Oh, you don’t get me
I’m part of the union

Inside: We mark the day, 140 years ago, when William Ullyott became ASLEF’s first member; Gregor Gall on what went wrong at Thomas Cook; and Darran Brown celebrates LGBT+ history
railway enginemen’s tax free saver plans

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HS2 should go ahead

‘VE been reminding people that it was the trade unions that formed the Labour Party and most working men only got the vote because of the women’s suffrage movement which removed property requirements for men and allowed women over 30 to vote. This led to the election of the first trade union MPs who formed the party, under the auspices of the unions, and, for the first time, gave working people a voice in Parliament.

We now have five years in opposition and the chance to choose a leader and deputy leader to take us from opposition into government. One of the benefits of union membership, and of being in the political fund, is that you get a say in who that might be. The executive committee will shortly be deciding, after conversations have taken place with all the candidates, who we endorse and, as always, we urge you to use your vote.

We took the time to contribute our views to the much-vaunted Williams rail review, but it is concerning that the Prime Minister, and industry stakeholders, were saying its recommendations would be adopted before the report was even published. This does not auger well for future engagement but we are not surprised; this is a Prime Minister who, as Mayor of London, hid from and did not engage with trade unions.

The Oakervee report says the cost of HS2 will balloon to £106bn; but it should still go ahead. £7bn has already been spent, Andy Burnham and other northern leaders say it should not be truncated, and upgrading northern Victorian infrastructure is not the answer. HS2 is the only way to deliver real capacity. We need it to deliver a boost to construction, the economy, and to be at the forefront of a green revolution.

I upset a few people by saying we are against forced labour, indenture, or modern slavery, by being denied the right to strike. This was deliberate. It is chosen, forceful, language that reflects the strong opinions of all those I have met in our industry and elsewhere (without the industrial language) about our position. If this is what it takes to have the voice of train drivers heard, we will not apologise for doing so. The impact on industrial relations will be counterproductive and we will do what you have told us to do to defend our rights.

Thank you. Your passion, solidarity, and unity invigorates us for the battles ahead.

Yours fraternally

Mick Whelan, general secretary
Leaders of the pack

SLEF’s executive committee will meet on Monday 10 February to endorse a candidate in the elections for leader and deputy leader of the Labour Party. The eight-strong EC – Jim Baxter, Dave Calfe, Marz Colombini, Andy Hudd, Howard Kaye, John Metcalfe, Mark Wakenshaw, and Terry Wilkinson – will make a decision about who to support after considering a report by general secretary Mick Whelan, who is also chair of LabourUnions, and a member of Labour’s NEC, and having listened to what each of the candidates has to say about the future direction of the party.

All the candidates have said they are committed to bringing Britain’s railways back into public ownership – a policy not just in the last Labour manifesto, and not just the policy of this trade union, but a policy that is popular with passengers, too.

There are now four candidates for leader – Rebecca Long Bailey, MP for Salford & Eccles; Lisa Nandy, Wigan; Keir Starmer, Holborn & St Pancras; and Emily Thornberry, Islington South & Finsbury – after Jess Phillips, Birmingham Yardley, stood down on Tuesday 21 January.

And five candidates for deputy leader – Rosena Allin-Khan, MP for Tooting; Richard Burgon, Leeds East; Dawn Butler, Brent Central; Ian Murray, Edinburgh South; and Angela Rayner, Ashton-under-Lyne.

Contenders for the two positions – who each had to be nominated by 22 Labour MPs or MEPs – now have to get nominations from at least 33 Constituency Labour Parties or three affiliates, of which two must be trade unions, representing at least 5% of the affiliated membership. Nominations close on Friday 14 February.

If they cross that hurdle, they will make the ballot from which Labour Party members, trade union members, members of affiliated societies, and registered supporters will vote. Voting, which begins on Friday 21 February, closes at 12pm on Thursday 2 April and the results will be announced at a special conference on Saturday 4 April.

GERMANY SLASHES LONG DISTANCE RAIL FARES IN BID TO GO GREEN IN 2020

Germany has cut fares – for the first time in 17 years – for long distance rail travel in response to fears about climate change. Passengers making journeys of 50km (31 miles) or more on Deutsche Bahn’s intercity express services have seen fares slashed by 10% in a bid to make train travel more attractive.

FATAL AUTONOMOUS VEHICLE CRASH SPARKS FEDERAL INVESTIGATION IN US

US investigators are examining a fatal crash in Los Angeles involving a Tesla car equipped with a semi-autonomous driver assistance system to see whether the autopilot played a part in the accident. Two people in a Honda Civic died when the Tesla S ran a red light and smashed into the other vehicle.

QUOTE...

‘The Daily Mail, magnetically attracted throughout its history to the wrong answer, if not also the wrong question’

– Colin Kidd. Professor of History at the University of St Andrews

ELECTRONIC SUPersonic

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

QUOTE...

‘While it’s easy to say ScotRail’s Hitachi Class 385s have a face only a mother could love, the truth is they are simply so much more practical to use than, say, a Class 365, which had no corridor connections.’

– Pip Dunn. Rail

I love trade unions

Heart Unions week – organised by the TUC to encourage workers to join a trade union – is being held from Monday 10 to Sunday 16 February. ‘It’s a chance to tell the story about why unions are vital for everyone at work,’ says TUC general secretary Frances O’Grady. ‘And encourage people who aren’t yet in a union to join. A chance for reps and activists to publicise what they’ve been doing and make the case for union membership.’

REACH FOR THE SKY

Mick Whelan was interviewed live by Sophy Ridge on her agenda-setting show on Sky News on Sunday 19 January about the Labour Party leadership election.

TWEETS OF THE MONTH

Greater Anglia’s brand new intercity trains have now entered passenger service between Norwich and London Liverpool Street #NewTrains @GreaterAngliaPR

Please @GreaterAngliaPR explain why new 12 car intercity trains only have 3 wheelchair spaces rather than 4 to comply with PRM-TSI. Can wheelchair users access the café? Is there wheelchair space in first? Jelley Head @LordOrk

Half of workers plan to ask their boss for a pay rise this year – report by @roberthalf @AlanJonesPA

Why only half!!! @FinnBrennan

Really disappointing no mention of role of @NUJofficial supporting @SamiraAhmedUK in her equalpay case in TheObserver. Just a fleeting, critical reference to #tradeunions, without whom there’d never have been equal pay or sex discrimination laws @JoStevensLabour

If anyone has a right to be mad at Harry and Meghan it’s the people of Sussex, who have been left leaderless without their duke and are now defenceless against incursions from Hampshire and Kent. @annevclark

As Scottish Labour surveys the ashes of the latest political earthquake, some fundamental questions must be asked and we cannot run away from the independence question. As a democrat, first and foremost, I accept that the people of Scotland have the right to choose their own future. @NeilFindlayMSP
Back on track

Ivor the Engine, with Jones the Steam on the footplate, braves the worst of the winter

LANS have been drawn up to bring Ivor the Engine back to the screen – but as an animated or live action film rather than as a television series.

The loveable locomotive and his friends at the Merioneth & Llantisiliy Rail Traction Company in the ‘top left-hand corner of Wales’ starred in 32 ten-minute black and white programmes made for ITV in 1959 and a further 40 five-minute colour episodes broadcast on BBC1 between 1975 and 1977.

The stop motion animation was done in a disused cow shed at Blean, a village near Canterbury, in Kent, by Oliver Postgate and Peter Firmin. As well as Ivor, the series featured Jones the Steam – Edwin Jones, Ivor’s cheerful and kind-hearted driver – Dai, the bluff station master at Llanio, Owen the Signal, Evans the Song, and Idris the Dragon.

The programmes – which owed something to the poetry and prose of Dylan Thomas – were immensely popular and Postgate’s son Daniel marked the 60th anniversary of the first broadcast by revealing that he is pitching new stories to film companies.

Oliver Postgate, who also made Bagpuss, The Clangers, and Pogles’ Wood, was the grandson of Labour Party leader George Lansbury; a conscientious socialist, as well as a conscientious objector, whose scripts often reflected his left-wing views.

QUOTE...

‘All the men in my family went sailing or played golf – two things I found unutterably grim.’ – Rupert Everett on Desert Island Discs

...UNQUOTE

CONFERENCES & RALLIES

The Welsh Labour Party conference is at the Venue Cymru in Llandudno from Friday 27 to Sunday 29 March. The Scottish Trades Union Congress is at the Concert Hall, Perth, from Monday 20 to Wednesday 22 April. Workers’ Memorial Day is Tuesday 28 April.

ASLEF’s annual assembly of delegates is at the Hilton Hotel in Cardiff from Monday 11 to Friday 15 May. The Wales TUC is at the Venue Cymru in Llandudno from Tuesday 19 to Thursday 21 May. The 

STUC LGBT+ conference is at the Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel, Glasgow, from Saturday 23 to Sunday 24 May. The STUC youth conference is at the Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel, Glasgow, from Saturday 27 to Sunday 28 June. The Durham Miners’ Gala is on Saturday 11 July. The Tolpuddle Martyrs’ festival, near Dorchester, is from Friday 17 to Sunday 19 July. The Burston strike school rally at Burston, near Diss in Norfolk, is on Sunday 6 September. The Trades Union Congress is at the Brighton Centre from Sunday 13 to Wednesday 16 September. The Labour Party conference is at the ACC convention centre in Liverpool from Saturday 19 to Wednesday 23 September.

500 CLUB: William Brooks, with number 93, won the January draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £460.

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

Off the Rails

MAURICIO POCHETTINO is much-missed in north London. And not just by Tottenham fans who liked the way his team played the beautiful game. People loved the poetry of Poch, particularly his aphorism about the cow in the field which watches the trains go by but can’t explain the timetable. In September 2018, on the eve of a Champions League tie with Inter Milan, he was asked if the experience of defeat against Juventus had helped. ‘It is like a cow that, every day for 10 years, sees the train cross in front at the same time but, if you ask the cow what time is the train going to come, it won’t have the right answer.’ Being there, experiencing the same thing again and again does not, he thought, necessarily lead to greater understanding.

PAUL ROUTLEDGE, the man from the Mirror, pictured here beside a rainbow in Thurso while researching his feature about the Far North line for last month’s ASLEF Journal, told Charlie Whelan, Gordon Brown’s one-time bag man, who took the piccies for Paul’s piece, ‘To my nostalgic glee, I was introduced as the man from the Locomotive Journal by Inverness branch chair Andrew Gardner. Paul, you see, is the son of a railwayman, who often travels with his ASLEF executive bag (advertised on page 6) and his brother-in-law John Richards used to work at ASLEF head office, helping general secretary Lew Adams, and then Mick Rix, put together the Locomotive Journal each month.

ALASDAIR GRAY, the great if idiosyncratic writer and artist who celebrated his native Glasgow in novels such as Lanark, Janine, and Poor Things, which he described as a ‘passionate ‘Scottish socialist’s love letter to the Victorian period’ fervently believed in Scottish independence. But when his 1992 pamphlet Why Scots Should Rule Scotland was republished for the 1997 general election he persuasively argued that it was an anti-Conservative, not an anti-English, rant.

DANIEL MALLORY, an American editor and author who also writes under the name AJ Finn, whose novel The Woman in the Window has been turned into a film starring Amy Adams, Gary Oldman, and Julianne Moore, to be released in May, finds ‘public transport conducive to reading’.

Writing in Areté, he muses: ‘The conclusion of Patricia Cornwell’s Postmortem jangled my nerves even as the school bus jangled my limbs; as a “flame-green daybreak” dawned over Gormenghast in Titus Groan, my Oxford to London bus braked at Marble Arch; and it was on the New York City subway that I scanned the final lines of a Booker-winning dirge and gently placed the volume on the seat beside me. “Someone will give it a good home,” I assured it.’

RICHARD FAIRBRASS – one half of the ‘90s novelty act Right Said Fred – is in trouble after some ill-advised tweets on matters of public import. Fairbrass, who now sings ‘I’m Too Sexy on revival roadshows at Butlin’s, slammed Jo Cox’s husband on Twitter and then doubled down with some rather right-wing opinions on Brexit, prompting really sexy progressives to refer to him as Reich Said Fred.

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Shapps sounds the whistle on Northern

FTER Prime Minister Boris Johnson was cornered in the Commons on Wednesday 8 January by MPs complaining about the company they call Northern Fail the Secretary of State for Transport, Grant Shapps, was sent to Leeds to make a non-statement – or, at least, the same statement he’s been making for the last six months describing the service as ‘completely unacceptable’. He said: ‘It has now been confirmed from the most recent financial information that the franchise will only be able to continue for a number of months. The proposal I requested from Arriva Rail North is being evaluated. Following completion of this process longer-term decisions will be made in the light of the recommendations of the Williams rail review.’

But what does Shapps know? In a written ministerial statement on Thursday 9 January he referred to his department, the Department for Transport, as the Department of Transport. ‘I will consider whether to award ARN a short-term management contract or ask the Department of Transport’s own operator of last resort to step in and deliver passenger services.’ You’d think he would know the name of his own government department, wouldn’t you? ‘But that’s typical of his sloppy Tory thinking,’ said GS Mick Whelan. ‘The right thing to do would be to bring all Britain’s railways back into public ownership. The railway is a natural monopoly, privatisation has failed, and no tinkering will alter that fact. Let’s put the wheels and the steel back together for passengers, for staff, and for the businesses of Britain.’

The history book on the shelf is always repeating itself

New stats from the Office of Rail and Road show that London Waterloo, with 94,192,690 entries and exits, is still Britain’s busiest railway station. Waterloo is followed by London Victoria (74,715,808); London Liverpool Street (69,482,532); London Bridge (61,308,364); Birmingham New Street (47,927,772); London Euston (46,146,456); London Stratford (41,206,226); London Paddington (38,181,588); London St Pancras (35,984,204); and London King’s Cross (34,645,924).

Outside the capital, the busiest stations, after Birmingham New Street, are Glasgow Central (32,797,088); Leeds (30,838,554); Manchester Piccadilly (30,251,948); Edinburgh Waverley (23,872,996); Gatwick Airport (21,225,246); Brighton (17,384,634); Glasgow Queen Street (17,207,208); and Reading (17,080,738).

DB Cargo fined £1.2 million for 25,000 volt shock to teenage trespasser

DB Cargo has been fined £1.2 million, with £27,873 costs, by District Judge Wheeler sitting at Wolverhampton magistrates’ court after the company pleaded guilty to an offence under the Health & Safety at Work Act. The Office of Rail and Road brought the prosecution after a 13-year-old trespassing boy suffered 40% burns and life-changing injuries when he had a 25,000 volt electric shock from overhead power lines after entering Bescot Yard freight terminal through a hole in the fence.

DRIVER AND CONDUCTOR ATTACKED

A train driver and conductor were attacked at Cleethorpes station in Lincolnshire at 6.45pm on Saturday 21 December. British Transport Police say two ‘aggressive’ men grabbed the driver – and then the conductor when he intervened – and have appealed for information about the assailants.

ASBESTOS DELAYS TRACK REPLACEMENT

The discovery of asbestos has delayed the replacement of old track with new infrastructure including noise-absorbing padding – designed to reduce the screeching sound on the noisiest section of the Underground – between Leytonstone and Wanstead on the Central line in London.

Raising the spa

Leamington Spa branch was pleased to welcome Dave Calfe, EC president, and Phil Spice, Vic Waite, Tony Wilson and Roy Woodward from the RMS, to our December AGM. Dave gave an interesting report of national issues including industrial action on Tyne & Wear Metro; disciplinary procedures on CrossCountry and Great Western; Medigold; EMUs for the Birmingham cross city line; eyesight standards for the train driver licence; toilet breaks, in addition to PNBS; and problems with the new IET and Class 230 Vivarail trains.

The RMS spoke about their activities over the year including their new catering arrangements for meals, visits to West Midlands council, and the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway at Toddington. The branch then presented them with gifts to raffle for the RMS Christmas party, as we do every year. We would like to thank all the visitors to our little branch over the past year, and wish everyone a very Happy New Year!

Nick Walker, branch chair
TOCs push up fares yet again

ICK Whelan attacked the privatised train companies for driving through another round of above-inflation rail fare rises when people went back to work on Thursday 2 January.

The GS said: ‘Once again the TOCs are telling passengers to pay more money for a poorer service and that’s not a great offer, is it? Not for passengers, not for businesses, and not for the British economy which needs a modern rail network to move people, packages, and freight around this country.

‘Commuters complain about delays and cancellations, the consumer group Which? says the privatised train operators are one of this country’s least trusted groups – beaten to bottom place only by secondhand car dealers! – wages aren’t keeping pace with inflation and yet the train companies, with the help of their new chum at the DfT, Grant Shapps, are pushing up prices. Again!

‘What a way to run the railway! We are calling for Britain’s railways to be brought back into public ownership. That will bring

Long life batteries

Vivarail’s Class 230 loco – converted from D78 District line Underground stock – has achieved a UK first by travelling for 40 miles on battery power.

Adrian Shooter, the company’s chief executive, said: ‘We began our work on battery power a couple of years ago and, since then, have tested the train in passenger service, built the fast charge system, and proved the range it can operate. With a new type of battery in our upcoming production trains we can confidently predict a range of 60 miles between charges, with a 10 minute charge time, and look forward to providing emission-free trains to play a significant part in decarbonising Britain’s rail network.’

Victory on Victoria

It was a pleasure to attend Victoria line branch’s AGM just after a massive victory to protect our members’ working conditions. Everyone pulled together, resulting in a massive ‘Yes’ vote for industrial action, thus giving our negotiating team a strong hand to play.

EC8 Terry Wilkinson and trains council members Maeve Hanley and Graham Dean said ‘We are proud to be part of a successful dispute, not just to protect our members’ working conditions, but to improve them: Both ends of the Victoria line have strong activists, resulting in new members. Well done to all involved! Gary Comfort, trains council

Shake, rattle and roll

It’s the end of the line for Britain’s oldest train fleet – the Class 483 electric multiple units built for London Underground in 1938 – which will be replaced by the Island Line on the Isle of Wight this summer. Old tube trains first ran on the island in 1967, the current fleet in 1989, and will be replaced by four Vivarail EMUs based on old D78 District line stock.

The clean green Class 230 machine is on track to help reduce Britain’s carbon emissions and not for the British economy which

LORD GNOME ON SOUTH WESTERN

Private Eye ran this dry story in its News in Brief column in January: ‘South Western Railway has apologised to commuters who didn’t notice that the month-long strike action by RMT members had begun.’ “They’re too used to every other train being cancelled and those which do run being so filthy and overcrowded that pregnant women and children are forced to sit on the floor. We apologise that nobody has spotted the difference, and we will work to make our strikebound service even more chaotic and miserable until they do finally notice”.

NILS POINTS FOR MICHAEL GREEN

Nils Pratley, financial editor of The Guardian, had a bit of fun in his Business View column last month: ‘What does a Transport Secretary do on a day when rail passengers are grumbling about annual increases in fares? One diversionary tactic is to put the boot into one of the most unpopular franchises in the country – Arriva-operated Northern Rail – to give the impression the government is primed for radical intervention.’

MACRON IN PENSIONS SHOWDOWN

Philippe Martinez, general secretary of the CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail) trade union, has called on all workers in France to join the protests against President Emmanuel Macron’s plans for pension reform – which boil down to making people work longer for less – and have resulted in police firing teargas at demonstrators at Gare du Nord and Gare de l’Est in Paris.

QUOTE…

‘All Johnson has ever been about is the ruthless pursuit of power’

– John McDonnell

…UNQUOTE

Vivarail’s Class 230 based on old D78 District line stock. will be replaced by four vivarail EMUs 1967, the current fleet in 1989, and it’s the end of the line for Britain’s oldest train fleet – the Class 483 electric multiple units built for London Underground in 1938 – which will be replaced by the Island Line on the Isle of Wight this summer. Old tube trains first ran on the island in 1967, the current fleet in 1989, and will be replaced by four Vivarail EMUs based on old D78 District line stock.
Tally-ho! Toffs on the line!

RAIN drivers are used to dealing with hazards such as stray dogs, deer, cows, and, yes, leaves on the line. But huntsmen in all their finery in full pursuit of a fox? Now that’s a new one.

But that was the hazard that Mo Khan, Birmingham Moor Street, was faced with on New Year’s Day while working a Chiltern Railways service at Fenny Compton between Leamington Spa and Banbury.

It was, as British Transport Police say, ‘a serious incident’ – made worse by the fact that when Mo made several attempts to remove the trespassers from the line so the service could continue he was completely ignored.

Brian Corbett, District 7 Organiser, said: ‘Everyone who works on the railway treats trespass seriously. It’s a crime.

‘Made worse by the attitude of these upper-class toffs who ignored the appeals of our driver to get off the tracks. They think we’re peasants who should not interfere with their sport. But they were out hunting foxes which is also illegal now.

‘We’ve got clear footage that shows the perpetrators and I hope the magistrates don’t turn a blind eye, just because these fox-hunters are the backbone of the country establishment.’

Mark Goodall, operations director of Chiltern Railways, said: ‘This was a serious incident that stopped trains running and Chiltern would like to support Network Rail in attempting a successful prosecution of the individuals involved:’

Martin Colmey, head of operations delivery, central route, NW&C region, Network Rail, added: ‘Such a blatant disregard for railway safety must not go unpunished.’

And Simon Martin, trespass and vandalism manager, Network Rail, after reviewing video and still footage of the incident, said: ‘Completely agree. I’ll be pushing the British Transport Police for swift action with such clear images.’

TOCs bleeding the railway dry

The TUC has said that the New Year rail fare rises (see page 7) cannot be justified when the private rail companies have paid out more than £1.2 billion in dividends to shareholders in the last five years.

‘Working people who rely on trains to get to work are getting a raw deal,’ said Frances O’Grady.

‘People have had enough of over-crowded and unreliable services. The number one priority should be running a world-class railway service, not subsidising shareholders. No more excuses – the government must end the failed privatisation and still footage of the incident, said:’

‘Completely agree. I’ll be pushing the British Transport Police for swift action with such clear images.’

40 up!

Peterborough freight driver John Kowal (right) is presented with his 40 years loyal to ASLEF badge by GBRf company council rep Barry Hare.

‘Congratulations to John on this huge achievement,’ said Barry.

JOHNSON SIGNALS THE END OF THE LINE FOR WMT

Boris Johnson says ‘the bell is tolling’ – although not, presumably, the bongs of Big Ben – for West Midlands Trains. The Prime Minister’s remark, on Wednesday 8 January, came after Andy Street, the Conservative Mayor of the West Midlands, said he had ‘lost all faith’ in the operator after delays, cancellations and overcrowding. And it followed criticism by Grant Shapps of Northern Rail (see page 6) and by the DfT of TransPennine Express and South Western Railway.

CUMMINGS CALLS FOR WEIRDOS AND MISFITS

Dominic Cummings, Boris Johnson’s Oxford-educated special adviser, one-time director of Vote Leave, and a man married to the daughter of Sir Humphry Wakefield, Baronet, of Chillingham Castle, Northumberland, has called on his blog for ‘weirdos and misfits’ to join Britain’s post-Brexit civil service. He would, he said, prefer to employ a ‘Chinese-Cuban free runner from a crime family hired by the KGB’ than someone ‘babbling about gender identity diversity blah blah.’

PASSENGER HURT WHEN WAVE SMASHES WINDOW

A passenger was injured when a massive wave hit the 10.57am GWR service from Exmouth to Paignton at Dawlish Warren in Devon on Thursday 16 January. The line – one of Britain’s most picturesque – is famously vulnerable to the elements because it runs right by the sea.
The 136th Durham Miners’ Gala will be held on Saturday 11 July 2020

Please support the Big Meeting by joining the Friends of Durham Miners’ Gala
www.friendsofdurhamminersgala.org
**So what went wrong with Thomas Cook?**

**GREGOR GALL, an affiliate research associate at the University of Glasgow, and editor of the Scottish Left Review, lifts the lid on the overnight collapse of Thomas Cook**

Or a long time in the 1980s and 1990s, the irritatingly catchy advertising slogan entreating holidaymakers, ‘Don’t just book it! Thomas Cook it!’ was on many people’s tongues, as well as television ads, because so many package holidays for working people seeking some sun, sand and sea in the summer were booked through Thomas Cook. So the collapse of a company, established in 1841 to get temperance supporters to meetings, on 23 September was a momentous event, for politics, business and public life.

The story was not consigned to the travel pages or business sections, but was front page news day after day. It seemed to be another case of ‘how the mighty are fallen’ as a result of corporate greed and management incompetence, with senior executives taking home £20 million in salaries and bonuses in the five years before the company’s collapse. But, if you dig a little deeper, a couple of worrying aspects emerge.

**EYE-WATERING £9 BILLION DEBT**

First, the way in which the firm was allowed by government regulators and international banks to become increasingly indebted over time. I have previously written in these pages about how company accounting regulations in Britain allow debt levels to be massaged to make them appear much less serious than they actually are. Indeed, the Official Receiver’s report put Thomas Cook’s liabilities at an eye-watering £9 billion.

And, second, there is the extremely cavalier attitude of the UK government to the fate of 9,000 employees (in Britain alone) and 150,000 British holidaymakers then abroad.

Because Thomas Cook was owned by four railway companies it, too, was taken into public ownership by Clement Attlee’s great post-war Labour government from 1948 until it was privatised in 1972. Thereafter, it grew, slowly but surely, and was bought and sold many times over, sometimes by German companies. This link to Germany would have been very profitable and desirable. In 2007, Thomas Cook merged with MyTravel and began selling in Germany. The story was not consigned to the travel pages or business sections, but was front page news day after day. It seemed to be another case of ‘how the mighty are fallen’ as a result of corporate greed and management incompetence, with senior executives taking home £20 million in salaries and bonuses in the five years before the company’s collapse. But, if you dig a little deeper, a couple of worrying aspects emerge.

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Clearly, there were many parts of Thomas Cook which other capitalists thought were still very profitable and desirable.

What is not widely known is that Thomas Cook’s two airline operations in Germany continue to fly. Condor Flugdienst and an associated company, Thomas Cook Aviation, secured additional credit facilities of €380 million from the German government to keep flying and a Frankfurt court authorised investor protection measures to allow Condor to be restructured. This protected the jobs of around 5,000 workers there.

It’s often been said that it’s easier to sack workers in Britain than in Germany. I recall Tony Woodley, then general secretary of the Transport & General Workers’ Union, making this point in the 1990s about redundancies made by Ford in Britain rather than in Germany. But the other side of the coin also appears to be true from the case of Thomas Cook. It also seems easier for workers’ jobs to be protected and saved in Germany.

This brings us back to the Christmas experience that many Thomas Cook workers endured rather than enjoyed. Hays Travel has only pledged to re-employ around one in four of the company’s travel shop workers. Although many Thomas Cook staff worked for free – from neighbouring coffee shops – to help out distraught customers, this counted for nothing.

Unions at the company, Unite and the TSSA, were left to help workers try to pick up the pieces. As the liquidation happened literally overnight, no workers were awarded redundancy pay or the like. They found out how difficult it is to access Jobseekers’ Allowance and other benefits such as Universal Credit. Many were forced to visit food banks for the first time. A survey by Unite found that only one in five of those who had lost their jobs had found other employment by Christmas.

**CORPORATE GREED AND APATHY**

Before Christmas, the TSSA lodged protective award claims on behalf of its members at a number of locations where more than 20 former Thomas Cook staff were employed. A protective award is for compensation of up to 90 days’ gross pay for failure by an employer to inform and consult over dismissal on the grounds of redundancy. But the law stipulates that a workplace must employ 20 or more workers for a claim to be made. Unfortunately, many Thomas Cook staff worked in smaller shops with fewer than 20 workers.

Both Unite and the TSSA have called for an independent inquiry into the government’s handling of the company’s collapse. Unfortunately, the result of the general election on 12 December means this is extremely unlikely to happen. And, as with so many other things, there is now no prospect of a reform of the rules by which corporations operate. So we can expect more examples of Thomas Cook-style collapses where workers pay the price of corporate greed and government indifference.
VER the past 40 years political and societal attitudes towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people has changed beyond recognition. This has been achieved by the dedicated campaigning of LGBT+ individuals and allies who have worked tirelessly to achieve equality for all. ASLEF’s LGBT+ committee has played, and continues to play, an important part in this within the trade union movement and wider society.

February is the month that LGBT+ history is celebrated. What is it – and why is it important?

First, it’s an annual celebration that provides education and insight into the issues that face the LGBT+ community. The aim of is, primarily, to teach people about the history of the gay rights movement and to promote an inclusive modern society irrespective of colour, gender, and disability.

It is an opportunity to honour those who’ve come before us and to raise awareness of the work we still have to do. Our history has some very well-known characters like Noel Coward, Rock Hudson, George Takei, and Harvey Milk. Writers such as Oscar Wilde, WH Auden, Gertrude Stein, Henry James, Walt Whitman, and Somerset Maugham.

And scientists and explorers, including Alan Turing, Amelia Earhart, Leonardo da Vinci, Florence Nightingale, Alan Hart (one of the first female to male trans people), and Sally Ride. But these people represent just the tip of the iceberg. Oh, and I almost forgot, someone no one expected to be on the list. Liberace.

SOME LOVE TOO LITTLE, SOME TOO LONG

The Buggery Act of 1533, passed during the reign of Henry VIII, made male homosexuals the targets for persecution, completely outlawing sodomy in Britain and, by extension, what would become the British Empire. Convictions were punishable by death. It was not until 1861 that the death penalty was abolished and replaced by a minimum of 10 years in prison. Then, in 1885, the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which became known as the Blackmailer’s Charter, made any male homosexual act illegal; even expressing affection between two men was all that was required to bring a prosecution. Female homosexuality was never explicitly targeted by legislation.

In the post-war period, transgender identities started to become visible. In 1951 Roberta Cowell, a former World War II Spitfire pilot became the first transgender woman to undergo vaginoplasty in the UK and continued her career as a racing driver.

The Wolfenden Report on homosexual offences and prostitution, published in 1957, recommended that ‘homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offence’ and represented a watershed, by promoting more positive conversations into the issues that face the LGBT+ community. The aim of is, primarily, to teach people about the history of the gay rights movement and to promote an inclusive modern society irrespective of colour, gender, and disability.

The Gender Recognition Act of 2004 gave trans people legal recognition of their gender, acquiring a new birth certificate. There is still an ongoing debate over reforming the GRA to one of self-recognition as exists in the Republic of Ireland. The fight is far from over and LGBT+ people are still seen as other, rather than everyday.

Equality has never been given but has been attained through protests, pamphlets, demonstrations, and confrontation.

Some 70 countries still have anti-gay propaganda laws; 35 of these are former members of the British Empire, and many still have the death penalty, compared to 25 that legally accept marriage equality.

THE MAN HAD KILLED THE THING HE LOVED

Things have changed, and are changing, though there is now a rise on the right trying to reverse our gains. The USA is still backward regarding trans issues and gays in the military. In the UK assaults on LGBT+ people have risen 78% since 2013 and these are reported crimes; research reveals that 81% of hate crimes go unreported.

So now is the time to increase our voice and visibility to push back against the rise in hate and move forward with a progressive equality agenda. The need for the committees is as important as ever. The keys in the closet have been rattled but the doors haven’t yet been flung open.

Support they needed. This pernicious piece of legislation was repealed by Labour in 2003 but protests against lessons about LGBT relationships at Anderton Park primary school in Birmingham, by Muslim parents who say such lessons are against their ‘religious beliefs and family values’, show the struggle for equality isn’t over.

A Labour government gave us the Civil Partnership Act in 2004 allowing same-sex couples to enter legally binding relationships. In 2013 the Marriage Act allowed same-sex couples in England and Wales to marry; Scotland followed in 2014. And at the end of last year a ruling by the Supreme Court meant that heterosexual couples can now enter into civil partnerships, too.

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There’s another train coming down that same old track

It is 140 years ago, this month, since ASLEF was founded as a national trade union for locomotive engineers – train drivers – and firemen working on the footplate of steam trains at the high point of the Victorian age. KEITH RICHMOND looks back to a pivotal moment not only in the history of Britain’s railways, but for the labour movement – and, a few years later, for the Labour Party – in this country.

WILLIAM Ullyott and 55 colleagues – all either train drivers or firemen when the job was hot, dirty, and dangerous – formed the first registered lodge of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen in Sheffield 140 years ago this month on Saturday 7 February 1880.

A momentous decision which prompted Charles Perry of York Place, Griffithstown, Pontypool, one of the men who was instrumental in forming this trade union, to write to him two days later:

‘You will allow me in the name of our men to congratulate you on your energy and, I may hope, your complete success, in the formation of a branch and, at the same time, to inform you that the M&S men are the first founders of the Society. Your men have the honour of being the first members. Trusting the flame you have lighted in Sheffield may never be extinguished, and that soon enginemen and firemen may take their proper place in the front rank of skilled labour.’

The railway boom in Britain in the 19th century – partly a result of, and partly an enabler for, the industrial revolution – brought benefits, labour.

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HARD TIME FOR RAILWAYMEN

The decade of the 1870s had been an atrociously hard time for railwaymen. There had been many fatalities and accidents to men and boys in the service, and all were ‘wage slaves’ in a real grim sense. The system that brought vastly increased wealth to commerce, banks, mines, and all financial interests, was only a durance vile for the men who ran the system.

Something was about to happen to break the suppression, and the great venture was launched by the drivers and firemen. Seven men of Monmouthshire, stirred by the arbitrary attitude of the Great Western, breathed the great inspiration. The same project was being confidentially whispered at Birmingham, Sheffield, Bristol, and Leeds, and in 1880 it broke out spontaneously under the letters ASLE&F.

HIGHLY SPEICALISED SKILLS

The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants was formed in 1871. This was an all-grade union and, at first, drivers and firemen joined it enthusiastically. Within a year it had more than
Driven by Ideals: A History of ASLEF

Sweet Street, is where ASLEF union were born. Where the roots of our trade and cultural day out to see part of an historic, informative went on Saturday 22 June as into action and a delegation our EC member, put the plan into action and a delegation our EC member, put the plan.

Leeds. Nigel and Howard Kaye, the first ASLEF head office in Leeds. Nigel Gibson earlier this year, we discussed a visit to the first ASLEF head office in Leeds. Nigel and Howard Kaye, our EC member, put the plan into action and a delegation went on Saturday 22 June as part of an historic, informative and cultural day out to see where the roots of our trade union were born. The Commercial Inn, on Sweet Street, is where ASLEF had its first head office in 1881. The pub has seen better days, but the historic value of the establishment is noted by a blue plaque issued by Leeds Civic Trust.

We were made to feel very welcome by the landlord who turned out to be Peter Lorimer of Leeds United fame from the 1960s and ‘70s! Once we introduced ourselves as ASLEF members he was very pleased we had come to pay tribute to the heritage of his establishment. Of course, it would have been rude not to have partaken of a drink or few to soak up the feel of the place! So we adjourned to the lounge and exchanged tales and anecdotes and had a very enjoyable visit.

You can feel the history in the room, where many a debate and ground breaking agreement were thrashed out in years gone by, where the story of our union was born, and the seeds planted of where we are today.

Members from King’s Cross, Bishop’s Stortford, and Stratford were even treated to a performance on the house piano by one of our retired members, who is rather handy when it comes to tinkling the ivories, so the visit was rounded off with a good old fashioned East End knees-up, albeit in the heart of Yorkshire!

A warm welcome from Peter Lorimer in Leeds

JOHN THORPE, Stratford branch secretary, wrote this piece for the Journal in 2013 after a trade union trip to the past in Leeds

At a District 5 weekend school in Cambridge, organised by DO Nigel Gibson earlier this year, we discussed a visit to the first ASLEF head office in Leeds. Nigel and Howard Kaye, our EC member, put the plan into action and a delegation went on Saturday 22 June as part of an historic, informative and cultural day out to see where the roots of our trade union were born. The Commercial Inn, on Sweet Street, is where ASLEF had its first head office in 1881. The pub has seen better days, but the historic value of the establishment is noted by a blue plaque issued by Leeds Civic Trust.

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Brave new world that has such people in it

John Stagg, of Hither Green branch, a driver with DB Cargo, and a member of ASLEF’s European Railway Traffic Management System working group, reports on MAs and EMAs – all explained below – after going live with ERTMS on the Cambrian lines

ARK Wakenshaw, the EC member for District 4; Nick Gowers, DCC secretary, Arriva Rail London; Adrian Hewitt, DCC, Thameslink Great Northern; and I attended a European Railway Traffic Management System operational course on the Cambrian lines in Wales as members of the ASLEF ERTMS working group from 25 to 29 November.

Many others from our industry have attended this course, including representatives of the Rail Delivery Group, Network Rail, and various TOCs and FOCs. But this was the first time the course was attended by representatives of the ‘end users’ – train drivers.

The course consisted of five days. The first two comprised classroom instruction of the system (ERTMS level 2) at Machynlleth, with relevant operating procedures, followed by two days driving (under instruction) on the ERTMS cab signalling system between a point three miles west of Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth and Barmouth. Followed by a fifth day of further driving, final instruction and assessment.

Our instructor for the course was Rhodri Lloyd, driver instructor at Machynlleth, who is a member of our Machynlleth branch and a driver on the Cambrian lines. His knowledge, as you would expect from both his role and experience during testing the system, is all-encompassing and he provided us with an interesting, stimulating, and challenging week which we all enjoyed and which has vastly underpinned our knowledge of this system.

Totally different skill set
ERTMS level 2 was first installed on the Cambrian lines, which are relatively self-contained, as a test bed for the system’s proposed eventual roll out across the UK rail network as part of European inter-operability requirements as the eventual predominant network as part of European inter-operability. It employs in-cab signalling which conveys to the driver movement information and acting on it in a timely manner.

The two primary impressions we obtained from actually driving under instruction on this course was, first, despite what others in the industry may want to believe, or even want us to believe, is that this system does not in any way de-skill the driver’s role. If anything, it upskills the driver. It is simply a totally different skill set that you are required to attain and one that may not always be acquired easily.

Still required to look ahead
The second primary impression was how much this system greatly increases work intensity for a train driver, and this on a network which is not operated DOO-P!

Despite being an in-cab signalling system with the driver, theoretically at least, driving to his or her DMI, the driver is still required to observe the line ahead and react accordingly to ABCLs, AOCLs, and UWCs, of which there is a preponderance on the Cambrian lines, stations, on-track staff, trespassers, animals on the line, obstructions, etc. In fact anything and everything that drivers already do now on conventionally signalled lines.

We were fortunate enough to meet Andy Hodson, ASLEF LDC rep at Machynlleth, who informed us of a report that the introduction of ERTMS on the Cambrian lines has resulted in an increase in what is known as heads down driving time of up to 30%! This is potentially a very major issue for freight traffic, and this on a network which is not operated DOO-P!

Neither did we see much to support the vaunted argument that route knowledge will be as major a component of a driver’s skill set as it is now, from what we could see of the practical workings of the system, and even more so in degraded conditions where, for example, knowledge of degraded working speed indicators and level crossing sighting boards are both safety-critical.

No doubt it is technically possible to provide more information on the planning area of the DMI but many of the icons are small enough as it is, so placing more may cause issues with disseminating the correct information and acting on it in a timely manner.

We are the front end experts
Space prohibits me from going into other issues we became aware of, such as staff responsible mode, and concerns with maximum permissible degraded speed, and certain implications for freight traffic, but no doubt these will be addressed by the EC and the ASLEF ERTMS working group in due course.

There are many experts in the rail industry who are not train drivers pushing for a national roll out of this system but, if it is to be successful, then the key group which needs to buy into it are the front end experts, the end users, us, the train drivers. And our input needs to be heeded and our concerns addressed satisfactorily if the planned transitions are to be successful.
**Black dog**

ALAN MOSS and SI GOODE, company council reps, Avanti West Coast, report on bespoke training for reps on the sensitive and sometimes difficult issue of mental health in the workplace

MENTAL health should be at the forefront of the welfare of our members. As representatives we adapt and move with the times and being able to talk, and learn, about mental health is essential in 2020.

Avanti West Coast company council successfully negotiated for, and set up, training courses for all its reps, company council, local level, health & safety and ULR.

There were two identical courses, in Birmingham and Preston, culminating in 40 representatives being delivered with an outstanding education and understanding of mental health awareness in the 21st century. The course covered a wealth of subjects. It started by informing us about all the different conditions encompassed under the mental health umbrella.

We moved on to the issue of starting that all important conversation and the vital element of listening and being empathetic. We learned about the wealth of resources available and how we can signpost people who have issues.

The course featured the well known short film I Had a Black Dog; a must see that captures the subject very well. The term ‘black dog’ was famously used as a metaphor by both Samuel Johnson and Winston Churchill and is a term now enshrined in mental health awareness and understanding.

ASLEF is at the forefront of discussing, engaging, and driving the agenda, working with our outstanding policy and, most importantly, letting our members know that, should they need it, we are there for them. The make-up of the grade is changing rapidly and policies such as the ASLEF mental health policy should be adopted by a modern railway; hence we have placed it into the machinery for the company to hopefully adopt it at some point.

We would like to thank Shirley Handsley, our ASLEF education project co-ordinator, for being the glue that held everything together and for putting everything in place; Tracy Douthwaite, who delivered the course; and all those who attended and are now better enabled to help and assist with issues that may affect not only our members but friends, family and colleagues, too.

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**Working for a safer railway**

ALAN MOSS, Longsight branch, reports on District 3’s recent health & safety seminar

DISTRICT 3 held its annual safety seminar in November in the northern capital that is Manchester. I was asked to chair the seminar which was a privilege. I relinquished my role as a safety rep last year after two decades in the role but am still active in any way I can to ensure that workplaces are safe – and we all know that a unionised workplace is a safer place to work.

The seminar was opened by our general secretary Mick Whelan; since being elected GS in 2011 Mick has opened nearly all our district’s seminars, ensuring that our union is at the forefront of health & safety. Many topics were covered and questions from the floor afterwards were wide-ranging.

Over the years our guest speakers have come from a wide spectrum across the industry, and this year we extended a warm welcome to Ian Prosser, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Railways, a role that goes back to 1840 – ‘there have been 25 of us in all those years’ – and director, railway safety, at the Office of Rail and Road.

Ian had a clear message – sometimes we disagree on things but most of the time we want the same thing, a safe railway for those who work on it and for those who use it. The current objectives and priorities of ASLEF and the ORR are similar: improving mental health and suicide prevention, SPADs, the introduction of new rolling stock, and track worker safety.

Ian also spoke about the Million Hour Challenge initiative where rail staff come together to volunteer one million hours to support the work of the Samaritans.

Lunchtime was a good opportunity for networking and catching up with comrades, following which we had an excellent session with EC vice-president Andy Hudd talking about his work with the cab ergonomics sub-group. With the number of new trains coming into the industry Andy’s attention to detail was well received. Every day is learning day and I learned a valuable lesson all about anthropometrics, even though I can’t pronounce the word, it’s actually invaluable when it comes to ergonomics. The main message from Andy’s presentation was get in early, keep up to date with industry developments to see when trains may arrive, begin negotiations with management before the trains arrive, ensure reps are present at the very early design stage, and use the ASLEF cab ergonomics guide.

The penultimate slot was a great workshop by Newton Heath safety rep James Sutherland, whose enthusiasm is infectious. His presentation encompassed competence development, inspections, facilities time, education, and mitigation of operational incidents, with an emphasis on adopting best practice across the district.

We concluded with our district organiser Andy Hourigan reinforcing the messages from the day and speaking with vigour and enthusiasm on what we need to do to as reps to ensure our members receive the representation they rightly deserve.

One of the most refreshing things was the diversity of the representatives present; we had newly-elected reps sat alongside reps with years of experience, all sharing a common goal, representing our members.

Sincere thanks to DO3 Andy Hourigan for facilitating the seminar; Mick, Ian and Andy for their presentations; James for his invaluable input from start to finish; and, most importantly, the 18 safety reps who attended and contributed to make the seminar such an overwhelming success.
When the Saints go marching in

E HAD our AGM on Sunday 1 December attended by GS Mick Whelan and EC1 Marz Colombini. Mick presented a 45 year badge to Brother Kev Ely and a 25 year badge to Brother Ed d’Bell. We also had a guest speaker, Jim Buchanan, from Bournemouth RMT. After the meeting Ed served up a curry, made by his father, which was gratefully enjoyed.

Ian Jolly, ULR and equality rep, Southampton Northam 160

Is Vic there?

District Organiser Kevin Lindsay was on hand to present newly-retired driver Albert Armstrong with a tankard and cheque at our recent branch meeting. Albert’s wife Edith – who let us into the secret that, at home, Albert’s real name is Victor! – was presented with a bouquet of flowers. We would all like to wish Albert a happy retirement (and thank Edith for the scrumptious cakes she baked and brought along).

Phil Gallagher, branch secretary

Auld man’s do

The annual retired drivers’ night (auld man’s do, as it is more commonly known) was held in November at the Beechwood Bowling Club, Edinburgh. This year saw the first woman from the RMS in Edinburgh attending – Yvonne Reid, who retired two years ago – which is a very significant occasion, obviously due to the name of the function, but which was addressed by the branch secretary five years ago (retired drivers’ night is now on the invitation). The function was well attended with the RMS, Ray and Dave, EC member Jim Baxter, district officer Kevin Lindsay, and branch members as well as retired members in attendance.

There were presentations to John Munro, just retired after 43 years’ service on LNER and East Coast, and long service badges for Bros Malcolm Risk (45 years); and Chris Barrie, Gary Gray, Alan McKean, Stuart Slicer and Alan Steedman (all 40). There was a special presentation for continual ASLEF membership, via the RMS, to retired drivers Jock Brodie (67 years); Alan Reid (64); Sam Baillie and Jimmy Hogg (63) all receiving honorary membership for this amazing achievement. Albert Ogg (75 years ASLEF membership) and David Dobie (73) couldn’t attend due to illness but this has to be recognised, as we’re sure their membership is unprecedented. Both joined the railway as youngsters; they are now 92 and 90 respectively.

Rab Wicksted, branch secretary, Edinburgh No 2

Upcoming Events

- Ripple Lane – Friday 7 February
  Ripple Lane’s monthly gatherings resume after the recess from 13.00 at The Wind Mill, near Upminster Bridge Tube station.

- Eastleigh – Saturday 14 March
  Reunion from 12.00 at the Eastleigh Railway Institute, Romsey Road, Eastleigh, Hampshire, SO50 9FE. All grades welcome.

- Cricklewood – Friday 27 March
  Reunion at RAF club opposite Bedford railway station from 12.00 noon. Hope to see as many Old Boys as possible.

- Gateshead & Newcastle – Friday 27 March
  Reunion at the Bowling Green Club, Gateshead, from 13.30.

- Brighton – Tuesday 5 May
  The 10th annual Brighton & Sussex branches reunion for all ASLEF members, past and present, from 14.00 at the Brighton Railway Club, Belmont, off Dyke Road, Brighton, BN1 3TF.
Ray: ‘Honour to serve’

Grove Park welcomed GS Mick Whelan, EC1 Marz Colombini, and DO1 Graham Morris, my Southeastern DCC colleagues, members and guests to our annual presentation evening. A packed branch room, with standing room only, listened to Mick address members and present long service awards to Joe Flynn and David Pocock (5 years), David Lee (10), John Row (20), Steve Rand (25) and Peter Scott (30). Awards and gifts were also presented to Derek Deacon, who asked for the branch to be formed back in 1968, Mick Fisher, who received his 50 year medallion, and Stephen Dunne on his retirement. I would like to thank the ASLEF officials for my appreciation certificate for my 20 years as branch secretary and to my branch members for the amazing and extremely generous gifts presented to me. It has been an honour to serve you. Thank you for such a great evening. Ray Garland, branch secretary

Bro Sedgebeer stands down after 25 years of loyal union service

Paul, on behalf of our branch, and all the members who crossed your path in the course of union duties, we want to thank you for all your hard work and excellent support. As EC vice-president Andy Hudd said, ‘You have never had a bad word to say about anyone.’ We are a passionate union, and you would always take on board the views of all our members; your expertise, and 25 years as a union rep, meant you could guide any member about the solidarity on which we, as a union, pride ourselves. Your efforts contributed substantially to the quality of our branch meetings which were enhanced by your professionalism. Working with you was a great learning experience. We really valued your knowledge and insight, and willingness to share. As a colleague, mentor and friend, you have inspired us.

Daniel Davis, Reading branch 169

We turn back time – and the pages of the Locomotive Journal – to February 1920 and the Americans, the government, the saints, our organising secretary, No 1 engine

OUR IMPUDENT RULING CLASS

The statement of Admiral Sims that a high official of the American Navy told him, ‘Don’t let the British pull any wool over your eyes: we would as soon fight the British as the Germans’ has given a rude shock to our impudent ruling class. The truth is that England is controlled by a clique of undisciplined snobs, and Winston Churchill is their model.

WELDED AND WHACKED

‘FE’, variously known as the Galloper, Lord Birkenhead, and Lord Chancellor of England, says in the Weekly Dispatch that Spen Valley sounded the death knell of Mr Asquith’s hopes, and the coalition is ‘invertebrate and undefined’. There is a reasonable prospect of a Labour government being formed in this country in the next few years, he says, and he wants a new national party to see off this ‘threat’. Even this, we might tell him, will be welcomed and whacked.

SAINTS WHO WERE SOCIALISTS

The early fathers of the Christian church saw what stood in the way of the Golden Rule. ‘The land is no man’s property; none shall possess it as property’ (Tertullian, earliest of Latin Fathers, AD155-222). ‘No man shall come into our commune who sayseth that the land may be sold. God’s footstool is not property’ (St Cyprian, AD200-258).

BIG GATHERING AT NEWPORT

Under the auspices of South Wales and Monmouthshire district council, a mass meeting of locomotivemen and friends was held at the Temperance Hall on Sunday 4 January for the purpose of making presentations to Mr and Mrs Parfitt, and the unfurling of the district council’s banner, on the occasion of the retirement of our organising secretary.

A RELIC OF OUR RAILWAYS

We have on view in the Quaker town of Darlington an old relic of our railways – No 1 engine. There she stands, quaint and stunted. How few people realise, as they pass through, how much they are indebted to that ancient memorial, the father of our locomotives.

Stories of old

The 1A Christmas reunion was held on Thursday 5 December at the Ex-Services Club, Watford. A very well attended event with 40-plus retired and active drivers and other railwaymen, many accompanied by their wives and partners. All enjoyed a light buffet, beverages, and, of course, listening and telling stories of old. One remarked, ‘This is like being in the old Stonebridge Park mess room’ although, I would add, a more polite conversation was noted! GS Mick Whelan and DO6 organiser Dicky Fisher attended and Mick gave a short but heartfelt speech before presenting retired drivers David Harvey and my dad David Humphrys with their 50 year ASLEF membership medallions. Mick remarked
STEVIE WEST
CHAMPIONED THE CAUSE OF PEOPLE WHO COULD NOT SPEAK UP FOR THEMSELVES

It is with profound regret and deep sorrow that Farnham branch has to report the passing of our retired colleague and friend, Steve West.

Steve left school at 16 and, instead of listening to his drama teacher and going to RADA, joined British Rail as platform staff before becoming a traction trainee at Woking in 1977 via a brief stint as a box boy. At 18 he was a second man driving diesels. He passed out as a driver in 1982; his first position was at London Bridge but, luckily, his clause 8(b) transfer to Farnham came into effect four weeks later! It was the start of a long and successful career on the railway and, years later, he was proud to call himself a Lost Boy.

Westie was a lifelong union man who championed the cause of people who could not speak up for themselves. He was Farnham branch chair, secretary, LDC rep, and district council member for more than 20 years; his meticulous minutes a reminder of the many struggles we, as a union, met and overcame in that time. His work, and insight, alongside Ray Cox and Martin Warrick was hugely appreciated. He was also our obituary writer and I wish he had written his own as he would hugely appreciated. He was also a keen photographer whose paintings decorate the walls of his home.

Steve was diagnosed with myeloma in 2007. He initially made a good recovery, after intensive treatment, but the cancer returned in 2010. He was told donor treatment would be the way forward and he was relieved to discover his brother Richard was a perfect match. Richard donated his stem cells in a successful operation; Steve would display an innocent, playful childlike, not childish, and delighting many, a few, who encouraged him in his daftness all the more! He was a library of many retired, and drivers and guards – always with a grin on his face. His mobile phone is a library of many retired, and passed, legends of the line. He had great fun editing his pictures to add a rude sign or fake cigarette and was a talented artist whose paintings decorate the walls of his home.

Steve was diagnosed with myeloma in 2007. He initially made a good recovery, after intensive treatment, but the cancer returned in 2010. He was told donor treatment would be the way forward and he was relieved to discover his brother Richard was a perfect match. Richard donated his stem cells in a successful operation; Steve would joke that he had inherited his brother’s blood group, his gambling addiction, and his womanising, but was pleased he had not inherited his cross-dressing habit!

Westie, as always, seized with both hands this donated extension to life; he travelled extensively, using his railway passes, at home and abroad. He befriended people wherever he went and organised many events for the old boys. The annual get together of Waterloo and Nine Elms at the Bluebell Railway was always well-attended.

Wherever Steve went we heard raucous laughter, his random musings and practical jokes delighting many, a few, which encouraged him in his daftness all the more! He was childlike, not childish, and displayed an innocent, playful glee, joy, humility, generosity, and kindness wherever he was and in whatever company he found himself. Many of us, in these uncertain times, will do our best to BMW (Be More Westie) and bring delight, rather than melancholy, to the world.

In late 2014, Steve suffered a stroke and, although he recovered well, had to medically retire a few months later. Determined to make the most of his retirement, he remained very social and enjoyed meeting colleagues and retired members all over the country. Steve loved the railway, his colleagues were family, and he was tremendously grateful for their continued friendship and support.

In early September, he became very unwell. Keeping a brave face, he did not let on how poorly he really was. He deteriorated very quickly and, after spending a short time in hospital, Westie went home. When the nurses from St Michael’s Hospice came out he told jokes and made them laugh. He continued to tell jokes, right up to the last moment. Steve passed away peacefully at home, surrounded by his family, on Tuesday 12 November. He was 59.

As we said goodbye, with many tears and much laughter, at his funeral, despite the appalling weather and the strikes on SWR, there were too many mourners for the crematorium to hold and too many friends at the wake for the pub to cope. Just as it should be. Farewell to a dear and special friend. Our thoughts are with Lynda, Barry, Leonie, Ivy, Richard, and all Steve’s family at this terribly sad time.

Shaun McCallion. branch chair, Farnham 252

ALAN ‘HOSSt’ CARTWRIGHT IN THE BONANZA GOLD LINK

Former Longsight colleague Alan Cartwright left us on 12 December aged 89. A Swinton lad, he joined the LMSR as a cleaner at Lanky Agecroft 26B MPD in 1947 at the age of 17. Ten weeks later he became a passed cleaner and district council member for more than 20 years; his meticulous minutes a reminder of the many struggles we, as a union, met and overcame in that time.

Alan registered as a fireman in February 1950 and was promoted passed fireman in August allowing him to drive. He served with the Royal Army Service Corps, and became a trainee at Woking in 1977 via a brief stint as a box boy. At 18 he was a second man driving diesels. He passed out as a driver in 1982; his first position was at London Bridge but, luckily, his clause 8(b) transfer to Farnham came into effect four weeks later! It was the start of a long and successful career on the railway and, years later, he was proud to call himself a Lost Boy.

Alan registered as a fireman in February 1950 and was promoted passed fireman in August allowing him to drive. He served with the Royal Army Service Corps, and became a booked driver in 1961 and, with the closure of Agecroft shed, got a transfer in 1966 to the former Wessy garage at 9H Patricroft. In 1967 Alan said goodbye not only to Patricroft, but also to steam traction, transferring to 9A Longsight and diesel and electric traction, swapping mast-free Leeds and Llandudno for the overhead road to Euston.

When the ‘holiday camp’ closed its BOP in 1994, Hoss joined the inter-city west coast link. It was during our days together at Longsight that I got to know Alan. Bonanza starred Dan Blocker as Eric ‘Hoss’ Cartwright. Now Dan stood 6ft 4in and weighed 21st; Alan fell a bit short of that, so, with a typical touch of depot irony, he had to be ‘Hoss’. Alan retired in August 1995, just before his 65th birthday. His last London to Manchester ran into Piccadilly, on time, to be greeted by his family after 48 years’ service, bar one month.

During his 24 year retirement, sun worshipper Alan visited Spain, Cyprus and the Canary Islands and relatives in America. He enjoyed DIY and gardening, loved Swinton rugby league club, Lancashire Cricket Club and Manchester City.

Having suffered 44 years of hurt, he lived to witness the Sergio Agüero moment in 2012, when that goal in the fourth minute of added time gave City the title.

Alan’s loving wife Pauline pre-deceased him, but he is survived by his sons Stuart and Stephen. RIP Alan, you were part of the rich tapestry that was 9A, and will be missed.

Mel Thorley. RMS Longsight 126
MICK BOULANGER RIGHT AWAY DRIVE

It is with great sadness that I inform you of the sudden passing of close friend and recently retired Wolverhampton driver Mick Boulanger on Tuesday 19 November aged just 59. Having taken ill health resettlement in May he had so much planned with his partner Kath that, sadly, will not now happen. Mick was predominantly a Wolves driver for the last 30 plus years, although he started on the railway as a box boy at Stafford No 4 more than 40 years ago, which is where he met Kath, on a bench on Platforms 3 and 4. He joined the footplate and had spells at Saltley, New Street and, finally, Wolves.

Mick was a bit of a jinx during his career, as anyone in control would admit, as when they heard his voice at the end of the phone saying, ‘Hello, Mick here,’ many a heart would sink. But he was a character and never one to shy away from any challenges. He loved mentoring new drivers and helped develop many in situ today at Wolves, as well as holding various positions in the branch. The funeral was full and standing at Bushbury with Mick arriving on a Routemaster bus which would have raised a chuckle and wry smile from him, but what a way to arrive! It was an honour to carry him from the bus into the chapel for his final journey.

Mick was more than a colleague to Si Goode and me, he was a very close friend; all three of us have been through some tough times but we were always there for one another and he will be greatly missed. Our thoughts are with Kath, Tim, Samantha, and Rich at this difficult time.

Nigel Harkness, branch secretary, Wolverhampton 236

ANDY SCOTT PACER PROBLEM – I CAN’T SEE OVER THE INSTRUMENTS

Andy Scott, retired Darlington driver, died after a short illness on 1 October aged 64. Andy worked in a number of government departments, including Save As You Earn at Durham, and Premium Bonds at Lytham St Annes, before joining the railway in 1979, initially as platform staff, and then a guard, before becoming a driver, which he regarded as his dream job. He loved driving and, as an ASLEF member, was always willing to help new drivers with advice and support, reviving mutual improvement classes.

Andy had a dry sense of humour and a clear and determined sense of right and wrong. Short in stature, if not in nature, he came to national media notoriety (well, attention) when, unable to wind up a jammed seat on a Pacer unit, he had to fail the train, as he couldn’t see clearly over the instruments!

When not at work, Andy enjoyed going to his caravan in Teesdale, or going on tour, usually to Scotland, in his camper van. He was a keen model railway maker, preferring to make his models himself out of bits and pieces rather than buying a kit. Like many railwaymen, he appreciated a pint of real ale away from work. Andy retired, after 37 years, in 2016 to spend more time with his wife Sue and three grandchildren. Andy was highly regarded and will be sadly missed.

John Clark, branch secretary, Darlington 058

TREVOR MARTIN CHUFFING THIS AND CHUFFING THAT

On 3 January our dear friend and colleague Trevor Martin (GWR Plymouth, formerly Wessex Trains and British Rail St Blazey/Par) was cruelly taken from us after complications following a stroke he had just before Christmas. Trev, you will be sorely missed. We will all miss your mess room banter, practical jokes, chuffing this, chuffing that! And your most kind nature. You have left the West of England depots heartbroken as you were taken from us far too early. May you have the road (greens all the way) to heaven. Sleep tight, old pal.

Nicholas Dyke, Plymouth 162

JOHN ROBINSON STILL SOUTHBOUND

Further to his partner Sharon’s announcement (Journal, January) Liverpool Lime Street driver John Robinson lost his long battle with cancer on 2 November at the age of 59. John followed in the footsteps of his father, Ralph, who was also a driver. He began work with British Rail, at the age of 16, in 1977 at the newsagent kiosk at Birkenhead Central. Shortly after his 17th birthday he started on the footplate as a traction trainee at Mollington Street diesel depot. He transferred to Lime Street in 1980 as a driver’s assistant and passed out as a driver in 1982, becoming a relief driver aged 21 and a booked driver in 1986. In the Lime Street extra link in 1987 he was one of a few of 40 who signed the London route, regularly getting London jobs and earning the nickname Southbound. After the depot split in 1994, which was done on seniority, John started with InterCity West Coast. Virgin took over the franchise in 1997 and John stayed with the company until he passed away. John was hugely popular, a true character, gent, and friend who will be greatly missed.

He was always willing to help, always had a smile, here to have a laugh. He loved his golf, watching and competing, and, above all else, was a family man, devoted to Sharon, his sons, and his grandchildren. RIP John. I’m sure you’re still Southbound.

Mike Cooper, branch secretary, Edge Hill 070

GORDON READ JOKER, GENTLEMAN, AND STEAM KING

Retired Marylebone driver Gordon Read has died at the age of 83. Gordon had a long career on the railway from Cricklewood to Neasden and on to Marylebone until retirement. I first met Gordon in the mid 1980s; he always had a story and a joke to tell. Never a cross word was said. He was one of the steam drivers and loved every minute of it. He had met the rich and famous and they were all in awe of his craft. He even had Anneka Rice sit on his lap! Gordon, a proper gentleman, enjoyed an active retirement with his family, which still involved steam trains. He is survived by his wife, two sons and his grandchildren.

Chris Edgson, Marylebone 132

February 2020 I The ASLEF Journal 19
Decent wages, but driving trains can be a lonely life

I attended a three day mental health awareness course at Southampton City College in October 2018, agreed and supported by my company, which gave me an insight into the issues that can affect our members at any time in our lives.

We earn a decent living, thanks to ASLEF, but being a train driver can be a lonely life. We work long, sometimes unsocial, shift patterns and may talk to just a couple of people during a ten hour or longer turn. One driver said to me that I was the first person he had spoken to all day. It was 5pm.

During this three day course students were asked to bring in their company’s mental health in the workplace policy document. I made enquiries to find my company did not have any such policy. Others on the course, from haulage companies, supermarkets, Portsmouth council, and a local bus company, all of which had such a policy, were shocked that a train company with staff more prone to this illness did not have one.

After the course I was invited to company head office to report my findings to the company and ASLEF’s company council and I asked the company to adopt a policy. ASLEF has produced its own mental health in the workplace policy which is an excellent document; I would recommend all train and freight companies to adopt it as a template.

Mental health must be taken seriously by the rail industry. As a union, we have seen members disappear without warning and walk out on everything. Sadly, my company has seen two drivers pass away in recent years. So I ask all TOCs and FOCs to support their loyal staff in their time of need. Please adopt ASLEF’s mental health in the workplace policy now.

Andrew Sheehan, health & safety rep, Bournemouth

Water in the cab could be the answer to SPADs

I read with interest Jeff Veale’s letter ‘Many reasons for SPADs (Journal, December)’ which rightly raises concerns over the increase of SPADs and, I might add, the increase of TPWS activations against red signals. I can assure Jeff that, as driver instructors, we do teach the best practice he advocates of not ‘chasing restrictive signals’ as well as not being distracted by any delays as they are proven by experience to work.

The question of increasing SPADs involves many factors with differing opinions and, while things like thorough knowledge of routes and risk factors, non-technical skills, risk-based commentary driving, proper rest, etc, are all very important, in my experience the simple act of regular hydration makes a huge difference with regards to keeping up concentration.

It may pay ASLEF to invest in a more in-depth study of this but the latest research I have reviewed shows that even being slightly dehydrated can have a big effect on us, because the brain effectively starts to ‘shrink’ which, in turn, slows the cognitive process which then affects concentration, risk perception, and reaction times.

I would suggest, as an experiment, and if you are not in the habit of doing this, you take a bottle of water with you and take regular sips (when it’s safe to do so) on every trip in the cab and, after four weeks, see if you have not become more focused, less fatigued, and generally feel better?

Stann Norfolk, driver instructor, Slade Green

Remembering Woodhead

It was my privilege to have known Bill Ronksley, ASLEF’s longest-serving president, for 40 years. I got to know him through the magnificent campaign he fought against the closure of the Woodhead line in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He made an excellent case for retaining the route. Woodhead will go down as one of the most wicked acts of railway vandalism. Friday 3 January was the 30th anniversary of the withdrawal of electrified services from the route. Could ASLEF commemorate this very sad and dark anniversary? With all the attention on climate change, global warming, and air quality, it would make a statement from railwaymen and women about the need for electrification in the future, as well as paying tribute to one of Sheffield’s finest sons.

Andrew Oldfield, Worrall, Sheffield

Tackling the Tories

The Tories now have a huge majority and are, soon, to be unfettered by EU legislation. Already this has led them to announce attacks on workers’ rights, including our ability to strike, and ignore the right of the people of Scotland to self-determination. In response, I believe, ASLEF should call for the TUC/STUC to organise demonstrations in defence of workers’ rights against the worst excesses of the Queen’s speech. I think we have to actively mobilise the biggest turnout possible for the Durham Miners’ Gala. We also have to look at our approach to a second Scottish independence referendum. Whilst ASLEF members may have differing opinions about whether Scotland should, or should not, be independent, we should discuss supporting another referendum. It is clear that the SNP won the election in Scotland, giving them a further mandate to request the powers to hold a legal referendum.

Steven Nimmo, Edinburgh No 2

ASLEF sorted out the Spanner in the works

Last year I wrote to the general secretary and executive committee regarding one of our members suffering a house fire. They kindly organised financial support from the hardship fund and a circular to branches appealing for financial assistance. Simon ‘Spanner’ Szczepanski and his family had to endure months in a hotel before they could find a suitable house to rent whilst the fire was investigated and insurance was held up until it had been settled so that support, along with a JustGiving page organised by his local level reps and colleagues, has been a vital lifeline. The appeal raised in excess of £4,000 with donations still coming in. Thanks from all of us at King’s Cross.

Richard Sullivan, branch secretary
**HANDBAGS AND GLADRAGS**

How very kind of the Journal to feature our model railway on the news pages of the January issue (LNER V2 with flour mill in background). I know, you never even noticed! Drooling over Rod Stewart’s system no doubt, and justifiably so.

As you are obviously interested, Nafferton on the Hull-Bridlington line, is the creation of a small group, of which this scribe is one, based in the Brid area. During November we had the pleasure of three days at the NEC exhibiting it, at what is claimed to be the largest model railway show in the land, encompassing far more than layouts. Historical reasons preclude interlocking of signals/points, etc, on Nafferton, but some layouts do feature such technology, making them rather more than ‘train sets’ as Rod Stewart notes in his December Railway Modeller interview. An eight page spread in the same issue depicts our layout in all its glory! Please ignore the totally incorrect loco headlamp codes carried (or don’t blame me, that is).

Roy Lingham, Bridlington

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**Trying to rebuild our lives**

We suffered a devastating arson attack on our home in June which nearly claimed the lives of my wife Rebecca and our three boys. If it wasn’t for our little dog Paddy, who alerted them to the danger, and gave them precious minutes to get out, they would not be alive today. Unfortunately, Paddy didn’t survive his heroic act; he was lovely, a big member of our family, and is greatly missed, God rest him.

We would like to thank branches and colleagues, past and present, for your kind and generous donations during this extremely difficult time. Without your help we don’t know what we would have done. Every day is a struggle for my wife and boys as the events of that night still haunt them. We are trying to rebuild our lives which is extremely hard. Having lost everything, your help has given us a start. Thanks for your support, with a special gratitude, brothers and sisters.

Having lost everything, your help has given us a start. Thanks for your support, with a special gratitude, brothers and sisters.

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**Hermann, Anne…and Rod**

Reichsmarschall, SA Gruppenführer, railway modeller…and Nuremberg war criminal

Re the piece about Rod Stewart and his model railway layout (Journal, January) it would surely be remiss not to mention television presenter Anne Diamond with her Great Western Railway layout and, oh no, Hermann Göring!

Rob McMillan, RMS, Wolverhampton

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**Is this the age of the train?**

Was it not the great political thinker Stuart Hall who said ‘We are a nation of masochists?’ We must be. Offered cheaper rail fares, and utility bills, we say ‘No’, and return a Conservative government. Brothers and Sisters, as you go about your railway business, you will be sharing not only a platform but also a mess of signals and points, etc.

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**FINAL RUN**

by Gareth Tomkins. Painting in acrylics to mark the last run of the HST on the western region. High quality giclée prints using archival inks on fine art paper available at £50 plus pp&p. Unframed. Overall size 20x16in; image size 18x14in with 1in white border. Delivered in strong cardboard tube. To order email me at gowingloc@sky.com. Payment accepted via PayPal.

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**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 pp&p; email Darley@aol.com or phone 020 7586 6632 for details. ‘All income from sales goes to the trust,’ says Peter.

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**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 in width. Gold £300, silver £100 + £7 pp&p recorded delivery. Contact Brad McCarthy on 07929 350146.**
As Boris Johnson prepares to talk to Donald Trump about war, trade, and the merits or otherwise of chlorinated chicken for the family feast each Sunday, 

**CHRIS PROCTOR** takes a wry look at 200 years of the special relationship

If you want to know about the ‘special relationship’ we have with the United States, take a look at the case of Harry Dunn. He was riding his motorbike in Northamptonshire last August when a Volvo XC90, driven on the wrong side of the road by a US citizen who is said to have been drinking, careered into him. Harry died. The driver sped back to America. And the President of the United States told us we had no chance when we said we wanted the driver to return to be tried in a British court. ‘She will not return to the UK’.

This tragic tale neatly sums up the ‘special relationship’ we enjoy with the US. Had our relations been ‘ordinary’ or ‘normal’ rather than, er, ‘special’, we would have asked for help and expected to be assisted. A ‘special’ relationship, on the other hand, seems to mean that, when we ask for aid, the other party tells us to sling our hook, get over it, and wise up to the fact that we’re not in line for any favours from them. I had a ‘special’ relationship of this type with my ex-wife.

**TRUMP: TIME TO TOE THE LINE**

Not that Donald Trump didn’t explain his refusal. He said it was our fault for driving on the left. ‘The woman was driving on the wrong side of the road, and that can happen. You know, those are the opposite roads, that happens,’ he explained. The US State Department amplified that returning the suspect would be ‘highly inappropriate’ while extradition would be ‘an abuse’. Yes, really.

But rather different criteria apply when the US decides to invade a country, change a regime or ‘zero’ an individual. Then the US sends a message to the UK telling us what time to have our troops ready to support them. Take 2003, for example:

‘Yo, Blair! I’m thinking of using your army to assist me invading a country that doesn’t have any weapons of mass destruction or links with al-Qaeda. Say yes and you can stay at my ranch and I’ll pretend you’re an important world leader.’

‘Why, that’s so terribly kind of you, Mr Dubya, sir! How many soldiers would you like?’

That’s the sort of straight-talking that makes a relationship ‘special’; when both sides, except one, can speak out freely and expect respect in return.

Close observers have noticed that every time the US mentions the ‘special relationship’, hundreds of thousands of citizens die; and, indeed, a lot of the effort put into the Atlantic alliance does concern war.

In fact, the only time we haven’t clung to the tails of American military greatcoats was their war at the tail end of the 18th century which was, ahem, against us.

Oh, and then there was Harold Wilson, who was rude enough to turn down Lyndon B Johnson’s frequent requests for British combat troops to join in the Vietnam war. The Prime Minister’s refusal put ‘great strains’ on relations: the idea of them being ‘special’ was stretched to the limit.

**WITH HIS PECKER HANGING OUT**

Harold offered to nip over to Washington to explain the UK’s reluctance to join its ally in napalming and defoliating Vietnam but LBJ was in a huff. He felt the job of ‘special’ friends was to obey, not to discuss. So the man against whom students on American campuses chanted ‘Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you fry today?’ declined the offer of a chin-wag, explaining his reasoning to a Presidential aide: ‘We’ve got enough pollution around here already without Harold Wilson coming over with his fly open, and his pecker hanging out, peeing all over me.’ The US also decided that if the UK wasn’t going to obey orders, then it wasn’t going to get any support for the pound. It is apparently considered reasonable among ‘special’ friends to say, ‘Do what I want or we’ll screw your economy.’

Our role in the US/UK bond has always been simple. Basically, they speak, we nod; they order, we obey; they instruct, and we happily wag our tails. The US is the master; and the UK is the dog.

The fact is, US governments, historically, are much keener on servility than criticism. When Cuba chomped them off they began a trade boycott that’s lasted 55 years. So far.

**GIVEN A GOOD SLAP**

The French – under the illusion that they, as the United States’ first ally, in the War of Independence against Britain from 1776 to 1783, also have a relation spéciale with the US – were given a good slap when they hesitated about joining in the bombing of Iraq in 2003.

The Gallic nation was sneered at as a ‘so-called ally’ and savaged where it really hurts a nation. In that case the other side may, possibly, if it wishes, be quite nice. But beware: if there are failures in fawning, you will not be allowed to sit at the top table with the big boys. You’ll end up in the dog house with the rest of the poodles.

Please note: Allegations that the United Kingdom follows the United States ‘like a poodle’ have been withdrawn from this article following complaints from the progressive poodle community; who say, as a proud breed, that they would not stoop to such lowly behaviour…

**President’s poodle**

Before Sir Christopher Meyer (above), British ambassador to the US from 1997 to 2003, took up his position in Washington, he went to Number 10 for a briefing with Tony Blair and Jonathan Powell. ‘Basically, Christopher, what we want you to do is get up the arse of the White House and stay there.’
‘Free market’ will eat itself

NCE upon a time, not all that long ago, companies such as Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google, and Microsoft were celebrated, especially in North America, as new tech successes. Not now. Big tech has become as pejorative a term as big pharma and big oil and the men – and they are mostly men – who run them condemned as the robber barons of 21st century capitalism.

The way they have been allowed to do business flies in the face of 100 years of anti-trust legislation in place since JD Rockefeller’s Standard Oil, which controlled 90% of America’s supply, was broken up by the US Supreme Court in 1911 into Esso (SO – geddit?), Amoco, Chevron, Marathon, and Mobil.

The original 13 United States fought for independence from Britain over, among other things, a monopoly on the trade in tea. But what this book reveals is the fundamental fissure at the heart of free market capitalism; that the market is never really free.

When Adam Smith, founding father of capitalism, wrote in The Wealth of Nations about the invisible hand of the market he imagined numberless suppliers with numberless consumers to arrive at a market price. But that is not how capitalism works. The relentless growth of an online retailer like Amazon, at the expense of tens of thousands of smaller stores, reveals the reality of contemporary capitalism in action. The market moves, inexorably, towards monopoly. Like pop, it will always, in the end, eat itself.

Keith Richmond

On Track

Prize Crossword

Crossword 166 by Tom Williams

Across
1 Wide triangular tie-knot
2 Charged
5 Young buffalo
7 Fraudulently manipulate prices
8 Backpack for hikers
9 Charges… of interest?
10 Work doggedly
13 Woven net fabric
14 Shriek and wail
18 Welsh national emblem
19 Desert water
21 Cabbage salad
22 Belonging to oneself
23 Pleased
24 A theme or topic

Down
1 Clothes cupboard
2 Nocturnal person
3 Strain and tension
4 Niche or alcove
5 Usual practice
6 Chance or fortune
11 Garnet, topaz or opal
12 Sweet horse tree?
15 Traditional tale
16 Expertise and acquired know-how
17 Spider’s trap
20 Turkeys and chickens

Solution to Crossword 165

Across
1 Lisbon
4 Comic
7 Snapdragon
8 Twig
9 Lathe
11 Descend
13 Sabbath
15 Quack
17 Skin
18 Explosives
20 Newts
21 Ginger

Down
1 Listed
2 Bang
3 Napkins
4 Coral
5 Mug
6 Canoe
7 Siesta
10 Thanks
12 Darning
14 Hangar
15 Queen
16 Knobs
17 Sewn
19 Paw

Congratulations to Paul Henderson, of Hitchin, Hertfordshire, 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 165th prize crossword in the January 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 February

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

February 2020 | The ASLEF Journal
The ASLEF RMS 500 Club

Colleagues

The 500 Club is a fundraising venture for ASLEF’s Retired Members’ Section.

**Conditions of Membership:** Only retired and working members of ASLEF, including district councils and branches, plus permanent staff employed by ASLEF, can make an application to join the RMS 500 Club. The application form and standing order form can only be completed and submitted by the ASLEF member, or staff member.

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

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**ASLEF RMS 500 Club application form**

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Postcode: .............................................................
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Each number costs £4. You can purchase as many numbers as you like. I confirm that I wish to purchase ____ numbers as part of the 500 Club.

(A) I have set up my standing order (£48 per annum or £4 per month)
(B) I enclose a cheque for advance payment (£48 per annum).

Delete (A) or (B) accordingly.

Signed: .................................................................
Date: .................................................................

Please return this coupon to: RMS 500 Club, Admin Dept, ASLEF, 77 St John Street, London, EC1M 4NN and hand the standing order mandate (right), to your bank (or via your internet bank).

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