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Chaos and confusion

Mick: ‘Many don’t understand the true benefits of rail’

HAVING on your behalf spent many hours recently making the case for a greener transport strategy. Lots of groups want to jump on the climate change bandwagon, building on the recent school strikes and rise of Extinction Rebellion, and every long-established pressure group seems to understand the true benefits of rail. We could deliver many of the commitments made at the Paris and Kyoto accords if there was a true modal shift to rail as part of a long-term integrated plan to secure a proper future for future generations.

Grant Shapps’ review into HS2 seems to have galvanised a number of people, some suggesting that investment – particularly real investment - is wrong and asking if there are cheaper, better, options? The reality remains that we need HS2 just for the capacity benefits alone. It’s a shame the vision isn’t greater. A true connected high speed network would free up freight, regenerate all the regions, and, partnered with electrification, deliver much of the green agenda being promoted by so many now.

Recycling decades-old defunct trains so that venture capitalists can continue to lease them at exorbitant costs does not form part of our green agenda. Many were not driver-friendly when built and are not fit for purpose now. How do all the trains and coaches purchased by the government end up being leased back to the industry at vastly over-inflated terms? Is it a tax fiddle? It’s time for our trains to remain in our ownership when bought by public moneys.

There were 271 suicides on our railways last year and my heart goes out to the families, friends, and all those in the railway family impacted in each and every one of those tragedies. It has made me think about how many incidents did not happen or, fortunately, were averted, or people changed their minds, and what we need to do going forward?

We have been seeking a review of all lone working. Unfortunately 21st century society is not a polite one, much of it driven by political austerity (and, yes, it was a choice), county lines, knife and acid attacks. If we are going to have the feeling of a safe railway environment we need the staff and the passengers to know they are safe. Many of the locations we go to at anti-social hours and the shifts of a seven days a week railway are dependent on walking, waiting for cars or taxis, and going into turnaround points or sidings alone. It’s time for a total review of what constitutes safe working.

It is the anniversary of the Ladbroke Grove tragedy this month and we should ensure that such a thing never ever happens again, but we still do not have legislation strong enough to deal with those who failed in their fiduciary responsibilities – and we must continue to seek it.

Yours fraternally
Mick Whelan, general secretary
Breath of fresh air

SLEF has welcomed Jeremy Corbyn’s pledge at the Trades Union Congress in Brighton to put power ‘in the hands of the workers’ by implementing the biggest expansion of employment rights in British history.

Jeremy promised union delegates radical action to transform everyday lives by driving up wages, improving job security, and giving staff more say in how their companies are run.

He said a Labour government will set up a Ministry for Employment Rights with a remit to improve pay and conditions for workers across the UK. It will also appoint a Secretary of State for Employment Rights and a Workers’ Protection Agency to enforce standards in the workplace.

Reritering the party’s pledge to repeal the Trade Union Act 2016, he said unions will get the right again to organise in workplaces, and reps will be protected against being sacked for union activities.

Leadsom calls for halt to HS2

Business Secretary Andrea Leadsom, Conservative MP for South Northamptonshire, has called for an immediate halt to work clearing the way for the HS2 until the government decides whether or not to press ahead with the project.

She said many of her constituents believe ‘enabling works’ should be paused amid fears about ‘unnecessary disruption to the countryside’ given that the line could be scrapped.

But Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said: ‘I have to make a go/no-go decision in December and to have a proper go/no-go decision, we need to continue to allow enabling works.’

HS2 Ltd has spent £1.25 billion buying property in London to clear the way for the line.

Wrong prescription

Chuka Umunna has never seen a party he didn’t want to join. He has been, this year, a member of four political parties – Labour, The Independent Group, Change UK and the Liberal Democrats – in the space of four months. Now partying like this takes its toll. Hence his criticism, at the Lib Dem conference in Bournemouth, of Jeremy Corbyn for failing to support the prescription of Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation. That was the script in Bournemouth, of Jeremy Corbyn for ‘failing the countryside’ given that the line could be scrapped.

Months. Now partying like this takes its toll. MS.

Check that spelling bee, Chuka

GP – has never suggested that Hezbollah should be prescribed. Chuka meant proscribed, or banned, not prescribed. But it’s been a tough year…

Top Tories on track to lose

Senior Tories could lose their seats in a snap election this autumn, according to private polling by Downing Street. The Lib Dems are pouring resources into Richmond Park in a bid to beat Zac Goldsmith and Momentum is active in Welwyn Hatfield and Chingford & Woodford Green, where Transport Secretary Grant Shapps and Iain Duncan Smith are vulnerable.

QUOTE...

‘HS2 is the best way to add the extra rail capacity we so desperately need to rebalance our country’s economy.’

– Sir John Peace, chair of Midlands Connect and the Midlands Engine

…UNQUOTE

FIRE SALE BAD DEAL FOR TAXPAYER

Network Rail’s £1.5 billion fire sale of 5,261 railway arches occupied by small businesses – to plug a funding gap – was not a good deal for taxpayers or tenants, according to a critical report by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee.

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.

ELECTRO MAN

Members can receive the ASLEF Journal – and reps can receive circulars – electronically if they choose. Please contact the admin dept at head office on 020 7323 2400.

TWEETS OF THE MONTH

David Cameron admits smoking dope with wife and getting ‘off his head’ at Eton.

mirror.co.uk

I care much less about Cameron taking drugs than I do him, Johnson and Gove running a regime jailing usually working-class and black kids who got caught for doing what they did.

@Kevin_Maguire

‘Starting with a blank sheet’ . We have debated this project [HS2] in Parliament for the past 6 years. You’ve repeatedly voted for it. If the project isn’t being delivered as planned, it’s Tory ministers who need to explain why not.

@LilianGreenwood

No matter how you voted, I’m sure you’ll agree that Brexit is a complete mess.

@sadiqkhan

The story of the Incredible Hulk is a tragedy. One man forced to live outside of society, desperately trying to find a cure for his terrible mutation. Whereas Chicken Run is a tale of how society working together can achieve great things. The Tories are not so good on metaphors.

@organgeorangeboy

@BorisJohnson @10DowningStreet Ok you got there. PM. Stick it on your CV. But please go away now and stop f***ing up our country for you and your friends’ benefits. There are real lives at stake here... it’s not a f***ing game.

Bowden Smith @TheLordBowden
I’d like to buy the world a coke and keep it company

IM BELL, who died on 25 August at the age of 77, was the glossy image maker and ad man who helped Margaret Thatcher win three successive elections in 1979, 1983 and 1987. Obits made much of his buccaneering (and expensive) lifestyle, innovative advertising ideas, and success at Saatchi & Saatchi before turning his attention to the Tories, but played down his dirty habits of making up research, claiming ‘irrelevant expenses’, and blowing a fortune on a stupendous cocaine habit.

Sir Tim, in his memoirs, admitted that the famous ‘Labour isn’t working’ campaign poster of 1978 left Mrs Thatcher bewildered because she had no sense of irony and, consequently, didn’t get it. When her aides drafted a joke comparing James Callaghan, the Labour Prime Minister, to Moses, with the punchline urging him to ‘keep taking the tablets’ she wanted to change it to ‘keep taking the pills’.

And she had an unfortunate habit of using the word ‘pussy’ when describing people who could not organise something properly. When Bell, fearing she was about to announce that Callaghan ‘couldn’t even organise pussy’ finally broached the subject, the unworlthy Thatcher simply stared at him and said, ‘What’s wrong with pussy? What do you think it means?’

QUOTE...
‘Really interesting detail that No 10 declined to give a sworn statement to court (the Court of Session in Edinburgh) and provided some emails and documents last night instead.’ – Laura Kuenssberg, BBC political editor

…UNQUOTE

Off the Rails

LORD LOUIS MOUNTBATTEN came perilously close to leading a cabal of industrialists, Army generals, and millionaire tycoons in a coup against an elected Labour government. The plot, in 1968, was designed to replace the government of Harold Wilson, who had been elected in 1964 and again in 1966. According to a new biography by Andrew Lownie – The Mountbattens: Their Lives and Loves (Blink Publishing, £20) – the tycoon Cecil King thought Wilson should be replaced by a ‘national government’ led by the Mosleyesque figure of Mountbatten, who had just retired as Chief of the Defence Staff. Hugh Cudlipp told King that Mountbatten had told him, ‘We can’t go on like this’ and Solly Zuckerman, scientist and senior government adviser, recalled a meeting where Mountbatten claimed, ‘Morale in the Armed Forces has never been so low’, adding ‘Dickie was really intrigued by the suggestion that he should become the boss man of a government!’ Mountbatten, blown up by the IRA at Mullaghmore in Sligo in 1979, was named by Marcia Williams, Harold Wilson’s secretary, as ‘a prime mover in the plan’. According to Lownie, it was not Zuckerman who talked Mountbatten out of leading a coup and making himself president of Britain. ‘It was the Queen herself.’

LEO TOLSTOY hated trains. ‘The railroad is to travel as a whore is to love,’ he wrote to a friend. But, as Sophie Ratcliffe points out in The Lost Properties of Love (Collins, £16.99), steam trains run through his novels and the effect is often erotic. Not just the wood-panelled, velvet-cushioned, samovar-scented carriages of Anna Karenina, played by Keira Knightley in the 2012 film, but meeting Vronsky amid the ‘frosty vapours’ and ‘curved lines’ of Moscow Central, where ‘the rumble of something heavy’ – love and death, War and Peace – is coming, and not just down those railroad tracks.

JOHN BETJEMAN wrote the script for a BBC programme about the life of Isambard Kingdom Brunel, broadcast in 1966. It has just been published for the first time, in Harvest Bells: New and Uncollected Poems (Bloomsbury, £16.99), and contains these lines: ‘The company’s offices in Tudor style / I built at Bristol’s Temple Meads meanwhile. / Bristol, which gave me my great Great Western birth, / Should have the finest wooden roof on earth.’

DELOITTE has been hit with a £4.2 million fine for failing to spot Serco’s dead prisoner tagging scandal and signing off on the company’s day accounts. The firm admitted misconduct for audits which overcharged for electronically tagging prisoners who were either back in prison or, er, dead. Helen George, a partner, was fined £97,500 for her part in the fiasco. She remains at the firm.

TUC press releases are usually rather earnest affairs, but Sam Gurney, regional secretary for London, the east and south-east of England, and Laurie Heselden, regional policy and campaigns officer, had a bit of fun at the expense of tech giant Amazon with this dry observation between the parenthetical commas: ‘In Amazon’s warehouses, which it remarkably calls “fulfilment centres”, conditions are basic and brutal.’

CONFERENCES & RALLIES

The STUC black workers’ conference is at the Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel, Glasgow, from Saturday 5 to Sunday 6 October. The STUC women’s conference is at the Concert Hall, Perth, from Monday 28 to Tuesday 29 October. 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. The Labour Party conference is at the ACC convention centre in Liverpool from Saturday 19 to Wednesday 23 September.

500 CLUB: ASLEF’s Woking branch, with number 159, won the September draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £428.

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
HE Tube has long exercised a powerful grip on our collective imagination. For more than 150 years – the Metropolitan Railway, the world’s first underground passenger line, running from Paddington via Edgware Road, Baker Street and King’s Cross to Farringdon, opened in 1863 – it has helped people get around the capital.

But for writers of short stories, novels, TV dramas and films, it’s a fantastic subterranean world, an irresistible setting, like Gormenghast, Middle Earth and Narnia, for all sorts of heroes, villains and monsters.

Latest in the line is Mark Strong – Tosker in Our Friends in the North, Oblonsky in Anna Karenina, and Merlin in Kingsman: The Secret Service – who in Temple on Sky1 plays a maverick medic who works out of a hidden corner of Temple station on the Circle line.

It’s a British version of Valkyrien, a Scandi noir medical thriller broadcast in Norway on NRK1, which might explain the many references to Norse mythology, Wagner’s Der Ring des Nibelungen and Milton’s Paradise Lost although our hero – Dr Daniel Milton, natch, with a daughter called Eve – is more like Torvald Helmer, the husband of Nora in Henrik Ibsen’s A Doll’s House.

Our friend Tosker (well, Dr Milton) at Temple Station.

Shelley’s Prometheus Unbound than Milton’s Satan.

But then the Underground – although it runs on electricity – has always run on the power of metaphor, too.

Do you have a favourite story – on the page, stage, or screen – set on the London Underground? Whether it’s an episode of Dr Who, EastEnders or London’s Burning, or that spectacular Tube train crash in the James Bond movie Skyfall, for which they built a replica of Temple station on a soundstage at Pinewood, let us know by emailing us at journal@aslef.org.uk

Links with the past at St Pancras

Back at the beginning of the year we went from one drivers’ link to two. We didn’t want to call them link 1 and link 2 or Sunday link and No Sunday link so we decided to name them in honour of the last two steam drivers who worked out of St Pancras. Miriam Parry retired around 2003 and Dennis Farthing retired about 2001 so Parry link and Farthing link were created. Come December a third link will be required and we intend to continue the tradition of using former drivers’ names. Mick Levesley was the third last stream driver to retire from St Pancras and Levesley link will be up and running by the end of the year.

Garry Miller, St Pancras LDC rep

Mick bashes Boris

ASLEF condemned Boris Johnson’s decision to try to sideline Parliament in the run up to Brexit on 31 October. GS Mick Whelan said: ‘Whatever your views about Brexit, the democratic process must underpin what is done in all our names. It is disturbing that a Prime Minister, who only has a mandate from the Conservative Party, and not from the electorate, is trying to undermine the foundations of our democracy. And while people did vote, three years ago, to leave the European Union, no one voted to leave without a deal. The best way forward is to call a general election and let the people decide.’

‘People think and, by the way, I think people are right, the Tory party is run by people who, basically, don’t care about people like me.’

– Dominic Cummings, Boris Johnson’s special adviser

QUOTE...

…UNQUOTE

FIRST DIESEL/BATTERY HYBRID RUNS

The UK’s first passenger-carrying diesel/battery hybrid train, a Class 230 unit built by Vivarail, ran between Evesham and Moreton-in-Marsh on Monday 9 September. It was part of a series of tests ahead of delivery to Transport for Wales to run on the Wrexham to Bidston line.

Stagecoach slams franchise system

Brian – never let it be said a man at the cutting edge of the progressive agenda when it comes to promoting his bus services – has gone off rail franchises since being excluded from bidding.

Sir Brian Souter, chair of Stagecoach, says the rail industry franchising system is ‘fundamentally flawed’ and suggested that contracts are awarded by the Department for Transport on the basis of who can best fill in forms, rather than run a good service for passengers.

He was speaking at the AGM of the company, which has brought a legal action against the DfT after being disqualified from bidding for the East Midlands, West Coast partnership, and South Eastern franchises.

DISTRICT 1 FORUM

DO1 Graham Morris is organising a district weekend forum at the Elstead Hotel in Bournemouth on Saturday 2 and Sunday 3 November. Speakers will include GS Mick Whelan and a Labour MP. Cost is £60 which includes a buffet lunch on arrival, evening meal, bed and breakfast. You can book at morrisg@aslef.org.uk

PLANES, TRAINS AND AUTOMOBILES

New research reveals that 60% of long distance journeys in the UK are cheaper on planes than trains. Bruce Williamson, of the campaign group Railfuture, says passengers are being forced to choose between environmental concerns – as rail is cleaner and greener than flying or travelling by car – and cost because of perpetually rising train fares.
HE Great North Run is hard enough, anyway. It’s even harder when you’re running this punishing half marathon from Newcastle to South Shields as a specially-commissioned Class 365. But that’s what five train drivers – Connor Gosling, Mark Tripp, Luke Venneear and Barry West of Great Northern and John Doyle of Southern – did on Sunday 8 September.

It was in aid of a good cause – Mark’s son Adam has 22q11 deletion syndrome and they wanted to raise funds for – and awareness of – a charity called Max Appeal which helps improve the lives of families affected by this debilitating genetic condition. ‘Why the Max Appeal Express?’ said Mark. ‘Well, that’s simple. Until early 2019 the Max Appeal train worked the Great Northern Railway in and out of King’s Cross but, sadly, the train had to be retired from public service so we wanted to ensure its spirit lives on.’

Mo Farah won the race – for the sixth time – but ASLEF’s famous five raised £2,735 and an awful lot of smiles along the way. The drivers did the run in a creditable three hours 15 minutes 20 seconds. ‘The whole day was amazing and the response from the crowds was fabulous,’ said Mark. ‘Everyone cheered us, and wanted to high five us along the entire course. Given the possibility that HS2 could be scrapped five of us from Great Northern and Southern decided to connect the Northern Powerhouse to the south anyway!’

Andy, you’re a star

Andy Hudd, a member of Bristol branch, has been re-elected unopposed as executive committee member for District 7. Andy, who joined the railway after serving for ten years in the Royal Navy, was first elected to the EC in August 2014 when his predecessor, Brian Corbett, became district organiser. Andy, who drives for GWR, was re-elected unopposed a year later to serve a full four-year term from 2016 to 2019. His new four-year term runs from January 2020 to December 2023. Andy was also elected vice-president of ASLEF’s EC in January this year when Dave Calfe was elected president after Tosh McDonald stood down.

Better cabs survey

ASLEF is launching a campaign for better cabs. As part of this we need to gather information, and document your experiences, in order to bolster our demands for a maximum cab temperature, air conditioning, and better ergonomics. We have created an online survey at www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/bettercabs and document your experiences, in order to gather information, and document your experiences, in order to bolster our demands for a maximum cab temperature, air conditioning, and better ergonomics.
Britain needs HS2 – but done properly

SLEF has backed HS2 in the wake of government announcements in early September about – and renewed criticism of – the mammoth rail project. GS Mick Whelan said: ‘Labour came up with the idea of HS2 but the project has been managed – badly mismanaged – by the Conservative Party. We need HS2 – but we need it done properly. It should go to Heathrow, and it should go to Scotland.

‘There will be no Northern Powerhouse – and no clean, green future for this country – if HS2, even in its current form, does not go ahead.

‘The Tories talk the talk but never walk the walk’ ahead.

‘Passengers and businesses in Britain have been hampered by the lack of investment in infrastructure in our country. Our railway is running at full capacity. We need to modernise our network and bring it into the 21st century.

‘The Tories talk the talk but, sadly, when it comes to infrastructure and public services, they never walk the walk. Whether it’s electrification, rolling stock or, now, HS2, they pull the plug after millions or even billions have already been spent.’

Mick was speaking after Transport Secretary Grant Shapps admitted that the first phase of HS2, due to open in 2026, will be delayed by up to five years and the cost has soared from £62 billion to between £81 and £88 billion. The second phase, to Manchester and Leeds, which was due to open in 2032, has been pushed back until 2040. And in August the Prime Minister announced a review of HS2 – ‘go or no-go’ – to report by the end of the year.

New lease of life for old signal box

WHEN Richard and Nikki Curzon left the RAF six years ago, they splashed out £700,000 on an old Station House and Signal Box standing by a disused railway line in south Devon, spent £20,000 taring it up, and now live in the former while renting out the latter as a self-catering holiday let.

‘We wanted a change,’ says Richard, 45, who served in the RAF police. ‘And stumbled across this place, on the old Great Western Railway Primrose line, a picturesque route from South Brent to Kingsbridge axed by notorious Dr Beeching in 1963. We did most of the refurbishment work ourselves, and now the Station House is our home, while the Signal Box brings in £25,000 a year income for us.’

Sherilee Jordan of cottages.com adds: ‘People don’t just want a holiday experience. That’s why we’ve seen increased demand for converted churches, railway properties, follies, and toll houses.’

QUOTE...

‘Donald Trump is not backing Brexit because he believes it to be in Britain’s best interests. He is doing so because it would weaken the EU, which he regards as a threat to US hegemony. Nor will this predatory “America First” president give Britain some fantastic trade deal by way of reward. Knowing Britain will be a supplicant, he would strike the hardest possible bargain.’ – Martin Fletcher, New Statesman

Azuma meets the Mallard

LNER launched its new 125mph Azuma services from London to Edinburgh on the East Coast main line on Thursday 1 August with a photo call putting its new train side by side with the Mallard, the world’s fastest steam locomotive, which had been hauled the short distance from the National Railway Museum by a couple of DB Cargo Class 66s.

‘It’s a real transformation for travel on LNER,’ said MD David Horne. ‘Each Azuma, which is noticeably quicker, has 100 extra seats compared to our existing trains, and state of the art wi-fi.’

Sixty-five Azumas, built by Hitachi at Newton Aycliffe in County Durham, should replace LNER’s existing fleet of 45 trains by summer 2020.

POLICE HUNT CONCRETE CRETINS

The BTP are looking for ‘three teenage cretins’ who risked the lives of rail staff and passengers by dumping concrete blocks on the line in Croston, Lancashire, on 14 August.

SUICIDES SOAR TO 16 YEAR HIGH

New figures from the Office for National Statistics reveal there were 6,507 registered suicides in the UK last year, a rise of 12% on the previous year and the highest since 2002.

Our new topical tee-shirt, designed by those Hoxton hipsters at Philosophy Football, features Rik Mayall as the obnoxious anarchist Rick in The Young Ones, and this classic exchange: ‘He threw us off the train because you said ASLEF was an anagram for “total and complete bastard”.’ And apart from everything else... it isn’t, even. £10 (inc p&p); email info@aslef.org.uk or visit our online shop at www.aslef.org.uk
That’s the sound of the men working on the chain gang

SAM WATERS, senior human factors specialist at the Rail Safety & Standards Board, examines the problem of driver cognitive underload – in English, a sense of monotony, fatigue, and impaired ability to deal with unexpected situations – and points you to a new set of tools designed to tackle the issue.

The rail industry has known for years that high mental workload (overload) can cause people to make mistakes. But there has been very little recognition of what happens when workload is low (underload). Train driving can be very demanding and require high levels of concentration; some locations are complex and there can be a lot to take in or there may be a fault or an emergency.

On the other hand, driving a train can involve long hours of repetitive work, which can get monotonous. In these situations, it can be more difficult to maintain concentration, and this can lead to mistakes.

Over the years, the design of train cabs has changed the task of the driver. Cabs are designed to be more comfortable through temperature controls and adjustable seating positions. As technologies advance, traction and cab controls have become easier to operate. These changes have brought obvious safety and health benefits; however, this has had the unexpected side effect that the cab environment now increases the likelihood of experiencing underload.

How do you know if you are drifting into a state of underload? Have you ever driven long routes on green aspects with very little going on and can’t recall the last few minutes? Or do you drive repetitive routes, with little variation, stopping at the same pattern of stations? You may find your mind starts to wander and you begin thinking about other things that don’t relate to driving the train or your route. You may find yourself asking: what aspect was my last signal? Did I stop at the correct stop car mark? These experiences may be a sign of underload. It is important to identify when you begin to drift into a state of underload in order to do something about it.

For years, drivers have used a variety of techniques to stay alert in repetitive and monotonous situations. The RSSB has worked with drivers to recognise the challenges of underload and develop a toolbox of different techniques that can be used to reduce the chances of experiencing underload. We’re all different and one technique that works for one person might not work for another. So you might need to try various options to see what works for you, or change techniques to keep them fresh.

The toolbox explains how to use each technique, why drivers find them effective, and any risks they carry.

The underload toolbox has been created by drivers for drivers – to ensure that good practice is shared throughout the industry. It is important that all levels within organisations, from directors to the front line, appreciate the importance of managing underload.

Use of the techniques is entirely voluntary, as they are not there to be part of a competence assessment. A number of companies are planning to integrate the toolbox into their briefings to help raise awareness. More information, including a short video and the underload toolbox, can be found on the RSSB website.

ASLEF takes Pride

DARRAN BROWN, secretary of ASLEF’s LGBT+ Representatives’ Committee, reflects on the Pride of our union.

ASLEF supports the outcomes of the RSSB’s Project T1133 on driver cognitive underload. But an EC res on 5 August adds: ‘The use of the cognitive underload toolbox is voluntary and should not form any part of a driver’s competence assessment.’

None of this could be achieved without the hard work of the LGBT+ committee and the support of the EC, the president, the general secretary, district officers, and Lee James, ASLEF’s equalities adviser, whose hard work made much of this possible, and, most importantly, the members who turned out to support equality and inclusion. This is something in which we can all take Pride, that our union is doing what a good union does in standing up for its members, in a world that, sadly, is becoming less tolerant. Thank you and I hope to see ASLEF’s LGBT+ banners flying at as many, if not more, events next year.

This could be Rotterdam or anywhere, Liverpool or Rome. Actually, it’s ASLEF in action in London, Liverpool, and Edinburgh.

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Ell into Ronald Reagan’s first presidency, Joe Strummer, lead singer of punk pioneers The Clash, harangued an audience of 150,000 at the US festival in California in 1983: ‘If there’s anything in the future, it’s going to be from all parts of everything – not just one white way down the middle of the road.’

I was reminded of this when Donald Trump attacked four Democrat Congresswomen, telling them to ‘go home’. All four first-term members of the House of Representatives are US citizens and all but one were born in the United States. But none of the four is white.

GIVE ME YOUR TIRED, YOUR POOR, YOUR HUDDLED MASSES

In a country established by the genocide of native American Indians, the importing of millions of black slaves from Africa, and then being populated by Irish, Scots, Poles, Germans, Italians, Russians, Mexicans, Turks, Armenians (limitations on space lead me to stop here but you get the point), we can get, and that perception can comprise different constructions. There is a perception involved in making them and holding them together – and that perception can comprise different components and be influenced by different people in different ways.

Nations are not old and timeless, and certainly not God-given, and it can be difficult to say exactly what the differences are between one nation and another (given that they are supposed to be defined by having key differentiating characteristics).

Which takes us back to Trump’s America. In trying to ‘make America great again’, Trump is using his version of white nationalism to define what it means to be American. He is using this construction to bolster his appeal to his core vote while he presides over growing economic disunity and inequality. It is a diversionary, but also selectively unifying, pitch.

Back across the pond, we wait to see how the supposedly cosmopolitan and liberal Boris Johnson will act. The omens are not good. Not only has he packed his cabinet with ministers who are anti-immigrant (including some of immigrant heritage such as Sajid Javid, Priti Patel and James Cleverly) but, as Brexit – deal or no deal – moves into the end game, the notion of what it means to be British will take on even greater significance.

He will, probably, try to pitch ‘all of us together’ against Johnny Foreigner, like those cheese-eating surrender monkeys (the French) while it will be towels at dawn on the beaches against the Germans. Social class will play no part as this shows we are not ‘all of us together’.

A NEW VERSION OF BRITISHNESS

Johnson has the arrogance and the guile to develop his own new version of Britishness for these purposes. Recall his ability to engage in ‘fake news’ about the EU as the Daily Telegraph’s Brussels correspondent years before the term was even invented. Britishness will, in essence, mean Englishness as he’s likely to calculate the Scots and Welsh are pretty much no-hopers for him. Though Englishness, funnily enough, will keep on board the Democratic Unionist Party in Ulster…

There were seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms – Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Essex, Sussex, Wessex, and Kent – which were eventually united under Æthelstan, as King of England, in 927. It was not until relatively recently that Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) was created and then, later, the United Kingdom (Great Britain and Ireland).

THE LEGENDARY POLISH PLUMBER

And, much more recently, we have seen the internal migration of Scots, Irish and Welsh into England and external migration from the Windrush generation. The legendary ‘Polish plumber’ is just the latest in a long line of examples dating back more than 2,000 years.

But what’s the point of this potted history lesson? It’s that nations are ‘imagined communities’, a phrase coined by Benedict Anderson in 1983. He didn’t mean that nations are fake but, rather, conscious human constructions. There is a perception involved in making them and holding them together – and that perception can comprise different components and be influenced by different people in different ways.

Britain, from the Latin Britannia, and Britannicus, was what became, long after the Roman legions had left, England and Wales; while Great Britain refers to England, Scotland, and Wales (and meant an enlarged Britain rather than any supposed status in the world). The crowns of England and Scotland were united in 1603 when James VI of Scotland became James I of England but, politically, the two countries were not united until the Act of Union of 1707 created the United Kingdom of Great Britain. The Act of Union of 1801 created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland which, in 1922, became the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

W

England, like the United States, is a nation of immigrants. 1,500 years ago the migration of Angles, Saxons, Frisians and Jutes from northern Europe (what would later become Germany and Denmark) led to the formation, under Æthelstan, of Angle-land. GREGOR GALL enjoys the irony of Home Secretary Priti Patel, the daughter of immigrants, wanting to ‘pull up the drawbridge’ as Donald Trump and Boris Johnson play the race card ahead of a presidential – and general – election

I’m the white man in Hammersmith Palais

Joe Strummer on stage with The Clash at US in Glen Helen Park, San Bernardino, California, on Saturday 28 May 1983; the President and his lap dog at the G7 summit at Biarritz in August; and the four left-wing US Congresswomen – Ayanna Pressley, Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez – who Trump says should ‘go home’
Brighton rocks

ASLEF sent six delegates – Mick Whelan, general secretary; Simon Weller, assistant general secretary; Dave Calfe, executive committee president; Darran Brown of Preston branch; Mark Prenter of Waterloo Nine Elms; and Tracy Whitbread of Didcot – to the 151st Trades Union Congress held in Brighton from Sunday 8 to Wednesday 11 September. EC vice-president Andy Hudd; EC members Marz Colombini, Howard Kaye, John Metcalfe and Mark Wakenshaw; district organisers Finn Brennan, Brian Corbett, Dicky Fisher and Nigel Gibson; and WRC chair Deborah Reay all attended as visitors.

The slogan for congress – a new deal for working people – was embraced by reps organising to build a better Britain – for the many, not the few – of which we can all be proud.

Delegates from 48 unions, representing 5.5 million trade union members, gathered on the south coast for the annual parliament of the movement. There were passionate debates on transport, education, public service pensions, privatisation, low pay, sectoral collective bargaining, industrial strategy, climate change, equalities and, of course, Brexit.

As well as motions on the conference floor, and fringe meetings every lunchtime and evening, congress offered delegates a chance to meet activists from other unions who face similar challenges in different industries. ‘We’re all doing the same job – representing our members – against intransigent employers and a hostile government,’ said Mick.

Rail the clean green answer

ICK Whelan was first out as part of the traps when our motion – on creating a green transport system in this country – was first up as part of the transport debate which kicked off congress on Sunday afternoon.

The GS said: ‘Comrades, for many years, climate change, for too many, was a peripheral issue. A hobby horse for a certain type of activist. Well, congress, no longer. Climate change has to be a priority for us all because it is now affecting us all.

‘And, like so many crises, it will be working people, the poorly paid, and the most vulnerable, who suffer first. It’s not just the plains of Africa and the rainforests that have endangered species. In the Shetlands, in little under 20 years, the puffin population has plummeted from 33,000 to just 570.

‘I know there are difficulties for many trade unionists in dealing with this issue. Some of our members have jobs that are reliant on fossil fuels and nobody wants any worker sold down the river. That is why we need an industrial strategy that focuses on green infrastructure.


‘Transport is the largest polluter in terms of CO2 emissions. The latest figures show that 33% of carbon dioxide emissions are from the transport sector. But rail accounts for less than 2%. Rail is far cleaner, and far greener, than road and air.

‘If more people travelled by train, and bus, rather than in cars or planes, and if we moved more freight onto our railways and waterways, then we would live in a cleaner, greener world.

‘We need a system that recognises transport modes should not compete with but complement each other. The railway must be electrified – so we must reverse the Tories’ broken promises and call for an even bolder programme of electrification. And we must recognise that our railway is at capacity – we must re-open old lines and build new lines and, yes, that must include HS2.

‘Congress, the challenge of climate change requires big, bold answers so let us create modern, green, high quality infrastructure and modern, green, high quality jobs.’

The motion, seconded by Keeley Lipscombe of the TSSA, and supported by James Mitchell of Unite, was carried unanimously.

The doors of perception

The ASLEF train crew was happy to spot a familiar – and friendly – face on the main door of the Brighton Centre. Big Bill Baxter, of Southport, has been a TUC steward since 2007 and an ASLEF stalwart since he joined the railway.

‘Brighton is a town that always looks as if it is helping the police with their inquiries’

– Keith Waterhouse

AGS Simon Weller made two thoughtful speeches to congress on Tuesday. In the morning he seconded an RMT motion on the safety of railwaymen and women in the light of the two track workers who died at Margam, South Wales, on 3 July, and the shocking 27% increase in assaults on rail staff. And in the afternoon he addressed the distressing issue of period poverty when low-income families, unable to afford sanitary products, are forced to improvise, miss school, or take time off work.

Simon at the podium on Tuesday
AVE Calfe moved our motion on ‘trade unionism and collectivism in the curriculum’ during the education debate on Monday morning.

The EC president said: ‘Despite the good news that trade union membership increased last year by 100,000 to 6.35 million – a fourth increase in the last seven years – just one in ten workers aged 20 to 24 is in a union whilst nearly 77% of union members are over 35. Organising the next generation of workers, particularly in the private sector, where most young workers are, is key to continuing to increase union membership.

“We all know that when workers are unionised, workplaces are safer, with higher pay, better conditions and holidays, and harassment and bullying will be called out and dealt with. Unions fought for a living wage, the weekend, annual leave, parental rights, flexible working, equality, and health & safety, to name just a few.

‘In the modern workplace, when technological change comes, or unscrupulous employers try to save a few quid by cutting staff or relaxing safety procedures, it’s only workers standing together in a union who can stop the exploitation.

‘Why, then, do some people not want this protection? Why don’t they join a union? One of the reasons cited, particularly by younger people, is that they don’t know what unions are for, their relevance for them, and the narrative of the mainstream media does nothing to help. The most powerful way to change that narrative is education. The more we share our successes online, the wider our good news will spread, but we need to take that message into schools. There is no reason why school curriculums shouldn’t include working people’s history – Tolpuddle, Peterloo, Burston strike school, the Bryant & May matchworkers, Shrewsbury 24, and the 1984-85 miners’ strike.

Industrial strategy with rail freight at its heart

RACY Whitbread called for an industrial strategy ‘fit for the future with fairness, green technologies – and rail freight – at its heart.’ She was seconding a motion on ‘an industrial strategy to deliver real change’, moved by Len McCluskey, general secretary of Unite, on Tuesday morning. She said: ‘The destruction the Tory government has wrought on industry in this country is not just careless, it’s unconscionable. Our proud history as an industrial nation has been steadily dismantled, with no regard for the communities around who have lost livelihoods in the closures of everything from factories to steelworks. It’s vital

Tracy at the podium on Tuesday morning
that the next Labour government prioritises the development of an industrial strategy to re-invigorate our country and communities.

‘In the rail sector we are fortunate that rail produces lower emissions than other modes of transport. Improvements to the rail network, for both passengers and freight, will make a significant contribution to industrial success. Rail freight is a particularly important, yet often overlooked, element of this work. Long-distance freight movements on rail produce 76% less carbon dioxide emissions than the equivalent HGV journey, and 90% less PM10 particulates.

‘Moving freight by rail improves safety and helps reduce congestion but the industry is vulnerable to market forces, relies on government grants, and is inadvertently disadvantaged by the subsidies afforded to road users. An efficient freight system, fit for the future, would see a strategic mix of rail, waterways, and road to move freight around the country, taking advantage of cleaner rail for long-distance journeys and developing efficient interchanges to allow local journeys to be completed by road.

‘This development must be part of a comprehensive national industrial strategy, taking account of spatial planning guidance, and how the rail network can best serve manufacturing hubs, as well as infrastructure funding. We urgently need to re-balance our economy and deliver an industrial strategy fit for the future with fairness, green technologies – and rail freight – at its heart.’

Clear and present danger

ARK Prenter spoke in favour of a Unite motion on ‘the climate crisis and a just transition’ on Tuesday afternoon.

‘Climate change is a real and present danger to working people which will affect every living being on our planet. For too long we’ve been told the younger generation aren’t politically active. Well, the wonderful young workers we have in this room and the amazing work of climate activists dispels that nonsense.

‘Jobs will change. The way we work will change. But our struggle for fair pay, job security, and decent conditions will not. A just transition to a low carbon economy must have trade

Prenter making his Mark at TUC
unions at its heart, to ensure working people are not left behind, but are at the forefront of new industries.

‘Climate change has been one of the free market’s biggest failures. Dealing with it must be one of the trade union movement’s greatest successes.’

Breaking the cycle of hate

ARRAN Brown called for trade unions to be at the forefront of the fight against homophobic and transphobic hate crimes on Wednesday afternoon.

‘We are here in Brighton, a safe bastion for LGBT+ people. Many cities have vibrant, safe, LGBT+ communities. But all too often we see LGBT+ people covered in blood, beaten, assaulted, devastated, and what we see is just the tip of the iceberg. Sorry for mentioning the B word but, since the vote, a door has opened where people viewed as different can be freely abused. These hate attacks take place on buses, trains, the street, and the workplace, with little regard to any consequences, and few prosecutions. Thatcher’s Section 28 tried to push LGBT+ people back into Narnia – that’s where some believe we are from. Oh, and Kansas. Well, I’d rather be a friend of Dorothy than a friend of Boris Johnson!

‘Now we see schools facing protests for teaching equality and respect for all. There are even Conservative MPs who suggest teaching LGBT+ equality at home! If they don’t want it taught in schools, what chance is there of it being taught at home? Education is the best way to break the cycle of hate. We must not go back to the days of Section 28.

‘For those who like figures, you won’t like these: 40% of all reported hate crime was violent. Four in five (81%) of victims don’t report to the police. And I’m sorry to say I’m part of the 81%. But no more. No more! Worst affected are trans. Two in five trans people reported abuse, trebling between 2017-18.

‘Hate, prejudice, and intolerance are taught. Let us be at the forefront of the fight for equality and bring an end to those images of bloodied, beaten victims.’
'And, whilst we talk of our history, it is important to remind our members of tomorrow that the underlying drivers are no different, with those who exploit working people offering minimum reward to make maximum profit. Some 21st century workplaces resemble 19th century mills, with insecure and unsafe employment, long hours, low pay, and workers forced to fight for shifts to keep their families fed.

‘The only way to change this is for working people to come together in trade unions, organising, and fighting back. The foundations for the fight back are in education, and that starts in the classroom.’

The motion, seconded by Jane Loftus, CWU, and supported by Joanna de Groot, UCU, Mark Morris, NASUWT, and Sheena Wheatley, NEU, was carried unanimously.

Is it still a man’s world?

A Tube train driver, a firefighter, and a professional footballer – all three of them trade union activists, all three of them women – discussed their experiences in the workplace and how, as trade unionists, we can work together to end occupational segregation, at a fringe meeting in the Brighton Centre on Monday lunchtime. Deborah Reay, Northern Line North, and chair of ASLEF’s Women’s Representatives’ Committee, was joined by Maria Buck of the Fire Brigades’ Union and Fern Whelan of the Professional Footballers’ Association, who plays for Brighton & Hove Albion (and is no relation to our GS)!

WHEN STANDARDS SLIP

Christian Wolmar, journalist, author, and would-be Labour MP, chaired an RSSB fringe on Monday lunchtime called ‘Working Together for a Better, Safer Railway.’ ‘Our railways, with almost 250,000 workers, are some of the safest in the world. But, as the 20th anniversary of Ladbroke Grove approaches, we are reminded of what can go wrong when standards slip.’

JUSTICE FOR COLOMBIA

Mick Whelan chaired a Justice for Colombia fringe on Tuesday lunchtime. Speakers included Diógenes Orjuela, president of the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores; Steve Cavalier of Thompsons solicitors; Mariela Kohon of the TUC; Grahame Smith of the STUC; Philippa Marsden of Unite; and Dave Todd of the Prison Officers’ Association. Mick also spoke from the podium on Wednesday, seconding a POA motion condemning violence against trade unionists in Colombia.

SIMON RE-ELECTED

AGS Simon Weller was re-elected unopposed to the general council of the TUC on Tuesday afternoon. On Wednesday morning he was also re-elected to the TUC’s executive committee.

MICK SLAMS COSTAIN AND SKANSKA

The GS seconded an emergency motion, moved by Gail Cartmail of Unite on Wednesday, demanding HS2 takes action to allow trade unions access to workers on the project.

THE ASLEF train crew stayed at the Old Ship, on the seafront, where our annual assembly of delegates was held in 2014. In Vanity Fair, the savagely satirical 19th century novel by William Makepeace Thackeray, several characters leave London for the Ship Inn – actually the Ship Tavern when Thackeray was writing in 1847 – and now the Old Ship Hotel. Why? Because, as the redoubtable Becky Sharp cheerfully tells her husband, Captain Rawdon Crawley, ‘A comfortable inn in Brighton is better than a spunging-house in Chancery Lane.’

ASLEF reps were media magnets. Mick Whelan wrote a full page feature calling for a cleaner greener transport system in the weekend edition of the Morning Star and Debbie Reay wrote a piece for the paper – Time for Thomasina the Tank Engine – ahead of our fringe Is it Still a Man’s World? Mick was interviewed by C4 News and delegates, over a coffee in the conference centre and a beer in the Hole in the Wall, lobbied Alan Jones of the Press Association; Mark Ellis, Kevin Maguire and Paul Routledge of the Daily Mirror; Raj Syal of The Guardian; Robert Wright of the Financial Times; Ben Chacko and Conrad Landin of the Morning Star; David Hencke of Westminster Confidential; Marcus Barnett, who writes for Tribune and The Jacobin as well as the Morning Star; Tim Lezard of Union News; Iain Watson of BBC News and Jon Craig of Sky News.

KATE FERGUSON of The Sun is known by colleagues to be ‘exceedingly ambitious but spectacularly ignorant’ (though one told the Journal ‘I’d put it the other way round’) a point she proved in front of hacks in the media room after Jeremy Corbyn’s speech on Tuesday when she had to pick Alan Jones’ brain for ten minutes before she could file her piece on JC’s plans for workers’ rights. Her personal best though, at 5.30pm, was ‘What day is it tomorrow, Alan? To which the veteran industrial correspondent wearily replied: ‘Wednesday, Kate.’

SIMON WELLER understands the TUC tradition that reps at the podium who add, after giving their name and trade union, ‘first time delegate, rising…’ get an automatic, loud, and lengthy, round of applause. This prompted our AGS, a man who has made many trips to the podium over the years, to whisper to Mark Serwotka, who was chairing the session, ‘Do you think I could try that?’ The PCS GS growled: ‘Just you f***ing try!’

VLADIMIR McTAVISH raised laughs for this observation in the Scottish Left Review: ‘Yet again, Michael Gove has ended up in a job to which he is totally unsuited. His previous job was Education Secretary. Now the guy looks to me as if he should not, legally, be allowed within a one mile radius of a primary school!’

SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINE

Mick Whelan spoke at the Palestine Solidarity Campaign fringe in the Brighton Centre on Tuesday night. Other speakers included Kevin Courtney, NEU, Mariela Kohon, TUC, and Hazem Jamjoum, al-Shabaka, the Palestinian Policy Network.

QUOTE...

‘We now have 21 Tory MPs with a new and sudden interest in employment law.’
– Keir Starmer, Shadow Brexit Secretary

...UNQUOTE
N 5 October 1999 a tragic collision took place two miles out from Paddington at Ladbroke Grove. The collision, and ensuing fire, claimed the lives of 31 people, including the two drivers – Brian Hodder (Paddington) and Michael Hodder (Paddington). It was a collision that was not only tragic but also avoidable – and it became a turning point in the way drivers were trained and managed in the newly-privatised industry, amongst other things.

Many lessons were learned but also, at a distance of 20 years, it seems many of the recommendations have been forgotten.

TUESDAY 5 OCTOBER 1999

The simple facts are as follows: a Thames Trains Class 165 turbo driven by Michael Hodder left Paddington at 08.06 bound for Bedwyn in Wiltshire. At 08:08:23 the turbo, travelling at 41 mph, passed signal SN109 at danger after passing the previous signal, SN107, at single yellow. The state of the points was such that the turbo was inevitably carried towards the up main line.

Meanwhile, a First Great Western HST was approaching the up main on green signals. Shortly before the crash a signalman at Slough power box, who had been monitoring the progress of both trains, put signal SN102 back to red in the face of the HST. Both drivers applied their brakes but this had no significant effect on the impact which took place at a speed of about 130 mph. Both drivers were killed.

The impact was virtually head-on. The HST absorbed the crash energy well but several bogies became detached. The turbo suffered a considerable degree of destruction and failure.

The initial impact was followed by a number of fires caused by the dispersal and ignition of some 690 litres of diesel from the turbo exacerbated by 4,000 litres from the HST. The most horrific fire was the one that engulfed coach H of the HST.

THE CULLEN INQUIRY

A public inquiry, led by Lord Cullen, was set up in 2000 to determine the cause of the accident and what action should be taken. He made several findings of fact, and 89 distinct recommendations, in part one of his report.

The immediate cause was identified as the turbo passing SN109 at danger but Cullen determined that there were a number of factors that led to that. These included the visibility and positioning of the signal – which was an unusual reverse L shape and not compliant with then current signal sighting requirements – and the poor quality training that the newly-qualified Michael Hodder had received. He had only worked 20 turns as a driver prior to the crash.

It could have been me

Twenty years ago BRIAN CORBETT, now ASLEF’s District 7 Organiser, was a driver with First Great Western, active in the union, a former Bristol branch chair and company councillor. Here he tells how the HST he was driving on 5 October 1999 could easily have been the one that crashed at Ladbroke Grove.

Early morning, I was driving from Bristol to London. The train concerned in the collision was empty to Cheltenham, the driver changed ends, then worked it from Cheltenham to Paddington. The driver booked on that turn went sick so they asked another driver to step up, and he said, ‘I’m prepared to work it to Reading, but then need a relief, to work my booked train back from Reading to Exeter.’ So Brian Cooper, spare at Paddington, was asked to travel to Reading to relieve that driver.

I came in on the platform, stopped at a red light, passengers got off and on. I was still stopped. I was fuming, as he hadn’t pulled off the signal. I was going to be late. Then he pulled off the green, and let Brian go in front of me. Otherwise, it would have been me.

Coming into Acton main line, double yellow, signal, went to single yellow, so I put the brake in emergency, on the HST, and fortunately stopped at the red light. Immediately got on the phone to the signalman, for putting the signal back, and he said, ‘Look, mate, we’ve got a major incident, come back in ten minutes.’ Then I had a bang on the door, one of the managers, in an orange jacket, been told a train has crashed in front. Now there was a slight curve, so I couldn’t see it, but I could see the smoke coming up, and as I walked along, heard shouts from passengers who had mobile phones and told me there had been a train crash and people had been killed. I spoke to the guard, and signalman, who told me to change ends and go, wrong road, then back to the normal route, to Ealing Broadway to detrain my passengers.

Then I went back empty to Reading, where it was chaos, and, eventually, back to Bristol.

Red for danger

NIGEL GIBSON, District 5 Organiser, explains how ASLEF was involved in the new driver competency regimes introduced in the wake of Ladbroke Grove.

HEN I joined the rail industry 30 years ago, in 1989, I became acutely aware of the importance of safety. Only six months previously, the Clapham disaster had occurred. During my training as a train man we were advised, by our instructor Piperdy, to buy a book called Red for Danger, the classic history of British railway disasters, written by LTC Rolt.

That book explains the background to many rail accidents and the recommendations that came out of them. It explains how signalling systems have evolved, about the equipment our predecessors worked with, and gives an understanding of the background to the developments that led to what was, at the time, a modern cab environment.

Our industry saw a number of horrific accidents in quick succession involving our members and the travelling public sadly losing their lives.
would not be considered a ‘slap on the wrist’ or and address them with a mechanism that individual basis and on an organisational basis and retaining their competency. A process that would offer train drivers support in regaining disciplinary processes towards something that moved away from a punitive and game to understanding that mistakes happen.

the industry consultant Halcrow. key operator in the industry at the time, with ‘charge’ train drivers with ‘disregarding a signal’ improve. The industry, historically, would time, many thought, for the rail industry to industry had a ‘no blame’ culture and it was

SPAD prevention was now a priority. TOCS WENT FOR CHEAPER SYSTEM Signal sighting standards were to be tightened up and ambiguity removed from regulations. Sighting standards must explicitly define the cab sight lines by referencing the driver’s eye line and be specified for each type of rolling stock. Briefing cycles for drivers and signallers were to be introduced with joint driver and signaler ‘away days to develop their mutual understanding’. Whatever happened to those? And while not specifically referenced in the recommendations, driver competency management came to the fore, with a consistent approach across the TOCs. This shake-up in driver management was a direct result of the Ladbroke Grove collision.

Driver training was massively overhauled; developing into a more consistent and professional approach – a departure from the ad hoc DIY approach practiced by some TOCs. Defensive driving techniques, which were in

the lack of knowledge of many drivers of the risk the multi-SPAD SN109 posed; it had been the subject of eight SPADs in the previous six years and the train operators had demanded action from Railtrack.

TURNING POINT FOR OUR INDUSTRY

The cause was one thing, the consequences another. The lack of flank protection in the relatively new track layout and signalling system – which was only seven years old – meant the opposing trains were routed into a head-on situation rather than away from each other in the event of a SPAD. The design and construction of the fuel tanks were identified as a problem; as was emergency information and escape provision for passengers; and the rules and working environment for the signallers. Following the Southall collision in 1997, when eight people were killed, and other serious incidents that had resulted in collisions but no deaths, SPADs had moved up the agenda. However, the response had been patchy and inconsistent and pretty much left down to local driver management teams. One of Lord Cullen’s recommendations was that SPADs were to be investigated with ‘no presumption that driver error is the sole or principal cause’. SPAD

The lack of knowledge of many drivers of the risk the multi-SPAD SN109 posed; it had been the subject of eight SPADs in the previous six years and the train operators had demanded action from Railtrack. It had long been our view that issues relating to driver competency through the disciplinary process were outdated. The air industry had a ‘no blame’ culture and it was time, many thought, for the rail industry to improve. The industry, historically, would ‘charge’ train drivers with ‘disregarding a signal’ after a SPAD when, in reality, no train driver would deliberately pass a signal at danger. The industry needed a new approach – a new culture – to get to the underlying causes of these incidents, moving away from a blame game to understanding that mistakes happen.

POINTS MEAN PRIZES

In 2007 ASLEF initiated the establishment of a working group involving National Express, a key operator in the industry at the time, with the industry consultant Halcrow. The working group sought to establish a process that moved away from punitive and disciplinary processes towards something that would offer train drivers support in regaining and retaining their competency. A process that would identify shortfalls in drivers both on an individual basis and on an organisational basis and address them with a mechanism that would not be considered a ‘slap on the wrist’ or headteacher dressing down at school. The working group spent much time looking at the effects of using a disciplinary process, and a ‘points make prizes’ system known as Specially Monitored Drivers, had on the grade. The outcome was fairly obvious in that we were in an adversarial process instead of getting to the ‘root cause’.

BEST INTERESTS OF OUR MEMBERS

Our job as a trade union will always be to defend the best interests of our members whilst the employers were always looking for someone to blame, someone to take the fall, someone of whom they could make an example. In reality, it can be argued that neither party served the best interests of the industry or the individual in that approach and what was needed was a more open dialogue where lessons could be learnt and our members were not hit with the big stick. National Express and ASLEF developed a policy known as the competency development process which was intended to be a non-punitive policy to support drivers in regaining and retaining their competency. It was a move away from a tick box exercise for managers to offload their obligations, instead creating a closer relationship and making those managers more accountable for the development of their train drivers, recognising that mistakes happen, and acknowledging the difference between error and violation.

The industry picked up the competency development process and, in general, is still working with these principles. The process introduced elements which meant that driver managers needed to support train drivers and were accountable. It introduced a more transparent decision-making process that gave the union an opportunity to participate in and influence the process while retaining the right to representation.

From an ASLEF perspective, I believe it has generally served our members well, albeit that, on occasion, there will be managers and reps who either choose to misinterpret the intention or fail to understand it.

IMPROVE SAFETY IN OUR INDUSTRY

Whilst we must accept that any system or policy which can lead to the loss of your substantive job, by nature can feel punitive, the intention is for a train driver to retain competency. There will, of course, be examples where this approach has failed but, all too often, that is because of a failure of those involved to comprehend and implement the CDP properly. ASLEF has continued to seek improvements that support our members, working with the RSSB and other organisations that seek to improve safety in our industry.
Homage to Catalonia

The annual commemoration for volunteers from North Lanarkshire who fought in the Spanish Civil War took place in Duchess of Hamilton Park, Motherwell, on Sunday 14 July. A total of 549 Scots – 40 of them believed to be from North Lanarkshire – travelled to Spain from 1936-39 to fight as members of the International Brigades.

A large crowd – including ASLEF members from Motherwell, Edinburgh No1 and Edinburgh No2 branches – gathered at the memorial to the volunteers to listen to tributes from Andy Jones of the No Pasarán Memorial Committee, which organised the event. Wreaths and flowers were laid by trade unions, the committee and individual family members.

Maureen Saunders, in a moving and compelling contribution, read out letters her grandfather, Archie Dewar, who was later killed in action, sent from the battlefield to his mother and brother;

In a further recognition of the significance of the sacrifices made by those who fought for liberty and democracy, and against fascism, North Lanarkshire council flew the flag of the Spanish republic at Motherwell civic centre from July 19-22. ‘We congratulate the council for this statement in recognition of the valour and the sacrifice of all those who fought fascism,’ said Andy. ‘This memorial in Motherwell and the flying of the flag are not just worthy tributes to those who fought in Spain, but reminders that we must be aware of the evil of fascism and be ready to challenge it in all its guises.’

Steve Fullerton, the last Scottish International Brigade veteran, died in 2008. The memorial was installed in 2013.

Andy Jones, Motherwell 137 branch secretary

Like being back at the Shanty

An unusual Stratford reunion took place at Mangapps Farm Railway Museum at Burnham-on-Crouch in Essex on Saturday 17 August. The museum has one of the best collections of old railway memorabilia anywhere in the UK and many former British Rail locomotives including Class 47s and 31s, plus a large collection of 03 shunters. Just under 30 former Stratford men came along for a superb gathering and train rides galore!

One remarked that sitting in the old railway carriage, drinking tea and sharing tales of bygone days, was just like being back in the Shanty at Stratford depot 40 years ago. They have never served so many cups of tea and the kettle gave up the ghost at one point. Danny Forbes came down from Aberdeen and Tony Gooding, who drove the Flying Scotsman from Stratford low level to North Woolwich in 1984 when the Queen Mother opened North Woolwich Railway Museum, came from Great Yarmouth. It was a great day and, hopefully, we can repeat it next year.

With sincere thanks to John Jolly, the museum owner, for allowing the event. John has been a good friend for over 30 years, and I have been volunteering there on and off for that length of time.

Dave Brennand, Stratford RMS

Sherwood foresters

Our recent branch meeting was attended by general secretary Mick Whelan and president Dave Calfe who made presentations to two recently retired members, Bros Nick Smith and Nigel Geary, and a 40-year-long service badge to local rep Andy Jones.

Andy Jones, Nottingham 148 branch secretary

Remembering Cowden

On 15 October, to mark the 25th anniversary of the Cowden rail crash in 1994, our branch is holding two events. One at Cowden, meeting beforehand in the Oxted Arms next to Oxted station for breakfast at 9.00, then travelling on the 10.08 London Bridge to Uckfield service from Oxted, to lay flowers at Cowden. And a second event, with a buffet, at Norwood depot later in the day, details to be confirmed. All ASLEF members are welcome to attend either or both events. Further information from Mick Green at useryg4163@aol.com or 07525 847274. Badges will be produced; any member interested should contact Mick so we can ascertain the number of badges required.

Daniel Bound, Norwood Junction 147 branch secretary

Upcoming events

- **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.

- **CRICKLEWOOD – FRIDAY 18 OCTOBER**
  Reunion at the RAFA Club, 93 Asburnham Road, Bedford, MK40 1EA (opposite the station) from 12.00.

- **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.
Zagreb day

AGS Simon Weller, EC vice-president Andy Hudd, EC3 John Metcalfe, who has responsibility for trauma awareness and mental health issues, and Northern Line North branch secretary Deborah Reay attended an EU-funded conference on trauma which coincided with the 30th anniversary of the Croatian train drivers’ union. JOHN METCALFE reports from Zagreb

Debbie, John and Simon address the Croatian rail union in Zagreb

Whilst our employers have a legal duty of care to assist drivers involved in traumatic incidents, through ASLEF negotiated chain of care polices, this doesn’t exist in Croatia. I explained the policies we have, how they work, and the professional counselling on offer. It would be too optimistic to expect rapid progress in a young country, with its industrial relations naivety, but, by playing our part with our Croatian colleagues, real benefits can be achieved and we should be happy to assist in any way we can.

We were also introduced to Croatia’s only woman train driver during our visit, which highlighted some obvious equality problems. ASLEF will provide future advice on equality work based on our own experiences.

Our attendance at their conference coincided with the 30th anniversary of the formation of their union. Next year ASLEF will be celebrating 140 years of fighting on behalf of train drivers and we’ve achieved much over that time. By helping a young, progressive, sister union in Croatia, we’re passing on our knowledge as they face many challenges.

We’ve all been directly involved or know of colleagues affected by trauma at work and it’s at this time we need collective support and care. Wherever fellow drivers struggle to get that support then, in the best traditions of John Metcalfe about how UK train drivers are cared for following traumatic incidents – especially suicides – on the railway. Nenad Mrgan explained that they were working on a project with EU funding to develop trauma support policies for their drivers and would welcome ASLEF’s input.

Nenad Mrgan, president of the Sindikat Strojovoda Hrvatske rail union in Croatia, spoke at AAD in Leeds in May. He also talked to Simon Weller and John Metcalfe about how UK train drivers are cared for following traumatic incidents – especially suicides – on the railway. Nenad explained that they were working on a project with EU funding to develop trauma support policies for their drivers and would welcome ASLEF’s input.

AN you imagine being involved in a fatality at work and having virtually no level of support and counselling? Or, subsequently, being arrested and questioned for 2-3 days over the fatality, then left to make your own way home without any support? Unthinkable in our country, but commonplace in Croatia.

A few days off work, then a return to duties, that’s the grim reality as our delegation heard during their conference. In a country where private freight companies can sack you just for joining a union and there’s little protection about shift lengths and rest periods. The driver’s working life there is something we wouldn’t tolerate.

Yet progress is being made and that’s where ASLEF is happy to offer advice and support. We have, for many years, carried out international work alongside other trade unions abroad. Deborah Reay gave a thorough presentation on the fantastic peer support drivers get, post-traumatic incident, through trauma support groups on the Underground network. Our Croatian colleagues seemed very keen to develop similar support for their own drivers.

We turn back time – and the pages of the Locomotive Journal – to October 1919 and a particularly pertinent call to arms by ASLEF’s general secretary John Bromley

WHEN WORKING PEOPLE ASK FOR JUSTICE THEY ARE RUINING THE COUNTRY

While subsidies have been paid to capitalists and their hangers-on in all directions out of the taxation of the people, the profits of the capitalists have been simply enormous: but when the working people ask for justice they are ruining the country. Surely, some day the organised workers will wake up, turn out all false Liberal and Tory representation, and have a government by Labour, and by Labour of the right stamp.

WINSTON UNDER THE HAMMER

An obnoxious piece of information comes in the subtle attempts of Mr Churchill to discredit the statements of Lieutenant-Colonel Kelly, VC. That officer risked his military career and reputation to expose the painful truth about Russia, and he deserved a bar to his VC for his gallantry. He showed that an offensive on a vast scale was planned at the very time that Mr Churchill was assuring the country that our troops were being withdrawn, and that no offensive war was being conducted. Winston’s luxurious motor and his remnant of political reputation went under the hammer in the same week.

SCHOOLROOM HUMOUR

One morning a teacher going into his school noticed that someone had written on the blackboard: ‘Our teacher is a donkey’. Without making a fuss, or inquiring who was the culprit, he took up the chalk, added the word ‘driver’ to the legend, and proceeded to open school with prayers as usual. Worry would never kill that man.

THE TOILER’S DREAM

Toll-worn, the worker reached his home
Within that meagre street:
A smile lights up his features
As his children run to greet
The one who toils that they may live,
Who earns their Bread of Life,
And guides their footsteps through a world
Of ceaseless care and strife.
The 500 Club
The 500 Club is a fundraising venture for ASLEF’s Retired Members’ Section. Numbers in the draw cost £4 each and, to begin making payments into club funds, all you have to do is complete the standing order form and return it to your bank. Alternatively, you can pay by cheque a year in advance; the cheque should be made payable to ASLEF RMS 500 Club.
Payments need to reach the club account by 1st of every month and the draw takes place on 12th of every month – with the winning number, name, and prize printed on page 5 of the ASLEF Journal.
Once you have arranged your method of payment just complete the form and return it to the Admin Department at head office.
The Retired Members’ Section committee would like to thank you for your support and wish you luck in the draw!
Yours fraternally, Mick Whelan, general secretary

ASLEF RMS 500 Club application form
Name...........................................................................................................................................
Address.......................................................................................................................................
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e-mail.............................................................................................................................................

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

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

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

**Keep right on to the End of the Road**

On the morning of Friday 16 August news started to filter through of the tragic and untimely passing of our dear friend and colleague, Richard Burgess, aged just 50. CrossCountry mess rooms throughout the network, not just at his home depot of Birmingham, were left in deep shock. Richard was a lively and much-loved character and his passing was very sudden. He was taken ill at home and passed away in hospital only a few hours later.

We are all deeply saddened and finding it difficult to comprehend. Those mess rooms will not be the same without his cheeky smile and friendly banter.

Richard left school and did various jobs including milkman, chef, and working in the motor industry. He became a driver at CrossCountry in 2003 and soon became a very popular and likeable colleague. He was also a devoted family man, husband to Joanne, and father to Jack and Katie. They enjoyed holidays abroad and very recently had a fabulous trip to Mexico.

Richard was a big Birmingham City fan and would often swap his shifts for very early starts so he could get to the games at St Andrew’s. He would certainly have had a giggle at the tributes left to him on Facebook, where his Aston Villa supporting friends changed their profile pictures to read ‘BCFC/KRO’ – a lovely touch. Confirmation of his popularity could be seen by his almost 1,000 friends on there and they turned Facebook blue with their tributes.

While Richard loved watching football, he was also a qualified football referee who was respected on and off the pitch. Tamworth FC issued with handcuffs, but I’m not sure what he intended to use those for!

All the railway family would like to extend our deepest sympathy and condolences to his family at this most awful of times.

Richard, you were a true gent, and you were taken far too early. God bless you, dear friend, we will miss you terribly but you will never be forgotten. KRO!

Phil Read, Saltley branch

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**Norman Stephens**

**Fitting Tribute to the Ace**

With sadness, I report the loss of retired driver Norman Stephens, a lifetime Newton Heath man, at the age of 81. He started at Dean Lane loco shed on 10 August 1953, as a cleaner, and worked his way through the grades to driver, and a move to Manchester Victoria. Norman was popular with colleagues, who called him by the nickname Ace, for reasons unknown to most, but probably because of his friendly nature and the help and guidance he gave them. I remember popping round to his house one day, soon after he had started training, and he was really keen to show me his new uniform. He had even been issued with handcuffs, but I’m not sure what he intended to use those for!

All the railway family would like to extend our deepest sympathy and condolences to his family at this most awful of times.

Richard, you were a true gent, and you were taken far too early. God bless you, dear friend, we will miss you terribly but you will never be forgotten. KRO!

Phil Read, Saltley branch

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**David Meurig Jones**

**One of the Jolly Boys**

It is with regret I announce, after a short illness borne with much courage, the recent passing of retired Swansea driver DM Jones. Dai Southall, as he was fondly known, started on the GWR at Whitland, transferring to Southall and, upon the closure of Southall, returned to his Welsh roots at Swansea High Street. A fully paid up member of the Swansea Jolly Boys, he will be sadly missed on their monthly excursions. Our deepest sympathy to his wife Ruth and son Gary.

Brian Jones, Retired Members’ Section

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**Rod Fowkes**

**Much Missed**

Rod Fowkes, a career-long ASLEF member, fireman at March, driver/instructor at Stratford, and, finally, DSM at Norwich, passed away in hospital on the morning of Wednesday 8 May. He is much missed by all his family and friends.

Andy Fowkes

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**Stratford marks 45 years’ loyal service**

At the September meeting of Stratford branch we were treated to hearing both the DO and EC member for District 5 in attendance, who gave informative reports on what is happening locally, around our district, and nationally, within ASLEF and our industry.

Howard thanked the branch for our support in the recent nominations for EC5 where he was re-elected unopposed for a further four year term (congratulations from Stratford branch) and we would like to thank Nigel and Howard for taking time out of their busy schedules to join us.

DO5, EC5 and the LLR for DB Cargo Barking made a presentation to retiring member Tony Humphreys who, after 45 years’ loyal service to the industry and union, has called it a day, and we wish him all the very best in the future. Prior to leaving, Tony had not enjoyed the best of health, and had been on long-term sick, and had exhausted all his company sick pay. The branch wished to help Tony in his time of need, so circulated a branch appeal; and this was concluded at our branch meeting where Tony received, along with his retirement certificate and 45 year badge, a cheque for more than £4,000. Stratford branch, and especially Tony, were overwhelmed with the response to the appeal, and the generosity shown by branches and members across the country, including the EC for their donation from the national hardship fund. For each and every member and branch who contributed, massive heartfelt thanks from Stratford branch and from Tony, you do not realise how much this has meant to us all.

Tony was speechless (which was out of character!) but he made contact the next day to express his gratitude at the generosity shown towards him. This just goes to prove how ASLEF is there to support the members, and how the members support each other. More than just a diary, eh? Many thanks again to everybody.

John Thorpe, branch secretary
The orange and the green and the impact of Ireland on the politics of Britain

Britain’s claim on Ireland (once all of the island, now an arbitrary part) has negatively impacted British politics for generations. Winston Churchill said he could not comprehend how a wealthy and powerful nation such as Britain was continually brought to crisis because of her small and impoverished neighbour. But it was only because Britain claimed Ireland as part of the UK that this happened. There is a school of thought that suggests Britain went to war in 1914 not to protect Belgium (the independence of small nations being so important to Britain) but to put an end to the Irish crisis that had seen sections of the Army mutiny and refuse to take orders from the government.

Now, in 2019, another Irish crisis. It would be funny if it wasn’t so serious. This time, over the backstop, we witness the mental contortions of Tory hard Brexiteers. They could have any kind of Brexit they want if it wasn’t for their claim on six Irish counties. The sensible (if you can call any kind of hard Brexit sensible) solution of allowing Northern Ireland to remain in the customs union while Britain leaves a non-starter as it would mean Northern Ireland has a different status in the United Kingdom than the other countries and that is unacceptable to the Tories. The fact that it does, anyway, is ignored.

Since the partition of the island into Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State in 1922, those who wish to see a united Ireland have been told that the democratic will of the people of the six counties must be respected and ‘Ulster must not be coerced’. Well, now it is the Tories coercing Ulster by dragging Northern Ireland out of the EU despite a clear majority voting to remain. So it turns out Ulster can be coerced, when it suits the Tories. How ironic that, in the end, it won’t be Sinn Féin that brings about a united Ireland or the SNP and ‘Ulster must not be coerced’. As you can well imagine, this has upset so many current and long-serving ASLEF members. The description was apparently made by a young ASLEF rep and seems to be acceptable to the hierarchy of this union. When it was repeated by this particular rep it was said like it was an ASLEF quote.

Like so many drivers, I am thankful that over many years ASLEF has continually fought to improve our pay, pensions and workplace t&cs. However, when reps are seeking to push a certain agenda, instead of insulting and alienating, they should persuade and enlighten colleagues trying to make progress on issues that need bringing into the modern ever-changing world in which it does, anyway, is ignored.

I heard an interview an ASLEF rep had given to a local BBC radio station to promote ASLEF’s current policy of persuading TOCs and FOCs to employ as trainee drivers more females, and increased numbers from ethnic backgrounds, all preferably young. During the interview the ASLEF rep referred, quite disparagingly, to the majority of current train drivers as ‘male, pale and stale’. As you can well imagine, this has upset so many current and long-serving ASLEF members. The description was apparently made by a young ASLEF rep and seems to be acceptable to the hierarchy of this union. When it was repeated by this particular rep it was said like it was an ASLEF quote.

Like so many drivers, I am thankful that over many years ASLEF has continually fought to improve our pay, pensions and workplace t&cs. However, when reps are seeking to push a certain agenda, instead of insulting and alienating, they should persuade and enlighten colleagues trying to make progress on issues that need bringing into the modern ever-changing world in which it does, anyway, is ignored.

I have been on the railway for many years and that quote was aimed at drivers like me but it’s totally wrong. Male? Yes. Pale? Probably. But if any rep described a BAME person as anything so insulting they would be in serious trouble. Stale? I certainly hope not. I have been a rep for many years and have always treated all drivers equally and all other reps from ASLEF at all levels should do exactly the same. As even old timers were young when we joined the railway.

Steve Harris, Plymouth

Male? Yes. Pale? Probably. Stale? Certainly not! Be careful when you’re promoting the diversity agenda

GS Mick Whelan says: ‘When I stood up at AAD in Leeds in May I was pleased to see how diverse the room looked. Because I have spent 35 years on the railway, and 35 years as an active trade unionist, and I know how many train drivers look like me. Middle-aged, male, and white. And when we launched On Track with Diversity at Westminster in June I said that we are committed to equality and diversity in the rail industry and want the TOCs and FOCs to improve their recruitment policies so staff more accurately reflect the communities we serve.’

“Male, pale and stale” is a modern shorthand – sometimes used to attack those who look like me, sometimes used ironically – but as a union we believe that a train driver is a train driver – regardless of gender, sexuality, religion, or race – and ASLEF always has, and always will, represent every member.’

Unfinished business

I note with interest the exchanges in the ASLEF Journal between Brothers Steve Hill, Pat Redmond and, latterly, Terry Baxter. Although I voted Remain I am willing to accept the UK’s leave is a non-starter as it would mean Northern Ireland has a different status in the United Kingdom than the other countries and that demeans drivers who have been the stalwarts and long-serving members of this unique and progressive union.

I have been on the railway for many years and that quote was aimed at drivers like me but it’s totally wrong. Male? Yes. Pale? Probably. But if any rep described a BAME person as anything so insulting they would be in serious trouble. Stale? I certainly hope not. I have been a rep for many years and have always treated all drivers equally and all other reps from ASLEF at all levels should do exactly the same. As even old timers were young when we joined the railway.

Steve Harris, Plymouth

Getting ahead of ourselves

ASLEF circular No 361/2019 regarding our response to a draft RAIB report into an overspeed incident at Sandy South Junction on 19 October 2018 states that ASLEF does not support the use of GSMR broadcasts to advise drivers of emergency speed restrictions.
Instead, it says, ‘The driver should simply be brought to a stand in advance of the ESR and advised of the speed restriction and location without exception.’ This is unsatisfactory because, in established railway terminology, if a driver were to be stopped and cautioned ‘in advance of’ a speed restriction the train would have already passed over it. I have never had difficulty in understanding the time-honoured rail phrases ‘in advance of’ and ‘in rear of’ yet it seems they are still causing confusion; hence the reason they were replaced with ‘beyond’ and ‘on approach to’ several years ago.

**Paul Marks, h&s rep, TPE, Preston**

**Ice on the cake of debate**

Am I the only person feeling concern? Surely not! We have had a family pilloried for refusing to ice a cake with a very pointed statement. Now a bus driver has been suspended for refusing to drive a bus with a political decoration and footballers threatened with losing their jobs if they don’t wear certain colours. What next? Vehicles bearing pro- or anti-Brexit slogans? Pro- or anti-abortion or other controversial statements? People criticised for not travelling in them or staffing them? We no longer burn people alive for not going to the ‘right’ church. Britain has a reputation for allowing freedom of conscience. The only way to support celebration of diversity is to ban all political slogans on vehicles that promote a particular or non-inclusive view. Is this not the way to go before this trend gets out of hand?

**Eric Stuart, RMS, East Finchley**

**I don’t give up that easily**

I would like to say a massive thank you to everyone in ASLEF for the wonderful support I have received, with a particular mention to the Portsmouth & Isle of Wight branch who have organised this for me. I was diagnosed with duodenum cancer two years ago and was given a few months to live. (As everyone who knows me knows, I don’t give up that easily!) I have so far undergone three courses of chemotherapy and, while this has improved my condition, it is only a temporary fix. Immunotherapy has been very successful in trials, particularly with the type of genetic defect I have, which made me more prone to certain types of cancer. Sadly, although this treatment has been licensed, our underfunded NHS cannot afford to offer the treatment so, like a number of other people, I have been put in a position of pay or die.

The help I have received gives me a chance of, at least, having a reasonable quality of life, for which I am extremely grateful. I would also like to give belated thanks to Nigel Cummins for the help he gave me in sorting out my ill-health retirement from SWR. I will never give up and hope to be in the ASLEF RMS for many years to come! Thanks again…

**Ruth Vincent, RMS, Portsmouth & IoW**

**Retirement certificates**

I read the letters in last month’s Journal and would like to apologise to Gordon Revell who did not receive a retirement certificate in 2013 after being a loyal ASLEF member for nearly 40 years. I am glad to see that the admin department at head office is sorting out certificates for Gordon and Dave Bamforth. I am not making excuses but I was not aware until a couple of years ago that these certificates existed and need to be ordered through your branch secretary. I found out through social media and did order certificates in 2017 for two of our drivers who retired.

I wonder how many branch secretaries are aware that they can order retirement certificates for their retired or retiring members and if there is some way of informing them. Gordon and Dave, both long time serving and loyal ASLEF members, have rightly been rewarded. It might only be a certificate but it is a nice gesture.

I would also like to congratulate Howard Kaye on his re-election to the EC for District 5 and to EC vice-president Andy Hudd for his re-election as the member for District 7.

**Richy Doran, Lincoln branch secretary**

**Ex-certificates**

Reading the latest Journal about retirement certificates, I retired in October 2014, and never received a certificate. I did get a rather nice thankcard, as I had been branch chairman at Leicester. Please would it be possible to get a certificate now, as I am still a member? (45 years on 09/09). Thank you!

**Ian Farnfield, Retired Members’ Section**

Reading the latest copy of the Locomotive Journal I have not received my retirement certificate. I joined Waterloo branch in 1970 and retired from Eastleigh in 2017.

**Edward Stuart Evans by email**

Mick says: ‘Our admin dept at head office has sorted this out for both of you.’

**Journal on demand online**

I currently receive my Journal both electronically and in paper form. Could I in future just receive it electronically, please?

**Stuart Judd, Brockenhurst**

Mick says: ‘If you complete the electronic form ‘Sign up to the Journal’ in the ASLEF Journal section of our website, you should receive it by email rather than by post.’

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

**THE KING’S CROSS STORY**

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

**442 PIG** poppy badge in support of the Royal British Legion. £6 each plus £1 postage per order from Martin Thompson at Fratton depot; email wdrailbadgeinfo@gmail.com

**GROVE PARK** branch 50th anniversary badge. £6.50 inc p&p. Contact branch secretary Ray Garland 07931 612615 or rgarland1@sky.com

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

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

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

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

**PERTH** branch badge to commemorate 110 years (1908-2018). £6 plus £1 p&p. Cheques payable to Perth branch ASLEF No 134 General. Please contact branch secretary Grant Murchie for details on 07412 453454 or grantmu32@btinternet.com

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

**Don’t let it cost you your job!**
Visions of Eden, heaven and hell

A new exhibition celebrates the work of the radical poet, painter, and printmaker William Blake. KEITH RICHMOND takes his passport to Pimlico – well, the Tube to Millbank – to enjoy some of the most astonishing and exciting images in English art.

It’s hard, these days, to take at face value anyone who claims to see visions. Especially when those visions fundamentally inform their work. Which can be an obstacle to appreciating the work of William Blake, who claimed to see visions all his life. But his radical politics, and his burning sense of injustice at the way the world is stacked against working people, together with his bold, graphic images – which have inspired the likes of Alan Moore, author of Watchmen and V for Vendetta, and Neil Gaiman, who wrote Sandman and American Gods – are startlingly modern and appeal to anyone who loves graphic novels, American comic books, and the Avengers superhero movies of the Marvel cinematic universe.

‘Tyger, Tyger, burning bright / In the forests of the night, / What immortal hand or eye / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?’

‘Blake is an inspiration to visual artists, musicians, poets, and performers worldwide, as well as everyone who aspires to the ideals of personal, spiritual, and creative liberty.’ That’s the view of Martin Myrone and Amy Concannon, curators of a vast and magnificent new exhibition of the visionary’s work at Tate Britain. ‘His heroic story has inspired and invigorated generations; his personal struggles, in a period of political terror and oppression, his technical innovation, his vision, and his political commitment, are perhaps never more pertinent.’

Blake was born in 1757 in Broad Street, Soho, and lived for most of his life in London. His parents were Dissenters. He had no formal education, but attended Henry Pars’ drawing school in the Strand from the age of 10, was apprenticed to the engraver James Basire at 14, and enrolled as a student at the Royal Academy at 21.

He worked as an engraver and illustrator for the bookseller Joseph Johnson, began writing poetry, and was on the periphery of a circle of progressive political radicals which included Tom Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft.

He said that, as a child, angels had appeared to him and, as an adult, believed the dead of his family watched over him and would walk with him each day.

He set up his own print shop in Broad Street in 1784, and captured many of the angels, devils, and grotesques he claimed he saw in his poems, engravings and watercolours. He set out alternative scriptures, foundation myths, and a parallel cosmology, which have proved irresistible to writers of science-fiction and fantasy.

‘Love seeketh not itself to please, / Nor for itself hath any care, / But for another gives its ease, / And builds a Heaven in Hell’s Despair.’

Alongside the commercial work he undertook as an illustrator and printmaker, he laboured on his own material, for some of it, such as Songs of Innocence (1789), developing new techniques to combine text and a coloured image in a single print, while works such as The French Revolution (1791), America: A Prophecy (1793) and Visions of the Daughters of Albion (1793) combine visionary ecstasy with a political fervour that made the authorities very uneasy.

His flowing lines, and the violent energy of his verse, make him very modern, but they made the rich and powerful – already anxious after losing the American colonies to ex-pat English radicals, and following the toppling of l’ancien régime in France – very nervous.

Blake did not paint lords and ladies, in their finery, in oils. His pictures and pamphlets – even Songs of Experience (1793) which includes the celebrated poems Tyger Tyger and O Rose Thou Art Sick – sold modestly.

And although he was influential, Blake was poor for most of his life. His wife Catherine would often put an empty plate in front of him at dinner to make the point that it was time he made some money.

‘And did the Countenance Divine, / Shine forth upon our clouded hills? / Among these dark Satanic Mills?’

As well as images from its own extensive collection, the Tate has secured some terrific pictures that have not been seen in Britain for many years. The result is a real treat, especially when those visions are bookended by Albion Rose and The Ancient of Days, is stunning.

When Blake died in 1827 the general view was that he was gifted, but barking. ‘There was no doubt that this poor man was mad,’ muttered William Wordsworth, ‘but there is something in the madness of the man which interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron and Walter Scott.’

William Blake is at Tate Britain, Millbank, London, SW1P 4RG until 2 February. Admission £18; concessions £17; 12-18 years £5; children under 12 free.
On Track

I’m on the road again

ETER Kaldheim graduated summa cum laude from Dartmouth College and worked as an editor at the publishers Harcourt Brace before his life fell apart when, with a lucrative sideline in dealing drugs, he made the mistake of selling cocaine to an undercover cop and ended up in jail on Rikers Island. After which, inspired by his literary hero Jack Kerouac, he hit the road as a hobo.

In his new memoir Idiot Wind (Canongate, £14.99) Kaldheim, who now fishes for fluke on Long Island, explains how to hop a freight train.

‘I’d had plenty of adventures but I still hadn’t experienced the thrill of hopping a freight train, like Jack did. I made my way to the rail yard at Vancouver, Washington state, and hid in some track-side bushes to await the Union Pacific freight train coming through at noon. Fifteen minutes before it was due, two tramps about my age came down the tracks. They were planning to catch the same train and, when I admitted I was a rookie, promised they’d make sure I got safely aboard.

The train slowed down as it entered the yard but was still travelling at close to 10mph as we ran alongside an empty flatcar. Keith lunged for the short ladder at the rear and made it look easy as he clambered aboard. Bulldog followed and yelled, “Toss your duffle bag up, then grab the ladder!”

I did as I was told and, when I reached the top rung, he seized my wrist and yanked me onto the wooden deck. By God, I thought, I did it at last!

‘Soon we were hurtling through the countryside at 50mph. We hunkered down with our backs against the flatcar’s head wall, which made a perfect windbreak, and settled in for the long ride north.

‘The noise of the wind made conversation impossible, but I didn’t mind.’

Keith Richmond

Prize Crossword

Crossword 162 by Tom Williams

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Across
1 Electric razor
2 Dangerous
3 Paper thrown at weddings
4 Breakfast meat
5 Starter
6 Lives of a cat?
7 Milk or beer measure
8 A mutual agreement
9 Prisoner’s response to a charge
10 The A in A-bomb
11 Curd or balm
12 An angel to watch over you
13 Burn superficially

Down
1 Large canvas bags
2 Public declaration
3 Baby’s noisy shaking toy
4 Offer money for favours
5 Doctor treating mental disorders
6 Young swan
7 Coal mine
8 Popped vegetable
9 Furniture shiner
10 Chipping tuber
11 Divine spirit
12 Under-age person

Solution to Crossword 161

Across:
1 Screwdriver 7 Plum 8 Tantrum 9 Ant 10 Spurn 11 Heckle 13 Grease 16 Caned 18 Rap 19 Sternum 20 Etch 21 Westminster

Down:
1 Silage 2 Remark 3 Wattle 4 Rants 5 Verruca 6 Romance 11 Hacksaw 12 Confess 13 German 14 Expert 15 Saucer 17 Denim

Congratulations to Robin Bates of Graigwen, Pontypridd, 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 161st prize crossword in the September edition of the ASLEF Journal. If you successfully complete this month’s crossword please send the solution to the Editor, ASLEF Journal, 77 St John Street, Clerkenwell, London, EC1M 4NN by 14 October

ASLEF’s legal services

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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Please return coupon to: ASLEF, 77 St John Street, Clerkenwell, London, EC1M 4NN

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