Rachael Maskell – I ran for Parliament on a burning sense of injustice
railway enginemen’s tax free saver plans

tax free savings plans for
Resource Managers, Roster Clerks, Driver Assessors,
Driver Team Managers, Customer Service Assistants,
Driver Instructors, Drivers, Customer Service Managers,
Train Managers, Conductors, Retail Sales Managers,
First Class Hosts, On Board Cleaners, Controllers, Guards,
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Heads they win, tails we lose

IRWIN Care, having lost a contract, sued the health authority and were awarded hundreds of thousands of pounds and, to rub salt into the wounds, awarded a major contract in Lancashire. When Virgin Stagecoach lost the West Coast gravy train they used the same tactics; we have never quite understood how they then retained it? The warning, of course, is that if, in future, we are in a TTIP or CETA type trade deal these are the tactics big companies use to challenge governments to the detriment of the needs of the people and communities concerned. That resonates very loudly to me with all the Brexit talk about sovereignty.

The government is considering re-opening lines closed by Beeching which, naturally, we would, in normal circumstances, welcome. But this re-announcement was really made to mask the failure of Virgin Stagecoach on the East Coast – the third time a train operating company has had to hand back the keys or go cap in hand to the government. Difficult after the success on the same line as publicly-owned Directly Operated Rail and the millions of pounds returned to the Treasury! So from 2020 it will be a private-public partnership letting Virgin Stagecoach off contractual payments of millions of pounds. Why don’t they admit it’s dogma – and the model has failed? How many more companies will be going back cap in hand on the back of this?

A lot has been made recently of drivers’ pay; shame it’s not reported that it’s been earned by productivity and flexibility over the past two decades. So while we do not do the politics of envy it’s worth noting that more than 70 people at Network Rail earn more than the Prime Minister. How many more earn more than train drivers? That neatly takes us onto directors’ pay which often contains share options and bonuses. We openly show what we earn so I would like to see all the share options and bonuses as well as the pay of managers and directors published – and then we would have a true comparison of those who, serially and for poor performance, get rewarded against those of us routinely castigated.

Homelessness has increased 65% in seven years but on Christmas Day Euston station was open to the homeless. Maybe as an industry we could and should do more as the railway can be the hub of our communities. Happy New Year!

Yours fraternally
Mick Whelan, general secretary
Failure of management and regulation to blame for Croydon tragedy

Mick slams Grayling’s ‘new’ strategy

Mick Whelan has condemned the Transport Secretary’s new plans for the rail network in Britain. ‘Chris Grayling has the temerity to describe them as “bold plans to expand the rail network” which will “boost jobs and housing”. They will do nothing of the sort. There is nothing bold about them, and they will do nothing to improve our transport infrastructure, nothing to increase the number of jobs in this country, and nothing to help build the homes young people so desperately need. It’s a typically vacuous set of proposals from a man who doesn’t seem to know what he’s doing. All he is doing is reheating a few old proposals. Where is the bold strategic vision for rail – and integrated transport links – in this country? And what has happened to the Tory promises on electrification on which he promptly reneged? We would be pleased to see the lines cut by Beeching restored. But we need something more – and someone better – to deliver the railway that people in this country deserve.’

Congratulations, Richard!

Richard Leonard (left), who was endorsed by ASLEF, was elected Scottish Labour leader at the end of November. Richard, 55, who decisively beat the centre-right candidate, Anas Sarwar, in a two-horse race, set out his agenda – including a radical programme of public ownership – in the Journal last year.

‘Richard shares our values and we were proud to support his campaign,’ said GS Mick Whelan. ‘He’s a committed trade unionist who recognises that the people of Scotland are hungry for change.’

Kevin Lindsay, ASLEF’s organiser in Scotland, added: ‘I’ve known Richard for many years. He’s a dedicated and hardworking socialist, who recognises the value of public ownership, and wants to ensure Scotland’s railways are run for the people of Scotland, not to subsidise the fares of our European neighbours or given away as dividends to line the pockets of the shareholders in private companies.’

While individual senior managers have changed since the accident, the culture at Tram Operations has not. Drivers still fear their job is at risk if they report being tired and they will be disciplined for reporting sick. ‘There is a serious lack of co-ordination between Tram Operations Ltd who are responsible for infrastructure, and Tram Operations, who operate the system. The recommendation to install a tram protection system that can automatically apply brakes to a speeding vehicle is long overdue. TfL should commit to firm timescales for installation now – with no more delays. This should cover the entire system, especially given that management and regulators have shown themselves to be so poor at identifying risks.’

Finn added: ‘There is no evidence that the Guardian device, the interim system used to monitor drivers’ alertness, would have done anything to prevent this terrible tragedy. Tram Operations should be dealing with the underlying causes of fatigue among staff, by recruiting enough drivers to eliminate the need for overtime working, and developing a fair culture that supports, rather than blames, staff who are ill or struggling to cope with shift working and the work/life balance.’

TWEETS OF THE MONTH

Tonight I put country and constituency before party and voted with my principles to give parliament a meaningful vote.

Stephen Hammond

David Davis your red line, your hill to die on, is really something. What made you want to become an MP? ’Great question, I really wanted to fight hard so people can wank at work.’

Jess Phillips

David Davis fighting for the God-given right to look at porn on company time and not get sacked. Truly, he is a giant among pygmies.

Stephen Bush

QUOTE...

‘By almost any measure, the past decade has been a disaster for living standards.’ – Larry Elliott in The Guardian

UNQUOTE

ROCK ON, ATTILA

EC president Tosh McDonald shared the stage with punk poet Attila the Stockbroker at a benefit concert on 10 December in support of the Women’s Aid centre in Doncaster.

Selfie time for Tosh, Nikki and Attila

TRAVELLING LIGHT

Roger Galloway Smith, traveller, train driver, and BEME rep for District 3, marked Human Rights Day by wearing his traveller ethnicity pin – and ASLEF lanyard – in the cab of his Class 158.
Swan’s way

A swan patiently waits for a train to pass at a level crossing in Lincoln city centre. David Burton, who took pictures of the bird on his mobile phone, said: ‘The swan was waiting quietly for a couple of minutes until the barriers opened. It was calmly staring into space as if it does this all the time. It had earlier been spotted strolling down the High Street here.’

Swans are often seen on the Brayford waterfront in Lincoln, Britain’s oldest inland harbour, and the birds have historic associations with the city. Hugh of Avalon, Bishop of Lincoln from 1186-1200, when it was the largest diocese in England, was famous for his compassion for the poor and oppressed, and for being followed around by a white swan, which guarded him as he slept. Health and safety experts wryly observed that the swan behaved rather better than some cyclists and motorists.

The swan waits patiently at the level crossing. Photo: David Burton

Off the rails

ANTONIO CARLUCCIO, whose passion for fresh and simple Mediterranean food, as well as mushrooms, transformed British tastes in the 1980s and ’90s, was born in 1937, the fifth of sixth children, of a railway station master at Vietri sul Mare on the Amalfi coast. When he was seven months old the family moved to Castelmuzio Belbo in Piedmont where, during the Second World War, the railway station was a crossing point for soldiers from both sides. As the youngest son of the station master, Antonio was petted by both the partisans and the Wehrmacht. He recalled that the Germans – ‘good Germans, not the SS’ – would turn up at lunchtime to sample mama’s cooking while the partisans made the family hand over one of their two pigs. ‘The waiting room of the station was turned into a slaughterhouse, they killed the pig there and then. I heard the screams, went to bed, and in the morning there were only sausages left.’

MEL THORLEY, Longsight legend, muses ‘Off the Rails? Well, nearly! Entry and exit to Maplins was from the up side of the West Coast main line via the infamous north and south ends at 15mph. One morning Bardicman had checked his three-car 323 EMU and was exiting the carriage sidings, having received the tip from the south end. What Bardicman didn’t know was that he had two more three-car 323s attached to his back end! To the amazement of staff in the south cabin, car after car went over the boarded crossing, gathering speed with every bogie. Once Bardicman had his unit on the main line, he whacked open the controller and enjoyed the g-force. Meanwhile, back at the south end, they witnessed the last bogie (number 18) fly over the points at 60mph. At Stockport, the shunter uncoupled the back two, and the Ferryman took them back to Longsight. Bardicman continued south with his single unit, no harm done, lesson learnt…’

THE BMA conference debated a motion from the Bedfordshire local medical committee calling on the British Medical Association to urgently consider how GPs ‘can be supported to operate within a private, alternative model.’ Note that splendidly weasel word ‘supported’. It means ‘paid by the state, by you, the taxpayer’ but not in a state-run model National Health Service. In other words, encouraged by Jeremy Hunt, another way of privatising the NHS and making private profits at public expense. The motion was voted down.

WINSTON CHURCHILL exemplified the attitude of most Liberals and Conservatives in Britain – he had, after all, been a member of both political parties – towards the Russian revolution in October 1917. As Sean McMeekin reminds us in The Russian Revolution: A New History (Profile Books, £25), the old war horse growled: ‘One might as well legalise sodomy as recognise the Bolsheviks.’

ALEXANDRE DUMAS, in The Count of Monte Cristo, observes, ‘The difference between treason and patriotism is only a matter of dates.’ A fine line that some of those Catalan separatists detained in Spanish prisons might be pondering...

500 CLUB: K Christie, with number 83, won the December draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £400.
Boogaloo dudes carry the news

SLEF, until recently, had not organised around young members but, last January, we convened our Young Members’ Forum with one member, aged 35 or under, from each of our eight districts to examine the barriers young people face in becoming activists in the union, to provide support and encouragement to young members stepping forward, to develop strategies to promote the recruitment of younger men and women into the driving grade, and to engage in young member structures in the wider trade union movement.

To start this work the forum sent out a survey to all young ASLEF members. Campaigning priorities, the survey revealed, include the protection of drivers’ terms & conditions, getting a good work/life balance, and securing decent pensions. The results

Beer and badges

Battersea branch would like to thank GS Mick Whelan, EC1 Marz Colombini, DO1 Graham Morris and Southern company council for taking time out from their busy schedules dealing with the various parts of the Southern dispute to attend our beer and badges event. Mick, now a regular at our annual get together, presented long service badges to Nick Warner, Trevor Hale and Dave Lane (5 years); Rob Crouchley and Paul Shovlin (10); Micky Harbour, Jay Brook, Gary Warburton and Dave Gibbs (15); Steve Biggs (25); and Alex Holness (45). Thanks to all who attended for assisting with demolishing the buffet and for contributing to yet another successful presentation evening recognising the loyalty and support of our members. Special mention to Southern driver Ray Coates who was due to receive a 35 year badge but, unfortunately, missed the presentation due to illness.

GS Mick Whelan at the power station

Poorest suffer most

The poorest and most vulnerable in our society will be hardest hit by government changes to tax, social security and public spending reforms, a report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission has revealed. Disabled people, the elderly, and lone parents will suffer financial losses far greater under reforms introduced in recent years. Women will also suffer an annual loss double that of men, and black households will face a loss of income more than double that of white families. The EHRC warns of a ‘bleak future’ for those most in need and has urged the Tory government to ‘come clean’ and provide a full impact analysis of all current and future tax and social security policies.

IN SOLIDARITY

So proud to be able to stand and applaud the brave PCS strikers (on strike to try and save Sheffield Eastern Avenue Job Centre from closing) as they marched back into the office before it closes its doors. PCS members have been striking not for money, not for jobs, but to try and keep an important Job Centre open in one of the most needy areas. Solidarity! Tosh McDonald, EC president

IN LIKE FINN: Finn Brennan has been re-elected unopposed as District 8 Organiser. ‘I’d like to thank all the ASLEF members on London Underground and Tramlink for their support,’ said Finn, 53, who spent 23 years as a Northern line driver before being elected DO in 2013.

Seeking justice on All Hallows’ Eve

A year to the day that the current Conservative government continued to cover up the crimes of its predecessor under Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s by refusing to hold a public inquiry into the brutal attack by South Yorkshire police on striking miners at Orgreave, hundreds of activists attended the Death of Justice rally on Devonshire Green in Sheffield to remind people that the fight for truth goes on.

ASLEF activists don fluorescent masks for the Death of Justice march on Halloween

QUOTE...

‘One more term of Tory government should be enough to see off the NHS. It will not collapse overnight and ministers will not announce its abolition. Rather, it will go the way of dental services, where more and more practitioners went private until, in some areas, it has become almost impossible to find an NHS dentist.’ – Peter Wilby

UNQUOTE
What can you get for your new, shiny £1 coin?

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just £1 a week covers you, your partner and dependent children.
0300 333 2000 www.tbf.org.uk

Transport Benevolent Fund CIO, known as TBF, is a registered charity in England and Wales, 1160901, and Scotland, SC047016.

Iron and coal
Ian Thompson, ATW company council, spotted this on the wall of the Old Town Hall in Merthyr Tydfil where the Wales Labour Party policy forum was held. The Morning Chronicle, first published in 1769, ran essays by radicals such as William Hazlitt and Charles Lamb, employed Charles Dickens as a parliamentary correspondent, and published pieces by Henry Mayhew later collected between hard covers as London Labour and the London Poor.

Packed in like sardines
Passengers on Northern Rail fed up with being ‘packed in like sardines’ say overcrowding is the most important health and safety issue in their lives. Kate Anstee, of Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, has set up a Facebook campaign group called ‘Northern: Ruining People’s Lives On A Daily Basis’ to push passengers’ concerns on social media.

‘Overcrowding is a massive problem. All too often we are faced with delays, cancellations, overflowing out of use toilets, windows that don’t open with our faces pressed against the glass whilst the person behind you is having a panic attack in your ear. An experience that is frequently dangerous and wouldn’t pass health and safety standards, that ruins our day before we’ve even got to work.’

AIRDRIE BRANCH
A new branch has been set up in District 2 – Airdrie branch No 276. Airdrie depot drivers will be moved from Yoker branch into Airdrie.

QUOTE...
‘George Orwell is in the wrong place. Ever since I challenged the last director general with the idea that the BBC should celebrate Orwell and his journalistic values – and was told he was “too left-wing” – I have known the BBC is fearful of its political masters, who hold the purse strings.’ – Joan Bakewell in The New Statesman

…UNQUOTE

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

Not so fast with the marmalade, Paddington
Packed in like sardines
Passengers are fed up of strap hanging

On the wall in English and Welsh

QuotE…
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Andy live on Five

Andy Botham was interviewed by Nicky Campbell and Rachel Burden on BBC Radio 5 Live’s breakfast programme on Wednesday 15 November about the effect on train drivers of someone taking his or her own life on the railway line.

More than 270 people committed suicide on Britain’s railway last year and the Samaritans, Network Rail, and the British Transport Police have launched a new campaign to encourage passengers to talk to anyone on a station platform they see acting strangely or who appears to be vulnerable. ‘A little talk can be all it takes to help start someone on the journey to recovery,’ says Sarah Wilson, who was talked out of taking her life by just such a conversation.

Rachel Burden told listeners that her brother was killed by a train 30 years ago. ‘His was an accident, but I’ve often thought about the impact it had on the driver.’

‘You say you can remember, Rachel, and I can guarantee that the driver involved in that case will remember it as plain as day, too,’ said Andy. ‘It’s the most devastating incident you will ever be involved in and something you didn’t expect when you became a train driver. It never leaves you.

‘You remember every second of it. The speed you’re driving a train means that by the time you see something it’s virtually impossible to stop before you actually make impact, because of the braking system. By the time you see somebody standing in front of your train, you do everything you possibly can to encourage them to move out of the way, by blowing the horn, you put the emergency brake in, but then you just sit looking at the impact and everything goes into slow motion. That image is replayed in your head time and time again over the years. It’s the worst thing you can imagine.’

Andy explained the process immediately after the incident, and how ASLEF has worked with management over the years to improve support for drivers.

‘Drivers deal with the immediate moment perfectly because that’s what we’re trained to do. It’s afterwards. You’ve got nobody to talk to because nobody knows what you’ve been through. They don’t even know what it’s like to drive a train, never mind to be in that uncontrolled situation where you can see something going to happen that is really, really bad, and you can’t stop it.’

‘The doctor will sign you off work for a period of time but, eventually, you’ve got to go back to work, because that’s your living, and drive the same trains over the same section of track, day in, day out, and the impact wears away over the years but it’s always still there. And there are days when it’s the same sort of light, the same sort of day, and it comes flying back to you…

‘Anything we can do to stop somebody taking their own life and anything we can do to stop another train driver today – and the chances are there will be a train driver today who will have to go through this process – is worth trying.’

****

PASSENGERS IGNORE THE BEEP

Passengers are putting themselves in danger by rushing on to carriages as train doors shut, according to a new study by the Rail Safety and Standards Board. Three in four commuters admit ignoring the door closing alarm and trying to board at the last moment, wrongly believing the doors will automatically reopen if they detect an obstruction. This has led to an increasing number of ‘trap and drag’ incidents in which passengers have been caught in the doors and pulled along the platform, causing serious injuries.

EXPRESS DELIVERY

The Metropolitan Intercity Railway Company in Japan has apologised after its Tsukuba Express service left Minami Nagareyama station, Tokyo, for Tsukuba 20 seconds early. The company said ‘we sincerely apologise for the inconvenience caused’ after the train was scheduled to leave at 9:44:40 departed at 9:44:20. ‘The crew did not sufficiently check the departure time and performed the departure operation,’ said ASLEF.

Eight men in

‘It’s been a few years but, finally, we have a full complement for our Black and Ethnic Minority Representatives’ Committee,’ says ASLEF’s equalities adviser, Lee James. ‘From left to right they are Roger Galloway-Smith (D3), Surjit Puee (D4), Trevor Robinson (D8); Ed D’Bell (D1); Aaron Clapp (D6); Floyd Doyle (DS); Paul Patmore (D2) and Peter Acheampong (D7)

DRIVERLESS CARS CAN CAUSE PILE-UPS

Driverless cars are at risk from hackers intent on causing accidents. MPs have been warned. Matthew Channon of Exeter University, giving evidence to Parliament on the Automated and Electric Vehicles Bill, said hackers who remotely access the controls of driverless vehicles will be able to cause fatal pile-ups on motorways. Because autonomous vehicles are wirelessly connected to each other criminals who successfully hack the systems of one car will be able to access the controls of others.

SHELTER FROM THE STORM

What do you do with a big empty railway station on the one day of the year that no trains run? Turn it into a shelter for the homeless.

Euston station, complete with yuletide decorations, and tables laid for a festive dinner, provided food and shelter for 200 homeless people on Christmas Day with 30 volunteers from Network Rail working alongside helpers from St Mungo’s and Streets Kitchen to bring a little warmth to those most in need.
Comprehensive legal cover to keep you and your family on track

ASLEF members get free, specialist legal advice and representation for:
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www.thompsonstradeunion.law/aslef  standing up for you
Would you know we’re riding on the Marrakech express

KERRY CASSIDY, Women’s Representatives Committee member for District 7, reports from the ITF women transport workers’ conference in Marrakech

I CAN hear the backlash now. ‘Women drivers? On a jolly! We don’t need equal rights, we already have them. A driver is a driver is a driver…’ et cetara et cetara! Yes, train driving may be one of the best high paid jobs for women – and one of the most equally paid jobs in the UK, according to the Office for National Statistics – but worldwide there are still gender discrepancies in pay, conditions and the roles women can do.

IMPORTANT WORK

That’s why it’s important we work with other unions around the world to highlight the problem and bring other countries up to our standards, and to learn from countries that have overtaken us on issues such as paid leave for sufferers of domestic violence and challenging job losses due to automation.

And that’s why Alison Miller (ScotRail and D2 rep) and Kerry Cassidy (GWR and D7 rep) went as delegates from the UK to the International Transport Workers’ Federation women transport workers’ conference on 7 and 8 November in Marrakech, Morocco, joining 250 delegates representing 730,492 women in 624 affiliated unions that have female transport workers as members. We were there to share our ideas and bring back initiatives from countries with similar issues and which are working elsewhere in the world.

The two priority themes were building women transport workers’ economic power – ending gender-based occupational segregation in the global transport industry – and building the power of trade union action to end violence against women transport workers globally, regionally, nationally and sectorally.

Across the two days there were many speakers of different genders talking about the different issues that affected them. All transport sectors were represented and there were translators for the larger represented languages, meaning that the whole conference was conducted in nine different languages.

Miloudi Moukharik, general secretary of the Union Marocaine du Travail, gave the opening speech. He is an important person in the trade union movement in Morocco because he was an elected member of the Moroccan government from 1997-2015, the first time workers here were represented in parliament and government. He helped establish a 50:50 split of men to women in the parliamentary transport group, and the union ensures there is a woman represented at every level in the organisation. For a country perceived as not being very Westernised, and not at the cutting edge of either workers’ rights or equal rights for women, that was a surprise to many delegates.

Kalthoum Barkallah, vice-chair of the ITF women committee, is from this region. She talked about how women in work have grown in numbers here and how representation has become stronger; there are now female general secretaries in trade unions in Arab countries. Given the economic, political and social issues, and the way some women have been threatened with violence, and been called back to their homes and told to stop working, unions are organising women to challenge discrimination and putting pressure on governments to end gender-based violence and discrimination.

BASIC RIGHTS

Amal El Amri, deputy national secretary of the UMT, talked of the progress in Morocco – they have had female train drivers here for 17 years – and of significant progress elsewhere in the Arab region with the lifting of the ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia and their strategic vision that, by 2030, women will be able to play an equal role in society.

Women have struggled to ensure even basic rights here, and without the struggle of women in other countries, talking and coming together, this progress would not have been possible. Some Islamist governments do not pay any attention to labour rights, human rights, the right to organise or bargain collectively. This has opened up these countries to trade because labour costs are lower, but workers’ conditions are being dictated, not challenged.

A big challenge we face in the future is automation and how it may challenge decent working conditions for women, more so than men, due to the type of jobs being replaced. There were discussions about recruiting younger members through ITF campaigns, with a focus on increasing membership in sub-sectors, and being able to equip and train women to empower and encourage them to take leading positions in the workplace and in the union movement.

We don’t have it as bad in the UK, gender rights wise. We may have one of the most equally paid jobs but we still have bullying and harassment issues we need to deal with. By other countries taking the lead preventing gender-based violence to workers we can use some of the tools and ideas shared at the conference to add to our own Mind the Gag campaign, to help challenge offensive behaviour from staff and passengers, too.

In the evening we went to a dinner organised by the UMT and were picked up from the conference venue by horse drawn carriages. The unions are so strong that even these drivers are organised and union members. Luckily, though, the fare was picked up by the UMT as there is no real price structure to journeys by horse, tuk tuk, or taxi, nor any queuing system either, so getting anywhere is a case of finding a taxi queue and haggling with each driver until you get an acceptable price (so although they are organised, in the union sense, the whole pricing structure and job allocation seems open to abuse by the person willing to work the cheapest).

IDEA FOR AAD

The conference closed with a group photo and, impressively, the majority were prepared to wear the provided red shirts. I would love to see the same commitment from delegates at AAD to all stay until the very end, wear something provided that is not their normal colour, and be in a fit enough state to be organised and appear in a photo. Perhaps first day photos, rather than the last, are a safer bet for the majority of our members at our events!
The road to hell

Companies such as Uber, Amazon and Deliveroo have been condemned for using artificial self-employment to deprive their workers of their rights, evade their corporate responsibilities, and cheat the Revenue. GREGOR GALL, Professor of Industrial Relations at the University of Bradford, lifts the lid on the bogus self-employment scam in pursuit of bigger profits.

If there is one clear way to get your head around what ‘neo-liberalism’ means, it’s the current plague of bogus self-employment. Neo-liberalism is the hard-right ideology – propounded, in the face of all the evidence, by conservative politicians, free market economists, greedy bankers, and ‘devil take the hindmost’ businessmen since the high water mark of Milton Friedman, Ronald Reagan, and Margaret Thatcher – that believes ‘the market knows best’ and, consequently, should be left to determine, well, pretty much everything. It means rolling back state rules and regulations, be it over prices or profits, and letting firms do pretty much whatever they like. A capitalist Wild West which, when applied to employment, means ending longstanding, and hard-fought-for, employment protections and terms and conditions.

Governments since 1979 have either, at worst, advanced the neo-liberal agenda or, at best, done nothing to stop it in its tracks. And, in the last five years especially, many employers hit on a great wheeze that not even the most ardent Thatcherite could imagine – don’t downgrade your staff and roll back their t&c’s, go one better and make them artificially self-employed.

REALLY, REALLY GREEDY

You get to keep control over your workers – what they do and when and how they do it – by having a commercial contract with them. But you don’t have to pay them the minimum wage, pay them sick pay, offer paid holidays, make contributions to their pensions or pay your share towards their tax and national insurance. In other words, all the things that, in a civilised world, good employers should do. And, if you’re really, really greedy, you get them to provide their own clothing, transport and tools to do your job for you.

In other words, you transfer a lot of your costs, and your risks, to your workers, while you watch the number at the bottom of your balance sheet rise. Workers are dependent on you as their only customer – it’s a ‘monopoly’ because you are the only buyer of their labour – so you still call the shots. This is what Uber, Deliveroo, Amazon and all the others worked out – as have construction companies using so-called ‘umbrella firms’.

This artificial form of self-employment is so critical to their profit generating ‘business model’ that an endless stream of employers have contested any challenges, going from employment tribunal to employment appeal tribunal and from the High Court to the Supreme Court, paying millions of pounds in fees to lawyers. They can afford it, of course. Because of all the money they have already saved – and hope still to save – by placing bogus self-employment at the heart of their brazen business model.

Unions such as the GMB and the Independent Workers’ Union have shown, in court, that these workers are not genuinely self-employed as they have no meaningful freedom over what they do and when they do it. But the rub is that these victories apply only to those taking the case to court. Employers are not compelled to understand that the court judgment applies to the complainant’s co-workers.

BOGUS SELF-EMPLOYMENT

And as necessity is the mother of invention, some companies have devised new ways of getting around these legal victories in order to protect their profits. Deliveroo has altered its de facto employment contracts; by allowing its workers the right to substitute someone else to do their work, in law these workers are now deemed to be self-employed. CitySprint has issued new contracts claiming they are merely commercial contracts. Other companies are expected to follow their lead.

This shows that while some limited advances can be made in the courts, under existing laws, it isn’t easy to protect workers from bogus self-employment. There is a role for campaigning directly against the likes of Uber and Deliveroo in terms of their trade and to have a negative impact on their brand and reputation through social media and boycott campaigns.

A RAFT OF RIGHTS

But if we want to make long-term, and deep-seated, change that protects workers and institutes basic rights for all, then a change in basic legislation is needed. This can only come from one party. While Theresa May – the Maybot – has a robotic instinct to repeat her same mantra, it is Labour that has the political will to institute the basic rules that over many years have been eroded by corporate responsibility.

The only party willing and capable of delivering a progressive agenda to end bogus self-employment is a Labour Party led by Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell. Looking back at Labour’s ‘for the many, not the few’ manifesto for the general election last year, they not only pledged to deal with this issue but also institute a raft of other rights to prevent companies finding it worthwhile to walk down the neo-liberal road.

Hopefully, in 2018, Corbyn and McDonnell will get their chance to implement these policies with the keys to 10 and 11 Downing Street. Because only then will we begin to have a society that starts putting people before profit.
ACHAEL Maskell is steeped in the Labour Party, in the labour movement, and in the people’s flag of socialism. She was born on 5 July – ‘the day the National Health Service was created’ – and, when asked when she first became interested in politics, admits ‘When I was very young’ and indicates, with her hand, that she means while still at primary school. She remembers James Callaghan, Labour Prime Minister from 1976 to 1979, and has lived and breathed politics – with a burning sense of the social injustices of this country – ever since.

Perhaps it’s not surprising. Her mother was dedicated to the National Health Service – she, too, was a physiotherapist – and her father was a trade union rep. It was, though, her uncle, Terence Morris, who really inspired her. He was an ‘outstanding’ Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the London School of Economics, according to Louis Blom-Cooper in a study of English prisons, and who campaigned tirelessly against capital punishment and life imprisonment.

‘I kind of grew up with politics, and a burning sense of injustice, all around me,’ says Rachael in her office close to the Commons chamber, and the whips’ office, at the Palace of Westminster. Those injustices multiplied after the election of Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government in 1979: ‘So many things about Thatcher – I saw the unemployment figures going up, and all the homeless people without a roof above their heads. My own father, with the shipping industry collapsing, spent some time travelling away from home. Thatcher politicised – and radicalised – a lot of young people in this country.’

When New Labour, under Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, and Peter Mandelson, was in opposition, from 1994 to 1997, and then in government, from 1997 to 2010, the party refused to use the ‘n’ word (nationalisation) or the ‘s’ word (socialism) and treated the trade unions and working-class party members – those ‘horny-handed sons of toil’ – as an embarrassing uncle at a family bash.

Now the party has a leader, in Jeremy Corbyn, and a Shadow Chancellor, in John McDonnell, who are proud to be socialists, proud to work with the labour movement, and proud to put a policy – the public ownership of Britain’s railways – in the party manifesto at the general election in June.

The tired mantras rejected by the electorate in 2010 but still pushed by the Blairites in Progress today that ‘the market knows best’, that ‘private-public partnerships’ are the best way for the state to do business, and that ‘the best offer to the electorate’ is that ‘we can manage the market better than the Tories’ have been dumped in the recycling bin. Now we have politicians on the Labour front bench who are happy to tell the emperor he isn’t wearing any clothes.

‘The neo-liberal economic agenda has failed, completely, creating greater inequality across the country, second only to the United States, when, as a nation, we should be creating greater equality. Why should one person be valued more than another? Everyone is born with talents and gifts. We want greater equality, not greater inequality, in our country.’

She fears that – despite Tory claims that the NHS is safe in their hands – Jeremy Hunt is determined to privatise our National Health Service. ‘He said, in 1987, that he wanted to see the privatisation of the NHS and every policy decision he has taken has been in that direction.’

The NHS, created by Aneurin Bevan in 1948, was one of the landmark achievements of Clement Attlee’s transformational post-war Labour government and is still, today, despite being starved of money by the Tories, and being fleeced by the big drugs companies and private health care providers, the model for how a modern country should run its health care system.

‘As a health care professional, I know how important the NHS is to keep you alive and well and not to have to worry about how you afford it. The NHS has tackled some of the fundamental economic and health inequalities in Britain – as Nye said, it shouldn’t matter whether you’re a duke or a dustman, and I’ve worked on wards where patients, bed by bed, come from completely opposite spheres of life – and that’s why Tories like Jeremy Hunt don’t like it.

‘It’s at the heart of my politics and my socialism. I see the NHS as a mechanism to address the huge inequalities in our society and I see, in the NHS, people giving of themselves, acts of extraordinary kindness and love, every day, and that stands out to me about what we want our society to be.’

She is scathing about those on the right, here and in the US, who think people should pay through health insurance – for their own health care.

‘Health insurance doesn’t work – as the social policy researcher Richard Titmuss said, “A service for the poor is a poor service” – while a National Health Service brings the wealth of the nation into one place. There are real challenges facing the health service but for the sick to be used to make a profit for the private sector is, I think, disgusting.’

Rachael is refreshing, down to earth, one of a new generation of young and gifted politicians.
who are in touch, rather than out of touch, with the electorate. Many Tories you meet in the corridors of power – and not a few New Labour Blairites, too – stand on their sense of entitlement, surrounded by sycophants in their own little echo chamber, never travelling without a phalanx of special advisers and a sense of their own self-importance.

‘I’m here to advance the views of my constituents. Sometimes to challenge the system. Standing for Parliament – and I used to talk, at length, to my mum and dad and uncle about how to effect change in this country – was a chance to continue to do what I was doing as a trade union official, to be an advocate and a voice for my members.’

She admits she is not someone who always conforms to what is expected, and she found the institutional culture of the Palace of Westminster curious. ‘It’s very easy to become complicit – I conform to what is expected, and she found the

FACT FILE

**RACHAEL MASKELL** was born at Winchester in 1972 and brought up in Highcliffe on the Dorset/Hampshire border. Her mum was a physiotherapist in the NHS and her dad was in the merchant navy, then worked at Southampton docks.

She went to local state schools before studying for a degree in physiotherapy at the University of East Anglia. She spent one-third of her time in clinical practice and graduated in 1994.

Rachael worked in the NHS for 20 years – she is the first physiotherapist to become a Member of Parliament – at hospitals in Norwich and Barnet, ‘mainly in neuro rehab, treating stroke patients, and respiratory patients, people who were very sick, very acute, often in intensive care.’

She became a local rep, then a regional organiser, and then a national officer, first for the MSF, which merged with the AEU to form Amicus, which in turn merged with the T&G to become Unite. She was national equalities and diversity officer at Amicus and Unite’s national officer for the community and not-for-profit sector.

Rachael was elected to Parliament as Labour and Co-operative Party MP for York Central in May 2015 with 20,212 votes, a majority of 6,716 over the Conservatives with UKIP in third place, the Greens in fourth and the Liberal Democrats in fifth.

Jeremy Corbyn appointed her as Shadow Defence Minister for Armed Forces Personnel and Veterans in September 2015. Nine months later he promoted her to the shadow cabinet as Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, a position from which she resigned ahead of the vote (which carried a three-line whip) to trigger Article 50.

Rachael was re-elected to Parliament in June 2017 with 34,594 votes, a majority of 18,575 over the Conservatives with the Lib Dems in third. She returned to the front bench as Shadow Rail Minister in July 2017.
Report

**RMS goes Posh**

**BILL DALE, Retired Members’ Section, Chingford branch, reports from the RMS annual general meeting in Peterborough**

This year our AGM was held in Peterborough (we agree a different area each year to give an equal chance for members to attend). Ray Jackson, the chair, welcomed members and called for a minute’s silence in memory of former colleagues, including ex-GS Neil Milligan and Rodney Bickerstaffe, ex-GS of NUPE and Unison, and a good friend and supporter of ASLEF.

GS Mick Whelan said ASLEF’s membership has increased and our finances are sound. He reflected on the Beeching cuts, when many routes were lost, which could have played a vital role today, with developments transport links. Mick mentioned that the TUC has stopped funding courses for training reps and health & safety reps, but said the union has options to overcome this.

On industrial matters, Mick talked to us about the long-running dispute on Southern Rail, and DOO, the Night Tube in London and continuing problems at the troubled FOC DB Cargo. He also talked about the government going back on its promises about electrification, and concern about the increase of sexual assaults, knife crime, and violent offences on the railway.

**GOOD NEWS ON PENSIONS**

On pensions, it’s good news. We are in a favourable position with no increase in rates and payments remain as planned. Mick then made reference to the political scene and the 1.5 million jobs lost in public services. Congratulations are in order for our officers elected to positions on the Labour Party NEC and the TUC. Finally, he said ASLEF policy is to move the retirement age, currently 65, to 55 to make way for the recruitment of a younger generation.

Neil Baines, a specialist in asbestos claims at Thompsons solicitors in Nottingham, said the World Health Organisation recognises the UK has one of the highest death rates related to asbestos – 25,000 every year, predicted to rise to 90,000. Apart from the railway, asbestos is found in many buildings, including schools and hospitals, and will affect another generation. BR staff affected include those who worked on steam, diesel, including Deltics, also carriage and wagon. Neil spoke about client care and warned people not to go to a high street solicitor as they take 25% of your claim and that’s a rip off.

Cases taken to the Royal Courts of Justice in London have been dealt with quickly; the more detailed the evidence, the higher the compensation, and although cases are getting more difficult, those from drivers who have worked on locomotives are winnable. To achieve a successful claim you must report any illness identified as asbestos-related immediately. Do not wait! And it’s important you are well represented.

Neil Duncan-Jordan, national officer of the National Pensioners’ Convention, said the NPC has gone from strength to strength with more than 1.5 million members. One in six pensioners are living in poverty while the government claims Britain’s senior citizens have never been better off! And it looks as if the Cridland report – calling for the state retirement age to be pushed back to 68 – should be brought forward.

**SOMETHING FOR NOTHING**

As for social care, those needing home visits only get 15 minutes and there is a postcode lottery on how that service is delivered. More than 80% of care homes are now in the private sector and there is a real need for local authorities to build more care homes. Universal benefits, the winter fuel allowance, and concessions such as bus passes and the TV licence, are not being attacked because pensions are so low – we are second from bottom in the European league table of pension provision.

Neil called for solidarity between the generations. ‘It’s wrong to say that pensioners are getting something for nothing. Pensioners currently contribute £40 billion plus to the government – more than they get back. Pensioners are not a drain but an asset.’ And he called for a state pension of £200 per week.

Tony Holdsworth from District 6 spoke about ASLEF’s new Young Workers’ Forum. He informed us of his aspirations for young members to become more active by attending branch meetings to help with shaping the future and to continue all the hard work and battles won by ASLEF members who are active now, and like the RMS in the past. Tony said ‘ASLEF is a unique union, which has allowed those, like me, to enjoy good wages and conditions.’ RMS members responded very warmly to Tony’s report and wished him well in his endeavours for such an imaginative setting up as the Young Members’ Forum.

**ANY IDEAS? SEND THEM TO LES**

Ray Jackson reflected on the work of the RMS committee and national secretary Les Muir gave his report, detailing the various meetings, marches, district councils and social events attended. He said that if any member had any ideas, or any concerns, you should write to him. Finally, he made a plea to members for the RMS to attend branches to give a report. Treasurer Alan Taylor said the RMS is now in a more stable financial position thanks to the establishment of the 500 Club set up in 2011, adding that we still need more members, both retired and active, to join. The revenue helps us fund activities – like the weekend forums and our AGM – which benefit members. The RMS is holding a second forum in April in Staffordshire. There being no new nominations, it was moved and seconded that the current members of the RMS committee be re-elected en bloc.
ASLEF in action

ASLEF is affiliated to the Labour Party and, as a modern trade union with a 21st century agenda, adopts a twin track approach – on the political and industrial fronts – to advance the interests of all our members.

We engage industrially with the train and freight operating companies to secure the best terms and conditions for train drivers in England, Scotland and Wales, just as we have been doing since we were formed in 1880. And we engage politically at Westminster, Holyrood and Cardiff Bay because politicians make the laws and set the rules and regulations – and the financial parameters – within which the TUCs and FOCs work.

That’s why ASLEF was in action at the London Labour Party regional conference at Congress House in central London on 25 and 26 November.

Marz Colombini, EC member for District 1, was our delegate at the composite meeting which got this motion on the agenda, proposed by the TSSA and seconded by Kingston & Surbiton CLP. District 8 Organiser Finn Brennan spoke for the motion, which was adopted and is now London Labour Party policy.

‘Conference calls on Transport for London to continue to invest heavily in transport in London, with particular regard for increased affordability and accessibility for passengers, capacity, and secure employment.

‘Conference notes that the Conservative government has ended TfL’s operating grant. The withdrawal of the annual £750m DfT grant has led to TfL needing to make savings of £5.8 billion over five years, resulting in delays or cancellations to upgrades on the Northern and Jubilee lines, and important station capacity projects; cutting hundreds of jobs as part of a TfL transformation exercise; thousands of other jobs being placed under review, causing uncertainty for staff; significant sums of money being lost in severance payments; and staff cuts compromising TfL’s ability to provide a quality service.

‘Conference resolves that the London Labour Party should, through the council elections, launch a public campaign to reinstate TfL’s funding from the DfT; to bring TfL in line with other authorities and pay it from vehicle excise duty collected in the capital for the maintenance of the road network.

‘Currently fewer than 1 in 10 London Underground stations are wheelchair accessible, and alternative transport options do not exist. We call for a radical and rapid project of creating step-free access to rail and Tube trains to improve services, increase employment, and recognise the needs of disabled passengers.

‘Conference notes with concern reports that the implementation of Crossrail 2, scheduled for 2033, may be delayed by seven years or more. TfL has stated that 17 Underground stations face chronic overcrowding by the 2030s if Crossrail 2 is not completed on time. We note that Crossrail 2 and other public transport projects play an important role in London reaching its targets to reduce air pollution, which are currently at illegal levels. Strain on transport on the north–south spine, with inadequate station and line capacity, might have to be endured for more than 20 years. London needs an integrated transport system – which is currently undermined by the franchising system. We call on all London reps to press for the implementation of Crossrail 2 on schedule.

‘Conference believes that in order to deliver and maintain a safe, reliable and robust public transport system for London it is key to ensure that there are sufficient properly trained and qualified staff across all sectors of that system. We welcome the well-deserved praise given to front line staff by the London Mayor and others for their heroic efforts during the terrorist attacks on our city, and in keeping London moving on a daily basis. We note that if suitably trained staff are not available to deal with evacuations or emergencies then the consequences for public safety will be severe.

‘Conference notes with concern the large number of agency and contract staff employed in front line positions within London’s rail network, and across the capital’s transport industry as a whole. We call on TfL to take a lead by eliminating agency and contract roles for front line staff in all TfL branded operations and in those over which it has any degree of direct control and replacing these roles with permanent directly-employed staff. This would enhance the safety of the network and contribute to the effective application of agreed security procedures by ensuring all staff are properly qualified, as well as ensuring that low paid workers are offered permanent roles rather than being forced to work under exploitative and precarious agency conditions.

‘We welcome the recent revocation of the licence for Uber. We support this action as we support fair employment for workers and safe and accessible service for customers. We support the unionisation of workers and the legal cases taken on their behalf’.

Swing low, sweet chariot

Peter Grant of Manchester Piccadilly

No 1 reports from the RMs forum

A

The junior hand it falls to me to report on the Retired Members’ Section forum at Low Hall, Scalby, North Yorkshire from 3 to 5 November.

GS Mick Whelan kicked off proceedings with a wide-ranging speech. He explained the situation over DOO and Southern Rail. Mick stated that ASLEF policy hasn’t changed but the attacks on ASLEF by the Tory government and the Department for Transport were unprecedented. The Southern franchise is a management contract so all costs arising from the dispute were picked up by the DfT. ASLEF was attacked in the courts where the DfT attempted to bankrupt our union. ASLEF activists and officers were subjected to unprecedented injunctions and restrictions. Costs reached the thick end of £1 million. The EC had to make some very tough decisions, along with the membership on Southern, and Mick paid tribute to how hard they fought for 18 difficult months. The importance of electing a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour government is vital if these legal attacks are to end.

On Saturday we heard from Steve Howley, brigade secretary, North Yorkshire FBU, who painted a frightening picture of how Tory cuts – 10,000 jobs axed – are having a direct impact on their ability to respond to incidents, putting lives at risk. We also heard from Bill Adams, regional secretary, Yorkshire & Humber TUC, who addressed issues around the pay cap, the Trade Union Act, Brexit and DOO. Helen Tomlin from Thompson solicitors talked about the continuing deadly legacy of asbestos and explained the importance of completing the special register forms from Thompsons.

Our final speaker was our president, Tosh McDonald, who gave another wide-ranging speech in his usual forceful style. He covered Brexit – it was correct, he said, to leave – the 100th anniversary of the Russian revolution, Trump – ‘a noise your arse makes’ – the Spanish Civil War, and the problems in Catalonia.

I would like to thank the RMS committee for putting on such a fantastic and educational weekend. I would also like to thank all those who attended for their comradeship in showing a new junior hand – and Lost Boy – the ropes.
King’s Lynn stars

SLEF branch

111 King’s Lynn held its 111 years old anniversary and long service awards dinner at the Riverside restaurant. Branch chair Andrew Sweeney welcomed a large number of members, wives and partners and extended special thanks to GS Mick Whelan, DO Nigel Gibson and EC member Howard Kaye for attending.

Mick said it was a pleasure to attend, particularly to pay tribute to members who have given long service to the railway industry and to our trade union. They included Paul Pearson (45 years); Bryn Griffiths, Nick Brown, depot h&s rep for 25 years, and Mark Steele, local level rep for 37 years and branch secretary since 1983, (all 40 years); branch vice-chair Derek Stock (35); Christian Lanchester and branch chair Andrew Sweeney (10).

The GS extended a special welcome to Paul Barnes, who is suffering with pancreatic cancer, but was able to join us to pick up his 30 year badge. A special thank you here to branches who responded so magnificently to our branch appeal on behalf of Paul and his family. Peter Chapman, whose driving career was cut short very early due to health issues but, thanks to the support of ASLEF, in particular the GS, retained a role on the railway, was presented with his 15 year badge. We should be very proud of the way ASLEF looks after its members. Thanks to everyone who attended a great occasion and to the staff at the Riverside for their superb hospitality.

Mark Steele, branch secretary

Eaton rifles

DB Schenker’s decision to demolish the train crew accommodation at Toton resulted in our retired members removing a plaque dedicated to the memory of John Eaton, who was a senior trustee of our Society, and secretary of District 6 council for many years. The plaque was consecrated by the railway chaplain and unveiled by the then GS Derek Fullick. John was an extremely popular and hard-working ASLEF officer. We felt it important to rescue the plaque, and to find a permanent place to display it. That’s why we were thrilled when the GS, Mick Whelan, accepted it at head office. Thanks, Mick.

Sean Madden and Jim Canning

Upcoming events

- **ASHFORD – THURSDAY 11 JANUARY**
  Southeastern retired and working members’ reunion from 11.00 at Ashford railway club, Beaver Lane, Ashford, Kent. Had to be this date – only one available – and don’t forget to dig deep when the raffle comes round as that’s what pays the bill! Remember this is your reunion; use it or lose it...

- **CRICKLEWOOD – FRIDAY 2 MARCH**
  Cricklewood reunion from 12.00 at the RAF Association Club, Ashburnham Road, Bedford, MK40 1EA, opposite the station.

- **EASTLEIGH – SATURDAY 10 MARCH**
  Annual reunion 12.00 to 16.00 at the Eastleigh Railway Institute, 2 Romsey Road, Eastleigh, Hampshire, SO50 9FE. All welcome. Buffet provided.

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

Wishing Wells

Derby branch held a retirement presentation for East Midlands Trains drivers Chris Wells and Chris Nutty. ASLEF certificates, tankards and coal trains were presented to both members by our EC member Dave Calfe and DO6 Dicky Fisher. A special appreciation certificate and badge were also presented to Bro Nutty in recognition of his many years as EMT union learning rep. Chris has also been a regular contributor to the Journal and was instrumental in promoting union learning in the workplace, regionally and nationally, for ASLEF members. We wish them both well in well-deserved retirement.

Eamonn Tague, branch secretary

Mick receives the plaque commemorating John Eaton from Jim Canning, Bob Peach, Peter Mee, Sean Madden and Reg Sargeant

Dave Calfe and Dicky Fisher present certificates to Chris Nutty (above) and Chris Wells (below)
Mick Holder turns back time to January 1918

JRR reflects on the new, and old, year in the Journal 100 years ago

VERY BELLS ARE SILENCED

New Year 1918 will not be heralded in the time-honoured way, for the very bells are silenced. Most of us will be glad to see the old year gone. For many homes it has been a time of bereavement and bitter sacrifice. The entry into Jerusalem does not compensate for the pitiable state of Russia, nor does the raising of new armies compensate for the submarine menace. These underwater sharks are trying to cut off our lifeline. Great Britain has got to depend on its own resources for its civilisation, and if it allows those resources to be controlled by a few monopolists then the people deserve to be lined up in margarine queues for the rest of their natural lives.

The dying year reveals potatoes as the only plentiful thing. Butter is almost unseen outside the big hotels, and tea and margarine are hard to come by. So far I have avoided queues by falling back on dripping, but they tell me even that is getting short. For a new laid egg I paid 6d in a cafe today, and lemons are 7d each.

Life is altogether meaner and more restricted than it was two years ago, for war is draining the life out of the nation. We are bereft of many of the joys of life: the bright lights of evening, the cheap excursions, the unlimited meals, and the real value of money.

Yet all of them are small in comparison to the fearful discomfort of the soldier in the trenches. Tonight I have been talking with a soldier who had endured Christmas at the front four times, been wounded and been sick; but still he must fight on. He told me of unspeakable horrors, and of the quiet resignation of men, and as he talked all our losses and discomforts seemed small. Yet we live in a time of strange and unnatural prosperity where money is tossed around without much regard. There is a very big population which is newly rich. More diamonds are sold and more fur coats worn than ever before in England.

Beer and badges

The highlight of Ashford’s beer and badges evening, at the BRSA club on 7 December, was the presentation of a 50 year ASLEF badge to probably one of the most notable drivers in the south-east, Neville Marchant. District Organiser Graham Morris, who chaired a Q&A session prior to the Ashford AGM, made the presentation. Other awards on the night were made to Steve Macmillan (10 years) and Lee Kearney and Ian Scrace (both 15).

Rob Kilkie, branch reporter

MP at branch AGM

Karen Lee, Labour MP for Lincoln, joins the imps

It was a pleasure to welcome Lincoln MP Karen Lee, DO Nigel Gibson, lead officer Dicky Fisher, EC member Howard Kaye and company council rep Pete Coles to Lincoln’s AGM at the Golden Eagle on 3 December. Karen, still a registered nurse, who works shifts on a regular basis, donating the money she earns to charities and deserving organisations, gave an inspiring speech. Her dad was on the railway, she likes to use public transport, and is well aware of the problems passengers face. Nigel wished John and Alice Drabble, who both retired on 21 November, a successful retirement and thanked them for all their efforts for ASLEF and the branch over the years. Pete talked about Sundays as part of the working week. Lincoln, Boston and Norwich started working Sundays as part of the working week from 10 December for drivers who opted in.

Richy Doran, branch secretary

Barry to Cardiff branch

Barry branch is now closed. All remaining members have been moved into Cardiff branch.

Don’t let it cost you your job!

Thornaby branch had a get together to present recently retired drivers Martin Joyce, Graham Lumsden, Keith Heseltine, Rodger Sonley, Toni Joly, Mick Dowling and Ewan Carmichael with their ASLEF certificates.

Geoff Burton, branch secretary
CHRIS JORDAN DRIVER FOR ENGLAND STARS
A celebration of Chris Jordan’s life was held at North Devon crematorium, Barnstaple, on Thursday 2 November. Chris was diagnosed with terminal cancer early last year, and passed away in October after a very courageous fight. His courage throughout was an inspiration to all of us who knew him.

Chris led life to the full. He served in the Army, was coach driver for the England football team, and worked for Virgin Atlantic in the early days and used his priv tickets to travel the world with his wife Caron.

He started his railway career with Gatwick Express where he and Caron both became drivers. He moved to Virgin West Coast at Euston, then First Great Western at Exeter, and then CrossCountry in Plymouth which allowed him to return to his home town Bude, where he wanted his children Erin and Kian to enjoy their childhood the way he had. Chris was a jovial, honest, hardworking family guy, commonly found with coffee and fag, always with time for a chat with colleagues. It was testament to his character that family, friends, and colleagues came from far and wide to pay their respects.

During his illness Plymouth and Exeter depots rallied round and a collection by all grades and a football match raised a substantial sum of money. ASLEF members nationally raised a large amount, too. Chris and his family were very appreciative of the support received during his illness which made a real difference to him and his family at a critical time.

Miles Bidgood, Plymouth

Ian Locke
It is with great sadness that I report the passing of our friend and colleague Bro Ian Locke who joined the railway in 1985 as a traction trainee and soon became a well-respected part of the train crew family at Laira depot. As a staunch member of ASLEF and the Labour Party he was not afraid to put his views across when he felt an injustice had befallen a workmate. Ian gave his time generously, supporting many good causes, turning up with his five huskies for the Santa special and driving his steamroller to rallies and fetes, never happier than when restoring a traction engine with his son James. As a proud Cornishman he often went to Twickenham to support Cornwall and England, trips involving many ales, another love of his. At 52 he was taken too soon. See you in the tent, old pal.

Phil Buxton, Plymouth
BILL GARNDER

Bill Gardner was born in Lanchester, County Durham, but his family moved down to Woking to find work.

He left school at 16 and took up an apprenticeship as an upholsterer until he was called up for national service in 1950, with the Royal Corps of Signals in Egypt. He married Margaret in 1953 and they lived in Wood Green with her two sons from a previous marriage.

Bill got a job on the railway, eventually becoming a driver on steam engines and, later, diesel. The family moved to Hatfield in 1956 and Bill became

ERNEST WHITE

It is my sad duty to report the passing of my father, retired Three Bridges and Redhill driver Ernest White at the grand age of 97. Known to all as Ernie, he started cleaning at his home shed of Dorchester in 1937, and after being stood off the first winter was called back. After a spell cleaning at Bournemouth dad transferred to Three Bridges as a fireman in 1941 where he progressed rapidly, for the time, to driver. Staying there until 1958 he moved to Redhill where we lived. Ernie retired in 1985.

Steven White, retired Three Bridges and Redhill driver

STEVE GREENWOOD TRUE GENTLEMAN

Steve Greenwood sadly passed away on 17 November after battling serious illness. A true gent loved by family, friends and colleagues.

Steve started his railway career on 9 January 1973, moving onto the footplate on 18 March 1974. He was a one depot man, staying at Hither Green until taking retirement in July 2017 due to ill health. Steve was BR old school and a railwayman through and through. Always up for a laugh, fun to be with, and a true professional, he left a lasting impression on everyone he met and will be sorely missed. RIP mate. I am proud to have been your friend.

Andy Eggleden, Hither Green

IAN HODGSON

Ian Hodgson, a good friend, mentor, and all round nice guy, has died aged 86. Ian has not been very active over the last few years, suffering with his knees and legs. He went through the steam, diesel and electrification eras at Stratford, always willing to pass on his knowledge to his second man and help in any way he could. A very lovely guy, I never heard a bad word said about him. He had three sons on the footplate, and two are still there. Darren and Kevin are both drivers, while Adrian decided his future lay elsewhere.

RIP Ian, one of the very best.

Dave Pizzle RMS

TOM ROOEKE

Tom Rooke began his railway career at Three Bridges MPO in 1949 and remained there for most of his life, retiring in the 1990s due to ill health. A likeable character, it was not unusual to hear him relating his latest experience in the mess room, his tales resulting in peals of laughter. He never had any formal training as an engineer but had a remarkable gift for building model steam locos from scratch. He loved motorcycles, bringing numerous old crocks back to working order, and he once rebuilt an Austin 7 sports car. His later life passion was clocks, again built from scratch in his tiny workshop. Tom came from a large family and had a son and five daughters of his own, an immense source of pride to him and his wife June.

He will be missed, but the love he gave will remain for all time.

Paul Eden, Three Bridges

DON COBB

Don Cobb died on 25 October at the age of 79. He joined the railway in 1954 as a cleaner at Buntingford station, went to Hertford as a young fireman, and from there to King’s Cross where he was involved in a record breaking journey to Leeds in 1961 on a Delight diesel electric (see photo). Whilst at XX he was involved with the Flying Scotsman and Mallard. He came to Bishop’s Stortford to become a driver and stayed until he retired in 2002. Don loved his garden, especially his fish pond, and is survived by his wife and daughter.

Dave Clark, Bishop’s Stortford

FINIAL JOURNEYS

I am sorry to report the passing of three Tonbridge men. FRED BOURNER came to Tonbridge during the last war and spent the rest of his career here. When Tonbridge was electrified he was in the 211 link which meant he only drove electric trains. Fred, 93, was a quiet man and easy to get along with.

BASIL SUMBLIN was another 211 man who spent all his time at Tonbridge and drove only electric trains after 1962. He did much for Tonbridge Working Men’s Club and, when that closed, for the British Legion. He, too, was 93. I first met ALAN THOMSON as a young fireman, just returned from national service with the RAF, and still recovering from TB. He was thought to be the smartest driver at Tonbridge. With privatisation, in 1994, 20 drivers were allowed to retire as we lost our freight work. Alan was one who chose to go. In retirement he suffered from leukaemia but recovered with the help of his lovely wife Carol. He was 89.

Dave Weddle, Tonbridge RMS
The real impact of EJRA

I am one of the greedy, grasping, over 65s who has continued working past the old default retirement age. The GS’s encouragement to vote in favour of an employer justified retirement age appears to me to be simplistic. There is a debate to be had on this topic which, to date, has not been fully rehearsed, as far as I am aware.

Unless you have been a member of the Railways Pension Scheme since you were 25 and are now approaching the previous default retirement age of 65, it is virtually impossible to achieve 40 years’ contributions if you retire at 65. The situation is progressively worse for those who entered the RPS at, say, 35 or even 45, so who could blame drivers who may want to play catch up to a limited extent with their pension contributions? I imagine there will be many drivers in this situation and many different reasons surrounding why they might wish to continue working, eg unable to transfer in previous (but less advantageous) employment pension contributions, no pension savings at all, etc. Brass takes off the rough edges but is no substitute for a full pension. And there may be many other reasons.

My current employer, London Midland, has a policy of immediate replacement for those aged 65 who wish to continue working so I do not feel I am doing anyone out of a job. The company still cancels trains due to insufficient staff numbers despite high levels of rest day working, so I fail to see a detriment to other drivers. I was fortunate enough to apply for, and be granted, a two day working week but what puzzles me is why several drivers over 65 and from several depots in LM have since applied for part-time working and been refused, some of whom have therefore continued working full-time! I know of others who have not even bothered to apply for part-time, fully expecting to be knocked back, and some who have just given up and left.

Point 14 of the ASLEF charter states that ASLEF will actively seek to negotiate with TOCs/FOCs part-time contracts but not to the detriment of establishment numbers. I do not understand why ASLEF representation in the case of LM drivers has failed so spectacularly, unless ageism is a factor, in which case there is legal redress, now at no cost. Regarding Virgin West Coast and their EJRA, the drivers I have spoken with about this have all said they doubt it would be passed if ballotsed again as they feel management has not kept to their side of the bargain.

I have only 16 years’ service on the railway and mainly applied for part-time working at 65 so I could maintain my employment into the new West Midlands franchise and stand a better chance of retaining free WM franchise travel in retirement as I am not safeguarded. Travel concessions have to be negotiated with new franchisees by ASLEF as there is no agreement to automatically retain them. Free travel in retirement is as good as money in the bank and I find it incredible that, 20 years after privatisation, ASLEF has not done more to negotiate this as a right. I understand the ATOC dimension is a barrier but feel the will may be lacking.

The way forward, for both EJRA and travel concessions, is, as hinted in the GS’s response to Brother Tyrrell’s letter (November Journal), to propose suitable, balanced and fair motions at AAD. Anyone up for it?

FP Chase, Crewe

GS Mick Whelan says: ‘It’s the policy of this trade union – made each year at AAD – to encourage young people to come into our industry and that’s one of the reasons we support EJRA. While I understand the point you make about having only 16 years’ service on the railway, I assume you have a pension, or pensions, from your previous employment?’

New guidelines needed

I totally agree with the star letter in the November Journal by Steven Nimmo. Several years ago I had to go on insulin due to my diabetes. I was taken off the main line and given a depot driver’s job working in a yard; as a result I now earn £8,000 less than my main line colleagues. In the seven years I’ve been on insulin and working in the depot I’ve never had a day off sick, or had any diabetic incident, as I have my diabetes well under control. I also know of at least one ex-colleague who is an insulin dependent diabetic like me working for a different TOC who is still allowed to drive on the main line. I read on the Diabetes UK website that airline pilots who become insulin dependent can continue to fly as long as they can prove they have their diabetes under control. As Steven says, group 2 bus and lorry drivers are also allowed by the DVLA, and those vehicles don’t have the safety equipment that most units and locos I’ve driven have. I believe new guidelines are needed throughout UK railways to benefit diabetic drivers.

Mike Somerville, Corkerhill

Hardingstone Junction

In September the university is moving to a brand new campus at Waterside in the centre of Northampton. Although the area has been derelict for many years, it was previously a busy industrial site with Avon Cosmetics, a greyhound stadium, and the Nunn Mills power station occupying different parts of the site. More importantly, it included Hardingstone Junction, where the Midland Railway and London & North Western Railway met. The Students’ Union is lucky to be inheriting the only visible remnants of the area’s railway heritage, a Grade II-listed engine shed and its associated office building constructed by the Midland Railway in 1873. We were awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund grant to help restore the derelict buildings which are being converted into a vibrant new hub for the Students’ Union. We also want it to operate as a heritage centre, where people can come to learn more about

DOC NOT SURPRISED
I’M A DRIVER WITH DVT

Re the letter ‘Keeping people in the driving grade’ by Steven Nimmo in the November Journal, I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes in 2008. It was controlled by tablets and I was still allowed to drive. More worrying, when I was a driver for Northern Rail, I was walking down a platform at Leeds station when I felt I had a lump of lead strapped to my right calf. A nurse practitioner at my GP surgery noticed a slight swelling and sent me to A&E where a blood test and ultrasound scan confirmed I had deep vein thrombosis (a blood clot) at the back of my knee. I was put on warfarin for three months and it cleared up. Four months later the symptoms reappeared, this time on the left side of my groin, and the consultant asked me what my occupation was. When I said ‘train driver’ he said ‘that figures’. Five years later, and no longer on the railway, I’m on warfarin for the long term. Train driving is fairly sedentary nowadays and, with the introduction of GMR, even more so. Drivers should check their legs and ankles and, if they see any swelling, seek medical advice. You can still drive trains if you are on warfarin. But remember if the blood clot moves to your lungs, heart or brain it could be fatal.

John Donlon, RMS
the history of the shed, Northampton’s railways, and other aspects of local history. In addition, we want to create heritage events, a heritage trial, and education packs for local schools. To make the project as effective as possible, we need to know as much about the site as we can. We know it functioned as an engine shed until 1924, when the Midland Railway became part of the amalgamated London Midland & Scottish Railway. The existence of a much larger goods shed at Cotton End, previously owned by the LNWR, made our shed redundant. Although it remained in the possession of British Rail we are unsure of its main function between then and 1965 when it became a welding school for British Rail civil engineers. It was closed in 1998 and abandoned after an arson attack in 2000. While I am conducting archival research myself, I am also interested in seeing if there is more material out there. It would be wonderful if anyone has photographs of the shed in operation, experiences of working in or around the site, or any historical material they would be willing to share with us.

Tom Carter, heritage & volunteer co-ordinator, Northampton University

Lost Boys, Boil in Bag...

I read through my Journal last month until I came to the letters pages and thought, my word, the editor now includes a comedy section! I’m referring to the Lost Boys and second men letter from Brother Pearce. Unfortunately, he has been well and taken in by these Lost Boys in the fact that he has responded in a somewhat awkward way via the Journal. This type of banter has always gone on. I had to suffer all the ribbing when I first started, and now I enjoy giving it, judging carefully the character of the victims first as I wouldn’t want to offend my friends. Boil in the bag, chicken shit, had sandwiches in the locker longer than you’ve been on the railway, is that a wagon number? Just a few of the names and phrases used for newer drivers I’ve heard and endured. I hadn’t heard of the phrase Lost Boys before reading it in the Journal, but if it is a childish group as Brother Pearce believes, he has fuelled their determination to ridicule newer members to the grade. It’s best to develop a thick skin and, as long as it doesn’t resort to bullying, I can’t see any harm at all in belonging to a Long Lost Boys group. Me, I’m looking forward to becoming a Fossil or Dinosaur Driver.

Karl Maguire, Birmingham New Street

...remembering times past

I fully agree with Edward Pearce (Journal, December) with regard to the abusive comments he or his friends have been subjected to by other members in our grade. This should not be tolerated under any circumstances. However, just because a group of old school ex-second men have started a group to remember their era doesn’t mean they are all there for the purpose of belittling anyone who has started in the driving grade after them. This group has been set up with the intention of remembering how things used to be, how the job was back then, and to fondly recall the memories of what is now a non-existent grade. It is not different than a group for, let’s say, classic cars or a preserved railway, to remember how it used to be, not to create a them and us mentality. I assume Mr Pearce came into our grade post-privatisation, whereas I started as a second man, that is how things were done all those years back. Times have changed dramatically since then, it’s called progress, and we know we are a dying breed, hence the Lost Boys, to look back on our careers with pride and humour.

Andy Czerniakiewicz, Crewe

Proud to be union

I wanted to write to our Journal to thank our executive committee and let members know the importance of a branch and the right to submit motions. Through my network of trade union comrades I support the outstanding work undertaken by the Bakers Food & Allied Workers’ Union in their McStrike campaign. McDonald’s workers have been striking over the company’s failure to offer acceptable working conditions, job security, and even a living wage. Most of those employed are young people and it’s vitally important we engage our young comrades and support them in their fight for justice. These young people are the future for movement and social justice. At my branch I moved a motion for a donation to the McStrike campaign which was passed unanimously; furthermore, we asked the EC for support, and not only did they support it they extended an invitation to young BFAWU activists to attend the inaugural ASLEF Young Members’ Forum. Now that is trade unionism in full effect. Proud to be union and proud to support all workers fighting for fairness and justice.

Alan Moss, Longsight

Best way to run a railway

I support rail nationalisation as it is the most efficient way to run a railway but, let’s not kid ourselves, under nationalised British Rail our wages were poor and few were interested in being a train driver. It is the availability of inter-company movement that has kept wages high. The only part of rail privatisation that remained in the possession of British Rail we made our shed redundant. Although it could be described as a porn prep – a quick delivery train which is why it has been a big disappointment for Tory voters.

Kevin Peat, Exeter

Revised duties

My wife says our new train ‘safety check’ could be described as a porn prep – a quick lick over.

Rob McMillan, Wolverhampton

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

CLASS 40 Preservation Society high quality enamel badges £5.50 each or £10 for both (50p p&p for one badge or £1 for both) email sales@cfps.co.uk or text 07788 240088. All funds raised will go towards the maintenance of our three Class 40 locos.

CLASS 3J

Brush type two 60 year badge at £6 inc p&p with £1 going to the repainting of the last Phase One CIG 1753. Send cheque payable to Dave East, 41 Highfield Road, Suffolk, IP1 6DD.

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

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Red dawn

A new exhibition celebrates the striking modern art created in the wake of the October revolution, examines the achievements of socialist realism, and reflects on the era of images of those who offended Uncle Joe. KEITH RICHMOND visits a remarkable display of rare posters, photographs and prints from before and after the Bolshevik revolution.

The revolution in Russia in October 1917, and the extraordinary political, economic and social changes that followed in its wake, was matched by a concomitant revolution in the visual arts. What the flamboyant jazz singer George Melly, albeit in a different context, called in his book about ‘60s pop culture, Revolt into Style.

Paintings, sculptures, banners, books, magazines and posters – many of them propaganda for the new people’s government – embraced radical new ideas and radical new forms. The visual arts, in the years immediately after the Russian revolution, were exciting and different as artists turned their collective backs on the bankrupt traditions of the ancien régime.

‘The future is our only goal’ – Aleksandr Rodchenko

A new exhibition at Tate Modern examines fifty years of revolutionary art – from pictures of the massacre of unarmed protesters by Tsarist troops in St Petersburg in 1905, which open the exhibition, and act as a timely reminder of the brutally repressive and autocratic regime of Tsar Nicholas II against which the peasants, as well as the industrial workers, were revolting, until the death of Joseph Stalin.

There’s a lot of facial hair – beards as well as Village People moustaches – especially on a banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin designed by Gustav Klutsis in 1933 to underline the position of Joseph Vissarionovich in the socialist pantheon of his more eminent Marxist-Leninist predecessors. Hard to look at Uncle Joe – still revered today in Georgia – without thinking of Big Brother in Orwell’s dystopian novel 1984.

In that book Winston Smith, who works at the Ministry of Truth, spends his time literally rewriting historical documents so they match the current party line. Orwell parodies, in splendidly dark fashion, the way that Stalin insisted on history being rewritten.

There’s a famous image here – part of a telling sequence – of Nikolai Antipov, Stalin, Sergei Kirov and Nikolai Shvernik, taken at a regional party conference in Leningrad in 1924 or 1925 from which, over the years, first Antipov, then Shvernik, and finally Kirov, are each erased as they fall out of favour.

There is also a table of black and white photographs – police mug shots, including one of the poet Osip Mandelstam – of 30 political prisoners taken before their show trials. Most haunting is the face of Grigory Zinoviev, long-time head of the Communist International, who is clearly not afraid as he looks into the camera lens; he has decided to look fate straight in the eye, disillusioned at how the revolution in which he played a crucial role has been betrayed.

‘The task of the press is the education of the masses’ – El Lissitzky

The exhibits are drawn almost entirely from the collection of the British designer David King who, between his birth in 1943 and his death in 2016, acquired a quarter of a million Soviet artefacts as he worked to forge a ‘visual style for the left’ in the UK.

They include pictures – some familiar, many unfamiliar – including the famous image, by Grigorii Goldshtein, of Lenin in Teatrainaya Square, Moscow, passionately addressing Red Army forces leaving for the Polish front in 1920, with Trotsky, the People’s Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs, waiting for his turn to speak.

There’s also the photo, taken by Yevgeny Khaldei, of Soviet soldiers raising the red flag over the Reichstag in 1945. It was staged, like Joe Rosenthal’s picture of the stars and stripes being raised on Iwo Jima, but is still an enormously powerful and enduring image. It caused some controversy – the soldier hoisting the flag has two wrist watches, one on each hand, and the Red Army was not meant to stoop to pillage – but the story that emerges here is how the photographer was Jewish, his father and sisters had been murdered by the Nazis, the flag had been made by his uncle, and the photograph reflects the dynamic geometries of Soviet abstract art.

Here, writ large, is the iconography of communism – workers and peasants, hammers and sickles, proclamations and propaganda posters in bold colours, geometric shapes and authentic Cyrillic script – and the adoration, if not of the magi, then of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov.

‘Everyone to the struggle against fascism’ – Nina Vatolina

The mood changes, from the dramatic revolutionary images of satirists such as Viktor Deni through the great constructivist artists, such as Aleksandr Rodchenko and El Lissitzky, whose Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge (1920) inspired so many 20th century graphic artists (and not a few indie rock album covers) to the symbolic images of Mother Russia during the Great Patriotic War of 1941-45.

There’s the cover of a journal from 1941, proclaiming Comrades in Arms: Britain and the USSR. A copy, too, of a Russia Today from November 1937 – price 2d – featuring pictures of Vera Mukhina’s staggering stainless steel sculpture of an idealised male industrial worker and female agricultural worker created for the Soviet pavilion at the World’s Fair in Paris in 1937.

This exhilarating exhibition – an absolute joy – proves that revolutionary art and revolutionary politics can march, hand in hand, into the future.

Red Over Russia: A Revolution in Visual Culture 1905-1955 is at Tate Modern in London until 18 February. Admission £13.30; senior £12.30; concessions £11; children under 12 free.
SO ANNOYING

It used to be ‘Well…’ then ‘Like…’ and sometimes just ‘Um…’ But now it’s ‘So…’ The way people – many of them on Today on Radio 4 but on most radio and television programmes and podcasts these days – answer a question – sometimes every question – by starting with that irritating little two-letter word. Even if grammatically it makes no sense.

To some extent, it’s become a verbal tic. To some extent, it’s a way of buying time while the interviewee thinks up a cogent answer. And, to some extent, it’s a technique, taught by media trainers, to make it seem – to listeners if not the interviewer – that what you are about to say is a seamless, sensible and, indeed, transparently obvious answer to the question. Even when it’s not.

The trouble is it sounds artificial. It grates. And it brings back bad memories of teacher spelling out something to the slowest child in class. ‘Pay attention, now, children…’

John Humphrys: So tired of ‘So…’

It’s a common enough word, of course, part of the conversational furniture of many a room. But the use of the word ‘So’ at the start of an answer in so many media interviews has reached the proportions of a linguistic epidemic. And the backlash has begun.

Jacka Garth @SocialBeastie – ‘Lefty, music addict, a Midlander with many interests’ – tweeted ‘Don’t start sentences with “So” unless you want to sound like a Muppet and, on a recent Feedback, Fergus from Glasgow growled: “Every time I hear it, the hair on my neck rises and my teeth bare in a grimace.” Today presenter John Humphrys says the word has ‘invaded everyday speech like some noxious weed in an unintended garden’.

Cressida Dick, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, set a new record when she managed to start no less than seven of her responses to questions on Today with ‘So’. It made her sound unnatural, robotic, and over-rehearsed – which she probably was – and distracted listeners from her answers. So remember Galatians 6:7. As ye sow, so shall ye reap…

Keith Richmond

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