The state of play for freight today

Inside: Simon Weller and Nigel Gibson introduce a special edition - with reports by Paul Barber, Kevin Bell, Philippa Edmunds, Barry Hare, Peter Mason, and Maggie Simpson - about freight on rail in Britain plus Gregor Gall on Greybull and British Steel; Bill Dale on the RMS forum; and the launch of On Track With Diversity 2019 at the Houses of Parliament.
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and anyone we’ve missed out who works
on the railways or for train operating companies!

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Cover: Winter at Parkend (GWR 0-6-0 Pannier tank loco with coal train) by Rob Rowland www.robrowland.co.uk

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GS Mick Whelan
Williams off track

K EITH Williams has been drip feeding the contents of his rail review before the report is actually released but there has been less than enthusiastic support from stakeholders, the travelling public, and politicians across the divide.

The first thing he says we must focus on is punctuality. Now I am old enough to remember when the first priority was safety; does Williams want more penalties that turn trains back from their destinations to protect PPM?

Second, he wants a Strategic Rail Authority-type body divorced from government. That didn’t work in the early days of privatised chaos and it won’t work now. Putting the foxes in charge of the hen house through the creation of the Rail Delivery Group – to give two degrees of separation from a Chris Grayling-led DFT – was patently unsuccessful. Recreating a useless quango from the past is not the way forward. But this quango was supported by the TOCs, in their submissions, so is it any surprise that the third major recommendation is for longer franchises to ‘encourage investment’? That was the lie peddled at privatisation; investment hasn’t happened and there is no reason to believe it will.

And where are the suggestions for dealing with freight, future capacity, and Network Rail debt? There’s talk of devolution, which we are not fundamentally against, but devolution without funding equals cuts and if there is a further drift towards concessions then the case for wholesale nationalisation is clear. Let’s have one publicly-owned, vertically-integrated, safe concession! I am appalled at the government’s decision not to support the steel plant in Scunthorpe. Social impact should be a determining factor, particularly in government procurement. What happens to supply chains, apprenticeships, local and national economies? Other countries look after key industries, so why can’t we?

The recent deaths of two track workers near Port Talbot has exercised our minds on rail safety. Our thoughts and condolences are with their friends and families, and extend to all staff involved in this tragic event and its aftermath. As always, we await the outcome of the investigation before commenting further.

We remain one of the safest railways in the world, but staff and passengers have a right, each day, to go home safely. This year’s comprehensive 71 page ORR report records that incidents at level crossings have reduced, but SPADs and near misses have increased, as have fatalities, with platform interface issues and trespass a key cause. The rail industry needs to concentrate on signalling irregularities, objects on the line, and fatigue in the travelling public. It is our intention to work closely with the industry on safety, but to be a critical friend when required. Please be safe.

Yours fraternally
Mick Whelan, general secretary

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Williams wrong to look back instead of forward

ICK Whelan, general secretary, has condemned Keith Williams, who is running a review for Chris Grayling into Britain’s railways, for taking a step backwards instead of moving forward.

Mr Williams, a former boss of British Airways, suggested, in an interview with Tom Burridge of the BBC, that a Fat Controller figure running another quango is the best way to solve the problems afflicting Britain’s railway network since privatisation.

‘The problem with Britain’s railways is the franchising system,’ said Mick, ‘Which hasn’t worked, doesn’t work, and will not work. The model is broken. That is what Mr Williams needs to address, not this two-bit half-baked idea to paper over the cracks on the rails.

‘He is trying to package up a broken model

‘Train fares dictate uni’ say 6th form students

A report by Sean Coughlan, family and education correspondent, on the BBC News website has slammed the privatised TOCs for pricing students out of certain universities.

‘It’s important to talk about the cost of going to open days,’ it quotes Rachel, a 6th former from Plymouth, Devon. ‘Not everyone can afford to go out of their area. Train tickets are expensive and there’s accommodation as well.’

Anne-Marie Canning, director of social mobility at King’s College, London, says the ‘eye-wateringly expensive cost of train travel’ is a much bigger barrier than has been recognised. ‘We invited parents to talk about reasons for people not going to university.

‘The problem with Britain’s railways is the franchising system,’ said Mick, ‘Which hasn’t worked, doesn’t work, and will not work. The model is broken. That is what Mr Williams needs to address, not this two-bit half-baked idea to paper over the cracks on the rails.

‘We need to put the wheels and the steel back together in a proper publicly-owned railway which works for everyone – for passengers, for businesses, and for those of us who work on the railway.’

Safety reps’ training day at head office

District 8 health & safety reps, with Mick Whelan, after a training day in the basement at head office in Smithfield.

GOING UNDERGROUND

Jamie Murray, asked by ES magazine during Wimbledon fortnight, ‘Bus, taxi or Tube?’ had no hesitation. ‘Oh, Tube every time. Do I get spotted? From time to time, but people are always really polite.’

RETIRED MEMBERS’ SECTION AGM

ASLEF’s Retired Members’ Section annual general meeting will be held at 11am on Wednesday 9 October at the BR Sports & Social Club, Beaver Road, Ashford, Kent, TN23 7RR.

TOGETHER IN ELECTRONIC DREAMS

Members can receive the ASLEF Journal – and reps can receive circulars – electronically if they choose. Contact admin at head office on 020 7324 2400.

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QUOTE...

‘I say Nigel Farage’s secret funder Arron Banks lied about his contact with the Russian government. Because he did.’ – Carole Cadwalladr

...UNQUOTE

The GS tweeted after Cliff Holloway, Euston, stepped out of his cab for the last time: ‘My mate Cliff on his last day of driving. Great comrade, trade unionist, and true friend.’


TWEETS OF THE MONTH

I left school with the word buffoon ringing in my ears and no qualifications. My union @ASLEFunion educated me to serve my members.

Alan Moss @AMOSASLEFREP

‘You’re not a female driver or a male driver – you’re just a driver and you’ve got the respect.’ Only 6.5% of train drivers in England, Scotland and Wales are women. Here’s what life on the tracks is like for one of them. @BBCNewsbeat

Delighted to have co-authored #OnTrackwithDiversity with Ijeoma Omambala from @OldSqChambers for @ASLEFunion about the low levels of diversity in the train driver profession, launching at Houses of Parliament today. A call to action for the rail industry. #equality #diversity @NadiaMotraghi

Brexit means blaming the neighbours when you’re having a row in your own house. @abisiffre
EMINIST, socialist, and bestselling author of hard-boiled contemporary crime fiction Val McDermid has a very dry sense of humour. As shown by this piece in The Telegraph Magazine: ‘I went to Cambridge to hear Ali Smith talking at her alma mater, Newnham College, which involved four hours each way on some of the shoogliest trains in the UK. London North Eastern Railway has been promising us lovely new trains for years now. They’ve just come into service but only as far as Leeds. In a comment that doesn’t bode well for Scotland, one of the train crew told me, “The trouble is, the railway has been transmuting life into art. No wonder Nicola Sturgeon calls her “Scotland’s greatest living writer”. ‘The event was followed by a private dinner in Newnham, the kind of glittering, glamorous, intellectually stimulating evening people believe is typical of a writer’s life, although the reality is more like the last evening I spent in the company of the vice-principal of Newnham, when dinner consisted of fish and chips and scurrilous gossip in a parked car after a book event...’

This is what a feminist, a Raith Rovers fan, and a top Tartan Noir writer looks like!

was worth every bone-shaking swerve and jolt to hear Ali talking about her own journey from working-class Inverness to Cambridge and her brilliant literary career beyond. I’ve heard her speak many times and she’s always incisive, generous, vivid, erudite and funny. It was an electrifying evening, made so by Ali’s alchemical gift of transmuting life into art. No wonder Nicola Sturgeon calls her “Scotland’s greatest living writer”.

‘The event was followed by a private dinner in Newnham, the kind of glittering, glamorous, intellectually stimulating evening people believe is typical of a writer’s life, although the reality is more like the last evening I spent in the company of the vice-principal of Newnham, when dinner consisted of fish and chips and scurrilous gossip in a parked car after a book event...’

CONFERENCE & RALLIES

The Burston strike school rally at Burston, near Diss, in Norfolk is on Sunday 1 September. 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 Saturday 21 to Wednesday 25 September. The STUC disabled workers’ conference is at the Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel, Glasgow, from Saturday 16 to Sunday 17 November. The Scottish Trades Union Congress is at the Concert Hall, Perth, from Monday 20 to Wednesday 22 April 2020.

500 CLUB: Michael Clatworthy, with number 62, won the July draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £428.

OFF THE RAILS

HILARY MANTEL, who concludes her Thomas Cromwell trilogy – after Wolf Hall (2009) and Bring Up the Bodies (2012) – with The Mirror and the Light, to be published by 4th Estate on 5 March next year, still holds a candle for Anne Boleyn, who lost her head at the end of the last book. ‘As a small child I remember being told by a solemn nun that Anne Boleyn had six fingers on one hand, she writes in The Guardian. ‘In the nun’s eyes, it was the kind of deformity that Protestants were prone to; it was for Anne’s sake, as everyone knew, that Henry VIII had broken away from Rome and plunged his entire nation into the darkness of apostasy. If it weren’t for this depraved woman, England would be as holy as Ireland, and we’d all eat fish on Friday and come from families of 12. Anne wasn’t exactly a Protestant, but she was a reformer, an evangelical; and the sixth finger, which no one saw in her lifetime, was a fragment of black propaganda directed at her daughter, Elizabeth.’

BORIS JOHNSON – educated at Eton and Oxford – and Jeremy Hunt – Charterhouse and Oxford – the last two men left standing in the battle for the Conservative Party leadership, were both keenly aware that the winner could lose a vote of no confidence in Parliament in September, lose a subsequent general election before Brexit is delivered in October, and be turfed out of Downing Street after the shortest tenure in Prime Ministerial history. Which would be small, but some, comfort to the loser...

GEORGE CANNING – another Tory educated at Eton and Oxford – holds the record at the moment. He served as Leader of the House, Foreign Secretary and Chancellor of the Exchequer before succeeding Lord Liverpool as Prime Minister on 12 April 1827. Canning was primus inter pares – first among equals, as a PM is said to be – for just 17 weeks. It wasn’t Brexit that did for him, nor a political opponent (although he did once fight a duel on Putney Heath with Lord Castlereagh). Canning died of pneumonia on 8 August.

JONATHAN AITKEN, cabinet minister turned Anglican clergyman, tells of how, as a prospective Conservative MP, he was talked out of cutting his teeth in a Welsh mining seat by his godfather, Tony (he would later be known as Selwyn Lloyd, who told him this tale: ‘During a divinity lesson at a school in Ebbw Vale the teacher asks who created the world. A chorus of voices calls out, “Nye Bevan”. She laughs and asks them to be serious but, again, the children say “Nye”. Angry, she demands a proper answer and, after a long pause, one child suggests, “Er, Miss, God?” and from the back of the class comes the furious cry, “Tory traitor”!’

LORD GNOME – well, Private Eye – has spoofed Virgin’s decision to insist passengers book a seat to travel on their trains: ‘We obviously could have ended the practice of people having to stand on long journeys by putting on more trains. But that would have been needlessly complicated, as it would have involved Beardy making less money.’

Our new ASLEF LGBT+ purple polo shirt – ‘driving for equality’ – is available in S, M, L and XL. £15 inc p&p; email info@aslef.org.uk or visit our online shop at www.aslef.org.uk
The railway should reflect the communities we serve

Our new report, commissioned from the Institute for Employment Rights, and written by Nadia Motraghi and Ijeoma Omambala of Old Square Chambers, shines a light on the gap between those of us in the driver’s cab and the passengers we carry. KEITH RICHMOND (left) reports from the launch of On Track with Diversity at the Houses of Parliament. Photos of our reception at Westminster by ANDREW WIARD (above)

ASLEF launched its new On Track with Diversity report – which reveals a glaring gap between the drivers in the cab at the pointy end of the train and the communities the railways serve – at the Palace of Westminster.

Jo Stevens, Labour MP for Cardiff Central, and chair of our parliamentary group, praised ASLEF’s history of solidarity, and effective industrial relations, and pointed to one of the positives to emerge from the report: ‘If you’re a woman and you want to be paid the same as your male colleagues, join a union.’

Rachael Maskell, Shadow Transport Minister, repeated Jeremy Corbyn’s pledge that the next Labour government will create a publicly-owned, publicly-operated, railway ‘with diversity and effective industrial relations at its heart’.

Dawn Butler, Shadow Women & Equalities Secretary, asked the white men in the room – and in the rail industry – ‘to use your privilege effectively to help us all improve equality and diversity.’

While the authors of the report, Nadia Motraghi and Ijeoma Omambala, barristers at Old Square Chambers, explained the parameters of their work, and outlined their recommendations for action.

Our guests in the Terrace Pavilion on Monday 17 June included Shadow Transport Secretary Andy McDonald; Tonia Antoniazzi (Labour MP for Gower); Peter Dowd (Bootle); Lisa Forbes (Peterborough); Louise Haigh (Sheffield Heeley); Carolyn Harris (Swansea East); Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow); Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North); Rupa Huq (Ealing Central & Acton); Ruth Jones (Newport West); Sarah Jones (Croydon Central); Clive Lewis (Norwich South); Ian Mearns (Gateshead); and Rosie Winterton (Doncaster Central); Kevin Maguire, associate editor of the Daily Mirror; Raj Syal of The Guardian; Marcus Barnett, industrial reporter of the Morning Star; Sienna Rodgers, editor of LabourList; and Christian Wolmar, the transport commentator who writes a regular column in Rail magazine; Carolyn Jones, director of the Institute of Employment Rights; Tim Roache, general secretary of the GMB; Steve Cavalier, chief executive of Thompsons solicitors; Steve Murphy, managing director of MTR Crossrail; and Alexi Ozioro of the RSSB.

They heard GS Mick Whelan say: As a trade union, we can only recruit, as members, those who have been employed as drivers by the privatised train and freight operating companies. We work with these companies, every day, to ensure they encourage women, as well as men, and black and minority ethnic, as well as well as
white, people to become drivers.

‘But the harsh facts are that, in 2019, only 6.5% of train drivers in England, Scotland and Wales are women; just 8% are from an ethnic minority; and only 15% are under 35. These figures do not represent the communities we serve because 51% of the people in this country are female; 20% in the last census identified as ethnic minority; and 23% of the population are aged 18 to 35.

‘We believe that a train driver is a train driver – regardless of gender, sexuality, religion, or race – and we’ve been pushing companies to allow more part-time and flexible working because the lack of such agreements has been a barrier, in the past, to women coming into our industry as many still take on the primary responsibility for child care.’

Mick wrote an article on Monday for the Morning Star; was interviewed on the breakfast programmes of BBC Radio Solent and BBC Berkshire; and by Mike Powell for Global Radio which provides the news for ILR stations such as Capital, Heart, LBC, Classic FM, Smooth, Radio X and Gold.

Mick was also interviewed, along with Kerry Cassidy, Plymouth, and Peter Acheampong, Paddington, by Paul Clifton for a running package broadcast on BBC South, BBC South-West and BBC London.

Kerry was interviewed on BBC Oxford. And AGS Simon Weller and Khalid Rana, Gidea Park, were interviewed by Claudia-Liza Armah on Channel 5 News.

Stories also appeared by Alan Jones in The Independent; Caroline Davies in The Guardian; Daniel Hammond in the Daily Telegraph; Modern Railways; Rail News and The Voice.

‘We are absolutely committed to equality and diversity in the railway industry,’ said Mick. ‘I hope the TOCs and FOCs will use the information, analysis, and recommendations in this report to improve their recruitment policies so that staff in the rail industry more accurately reflect the communities we serve.’
Ban Starbucks from stations

SLEF has urged Network Rail and the government to ban Starbucks from Britain’s railway stations until the company pays the tax it should on the profits it makes in this country.

GS Mick Whelan said: ‘No railway premises should be let as retail space to companies that don’t pay their tax on the money they make. Passengers already pay fares – and taxes – and it’s wrong to ask them to subsidise immensely profitable global corporations such as Starbucks.

‘This is a company – and there are many others – that makes an enormous amount of money in this country, but chooses to declare its profits in other places. We need proper transparency for tax purposes because, at the moment, the company’s accounts are as murky as the coffee it serves.

‘Starbucks – and all the other companies that have shops on stations – benefit from our infrastructure so it is only right that they pay their fair share of tax.’

Mick was speaking after it was revealed that Starbucks’ UK-based European business paid a paltry £18.3 million in tax last year while funnelling £348 million in dividends back to its parent company in Seattle as part of what it boasts is a plan to ‘focus on maximising total shareholder return’ by minimising tax in the countries in which it operates. Starbucks has 1,000 stores in the UK, but paid just £4 million in tax here despite raking in sales of £387 million through its tills.

A pact with the Brexit Party would be an admission the Tories are dead.

‘A pact with the Brexit Party would be an admission the Tories are dead.’ – Ruth Davidson, Scottish Conservative Party leader

GO WEST WHERE SKIES ARE BLUE

The Sunday Telegraph has reported that FirstGroup is set to be awarded the profitable West Coast main line franchise run by Virgin and Stagecoach since 1997. The DfT is said to favour the bid by First, in conjunction with Trenitalia, over a joint bid by MTR of Hong Kong and Guangshen, the Chinese state railway company.

ARRIVA AT CANARY WHARF

Brookfield, which owns a substantial slice of Canary Wharf, is said to be involved in a £3 billion battle with Goldman Sachs, I Squared Capital, Carlyle & Apollo, DWS and Keolis to take control of the Deutsche Bahn subsidiary Arriva which runs Northern, CrossCountry, Chiltern, Grand Central and London Overground trains, as well as 5,000 buses in Britain. DB hopes to complete the sale by the end of the year.

Young at heart

EC2 Jim Baxter, who tweets @JimBaxter5, where he describes himself as an ‘ASLEF activist, NLTruc founder member, and chair and supporter of his local football team (well, why wouldn’t you)?’ dryly tweets this picture with the words: ‘At the STUC Youth Conference, clearly not as a delegate, with @ASLEFunion delegates Ashleigh Smart and Hollie Yates.’

Time team

The District line went back in time on Saturday 22 and Sunday 23 June as a steam train – the first to be driven on London Underground for 59 years – took passengers on the line for the last time before signalling gets an upgrade. One of seven original Metropolitan Railway Class locomotives, built between 1896 and 1901, returned to service to take passengers – and a few actors, between jobs, dressed for the occasion – from High Street Kensington to Ealing Broadway and back.

Staring down the Brexit barrel

Jo Coburn, presenter of Politics Live on BBC2, has opened up about the infamous locked eyes stand-off between Mark Francois, the hard right Tory MP for Rayleigh & Wickford, and deputy chair of the ‘No deal is the best deal’ European Research Group, and Will Self after the left-wing writer said, ‘Every racist and anti-Semitic in the country, pretty much, probably voted for Brexit.’ The presenter admits: ‘My editor asked me through my earpiece, Jo, have you got a strategy if it does end up in fisticuffs?’
Steel fades to fifty shades of Greybull

GREGOR GALL, an affiliate research associate at the University of Glasgow, and editor of the Scottish Left Review, lifts the lid on a greedy – and secretive – private equity firm which has left a trail of company corpses in its wake.

NLESS you regularly read the Financial Times or the business pages of a broadsheet, you’re unlikely to have heard of a private equity firm called Greybull Capital. It’s not a household name but it should be – if only because of the havoc it has wrought on workers in Britain. The latest instalment of this depressing company saga is the collapse of British Steel.

The firm, founded by Marc and Nathaniel Meyohas and Richard Perlhagen in 2010, takes its name from the ‘bull market’ – a stock market term for when shares are rising, and the opposite of a ‘bear market’; when prices are falling – and from the famous statue of a charging bull in the financial district of Wall Street in New York.

GREYBULL – LIKE GEKKO – BELIEVES THE CREED THAT GREED IS GOOD

There is nothing very grey about this ‘entrepreneurial investment group’, though there is a lot of bull. In fact, it’s easy to be black and white about Greybull, a firm that reminds me of Gordon Gekko, the flashy corporate raider and arrogant asset stripper in Oliver Stone’s 1987 film Wall Street who proudly announced: ‘Greed is good.’

Greybull is a leading ‘turnaround specialist’, investing in ‘failing’ companies, stripping out costs, producing bigger bangs for its corporate bucks, the result, of course, of redundancies and attacks on workers’ wages and terms and conditions.

One strategy Greybull deploys is to buy a company for as little as £1, charge massive fees and interest for money lent, then engineer its bankruptcy to avoid its pension and redundancy liabilities. Ironic when Greybull claims it is ‘passionate about making companies successful’.

Casualties of Greybull’s ‘special treatment’ include Comet, the electrical retailer, acquired in 2011 for £2, which went into administration in 2012, became insolvent in 2014, with 7,000 jobs lost, costing the government £49 million in redundancy payments and £26.4 million in tax owed while Greybull banked £60 million from the deal.

Monarch, the airline, was acquired in 2014, went into administration in 2017, with 1,900 jobs lost; the government spent £60 million bringing stranded passengers back to Britain when the company collapsed while Greybull made £50 million from insolvency.

THE ICING ON THE GREYBULL CAKE

But buying British Steel from Corus for £1 in 2016 has been the icing on the Greybull cup cake. In the following two years, Greybull charged British Steel £6 million in management fees and £34 million in interest as well as demanding a pay cut from workers in the first year and a 10% headcount reduction. Now 5,000 workers in Scunthorpe are at risk of redundancy with 20,000 others in the supply chain.

Before British Steel went into administration, Greybull got £120 million from the government and is still after another £75 million. Taking £40 million out of a struggling company only makes sense if you have limited all your liabilities and know you’re first in line to be paid, as a creditor, when the joint goes bust.

British Steel, like Comet and Monarch and many others, shows that Greybull’s business model is based not on investing capital in companies but on lending to riskier ventures and charging exorbitant fees and interest without regard to the human consequences.

The lending is done by entities often located in offshore tax havens, which do not levy corporation tax on profits made outside that jurisdiction, while the interest payments qualify for tax relief in Britain. Currently, £331 million is owed by British Steel to supply chain creditors and there is a deficit of £46.5 million on its pension schemes.

STEEL – STRATEGICALLY ESSENTIAL

Steel is strategically essential to any modern economy, providing for infrastructure projects such as rail tracks. The Tories privatised steel in 1988 because they said it did not matter where the steel used in Britain came from. Wind the clock forward to 2019 and, after the closure of the Redcar facility on Teesside in 2015, Port Talbot in South Wales and Scunthorpe are the only two integrated steel plants left here.

If Scunthorpe closes as a result of Greybull’s greed, there will be only one blast furnace left in Britain that can take raw iron ore and make the basic steel from which all other grades of steel are made, and which underpins a modern 21st century economy.

Without the capacity for basic steel production, no government will have an industrial or manufacturing strategy worth its name because it will be dependent on China or India.

Steel is strategic, unlike Jamie’s Italian, Jamie Oliver’s chain of restaurants which went down at the same time. No one called for the nationalisation of Jamie’s but they did call for the renationalisation of British Steel. Indeed, the GMB union rep at Scunthorpe said: ‘If they can nationalise the banks, why can’t they nationalise us?”
DBC pensions

SIMON WELLER, ASLEF’s assistant general secretary, and lead officer for DB Cargo, explains the background to the present plight of the DBC pension fund

B CARGO members will understand that the incompetence of the previous management is coming home to roost again. I apologise for the length of this piece but it is a difficult subject, and I can only scratch the surface.

You will have had a pension pack from DBC that sets out some stark choices. The council and I have been touring branches explaining what the problem is and how we are proposing to deal with it. We have two main problems – the first is a £257 million deficit in the section’s funding and, second, the future sustainability of the section itself.

The council and I have been addressing this issue since autumn last year, facing some very difficult choices. As the lead union in the DBC group we have had expert advice from a qualified, independent pension specialist, as well as our own industrial experience gained over many years dealing with the Railways Pension Scheme.

THE RESULT OF A PERFECT STORM

This isn’t down to one factor but a combination to create a perfect storm. It’s also worth bearing in mind that the freight sector has fundamentally different dynamics to the government-backed TOCs – although the TOCs sections are under pressure from the Tories, too, but that’s another story.

Pension sections are valued by actuaries every three years; in 2010 it showed a £34 million deficit and in 2013 a £41 million deficit. In the scheme of things these were relatively small, and easily dealt with, by adjusting actuarial assumptions with slight modifications to pensionable pay caps and the like. The deficits were no surprise given the global financial crash and changes to longevity putting pressure on all pension schemes.

However, the 2016 valuation, showing a £257 million deficit, was not minor and not small. It exposed a structural failing and has led to unsustainable member contributions of 32% for most members (non-protected face contributions of 29%).

The current scheme is a defined benefit scheme which means you know the benefits (retirement age, death in service, accrual rate, pension size, etc) but not how much you have to pay for those benefits. The reason for the massive increase in contributions is primarily down to a covenant change, which leads to lower investment returns, coupled with actual lower returns, anyway. It has made a huge hole.

The covenant is a rating of the employer’s strength and its likelihood of collapsing and making a claim on the government’s pension protection fund. DBC has had its covenant reduced from 2 to 3 (the TOCs are 1). A reduction in covenant forces the trustees to change their investment strategy from return seeking to a more defensive and safe one – this has the effect of significantly reducing the investment returns.

There had been a threat to reduce the covenant in 2010 and the German DB group put a bond of €1 billion against DB Schenker in the UK to prevent this. Whilst not underwriting the pension (which German law does not allow) it underwrites the company so it would be unlikely to claim on the PPF. But that bond was not enough to prevent this latest reduction in covenant.

STRUCTURAL WEAKNESS AT HEART

It is very difficult to argue that DBC is a healthy company when, not that long ago, it was threatening to make all its drivers redundant to force cheaper t&cs on us. The covenant change has created a funding hole and exposed the structural weakness at the heart of DBC.

I have given this example of the problem at branches and it’s worth repeating here:

When Carillion collapsed it had a business value of around £5 billion and pension liabilities of £2.5 billion. A relationship of business to pension of 50% when the general view is that this should not be more than 18% (20% at the outside). DBC’s business to pension liability relationship is 400%.

This is down to the rapid contraction of DBC’s business over the last decade – going from nearly 3,000 drivers at privatisation to roughly 750 now – with the pension liability remaining relatively constant. The incompetence in managing contracts as EWS and DBS has led us to this point.

The unsustainable 32% contribution levels (they are currently 12%) which take effect from October 2019 meant we had to act. The decision to close the scheme to new entrants from July 2020 was not taken lightly. We opposed it until we had secured a significant concession from DBC.

When a scheme is closed it has no new money coming in from new starters and the numbers of active staff start to dwindle through retirements, resignations, etc. This leads to the pension deficit load being spread over fewer members and contributions increasing. Which, in turn, leads to members leaving as they can’t afford it and the load being carried by even fewer members until no-one can afford it.

The concession from DBC we achieved was that they would put in place a deficit recovery cap. A portion of your pension contributions is dedicated to filling the deficit hole over several years – split 60:40 across employer and members in line with the scheme’s rules. The cap breaks the 60:40 link and forces DBC to pay any deficit that exceeds the current level. This stops costs spiralling for members as they are now borne by the company.

However, this does not get around the 32% contribution rate. We have had to provide alternatives to ensure that some level of pension can be provided at a level that is affordable and worthwhile. These are the alternatives which we have been talking about at branches and will be discussed as part of the 60-day consultation that is just concluding.

THERE ARE NO SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

We have a cast iron commitment from DBC that members who feel they need independent financial advice on this matter will get it but it does not detract from the enormity of that decision. I have been through a lot of difficulties with DBC and this is one of the very worst. It is serious and has far-reaching consequences and requires difficult decisions to be made.

The council and I have never shirked from these decisions – we are dedicated to ensuring there is a decent pension for current members and for future generations but that will not be easy because there are no simple solutions.
Beware of freight company promises of jam tomorrow

NIGEL GIBSON, District 5 Organiser, and lead officer for Freightliner Heavy Haul, Freightliner Intermodal, and GB Railfreight, reflects on a rail sector red in tooth and claw, and the fallout for train drivers who work for FOCs, TUPE transfers, lease cars, and the problems at British Steel

ORE and more, as a trade union, we are dealing with the effects of freight contracts being awarded by the customer away from one employer to another. This has very real consequences for our members. Under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 if members are part of an organised group of workers assigned to a contract there is the potential that members will have to move with that work and choosing not to move can leave you, potentially, without a job. Taking your terms & conditions is a key part of TUPE legislation which can create difficulties for employers and, in turn, put pressure on employees to accept the new employer’s terms.

As a trade union, we are dealing with this difficult situation on a day by day basis. We are now working together as lead negotiators with the ASLEF executive committee, which creates a far more cohesive approach. When we are dealing with these transfers, we have a duty to protect members transferring to a new employer but also to protect those who remain with the existing employer. Allowing employers to pick and choose, dependent on how the business model or recruitment strategy is developing, will only lead to more problems further down the line.

Unfortunately, pensions are not covered by TUPE legislation and the freight companies are becoming renowned for being poor providers with sections either closed or contributions escalating disproportionately. There is little we can do in this context.

Another area which members have found difficult is when the current employer offers schemes which allow employees to purchase or lease cars. These arrangements cease when a TUPE transfer takes place and, in some circumstances, members have been told to return a car to the leasing company and make substantial penalty payments prior to transfer. We would urge you to read the small print and put it into context with your employment before signing up.

Several freight operators have recently suggested that there should be a choice for the employee when TUPE applies; let us be clear, this is not because of a desire to support our members but because of their shortfall in resources. Would they really be willing for members to remain with promises of jam tomorrow if they had a surplus of driver resources? We know the answer to that from experience…

BRITISH STEEL

You will be aware of the issues faced by workers in the steel industry with British Steel going into liquidation at the end of May (see Gregor Gall’s article on page 9). This has created so much uncertainty for so many workers, including ASLEF members, who are part of the supply chain. The UK steel industry employed 323,000 people in 1971; the latest figure is 32,000 people, employed by 600 businesses, just 10% of what is was 48 years ago. We will do all we can to support and mitigate drivers against potential redundancies while AGS Simon Weller continues to work with colleagues on the TUC general council to address the wider issues faced by this industry.

MEMBERSHIP DENSITY

On a positive note, we are gaining levels of membership density in the freight sector that we have not seen for a number of years, a reflection of not only the good work our reps are doing throughout the rail freight industry, but a recognition of the need for trade unions to defend workers’ rights and conditions.

Shot in the arm

PHILIPPA EDMUNDS, Freight on Rail manager at the Campaign for Better Transport, reports on a scheme to turn an old council rubbish tip into new freight railway sidings in the Peak District

UTH George, Labour MP for High Peak, opened a new £14 million railway extension serving five quarries at Buxton in Derbyshire on Monday 29 April – a vote of confidence in, A longer Freightliner train out of Buxton and a big boost to, the rail freight sector in Britain. Network Rail has transformed a disused council tip into 430 metres of new railway sidings so longer freight trains can serve local quarries and haul loads of aggregates to London and Manchester. The project should give a shot in the arm to the UK construction industry.

The scheme means freight firms such as DB Cargo and Freightliner can increase the number of wagons on each train from 18 to 26. This allows up to 2,500 tonnes of stone to be moved on each journey, providing a boost to building projects in Britain and helping the environment.

Each freight train takes 76 lorries off local roads and every tonne of freight carried by rail cuts carbon emissions by 76%. And the area has been sympathetically landscaped to blend in with the surrounding countryside, an area of outstanding natural beauty.
We must electrify to meet carbon targets

MAGGIE SIMPSON, executive director of the Rail Freight Group, calls on the government to invest in the electrification our railway network so desperately needs.

All freight is known for its environmental benefits, and it is a key reason for customers who are increasingly looking to use more rail as part of their supply chains. The ability to move many lorry loads with a single engine means that, on average, rail produces 76% less carbon dioxide than the equivalent road movement, and produces significantly fewer air quality emissions, too.

However, with renewed global focus on climate change, and the UK government setting a requirement for no net carbon by 2050, the pressure is on all sectors of the economy to reduce their use of fossil fuels, and the railways are no exception.

Recently there has been much excitement over the first trial of a hydrogen-fuelled passenger train – the Hydroflex unit developed by Porterbrook, a member of the RFG, in collaboration with the Birmingham Centre for Railway Research and Education.

Innovation such as this is good news for the industry, but for rail freight the ability of hydrogen or battery power to replace diesel is much more challenging, because the power output these alternative fuels can deliver is not sufficient for hauling heavy loads. Indeed, the Committee for Climate Change has acknowledged the difficulties of replacing diesel entirely for HGVs and rail freight even by 2050.

Yet there are many actions that can be taken to reduce diesel use in rail freight and key amongst them is overhead electrification. Today less than 10% of freight is electrically hauled, and many of the routes we operate over are not wired. This, in turn, means that freight operators have tended to buy diesel locomotives which can ‘go anywhere’ on the network. Recent decisions by the government have not helped, either, with the cancellation of electrification on the Midland main line leaving heavy construction trains consigned to diesel haulage for years ahead. However, recent work by the Railway Industry Association has shown that a rolling programme of electrification could be made affordable on many routes, through sensible application of standards and new technology.

This offers a chink of light for restarting work and we are making a strong case to government for ensuring that freight is factored into this work. Analysis by the

What have we here?

KEVIN BELL, company council secretary, Direct Rail Services, admits that when they first met Andy Hourigan, they wondered. Well, let him explain…

UR long standing lead officer, Colin Smith, retired last year and when his successor, DO3 Andy Hourigan, arrived to take over the role we thought, ‘What have we here?’ Not like Colin at all. But, as the weeks and then the months passed, we got to know the real Andy. His fresh approach has been welcomed by all, his stories too, but we won’t go into that…

DRS has a full new company council as, alas, for various reasons, both members resigned from their posts. Our lead officer stepped in as company council while nominations were sought. ASLEF and DRS had numerous discussions around the number of company council reps, and the vast areas of the constituencies, especially in the north. Talks centred around bringing in a third member; this was agreed and signed off by the EC and head office.

The three new CC reps are Warren Brannon (chair) northern; Matt Cox, southern; and Kevin Bell (secretary) Scotland.

We hit the ground running as there was a considerable backlog of business to deal with. We are in the process of writing a new rest day working agreement which will go in front of the EC. The current agreement is outdated and it was felt that, rather than change this, it would be more beneficial to start again. With Andy’s help, company council also successfully negotiated a three year pay deal which was accepted over the table and has brought DRS more in line with other FOCs.

We also, with Andy, successfully negotiated a new structure for trainee drivers. Following this the company has recruited from within the organisation a number of trainees, mostly from the train person grade, but there are a couple who came from other departments. The trainees have successfully completed their first rules and regulations course and are doing traction. The basic traction remains the Class 37, and training will cover Class 57, 66, 68 and the latest addition to the fleet, the dual-powered Class 88. At the beginning of July trainees completed their handling turns and will soon be out on their own. Congratulations to every one of

The all-new DRS company council them. DRS sees this as a starting point to putting many more potential drivers through the training school.

Company council, with our lead officer, have worked with DRS on a new competency development policy. The final proposal was presented to the EC and accepted and adopted in June.

When the new council was formed there were a few depots where there was no local level rep. We have turned this around and now have a rep at all locations. The LLRs have been working hard alongside production planning looking at link structures. There have been numerous workshops throughout the country and recently we saw the results of the work by the reps; approximately 92% of all the links in the company are now in line with ASLEF’s aspirations for a four day week.

We have seen an increase in ASLEF membership, too, with new drivers joining the company and lapsed members asking to rejoin.

Level of Consideration

PAUL BARBER, business council secretary, Freightliner Heavy Haul, reports that it took the company nine months to notice an overpayment of £1.5 million.

We have a number of issues with FLHH. Frequent management changes in the HR department means an inconsistent approach and a lack of understanding of the issues affecting our members.

In February 2019 we were told
Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport’s rail freight forum suggests that only around 300 miles of work would enable around two-thirds of rail freight to be electrically hauled for most of its journey.

Of course, it is not likely to be possible to electrify everywhere and, on some parts of the network, freight will still have to use diesel traction, possibly using bi-mode locomotives such as the Class 88. The challenge here is to use as little fuel as possible, and so measures such as auto start stop can, if properly managed, have an important role to play. We would like to see more widespread uptake of such measures, particularly in terminals, and when freight is recessed for network management, recognising the need to ensure that train crew can access the systems they need for comfort at all times.

Rail freight is a key part of reducing transport emissions and can do more. Government must now step up to the mark and invest in the electrification our network so desperately needs.

Driver numbers rising

But that’s about the only bit of good news. PETER MASON, business council secretary, Freightliner Intermodal, says it’s disappointing how management so frequently forgets to do the right thing by its drivers

As much changed since our last report in the Journal? The short answer is no. Work flows remain consistent, and boxes moved we are told is pretty much the same, with just some changes of final destination of our trains. Driver numbers are rising, due to driver graduates finishing their core training and the flow of drivers leaving for other companies becoming less.

But there are still problems within the company. First, MFA. This has been on the agenda since I moved onto business council over nine years ago. It’s something which we believed, through numerous meetings, that we were close to an agreement on an updated policy, and have been promised a draft policy on a number of occasions, and even for it to be discussed at business council meetings, but neither draft policy nor HR have shown up, and we shall be seeking urgent action on this matter, to be resolved to our satisfaction.

The pay deal due for 1 January 2019 was accepted by referendum in early April but, again, full implementation of rates of pay and consolidation of booking on allowance to all applicable grades has not taken place and a full explanation of what appeared on drivers’ pay slips has still not been supplied. Management now seem to have their own ideas on a few issues regarding the deal, that were not discussed, and we will be meeting with management to address these issues.

In with pay will be the ongoing situation regarding HPA, which is due in May’s pay each year. Two days before it was due we were informed that it would be paid in June; we again spoke with management regarding agreement and, as such, the lead officer had to report to our executive committee, with the decision made to withdraw rest day working, which resulted in HPA being paid on the final day of May. Again, no communications from Freightliner, with it being left to our reps to try to sort out their mess. A letter regarding interim payment was sent out but was very vague in content. Unfortunately, Nigel Gibson, Andy Hourigan and I had to intervene on behalf of a driver who the company were looking to discipline outside of what we had agreed after a CDP dispute 18 months ago.

Ultimately we arrived at a position that was correct but it is disappointing that we still have to explain the correct systems. We will carry on challenging management on all issues and, maybe, next time, I can report a big change and bring much happier news. But don’t hold your breath.

And then there was no deal on the table

BARRY HARE, company council, GB Railfreight, reflects on strange days in the freight sector – when managers withdraw a pay offer that had been all but agreed

We are seeing challenging times within the freight sector, TUPE is starting to become sort of the normal, and delivers many problems for our members. We are undergoing pay talks at this present time. We believed we had reached a formal offer, and a way forward, but when the company council met management again on the 11 June the agreement we thought we had reached was formally rescinded by management. And we have been told there is definitely no more money on the table.

This puts us in a pickle because the referendum was on pay, and pay alone, and after talking to members it’s clear the majority would like to see better terms and conditions giving a better work/life balance. The company has agreed to sit down with the company council to revamp t&c’s but these would not be in place until April 2020!

The revised offer was placed in front of the EC in July; the company council believes we cannot recommend acceptance unless the company offer improvements that can be put in place this year.

And we would like to find a way of protecting annual leave so members are not booked to work into their leave or come back on early turn after leave!

Incompetence at Heavy Haul we haven’t seen before

There had been a miscalculation of the May 2018 week 53 payment. Five weeks were paid for a four week period shown as arrears on the payslip. We still have yet to receive a formal communication (as of the end of June) from the company on how they expect our members to repay this amount and the options available to them. Members have been faced, when leaving the company, with a deduction of nearly £1,000 from their final pay packet. Anybody in this situation needs to contact HR and agree a repayment plan. But it demonstrates a level of incompetence we have not seen before; taking nine months before Freightliner noticed an overpayment of £1.5 million had occurred begs the question as to how much they really are struggling to make a profit.

We have also had delays yet again in the Holiday Pay Arrangements with the only explanation coming after ASLEF was informed, at the last moment, and when we asked for a written explanation to be sent to staff with no one from HR wanting to communicate the problem to staff. The payment was only made after ASLEF wrote to both Freightliner companies informing them that rest day working would be withdrawn the following Saturday if payment was not made. The date for HPA to be paid has been agreed for three years and yet Freightliner seems to be caught by surprise. Every year.

The lack of communication regarding both week 53 and HPA has meant that relations between ASLEF and the Freightliner HR dept have become difficult. It should not be for the business council to communicate items to drivers that have been caused by the company itself.

Nigel Gibson has written (page 11) regarding the difficulties drivers face in the freight industry regarding British Steel and TUPE. It now appears, regardless of legislation, that each freight company is applying its own interpretation of TUPE for its own benefit and not for our members.

There are currently vacancies for LLC reps in the north-west and Scotland plus elections for hs& reps in Scotland and the north-west. If you want to get involved, but are not sure what is involved, please give any of the BC a ring.
ASCIST is a word that has become, for many, a term of abuse to damn anyone deemed to be a ‘swivel-eyed loon’ to the right of us. But going over the top to condemn someone who holds opinions with which we disagree undermines the real historical horrors wrought by an ideology—and movement—which swept first Benito Mussolini to power in Italy and then his ideological stabalmates the Nazis to power in Germany and the Falange to power in Spain.

“Fascism is a religion. The 20th century will be known as the century of Fascism.”
—Benito Mussolini

Fascism never had the ideological coherence—or, more cynically, the dialectical rigidity—of communism, against which it set itself as a polar opposite. Fascists scorned parliamentary democracy as decadent, outdated and ineffective, loathed trade union activists, socialists and communists, and wrapped themselves in all the trappings and the tropes of a primitive patriotism and misty-eyed nationalism.

‘Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles’ (Germany, Germany, over all) are the opening lines of the national anthem Das Lied der Deutschen (The Song of the Germans) with words by von Fallersleben to music by Haydn and adopted in 1922 as the brownshirts began to march on the streets of Berlin.

It was a pernicious ideology that, in Germany, and then on the rest of continental Europe, meant the round-up of communists, socialists and trade union activists; Jews, Roma and Jehovah’s Witnesses; homosexuals and ‘social deviants’ sent by train to die in the konzentrationslager or extermination camps at Auschwitz, Birkenau, Sobibor and Treblinka in occupied Poland.

“Fascism is capitalism plus murder”
—Upton Sinclair

Fascism rose out of the ashes of the Great War of 1914-18. The failure of the democracies in Western Europe to provide bread and roses for their citizens, let alone a land fit for heroes, together with the spectre of the Bolshevik revolution and the prospect of a communist utopia—or, at least, workers’ soviets—in Russia, meant that a disgruntled former lance-corporal in the 16th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment could call for order and obedience and develop a cult of the strong leader—Il Duce and Der Führer—to replace the left-wing utopia—or, at least, workers’ soviets—in Russia, meant that a disgruntled former lance-corporal in the 16th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment could call for order and obedience and develop a cult of the strong leader—Il Duce and Der Führer—to replace the left-wing utopia—liberté, fraternité, égalité—of the French Revolution.

The peace treaty signed in the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles in 1919 between the Allied and Central Powers left Britain, France and Italy with a ‘mutilated victory’ which fell short of the expectations of soldiers who had fought for four years in the trenches on the bloody fields of Flanders, and resentment in Germany at reparations forced on a country which had not surrendered, but signed an armistice ending hostilities.

Nationalist politicians—glorifying the Teutonic myths and Aryan legends of the past—gottraction with disenchanted voters by blaming foreigners, especially Jews, for their plight.

“The victor will not be asked afterwards if he told the truth or not”
—Adolf Hitler

The Fascist Manifesto, by Alceste De Ambris and the Futurist poet Filippo Marinetti, was published in 1919; Mussolini set up the Partito Nazionale Fascista (National Fascist Party) in 1919; and seized power after the March on Rome by 30,000 blackshirts in 1922. Hitler joined the German Workers’ Party in 1919 (renamed the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei in 1920); became its leader in 1921; and Chancellor of Germany in 1933.

But there were fascist movements—inspired by philosophers such as Hegel and Nietzsche, preaching ideas of racial purity, and white superiority—in every European country including the Heimwehr (Homeland Guard) and Vaterländische (Fatherland Front) in Austria, the Ustaše in Croatia, the Iron Guard in Romania, the Falange in Spain, and Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists in the UK.

The rise of fascism in Europe led directly to the Italian invasion of Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) in 1935; the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39; the Second World War of 1939-45; and the Holocaust or Shoah.

‘Are you a communist?’ a woman asks Robert Jordan in For Whom the Bell Tolls by Ernest Hemingway. ‘No, I am an anti-fascist,’ he says. ‘For a long time? she asks. ‘Since I have understood fascism.’

Radio Luxembourg

At our annual assembly of delegates in Leeds in May, an agenda item put forward by Victoria Line 182, amended by Northern Line North 067, was approved by AAD and adopted by the EC. AAD pays tribute to two giants of the socialist and international working-class, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Leibknecht, in this 100th year of their murder at the hands of the proto-Nazi Freikorps. In the midst of the horrors of the First World War, Luxemburg wrote: “Society stands at the crossroads of a transition to socialism or regression into barbarism.” We have witnessed the horrors of that regression into barbarism in the form of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Those words echo as a stark reminder about the struggles we face as far-right and fascist forces gain momentum in Europe today. This AAD instructs the executive committee to commission a series of articles about fascism for the ASLEF Journal, with a focus on what fascism is, with historical and contemporary examples, and how organised workers and their trade unions are always among those that fascism sets out to destroy.

Karl and Rosa were murdered in Berlin by proto-fascist militiamen in January 1919
The wind that shakes the barley

BILL DALE, Retired Members’ Section committee member, and Chingford branch, reports on the RMS spring forum at Yarnfield Park in Staffordshire, a training and conference centre originally known as Beatty Hall

UR chair, Ray Jackson, opened the RMS spring forum by welcoming everyone, particularly members who had never attended such a meeting before, and said he hoped everyone would participate in the debates.

ASLEF’s new president, Dave Calfe, took the opportunity to outline his background since joining the railway in 1985, and his years of union involvement. Dave said lay members lead trade unions, and not many operate like ASLEF, which has 20,370 members. Our finances are sound and healthy, and we use RPI when increasing members’ subscriptions.

SHORTAGE OF TRAIN DRIVERS IN UK

Dav said there was a shortage of train drivers countrywide and companies are looking to lower the age to 18 to make a career in the driving grade; we need younger people, not older people. He believes in the Employer Justified Retirement Age policy and not extending working beyond retirement age. He said there is a need to create better pensions, and there are currently problems with Arriva, Stagecoach, and Virgin, as the DfT wants companies to pay deficits on their pension schemes at the end of the franchise. There is uncertainty over Abellio dealing with their deficit, and there should be a 40/60 government pay out.

On freight, Dave said there are many problems, with a downward trend, loss of traffic, and companies operating zero hours contracts. Dave talked about DOO on Mersey and Northern Rail, Greater Anglia, and an agreement reached by the RMT without consulting ASLEF.

Following two disputes on CrossCountry, a strike was pending, and he mentioned fatigue as a problem following a crash.

In-cab signalling is proving difficult, with different systems and too many operators. He said ASLEF still supports HS2, for investment in Britain’s railway network, and finally, on Brexit, the EC did not support the call for a People’s Vote.

SOCIAL CARE PROVIDERS OFFER POOR SERVICE, ONLY INTERESTED IN PROFIT

Allison Gardner, a lecturer in Bioinformatics at Keele University, councillor for Crackley & Red Street on Newcastle-under-Lyme borough council, chair of Newcastle-under-Lyme CLP, and co-founder of Women Leading in Artificial Intelligence, came to talk to us about transport problems in her constituency, including the effects of Tory cuts on transport, phase two of HS2, and subsidies for bus services in rural areas. Allison concluded by saying it’s time to get rid of Failing Chris Grayling, and replace him as Transport Secretary with someone who understands the transport system in Britain and its requirements and, more importantly, to return transport to public ownership with a Labour government.

Ashley Morley, regional officer for Unison in the West Midlands, talked about social care – in the light of future heavy demands for services – in this country. The number of over 85s has gone up in the last 20 years, and is likely to go up even further in the next 20 years. NHS contracts have been awarded to private companies that offer poor service to disabled and elderly people, and are only interested in profit.

Then we settled down to watch a film – I, Daniel Blake – that the chair had brought with him. This movie, directed by Ken Loach, who made Up the Junction, Cathy Come Home, and The Price of Coal for television, and Kes, Land and Freedom, and The Wind That Shakes the Barley for the cinema, tells the (fictional) story of a middle-aged widower in the north-east of England who can’t work or get benefits after a near-fatal heart attack. The story is told with stark and fierce plainness – unadorned, unapologetic – and won the 2017 BAFTA for outstanding British film.

SPEAKING UP FOR MY GENERATION

Bob Deacon, vice-chair of the TUC Midlands Pensioners’ Network, and a member of Unison, said the government wants to transfer responsibility for the free TV licence for the over 75s to the BBC in June 2020. This has to be reversed, he said, as it is the government’s responsibility, not the BBC’s. He said the young should not be pitted against the old, and the TUC needs to be seen to be speaking up for the older generation.

Leroy Hawkins of the RMS spoke about the fallout from the Windrush scandal, which was very interesting as it included his personal involvement, and Mike Baker spoke about his activity as a Samaritan and the fulfilment it gives him in helping others.

Members said they felt it was a very good forum and looked forward to future meetings. The chair thanked members for their attendance and closed the forum.
RIPPLE LANE – FRIDAY 6 SEPTEMBER
The annual jolly boys’ outing to Clacton – everybody welcome – meets at 12.00 in the Spoons opposite the pier and finishes in the old BRSA club after the bingo has ceased at 3pm.

RAINHAM – THURSDAY 3 OCTOBER
From 11.00 at Rainham Social Club, 86 Station Road, Rainham.

LONGSIGHT – THURSDAY 10 OCTOBER
All grades welcome at our annual reunion from 13.00 at the Navigation Road BRSA Club next to the BR & Metrolink station. Always a great event with beer and buffet. For further information please contact either Colin Allsobrook (07771 374559) or Ray Bullen (07952 686495).

FRATTON – FRIDAY 11 OCTOBER
Railway reunion open to all rail and retired workers – drivers, guards, shunters, signalmen, platform staff and ticket office – from 12.00 to 18.00 at the BRSA Club next to Fratton station. Free buffet and raffle. ‘Come along and make it a great event,’ says Gary White. ‘And bring any photos of railway interest.’

TOTON – FRIDAY 25 OCTOBER
The Toton old boys’ reunion is at the Sportsman, Derby Road, Long Eaton, NG10 4HA from 19.30. All former and present Toton train crew, partners and friends are most welcome.

Basingstoke 017 branch held its retirement and long service awards evening on Sunday 16 June at the Red Lion Hotel. Retirees Paul Harmsworth, Steve McCarthy, Bryan Rodbard and Julian Wagstaff received their certificates from South Western Railway company council Nigel Cummins. Long service awards, presented by branch chair Duncan Bird, went to Peter Vernon (45 years), Ian Stephens and Phil Warren (40).

Ian Robinson, branch secretary

York branch held our beers and badges night on Friday 14 June at York Railway Institute, with a good number of present and past members to see 20 long service awards, including three 40 year badges. We also presented a number of retirement certificates to recently retired drivers from York and Scarborough. EC4 Mark Wakenshaw and FTO Andy Hourigan were warmly welcomed, and spoke before carrying out the presentation duties. It turned into a great social event, to be hopefully held again next year, and many years to come.

Adrian Cook, branch secretary

Many thanks to AGS Simon Weller, DO3 Andy Hourigan, DO5 Nigel Gibson and EC3 John Metcalfe for attending our June branch meeting with members from DB Cargo, FLHH, GBRf and Arriva Rail North in attendance. Pensions dominated the meeting as well as the new deal for train crew for Arriva drivers. All officers answered the many questions that followed.

Paul Costello, Buxton & Peak Forest

Old oaks
This year’s Old Oak Common reunion, which has been going for more than 50 years, took place on Tuesday 11 June. DO7 Brian Corbett made presentations to retired drivers Chris Boyce, Joe Hrycyszyn, Peter List, Val Williams and Des Wright while GS Mick Whelan made a special presentation to Bob Morse who retires in late August. Bob and his family have been the driving force behind our reunion for many, many years, providing a great day which is much appreciated by the retired and active staff who regularly attend. Thanks, too, to Paddington branch and all who provide donations to help fund this event.

Mark Urpeth, Old Oak Common

There are no ASLEF branch socials this month.
180 years’ ASLEF service
A very well attended June branch meeting welcomed GS Mick Whelan, DO3 Andy Hourigan and EC3 John Metcalfe who all gave very informative and detailed reports on all aspects involving the driver grade. This was followed by the presentation of ASLEF badges to Neil Barker, Tony Beard, Chris Boothby, Ian Ridsdale, Darren Vickers and Paul Harnett who also received his retirement certificate.

Graham Fazackerley, Preston

Red Leicester
The Leicester reunion, held at the Marquis of Wellington on Saturday 15 June, was a great success. An afternoon of convivial conversation and comradeship. Drink was drunk, tales were told, and memories were burnished.

Reg Sargeant, RMS

Leamington sparkles for Dave and Bob
Leamington Spa branch was pleased to welcome EC president Dave Calfe and Bob Earlam, West Midlands Trains company council, to our latest meeting. Dave spoke on various national issues, including pensions, Freightliner pay, Medigold problems, Northern route learning, the Cross Country dispute, and the European train driver licence. Bob went next with local issues on WM Trains including the new pay and productivity deal, an RDW extension until May 2020, recruitment of new drivers, the new Nuneaton work for Leamington, and the problems and issues associated with the May timetable introduction. We would all like to thank Dave and Bob for their latest visit, and for their continued support of our little branch.

Nick Walker, branch chair

My perfect cousin
Ramsgate branch chair Paul Fennell (left) and his cousin, local rep Steve Bailey, both received their 40 year badges at a recent branch meeting.

Nik Fetherston, branch secretary

Please don’t switch us off
100 pensioners gathered outside the BBC in London on Wednesday 12 June to protest at the withdrawal of the free TV licence for the over 75s. This was introduced by the Labour government in 1999. The Tory Government, who did not have the guts to do it themselves, as their election manifesto promised not to interfere with pensioners’ benefits, off loaded it onto the BBC to do their dirty work. After a successful demonstration we spontaneously decided to line up and stroll down the road to Oxford Circus where we went round and round in the road, bringing it to a standstill. Motorists were burnished.

Bill Dale, Tony West, Terry Murphy and PJ Smith with (far left) a friend and comrade in struggle we have not been able to and pedestrians supported our action, and will remember this come the next election.

PJ Smith, Retired Members’ Section

We turn back time – and the pages of the Locomotive Journal – to August 1919 and the old German colonial territories, British troops in Russia, and dropping a coin

GERMAN COLONIES NOW PART OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE, ADMITS PM
Mr Lloyd George wrapped up very nicely the appropriation of 800,000 square miles of German colonial territory as a new perquisite to the British Empire. He told the House of Commons in a tone of meekness that was almost comical that we had added 800,000 miles to the responsibilities of our empire. The exploiters sitting behind him applauded this nice way of putting it. They are more concerned about the opportunities than the responsibilities, and the interests they represent will soon be off prospecting.

CHURCHILL CHANGES MIND ON RUSSIA AFTER STRIKE THREAT
The Southport decision in favour of direct industrial action as a means of enforcing a withdrawal from Russia had immediate effect. Mr Churchill, the precocious Minister of War, hastily summoned representatives of every daily newspaper in London to a private conference with him at the War Office and next morning this sort of thing appeared in practically all of them:‘I had a chat with Mr Churchill yesterday, and he tells me our troops are being withdrawn from Russia as rapidly as possible.’ ‘I have the best authority for stating that before the ice closes in the White Sea all British forces will probably be withdrawn.’

GROPING IN A DARK CORNER FOR A HALF-SOVEREIGN
The other day the imperturbable calm which characterizes a provincial railway station waiting-room was disturbed by the metallic ring upon the floor of a dropped coin. Nobody betrayed consciousness of having dropped it, but everybody began furtively to look for it. All was silence until a lachrymose individual, who had been groping in a dark corner, inquired in plaintive tones, ‘Has anyone dropped a half-sovereign?’ Then there was a chorus, matchless both for simultaneousness and spontaneity, of ‘Yes, I have!’ At least a dozen persons seemed to have lost that half-sovereign. ‘Well,’ drawled the dolorous individual, ‘I’ve just found a half-penny of it, so we may as well continue the search for the remainder.’
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...........................................................................................................................................
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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).

The 500 Club is a fundraising venture for ASLEF’s Retired Members’ Section.
ROGER BLACKHURST MOTORBIKIN', MOTORBIKIN', LOOKING LIKE A STREAK OF LIGHTNIN'

It is with great sadness that I report the passing of ex-Bath Road, Cardiff and CrossCountry driver Roger Blackhurst on 23 May 2018. He was 78.

Roger was born at Plymouth in Devon on 27 October 1940. The family home was destroyed during the Blitz and they moved to Bristol shortly afterwards. Roger lost his father, a sailor when his ship was torpedoed in the Atlantic during World War Two. Roger’s mother brought him, and his two sisters, up on her own. She had to go out to work to provide for the family and the children had a tough start in life.

Roger was a Western man, joining the railway as a cleaner at Bristol Bath Road on leaving school in the mid-1950s. He was promoted to fireman but, unfortunately, was made redundant in the early 1960s as part of the Beeching cuts. In order to stay on the railway Roger reluctantly agreed to be ‘put back’ as a cleaner at Canton depot in Cardiff. He was able to move back to Bristol Bath Road as a second man and was promoted to relief driver and then driver.

Roger was a keen motorcyclist and there are several legendary tales about his adventures on the road. One day he famously dismantled his machine, to tune it up, when he was fireman on the station pilot. Unfortunately, he was unable to put it back together again! On another occasion, he was giving his driver a lift home on the back of his motorbike. His passenger put his legs down whilst they were stopped at traffic lights. When the lights turned green Roger rode off leaving his driver stranded in the middle of the road!

And Roger was driving home after work when a Jaguar sports car suddenly stopped in front of him. Roger drove up and over the boot, roof and bonnet and ended up back on the road in front of the Jag with no noticeable injury or damage to himself or his bike. No mention, either, of any damage to the Jag!

Roger ended up working for Virgin CrossCountry in Bristol and retired in the early 2000s after almost 50 years on the railway. He is much missed by family, friends, and former work mates. Bernard Kennedy, Bristol branch secretary.

RAY PILLINGER THEN RAISE THE SCARLET STANDARD HIGH

Ray Pillinger, a former Bristol Bath Road and St Philip’s Marsh driver, sadly died on 15 February. He was 93. Ray was a Western man, starting his railway career just before the outbreak of the Second World War as an engine cleaner at Bristol Bath Road. He was a loyal ASLEF member and lifelong Communist Party activist. The black and white photograph (right) shows the Bath Road strike committee in 1955. Thanks to Ken Millard for providing this picture. Ray organised a number a trade union-sponsored trips to the Soviet Union during the 1960s and 1970s.

And his partner Joan ran a successful fish and chip shop and also enjoyed many happy times in their local, the Royal British Legion, in Keynsham. He will be much missed by his family, friends and former work mates. Thanks to Steve Hampton for providing the recent photograph of Ray.

Bernard Kennedy, Bristol.

CHARLES DRABBLE DAD IS UP AGAINST THE DOOR IN THE SHIRSHASANA POSITION

Charles Drabble – Charlie to his friends on the permanent way – has died at the age of 89. He was born at Darnall near Sheffield in South Yorkshire, one of five children, and spent his childhood there except for a spell during the Second World War when he was evacuated to a farm at Gotham in Nottinghamshire. When not at school he worked on the farm, caddying on the golf course, and pumping the church organ bellows while helping himself to the organist’s wine, which he topped it up with water to cover his tracks! He returned to Sheffield then in 1948 went into the Royal Navy as a cook on submarines based at HMS Dolphin in Gosport, Hampshire.

Charlie started his railway career as a cleaner at Darnall loco, moving to King’s Cross top shed for a firing vacancy, and staying to become a top link driver. He had the pleasure of working on top the flight express of the day, steam, diesel and electric hauled.

He married Doreen in 1953 and moved into Thane Villas in Holloway where many an impromptu party was held with work mates and their families, a group known as the Railway Children.

Charlie and Doreen were blessed with three daughters and when he took up yoga she would call out to the kids as they rushed in, ‘Be careful, your dad’s up against the door in his vest and pants standing on his head in the shirshasana position!’

His other loves were dogs and darts in his local, the Earl Russell. When he retired they moved to Morden in Surrey.

It was standing room only at Charlie’s funeral as family, friends, and work colleagues, many who had worked under his wing when they came onto the railway, gathered to celebrate his life. May he RIP.

PJ Smith, Retired Members Section.
Brexit cultists, Marxists, & the sound of an angry man

Responding to Brother Redmond’s letter in the July edition of the Journal, I am not a Brexit cultist. Myself and millions of other traditional working-class Labour voters voted for Brexit in good faith. Having educated myself on the procedures and mechanics of how the European Union functions, it became apparent the EU is an undemocratic, dysfunctional, and dictatorial institution. My aspiration was, and indeed still is, to return democracy and sovereignty back to the UK.

I wish to return control of political, financial, judicial and immigration institutions to an elected UK government. Jeremy Corbyn is a Eurosceptic and his reluctance to support a second referendum, and the fact that over the last 30 years he has voted against most, if not all, EU legislation put before the UK parliament is testament to that fact.

ASLEF supported the campaign to leave the EU, along with other rail unions. As for the figures, if people do not go out and vote we have no choice in a democracy but to honour the result returned after the conclusion of any ballot. Surely that is a fundamental principle of democracy and freedom?

Apparently, I entwined in my original letter (Journal, June) Marxism with liberalism? What I did was accuse the Labour Party of being a Marxist movement which, behind the scenes, I believe it to be. My reasoning stems from repeated accusations of anti-Semitism levied at many individuals in the party. Labour MPs and councillors have resigned having witnessed alleged anti-Semitism behind closed doors. Look at the recent debacle with the lifting of the suspension of Chris Williamson (MP for Derby North). More than 90 Labour MPs have called for him to be sacked.

Another example is John McDonnell, the Shadow Chancellor, who in interviews when challenged on whether he or senior figures in Labour are Marxist will only acknowledge having sympathies towards aspects of Marxist ideology. Then we have Momentum, apparently the true driving force behind the current Labour Party. Momentum has been exposed as being awash with Marxist activists.

 Karl Marx, in an essay On the Jewish Question, written in 1844, clearly demonstrates an anti-Semitic tone. Hardly teachings of tolerance and respect. Vile racism as far as I’m concerned. You can draw comparisons of Marxism, anti-Semitism and the accusations buzzing around the Labour Party.

Brother Redmond makes many assumptions regarding points of view I may hold, and aspects of my character, even insulting my level of intelligence. He refers at one point to ‘he and his ilk’. I can tell Brother Redmond my ilk is the Labour-supporting working-classes of this country. I’m a Blairite? I supported the war on terror? I’m an angry man! If Brother Redmond would like to gain an insight into my character and political allegiances may I direct him to a copy of the Aslef Journal from the past where Chris Proctor wrote a piece on my family’s railway history titled ‘The hills are alive with the Sounds of Railways’! Maybe this will provide clarity as to my true character.

I could go on picking apart Brother Redmond’s tirade against me with topics I have not covered such as his desire to hand over all decision making to the young as it’s their future and anybody who has an opinion, deemed not to be young, is irrelevant, or his comparison of my letter with the overzealousness of Franco in Spain which, I must confess, had me chuckling for most of the day! However, I am aware of constraints of space on the letters page of the Journal.

Steve Hill, Manchester Piccadilly No 1

We now have a railway grade called shunter driver which, for me, is a job lost for a fully trained driver

Over the last few years I have been very disappointed in the way our union has handled certain matters in our grade. There are many employees on the railway, all of different grades, such as guards, shunters, railmen, signalmen, who all contribute in the running of the railway. As a driver, like my colleagues, we were fully trained, rules, regulations, etc, to drive trains, as was a shunter. We now have a grade called shunter driver which, for me, is a job loss for a fully trained driver, especially a restricted driver due to ill health, who cannot go on the main line but may have an opportunity to stay in the driver’s grade as a permanent shed driver. Not no more as we have this new grade shunter driver to replace our title as train driver. As a strong union I think ASLEF overlooked this situation of this made up grade. I am also concerned at the way the pay structure is set for new drivers. If you are a fully qualified driver in the link, drive the same traction, sign the same roads, book on for the same shifts, why are we not all paid the same rate? This is an insult for all up and coming new drivers. Come on, ASLEF, let’s get back to all being equal and keep the grade called train driver.

Phil Hollis, Kirkdale depot

Mick tells delegates at AAD ‘A driver is a driver’ and (right) a British Railways Class 08 0-6-0 Shunter 13079, built at Darlington in 1953, now at the National Railway Museum

BBC wrong to scrap free TV licence for over 75s

Surprise! Surprise! Having been handed the job of deciding what to do about the free TV licence for the over 75s issued by this cowardly rattle of a Tory government, despite their manifesto promise to preserve the entitlement, the BBC has fiddled the consultation figures and done exactly what we had expected. The corporation’s excuse for scrapping the entitlement for a majority of over 75s is ‘to continue to maintain high quality programming’. What utter garbage!

Apart from the news and Proms concerts of our union to seek to stimulate employment in the grade.’

Apart from the news and Proms concerts

Steve Hill, Manchester Piccadilly No 1

Undermining democracy sets dangerous precedent

In response to Pat Redmond (Journal, July) we had a democratic vote on leaving or remaining in the European Union, and leave won. Had the result in 2016 been 52% remain the book would have been closed the same day. Trying to undermine democracy sets a dangerous precedent. Nigel Farage cobbled together a new party five weeks before the EU elections and managed to get 29 MEPs. Another remain party was formed around the same time (Change UK) and didn’t get a single MEP. Many even argue that if you tally up all the votes for the other parties remain won on points. But we have a first past the post system in the UK. If the Brexit Party got 36% of the vote in a general election it would be a massive majority. We could have reached a deal long ago if it wasn’t for the shenanigans of those who want to see Brexit fail.

Terry Baxter, LU, Neasden depot
The Day of the Triffids

I am writing to the Journal to ask if ASLEF could highlight the disgusting state of our rail network in recent years. I refer to the appalling buddleia which has taken over the lineside, and Network Rail’s apparent and blatant neglect to properly deal with this matter. Surely this plant, which grows out of retaining walls and other structures, poses a threat to a structure collapsing, which could result in a serious incident occurring.

I have a feeling that NR’s failure to deal with this problem is all down to cost. That may be so, but if the plant was growing out of my property, I would take it out and not leave it to get worse.

I would be very interested to hear what other readers think.

Edward Pearce, Marylebone

Tell MPs we’re watching

The National Pensioners’ Convention was invited to join the Barking, Dagenham & Havering trades union council on their stall at the Steam & Cider Fair in Dagenham on 29 June. Barry Todman and I went along, Barry as EC member of the NPC national, secretary of London region, and Unite rep, I as representative of ASLEF’s RMS, Enfield over 50s forum, NPC national and London region. We took along literature to give out, and took the opportunity to ask members of the public to sign an NPC petition condemning the withdrawal of the free TV licence for over 75s by the BBC on the instructions of the Tory government. We managed to get 350 signatures; I am sure if we had managed to have more bodies on the ground we could have got over a 1,000, so my request to all who read this is write to your MP, which we weren’t able to do as work always got in the way.

Mick Boulanger, RMS

Mick Whelan says: ‘Good luck, Mick, and thanks for all you’ve done!’

Costing the Earth

I am trying to reduce the amount of plastic I use to save the environment for generations to come. It annoys and frustrates me that the ASLEF Journal arrives in unnecessary plastic packaging when a paper envelope can be used. Do ASLEF have any plans to stop sending the Journal in plastic packaging?

Melissa Bell by email

Mick says: ‘We are looking into the cost of switching to a biodegradable alternative.’

Thanks, Kevin, company council and Wolves reps

I am writing this letter to thank our full time officer, Virgin Trains West Coast company council, Wolves LLC reps and Thompson’s solicitors who fought on my behalf to negotiate a deal that has allowed me to retire. We were paid £300,000 each, and totalling tens of millions of pounds, paid to top heavy BBC management.

The council, Wolves LLC reps and Thompson’s officers, company council and Wolves reps

remuneration packages, averaging well over £300,000 each, and totalling tens of millions of pounds, paid to top heavy BBC management.

Reg Sargeant, RMS Derby

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The best job in the world

KEITH RICHMOND reviews some of the new books that have turned up – just in time for the summer holiday – at ASLEF’s head office on the edge of Smithfield Market in London

TEVE Davies spent 48 years on the railway – from 1969 to 2017 – starting as a messenger boy at Maesglas, Newport; becoming a clerk at Ebbw Junction; then a traction trainee at Cardiff; and a second man at King’s Cross; before moving back to Ebbw where he joined ASLEF, ‘by far the best trade union to represent footplate staff, and ‘worked a lot of trains loaded with iron ore imported through Newport docks.’

He moved to Westbury in 1980, making copious notes about working on the iron road, and filling 148 notebooks, from his first driving turn on 15 March 1982 to his last on 28 September 2017. He’s plundered them for Career Right Away! A Train Driver Recalls His Railway Career (The Choir Press, £8.99) which gives a real flavour of life on the permanent way by a man who considers train driver – ‘on good days’ – ‘to be the best job in the world.’

“All train movements require a team effort” – Steve Davies

Steve explains his ‘enthusiasm for trade unionism in general, and ASLEF in particular’, revealing what he got up to as an ASLEF rep, as well as the trials before, during and after ‘the most acrimonious industrial dispute I have ever been involved in’ – the 1982 strike.

There are lighter moments – including the tale of a train driving gorilla – too. Whether you work in this industry, or are a ‘civilian’, you can enjoy this book.

“Well my daddy come on the Ohio works / When he come home from World War Two / Now the yard’s just scrap and rubble / He said, ‘Them big boys did what Hitler couldn’t do’ // From the Monongahela valley / To the Mesabi iron range / To the coal mines of Appalachia / The story’s always the same” – Bruce Springsteen

Nine years ago, in an interview with Brian Hiatt, a senior writer on Rolling Stone, Bruce Springsteen admitted that he’d realised, when he was still playing the Stone Pony, that he wasn’t as great a guitarist as ‘Hendrix or the Edge’ and he wasn’t, as a singer, in the same league as ‘Frank Sinatra or Elvis [who] can call it up with your voice’. But he was, he knew, a gifted songwriter and that became the key to his career in rock’n’roll.

Bruce Springsteen: The Stories Behind the Songs by Brian Hiatt (Carlton Books, £30) is a track by track take on every song on every album from Greetings from Asbury Park, NJ (1973) to High Hopes (2014). Hiatt is good on the sources of those songs – on the references and the meaning of these mini-epics – and his interviews with producers, engineers, and surviving members of the E Street Band sheds light on how they were pieced together, sometimes painfully slowly, in the studio.


From Mercian Hymns (1971) and Tenebrae (1978) to The Triumph of Love (1998), The Ormonds of Syon (2002) and A Treatise of Civil Power (2007) Geoffrey Hill showed, with his acute observations, dry wit, and muscular verse, that he was, with Ted Hughes and Philip Larkin, one of the most important post-war English poets. The Book of Baruch by the Gnostic Justin (Oxford University Press, £20) – the title taken from an apocryphal Biblical text associated with gnostic heresy – is Hill’s last will and testament.

“Once upon a time in mid-winter, when the snowflakes were falling from the sky like down, a queen was sitting and sewing at a window…” – the Brothers Grimm

There’s a lot of Lear – grumpy old man raged against the dying of the light – in here. But, with its references to Milton, Bunyan, Dryden, Tennyson and Blake; Piers Plowman, Gerard Winstanley and Neil Gaiman; William Walton and Winston Churchill; John Keats, John Clare, John Donne, Grub Street and the splendidly named Shittebowrelane; it is all utterly magnificent, too.

Snow White and Other Tales by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (Oxford World’s Classics, £14.99) is a veritable treasure trove of 82 tales, fables, legends and morality stories ‘that have given pleasure, terror, and imaginative coping-space to generations of children’, translated and with an introduction and notes by Joyce Crick, senior lecturer in German at University College, London, until she retired. Hansel and Gretel, Rapunzel, Rumpelstiltskin, Iron John, The Golden Goose, and, er, The Devil and His Grandmother. They’re all here. Share them with your children, or grandchildren, or enjoy as a secret treat yourself.

“The whole day I had been fishing, pulling up / living tongues of fire through the icy-cold depths” – Stein Mehren

Stein Mehren (1935-2017), though little known in this country, was a popular and award-winning poet, playwright and essayist in Norway. To the Outermost Stars (Arc Publications, £10.99) is a selection of 50 of his finest poems, most about love, translated by Agnes Scott Langeland. Mehren, who observed that ‘the best love poetry is as much about life as about love’, writes about Tristan and Isolde, Hero and Leander, Hamlet and Ophelia, as well as of himself. ‘But with you I dare to lose myself and meet / another who sees me, as the one I am / and as the one I could become.’
On Track

RAIL DREAM
LAST NIGHT

I was on the bank of a deep river. On the further bank were B and a whole crowd standing round E who was tied to the rails of a railway track. An express was racing towards him. I knew that E was being executed on a charge of sabotage and that I had the evidence to save him if I could get there in time. Moored to the other bank was a ferry boat in which stood the ferryman, a tall fair young man who I feel I have met before, but not in real life.

Wystan Hugh Auden and a first edition of The Orators (published by Faber & Faber, 21s net)

His back was turned to me as he was watching the proceedings. Behind me a football match was in progress and the spectators were crying my name. I screamed to the ferryman, but their row drowned my voice completely. As the engine reached E the driver leant out with a disgusting leer, dangling a large old-fashioned fob and I saw the time was 6.0am.

Everything disappeared as a newsboy touched my arm holding out a news-sheet bordered with black. At the top was a photograph of my Uncle Henry, the one which actually appeared at the time, but under it the words ‘I have crossed it’.

I woke hearing voices as if the battle were lost.

Dream Last Night, a section of Journal of an Airman, was published in 1932 in The Orators: An English Study by WH Auden (1907-1973). It was his second book, and established him, at 25, as a leading figure of the modernist movement. Auden was close to other young left-wing writers, such as Cecil Day-Lewis, Christopher Isherwood, Louis MacNeice, and Stephen Spender; won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for The Age of Anxiety in 1947; and was Professor of Poetry at Oxford from 1956 to 1961.

Keith Richmond

Prize Crossword

Crossword 160 by Tom Williams

Solution to Crossword 159

Across: 1 Madrid 4 Digit 7 Privileged 8 Gore 9 Kitty 11 Tussock 13 English 15 Punch 17 Plan 18 Adjustable 20 Dirty 21 Legacy

Down: 1 Midget 2 Rare 3 Divorce 4 Dalek 5 Gig 6 Toddy 7 Prison 10 Triple 12 Know-all 14 Hungry 15 Plaid 16 Husky 17 Plug 19 Jar

Congratulations to John Preston, of Chelmsford, 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 159th prize crossword in the July 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 August

ASLEF’s legal services

Have you been sacked, or are in trouble at work, and cannot get hold of your branch secretary, local representative or District Organiser in an emergency? Call our industrial relations department on 020 7324 2400 (9am to 5pm Monday to Thursday or 9am to 4pm on Friday) or leave a message on the answer service, or email info@aslef.org.uk with a subject heading of ‘For the attention of the industrial relations dept’.

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TUC Congress 2019

The 151st annual Trades Union Congress is at the Brighton Centre from Sunday 8 to Wednesday 11 September.