Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart and you’ll never walk alone

Inside: ASLEF in action at the Labour Party conference in Liverpool; and 100 years after the guns fell silent on the Western front, we remember the sacrifice of Britain’s railwaymen during the Great War of 1914-18
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Cover photos: Andrew Wiard

The work of a weasel

HERESA May wants a rail review after Chris Grayling, her Secretary of State for Transport, dishonestly attacked the wages of railway staff, seeking to link them to fares, in August. It was the work of a weasel; attacking those who have to take the abuse for the failings of his government.

David Brown, chief executive of the Go-Ahead Group, which includes GTR, is only going to get a £582,000 bonus, on top of his £1 million salary, after a summer of chaos for his company. It’s OK, apparently, because he decided to take only a 2.7% pay rise and declined 25% of his proffered bonus, never mind what the rest of the board will pocket. I looked forward to anguished cries from Mr Grayling, copious references to CPI, and talk of relating senior rail managers’ salaries to fares – but not a peep.

We have not seen the remit for the Prime Minister’s rail review but will it include, as rumoured, a real look at alternative models? Will it look at directors’ pay which, under a nationalised system, would not have seen such massive increases and so much duplication? Will it look at the need for a long-term investment strategy? Will it look at the need of the railway sector which has to be part of our integrated railway to protect and maintain the infrastructure? And will the voices of passengers and employees be heard? I doubt it, and token efforts should be called out for what they are. Rumours abound about the wheels and steel coming back together in some form of bastardised alliance. This is not the solution as false links and geographical borders will only exacerbate problems and hurt regional investment.

Passengers want a railway run as a public service – clean, safe, and affordable – that delivers for local and national domestic product. A nationalised service that enhances communication as a factor of productivity and production rather than reinforcing the north-south divide. That drives not only economic equality but social equality, too. People want a fully-staffed transport that delivers a better, greener, system not based on faux competition that deters useage. Privatisation has caused havoc in an industry this country invented; people want their railway back, linking homes and businesses and delivering the green targets to which this country is committed.

Maybe we have just saved the government some money to be spent on that review?

Yours fraternally
Mick Whelan, general secretary
Tube drivers walk out

SLEF members shut the Central line in London when they went on strike on Friday 5 October after a breakdown of industrial relations with London Underground. Tube drivers voted by more than 9:1 for action. Finn Brennan, ASLEF’s organiser on the Underground, said: ‘Industrial action is always the last resort but, given the intransigence of the management on a whole range of issues, we have, reluctantly, decided this is our only course of action.’ The strike was the result of a campaign of bullying and intimidation by senior Central line managers and their failure to deal with issues raised by reps regarding service control problems; abuse of the attendance at work procedure; breach of agreements regarding managers driving trains; unfair use of the disciplinary procedure; and the imposition of new and unsafe ‘flash and dash’ working practices.

What links these issues is a basic failure to treat drivers on the line with fairness and respect,’ said Finn. ‘We have seen drivers dismissed because of one mistake after a quarter of a century of excellent service or reduced in grade because they had the temerity to take time off sick after a traumatic incident. ‘LU management had ample opportunities to resolve this dispute. But they chose not to, because they believe they will get what they want by using sticks instead of carrots. They have tried to create a climate of fear on the Central line but our drivers will not be bullied. The huge “Yes” vote for industrial action shows our members will not be intimidated.’

RMS up to speed

The Retired Members’ Section held its AGM at the International Transport Workers’ Federation head office in Borough, south London, on Wednesday 3 October. We had the pleasure of being addressed by the general, Mick Whelan, retiring president Tosh McDonald, and Jan Shortt, general secretary of the National Pensioners’ Convention. Mick and Tosh brought us up to speed on what the union is doing for its members and its continued action in support of both our members and our customers. Jan gave a full and frank rundown on what the union is doing for its members and its

Alan Taylor, Jan Shortt, Ray Jackson, Mick Whelan and Tosh McDonald

Remember the fallen

This year’s ASLEF poppy badge, marking 100 years since the end of the Great War in 1918, is available in three versions: a traditional red poppy; a white poppy with the raised metal detail in black and gold; and a white poppy with the detail in gold. Price £5 (inc p&p); email info@aslef.org.uk or visit our online shop at www.aslef.org.uk

QUOTE...
‘There is endless speculation about a new centre party filling the gap left by the supposed lurch to right and left of the two main parties. The trouble with these plans is that they seem designed to restore the liberal establishment politics of the past 25 years which led to our current divisions in the first place.’ – David Goodhart in the Evening Standard

That beard ain’t bad

EC president Tosh McDonald was voted Beard of Labour conference – ahead of Jeremy Corbyn, Ben Bellamy and Jyoti Wilkinson – in a poll conducted by the Beard Liberation Front. ‘Tosh shaved his rival’s; bristled organiser Keith Flett. ‘He took 52% of the popular vote after his passionate conference speech.’

CONFERENCES & RALLIES

The STUC women’s conference is at the Caird Hall, Dundee, from Monday 29 to Tuesday 30 October. The STUC disabled workers’ conference is at the Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel, Glasgow, from Saturday 17 to Sunday 18 November. The Scottish Labour Party conference is at the Caird Hall, Dundee, from Friday 8 to Sunday 10 March 2019. The Welsh Labour Party conference is at the Venue Cymru in Llandudno from Friday 12 to Sunday 14 April. The Scottish Trades Union Congress is at the Caird Hall, Dundee, from Monday 15 to Wednesday 17 April.

ASLEF’s annual assembly of delegates is at the Marriott Hotel, Leeds, from Monday 13 to Thursday 16 May. The STUC youth conference is at the Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel, Glasgow, from Saturday 29 to Sunday 30 June. The Durham Miners’ Gala is on Saturday 13 July. The Tolpuddle Martyrs’ festival, near Dorchester, is from Friday 19 to Sunday 21 July. The Trades Union Congress is at the Brighton Centre from Sunday 8 to Wednesday 11 September. The Labour Party conference is at the Brighton Centre from Sunday 22 to Wednesday 25 September.
A day in the life

Jamie (below with Paige) drew Tosh (left) after listening to his barnstorming address to party conference; which prompted the Daily Telegraph to print a picture of ‘Aslan’, too

Off the Rails

ISABEL HARDMAN, who writes for the Daily Telegraph and The Spectator, bursts the bubble of those talking up the advent, before Christmas, of a new centre party. The new centrist party will always be just a fantasy for when they’ve temporarily grown weary with the reality of party politics, like a child wishing they had actually been adopted by a fairytale princess after being scolded by their parents. It’s easy when you’re having a fight with your national leader and your constituency to yearn for a simpler life in which local party meetings are just you and a glass of gin, rather than bores who have been defending their own personal fiefdoms for years. ‘Cynics in the Parliamentary Labour Party think there’s a hidden message here; Isabel’s partner is John Woodcock, MP for Barrow & Furness, who was elected for Labour but now sits as an independent.

IAN RANKIN, whose tartan noir Rebus novels transformed contemporary crime fiction, was on revealing form in the New Statesman. Rankin, who grew up in a council house at Cardenden in Fife, names his heroes as William McIlvanney, Ruth Rendell, and Captain Scarlet; his Mastermind subject would be the novels of Muriel Spark or the life and times of the Rolling Stones; he loves Silver Machine by Hawkwind – ‘I bought the single when I was 12 and still play it’; and the political figure he most admires is ‘John Smith. It’s a question of unrealised potential. Would he have become Prime Minister? Would he have shaped the UK differently? We’ll never know.’

FOUR RIGHT-WING think tanks – the Institute of Economic Affairs, the Adam Smith Institute, Legatum, and Policy Exchange – are taking millions of dollars from anonymous US donors to persuade us to leave the European Union and become a client state of a country committed, under Donald Trump, to ‘put America first’. The Guardian revealed that $5.6 million (£4.3 million) has been channelled from America to the four lobby groups on the understanding that they make the case for Brexit and pursue policies favourable to the US such as allowing GM crops and chlorinated chicken onto British shelves.

PETER HITCHENS, in his new book The Phoney Victory (IB Tauris, £17.99) pointedly wonders why Britain went to war in 1939 to save Poland, a country with a virulently anti-Semitic, authoritarian, and aggressively military government (and a country, moreover, whose obsolete military equipment and open borders on the plains of central Europe made it impossible to defend) when Britain would not go to war in 1938 to save Czechoslovakia, a liberal, democratic state with modern, well-equipped armed forces (and an easily defended mountain border with Nazi Germany)?

THE PROCLAIMERS are still belting out witty, heartfelt songs and railing against the injustices of this world, even after walking 500 miles, or 500 more, from Leith. On Classy, from their new album Angry Cyclist (Cooking Vinyl) they sing: ‘You’re not fooling me / Private schooling / Claiming you are a charity / Those you help most / Own half the west coast / And the odd distillery.’

OSH McDonald, who steps down as EC president at the end of the year, is a larger than life figure in the labour movement who has, over the years, proved a gift to those who earn a crust by drawing pictures for the public prints. Jamie-Max Caldwell, a socialist cartoonist who works as a community co-ordinator for Unite in Scotland, and draws for the Morning Star, had fun with this image of Tosh (in slippers, natch) perched on the edge of his bed, in front of an ASLEF banner on the bedroom wall, earnestly examining his alarm clock for that extra hour with which to hate Mrs Thatcher.

‘It was a fantastic speech at party conference,’ says Jamie. ‘The way he used powerful imagery, not just words. And I liked the personal story – so many people just lay out a political point of view. I wasn’t in Liverpool, but watched on social media, and hearing Tosh inspired me to draw this cartoon.’

The speech – and anecdote – was picked up elsewhere. The Daily Telegraph, house journal of the Conservative Party, printed a picture of Tosh at the podium across much of its spread of reports, with Michael Deacon, in his conference sketch, noting how ‘speakers are still raging about Margaret Thatcher’ and, after Tosh spoke, ‘as one, the historical re-enactment society [delegates in the conference hall] laughed and clapped.’

After announcing that ‘trade union boss Tosh McDonald went viral’ The Poke – ‘time well wasted’ – referred to Aslan, Rick Wakeman, Gonder, Mordor, and, er, orcs. While John Rain came up with a Wizzard reflection, ‘Bet he wishes it could be Christmas every day.’

Coverage of the Labour Party conference starts on page 11

500 CLUB: Howard Kaye, with number 196, won the October draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £428.

Our new ASLEF mug has images from the Mick Jones triptych in reception at head office. There are four versions – three have an image on one side and the ASLEF logo on the other; the fourth has all three images. £6 each (inc p&p) or £15 for a set of three; email info@aslef.org.uk or visit our online shop at www.aslef.org.uk
Truth for Tube drivers – anyone can get in the cab

Managers on London Underground have been dragging their heels over the vital issue of cab security. They only got their act into gear when drivers voted overwhelmingly – 9 to 1 – for industrial action over the issue. ASLEF TRAINS HEALTH & SAFETY COUNCIL reveal what went on behind the scenes

London Underground train stock operates in service with a simple lock, commonly called the J door lock, with the handle protected by a piece of breakable safety glass. ASLEF has reps for a long time been raising concerns with the management of London Underground about the poor security offered by this style of lock and its protection to prevent unauthorised access.

Over the years the driver’s cab has been accessed many times by the public. This has demonstrated that the security measures in place are ineffective. Many of these intrusions have not been recorded by LU management.

LU has for many years been changing the type of protected glass used, from normal safety glass to a breakable plastic style and, in recent years, a flimsy ring-pull style of opener, a bit like a tin of beans only weaker. None of the styles used, both past and present, had any effect in discouraging or preventing people from breaking them and gaining unauthorised entry to the cab. The lock type has never been changed and can be accessed with a £1 key available from hardware stores and supermarkets.

The issue progressed through LU’s H&S machinery, eventually being raised with the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, with ASLEF trains H&S council reps insisting that LU takes this matter seriously and makes suitable and effective safety changes not only to the glass but to the lock.

We had a number of meetings with the LU head of security, the head of rolling stock, and the chief engineer, to look at alternative measures that could be used for the job required, to protect the driver at all times and allow for emergency evacuations. It was agreed by all present that cab security required improvements as almost all other areas have seen steps to improve security but nothing has been done for the train drivers on the front line at London Underground.

Some progress was made at these meetings; an electromagnetic style of lock was suggested and agreed to be the best viable option to replace the existing lock as it not only offered the security needed but was fail safe for emergency exit use by the public. This type of lock was agreed as the way forward. All that was needed was funding – and that is where the games started. On numerous occasions we were told that a case had to be given to justify funding being granted. The case was made and we were given date after date for LU to confirm, with LU’s chief operating officer Mark Wilde providing assurances that money would be available to support and complete the project.

Given that London and the Underground have been at a severe security level, and with no foreseeable change in that level of threat, it was hard to believe when LU finally announced that it would not support upgrading the J door lock but would, instead, merely look at a better version of the plastic safety cover.

We said this was unacceptable and would report back to head office. While these discussions were taking place drivers continued to experience further cab intrusions by members of the public. With an increase in recorded staff assaults, an increase in violent crime, and a management unwilling to take any significant steps to protect our members, we felt all options had been exhausted. That was why we went to ballot with regard to industrial action in order to get a more robust and committed response from the company.

All ASLEF branches on LU passed motions in favour of a ballot for industrial action. Our members voted overwhelmingly in support of action to tell LU management that urgent action is needed to make our work environment safe.

Following the successful ballot result, LU management arranged a meeting on Friday 5 October. Whilst we welcomed the meeting, chaired by the director of operations, and attended by the head of rolling stock and chief engineer, we found it very disappointing that management had moved no further forward and were addressing the matter as though this situation had only just been identified.

They said they were looking at a viable solution and this could be an electromagnetic-style lock. What’s surprising is that they had only been looking at this method for the previous two weeks, even though discussion on this lock started well over a year ago. This indicates clearly that LU never intended to improve the J door lock prior to the successful ballot result. Further, they informed us that they didn’t even know their legal obligations with regards to evacuation requirements which seems astonishing given they have been running a public railway for well over 100 years, if they don’t know that what hope has anyone got with regards to safety on our railway?

ASLEF’s THSC repeatedly asked for a management commitment with regards to which solution they would use, whether they are actually going to use an electromagnetic style lock or not, and for a firm installation start date. None of which was forthcoming. Though they did say they would be better placed to give estimates in eight weeks’ time.

In fact, we were left in no doubt that LU would rather drag their heels and would only commit to a further workshop on 23 October. We feel LU management is just stalling until our ballot mandate runs out. Our view is that LU should be informed that our ballot mandate will be maintained. We do not want this matter to be left to fester with no genuine commitments given by LU.
Donny Dave’s poetic farewell

REAT turnout from Ipswich, Clacton and Colchester branches to wish Dave Hunter of Freightliner Intermodal farewell. Dave started at Doncaster as a freight guard in 1978, in one of the coldest winters on record. He thought to himself ‘What on earth have I done?’ and, 40 years later, is still thinking the same! Dave moved to Clacton in 1985 and to Ipswich in 2005. Adi Pearce read out his Ode to Dave (right).

Dave would like to thank everyone who came to the Manningtree to bid him farewell. All the best, Dave, have a great retirement.

Lee Barber, branch secretary

Poor Dave hasn’t a clue,
He’s not sure what to do.
Am I on at 4, I’m not quite sure,
do I take one engine or two?
These diagrams are confusing to me,
I never know where I should be,
I get muddled and puzzled.
Every day is like my first day, you see.
Dave did a turn on the shed.
Do I put these locos to bed?
I’m in a fix with this 86
I’ve asked for the table instead.
I don’t think I’ve been here before
do I work 84 or L22 or M52
I’ll go down pass instead.
I forget and take the wrong train
That Hunter’s done it again.
Our Dave loves a joke,
he’s really top bloke,
the mess room won’t be the same.

Cheers,
Dave!

Steam machine

One of the most famous steam locomotives in the world, the 60103 Flying Scotsman, travelled slowly through Dawlish in Devon — on one of the most picturesque stretches of railway line in the country — on its way through the West Country from Taunton to Plymouth on Thursday 4 October. Two days later the Scotsman crossed the Tamar on its way from Plymouth to Penzance, the first time Sir Nigel Gresley’s world record-setting steam machine has run on the rails in Cornwall.

Temple of the kings

The GS attended King’s Cross branch on Monday 8 October at the Cock Tavern in Somers Town. Mick, DOS Nigel Gibson and ECS Howard Kaye gave full and frank information on what the union is doing for its members, other railway employees, and the travelling public. The general presented service awards to loyal ASLEF members Colin Fisher (40 years); Chris Munro and Nigel Turner (35); Mick O’Shea (30); and retirement certificates to Ray Whitehead and Mark ‘Trixie’ Trundle.

Chris Luesley popped in to pick up his 40 year badge on the way to Heathrow for a flight to Santiago! Richard Sullivan, branch secretary

Quote...
‘You can always tell when the money people think a change of government might be coming. They turn up at the conference of the party they believe is on the cusp of power. So, amid rumours of a snap election in November, the suits are swarming in the monstrous glass and steel pavilion by the Mersey.’
— Paul Routledge in the Daily Mirror

…Unquote

The water of life tastes better in an ASLEF crystal whisky tumbler! Price £8 (inc p&p); email info@aslef.org.uk or visit our online shop at www.aslef.org.uk
Safety in numbers

MICK HOLDER, of ASLEF’s health and safety department, reports on the findings of the 2018 TUC health and safety representatives’ survey

EVERY two years the TUC carries out a survey of health and safety reps to find out their major concerns. ASLEF has always encouraged our reps to participate and we then have our statistics extracted from the overall figures.

This year’s survey is now complete and ASLEF’s results have been provided showing our reps have concerns regarding stress (78%), violence and threats (47%), high temperatures (42%), overwork (41%), cramped working conditions (39%), bullying and harassment as their primary concerns. Whilst these results reflect previous surveys, DOO is missing here as are slips, trips and falls (58%), dust (47%), vibration (37%) and display screen equipment (35%) and asbestos (31%). Of these, our reps rated long hours of work, stress, back strains, noise and bullying and harassment as their primary concerns. Whilst these results reflect previous surveys, DOO is missing here as are the reliance on overtime working and the shortage of staff, all of which had been raised previously.

ASLEF reps have always been major contributors to these surveys, and this year was no exception with a slight increase in the number of respondents (up to 89) which means ASLEF’s position in the ‘league table’ has gone from fifth to third best participating union. And, whilst they may be small in number, more than 50% of our women health and safety reps responded.

Our reps record themselves as predominantly white, male, and British, in the 40-60 years old bracket. However, there are eight reps between 26-35, seven women reps, and two who record themselves as disabled.

The reps also made a number of comments on issues not defined in the survey, including diesel emissions, terrorism, ERTMS, strains in general, walking route lighting, fatigue, repetitive work, toilet breaks, personal hygiene, fatigue, poor rostering, limited time between shifts, poor shift patterns, unsocial hours, difficulty getting reasonable time off, trip hazards, cab cleanliness, poor management, vertigo, no safety committee, passengers when delayed, lack of co-operation/co-ordination with Network Rail, poor housekeeping, and not complying with regulations or standards when building new structures.

Whilst a majority of reps report employers having the basics in place, such as a health and safety policy and risk assessments, they also report either being involved with the risk assessment process but not enough or not at all, with only 30% reporting they are satisfied with their involvement, down from 48% in the previous report. And just 34% say management automatically consult reps in good time over safety issues, although this improves if the rep asks to be involved.

Rps report time spent on h&s matters in the previous week with 44% spending 1-5 hours on health and safety, 21% reporting 5-10 hours, and 9% spending 10 hours or more.

Profile of a train driver
Good job we can laugh at ourselves. This scabrous image has been doing the rounds of social media. What the gym bunnies out there don’t realise is that driving trains is a sedentary occupation…

‘It’s stupid’ judge tells railway trespasser
A man who trespassed on the tracks at Carlisle station was fined £250 and ordered to pay £85 costs and a £30 victim surcharge. Judge Gerald Chalk told Christopher Forbes, 34, ‘It’s just stupid and thank goodness you didn’t kill yourself.’

QUOTE…

‘If you are a commuter who endures a lousy and expensive train service day after day, year after year, why wouldn’t you respond to Corbyn’s call to nationalise the railways? And if you are a young couple who sees no chance of ever getting on the housing ladder, why wouldn’t you believe your prospects could not possibly get any worse under Labour?’ – Tony Parsons in the Sun on Sunday …UNQUOTE

GA go bi-mode
Greater Anglia has unveiled its new bi-mode unit which will form part of a new 58 train fleet for the East Anglia network. The BMUs, built by Stadler, the Swiss rail manufacturer, will ‘transform rail travel’ in the region, says the company, when it enters service next year. They will run on rural routes in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire; 24 will have four carriages and 14 will operate as three car trains.

NEW BOSS AT THE OFFICE OF RAIL AND ROAD
The Office of Rail and Road has appointed John Larkinson, an economist who was director of railway markets at the ORR, and used to work for the Strategic Rail Authority, as its interim chief executive. He replaces Joanna Whittington, who left last month to become director general, energy and security, at the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.

JOHN MCDONNELL HELPS ARCHBISHOP JUSTIN TIME
John McDonnell was ready to give Justin Welby a spot of advice after the Archbishop of Canterbury was blasted by Tories for his speech at the Trades Union Congress in Manchester. ‘When they get round to calling you a Marxist,’ he said, ‘I will give you some tips on how to handle it.’

SO IS IT LABOUR FIRST OR LABOUR LAST NOW?
Huda Elmi was in a witty and wapsiph mood at a Campaign for Labour Party Democracy fringe meeting during the Labour Party conference, referring to the Blairite factions Labour First and Progress as, ahem, Labour Last and Regress.

Our new topical tee-shirt, designed by those Hoxton hipsters at Philosophy Football, features Rik Mayall as the obnoxious anarchist Rick in The Young Ones, and this classic exchange: ‘He threw us off the train because you said ASLEF was an anagram for “total and complete bastard”?’ And apart from everything else… it isn’t, even. £10 (inc p&p); email info@aslef.org.uk or visit our online shop at www.aslef.org.uk
The 135th Durham Miners’ Gala
will be held on Saturday 13 July 2019

Please support the Big Meeting by joining the Friends of Durham Miners’ Gala
www.friendsofdurhamminersgala.org

Changing the world of work for good
Turn to the left – turn to the right

GREGOR GALL, an affiliate research associate at the University of Glasgow, and editor of the Scottish Left Review, analyses how the SNP talks the talk, as a left of centre party, but never walks the walk

As we get older, one of the perennial truths we learn in life is that many things are not quite what they seem. As Macbeth, in William Shakespeare’s play of the same name, says: ‘Nothing is but what is not’. And, as you know, Macbeth is set in Scotland.

This offers an interesting take on what seems like a significant advance in the struggle to return the railways to public ownership. The event I’m thinking of was an announcement in late August by the SNP government in Scotland that public sector bodies will be able to bid for the next ScotRail franchise.

This means bidders which are wholly-owned by the Scottish government could compete with private firms to run the train service, and comes after the Scottish Parliament was given the power to allow public sector bids for rail franchises under the Scotland Act 2016. The parent company of the government-owned ferry operator, CalMac, appears likely to be among those bidding for the next contract to run ScotRail in 2025.

SCRATCH BENEATH THE SURFACE

While the headline news seems good, you only have to scratch a little beneath the surface to see that this so-called return to the public sector is not quite what it seems.

First, there is no guarantee that a public sector bid would win. Indeed, a private tender might beat a public one by offering more money for the tender with the aim of getting this back through cutting wage costs and staff numbers.

Second, any tendering process would involve a public sector body spending millions of pounds on external management consultants, lawyers and accountants, because it would not readily have these skills in house. This money could be spent on other things like more staff, better rolling stock, and so on.

Third, 2025 is a long way away, with the Scottish government already having been shown to have protected Abellio despite it breaking the terms of its franchise by breaching performance standards.

Fourth, in order to make a success of any publicly-owned franchise, levels of investment in tracks and trains would have to significantly increase. Otherwise, a public sector franchise could get the blame for something that is not its fault – a bit like British Rail, back in the day, being so underfunded that the proponents of privatisation got some purchase.

When all is said and done, there’s something bigger going on here: the SNP often talks a good talk – even talks left – but does not act as its words would suggest. Simply put, the SNP calls itself a social democratic party but you’d be hard pressed to find much evidence for this claim. The quintessential definition of social democracy is being prepared to use the levers of the state to intervene in the processes and outcomes of the market in order to ameliorate the effects of that market.

There is no clearer instance of the SNP not being social democratic than the party’s Sustainable Growth Commission report, published in May. After the failure to win the referendum on independence in 2014, the SNP decided that any future chance to win the argument for independence would depend on being seen to be more credible in economic and fiscal terms amongst the movers and shakers (aka the employers, the establishment, and the media).

THE MOVERS AND THE SHAKERS

The SNP believed the reason the referendum was lost was because, on the issues of what currency should be used, what size of deficit a new state would run, and how much control it would have over its own national economy, etcetera, it was not reassuring these movers and shakers.

Enter, stage right, Andrew Wilson. As a former economist, SNP MSP, and now energy manufacturer, and opening up the possibility of a public sector ScotRail franchise – along with politely urging companies to voluntarily pay a living wage and not use zero hour contracts – just does not cut it in the social democratic stakes. If you want social democracy, head south (metaphorically) and put your cross in the Corbyn box on the ballot paper. The opportunity may come sooner than you think.

CREATING SOCIAL JUSTICE

From the left of the independence movement, the report was trounced, believing it undercut the possibility of creating social justice under independence. Indeed, the fallout has been so bad that the report looks like it will quietly be dropped. The irony is the reception to it will not change the SNP’s thinking, though.

The lesson the SNP will try to learn from this debacle is to not be so open about its thinking and, at the same time, redouble its efforts at spin and media management. When compared to Labour’s plans for state intervention on workers’ rights, public ownership, and controlling corporate power (and even taking into account the limitations of the devolution settlement), the SNP’s efforts are meagre, to say the least.

Talking over Prestwick airport, a wave energy manufacturer, and opening up the possibility of a public sector ScotRail franchise – along with politely urging companies to voluntarily pay a living wage and not use zero hour contracts – just does not cut it in the social democratic stakes. If you want social democracy, head south (metaphorically) and put your cross in the Corbyn box on the ballot paper. The opportunity may come sooner than you think.

A
It’s not the leaving of Liverpool that grieves me

Congress photos by Andrew Wiard

SLEF sent four delegates – Mick Whelan, general secretary; Tosh McDonald, EC president; Dave Bowen, Piccadilly branch; and Steve Soffings, Leeds – to the Labour Party conference at the Arena and Convention Centre on the banks of the River Mersey in Liverpool from Sunday 23 to Wednesday 26 September. Simon Weller, assistant general secretary; EC vice-president Dave Calfe; executive committee members Marz Colombini and Howard Kaye; district organisers Dicky Fisher and Andy Hourigian; Collette Gibson of Shenfield branch, who is a member of the National Policy Forum; Tom Corbin, Salisbury; and Ed Mayne, Feltham Electric; all attended as visitors. Jamal Ajane, Feltham Electric, and Esher & Walton CLP; Phil Graham, Islington South & Finsbury CLP; Pat O’Rourke, Edinburgh No 2, and Motherwell North CLP; Karen Tily, West London Electric, and Ealing CLP; and Julian Vaughan, Northern Line North, and North East Bedfordshire CLP, all attended as delegates for their constituency Labour parties.

“This conference, with the theme rebuilding Britain – for the many, not the few – represents our party’s strengths,” said Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn. “Our mass membership and the millions of affiliate members. It is the extraordinary vibrancy, reach, and wisdom of this mass participation that makes our party an effective, inclusive, and democratic force – capable of forming the next government.”

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

The Musicians’ Union dug up some, er, old records to reveal that the fab four – John Lennon (guitar), James Paul McCartney (guitar), George Harrison (guitar) and Peter Best (drums) – all joined the Liverpool branch of the MU on 1 August 1962.

“That crew of Liverpool hard cases had in them the right stuff. It’s my experience they always have. It is the sea that gives it – the vastness, the loneliness surrounding their dark stolid souls.” Joseph Conrad in Youth

I saw her standing there

Angela Geddes-Brown, of Birmingham New Street, who works for East Midland Trains, and Debbie Reay, of Northern Line North, attended the Labour Party national women’s conference in the ACC on Saturday 22 September as ASLEF delegates.

The Tories are pricing people off our railways

ICK Whelan wrote an article on Monday in the Yellow Pages, a daily conference briefing produced for delegates by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, ahead of the debate that morning on public investment and public ownership.

“There are some strange people around,” wrote Mick. “Take James Price of the right-wing think tank the TaxPayers’ Alliance. When the Labour Party, last month, called for a freeze in fares, to help hard-pressed families, he said that, as a hard-nosed free marketeer, he reckons it’s right to try to price people off trains.

“He said: ‘It would be wrong to announce any kind of fares freeze, as it would hurt rail users, as well as taxpayers, who subsidise rail in the UK whether or not they use trains. Taxpayers would be subsidising rail users to the tune of more than £1 billion over a parliament if fares were frozen and rail users would suffer a worse experience from more crowded trains and more delays. Instead, the trade union caused bloated wage bill should be addressed.”

“Factually wrong, of course, but that has never stopped the weird people on the extreme right. Office of Rail and Road figures show that train operators’ total costs are £12.6 billion of which staff costs are just £2.9 billion (23%).

‘Morally wrong, too. Government statistics reveal that passenger journeys are down from 1,729 million in 2016-2017 to 1,705 million in 2017-2018 while season ticket sales have plummeted 9.2%.

‘The Tories would have you believe this is due to the changing nature of work. They’re right – to the extent that zero hours contracts, faux self-employment, and job insecurity, make people reluctant to buy a season ticket. But the brutal truth is that passengers are being priced off our railways.

‘Fares across all operators are now 20% higher in real terms than they were before privatisation. We care because, industrially, we want a thriving, successful railway that works for everyone in this country. And we care, politically, because we want a socialist society in which everyone has a fair chance.

‘The government has ordered a review of the rail industry. Well, we know the problem. And the solution. The franchise system isn’t just flawed, it has failed, and is broken beyond repair. That’s why passengers as well as politicians know it’s time to bring Britain’s railways back into public ownership’
From San Diego up to Maine in every mine and mill where workers strike and organize says he, you’ll find Joe Hill

The GS, introducing Jeremy, said: ‘The link between the Labour Party and the trade unions is one of our movement’s most precious assets.’ London Mayor Sadiq Khan added: ‘Trade unions are the lifeblood of our party – standing up for workers’ rights across our city and our country.’

Mick and Jeremy both paid tribute, from the stage, to Tosh McDonald, who was standing, listening, in the audience with his wife Nikki. They persuaded an initially reluctant EC president to join them at the mic where he recalled, briefly, a lifetime of struggle as an activist in the labour movement.

Tosh, who steps down from ASLEF’s executive committee at the end of this year, recalled the struggle against apartheid in South Africa in his youth, industrial struggles on behalf of train drivers, and the political struggle to build a Labour Party that recognises this challenge and offers the real radical alternative policies that this country needs. Whether this is the creation of a National Investment Bank, worker ownership funds, or plans to give workers more of a voice in how their industries are run, the leadership of our party have put us on the right course and must continue to be bold.

‘It’s this boldness that has seen our membership grow to become the biggest in Europe. It’s why the Labour Party is getting stronger whilst social democratic parties across Europe, who continue to follow neo-liberal orthodoxies, are collapsing. If we do not offer radical change, we leave a vacuum. A vacuum that will be exploited by those who will use this crisis to spread hate and division. The far right is on the rise. Donald Trump in the United States, Viktor Orbán in Hungary; the Freedom Party in Austria. ‘We know they don’t offer the answers and seek to scapegoat minorities and immigrants. We’ve seen it before. And the Tories have their own little Trumps hovering above the Prime Minister like vultures, waiting for their chance to push this nasty right-wing government even further to the right.

‘Jeremy, John and the labour movement offer real hope. Bold policies that redistribute wealth and power to the many, not the few. Policies that say we don’t have to accept the status quo. That society can be different. That equality and affluence are not at odds with one another but are dependent on each other. The Labour Party must continue to build on its bold vision, to bring about the real change working people are crying out for.’

Josephine Butler, in her work ‘Proud to be union – Tosh, Jeremy and Mick’ better and fairer Britain. He finished by raising his clenched right fist, the international symbol of the left, to the rallying cry, ‘Solidarity!’

 Mick is chair of TULO – the Trade Union & Labour Party Liaison Organisation – which coordinates the activities of the 12 trade unions which affiliate to the Labour Party – ASLEF; the Bakers, Food & Allied Workers’ Union; Community; CWU; FBU; GMB; Musicians’ Union; NUM; TSSA; Unison; Unite and USDAW.

**QUOTE…**

‘If he can secure enough Tory MPs to get into the final two-horse run-off – a big ask – Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson would win by a mile. He is hugely popular amongst the “fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists” who make up the Tory rank and file.’ – Jack Conrad in Labour Party Marxists

**...UNQUOTE**
Carillion, Tosh said ‘The simplest longed! could be like Jeremy and rise above everything it could claiming – in the hard right Tory government sold off state and undermining the post-Conservative governments. Her set about dismantling the welfare Thatcher was elected in 1979 and were no parasites!’

labour. We used gas, electricity, and tenancies, maintained by direct had houses, with long, secure that long ago, ‘We went to schools, and the first time as a Doncaster ‘the last time as president of ASLEF, ‘People in Palestine are growing up with no rights,’ he said. ‘My abiding memories of a fact-finding visit to Palestine are of yet another security barrier and yet another wall. These people are abused on their way to work and it difficult to get back to their homes at the end of the day. Palestinians pay their taxes but their refuse isn’t picked up and the Mayor of Jerusalem, when asked why, says; “If they want that they should go back to their own country”’. When the plane touched down at the airport I was asked the purpose of my visit and said, “I’m the general secretary of the train drivers’ union. I’m trainspotting”! But the truth is the railways go into the wilderness to encourage the building of more illegal settlements. And Mr Trump is destabilising the region by changing the status of Jerusalem that has enjoyed – an albeit uneasy – co-existence for 70 years since 1948.’

You say you want a revolution

OSH McDonald spoke to delegates on Tuesday morning for, as he put it, ‘the last time as president of ASLEF, and the first time as a Doncaster councillor’.

In a barnstorming speech that earned him a standing ovation in the conference hall, Tosh recalled that, once upon a time, and not all that long ago, ‘We went to schools, and hospitals, that we owned. We had houses, with long, secure tenancies, maintained by direct labour. We used gas, electricity, and water and we owned it all! There were no parasites!’

That changed when Margaret Thatcher was elected in 1979 and set about dismantling the welfare state and undermining the post-war consensus of both Labour and Conservative governments. Her hard right Tory government sold off everything it could claim – in the face of all the evidence – that private worked better than public.

‘Thatcher sold us what we already owned! I hated her. I wish I could be like Jeremy and rise above it, but I can’t. I did set the alarm clock an hour earlier than I needed just so I could hate her for an hour longer!’

In the wake of the collapse of Carillion, Tosh said ‘The simplest way to ensure we don’t worry about where the contracts go is public ownership. We make it better for all of us.’

He praised the Labour Party and a Labour leadership – ‘the best I’ve seen in my lifetime’ – committed to public ownership.

Tosh finished a passionate speech – made from the heart, without notes – by saying that although he had not always agreed with the decisions of the Labour Party, ‘I never worked against any of them – I accepted those decisions – and I call on all Labour members, in parliament, and in this country, to get behind the Labour leadership now.’

His call for solidarity brought delegates to their feet, and Jeremy Corbyn thanked Tosh for everything he has done for the labour movement.
There’s a ghost in my house

NGELA Rayner, Labour MP for Ashton under Lyne, and Shadow Education Secretary, was the star turn at the joint ASLEF/Co-operative Party reception in the Shipping Forecast bar and restaurant in Slater Street on Monday night.

After speeches by GS Mick Whelan, Co-op Party general secretary Claire McCarthy, and Angela, delegates danced to Northern Soul classics – authentic, vintage vinyl 45s, not CDs or downloads – spun on the mobile wheels of steel by David and Laura Price of the Witney Soul Club in David Cameron’s backyard (where Laura is a Labour councillor, natch).

The music – classic cuts of Tamla Motown, ’60s and ’70s r’n’b, and ska – went down a storm although some delegates, whose tastes lean towards heavy metal, denim, and blue collar rock, preferred to talk rather than move and groove on the dance floor.

The night was a great success and the ASLEF/Co-op reception is becoming, with the Mirror party, the hottest ticket in town at the Labour conference.

Children of the revolution

The Labour Party conference in Liverpool – attended by more than 13,000 people – was the biggest and most upbeat for more than ten years. As delegates left the conference hall after the leader’s speech on Wednesday, to the sound of Children of the Revolution by T.Rex, and made their way back to Lime Street station, all the chatter was about what Labour would achieve when – not if – it is back in government.

Fares – everyone feels they’re being diddled

AUL Plummer and Robert Nisbet of the Rail Delivery Group struggled to be heard above the sea shanties being lustily sung next door by the Port Sunlight Sea Dogs at the RDG fringe in the ACC on Monday lunchtime in a room taken by Dods, the company which publishes The House, Holyrood, Total Politics and Politics Home.

But Plummer did candidly admit: ‘Rail fares need fundamental reform. There are 50 million different ticket possibilities that rail employees, as well as passengers, fail to understand. I don’t understand the ticketing system and we need to make it simpler.’

Rachael Maskell, the Shadow Rail Minister, said: ‘Everyone feels they’re being diddled and fragmentation is a barrier. We need a new system – one single ticketing system – across the network.’ She promised that ‘social justice will be at the heart of a Labour government’ which, she reiterated, is committed to ‘a fully-integrated publicly-owned railway’. She added dryly: ‘People know fares are going up because they’re paying for the compensation the companies have been told to give them.’

Anthony Smith of Transport Focus, enjoying himself hugely, and not just because the Sea Dogs had stopped singing, said: ‘It’s been a torrid summer for the RDG. Industrial relations sticky, inexorable price rises for passengers, patchy service. Passengers around the country aren’t waiting for Chris Grayling’s rail review. Quite a confession from the RDG, which has always argued, in the face of all the evidence, that privatisation is the solution rather than the problem.

HELP! Marz Colombini chaired a fringe meeting to launch a new organisation, Labour & Palestine, at the ACC on Tuesday night. The inaugural meeting was a springboard for a new initiative to build grassroots support at branch and CLP level in the Labour Party for the people of Palestine. ‘The intention is to establish an independent social media platform providing support, advice and guidance to an informal network of Labour Party members and activists,’ said Marz.

‘The focus will be on how party members should harness and develop the support that clearly exists for Palestine within the party and help deliver proud advocacy of Palestinian rights as part of Labour’s ethical foreign policy.’ The new group has been sponsored and supported by ASLEF, Unite, Unison, and Jewish Voice for Labour, with PSC and War on Want. Speakers included Richard Burgon, Labour MP for Leeds East; PCS GS Mark Serwotka; and PSC chair Hugh Lanning. You can find more information on Facebook: @labourandpalestine and Twitter: @LabourPalestine

Give peace a chance

Mick Whelan chaired a Justice for Colombia fringe meeting in the Albert suite of the Hilton hotel on Tuesday evening. Speakers included Steve Cavaller, chief executive of Thompsons solicitors; Jo Stevens, Labour MP for Cardiff Central; Ian Lavery, Labour MP for Wansbeck; and Victoria Sandino, a former FARC commander.

QUOTE...

‘Former Tory treasurer Jim O’Neill’s acknowledgement in the Financial Times that the Tories need to catch up in six key areas shows that it’s Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell who is making the running now.’ – Kevin Maguire in the Daily Mirror

…UNQUOTE

Mark Serwotka, Leah Levane, Hugh Lanning and Marz at the first meeting of Labour & Palestine
If I should die, think only this of me:
That there’s some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England

Those lines, from Rupert Brooke’s poem *The Soldier*, have a special resonance this month as we mark the end of the Great War, 100 years ago, with an armistice signed in a railway carriage. KEITH RICHMOND looks back through the pages of the *Locomotive Journal* for the faces of some of the young railwaymen who for four years fought, and died, for their country.

The spot in the forest where the armistice was signed (top); the signatories; the fantasy of jingoistic recruiting posters was a world away from the grim reality of war – a labouring party travels by train through a landscape devastated by shell holes (above)

The armistice between the Allied Powers and Germany was signed at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918 in a carriage of the private train of Marshal Ferdinand Foch, the French general and commander in chief of the Allied armies, in a railway siding in the Forest of Compiègne in Picardy.

The signatories on the document which put an end to the Great War of 1914-18 included Foch, for France; Admiral Rosslyn Wemyss, Britain’s first sea lord; and, for Germany, Matthias Erzberger, Count Alfred von Oberndorff, General Detlof von Winterfeldt, for the army, and Captain Ernst Vanselow, for the navy.

Many railwaymen were recruited, as the *Locomotive Journal* recorded, and many died. The Great Western Railway memorial at Paddington station pays tribute to 3,312 men from that company who were killed; a fraction of the 20,000 railway workers from Britain and Ireland who died during the conflict.

In December 1918 the *Journal* recorded on its front page: ‘The war has come to a dramatic end during the month, and its effects have been to plant democracy surely in many parts of Europe. The war lords have fallen, and the Kaiser is in exile, with the red flag flying over Potsdam.

‘We naturally think with sorrow of the many bright young lives burned out on the great European funeral pyre during the last four years, and extend a hand of sympathy to all those whose family circle is reduced, or whose friendships are less numerous today than yore. These young men died nobly, and by their sacrifice must we endeavour to exalt humanity to emulate their courage and with their spirit go forward into the future.’

‘Droll rot, they would shoot you if they knew Your cosmopolitan sympathies’
– Isaac Rosenberg, *Break of Day in the Trenches*

‘If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood Come gurgling from the froth-corrupted lungs, Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, My friend, you would not tell with such high zest To children ardent for some desperate glory, The old lie: Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori’
– Wilfred Owen, *Dulce et Decorum Est*
Branch News

Dancing queen
Southampton
Northam held its long service presentation on Sunday 30 September in the South Western Arms, St Denys. We welcomed GS Mick Whelan, AGS Simon Weller, EC1 Marz Colombini, DO1 Graham Morris, company council reps Nigel Cummins and Andy Davy, plus active and retired members from many different branches across the area. After enjoying the BBQ Mick presented Martin

Mick and Graham (above); Pete and Martin (right); and the crew at St Denys (top)
Queen and retired member Pete Ward with their 40 year badges and engraved glasses. We had an additional presentation to Graham who received an engraved 40 year glass from the branch. Also a short but passionate speech from our Bournemouth RMT colleague Jim Buchanan about their current dispute with SWR; he thanked the branch for their donation to their hardship fund. We thank everyone who attended, especially those who travelled long distances to join us, and look forward to seeing you next year.

Alan Loughlin, branch secretary

30 years on Moss side
Longsight’s September branch welcomed District 3’s newly elected district organiser Andy Hourigan and guests from the RMS. First up to give the branch an update was Andy whose fine delivery informed us of the Northern debacle and various industrial relations issues. Followed by Les Muir and Tony West reminding us of the many benefits of being a member of the RMS and what ASLEF has achieved for members over the years, whilst not forgetting the struggles ahead. Andy presented a well-deserved 30 year service badge to Bro Alan Moss. Then we joined ASLEF colleagues in Manchester attending the 150th Trades Union Congress in the city where it all began. Finally, we would like to thank the RMS, EC vice-president Dave Calfe, and DO5 Nigel Gibson for donations to the Stalybridge & Hyde women’s forum.

Jim Hopkins, branch secretary

200 years together
Dick Wordsworth, Derek Payne, Denis Harriman and I were made redundant as firemen when Manningham loco closed on 30 April 1967. We all worked on the footplate until retirement, earning our 50 year medallions. Unfortunately, Dick passed away before he could pick up his medallion, so we presented it to his brother John at a do in Leeds.

Ernie Whitfield, RMS

Upcoming events

FRATTON – FRIDAY 2 NOVEMBER
Fraton train crew and railway reunion from 12.00 to 18.00 at the BRSA Club next to Fratton station.

HITHER GREEN – WEDNESDAY 7 NOVEMBER
‘Old farts’ reunion’ from 11.00 at the Richmal Crompton opposite Bromley South station. Details from Ray Cooper, RMS.

CATERHAM – SATURDAY 1 DECEMBER
To celebrate 90 years of a drivers’ depot at Caterham, and Christmas, we will be having drinks at the Surrey Hounds pub in Caterham Valley (now called the William Garland) from 19.00. Contact Dean Anderson (07930 911619) for details.

NORWOOD JUNCTION – SUNDAY 2 DECEMBER
AGM from 12.45 and buffet from 14.00 at Selhurst Railway Club. ‘All RMS members are welcome,’ says Daniel Bound.

RIPPLE LANE – FRIDAY 7 DECEMBER
Annual Christmas quaff and jollity will commence at 13.00 at The Windmill near Upminster Bridge tube station. All welcome. ‘Fancy dress optional, but please note the January gathering is “caped” as is the norm;’ says Cliff Blackwell. Normal service will resume in February…

GS Mick Whelan attended a special Leytonstone branch meeting on Thursday 20 September to hand out long service awards.
Driver of the future

You will know, depending on who you talk to, or which magazine you read, that the European Rail Traffic Management System is somewhere around the corner. But what is it – and what does it mean for ASLEF members? ANDY HUDD, EC member for District 7, reveals all.

THE UK rail industry uses European Train Control System to describe the signalling and control part of ERTMS that will be used here. The four main components of the system are the train; driver; onboard equipment (including GSMR); and trackside equipment (including control centres).

The driver of the future will be required to interact with equipment in the cab, rather than just signals outside, to deliver improved safety and performance through an advanced system of communication that allows data to be passed between train and signalling centre so train speed can be managed more efficiently.

There are four (basic) versions of ETCS available, offering varied levels of train control; in the UK we are likely to see the introduction of level 2 (overlay) which means we will have in-cab as well as conventional signalling.

SIGNS AT DANGER
The logic behind this choice is that it assists with the delivery of training needed for ETCS – if you don’t have drivers trained in ETCS then, fine, they can run under conventional signalling. If and when all drivers are trained in ETCS the idea is to remove the physical signalling outside of the cab window – easy!

Well, not quite. This concept, as well as assisting with training, increases it as new entrants have to be trained in both types of signalling to deal with degraded working and non-ETCS routes. Drivers will also have to deal with driving to and acknowledging the in-cab system, as well as stopping at conventional signals at danger. There are other things to consider, too, working on it now!

If you follow the logic we can see an industry moving closer to fully automated trains. Whilst this could be an existential issue for ASLEF long-term – and we must protect our members – I don’t see anything to be concerned about in the short- to medium-term.

The privatised industry struggles with how to fund these technological developments and, as we’ve seen with electrification, widespread delays, mismanagement, and lack of funding means that although a fully automated, integrated, high-tech system is possible it is also, probably, a long way off.

WHAT IS ASLEF DOING?
AAD commissioned an ERTMS working group in 2012 to deal with rules changes around ERTMS being decided at the RSSB. This group has now expanded its remit – and size – for the challenges ahead such as issues around training and fitment of ERTMS.

Freight reps are having a valuable input into the first in-class fitment in the freight sector. EC2 Hugh Bradley and I are attending meetings of the Future Operations Training Group to put ASLEF’s position and, in future, may secure further ERTMS training for our reps on the working group so we have educated and experienced representatives to take the lead when ERTMS is implemented at their companies.

ASLEF will always manage technological advancement with safety as our primary concern. But we should also ensure that we have trained and competent ASLEF members at the front of the train. Because in this brave new world there will still have to be a human eye with the experience to deal with exceptional incidents and emergencies.

I doubt there will ever be a technology that can accurately predict – and effectively deal with – suicides, derailments and fire evacuation.

Even with increased automation, passengers will still want, and need, a driver at the pointy end of the train. Most planes are now fly-by-wire but airlines and, especially, passengers still want a pilot, and co-pilot, in the cockpit in case there’s a problem, or when the technology breaks down. Which, in the end, it always does.

Including the kilometres (ETCS) to miles (conventional signalling) change at transition points along the boundaries of ETCS.

The plan is to develop ETCS and engineers are considering ERTMS levels 4, 5 and 6! In this far-off world trains will be able to communicate with each other using GPS and use integrated systems including Connected Driver Advisory Systems to provide more accurate routing and train control.

THE FUTURE OF ERTMS
Can you imagine a future where automatic trains run at high speed with just a braking curve safety distance and communication latency between them? Or where a delayed train and a right time train can be run together as one train? Well, the egg heads can and they’re

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Whispers of war and peace found their way into the pages of the Journal. MICK HOLDER turns back time to November 1918

SHOUTING BY THE NEWSBOYS
‘We certainly do live in these times, and few will forget Sunday 13 October, for its suppressed excitement over the rumour that the German government had accepted President Wilson’s peace terms, and had ordered the evacuation of all invaded territory. There was no shouting except by the newsboys, but there was a feverish hope that the best might be true. The next morning placed things in colder light, for rumour was slightly exaggerated. The war was still on, and the making of shells and the clash of forces of men proceeded apace. There was, however, sufficient ground for hope of a very early peace, as serious talking was proceeding over the wires between President Wilson and the German dynasty.’

FROM WAR TO PEACE
‘Peace is likely to find this nation just as unprepared to meet its urgencies as the war did. The transition from war to peace will involve enormous changes in industrial and social life, and it can be frankly said the cabinet is not ready. It has not settled the Irish problem, and the refusal of liberty to a small nation will hamper our representatives in the peace conferences.’

ONLY A SAD CONSOLATION
‘We feel deeply concerned by the very heavy obituary notices this month. The practical sympathy of the Society has gone out in very many cases where it has proved an absolute blessing, but the grant is, at the best, only a sad consolation. Death has met an early end. The winter is going to be severe, and trying, be it peace or war.’

SERIOUS SHORTAGE OF COAL
‘Owing to the very serious shortage of coal, it becomes us, as one of the greatest (if not the greatest) bodies of coal users in the country, to turn our attention to the question of the greatest economy in the use of the precious material of which we use so much and, in ordinary times, value so little.’
The 500 Club

The 500 Club is a fundraising venture for ASLEF’s Retired Members’ Section. Numbers in the draw cost £4 each and, to begin making payments into club funds, all you have to do is complete the standing order form and return it to your bank. Alternatively, you can pay by cheque a year in advance; the cheque should be made payable to ASLEF RMS 500 Club.

Payments need to reach the club account by 1st of every month and the draw takes place on 12th of every month – with the winning number, name, and prize printed on page 5 of the ASLEF Journal. Once you have arranged your method of payment just complete the form and return it to the Admin Department at head office. The Retired Members’ Section committee would like to thank you for your support and wish you luck in the draw!

Yours fraternally, Mick Whelan, general secretary

ASLEF RMS 500 Club application form

Name...........................................................................................................................................
Address........................................................................................................................................
Telephone No.................................................
email.............................................................................................................................................

Each number costs £4. You can purchase as many numbers as you like. I confirm that I wish to purchase ____ numbers as part of the 500 Club.
A) I have set up my standing order (£48 per annum or £4 per month)
B) I enclose a cheque for advance payment (£48 per annum)

Signed.................................................................Date............................................

Please return this half of the form to: Andrea Weston in the Admin Dept, ASLEF, 77 St John Street, London, EC1M 4NN and hand the other half, the standing order mandate, to your bank (or via your internet bank)

**STANDING ORDER MANDATE**

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Please cancel any previous standing order or direct debit in favour of the beneficiary named above

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS

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Note: The Bank will not undertake to:
(i) make any reference to Value Added Tax or other indeterminate element
(ii) advise payer’s address to beneficiary
(iii) advise beneficiary of liability to pay
(iv) request beneficiary’s banker to advise beneficiary of receipt

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BILL AND MICK: SAD LOSS TO EDGE HILL

It is with great sadness that I have to inform you of the passing of not one but two ex-branch secretaries – William Potter, 89, and Michael Maher, 62 – both loyal members of this union.

Billy had been retired for 26 years but, as branch sec, led us through the 1982 strike. He had been at Bankhall shed but, on closure, moved to Edge Hill. He was always willing to pass on his wealth of knowledge about union procedures, and train driving, to those who showed interest. Billy’s funeral was attended by many of his old comrades.

Mick had only recently retired due to ill-health after 41 years’ service. He attended our last branch meeting on 21 September, where we spoke about many things. Two days later he was admitted to hospital and tragically passed away on 29 September.

Mick started his career at Birkenhead and moved to Lime Street on that depot’s closure. He immediately immersed himself in the branch, taking on various positions, from branch committee, LDC rep, branch chair, and branch sec, to company council sec (Northern), AAD delegate, and district council delegate. Mick used his array of knowledge to battle for every individual, and put his heart and soul into any fight. His death came as a shock to comrades who knew him personally and worked alongside him for many years. Things will never be quite the same. The branch sends its heartfelt condolences to the families of both of our comrades.

PE Stannard, branch chair

MICK MAHER NEVER FORGOTTEN

Mick Maher died on Saturday 29 September, shortly after he retired after 41 years of railway service and many years of dedication to ASLEF. Mick began at Birkenhead in 1977 and later transferred to Lime Street. He served as company council rep at Northern Rail and, for many years, was branch secretary at Edge Hill 070. His dedication over the years was amazing, supporting members new and old.

On Friday 7 September we held leaving drinks and presentation for Mick with many friends, colleagues and wives in attendance. Alan Donnelly, ex-EC president, was in attendance.

Alan Donnelly (far left) helped Mick mark his retirement from the railway in September and kindly presented Mick with a plaque and gifts. Mick, you will never be forgotten; our condolences to wife Jan and family.

Mike Cooper, assistant branch secretary, Edge Hill

LEN HUNTLEY TREADING THE BOARDS IN ERITH

Slade Green driver Leonard Stanley Joseph Huntley has taken his final curtain call. Gentleman Len was born on 28 July 1938 and joined British Rail as a cleaner at Hither Green on 10 August 1953. He became a fireman on 1 August 1955, a driver on 25 December 1961, and transferred from Hither Green to Slade Green on 8 April 1963.

Len, who had wanted to be a train driver from an early age, never married and remarked that the reason he looked so young was that he’d had ‘a lucky escape’. In his spare time he loved his garden, classical music, and treading the boards at his local theatre, The Playhouse at Erith in Kent, where he acted, built sets, worked back stage, and front of house for over 50 years, and where he was able to spend more time after his retirement at 65.

Unfortunately, 18 months ago Len took a tumble on a bus on the way to the theatre and ended up at Stoke Mandeville Hospital. When he came out he moved into a local nursing home where he passed away in September.

Richard White, Slade Green

LEN received his 50 year badge and ASLEF tankard at a beer and badges night in 2016

JOHN ROWLAND GREAT RAILWAYMAN

It is with great sadness that Stratford branch reports the loss of Bro John Rowland who died in August. John took ill health retirement in 2011, having started at Stratford as a second man in 1986. His career took him to Gidea Park as a driver, before transferring to Liverpool Street in 2004 driving interCity services to Norwich. John was the ASLEF h&s rep during his time at Gidea Park and Liverpool Street, as well as treasurer for the Liverpool Street welfare & social club. He was a character, and many who had the pleasure of working with him also had the pleasure of calling him a friend as we enjoyed a great social scene together. John’s health deteriorated following his retirement, and he finally lost his battle with illness at the far too young age of 52. We shall all remember with fondness the happy memories we shared. His funeral saw a good turnout of former colleagues to pay tribute to a great railwayman, and a jolly nice bloke!

John Thorpe, Stratford

RICHARD WORDSWORTH YOU DON’T PUT COAL ON UPSIDE DOWN

Dick Wordsworth – Snuffy to his mates, because of his love of snuff – was a true railwayman. He loved his job on the footplate, and was always supportive of ASLEF. Dick had a dry sense of humour; one of his sayings was, ‘You don’t put coal on upside down because the engine will not steam.’ Dick took early retirement in 2000 through ill-health; he was riddled with arthritis. When, in 2012, he was diagnosed with leukaemia, he just said, ‘OK, I will have to get on with it.’ That was Dick! He was given two years to live but lasted six. He passed away on 12 April at the age of 73.

Ernie Whitfield, RMS
Bollocks to Brexit? But we all know Brexit is bollocks

I read with much amusement the letter from Andrew Green and Mary-Clare Buckle about the Tolpuddle rally in July (Journal, October) describing how they were confronted by ‘offensive’ stickers labelled ‘Bollocks to Brexit’ which left them feeling ‘intimidated’. My initial reaction was that those stickers should have read ‘Brexit is Bollocks’ but I was also left wondering who these people think they speak for when they claim these stickers might as well have read ‘Bollocks to train drivers’.

A Google search leads me to Ms Buckle being a charming textile artist from Dorset, and Mr Green is her husband. I found nothing on either of them working for the railways. Presumably their defence of our politics doesn’t extend to the bad eggs amongst us. Those, like me, who voted remain, or many of my younger (and not-so-young) colleagues who did likewise. Or those who have EU-born parents or spouses, or even those who pay 40% tax but couldn’t vote in the first place? Well, here’s a message to Buckle & Green: you don’t speak for me.

I doubt either has ever been near a train drivers’ mess room in recent years. I believe the large rail vote for Brexit was aided by hubris that the industry would remain immune from any economic fallout. After all, the financial crisis seems to have never happened to me; my wages were not curtailed, let alone cut, like so many of Britain’s workforce in the last ten years. Thus non-rail and economic issues have been elevated into the Brexit argument here.

Leaving aside that I am from a depot sometimes unjustifiably tarnished as mainly full of ‘old white farts’, most Brexit-voting drivers I know were concerned about the things that The Sun and Daily Mail consistently drag up: immigration (particularly Muslim immigration) and ‘being ruled by Brussels’. It’s immaterial that these colleagues can never explain how the EU – with no Muslim member – is responsible for Muslim immigration into Britain, or how the EU is ruling us, when Bliar – is responsible for Muslim immigration into this country. This is, well, still what bothered them.

Occasionally, one or two will point to an EU threat to the public ownership of our railways. But that’s the funny bit because Britain has so successfully led the way in rail privatisation there really isn’t much left for anyone else to privatise. Indeed, thanks to privatisation, the free access model the EU wants – which differs from full privatisation itself – has had its trial run in Britain. Foreign state-run concerns (Deutsche Bahn, Nederlandse Spoorwegen, Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens, etc) have moved in, and will remain long after Brexit. Of course, things would be different if a nationalised British Rail could encroach onto other countries’ networks. But that’s not going to happen, is it?

Another myth is that the EU would prevent re-nationalisation. Much like those stickers about Brexit at the Tolpuddle rally, this is, well, you get my drift. The EU didn’t object when the East Coast main line was re-nationalised, nor to the re-nationalisation of Railtrack. And if a British government – under Green & Buckle’s messiah, perhaps – really did care about things, they could always get an opt-out.

Lexiteers are a small branch of the left but, like a delusional millennial religious cult, think only they hold the truth. That’s why the organisers of the rally thought such stickers were acceptable, because most of the left sees Brexit for what it truly is. Lexiteers detest the EU as a neo-liberal monster, despite all evidence pointing to a far more progressive entity than anything the UK has offered under either the post-Heath Tories or New Labour, let alone something like the USSR. It’s not just having a parliament returned by PR or a commission whose delegates are sent by democratically-elected governments where the descendants of the mistresses of, say, Louis XIV or Frederick the Great don’t get an automatic seat. It’s about what even the continent’s capitalists believe amounts to social justice.

You often hear politicians, even non-French and within the leading centre-right EPP, dismiss the Anglo-Saxon economics of Britain and America as socially unacceptable to their own values. Most Christian Democrat politicians across Europe find the callous approach to the disabled exhibited by the Tories morally repugnant. This probably explains why in 2009 the Tories left to join people more suited to them, such as the Polish Law & Justice Party.

How Lexiteers think they will ever create a socialist utopia in Britain is beyond me, but leaving the EU is already making the lives of those on the lowest rung – those they claim they care for – far worse. If those pesky experts we were told we’ve had too much of – but

Letters

Join the conversation! Send letters by email to journal@aslef.org.uk or by Royal Mail to the ASLEF Journal at 77 St John Street, London, EC1M 4NN

Kris and Rik: Rail crossings, footbridges and train horns

I must apologise sincerely to Rik Scone (Journal, October). My information about the incident at the Wallows Lane crossing was gathered from websites and I was unaware of their veracity. I was actually hoping to get Rik, the driver involved, on board to strengthen the argument for use of a two tone horn but couldn’t find out the name of the driver. I have had two fatalities myself in the past and those very close near fatalities (Journal, August) with the father and baby plus the young girl. I don’t want any other driver to go through this. Once again, I do apologise to Rik for any inaccuracies in my information.

Kristian Jendesen, Salisbury

I accept Kris’s apology and appreciate his attempt to encourage debate on this matter. I bear him no ill-feelings and understand that his actions were of good intent. I, for one, endorse his concerns about the use of only a single tone warning on approach to unmanned crossings. I know that individual drivers use a variety of ‘styles’, some of which differ (considerably) from the rule book. Personally, as I mentioned in my original letter, I believe that all crossings should have some kind of warning system in place.

The Wallows Lane crossing, near Walsall’s Bescot Stadium, where Sarah Athersmith lost her life

If only so much public money hadn’t been diverted into the pockets of shareholders! At the scene of my incident, a police officer in attendance expressed his opinion that the cost of the clear up operation and subsequent enquiry would have easily paid for a footbridge! Thank you for forwarding Kris’s apology and for printing my letter.

Rik Scone, Birmingham

New Street

Journal

November 2018

KRIS AND RIK: RAIL CROSSINGS, FOOTBRIDGES AND TRAIN HORNS
who were right about the pound dropping to 85% of its rate against the dollar following the vote, and a current rate of parity with the euro – as to be believed, Brexit will damage the economy so badly – loss of foreign-owned manufacturing, particularly in the motor industry; the return of ex-pats unable to pay the extra health insurance to live abroad putting greater strain on an understaffed NHS; the inevitable rise in food prices with the lack of EU farm workers, being just three examples – the future doesn’t look good. Maybe that’s what Lexiters want: a revolution when the Tories, aided by working-class voters who believe Boris the Menace has more to offer them than Corbyn, have turned the UK into one vast tax haven for the benefit of the few.

The EU may not be perfect – it would take simultaneous progressive voting across the European Union in national elections to reform it which, ironically, will be easier without the UK – but it remains far better than any alternative being offered. When the inevitable call to strike goes out, as tax shortfalls force a squeeze on public transport spending, particularly in London, impacting on both wages and jobs in our industry, I wonder if Millie Tant and Dave Spart, as champions of Brexit, will caution restraint. Without his unflagging support I do not think I would have got through the last six months. You are a credit to our union, Keith, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all my colleagues at work who supported me – you know who you are.

Keith Garry, Wigan Wallgate, Northern Rail

Credit to our union, Keith

I would like to express my eternal gratitude through the ASLEF Journal to my local rep, Keith Martin, for his resolute and unswerving support for me during what was a traumatic last six months at work, from accompanying me to an interview with BTP in his own time, as he was on holiday, to representing me at all my investigatory interviews. Without his unflagging support I do not think I would have got through the last six months. You are a credit to our union, Keith, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all my colleagues at work who supported me – you know who you are.

Keith Garry, Wigan Wallgate, Northern Rail

What’s the root of all evil?

Bro Brian Ayrton (Journal, June) extols the virtues of Jesus Christ and provides a lengthy list as to why he believes we all need to be grateful to Jesus. I wonder if Bro Ayrton would care to contemplate how many lives have been lost in the last thousand years in the name of religion? The slaughter continues to this day. Many people believe that money is the root of all evil. They are wrong. Religion is!

Denis A Lewis, Kingsteignton, Devon

Crime and punishment

In 1982, not long after the dispute between BR and ASLEF over flexible rostering, I had to call the police to deal with an unruly passenger on the train I was driving. After the police officer interviewed the passenger he called me a ‘troublemaker, always going on strike’. Now, with crime soaring and fewer police, morale is so low officers are quitting the force to become train drivers…

P Begley, Bedford

I never met the right girl

Snippet from the Billy Gaskin eulogy at a funeral: “I never met the right girl.”

Mel Thorley, Longsight

Don’t chuck it in the bin

As a retired member I can ill afford to pay income tax on my pension, never mind too much. Thanks to ASLEF putting the tax refund form in with the Journal I thought, nothing to lose, filled it in and sent details to the Tax Refund Company. No hassle and I was pleasantly surprised to receive a three figure payment.

Dave Darwin, RMS, Chesterfield

VEP POPPY BADGE in aid of the Royal British Legion. £6 + £1 p&p; email Martin Thompson (Fratton) at wdralblageinfo@gmail.com

CLASS 308 NSERS badge to raise funds for the preservation of the last complete Phase One 4 CIG train 1753. £6 inc p&p from NSERS, 41 Highfield Road, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP1 6DD. Cheques payable to Network South East Railway Society.

CATERHAM depot opened on 17 June 1928 due to the electrification of the Caterham line. We did 90 badges to celebrate 90 years and also 50 black rim badges based on our ‘82 strike badge. £5 via PayPal contact Dean Anderson (07930 911619) for details.

AIRDRIE has produced a badge to commemorate its reopening as a separate branch. £6.50 inc p&p. Please contact branch chair Ivan Wilson (07949 862393) for details.

PERTH branch badge to commemorate 110 years (1908-2018). £6 plus £1 p&p. Cheques payable to Perth branch ASLEF No 134 General. Please contact branch secretary Grant Murchie for details on 07412 453454 or grantm32@btinternet.com

KIRKDALE 121 limited edition centenary badge 1917-2017 price £7.50 inc p&p from branch secretary Keith Devling. Call 07933 144768 or email kdevling@aol.com

HANDMADE miniature driver’s keys to wear as a charm or round the neck. Solid silver and 9ct gold weighing approximately 7 grams. Just over 2cm in length and just under 2cm wide. £300, £100 + £7 p&p recorded delivery. Contact Brad McCarthy on 07929 350146.

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Oh, welcome to the party, we’re all just papers in the wind

With an eye on the presents under the tree, KEITH RICHMOND looks at some of the books that have dropped on the ASLEF Journal desk at head office

On the write lines: The Helium Kids (above), George Orwell, Fred Kerr, David Taylor, John Forrest, Gerđur Kristný and Iain Galbraith

J TAYLOR has taken a line attributed to John Belushi by Bob Woodward in Wired – ‘Film is king; television is furniture; and rock and roll is life’ – as the title for his brilliant new book. And added, as an afterthought, possibly at his publisher’s request, ‘a novel’.

Without that admission – and there are people who have watched chunks of This is Spinal Tap without realising it’s a mockumentary – you could read this book believing it really is a memoir by Nick du Pont about his life and times on the road with the Helium Kids.

Because it’s beautifully done – down to the endpapers, with their glorious album covers of the band’s seminal LPs – quotes from Gandalf’s Garden, the NME Book of Rock, and Mojo; features from Sounds, reviews from Melody Maker, and articles in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. All perfectly pitched by a writer whose ear is as good as his eye.

“It’s only rock’n’roll but I like it…”
– Mick Jagger

Taylor – possibly because he comes from Norwich, possibly because he’s working-class, possibly because he writes parodies (and gossip pars) for Private Eye – has never had the credit his writing deserves.

Rock and Roll is Life (Constable, £18.99) is a dazzling book. If you’re familiar with pop music from the early ’60s beat group boom through the hippie haze of dope and glory via heavy metal, prog rock, and glam rock to punk, you’ll smile warmly at the references. If you’re not, you’ll enjoy the observations about the changing political, social and sexual mores through the ’60s and ’70s. It’s one of the best books of the year.

“All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.” – Animal Farm by George Orwell

As a journalist, novelist, essayist and critic, George Orwell is without peer. His dystopian novel 1984 – which introduced Big Brother, Newspeak, doublethink, thoughtcrime and Room 101 to the English language – and the perennially popular fable Animal Farm are two of the most important pieces of 20th century prose fiction; Down and Out in Paris and London and The Road to Wigan Pier, his investigations into poverty, and Homage to Catalonia, an account of fighting in the Spanish Civil War, are non-fiction masterpieces; and his reviews for Tribune, and broadcasts for the BBC, are masterclasses in clarity, criticism, and analysis.

George Orwell Illustrated by David Smith and Mike Mosher (Haymarket Books, £15) is a comprehensive guide to the man and his work, first published 20 years ago as Orwell for Beginners, which is what it is, in easily digested paragraphs, with lots of graphics. The perfect present for anyone yet to read the work itself.

“Once upon a time, I couldn’t spell engineer. Now I is one.” – John Forrest

As a boy John Forrest dreamed of becoming an engine driver, left school to do an engineering apprenticeship at Crewe, became a trainee draughtsman in the locomotive drawing office at Derby, and ended up spending 40 years as a railwayman. I Would Have Done the Job for Nothing (Matador, £16.50) is the story of his life, solving design faults and maintenance problems on steam and diesel locos for British Rail.

Steam in the North West by Fred Kerr (Pen & Sword, £25) is a celebration in pictures of steam traction running, since 1972, on main lines north of Crewe to Carlisle, east of Crewe to the Calder Valley, south to Buxton, and west to the S&C route from Hellifield to Carlisle.

“‘You tilted / your head back / caught the snowflakes / with your tongue.’
– Gerđur Kristný

Drápa by the Icelandic journalist, poet and novelist Gerđur Kristný (Arc Publications, £9.99) is an extraordinary and powerful poem sequence, taking its structure from the Old Norse shield poetry of the Vikings, its subject matter from contemporary Nordic crime, and its mood from modern Scandi noir. Beautifully translated by Rory McTurk, Emeritus Professor of Icelandic Studies at Leeds University, it’s a compelling meditation on the misogyny of murderous men, written after Kristný spoke to the boxer Bragi Ölfsson in the room where he strangled his wife Grítha Bígisdóttir in 1988.

“‘Deep in the sedges reeled the kinglet wren / and marking a full between incoming planes / ice-melt sighed on a stone.’
– Iain Galbraith

The True Height of the Ear (Arc, £9.99) is the first volume of verse by Iain Galbraith, who was born in Glasgow, brought up at Arrochar in Argyll, and now lives at Wiesbaden in Germany. He brings a fresh eye and a keen ear to the world, whether seen from a train – ‘Snow-geese had never come this far’ – or the river bank: ‘No breath passes the shutter / and the river, // girls in debate, their pale arms / no wind ruffles the sail – / scenes taken in June on the river, // girls in debate, their pale arms / like swans’ necks against the blue keel.’
THE MYTH AND THE MADNESS OF THE MARKET

INCE Margaret Thatcher walked through the door of Downing Street in 1979, and Ronald Reagan strode into the Oval Office in 1981, the Western world has been suffering at the hands of free market theory run riot. Milton Friedman and his Chicago School of Economics was the only game in town as monetarist theories eclipsed the ideas of John Maynard Keynes and John Kenneth Galbraith that had saved the world from the Great Depression.

A new breed of supply-side economists joined forces with right-wing Republicans, hard-line Conservatives and morally corrupt ‘greed is good’ businessmen – Gordon Gekko’s credo in Oliver Stone’s 1987 film Wall Street memorably summed up the mood of the moment – to repeat the mantra that the best system is the market system with minimal state intervention. The private sector was better at running everything so the post-war consensus was torn up, public services sold off, and the Tory dream of private affluence – and profits plundered – amidst public squallor became the new norm.

When voters realized these guys were living on Fantasy Island – even George Bush famously derided Reagan’s ideas as ‘voodoo economics’ – it was too late. Tony Blair, in Britain, and Bill Clinton, in the United States, both embraced the market myth and won office on the basis that they could manage the market better than their opponents.

The problem is that the evidence of the last 40 years – and, especially, the global financial crisis of 2008 – shows that the market, left to its own devices, doesn’t work. Or doesn’t work very well. It’s financially crisis of 2008 – shows that the market, left to its own devices, doesn’t work. Or doesn’t work very well. It’s – even George Bush famously derided Reagan’s ideas as ‘voodoo economics’ – it was too late. Tony Blair, in Britain, and Bill Clinton, in the United States, both embraced the market myth and won office on the basis that they could manage the market better than their opponents.

The problem is that the evidence of the last 40 years – and, especially, the global financial crisis of 2008 – shows that the market, left to its own devices, doesn’t work. Or doesn’t work very well. It’s attractive – like pop, it will eat itself. A noble lady or partition rodent.

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

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