IRON ROAD We celebrate 190 years of the American railroad

FRASER COATS proposes a cure for the ills of Britain’s railways

CHRIS PROCTOR listens to some Radical Voices

Southern and DBC the latest positions

Tom Jones warns on feeding the fat cats

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Mick: Now the Transport Select Committee says what we have been saying for years

Stakeholder chickens come home to roost

T ANY other time we would be celebrating the fact that, after three decades, the cross-party Transport Select Committee has finally admitted what we have said all along – that rail privatisation doesn’t work. John Major blatantly misled us when he said Europe has told us to privatise our railways and claimed competition would increase investment, reduce public subsidy, improve services and cut fares. This is reflected in the first lines of the Select Committee’s report: ‘The premise behind franchising was that competition would increase efficiency, reduce taxpayer subsidy, lower fares and improve services. While franchising has facilitated passenger growth and service improvements, it is clear it has not yielded all the competitive benefits initially envisaged by the government in the early 1990s. Many metrics of performance are plateauing and the passenger is not receiving value for money.’

Actually, studies have shown that population growth, and GDP, not the model, were the main drivers for the increase in passengers and services. ‘The transfer of financial risk to the private sector was another central premise of rail franchising’ but the report highlights that, in 2015/16, £4.8 billion of public subsidy was still provided for the privatised railways. Let’s not wait another 30 years; let’s renationalise our railways now! When making our case for bringing Britain’s railways back into public ownership I often challenge people to name a successful privatisation. Successful, that is, not for the banks, the shareholders, or the pension funds; but for the customers, the taxpayers, and the workers. I’m still waiting.

So are the chickens coming home to roost in the ‘stakeholder society’? As the pretence of living in a ‘big society’ quietly disappears, the government seems, finally, to have recognised that we have priced current and future generations out of the housing market. Governments of all colours have failed to address the problems – a consequence of decisions taken in the 1980s and ’90s – of the gig economy, a decline in social mobility, educational opportunity, and the NHS. We need radical policy change.

The executive committee has discussed Brexit and we shall be supporting maintaining workers’ rights, and all forms of human rights legislation, and supporting the best possible deal for manufacturing and trade, supporting the NHS and skilled workers, based on protection of wages and terms & conditions being not undermined or reduced.

Yours fraternally
Mick Whelan, general secretary
I just want a Picasso in my casa

A SLEF legend Bill Ronksley recalled the day he met Pablo Picasso for a full-page feature in The Observer Magazine’s Brush with Greatness series on 22 January. Bill, who began his railway career as a messenger at the age of 14, served on the executive committee for 21 years, and was EC president for eight, told how he met the left-wing Spanish artist off the train at Sheffield station as part of a three-man welcoming party.

‘It was 1950 and there was an international peace conference in the city. Thousands of delegates were coming from across the world and Pablo Picasso was speaking. He was a living legend and his visit electrified the city. ‘When he got off the train, he was wearing a beret and tie. He was smaller than I imagined. We all shook hands. He didn’t speak much English – a French assistant did the talking – but he was warm and comradely. Humble, actually. I remember thinking him quite eccentric – but maybe that was because of the beret. Later in life, because of ASLEF, I met all sorts of famous people – including Harold Macmillan and the Queen – but none had Picasso’s quiet aura and charisma.

‘We presented him with flowers. It was quite embarrassing, though. We only had one bunch and were due to collect other dignitaries later that day so, after the photographs were taken, I had to say, “Excuse me, but do you mind if we have those flowers back?” He laughed.

‘His talk was very inspiring. It made peace feel possible. He drew a dove and auctioned it off, but the story goes that he drew one or two others while he was here and gave them to people as gifts, and they became worth thousands. I sometimes joke I should have asked for one...’

ASLEF and Southern

ASLEF drivers on Southern Railways rejected in a referendum a proposed resolution to the long-running dispute with the company. The following question was put to members. Do you accept the proposed agreement on driver only operation and related issues as GTR Southern services?

The result was Yes: 317 (45.9%), No: 374 (54.1%). Papers despatched: 953. Papers returned: 693. Invalid papers: 2. Papers to be counted: 691. Turnout: 72.7%.

Mick Whelan, general secretary, said: ‘We understand and support the decision arrived at democratically by our members and will now work to deliver a resolution in line with their expectations.’

The result of the referendum was announced on 16 February – papers went out on Friday 3 January and had to be returned by 10am on Thursday 16 – and the union went back into talks with the company on Tuesday 21 February as the Journal went to press.

ASLEF AND DB CARGO

ASLEF members have rejected proposed new terms & conditions at DB Cargo. The following question was put to our driver members at DBC. Do you accept the DB Cargo terms & conditions restructuring package? The result was Yes: 65 (14.1%), No: 396 (85.9%). Papers despatched: 690. Papers returned: 465. Spoiled papers: 4.

ITALY’S RED ARROWS ON TRACK FOR HS2

Trenitalia, Italy’s state railway company, says it will bid to run both HS2 and the West Coast main line currently run by Virgin – being offered as a package, the West Coast Partnership, by the DfT – as it operates ‘one of the most advanced high speed rail services in Europe’ with its Frecciarossa ‘red arrow’ trains. The bid comes shortly after Trenitalia bought its way onto Britain’s railway network with its acquisition of c2c.

QUOTE...

‘The government is disingenuous in standing back, Southern stands rightly charged of ham-fisted and heavy-handed management.’ – Nigel Harris, Rail

...UNQUOTE

PARL INQUIRY INTO SOUTHERN RAIL

The National Audit Office – Parliament’s financial watchdog – has launched an investigation into Southern Railways, the train operating company condemned by commuters as ‘badly managed and strike-prone’. The news comes in the wake of revelations by The Guardian that Peter Wilkinson, a senior civil servant at the DfT, had a ‘clear conflict of interest’ in his dealings with the company.

EASY AS ABC

The Association of British Commuters has applied for a judicial review of the Department for Transport’s handling of the Southern Rail crisis. ‘We believe the Secretary of State acted unlawfully by failing to determine and announce, within a reasonable time, whether GTR is in breach of its franchise obligations; and failed to comply with his duties under the Equality Act 2010 and has, as a result, caused indirect discrimination to passengers with disabilities:’

SIGNALLER TO BLAME FOR PLYMOUTH CRASH

Investigators from the Rail Accident Investigation Branch have blamed signalling errors for a train crash at Plymouth station in April last year when a service from Penzance to Exeter collided with an empty train already waiting at platform 6. The accident, which happened at a speed of about 15mph, caused minor injuries to 48 people.

TWEETS OF THE MONTH

Four out of five consumers would rather shop with a business that pays its fair share of tax – @FairTaxMark

Alan Jones

Murderous double standards when Britain condemns (rightly) IS, Russian, Assad atrocities then (wrongly) arms Saudis and sucks up to the regime

Kevin Maguire

Same old, same old. Not enough drivers, defective DOO equip & Charles Horton. Blast from past 2001. #southernFail

Simon Weller
We can be heroes for ever and ever

A TRAIN driver hailed as a hero after saving a man’s life has been awarded the British Transport Police’s highest accolade. Davinder Shanker, who works for East Midlands Trains, was coming out of Clay Cross tunnel in Derbyshire last June, working an empty stock movement from Derby to Sheffield, when he spotted a man lurking near the railway line.

When he sounded his horn and applied the emergency brake the man ran off. But as the train came to a halt Davinder saw the man had climbed the embankment and was trying to hang himself from a tree.

Davinder jumped out of the driver’s cab and ran to the man who was now hanging from the tree, unconscious. Davinder and lain Vickers, a fitter with Bombardier, cut him down, put him in the recovery position, helped him regain consciousness, and called the emergency services. The man was taken to hospital where he received the care – and treatment – he needed.

‘We tried to keep him calm and safe until the emergency services arrived,’ said Davinder: ‘Afterwards, I heard he was being fully supported and it put my mind at ease to know he was safe and being properly looked after.’

Chief Inspector Stuart Middlemiss, who nominated Davinder for the award, said: ‘Davinder is a great ambassador for the rail industry and a shining example of selflessness to us all.’

KELLYANNE CONWAY, one of Donald Trump’s top aides, says the President, and Team Trump, do not lie. They just present ‘alternative facts’. Conway, controversial counsellor to the President, appeared on NBC’s Meet the Press to try and defend White House press secretary Sean Spicer who had been overwhelmed by what even the conservative online magazine American Thinker described as a ‘tidal wave of derision’ after insisting that more people turned out to watch Trump’s inauguration than Barack Obama’s. Put on the spot about Spicer’s palpably false claims, the hapless Conway argued, ‘You’re saying falsehood. Sean Spicer gave alternative facts.’ ‘Alternative facts are not facts,’ was the riposte from presenter Chuck Todd. ‘They’re falsehoods.’

Michael Portillo – former MP turned TV presenter – is touring the country with his 90 minute one man show Life: A Game of Two Halves. Credit where it’s due; he does a nice line in self-deprecation, referring, on stage, to the moment when, in front of millions on national television, he lost the safe Tory seat of Enfield Southgate in the rout of the Conservatives at the 1997 general election. His humiliation at the count, as Stephen Twigg rolled his eyes, has entered the English language. ‘A Portillo moment,’ the man once touted as a future PM, tells punters, ‘means a man eating a bucket load of shit in public.’

Mel Thorley, Longsight legend, told in the Journal in January of the days when drivers described the depot as Maplins and how a Tinsley man once ‘strolled into the mess room and asked if it was an urban myth that we still booked on and off on a clipboard. I took him to the lobby, took the board off the nail, and showed him my entry that morning, then said that when we booked on, or off, the window man always looked away. Mel adds: ‘Here’s the evidence of booking on clipboard style. Happy Alf turns away as Dave Needham books on. Both Longsight originals.’

HS2 has forged some strange friendships. Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, two progressive environment groups, have got into usual suspects – Stop HS2, the HS2 Action Alliance, and HSUK – to sponsor a series of anti-rail ads in the broadsheets featuring fake news pics of Jeremy Corbyn and Theresa May. It’s a long way from the radical days of the Rainbow Warrior.

Kevin Maguire reports, in his New Statesman column, that when Charlotte Church was invited to speak at the Durham Miners’ Gala this summer, her agent promptly asked if there was a fee. Kevin, associate editor of the Daily Mirror, and a good friend of ASLEF, wistfully suggests: ‘The organisers should have replied that they don’t charge and she can speak to the masses for free.’
Age of steam returns to Roof of England

The steam age made a romantic return to Britain’s railways on Valentine’s Day with the first main line service for 50 years. Passengers enjoyed a brief encounter with the Peppercorn Class A1 Pacific 60163 steam train Tornado as it passed over the Roof of England on the picturesque Settle to Carlisle line. Heads turned as the eight-carriage loco carved its way through the spectacular snow-capped hills of the Eden Valley in Cumbria, over the Ribblehead viaduct, and across the Yorkshire Dales.

Graeme Bunker, director of the A1 Steam Locomotive Trust, said: ‘People stand in awe as it goes by. You can see them looking up from their newspapers and iPads; it’s like being in a time machine.’

It took 18 years – and £3 million – for a group of enthusiasts in Darlington and Doncaster to build the replica loco which can achieve speeds of 90mph. That’s not as fast as the Flying Scotsman – but the return fare from Skipton to Appleby is just £17.70 compared with £220 for a trip on the Scotsman.

Bid to ban rail strikes beaten

A Tory bid to ban rail workers from going on strike was soundly defeated in Parliament. Chris Philp, Conservative MP for Croydon South, proposed a 10 Minute Rule Bill meaning transport strikes would need the approval of a High Court judge and drivers would have to provide a skeleton service during industrial action. Kevin Brennan, Labour MP for Cardiff West, said the proposed law was a fundamental attack British liberty. ‘Dogs bark, birds fly, and Tories attack workers’ rights’. The Bill was defeated by 206 votes to 127.

DANGER DRIVER BANNED

A man has been fined £2,740, ordered to pay £255 costs, and disqualified from driving for 20 months after driving his car, while over the drink-drive limit, onto a level crossing at Yapton in West Sussex. British Transport Police said had a train been coming Anthony Foot, 69, of Chichester, ‘would most likely have been seriously if not fatally injured, along with the train driver and passengers.’

AIR POLLUTION UNDERGROUND

Passengers travelling on London Underground are exposed to more than eight times as much air pollution as commuters who drive to work, according to a study by Surrey University. Monitors worn by researchers revealed that people on the Tube were exposed to 68mg of harmful pollutants compared with those in cars who registered just 8.2mg. PM levels were highest on the Victoria and Northern lines but ‘new airtight trains with closed windows’ showed significantly lower levels.

First Trenitalia v Stagecoach for East Midlands franchise

FirstGroup and Trenitalia have formed a joint venture to bid against East Midlands Trains, owned by Stagecoach, for the East Midlands franchise from 2018. A new IPPR reports says that up to ten times as much money is spent on transport in London than in the East Midlands.

QUOTE...

‘Passengers are paying through the nose for a shoddy service, and the government appears not to care as long as the money keeps rolling in.’ – Lianna Etkind of the Campaign for Better Transport

...UNQUOTE
FRANCHISING SYSTEM ‘NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE’

Britain’s rail franchising system is not fit for purpose, say MPs. It doesn’t do the job that John Major promised it would when he privatised British Rail back in the 1990s; there is no meaningful competition between operators; and passengers are being sold short every day.

A new report by the House of Commons Transport Select Committee slams the government for failing to hold the privatised train operating companies to account; urges the DfT to commission an independent review of rail franchising; and argues that ‘serious deficiencies’ at the Department for Transport means the government should consider transferring some of its enforcement powers to the Office of Rail and Road.

‘Passenger satisfaction with the railways is falling,’ said committee chair Louise Ellman. ‘Its core objectives are no longer being met, potential benefits are being lost and the passenger is suffering through higher fares and continued underperformance.’ She said the government has ‘serious lessons’ to learn from the management of GTR’s contract with Southern and criticised the ‘serious deficiencies’ in the department’s monitoring and enforcement of this franchise.

Mick Whelan, ASLEF’s general secretary, said: ‘The MPs are right to say that rail franchising is no longer fit for purpose. It never was. No amount of fixing or fiddling will change an artificial market imposed on a natural monopoly where the only competition is in the bidding process itself. It’s a system which embeds short-termism and profit seeking and has held the railway back for the last 20 years. We need a new model for rail operations in Britain which delivers new capacity and investment. How about one which is publicly owned and publicly accountable?’

Shadow Transport Secretary Andy McDonald said: ‘A railway works best as an integrated network, but privatisation and franchising have meant breaking it up to create opportunities for companies to extract a profit, resulting in costly inefficiencies. For example, hundreds of people are employed full time on the railway to argue about which company is responsible for delays. The current system is broken. It’s time for our railways to be run under public ownership, in the public interest, as an integrated national asset with affordable fares for all and long-term investment in Britain’s railway network.’

WAVES SMASH CAB WINDSCREEN

Services into Cornwall were disrupted last month when storm force 10 waves smashed the windscreen of a driver’s cab. The 5.03pm Paddington to Penzance train on 13 February was battered by waves and pulled out of service at Newton Abbot in Devon. The railway line from Exeter to Plymouth – built by Isambard Kingdom Brunel in 1845 – particularly the part which drops down to Newton Abbot and Totnes, is one of the most beautiful in Britain. But the stretch which runs along the coast from Starcross, at the mouth of the River Exe, down through Dawlish Warren and Dawlish to Teignmouth, is susceptible to the waves and, from time to time, to breaches of the sea wall.

BRITISH TRANSPORT POLICE SLAM TROLLEY YOBS

Yobs who hurled a shopping trolley onto the railway line at Blairhill station in Coatbridge, North Lanarkshire, are ‘lucky to be alive’ according to British Transport Police. ‘The trolley was thrown through overhead power lines and they could have been electrocuted,’ said the BTP. A train hit the trolley, but there was no serious damage to the driver or the loco.

QUOTE...

‘There’s a story going about that you’ve set a date for when you’re gonna quit as Labour leader?’ – Charlie Stayt, BBC Breakfast.

‘That’s on madeuptypesterday.com’ – Jeremy Corbyn

...UNQUOTE

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LASER LOUTS

Police were deployed after a laser pen was pointed at a train driver at Penketh, near Warrington in Cheshire, on 12 February. Under new government proposals anyone convicted of shining a laser pen at a train, plane or automobile will face a fine of up to £2,500 or a prison sentence.
INSPIRING WOMEN WITH ASLEF

VICTORIA CONSTANTINIDES wants help to tackle gender equality in the workplace

THE theme of this year’s International Women’s Day on Wednesday 8 March is Be Bold for Change. Gender inequality in the workplace is importante but there is still a long way to go. The World Economic Forum predicts the gap—which affects women at both entry and senior levels—won’t close until 2186.

The good news is that both women and men can help to fight inequality and it has never been easier for you to get involved! The Inspiring Women campaign runs events all year round and is looking for more people from the world of work to join our community of 34,000 volunteers.

The ASLEF Women’s Representatives Committee has been very involved with the campaign, with members signing up as volunteers and the committee helping to promote our campaign.

Gender inequality is grounded in stereotypes formed in a child’s mind from as young as five years old. Something as simple as talking to young people about diversity at work can make a huge difference. Inspiring Women would like to extend a special thanks to ASLEF WRC for your continued support for the campaign.

Signing up to volunteer is easy and free. All we ask is for one hour, once a year, to visit a state school near where you work or live and chat to young people about your job.

This year ASLEF has submitted a motion to the TUC women’s conference calling for the trade union movement to volunteer and support the project. 15 million women are employed in the UK.

ALÉ’S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

Trade Union Pale Ale – a proud product of the trade union movement – was launched in Brick Lane in London and then at the King’s Arms in Salford with music by Joe Solo, Conor Molloy and Boss Caine. TUPA, a session ale brewed in the East End of London for Hope Not Hate, and supported by ASLEF, the FBU, GMB, RMT, Thompsons solicitors and the TSSA, slipped down smoothly on a night to raise funds for Salford Trades Council’s food bank.

Drink drive rail chief spared ban as ‘I can’t rely on public transport’

A train company manager has been spared a driving ban after a court heard he couldn’t rely on public transport. Phillip Rutter-Collins, who works for Greater Anglia at Liverpool Street, brazenly defied a drink drive ban and was caught behind the wheel of his Ford Fiesta in Brightlingsea, Essex. The court in Colchester heard the ban had caused hardship for the rail boss because he couldn’t rely on buses and trains.

Which? chief slams great rail rip off

Peter Vicary-Smith, chief executive of the Consumers’ Association’s magazine Which?, has launched a scathing attack on the way the privatised train companies plunder the pockets of passengers. ‘Booking a train ticket feels like you need the pre-planning skills of a polar explorer and the in-depth knowledge of a Mastermind contestant to avoid getting ripped off,’ he said. ‘You must also be in on the lingo to understand the jargon-choked and contradictory dialect the rail companies insist on using. Which routes are “permitted” for instance? And why is one company’s “off-peak” another’s “peak”?’ He added: ‘The booking system is needlessly complicated and punishes those who don’t know how to play the game. Why can’t you just turn up at the station and trust that the person behind the counter can advise you on, or the automatic ticket machine can sell you, the full range of available fares? Is that too much to ask for?’
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.

#FeedingFatCats is a campaign run by Thompsons Solicitors. Thompsons is proud to stand up for the injured and mistreated.
Feeding the fat cats

TOM JONES, head of policy at Thompsons solicitors, reveals how access to justice for injured people is under attack by the government – and what we can do about it

Before Christmas, the government finally published its plans – first announced in November 2015 – which would, if pushed through, severely restrict access to justice for injured people in England and Wales. The government’s proposals, which they gave people very little time to comment on over Christmas, would affect nearly 1 million injured people every year, removing their right to access free or affordable independent legal advice.

Currently, the system allows injured people to claim back their legal expenses for damages above £1,000. If your compensation for your pain and suffering falls below £1,000 – regardless of how much your losses and expenses have been – you get your compensation but no legal costs.

A DANGEROUS CON

If the government gets its way, the £1,000 limit will increase 500% to £5,000. In a single, destructive stroke this would force 95% of all personal injury claimants to pay the cost of getting independent legal advice out of their own pocket rather than it being paid by those who caused the injury. Many people will be put off bringing a case in the first place, even when they are fully entitled to do this.

While the government says its proposals are designed to tackle a problem with what they call ‘fraud’ in ‘whiplash’ claims, this is a dangerous con – a fig leaf – and the consultation document proves that the government actually wants to impose the small claims limit increase in all personal injury claims, whether they occur in the workplace, on the road, or anywhere else.

This massive change cannot be justified on any legal, moral or economic grounds and is not supported by any independent evidence.

We represented an ASLEF member, Alison, who suffered injuries to her left shoulder and ribs after a bus crashed into the side of the tram she was driving. She was left with a dislocated collar bone and damage to her ribs and a tendon in her left shoulder. She couldn’t work for two months and still remains nervous on the roads. Working with ASLEF, we secured £5,000 in compensation for her.

If the government is allowed to put through these changes, injured people like Alison will be stripped of their access to justice and left to fight insurers on their own in their own time. They will end up not knowing whether to accept the insurer’s injury valuation, which – in our long experience at Thompsons – we know they will more than likely try to under-settle.

The changes, in effect, mean a huge cheque being paid by the government from your taxes to insurers, their multi-millionaire bosses, and their shareholders.

THE PRIVILEGED FEW

Using the government’s own figures – which are a gross underestimate – these proposals would see our already squeezed NHS lose at least £9 million per year, and the Treasury – and, therefore, public services including schools and the NHS – lose at least £135 million every year.

Meanwhile, the government admits that the insurers will benefit to the tune of £200 million each year.

The proposed change to the small claims limit would mean the end of long-established principles of UK law – that the polluter should pay for all the consequences of their negligence – and directly attack the right of injured people to pursue damages using an independent solicitor.

The government has been talking up scare stories of a ‘compensation culture’ and ‘whiplash fraud’ when its own statistics show that the number of work injury cases has dropped by 12% over the last ten years, and admits there is no suggestion of fraud by injured workers.

The government skates over the fact that the insurance industry’s own figures show they have saved a staggering £8.7 billion in costs for motor insurance claims in the last five years. And, yet, premiums are higher now than in 2010 and have increased by 17% in the last year alone. I bet your car insurance hasn’t got cheaper, has it?

We investigated the pay of the CEOs of the top three insurers and found that their salaries, benefits, bonuses and dividends gave them earnings in 2015 ranging from £4.82 million (Paul Geddes of Direct Line) to £37.82 million (Henry Engelhardt at Admiral). Mark Wilson of Aviva doubled his pay to £5.67 million.

On the steps of Downing Street, when she spoke for the first time as Prime Minister, Theresa May said her government would not work for the ‘privileged few’ but for those who are ‘just about managing’. It is hard to think of many people who better fit the definition of the ‘privileged few’ than these insurance CEOs.

The detail in the government’s consultation confirms that these proposals would mean even less money for vital public services, already suffering from the Tories’ vindictive budget cuts, and more money for highly profitable insurers and their grossly overpaid chief executives.

SIMPLY UNACCEPTABLE

The insurers are raking it in and are happy to see premiums go up while hardworking people on low incomes, who struggle to afford to drive a car to get to work, bear the brunt.

It is the same people who are being told that their injury, worth ‘just’ £5,000, is too ‘minor’ to deserve the support of an expert lawyer. Let Theresa May or Justice Secretary Liz Truss tell a carer, nurse or cleaner working long hours every week that £5,000 is a ‘small’ sum and see how they react.

The audacity of those receiving such eye-watering rewards packages is staggering – they lobby for changes to the small claims limit that will mean more profit for them and leave people injured at work, or on the roads, out in the cold.

It is simply unacceptable.

You can help defeat these unfair and vindictive proposals. Please put pressure on the government to think again by writing to your MP (you can find a draft letter at www.feedingfatcats.co.uk. Follow twitter.com/FeedingFatCats and sign the online petition at petition.parliament.uk/petitions/173099
All I want is 20/20 vision

Brexit notwithstanding, revised regulations for the European Train Drivers’ Licence come into force next year.

ASLEF’s assistant general secretary SIMON WELLER explains what the medical changes will mean for us

HILST the media may be full of the Conservative government’s plans for a hard Brexit from the European Union the revised European Train Drivers’ Licence is still due to take effect for all drivers, new and existing, in 2018. There is no reason to believe that the current disarray at Westminster will stop it. In the revised regulations there are a number of medical changes that will affect us.

There is a proposed increase in frequency of medical checks (every three years until 55 then annually after that) and, in light of the German Wings’ air crash, a renewed emphasis on psychological checks – it’s not just the British who have a penchant for knee jerk reactions…

The increase in medical frequency may help in early detection and treatment of illnesses or conditions that could have a long-term and life-changing effect on a driver.

There are also proposals to make post-traumatic support for train drivers a requirement for railway undertakings. A welcome development which we, as representatives from the European Transport Federation, were instrumental in achieving.

FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE

However, the fundamental change is to vision standards. The standard for vision which has been in force since 2010 in Annexe II (1.2 Vision) of the current directive says the following requirements as regards vision must be complied with:

- vision for both eyes: effective; not required when person has adequate adaptation and sufficient compensation experience. Only in case he lost binocular vision after starting his job.
- binocular vision: effective.
- recognition of colour signals: the test shall be based on recognition of single colours and not on relative differences.
- sensitivity to contrasts: good.
- no progressive eye diseases.
- lens implants, keratotomies and keratectomies are allowed only on condition that they are checked on a yearly basis or at intervals set by the medical doctor.
- ability to withstand dazzle.
- coloured contact lenses and photochromatic lenses are not allowed. UV filter lenses are allowed.
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- coloured contact lenses and photochromatic lenses are not allowed. UV filter lenses are allowed.

UNNECESSARY SURGERY

As you can see, in the changes there is a relaxation of the best eye standard (from 1.0 to 0.7) while the worse eye remains the same at 0.5. As a general rule exceptional vision is 2.0, average is 1.0 and poor is 0.20.

There is no minimum ‘uncorrected’ vision requirement, just a maximum permissible correction level. This remains the same as now. If the test is taken with glasses the maximum correction is limited to hypermetropia + 5 and myopia -8.Crudely put, this is the ‘thickness’ of the lens.

There is also a proposed relaxation of standards in relation to field of vision, binocular vision, and sensitivity to contrasts; these now only need to be ‘sufficient’.

As it stands, the suggested changes to medical standards should not cause undue concern for existing train drivers but it seems there is some confusion and a belief that requirements that are more restrictive are proposed.

We have had a number of cases where individual members are being told, incorrectly, by managers that the changes will mean they will no longer drive. In one case the driver paid for eye surgery out of his own pocket. Surgery which carried a real risk of sight loss that may have been totally unnecessary.

If you are being told by your manager that the vision requirements are becoming more stringent please speak to your district organiser.

PROPOSED REVISIONS

The proposed revisions, to take effect in 2018, will mean that the following requirements as regards vision must be complied with:

- aided or unaided distance visual acuity: minimum 0.7 for the better eye and 0.5 for the worse eye.
- maximum corrective lenses: hypermetropia + 5/myopia -8. Derogations are authorised in exceptional cases and after having obtained the opinion of an eye specialist. The medical doctor then takes the decision.
- near and intermediate vision: sufficient, whether aided or unaided.
- contact lenses and glasses are authorised when periodically checked by a specialist.
- normal colour vision: use of Ishihara completed by another recognised test if necessary.
- field of vision: sufficient.
- binocular vision: sufficient.
- sensitivity to contrasts: sufficient.

If you are being told by your manager that the vision requirements are becoming more stringent please speak to your district organiser.

Field of vision: full.
Working on the railroad all the live long day

At a meeting in Baltimore on 12 February 1827 a group of railway enthusiasts, engineers, investors and businessmen set up the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Company, writes Keith Richmond. It was the beginning of the great railway adventure which opened up North America. Here we celebrate, in pictures, the spirit of the iron road on the other side of the Atlantic.

It’s 190 years since railroad pioneers George Brown and Philip E Thomas, having spent a year over here examining Britain’s burgeoning railways, established the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Company in 1827 to build an iron road between the port of Baltimore in Maryland and the Ohio River.

Construction began in 1828 and the first section, from Baltimore to Ellicott’s Mills, was opened in 1830. It was extended to Parr’s Ridge in 1831; Point of Rocks in 1832; Sandy Hook in 1834; Harper’s Ferry in 1837; Cumberland in 1842; Piedmont in 1851; Fairmont in 1852; and Wheeling, in West Virginia, in 1853.

The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad was the first chartered railway in the United States, with 20,000 investors buying $5 million worth of stock in the company. The B&O was a success, and became the first firm to run a locomotive built in America – the Tom Thumb in 1829. It built America’s first passenger and freight station, at Mount Clare, in 1829, and was the first railroad to publish a permanent timetable, in 1830. And, in 1852, it became the first railroad to reach the Ohio River from the eastern seaboard.

The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad was bought by the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1901, and then by the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway in 1963, which merged with CSX Transportation in 1987.

The B&O is historically significant because it was the first of many westward railways in the United States. It was the commercial success of the B&O which paved the way for the great expansion westwards in the 19th century. That meeting in Baltimore on 12 February 1827 was the beginning of the railway adventure which opened up the whole of North America.
in 1858 to show off its railroad, to ride, somewhat precariously, and scenes which were opening Weekly. 'Such was the mighty steed.'

*Big Six Elegance* by Larry Fisher. A B&O freight train, powered by a Santa Fe locomotive, 6179, known as Big Six, on its way out of Washington DC in 1950.

Woodcut of a horse-drawn carriage on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in 1830

Workers on the B&O in Brunswick, Maryland, in 1883

A Cumberland Christmas by John Winfield. Crew change at the Queen City Hotel in Cumberland, Maryland. A helper engine is added to aid the E8 loco climb the Sand Patch grade

Advertisement for the B&O during the Civil War in 1864

B&O route map 1891 (below)

Frank Blackwell Mayer in February 1827
Men of England, wherefore plough
For the lords who lay ye low?

The government, TOCs and FOCs reckon the cure for the problems caused by privatisation is more privatisation. FRASER COATS, chair of Bathgate branch, has a different solution. And it’s one of which even Adam Smith, the father of the free market, would have approved...

PUBLIC ownership of the railway may seem something of a radical idea in an era dominated by the neoliberal agenda of a hitherto small far-right economic sect. The Adam Smith Institute, for example, promotes more and deeper rail privatisation but the man himself would have had little time for those claiming to act in his name. Smith, an economist and moral philosopher, born and brought up at Kirkcaldy in Fife, is considered the ‘father of capitalism’ because of his book The Wealth of Nations. A key figure in the Scottish Enlightenment, he recognised that public funding of vital infrastructure was necessary in order to ‘facilitate commerce’ and advocated this for health, education, the Post Office, and transport, albeit as he was born and died before the railway era he was referring to roads, canals, bridges, and ports.

CURE FOR THE PROBLEMS
The point, though, is that while public ownership is and always should be a demand of socialists, trade unionists and the progressive left, it is also in keeping with traditional mainstream capitalist thought, a point reflected in polls showing public opinion, including Tory voters, hugely in favour of rail nationalisation.

However you look at it, the case against rail privatisation is unanswerable. Direct government subsidy, together with other hidden subsidies, such as the halving of track access charges, mean the taxpayer now underwrites the UK’s private rail industry to the tune of £3.5 billion more, in real terms, than was the case under British Rail; carriage capacity has risen only 3% to cope with a rise of 60% in passenger numbers; and rolling stock is older than under BR while fares have soared well above inflation.

Governments have acknowledged the chronic problems, but don’t know what to do about them. The McNulty Report infamously prescribed more privatisation — together with wage cuts, mass redundancies, booking office closures, DOO, attacks on pensions, and savage cuts in track maintenance — as a cure for the problems caused by privatisation.

As TOCs try to jump start the moribund McNulty Report back into life, so disputes, strikes and High Court injunctions have begun to poackmark our industry and make the need for a serious conversation and campaign around public ownership critical.

But first we need to address the popular myth – propagated by David Begg of Transport Times when he spoke at AAD in Edinburgh in 2013 – that privatisation brought the decent pay and conditions enjoyed by most grades in the railway today. Were this true, then it would surely be the same right across the private sector, which we know it is not; and if it really was the private train operators who awarded the conditions we won, why are they now preparing all-out assault on them? Let’s not fool ourselves. Our pay and conditions were not given, they were taken. They are the result of working-class organisation, solid trade unionism, collective bargaining, and nothing else. The same means by which we would defend ourselves against any attempted future public sector pay restraint, a scenario feared by some members, though one which did not, in fact, arise during the six years in which East Coast thrived in public ownership.

EXPERIMENT UNRAVELLING
So, as the bitter struggle on Southern makes crystal clear, the privatisation experiment is unravelling and the TOCs, armed with McNulty, want the workers to pay. We should run as far as we can from such butchery and campaign seriously for the escape route of public ownership, including the public ownership of rolling stock and, in time, of the freight sector, too.

Does that mean a return to British Rail? And would we not be just as exposed to McNulty under government control? Neither needs to be the case. While there remains a certain nostalgia for BR the model was inherently flawed. One hierarchy replaced another. The railway had become dilapidated under private ownership and yet, crucially, it was given a target of breaking even while forced to give over-generous compensation to former shareholders. In the first year of operation this turned a £24 million profit into an £8 million loss. Together with advances in rail transport the structure became unsustainable and Dr Beeching’s axe fell. By 1970 staff levels had fallen to 296,000 – from 640,000 in 1950 – and a break-even target was again imposed. BR didn’t work because it couldn’t work.

More recently, East Coast’s six years of public ownership, under arms-length Directly Operated Railways, gave a glimpse of a better model, relatively free of IR issues, profitable, and with record punctuality and passenger satisfaction, a record since undone by Virgin.

As McNulty bites, most of us would probably settle for an East Coast scenario. But with no change to the internal structure of the organisation, it retained the same basic flaw as BR. The bosses made the decisions.

It’s curious that we live in a democracy, believing we should participate in decisions which affect us, yet seem content to unthinkingly suspend any democratic participation the moment we enter our place of work. Decisions are dictated from above to those best placed to make them.

Would ScotRail staff, for example, funnel profits to Holland? Would drivers and guards at Southern decide to extend DOO only to go into bitter dispute against their own decision? Would booking office workers use improved technology to put half of their colleagues out of work when they could, instead, reduce everyone’s working week with no loss of pay? And would we risk disaster by planning to cut track maintenance? Of course not. We know our responsibilities and they are not to shareholders.

DECISIONS WOULD BE OURS
Responsible decisions, out of the hands of the privateeers, may include everything from the repositioning of marker boards to mitigate against stop shorts, to bigger general questions like investing subsidy, previously squirrelled away as private profit, in green projects like the zero emissions hydrogen train recently developed in Germany; the introduction of a reasonable wage differential; the guarantee of passenger work for redundant freight drivers; and even the election of our managers with a guarantee of a return to the grade they came from should they be recalled or deselected.

The important thing is the decisions would be ours to make. The possibilities are many and varied but two things are certain. Only public ownership can stop the private pillage of our industry, and only democratic employee direction can place decisions in the hands of those who should be making them. Even Adam Smith might agree with that...
AY JACKSON, our chair, welcomed everyone, especially those who had travelled from London, and as far away as Sussex, to be at the Retired Members’ Section AGM in North Lanarkshire. It was a landmark event, the first AGM to be held in Scotland.

Our first speaker was Kevin Lindsay, ASLEF’s organiser in Scotland, who has served under four general secretaries. Our current GS, he said, is the best for representing this union, particularly with all the problems facing members, and the increasing use of the High Court by TOCs for injunctions against the EC calling for action by ballot. He talked about Scottish politics; regarding independence he said he believed ‘being Scottish is what is important’ and that Scotland should stay in the UK.

KNOWS NOTHING

On freight, Kevin said that DB Cargo, formerly DB Schenker, due to the collapse of work, and the way the company managed its contracts, has been losing £1.5 million per week. The company wants redundancies, and new terms and conditions, but the TOCs in Scotland have vacancies, and he hoped would take some of the redundant freight drivers.

Kevin has worked closely with all the Transport Ministers in Scotland since his election as DO2, but the current minister knows absolutely nothing about transport matters. Kevin has written asking for his resignation, and others are now asking, too. Regarding DOO, he said members on ScotRail had refused to drive without them, and currently the guards remain.

Our next speaker was Richard

THE NEXT ELECTION

He believes that Jeremy Corbyn will win the next general election, because of his socialist beliefs and his vision for change. To reverse Tory policies by looking after the poor and elderly rather than the rich. Richard also addressed the crisis in ScotRail and measures being taken to remove the BTP out of Scotland.

GS Mick Whelan said the union has grown by 5% year on year. He explained how privatisation has diminished freight, and how the government – and the FOCs – did nothing about the loss of coal and steel traffic.

Regarding DOO, an ongoing crisis in ScotRail and measures being taken to remove the BTP out of Scotland. Kevin has worked closely with all the Transport Ministers in Scotland since his election as DO2, but the current minister knows absolutely nothing about transport matters. Kevin has written asking for his resignation, and others are now asking, too. Regarding DOO, he said members on ScotRail had refused to drive without them, and currently the guards remain.

Our next speaker was Richard

Ray Jackson (with Dave Court) presents Crawford Kennedy with a glass engraving of Mick Jones’s painting at head office to mark the 125th anniversary of Glasgow branch (above); and Ray thanks EC2 Hugh Bradley and Motherwell branch secretary Alan Jones for their hospitality (above right)

Leonard MSP. He was the GMB’s organiser in Scotland, a former Scottish TUC economist, secretary of the Keir Hardie Society, and vice-chair of the Scottish Labour History Society. He spoke of his long history as a trade union activist, and of fighting alongside ASLEF on many issues, and talked about the Labour Party and what it stands for. He said the party needs an industrial strategy, that nationalism creates divisions, and we should unite as a class. The anti-Trade Union Acts brought in by the Tories should have been repealed when the Labour Party was in power and must be addressed when next in office.

RE-ELECTED EN BLOC

Secretary Les Muir said he was still fairly new in this position and, even after a year, was still settling in, but echoed and endorsed Ray’s comments. Treasurer Alan Taylor gave a statement on current finances, which are healthy, and said this was helped enormously by the 500 Club. ‘Figures fluctuate, but currently we have 194 members, and would like to see more, moving towards the 500. It only costs £1 per week.’

Ray Jackson was re-elected as chair; Les Muir as national secretary; and Alan Taylor as treasurer. The secretary indicated that all current committee members were willing to stand again and called for nominations. There were no new nominations so the incumbents were re-elected en bloc.
Passion and pride

At branch and LGBT positions she has been our secretary for more years than people can remember. We all enjoyed the buffet – Syd Saeed's samosas are legendary – on an evening filled with pride and passion in our great union and the recognition of great service. After the meeting we adjourned to the bar for a few bevies and tales of yore.

Martin Bromage-Griffiths, Birmingham New Street

Long service and retirements (left to right): Barbara Holland (retired); Jim Clewes (25 years); Dutch Holland (ret'd); Colin Owen (20), Clive Mathews (ret'd); Steve Felton (25); Lee Scott (20); Beau Chambers (20); GS Mick Whelan; A Killick (5); Craig Phillips (20); DO6 Dicky Fisher; Geoff Waters (25).

Chuffed to tears

We also said farewell to our very popular health & safety official Steve Watts. For years he has provided cover not only to New Street but Snow Hill, Soho, Tyseley and Coventry when other members were not available. Steve was old school and came through the guard's grade to driver. A Villa fan through and through, there has been lots of banter over the years, but never a falling out. He was presented with a model train as a farewell gift and was chuffed to tears as he made his farewell speech. Good luck in your retirement, Steve.

Martin Bromage-Griffiths

Come all ye jolly tinner boys

St Blazey branch welcomed Simon Weller and the DB Cargo company council on Sunday 22 January to give us a run down on the current position regarding proposed new terms and conditions for DBC drivers. Everyone was grateful to Simon and the team for making the trip to Cornwall. Simon presented long service badges to Brothers Darrin Hart and Lawrence Pierce (30 years); Jeffrey Hancock (25) and Mark Bartlett (10). And all of us at St Blazey wish our Great Western colleague Sister Wendy Archibald all the best for her retirement.

Andrew Pope, branch secretary

Upcoming events

- **CRICKLEWOOD – FRIDAY 10 MARCH**
  Cricklewood reunion from 12.0 at the RAF Association Club, Ashburnham Road, Bedford, MK40 1EA.

- **EASTLEIGH – SATURDAY 11 MARCH**
  Depot reunion from 12.0 to 6.0 at Eastleigh Railway Institute, 2 Romsey Road, Eastleigh, S0SO 9FE. Buffet provided.

- **WILLESDEN – SATURDAY 18 MARCH**
  Willesden and Stonebridge Park/Wembley reunion for retired and working members 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, on from 17.00 till late. If you want accommodation please ring the Railway Tavern (020 8534 3123) quoting Stratford reunion.

- **RAMSGATE – THURSDAY 6 APRIL**
  Southeastern retired and working members’ reunion from 11.0 at the Red Arrow Club, Newington Road, Ramsgate.

- **NORWICH – FRIDAY 21 APRIL**
  Colleagues from other grades and depots are welcome to join us at 19.00 at Arkwright’s Social Club, Hobart Street, Norwich, NR3 3JB. Free buffet thanks to the Norwich loco welfare fund who have sponsored this year’s reunion.

- **DIDCOT – SATURDAY 29 APRIL**
  Past, present and associates welcome at our 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.

- **Please send your all branch news, reports, features and photographs to journal@aslef.org.uk**
52 year men hang up their keys

The last two Western Region steam drivers took to the rails for the last time in January. Colin Woodley and Ron Richards both called time on an incredible 52 years on the railway. Both men began their careers in Oxford, Colin in August 1964 and Ron a month later. They have seen many changes on the railway, most notably the switch from steam to diesel and only narrowly missing the change to electric. More than 200 colleagues, ex-colleagues, friends and family turned out to see them on their way with presentations on behalf of GWR, Oxford social & welfare fund and, of course, ASLEF. Andy Hudd, EC member for District 7, presented them with retirement certificates, 50 year badges and the Mick Jones triptych at head office after loyal and unbroken service to the union. Colin and Ron are an inspiration to me, as a young driver, and many other drivers and will both be greatly missed. Tom Taylor, branch secretary

First class Oxford men Colin and Ron

Mick Holder turns back time to March 1917

The cost of living and getting food when booked off away from home were in the Journal 100 years ago

COST OF LIVING SOARS

The editor notes: ‘The cost of living continues to advance at a tremendous rate, and up to 1 February had risen to 89% over that of July 1914. Thus the value of £1 in July 1914 has dropped to 10s 2d, and the cost of providing food for a family for one week has risen from 25s in July 1914 to 47s 9d. It is quite clear that further increases have taken place, with more to follow.’

DIFFICULTY OF OBTAINING FOOD

‘The executive, at their January sitting, considered the complaints of our members on the question of the difficulty of obtaining food when unexpectedly booked off away from home during the hours that shops are closed, and when kept on duty excessive hours, and on their instructions the general secretary has since been in communication with the Railway Executive, Board of Trade, and Ministry of Labour, with a view to having food provided for our members under such circumstances. The Railway Executive said the question was not one for them to deal with, but for each individual company, while the Labour Ministry, from which so much was expected, said the question was one for the Railway Executive. The matter was finally shuffled on to the Board of Trade, which department is now dealing with the question, and we trust some political solution to the difficulty will result.’

THE CONDITIONS OF WAR

‘As a result of the efforts of our union, extending over nearly two years, we understand it is now generally recognised that drivers and firemen who are reduced in position owing to the conditions of war shall continue to receive the rates of pay of the grade from which they are so reduced. We have kept continually righting this matter on each company as it arose, until now the principle is nationally accepted.’

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

‘Colonel Pringle, of the Board of Trade, in his report of the accident on the Midland Railway near Bedford, on 20 November, remarks on the fact that the accident is a further illustration of the necessity for some form of automatic control. We may get those automatic cab signals yet.’
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
**PETER MURRAY DRIVING HER MAJESTY**

Peter Murray, a retired Mossend Freightliner Intermodal driver, and his husband, died on 26 August at the age of 73. He began his career at 15 as a messenger at Hamilton steam engine shed in 1958 before moving to Polmadie to become a cleaner in 1960. Peter prepared the 6.50pm ‘overnight travelling post office’ Royal Mail train from Glasgow to London on 7 August 1963 – stopped by the Great Train Robbers at 3am the next day at Bridgeno Bridge in Buckinghamshire – and, as a result, he and the driver, Jack Mills, were fingerprinted for the purposes of elimination.

Peter became a fireman in 1966, a second man in 1968, and was finally passed out as a driver in 1974, when he moved to Motherwell. He worked various types of diesel, electric and traction engines on numerous routes from Carlisle, Millerhill, and Dundee, and in 1992 he had the great pleasure of driving the royal train with the Queen on board.

In 1994, after the restructuring that followed the privatisation of British Rail, he moved to Mossend under Rail Freight Distribution (now Freightliner Intermodal) and drove trains to exotic destinations such as Fort William, Grangemouth, York and Crewe. He retired in 2006 after 48 years on the railway.

Peter died after a short battle with cancer and is missed dearly by his son Peter, daughters Lorna and Audrey, grandchildren Kyle, Ruby and Caitlin, and by me.

Mary Murray

**PETER MACKENZIE**

It is my sad duty to report the passing of Peter Mackenzie at the age of 88. Peter, who was the long-time branch secretary here in Inverness, from the mid-1950s until 1982, passed away peacefully after a short illness. A regular and respected attender of district council, a fearsome negotiator, and an excellent ASLEF rep, he will be sadly missed and fondly remembered.

Andrew Gardner, Inverness

**BILL COLLINS UNION MAN**

Bill Collins, who died on 16 December at the age of 77, began his railway career on the Southern region before moving to Clacton depot where he was branch secretary and on the LDC. Bill used to attend region reunions to see his old workmates. He loved travelling to places such as Norwich, King’s Lynn and Dover with his good friend Graham Jackson. Bill’s funeral was full of family and friends and everyone was invited back to the local pub for refreshments, reminiscence, and a

**ERIC HODKINSON**

Eric Hodkinson, who began his railway career in the 1940s as a cleaner at Yeovil, has died at 87. He progressed through the grades to become a driver at Three Bridges in 1958 where he stayed until the mixed traction depot was moved to Redhill. A passionate trade unionist, Eric was a regular at branch meetings, serving as branch secretary for 20 years, LDC rep, AAD delegate, and on sectional council. He did his national service in the RAF, spending most of his time in Egypt, and loved travelling. As a young man he went around Europe on his motorcycle with Dianna, who became his wife. A keen photographer, he had a massive collection of pictures of the railway and local sites.

David Heydon, Redhill

**STAN BRAYBROOK**

Stanley Braybrook (1935-2017) was born in Northampton, the youngest of three children, and left school at 15 to work on the railway. He began as an engine cleaner and worked his way up to fireman. Around the time of the change to diesel locomotives he became a driver. Stan worked his way through a variety of driving jobs, including freight and passenger services. He was a long-standing member of ASLEF, serving as welfare officer. He retired in 2000, just shy of 50 years’ service on the railway, to spend more time travelling the world with his beloved wife Janette (who died in 2008) and playing lawn bowls.

Philip Braybrook
Common sense is an alien concept in our industry

July this year will mark my tenth year in the railway. In that time I’ve realised that common sense seems to be an alien concept in this industry. You would, therefore, think that I wouldn’t be surprised by the most recent changes to the rule book in relation to GSMR. What I find surprising is not just that we can travel at 100mph without a functioning radio system but that this decision was made after consultation and agreement with this union! How can we accept a rule change that completely negates a safety system and effectively puts the lives of our members, colleagues and passengers at risk?

Steven Nimmo, Edinburgh No 2

Taking issue with Tosh

I am afraid that I am going to have to take issue with Tosh McDonald’s response to the letter from Steve Hill, Manchester Piccadilly No 1 (Journal, February). The rejection by members in a referendum of a set of proposals put forward by the EC, whilst being a result of a democratic vote, serves to demonstrate exactly the point that Steve makes. If a set of proposals put forward with a recommendation for acceptance is so far away from members’ aspirations that they are then rejected in such a manner it indicates the distance and lack of communication between the negotiating parties. In these turbulent times it is imperative that we all work together. There is no room for complacency, and no branch or group of members should be allowed to feel isolated and should have full confidence in those who represent our interests.

Mark Barrett, Westbury

Tosh McDonald says: ’A referendum is our way of consulting our members. It’s what we do – and what we’ve always done. We are a democratic union; the EC, officers, company council and branch reps – all the positions in our union – are elected. There’s never been a deal which pleases everyone. But we always try to get the best possible deal to please a majority.’

Auld Man in Edinburgh

Alan Taylor, Brian Tagg, Dave Court and I made the journey to Edinburgh No 2’s annual retired drivers’ dinner – better known as the Auld Man’s Do – in the knowledge of a great welcome from officers of the branch, Rab and Chris, not forgetting DO Kevin Lindsay and Hugh Bradley, EC member for District 2. Following an excellent meal, there were contributions from the top table, and Kevin presented retirement certificates and badges to ASLEF elders present, wherein the history of the recipients was exposed to the full brunt of the silver tongue of the district organiser, revealing all their quirks, albeit in a kindly and very amusing manner. The RMS love making this journey north and long may it continue.

Ray Jackson, RMS

Wrong fight, wrong place

We wish to respond to the letter ‘Democracy in action’ by the Shrewsbury branch secretary (Journal, January). In June the 38 ASLEF Infrastructure Monitoring drivers at Colas UK voted overwhelmingly to take industrial action over issues that included annual leave premiums, release of reps, recruitment, and a general disregard for protected t&c’s. The RD agreement was withdrawn in April 2016, and all overtime working withdrawn in June, and for the next four months no one received any information or updates from either the lead officer or company council. Our LCUs had stepped down as they were unable to work with the LO or IM CC.

We did get a mention in the Journal once, and even then our title was wrong, and, despite numerous IM members using the same democratic process that Bro Griffiths mentioned in his letter, to contact EC members, CC rep, and lead officer, amazingly a blank was drawn. This led to frustration and anger, as we were in limbo, with no information forthcoming, but expected to uphold a dispute which, in reality, had diminished to a single item, an item that will never be resolved, but the IM membership continued to hold fast and loyal despite this. The lead officer rang around to gauge response to strike days and to escalating the action over the only outstanding issue, recruitment, and the advice he was given was ignored.

Colas had by this time been recruiting at an alarming rate, drivers on zero hour contracts to supplement the core drivers who were now taking over our duties on infrastructure monitoring trains with as little as eight hours training for ultrasonic test trains and 10 hours for the NMT (a former HST) running at 125mph. He was told that an escalation would not harm Colas but would only harm the membership. Despite this, a report was given
to the EC and a day’s strike called. Even so it got a 100% response. A second day was called, again with 100% support, although the effectiveness was questioned by the IM membership. Those of us who have been through numerous bouts of industrial action over the years held the concerned numbers together.

A mass meeting of drivers was subsequently held in Derby, with nearly half the membership attending; it must be remembered the 41 IM drivers are spread throughout the UK. At this meeting the lead officer and EC were told that we wanted no more strike days, after it became apparent a week-long strike had been sanctioned by the EC. At this meeting the EC president repeatedly referred to us as Inter Modal drivers; a small thing in theory but it spoke volumes to the men there who felt poorly treated by ASLEF.

This strike action was suspended, but only because of our persistence, the futility of it being made clear to the EC president and lead officer. The dispute is still in place, albeit suspended.

Our frustration and anger lead to a single motion being created, not by an individual, but by several IM drivers, disgruntled at the unwillingness of the EC, lead officer & invisible CC rep to listen to the majority of IM drivers. It must be stressed that the intention of this motion was given to all IM drivers, and input was welcomed. The motions were taken to five branches, not two, as Bro Griffiths suggests, to have the industrial action called off, to have a new lead officer and a motion of no confidence in the CC rep.

This, Bro Griffiths, is democracy; five branches representing 34/38 members, even after the Shrewsbury turnaround, the other four branch motions stand, which equates to 29 out of a possible 38 members who have exercised their democratic right to challenge the decisions of the EC. We have the right to select, and deselect our representatives if they fail us. We have a democratic right to enforce change through the branch.

ASLEF will not come out of this dispute unscathed and will be lucky to keep many of the IM drivers in its fold. Why? Because they have ignored the membership and failed the people they represent. As for Colas, their belligerence and ignorance of the laws surrounding TUPE beggars belief. IM is the only foothold ASLEF has in Colas, preferring not to try and harness the many members within Core to ensure solidarity, instead, choosing the wrong fight, the wrong location and the wrong people to ignore.

S Sheehan, J Dicks, P Taylor, R Campbell, J Daniel. Infrastructure Monitoring drivers at Colas UK

Mick Whelan says: “Every position in ASLEF – GS, AGS, EC, DO, company council and all the branch reps – is elected by the members. People stand on a platform of what they hope to achieve and then stand for re-election on their record. We are a democratic organisation. In this case the tactics and strategy of the EC have worked.”

Despicable behaviour

I am copying you in on a letter I have sent to Theresa May, the Prime Minister; Chris Grayling, the Secretary of State for Transport; and Crispin Blunt, Conservative MP for Reigate.

I wish to draw your attention to some breathtaking, despicable behaviour by Govia. The Thameslink Bedford service provides a train which reaches Gatwick at 8.01 and should stop at Redhill and then East Croydon before heading to Blackfriars. On 9 December the service, which at Gatwick was half full, ran through Redhill and East Croydon without stopping. On earlier strikes there were announcements that some Thameslink trains could not stop because of overcrowding but that was not the case this day. There were dozens of passengers unable to get their usual Southern Railways train all waiting patiently for this alternative option. And the train just tore through.

So why did this happen? Could it be that Govia, who also own Southern, the company in dispute, wish to manipulate the situation, escalating anger by forcing even more misery on passengers and encouraging ill-feeling toward the strikers? By skipping stations there is less threat of their having to pay compensation to passengers made late, another reason for Govia’s behaviour where profit is everything. Southern is not fit for purpose. That was abundantly clear before the strike action.

Mark Townier, Redhill, Surrey

Do you remember Percy?

I thought you might be able to help me find out about my grandfather, Percy Brook. He was a train driver based at Mexborough in the 1920s and 1930s. He was, I am told, heavily involved with ASLEF. My father, Alan Brook, was also a train driver (and ASLEF member), serving 45 years at Mexborough, Wath, Masborough and Doncaster. He is now 86, and suffers from Alzheimer’s. I’m a late starter; in the 1920s and 1930s. He was, I am told, heavily involved with ASLEF. My father, Alan Brook, was also a train driver (and ASLEF member), serving 45 years at Mexborough, Wath, Masborough and Doncaster. He is now 86, and suffers from Alzheimer’s. I’m a late starter; in the 1920s and 1930s.

Chris Brook

Trumps or no Trump?

I am somewhat concerned at the anti-Trump comments in the January Journal. We must remember that the US is not our country; and roughly half the electorate voted for Donald. We have quite enough issues here in Britain with which to concern ourselves.

Eric Stuart

Drivers have enough to do

The driver has enough to do in the cab without worrying about what is going on behind him.

Dave Weddle, Tonbridge RMS

NORWICH 125 year commemorative badge, limited edition. £5 + £1 p&p from Dave Tyson at fdavetsyon@btinternet.com or 14 Pond Road, Horsford, Norwich, NR10 3SW. Cheques payable to ASLEF Norwich Amenities Fund.

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 Oakand colliery near Barnsley on 12 December 1866. £3 from remembranceoaks@gmail.com

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

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Radical chic it's your mystique

If you’re in the Euston area, with half an hour to spare, nip up to the fourth floor of Senate House and have a look at the Radical Voices exhibition. Chris Proctor did – and came out feeling a little bit better about the world.

"Radical (noun): A person who advocates thorough or complete political or social reform" – Oxford English Dictionary

Lucky for us, though, some were kept as souvenirs or guarded by hoarders. We owe these folk a debt because they help us appreciate our history; and, in this case, to realise that radicals, those seeking real change in society, have always found fresh ways of expressing their views: from songs, manifestoes and petitions to posters, demonstrations and cartoons. Even the humble badge, so much a part of the ASLEF tradition. Badges voice support. It's wearing your heart on your sleeve. Or lapel.

Supporters of women's rights wore badges; while women who wished to be recognised as a sympathiser of the Suffragettes without making any strident and overt declaration wore silk buttonholes in the colours of the Women’s Social and Political Union. Radicals always have a voice, albeit sometimes muted.

There is a splendidly British feel about some of the dissent: like the petition deferentially requesting that the university ‘admit women to the Medical Examinations and Degrees of London University’.

This politeness stretches to the squatters who took over UK financial centres in 2012. At the top of their posters was a note saying, ‘Sorry for the inconvenience – we’re trying to change the world’. Sadly, students trying to occupy the Senate building in the 1970s failed to maintain this standard of decorum. The headings on their broadsheet began reasonably enough with phrases like ‘Right to Protest’, ‘Organise’ and ‘UL Racism’; but then degeneration set in. The final header was ‘Arseholes’!

The exhibition also reminds us of the value of working-class culture. We are so conditioned to only admiring the images, sounds and habits of the opulent and powerful, we ignore the riches of ordinary lives. Here we find books on ‘the shipyard patter of Tyneside’, poems by former CN D and Amnesty leader Pat Arrowsmith, and publicity for a show I’m sorry to have missed: The Case of the Baffled Boss by the Workers’ Theatre.

‘Radical (adjective): Representing or supporting an extreme or progressive section of a political party’ – Oxford English Dictionary

It is also useful sometimes to remind ourselves of the achievements we have made over the years. How strange it seems that it was once acceptable to exclude women from democracy. And that London’s first Gay Liberation Front meeting took place at the London School of Economics as recently as October 1970. And to see how once-radical books such as Uncle Tom’s Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe have dated terribly with their crude stereotypes.

Hanging above the cases are quotes from or about radicals. The first you see is WH Auden’s ‘All I have is a voice’. Then there’s Margaret Busby’s ‘Other voices need to get a look-in, not just those that already have the power’; and the encouraging but exhausting advice from Angela Davis, ‘You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the tim e.’

‘Radical (British historical) Belonging to an extreme section of the Liberal Party during the 19th century’ – Oxford English Dictionary

War is ever a radical theme, strange though it may seem that a desire for peace makes a person an extremist. We are reminded of the National Council Against Conscription, opposing the Great War; of the Independent Labour Party’s manifesto opposing the second; and the iconic poster from 2003 telling Tony Blair he did not invade Iraq in our name.

The message from this small exhibition is that radicals, the people who, united, change our society, will always, under any circumstances, find a way to express their beliefs. From wearing a particular coloured piece of ribbon to organising a local meeting to speaking at a rally or singing a particular song; the voices of the radicals are as vibrant and necessary as ever. You walk out of Senate House feeling encouraged.

Radical Voices is at Senate House Library, University of London, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HU. Admission is free.
ON THE ROAD AGAIN

JACK KEROUAC, the dope smoking, jazz loving, hipster hobo who celebrated the Beat generation in *Desolation Angels*, *The Dharma Bums*, *Big Sur*, *The Subterraneans*, and *On the Road*, with thinly-disguised versions of Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs and Neal and Carolyn Cassady, wrote as poignantly about the American railroad as he did about Route 66: Tracy is a railroad town; brakemen eat surly meals in diners by the tracks. Trains howl across the valley. The sun goes down long and red.

We spent some time trying to sleep on the bench at the railroad ticket office, but the telegram clicked all night and we couldn’t sleep, and big freights were slamming around outside. We didn’t know how to hop a proper chain gang; we’d never done it before; we didn’t know whether they were going east or west or how to find out or what box cars and flats and de-iced reefers to pick.

Dean went on. ‘One time I rode a freight from New Mexico clear to LA – I was 11 years old, lost my father at a siding, we were all in a hobo jungle, I was with a man called Big Red, my father was out drunk in a boxcar – it started to roll – Big Red and I missed it – I didn’t see my father for months. I rode a long freight all the way to California, really flying, a desert Zipper.’

He and I and Ed Dunkel ran across the tracks and hopped a freight at three individual points; Marylou and Galatea were waiting in the car. We rode the train a half-mile into the piers, waving at switchmen and flagmen. They showed me the proper way to get off a moving car; the back foot first and let the train go away from you and come around and place the other foot down.’

‘These romantic old broken-down Frisco brakemen live sad but eager lives of their own,’ I told Dean.

O n Track Prize Crossw ord

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and place the other foot dow n. ‘

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Thanks for all your responses to the 130th prize crossword in the February 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 March

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Solution to Crossword 130

Across: 1 Greyhound-like racing dog 5 Bank strongbox 7 Pen for hens? 8 Unmarried man 9 A pub close to home 10 Always 13 Narrow country road 14 Fixed kitchen basin 18 Forcibly pull apart 19 Joint on which a door turns 21 Man who eats human flesh 22 To steal from 23 In good health 24 Ship’s captain

Down: 1 Barred 2 Late 3 Drawing 4 Label 5 Sir 6 Style 7 Sprain 10 Toilet 12 Dolphin 14 Garage 15 Tests 16 Cater 17 Tree 19 Eve

Congratulations to Michael Hawthorn, Banbury, Oxfordshire, who was last month’s winner. The winner of this month’s Prize Crossword will receive Marks & Spencer vouchers to the value of £25

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

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