

tssaupdate

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FUTURE OF RAIL

OUR VISION

As Bladerunner is rebooted and hitting our cinema screens, TSSA presents our vision for public transport in the future...





**Transport Salaried
Staffs' Association**

TSSA Update: issue 2017/2

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Can artificial intelligence do the job?



**General Secretary
Manuel Cortes
calls for a new
industrial model**

Bladerunner is back on the big screen with a 2049 version and Phillip K. Dick's *Electric Dreams* in a new television adaptation. This is a reflection of our enduring fascination with dystopian versus utopian futures. In its own way, that's exactly what *Marx's Communist Manifesto* represented when it was published. A programme of hope and a choice of a future, between barbarism and socialism.

Amidst the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) come real concerns that robots will replace humans, "take our jobs," and finally dump humanity in to the dystopia bin of history. But as trade unionists, we should not let pessimism get the better of us. Our movement was created precisely to prevent us from being crushed by alienating working practices. Our understanding of collective ownership will now become vital if we are to continue to shape the future and the

potential of AI and robots to benefit rather than do away with us.

Polls tell us that public ownership has become a mainstream view. Voters, by overwhelming majorities, want to see rail, energy and water run in the interests of our citizens rather than shareholders. Jeremy Corbyn has been propelled to the fore of our politics precisely because capitalism is holding out the prospect of a bleak future for millions of our young people. They are saddled by debt, have no prospect of holding capital and are desperately seeking an alternative future which is why Labour's manifesto *For The Many* excites them. Me too!

Under Corbyn, Labour will reconfigure the British economy



towards the collective, including our transport. Rail will receive new investment both upgrading and extending our existing network and building a new high-speed line all the way to Scotland. Music to our TSSA ears obviously and, let's face it, only governments have the means to deliver the billions needed to achieve this and the green benefits it brings. Whether buses, metro systems, conventional or high-speed, it's vital to decarbonisation, economic development, and cleaning-up the air that we breathe. The prospects for its future are as bright today as when the first steam locomotive started its journey on the Stockton to Darlington Railway back in 1825.

Since the 1919 International Labour Organisation met to agree an 8 hour limit on the working day, there have been huge technological advances which have seen productivity sky-rocket but, the reduction in the daily hours we work has been comparatively moderate. Increasing automation and robotisation gives us the opportunity and ability, as a society to redistribute work to achieve and maintain full employment.

Use our collective power

We know many passengers will still want a human presence irrespective of what AI may bring. Like we do today, we will build broad alliances with rail users, to ensure this remains the case. However, on its own, this may not be enough to secure our jobs. That's why we must look at a serious reduction in the working week without loss of earnings and retraining opportunities for our members to fill the new jobs that these technologies will create. I doubt many bosses are going to freely agree to this but we can use our collective power to make them do the right thing. If we don't, inequality will continue to spiral and many will languish on the unemployment register.

Of course AI presents many challenges for us. Yet it also offers the prospect of a new route by which we can take control of our working lives. If robots are to be a means of production, imagine if they were collectively owned and the wealth they generate is shared among the workers they displace. Far from being some utopian dream, this is actually an economic theory gaining traction even within the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) thinking. Harvard Professor of Economics, Richard Freeman is not an avowed Marxist. Yet he argues

that if distribution of capital remains narrow, as it is today, the main beneficiaries of robotisation will be a small number of wealthy owners.

To counter the collateral inequality he theorises that if workers shared in the ownership of the machines that are brought in to replace them, everyone's freedom and living standards would improve. Furthermore he claims rightly that governments have at their disposal a range of policy initiatives that can help achieve this. If Harvard and the IMF are advocating collective ownership of the future means of production, trade unions must also rise to the challenge and bargain harder for our workers' share.

Imagine if we collectively owned the means of production! We would be the first generation of workers to share among ourselves the full spoils of the enormous wealth which technological change generates. This will allow working people to significantly cut their working week without loss of income whilst maintaining full employment. The world of work will be transformed by robotisation. A new industrial revolution is certainly now in the making. We will campaign for this to benefit the many not the few, to secure a brighter future for you, your colleagues, our industry and our society. ■



How transport can be run for

TSSA's Media and Communications Officer **Kerry Abel** met Shadow Transport Minister **Andy McDonald** to discuss his vision for public transport.

I first heard Andy McDonald speak at a TSSA Conference dinner and I was struck by not only how knowledgeable he was about rail, but also how passionate he was about public transport. I asked Andy where that comes from and his answer lay in his constituency.

"I think the reason I ended up in this position was because what was stimulating me was the peripheral attitude that Department for Transport and central government had towards constituencies like mine in terms of connectivity and service. My borough is the heart of a conurbation of 660,000, not electrified and no direct connection to the capital. We've got the third largest port in the UK that isn't properly connected and we want to see that happen. We were persevering, having to tolerate and suffer the pace of trains which have long since out-lived their shelf-life. And it was that sense of, not just injustice, but an absolute rank failure to provide people with a decent railway transport system in so many parts of the country. Which of course leads to a

failure to grow that economy; to get people into productive work; so on and so forth."

Andy has a reputation for being one of the nicest MPs, but as I found out he's also got a sharp head for rail. He was particularly keen to talk about research that his office had carried out which involved passengers, rail staff, including a hundred TSSA members. He said "When we talked to staff,

"I think it's not just feasible it's the logical way to go about this. We know that there is massive leakage out of this system. The franchising model itself is widely criticised as not being fit for purpose"

which was TSSA particularly, you get the same themes – there's a mess at ticketing, there's all sorts of different rules, that the railway doesn't take any responsibility to get from one side to the other."

This research is interpreted by Andy's fundamental view that the vision for a publicly owned railway laid out in the *For The Many* Labour manifesto in 2017 is a sensible way to run

our transport infrastructure. Critics have questioned how easy it would be to bring franchises into public control but Andy rebuffed this,

"I think it's not just feasible it's the logical way to go about this. We know that there is massive leakage out of this system. The franchising model itself is widely criticised as not being fit for purpose and is not simply described in that way by those who are enthusiastic about public ownership, it's those who have looked to privatise their model who say this doesn't work. Not only is the rationale right, but the way we want to go about it is

sensible, it's pragmatic, it's business-like. We're saying that as those franchises expire they will come across one by one by one."

He talked about his frustration with leakage from the system from the franchising process and litigation as well as the lack of innovation.

What struck me most from the hour I spent talking to Andy was that his motivation comes from how ordinary people use public transport and why they need to get themselves and goods around the country.

When I asked about future staffing levels he was clear the public want to see visible

the many

staff. He was clearly against driver only operation and quoted some recent near-miss accidents. But he said it was much wider than this issue and spoke passionately about disabled passengers right to be able to turn up and travel. His harshest criticism was saved for the Tories – “Why on earth are we saying to a very large proportion of the population “No I’m sorry you’re not going to have the same freedoms as everybody else”? That’s scandalous and unacceptable!”

Andy understands the overall role that staff play in passengers’ experience of travelling and their research has noted this. He called staff ‘human Polyfilla’ trying to cover up the cracks in the system, but acknowledged: “the cracks are too deep to smooth over with that human Polyfilla”.

We know the excellent and sensible ambitions for a People’s Railway laid out in the *For The Many* manifesto rely on Labour getting elected and when I asked what TSSA members could do to contribute to getting Labour into power Andy slowed down and spoke in a lower tone. Which I think explains how I got such a long interview with

him at relatively short notice.

“I’d like to take this opportunity to thank TSSA members at the last election, their dues into the union are what is supporting a union position. I don’t think we can over-state this. TSSA should feel very, very good about their role, because you hosted

“Andy called staff ‘human Polyfilla’ trying to cover up the cracks in the system, but acknowledged ‘the cracks are too deep to smooth over with that human Polyfilla’”

phone banks and all sorts. We don’t often stop to say thank you enough and it dawned on me that we’ve been so caught up in taking on an election when nobody thought we’d survive it, pitching into that with all that energy and coming out the other side with a good result. We’re not in government but we did so much better

than anyone ever thought we would do. There’s an awful lot of people who made this possible and we’ve got to say a huge thank you to them.”

However he added “But maybe we have to get ready to do the same again!”

Andy feels the public tide is turning and Labour is on the front foot now, focusing on policy development, financial consequences and legal processes. His passion for a democratic and well-run public transport system is anchored in the people

he represents and speaks to from Tanni Grey-Thompson to staff in ticket offices. TSSA and Andy McDonald’s department have a close working relationship and our ambitions are closely entwined, we should make the most of it. ■



Extra: Full interview available at bit.ly/AMinterviewOct2107

Labour's vision for the railway

Labour's vision for our railway is just that. It should be ours, in public ownership; and it should be one unified railway, not multiple railway companies squabbling to maximise their profits instead of concentrating on working together to provide the best public service.

A Labour government will give priority to creating a publicly-owned railway that is fully integrated across all

of its functions throughout the whole of Britain, whilst also providing the benefits that have stemmed from

devolution of powers over local rail services.

Very little of this can be achieved in the present railway that has been cut into pieces to enable privatisation. Sufficient funding for the railway is also vital. Labour's manifesto at the last election announced proposals to upgrade and expand the railway across the country, as part of a £250 billion National Transformation Fund.

Labour will implement railway funding consistently and steadily, so the rail supply industry will always have a multi-year forward view, giving confidence to invest in training, staff capacity, technology and facilities.

Moreover, this support for the railway will be set within a 30-40 year strategic view of railway development. There has never been such a long-term framework for rail development in Britain, so this represents a high ambition. Labour's intention to achieve a re-integrated railway with an overall guiding mind brings it within range. ■

Integration of the railway will be able to achieve many practical benefits the present privatised system cannot:

A railway that is **easy to use** from one side of the network to the other

A railway where ticketing is unified, **simple and logical** – and where it does not feel like a lottery to get reasonable price tickets

A railway that **works together** to give the densest possible network of services at regular spacings - rather than multiple operators but fewer available travel options

A railway able to **take responsibility** to get passengers from one end of their rail journey to the other

A railway that is **integrated** with other forms of local public transport

A railway where **information** is reliable, timely, consistent, comprehensive and readily available

A railway that is **cost-effective** in how its parts work together, without duplication and conflict between parts in its day to day operation or its strategic planning

A railway that is cost-effective in **procuring and managing** its rolling stock and other equipment, so that all parts of the railway can maximise possible economies of scale – and so that rail manufacturing is supported in Britain

A railway that maximises opportunities to move **freight** by rail – where a 'guiding mind' that controls all train operations gives the benefits of freight on rail appropriate weight in trade-offs against passenger services

A railway that **functions as a whole** in its daily operation – with infrastructure and all train operations working as an integrated whole to maximise service continuity around planned and unplanned disruption

A railway that functions as a whole in its **strategic planning** for improvements - with infrastructure and train operations working as a unified whole rather than divorced so that trains get ordered without certainty whether the routes they run on will be electrified or will need diesel traction



TSSA's Strategic Vision 2018–2020



TSSA's Strategic Vision 2018–2020

Our union's ability to meet some of its strategic objectives is under pressure due to a declining membership albeit at a reduced rate than for the past couple of decades. We have turned our finances around and recorded a small surplus in 2016. Sadly, having taken very tough and difficult decisions to achieve this, our financial viability is once again under some pressure due to a slow, but ongoing, decline in membership. If this situation is not reversed soon, our union's survival will again be at stake.

Our vision

Our Executive Committee has agreed that our union's overriding strategic priorities are:

- To build our members power through growing the size of our union;
- To get more of our members involved in our activities;
- To build strategic partnerships which help ensure that our union's resources are focussed on advancing our members interests and on securing a viable future for their voice;
- To maintain financial stability through the careful management of our assets, income and expenditure.

Our vision takes account of the tough operating environment that current governments are creating for our union in both Britain and Ireland. Savage cuts have been ongoing for many years. These have had a negative impact on our membership. If we don't start growing soon, our financial position will significantly deteriorate. Shamefully, the British government has further restricted our legitimate activities. It has added to the bureaucracy which unions need to comply with to operate legally. This is an increasing drain on our union's resources. Ultimately these detrimental new laws and regulations, could place our union's assets at significant risk if not managed carefully.

On the positive side, the compulsory purchase of our former headquarters in London has provided our union with significant capital to buy a new building that will house our staff as well as generate a much needed rental income stream. We will also carefully invest any surplus that may result from the sale of

Walkden House and buying our new headquarters. We also intend to buy our own office in Bristol.

Building power through growing our union and getting many more members active

Our aim is to put our members at the centre of everything our union does. Our Reps are increasingly taking the lead and this will continue to flourish as our union rises to the many and varied challenges which our members face. We provide our Reps with the tools they need to do their jobs. We also invest heavily in their training and development so that they become workplace leaders as this is pivotal to our unions success. That's why we are deeply committed to continue working with partner organisations such as the GFTU to develop and upgrade our Education Programme so it always meets the changing needs of our workplace leaders.

Our aim is to transform all of our Reps into strong workplace leaders. This means that increasingly, they are developing our workplace campaigns, they set the bargaining agenda in conjunction with our members whilst also representing them at hearings. Perhaps, most importantly, they are at the forefront of our recruitment and retention efforts. We aim to build a union in which our workplace leaders create the conditions which shift the balance of power in favour of our members. This will only be achieved by involving many more of our members in our union's activities.

Our paid Organisers are being developed to provide the vital support which our workplace leaders need. Their roles continue to evolve into one that nurtures and builds on the many talents which our activists bring. They in turn, will seek to engage as many of our members as possible in our union's activities. This is how our Executive Committee (EC) intends to continue building stronger workplace organisation. That's also why our union's Time to Grow Strategy will remain the central focus of our efforts to reverse our decline in membership.

- All parts of our union will be involved in implementing our Strategy. This means our EC, Divisional Councils, Branches, Self-Organised Groups (SOGs) and workplace leaders - as well as our staff - all have a crucial role to play if we are to be successful;

- Project-based working will be the framework by which our paid staff deliver the implementation of our Strategy.

Our experience shows that when we train our Reps in recruitment skills, our union starts growing within their workplace. However, so far, we have been unable to train enough of them to turn our fortunes around. What has been missing is 'scale' in light of the challenges our members and our union face. To speed up the delivery of our Time to Grow Strategy, early in 2018, we will be running compulsory courses on recruitment skills for all our Reps and Branch and Divisional Council Officers. This will be a huge undertaking as we will be training over 1200 of our people - running at least 70 courses across Britain and Ireland - in a short space of time. We will then set recruitment targets for Reps, Branches and Divisional Councils. In many ways, this presents our union with the best opportunity to turn our decline around and start growing once again - our union simply cannot survive without addressing the decline in membership!

Strategic partnerships

Global deregulation and privatisation of transport networks is leading to an increase in multi-modal ownership. This means a number of companies now operate across the public transport, freight and maritime industries. Besides our own union, there are a number of specialised transport unions within the UK - Aslef, Nautilus, RMT and URTU - and in Ireland, NBRU.

The structures and membership of all of these unions, including our own, largely reflect the way that our industries use to operate. Multi-modal ownership, deregulation and privatisation create a new set of challenges on a daily basis. We must continue to rise to the opportunities this may offer whilst minimising the threats it brings. We need to look at ways of building strategic partnerships which maximise our members bargaining strength and use of our union's scarce resources as this will help protect our members interests. It's difficult to predict how strategic partnerships will develop. In some cases, working together might take the form of inter-union federations or may even lead to the creation of a new union.

In Ireland, we are well on the road to delivering a union federation with the NBRU. This will give our Irish members an even more powerful voice well into the future. We will also pull our resources with those of the NBRU and redirect the spare capacity this creates towards achieving membership growth. If at all possible, we intend to look at opportunities to adapt this ground-breaking model to Britain so that we can build further federations with our sister unions.

If sharing services is the main driver for a strategic partnership, it may lead to the creation of separate entities jointly owned by the participants. It's vital that our union continues to explore these options whilst we remain in a relatively strong financial footing. In doing so, we will continue to work closely with the GFTU to develop further services which support our members as well as those of other small to medium size unions. Our EC's overriding aim is to ensure that our members continue to have a strong voice long into the future. To help deliver this, we will maximise the effectiveness of all our resources and strategic alliances. We will also focus on growing the size of our union as this is the most crucial measure of our success.

To maintain long term financial stability through the careful management of our assets, income and expenditure

In recent years, our EC has taken very difficult decisions which led to significant reductions in our staff costs. We have also implemented measures which have streamlined our democratic structures. Taken together, these achieved a small surplus in 2016 after years of running deficits. Our current structure will sustain us as an independent union provided our membership does not fall below 18,000. We now have in place a staff structure with an agreed full time equivalent limit of 46 employees. This will be maintained until such times as membership increases above 21,000 or falls below 18,000, either of which will lead to a review of this figure.

Our declining membership puts our financial viability under threat. We will continue to seek to improve this by maximising rental income from our new headquarters and investments. However, this in itself will not be enough so we will continue to look at ways of reducing costs whilst improving the services our members get through sharing resources with other unions as part of our strategic alliances. We are already doing this in a number of areas and savings have been - and continue to be achieved. However, we are reaching the limit of how much more breathing space can be delivered by such measures alone. Efficiency isn't just about reducing costs. We always aim to improve the quality of service our members get to be able to retain them and also be attractive to potential new ones. This is the best way to protect and expand our income. Focussing on reducing costs alone will eventually undermine our capacity to deliver our strategic objectives as our resources begin to be overstretched and the motivation of our staff is lost.

We will continue decentralising the day to day management of budgets within our union to bring

further control and greater accountability to all our expenditure decisions. We will keep a tight rein on spending to ensure that we never again allow deficits to grow to the point which threatened our very own existence in 2013/14. Instead, we will take whatever action is needed to protect the interests of our members in the medium to long-term.

We intend to purchase a new London headquarters at the earliest opportunity. This will provide us with a home as well as much needed rental income. Our new building will provide 21st Century facilities for our staff and our members. This means implementing an Information Technology (IT) strategy which recognises its expanding role in changing the way our union operates. It also means equipping our staff with the tools they need to do their jobs. Our EC recognises that the move to a new headquarters offers us a real opportunity for a fresh start and significant investment in IT equipment and furnishings will be undertaken.

Maintaining membership above 18,000 is crucial to our union's survival. This, together with strategies designed to maximise our rental and investment income whilst carefully managing our costs is vital to remain financially viable in the medium to long-term.

Making it a reality

Our Operational Plans will continue to ensure that adequate resources are allocated to our priorities. Our EC regularly reviews their outcomes and if required adapt the set objectives to deliver our needs. However, the key to achieving our vision is our members. Our very best plan is doomed to fail if it does not capture their imagination. Our Reps, SOGs, Branches and Divisional Councils are the conveyor belt which enables our union to successfully achieve our plans. They will always be at the forefront of our efforts to make our vision a reality.

Network Rail, TfL, High-Speed 2 (HS2) and Crossrail continue to be key organisations offering the greatest scope to deliver our union's operational objectives of:-

- 1) Building capacity and workplace power by increasing our union's activities;
- 2) Having our union growing once again through member-led recruitment activity.

Dedicated resources will be allocated to our TfL, Network Rail, HS2 and Crossrail projects in varying degrees. Network Rail and TfL offer the most immediate opportunities for growth, consequently, building our workplace leaders and organisation within these companies will be our key priority in the immediate to medium-term. In addition, the opening of Crossrail in 2018 also provides opportunities for the recruitment of new members.

To ensure that we remain a key player as the face of our rail industry continues to change, we must put in place the foundations which pave the way for our future membership growth. That's why, HS2 will attract increasing resources in the medium to longer-term. As and when resources allow, we will identify other priorities which will help us grow our membership and give greater workplace power to our members.

The key strategic operational objectives for 2018-20 in TfL, Network Rail and Crossrail will be as follows:

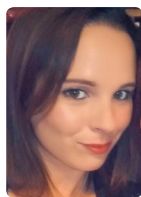
- To identify and cultivate workplace leaders at all levels;
- To build more effective, sustainable and organising focussed workplace structures which are supported through the coaching, training and development of our new and existing workplace leaders;
- To develop more effective communications with our members and potential members with the development of electronic organising resources including My TSSA and News-On-The-Go;
- To launch key campaigns in TfL, Network Rail and Crossrail aligned to our union's key industrial goals which will be used to maximise growth and retention by delivering victories for our members. Our union will set recruitment targets in support of our Time to Grow Strategy within each of these companies and among our reps within them;
- To build coalitions, increase community engagement linked to our political and industrial aims.

To deliver the above our staff are increasingly engaging in project work and our paid Organisers have all been set recruitment targets. Beyond Network Rail, TfL and Crossrail, each of our Organising Teams, will continue to support our workplace leaders whilst seeking to identify and take advantage of opportunities to build our capacity and membership across their workplaces. To help them achieve this, all our Reps and Branch and Divisional Council Officers will undertake compulsory recruitment skills training in the early part of 2018 after which they will all have set recruitment targets and be accountable for their delivery.



The future of TSSA

The theme of this edition is the future of rail. We believe staff pay a huge part in that, so as part of the future of TSSA, we asked young member **Sarah Jane Potter**, a TSSA member working at the busy Euston station to write about her experience of the union.



Having been a member of all three railway unions, I know that with regard to socialist values and

equality – TSSA is without equal in the industry.

We are making history by joining forces with Stonewall to promote LGBT rights. We fight racism and fascism with the EMix group for BAME members. Rights for disabled members, women's rights, the right to fair pay – these are all current and ever more essential fights.

Historically, Labour Party and union membership have gone hand in hand.

However, trade union membership country-wide has fallen by 4.2%. As members retire, they are not being replaced.

I believe that this is, in part,

due to insecure work such as zero hour and short term contracts. It is difficult to organise and unionise people under these conditions. People don't want to join a union in a job they know is entirely insecure.

Many young people are starting in the industry on permanent contracts and still not joining a union. We know young people are becoming increasingly politically engaged, so why aren't they putting this into practise by joining a union?

Many people, myself included, would argue that Momentum was responsible for delivering Labour's excellent result in the general election.

It was on the streets, on the phone 'Calling for Corbyn' and all over social media. Momentum was visible, their goal was clear from beginning to end. But more than this,

activists went out of their way to engage with and be inclusive to young people.

I was brought up in a pro-union family. I knew how important unions were before I was old enough to be in one and I couldn't wait to join as soon as I was, but many other people my age have grown up at the mercy of free market capitalism. They have 'come to terms' with the fact that their future is bleak and they don't think there is anything that a union can do to stop any of that.

When the Tory government is trying to lessen the power of trade unions, we need to speak louder to younger people.

Ask them their opinion. Ask them what problems they face in the workplace and what the union could do for them. Most importantly though, tell them how they can get involved and how they can make a difference.

We've seen the energy that young people have. They really do care and they really can make a difference if we make an effort to engage them. ■

In the last few years – with the appointment of Jeremy Corbyn as leader – The Labour Party's membership has skyrocketed to over 500,000 members.

- 60% of voters aged 18-24 voted Labour at general election 2017
- 61.5% of Labour's total vote was from people under the age of 40

The future is female

TSSA's Head of Communications **Carmel Nolan** recently interviewed **Claire Mowbray**, who is leading up the National High Speed Rail College. She asked her what the future had in store for the industry.

The future of our rail industry is growing very much out of the heart and soul of Claire Mowbray. Yes, you read that right: the future of rail in Britain is currently being fashioned by a woman. And in her role as Chief Executive Officer of the National High Speed Rail College, (NHSRC) Mowbray is ensuring her female vision of the rail future will beget a stronger female workforce. She stands not much more than 5 feet tall. But she will be remembered, I hope, as an inspirational rail industry giant and for the formidable change and good fortune she brings to UK rail.

The soil on which both the HS2's two new aluminum and glass campuses now glisten in Birmingham and Doncaster was, just two years ago, still wasteland crying out for urban renewal. They came in under time and on budget because of her sheer will to get things done.

This September the first cohort of students took up their apprenticeship and degree places to start out on

a journey to transform them into our next generation of rail engineers, signallers, surveyors, designers and customer servicers. Next September 1,000 students are expected to enroll at the Birmingham and Doncaster campuses and begin, in earnest, the biggest government sponsored initiative in generations, to redress our nation's chronic skills shortage. By the time HS2 comes on line in 2027,

"It's really going to be a job for life because we are so short of skills we won't be able to let go of the talent we develop"

the NHSRC should have turned out some 10,000 graduates. It is Claire's hope that by that time, half of that number will be women graduates.

The concentration on gender balance is certainly not a matter of political correctness. It's an economic necessity. Rising to our nation's skills-gap challenge means it is essential young women are persuaded to take up a career in rail. NCHSR,

perhaps better described as The Rail University, is very much the welcoming new entry point. Charlotte Murray, Emergency Planning Manager & Care Team Leader at Greater Western Railway Rail told a recent Women In Rail Forum: "Rail still looks like a male world, not much is advertised to make it attractive to women. It would be a good idea to get involved in careers days at schools." Mowbray intends to

do just that. Her gender itself is an important show of female leadership needed to

make the industry look like the recruits it needs. Her background is entirely in further education colleges and enabling kids to make educational transits that weren't always obvious to them. "The problem with rail in the past is that we have never encouraged it as a vocational career you go into from school. It's been an industry people have fallen into rather than





*Claire
Mowbray*

come to by design. The NHSRC will change that by building a pathway straight from school to industry,” she explained.

Much rests on her ability to drive knowledge of the careers paths now offered via NCHSR down into schools. Britain currently needs an estimated 10,000 new engineers to see through the improvements to the existing networks. The recent disappointing cancellation of electrification upgrades on Trans-Pennine, East Midland and South Wales mainlines has been presented as a cost-savings exercise by the Tory Department for Transport, but of course the upgrades were imperiled because we just don’t have the

skilled staff to do the work. HS2 is expected to create 25,000 jobs during construction and 3000 jobs when in operation. Yet the rail industry is to lose half its staff to retirement within the next 15 years. That was unsustainable even before the Brexit vote which has turned Britain into a hostile climate for the foreign workers with the skills we need. So plugging the skills gap is NHSRC’s raison

d’être. As Clare Perry said before resigning last year, “We can’t hope to have the high performing rail industry that the country needs without first addressing the challenge facing the industry today: its dismal performance on gender equality.”

Why more women?

Insufficient progress on women in rail is not news to TSSA. Women make up 47% of the national workforce but just 16% of the rail workforce. A report for Women in Rail two years ago reported only 13,492 out of the 87,000 people working in rail were female – almost exactly the number of women who were working in

rail at the outbreak of World War I. By the end of that war, there were 25,000 women out of a total workforce of 85,000. A precise comparison between then and now can’t be made, but it is a sad truth that there are fewer women in rail today than 100 years ago. The national interest is once again demanding women be fast tracked into rail. Skilled up via the NHSRC courses, Mowbray insists, there will be no social compunction for women to ever again leave the industry. “Britain has now entered its biggest rail revolution for generations. The College will play a transformational role in bridging the skills gap within the industry, is paving the way for an alternative form of education by working closely with industry leaders to create a tailored curriculum giving the next generation of workers specialist training in sectors like rolling stock and track systems.

“We need the perspective of women at every level, particularly if you go into engineering and design, it’s really going to be a job for life because we are so short of skills we won’t be able to let go of the talent we develop in Doncaster and Birmingham. No matter what your gender we want you. By seeking to reach a 50:50 gender balance by 2020, we are a college that very much wants women to join us to ensure women really are shaping the future of rail.” ■

What will trade unions look

Organising Director **Nadine Rae** looks at the possibility of embracing technology to organise workers in the future and examines international examples to see what we can take for our industry.

It is true that the unionised working population of Britain is roughly half of what it was in 1979¹, and in TSSA our membership has mirrored this decline. But, I'd make the case that now trade unions are more relevant than ever.

As more jobs are replaced by gig economy models or moved online someone needs to fight for workers' rights, particularly those further down the pay scale. Unions aren't just for the low paid, they are for negotiating collective deals, so the few aren't played off against the many in an increasingly alienating work-from-home, hot-desking culture. Trade unions enable us to speak with one voice about our industry.

I am heartened by the political campaigns I've seen from groups like Momentum, largely from young people who have grown their voice online to get their opinions noticed. Much of this type of campaigning is traditional organising – outlining their

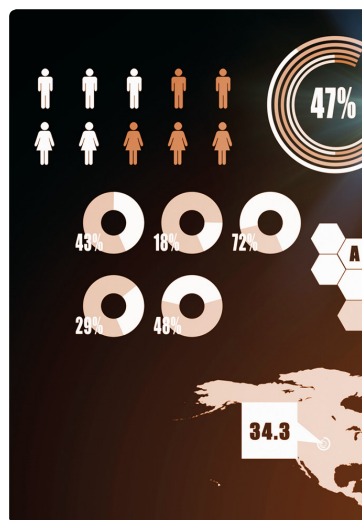
campaign, finding out who's interested and going out to build more support. We've been doing this for years, but I'm pleased to see it done with humour and enthusiasm, and gaining a growing audience online.

First of all, it's important to realise we don't have an image problem. Four out of five people in Britain think trade unions are 'essential' to protecting workers' interests². But the world of work has changed, industries have changed, and young members simply aren't joining up.

We have seen the slow industrial restructuring, the rise of smaller and more out-sourced employers that encourage 'self-employment' contracts alongside anti-union legislation and deep cuts to public sector spending.

TSSA has been working hard in the face of all of these challenges, but we also need

"Four out of five people in Britain think that trade unions are 'essential' to protecting workers' interests"



to think differently in the near future.

Looking to the US, which has an even worse situation – union membership has fallen to just 10% – I've noticed union leaders in America are more prepared to experiment. They are upfront in

saying they don't know what the organisational models of the future will look like, but they do want to discover them. It's hard to imagine a UK union leader speaking with such candour so publicly in the same way as David Rolf, Vice President of SEIU and the

like in the future?



founder of the 'Fight for \$15' minimum wage campaign. His mantra is 'innovate or die'.

We can use technology to empower our members, but we can't hide behind it. Trade unions were built on armies of reps on the ground who are accessible to members, well trained by the union and prepared to speak truth to power. These are the backbone of our union but the individuals who stick their neck out are targets for management and struggle to manage their union work alongside their paid jobs and family lives. To be successful in the future we need to keep reps at our centre and find ways to educate and support those

who spread our message. More reps mean fewer burnouts and more communication makes it easier. But there's no getting away from the central task of finding good reps and building them up so they can successfully represent all of us.

The future doesn't look like the past

Across the whole of the UK workforce, 47% is female and unfortunately women are more likely to be working in low paid sectors and hold down fewer working hours, making their

situations precarious. In the rail industry just 16% of workers are women, but in March this year, Network Rail (NR) set a modest target to get to 20% by 2020. I welcome this goal, but in order to do this, NR will have to meaningfully engage with the issues that act as barriers for women at work, they will have to challenge their ideas of what makes a good manager, how workers can carry out their jobs flexibly and make sure they are training up their internal talent rather than buying in the newest 'expert' when they've run out of ideas.

Trade unions are critical friends to employers, we can congratulate these initiatives at the same time as pointing out what could be done better. Employers would be wise to work alongside us to achieve these goals together.

Many of the struggles of the past, advocated so strongly by trade unions – for equal pay, to challenge discrimination and against breaking up the workforce will have to continue. We are only strong if we are united and speaking to the employer clearly with one voice. ■



References:

- 1 Source: Department of Employment Statistics Division (1892-1974): Certification Office (1974-2015)
- 2 <https://www.wipsos.com/wipsos-morilen-uk/trade-unions-poll>

The 70th anniversary of passing the Transport Act asks us to take note from history.

Looking back – looking forward

Between 1945 and 1950 Parliament passed 310 Acts that fundamentally changed British society. The private sector continued to dominate the economy but the changes made were of major economic and political significance. As well as nationalising the Bank of England and the National Health Service, the Transport Act was passed 70 years ago.

The vindictive Trade Disputes Act of 1927 was also repealed. Without looking back with nostalgia, it would be foolish to ignore our history. Rail nationalisation was discussed with the government as far back as 1918, but it took several decades and a Labour government with a radical '*Let Us Face The Future*' manifesto and strong calls from the union movement to get progress on a democratic, nationalised transport infrastructure.

We know our recent history and that rail companies have been in private hands for several decades now, but it is important to understand these gains are not just handed over,

it took patient and persistent calls from those in the transport unions to repeatedly make the case for public ownership and leadership from a radical Labour government to take this up. Does this sound familiar?

Role of trade unions

It is worth noting that in 1945 the Labour Party launched an election appeal of one shilling (5 pence) from every contracted-in member and our union (then called the RCA) was the first union to respond. With almost 90% of its 89,000 members

paying the political levy it sent a donation of £5,000.

This was direct democracy pooled from working people through a trade union movement. The current Tory government understands how powerful this is, and despite trying to frame union leaders as 'barons' it is much fairer than shady donations by individual business leaders.

All members should understand their power in our larger movement. Encouraging your colleagues to join TSSA allows a bigger voice in your workplace and in the political sphere to influence national politics. The current Labour government's '*For The Many*' manifesto is radical and forward looking, our next task is to make the Labour government a reality, so we can see this vision rolled out. ■

