemberg, which we also visited, has on display a vast array of transportation technologies.

I think the star exhibits at the Speyer site are a Russian Buran space shuttle and a jumbo jet. A jumbo jet is not, you might think, such a remarkable thing, but this one is mounted 16 metres in the air at an angle as if it is climbing and you can walk through the plane and out on to the wing! For those who don't fancy the walk back down the spiral staircase, there's a slide.

The Sinsheim site has both a Concorde and a Tupolev Tu-144, the Russian 'Concordeki' version, perched above the roof at an angle as if taking off. Again, you can go on both aircraft.

TANKS, BOATS AND LOCOS
The Speyer museum has more than 200 motorcycles and 300 cars, and this is only a small selection of the exhibits that also includes tanks, boats, and locomotives. The town of Speyer's other star attraction is its magnificent 11th century cathedral, which we also visited.

Our second day saw us visit the Porsche factory and museum in Stuttgart, although half way through our tour the factory stopped work to allow a meeting for workers and management to discuss recent production problems and the need to work overtime to get production back on schedule. Our guide told us that both sides are committed to making it safer, it has no doors. Sarah said there were plans to ban them, but they were very popular, and it has been saved by public outcry. The design is English, and dates from the 1920s.

MAKESHIFT FIRING SQUAD
The tour ended at the Stauffenberg exhibition in the city centre. Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, who spent his childhood in the city, was one of the leaders of the 20 July plot to kill Adolf Hitler at his Wolf's Lair near Rastenburg in eastern Prussia. Von Stauffenberg, who planted a bomb in a briefcase under an oak conference table, was executed early the next day by a makeshift firing squad lit by the headlights of a truck.

The next day we were back in Stuttgart, exploring some of the more unusual parts of the city’s transport system. First was the rack railway from Marianplatz to Degerloch, which gives excellent views across the city. Then it was on to the funicular at Südheimer Platz. Our final stop of the day was at the Mercedes factory at Sindelfingen; many felt this was the better of the two factory visits, because of the size of the plant, and the fact that Mercedes, unlike Porsche, make many of their own components. To give you some idea of its size, the Sindelfingen plant has 10km of internal rail. Sadly, neither factory gave away free samples.

Our final day was spent at the Auto and Technik Museum at Sinsheim, then it was back home to Blighty. Train trips can be dull, but our return to the UK was via the banks of the beautiful river Rhine, and we even had a choir giving an impromptu performance for a hen party on our coach.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE
The trip demonstrated that learning can be varied and doesn't have to take place in a classroom. EMT driver Martin Johnson said: ‘The study visit was well organised and the visits to the Porsche and Mercedes plants were fascinating for the levels of technology they use. The museums at Speyer and Sinsheim were brilliant, with something to interest everyone. Our walking tour of Stuttgart revealed places and things we’d never have found on our own, like the paternoster. Like a bunch of kids, we all had to have a ride on that’.

I arranged the educational side of the visit; the learners were responsible for booking their own travel and accommodation. We travelled via Eurostar, using our reduced staff rate, then across Belgium and around Germany on our free ATOC coupons. Learners paid for their own food and accommodation and entrance to museums. The tours of the factories, and the Stuttgart 21 exhibition, were all free, although you need to book well in advance for the factory visits. There was a charge for the Porsche museum, city tour, and Stauffenberg exhibition, but on this occasion they were funded for the learners.

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All’s well in Motherwell

MOTHERWELL branch held its AGM on Sunday 18 December at the Bentley Hotel. EC president Tosh McDonald was our special guest, along with District Organiser Kevin Lindsay and the executive committee member for District 2 (and Motherwell branch member) Hugh Bradley. Tosh gave a very detailed report on the major issues facing the union today, including the GTR dispute on Southern, major redundancies at DB Cargo, the political situation, including Brexit, and Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn. Kevin followed up with an update on all Scottish issues. Tosh presented long service badges totalling 140 years to five members, and two retiring members, J Halloran and R Hanlon, were given presentations. Retired member G Adamson was given his 50 year medallion. After the meeting, members enjoyed a bit of ‘light refreshment’ at the bar. Andy Jones, branch secretary

50 years on the rails for Rambo

Paul ‘Rambo’ Ramsey started on the railway, as a messenger lad, just after England won the World Cup. He became a leading rail man in 1967 and then, in 1974, a senior rail man. He became Ipswich yard supervisor in 1990 and then TCS. In 1997 he moved to the Port of Felixstowe as a pilot driver, including Class 66 locomotives. Paul retired in September and was presented with a nameplate mounted on pilot loco 08624. Paul would like to thank Tony Lakeman for organising the collection and all who contributed. Lee Barber

SO LONG, FAREWELL

West Brompton 226 members say goodbye and best wishes to Bro Mick Beamish, who has worked at London Underground for over 25 years, starting as a guard and then working as a driver. We hope he will enjoy his retirement and meet us from time to time at forthcoming events. I would like to thank Mick for all his support of our branch; he has been a long and loyal member, never swayed or intimidated. Thank you. Greg Tasker, branch secretary

Upcoming events

- **CRICKLEWOOD – FRIDAY 10 MARCH**
  Cricklewood reunion from 12.0 at the RAFA Club, Ashburnham Road, Bedford.

- **EASTLEIGH – SATURDAY 11 MARCH**
  Depot reunion from 12.0 to 6.0 at Eastleigh Railway Institute, 2 Romsey Road, Eastleigh, S050 9FE. Buffet provided. All grades welcome.

- **WILLESDEN – SATURDAY 18 MARCH**
  Willesden and Stonebridge Park/Wembley annual reunion for retired and working members of 1A depot and surrounding yards from 14.00 at the Skinners Arms, 114 Judd Street, London, WC1H 9NT.

- **STRATFORD – SATURDAY 1 APRIL**
  Annual Stratford reunion is at the Railway Tavern, Stratford, from 17.00 till late. If you want accommodation please ring the Railway Tavern (020 8534 3123) quoting Stratford reunion.

- **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).

- **HITHER GREEN – WEDNESDAY 10 MAY**
  Hither Green old boys’ reunion at Richmond Crompton pub, Bromley South, from 11 am. Details Ray Cooper, RMS.

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

Don’t let it cost you your job!

Branch News
Britain crying out for a progressive Brexit

MARK REYNOLDS of Lincoln branch, and District 5 Council, reports from the East of England Labour Party conference in Southend

ANY thanks to ASLEF and District Council 5 for sending four delegates to the Labour East conference. Because Labour can make a difference in a place like Southend.

Southend-on-Sea borough council, with Labour as part of the controlling group, stopped the planned closure of care homes, built new council houses, and made cuts without losing children’s centres and libraries. Sadly, at the last election, the Tories took back control.

In Ipswich there are plans to build 1,000 new council homes, good quality, with solar panels and PVC windows and doors. The council is building on land it owns and purchasing new land for further development.

In Cambridge, Labour set up a housing company to buy houses destined for the private market. The rent is set at 80% of market value, still expensive, but a better alternative.

Luton borough council has suffered from the massive Conservative cuts to local authority grants. Statutory duties cost £136m but they only receive £132m, leaving discretionary services vulnerable. This is the sort of problem councils are facing at the hands of this Tory government.

As for Labour East, membership now stands at 43,000. That’s an increase of 186% since the last general election. Many new associated groups have affiliated. Last year Labour made big gains on councils in Norwich, Ipswich, and Cambridge but suffered setbacks from the rise in support for UKIP at Great Yarmouth and Thurrock, where Labour lost overall control.

Brexit has people worried. The pound is worried about the future. There has been a rise of race attacks, including a murder in Harlow. We have seen an erosion in workers’ rights under successive Conservative governments.

Mick Holder turns back time to February 1917

Better brakes for larger, heavier trains and deaths on the iron road were in the Journal 100 years ago

WE WANT A BETTER BRAKE

Mold Junction reports: ‘We have had a few discussions lately on the brake power on L&NW Railway engines, and many points were raised as to the causes of even the present power being weakened, hand brake blocks which will not bite the wheels, small wheels placed on hand brakes instead of large ones, and weak intermediate springs and draw bars between engine and tender.

What about the promise made recently that the brake power would be improved? There were 15 cases of passing signals at danger recorded on the suspension sheet dated 26 October. If any of us reported a case where we had failed to stop at signals, we should probably have a day’s holiday without pay, which we don’t want. We have larger and heavier trains and, of a necessity, we want a better brake.’

FIREMEN REDUCED TO CLEANERS

Portsmouth branch reports: ‘A few important matters were dealt with, such as dangerous position of oil stores owing to the layout of a new shunting yard, which has brought a number of sidings between shed and stores in which shunting goes on, and there is no pathway made and no light in these days of restricted lighting. Some other arrangement ought to be made, or one of these days the ambulance brigade will be required. The case of firemen reduced to cleaners was brought forward, and the hardship this entailed on the men and their families, owing to wages being reduced, but food prices still soar higher.’

RAILWAY ACCIDENTS

The editor writes ‘1916 closed with quite a number of railway accidents, some involving loss of life either to passengers or railwaymen or both. There were three accidents on 19 December, one at Wigan in England, one at Kirtlebridge in Scotland, and one in Kilmimagh in Ireland, so three countries had their share of disaster. We, unfortunately, had members involved in each.’

KILLED IN ACTION

‘Airdrie branch deeply regrets to report the death of our member, Bro Robert Fraser, who was killed in action in France on 1 November whilst serving with the 10th Battalion Gordon Highlanders.’

Still making steam

Dave Calfe, EC District 6, and Phil Spice, Roy Woodward and Vic Waite of the RMS joined Leamington Spa branch for our AGM on Sunday 11 December. Dave spoke on ASLEF national issues, mainly the Southern DOO dispute and legal actions, also the redundancies and movement of drivers at DB Cargo, plus the recent rule book changes to GSMR radio failures.

Vic told us about the retired members’ activities and the sad losses of George Thompson in April, Sam Read in September and Mick Kennedy in November. Our condolences and best wishes to their respective families. Our retired section has three members over 90 and still making steam! We are only a small branch of 17, so all our visitors are very much appreciated.

Nick Walker, branch reporter
ASLEF Freight Weekend

ASLEF will be holding a Freight Weekend in Birmingham from Saturday 8 – Sunday 9 April

The weekend will be an opportunity to discuss the sector, including how we get through the current issues facing our industry, as well as securing better terms and conditions and working towards safer working.

Several speakers will address the weekend from within the union and the industry.

Rooms can be booked for £95 if sharing a twin room or £130 for your own room. This includes a hot lunch on arrival, dinner, breakfast and refreshments during the 2 days.

For more details and the application form please visit the ASLEF homepage which has details at: www.aslef.org.uk

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.stmichaelirishcentre.org)
24-26 November Yorkshire rural touring scheme (venues tbc)
30 November The Place, Bedford (01234 718112; www.thefield Bedford.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 Buckcarril, Devon (01363 773660)
4 February Burton Bradstock village hall, Dorset (01308 897421)
5 February Cadeleigh parish hall, Devon (01884 855311)
7 February Swan Theatre, Worcester (01905 611427)
9 February Corn Hill, 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 Crampshorn 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 330999)
4 March Blantyre Miners’ Welfare, South Lanarkshire (01698 454690)
5 March Eden Court, Inverness (01463 2334234)
ALAN PICKFORD A TRUE WARRIOR

It is with great sadness that I have to inform you of the passing of our brother Alan Pickford after a brave four and a half year battle with pancreatic cancer that finally beat him on 29 November. Alan, the most positive man I have ever met, fought to the end with courage, never complained, and always apologised if his illness prevented him from attending a branch or meeting with workmates for a brew. Alan was determined to beat his illness and return to work, which he achieved for a few months, but just as he felt the best he had for a long time a scan kicked him in the teeth and months later, passed away peacefully with his wife Carol by his side.

The funeral at St Peter’s Church, Buxton, was packed with friends, relatives, and railway workers past and present, and was followed by a wake at the sports and social club where many amusing episodes of Alan’s life were shared. Alan was a gentleman and the nicest man you could wish to meet. The words that best describe his courageous fight were written by a colleague on his retirement card: ‘Alan, a true warrior.’ Rest in peace, dear friend.

Paul Costello, Buxton & Peak Forest

JOHNNY BARNES ALWAYS A PLEASURE

Johnny Barnes started on the railway at 15, as a porter in 1958, and then became a fireman at Eastbourne. He got his driver’s job at Orpington before finishing his career, after 50 years, one month and a day, at Tonbridge. He was always a pleasure to have at branch and had great input, being a rep and a solid union brother.

Andy Caddick, Orpington

FINAL DEPARTURES FROM KING’S CROSS

BILL CLARK (1932-2016)

Bill, 82

Bill joined us in the 1960s, as part of what was known, affectionately, as the Caribbean contingent. A really smashing bloke, always smiling and joking. It was a pleasure to have known him.

Peter, 84

Lincoln, 78

PETER GREEN (1932-2014)

Before joining the railway Peter served as a lad in the Merchant Navy, joining the permanent way as a porter before transferring into the footplate grade. A keen Arsenal supporter and walking advert, often fully decked out in their colours.

Ralph, 80

A Yorkshire lad transferred to King’s Cross from Doncaster, called Mr Fixit as he was always wheeling and dealing. He moved back to Darlington when he retired.

Dave Pizzie, RMS

RALPH BOSWORTH (1936-2016)

Ralph, 80

A Yorkshire lad transferred to King’s Cross from Doncaster, called Mr Fixit as he was always wheeling and dealing. He moved back to Darlington when he retired.

Dave Pizzie, RMS

BILL KNIGHT: A GOOD LEG PULL

Bill Knight, a lovable character, sadly passed away on 3 January. He enjoyed a good leg pull and you could never tell he was having you on until his smile at the end gave it away! Like most of his generation, if you were lucky enough to be his fireman, you did the job half and half, with Bill passing on his driving skills. He was one of the best drivers you could be with as all his firemen will attest. Our twice yearly visits to Clacton to see the retired drivers down there will never be the same again. Bill was diagnosed with cancer eight years ago, and told he only had two years to live, which just goes to show how much of a fight he put up.

Dave Pizzie, RMS

KEITH ELLIS STRATFORD LEGEND

Another Stratford legend has departed on his last journey. Keith Ellis started his railway career at Canklow. When he was made redundant he came to Stratford, did several years driving, then decided to go to the supervisor’s grade. He was the TCS at Stratford, and from the tributes on Facebook a respected foreman, very fair to everyone. He moved into management at Broxbourne and Liverpool Street.

Dave Pizzie Retired Members’ Section

Obituaries

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One size does not fit all

Class 317s on the Bed-Pan line were four-car, not three-car, units (Journal, December) and were operated with DOO for many years. However, this should not blur the very real issue that one size does not fit all with regard to DOO. What I find particularly disturbing is the lack of any basic scientific analysis of the problem. Joe Public can well ask is it simply a trade union trying to protect jobs? Is there really a safety issue? If so, what? Saying drivers already operate doors in one situation does not imply it’s OK to do so elsewhere, let alone everywhere, but that is how it’s perceived by the public and politicians.

London Underground operated its first driver only operated train in the Acton area in 1932, with no CCTV, mirrors or such like. But the train was only one vehicle and the platforms straight. I suspect the train was rarely packed! Contrast that with a 12-car Class 700 snaking around the crowded platforms at Farringdon in the rush hour (to get even more crowded when Crossrail opens). Can we really say that the situation is the same, even with CCTV coverage and other gizmos? A three- or four-coach train at, say, Seaford is hardly comparable.

It seems clear that a number of factors should be considered: the length of the train; the position of cameras (on train or on platform) or mirrors; the geometry of the platform; the day of the week; the time of day; and the availability of platform staff.

The clarity of the images on the monitors is also a concern. Some images are little bigger than postage stamps. And, yes, there are safety issues. There have been a number of incidents of people caught in doors, and even dragging incidents, so we are not talking Aunt Sally arguments here.

What about platform staff, who can more easily see and hear an emergency situation, being provided with an abort departure facility to stop a train leaving if a dangerous situation arises?

And what of the risk to staff? You must remember the incident of a guard sent to prison for alleged failure of duty after an incident at James Street station in Liverpool, which some people (including me) think was a grave injustice. Of course, people only want soundbite arguments, not detailed analyses, although that is what is needed.

Eric Stuart, former guard and driver

Bashing West Coast again

Once again it’s bash West Coast time. Brother Strath comments on the age of some West Coast drivers (Journal, January).

Dear Mick

I would like to thank you for responding to my letter of a few months ago regarding my search for Wayne Brown. Since you helped us reconnect (after almost 30 years) we have been having a great time sharing photos, sending emails, and phoning each other, after sorting out the eight hour time difference, of course! We even listen to the Gayle Lofthouse radio programme on BBC Radio Leeds together. Wayne, at tea time, and me at porridge time!

I’ve attached a couple of pics of myself winterizing my Harley, which I sent to Wayne earlier. He told me on the phone that I have an uncanny resemblance to Tosh McDonald, the EC president, and even that we both ride hogs. I looked up Tosh on your website and, except for the age difference, we could pass for brothers in a dimly-lit room. I need longer hair, and Tosh needs to work on his beard, to complete the deception. I’m almost 73, and still riding, and (so far) managing to outrun the Grim Reaper.

So, once again, thank you so much for making an old guy’s life more interesting.

Dave Hannah, aka Hogger Hannah, Canadian Pacific Railway locomotive engineer, retired

As one of those drivers I have a very thorough medical every year and, if I fail, I am finished. Likewise, I have to take a strict biennial rules exam to ensure I’m still current otherwise, once again, I’m off the job – just like when I was with Freightliner, EWS and BR. I have seen some very fat drivers working for regular TOCs; how fast will they move in an emergency?

The Wootton Bassett SPAD was very disturbing, but it was just one driver in one moment of confusion. It hit the headlines because it involved a large steam loco and was in the public eye. Every week there are SPADs, station over runs, wrong routings, collisions, derailments and all manner of irregularities – including some very disturbing incidents that go unpublicised. Every TOC and FOC has the same problems with drivers of all age groups.

West Coast does have some younger drivers but very few can afford to work for a company that has such erratic work patterns and periods of low pay. No driver with a mortgage and family can afford it – so it is left to us older blokes.

Brother Strath accuses us of having jolly boys’ outings on our steam locos. Actually, we have a strict policy of only having necessary staff on board. A regular steam crew is three, but there is often an inspector doing an assessment, and, with some locos, a technical supervisor. Sometimes the steam driver is being minded as he may be new to it. Amongst the steam fleet the locos have widely differing technical aspects and sometimes a driver is undergoing a conversion course. A driver familiar with a Castle class will need additional training before handling an A4 or a Battle of Britain because they are all very different. That is why there are sometimes more staff in the cab than looks normal.

It is also hinted that we drive over routes we don’t sign – does Brother Strath think we are mad? Of course we don’t. Apart from the sheer danger we would be sacked. Our route cards are very strictly monitored and we often have refreshers – just like every TOC and FOC.

ASLEF has always supported equal opportunities; it is a policy that applies to everyone – even us older blokes. There is also a question of dogma. What type of mindset wants to criticise a fit and healthy person for doing the job they love, and do...
I don’t know who writes the headlines for the Journal, but kudos to them for slipping in as many rock and pop references as possible!

In the January issue I spotted these gems (I may have missed a few): In the Eye of the Storm, Scorpions from Return to Forever (amongst many others); Blood on the Tracks, Bob Dylan album, 1975; Sign o’ the Times, Prince album, 1987; I Want to Be Elected, Alice Cooper from Billion Dollar Babies, 1972; Another Brick in the Wall, Pink Floyd from The Wall, 1979; D’ye Ken John Peel, traditional Scottish folk song; When I Get Older, Mick Whelan says: ‘The inquiry into the Wootton Bassett incident revealed systemic failures at WCR.’

Utopian view of ASLEF

I read with interest the letter from Shrewsbury branch secretary Alan Griffiths (Journal, January) detailing his Utopian outlook on all things ASLEF and how members at Colas IM in recent times have witnessed the democratic machinery of ASLEF in action. I have, in the past, through the forum of the Journal attempted to highlight the plight of drivers at TransPennine Express and the ongoing turbulent times we find ourselves in, with numerous ballots for strike action, repeated withdrawals of rest day working and now, after months of productivity talks, the company continues to treat our company council and, in turn, drivers with contempt, by giving assurances on dates by which improved offers on productivity will be tabled only for those dates to pass without any new offer from the company. Drivers recently rejected proposals endorsed by the EC as productivity items were included with no increase in salary on offer.

Losing My Hair, The Beatles, from When I’m 64; You Can Get It If You Really Want, Jimmy Cliff or Desmond Dekker, 1970. Enjoy!

Andy Long, simulator manager, GWR,
St Philip’s Marsh

Thank you, head office

I would like to thank all who work on our behalf at head office. Without your dedication and commitment ASLEF would not be the union it is.

Peter Grant, branch secretary, Manchester Piccadilly No 1

Mick Whelan says: ‘And we want to thank Peter for his hard work and long service as a rep and branch secretary.’

Southern comfort

I am a guard on Southern and in the RMT. I would just like to say thank you for your support with the strike action. Please don’t sell out as it would mean the end of us.

Chris Davies by email

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

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

DAVE EAST has some badges to sell to raise money for preservation and repaint 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 intercityexpress125@hotmail.co.uk

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.

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

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ROCK’N’ROLL RUNAWAYS

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London to Brighton in 80 Days

Last month the News Quiz, Radio 4’s wicked and wonderful topical game show, tackled the Southern Rail strike. Here are some of the highlights from stand-up comedians Angela Barnes, Jeremy Hardy and Andy Parsons, chair Miles Jupp, and Tory peer Danny Finkelstein

MILES: Whose prices are off the rails?

ANGELA: Train fares have risen by an average of 2.3% in the UK and we now pay, on average, six times more for our season tickets and rail fares than our European peers. If you’re commuting from, say, Luton to London you pay an average of £387 a month whereas, for the equivalent distance in Paris, they pay £61 a month. And they don’t have to live in Luton. I had to go to Glasgow before Christmas, a last minute replacement for someone at a show in Glasgow, and it cost me £250 to get to Glasgow and back. You double that if you buy a sandwich. It cost Tim Peake less to go to work than it cost me!

ANDY: It’s funny you should say that, Angela, because I had to go to Glasgow and the standard off-peak was £134 by train. You can fly to Barcelona for £40. If you’ve got a meeting in Glasgow it shouldn’t be cheaper to fly yourself out to Barcelona and then fly from Barcelona to Glasgow but, possibly better than that, if you’ve got a meeting in Glasgow, just fly yourself out to Barcelona for £40 and, whoever you’re meeting in Glasgow, fly them out to Barcelona as well…”

DANNY: Have you ever tried pressing the button when the train’s not at a station, though, Andy?

ANDY: I haven’t, no.

DANNY: Because they’re the ones that have unlocked the doors to make that possible for you. I’m not saying that what you’re saying doesn’t stand up to scrutiny, but there is an element of safety involved. Someone has to unlock the doors for you to get a bit of a power rush when you’re the person in charge of opening the doors…

ANDY: But they want to make the guards on board supervisors and they don’t do the doors. But surely the doors are on board? Surely that should be part of their supervision? Are they saying that if someone actually gets stuck, in the door, the on board supervisor will be looking at that, going ‘Nothing to do with me, mate! Most of them is outside!’

JEREMY: The trouble is that those of us who are zealous about renationalisation do somewhat sentimentalise nationalised railways and our memories are somewhat rose-tinted now. We think of British Rail as a golden age of steam with Bernard Cribbins doing the signals and standing on the track is Jenny Agutter and she’s naked with an Aborigine.

MILES: I think you might have been watching quite a short showreel of her work there, Jeremy. This is the news that rail passengers across the country have been hit by New Year price hikes as part of the rail industry’s ongoing commitment to find the fastest way of getting things from A to B where A is your bank account and B is the pockets of the chief executive of Abellio. Southern Rail have recently been out on strike again, meaning no trains were running from London to Brighton, a state of affairs largely indistinguishable from their normal operations, except that passengers were spared the misery of hope…
LETTING THE TRAIN TAKE THE STRAIN

ANTHONY TROLLOPE, the prolific Victorian novelist who wrote 47 books in 35 years, including the enduringly popular Chronicles of Barsetshire, the gripping Palliser political tales, and his magnificent state of the nation novel *The Way We Live Now*, would famously get up at 5.30am each day to knock out 2,500 words before breakfast. He also commissioned a little tablet, or portable writing desk, so he could write while travelling by train around the country doing his day job working for the Post Office:

‘It was while I was engaged on *Barchester Towers* that I adopted a system of writing which, for some years afterwards, I found to be very serviceable to me. My time was greatly occupied in travelling, and the nature of my travelling was now changed. I could no longer do it on horseback. Railroads afforded me my means of conveyance, and I found that I passed in railway carriages very many hours of my existence.

‘Like others, I used to read, though Carlyle has since told me that a man when travelling should not read, but ‘sit still and label his thoughts’. But if I intended to make a profitable business out of my writing, and, at the same time, to do my best for the Post Office, I must turn these hours to more account than I could do even by reading. I made for myself therefore a little tablet, and found after a few days’ exercise that I could write as quickly in a railway carriage as I could at my desk. I worked with a pencil, and what I wrote I copied afterwards.

‘In this way was composed the greater part of *Barchester Towers* and of the novel which succeeded it, and much also of others subsequent to them. My only objection to the practice came from the appearance of literary ostentation, to which I felt myself to be subject when going to work before four or five fellow passengers. But I got used to it, as I had done to the amazement of the West Country farmers’ wives when asking them after their letters.’

*From An Autobiography* by Anthony Trollope (1883)

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**Solution to Crossword 129**

**Across:**
1 Slow sentimental song
4 Catalogues
7 A soft fruit eaten with cream
8 Ready to be eaten
9 Unit of liquid volume
11 Precious stone
13 Young goose
15 Pick-me-up
17 Rip
18 Knitted cotton sweater
20 Pointed weapon
21 Sharp sewing instrument

**Down:**
1 Prevented from entering
2 After the expected time
3 Picture or sketch
4 Identity tag
5 Polite term of address
6 A fashion or method
7 To wrench the muscles
10 Loo
12 Marine mammal
14 Building to house a car
15 Examine or try
16 Provide food
17 Oak or beech
19 Girl’s name

Congratulations to Jeremy Woodrow of Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire, 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 129th prize crossword in the January 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 February

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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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