Rail in Wales: special report

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ANDY HUDD: The new Wales & Borders franchise
DAVID JONES: Are we on the right track?
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We know the dangers of over hours culture

HAVE just read the claims that the average employee works 100 hours more than their basic week every year. That bears no relation to anyone I know in our industry – or outside it. There are thousands of people who are working 48 hours or more every week and still cannot live without state support. The figures must be skewed by the million people on zero hours contracts who do not know whether they have work from one week to the next, as well as all those forced on to ‘faux’ self employment.

We, in our 136 year history, know the dangers of an over hours culture which drives down wages and conditions – and must never regress to those dark days again. Whilst we recruit and grow the driver base, and create opportunities for apprenticeships, work on the introduction of traction, or major infrastructure projects, we are not here to cover for the mistakes of the train operating companies or the DfT.

We seek a vibrant well-invested industry that works for the passenger, the taxpayer and those who hope to operate safely within it. I am not sure that is where we are heading, with all our fears over managed decline looking more and more likely as the amount of money allocated to maintenance and renewals decreases in real terms. The days of temporary speed restrictions and emergency speed restrictions popping up all over the place are not far away. The move back to risk-based maintenance is also a concern as we are all aware of how this contributed to major incidents in the past.

As for major infrastructure investment all the promises seem to have been downsized or delayed and costs increase with no real information or proposals as to future delivery. Where are we on the Northern powerhouse other than devolving cuts to local councils or civic administrations? We need a national strategy for rail that concentrates on the whole of the United Kingdom; economic growth, and a much-needed housing initiative, are both dependent on good transport links, so it’s time for a major rethink now!

I’m looking forward to our annual assembly of delegates where we hand our trade union over to the member delegates for a week; we look at what we have done and where we are going in future. Given the issues and challenges we have faced recently, and are going to face in future, I look forward to the debate. All this and a snap general election announced for 8 June! We are going to be busy in the next few weeks...

Yours fraternally
Mick Whelan, general secretary
ASLEF in action

SLF activists are standing in the local elections to councils in England, Scotland and Wales on Thursday 4 May.

Mark Daniels, of Barking main line, is standing for Labour in Rochford South in elections for Essex county council and Collette Gibson, of Gidea Park, is standing in Bocking.

Andy Botham, cabinet member for council services, is standing in Matlock for Derbyshire county council. Alan Moir is standing in Bishopbriggs South for re-election to East Dunbartonshire council. Richard Solesbury-Timms is standing in Middleton Cheney for election to South Northamptonshire council, and Mark Reynolds for election to North Hykeham town council.

ASLEF has also backed Labour candidates in elections for the newly-created posts of English regional mayors.

LU BACKS DOWN

Strike action on the Night Tube in London was called off after LU management backed down in the face of the threat of industrial action by drivers.

Finn Brennan, ASLEF’s organiser on London Underground, said: ‘I am pleased to report that ASLEF has now received clarification from LU management on their proposal to resolve the Night Tube dispute. Our aim has always been to make sure NT drivers were not forced to remain in the role indefinitely, while new recruits took up full-time positions. The new proposal means that LU will fill full-time vacancies from waiting lists in line with agreements and NT drivers will not be jumped by new recruits. Recruitment of new part-time staff has already started to backfill positions, allowing NT drivers to move to full-time roles. Training began in April so NT drivers can be called to full-time positions as soon as they reach the top of the waiting list.

‘The support members showed, with a 100% Yes vote to take industrial action, means we have achieved a fair settlement that ensures Night Tube drivers will move to full-time roles much sooner than London Underground had planned. This has only been possible because NT drivers got active in ASLEF, attended branch meetings, and demonstrated they were prepared to take industrial action.’

A delegation from Julkisten ja Hyvinvointialojen Litto, the trade union for public and welfare sector employees in Finland, on the steps of ASLEF’s head office in March.

Six figure settlement

A former train driver who was left in need of life-long care after he was hit by a taxi driver has received a six figure settlement with the help of ASLEF and Thompsons solicitors.

Gareth Jones was crossing the A489 near Machynlleth, mid-Wales, when he was run over. He was rushed to hospital where he was treated for a serious brain injury. Gareth was left with reduced mobility and in need of support for everyday tasks such as cooking and getting dressed. He was not able to return to work. Gareth and his partner, Tracey, initially went to a high street solicitor, but later turned to ASLEF and we instructed Thompsons.

‘The collision turned our entire world upside down,’ said Tracey. ‘Gareth went out that night with his brother, but came home a completely different person. The settlement that Thompsons and ASLEF secured means we can move to a house better suited to his needs. We needed experts on this case and, without the support of Thompsons and ASLEF, I can’t imagine how we would be coping now.’

Regulator’s principles for DCO

GS Mick Whelan has responded to publication by the Office of Rail and Road of its paper ‘principles for driver controlled operation.’

He said: ‘As train drivers, we want a safe, efficient, and modern railway delivering for passengers and business in Britain. What we don’t want to see is the safety of our railway compromised by a ruthless desire to cut costs and increase profits for the privatised train operating companies.

‘The key paragraph in the ORR’s principles – really a re-release of guidance it has published before – is that “suitable equipment, proper procedures and competent staff must be in place for the safe implementation of driver control operation.”

‘Ian Prosser is quite right. They should be in place – and at the moment they are not. And they should be achieved through dialogue and partnership with the people who, every day, deliver the service for passengers. Not the bean counters in the finance department of the TOCs looking to shave costs and push up profits.

‘That’s why we are calling on the rail companies to work with us to achieve a way of running the railway and fulfilling their responsibilities that works for staff, for passengers, and for the train companies, too.’

ASLEF AND DB CARGO

ASLEF members have voted to accept a revised set of terms & conditions at the freight company 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: 345 (57.5%). No: 255 (42.5%).

TWEETS OF THE MONTH

UK rail passengers endangered by biggest spending cuts since 2008 financial crash

independent.co.uk

It’s clear that May is ‘frit’ (to borrow a term from Thatcher’s era) – both of losing current debates and of longer term electoral damage.

Megan Davies

Half UK rail journeys are on foreign-owned services

news.sky.com
ASLEF and Southern

ASLEF drivers have rejected a proposed resolution to the long-running dispute with Southern Rail.

The following question was put to our driver members employed by the company. Do you accept the proposed agreement on driver only operation and related issues on GTR Southern services?

The result was Yes: 346 (48.2%). No: 372 (51.8%). Papers dispatched: 953. Papers returned: 718. Turnout: 75.4%. GS Mick Whelan said after the result of the referendum was announced on 3 April: ‘We understand and support the decision arrived at in a democratic vote by our drivers and will now seek new talks with the company and will work to deliver a resolution to this dispute in line with the expectations of our members.’

Andy Bindon of GTR, Southern’s parent company, said: ‘It’s a hugely disappointing outcome for our passengers, particularly as the agreement carried the full support and recommendation of the ASLEF leadership. We have shown a willingness and desire to find a solution to the dispute and we will now, once again, sit down with the union, understand the issues which led to this regrettable decision by the drivers, and try and find a way forward to resolving it.’

QUOTE...

‘Can America be run the way Trump runs a company – on the fly?’ – Giles Smith in the New Statesman

…UNQUOTE

Shedding light on tunnel legend

Engineers have tested one of Britain’s most intriguing, and enduring, railway legends – that the rising sun shines through the two mile long Box Tunnel near Bath on the birthday of Isambard Kingdom Brunel, the brilliant 19th century engineer who built the Great Western main line. The line was shut for upgrade work on Sunday 9 April, 176 years after it was finished, and engineers positioned themselves at either end of the tunnel on one of the brightest days of the year. ‘The sun rose and was shining directly down the tunnel,’ said Paul Gentleman of GWR, who was at the eastern end. ‘Quite an astounding sight. You got the feeling it was part of the design.’

CONFERENCES & RALLIES

ASLEF’s annual assembly of delegates is at the Marriott Royal Hotel, Bristol, from Monday 22 to Thursday 25 May. The Durham Miners’ Gala is on Saturday 8 July. The Tolpuddle Martyrs’ festival, near Dorchester, is from Friday 14 to Sunday 16 July. The Trades Union Congress is at the Brighton Centre from Sunday 10 to Wednesday 13 September. The Labour Party conference is at the Brighton Centre from Sunday 24 to Wednesday 27 September.

Off the rails

MEL THORLEY, Longsight legend, and a railwayman who fondly remembers the days when drivers described the depot as Maplins, has another tale from the holiday camp. In 1992, Maplins was granted an open weekend to celebrate 150 years of a depot called Longsight on the same site. No original staff were available, although one or two were told they looked old enough. More than 30,000 people turned up over two days, Saturday 25 and Sunday 26 April, and many football clubs were envious. Several coal-burning engines were invited and, being passed for the main line, arrived in steam. However, over on the East Lancs Railway lived 76079, owned by a nice chap called Derek Foster. This engine wasn’t passed for the main line but, Derek being Derek, and Longsight being 9A, 76079 left Bury on 21 April and travelled by road, courtesy of Allelys Heavy Haul, to the Wheel Lathe. It was then tripped across the WCML by the Class 08 diesel. By Thursday morning, 76079 was in steam, and many of us had a go (my first) moving up and down outside the X shed. For most drivers, it was their first steam action for 25 years. Mel adds: ‘Longsight is 175 this year, management please note. Why no celebrations? Charities denied a fat wedge. Rumour has it Alstom France said “Non”.

IAIN DALE, who presents the drive time show on LBC, runs Biteback Publishing, and the West Ham Till I Die website, confesses: ‘They say disasters come in threes, and so it proved last Saturday morning. I was standing in for Matt Frei on his Saturday show on LBC. I am not used to getting up early on a Saturday so I guess that has to be the explanation as to why I got on the wrong train at Tonbridge and suddenly realised that, instead of heading for Charing Cross, the train was going to Strood, one of the Medway towns. I got to the studio with only 20 minutes to spare, and then found I had forgotten to bring my laptop. Then, when I was doing my opener, I realised I hadn’t heard the background music before. Was it a long opener, was it a short opener? I made the wrong choice and stopped speaking too soon. Now I realise that, on the disaster scale, all these would score pretty low – but that’s not how it felt at the time.’

THE GIRLS, the Gary Barlow musical based on the hit film Calendar Girls, is breaking box office records at the Phoenix theatre in London’s West End but its cheeky content, and nudity, haven’t gone down so well with London Underground. Po-faced TFL chiefs scuppered a planned advertising campaign on the Tube by banning two of the proposed posters. It’s curious that LU was happy to run those controversial Are You Beach Body Ready? ads, which objectified women, but gave the thumbs down to these ads ‘because the bums are too big.’

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The future’s calling

London Midland driver ANTONY HOLDSWORTH, ASLEF Young Members’ Forum rep for District 6, reports on the TUC young workers’ conference

T HE FIRST sunny weekend in March. Many young, carefree people across the United Kingdom were deliberating which beer garden to occupy to enjoy the sunshine. And this was the weekend I found myself at the TUC young workers’ conference at Congress House in London.

Saturday 25 March was the day my small world as a trade unionist opened up. I was overwhelmed by the fact that other unions are out there, fighting for terms and conditions taken for granted by me as a young railwayman and member of ASLEF. Conditions like equal pay for young workers doing the same work as their older peers.

The conference was addressed by some fantastic speakers who delivered vehement speeches and electrified delegates throughout the weekend.

Craig Dawson who, according to Twitter, was once described as a Young Labour warlord in the north-east, was elected chair. He has been fighting ardently to ensure more young workers’ voices are heard and this resonated throughout the conference.

Antonia Bance, head of communications at the TUC, told us of her intention, as an experienced trade union activist, to engage more young people in their unions. She has been running workshops using a range of tools young workers use in their day to day lives, including WhatsApp diaries over a two week period.

She explained that these have led to the conclusion that if young members are not engaged it can have catastrophic consequences.

The TUC has reported that only 9.3% of low and middle income wage earners between the ages of 21-30 are in a trade union.

Although this figure is hard for me, as an active member of ASLEF, to relate to, I found myself pondering my future and can relate this to my own engagement in our union.

But the first sunny weekend in March was the weekend I stopped deliberating which beer garden I should occupy in the sun and started to deliberate my future in ASLEF and how I, and others, can better engage in securing a better future for ourselves, and others, alike.

Without prejudice

ASLEF Education project worker WULLIE SIMPSON reports on the success of Show Racism the Red Card Scotland

It was with great pride that, on behalf of ASLEF, I attended the Show Racism the Red Card annual creative competition presentation of the prizes. The competition is open to all schools throughout Scotland and the category winners were invited to the national stadium, Hampden Park, in Glasgow.

More than 1,000 pupils took part, the theme was Scotland for all, and the entries were absolutely fantastic. They ranged from poetry, song, drama and paintings.

Entries came in from all ages, from primary 1 right through to academy, and once again ASLEF was at the forefront, donating the star prize of a Lenovo Ideapad computer to the overall winner. Prizes were presented by Sky Sports journalist David Tanner; football coach Eddie White, whose team, Glasgow City Ladies, has won ten titles in a row; and ASLEF Education project worker Wullie Simpson, as well as footballers and managers past and present.

It is great to see that youngsters are clearly getting the education and the knowledge that racism and sectarianism have no place in the national game, or 21st century society, and with their enthusiasm it gives us hope that the future will be one without prejudice.

Orient excess

The first freight train to run from Britain to China left Barking in east London on 10 April on an 18 day, 7,456 mile, journey via France, Belgium, Germany, Poland, Belarus and Kazakhstan to Yiwu Xi station in Zhejiang province. The China Railway Corporation is promoting the 200 container block service as a new Silk Road. ‘This is modern rail freight at its best,’ said Freight on Rail manager Philippa Edwards. ‘Rail is a crucial part of the logistics supply chain and well placed to offer long distance traffic both internationally and in the UK. Rail freight is cheaper and less environmentally damaging than air freight and faster than sea freight.’

Horton – No shame

Charles Horton, the man in charge of Southern Rail, Britain’s worst train company, was paid £495,000 last year. The deal for a company which, in the words of The Guardian, ‘has become synonymous with delays, cancellations and strike action’, was roundly condemned. ‘Those at the top of Southern’s parent company, Govia Thameslink, clearly have no shame in dishing out extraordinarily large pay packages to themselves,’ said Shadow Transport Secretary Andy McDonald. ‘The audacity with which train operating companies are extracting value from our railways is quite astonishing.’

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Greater Anglia has released initial designs for its new trains to be introduced over the next three years. This is the Bombardier Aventra train for suburban services in Essex, Suffolk, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire.

QUOTE...
‘Tax is not a “burden”. It’s the price for civilisation.’ – Polly Toynbee, The Guardian

…UNQUOTE
Grayling’s aim to de-staff the railway

District 1 Council secretary
STEVE RICHARDSON
welcomed Andy McDonald to Waterloo

DISTRICT 1 Council warmly welcomed the Shadow Transport Secretary, Andy McDonald, to our March meeting at Waterloo Action Centre. Andy, who spoke at AAD in Aviemore last year, said he felt he knew us all and was impressed by the way ASLEF meetings are conducted. The Middlesbrough MP’s visit coincided with important Commons business, so he dashed over from a debate on climate change and had to rush back for the afternoon session; but his visit was much appreciated.

Andy said he had mostly been occupied by the issue of DOO and realises how important the dispute on Southern has become. He feels the debate has been misrepresented in order to achieve Chris Grayling’s intention of de-staffing the railway, saving the Exchequer billions of pounds, and realising the Tories’ ambition to weaken ASLEF’s ability to adequately defend our members.

In his view support for freight is crucial not only for our members facing redundancy, but for cutting back on road congestion and improving air quality. Andy emphasised the point that guards are a crucial element of keeping our trains safe, not only from an operational point of view, but also by keeping the public safe from anti-social behaviour, and helping those with disabilities.

He recognises that our rail network is a vital element of the UK’s national infrastructure and a fully integrated public transport system is essential. He reiterated Labour’s pledge to bring the railway back into public ownership and said he will continue listening to and working with the rail unions.

The banner man held the banner high

The Marx Memorial Library on Clerkenwell Green in London is to open its doors on May Day for free tours. It’s a chance to visit the room where Lenin worked in exile in 1902 and have a look at the library’s impressive collection which includes the original International Brigades British battalion banner.

Trade union activists will be joined by students, pensioners, and anti-austerity campaigners for the traditional May Day march – one of the highlights of the labour movement year – which sets off from Clerkenwell Green, an area with strong radical roots, just round the corner from ASLEF’s head office. It ends with a rally in Trafalgar Square.

‘This year, on International Workers’ Day, we are inviting visitors to look at our special Russian revolution slide show exhibition, as well as experiencing the feature tour of the library, and a chance to pick up a bargain on one of our stalls,’ said a spokesperson. ‘So take a break for refreshments before joining the march which starts on our doorstep!’

A FEW SCOOPS WITH WILLIE

Corkerhill branch invited recently retired colleague Willie Gormley, and his wife Angie, to thank him for his service to the branch. Willie joined ASLEF in 1980 and was recently forced to retire through ill health. ‘Willie was the mainstay of our staff association where he would play snooker, pool and (his great love) darts,’ said branch secretary Phil Gallagher. ‘He organised our annual pilgrimage to the King’s Theatre for the Christmas pantomime; the children loved it (as did the adults). Willie was given an engraved tankard from the branch and Angie a bouquet of flowers. We then went for a few scoops and a trip down memory lane, and a great day was had by all.’

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**Return to Eden...**

TEAM buffs turned out in force to see one of the world’s most famous locomotives, the Flying Scotsman, travelling on the West Coast main line when it ran from Carnforth to Carlisle to celebrate the reopening of the Settle to Carlisle line.

The line was cut at Eden Brows near Armathwaite in Cumbria in February 2016 when 500,000 tonnes of earth gave way under the tracks after weeks of heavy rain. Services resumed in March after engineering work costing £23 million.

Network Rail said the scale of the job, and its remote location, made it the most challenging project it had undertaken. Hundreds of steel tubes filled with concrete were set into the hillside to form a corridor on which a 100 metre long concrete slab was built to give the track a solid base.

‘Our orange army has ensured that if the ground gives way again in the future, the railway will not,’ said Martin Frobisher, NR’s London North Western route MD.

The 73 mile line, built in 1876, is a testament to High Victorian engineering. It runs through the beautiful Yorkshire Dales and Eden Valley and includes the 104ft high 24 arch Ribblehead viaduct.

**Trump dumps on US railroad**

US President Donald Trump is proposing a savage 13% cut in federal funding to long distance Amtrak services, and an end to New Starts and TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) grants which have underwritten many commuter rail and urban transport projects in the United States in recent years. Richard White, of the American Public Transportation Association, said he was ‘surprised and disappointed’ by the planned cuts, given Trump’s promise, when seeking election, to increase spending on infrastructure.

**Uber in trouble as self-drive car rolls in smash**

Uber has run into more trouble – and suspended testing of its self-driving cars – after another of its autonomous vehicles was upended in a crash. The modified Volvo XC90 SUV was in self-drive mode when it was involved in an accident in Tempe, Arizona, where it was being tested on public streets. Embarrassing photos showed the car rolled onto its side. An Uber spokesperson said the accident happened after another car ‘failed to yield’ to its vehicle. There was someone in the driving seat who was supposed to take over in an emergency but that ‘safety feature’ failed to work, too. Critics were quick to say it shows that self-drive vehicles are not safe.

**NEW CEO AT DB**

Richard Lutz has replaced Rüdiger Grube as CEO of Deutsche Bahn, Germany’s state-owned railway. Lutz, 52, chief financial officer since 2010, was appointed by Transport Minister Alexander Dobrindt for a five year term until March 2022.

**QUOTE...**

‘The Article 50 Bill is the shortest suicide note in history!’ – Labour peer David Lea

...UNQUOTE

**DRINKING ON DUTY**

The number of train drivers on India’s railways failing alcohol tests at work has tripled in the last three years. Official figures reveal that 81 drivers were caught under the influence – and over the limit – last year. Most failed the test when signing in, so didn’t drive, but 15% tested positive at the end of their shift. Drivers caught drunk on duty are suspended but dismissal and prosecution is rare. ‘Every day we run millions of rail passengers faced problems buying tickets at train stations last month when the new 12-sided £1 coin was introduced. The Daily Telegraph reported that 11 of 18 train operating companies it contacted had not modernised all their automated payment machines to accept the new coins. Angry passengers who discovered that machines at their stations rejected the unusual dodecagon coin faced long queues at the few manned ticket bays – brutally cut by many TOCs – and missed their preferred trains.
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.
Twenty-six men and women have been Secretary of State for Transport in the last 26 years. It’s ironic that such an important job, which needs strategic thinking and long-term planning, has seen such a quick turnover at the top. CHRIS PROCTOR reflects on what you need to step into Chris Grayling’s shoes at the DfT...

Imagine you are a confirmed and committed slacker, anxious to avoid responsibility, and keen to avoid blame for your endless mistakes. Where would you find a job that enables you to get away with tardy performances, a lack of interest in the work, and all round incompetence? And, more than that, pick up a six-figure salary, have a chauffeur on hand and secure membership of a subsidised club on the river? Good news! You’re ideal material to become the next Secretary of State for Transport.

Don’t stay too long
As a malingerer – and I know about these things – the first requirement is not to stay in a job too long. You need to be out of there before your errors, misjudgements, and downright lies are unearthed. You definitely don’t want to still be in post when people start asking about the promises you made on your first day.

Being a government transport minister is ideal. Their turnover rate is brisker than summer holidaymakers in Spain. Sometimes trade union leaders and journalists only meet them at their leaving do.

In the 26 years that have elapsed since John Major became Prime Minister in November 1990, 26 individuals have been responsible for transport. In the 20 years since Labour won under Tony Blair in 1997, there have been 15 Secretaries of State for Transport. This means the average period for doing the job is just about a year.

Perfect! The chances of being rumbled in that time are virtually nil. And your successor doesn’t mind that you’ve left a crock of whatsisname behind you big enough to fill the Albert Hall. They point the finger at you, but you’ve gone, so you don’t care; while they, compared with you at least, look quite competent. For a week or so.

And it’s not a dead end job without prospects, either. Former Transport Secretaries include John Major, Alistair Darling, John Prescott and Philip Hammond. Although, on the other hand, does anyone now remember Tom King, John Moore, Paul Channon, John MacGregor, Brian Mawhinney, Sir George Young, Stephen Byers, Ruth Kelly, or Geoff Hoon?

Self-preservation instinct
Whatever name is on the office door, Transport Secretaries combine a desire to be in the limelight with an instinct for self-preservation. The post is a perfect fit for both.

On a whim you can make an announcement and go on telly, which is any professional politician’s dream. Even better, you are admired for being the bearer of good news. How does this work?

Let’s say you notice punters are moaning about having to stand on trains. All you need to do is select a high number, and think of a date well into the future. Then announce that the number refers to how many new carriages you’ll be providing, and the date is when you expect them to arrive. It is advisable to give yourself a bit of leeway, to ensure you won’t be in the job when your promises turn out to be bogus.

That’s how Philip Hammond did it during his 17 month tenure at the Department for Transport from May 2010 until October 2011. Bored, feeling overlooked, and anxious for another job he couldn’t do – and which he has now found, remember how the Chancellor bungled the Budget? – he began issuing all manner of make-believe.

Quite casually, he mentioned he’d modernise the rail network, tackle overcrowding, improve reliability and speed up journeys. New carriages – 2,100 of them – would soon be toddling up to stations unmentioned in a timescale ill-defined.

He outbid Labour on this score, the rather unambitious Douglas Alexander having only promised an extra 1,000 carriages. But Douglas rather foolishly tied himself to a specific date – 2014 – although he made sure he had been moved on by 2007 after just 13 months in the job. Edging to the door, he proclaimed that the mythical 1,000 carriages were only a ‘first step’ towards something vague.

New timetables flaunted
Last month they were at it again, with Chris Grayling announcing that his department was poised to tackle the ‘capacity crunch’ on the network and improve service reliability.

Aided by the Rail Delivery Group, he smugly predicted that there would be 6,400 more passenger train services running every week. New timetables were flaunted, demonstrating an extra 1,283 trains every weekday. This nirvana would all be up and running – by 2021. By which time Mr Grayling’s tenure at the transport department will be but a distant memory. On current form, he’ll be gone six years before his promises have proved as hollow as down-pipes.

If you’re hardworking and conscientious, driving trains is a perfect job for you; but if you’re work-shy and shifty, I’d strongly recommend a move to Great Minster House, 33 Horseferry Road, London SW1.
I want to live, I want to give, I’ve been a miner for a heart of gold

ALAN JONES, the highly respected industrial correspondent of the Press Association since 1992, and a journalist for more than 35 years, was a young reporter during the bitter miners’ strike of 1984-85. He was at the Orgreave coking plant in South Yorkshire on the day mounted police charged and beat pickets in a defining moment in the dispute and in post-war industrial relations in Britain.

TILL hating someone after 30 years suggests a special kind of hatred. But when the person doing the hating is a former miner, and the object of his hatred is Margaret Thatcher, it’s hardly surprising that feelings still run deep.

A group of ex-miners and other supporters wore I Hate Thatcher badges during a recent protest in London as part of a campaign for a public inquiry into policing on the most violent day of the year-long miners’ strike.

SHOCKING SCENES
Clashes between thousands of police and pickets on 18 June 1984 became known as the Battle of Orgreave, a day which will never be forgotten by those who witnessed shocking scenes.

A British Steel coking plant near Rotherham in South Yorkshire had been picketed peacefully for weeks, as had many pits which largely came to a standstill because of the strike over jobs and closures by the powerful National Union of Mineworkers.

But something changed dramatically on 18 June and, 33 years later, the true reasons for what happened are still not known.

Campaigners blame the Conservative government for being behind the police tactics, to break the morale of the NUM, but they also believe the police went too far in attacking pickets, leading to dozens of injuries.

The true story of what happened is still to be told – and it certainly wasn’t clear on the day for members of the media covering the events.

I was a young reporter who had travelled across the country to report on the strike, so I was getting used to seeing ranks of police officers facing up to striking miners in increasing numbers as the dispute became more bitter. But nothing prepared anyone for the scenes of violence and the sheer numbers involved at Orgreave.

I arrived by car with a colleague, found what we thought was a safe parking place about a mile from the coking plant, and sat back to enjoy a flask of tea he had thoughtfully brought.

Ten hours later we sat exhausted in the same car – moved several times during the mayhem – not quite believing what had happened, not really knowing the full extent of the violence, and hugely relieved the day was coming to an end.

I didn’t attempt to write anything in a notebook. Experience had taught me that miners weren’t particularly keen on talking to the press, which was hardly surprising given the anti-union stance of much of the media.

STANDING, RUNNING, FIGHTING
So much of what happened is now a blur of memories of police on horseback wielding truncheons, pickets scattering in all directions, and the sheer number of people standing, running, fighting and shouting in a field, with the coke plant in the distance and the sound of lorries leaving to travel to another site at Scunthorpe.

Memories are much clearer among the miners, fuelled by the burning injustice of what happened to them and their colleagues on that fateful day. Miners such as Kevin Horne, now in his late 60s, who remembers being on a picket line of just six at Orgreave, with three policemen nearby, in the weeks before.

‘I didn’t know I was going back to Orgreave on 18 June until that morning, but I thought something was strange because the police told us where we could park, and there were buses bringing miners from Scotland and South Wales, giving parking spaces.

‘We should have realised then that something was up. I saw policemen marching up and down in a field, being held in reserve, which was scary. A friend said they looked like the army.’

Kevin jumped over a wall and started shouting at drivers of the convoy of lorries leaving the plant before he was pushed towards a line of policemen and arrested. He was taken to two different police stations and remembers seeing many miners nursing wounds.

‘Some of the lads were bleeding so I helped bandage them with t-shirts.’ Kevin was charged with obstruction, then unlawful assembly, but the case was dropped when it got to court, along with charges against 94 other miners.

Talking to him for this article, it’s clear that men like him were only interested in trying to save jobs – and pits – and never intended to be caught up in violence. He later became a care worker – proof, if any was needed, of the decency and dignity of the miners.

JUSTICE TO MINERS
Along with many others caught up in the clashes, he believes the government was behind the police tactics, and that officers lied in court. Newly declassified files published this year showed that Margaret Thatcher’s government feared a witch hunt if a public inquiry was held into policing during the strike.

That hasn’t stopped politicians, union leaders and human rights protesters from continuing to campaign, not least to clear the names of the miners who were arrested.

Home Secretary Amber Rudd continues to rule out an inquiry, but the fact that one was eventually held into the Hillsborough disaster in 1989 has given campaigners hope.

But the biggest reason for holding the government and police to account is, finally, to bring justice to miners like Kevin.
State of the nation

District 7 Organiser BRIAN CORBETT reports on the state of the railway – including problems on freight, electrification, and the new franchise from 2018 – in Wales

T HE start of last year, we saw issues with DB and Freightliner at Aberthaw, involving TUPE, and drivers not knowing if they were going to be in employment until the last moment. As the Journal goes to print, contracts are up for renewal, and worry for our members is on their shoulders again, regarding the future.

Senior Deutsche Bahn management in Germany now realise that the British section of DBC has been run very badly. Bad management has led to a shambles in various parts of the country where voluntary redundancy has been offered and been greatly over-subscribed. In my view, if it was not for the DBC drivers’ council, the situation would be far, far worse. Because even at depots in the south of England, which have work, drivers are leaving regardless, and going to TOCs, for job security, with no VRS.

We only have two DBC depots, at Port Talbot and Newport, and these depots will now become much smaller. Hereford depot has finally gone, which was part of Newport branch, which had a long and proud history, not only in the trade union but also the Labour movement, with ASLEF councillors, going back many decades, representing the people of Hereford.

EC2 Hugh Bradley, DO7 Brian Corbett, Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, DO6 Dicky Fisher and GS Mick Whelan at Westminster

The real problem in Wales is how will infrastructure projects be handled in the future and, at the same time, how can they obtain and hold on to the contracts they have? Coal and steel have been the backbone of the work on freight in Wales; surely, on environmental and economic grounds, it’s time for some government intervention.

The Great Western main line electrification continues to be a farce with the works being put back and back. In September last year the Severn tunnel was closed for six weeks for work to be completed, and it was, for the programme. Dates have come – and gone – for the electrification of the line from Bristol Parkway to Cardiff to commence, let alone be completed.

To be fair, one aspect taking place is the alteration to the bridges that are crossing the railways, but no gantries, posts or wires. Cardiff to Swansea is still on the back burner, till who knows when, but we are certainly talking years. Which in turn has resulted in the new IET fleet being refitted to become bi-modal.

As for Arriva Trains Wales, there are now four bidders for the new Wales and Borders franchise, and these are being selected by the Welsh government. I am pleased to say that we – ASLEF – have been invited to speak to the ministers concerned, and to Assembly Members, regarding our thoughts and views on improvements to the railways, not only in South Wales, but also in North Wales.

ASLEF is asked what’s the best way forward

ANY HUDD, executive committee member for District 7, on the future for rails in Wales

I GAVE oral evidence to the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee of the Welsh Assembly in Cardiff on 29 March as part of its inquiry into the new rail franchise and the Metro.

The last time ASLEF attended the Welsh Assembly building we heard some positive noises from Economy Minister Ken Skates. He listened to the concerns of representatives from the rail trade unions on the devastation of freight, the threat of DOO, and the state of Network Rail.

The Wales and Borders franchise is up for grabs at the end of 2018 and, this year, the Welsh government will have the responsibility for awarding the next Welsh franchise under a new Transport for Wales body. Although ASLEF welcomes the Welsh government’s not for profit plans it is unfortunate that this could not be on a model of public ownership that would prevent vital money leaving the industry.

Despite this, there is a great opportunity for the Welsh government to look at the terms of the next franchise, including the quality of rolling stock, and the provision of routes, so that Wales can be properly served with a railway that is modern, clean, punctual and offers real value for money. The minister and his team provided an insight into the procurement process by which they provided bidders with their key requirements and then allowed them to propose the best solutions. The team will build a package from these solutions and invite bids.

Interestingly, the minister and his team did not make DOO a requirement and were looking to see if this was suggested by the bidders. ASLEF has a chance to influence this process by accepting an invitation to meet the bidders for the next franchise at a meeting in the future.

This is a crucial time for the railway in Wales. Statistics from the Office of Rail and Road show that in 2016 there were 29.3 million passenger journeys to, from, or within Wales, and that this is set to increase by one-third by 2023, with Cardiff showing a huge 68% increase in this period.

Originally electrification to Swansea and, eventually, the Valley lines was to bring this increased growth but, as we all know, this has ground to a halt during Control Period 3 after the Department for Transport’s disastrous management of the electrification project. Wales suffers from chronic underfunding, as figures from the Treasury show. Expenditure on transport for Wales is £320 per head whereas in London it is £600. This imbalance – as with other other areas of the UK – needs to be redressed. Whilst we see any investment in our railways as largely positive there needs to be an acknowledgement that there could be a greater economic case made for more investment in Wales. By arguing for balanced investment between rail freight and passenger services ASLEF not only hopes to see better served communities, through improved passenger services, but also a network that would serve Welsh industry and start an economic U-turn that would benefit Wales, and the United Kingdom, as a whole.
Are we on the right track?

It’s been hailed as the biggest change to the Western Region since steam gave way for diesel. DAVID JONES, Swansea branch secretary, casts a critical eye over this brave new dawn.

S WALES on the right track? It is difficult to look forward without looking back to how we got here. I am the branch secretary at Swansea High Street branch, and 2018 sees us celebrate our 130th anniversary.

We have a long tradition of heavy industry in Wales, and this has always been inextricably linked to the railway. Indeed it was the necessity of moving the coal and the steel that gave the reason to build a lot of our railway in Wales.

Now we leave behind a lot of our industrial heritage, on the verge of a brave new dawn with the intercity express project. Giving us new electric trains has been hailed as the biggest change to the Western Region since steam made way for diesel.

It’s a great shame that the electrification project is way behind the estimated completion date and our brave new dawn may feel spookily like the old one with the new electric trains forced to use diesel engines for the entire journey in Wales.

So is it all bad news? Of course not! I recently attended the first ASLEF equalities weekend school, a terrific event showing how far the equalities agenda has come since my branch was formed 130 years ago.

We have seen some great progress in equal treatment of members from the black and ethnic minorities communities, and members from the LGBT community, and we are slowly seeing more women joining the footplate, although there is still a long way to go until our depots are representative of the society in which we operate.

Another positive move in this direction is the recently formed Young Members’ Forum, as young people in our society are often under represented.

So I guess, yes, in Wales we are on the right track, but we have a huge part of the journey left to travel. Let us keep demanding that intercity express is allowed to continue to Swansea and that the Cardiff Valley lines, along with the rest of the Welsh railway, get the 21st century infrastructure we deserve.

Fierce the beacon’s light is flaming

IAN THOMPSON reports from the Wales Labour Party conference in Llandudno

Conference was running a little late on Saturday afternoon when the motion came up. Our delegation had their notes ready for Brian to speak. Asked to remit, the CLP refused, and rose to move the motion. Hand in the air, to be recognised to speak, Brian was refused by the chair, Donna Hutton. There was, unusually and surprisingly, no request for a seconder for the motion, only a response by Assembly Member Jane Hutt, Leader of the House and Chief Whip, and the matter was put to the vote. It ‘clearly fell’.

The delegation attended a fringe meeting on the Trade Union Act 2016. This was also spoken about in First Minister Carwyn Jones’ speech, along with many other subjects, including financial improvements for Welsh people and our services. He announced that the Welsh government would waive burial fees for children. Something not agreed to by the Tory government at Westminster when proposed, and he announced that Wales, the only Labour government in the UK, was also the only one which had again begun to build council houses. It was also wonderful to hear Jeremy Corbyn in his speech, amongst other things, confirm that a Labour government would repeal the Tory anti-trade union laws, and that they too, would begin a council house building programme, and raise the minimum wage to a real living wage of £10 an hour.
I read the news today, oh boy

**CONRAD LANDIN**, industrial reporter of the *Morning Star*, looks at fake news from the Zinoviev letter to Corbyn, Trump and Putin

I T SHOCKED a nation before a major poll – a sensational tale of Russian interference in Western politics. There was fierce debate over the authenticity of the story, but the damage was done.

No, not last year's US presidential race. This was the Zinoviev letter, a document purportedly from the Communist International, or Comintern, in Moscow to the Communist Party of Great Britain, in 1924. Published by the *Daily Mail*, it argued that the Labour government's recognition of the USSR would bring the British proletariat out onto the streets. An official report in 1999 concluded that it was not written by Grigory Zinoviev – which was always improbable and consistently denied by the Russians – but probably forged by an MI6 source. But the infamous letter had done its job; the Conservative Party romped home to victory in the general election of 1924.

**AFTER TRUMPAGEDDON**

Shortly after Trumpageddon last autumn, Barack Obama raised the alarm about the rise of fake news. He was right: inaccurate claims and sometimes bare-faced falsifications were shared more frequently than ever on social media. One article claimed that the Pope had endorsed Donald Trump, and picked up almost a million engagements on Facebook. An official report in 1999 stated that it was not written by Grigory Zinoviev – which was always improbable and consistently denied by the Russians – but probably forged by an MI6 source. But the infamous letter had done its job; the Conservative Party romped home to victory in the general election of 1924.

The spreading of false information is, of course, a menace. But one major factor in its growth has been largely ignored. Fringe outlets that are derided for their partiality and lack of fact-checking have grown, as the journalist Solomon Hughes has argued, ‘precisely because the established media has repeatedly printed fake news itself’.

Nowhere has this been more apparent than in the media’s depictions of the labour movement – and the Zinoviev letter was just the start.

**MEDIA A MAJOR WEAPON**

The media was a major weapon in the bitter miners’ strike of 1984-85. The BBC’s coverage of the Battle of Orgreave, when flying pickets descended on a coking plant in Yorkshire, is the most pertinent example. News programmes showed miners lobbing missiles at police lines before being charged by coppers – even though it had happened the other way round.

Then, in 1990, the *Daily Mirror* claimed NUM president Arthur Scargill had used money from Libya to pay off his mortgage. Again, the allegations were unsubstantiated, and Scargill was not given the normal right of reply. Roy Greenslade, who edited the *Mirror* at the time, finally apologised 12 years later.

Even as New Labour was paving its road to power, Fleet Street was as keen as ever to discredit the left. In 1995, a *Sunday Times* headline screamed: ‘KG: Michael Foot was our agent: Foot won a six-figure sum in court and a written assurance that the paper was not suggesting he had been a spy.

These are stand-out fake news falsehoods. But the more recent decline of journalistic standards is also worrying. Newsrooms have faced savage cuts over the past two decades. Between 2013 and 2015, more than 6,000 posts were lost in British journalism, while the PR industry has ballooned by 18,000.

So it’s no surprise that journalists often uncritically regurgitate stories they are spoon-fed. In this walk of shame coverage of industrial issues takes the lead once again. Since most newspapers no longer employ industrial correspondents, unions tend to only get a hearing when they can be linked to political intrigue or ‘travel chaos’. The ASLEF Journal has covered both the inaccuracies of the coverage of the Southern rail dispute (February 2017) and the failure of journalists to understand the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn (March 2016). Other highlights include a recent reference in an *Evening Standard* editorial to ‘tube drivers represented by the RMT and TSSA’ Slapdash.

There’s no denying that new fringe media has published far-fetched coverage of Labour politics, but it’s far from alone here. In January the BBC Trust rebuked political editor Laura Kuenssberg for misrepresenting Corbyn’s comments on ‘shoot to kill’. A recent *Newsnight* report saw Shami Chakrabarti interviewed in front of a doctored image in which Corbyn was wearing a baseball cap with the slogan ‘Make Britain Great Again’. And viral site Buzzfeed says fake news has failed to grow in Britain as it has in the States because traditional papers already ‘stretch the truth to its limits’.

Fake news is a snappy phrase, but it was foolish for anyone to think its coinage could help restore the fearless journalism we need now more than ever. Instead we have ended up with a game of ping pong. Donald Trump is now one of the first to brand his opponents, and media scrutineers, as offering ‘fake news’. It’s a term of abuse picked up by Vladimir Putin.

**WINNING BACK TRUST**

Rather than engaging in this tit-for-tat, journalists should surely focus on winning back the trust of audiences across the globe. This means investing in newsrooms and not cutting editorial processes – like sub-editing and proof-reading – that we once took for granted. But it also means a conscious shift away from trivia and towards serious reporting. There’s little in our papers that isn’t about Westminster, the City or the world of celebrity. If the established media is to restore its credibility, it could start by giving a bit more coverage to the realities of ordinary people’s lives – including the world of work.
One love, one heart

FLOYD DOYLE is the first ASLEF member to chair a TUC conference since Ray Buckton back in the 1980s

ASLEF is a small craft union – we have 19,540 members as well as 2,350 ex-drivers in our Retired Members’ Section – but, in boxing parlance, we punch well above our weight.

Despite the litany of anti-trade union legislation passed by the Tory governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major in the 1980s and 1990s and by David Cameron in 2016, 96% of the train drivers in England, Scotland and Wales choose to join ASLEF.

INCREASINGLY INFLUENTIAL
That gives us real industrial muscle when dealing with the privatised train and freight operating companies who put profits before passengers, staff and providing a proper public service. We are increasingly influential.

Mick Whelan, ASLEF’s general secretary, was elected chair of the Trade Union & Labour Party Liaison Organisation in Liverpool last year. TU LO co-ordinates the activities of the 14 trade unions which affiliate to the Labour Party – ASLEF; BECTU; the Bakers, Food & Allied Workers’ Union; Community; CWU; FBU; GMB; Musicians’ Union; NUM; TSSA; UCATT; Unison; Unite and USDAW.

Simon Weller, ASLEF’s assistant general secretary, was re-elected to the general council of the TUC in Brighton last year. He got 271,000 votes and topped the poll in his section. Simon was also re-elected to serve on the TUC’s executive committee.

Tosh McDonald, president of ASLEF’s executive committee, is in great demand as a speaker at Constituency Labour Party and trade union branch meetings, as well as fringe meetings at conference and congress.

The Labour Party, and the labour movement, take notice of what we think, what we say, and what we do.

This was underlined last month when Floyd Doyle, a driver with Great Northern, member of our Cambridge branch, and chair of ASLEF’s Black and Ethnic Minority Representatives’ Committee – he’s been a member of the committee since it was set up 17 years ago – was invited to chair the TUC Black Workers’ Conference at Congress House from Friday 7 to Sunday 9 April. Floyd is the first ASLEF member to chair a TUC conference since Ray Buckton, GS from 1970 to 1987, back in the 1980s.

This is what Floyd told delegates when he opened the conference:

‘In the transport industry where I work, millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money – our money – is being taken out as profit each year by the multinational companies that run the privatised rail franchises. These profits are not reinvested in the UK railway system – they are used to subsidise state-owned railways right across Europe.

‘I am a train driver and our industry is facing many challenges, the biggest being the proposed extension of driver only operation, where we are fighting for a second safety critical member of staff on our trains.

PUNCH UPS WITH UNIONS
‘Just this week our members rejected a deal offered by Southern. Let’s be clear. This is an industrial dispute being fought politically. The Department for Transport and the Conservative government are driving this battle and my trade union has found itself in the High Court several times in the last 12 months and we still have the threat of the Supreme Court hanging over us.

‘In February 2016, Peter Wilkinson, director of rail passenger services at the DfT, said at a public meeting in Croydon, ‘We must break the drivers’ – he also referred to us as ‘muppets’ – and boasted that he was looking forward to ‘punch ups’ with trade unions over his plans to force through changes to rosters. Well, Peter, it’s a year later and you’ve still not done that! I’ve been a member of ASLEF for more than 25 years, a founding member of our BEM committee, that started 17 years ago, and am also the current chair of our committee. Within ASLEF, we also have committees to represent the other equality groups – LGBT, women, and young members – and we also have a Retired Members’ Section.

EXPPELLING RACISTS
‘Even after 17 years’ hard work we still have low numbers of BEM drivers in the rail industry. We can only recruit, as trade union members, the men and women employed by the train and freight operating companies. We have tried to work with the TOCs and FOCs to give them ideas on diversity recruitment but it is a slow road and the numbers of BEM drivers are nowhere near where they should be.

‘As a committee we’ve run campaigns like supporting members who refuse to drive trains that take racist and fascist groups to demonstrations organised by the English Defence League. We pushed and had motions passed at our annual assembly of delegates to acquire accommodation for members observing Ramadan. Because the fight for equality is deeply entrenched in ASLEF history; you only have to look at the historic court case expelling racists from our union.’

WE ARE FIGHTING FOR A SECOND SAFETY CRITICAL MEMBER OF STAFF ON OUR TRAINS

EXPERIMENTING WITH UNIONS

THE LABOUR PARTY, AND THE LABOUR MOVEMENT, TAKE NOTICE OF WHAT WE THINK

May 2017 | The ASLEF Journal 15
The AGS with the Eastleigh crew

We would like to thank the AGS and company council for their hard work at this difficult time and for their third visit to the branch in four months, giving an honest and frank assessment of the problems at DBC.

Paul Barber, branch secretary

The great thing about being the branch secretary is giving the legend Jeff Price (top) his 40 year badge; and Connell Anezu (above) his five year badge.

Steve Walker, Lillie Bridge

Raise your glasses

We had a great turn out for the retirement party of Bro Kevin Rose of West Brompton branch, who has completed 40 years of service and membership of ASLEF. Kevin became sectional council rep back in the 1980s and was voted into position as District Secretary from 1992 to 1997. Then Kevin returned to train driving on London Underground at Acton Town depot. Kevin, we thank you for your help and your commitment to the branch and all its members. Good luck.

Greg Tasker, branch secretary

Safety concerns at Cambridge

Dave Sullivan from Cross Country reported on EJRA (employer justified retirement age) to a well-attended Cambridge branch meeting on Monday 3 April. He also spoke about the planned 17 December timetable and problems with drivers’ tablets. Steve Panks, Greater Anglia company council, reported on frustrations over ongoing harmonisation talks on GA. Concerns were also raised about the introduction of 12-car DOO trains on Stansted Express and the branch expressed its concerns about safety, particularly the mile-long single bore tunnel trains will pass through. The branch also remembered ex-drivers who recently passed away, including Jim Pleasance, Peter Andrews and TCS Ron Mackie. Our next meeting is Monday 5 June where long service badges will be presented.

Martin Haylett, branch secretary

Upcoming events

- **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.

- **HITHER GREEN – WEDNESDAY 10 MAY**
  Hither Green old boys’ reunion at Richmal Crompton pub, Bromley South, from 11.00. Details from Ray Cooper, RMS.

- **DERBY – FRIDAY 9 JUNE**
  Derby branch celebrates 125 years from 15.00 at Nunsfield House, 33 Boulton Lane, Alvaston, Derby, DE24 0FD. Former Derby four shed crews/staff all welcome. Contact Eamonn Tague on 07500 099190 or eamonn.tague@sky.com

- **OLD OAK COMMON – TUESDAY 13 JUNE**
  Annual reunion from 13.00 to 16.00 at the Acton Garden Village Club, Alwyn Gardens, Acton, London, W3 0JH.

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

ASLEF Education project co-ordinator
SHIRLEY HANDSLEY reports on our annual union learning rep conference in Derby

The Derby Silk Mill, a key historic building in the development and growth of trade unionism in England, was the venue for the ASLEF union learning representative conference on 28 February. It was a busy programme of workshops and activities, with 55 ULRs in attendance at our annual national event.

The conference was opened by GS Mick Whelan who welcomed delegates to the Silk Mill Museum and said that ASLEF recognized the importance of education and providing learning opportunities for its members – a long established trade union tradition. Mick also took time to provide an update on the current situations at some of the TOCs, and DB Cargo, and responded to questions from delegates.

Mick then presented the ASLEF Learner of the Year award to Darren Carmody, a driver for GTR based at Bedford. Darren started his learning journey after his local ULR, Jerry Rollinson, gave him information about the 12 week distance learning courses offered via ASLEF Education. Darren completed this course and has since gained another two qualifications. In addition, he will soon achieve a level 2 ITQ, showing a real commitment to learning, despite juggling work shifts, and family commitments, and coaching his son’s football team. He even completed some course assignments whilst waiting for his daughter to finish her dance classes!

Dr Bill Whitehead provided a presentation on the history of the Silk Mill in the 19th century and its significant contribution to the development of trade unions in Britain. The Tailors’ Union, set up by silk workers in an attempt to improve their working conditions, was one of the earliest trade unions, and some of the things they did predate the better known Tolpuddle Martyrs. Locked Out, a film about the Derby lock out, was shown, providing a detailed account of the Silk Mill lockout, when local mill owners responded with brutal repression to the setting up of the trade union by locking out hundreds of workers and attempting to starve them back to work.

The conference also featured a presentation about the new ASLEF website, and communication strategies, by Katy Proctor and a session on good communication skills and engaging learners by TUC tutor Nick Palmer. Workshops were also delivered by the ASLEF Education project workers to support the ULRs in their role and provide them with updates on the project, which has successfully gained further funding from the Union Learning Fund.

The workshops focused on the importance of ULRs being active and supporting project outcomes; the courses on offer via ASLEF Education; some practical advice about new forms and documents; and also an opportunity for the reps to have a tour of the railway archive at the museum.

As always, the ULRs enjoyed their annual get together and feedback was positive. Tracey Carter, ULR at LUL, said: ‘Thank you to all those involved in the organising and running of this year’s conference. All of us returning to London really enjoyed our time and have come away feeling very enthused and ready to put our all into this year’s learner days.’

Delegates at the ULR conference; Mick presents Darren Carmody with his Learner of the Year award; the Silk Mill in the 19th century and as it is today

The annual Silk Mill march in Derby celebrates the struggle of workers locked out of the mill in the 19th century for having the temerity to join a trade union. Some socialist historians consider the Silk Mill as significant as Tolpuddle in the story of the labour movement in Britain. The mill is now an industrial museum, with a memorial to the workers at the entrance, and one floor dedicated to local railway history. It’s well worth a visit.

Mick Holder turns back time to May 1917

Bad quality bread, an early IED, and deaths on the railway were all in the Journal 100 years ago

WE CAN DO WITHOUT POTATOES

The editor writes: ‘We now have a coarser and darker loaf, with a legal addition of 25% of other ground cereals. Naturally the new loaf is more porous and crumby, and not so sustaining. It is nutritious, but no one eats more of it. While we need not anticipate compulsory rationing, or compulsory food kitchens, we are asked to spare the bread. We can do without potatoes, but we do want plenty of bread, and where is the substitute? There doesn’t seem to be one.’

A TERRIBLE EXPLOSION

Reporting on the war in Africa, member WH Loosby reflects: ‘I was up at a place called Morogoro, and some natives were digging for hidden ammunition, under escort of some white men, where Mr German had laid a fine trap. One of the natives came across a bottle of chemicals coupled up with wires, and raced off to see the commandant. While he was away a terrible explosion occurred. I thought it was an earthquake, and went down to have a look. There was only a big hole, with legs, arms and heads scattered in all directions – an awful sight. We could not even find their identification discs.’

CRUSHED TO DEATH

Organiser J Drummond reports: ‘I was at Greenock sheriff court looking after the interests of our members involved in two accidental cases. The first was into the death of Bro Wm Dowdall, driver, killed when underneath the engine while his fireman was setting it for him to tighten up a big end. He was crushed to death between the steps at the end of the pit and the brake crossbar of the driving wheels. The other case concerned the death of a plate layer killed in a tunnel on a Sunday while out flagging to protect the operations in the tunnel.’

DUNGAREES OR OVERALLS

Organising Secretary H Parfitt writes about a meeting with the Taff Vale Railway conciliation board. ‘The desire for overalls has been expressed on the GWR for a considerable time, we now have a request for dungarees from the TVR men, shed men included.’
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LEN WORBOYS UNION STALWART

Len Worboys, after a long illness, passed away peacefully, with his family at his bedside, on 15 March. Len was a man well known and much loved within the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers & Firemen. He was a brave man and faced the inevitable with real fortitude, the way he fought for ASLEF throughout his life.

Len was District 1 Secretary from 1990 until 2000; he also represented District 8 from 1990 to 1992. He started his railway career at Fratton (Portsmouth) as an engine cleaner on 28 December 1953 aged 15. He joined the society the same day and stayed a member until he retired. Within 18 months of starting he was elected engine cleaner rep at Fratton throughout the 1955 national strike. Promoted to driver in 1962 at Effingham Junction he returned to Portsmouth in 1966 and was a driver there until 1990.

Len was a local departmental representative and secretary (LDC rep) at Fratton from 1968 until 1990. Throughout his railway and society career Len did much for his fellow man, and there are many who will thank him for the way he represented them, and remember the jobs he protected and saved.

He was one of the union stalwarts who helped us through the trauma of rail privatisation. Len firmly believed that Britain’s railways should have remained in the public sector and did much to advocate that policy throughout his life. Privatisation was a difficult time for the society but, throughout the process, Len ensured the membership received the highest level of representation. He was the district secretary with the largest membership of any district and carried the additional responsibility of representing District 8 for two years.

He did much during the period of driver restructuring affecting a number of train companies; again, not an easy period in our history. Len was part of the group that got the union through privatisation, ensuring our future, as a trade union highly thought of in the trade union movement.

To Len’s family, especially his wife Vera, we thank you for the time Len gave to us. Len, ASLEF owes you very much; many thanks, my old friend, on behalf of the membership.


CHARLES SMITH OLD SOUTHERONIAN

Charles Smith was born in Chelsea on 20 May 1925, one of seven children. The family moved to Battersea when he was nine. He joined the railway at 16, following in the footsteps of his father and eldest brother. He started as a cleaner boy and progressed to fireman and then driver. He worked at Bricklayer’s Arms depot, Charing Cross, Stewart’s Lane, Victoria and Slade Green. During World War Two he served in the Home Guard, due to his reserved occupation. He married Rose in 1947 and they celebrated their 69th wedding anniversary in June last year. Charles was a lifelong member of ASLEF and branch secretary at Charing Cross and Victoria; he was also on the LDC for many years and helped run the Charing Cross Motorman’s Social Club, organising outings, etc. Charles retired in 1990 and enjoyed an active retirement with the Old Southeronians, maintaining his membership of ASLEF through the RMS. Unfortunately he suffered a severe stroke in 2012, which impaired his mobility and eyesight. His health continued to deteriorate and he died on 30 November 2016. He is survived by his wife Rose and daughter Christine.

Christine Stone, Charles’ daughter

GRAHAME NASH ASLEF TRUSTEE

A large gathering said their farewells to Grahame Nash (1948-2017) at Bristol South crematorium on 5 April. The Rev D Hardy, himself a railway supporter, requested by Grahame, led the service. Grahame came to Bristol Bath Road in 1983, via Oxley, St Pancras and Cricklewood. He was an ASLEF trustee for six years, staff rep for 20 years, and also deputy chair and chair of Bristol branch. Grahame was also a committee member of the Railway Enginemen’s Assurance fund, and its chair from 1983 to 2013. On a personal note, football and speedway visits will not be the same any more. Our thoughts are with Marion, Kevin and Paul.

Graham Bellamy, Bristol

PETE LADHAR DRY HUMOUR

It is with great sadness that I inform you of the recent passing of retired driver Peter Ladhar at the age of 63. Pete had taken ill health eight years ago but lived life to the full, travelling around the world. He was very dry with his humour and wit and once described management as ‘Those who get in the way of running the railway’. Originally a miner from Daw Mill colliery near Nuneaton, Peter found himself on the railway and worked at Waterloo, Birmingham New St and Wolverhampton depots during his career. He was certainly a character. RIP Pete.

Nigel Harkness, Wolverhampton

TONY BRAZIER INSPIRATIONAL

Tony Brazier (1939-2017) started his career at the old Midland shed at Canklow in Rotherham, South Yorkshire. He transferred to Doncaster on the reorganisation of motive power depots in the Sheffield area during the 1960s.

Tony finished his varied main line career on both sides of the footplate on the depot at 36A; due to ill health he suffered the indignity of a reduction in his rate of pay, this finally being reinstated thanks to ASLEF!

During his time of serious illness he only ever had one day off work. A truly inspirational man indeed. EC president Tosh McDonald and a number of former colleagues attended his funeral at Rose Hill crematorium and wake at Wheatley WMC; both attended by a very large congregation. Tony will be sadly missed by his wife Joan, children and grandchildren, former work colleagues and many, many friends and colleagues.

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

Mutual benefit of members

Two years ago, I was the unfortunate victim of an accident at work, which resulted in several weeks off work, countless visits to various doctors and physiotherapists, and a considerable amount of pain and suffering.

This ‘accident’ was entirely due to my employer having failed to not only install equipment on my locomotive in a proper manner but also their failure to rectify known faults in a proper manner.

Thankfully, I have now fully recovered from my injury and resumed work. This is due to the assistance I received from ASLEF and Thompsons solicitors who provided a first class service in proving my employer’s negligence was to blame for my accident and successfully claiming compensation on my behalf. As a gesture of my appreciation, will you please accept the enclosed donation to help continue our union’s work for the mutual benefit of all our members. ASLEF: so much more than an expensive diary!

Paul Forman, Ipswich

Confused or disingenuous?

As I write this, I am bracing myself for months, possibly years, of Labour, Tory, UKIP, and Liberal Democrat politicians telling me once again that, unlike a myriad of small nations around the world, the Scots are uniquely incapable of running their own country.

We have already been subjected to Ruth Davidson going door to door frightening pensioners, whilst complaining that the First Minister shouldn’t be representing Scotland in the US; apparently pensioner frightening is something I need to learn.

I was shocked and saddened, though, by Neil Bibby (Journal, April). I don’t for a second believe he is unable to understand the d’Hont system under which he managed to get a list seat, which leads to the only reasonable conclusion that in the vacuum of policy and direction (other than downwards) Scottish Labour has specialised in recently, he is being deliberately disingenuous.

The 2014 referendum achieved one spectacular thing in Scotland and that was the engagement and education of the electorate, and no longer can Labour rely on blind loyalty for votes. With one recent Survation poll showing that the Scottish Greens are now within four points of pushing Labour into fourth place in the Scottish Parliament, are we to see Labour scrabbling about with the Lib Dems and the Scottish Socialist Party in the basement of Scottish politics? With the ‘SNP bad’ attitude of Labour it may now be inevitable. It has been said that if the SNP cured cancer, Labour would complain that they were putting undertakers out of work!

Hugh Cumming, Edinburgh No 2

Forza America

In response to the letter from Adam Thompson (Journal, April) I am also a new ASLEF member. I’m not sure whether his letter was satirical or genuine but am making the assumption it was the latter. If he is, as is suggested, a supporter of the President of the United States I am unsurprised that he wishes to quash any dissenting voices. His presumption of Eric Stuart’s ignorance is typical of the right-wing ‘I know best and everyone else should think what I think’ attitude that seems to prevail in society at the present time.

How dare he suggest that other members should refrain from offering political opinions because counter to his own views. His own ignorance shows through with his statement ‘President Trump loves the UK.’ Trump does not love anything other than increasing his own personal wealth, irrespective of those affected by his actions. He is anti-free speech (his staff bar reporters employed by organisations that disagree with him from press conferences) and makes knee-jerk allegations without supporting evidence (about GCHQ).

ASLEF is a proud, historic trade union run on a democratic basis, and the Journal is a democratic mouthpiece. I would not wish to silence Brother Thompson’s views but attempt to persuade him that Donald Trump is in no way a friend of an enlightened, civilised society (although he may be a friend of the UK in the current political climate in this country!) but an arrogant, self-serving, misogynist bully.

Simon Cummings, Three Bridges

BACK TO BASICS WITH JEREMY AND KEIR

Please pass on my heartfelt thanks to all at District 2 Council. Your contribution is warmly welcomed at a very pressing time. It was 20 years ago that I got involved in politics, with a drive for social justice and a desire to put an end to 18 years of Tory rule. I joined the only party where an active trade unionist would feel warmly welcomed.

In the following 20 years, I admit, at times, I wondered if I was in the correct party. Coming from the village where Keir Hardie was raised, I was acutely aware of his history and drive to better the lives of the working-class. Through reading his life story I learned that, no matter how successful industrial action is, if you can’t influence political decisions, the victory can be quickly overturned by new laws.

But through my ASLEF political education, and many branch debates, I was given the confidence to put my toe to the line and stand for election. Over the past few weeks, though, the juggling act of returning to driving, working as a councillor whilst running an election campaign, together with balancing family commitments, is draining and I questioned whether I could be successful, especially when my main opposition is trying to turn my election into an indy ref.

But your decision to help has confirmed my commitment to our cause. Meeting ASLEF reps from all over Britain, and on TUC education courses, I am convinced that the Labour Party and the labour movement are the right vehicles to promote our desire for social justice.

Keir Hardie was born at Newhouse, not far from Motherwell, in North Lanarkshire, in 1856. He was a miner, and then a full-time trade union organiser, before becoming MP for West Ham in 1892. He was the first working-class socialist to be elected to Parliament and was leader of the Labour Party from 1906 to 1908.

The fight goes on in our party to move it back to where it came from. Our party is the TUC’s offspring. If we give up and walk away, we give up on Keir Hardie. Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership has restored my faith in the Labour Party and is a big step towards bringing the party back to its roots; to what it was once and can be again. The donation means far more than the generous financial contribution. Knowing that you represent, and have the backing of, your comrades gives you a lift of confidence that no greed-inspired ambition can match. Once again, please pass on my heartfelt thanks to all at District Council 2 and, assured, you have backed one of your own.

Pat O’Rourke, Edinburgh No 2
Surely you were joking?

Joy of joys; the renaissance of satire was naively nurtured by Adam Thompson’s letter (Journal, April). However, we should beware of satirists as recent history has bitten us a few times. Yes (Prime)Minister became a manual for spin doctors regardless of the colour of their political rosette and the The New Statesman was a draft for the Conservative manifesto. It was satire, surely?

Wayne Larman, Watford Junction, and ASLEF Journal reader (the magazine for ASLEF members, not kettle watchers)

Level up, not down

I appreciate the time taken by Brother Mick Whelan to answer my letter in the March edition of the Journal. I feel it is, however, necessary to respond and attempt to highlight the contradictions and flaws in the stance taken by our union on this matter.

On the face of it having a standardised approach nationally is the right thing to do and should be our aim in everything we negotiate. The real problem is that we have agreed to a levelling down of the playing field. It isn’t good enough to say ‘south of Grantham you could run at line speed without a functioning radio anyway’. What next? Class 156 doesn’t have vigilance so we won’t bother with it on other trains? Drivers at Company X get £10k less than everyone else so we will all take a pay cut? As a union we should be arguing for a levelling up, and the safest solution.

The irony of accepting an attack on safety in the name of a national standard is not lost on me. How can this be justified when our union accepted a policy, at last year’s AAD, that institutionalises a two tier workforce? On the one hand it is OK to have two agreements that we had no complaints until we stopped negotiating. The real problem is that we have both local reps and delegates at AAD. Then he was District Secretary and I was the EC member for District 1. We worked closely together during the privatisation process and I must say that nobody did a better job than Len in leading his various company councils in what were unique circumstances. We both retired in 1999 and spent many happy hours on the golf course and socialising at the numerous old boys’ reunions. Len was a dedicated family man and my condolences go to Vera and the family at this very sad time.

Bill Mackenzie

No hiding place

As someone who uses trains irregularly, I have witnessed and been involved in serious incidents. Drunken thugs and troublemakers not only terrorise innocent passengers but, on long distance trains, could do so with impunity on driver only trains. There is no hiding place on a train. And how many passengers would attempt to intervene in the face of anti-social behaviour if there were no guard on the train? The railway companies have a duty of care to safeguard their customers and, without a guard on their trains, they are ignoring their responsibilities.

Jack Guthrie, Camberley, Surrey

Not safe without a guard

Two weeks ago, I had a very difficult situation on a train travelling from Birmingham to Cambridge. Five young men joined us on our journey, and they were as high as kites and swearing like troopers. My friend and I felt very anxious, being pensioners. Luckily, the refreshment trolley came through the carriage and the young men made complicated orders for goodies, and also stole something from the trolley.

The woman selling refreshments called the guard and he discovered they did not have tickets for the journey. The young men swore at him but, I’m pleased to say, they were off at the next station. I would not be happy to travel by train without a guard to look after my safety.

Margaret Dickerson, Cambridge

The case of the third man

Ah, 1968! It was a wonderful year; the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, the Isle of Wight pop festival – wonderful times. Oh, yes, I nearly forgot; 1968 was also the last year that steam locos had a crew of two. Yup! For the last 49 years steamers have had a third man on board. It was good old nationalised British Railways who decided to put a third man in the cab. He was there in the interests of safety, acting in a supervisory role. It has been like this for the last 49 years. Did Bro Kettle (Journal, March) or anyone else not notice? I know you all like to bash West Coast but, please, can’t you do better than this?

Arno Brooks, York

Remembering Len

The attendance at Len Worboys’ funeral was testimony to the great respect and regard in which he was held by the members he represented and others in the railway community.

Len was my friend and colleague for over 30 years. We were both local reps and delegates at AAD. Then he was District Secretary and I was the EC member for District 1. We worked closely together during the privatisation process and I must say that nobody did a better job than Len in leading his various company councils in what were unique circumstances. We both retired in 1999 and spent many happy hours on the golf course and socialising at the numerous old boys’ reunions. Len was a dedicated family man and my condolences go to Vera and the family at this very sad time.

Bill Mackenzie

DERBY branch 125 year large commemorative badge £8 + £1 p&p from Eamonn Tague (07500 099190) or eamonn.tague@sky.com

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 remembertheoaks@gmail.com

Dave East has some badges to sell to raise money for preservation and repair 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.

Class 15 locomotive (D8233) enamel badge on sale to raise funds for restoration of the sole surviving Class 15 loco by the Class 15 Preservation Society. £5 + £1 p&p from Ipswich driver Clive Whiting. Payment can be sent via PayPal to treasurer@d8233.org.uk (friends & family to avoid fees).

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

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.

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

On loan from British Rail hard enamel badge. Individually numbered, brooch fastening. £6 + £1 p&p from josephuddington@gmail.com

Bland Encounters by Donald Wightman is a comedy novel about risqué encounters on the railways. A donation from the sale of each book will be made to the Royal British Legion and Help for Heroes. Paperback £7.99 ebook £3.95 from www.amazon.co.uk

May 2017 | The ASLEF Journal 21
‘Books do furnish a room,’ says one of Anthony Powell’s characters, Lindsay Bagshaw, dryly, in *A Dance to the Music of Time*. KEITH RICHMOND opens some of the books that have turned up on his desk at the *Journal*.

ERE I stand; said Martin Luther when he was summoned to appear before the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V at Worms in 1521 to defend what he had been writing, preaching and teaching. ‘I can do no other.’ Tariq Ali uses Luther’s words as an epigraph for *The Dilemmas of Lenin* (Verso, £16.99) and it’s appropriate because, just as Luther was a leading figure in the Protestant Reformation which fundamentally changed the Christian world in the 16th century, so Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, better known as Lenin, his nom de guerre, changed not just feudal Russia but much of the 20th century world.

There will be a lot of books about Lenin and the Russian revolution this year – because, as Tariq Ali says, ‘the 1917 October revolution transformed world politics and, in the process, remade the 20th century with a frontal assault on capitalism and its empires’ – but this, I suspect, will prove to be one of the best. Partly because the author’s elegant prose makes the man, and his ideas, perfectly accessible; partly because he can tell, analyse, and interpret, a good story; and partly because he can put it in context, then and now.

‘It is what you read when you don’t have to that determines what you will be when you can’t help it.’ – OSCAR WILDE

Adventures in Modern Marriage by William Nicholson (Quercus, £19.99) is the latest in a series of loosely-linked contemporary novels by the man who wrote the screenplays for *Shadowlands*, *First Knight*, *Gladiator*, and *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*. You get the feeling that Nicholson – an extremely accomplished writer – is happiest writing fiction, but his bank manager tells him it’s the big screen work that pays the bills. There’s warmth, wit and insight as he exposes the hypocrisies, infidelities, disappointments and self-deceptions of a group of middle-aged, middle-class, married couples in and around Lewes, in Sussex, during the general election of 2015. Part of the fun is that we know – even if the characters don’t – that David Cameron and the Conservatives, not Ed Miliband and Labour, are going to win, but the mix of the personal and the political is not just possible and plausible but utterly convincing.

*Brexit* by Harold Clarke, Matthew Goodwin and Paul Whiteley (Cambridge University Press, £15.99) is the first comprehensive academic and objective study of the historic vote last year by Britons to leave the European Union. The analysis is spot on – and, unlike so much written about the referendum, not obviously biased – and it also benefits from a wicked cover illustration by Martin Rowson.

‘I find television very educating. Every time somebody turns on a set, I go into the other room and read a book.’ – GROUCHO MARX

Raja Shehadeh, who lives in Ramallah, on the West Bank, is an outspoken author, lawyer, and founder of the Palestinian human rights organisation Al-Haq. His lucid, honest, and illuminating new broadside *Where the Line is Drawn: Crossing Boundaries in Occupied Palestine* (Profile, £14.99) is written through the prism of his close, but sometimes problematic, relationship with Israelis. It’s as personal as it is political but if you really want to get behind the headlines, and the soundbites, and the entrenched positions, then this is the place to start.

*Grunwick: The Workers’ Story* by Jack Dromey and Graham Taylor (Lawrence & Wishart, £12) is a new edition of a book about a bitter industrial dispute, between 1976 and 1978, at film processing labs in Willesden, north London, which changed the way trade unions, employers, politicians and the mainstream media thought about race, class, colour, creed, immigrant communities, and industrial relations.

‘Where they have burned books, they will end in burning human beings.’ – HEINRICH HEINE

Memories of Colwick Loco looks at the shed, yard, lines and workings from 1876 to 1970. It contains the recollections of ‘the Old Man’s link’, six Colwick footplatemen – Les Bemrose, John Gadsen, Eddie Graves, Roy Harvey, Ernie Yardley and Kenny Ward – as well as the evocative photographs of John Wayman, who says, ‘Drivers Ernie, Les and Roy are all now in the big engine shed in the sky; I don’t know about Kenny but the two firemen, Eddie and John, are still with us.’

And *Felix the Railway Cat* by Kate Moore (Michael Joseph, £12.99) is the real life story of a five-year-old feline, featured in the *Journal* in March last year, who was, er, purrmed to senior pest controller to keep Huddersfield railway station rodent-free.
EWS that the Apostrophe Avenger – aka the Grammar Vigilante – prowls the streets of Bristol every night correcting poor punctuation on billboards, shop fronts, and road signs is a timely reminder that punctuation matters. So, too, is a federal court ruling in the US where the Oxford comma helped workers win a $10 million dispute with management about overtime pay.

The Oxford comma – which gets its name because it has long been used by printers, readers, and editors at the Oxford University Press – is a comma placed before the word ‘and’ at the end of a list. It clarifies sentences which could otherwise be misconstrued.

As the website grammarly.com dryly notes, the sentences ‘I love my parents, Lady Gaga and Humpty Dumpty’ and ‘I love my parents, Lady Gaga, and Humpty Dumpty’ can mean two different things. Without the final Oxford comma it looks, in the first version, as if the parents in question are Lady Gaga and Humpty Dumpty.

In a judgement last month the US Court of Appeals backed 75 delivery drivers at the Oakhurst Dairy in Portland, Maine, because the lack of a comma made the New England state’s overtime laws ambiguous.

State law says the following activities do not count for paid overtime: ‘The canning, processing, preserving, freezing, drying, marketing, storing, packing for shipment or distribution of: (i) agricultural produce; (ii) meat and fish products; and (iii) perishable foods.’

Workers argued that the lack of a comma between ‘packing for shipment’ and ‘or distribution’ means the law refers to the single activity of ‘packing’ and not to ‘packing’ and ‘distribution’ as separate activities. As the drivers distribute – but do not pack – the goods this would make them eligible for overtime pay.

A district court ruled in favour of the company, which argued that the law ‘unambiguously’ identified the two as separate activities. But a federal appeals court, in a 29 page decision, sided with the drivers, who are suing the company for $10 million in damages for unpaid overtime, because of the absence of an Oxford comma. ‘We adopt the drivers’ narrower reading of the exemption.’

The drivers each worked an average of 12 hours overtime every week from 2008 to 2014, when they filed suit. OUP’s style book says, ‘The last comma can serve to resolve ambiguity’ while David Webbert, the truckers’ lawyer, candidly admitted, ‘The comma would have sunk our ship.’

ASLEF’s legal services

If you are being harassed at work, bullied or discriminated against, and if your local, branch or district rep is unavailable, call the industrial relations department at union headquarters (020 7324 2400) or email info@aslef.org.uk. If you are arrested or interview ed 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.

Solution to Crossword 132

Across: 1 Supermarket 7 Oboe 8 Sceptre 9 Duo 10 Aphid 11 Absent 13 Pimply 16 Adapt 18 Tar 19 Martini 20 Gift 21 Down to earth
Down: 1 Suburb 2 Pledge 3 Resort 4 Arena 5 Ketchup 6 Tuesday 11 Alarmed 12 Sparrow 13 Petite 14 Merger 15 Loofah 17 Taint

Congratulations to George Galloway, of Coltness, Motherwell, who was last month’s winner. The winner of this month’s Prize Crossword will receive Marks & Spencer vouchers to the value

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

Thanks for all your responses to the 132nd prize crossword in the April 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 May
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