

The Union and Me, Alan Tebbit BEM.

Another in the occasional series of the memories of a Chelmsford Busman.

Firstly, let me say, that I agree, in principle, with the unions. Anyone who has read Dickens, will know that they were a necessary evil to gain proper working conditions, but in the '60s, '70s and '80s, they became very obsessive, giving rise to the saying, "you cant even blow your nose, without asking the union".

I entered the job when Eastern National was a closed shop, i.e. no union card, no job. Mostly I toed the line, but a love hate relationship developed between the militants and me. Most of the time this involved vehicle allocation, I loved the older buses and would ignore, for example, the edict that only Leyland Nationals/Lynxes would be used on the 152/3/4 services. On the two evening runs I would invariably take an MW, and once operated the 1600 departure, a crew job, as OMO with a VR.

I was once given an unusual private hire job. The Mercedes 608s, in Coastline livery, were awaiting allocation, and I was asked to take one to London Country's head office, in Reigate, to take their senior officers on a trial run, which I believe, was paid for by the Mercedes dealers. A most enjoyable day, touring the Surrey hills, with obligatory pub lunch, but on my return to CF, I was met by an irate branch chairman, W.G. "Bill" Horslen, who told me that a rate to drive the minis had not yet been agreed, I should not have used one. I pointed out that I had got private hire rate for the job, a rate negotiated by the TGWU, whether I was driving a 20-seater, or a 70.

I was scheduled to operate the 1345, service 33, to Saffron Walden one day. When I checked the output board for my bus, there was a blank space. I asked the output driver why this was, and he told me that he had been landed with one of the Ford R1014s from BS depot. This could obviously display Walden, and would I help him out by taking it, otherwise he would be short of buses in the peak. No one else would take it without type training. Off I went for an enjoyable afternoon, on a vehicle built to the correct dimensions for those country lanes. Again, my return found a reception committee of union men, angered at my using a vehicle for which I had not had been trained. Foiled again, I pointed out that I had a briefing on the Fords, prior to delivering some to BS, some overtime that I had arranged without their knowledge.

When operating rail replacement services we used a standard work ticket, which contained the words, "between rail stations in Essex, or, as directed by British Rail". One Sunday we were working between Colchester North and Manningtree. At one point something had gone amiss, so I was asked to carry on to Ipswich (Suffolk). I was fined at the next union meeting for not staying in Essex, a fine I have yet to pay, even though I pointed out the "or as directed" codicil. Not long after that, seven of CFs finest worked a Sunday rail job, between Waltham Cross and Bishops Stortford, three of the stations being in Hertfordshire. I turned up at the next union meeting to demand that we should all be fined, but excuses were found for the other six.

I was conned one Saturday into breaking one of their most adamant of rules. There was an agreement that no duty would work more than three "rounders", (3 hours) of Chelmsford town services. On this day, I had a lovely shift, 1015 sign on, spare duty, 1128 to 1228 on 43A, one of our busiest towns, followed by the 1305 to Dunmow, Church End, and more town work. I picked out a nice bit of overtime, 0728 to 0928, (2 rounders) on 43A, giving me a couple of hours for breakfast. When I went to find the bus, I was delighted to find that it was FLF 2817 (HEV 995B), my absolute favourite. I later found that the regulator, Doug Taylor, knowing my love of 2817, had arranged it, as he intended to stitch me up. He begged me to help him out, by adding 0928 to 1028 (43A) to my overtime, bribing me with extra pay, to which I agreed. When I drove into the bus station at 0928, Doug stood waiting for me, with a piece of paper in his hand. You start your shift on an hours spare, he said, can you do this for me? The paper read 1028 to 1128 service 43A, and so I did five straight rounders on a busy Saturday. My explanation to the union was, their rule was, "no one duty will contain more than three straight rounders", whereas I had worked four separate duties.

One Christmas when Boxing Day fell on a Thursday, the company decided to run a Saturday service on the 27th, as all factories and offices, as well as schools would be shut. The union refused, and said that we would work a weekday rota. On that Friday, I was early OMO spare 0540 sign on. There was also an early, 0530, crew spare. The first bus out on a Saturday was the 0600 152 to Grays. The crew of this failed to show, probably hung over from the festivities, and the crew spare, a militant pair, refused a Saturday shift.

The regulator, Derek Clements, could see that I was champing at the bit, to work it OMO, definitely against union policy. DC phoned the area manager, Ian Banwell, to advise him of the situation. He was delighted to say that as the crew had refused to go, it constituted a strike, and the doors were to be locked. The company had expected to make a loss of several thousand pounds that day; the union's action had avoided that, and would have to take the blame for buses not running. None of us got paid, and the TGWU had shot itself in the foot.

From the above it will seem strange, to some people, that on 17/11/1994 I sacrificed my beloved job, in order to support the union, but the facts did not speak for themselves on that day, and it is a story yet to be told.

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Industrial relations, Alan Tebbit BEM

When I joined Eastern National, it was a "closed shop", i.e. if you weren't a member of the Transport & General Workers Union, you could not be employed. Although I have always agreed with the principle of unions, there were occasions when they abused their power. I started off with the militancy of youth; in later years, I mellowed considerably, and opposed a lot of their less logical ideas. One thing that did impress me was the respecting of depot boundaries, that is that no buses would cross into the territory of a depot in dispute. I first became aware of a strike when I was still in primary school. I was playing in Melbourne Park, Chelmsford, after school. A Bristol KSW turned up at the terminus of service 41, the conductor wound up PRIVATE on the blind, and the bus sped off, failing to stop for intending passengers. A few minutes later another KSW emerged from Pines Road (44A), again marked PRIVATE, and not stopping.

I returned home to find my very angry father, denied work due to the lightning strike. The militant Chelmsford depot had been drawn into the 1958 London Transport strike, through the actions of one crew. The Chelmsford to Bow service was no threat to LT, as it was not allowed to pick up London-bound passengers after Brentwood and could not set down until that point on the return. However, LT pickets at Romford had observed a service 30 bus either picking up or setting down "local" passengers. I recall seeing a photo, in our local paper, of irate Chelmsford crews attempting to pull the driver, Charlie Willsher from his cab.

Another lightning strike occurred when I was attending Chelmsford grammar school. Buses came to a halt during the morning peak, and a Braintree crew had just reached the stop in Broomfield Road. They were due to leave their bus in Chelmsford depot, and return home as passengers. The bus they were to travel on was already parked opposite so they abandoned their vehicle and went off. The bus became the object of souvenir hunters, mostly my school chums, so I told dad at lunchtime and, after a phone call, the maintenance staff arrived to effect a rescue.

Whilst I was working at head office, I was courting a young lady from Althorne. We had a date in Maldon one evening, but Chelmsford were on strike. I got a lift with a work colleague, but on returning on the 22.15 ex-Maldon service 31, I was dumped at Molrams Lane, and the crew awaited their return. I was faced with a four mile walk giving time to reflect on my association with the Althorne lass, and so turned my attention to a Chelmsford conductress, who lived within a reasonable distance.

I recall Southend having a strike whilst I was a conductor. The Southend boundary was the edge of the co-ordination area. Fred Smith and I had a late afternoon service 11 to Southend on a Saturday. We arrived at Battlesbridge just as it got dark. We parked in the lane next to the Barge pub, in our open platform Bristol LD5G, and spent over an hour freezing our bits off, until it was our scheduled return time. I hope the Southend boys were successful in their dispute.

When I was that young, militant driver, Brentwood were involved in a dispute. The boundary was recognised as the Rose pub, at Shenfield. Mohamed Hanif and I were on a 351 to Romford. The Regulator at Chelmsford told me to turn at the Rose and work the next scheduled journey back. I quickly realised that I would be on a BD working, and that there would be enough time for me to work another BD job back to the Rose and pick up my own duty. No way was I going to scab, so I planned to take a break at Shenfield, until my return journey was due.

I decided to park up at Shenfield station, as BD were out there would be spare bus stop capacity there. Executing a U-turn with my FLF, there was a loud bang, and some blue and white glass came tumbling down by my nearside wing. I had hit the canopy. I swept up the debris, and then went to the Station Masters office to report my misdemeanour. I burst into the room, and announced that "I've hit your ***** sign outside the station". Unfortunately one of the clerks was making a tannoy announcement, and my emergence onto the platform was greeted with a loud cheer from the waiting passengers. I don't know how I got away with that one, as the company's insurers had to pay for the repair.

I arrived in Great Yarmouth one Saturday, on National Express 082, to find the Eastern Counties' staff on strike, in a dispute over canteen facilities. All National Express coaches were barred from picking up. A bus had arrived from head office in Norwich, with enough cash for refunds to all of the stranded passengers. A Whittles' coach, returning empty to the West Midlands pulled up, and the driver announced, "Leicester, Coventry and Birmingham, 5 quid a head". He left with a full load, and £250 in his bin. I hope he shared his ill-gotten gains with his boss. The Station Inspector advised my punters to catch a Corporation bus to Gorlestone Library, which is where I started from. I left Wellington Road to the waves and smiles of the pickets, they did not realise that I was picking up just down the road, but I had respected their boundary.

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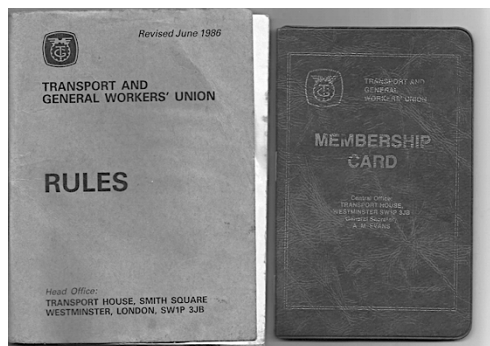
Further Recollections of a Former Chelmsford Bus Man.

Alan Tebbit BEM.

I always regarded the unions as a necessary evil. I will not deny their worth; they, or their members, fought for a fair deal at a time when many employers would exploit the workforce. However, they often went "over the top" on inconsequential matters. When I joined Eastern National in 1964, it was a closed shop, i.e. no Union card, no job. Chelmsford (CF) depot had a reputation for militancy, and my father, a long service employee, offered me the advice to keep a low profile, when it came to Union affairs. If there was a move towards industrial action, I would attend Union meetings to argue against striking, but if the vote went against me, I would stay away on the day of inaction, and not join the pickets. In production or retail industries, what was lost on a strike day could be made up at a later date. In the public transport sector, if you left your passengers behind on a Monday, you could not expect them to travel twice on Tuesday, and many of them would find a permanent alternative, a strike was always counter-productive, in my opinion. I know that some of the readers will point out that I forfeited my job with ENOC as a result of industrial action, but that is a story for another day. There were a couple of disputes in which I was very involved. Both were during my time as vehicle output supervisor at CF.

The availability of crew type buses had ceased, our last allocation of double-deckers at CF had been VRs 3027/9/35, which we were using as crew buses, and the management were eager to use them as they were intended, as OPO vehicles. We were already using Leyland Nationals as high capacity 72 passenger buses but introducing double-decks was a step too far for the TGWU 1/699 branch. New vehicle allocation graphs had been prepared, and I was summoned to a meeting in the local superintendent's office. It was made quite clear to me that I WOULD allocate VRs to services 41/a/b Bus Station and Galleywood the following day. Any OPO driver refusing a VR, I had to send to the duty inspectors office, to be dealt with. On no account was I to substitute a Leyland National for a VR. I went about my usual routine, arriving at 0415, opening up the depot, and driving buses onto their respective stands, including a VR onto bay 4. The early buses departed, until the 0618 41a to Galleywood was refused. The driver was sent off to report to the Inspector and was sent home. No other buses left the depot that morning, and I set about putting all of the buses away, apart from one being left out to change over with the Dunmow outstation car, due in for routine maintenance. As a card-carrying member, I then had to join the strikers, but to stay available to allocate buses back out, if an agreement was reached. Just after lunch a compromise was agreed, and I had a busy hour getting the services up and running.

On the second occasion, I took more of a central role. We were at that stage where OPO conversion was increasing at a rapid pace. Many of the conducting staff, especially the ladies, were not keen on driving, or finding alternative employment within the company, cashiers, cleaners etc. Increasingly, OPO drivers were being asked to cover crew duties. On one afternoon duty OT11 (crew) had no conductor. This was an easy little job, 1600 hrs service 54 to Danbury Common, and 1735 hrs 31a to Woodham Walter. Derek Harris volunteered to do it, but there were only crew buses available. We took a gamble on asking Derek to take RE, Plaxton 428, a most unsuitable vehicle for OPO, although it did have numbers on the destination display, and an automatic door. A conductors Setright strap was tied to a stanchion, to hang the machine on, and a margarine tub placed on the dashboard to act as a cash tray. It was a lightly loaded couple of trips, and Derek was as happy as a pig in fertiliser driving the cream of the fleet. The following day a similar situation arose, only this time it was the 1600 hrs service 152 to Grays, a very busy trip, with a lot of schoolchildren out of town. Again Mr. Harris was up for it, on condition that he could have 428. I was very dubious about this, but the regulator, Ron Jepson, argued that 47 seats were better than none, and it reduced the lost mileage. I prayed that nobody spotted him leaving the station. All went well until he went through Basildon, some of the drivers incredulous at what they were seeing. Phone calls ensued among Union officials, and it was agreed that Derek would be "persuaded", to offload any passengers at Basildon on his return trip, and run back "dead" to CF, or both depots would cease work. I can only imagine the conversation that took place at Basildon bus station, but there was no disruption to service, apart from the loss of one 152 from Basildon to Chelmsford. The next day I was summoned in to see the boss, praised for my initiative, but to keep my ideas to myself in future.



Ironically a few years later (1980), a similar situation arose. Again, there was not a conductor for the 1600 hours service 152 to Grays. I was back driving at this time and offered to operate it OPO on overtime. However, I stipulated one condition, that I could use Bristol VR no. 3048, which at that time wore the original 1930s livery, as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations. In order to get the trip covered, this was readily agreed to, and off I went. This led fairly rapidly to union resolution being passed that "only Leyland National vehicles will be allowed on OPO operated service 152/3 journeys".

Spoilsports!

VR 3048 was selected to carry this historic livery from June 1980 to June 1981 as the Company commemorated 50 years of service. Seen at Central Works Open Day, the bus then toured depots around the county before regaining NBC green livery. It might not seem that long ago, but we're heading for the 90th anniversary of the formation of ENOC Ltd. The late **Peter Snell**.



Alan refers to RELH/Plaxton coach 428 but this is sister 429 (LWC 980J), which - like 428 - stayed with EN until May 1974 when it joined the National Travel (South East) fleet. Both passed to Eastern Counties (as RE844/5) in 1978 and then Ambassador Travel, the pair staying together even after that when they went to Wing of Sleaford. Seen here on the forecourt of Chelmsford Bus Station, an RE bus waits alongside, an early FLF follows 429, what looks like an LWC-C registered FLF is heading for Dunmow on the 33 and a Leyland National on the 36 just gets into shot.

EBEG collection, per the late **Andy Meadows**.



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