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district 3 & district 7 weekend school
23-24 march 2019

venue
Royal Hotel Weston
1 South Parade, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1JP
www.royalhotelwestern.com

Applications
- Rooms are allocated on a first come, first served basis.
- Applications should be sent to hourigana@aslef.org.uk
- All applications are to be received by 1 March 2019 (no exceptions).
- Please state your name, branch and contact details when making your application.
- There will be no refunds or cancellations after 1 March 2019.
- Please state how many and which type of rooms you require and for which days.

Payments
- Cheques should be made payable to “ASLEF”.
- Cheques and cash payments will be taken on the day.

what to expect
Registration begins at 10am on Saturday morning with tea/coffee and will be officially opened by the General Secretary Mick Whelan at 11.00.
A buffet lunch will be provided and a hog roast will kick off the social event in the evening. The event ends at midday Sunday. There will be industry and political speakers providing an update on developments on our railway as well as educational elements suitable for reps and lay members alike.

Delegate fees and room rates
- Delegate fee: £10 pp*
- Single room: £30 p/room, p/night
- Double/Twin: £42.50 p/room, p/night

Additional rooms are available on the Friday night (at the same rate) if required. Branches are encouraged to subsidise or pay for delegates to attend.
* Mandatory
Monty Grayling’s Flying Circus

RAVELLING around the country attending branches and meetings I notice a mood of increasing uncertainty driven by the shambles this Tory government is inflicting on our industry and our communities with a nonsense Brexit deal that pleases no one – whatever their political perspective.

The latest fiasco saw Chris Grayling give a contract to a sea freight company with no ships. That contract has now been cancelled at, they said, no cost, but, on scrutiny, consultants cost a whopping £800,000 and the local council stands to go down for £2 million. There is a march in London by the POA on Wednesday 20 March dealing with the legacy issues from when Mr Grayling was in charge of that department and I imagine that, along with members of the rail unions, and probation unions, it will be well attended by those who have been impacted by Mr Grayling’s long career of political and industrial destruction.

We point to the long, harsh, government-sponsored GTR dispute and the impact that had across the rail industry; the £2 billion lost on the proposed early termination of the East Coast contract which, in real terms, is even greater as it was terminated even earlier; the cancellation of manifesto pledges for electrification in the East Midlands, TPE, and elsewhere. The knock-on effect of the lack of trains and the timetable debacle on Northern and GTR that dented public faith in rail – which would have been a hundred times worse but for the dedication of staff which has never been recognised. Blaming rail staff for the high cost of fares is reminiscent of the famous Monty Python sketch with workers expected to pay for the privilege of working to support the profits of the privateers that do not repay the subsidies they receive before taking money out of our industry. And have we heard any mention of executive pay or bonuses being limited?

I wish Keith Williams well with his rail review, wading through the chaos of an industry in meltdown; staff morale has never been lower and employers talk to me, offline, about a total lack of strategic direction. Failing Grayling’s previous history has been routinely overturned: £170 million for the book ban for prisoners, £20 million on a failed tagging system, tribunal fees, legal aid cuts which would have been a hundred times worse but for the dedication of staff which has never been recognised. Blaming rail staff for the high cost of fares is reminiscent of the famous Monty Python sketch with workers expected to pay for the privilege of working to support the profits of the privateers that do not repay the subsidies they receive before taking money out of our industry. And have we heard any mention of executive pay or bonuses being limited?

The legacy of hurt by this government – to our industry and our communities – is a matter of public record. It needs to stop. It will take generations to correct but think how much worse it would be without the trade unions and civil society organisations who have battled for a better world.

Yours fraternally,
Mick Whelan, general secretary
Taxi for Failing Grayling – MPs

HERESA May has faced cross-party calls to dump her Transport Secretary, Chris Grayling, in the wake of that no-deal Brexit ferry fiasco when the DfT handed a £13.8 million contract to run ferries from Ramsgate to Ostend to Seaborne Freight, a company with no ships, no trading history, and t&cs copied and pasted from a takeaway food firm’s delivery site.

Shadow Transport Secretary Andy McDonald said: ‘We cannot have this incompetent heaping humiliation after humiliation on our country. He has to go.’ Lib Dem leader Vince Cable said: ‘Failing Grayling has made too many crass mistakes and lost the confidence of the service.’ Anna Soubry, Conservative MP for Broxtowe, said: ‘He has no grip on the job.’ GS Mick Whelan said: ‘The Secretary of State for Transport, if he had any sense of embarrassment, or responsibility, would do the decent thing and resign. He won’t, of course. That’s why Theresa May should sack him.’ The Prime Minister is reluctant to get rid of Grayling because he ran her campaign to become Tory Party leader.

Look how much I gained

Kelly-Joe Ballard was interviewed by Jane Garvey on Woman’s Hour on Radio 4 on Friday 8 February, talking about why driving trains is a good career for women. Ellie Burrows, train services director at Southeastern, which is backing ASLEF’s campaign to encourage more diversity in the rail industry, was also interviewed. ‘We want to ensure train drivers reflect the diversity of the communities we serve,’ said GS Mick Whelan.

Quote...

‘The tragedy of the English conquest of Ireland is that the Irish can never forget it and the English can never remember it.’

– GK Chesterton

…UNQUOTE

Tweets of the Month

Today we reached peak #FailingGrayling. Things we now know he can’t organise: 1. Reliable, affordable and on time trains 2. Buying boats from anyone that’s ever had a boat 3. A fake traffic jam. Not sacking him highlights just how pathetic and weak this government is.

@DaveWardGS

Oh great. I hear Tony Blair has been put up on the Today programme again as the voice of People’s Vote. Why don’t we all just give up and go home? Socialist in Labour.

@michael_chessum

Easiest way of avoiding embarrassment like this is to buy from unionised companies. #SpiceGirls #ComicRelief

@thisislucio

ORR stats reveal model broken beyond repair

GS Mick Whelan has called for ‘root and branch reform’ of the way Britain’s railway is run after the regulator’s latest report revealed that passenger revenue has tanked while government subsidy has soared. Figures released on Thursday 31 January by the Office of Rail and Road in its annual report on rail finance 2017-18 show that falling passenger numbers meant income from fares fell 2.4% while taxpayer subsidy went up by 8%.

‘The government has ordered a review of the rail industry,’ said Mick. ‘But we all know the problem. And the solution. The franchise system, brought in by John Major 25 years ago, in a move which even that arch privateer Margaret Thatcher described as “a privatisation too far”, isn’t just flawed, it has failed. The reality, which everyone in our industry knows, is that the franchise system is broken beyond repair. It doesn’t work for passengers, it doesn’t work for taxpayers, and it doesn’t work for the men and women who, every day, deliver what should be a public service, not a chance for a few to make a private profit at public expense.’

Get ‘Em Out of the Workplace

The theme of this year’s International Workers’ Memorial Day on Sunday 28 April is dangerous substances – carcinogens such as asbestos and diesel exhaust – and the importance of getting them out of the workplace.

Quote...

‘Brexit: All that happened is that there was a financial crisis and then people got a bit racist.’ – Nish Kumar

…UNQUOTE

Rust never sleeps

A statue of Margaret Thatcher in Grantham will require a 10ft-high platform to prevent vandalism, say police. The £300,000 bronze sculpture was meant to stand in Parliament Square but that idea was quashed for fear it would be a target for protesters. Lincolnshire Police has told South Kesteven district council that ‘the passage of time does not seem to have diminished feelings of antipathy’ towards the former Prime Minister.
Brenda got her break at BR

Brenda made her name on stage in *A Doll’s House* by Henrik Ibsen, *An Ideal Husband* by Oscar Wilde, and *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams, all at the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester; in Alan Ayckbourn’s *Wildest Dreams* at the RSC; and George Farquhar’s *Restoration comedy* *The Beaux’ Stratagem* at the National Theatre.

She went on to star as Cynthia Rose Purley in Mike Leigh’s *Secrets and Lies* with Timothy Spall and Phyllis Logan; as Mari Hoff in Little Voice with Jane Horrocks, Michael Caine, Ewan McGregor and Jim Broadbent; and as Mrs Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* with Keira Knightley and Matthew Macfadyen. And she hasn’t forgotten her roots. ‘I still love travelling by train!’

Vera Stanhope – well, Brenda – discovered her talent for acting as a typist at British Rail entering a drama competition, and somebody has gone sick, can you do it, please, it’s only one line’. They were persuasive and I did it; to help them out, and I just loved the whole experience. So I went to drama school with the idea entered my head I would ever be on television or in a film.’

CONFERENCES & RALLIES

The Scottish Labour Party conference is at the Caird Hall, Dundee, from Friday 8 to Sunday 10 March. 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. Workers’ Memorial Day is Sunday 28 April.

ASLEF’s annual assembly of delegates is at the Marriott Hotel, Leeds, from Monday 13 to Thursday 16 May. The STUC’s LGBT+ workers’ conference is at the Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel, Glasgow, from Saturday 25 to Sunday 26 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.

Off the Rails

JOHN MAJOR is enjoying a new lease of life as a Tory grandee, political commentator (especially on Brexit), and cricket buff. But the former Prime Minister didn’t look as if he would enjoy bumping into a group of ASLEF activists and fellow travellers – including AGS Simon Weller, DOG Nigel Gibson, DOG Dicky Fisher, WRC chair Debbie Reay, and Steve Cavalier and Vicky Phillips from Thompsons solicitors – who were on their way back from the District 4 Christmas lunch in Doncaster.

GS Mick Whelan, though, took the opportunity to go over and talk to the man who privatised Britain’s railways – even his predecessor, Margaret Thatcher, described as ‘a privatisation too far’ – and, although it was hardly a meeting of minds, voices were not raised, blows were not exchanged, and Sir John’s security detail did not feel it necessary to intervene. ’We spoke for a few minutes, amicably, including about rail privatisation, and although we disagreed, it was all perfectly polite,’ said Mick. ’Actually, he’s a really nice bloke.’ And, when the former Prime Minister got off at Peterborough, he did smile and wave at the ASLEF train crew through the window…

THE REV RICHARD COLES – once, before he became the vicar of the village of Finedon in Northamptonshire, half of The Communards with Jimmy Sommerville of Bronski Beat – presents *Saturday Live* on Radio 4. The running theme of the 26 January edition was rail, introduced by Richard as a programme ‘Pulling out of the station through budleia-fringed cuttings and clashing points…’ Then he revealed: ’My friend Verner was station master at Edinburgh Waverley, which is great in itself, right, and there was this woman he knew, who was always travelling down to London, and he had a bit of a thing for her, and they got a bit friendly, and sometimes her timekeeping wasn’t great, and she would sometimes phone ahead and say, “I’m going to be a little late”’, and he would delay the London train for her! After a Pinteresque pause, and gasps in the studio at New Broadcasting House, he added, ‘Listeners, he married her.’ When Aasmah Mir said, ’Hopefully, no one’s going to get in trouble for that?’ Richard responded: ’He doesn’t work for ScotRail anymore’!

BILL RONKSLY is not the most obvious candidate for an obituary in the *Daily Telegraph*, which tends to prefer Army majors who led an assault during the Battle of Monte Cassino during the Second World War. But, fair do’s, the Torygraph gave Ronks the full treatment on Monday 28 January, albeit under the headline ‘Bill Ronksley, committed communist who led the rail union ASLEF and brought Picasso to Sheffield in 1950’ which might have led one or two readers to skip the piece.

BILL SHANKLY, the Liverpool legend, once revealed the synergy between his philosophy of football and his politics, forged in the Ayrshire coalfield: ‘The socialism I believe in is everyone working for each other, everyone having a share of the rewards. It’s the way I see football, the way I see life’.

500 CLUB: Peter Manley, with number 137, won the February draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £438.
Tube appeal after attack on driver

British Transport Police released pictures and CCTV footage after the Tube driver was attacked with a bottle on board a Jubilee line train at Kilburn station. The charge of grievous bodily harm with intent.

‘Officers believe the man shown in these CCTV images may have information which could help their investigation. Anyone who recognises this man, or who has more information about the incident, is asked to contact BTP by texting 61016 or calling 0800 405040, quoting ref no 615 of 29/01/19. Alternatively, you can call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555111.’

QUOTE...

“You know what a Tory is – one who wants to drive the working men as he’d drive cattle. That’s what a Tory is.” – Felix Holt: The Radical

…UNQUOTE

Mackem makes his media Marx

Kevin Maguire, associate editor of the Daily Mirror, columnist on the New Statesman, Visiting Professor of Journalism at Sunderland University, and friend of this parish, talked to ASLEF members about politics and the media on Tuesday 5 February as part of our five day political course at Esher Place in Surrey run by EC1 Marz Colombini and Mark Walker and Ed Murphy of Cogitamus. Kevin, fresh from describing Alec Shelbrooke, MP for Elmet & Rothwell, as a waistcoated Tory with the girth of a prosperous 19th century mill owner, went down a storm.

New Tube trains to be built abroad

Unite AGS Steve Turner and Phil Wilson, Labour MP for Sedgefield, have called for a review of the order to build new Tube trains for London Underground after it was revealed that most of the rolling stock for the Piccadilly line will be built in Austria, not Britain. Last year a joint bid by Hitachi in Newton Aycliffe, County Durham, and Bombardier in Derby lost out to Siemens who promised to build a new factory at Goule in Yorkshire to build the trains in Britain. Now it has been revealed that two-thirds of the new Tube trains will be built in Vienna.

Which? slams Failing Grayling

Peter Vicary-Smith, hailed as ‘one of the most influential figures in the organisation’s 60-year history’ when he stepped down as chief executive of Which? last year, has launched a corrosive attack on Britain’s ‘shambolic’ privatised railway. He said: ‘There are operators that don’t even deliver the basics for passengers. It’s not as though train travel is a budget option. Prices keep rising – we’re often paying much more than passengers in the rest of Europe – so of course we expect more. At the very least we expect trains to run on time.

‘Our rail network fails on multiple levels – it’s not just delays. The ticketing system is far too complex, and it’s simply not clear how we can access the best deals. Chasing compensation if your train has been cancelled or delayed is time-consuming and complicated. Another layer of failure for the passenger. ‘It’s time for action to end this disservice and make our railways work for passengers again.’

YOBs kick out window of moving Metro train

Tyne & Wear Metro services director Chris Carson has promised to keep staff and passengers ‘as safe as possible’ after footage was posted on Twitter of youths leaning out of the window of a moving Metro train between South Shields and Hebburn after they had kicked out the window.

Fare dodging lawyer struck off and loses job

Adam Kemeny, 33, has been struck off by the Solicitors Regulation Authority – and sacked from his £38,000 a year job – for evading £650 in fares by regularly dodging the £17 daily return fare from his home in Shoreditch to Redhill in Surrey by using a station exit without a barrier. He repaid GTR £850 in return for not being reported to the police; and was ordered to pay £3,000 costs by the SRA.
ASLEF calls on government to help the BTP beat drugs gangs

S Mick Whelan has spoken out after the recent upsurge in violence among county lines gangs using trains – and young people – to move drugs and cash from crime around the country.

He said: ‘In the light of the recent increase in knife crime, and violent assaults, on Britain’s trains we believe that the safety and security of our railway has to be improved – both for the travelling public who use our trains and for the staff who work on the permanent way.

‘That’s why we are calling, yet again, for all trains and all stations to be properly staffed.

Mick: Everyone should be able to travel safely, at any time of the day or night’

‘And why are we calling on central government to invest the necessary resources both at local level, and in the British Transport Police, to ensure that everyone can travel safely in Britain at any time of the day or night.’

QUOTE...
‘There’s no point trying for a seat in the middle-class coach – sorry, the quiet coach – as they get booked up early.’
– Nicholas Lezard, the New Statesman

...UNQUOTE

Poor air quality on Tube

Fresh concerns about the air quality on London Underground have been raised after new research found that particulate pollution in Tube stations is up to 30 times higher than busy roads in the capital. The report, by experts at King’s College, London, for TfL, found that the Northern line is worst. DO8 Finn Brennan said: ‘ASLEF reps have a special committee working on this issue, and are actively working to ensure London Underground is doing its utmost to address the problem.’

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Luxembourg scraps fares on trains, trams and buses

Luxembourg has become the first country in the world to scrap fares on public transport. The little landlocked country – population 590,000 – which borders Belgium, France and Germany has announced that Sunday 1 March 2020 is ‘free day’ in the Duchy when only passengers travelling first class on trains will pay a fare. Transport Minister François Bausch called the move ‘the social cherry on the cake of a larger mobility strategy’.

Luxembourg already has the cheapest public transport in Europe. Everyone under 20 travels free. An all-day ticket for every form of public transport costs €4 (£3.50), which is less than the fare for a six-minute journey from Victoria to Clapham Junction in London. A nationwide flat fare of €2 (£1.75) is valid for up to two hours of travel which, in a country the size of Oxfordshire, covers almost any journey.

The current structure of first and second class rail compartments will be kept ‘to allow people who want to work on the train to do it serenely’.

Passengers will be expected to carry an identity document, which for UK travellers will mean a passport.

The cost of scrapping fares is estimated at £36 million each year – a small sum compared with the £875 million annual cost of running the Duchy’s transport network.

CONCRETE ON THE LINE

Railway ballast was deliberately left on the tracks at Bridlington station in an attempt to derail a train. ‘Placing items on the tracks is extremely dangerous and could result in injury or even death,’ said a spokesperson for the British Transport Police.

ARE FRIENDS ELECTRIC?

Transport for London is running modified four-car electric trains on the Gospel Oak to Barking London Overground line because the new Class 710 electrics ordered to replace the diesel Class 172s are not yet ready.

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Shine a light on mental health

DISTRICT 2 COUNCIL reports on a workshop it ran on mental health in the 21st century workplace

DISTRICT 2 council, in conjunction with Headtorch, a firm which offers well-being training at work, recently held a mental health workshop to discuss how we are affected every day of our working lives. It was led by Amy McDonald, the founder of the company, and its chair Angus Robinson. They spoke about how we need to help as statistics show that 1-4 people will suffer from one sort of mental illness or another in their lives. They also examined the impact it can have on business. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence estimates that, for an organisation with 1,000 employees, the cost of mental ill-health at work is now £835,000 a year. Legally, if employers don’t take their employees’ mental health seriously, they can be in breach of the Health & Safety at Work Act and the Equalities Act. Also, looking at it ethically, it is morally right to look after our families, friends and colleagues.

John Brown, a GMB shop steward at BAE shipyard on the Clyde, which has a predominantly male workforce, told us how they have developed the role of ‘mental health first-aiders’ as a point of contact for colleagues who suffering from any issues.

Who’s in the cab with Roo?

One moment you’re about to set off from Derby to London, the next you’ve got the Leader of the Opposition in your cab. But this explains why Jeremy Corbyn, at the Labour Party conference in Brighton, paid such warm personal tributes to Mick Whelan, Tosh McDonald and Andy Botham: ‘I want to thank Mick, as general secretary of ASLEF, and as chair of TULO, for allowing me to speak, usually soon after I arrive, if only to get rid of me; I want to thank Tosh, for his passion; and I want to thank Roo Botham, for being my personal train driver chauffeur!’

Spurs delay ‘held up Crossrail in London’

The long delays in opening Tottenham Hotspur’s new £1 billion stadium – it should have been finished last August, but won’t now open until later this month – had a knock-on effect on Crossrail. Rhys Williams, head of engineering, said problems completing the 62,000 seat stadium at White Hart Lane caused a labour shortage in London, making it impossible for the project to meet its proposed opening date of December last year.

‘Tottenham going late had an impact on everyone working here,’ he told New Civil Engineer. ‘We are working with public money so can only pay a certain amount. Private clients don’t have the same restrictions. If they want something done, they can throw money at it.’

WORKING ON THE NIGHT SHIFT

The number of men and women working through the night has gone up by 150,000, according to new research by the TUC which wants to see greater protection for the 3.5 million people employed as shift workers in the UK. Some scientists believe nocturnal working can reduce your life expectancy by up to six years and the Health and Safety Executive says irregular shift patterns can lead to fatigue and all the associated risks.

3 Q U O T E . . .

‘Rail is the most energy-efficient form of transport, and can be zero-carbon if renewable electricity is used.’ – Chris Page, chair of Railfuture, in Railwatch

QUOTE...
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HE Hazards campaign has launched its new Manifesto for Health & Safety Fit for Workers, subtitled ‘decent jobs and decent lives’, to assess the position we’ve been pushed into by deregulation-crazy Tories who have degraded workplace protection to the point where ‘elf’n’safety is an easy target for second-rate stand-up comedians, as well as setting out ideas on how to repair the damage done.

They succinctly put the case for action. ‘Work contributes to a huge amount of public ill-health, health inequality, and lower life expectancy,’ says Janet Newsham of Hazards. ‘Fewer years of healthy life kills over 50,000 people in the UK each year, makes millions ill, injures half a million, and the quality of jobs contributes to poverty and ill-health. But all of this is preventable with the right framework of strong laws, strict enforcement, and support for active worker and union participation, and will have massive payback for workers, employers and the whole economy. The current political situation has given us an opportunity to place health & safety firmly back on the political agenda.’

She adds: ‘It’s an opportunity to address our concerns, to discuss what we want from regulation, and enforcement, to support trade union safety reps and ensure workers are treated with more dignity and are able to organise and respond collectively.’

Their key areas for action are: ending deregulation and restoring regulation and enforcement as a social good; developing a health & safety system based on prevention, precaution and the participation of strong and active unions, ensuring good health & safety in low paid and precarious work via joint enforcement agency working.

The Manifesto is supported by ASLEF and is available free to download from the website www.hazardscampaign.co.uk

- The Hazards campaign, set up in 1987, is a network of worker-oriented health & safety centres, activists and groups working with trade union safety reps, families and communities on all aspects of work-related safety and ill-health.

Rigging the rules of the game

The Tory government is intent on skewing democracy in this country. NANCY PLATTS, co-ordinator of PoliticsForTheMany.co.uk, and former trade union adviser to Jeremy Corbyn, spells out how we can fight back

We hear a lot about ‘voter suppression’ in the United States – marginalised groups of people denied a vote due to hyper-stringent registration or ID policies.

The Tory government appears keen to bring some of that over here. Last May 350 people (in just five local authority areas) were denied a vote in their council elections as voter ID was trialled for the first time. To put that number in context, it is double the number accused of cheating the system to vote by impersonating someone in eight years across the whole of the UK!

The Windrush scandal highlighted the difficulties some legitimate voters can have in accessing identity documents through no fault of their own. Yet the measures to account for these issues were limited at best. As marginalised people were further sidelined, the PM shored up her power in Parliament.

At one point it appeared as if Theresa May would suspend appointments to the bloated House of Lords. Then, under cover of the royal wedding, a dozen new unelected lords were announced; all but a few were Tories, each set to legislate on our laws for life. What century is this again?

And what about the proposed new constituency boundaries? The election specialists Rallings & Thrasher worked out that if the votes cast in the 2017 election were cast under the proposed new boundaries, the Conservatives would have a majority of 16 – without one vote changing.

Ministers say it’s about ‘equalising’ constituencies – but the real inequality is the millions of votes that go to waste across the country under our first past the post voting system. All this, alongside the use of unchecked Henry VIII powers to push through controversial plans, with devolved governments overruled. And they changed the committee system rules to guarantee the government an undeserved majority. In the face of genuine threats to our democracy – from dodgy donors to foreign interference and disinformation – the government is skewing the rules against voters.

But sadly, our elections are anything but fair. Voting for Westminster isn’t about how many votes a party gets. It’s about winning one more vote than the person after you, in hundreds of different seats. So some MPs pile up massive majorities while others sneak a win by a handful of votes. That leaves millions of votes and voices unheard, as they don’t make any difference to the make-up of parliament. This isn’t the case in Scotland, the Welsh Assembly, the London Assembly or Northern Ireland: each uses a system where every vote counts.

That’s why Politics for the Many, the trade union campaign for political reform, is getting active to build a movement for real democratic reform. This isn’t just about rules: it’s about workers everywhere having real power, at the ballot box and in their communities, to build a democracy fit for the 21st century.

That is our aim, and some ASLEF members are already supporting us. But we need you, too; visit www.politicsforthemanyc.org.uk

- The EC hasn’t decided whether or not to back this campaign. Nancy’s piece is published here not as an endorsement, but to open up discussion and debate on the subject.
Breath of fresh air

BRIAN CORBETT, District 7 Organiser, reports on the state of rails – passenger and freight – in Wales after ATW made way for Keolis Amey

The main passenger operator in Wales and its three depots in England has, in the last year, been in a period of limbo, until the new company – Keolis Amey – was awarded the grant, which it has been running since October 2018. Transport for Wales, along with the Welsh government, certainly have the ambition and desire to improve the railways for the people of Wales and are committed to increasing the frequency of services.

They have a commitment to generate up to 600 new jobs; 300 will be in the driving grade and a further 300 apprenticeships in other grades over the next 15 years. This must be seen as a breath of fresh air in the industry.

Brand new trains will be assembled in Wales and refurbished traction is also to come onto the network. In the meantime TfW, whilst running the old clapped-out units left to them by ATW, is on the right track, it is fair to say. So far so good, but we (ASLEF) will continue to hold TfW to account on its promises, as I am sure the Welsh government will as well.

KA and TW have been positive about engagement with trade unions and been very constructive in wanting regular meetings; dates have been placed in diaries. The ASLEF drivers’ company council is doing a great job in trying to improve drivers’ terms and conditions.

I can also say that this is down to the political willingness of the Welsh Labour government to forge ahead against the UK government, and the DfT, which have been less than supportive. Whilst the political levy of our trade union fund is not just for the Labour Party, but for a whole range of social items that need support, our affiliation in Wales is surely worth every penny and I would encourage those who are not currently paying the levy to contact your branch secretary and sign up. We have very good Assembly Members in the Welsh government who are working not just for the railways but in the best interests of the people of Wales.

The freight industry continues to change like the weather; contracts going from one company then back to another.

There is no stability; we have drivers who love freight but cannot see what the long-term future holds for them. We should be seeing more government intervention, and our freight and environmental friends who campaign must be listened to, otherwise the industry will continue to have an uncertain future. Our freight drivers are the people who do the ballast and infrastructure work; an important point which seems to have been forgotten by politicians in Westminster.

We only have two pure freight depots left in Wales – Newport and Port Talbot – and both have a long and proud history and must be part of the long-term future for freight.

Fit for purpose

ANDY HUDD, executive committee member for District 7, and the new EC vice-president, is cautiously excited by the noises being made by TfWRS

I'm excited! At last we have a meaningful attempt to bring rail services back in-house, something that has been sorely needed in Wales for decades. Proper investment on a not for profit basis to meet the demands of the end user – the people of Wales.

More services to the valley lines, an integrated transport network, new traction and improvements to infrastructure – not only to improve passenger services but to ensure the continued sustainability of freight services – magic, where do we sign up?

Of course, all this is great news but there's one thing that brings me – and this rose-tinted optimism – back down to earth. I just get the feeling that all this is being done on a bit of a shoestring, which is fine – after all, the money will be largely provided by the taxpayer and there should be some oversight to the whole process – but there's financial prudence and then there's penny-pinching.

My problem lies with the dubious traction options that Transport for Wales Rail Services have gone for. Let's start with the Class 769s. These multi-modal units are ideal – on paper – for the type of work that can be expected around the major towns and cities of Wales as well as its branch lines, but these converted 319s have a major problem – if you're too tall you won't fit into the cab! Along with the poor performance of the air conditioning, and the lack of fitment of anti-spill protection for the windscreen, these sets give our representatives a lot of work to do.

The 'best' is yet to come, however, with the proposed introduction of the Class 230. These Frankensteins of former Underground D-stock trains are also earmarked for West Midland Trains and Chiltern despite one of them bursting into flames under testing! Vivarail is pushing forward with this design and is very keen to implement suggested changes put forward by our reps but there is still some way to go.

It's something our members have been struggling with for years – regurgitating rolling stock that is well past its life expectancy. There should be fixed ergonomic reviews of driving cabs based on the manufacturer's life expectancy; this would allow driving cabs to be modernised where the current regulations lie; however, it is pursued by ASLEF at a European level as this is a state of rails – anything can be done to improve safety or comfort.

These initiatives are currently being pursued by ASLEF at a European level as this is where the current regulations lie; however, it will take time for these to take hold due to the bureaucracy of Europe but we can, by supporting our reps, ensure that legacy rolling stock is fit for purpose and new traction is state of the art – not only in Wales but all across the UK.
NE of the most rewarding aspects of being Transport Minister in the Welsh Labour government over the last couple of years has been working side by side with the fantastic people employed in our rail industry in Wales. They are people of passion, of knowledge, and of understanding about what makes a good railway system tick.

But what was clear to me when I first took on the role in May 2016 was that those people working in rail in Wales had been let down over many years by the UK Conservative government. Let down by their failure to invest in the network in Wales.

Rail infrastructure in Wales hasn’t had the funding other parts of the UK network have seen – little more than 1.5% of rail enhancement funding has come to Wales since 2011 despite us having 11% of the track in England and Wales.

They had been let down by the cancellation of major projects – such as electrification to Swansea – and let down by the failure to set any kind of a timetable for North Wales main line electrification. And they had been let down by the failure to invest in them.

So when I began my role taking forward the work of developing the new Wales and Borders rail service – the very first the Welsh government has ever designed and procured – I committed to do it in partnership with our trade union colleagues such as ASLEF. I wanted to show that the chaos, the poor service, and the disastrous industrial relations that have hallmarked rail services over the border in England didn’t have to be the case here in Wales.

I wanted to show that we could develop and run the best passenger railway anywhere in Europe by 2030.

I can’t pretend there weren’t bumps along the road when we designed the new service. There were tough meetings and honest conversations – there were even a few choice words! – but we never gave up on each other. We wanted to show that, together, you could build the most innovative rail service anywhere in the UK and do it through effective social partnership.

And I’m proud of what we have achieved together. Last year we announced the new Wales and Borders rail service including ambitious plans for metro. The £5 billion package of investment we outlined includes an £800 million investment in new rolling stock, with a commitment to replace every train by 2023. Half of these will be assembled in Wales.

We’ll spend £194 million on modernising all 247 stations across the Wales and Borders network with smart ticketing and cheaper off-peak fares. We’ll introduce fare reductions in North Wales and at approximately 50% of stations in the valleys.

By December 2023, we will run an extra 285 services every weekday, including improvements on the Ebbw Vale, Cambrian and Heart of Wales lines and the North Wales Metro. A new service will link Cardiff and Liverpool via Wrexham and, on Sundays, we’ll have an extra 294 services running across Wales by December 2019.

We’ll invest £738 million to transform the valley lines to Treherbert, Aberdare, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhymney and Coryton, electrifying 172km of track. And we’ll create more than 600 new jobs, including 200 new on-train customer service staff, and add 30 apprenticeships a year.

Stations and overhead wires will be powered by 100% renewable energy, with at least 50% sourced in Wales, and we will have free end-to-end internet access available on 85% of journeys by 2024. We’ll extend free travel for under 5s to under 11s and half-price fares will be extended to 16-18-year-olds. Under 16s will go free off-peak when accompanied by a fare-paying adult.

But, most importantly, we’ll build all this by supporting the people who know how to get it done. Just as with the Welsh Labour government’s new economic contract, public investment with a social purpose is a cornerstone of our new approach to rail.

Working with, and not against, our trade union partners, we are safeguarding the conditions of those people who work on the rail network – and we will keep a guard on every train.

Our new rail service can be the cornerstone of a stronger, more resilient, economy. One that people working on can feel proud to have played a part in building.
IAN THOMPSON, from Treherbert at the head of the Rhondda Fawr valley, sits on the general council of the Wales TUC, which represents 52 trade unions and 400,000 members in the public, private and voluntary sectors, and is the voice of organised labour in the Welsh government’s social partnership structure. He reveals what Welsh Labour Party leader Mark Drakeford, and First Minister in the Welsh government, told the Wales TUC recently

Making his Mark

A S THE ASLEF representative on the Wales TUC general council, I was proud to be there when we were addressed by Mark Drakeford, the new, and fully ASLEF supported, First Minister of the Welsh government – indeed, the only Labour government in the UK.

He informed us he was due to meet the Prime Minister to put the case for a Brexit deal that protects jobs in Wales.

Between 2009 and 2019, due to austerity measures, the budget for public services is £800 million worse off. Had it kept track, as before, and grown in line with inflation, the budget for Wales would be £4 billion better off.

More households in Wales than anywhere else in the UK rely on a single wage earner, and that wage earner is more likely to be female and more likely to work in public services.

A social partnership between trade unions and the Welsh government has produced great results in Wales, but this would be hampered by draconian trade union legislation. In his first term of office Mark wants to legislate a Social Partnership Act for Wales. Responsibility for this is currently with Julie James, AM for Swansea West, and one of his staunchest allies.

Mark wants to build on the good work already achieved to see decisions made by the Welsh government, employers and trade unions, and enable ethical procurement and employment.

He believes that whilst the central energy policy is in tatters, Wales, at the western edge of the UK, is the best place to take advantage of wind and wave technology, but it isn’t being utilised or supported with appropriate breaks and incentives. Wind energy was expensive at first but the cost has plummeted in the last five years and, with government assistance, will become cheaper still.

We were told how disappointed the Welsh government is that our money is being spent where there is no trade union recognition. In future, if an employer is taking Welsh government money, that employer will have a responsibility to the Welsh government to recognise our right to organise.

There is a programme to build 20,000 new homes, schools, and hospitals, fit for the 21st century, with Welsh government money and contractors will procure the steel for these schemes from Welsh manufacturers, keeping the money in this country and helping protect our jobs.

Examples a Tory government could learn from or, preferably, that a Labour government could mirror across the UK.

employees. We broke with usual practice and used a different approach when we procured our new operator and development partner. This meant that we could create a people-focused culture where our hard-working staff share in the success of a growing rail service.

Recognising that dedicated, hard-working staff are a major asset and central to the upgrade and improvement and ongoing success of the rail service, employee development and well-being feature strongly in the agreement we have with our operator and development partner.

We have developed a clear vision for the year that is underpinned by our corporate objectives, together with values and behaviours which will support the development of our culture. Employee satisfaction surveys and feedback from our wellbeing and engagement champions will inform our programme of employee engagement.

We are excited to be on this journey of improvement together with our people, and look forward to delivering on the ambitious vision for our transport network.
System is broken beyond repair

FRAN BOAIT, executive director of Positive Money, a not for profit organisation with a vision for a better, fairer, and more democratic banking system, is fighting for the many, not the few, as Labour’s PPC in the target seat of Gloucester and working closely with DO7 Brian Corbett, EC7 Andy Hudd, and Daniel Davis of Gloucester branch.

The train is the most efficient, and low carbon, way to travel but it is way too expensive for so many people, and ticket prices just keep going up. The cost of a Gloucester to Cheltenham season ticket has increased by almost 40% since 2010, at the same time as wages have been stagnating and falling. For too long we have had shareholders’ profits being put above a high quality service. Railways are a natural monopoly. We are

True blue Ipswich legend retires

Kelvin Higgins started on the railway in March 1971 in the goods link, progressing to Ipswich passenger link the week he got married in 1975. He passed as a driver in 1978 – the year Ipswich Town won the FA Cup! Kelvy moved to Ilford car sheds in 1980 to get his driver’s check, coming back to Ipswich in 1984 on an 8b move. In 1997, post-privatisation, he switched to Anglia and then various companies until retirement on 13 November 2018 after almost 48 years. Kelvy’s highlights are the Tractor Boys winning the FA Cup in 1978 and the UEFA Cup in 1981 – and having his dad George as a second man. Priceless! Kelvin had a retirement party which was absolutely brilliant with a live band and a free bar! It was like a giant mess room! Kelvin was presented with a gift from Ian Watling, h&s rep, who organised a collection from Ipswich Anglia and Freightliner, Colchester, Liverpool Street and Norwich depots. Kelvy would like to thank everybody for this and for giving him a great retirement send off. COYB!

Lee Barber, branch secretary

Joined first day

Grove Park’s first meeting of 2019 was unusual as we welcomed GS Mick Whelan, Arriva Rail London company council, and members from New Cross Gate branch for the retirement of long-serving member Tony Waters.

Tony started as a second man at Salisbury in March 1980, joining ASLEF on his first day. During his long railway career, Tony worked as a driver at Charing Cross, Reading, Salisbury (again), Ryde, York, Hull and, finally, New Cross Gate. Always active, Tony served as LDC and company council at several depots and companies.

He’s proud to say he was a professional road learner ‘and eight miles of track at Ryde was strung out for six months!’ Special thanks to Steve Panther and, of course, the GS for presenting Tony with his appreciation certificate and RMS badge and for making an impromptu 20 minute address. Best wishes to Tony in retirement.

Ray Garland, branch secretary

Sorry, Sandgrounders

Southport officials Dave Baxter – LLR for 11 years – and Bill Baxter – company council for 11 years, LLR for five years and h&s rep for four years – have always done their best for members but they were still pleasantly surprised by the generous branch presentations they received by way of acknowledgement. Mea culpa. We should have published these pictures in the Journal nine months ago but – new technology not being infallible – the pix got lost in the system. Sorry, Bill…
Accountants like to tell this joke: ‘How much profit have we made this year?’ the mill owner asks his bookkeeper. ‘How much profit do you want to make?’ Boom, boom! GREGOR GALL, an affiliate research associate at the University of Glasgow, and editor of the Scottish Left Review, examines the world of dodgy figures and dubious dealings.

APITALISM is, fundamentally, about numbers – income, expenditure, turnover, profit, the rate of return on an investment, the bottom line, the share value, the bangs a corporation gets for its bucks, and so on. That’s why accountancy is critically important to capitalism – it’s the oil that lubricates the cogs of the capitalist machine, letting businessmen know how they are doing in terms of profit and loss. The profession is also supposed to play a regulatory role by ensuring honesty and transparency in financial data so when its members sign off the annual company accounts the figures are a true reflection of the balance sheet. This external audit is a statutory requirement in company law.

Recent events at Patisserie Valerie threw this into sharp relief – and raised eyebrows – as it revealed that many accountants do not adequately perform their regulatory, safeguarding, role.

Patisserie Valerie is – or was – an upmarket chain of cafés specialising in handmade cakes which went into administration in January. The original patisserie was founded by Theo Vermeirsch and Esther van Gysseghem in Old Compton Street in the heart of Soho in 1926. For more than 50 years it was part of the fabric of Soho until, in the 1980s, it expanded, slowly, from one café to nine.

FANTASTICAL FIGURES

In 2006 Patisserie Valerie was bought by venture capitalists – Luke Johnson’s Risk Capital Partners – who indulged in rapid expansion and turned it into a high street, airport, and train station chain of nearly 200 cafés by 2017, funded by borrowing and debt.

Late last year, shares in the company were suspended following the discovery of fraudulent accounting irregularities as a result of a material misstatement of the company’s accounts. In plain language, there was a whopping £40 million missing. The human cost was high, too, with the loss of 900 jobs with these workers not getting the wages they were due – while the company continues to trade.

Auditing is a specialist branch – auditors check the work of the accountants – so it was interesting to hear Patisserie Valerie’s former auditor, Grant Thornton, claim at a Parliamentary hearing that it was not the role of accountants to uncover fraud.

Patisserie Valerie is only the latest in a long line of misdeeds. These accounting and auditing ‘errors’ usually come to light when companies collapse, highlighting the role of the ‘errors’ in – excuse the pun – accounting for the collapses.

Carillion was the last big collapse. MPs said in 2018 that KPMG had been complicit in signing off the company’s ‘increasingly fantastical figures’ and that the internal auditor, Deloitte, had missed ‘terminal failings’ in risk management and financial controls or ‘too readily ignored them’. And, because Carillion had so many public sector contracts, the public – you and me and every other taxpayer – picked up the bill for the collapse while the directors, accountants, and auditors laughed all the way to the bank.

SPREADSHEET ARITHMETIC ERROR

Conviviality, owners of Bargain Booze, blamed a ‘spreadsheet arithmetic error’ for the profit warnings it issued just before its collapse. And a £30 million tax bill for which it did not bother to budget. There was a similar story at BHS, and companies such as Rolls Royce, BT, Mitie, Sports Direct, Ted Baker and Quindell have all had their share of accounting and audit woes.

Accountants and auditors have a bit of previous, too. Back in the 1980s and 1990s we had Polly Peck, Barlow Clowes and BCCI. At the root of the problem is one issue – accountability and auditing firms are capitalist companies themselves, chasing profits. They are not, in any meaningful sense, independent of the firms they audit nor do they really, meaningfully, compete among themselves to get the work that is going. And they do more than just accountancy and auditing – they sell insurance, management consulting, actuary, financial and legal services to their clients. So, naturally, they are complicit.

The situation is made worse by two factors. First, four companies – Deloitte, Ernst & Young, KPMG and PwC – control three-quarters of all the accountancy work in the world. This concentration has increased in the last 30 years and means there is pressure to let them carry on as they are deemed, in government circles, to be ‘too big and important to fail’.

CLEAN UP THE AUGEAN STABLES

Second, as we found to our cost during the financial crash of 2008, capitalists are far less regulated than they used to be because of the spread, like snake oil, of the neo-liberal ideology that, in spite of all the evidence, ‘the market knows best’. This applies especially to accountancy and auditing in the switch from historic cost accounting to fair value accounting through what they call ‘financialisation’.

There are proposals from the Competition and Markets Authority to compel all large companies to be audited by two accountancy firms, of which one cannot be from the big four. The big four are lobbying hard against this idea and the authority has already drawn back from suggesting they separate their auditing and consulting arms.

A more radical and effective proposal would be to compel companies to use a state auditor and to separate auditing and consulting as the banks had to do with their retail and investment arms. The good news is that the Labour Party is moving towards adopting these two proposals which would clean up the Augean stables of the accountancy world.
Thanks, Shug, for everything

OTHERWELL
137 branch held its AGM at the Bentley Hotel on 16 December; a special occasion as it saw the end of the 15 year span of Hugh Bradley being the elected executive committee member for District 2. In attendance were GS Mick Whelan, AGS Simon Weller, and District 2 Organiser Kevin Lindsay. All three addressed the meeting, paying particularly high praise to the hard work and professionalism of Hugh’s time on the EC. The meeting was open to all District 2 members and other attendees included GS Mick Whelan, DB Cargo company council; branch secretaries Alan Moir and Tam McKendrick; Women’s Representatives’ Committee member Alison Miller, along with more than 50 members from Motherwell branch. Presentations were made to Hugh and his wife Ellen, along with long service awards and five retirement presentations. After the meeting members and guests enjoyed a few drinks and the buffet whilst having a catch up with colleagues and comrades. Andy Jones, branch secretary

Bristol celebrates 935 years

Bristol branch held its long service awards branch meeting on Wednesday 3 October. The general secretary, EC president, and district organisers from Districts 5 and 7 all made valuable contributions. The GS gave a state of the nation speech reporting on various topics, including the current dispute on the freight sector and specifically on Freightliner Heavy Haul. Brian Corbett reported on GWR and other issues in District 2. Long service badges were then presented to Seb Micknowicz and Nicola Torrance (5 years), Gareth Jenkins (10), Andre Gregg and Simon Gould (25), Chris Bowden and Brian Corbett (45). Chris also got his retirement certificate and other badges were sent to members’ depots for a less formal presentation. It was a great turnout; thanks to everyone who made it such a memorable evening. Bernard Kennedy, branch secretary

Upcoming events

- **EASTLEIGH – SATURDAY 9 MARCH**
  From 12.00 until 18.00 at the BRSR Club, Romsey Road, Eastleigh. All welcome, buffet provided.

- **CRICKLEWOOD – FRIDAY 29 MARCH**
  From 12.00 at Bedford RAF Club, Ashburnham Road, Bedford (opposite the railway station).

- **GATESHEAD & NEWCASTLE – FRIDAY 29 MARCH**
  Reunion from 13.30 at the Bowling Green Club in Gateshead.

- **GLOUCESTER HORTON RD – SATURDAY 30 MARCH**
  From 12.00 at the Fountain Inn, Westgate Street, Gloucester to mark 25 years since the closure of Horton Road depot. All welcome. Enquiries to Jerry Matthews (07500 800195).

- **RAMSGATE – THURSDAY 4 APRIL**
  From 11.00 at the Red Arrow Club in Ramsgate, Kent.

- **STONEBRIDGE PARK – SATURDAY 6 APRIL**
  Reunion from 14.00 at the Skinners Arms, Judd Street, King’s Cross, WCTH 9NT. ‘Hope to see you there,’ Carlos Chase.

- **NORWICH – SUNDAY 14 APRIL**
  The Norwich loco welfare fund has kindly sponsored the annual reunion of Norwich footplate staff past and present. Colleagues from other grades and depots are welcome to join old friends from 19.00 at the Sprowston Sports & Social Club, Blue Boar Lane, Sprowston, NR7 8RY. Free buffet; a bar is also available. Contact Chris Pearson on 01362 691045 or 07776 123206.

- **DIDCOT – SATURDAY 27 APRIL**
  Annual reunion from 12.00 at the GWRSA Club. Buffet provided.

- **BRIGHTON – TUESDAY 7 MAY**
  Informal open afternoon for all retired and working members of Brighton or any of our Sussex branches from 14.00 at the Brighton Railway Club, Belmont, off Dyke Road. Details from Paul Edwards (07402 478278) or Paul Horan (07868 757492).

- **HITHER GREEN – WEDNESDAY 8 MAY**
  Old farts’ reunion from 11.00 at the Richmal Crompton (a Wetherspoons pub) near Bromley South station. ‘All welcome – well, nearly everyone’ smiles Ray Cooper, RMS.

- **ENFIELD – FRIDAY 17 MAY**
  Reunion starts 19.30 at the Jolly Butchers, 168 Baker Street, Enfield, Middlesex, EN1 3JS.

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

A set of badgers at Ashford

On Monday 10 December the Ashford ASLEF branch held its AGM in the snooker room of the Ashford Railway Club due to the main hall being booked. District 1 Organiser Graham Morris and Southeastern company council reps held a Q&A session then Graham presented long service badges to John Bradley (40 years), Barry Taylor (30), Richard Daniels and George Sugden (25), Paul Cooper (15) and James Strachan (5). There were apologies from David Reach (45) and Dean Healy (40). After formalities, all retired to the main lounge for food, beer and an evening of reminiscing. Rob Kilkie, branch reporter
Freight train, freight train, run so fast

Almost half of London’s construction materials are now delivered by rail but there is demand from customers for more services.

The new aggregates terminal at Cricklewood in north London, which will service the £4.5 billion Brent Cross housing regeneration scheme, got planning permission in February 2018 and sets an important precedent. The developers had to provide extensive mitigation measures to ameliorate any adverse local impact on residents. Each train in and out of the terminal will remove up to 85 HGVs from the strategic road network and carry enough materials to build 30 houses.

Terminals reduce the transhipment costs between road and rail and let both modes play to their strengths. Their location is crucial. Port in Doncaster, the first inland SRFI built for ten years, connects to the East Coast main line, is next to the M18, and just two hours from the east coast’s deep water ports.

The proposed Four Ashes SRFI near Wolverhampton is adjacent to junction 12 of the M6, with direct access to the West Coast main line, which has the capability to carry larger containers.

There are proposals for SRFIs at Hinkley in Leicestershire and in Northamptonshire. However, two long-standing applications for terminals at Radlett in Hertfordshire and Howbury Park in south London face huge local opposition and illustrate the problems of getting planning permission, especially in London and the south-east.

Rail freight is popular: people recognise its potential to reduce lorry traffic, make roads safer, and cut pollution. In a recent survey by the road safety charity Brake, more than three-quarters of respondents said there was too much freight on Britain’s roads. The challenge is to make the case for more terminals, without which rail freight is impeded. The Daventry terminal removed 64 million lorry journey miles from UK roads last year: a glance at our traffic jams and dirty air shows how badly we need more such terminals.

Lloyd George promised to ‘make Britain a fit country for heroes to live in’ but the rail companies had other ideas. MICK HOLDER turns back the pages to March 1919

STRIKE OF ELECTRIC TRAIN MEN

After fighting in the Great War for king and country trade unionists were forced to fight for better terms and conditions. In a special article entitled ‘Why London was stopped – Eight hours and the Tube’ the Locomotive Journal reports: ‘During the first ten days of February all eyes were on London, where a strike of the electric train men, extending to a number of steam railway routes, caused extraordinary scenes in the metropolis, and led to the usual outburst by the capitalist press against our Society, and the demands of the working-class generally.’

PAYMENT OF OVERTIME RATES

‘On 6 December the 8-hour day agreement was wrung from the government after very serious negotiation. Following this your EC met with the railway executive to adjust problems which might arise in the bringing into operation of the 8-hours. We differed, however, as to the payment of overtime rates which were contended should commence after an 8-hour day or a 48-hour week whilst the railway executive contended overtime rates should only commence after the old hours had been completed.’

INSTRUCTIONS HAD BEEN ISSUED

Following meetings with government representatives it transpired that a deal had been done and ‘before we even knew of this agreement, much less signed it, instructions had been issued to the electric companies that no meal reliefs were to be given with pay and that there was to be an actual 8-hours working day. Also, on L&SW Railway all overtime was to be paid, not at time and a quarter, but at ordinary time rate.’

A BRIEF BUT SOLID STRIKE

There followed a brief but solid strike during which ASLEF reps met with the employers and ‘the opposition gave up their claim that there had been a breach of the agreement, much less signed it, instructions had been issued to the electric companies that no meal reliefs were to be given with pay and that there was to be an actual 8-hours working day. Also, on L&SW Railway all overtime was to be paid, not at time and a quarter, but at ordinary time rate.’

UNION FOR STATION MASTERS

‘The Railway Clerks’ Association can be congratulated upon their recent victory having won the right of recognition as the organisation for station masters.’

DO1 Graham Morris handed out membership badges to John, Barry, Richard, George, Paul and James

March 2019 I The ASLEF Journal 17
Driver Standards Manager

Circa £63,500 on achieving competency
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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
Raymond Black
Famous One Liners

Sadly, after a short and brave battle with cancer, driver Raymond Black passed away peacefully in the Beatson wing of Gartnavel hospital in Glasgow.

Raymie started his railway career in 1977 as a guard at Glasgow Central, where he spent the next 14 years, before moving to Yoker as a driver. Raymie settled in very quickly at Yoker; he was a very popular guy, nobody had a bad word to say about him, and nobody ever heard Raymie raise his voice to anyone. He would help out anyone if he could, he loved his job, and he never complained about anything.

Raymie had a great sense of humour, and could talk away to anyone about anything in the bothy, never loud, or taking over conversations, then it would happen, right out of the blue when you least expected it, the famous one liner that would have everyone laughing.

A devoted husband to Marie, son Raymond, and daughters Hilary and Louise, of whom he spoke often, and with whom he took as many holidays as he could, and with whom he spent as much time as the shifts would allow. Raymie had made plans to retire in 2019 to spend more time with his family after 41 years’ service.

But after a period of ill-health Raymie was diagnosed with stage four cancer in October. Even in his last few days Raymie spoke of how much he missed his work, and his colleagues, and to tell everyone he was asking for them. Raymie passed away peacefully on Christmas Eve, surrounded by his family. He will be sorely missed in the railway, but it’s his family who will miss him the most. Rest in peace, big man.

Mick Kane, LLC secretary, Yoker

Neville Evans could fire LMS 8F better than anyone

It is with deep regret that I have to report the passing of Neville Evans (19 July 1945 to 4 December 2018) who started his career on the footplate at Royston MPD, subsequently moving on to Knottingley and Healey Mills depots. Nev had suffered from Parkinsons for a number of years. I worked with Nev on steam and Dave ‘Kipper’ Cathraw in the team. Nev could fire an LMS 8F better than anyone on the system. I know this from personal experience as a driver working alongside him. The service and committal took place at Ardsley crematorium in Barnsley on Tuesday 18 December 2018 and many railway colleagues attended. Our thoughts go out to wife Joan and family. Keep steaming on, Nev!

David Court, Retired Members’ Section

Jm Morgan Dry Wit

It is my sad duty to inform members of the sudden passing of Bro Jm Morgan. During John’s career he worked at Kings Cross, Immingham and, lastly, Cleethorpes for TransPennine Express. With his laid-back approach, and dry wit, John was a friend as well as a work colleague. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him.

Colin Holmes, Immingham 106 branch secretary

Cliff Tice Centenarian

It is with regret that I have to report the passing of one of our oldest surviving drivers, Cliff Tice, at the age of 101. Cliff hailed from GNER territory at Sandy where he grew up before starting on the railway at Bedford and going through the ranks until he became a driver. He retired in 1982.

Cliff was a very good mate to work with, an unassuming man who came to work, did his job, and went home with as few problems as could be managed.

He liked a pint, especially with his friend, the late driver Don Russell, and whilst at work he would very often be seen with a cigarette in his mouth, a habit he gave up on retirement. We offer our condolences to his son, family and friends.

Bill Davies, Retired Members’ Section

Ee Griffiths Top Driver

The last footplateman from Bala shed, sad to say, has passed away at the age of 92. EE Griffiths was a passed fireman when the Ruabon to Barmouth shut in December 1964 and he and a few moved to Chester and passed his experience and tales of the Western branch to us second men there. A true top driver to be with. Diolch ieuain.

Stephen Bie

Well known for a good laugh, Pete has been a close friend of mine for many years, we both worked together at Bedford on the Western branch. He was a WIT and a ‘Kids’ driver. Always a character, he was a pleasure to work with, firmly establishing himself at Bedford, where he was noted for his last minute flying in arrivals to sign on just before his train was due to depart. Most of us have good memories of working in and around Richo, there not being many dull moments. Latterly, he has suffered a number of health problems from which he never fully recovered. We extend our condolences to his wife, family and friends.

Bill Davies, Retired Members’ Section

Peter Richardson Flying in at the Last Minute

A dark shadow has been cast over Bedford depot with the very recent passing of retired driver Pete Richardson. Richo was a Waxy as he started on the railway at Wellingborough depot, from which he came to Bedford in 1984 as one of the six starred men. To ensure that the 1965 manning agreement was adhered to, we on the LDC had to re-establish a ghost link. Although Pete was quite an old hand it took a while before he attained driver status so he had to put up with us ‘kids’ for a good while.

Always a character, he was a pleasure to work with, firmly establishing himself at Bedford, where he was noted for his last minute flying in arrivals to sign on just before his train was due to depart. Most of us have good memories of working in and around Richo, there not being many dull moments. Latterly, he has suffered a number of health problems from which he never fully recovered. We extend our condolences to his wife, family and friends.

Bill Davies, Retired Members’ Section
Suzy Kendall came up and said, ‘Can I have a ride in your cab?’ so I took her down the sidings at Clapham Junction

With reference to the rumble of rail films in the ASLEF Journal (February) you missed the film that I was in called Up the Junction in 1967. Here is a photo taken at the time.

ViC Raskin, Seaton, Devon

We featured Vic, a railwayman for 50 years, and a stalwart of our Battersea branch, across two pages of the ASLEF Journal in June 2013. He told us then how he had just run three cars into Clapham Junction when he was asked ‘to come in again and they chalk marked the platform where they wanted me to stop’ so Polly, ‘a posh middle-class blonde from Chelsea slumming it in Battersea,’ played by Suzy Kendall, could look out of the carriage window and alight from the train. ‘As I got ready to take the train down the sidings while everyone had a break, Suzy came up and down the sidings while we were on our break.’ Then it was back to work and take after take. ‘Eight times till we got it right,’ said Vic, adding ruefully, ‘I saw the film, but they cut me out.’

The ASLEF Journal can, sometimes, be a bit like eating a rich tea biscuit: hard, dry and decidedly lacking in taste. But, occasionally, the articles or letters make my day. The February issue contained two letters that did just that. One was Patrick Redmond’s ‘No unicorns, but a promise of Paradise Regained’, the other was Arno Brook’s ‘Pen pushers in Brussels’.

Patrick’s letter was a relief for anyone who lives in this country without, and without the wish for, an iconically blue passport, and who would love to peacefully spend the remaining time after retirement from the railway in peace and prosperity. Without, after spending more than 30 years of my life in the UK, having to be cap-in-hand grateful and forking out for the right to either naturalise or get settled status. My sincere gratitude for the relief and enjoyment you provided me, Patrick.

Arno, my dear man, those pen pushers in Brussels? The international train driver’s licence is the one piece of paper that all railway companies in Europe subscribe to, to ensure that footplate staff throughout the continent have a comparable basic knowledge of operating trains, signalling, and procedures. That was done when it became clear that the railways were gearing up to take on road and water as a means of shifting international passengers and freight.

In the old way of doing things, a lot of time was lost exchanging traction and crews. The idea was to let what was hooked up at the point of origin take the train all the way to its destination and let the person work it as far away as labour agreements permitted. Less traction needed was better used, but immediately there arose the question, what about drivers? How do we ensure quality and consistency of knowledge and skills?

Otherwise, try to imagine what would happen if Eurostar sits waiting at Folkestone for a Channel tunnel driver and then at Calais for a French driver. Are you getting there?

The hills are bare now and leaves lie thick and still

In response to Wullie Simpson’s ‘SNP and Tories bed buddies’ letter (Journal, January) I, like him, also want to see ScotRail (indeed, all rail companies) back in public hands. Its performance figures have been poor; however, something like 68% of delays were as a result of Network Rail infrastructure failings. The break clause cannot be enacted until 2020, for implementation in 2022, whether or not the vote had been successful. To suggest it was some form of bed sharing deal with the Tories is laughable.

Labour in Scotland wanders aimlessly around looking for political headlines rather than cohesive policies; Richard Leonard embarrassingly complains about the need for the Scottish government to do more on welfare to combat cuts but, when asked to co-sign a joint letter with the First Minister asking for welfare to be fully devolved to Scotland, shrinks away mumbling into a corner.

The comment on the curriculum for excellence was very vague. He says the Scottish government ignored it, however it is in place in Scottish schools. Between 2003 and 2017 there was no compulsory national testing for primary school pupils in Scotland. It was scrapped by the Labour-Lib Dem coalition in an attempt to get rid of a ‘teaching to the test’ ethos in schools and reduce the obsession with league tables. In September 2015 Nicola Sturgeon announced plans for compulsory tests to be introduced in all Scottish primary schools for the first time in more than a decade. Since 2017 children have completed Scottish National Standardised Assessments, more school leavers are continuing to higher/further education, my niece has just been accepted to uni, and I have plenty of friends who attended uni and have their
degrees whilst all coming from working-class backgrounds.

As for council tax, it was frozen in Scotland for nine years when, between 2007-08 and 2015-16, council tax increased by 12% in England, and soared by 32% under Labour in Wales (for a band D house).

Merging Police Scotland was not something I would have done but to say it’s ‘putting people’s lives in danger’ is nonsense. Murders, serious assaults and housebreaking are at a five year low and overall crime is at a 43 year low.

The ending of the letter brings into focus what it’s all about; Wullie’s view that it would be somehow undemocratic to change your mind when presented with new evidence. In Scotland, in 2014, people were lied to and, when the SNP stood for re-election, did so with a manifesto pledge to revisit the independence question if there was a material change (such as Scotland being taken out of Europe against its will, now that is very specific) and were returned with an increased vote. The Scottish people are sovereign and that is recognised in law and they will therefore decide the future of this country.

With regards to Brexit, people voted on an idea but with no information or were lied to. Now they have an idea of what it will be like maybe they should revisit it. But I have no interest in being part of the UK in the EU as I want to part of the EU in an independent Scotland.  

Liam Tansey, Edinburgh

Drake he’s in his hammock an’a thousand mile away

Oh dear, another long-winded letter from Brother Redmond (Journal, February) you would need a tea break to get through. If ASLEF had a ballot and it didn’t go Pat’s way would he cross the picket line? David Cameron said, ‘There’s no turning back, and Article 50 would he cross the picket line? David Cameron said, ‘There’s no turning back, and Article 50 would he cross the picket line?’ Just like Pat, he didn’t like the result, and he walked away.

The EU is run by Germany for the benefit of Germany; Angela Merkel should be honest and move the EU headquarters to Berlin where it belongs. I have faith in this country; we have traded with the world since Sir Francis Drake and the tall ships.

Train Operator Terry Baxter, Neasden, Metropolitan line, London Underground

Name looks quaint in 2019

I have been proud to be a member of this fine trade union for 55 years but now believe that, in the 21st century, it is time for a new or revised name with, of course, the same principles and areas of membership. The ‘& Firemen’ part of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers & Firemen is well and truly gone. The ex-firemen have all retired with the exception of some working with steam on Network Rail routes.

Reading in the Journal that a new driver apprenticeship standard is being launched with the support of ASLEF a new name must reflect the changes within the grade. Here are some suggestions: Association (or Associated Society) of Train Drivers or British Train Drivers’ Association. I find this hard to say but the ASLEF name is beginning to look a little quaint in 2019.  

JE Rimington, RMS, Maidstone

GS Mick Whelan says: ‘As a member-led organisation this is a matter for members but, personally, I am proud to honour the memory of all those who worked so hard to improve the lot of drivers, and firemen, and am pleased we honour the tradition with our name.’

Hobo Lee riding the rails

Further to Conrad Landin’s article (Journal, February) I would like to draw your attention to a long forgotten, and seldom mentioned, railway film from the early 1970s, called Emperor of the North, starring Lee Marvin and Ernest Borgnine. The film is set in Depression-era America, with Lee Marvin playing the part of a determined hobo, and Ernest Borgnine as the ruthless railroad conductor who will stop at nothing to prevent hobos riding on his trains. The film does, at times, seem a little too melodramatic, and a little clichéd, but its portrayal of that period of American history, and the wonderful use of steam locomotives and scenery, with a very good story to tell, makes it well worth seeking out for a viewing.

Tony Empgate

Final days of the LMS

My favourite railway film is Train of Events (1949). It gives a good insight into the final days of the LMS. Also two films not mentioned in the article are North West Frontier (1959) and Von Ryan’s Express (1965).  

Joe Reeves, RMS, East Ham

Warner at Willesden

My favourite railway film is Train of Events featuring Jack Warner; it was filmed at Willesden and Camden loco and Euston station.

Kevin Kenny, Retired Members’ Section

Double trouble

Double Indemnity (1944). Great film!

David Strauther, Hammersmith & City line, Hammersmith depot

The rumble of the railway

The headline on Conrad’s piece about trains on film (Journal, February) was familiar but I can’t quite place it. Where does it come from? Peter McCarthy, Colchester

● Harrow-on-the-Hill by John Betjeman: ‘And the rumble of the railway / Is the thunder of the rollers / As they gather for the plunging / Into caves.’

THE KING’S CROSS STORY

by Peter Darley (The History Press, £20) as featured on the centre pages of the January Journal. Buy it direct from the Camden Railway Heritage Trust at a discounted price of £15 inc p&p; email darleyp@aol.com or phone 020 7586 6632 for details. ‘All income from sales goes to the trust,’ says Peter.

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.

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

CLASS 308 NSERS badge to raise funds for the preservation of the last complete Phase One 4 CIG train 1753. £5 inc p&p from NSERS, 41 Highfield Road, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP1 6DD. Cheques payable to Network South East Railway Society.

INTER-CITY DRIVER LANYARD

With black safetyclip. £5 inc p&p from Greg Burton (Paddington). Paypal payment to: intercityexpress125@hotmail.co.uk

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

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It was a foggy day in London, and the fog was heavy and dark

The Dickens Museum in London has a special exhibition Food Glorious Food: Dinner with Dickens running until 22 April. KEITH RICHMOND knocked on the door in Doughty Street and asked, liked that famous founding Oliver Twist, for another bowl of gruel

HARLES Dickens captured the Victorian popular imagination like no other novelist and, despite muttered complaints about a tendency towards sentimentality and sensationalism, and his inability to portray women as anything other than grotesques or innocents, he has always been held in high critical esteem, too.

Dickens was born at Portsea in 1812, and brought up in Chatham, the son of a Royal Navy pay clerk who was imprisoned in the Marshalsea debtors’ gaol in Southwark; Charles, at the age of 12, was forced to leave school and was put to work in Warren’s blacking warehouse on Hungerford Stairs near Charing Cross station, a miserable experience which cast a long, long shadow over his life, and informed much of his fiction, especially David Copperfield (the initial letters of the central character’s name are, of course, CD reversed).

‘Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen and six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery.’ – David Copperfield

Dickens became a reporter on the Morning Chronicle and contributed to periodicals such as the Monthly Magazine and the Evening Chronicle; pieces republished as Sketches by Boz, the success of which led to an invitation in 1836 to write The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club, published initially in monthly instalments and followed by Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby, The Old Curiosity Shop and Barnaby Rudge.

While it would be wrong to characterise Dickens as a socialist – he wasn’t – he was a social reformer on the side of the poor and oppressed, an outspoken critic of the economic and social system, who railed against the injustices of 19th century capitalism, describing businessmen in his novels as ‘schemers’ and ‘villains’.

He moved into what is now the Dickens Museum, a five storey terrace house in a neat Georgian street in Bloomsbury, in 1837, shortly after his marriage to Catherine Hogarth, daughter of the editor of the Evening Chronicle, on a three year lease at £80 per annum. The building was bought by the Dickens Fellowship in 1923, when it was threatened with demolition, and opened as a museum to the author two years later. It benefited from a £3 million refurbishment six years ago.

The house is now pretty much as it was when Dickens saw it for the first time, ‘a frightfully first class family mansion, involving awful responsibilities’: entrance hall, dining room and morning room on the ground floor; kitchen, scullery, wash house and wine cellar in the basement; drawing room and study on the first floor; master bedroom, Catherine’s sister Mary’s bedroom and Dickens’ dressing room on the second floor; and a nursery for the children – Charles, Mary and Katey – and a servants’ bedroom on the top floor.

‘I never saw a man so thoroughly enjoy himself amid the fragrance of lemon peel and sugar, the odour of burning rum and the steam of boiling water, as Mr Micawber did that afternoon’

With any author – and Dickens is no exception – it is the work that endures. Long after the body has been buried six feet down – in his case, in Poets’ Corner in Westminster Abbey, on 14 June 1870, between George Frederick Handel and Richard Brinsley Sheridan – it is the texts to which we return.

The characters, the narratives, the reflections on love and life, and the quotable observations about, as his contemporary Anthony Trollope put it, The Way We Live Now.

But a trip to the Dickens Museum – especially while Dinner with Dickens is on – offers a splendid opportunity to get a little closer to the man and his times, and to understand those books a little better.

The Charles Dickens Museum at 48 Doughty Street, London, WC1N 2LX is open from Tuesday to Sunday, 10am to 5pm. Admission is £9.50 for adults; £7.50 for students and seniors; £4.50 for children 6-16; children 5 and under free.
ON THE ROAD TO NOWHERE

RAINs have to be driven; they don’t drive themselves, whatever Isaac Asimov – remember I, Robot? – and other science fiction writers like to think. And, 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 – they have been for decades – but airlines and, especially, passengers still want a pilot, co-pilot, and flight engineer, up there in the cockpit in case there’s a problem, or when the technology breaks down. Which, in the end, it always does.

That’s why those letters of outrage – ‘Time to order driverless trains!’ – from Colonel Sir Buffton Tufton to the Daily Telegraph, when drivers or other staff have the temerity to withdraw their labour, and he has been inconvenienced on his journey in from Barsetshire to Westminster, entirely miss the point.

The Docklands Light Railway was launched in 1987, amid much fanfare, as both ‘driverless’ and ‘strike-proof’, terms that Michael Heseltine and Nicholas Ridley regarded as synonymous, but Serco had to bring in ‘train captains’ to keep the service on track. And when those train captains went on strike in 2015 it led to much witty traffic on Twitter about the rising of the unionised robots. The truth is that the real world utility of driverless vehicles has been seriously over-hyped.

In his new book Driverless Cars: On a Road to Nowhere (London Publishing Partnership, £9.99) transport expert Christian Wolmar looks behind the hype, and the hope, of autonomous vehicles and self-driving cars and discovers that, whatever a few gullible commentators may think, it’s all smoke and mirrors, orchestrated by snake oil salesmen.

Far from reducing traffic congestion and pollution, which the tech giants and motor manufacturers would have you believe, Christian suggests that hundreds of thousands of zombie vehicles on our roads would only make life worse. And much, much more dangerous. His meticulous research and thoughtful analysis are a healthy antidote to the meretricious material being pumped out by the men in the shiny suits who want to make a fast buck.

Keith Richmond

ASLEF’s legal services

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Prize Crossword

Crossword 155 by Tom Williams

Across
1 Stagehand responsible for lighting
7 Ooze or percolate
8 Putting money on the horses
9 Barn or Tawny
10 Bring up… a family?
11 A symbol of importance?
13 Carve in stone
16 To run into… debt?
18 Wicker lobster trap
19 Shrink or waste away
20 Bagel
21 Spicy biscuit man

Solution to Crossword 154

Across: 1 Draught 5 Fist 7 Sum 8 Exterior 9 Aphid 10 Edit 13 Dove 14 Drip 18 Reel 19 Chest 21 Carnival 22 Dot 23 West 24 Reserve

Down: 1 Discards 2 Armchair 3 Greedy 4 Totter 5 Forbid 6 Shop 11 Toreador 12 Sextette 15 Peanut 16 Clover 17 Scales 20 Date

Congratulations to Rob Monk, of Grays, Essex, 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 154th prize crossword in the February 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 March
Qualified Train Drivers

£49,819-£50,977 rising to circa £62,000 by 2020
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