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Steve Gillan reveals how the Tories’ obsession with privatisation is wrecking Britain’s prisons; John Metcalfe reports on the peace process in Colombia; Mick Humphrys recalls the end of the second man; and the secret mistress Charles Dickens feared would be exposed when they were involved in the fatal Staplehurst train crash in Kent.
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ASLEF, 77 St John Street, London, EC1M 4NN
Tel: 020 7324 2400 | email: journal@aslef.org.uk
website: www.aslef.org.uk | twitter: @ASLEFUnion

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GS Mick Whelan

Truth about the Tube

At the time of writing this column, between the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party conference, we are still in dispute with the Tube. And once more, even though I know the strength of feeling and unity we always get, the solidarity demonstrated has been truly awesome. This has led to talks continuing, but we are a very long way apart.

Let me remind those not involved why we are in this position. The company, which has hidden for years behind the company plan when we wish to improve things, chose to obviate the framework agreement – the machinery – and announce a start date for Night Tube. No negotiation, no consultation, but an act of pure malicious bad faith. Strange, as none of the unions involved are fundamentally against a properly resourced and funded Night Tube. Having acted in bad faith the company then declares a one-off payment, with no guarantees or limits on rostering or staffing levels to protect existing agreements, or the work/life balance, and health and safety is not even a factor for a system that saw an increase in sexual assaults last year.

Can 20,000 workers all be wrong? According to the press, it’s all about ‘greedy Tube drivers’ and comparisons are made with other workers outside the Tube, in a race to the bottom, which we will not get into (let’s have other workers paid properly, not false comparisons by those who do not understand the nature of what we do). We then get the lies that what they are offering is reasonable! Because Boris Johnson, a man with four jobs, who has just taken a 10% increase in one, tells us so?

The other lie being propagated by the Transport Minister, and others, is that this is political and we are only on strike because we did not like a Tory election victory. But we were unaware either of the intended dishonourable and despicable act of bad faith that was going to take place or of who would win the election. If I had been I’m sure I would have placed a bet accordingly rather than running around the country pursuing our policy! Talks continued, and we jumped through the hoops of Maggie’s laws, and the timetable for action gets impacted by the state’s rather undemocratic system.

Whether on the Tube, or elsewhere in the rail industry, this trade union will continue to fight against bad faith, imposed conditions, and political lies. Now and in the future.

Yours fraternally
Mick Whelan, general secretary
Broken rail franchise system up for review

A REVIEW of the rail industry has been ordered by the government following trenchant criticism from rail unions, the Labour Party, transport think tanks, passengers, and commuter groups. The review, to be led by Keith Williams, deputy chair of the high street chain John Lewis, follows damning criticism by the Transport Select Committee of the Department for Transport under Chris Grayling. The committee condemned the DfT as ‘naïve’ and said it singularly failed to conduct ‘appropriate due diligence’ on the VTEC bid to run the East Coast main line.

‘The franchise system isn’t just flawed, it has utterly failed, and is broken beyond repair,’ said GS Mick Whelan. ‘It’s time to bring Britain’s railways back into public ownership.’

NWA

On his way into Sam’s Chop House in Manchester, during the Trades Union Congress, Jim Walsh bumped into a man sitting at the bar. He politely said ‘Sorry’ before realising it was a strikingly realistic 700lb bronze statue, complete with titter, of the artist LS Lowry, a regular here while painting his pictures of Matchstick Men and Matchstick Cats and Dogs. And, on his way out of the basement bar, Jim bumped into Terry Christian, the Mancunian broadcaster who made his name on The Word and now presents Northerners.

Cheers! Laurence Stephen Lowry, looking bronzed, and thirsty, has been called to the bar

With Attitude on Imagine FM in Stockport.

Fortunately, Jim didn’t spill anyone’s beer…

OMOV in Wales

DO7 Brian Corbett and district council secretary Ian Thompson, who sits on the general council of the Wales TUC, attended the special Welsh Labour Party conference in Cardiff on Saturday 15 September to determine the new process – one member one vote or a reformed electoral college – for voting for the Welsh Labour leader. ‘After much debate OMOV was selected by 64.1% to 35.9%,’ said Brian. ‘Which all delegates accepted in a positive and comradely manner.’

Lest we forget

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

CONFERENCE RALLIES

The STUC black workers’ conference is at the Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel, Glasgow, from Saturday 6 to Sunday 7 October. The IFTF congress is at the Suntec convention centre in Singapore from Sunday 14 to Saturday 20 October. 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 Trades Union Congress is at the Caird Hall, Dundee, from Monday 15 to Wednesday 17 April 2019. ASLEF’s annual assembly of delegates is at the Marriott Hotel, Leeds, from Monday 13 to Thursday 16 May.
All’s well that, er, ends well

B

EN Elton, who made his name bashing ‘Thatch’ on Friday Night Live on C4 in the 1980s, is back on form with Upstart Crow, his sharpest and most political comedy since Blackadder.

It stars David Mitchell as William Shakespeare; Liza Tarbuck as his wife Anne Hathaway; Paula Wilcox as his mother Mary Arden; Harry Enfield as his disapproving father; Tim Downie as his friend and fellow playwright Kit Marlowe; and Mark Heap as his rival Robert Greene, Master of the Revels, Heap as his rival Marlowe, and the man who dismissed Will as ‘an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, (who) is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country.’

The first episode of the third series, broadcast on BBC2, featured a typical riff on the problems of transport.

‘Do you really think the peoples of this scepter’d isle will endlessly suffer an under-funded, ill-run and pointlessly fractured transport infrastructure to hobble the nation?’ asks Shakespeare. ‘That would be mad!’

When his dad says, ‘What do you reckon they’re going to do about it, then?’ he replies: ‘Why, ’tis certain that, one day, it will not be a rag bag of private companies that run the means of transport in Albion but the public itself, in some form of nationally organised collective. Run for the benefit of all and profit of none!’

‘I must say that does seem like a pretty good idea,’ says Anne. To which dad mutters dryly: ‘Except if ever there was such a publicly-funded service like that the first thing the Queen’s ministers would do is flog it off to their mates.’

‘Come now, father, I hardly think people would be so stupid as to allow that to happen…’

QUOTE...

‘If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face.’ – George Orwell. 1984

...UNQUOTE

500 CLUB: P Fowles, with number 144, won the September draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £432.

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

Off the Rails

NEWS THAT SNCF has signed a deal with Alstom, Bombardier, and Bosch to develop a project towards a prototype driverless train by 2023 has prompted a few over-excitable, anti-trade union, swivel-eyed loons on the right of the Conservative Party to start drooling at the prospect of getting rid of train drivers. Trouble is – but don’t let the facts get in the way of a little wishful thinking – that trains have to be driven. They don’t drive themselves, whatever Isaac Asimov – remember I, Robot? – and other science fiction writers like to imagine. Even with increased automation, we will still want, and need, a trained driver at the pointy end of the train. Most passenger 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.

MARIAN KEARNEY stepped down from her job at head office at the end of August. She joined ASLEF in 2001, working in equalities, education, and then GSP, through ‘some challenging times as well as very good times’ and is well-known to members. Her official goodbye was at the Yorkshire Grey in Bloomsbury on 19 September, between the TUC and the Labour Party conference, but on her last day in the office, 31 August, she picked up a bunch of flowers, shared a chocolate cake with staff, and admitted ‘I’ll miss ASLEF but I won’t miss getting up at silly o’clock to get on the Hammersmith & Shitty line…’

JOHN McCAIN, the Vietnam veteran and Republican Senator for Arizona who lost the US presidential election to Barack Obama in 2008, was witty enough to become a favourite on liberal America’s favourite programme, Jon Stewart’s The Daily Show, and Saturday Night Live, and had a good line in self-deprecating jokes. When he lost the election he said: ‘I slept like a baby. I slept for two hours, woke up and cried. Then slept for two hours, woke up and cried.’ Out on the campaign trail he would greet staff – who were famously loyal – every morning with the words: ‘Where’s the coffee? You’re all fired.’

THE SUN Inn at Feering, close to Kelchester in Essex, has a wonderful way with words on its menu, which describes its excellent beers as well as its fine food. To wit ‘Bishop’s Finger: mouth-filling fruit, prunes, plums and dried apricot spiked with palate-pricking pepper, cinnamon and a soft bitter blood orange finish’ and ‘Whisttable Bay pale ale: a full-bodied fruity ale with a subtle bitterness and glorious grapefruit and pine aromas.’ And then ‘Carlsberg: Everyday cooking lager.’

LONGSIGHT Legend Mel Thorley says that Mr Methane – the stage name of former Bury and Buxton driver Paul Oldfield who trades as the ‘king of farts’ – established a new world record at the Great Dorset Steam Fair in August ‘letting off 86 raspers, one after another. Bad Manners front man Buster Bloodvessel collapsed on stage. Not connected to Methane’s act.’
Perth branch secretary GRANT MURCHIE reports on the most recent branch meeting, which was chaired by Donna Williams, making it a first for Scotland

P ERTH branch resumed, in some style, after the long, hot, summer recess. Despite being on the same day as an Old Firm derby which, inevitably, had an impact on the day’s attendance, a reasonable turnout gathered for the chance to say farewell to branch stalwart and 24-carat character Bro Raymond Irving.

His official retirement do in early August attracted a three-figure attendance from places as far apart as Inverness and Tweedbank and all points in between. District Organiser Kevin Lindsay had been invited along to present Raymond with his ASLEF retirement certificate long before the Scottish Premier League fixtures were announced, so the meeting went ahead as scheduled.

Raymond started on the railway in 1979 and spent his entire career at Perth. In the mid-1980s he took up photography as a hobby which has, now, resulted in the train crew photographic record of nearly everyone who worked at Perth from a mid-1940s seniority date on.

Bro Lindsay noted in his opening remarks that it was the first time he had attended a branch meeting with a female member in the chair – Sis Donna Williams, who even managed to prevent Raymond from launching into one of his trademark rants. A few more branch members joined the celebration post-match to help boost the takings at the bar and see Raymond off properly – the festivities continuing until the following day!

There is no doubt that Raymond will be sorely missed in bothies from Glasgow to Aberdeen and Inverness to Edinburgh, but certainly none more so than in Perth itself. It’s quite sad to think that we’ll never again see a new recruit sit wide-eyed and open-mouthed as Raymond emits a profanity-laden, high-volume, monologue about any, or all, of his pet topics. Enjoy your retirement, Raymond, you’ve earned it, lad!

Amazing turnaround

JIM WALSH, Glasgow branch and ScotRail company council, was one of six ASLEF delegates – GS Mick Whelan, AGS Simon Weller, EC vice-president Dave Calfe, Lesley Atkins-Smith of King’s Cross, and Debbie Reay of Northern Line North were the others – to the 150th Trades Union Congress in Manchester

I HAVE been to one other TUC – in Brighton, when Tony Blair had just been elected Prime Minister – and the theme was the visions and values for a New Labour, and we waited with bated breath. Blair stood at the podium and told us Labour was now New Labour, Old Labour had gone, there would be no revoking of the anti-trade union laws, and we had to get used to it.

I was so angry, disgusted, I stood up and left the room. I was the first – though not the only one – to leave. CS News was waiting and interviewed me. Lew Adams was the GS, and not too happy about me leaving, but I wasn’t going to sit there and be lectured like that by the head teacher. I gave up my Labour Party membership shortly after that and joined the Scottish Socialist Party, but rejoined Labour when Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader. This year I felt I could come back to the TUC having felt, for years, it would be a waste of time.

John McDonnell’s speech was the complete opposite of Tony Blair! I remember listening to John at AAD in Nottingham in 2009, and saying to him, why can’t we have people like you running the Labour Party? His answer was ‘Because they’re all Blairites and they don’t want people like me running the Labour Party!’ To hear him talk about embracing the trade unions, and revoking the anti-trade union laws, is an amazing turnaround.

Debbie spoke on the GRA. It came out of the LGBT+ conference, led by Maria, and Darren Brown wrote the motion. It’s important. They know who they are, but don’t look like who they know they are. It’s treated as a mental health problem, enshrined in the Act, the same arguments used against gay people 20 years ago. It was inspiring listening to Debbie, and Lesley, a first time delegate, very brave, very confident, and she came across very well.

I’m getting old – a lot of us are getting old, look at the EC – and won’t be here in a few years, so it’s good to see young people and know ASLEF is in safe hands.

QUOTE...

‘So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past’ – F Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby

...UNQUOTE
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Privatised TOC tweets for ‘slaves’ to run its stations

G

Mick has slammed a privatised train company for asking for unpaid volunteers to provide the services for passengers which it is unwilling to provide itself.

‘It’s outrageous that Grand Central expects unpaid volunteers to turn up to work and look after passengers at stations which are unmanned because the company wants to boost its profits by not employing – and properly paying – people to do a job.’

Sean English, chief operating officer of Grand Central Rail, cheekily tweeted: ‘GC station ambassadors are a team of dedicated volunteers supporting customers/visitors on stations across our routes at weekends. We are looking to introduce a team at Wakefield Kirkgate station. If you know of anyone that it is interested in volunteering please DM me.

Thanks!’

English – ‘loves Celtic and Arsenal and (sic) all things Yorkshire’ – and Grand Central were subject to a social media storm. ‘Fat cat rail boss wants you to work for nothing. While he picks up his salary as normal. Cheek!’

Mick said: ‘There are important safety and security issues here. It is important, for the safety of passengers and staff, that stations are manned. And we know that infrastructure is a target for terrorists. It is utterly wrong that Grand Central, in pursuit of bigger profits, won’t pay for staff at stations like Wakefield Kirkgate. And utterly wrong that Mr English is outing for “ambassadors” to do a job which should be done by properly trained, and properly paid, staff. Ambassadors? That’s a line they used during the London Olympics. Mr English wants unpaid slaves to man his galley.’

New Haines manual

Andrew Haines (left) has started work as chief executive of Network Rail. Haines, 54, says he’s passionate about rail. He began his career as a left luggage clerk at Victoria station and later had stints as managing director of South West Trains and First Group’s rail division. He was also on the board of the RoSCo Eversholt, a position he resigned to join NR from the Civil Aviation Authority. Haines has pledged to deliver ‘closer working between track and train, devolution, and the digital railway strategy.’ He will pick up £588,000 a year, plus a possible 9% bonus, 27% less than his predecessor Mark Carne.

#AllChangePlease

EC president Tosh McDonald joined Labour MPs Caroline Flint, Don Valley; John Healey, Wentworth & Dearne; and Rosie Winterton, Doncaster Central; to talk and listen to early morning commuters at Doncaster station as part of Labour’s rail campaign day on Monday 3 September. ‘Campaigning for public ownership of our railways at Donny during rush hour with MPs, deputy mayor, councillors and activists,’ said Tosh. ‘Fantastic response from the public in general.’
Failing’s wheeze is dead on arrival

M ICK Whelan told presenter Mishal Husain on Radio 4’s agenda-setting news programme Today that Transport Secretary Chris Grayling’s proposal that rail fare and staff wage increases should both be linked to a lower measure of inflation – the Consumer Prices Index, which does not take into account mortgage repayments, rather than the Retail Prices Index – was a ‘smoke and mirrors’ exercise designed to deflect criticism from the steep rail fare rises announced later that day. ‘Commuters in Conservative-voting constituencies are fed up with being ripped off by the privatised train operating companies,’ Mick told Mishal on Wednesday 15 August. ‘That’s why they are calling for Britain’s railways to be brought back into public ownership. ‘That’s frightened Mr Grayling who’s on the ropes – with cabinet colleagues calling him Failing Grayling – after a summer of discontent because he is clearly not on top of his department. ‘I wouldn’t trust him to run a model train set – let alone Britain’s complex railway network. And, anyway, we have free collective bargaining in the rail industry; government is not involved. A point Mr Grayling – and his predecessor Patrick McLoughlin – have been quick to make on more than one occasion.’

Fare freeze would hurt rail users – bizarre claim from Fraggle Rock

James Price of the extreme right-wing free market lobby group the TaxPayers’ Alliance said: ‘It would be wrong to announce any kind of rail 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 wealthier 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.’

Silver bullet band

The Japanese rail company JR West has been criticised for a controversial training exercise that requires rail staff to crouch in a 1 metre by 1 metre by 1 metre trench between the tracks as three bullet trains speed past at 200mph. The company says it shows ‘the forces at work’ and ‘underlines the importance of safety inspections’.

Anti-fascist footie

Clapton CFC’s new away kit is a hit in Spain

Clapton community football club, who play in the first division of the Middlesex County League, the 12th tier of English football, typically attract 250 fans to home games at Wadham Lodge in Walthamstow, east London. But they have shipped an astonishing 2,500 replica away strips – and made £60,000 in the process – mostly to Spain. Why? Because the colourful red, yellow and purple shirt, voted for by members, was inspired by the colours of the International Brigades, who fought for the democratically-elected Republican government in the Spanish Civil War, and includes the anti-fascist slogan ‘No Pasarán!’

COLLIER’S WOULD AT THE ORR

Declan Collier, 62, who stepped down last year as CEO of London City Airport, will replace Stephen Glaister as chair of the Office of Rail and Road. He will start work on 1 January.

Have the Tories and TOCs priced people off rail?

‘These prices are starting to deter people from travelling by rail,’ said Bruce Williamson of the campaign group Railfuture. ‘The latest figures show that the rise in passenger numbers we’ve seen over the last 20 years is levelling off, because people can’t afford to have an ever larger chunk taken out of their wallets year after year.’

The latest government statistics show passenger journeys down from 1,729 million in 2016-2017 to 1,705 million in 2017-2018. Season ticket journeys are down from 690.9 million to 627.5 million.

NEW BUILD AT NEWTON AYCLIFFE

Hitachi has opened a new £5 million building at its plant at Newton Aycliffe, County Durham, taking its investment at the site to more than £100 million. It will increase production capacity by providing more storage areas for trains. ‘We are proud to add a new chapter to the region’s rail heritage,’ said chief operating officer Ross Nagle. ‘Our long-term investment is making a real impact to manufacturing in the north of England.’

SOUTHERN RAIL ARE S*** TATTOO

Ruari Barratt, 36, a video producer from Brighton, Sussex, is so fed up with the service provided by Southern Rail he has had ‘Southern Rail are S***’ tattooed in black and red ink on his torso. Without the asterisks. He said: ‘Getting it done didn’t hurt half as much as a journey on Southern Fail.’

QUOTE...

‘The destructive Brexit path being pursued by the government threatens to have a hugely damaging effect on football clubs across the country.’ – Burnley chairman Mike Garlick

UNQUOTE

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
Farewell to the second man

The role of driver’s assistant was abolished by British Rail 30 years ago this month. In a valedictory piece Euston driver assessor MICK HUMPHRYS reflects on the job, and on what was lost when the second man became a train man

HISTORY years ago, on 2 October 1988, the grade of driver’s assistant was abolished and replaced with the train (wo)man concept. This signalled the end, as those within the grade passed on to drivers, of the second man in the cab. A feature that had existed, in one form or another, for the previous 160 years.

It should be remembered that the ancestry lineage of the role began with fireman, until 1968, then second man, and, finally, ending with the driver’s assistant, although most of us still used the term second man until the very end. The ‘f’ for fireman, of course, is still the ‘f’ in our name. We are the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers & Firemen.

British Rail had proposals to end the second man role, and introduce the train man, as early as 1969. With the end of steam, and no longer the need for a fireman, BR had plans to implement single manning as soon possible. But their modernisation plans, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, were thwarted because they introduced main line diesel locomotives, with a heating method which was predominantly steam, which required a boiler, operated by a second man.

**DRIVER ONLY BOILER OPERATION**

BR management did try a system of driver-only boiler operation, which entailed the boiler being prepared on the depot by maintenance staff. On/off buttons fitted to some, predominantly Class 47, locomotives were operated by the driver when coupled or uncoupled to the coaching stock. Boiler reliability issues, and protests from our union, protecting jobs, saw this system abandoned. Thus the second man was employed in steam heating operations right up to the 1980s although, by the middle of that decade, steam heating had been virtually phased out.

Electric main line traction with an electric train heat supply was, however, altogether different. With this traction, like the numerous suburban lines operated by both electric and diesel multiple units, single-manned for many years, a second man was not required.

The first phase came in 1965 with an easing of manning agreement which allowed a substantial increase in single-manned main line operation. Our union fought to protect, and did indeed achieve protection of, firemen’s earnings.

Double manning also continued on numerous types of work that required a second man, including light engine movements, ferrying, trip work, and ballast turns. In addition, manning agreements still in place required a driver to be rostered a second man if on a turn in excess of eight hours or with no clear rostered physical needs break.

**PROGRESSION TO DRIVER**

Progression to driver, of course, was still the ultimate aim of the second man with traction; rules and regulations learnt on the job and by attending, in your own time, mutual improvement classes. A more formal method of training commenced in 1976 with the introduction of the MP12 driver’s course, 26 weeks long, in three parts, comprising rules, traction and train handling. A second man was eligible to commence a course when 20 years and 6 months old and it was, according to his seniority, honours. The 1970s saw a huge recruitment drive as BR looked ahead at a new horizon. The 1980s saw a huge recruitment drive as BR looked ahead at a new horizon.

The train man concept in the Locomotive Journal in November 1969; the BR Eastern Region vacancy list in September 1979 showing Mick Humphrys’s appointment on the first rung of the footplate ladder (above); and the Stonebridge Park vacancy list in November 1988 showing GS Mick Whelan getting his driver’s position (top) for a special working, and was driven by my DA on that day, our current EC vice-president, Dave Cafel!

Another nail in the coffin of the grade occurred on 17 January 1987 with the implementation of a revision to the 1965 manning agreement. This removed the requirement for a second man on light engine movements and, indeed, a second man only provided in exceptional or safety requirements.

Our union, on a local level, managed to protect some of the work on depots, utilising the DA for coupling and uncoupling duties; their workload and requirements were, however, drastically reduced.

I was predominantly on single manned turns on local suburban work so noticed little impact on a personal level. This changed when I was appointed an instructor in 1988 and was involved from the start on the train man driver D training programme. One of my first trainees was our current GS, Mick Whelan, having obtained his driver’s vacancy on the first available list in November 1988!

**DRIVER APPRENTICE ROLE**

Some of the remaining second men were made to undertake guards’ training as their workload disappeared and, by the early 1990s, the driver’s assistant was consigned to history. DRIVER APPOINTMENT ROLE

Some of the remaining second men were made to undertake guards’ training as their workload disappeared and, by the early 1990s, the driver’s assistant was consigned to history. Looking ahead, some railway companies, mine included, are today beginning a driver apprentice role so, once more, young men and women will have the chance to enjoy the career their predecessors had.

Many thanks to my fellow second men, the Lost Boys, for their help in writing this article.
Privatisation of our railways, prisons and other public services has been disastrous

We all know that privatisation doesn’t work but this Tory government doggedly keeps going – like a rambler heading the wrong way who doesn’t have the courage or common sense to turn back to the right route – because it dares not admit its market dogma is wrong and that some services – like gas, electricity, water and rail – are natural monopolies while others – such as the fire brigade, prisons and police – are not the place to try and turn a profit. The government found that out the hard way when it had to take over HMP Birmingham – described by Peter Clarke, Chief Inspector of Prisons, as the worst jail he has ever inspected – after it had been run into the ground by the private provider G4S. STEVE GILLAN, general secretary of the Prison Officers’ Association, gives us a revealing insight into how it’s all gone wrong inside Britain’s prison system.

GOVERNMENT led by Jeremy Corbyn would end the privatisation of our railways and ASLEF, as an affiliated union, has been proud to support Jeremy for the Labour leadership. The POA is not affiliated to the party but we still supported Jeremy for leader. The last manifesto has a pro-worker and pro-public services agenda. At last we have a Labour leader who has departed from the Tory-lite agenda of the past and there is now clear water between Tory policies and Labour policies.

The POA has consistently opposed budget cuts and the privatisation of not just prisons but our utilities such as gas, water and electricity, along with our railways and NHS, because successive governments have not cared about the consequences of cuts and have had an obsession with private enterprise over public services which, in real terms, is always a race to the bottom.

OUR PRISONS ARE IN CRISIS
Privatisation – and consequent cuts – have consequences and our prisons are in crisis. Since 2010 we have had Kenneth Clarke, Chris Grayling, Michael Gove, Liz Truss, David Lidington and, now, David Gauke. Six ministers in eight years with little cohesion in policy or direction. POA members want stability and consistency – not policy being made up as reaction to the right-wing media.

The government plays at a prison reform agenda with very little detail or substance and with the white paper on reform being thrown in the dustbin and scrapped since the last general election there is even less direction. How bad do our prisons need to become before the general public insists on change?

I believe if there is to be true reform of our prisons – and not just a cuts agenda – then it needs to go back to basics and actually mean something. David Gauke needs to not just reflect on HMP Birmingham, where the public sector has taken back control from G4S, but to take time and reflect on the very basics of our prisons and engage in a meaningful dialogue with the experts who deal with the day to day running of our jails – the POA trade union – who are part of the solution, not the problem.

DAVID GAUKES NEEDS TO LISTEN
He needs to listen because I am afraid the others didn’t and we have been used as a political football in a point scoring exercise that we have witnessed for far too long. HMP Birmingham is the tip of the iceberg and the Conservative Party has overseen this debacle with their cuts agenda – 8,000 fewer prison staff than in 2010 with a record prison population.

Privatisation which has failed. Prisons in England and Wales overcrowded with two prisoners sharing a cell designed for one. Self-harm and violence at record levels – prisoner on prisoner, and prisoner on staff. Suicides and murders occurring on a regular basis. Widespread drug use causing fear, debt, bullying, intimidation and lawlessness as we have witnessed with many recent riots at HMP Birmingham and other establishments across the country.

If it wasn’t for the bravery of POA members in Birmingham and jails across the country things would be far, far worse. It isn’t rocket science in fixing the problem. There are far too many people in our prisons who should have been diverted away such as the mentally ill.

There should be proper drug treatment programmes and education in our communities, along with our schools, about drugs and their devastating effects. And there needs to be safe staffing levels with better paid and better trained prison officers – the very people who keep the public safe.

ONLY INTEREST IS MAKING MONEY
Until we see a change in attitude by government Birmingham will be the new norm. That’s why it is now time for a public debate on the national scandal of failed privatisation from our railways to utilities and indeed our NHS. The public owns our public services and they should not be hived off to the private sector who have no interest apart from making money for their shareholders and investors.

ASLEF runs great campaigns against privatisation and getting our railways back where they belong, and out of the hands of privateers. I have every sympathy with you as you have an incompetent minister in Chris Grayling who doesn’t know the value of anything and appears to blame trade unions for the ridiculous policies of private train operators up and down the country.

The trade union movement needs to keep the pressure on this reckless Tory government, propped up by the DUP, to ensure our public services are not totally dismantled. I am grateful for ASLEF for giving me the opportunity to write for your Journal.

I hope we continue to campaign and fight for better public services and I wish all ASLEF members well in their endeavour to regain a railway service that is run by the public for the public.
ASLEF in action in Manchester

SLEF sent six delegates – Mick Whelan, general secretary; Simon Weller, assistant general secretary; Dave Calfe, EC vice-president; Lesley Atkins-Smith of King’s Cross branch; Debbie Reay of Northern Line North; and Jim Walsh of Glasgow – to the 150th Trades Union Congress from Sunday 9 to Wednesday 12 September in Manchester. Executive committee members Marz Colombini, Andy Hudd and Howard Kaye, and district organisers Dicky Fisher and Nigel Gibson, attended as visitors.

The slogan for congress – changing the world of work for good – was embraced by reps organising to build a better Britain – for the many, not the few – of which we can be proud.

Delegates from 48 unions, representing 5.5 million members, gathered in the north-west for the annual parliament of the trade union movement. There were passionate debates on pay bargaining, pensions and employment rights; health, safety, and regulation; privatisation; education; energy; transport; industrial strategy; social policy, equalities, and Brexit.

As well as the motions on the conference floor, and lots of fringe meetings every lunchtime and evening, congress offered reps an opportunity to talk to activists from other unions who face similar challenges in different fields. ‘We’re all doing the same job – representing our members – in an often hostile environment, while trying to make this country a better place in which to work and live,’ said Mick.

What’s the buzz?

‘The EU we entered in the 1970s is not the EU we have now,’ said Mick. ‘The EU was meant to transform itself – but what happened to that social contract? We were promised a better, socialist, way but that hasn’t happened. Instead we have a dialogue based on fear. You talk in a room with the bosses and you keep talking because when you stop talking they impose. That’s not a social partnership.’

‘We have ended up with a neoliberal model where we have to privatise everything. We had a contretemps with GTR Southern, and spent a lot of time in the High Court, where they were running threads based on Europe. Now, thankfully, those threads didn’t fly. But the idea that if you are owned – or even partially owned – by a European company then you don’t have the right to go on strike frightens me.’

‘And the idea that nation states can’t protect their own coal or steel industries frightens me. And how can you have a situation, as happened in Greece, where the European Central Bank determines whether your people can eat or not? There is no reason why we can’t enshrine workers’ rights in British law. And we don’t believe you continue to vote until you get the result you want.’

Dialogue of fear

‘The worker bee has been an integral part of Manchester – like congress – was a hive of activity, with 230 busy bee sculptures buzzing about the place, each designed by a different artist to celebrate one aspect of the city, from its 19th century industrial heritage through its 20th century ascendency at football to its vibrant 21st century music scene. ‘The worker bee has been an integral part of Manchester’s coat of arms since 1842,’ explained a TUC apparatchik. ‘And is synonymous with the city’s spirit of industry, enterprise, and resilience.’

‘GENERAL INTERESTS OF THE WORKING-CLASSES’

150 years ago, in 1868, trade union activists from every corner of the country met at the Mechanics’ Institute in Manchester for the first Trades Union Congress. They passed a resolution ‘that the trades of the United Kingdom should hold an annual congress, for the purpose of bringing the trades into closer alliance, and to take action in all Parliamentary matters pertaining to the general interests of the working-classes.’

‘150 years on from our founding, while much has changed, the TUC’s mission remains the same,’ said TUC GS Frances O’Grady. ‘Standing up for working women and men, and making sure their voices are heard.’

Doors of perception

The ASLEF train crew was cheered to spot a familiar – and friendly – face on the main door of the Manchester Central convention complex. Bill Baxter, of Southport, has been a TUC steward since 2007 and, more importantly, an ASLEF stalwart since he joined the railway.
Definition of insanity

Let us use the evidence and stop the insanity.

We must learn from our mistakes or we’ll constantly repeat them. The market will continue to repeat the same mistakes.

We expressed our members, and the British public, our politicians about the decision to constantly outsource?

Over again, but expecting different results”. Well, what does that tell with operators at the cost of the taxpayer. Einstein is credited as government.

Avoided paying more than £2 billion in franchise premiums to the since privatisation. The last failed operator, Virgin Trains East Coast, operators have defaulted and handed back the keys three times since privatisation. The last failed operator, Virgin Trains East Coast, avoided paying more than £2 billion in franchise premiums to the government.

‘To hide embarrassment, the government is rewriting contracts with operators at the cost of the taxpayer. Einstein is credited as saying, “The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results”. Well, what does that tell us about the decision to constantly outsource?

‘Comrades, you have our support as people who have experienced the same nonsense on our railway. The most obvious example being the East Coast, where overbidding has meant train operators have defaulted and handed back the keys three times since privatisation. The last failed operator, Virgin Trains East Coast, avoided paying more than £2 billion in franchise premiums to the government.

‘There is only one reason for this. Free market dogma. We must learn from our mistakes or we’ll constantly repeat them. The market has failed to provide quality public services and value for money. Let us use the evidence and stop the insanity.’

Pricing people off rail is bad for us all

ESLEYS Atkins-Smith moved motion 11, on high fares and the decline in season ticket sales, on Tuesday afternoon. It was seconded by Mick Carney, TSSA, and passed unanimously.

‘We’ve all heard the narrative. The operators, the Rail Delivery Group, and the Tories tell us the privatised railway must be brilliant. We have record numbers using our railway. Overcrowding is a sign of success. Stagecoach, FirstGroup, Deutsche Bahn and the rest are doing such a good job that people are willing to pay huge fares for the brilliant service they provide. We all know it’s true because, if you go to East Croydon, Manchester Piccadilly, or Bristol Temple Meads, and ask people why they are taking the train, they will tell you it’s because they think Southern, Northern, and Great Western are doing such a wonderful job in running trains!

‘Congress, it’s time to recognise the truth about growth on our railway. Of course ASLEF is delighted that the pattern over the last 20 years has been one of growth for our industry. More people on trains means fewer car journeys, less carbon emissions, and fewer road deaths. But let’s not kid ourselves that this is down to privatisation.

‘Most people who commute on trains do so because they have little choice. Jobs have become concentrated in city centres where housing costs has gone through the roof. Working people are having to move out of the centres of our cities and commute from further away, meaning a train journey is the only viable option. Meanwhile, the industry has failed to increase capacity, leading to intolerable levels of overcrowding.

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Off message

**MICK WHELAN**, at the Brexit fringe on Monday, coming towards the end of his speech, ended one line of argument by quipping, ‘Before the chair cuts me off!’. Jacqui Johnson, former president of the UCU, piped up: ‘No, keep going, I’m enjoying it!’ Prompting a heckle from the back, where the ASLEF train crew was showing solidarity with the GS: ‘Never, ever, say that to him!’ Cue peals of laughter and a subsequent investigation to discover the culprit. The smart money is on Marz Colombini.

**WH WOOD**, secretary of Manchester Trades Council, presided over the first Trades Union Congress in 1868. Samuel Nicholson, president of the council, should have been in the chair, ‘But for his attendance’, according to AE Musson in *The Congress of 1868*, which ended one line of argument by quipping, ‘Before the chair cuts me off.’ Jacqui Johnson, former president of the UCU, piped up: ‘No, keep going, I’m enjoying it!’ Prompting a heckle from the back, where the ASLEF train crew was showing solidarity with the GS: ‘Never, ever, say that to him!’ Cue peals of laughter and a subsequent investigation to discover the culprit. The smart money is on Marz Colombini.

**AS THE** Virgin Trains service from London Euston to Manchester Piccadilly stopped at Milton Keynes on Sunday morning, the train manager cheerfully announced: ‘Alright here if you like concrete cows, roundabouts, Barratt homes – and League Two football.’

**ASLEF** delegates were media magnets in Manchester. Mick Whelan wrote an article for the *Morning Star* on Tuesday and was interviewed by Alan Jones of the Press Association; Raj Syal of The Guardian; and Conrad Landin of the Morning Star. Delegates lobbied Chris Hope of the *Daily Telegraph*; Kevin Maguire of the *Daily Mirror*; Ben Chacko, editor of the *Morning Star*; Iain Watson, political correspondent, BBC News; Jon Craig, chief political correspondent of Sky News; and Jon Snow, presenter of *C4 News*, over coffee in the conference centre.

**PAUL ROUTLEDGE**, the veteran political journalist who writes for the *Daily Mirror* and *Huddersfield Examiner* (and the ASLEF Journal) was covering his 50th Trades Union Congress. ‘I remember George Woodcock, general secretary of the TUC, and something of a philosopher, at my first congress, at the Opera House in Blackpool in 1968, wondering aloud, “Why are we here?” Which prompted one wag to call out, “We were hoping you were going to tell us?”’

**THE PUB** where Mick spoke on Brexit, The Briton’s Protection, established in 1806, is extraordinary. There’s a large mural commemorating the Peterloo Massacre – the protest in 1819 by 80,000 people, listening to Orator Hunt arguing for Parliamentary reform, which ended when troops from the Salford Yeomanry and the 15th Hussars charged into the crowd, sabres drawn, killing 15 and injuring 200 – as well as local Lancashire ales and, er, 300 whiskies.

**THE GS** was a guest of the PFA at their offices on Bishopsgate on Monday night where Fabrice Muamba, the Bolton midfielder who suffered a cardiac arrest during an FA Cup tie with Tottenham; Nick Cusack, who played for Oxford, Fulham and Swansea; and PFA boss Gordon Taylor explained how the players’ union is helping footballers prepare for life after they stop playing, and dealing with the growing problem of gambling in the game.

**ASLEF**, the RMT and the TSSA usually sit next to each other in the conference hall. Not last year. Not this year. The TUC put ASLEF between the CWU and the TSSA, in front of the NAS/UWT, Equity, and Bakers, on the far left of the hall, while pushing the RMT to the back of the room, on the far right, next to Nautilus and the URTU.

**JUSTIN WELBY**, the Archbishop of Canterbury, slew the old adage that the Church of England is the Tory Party at prayer when he gave a speech on Wednesday morning prompting holliers from hacks in the media room – who do not write the headlines under which their copy appears, that’s what sub-editors do – ‘This is great stuff! Red Bishop Bashes Bosses!’

**JOHN McDONNELL** began his address to congress on Tuesday afternoon with a plea: ‘I am late because the train in front of us broke down. Please, Theresa May, do not have Chris Grayling in any government department ever again…’

**WE SHALL** spare the blushes of the trade union press officer who came into the media room and handed out drafts of his general secretary’s speech, to be delivered later that day, with this guidance to reporters: ‘No need to check against delivery because, if he doesn’t say it, no one will ever know.’

Debbie on Tuesday afternoon

the possibility of apprenticeships and training opportunities.

‘Infrastructure investment could be an opportunity to stimulate our economy through creating quality jobs in many sectors such as engineering, transport, and in the growing green economy.

Yet, earlier this year, we heard the stark warning that the UK will miss its legally binding carbon targets without urgent government action.

‘The Select Committee on Climate Change said vague ambitions, such as banning new petrol and diesel cars by 2040, must be turned into solid plans. This is not only the right thing to do in order to ensure our planet remains sustainable. It can also be an opportunity to create new jobs, apprenticeships, and industries.

‘So let us create an economy for the many, with an industrial strategy that promotes quality jobs, sustainability, and strong workers’ rights. Let the UK be at the forefront of new technologies and industries. Let the UK promote quality jobs, sustainability, apprenticeships, and industries.

The UK has a target of an 80% reduction in emissions by 2050. This is not only the right thing to do in order to ensure our planet remains sustainable. It can also be an opportunity to create new jobs, apprenticeships, and industries.

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IMON Weller moved motion 13, about the dangers of rail freight decline for UK infrastructure, on Tuesday afternoon. In a passionate speech, made without notes, he told congress: ‘I was a rail freight driver for many years. And it’s hard. The passenger sector – the shiny, sexy, rail transport sector – isn’t really privatised. If a franchise fails, staff get a new uniform, the carriages get a new livery, and it all continues as before. Because the franchises are really government contracts, run by bus companies, and European state railways. Because the British government doesn’t have a problem with state ownership as long as it’s not the British state doing the owning… ’

‘But if a freight operator goes under, it’s the job centre for train drivers. Because the rail freight sector is properly privatised, it’s red in tooth and claw, and it’s not a pretty sight. ’

‘Over the last few years we’ve witnessed the collapse of rail freight in this country. One company, which had 2,700 staff, now has 680. And 1,116 drivers were served with redundancy notices and told to reapply for their own jobs with different, and much worse, terms and conditions. It was thanks to ASLEF that the company failed in that attempt at a land grab on our t&cs.

‘But the truth is that once you lose the capacity, that capacity does not come back. And we are losing capacity on freight, and it won’t come back. And it is the freight sector that carries out the heavy maintenance on the infrastructure in this country. ‘

‘Sending freight by rail is 20 times safer than moving it by HGV. And moving freight by rail, rather than road, must be part of our drive to reduce carbon emissions by 2050.’

The motion was seconded by Manuel Cortes, TSSA, who warned delegates: ‘Our rail freight sector is on life support.’

Mick, Steve and Hugh on the platform for Palestine

ICK Whelan spoke at a Palestine Solidarity Campaign fringe in Exchange 11 of the convention complex on Tuesday evening on a platform with Salma Karmi-Ayyoub of the British Palestinian Policy Council; PCS GS Mark Serwotka; NUJ GS Michelle Stanistreet; NEU president Kiri Tunks; Unite AGS Gail Cartmail; and PSC chair Hugh Lanning.

‘My overarching impression of Israel-Palestine,’ said Mick, ‘is of one big prison. People who want the same rights of citizenship are being denied them. There are four types of citizen in one modern 21st century country! Palestinians work and pay their taxes but don’t have the same rights. And the Mayor of Jerusalem said: “If they want that, they can go back to their own country.” That’s the view! People want to live in peace but they have the right to self-determination.’

No one thought it would be easy but…

ICK Whelan chaired a packed Justice for Colombia fringe meeting in Exchange 6 at the convention complex on Tuesday lunchtime where the speakers included Luis Alejandro Becerra Pedraza, president of CUT, the Colombian trade union confederation; Steve Cavalier, chief executive of Thompson’s solicitors, Joe Simpson of the POA; Paul Glover of Unison; and JFC director Mariela Kohon.

‘We all had great hopes for the peace process,’ said Mick. ‘And the landmark deal between the government of Colombia and Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC. Although we knew that peace and reconciliation would be hard, none of us expected that most of what had been agreed would be reversed by the Senate; that Juan Manuel Santos would pocket his Nobel Peace Prize, move on to pastures new, and not stand up for the peace process; that the FARC would hand in their weapons, and come out of the interior, but get nothing in return. And that Colombia would still be the most dangerous place in the world to be a trade union activist.’ Steve added: ‘It’s an asymmetrical peace process where the FARC has delivered and the government has not.’
remarkable man and he deserves our support and recognition.'

And all he wanted to talk about was the people who have lain down
needs. He cannot see. But all he wants are his books, and his materials.

TUC. 'Jesús Santrich is a writer, and an artist, and he does have special
are today without Justice for Colombia and the support it gets from the

Fairhurst, POA. 'Less than a month ago [TUC president and congress
Bird, Unison; seconded by Mick Whelan, ASLEF; and supported by Mark

Call and response – Mick, at the end of his speech, asked delegates to show their support by raising Palestinian flags

Manchester is the most wonderful city of modern times,’ Benjamin Disraeli in his novel Coningsby.

Free Jesús call to Colombian government

ONGRESS unanimously backed an emergency motion in

Simons re-elected to TUC general council

Simon Weller was re-elected

Simon re-elected to TUC general council

Paul Nowak and Simon Weller

should we stay or should we go?

TUC GS Frances O’Grady, speaking on Sunday afternoon, said: ‘I’m a trade unionist and when we do a deal, we go back to the members and have to get their approval. Whether it’s through a general election, or a popular vote, Theresa May should take her deal on the terms of Brexit and put it to the people.’

One goal, one mission, one vision

Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell won an ovation from congress on Tuesday afternoon when he said: ‘Jeremy and I are determined that never again will the link between the Labour Party and the trade unions be considered anachronistic. We are one movement – the labour and trade union movement.’

Quote...

‘The best way to mark the TUC’s 150th birthday is by making our movement fit for the next 150 years. The world of work is changing fast and we need to adapt. A new generation need our help to win workplace justice and our vital public services need us to stand up against privatisation and for proper funding.’ – Frances O’Grady, general secretary, TUC

...Unquote
Massive thank you to Mick

NCE again I have the pleasure to report on another successful and very well attended Derby ASLEF reunion. A massive big thank you to our general secretary, Mick Whelan, who attended at the last minute, to be our guest speaker, due to last a minute cancellation, and especially on his birthday!

I really think as a trade union we are extremely fortunate to have a GS who is so hands on and ready to go that extra mile for his membership and branches. Not all unions have that relationship. Mick gave his usual in-depth speech, giving us an update on all things relating to the railway industry, and what ASLEF is doing to continue to protect its members.

A minute’s silence was observed, allowing us to reflect on the loss of some of our retired members, sadly taken from us since our last reunion, including Bro Roger Warren, Bro Graham Cox, and Bro Arthur Stokes.

Mick presented long service badges to Bros R Lee (40 years) and E Tague (30). The ASLEF welfare couldn’t let the GS leave empty-handed on his birthday and a good single malt was duly presented.

A hot buffet lunch was provided followed by the ever popular raffle to draw an end to another successful reunion.

Arrangements are already being made for the 2019 bash and I would appeal to any retired members who have lost contact with us and would like to attend to please feel free to contact me (07812 368782 or email eamonn.tague@sky.com) because you are extremely welcome.

I would like to place on record my thanks for Mick Whelan attending at such short notice and thank Mrs S Lambert, Mrs Adele Abbott, and Mrs Porter for their help with arrangements.

Eamonn Tague, branch secretary

It’s a beautiful day

Modfather Finn Brennan unveils the new District 8 banner, complete with RAF roundel, in front of Tower Bridge

It’s been a good day. Visited City Hall with my old comrades from ASLEF district council 8. Topped off by a resounding result in Labour’s NEC elections for the #JC9 including my Bunhill ward, Islington, colleague Councillor Claudia Webbe.

Phil Graham, Islington

CLOSE SHAVE AT WOKING

The great Woking shave off took place on Tuesday 17 July. More than 20 drivers, guards, platform staff, and even a friendly signaller, came together to ‘brave the shave’ in support of the Macmillan cancer support charity. It was organised and inspired by Woking’s very own Sister Christine Wilson.

Christine was recently diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer and, rather than let this devastating news get her down, she decided to face it head-on and take the fight to the Big C!

So far, donations have reached just over £5,500! Special thanks to Bro Dave Johnson for shearing everybody – and keeping blood loss to a minimum – Lorraine Beachus and Rose Bray for making the most amazing cakes and everybody who gave up their time, money, hair, beards and blood for this great cause. Our message to cancer is simple – don’t f**k with the baldies!

Chris Smith, branch secretary
Redemption song

Liverpool was a city built, in the 18th century, on the back of the slave trade. It overtook Bristol and London to become, as the International Slavery Museum, part of the Merseyside Maritime Museum on Albert Dock, candidly admits, ‘the capital of the transatlantic slave trade’. HANS EKONJE, Waterloo branch, reports on a thought-provoking visit to the museum on the banks of the Mersey.

AM originally from Africa and, probably like many other Africans, I often ask myself questions about the slave trade since not much is being taught about it in the Western world or even back in Africa. So when a circular from ASLEF about an organised visit to the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool came through the post, I quickly booked a place and, luckily, my branch agreed to sponsor my trip.

My aim, primarily, was to understand better transatlantic slavery and its enduring impact. Secondly, I was thinking I may find out if one of my great-grandrelatives had been shipped abroad in the appalling conditions that slaves were transported.

The museum is one of its kind in the world. It highlights the importance of slavery, with a focus on freedom and enslavement, and provides greater awareness and understanding of the legacy of slavery today. Here are a few highlights, what I thought were interesting facts, which I guess some of you might already know:

Prior to the arrival of European slavers, Africa had a very rich and varied history and culture. They had political arrangements, such as kingdoms, city states, tribal groups and organisations, each with its own language and culture.

Africans were especially skilled in subjects such as medicine, mathematics, astronomy and making fine luxury goods from bronze, ivory and gold. In the 15th century, the Portuguese, Dutch, British and French traded with West Africans in gold, ivory, spices and bronze.

From their first contact, European traders kidnapped Africans for sale in Europe and the Americas. When the plantation owners in the Americas wanted more and more slaves to satisfy an increasing demand in Europe for sugar, the transatlantic trade became a dominant trade.

Traders set out from Europe to West Africa where they would exchange people for goods and then voyage across the Atlantic to the Americas, where they were sold as slaves. The same traders would then return to Europe with goods such as coffee, sugar, tobacco, rice and cotton from the Americas.

Voyages across the Atlantic lasted between six and eight weeks, with men packed below the decks in cramped conditions, secured with irons. Women and children were kept in separate quarters and were usually exposed to sexual abuse and violence from crew members. Lack of sanitation resulted in illness and it is suggested that one in five Africans died on board those slave ships. No one knows exactly how many lost their lives but it was noted that some traders took out insurance against dead slaves.

Countries that took part in the slave trade included Britain, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden. In the UK, the Royal African Company had the monopoly of British trade, with Liverpool merchants outstripping all other rivals.

This trip widened my scope about slavery but not all my questions got answered, which I guess they never will. Interestingly, I learnt that some slaves also came from the Americas. Morally, it teaches us how far we, as human beings, have evolved from the slavery era. Maybe it’s time we openly talked about it, to make sure it never happens again. It is worth noting that slavery still exists in the 21st century, but in different forms.

Many thanks to Lee James, ASLEF’s equalities adviser, for organising the trip and to my ASLEF branch for sponsoring the visit.
Fighting for the safety of people at work

ALAN MOSS of Longsight branch reports from the 29th national Hazards conference held at the University of Keele from 27 to 29 July

The last weekend of July saw close to 300 trade union safety reps descend on Keele University in Staffordshire for a weekend of workshops, union education, networking and meeting like-minded comrades old and new. To be nominated to attend by our executive committee is a privilege, and affords us the opportunity to enhance our skills and roles as reps and offer our members the representation they deserve.

I was very ably joined by a cracking group of comrades that consisted of Lee Norman from Darlington, Mark Tripp from Hitchin, and Nigel Thompson from Wolverhampton. Also joining us in his new role was Vincent Borg, our head office health & safety adviser who we are looking forward to working with, and tapping into his expertise when we need to; our Sister Rachael Gentle from Bristol was also with us, we didn’t know Rachael was joining us till the Saturday as she had come under her own steam, supported by her branch, a testament to her enthusiasm and dedication to the role. Apologies for not getting you in the photo, Rachael!

Friday evening was the opening plenary which saw the packed hall listening, sometimes in shock, to the outstanding speakers. We face so many obstacles and issues but, united together, we will ensure that we fight for the safety of people at work. We listened to our comrades from Turkey, whose problems echoed ours, and who faced attempts at being silenced by the political regime in her country. We heard from Louise Taggart, from the FACK campaign, whose brother was killed in the workplace due to employer negligence, a truly moving speech. We heard a passionate contribution from Steve Tombs about the ‘social murder’ of the residents of Grenfell.

The plenary set the scene for the weekend. After some networking and exchanging ideas it was an eager delegation that met on Saturday morning to attend the workshops and campaign meetings. We took on board a wealth of information about air quality, mental health, questioning employers on wellbeing and resilience, and the perils faced by those working for employers with a quest for profit over safety. We heard harrowing testimonies from workers at McDonalds and Amazon, to name a few, corporate monsters that are parasites exploiting workers on zero hours contracts, exposing them to danger, just to line their own pockets.

On a personal note it was a privilege to run the photo, Rachael!

ASLEF in action at Keele: Mark Tripp (who says ‘in my defence, I didn’t get the wear a shirt and tie memo’), Lee Norman, Alan Moss, Vincent Borg and Nigel Thompson two workshops on inspections. I was asked if I would deliver the workshops and nervously agreed, after being on the receiving end of trade union education I’ve always embraced it and put so much of the education into good practice. To deliver the workshops to a room full of trade unionists left me truly fulfilled and proud to be an activist. Despite having a face for radio and a sheep rustling accent the feedback from those who took part was really positive, it was a pleasure to give a little something back. I must thank Vincent from head office and Janet from the Hazards Campaign for their encouragement.

No sooner had conference began than it was over. Our delegation made some outstanding contributions; we are a small union but we always have a prolific presence. We now take away what we digested and take it into the workplace to ensure safety is always at the top of the agenda.

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. .................................................................................................................................
e-mail..................................................................................................................................................

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)
George, with his (empty) ASLEF whisky glass, and Bernard

GEORGE TUCKER
PROUD CENTENARIAN

Brother George Tucker, one of our oldest retired members, passed away on the morning of Sunday 2 September. He was 100 years old. Bristol branch secretary BERNARD KENNEDY, who had the pleasure of presenting George with an ASLEF engraved whisky glass to mark his 100th birthday on 7 April, pays tribute to one of the old school

George Tucker was born and raised in Weston, Bath, and has three sons. He was married to his late wife Betty for 73 years and they lived in the village until he died.

George began his railway career as an engine cleaner at Bath Green Park on the Somerset & Dorset Railway in 1936. At the outbreak of the Second World War promotion was quite rapid. George was promoted to driver in 1941, having passed all the tests of the time. ‘The reason for rapid promotion was that the war was imminent and they needed extra engine drivers so I was passed for driving at the age of 23; the youngest age allowed on the railway in those days.’

George remembered those days well, especially working heavily loaded holiday trains to Bournemouth. ‘Because the Somerset & Dorset Railway had a gradient of 1:50 after leaving Bath, many trains required the assistance of a second engine up the Devonshire tunnel. There was limited clearance, so the crew would have a cloth over their noses and mouths, and duck their heads as low as possible, to combat the fumes from the engine. Believe me, it was not very pleasant!’

George progressed through the links, ending up working the top link Pines Express jobs. When the depot, and route to Bournemouth, were closed in 1966 as part of the Beeching cuts, he transferred to Bristol Bath Road diesel depot. He was now a senior driver and continued to work through the links, ending up working the top mileage jobs on 125 HSTs to Paddington, Plymouth and Derby.

George saw many changes in his long and distinguished career which began with carrying out the dirty tasks of cleaning steam engines. There were many years of firing and driving steam locomotives in challenging circumstances. His uniforms began with dirty, greasy and dusty overalls and ended with a smart BR blue jacket with collar and tie in the comfortable environment of the enclosed cab of an InterCity 125. ‘I do miss it;’ he said earlier this summer. ‘I would certainly do it all again.’

Off the footplate George was a proud family man with three sons and a passion for gardening; he brought plants on from seed and supplied them to his work mates. His colourful garden was often the topic of conversation, with people stopping to admire the fruits of his labours.

When the northern part of the Somerset & Dorset line was re-opened as the Bath twin tunnels cycle route in 2013, George was invited to the opening ceremony, the only ex-driver to attend. ‘I like the idea of turning it into a cycle path, as long as they make it safe, of course,’ he said.

George is commemorated on the information board at Claude Avenue on the way out of Bath. One of his first jobs, as a cleaner, was to assist in re-railing an engine that had jumped the track following a runaway further up the line. The engine ended up leaning against Claude Avenue Bridge. ‘The reason for the runaway train was due to the driver, being fearful of a collision, had jumped off near Braysdown Colliery, Radstock!’

George had regular visits from retired colleagues from his old steam days and enjoyed recalling stories from this era. I had the pleasure of visiting George on 7 June to present him with an ASLEF glass and, on behalf of the members of Bristol branch, to congratulate George on making it to 100.

Thanks to George’s sons Royston, Alan and Peter for their help in writing this article for the Journal.

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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

More than just a railway

Big projects, like big ideas, do not come pre-cooked. They have to be continually thought through, not just in terms of delivery, but also their potential to bring about radical change. In the four years that I have been chairman of HS2 Ltd we have been developing our understanding of how HS2 can be a catalyst for fundamental change in Britain at both a national and a local level. Working with local authorities, enterprise partnerships, as well as local businesses, we have seen first-hand how, across the country, people are seizing the opportunities that HS2 brings.

Around 6,000 jobs have been supported by the project to date and over 2,000 businesses have had contracts in the supply chain. People only need to look to Birmingham and its booming economy to see the benefits that HS2 will bring, right around the country, happening already in the Midlands.

But with opportunities there also come challenges and we need to design HS2 services to reflect and deliver the broader strategy for the national transport network. And we need to future-proof Britain’s transport network against changes in the way we live, work and enjoy our leisure time.

HS2 is more than just a railway – a catalyst for regeneration, job creation, and a rebalancing of our economy. There are many years until this project is finally completed but if we continue our work to realise its potential now then we can go on delivering widespread benefits to the whole country now and for years to come.

David Higgins, chairman, HS2 Ltd

Bollocks to Brexit

We attended the Tolpuddle rally in July. In previous years, although aware of divisions in the labour movement on the EU, we went away buoyed up by a sense of shared struggle. But this year, as soon as we entered the site, we were confronted by two people giving out bright yellow fluorescent stickers which read ‘Bollocks to Brexit’. There were many other people throughout the site handing out these stickers and one person we spoke to thought they were in lieu of an entrance armband – a confusion no doubt deliberately engineered by the placement of the distributors.

As socialists who voted to leave the EU, we went with open minds; our long-standing anti-EU views, ‘Bollocks to fishermen’ or, given his long-standing anti-EU views, ‘Bollocks to Corbyn’.

Why did the Tolpuddle organisers allow these stickers to be handed out on the site? What would they have done if people had been handing out stickers reading ‘Bollocks to immigrants’, ‘Bollocks to the NHS’ or ‘Bollocks to trannies’?

Andrew Green and Mary-Clare Buckle, Dorchester, Dorset

Ruskin future in jeopardy

The future of Ruskin College, Oxford, is in the balance. Following 18 months of sackings, redundancies and deferred courses, Ruskin has abruptly cancelled the college’s BA Hons in Community Development and Youth Work, leaving signed-up students stranded.

The Further Education Commissioner’s intervention report in July envisages a partnership with an HE institution; and the Apprenticeships & Skills Minister welcomes the naming of a suitable FE or HE merger partner.

But the reputation and ethos of Ruskin College is based on labour movement internationalism and solidarity; trade union involvement in its finance, governance and education programmes; independence from other institutions; the provision of courses up to masters degree level; good employment practice; permanent contracts, good pay, terms and conditions. All of these have been surrendered or compromised by the college’s current management.

Five international labour and trade union studies staff were dismissed in 2017. Two trade union assistant general secretaries were also removed from the college’s governing executive. In June, the governing council

As I approached the whistle board I sounded two tones, long and loud, drowned out by a double-header freight wagon, panicked, and ran in front of me.

I must take issue with Kristian Jendesden’s letter (Journal, August) as it caused me unnecessary stress; so much so that I nearly went off duty today as I was having difficulty concentrating.

He asserts that 14-year-old Sarah was killed on a crossing last year when two trains, on opposing tracks, blew single tone warning horns which drowned each other out. This is factually incorrect and I wish to correct him.

I was driving 2A66 (Rugeley to Birmingham) and had left Walsall on the up line. As I approached the whistle board I sounded two tones, long and loud. Unfortunately, on this occasion, it was drowned out by a double-header heavy freight (the driver of which was able to confirm my actions) on the down line. I was blind to the right hand side of the uncontrolled foot crossing and only saw Sarah at the last second as she stepped from behind the last

Sarah Athersmith was killed at the controversial Wallows Lane foot crossing near Walsall’s Bescot Stadium. There had been calls for the crossing to be closed but Ben Parish, a safety specialist at Network Rail, perversely told the inquest at Oldbury, in the West Midlands, that the crossing posed ‘no significant risk’. It has subsequently been closed railways! And, closing the stable door after the proverbial horse has bolted, this crossing (along with two others on that same route) have now been permanently closed!

Rik Scone, Birmingham New Street

IMHO, what killed Sarah that day was the fact that, in the 21st century, we still allow children unrestricted access to busy operational

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Use it or lose it, comrades

I wish to thank Tommy Taylor for once again hosting the Tonbridge reunion at Ashford. The attendance was not bad, but could have been better. Don’t forget, use it or lose it. I pleased to say those present put their hands in their pockets to support the raffle, making it possible for Tommy to host the Ashford reunion on 10 January 2019. Raffle proceeds pay for reunions so dig deep – you can’t take it with you. I was pleased to see new faces and working colleagues in attendance. Spread the word! And pleased to see Ray Garland, Martin Brooks and Steve Burgess, Southeastern company council, present to make a surprise presentation voted to replace itself with an advisory Friends of Ruskin committee appointed by a board of trustees. Representatives of the Ruskin fellowship of former students voted against this arrangement, which excludes places reserved for external representatives from British trade unions.

Ruskin has a proud international history of working-class education and labour movement solidarity. We call on trade unions working-class education and labour foundations principles.

Drivers, by uniting, can defend each other

I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to all the many ASLEF members and branches who supported me through my recent troubles and sent so many messages of support and encouragement. I have been reading glasses. I used a tube of soothing drops, and another for dry eyes, but I require surgery. And make sure you use your reading glasses. I used a tube of soothing ointment so I could sit down. Wrong! When I cleared the tears and donned glasses I read the label, Deep Heat!

Bruce Derere, Norwich

Time for that winter jab

The flu season is almost here. Some GPs will give a free jab for transport workers; if not, you can get one from a pharmacy, costs vary but the maximum is £20. Any savvy manager would see this as an investment in staff; if not it is worth investing in yourself. It is also important to have a proper eye test done, whether working or retired, as this can spot potential problems. I found I have cataracts in both eyes but, if I wear sunglasses on bright days, they should not get bad enough to require surgery. And make sure you use your reading glasses. I used a tube of soothing ointment so I could sit down. Wrong! When I cleared the tears and donned glasses I read the label, Deep Heat!

Jeff Veale, Battersea RMS

Care and legal assistance

I retired from TfL on 10 August after 37 years of service – the last 28 being a member of ASLEF. I want to thank you for the support I received from you during that time – particularly when I suffered an industrial accident. The care and legal assistance I received was outstanding and I will be eternally grateful. Best wishes to all at headquarters and all ASLEF members.

Mike Power, health, safety & environment manager, London Underground

Why is head office in town

Having pondered for quite some time, I have finally felt the need to raise this issue. Before I start, though, I have been an ASLEF member for the best part of 30 years and will continue to be loyal to the union for the next few years before my retirement. However, the issue that bugs me every year is when I receive a letter saying the union subscriptions have been raised due to increased costs. Can I respectfully suggest that rather than have the HQ in one of the most expensive cities on the planet, I move to the Midlands, say, would make more financial, as well as geographical, sense given that members are spread all over the UK? This isn’t an ‘expensive diary’ rant, I’m just questioning why ASLEF’s HQ has to be in London?

Bruce Derere, Norwich

January

South Eastern company council in action on behalf of ASLEF to a retired member. Unfortunately, the recipient had to attend hospital, but all was not lost as they were able to network.

Peter Smith, Retired Members’ Section

I retired from TfL on 10 August after 37 years of service – the last 28 being a member of ASLEF. I want to thank you for the support I received from you during that time – particularly when I suffered an industrial accident. The care and legal assistance I received was outstanding and I will be eternally grateful. Best wishes to all at headquarters and all ASLEF members.

Mike Power, health, safety & environment manager, London Underground

To place an advertisement please phone 020 7324 2400 or send an email to journal@aslef.org.uk

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Classified Advertisements

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

CLASS 800 IET Great Western Railway badges. Individually numbered, 100 produced. £8 each + £2 recorded p&p. Paypal payment please: to intercityexpress125@hotmail.co.uk

THREE BRIDGES branch strike badge 2016/17. £5 inc p&p (proceeds to charity) from Paul Eden (branch secretary) email paul@homeizard.com.

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

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

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

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

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The long and winding road to peace

ASLEF set up Justice for Colombia with the FBU and the TUC in 2002 to support workers there in their struggle for basic trade union – and human – rights. JOHN METCALFE, EC member for District 3, went with GS Mick Whelan on a JF visit to monitor the peace process in the country

T HINK of Colombia and the usual visions of violence, drugs cartels, murders and corruption spring to mind. All of which continue to take place despite the historic peace deal signed in Havana nearly two years ago. As part of a delegation of leading trade unionists, MPs, human rights experts and legal professionals, through Justice for Colombia, we were charged with monitoring progress of the peace agreement.

It was painfully obvious that, despite the will of the international community, and the eternal optimism of Colombians who strive for peace and reconciliation, dark forces are still at work in the country. Newly-elected President Iván Duque and his government hail from the extreme right of the political spectrum and seem determined to frustrate and dismantle the peace process.

LAY DOWN THEIR ARMS

Our delegation met trade unionists, opposition parliamentarians, former FARC guerrillas and their political leaders, the UN, farmers and peasants, victims of violence, and UK and EU ambassadors, who all offered a telling insight into the slow progress of achieving normality in Colombia.

The peace agreement, signed in Havana in December 2016, saw the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia end the armed struggle after 53 years and lay down their arms. In response a series of democratic, social and economic changes should have set Colombia on the long road to peace and reconciliation. The evidence we saw and heard gave a tale of slow, or no, progress on many issues.

For example, land reform and the move away from growing coca and cannabis to sustainable crops such as chocolate and pineapples was extremely difficult or impossible due to paramilitary groups filling the void left by the disarmed FARC. So far this year 148 social leaders have been assassinated, which is a huge increase on last year. To volunteer to be a community activist or trade unionist in Colombia means you put the lives of your families and yourself at risk. Having a conversation with someone who has lost six close family members to murders and survived four attempts on his own life is very sobering.

The Colombian police and army were supposed to ensure security after the FARC disbanded. In reality, they are viewed with deep suspicion by many of the people we met with. So what does the future hold for Colombia?

Well, first, President Duque doesn’t command a huge majority in parliament and progressive politicians on the left have formed a broad coalition to hold his government to account. Elected with 10 million votes, his left-wing opposition polled 8 million votes for the first time. So, politically, there is hope in controlling the excesses of the far-right in Colombian politics.

FRAUGHT WITH DIFFICULTIES

Second, critically, the Havana peace process was the result and will of the international community, and as long as the eyes and ears of the world continue to monitor what happens in Colombia, there is hope. That is why the work of Justice for Colombia, with ASLEF’s support, is vital. The peace deal is being monitored by the UN and is now enshrined in Colombia’s constitution.

The road ahead is not an easy one for Colombia, and is fraught with difficulties, yet there is a will and determination amongst the people we met to make the peace deal succeed. I suspect that without prolonged and sustained international pressure, and continued monitoring and lobbying, it may well be impossible.

In a small, but important, way ASLEF, with our long and proud history of international solidarity with communities and trade unionists facing struggles, will make an impact. Our support for JFC adds an important dynamic to our union.

Colombia is a beautiful country, rich in resources, and an equitable peace agreement, if properly enforced, will ensure a lasting change for the good. And if we can play a small part in making that a reality then, as a trade union, we can be justly proud.

Justice for Colombia

JFC has taken more than 250 trade union activists and politicians to Colombia – visits which have saved the lives of trade unionists who were being picked up and summarily executed by government troops and their right-wing paramilitary allies. It organised the first shared platform outside Colombia for the two sides – the Colombian government and the FARC rebels – at the House of Commons in 2015, a significant step in the peace process. Mariela Kohon, JFC’s director, working with the UN, is an official adviser at the peace talks in Havana, Cuba.
On Track

THE AUTHOR, THE RAIL CRASH AND A TORRID AFFAIR

EN people died and 50 were injured when the South Eastern Railway boat train from Folkestone to London, carrying 115 passengers, crashed while crossing a viaduct near Staplehurst in Kent on 9 June 1865. Just before 3.15pm the train – comprising a locomotive, four brake vans, seven first class carriages, and three second class coaches – was travelling at 50mph when the driver saw a red flag. He-whistled for the brakes, and reversed his engine, but it was too late to stop.

A length of track on the 10ft high viaduct had been removed so timbers could be renewed. A Board of Trade inquiry found that while regulations required a man with a red flag to be posted 1,000 yards ahead of the works, he was only 554 yards away and the train had insufficient time to stop.

As Claire Tomalin describes it in The Invisible Woman, the train ‘simply steamed over the gap, its middle section collapsing into it; some of the coaches then ran out of control down a bank and overturned into boggy ground, crushing and killing passengers.’

One of those passengers was Charles Dickens, who was travelling with his young mistress, Ellen Ternan, a pretty 26-year-old actress, and her mother Frances. Dickens, 53, had been enjoying a torrid affair with Ellen for eight years, since he spotted her performing at the Haymarket Theatre when she was 18. Dickens, who climbed out of a window, wrote: ‘The scene was so affecting when I helped in getting out the wounded and dead, that for a little while afterwards, I felt shaken by the remembrance of it.’

Despite his fame, and the part he played in helping passengers, he was keen to keep his name out of newspaper reports and the inquest. Why? High Victorian morality and hypocrisy. The journalist and author didn’t want his torrid affair with a woman less than half his age to be exposed.

Keith Richmond

Prize Crossword

Crossword 150 by Tom Williams

Across
1 Travel card
7 Ocean-going vessel
8 An explosive
9 Printing machine
10 Fishing-line spool
12 Pudding grain
13 Famous public school
14 Bay or sea inlet
15 Lofty
17 Equipment
19 Same again
20 Charitable gift
21 Big
22 Change over

Down
1 Period of half-timbered houses

Solution to Crossword 149

Across: 1 Sitting room 7 Chum 8 Started 9 Bee
10 Tepee 11 Claret 13 Blasts 16 Elect 18 Tag
19 Scarlet 20 Oval 21 Steeplejack

Down: 1 School 2 Timber 3 Insect 4 Grant
5 Octopus 6 Madness 11 Cheeses 12 Average
13 Battle 14 Angora 15 Thwack 17 Tulip

Congratulations to John Williams of Wandsworth, south London, who was last month’s winner. The winner of this month’s Prize Crossword will receive Marks & Spencer vouchers to the value of £25

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

Thanks for all your responses to the 149th prize crossword in the September edition of the ASLEF Journal. If you successfully complete this month’s crossword please send the solution to the Editor, ASLEF Journal, 77 St John Street, Clerkenwell, London, EC1M 4NN by 14 October

ASLEF’s legal services

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

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