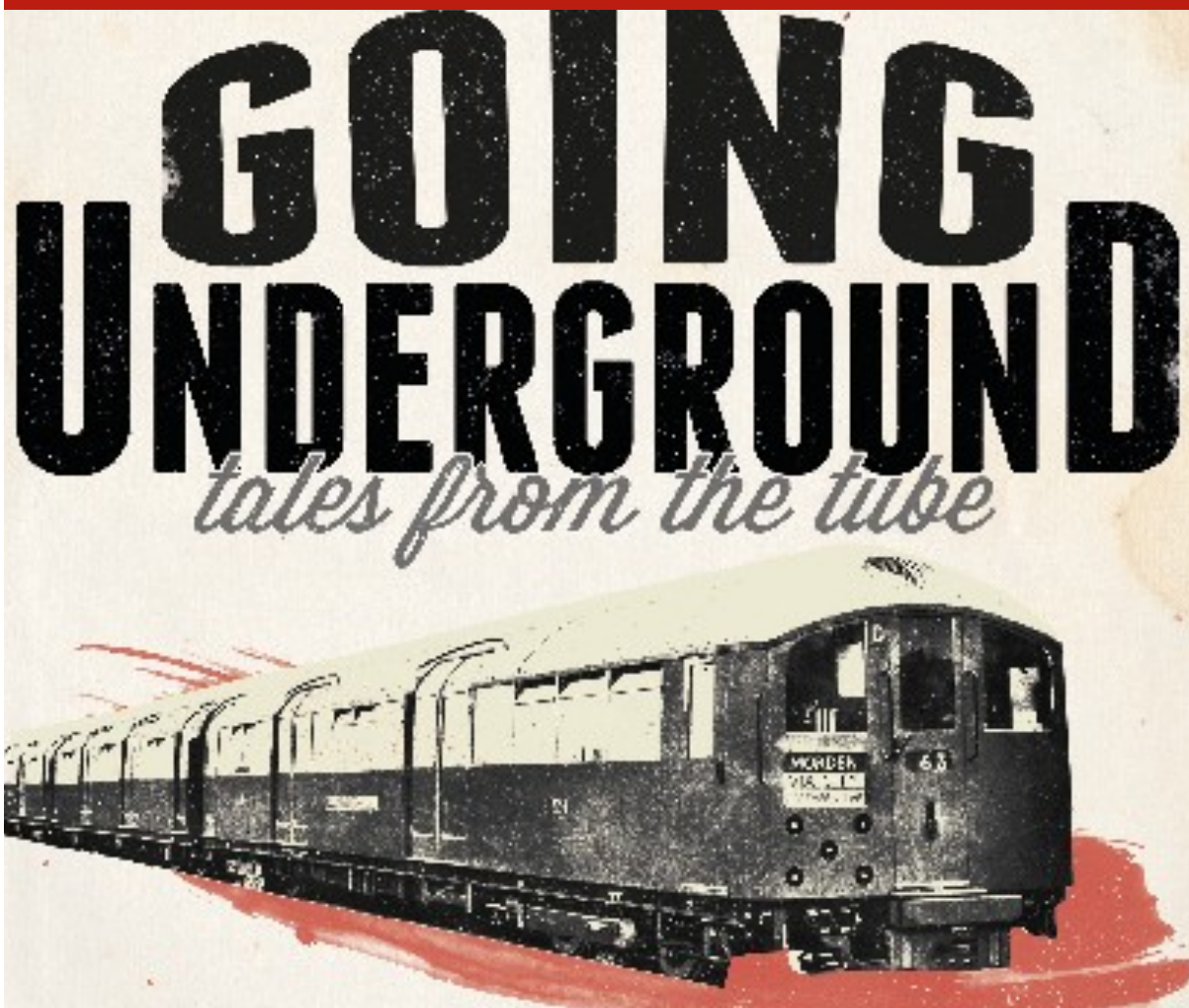


Britain at Work

London project newsletter issue 3 July 2013



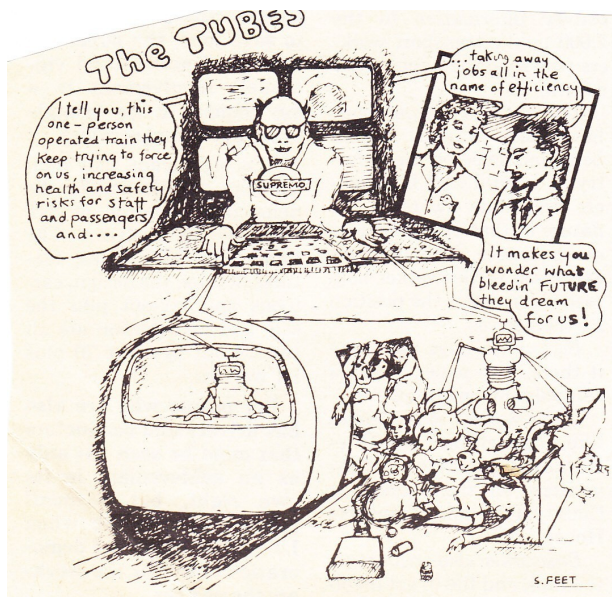
It's the 150th anniversary of the London Underground this year. July 1 2013 will also mark the 80th anniversary of the formation of the London Passenger Transport Board (LPTB) in 1933. This was a public corporation that took over control of all public transport (except mainline railways) from private companies and unified the services at 55 Broadway, under Lord Ashfield and Frank Pick. This was an important turning point for the underground as it placed all lines under one umbrella, allowed for improved planning and development and ensured that the unions were able to consolidate their key role in representing tube workers.

The underground has remained largely in public ownership ever since, being nationalised after the Second World War, handed over to the Greater London Council in 1970, renationalised as LRT in 1984 and handed back to the Greater London Authority (part of Transport for London) in 2000 when it was part-privatised under the notorious Public-Private Partnership (PPP) scheme. With the complete failure of the PPP, it's now largely back in public hands. In this issue, we explore more recent underground history with an article on a new film which features the experiences of tube workers, B@W interviews and other background information.

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London Underground: Working on the Transport Dave Welsh



When the London Passenger Transport Board was formed on July 1 1933, it was never going to be simply about the unification of London's transport services. For some, it was the embodiment of 'gradualist' socialism in the form of Herbert Morrison's public corporation, 'the first great industry which had been transferred from private to public ownership.' For others it represented a dangerous collectivist fantasy, 'Nationalisation in disguise.' Ernest Bevin, the leader of the TGWU, called it 'positively the worst form of public control' whilst the CP, in a pamphlet called *More Fares Please*, condemned it as a 'financial dictatorship... which is strangling the proper development of London's transport system.'

That London's underground could and should not be left in private hands was an axiom of the political elite, the transport unions, most political parties and large swathes of the public. It was simply too politically dangerous, as well as grossly inefficient to allow 'fat cats' to run free, a point made by William Morris in 1886 when private companies were fighting each other for every penny of profit to the detriment of passengers. After World War 2, when services were nationalised under the BTC and LTE, public ownership gave the tube more security and stability in terms of work. Progress in building new lines—the Victoria—was glacially slow but the tube did not shrink (unlike British Railways under Beeching). There were substantial improvements to working conditions and working on LT was a secure job with a pension and union representation, a welcome change from the horrors of the depression years.

A new generation of tube workers emerged in the 60s and 70s. They were often black, a legacy of London Transport's Caribbean recruitment policies, and had felt the racism that permeated much of public transport employment. They were mostly young, flouting uniform

rules, challenging their employer and the slow-moving unions from below and mocking the 1956 machinery of negotiation with its sectional councils. They were a Bolshie lot, less inclined to do shift-work, looking outside at better-paid jobs and believing that working on the transport was a mug's game.

With the '9 Point Plan' (1974) there was some improvement but these workers began to lean on a partially-opened door to create a new approach that would potentially unify all tube workers and give them a bigger voice in how LT was run. They launched rank and file newsletters such as *Picc Up on the East* and *Close Encounters on the District Line*, challenged the right-wing leaderships of their unions for democratic control (NUR and TSSA), campaigned against sexism and the lack of facilities for women workers, and, through Rail Against the Nazis, fought racism and the rise of fascist groups like the National Front. They also argued against the productivity and efficiency mantra of the underground, and they were at the forefront of strikes in the 1980s, often seeking alliances with bus workers.

With the GLC in charge of London Transport from 1970, it began to be possible to articulate a strategic policy for the tube with cheaper fares as the keystone. In 1981, the GLC's Fares Fair policy reflected the coming together of many strands including the unsuccessful Can't Pay Won't Pay campaign, and creating a new atmosphere which brought passengers onto the tube and promised a new era for staff. A one-day strike on March 28 1984 in defence of the GLC's control of the system was an unprecedented demonstration of support from the workforce for public-owned and accountable transport. But with the GLC abolition in 1986 and transport handed over to a government quango, the tide turned and productivity was pushed through with the introduction of one person operated trains (OPO) and changes to station staffing after the King's Cross fire.

Instead of the new era envisaged by staff and passengers, a managerial, top-down approach coupled with the selling off of bus routes and the introduction of gate line technology, prevailed with the backing of Thatcher's government. A further assault on the underground came with PPP, with two companies, Tubelines and Metronet, taking over all tube lines, opposed by Ken Livingstone, the unions and the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation (CATP). In 2013, the underground is largely back in public ownership. The unions retain a key role and the Greater London Authority may be able to play a future role in rebuilding the system to create a peoples' Underground and a peoples' London. Recent history tells us that public transport is shaped by a wide array of forces. The current protests in Brazil, triggered by transport fares, should remind us that public transport is something the people have to build and defend.

Pam Singer/Bill Siepmann/Glenroy Watson/Martin Eady

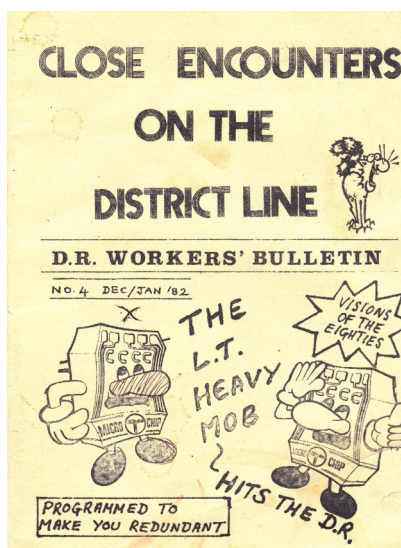


Pam Singer White City training Centre [1982], which of course is now buried by that absolutely massive Westfield Shopping Centre. I went to the Training Centre, run a bit like a military academy. I went through the training for station staff. I was starting off as station staff on the Metropolitan line, mainly in the City but also at Edgware Road as well. Guards' training came up and I went through for that, again at White City and I was taken on as a guard, first at Hammersmith, then at Baker Street and then at Neasden where I remained for many, many years. You had to know the tracks and signals. You were there to guard the back of the train, to make sure that nobody ploughed into you. What they were not strong on, of course, was how to deal with the public, how to deal with passengers, a kind of little side line. They got rid of guards, well, lucky I had trained as a driver. [Later] I trained to be a shunter, you were moving the trains from this part of the depot to that part of the depot. So it was like a break, from having to deal with people who were yelling at you because you were five minutes late, the public was really unsympathetic.

Bill Siepmann A new depot at Baker Street Jubilee opened up. And for me it was a bit of a special depot. It was a better place to work than anywhere I ever worked elsewhere on the system. Different times I worked on the East London line, Piccadilly line. [I was in ASLE&F] I have read the official history of ASLE&F, *The Lighted Flame*. Reading that is like chewing your way through a doormat. It was sort of tribal. Train crew, being trained drivers and guards, because they were in line to promotion to be train drivers, were allowed to be ASLE&F, and everyone else was represented by the NUR, because the effect was management had a divide and rule edge for every single occasion. [The sectional council system] meant it was like fighting tanks with bows and arrows. When I first went on the job I thought I was a Trotskyist and I read the *Guardian* and I was a fairly easy target for wind-ups. And the whole culture of the mess room was wind-ups, sometimes very, very funny and very witty. (Pictures left to right Pam Singer, Glenroy Watson and Martin Eady)

Glenroy Watson I joined London Transport in June 1979. I was working as what was called a station guard, you were assigned to the Area Manager at the time at the station, and this was Finchley Central, even though the depot was at East Finchley. I was very involved in the Anti-Apartheid Movement, and the war in Angola and Namibia. So therefore I think that gave me a bit of a bedrock as far as trade union issues were concerned. I saw that as a natural component of that activity. OPO was brought in on the Piccadilly line. I was the only driver who refused to do it, and I actually did the training... I was on the Picc for about 6 years, about 1985, 86, I moved to the Jubilee and Bakerloo lines and then OPO came in. I think OPO is dangerous. We haven't had the predicted disaster, or the level of predicted disasters, we've had a number of individual disasters. People have lost their lives. You have a long vehicle, you've got a vehicle that anybody can buy a ticket and get on, know nothing about safety. The railway can be dangerous. Its very useful but it can be dangerous.

Martin Eady I joined [LT], I started on February 5 1973, that was the seniority date. Service seniority used to be very important on the railways. I was allocated to Ealing Common depot on the District line as a carriage examiner. It was 100% union membership. And we had a system called the staff council scheme, which was a sort of Whitley system. The union have to go through an incredibly bureaucratic process of committees before they can even think of calling any industrial action. So it was an awful scheme really. With Fares Fair, the problem I think was there were people who were campaigning for people not to pay fares, or not to pay the increase, and for free fares, and of course a lot of our members were responsible [in the NUR] for collecting fares, and they would be disciplined by management if they didn't collect fares. And so the union as a whole could not support that sort of slightly anarchistic move... We were completely opposed to the fare increase and Fares Fair absolutely turned it around. There had been a steady decrease in the number of passengers on London Transport, with that policy it went back up.



GREATER LONDON ASSEMBLY May 4th ELECTIONS

The future of the Tube: Your choice!

CAMP

Let's do something for London

Let's do something about London. Let's have a London Assembly and a London Mayor who speak for ordinary Londoners and not for the party machines.

Don't waste our votes!

The Assembly and the Mayor have few powers. But together they will control the TUBE. That means on May 4th our votes for the Mayor AND the Assembly will decide the future of the tube. Don't waste them!

Time to choose!

The choice is clear. New Labour plans to give the tube away to private companies. On top of that, they are ready to hand over £100 million of our money in grants to make their profits.

New Labour's privatisation plans will cost an estimated £5 billion more than the City Bond put forward by Ken and the CATP.

Do we want to put our children in the hands of the same type of companies which gave us the privatisation disasters on British Rail? Or do we want a future on fares plus a mass

There is no point voting for a Mayor who opposes New Labour Privatisation of the Tube without also voting for an Assembly that will carry it through. The Assembly can block or support the Mayor's proposals. We need an Assembly that is committed to the tube not to party politics.

Remember, on 4 May you have two votes for the London Assembly - one for an individual (Constituency Member) and one for an organisation (London Members). Vote KEN for Mayor, and vote Campaign against Tube Privatisation for London Members

"Tube Sir?"

LONDON MEMBER	
1	
2	CAMPAIGN AGAINST TUBE PRIVATISATION
3	

Going Underground—With funding from HLF, arts and education charity digital-works, have been working with Year 6 children from two London primary schools to make an oral history documentary about the London Underground from the perspective of those who actually worked on the system. Digital-works specialises in running art and media projects which enable communities to explore areas of interest and also to then share their findings with the wider community. The principal is to give participants control of the project, literally giving them a camera and the skills and support to use it.

The object of the project is to give centre stage to the workers themselves and to the importance of oral history as a key means of understanding and interpreting this history. The film-making serves several purposes; as a mechanism for enthusing the children about researching and recording this history; providing a process to learn and understand the history; and as a way of recording and also sharing this history as widely as possible. For this project children have undertaken training with digital-works in film-making and oral history interviewing skills as well as researching the history of London Underground. They have visited the London Transport Museum and their local archives to do the research. They have undertaken drama workshops in which they interpreted and re-enacted key moments in the history of the Underground in order to develop a sense of what it's like to be in the shoes of those who work for the system. They have also worked with a creative writer to produce a history of the underground for a booklet, exhibition, website, and the film narration.

The children developed their oral history interview skills and produced questions in preparation for a series of interviews with current and former workers. Over four days 25 workers with a range of experience and backgrounds came into the schools and also to Acton

Depot to be interviewed on camera, bringing with them photographs and ephemera to illustrate their time and experiences. The children operated the cameras, the sound and conducted the interviews, edited by digital-works into a documentary film.

The London Transport Museum generously gave the project use of archive footage and images which, in addition to material supplied by the interviewees, was used to contextualise the areas covered in the interviews. The film will be launched at the cinema at the London Transport Museum on July 19 and all of the children and interviewees will be invited to this celebration. The film will be shown at schools and libraries across Camden and Westminster and by any other organisation wishing to show it. The film will also be available to watch online. The full interviews will be summarised by volunteers on the project and given to Westminster and Camden Archives. The project has a website on which you will be able to watch the film from July 21. The website also contains a selection of full interviews, the creative writing produced by the children and their project blog. Matthew Rosenberg Sav Kyriacou www.goingunderground.org.uk

Britain at Work is a national programme collecting oral histories of the working lives of people in Britain 1945-1995. The Britain at Work London Group has recorded over 100 interviews in west London and plans to continue in north and central London. We will also be publishing *All in a Day's Work* in autumn 2013. All interviews will be placed on the TUC Library Collections website www.unionhistory.info/britainatwork If you would like to be interviewed or be on our mailing list, please contact davidwelsh83@btinternet.com Britain at Work London Group secretary Dave Welsh/ chair John O'Mahony/treasurer Jan Pollock/outreach/IT Rima Joebear/newsletter editor Tom Vague