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Tories and the DfT – here we go again

ELL, here we go again. A party that promised electrification of key areas in 2010, and then truncated the proposals to win votes, has done it again: 2015 electrification, 2017 no mention of reduced investment until after elected. The figures for the comparative investment, in particular rail, per head of population, are a matter of public record and, as we know, do not make good reading if you live outside the south-east, especially when qualified by population density. What can you say to those areas – what we call districts 3, 4, 6, and 7, which make up half our railway – directly impacted by the lack of a long-term strategy? So in the month they announce the end of production of petrol and diesel cars we commit to bi-mode trains for an indeterminate future. The Northern Powerhouse on rail is no more – just minor fixes that only mitigate in certain areas and do not meet economic, social and community needs.

The irony is the announcement of Crossrail 2 (which we welcome as part of a greater long-term strategy) at the same time which highlights the contempt this government holds for rail outside the south-east. As I write the big discussion on Radio 4 is about walking and cycling as the solution for all our transport needs; they have a role but do not drive the economy like rail. And does this government have any plans for the long-term future of freight other than the paths that may be created, years from now, by HS2?

21st century society is not the polite respectful place we would all like it to be and the rise of knife crime and sexual assaults in our industry, with many more unreported, is a major concern. These issues are coming to a head in certain areas, especially in Scotland, and we are calling for additional staff to ensure not only the safety of the travelling public but of those who work on our railway system. It is time for employers to demonstrate their duty of care.

Finally, let’s nail an industry lie – when companies try to deflect criticism of their failure to recruit enough staff by putting out on CIS that it’s down to the drivers. It isn’t. It’s the company’s fault. And if any driver is abused or assaulted because of such company misinformation we will act in the strongest terms.

Yours fraternally
Mick Whelan, general secretary
Commuters – cattle trucks not carriages

ICK Whelan has put the blame for overcrowded commuter trains firmly where it lies – on privatisation – after new figures from the Department for Transport revealed the extent of the problem on Britain’s railways.

ASLEF’s general secretary said: ‘If we had cattle trucks instead of carriages then fare-paying passengers would be much better off! Because we have legislation – statutory protection – for animals being transported – but not for people. Which is why so many trains are now not just uncomfortable, but seriously overcrowded. It cannot be right that, after 20 years of privatisation, people travelling and working on our railways are treated like this by the privatised train companies.

‘These DfT figures underline what we have said all along – that there is no long-term strategy, no long-term planning, and no long-term thinking, among the TOCs which are only in the railway business to make a quick buck.

‘The train companies say they need more time to sort it out but they’ve already had more than 20 years, since the railways were privatised, to provide enough trains for passengers to get the seat for which they have paid a lot of money’.

Mick added: ‘Privatisation has failed. Fares have soared, taxpayer subsidies have risen, rolling stock has got older and overcrowding has got worse. We need – and the people in this country deserve – a properly integrated, properly managed, publicly owned railway. That’s what Jeremy Corbyn has promised and these figures from the DfT prove the point. By bringing our railway back into public ownership, the Labour Party will put a badly fragmented system back together, which will allow better management of capacity and resources across the whole network, rather than on a company by company, franchise by franchise, area by area, basis.’

Stephen cleared – but clouds lour over DOO

The driver whose train pulled away from a station, dragging a woman along the platform, after the systems failed, has been found not guilty of endangering passenger safety.

Stephen Murdoch, 45, was charged with ‘endangering the safety of rail passengers, by wilful omission or neglect, by failing to check the length of the train was clear before leaving Hayes & Harlington station in west London in July 2015.

The verdict, at Blackfriars crown court, has clear implications for the safety of driver only operation in Britain. Evidence revealed a malfunction on the warning system in the driver’s cab, which did not illuminate to show there was an obstruction – Neelan

SUPERTRAM DEBTS TO LAST FOR 60 YEARS

Mick Whelan has condemned the spiralling cost of the Stagecoach Supertram in Sheffield after the Star newspaper in the city revealed that residents in South Yorkshire will be paying for the system, which opened in 1995, until 2056.

Mick said: ‘As a trade union, we believe in improving Britain’s infrastructure, and we believe passionately in better transport links because we know better transport links are good for people, and good for business. But politicians have to get a grip on the costs and make sure that taxpayers, at national level, and council taxpayers, at local level, aren’t ripped off. It is utterly ridiculous that the Stagecoach Supertram spiralled four times over budget, and utterly ridiculous that it is going to take 61 years to pay it off. We need investment – but we need clarity, transparency, and value for money, too.’

SUPERTRAM’S DEBTS TO LAST FOR 60 YEARS

The system’s failure left Neelan Malik struggling to free her hand from the train door as the loco left the station.

Malik’s hand – in the door. Stephen told police he carried out all the proper checks and an investigation revealed that the safety lights did not work.

But the British Transport Police, perversely, decided to prosecute.

‘This case shows that drivers cannot rely on the train door interlocking technology,’ said Mick Whelan. The GS has written to Ian Prosser, chief inspector of railways and director of rail safety at the Office of Rail and Road, asking: ‘Given the jury and the RAIB appear to agree this issue relates to a technical problem, are you considering stopping the movement of all units which might perform in a similar manner in such circumstances until such time as a safe solution to the problem is found?’

MBE FOR TEJ

Tejinder Kumar Sharma, a former Silverlink/London Overground driver, who has written several critically-acclaimed collections of short stories, was made an MBE in the Queen’s birthday honours list for his contribution to Hindi literature and community cohesion in London.

WORK FROM HOME – THAT’S THE ANSWER SAYS SOUTHEASTERN

Southeastern’s credit card size fold-out guide to ‘changes and closures’ on services into London Bridge, Waterloo East, Charing Cross and Cannon Street from Saturday 26 August to Saturday 2 September doesn’t beat about the bush. Under ‘top tips for passengers’ it simply advises: ‘Work from home’.

TWEETS OF THE MONTH

Pensions are deferred wages. Any attack on the TFL pension fund would mean the mother of all disputes.

Finn Brennan

Chancellor called me hysterical a couple of months ago. Now it’s the turn of train drivers.

Mary Creagh

Emmanuel Macron is a Silicon Valley-loving, union-hating, Third Way centrist. He’s no bulwark against the far-right.

Jacobin

QUOTE...

‘If 7% of the population goes to private school, then it seems only fair that only 7% of Britain’s elite jobs should go to privately-educated individuals. This would include chief executives, barristers, journalists, judges, medical professionals and MPs.’ – Ellie Mae O’Hagan in The Guardian

…UNQUOTE

The GS with ASLEF freight reps at AAD
New rail crossing is a bridge too far

EWIDAR W Fox, who starred in films such as The Day of the Jackal, The Shooting Party and A Bridge Too Far, has spoken out against controversial plans to replace the rail crossing at his local station – Wareham in Dorset – with a new and ‘unsightly’ ramped railway bridge costing £1.7 million.

The Grade II listed station is currently served by a level crossing controlled by locked gates and a guard but Network Rail says the cost of manning the crossing – £120,000 a year – is prohibitive.

Now 2,200 residents have signed a petition calling for the crossing to be retained, saying no one has been seriously injured in 40 years and, if the guard has to go, they would prefer an automated gate linked to the signal system at the crossing.

The 80-year-old actor, who has lived in the hamlet of Steeple for 30 years, and uses the station to travel to London, told a packed public meeting: ‘The proposal would ruin for evermore a precious corner of our town’s historic station.’

Films star Edward Fox (top) has criticised plans for the new railway bridge (above)

Fill in your form

Dave Tyson, trustee director of the Railways Pension Scheme, a driver with Greater Anglia, and former EC president, as well as the man who each year provides a detailed, but highly intelligible, report to AAD on our pensions, has made a timely call for members to fill in their death in service nomination forms and, if possible, get them to make a will as well! That way they will ensure that what they have goes to the people they want to have it.

Members can download the form from https://employers.railwayspensions.co.uk/Media/Documents/Public/Forms/RPS/Nomination Form (PM39).pdf or go online.

No go loco

Locomore, the crowdfunded open access operator, has cancelled all services between Stuttgart and Berlin and begun insolvency proceedings. The company, launched as an alternative to the state-owned rail operator Deutsche Bahn in 2016, said it hoped to find a ‘positive solution for train traffic’.

Conferences & Rallies

The Burston strike school rally is at Crown Green, Burston, near Diss, Norfolk, on Sunday 3 September. 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. The Scottish Trades Union Congress is at the Macdonald Highlands hotel, Aviemore, from Monday 16 to Wednesday 18 April 2018. The Durham Miners’ Gala is on Saturday 14 July. The Tolpuddle Martyrs’ festival, near Dorchester, is from Friday 20 to Sunday 22 July.

500 club

D Weddle, with number 42, won the August draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £394.
John Davies, a former member of ASLEF’s executive committee, died at the end of July. LEW ADAMS, general secretary of ASLEF from 1994 to 1998, pays tribute to a union legend

ONH DAVIES, former Southern Region executive committee member, passed away peacefully on Saturday 29 July. He served on the national executive from January 1985 until he retired in 1993.

John started his railway career at Hither Green depot in 1947 and, after cleaning and firing, was appointed driver in 1958. During his career John was always active in the Society, representing ASLEF on Hither Green LDC for 17 years and holding office as staff side secretary throughout that period. In addition, he was branch chair and district council delegate for many years and a delegate to sectional council B Southern Region from 1977 until elected to the national executive in 1985.

During the 1982 flexible rostering strike John acted as co-ordinator of information between Southern branches and ASLEF head office. He also made time to attend education courses at York University and Sheffield University and Ruskin College, Oxford, in 1970 for an eight day course on industrial relations. You might wonder what he did outside of representing the Society? Well, he served his country through national service in the RAF from August 1949 until September 1951.

John became famous when he stopped the job at Charing Cross in support of the miners in 1985; an understanding manager and the support of the Society saved the day.

Hither Green, many years ago, had a football team that ran out in the sky blue shirts of Manchester City. There was speculation as to how they came by the strip, and much was made of the fact that John’s brother-in-law was Malcolm Allison, the former West Ham centre-half who was, at the time, manager of Manchester City!

John married Alexia in 1951 and they had two daughters, Annette and Kim. Sadly, Alexia died in 1977. John married Ina in 1980 and became father to her daughter. He was very proud of his family and his three wonderful grandsons.

Ina, and family, we thank you for the support you gave John because, without that, he could not have done so much for ASLEF. John, the union salutes you. You gave so much to this trade union and for that we are really grateful. You did us proud.

This is the modern world

GS Mick Whelan has welcomed the Labour Party’s pledge to invest in Britain’s railways after Theresa May’s Tory government abandoned plans to modernise Britain’s railway system – the much-needed and long-promised electrification of this country’s busy main lines.

‘Chris Grayling’s decision to axe plans to fully electrify the Midland main line, Great Western, and parts of the Lake District is yet another reminder of the lack of ambition for the future which has beset the railway since privatisation and confirms that the government’s rail policy is no more than make do and mend.

‘Bi-mode trains are more expensive, less reliable and slower to accelerate than electric trains. Passengers on packed trains today will face even more overcrowded trains in 10 years’ time.

‘The failure of successive governments to develop a transport strategy has been a huge impediment to economic growth and social mobility which will only be worsened in a post-Brexit Britain.

‘In contrast, the Labour Party’s plans to deliver the infrastructure Britain needs with electrification and expansion across the whole country, including Wales and the South West, offers the prospect of building a better Britain.’

The Tories announced they were halting electrification with a masterclass in Orwellian doublespeak. The Transport Secretary, trying desperately to turn a negative into a positive, said passengers would now not have to put up with ‘disruptive electrification works’ and ‘intrusive wires and masts’.

LEVEL CROSSING DRIVER JAILED

A farm worker who drove his Land Rover Discovery onto Nairns level crossing at Strettham in Cambridgeshire, without contacting the signal box for permission, has been jailed for 10 months. Dimitar Vaclinov, 34, of Ely, pleaded guilty to endangering the safety of persons on the railway.

His vehicle was immediately struck by a passenger train travelling at 70mph, causing £100,000 worth of damage to the loco. ‘It was extremely lucky no one else was injured,’ said Det Sgt Alan Bardsley. ‘But it was extremely traumatic for the train driver and passengers.’

QUOTЕ…

‘More than 100 years ago, Britain’s pioneering railway network enabled its national daily newspapers to reach all parts of the country by breakfast time. It helped to create the legendary power of Fleet Street.’

Colin Morrison on Flashes&Flames

…UNQUOTE

ON THE BEACH

Seven New York City subway stations will partially close until late next year as part of a $395 million modernisation programme on the BMT beach line.

PROFITING FROM PUBLIC PROJECTS

Network Rail announced ‘sweeping new reforms’ on 31 July to enable ‘third parties’ – private companies – to become ‘heavily involved’ in delivering railway infrastructure projects. At the same time it published a report commissioned from Peter Hansford, a civil engineer, called Unlocking Rail Investment: Building Confidence, Reducing Costs. ‘I am determined to create an environment where innovative third party companies can compete for, and directly deliver, railway projects,’ said CEO Mark Carne.

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Will you still need me will you still feed me?

LES McDOWELL, chair of the British Transport Pensioners’ Federation, and a former director of EWS, explains what the BTPF does

I AM delighted to have this opportunity to let you know a little about the British Transport Pensioners’ Federation, which was set up in 1948.

The BTPF provides a voice for everyone who has retired from our great railway industry. We are one of the few recognised organisations that works to protect and maintain the wellbeing of railway people in retirement and, over the years, we have helped secure many financial benefits for our retirees and their dependants, as well as improvements in their travel facilities.

We do this through regular contact with Railway Pensions Management & Investments, both directly, and through a BTPF member who is a director on the board of the Railway Pensions Trustee Company, and through BTPF members who are trustees of a number of Railways Pension Scheme committees; by lobbying Parliament through our affiliation to the National Pensioners’ Convention; and by having a close relationship with the Rail Delivery Group, especially regarding free and privilege travel.

We also work closely with railway industry trade unions – like ASLEF – to help safeguard our benefits and pensions.

Just as important is the welfare support and advice we offer. We promote social activities with former colleagues across all our branches, such as day trips by river, road and railway, holidays in the UK and abroad, theatre trips, dances, lunches, and talks.

BATTERY PARK
Vivarail, the British company building the D-train, turning old District line Tube trains into modern rolling stock to replace Pacers on short commuter routes, branch lines and tourist hops, has received an Accelerating Innovation in Rail grant from Innovate UK to develop and build battery-run trains.

QUOTE...
‘Now we know how the City will be kept open for business after Brexit. If a foreign government, in this case Saudi Arabia’s royal family, doesn’t like the rules in London, the UK is happy to be flexible.’
– Nils Pratley in The Guardian

...UNQUOTE

DIAGNOSTIC TECHNOLOGY FOR FREIGHT TRAINS
Siemens is to install predictive maintenance technology on DB Cargo locomotives. A spokesperson said: ‘Rather than be dictated by mileage or time, maintenance will now be conducted when data show it is needed.’

New DfT stats reveal that Southern Rail run five of the ten most overcrowded services in Britain. The TOC’s worst train – the 5.40 from Uckfield to London Bridge – operates at 226% of capacity and the second-worst, Southern’s 7.16 from East Grinstead to London Bridge, operates at 195%.

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Southern Fail top for overcrowding

The Rail Delivery Group – the fox in the railway hen house, and desperate to try and grow its power base in our industry, especially when decisions are made about the future of rail – has announced ‘a new strategic partnership’ with the Rail Supply Group in a bid to create ‘a one-stop shop’ and ‘encourage growth in the rail industry supply chain’.

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**Rail firms that fail disabled should lose their franchises**

ICK WHELAN, general secretary of ASLEF, has backed a call for train companies to be stripped of their franchises if they fail to meet standards for making their services accessible for disabled people.

‘Everyone has a right to use our rail network,’ said Mick, ‘and it is probably more important for disabled people to be able to get on and off trains, and in and out of stations, because there are fewer realistic alternatives. ‘We all know the franchise system isn’t fit for purpose, and that privatisation hasn’t delivered what John Major promised it would more than twenty years ago. ‘But the one thing the train operators fear is losing their licence to print money. That’s why I agree with the think tank Bright Blue. If a rail operator doesn’t deliver, it should lose its franchise.’

**WEST MIDLANDS FRANCHISE SLIPS AGAIN AFTER DFT PREVARICATES**

London Midland has got an extension to continue operating its West Midlands services until at least December 2017. The Department for Transport should have announced the winner of the new franchise agreement, due to start in October, in July but London Midland will now hang on to the franchise until the end of the year, with a possible extension until February 2018. The DfT said: ‘We want the next operator to deliver real improvements and provide more space, improved connectivity and more frequent journeys. We are currently evaluating the two bids and the winner will be announced in due course.’

**NIGEL’S MAKING PLANS FOR YOU**

District 6 Organiser Dicky Fisher and Nigel Thompson, health & safety rep on Virgin Trains at Wolverhampton, have organised a seminar for D6 reps on Tuesday 3 October to replicate the successful forums organised in the north-west by DO3 Colin Smith and Alan Moss of Longsight. ‘It will be held at Virgin’s office in Birmingham,’ said Nigel. ‘Mick Whelan has kindly agreed to open the seminar and speakers from the Hazards campaign and Thompson’s solicitors are also booked.’ Details from either Dicky (rfisher@aslef.org.uk) or Nigel (nj_thompson@tiscali.co.uk).

**FREEDOM RIDERS FOUNDATION DIES**

Dave Gibson, one of the founding fathers of the Freedom Riders in South Yorkshire, the campaign against cuts in free travel for pensioners and disabled people, has died. ‘Dave did so much to build links between our campaign and the trade unions, particularly Tosh McDonald and ASLEF,’ said George Arthur. ‘He had also been an inspirational secretary of Barnsley trades council.’

**Jailed for obstructing the line**

A man has been jailed for 12 weeks and ordered to pay £1,000 compensation after causing chaos on a railway line by threatening to commit suicide. Jamie Considine, 23, of Kenilworth, sat on Rugby Road railway bridge in Leamington for two hours, dangling his legs over the edge and threatening to throw himself off, causing 26 trains to be delayed. Doctors at University Hospital in Coventry said his behaviour was the result of drink and drugs.

Judge Andrew Lockhart, sitting at Warwick crown court, said: ‘This offence is so serious that only a custodial sentence can be justified. That is a busy railway line that carried fast-moving trains. As a result, quite rightly, National Rail took the view that all railway traffic should be stopped. It took two hours for Mr Considine to be talked down. ‘The inconvenience was considerable and this man has pleaded guilty to a serious matter of obstructing an engine using a railway line.’

**Corruption on Crossrail**

Four men have been jailed over corrupt payments made to secure work on the Farringdon station redevelopment for Thameslink and Crossrail. A landale Rail, the contractor, was also convicted of corruption and fined £25,000. Blackfriars crown court heard how operations director Kevin McKee and fellow director John Zayya made corrupt payments to Innocent Obiekwe, a senior manager working for Costain/Laing O’Rourke, to get the contract to supply safety critical staff for the project. They later made payments via William Waring, a director at Qualitas Infrastructure Developments. ‘The scale of the corruption was significant,’ said Justin Yorke of the British Transport Police commercial fraud squad. ‘It was complex, prolonged and meticulously planned and I am pleased we have brought a criminal gang to justice.’

**After Boaty McBoatface it’s Trainy McTrainface**

MTR Express has named one of its new high speed trains Trainy McTrainface. The Swedish operator asked passengers to submit names for four trains on the Gothenburg to Stockholm route and the most popular suggestion was Trainy McTrainface.

**Freedom Riders founder dies**

Dave Gibson, one of the founding fathers of Freedom Riders in South Yorkshire, the campaign against cuts in free travel for pensioners and disabled people, has died. ‘Dave did so much to build links between our campaign and the trade unions, particularly Tosh McDonald and ASLEF,’ said George Arthur. ‘He had also been an inspirational secretary of Barnsley trades council.’

**QUOTE...**

‘It is a very unsatisfactory situation where you have the Prime Minister surrounded by people who are just waiting for the moment they decide to throw her off the ledge.’ – Tony Blair …UNQUOTE

**A BRAND NEW FRIEND**

London Mayor Sadiq Khan and Transport Secretary Chris Grayling have pledged to work together on Crossrail 2. ‘Crossrail 2 is essential for the future prosperity of London and the south-east,’ said Sadiq, ‘so I’m pleased the Transport Secretary and I have reached an agreement to take this vital project forward.’

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Let me take you by the hand and lead you through the streets of London

VAL SHAWCROSS, Deputy Mayor for Transport in London, on the Mayor’s bold new transport strategy which will fundamentally change the way people move around one of the world’s busiest and most exciting cities

TODAY about one-third of journeys in London are made by car. Although that is less than other major cities in the UK, the density of London, and the fact that our population continues to grow rapidly, means we simply cannot afford to continue using our cars at this rate. We don’t have the space on our roads, we can’t continue to ignore the growing health problems caused by inactivity, and we must tackle the air pollution crisis. It is, therefore, vital that more people choose to walk, cycle or use public transport – especially rail.

That’s why the Mayor of London has set out a bold new transport strategy that, working with you, will fundamentally change the way people move around our city. It is an ambitious 25 year approach that will help Londoners make more active and sustainable transport choices, reduce congestion, make efficient use of our streets, and support the health and wellbeing of Londoners.

AT THE HEART OF OUR PLANS

It’s a strategy that puts rail – light and heavy, the Underground, and the Overground – at the heart of our plans to increase and improve public transport services, develop more housing, regenerate the city, and make London a more attractive and healthy place to live.

The hard work that you put in every single day across the transport network and your drive to offer a passenger-focused, accessible service that will encourage people to move away from their cars, is absolutely vital to Londoners and London’s future. As part of this new approach, we are committed to giving you the tools you need to help passengers so you can improve training and take advantage of innovations to ensure you have the latest real-time information to hand, making more stations fully accessible and bringing 4G mobile communications to the Underground.

You, more than anyone, know the importance of modernising and improving our services for passengers so they choose to use public transport. In the coming years there will be major investment across the entire Tube network with the completion of new signalling and more frequent services on the Metropolitan, District, Circle, and Hammersmith & City lines; improvements to the Jubilee, Northern, and Victoria lines, making them among the most frequent services in the world; and modernisation of the Piccadilly, Central, Bakerloo, and Waterloo & City lines with new trains to increase capacity and improve reliability.

WE WILL GROW THE NETWORK

We will grow the network by opening the Elizabeth line and expanding the Bakerloo line to Lewisham and beyond, the London Overground to Barking Riverside, and the Northern line to Battersea. We’ll also be investing in the tram, DLR and bus network, and working to ensure London’s entire transport system is zero emission by 2050 – as part of the Mayor’s wider ambition to improve air quality across the city.

The centre piece of the Mayor’s strategy to promote economic growth in London and the south-east in the long term is Crossrail 2. This project would support hundreds of thousands of jobs and homes, and prevent unprecedented overcrowding. It is a line that would complement and support High Speed 2 coming to London and must be part of a co-ordinated major UK-wide development plan for rail transport infrastructure.

Rail devolution is also more important than ever, as it is vital that we see improved services on London’s existing Network Rail track infrastructure. Allowing TfL to run the suburban lines is the fastest and most cost-effective way to guarantee better transport services to vast areas of south London and we need support from the government to make this happen.

Sadiq understands that transport doesn’t just impact on our daily lives by helping us get around – it also creates new opportunities, unlocks housing potential, and shapes the whole character of our city. That’s why it’s so important that we don’t just deliver affordable, reliable and accessible transport, but also change the way we look at every aspect of our transport network.

INVEST RECORD SUMS

Some parts of London have been planned around car use for so long that there are no decent alternatives for local people. We plan to change that. We will transform London’s neighbourhoods using the healthy streets approach to make them cleaner, safer and quieter. We will invest record sums to improve streets for all, and ensure that new developments are designed around walking, cycling and public transport. This will help to reduce our capital’s car reliance, significantly increase the proportion of people walking, cycling and taking public transport, and help Londoners do at least the 20 minutes of active travel they need to stay healthy each day.

I hope that our bold strategy will begin a national shift towards a more progressive, environmentally-friendly approach to transport policy. We want it to mark the beginning of a new appreciation of the importance of growing and improving our rail networks and services. And we want the whole of the UK to see how vital the role of walking, cycling and public transport can be in making us healthier and improving the places where we live.

I urge you to read our draft strategy and give us your comments. You can access it by visiting tfl.gov.uk/mayors-transport-strategy

VAL SHAWCROSS lives and breathes the capital. She was first elected to the London Assembly at the inaugural elections in 2000 and represented Lambeth & Southwark for 16 years. Before that she served on Croydon council from 1994 to 2000. Last year London Mayor Sadiq Khan appointed her Deputy Mayor for Transport to help him get the capital’s public transport system back on track.
When I get to Warwick Avenue meet me by the entrance of the Tube

District 8 Organiser
FINN BRENNAN
reports on a busy year dealing with churn and change on London Underground

NE of the many useful pieces of advice I was given by my predecessor as district organiser, the late Steve Grant, was ‘Remember, Finn, there is never a quiet time in ASLEF District 8.’ Well, that has certainly proved to be true!

On London Underground increasing passenger demand, line upgrades, and higher service levels, including Night Tube, have been combined with huge cuts in government funding. The fares freeze, although a real benefit to hard-pressed commuters, means even less money is available. The result is constant pressure to make cuts to budgets and put off spending plans.

The management structure has also changed dramatically in a short time. The role of trains operational support manager and performance manager have disappeared. Line general managers and service directors are being reorganised. Chief operating officers or their rebranded equivalent seem to come and go on a more regular schedule than the Circle line on a Sunday. So far, I have had a new one to deal with each year I have had this role.

With so much change and churn at senior level, dealing with staff concerns and trade unions seems to be very far down the list of management priorities. With their eyes firmly focused on spreadsheets – or the prospect of a large redundancy cheque – mundane matters like sticking to agreements and genuinely consulting on change seem, to some, to be a nuisance.

Despite this, your ASLEF reps, at local and combine level, continue to battle with some success to defend and improve working conditions for our members. Our strikes in 2015 delivered four years of guaranteed pay rises that keep us ahead of inflation but, as executive committee member Terry Wilkinson outlines overleaf, the fight continues to make sure all the commitments made on the work/life balance and personal development are delivered.

Health & safety reps have, perhaps, the hardest battle against the impact of ill-thought through cost cutting but, as successes on issues like access to cool drinking water show, their persistence and determination still brings results. Branches and IR reps have had to deal with a big jump in the number of disciplinary cases, many of which should have been dealt with simply and quickly at local level. ASLEF trains council reps have shown huge commitment and dedication in holding management to account. Despite the pressure put upon them, and attempts to intimidate them, they do not hold back from vigorously defending our members.

So, while there will never be a quiet time in District 8, neither will there ever be a quiet union. ASLEF reps at every level will continue to do whatever we can to defend our members and better our conditions at work.

A tram is not a bus on wheels

By far the worst moment of the last 12 months in our district was the terrible tragedy on Tramlink at Sandilands on 9 November last year. Seven people lost their lives and scores more were seriously injured. Multiple investigations are continuing into the causes of the derailment by the RAIB, BTP and TfL. But while the root causes have still not been revealed the driver involved faces the prospect of a criminal trial.

As always when such accidents happen a rush to close the stable door means new safety measures are introduced. While these may be necessary, drivers and their union reps have seen a huge increase in pressure, public scrutiny and potential major changes to the way they work pushed through with little or no consultation.

Recent changes in management, including bringing in senior people with a background in rail operations, who understand that a tram in not just a ‘bus on wheels’ are welcome, but a serious culture change is needed. Unless management start listening to drivers instead of imposing change from above it will be impossible to build trust and industrial relations will suffer.

Active in ASLEF

ITH so many challenges to deal with, keeping members informed and encouraging you to be active in our union – at branch and district level – has never been more important. In July we ran, for the first time, an Active in ASLEF seminar at head office aimed at giving recently-involved members the tools they need to understand the union’s structure and how to influence change.

The event included a brief history of ASLEF, sessions on the role of equality and learning reps, writing a branch motion and an AAD item, and strengthening local organisation. Ian Goodman of White City kindly helped with an overview of the trials and tribulations of being a local rep.

Feedback from the participants will be used to develop more seminars and half day courses so that as many people as possible have the knowledge and confidence to take part in their branch and build the strong and resolute ASLEF we know we will need to succeed in the battles ahead.

Finn Brennan (third left) and District 8 activists on the steps of head office in Clerkenwell

The ASLEF Journal
More bangs for your bucks

GRAHAM DEAN, chair of trains council, reports on the state of the pension fund for London Underground staff

NOTHING is guaranteed to get members’ attention at branches than a report on the state of the pension fund so, as a trustee of the fund, I thought it would be good to give a brief update on where we are in regards to staff on London Underground.

I am pleased to report that, currently, it is pretty much all good news. The fund remains open for all staff to join when they come on to London Underground, it remains as a final salary scheme, and contribution rates for members remain at 5% of pensionable salary.

In regards to the funding position, we have made good progress recently in closing the funding gap, which has been as low as 85% fully funded (in June 2016) to a position where we are now 96.6% fully funded. This means we are on track to be 100% fully funded at the end of the recovery plan in 2022.

However, I must offer a word of caution. The markets are still very volatile and, as they always say, the value of investments can go down as well as up. For example, the most recent increase in the funding level is considered to be because of two very newsworthy events. First, the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States and, second, the vote on Brexit.

Without getting dragged into a debate on the rights and wrongs of leaving the European Union, it is generally regarded to have raised the rate of inflation in the UK, which is, in broad terms, generally regarded as a bad thing (although I know it can be argued the other way).

Because the TFL pension fund is invested mainly overseas it has had a positive impact on funding as, when profits are taken in, say, US dollars, then when the currency is converted you get more pounds for your bucks.

Likewise, I doubt many in the trade union movement would welcome the election of President Trump but, because he is viewed as good for business, this has had a positive impact on the markets. This has, in turn, led to an increase in the value of our investments which, again, improves the funding position. As they say, it’s an ill wind that blows no one any good.

The other big event has been the welcome news that former Tube Lines employees are now able to join the TFL pension fund and benefit from all the benefits it offers – and it would appear that they virtually all have.

One other benefit available to members of the pension fund worth mentioning is the option to make additional voluntary contributions. This is a scheme where members can choose to invest a percentage of their salary into a range of funds to build up an additional pension fund on retirement. Without getting into too much detail, the obvious attraction is that the money you invest is tax free which, for a higher rate taxpayer, has the effect of giving you £10 of benefit for every £6 you put in. There are caps on what you can put in but I would recommend members do look into it and consider if it is something you would like to do.
Service over safety at LU

JULIAN VAUGHAN, of trains health & safety council, reports on a worrying change of culture on London Underground

HE Tories’ austerity measures have resulted in huge cuts to London Underground’s budget and will mean that, by 2020, London will be the only major European city without a subsidised transport network. The mixture of cuts and ever-increasing passenger numbers means that ASLEF health & safety reps face significant challenges on the front line in the next few years.

It can seem that health & safety reps are fighting a rear-guard action and merely holding the line against a ‘service over safety’ culture that seems prevalent at the current time. However, we have had a number of successes as ASLEF health & safety reps hold LU to account. These include ensuring the default position that traction current is turned off when drivers access the track; ensuring LU has adequate procedures in place when dealing with infrastructure incidents; improvements to safety at the platform train interface; and raising the profile of dust and fatigue issues. These subjects – and many more – have been hard fought for and were not conceded lightly.

The Grenfell Tower tragedy has highlighted what can happen when health & safety is seen as a ‘burden to business’ rather than as an essential requirement and concerns are ignored as scaremongering. One of the most disturbing aspects of the fire was that residents and organisations had been predicting such a disaster for years. The lesson that must be learned is that the current culture of cost/benefit analysis and safety seen as a burden rather than a benefit has to change across all areas of public service including London Underground.

Tier 2 health & safety reps deal with safety matters that affect all lines and deal with issues that were not resolved locally. We also keep in close contact with the ORR and raise concerns or formal complaints as appropriate. As well as ensuring that LU complies with health & safety laws and their safety certificate we deal with combine-wide issues such as training and hazards faced by members (such as dust and fatigue).

Drivers themselves hold a great deal of power in dealing with safety issues. While London Underground is used by critics of the Southern Rail dispute as a shining example of driver only operation in action, we know that this mode of operation has significant issues, particularly in relation to obscured views of the PTI. While tier 2 reps deal with the GAPS project, which is slowly dealing with the movement of cameras, drivers can take immediate action by insisting on assisted despatch at platforms wherever view of the platform train interface is blocked.

The role of a health & safety rep can seem like a war of attrition, but it is a war we must continue for the sake of our members and our passengers. We are confident that, with the support of drivers, and local health & safety reps, we will continue to hold LU to account and achieve further successes, resulting in a safer and healthier working environment for our members and the public.

Fortune’s always hiding

ASLEF SHRUGGED, an entertaining, enlightening and rather wry blog about life Underground written by a Central line driver, and West Ham fan, shut up shop earlier this year. This was his last valedictory post on 18 April:

EVEN years ago today I started blogging so it seems appropriate that I mark that anniversary by ending it. I’m all blogged out. I keep thinking I should write something, start to write a post and then simply can’t be bothered to finish. It was fun for most of the time but, from now on, I will stick to posting comments on The Guardian website (mostly on London and transport issues), occasionally on the Evening Standard when I can do so without a feeling of vague disgust, District Dave’s London Underground forum and WHU606.

A lot has changed on the Tube with ticket offices closing, station staff undergoing a complete re-organisation and Night Tube, but my job is relatively the same as it was in 2010. They can mess around with station staff, managers (currently undergoing another change with TOSMs and DTSMs being merged back into one grade) and technical staff but they still need one driver per train. The big change will come with the introduction of driverless trains but even that will only happen if the T/Ops agree to it, as was the case when they converted M1 in Paris. I might get to enjoy the blissful irony of driving a driverless train but it now looks as if the Bakerloo line will get the new trains before we do so I’ll probably miss out on that experience. I’ve got 10 years, 8 months and 20 days until I retire, I’m going to dedicate more time to looking after Old Mother Shrugged (now 87), looking after myself, and getting out in London a bit more. I’ve got memberships for both the Tate and the National Portrait Gallery but haven’t used either in the last six months. I’ve been to the theatre in one year while the last film I watched was La La Land!

If you’re ever up by the Lea Bridge Road end of Leyton High Road and fancy a drink, pop in the William IV, there might be an ex-blogging T/Op propping up the bar on his rest day.
HEN Theresa May made her pitch to become Tory leader and, thus, Prime Minister in Birmingham last summer, she was promising big things. Her key messages were that work should pay and people should be able to get on in life. She promised opportunity for all, ‘a country that works for everyone – not just the privileged few’. Britain, under her, would become a meritocracy. This was a pitch from a state school-educated Conservative against the privately-educated Bullingdon Club (past members of which include Boris Johnson, David Cameron and George Osborne) ruling elite.

But, like Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Cameron before her, the dream of a new promised land with equality of opportunity (if not equality of outcome) has died a death. And, in May’s case, much, much quicker than her predecessors.

CRASHER AND BURNED
So why has May’s dream of a meritocracy crashed and burned so quickly? Could it be that her inadequacies as a leader have been her undoing? Could it be that she didn’t mean what she said? Could it be that, since becoming Prime Minister, she has changed her mind? Could it be that she did not get enough support in the Conservative Party to make her vision a reality?

It could be any or all of these things because what underlies them is the system of social classes at the heart of how the British economy, polity, and society operate. If you are to challenge the establishment, and confront the ruling class, you need to be sure of your ideas as well as having, to use a now common phrase, all your ducks in a row.

STORM THE BARRICADES
Because the establishment and ruling class have material interests to defend and will use their financial, ideological and organisational power to see off any challenges. Don’t get me wrong – I’m not trying to paint May as a radical, let alone a revolutionary, preparing to storm the barricades of privilege.

But if you look at all the key elements of her leadership pitch, she has either backed down or not moved forward with them. The kinder and more forgiving might say she’s had to deal with making sure ‘Brexit means Brexit’ and the self-induced hari-kari of calling that ill-fated general election.

But the underlying reason is that she has met opposition from powerful vested interests who made it clear to her that she can continue to spout those ideas – if she wishes – so long as she does not use the levers of the state to pursue them.

Hence, when she calls upon business groups to do x or y, that is all she is doing. She is not prepared to use state intervention to right the wrongs of the market or the class system under which we live. This is because such state intervention could work and would favour the many, not the few.

The recent Taylor review of modern working practices, Good Work, is a case in point. Mick Whelan, ASLEF’s general secretary, struck the right response when he said: ‘For Mr Taylor to say work should be fair is a statement of the obvious. Unfortunately, Mr Taylor’s report offers no practical solutions to the scourge of insecure and low paid work and is frankly not worth the paper it is written on.’

After the CBI sunk her proposal of mandatory worker representatives on the boards of big companies, it was clear that by choosing Matthew Taylor, a former adviser to Tony Blair, nothing significantly progressive would come out of the review – especially in terms of what the government would do.

DEAD IN THE WATER
So the notion of meritocracy as May’s big idea is as dead in the water as Cameron’s big society was by 2011. When it comes to it, May is not prepared to challenge those who would lose out from creating an economy and society based upon people’s life chances being determined by their ability, talent and performance.

Amongst other things, it would mean ending student fees and re-introducing student grants so money is no object to getting a degree; it would mean banning unpaid internships which only middle-class kids can now afford to take; it would mean ending pay inequality based on gender; ending inherited wealth; and giving workers a say in how they are treated at work. There would be many winners from this – but also quite a few losers, too.

One way or another, Theresa May has shown that attending Oxford University and working for the Bank of England has instilled in her a respect for the powers that be in Britain. Her vision of one nation Toryism has been bent to shape around them and not the other way around.
Justice at last – Supreme Court victory in battle over employment tribunal fees

In a landmark judgement on 26 July the Supreme Court ruled against the government – saying its introduction of fees for employment tribunals was unlawful. DAVE PRENTIS, general secretary of Unison, the union which took the case to court, explains what this means for every worker in Britain.

The right to challenge injustice at work and seek legal recourse is something that most of us will, thankfully, never have to do. But it is something which none of us should ever take for granted.

When tribunal fees were introduced in 2013, they tipped the balance in favour of exploitative employers and away from vulnerable workers. These unfair fees were letting law-breaking bosses off the hook, and leaving badly treated staff with no choice but to put up or shut up.

For those without the support of a union to cover the fees, justice seemed completely out of reach. And without the means to challenge these employers, the rights of many employees became meaningless.

People don’t choose to go to tribunals. They go because they have to. With fees as high as £1,200 – plus another £1,600 should a case go to appeal – it’s not hard to see why working people – especially those on low incomes – were deterred by such expense.

That’s why the unanimous Supreme Court ruling is so important. Not just for the 1.3 million public sector employees who belong to Unison, but for all employees and workers, everywhere.

It’s also the most significant judicial intervention in the history of British employment and constitutional law, because it overturns legislation explicitly designed to deny working people their rights. The Supreme Court ruled that fees should be affordable for all.

Unison’s fight – and victory – is also a reminder of the importance of unions in fighting for all of our rights. This was a long, difficult, and expensive legal case. It’s taken almost four years to get here.

In taking on this case, Unison was not simply pursuing a legal case but also a moral one – that everyone deserves the right to have his or her case heard, and there should never be a barrier to justice based on ability or willingness to pay arbitrary fees.

The coalition government – the Liberal Democrats’ role in the fees imposition must not be forgotten – claimed that introducing fees would stop so-called vexatious claims. In reality, as the Supreme Court pointed out, it was genuine cases that were affected – the type of claims employment tribunals were put in place to support.

But, as well as being a day of celebration, this victory is also a time for reflection. We will never know just how many people were stopped from taking legal cases as a result of employment tribunal fees. We will never know how many people have been denied access to justice and to legal recourse.

This result brings to an end the cruel employment tribunal fees regime, and ensures that no-one else is ever forced to pay crippling fees just to access basic justice. It should enshrine once and for all the vital principle that justice does not belong to the rich and the powerful, it belongs to all of us.

And it should show this government, as ministers continue Brexit negotiations that threaten our rights at work and at home, that we will stand and fight to defend our vital protections.

Sign o’ the times

CHRIS NUTTY explains how ASLEF Education is working across the TOCs to help make deaf passengers welcome.

BITISH Sign Language is the preferred language of the UK’s 70,000 deaf community. It is their main means of communication and recognised by the government as a language in its own right. As a service industry the railway needs to ensure that all its passengers feel included, valued, and safe while travelling by rail. Hence the importance of staff learning to sign so they can help and support deaf travellers.

Over the last 10 years ASLEF Education has worked with Marie Tacey to promote deaf awareness within the rail industry. Marie is a BSL tutor who specialises in teaching sign language to rail workers and has worked with ASLEF to deliver BSL courses to staff in East Midlands Trains, London Midland, Greater Anglia, and Arriva Trains Wales.

Recently she was in Derby to deliver a beginners course, co-funded by EMT, CrossCountry, and ASLEF Education. The course was organised by EMT ULR Chris Nutty and CrossCountry ULR Richard Swain.

Working across TOCs helps ensure fuller courses and creates a better learning experience. With the TOCs and ASLEF providing the course and venue, the learners do their bit by undertaking the course in their own time. The benefit is not only that you learn how to sign, but you receive a certificate from the awarding body, Signature, which adds to your CPD and enhances your CV.

Marie delivers her course in an open, friendly, informal way, quickly putting learners at ease. Being a deaf person, and regular rail user, she is well-qualified to teach how to interact with deaf passengers. The beginner’s course offers the basics you need to sign and communicate, and is the first stage towards a full Level 1 qualification in BSL. Having broken the ice with this unit, most of Marie’s learners go on to complete the full Level 1 qualification and many go on to higher levels.

‘I found the BSL one day course really enjoyable,’ said Nicola Davis, an EMT driver at Derby. ‘Marie is a fantastic tutor and made me feel comfortable straight away. I started the day not knowing anything, and by the end felt confident enough to approach a deaf person to help with their travelling directions.’
First class half century

World beer journey begins

Upcoming events

UKING branch No 235 held a celebration and presentation evening on Tuesday 18 July to mark 50 years since the current branch was formed shortly after the cessation of steam working in July 1967 and the associated closure of Guildford locomotive shed (70C).

Most of the men displaced moved six miles up the line to Woking.

GS Mick Whelan presented long-serving drivers’ company council Nigel Cummins with honorary life membership. Bro Cummins was pivotal and successful in organising resistance to the proposed closure of Woking and Farnham depots in 1995 on the cusp of privatisation. He has been a member of our Society for 43 years, served on the DCC since 1999, and it was the first time in all that time that Bro Cummins has been lost for words!

Long service awards were given to Mick Taylor (40 years), Shaun McCallion (25), Adrian McTernan and Tom Aldrich (15), Christine Wilson, Rob Taylor and David Cannings (10).

Woking branch would like to thank all those who attended, especially the GS, AGS, District 1 Organiser and District 1 and District 5 EC members who took time from their busy schedules to celebrate with us.

Chris Smith, branch secretary

Ripple Lane Jolly Boys outing to visit retired colleagues at the Old Clacton BRSA club from midday, being conveyed by an Essex Coast Express, for a day of frivolity, quaffing and storytelling. Everybody welcome.

Southeastern retired and working members’ reunion from 11.00 at Rainham Social Club, 86 Station Road, Rainham, Kent.

Fratton train crew and railway reunion from 12.00 to 18.00 at the BRSA Club next to Fratton station. All members, retired members, and other retired railway staff welcome. Free buffet and raffle. For details contact Gary White on 07798 706204.

Peterborough – Friday 6 October

Booz’n’chat at the Parkway Club, Maskew Avenue, Peterborough. £5 in advance, £6 on the door. Call Malcolm Bell on 07884 432424 or fletton.brick@btopenworld.com

Watford – Saturday 7 October

Watford reunion from 14.00 in The Flag next to Watford Junction station. All past and present drivers welcome. Please contact Kevin Corcoran at kev.corcoran@virginmedia.com.

King’s Lynn – Friday 20 October

Linnets come home. ASLEF branch number 111 reunion, long service awards and 111th anniversary celebration evening. Contact Mark Steele for information on 07788 153954.

Hither Green – Wednesday 8 November

Hither Green reunion from 11am at the Richmal Crompton (Wetherspoons) opposite Bromley South station with, hopefully, a few surprise guests and a new badge to commemorate the occasion. Ray Cooper, RMS Hither Green.

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

SO LONG, FAREWELL

West Brompton said farewell on 21 July to three loyal members – Al Fenwick, Peter Jones and Avtar Dhanju – with, between them, well over 90 years’ membership of ASLEF. They truly have been the back bone to our trade union. We wish them all the very best in retirement, good health and lots of fun. Thank you for your support over the years, and please pop in to see us.

Greg Tasker, branch secretary

RAY RUTTY STRATFORD MAN

Ray Rutty, a Stratford man all his railway career, died on 10 May. He went through all the footplate grades at Stratford. A well-liked guy, although an agitator at times, who liked a good wind-up, he was a bit of a boxer in his early days, and a mean tackler on the football field when he played for Stratford loco.

Dave Pizzie. RMS

World beer journey begins

At our recent presentation branch meeting EC vice-president Dave Calfe (second right) and DFC rep P Coles (far left) presented 50 year medallions and badges to three retired members (from left) G Crowder, C Mitchell and I Widderson.

Andy Wakefield, Nottingham

The GS presented awards to (left to right, top to bottom) Mick Taylor, David Cannings, Rob Taylor, Shaun McCallion, Adrian McTernan and Nigel Cummins

Graham Morris, Mick Whelan, Simon Weller and Marz Colombini (top) celebrate 50 years of Woking branch (above)
Burning desire to make work safer

MORE than 300 trade union health & safety representatives descended on Keele University in Staffordshire on the last weekend of July for the annual Hazards conference. I was joined by a great ASLEF delegation consisting of John Doyle (Selhurst); Rachel Gentle (Bristol); Derrick Lowrie (Yoker); and Alec Bishop (Hammersmith & City) all of whom had enthusiasm in abundance and a burning desire to ensure their members are afforded the best representation. The union ethos was shining bright and made for an enthralling weekend.

The opening plenary session on Friday evening began with a huge round of applause for Unison for their success in the employment tribunal case they took all the way to the Supreme Court. We observed a minute’s silence for everyone lost in the workplace due to negligent employers, and heard a synth. Still got paid for the session. He gave his ticket to Gary… ’Hey, brother, I’ve got a stab at the Open, I’m teeing off in the qualifying round tomorrow.’ ‘Give us yer ticket.’

Another highlight was Bryan Simpson, a young trade unionist from the Better than Zero campaign against the exploitative culture which permeates the hospitality industry.

No sooner had the weekend begun than it was over and we went home brimming with information, new contacts, great ideas and a burning desire to ensure our members are safe at work.

All branches, please support the Hazards campaign and the conference and sponsor a delegate to attend in 2018; it would be wonderful to see a larger delegation.

Alan Moss, Longsight

Ticket to Ryde

Remember those lines from True by Spandau Ballet – ‘I bought a ticket to the world / But now I’ve come back again?’ Well, British Rail had this nasty habit of sticking you on courses, or marking you up for road learning, without any thought to the packed programme in a chap’s ASLEF diary. My mate Terry Laird came back off annual leave to find his AC loco course had started the week before, whilst he was in Miguel’s English Wine Bar having breakfast. So sometimes you had to resort to the Longsight drivers’ ticket boxes, one at 9A, the other at Piccadilly. Just like voting at an election, you popped in a piece of paper with your mate’s name on it. Road learning, route review, traction review, safety brief – ‘Give us yer ticket.’

‘Hey, brother, I’ve got a stab at the Open, I’m teeing off in the qualifying round tomorrow.’ ‘Give us yer ticket.’

‘Hey, mate, I’ve got to go to the clinic this afternoon with the girlfriend.’ ‘Give us yer ticket.’

‘Hey boss (his allocated conductor driver), you don’t need me, do you? City are at West Ham tonight.’ ‘Give us yer ticket.’

‘Hey, mucker (the second man), I’ve been after Julie for weeks and tonight’s the night. My head won’t be right for this ballast job, I’d be a safety risk. Will you hook on and off for us?’ ‘Give us yer ticket.’

And Martin Kemp did not play bass on True, they used a synth. Still got paid for the session. He gave his ticket to Gary…

Mel Thorley, Longsight

Mick Holder turns back time to September 1917

A strike over the eight-hour day, and the government’s response, dominated the pages of the Journal

CONFERENCE DECIDES – STRIKE

Under the heading ‘The eight-hour day crisis – conference decision to strike’ the Journal reports: ‘Many were watching anxiously for our success in the demand for a principle of the eight-hour day. They were with us heart and soul, for having worked more than eight hours for very many years, they knew eight were quite enough for any man. Best of all was the solidarity from our own members. From every branch, far and near, came the message of readiness to fight this great fight for a principle.’

‘If a doctor makes an unconscious mistake, he may destroy one life. If an engine driver makes a mistake he may destroy hundreds. To reduce hours is to reduce risk.’

ON OUR OWN SHOULDERS

The Edge Hill branch secretary says: ‘Every nation and every people are demanding to live as people should live, and on our own shoulders lies the task of removing that which operates the engine driver makes a mistake he may destroy hundreds. To reduce hours is to reduce risk.’

VITAL PULSE OF THE SYSTEM

‘On Friday 17 August a decision to strike was arrived at. The press, which had hitherto been indifferent to the controversy, began to realise an acute national crisis was at hand. Never before was it so fully realised that engines are the vital pulse of the whole railway system, and that our men alone rested the safe conduct of a nation’s transport.’

GOVERNMENT BANS STRIKE

The government enforced the Munition Act (1915) forcing us to report the difference to the Ministry of Labour for settlement by conciliation or arbitration. It prohibited any stoppage of work and made it illegal to apply union funds for the purpose of strike pay.
Rusting equipment and infrastructure on Britain’s railways means that asbestos remains a serious issue for ASLEF members. Thompsons brought the first successful case for compensation to the House of Lords in 1972 and we have worked tirelessly ever since to protect and assist workers who have been affected by asbestos-related illnesses. We know all too well the dangers asbestos still poses to working people.

LIVING IN FEAR
While not everyone who has been exposed to asbestos will develop an asbestos-related condition, and those who do will not necessarily develop the most serious conditions, it is worrying that the number of people being diagnosed has not yet reached its peak. There will be many ASLEF members who know they may have been exposed to asbestos and are living in fear of what that may mean for their health.

There are three types of asbestos – blue, brown and white. White asbestos was the least-used. Blue asbestos is potentially the most toxic and was routinely sprayed onto train carriages for fire-proofing and insulation. It was an extremely dusty and messy job, for guards walking through trains as the carriages vibrated along the tracks.

White was the most widely-used asbestos in the UK. Many workers were told by employers that it was ‘not dangerous’ but while it may not be as toxic as blue, all asbestos is, potentially, a danger to health. White asbestos sheeting was used in carriages as partitioning and white asbestos lagging was used on steam engines. Many slam door carriages pulled by diesel locos were riddled with asbestos for years.

ASBESTOS EXPOSURE
Railwaymen and women working from the 1940s to 1990s involved in driving, cleaning, maintaining or guarding trains, as well as those cutting, fitting, repairing and maintaining asbestos materials, are likely to have experienced asbestos exposure. It can be many years before the condition becomes apparent – anything from 10 to 50 years and upwards.

We recently met a mesothelioma victim, a retired coach builder, who recalled men around him spraying blue asbestos. He told us he was ‘expecting’ mesothelioma and, when finally diagnosed, his doctor couldn’t understand why he wasn’t shocked. He said he’d had ‘the last 40 years to get used to the idea’. We encourage those who know, or suspect, they may have been exposed, but have had no medical disease diagnosis, to complete ASLEF’s asbestos exposure questionnaire. This ensures the exposure is logged independently of railway employers. The information is entered onto a database which records key information. You can download a questionnaire from www.aslef.org.uk/visageimages/About/HealthSafety/ThompsonsaSLEFasbestosquestionnaire.pdf or request a copy by calling 0808 100 8009.

Recording information not only gives each member peace of mind knowing their exposure has been properly and safely recorded, it enables ASLEF and Thompsons to identify people who worked in the same place. If you register your details, not only are you helping yourself but former colleagues, too.

A REAL DIFFERENCE
We have been instructed in a number of fatal cases where little information about asbestos exposure is known and yet, when we contact former colleagues via the database, the wealth of information provided has made a real difference to the success of the claim being made to support the member’s family.

If a member is diagnosed with an asbestos-related condition, they should seek legal assistance by calling our legal helpline on 0808 100 8009. It is important that early advice is sought.

Through your union, you have access to Thompsons and we are experts in asbestos disease and can advise, investigate and pursue a claim on your behalf against those responsible for negligence in the workplace.

For more information about dangers of asbestos and any steps you can take, please visit www.thompsons.law.co.uk/asbestos-diseases. For more information about your legal service, go to www.thompsonstradeunion.law/trade-unions/aslef
GRAHAM NASH UNION GIANT

It is with great sadness that I announce the death of Brother Graham Nash who passed away on 13 March aged 68. He had been ill with cancer for 15 months.

Graham was a giant in ASLEF, locally and nationally. He joined our union in January 1964. He was a local staff rep for 20 years, first at Bath Road in BR days and then for FGW post-privatisation; deputy chair and then chair of Bristol branch for many years; and an ASLEF trustee for six years. He was also a committee member of the Railway Enginemen’s Assurance Fund and its chair from 1983 until 2013.

Graham began his long and distinguished railway career as a cleaner at Shrewsbury in 1963. He was promoted to fireman and moved to Oxley shed and then to London St Pancras where he lodged at the ‘railwayman’s hostel’. In 1972 he moved to Cricklewood where he was promoted to driver and, when Cricklewood closed in 1983, he transferred to Bristol Bath Road.

During 20 years as local rep Graham represented members’ interests and played a huge role in guiding and advising during BR days through to the uncertain times of privatisation. He ended up working for FGW and retired from resources and planning in 2011 after 48 years’ active service.

As well as his ASLEF activities he played a very important role as treasurer of the Bristol Railworkers’ Social & Welfare Fund and after he retired he organised the Bristol Retired Members’ Section. For many years he helped me organise the Bath Road Old Boys’ get together every June.

Graham was an ardent Sheffield Wednesday supporter and enjoyed horse racing, speedway, skittles and other pub-related activities, with family and friends. He had a keen interest in music, particularly rock and progressive genres, and at school played bass guitar in Brand X. He had a huge collection of vinyl LPs which he treasured and kept in special order.

We arranged a tribute for Graham on 7 March. He was very weak, but determined to attend. A very emotional branch saw the GS and AGS present him with a tribute to celebrate his life and work for ASLEF. The meeting was jam-packed, which showed how popular he was. Sadly, the next day Graham was taken into hospital and never came out. Graham will be much missed by his family, his brothers Colin and Phillip, his sons Kevin and Paul and by his all his friends and workmates.

Peter Ashby, Bristol branch secretary

PETER ASHYBY CROYDON’S NUMBER 1

Peter Ashby passed away suddenly on 28 June after suffering a cardiac arrest nine days before his 70th birthday. Peter was Tramlink’s first driver – he joined on 15 February 1999, during the commissioning period, before the system opened in 2000 – and soon became part of the training team. This branch secretary, for one, is grateful to Peter for all he learned about driving. He was one of the very first tram drivers to join ASLEF in August 2000 and a founder member of our branch in February 2001, well before we were officially recognised. In his training role, he was ideally placed to encourage new trainee drivers to join the best trade union! Sadly, he injured his leg in 2010, was forced to give up work, and several periods in hospital. But he remained active in the background, kept in contact with everything going on at Tramlink, and many times gave us good advice. He was a great supporter of ASLEF and passionate about his branch!

Robert Sambridge, Croydon Tram/Light Rail No 1

RUGBY LEGENDS

Three retired members of Rugby branch have joined the eternal link. Ray Worthy, who retired six years ago, passed away on 17 March just short of his 68th birthday. Bob (Drummer) Hitchcock, who retired in 1997, died on 19 March aged 73. Keith Sprayson, who finished in 1993, left us on 29 March at the age of 88. All three were absolute legends!

Tony Venson, Rugby branch secretary

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Grayling and the DfT are short-sighted and wrong

The Transport Secretary’s announcement postponing or cancelling several railway electrification projects is fundamentally flawed. The decision will leave several major cities dependent on diesel powered/bi-modal trains for the foreseeable future. This is a cheap fix and follows a dismal pattern of binary investment decisions regarding the electrification of the main line railway system in Britain.

Worryingly, internal resistance to main line electrification deep within the DfT seems to have won the day. Having been castigating for a failure to develop this option on a rolling basis to secure the benefit of faster and more reliable trains in 2009/2010 the DfT had a Damascene conversion, aided and abetted by Network Rail, and supported a range of projects including main line electrification, infilling existing schemes, and developing an electric spine between Southampton and the Midlands/Yorkshire.

The DfT was, however, intent on the deployment of bi-modal trains which they had advocated as a replacement for the existing high speed fleet, leading to proposals to electrify the GW route which was, perversely, preferred as the primary route for modernisation. The GW electrification scheme was originally to stop at Cardiff, leaving Swansea to be served by bi-modal in diesel mode. This lunacy was overturned after protests but the massive overruns and incompetence that characterised this scheme (look at the National Audit Office report 2016) led to a return to the original half-baked plan.

The cancellation of the MML project condemns cities in the East Midlands and South Yorkshire to be served by cheap bi-modal options. In any sane evaluation it beggars belief that this option is seen as justifiable. Having ‘paused’ schemes as a consequence of overruns for which they were culpable, the DfT and Network Rail have effectively crippled the economic potential of this region and also failed to deliver a more connected electrified rail network. This leaves the rail sector with a series of lines which do not provide a national system. Echoes of the position which crippled the West Coast main line under the modernisation plan of the 1950s and 1960s.

The cities which would have been wired up under the MML scheme now have to wait the arrival of HS2 (this year, next year, sometime, never). The missing link in terms of rail mileage between Bedford and Leeds is relatively small and could have been wired up quickly had there been competent project management in Network Rail and the DfT. Both organisations were rightly castigated for incompetence. This has led directly to the dilution of intentions to create a modern electrified railway at a national scale able to service both passenger and freight transport. The decisions to abandon plans to wire up parts of the network effectively destroy one of rail’s big advantages by being able to operate using a mix of energy and fuel inputs and not be utterly dependent on the continuing supply of liquid hydrocarbon fuel and the emissions this creates at the time and point of use. The decisions by Chris Grayling and the DfT are short-sighted and fundamentally wrong.

Phil Mortimer by email

Newton Heath at Millgate

A big turnout for the annual reunion of Newton Heath drivers and other grades who found their way to the Millgate in Failsworth for the twelfth year running. Thanks to Johnny Pat and Andy Gee for the organisation which brought so many together again. The buffet was excellent and Johnny ran the booze raffle. It was good to see our younger drivers, which is difficult under their circumstances. Our thanks to the branch and the 105 members who continue to provide the means for this popular event.

S Black, RMS

Anyone remember Alan?

I wonder if you can help me? My father, Alan Phillips, was born in 1928 and worked on the railway from 1945 for over 40 years. From 1945 until about 1953 he was in the hostel at Old Oak Common, which was a very happy time for him. I’d like any former workmates to contact me about my dad, who later moved to Didcot, and who died two years ago. My father was a staunch union man and I have all his union badges – he was especially proud of the one showing solidarity with the miners.

A Phillips, 3 Minehead Road, Bishops Lydeard, Taunton, Somerset, TA4 3BS

Push-pull train stories

You kindly published my request for information (Journal, July) about push-pull trains and other trains that went backwards. Sadly, only one member contacted me – I realised only long-retired members would be in the frame with first-hand information – but he was invaluable, as he worked push-pull trains until they were discontinued in 1966 (51 years ago!) He confirmed things I suspected, and gave me other information which has been included in a couple of articles I am writing.

Eric Stuart, RMS

We can be heroes

Please can I give a big thank you to the staff running your stall at Tolpuddle? My son is autistic and was starting to get agitated by the large crowds at the banner march and heat. Thank you for giving my son and daughter a cap and allowing my son to use your tent as a safe place. He managed to contain himself and we were able to get onto the GMB field which was quiet. Your staff were so helpful!

Neil Henderson by email
Sing if you’re glad to be gay
Sing if you’re happy that way

DARRAN BROWN, national secretary of our LGBT representative committee, marks the passing of the Sexual Offences Act in 1967 which decriminalised homosexual acts, in private, between men over the age of 21

TAKING PRIDE
Well, the Act only covered England and Wales. Northern Ireland and Scotland followed later. In 1972 the first Pride event took place in London and was attended by 2,000 brave people. They were jeered at, had stones thrown at them, and faced abuse along the march, but it was a huge success because it happened. Now London has more than 1 million people who attend London Pride and Pride events held around the UK.

However, in 1988, the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher passed the Local Government Act, Section 28 of which prohibited local authorities from ‘promoting’ homosexuality. It was a huge backwards step in equality. Local councils were told schools weren’t allowed to promote the acceptability of gay relationships or openly talk about homosexuality. The law remained in place until 2003 when the Labour government under Tony Blair repealed this pernicious piece of legislation.

The first decade of the 21st century was a time for many progressive changes, which leads to the question of what’s been happening since the keys have been rattled in the closet! LGBT people were allowed to adopt children in 2002. Civil partnerships for gay and lesbian people were introduced in 2004. It became illegal to encourage homophobic hatred in 2008 (7,000 hate crimes were reported that year; in 2015 the figure was 24,000).

The Marriage Equality Act became law in 2013 enabling LGBT people to marry, and the most recent change, in 2017, is that gay and bisexual men and women can now donate blood.

Public attitudes have changed enormously over the last 50 years and become much more supportive. But it’s not all perfect yet and equality isn’t fully realised.

THE RIGHT TO LOVE
Ideally, we want a situation where no one cares what sexuality you are, where we accept a person and their right to love whoever they wish.

The campaign goes on and I’m proud to say ASLEF is playing a part in that movement of change, with its committees and members who push for equality day by day. There are huge problems in Chechnya, the imprisonment, torture and murder of gay men. President Trump’s anti-LGBT policies affect the day to day life of LGBT people across the Atlantic, and there are 74 countries where it’s still illegal to be gay with 11 that hold the death penalty for just being gay.

The decriminalisation of homosexuality 50 years ago didn’t mean the closet doors were flung open. But they were unlocked…

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).

ASLEF BRANCH 111
ASLEF branch 111 is 111 years old and has a limited edition numbered badge to celebrate the introduction of the Class 387 on KL services. Proceeds to the King’s Lynn branch welfare fund. £7.50 inc p&p from Mark Steele, J Rosecroft, South Wootton, King’s Lynn, Norfolk, PE30 3WX.

SOUTH WESTERN
Suburban 707 limited edition 35x30mm enamel badge £5 + £1 p&p from Martin Thompson (Wimbledon Park) email wdrailbadge@live.co.uk

DAVE EAST is selling three badges – Class 302, Class 312 and Class 453 – to raise funds for the preservation and repainting of the last Phase One 4 CIG 1753. £5 each + £1 p&p for up to three badges. Please send cheques payable to Network South East Railway Society to NSERS, 41 Highfield Road, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP1 6DD.

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

WOKING
branch 50 year commemorative badge. Slam door & Class 455. £6 + £1 p&p each. Contact Chris Smith, branch secretary, on aslefwoking235branch@hotmail.co.uk

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

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I see the station not just as a building but as a social phenomenon, a place where people perform the timeless rituals, not just of travelling, but of congregating, working, playing, greeting and parting. A station is a public stage of human contact, once again at the heart of British life. — Simon Jenkins, Britain’s 100 Best Railway Stations

He offers literary nods to Anna Karenina (who throws herself in front of a train at Obiralovka station), GK Chesterton, EM Forster, JK Rowling, John Betjeman, Philip Larkin and Edward Thomas — the sublime lines of Adlestrop, a station closed because of Beeching’s brutal cuts — as well as John Schlesinger’s 1961 documentary film Terminus, shot at Waterloo, which clearly left its mark on the author.

Life on the Leicester Line by Anthony Gregory (P Way Publishing, £12) is a revised edition of the progress not of a pilgrim but a train driver, first published in 2002. Tony weaves his story — jumping into the cab of a Class 47 at Moor Street in 1974, leaving school in 1977, becoming a traction trainee with British Rail in 1979, picking up a copy of the ASLEF rule book, and starting work at Coalville as relief driver’s assistant, ‘not even a proper second man’ — in and out of a vivid memoir about the 30 mile branch line from Burton to Knighton Junction, the problems of freight work, the miners’ strike of 1984-85 — ‘It soon became clear we were all in support of the strike and greatly admired the miners and their families’ — the Branston crash in 1986, and the closure of Coalville in 1990. Tony went on to Bescot, Saltley, Toton, and then, after 23 years on freight, moved to Midland Mainline at Derby. He went back to freight in 2012, with Freightliner Heavy Haul, until he retired in December last year.

‘I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading!’ — Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice

It’s a fund of memories and anecdotes — about drivers, guards, shunters, signalmen and booking office clerks — and brings to life an era which ended not with the closure of Coalville, but with the loss of coal and steel on our rails. Send a cheque for £13.75 (inc p&p) to 90 Henhurst Hill, Burton-on-Trent, DE13 9TA or pay via PayPal at tony.gregory79@yahoo.co.uk. Or pick it up in person, says Tony, without paying the postage!

The Settle–Carlisle Railway 1850-1990 by Martin Pearson (£13 inc p&p from 23 Town Head, Settle, BD24 9JB) is a detailed analysis of the building of the line, during the great railway expansion at the height of the Victorian era, and the saving of the line, at the end of the 1980s, when British Rail and the Thatcher government seemed to determine to close it. There’s a foreword from Michael Portillo, Cabinet minister turned TV presenter of Great Railway Journeys, who says his greatest achievement in office was ‘saving the Settle to Carlisle line.’

Revolt on the Clyde (Lawrence & Wishart, £13) is William Gallacher’s eyewitness account, originally published in 1936, of the protests, marches, rallies, rent strikes, factory strikes and social unrest on Red Clydeside before, during and immediately after the Great War, which culminated with tanks on the streets of Glasgow, and the police reading the Riot Act, in 1919 as the government feared a Bolshevik-style revolution. It reads fresh, if raw, in this new edition, edited by John Callow who, in his introduction, describes it as ‘the first, and best, memoir written by a leading member of the British Communist Party’ — Willie was Communist MP for West Fife from 1935 to 1950.

‘At 18 our convictions are hills from which we look; at 45 they are caves in which we hide.’ — F Scott Fitzgerald, Bernice Bobs Her Hair

Egil Skallagrímirson was a 10th century Viking warrior-poet, born in Iceland, who fought for Aethelstan against Olaf Guthfrithson at the Battle of Brunanburh in 937, after which Aethelstan became the first King of England. Ian Crockatt, who lives on a croft in North Ayrshire, in which is clearly a labour of love has imaginatively translated Egill’s Old Norse poems about eating, drinking, sailing (‘the sea god / grapples me down’), loving (‘when her hair’s hill-torrent / harries thought with verses’), and killing (‘Battle-cranes flew / where corpse-heaps grew’) into modern English while retaining a flavour of the skald.
HE GUEVARA is best remembered as a Marxist revolutionary – the man who, fighting alongside Fidel Castro, toppled the corrupt Batista regime in Cuba – as a medical student who took time out from the University of Buenos Aires to ride a Norton 500cc motorbike through Latin America, and as the rugged pin-up whose iconic image, Guerrillero Heroico, taken in 1960 by Alberto Korda, inspired generations of free radicals throughout the world.

Che – on the ball

But, as the new rugby season starts, we remember Che the rugby player. He started playing for Estudiantes de Cordoba at 14 in 1942. His father was alarmed – Che was asthmatic and, every twenty minutes, ran to the touchline to use his inhaler – and pleaded with him to give up. ‘But I love rugby. Even if it kills me one day, I am happy to play.’ He turned out as an inside centre, fly-half, and wing, but liked to wear a scrum-cap.

At university, back in Buenos Aires, he played for three teams – the Atalaya Polo Club, Club Ypura, and San Isidro – and founded a rugby magazine, called Tackle, in 1951. After one article – a political polemic about the elitist attitudes of rugby in Argentina – police forced the magazine to close on the grounds that it was a vehicle for communist propaganda. Che set off with his friend, fellow medec and rugby fan Alberto Granado on La Poderosa (The Mighty One) on a 5,000 mile road trip which led to the book, and later film, The Motorcycle Diaries.

‘He was a massive rugby enthusiast,’ recalled Granado. ‘Despite his scrawny figure, he was surprisingly strong. He had an excellent tackling game, at the height of his elbows. His father said that Ernesto always remembered all he had learned about team spirit, discipline and respect for the adversary.

‘Ernesto received a visit from the police, accused of spreading communist propaganda in an article he wrote for Tackle about the class differences in Argentine rugby. We decided to motorbike around South America. The expedition was interrupted because we met Fidel Castro in Mexico. That day changed history.’

Keith Richmond

HASTA SIEMPRE COMMANDANTE

On Track Prize Crossword

CHE – on the ball

Solution to Crossword 136

Across: 1 Bollard 5 Tusk 7 Nod 8 Accurate 9 Album 10 Disc 13 Hash 14 Oars 18 Deer 19 Tramp 21 Beetroot 22 Ace 23 City 24 Scented
Down: 1 Bungalow 2 Ladybird 3 Alarms 4 Decade 5 Thrush 6 Site 11 Cataract 12 Shepherd 15 Sentry 16 Brooms 17 Statue 20 Sem

Congratulations to Malcolm Cook, of Reading, Berkshire, who was last month’s winner. The winner of this month’s Prize Crossword will receive Marks & Spencer vouchers to the value of £25

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

Thanks for all your responses to the 136th prize crossword in the August 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 September

ASLEF’s legal services

If you are being harassed at work, bullied or discriminated against, and if your local, branch or district rep is unavailable, call the industrial relations department at union headquarters (020 7324 2400) or email info@aslef.org.uk. If you are arrested or interviewed by police and need legal assistance – day or night – call the members’ emergency hotline on 0800 587 7530. ASLEF also provides first class legal advice free for members and dependents.

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