

# REBEL WORKER

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL

Sydney, Australia

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**RANK & FILE SEIZE CONTROL OF THE NSW PUBLIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION (PSA) & INSPIRE THE FIGHT AGAINST THE ALP OCTOPUS IN THE UNIONS & THE O'FARRELL RAMPAGE!**



**NATIONAL NEWS; NSW RAILWAY NEWS; STATE TRANSIT NEWSFLASH; WE CARE WE RECYCLE; VICTORIAN RAILWAY NEWS; RANK & FILE VICTORY IN THE NSW PSA; BRITAIN TODAY; SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR NEWS; ANARCHISM IN CHILE; INDONESIA; BOOK REVIEW CORNER; DEBATE ON REVOLUTIONARY UNIONISM; NEWS & NOTES**

Rebel Worker is the bi-monthly Paper of the A.S.N. for the propagation of anarcho-syndicalism in Australia.

Unless otherwise stated, signed Articles do not necessarily represent the position of the A.S.N. as a whole. Any contributions, criticisms, letters or

Comments are welcome.

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## NATIONAL NEWS

### GILLARD & SOCIAL SECURITY

Just in case you think the re-election of a Gillard led government is all that is required to keep the holes in the social security net from getting bigger, think again. The decision to put single parents on new start allowances is just the first in a long line of reforms that's designed to weaken the social security safety net. Australia's relatively narrow tax base is putting pressure on successive governments to slash social security funding. Irrespective of their ideological orientation, governments are coming under increasing pressure to slash costs.

The social security safety net is the biggest cost borne by governments. Those governments that don't have the will or power to widen the tax base to include the financial and corporate sector soon find they have no choice but to slash social security fund-

ing to balance their books. The removal of Rudd, a first term Prime Minister, by his own party highlighted the perils of taking on powerful interests in this country.

The mining sector used its considerable resources to water down the mining super profits tax to such an extent the Federal government did not gain one extra cent in revenue during the first three months of its introduction. Successive Australian governments have not been willing to raise the ire of national and transnational corporations as they know there will be a political price to pay if they do so.

The gaming lobby's ability to block the introduction of one dollar maximum bets despite the considerable cost to the community, families and individuals, highlights that power does not lie in parliament, it lies in the boardrooms of unaccountable national and transnational corporations. Without wide spread community protests no government will feel confident enough to take on the corporate and financial sector. Without significant direct action it's highly likely the social security safety net will be torn to shreds in Australia as governments battle to balance their budget in an era when the corporate sector pays voluntary taxation.

### Councils & Federal Court Win

You can eat them, wear them, make love to them, but you can lose a lot of money when you play the "synthetic derivative" shuffle. Twelve New South Wales Councils have had a landmark win in the Federal Court. Justice Jayne Jagot has found that Standard and Poor's was negligent in giving wham bam thank you ma'am financial products a AAA rating. Just in case you're not a financial "expert" and don't know who Standard and Poor's are, don't panic. Standard and Poor's, Moody's and Fitch

are financial ratings agencies which rate financial products ranging from financial products offered by financial institutions to rating the financial status of sovereign nation states.

These ratings agencies have the power, like the Michelin restaurant guide, to make or break financial institutions. Credibility is at the core of their business. In 2005 ABN Amro bought a financial product on the market that Standard and Poor's gave a AAA rating to although they did not fully understand the nature of the "constant proportion debt obligations" of the investment. This investment lost 90% of its value during the 2008 Global Financial Crisis.

The 12 New South Wales Councils had invested 18 million dollars into what they believed (based on S&P ratings) was a gilt edged investment. They argued in the Federal Court that S&P had betrayed them because they had not taken into account the nature of the risk they were exposed to in their ratings. The Federal Court found "S&P and investment bank ABN Amro misled investors and breached their duty of care when they give complex and risky products a AAA rating".

This judgement opens the way for investors from around the world to sue S&P and the other ratings agencies which at no time give any indication of the financial risks associated with the marketing of the bodgy financial products that triggered the Global Financial Crisis in 2008.

*Thanks to*

*The Anarchist Age*

# Rebel Worker Web Site:

# [www.rebelworker.org](http://www.rebelworker.org)

# N.S.W. RAILWAYS NEWS

## THE WALKING DEAD - ARE ZOMBIES RUNNING OUR UNION?

By *Crimson Coconut*

**It's been almost two years since the last RTBU (Rail Tram & Bus Union) election. Unfortunately Members' Voice (grass roots organisation pushing for membership control of the union and direct action) was unsuccessful in dislodging the Labor Leadership at that election despite having gained upwards**



**of 40% overall of the contested vote. Since then the O' Farrell Government has been rampaging through the public sector, including the transport sector, cutting jobs and destroying conditions. The union movement with a few exceptions has been largely unable or unwilling to stop these attacks on members despite the Transport Minister having called rail workers "bludgers" and threatened bus drivers with privatisation of their jobs if they did not reduce costs.**

During this time Enterprise Agreement 2010 has handed RailCorp management a broad sword with which it has cut a swathe through differing layers of jobs and work practices. This reform process is not yet complete and the 2010 agreement does not end till April 2013.

Within State Transit there are threats to privatise Government Buses. Sydney Ferries and its workforce have already fallen by the wayside having been "franchised" (privatisation by stealth) some 12 months ago. Plans for this reached an advanced state under the previous Labor Government.

So with public transport workers facing the biggest crisis in recent history how have the public transport union leadership responded? Have they been successful at all in blunting the attack on members?

### **Railway Station and Train Cleaning.**

Within the last week the Government announced that despite the continuous reform that had been implemented over the last 10 years the engineering company Transfield had been awarded the contract to manage the newly created transport cleaning division within Transport for NSW. The Union members affected are not happy about this transfer to Transfield.

By the end of the year it will bring more uncertainty to their jobs, if they manage to maintain one.

Before this announcement by the NSW Government the RTBU oversaw a huge overall reduction in cleaning staff. Cleaners were unable to complete their daily allotted tasks due to the increased workloads that resulted. Many remain disillusioned and gloomy about the future. Some have stated that they will quit their jobs rather than work for a private contractor. If they decide to stay on with Transfield cleaners will no longer be working as RailCorp employees, though wages and conditions will temporarily be transferred across to the new management. There are no guarantees once the current enterprise agreement terminates in April next year that conditions will remain.

In the case of the cleaners the Union leadership kept most of the detail concerning the changes under wraps. No serious mobilisation of the workforce took place. Consultation with the affected workers has been fleeting and members have suffered what must be called a defeat at the hands of management. Union members are opposed to privatisation.

**THE RTBU LEADERSHIP MUST BE MARKED DOWN AS A FAILURE FOR FAILING TO FIGHT BACK AGAINST PRIVATISATION OF CLEANING JOBS AND FAILING TO MOBILISE THE GENERAL MEMBERSHIP TO SUPPORT THE CLEANERS. THIS LED TO A DEFEAT FOR IT'S MEMBERS.**

### **The Removal of Railway Transit Officers**

The RTBU oversaw the winding back of Transit Officer positions. Some have gained employment in other areas of the railways, whilst others have changed course by entering the NSW Police Force.

Large numbers simply left.

While Transit Police are unloved employees due to the nature of their work they are nonetheless employees worthy of protection by the union. They also provided a level of security for other rail employees and members of the public.

There are signs that the security situation has deteriorated since the removal of Transit Officers from trains and stations. Witnesses describe recent events where rail staff have been threatened and harassed by mentally ill members of

the public. Calls to the police for assistance from the Security Division have failed to elicit a response from the police who have been preoccupied with more "significant" matters.

Because of the latest reforms there are less staff. Some staff are working alone at remote locations throughout the RailCorp network. This is a significant threat to the safety of those employees. A quick OH&S assessment could justify a return to rail workers working in pairs or groups. However this cannot be justified on "economic" grounds according to some in the union leadership.

**THE UNION LEADERSHIP FAIL ON THIS ISSUE FOR NOT SUPPORTING THE JOBS OF TRANSIT OFFICERS AND FAILING TO IMPLEMENT A PROGRAM TO PROTECT THE SAFETY OF IT'S MEMBERS.**

### **Democratic Rights and Freedom of Speech**

Recently RailCorp has cracked down on employee's critically speaking out on issues of importance to rail workers and the public.

In a recent case millions of dollars were wasted hunting down an employee who

spilt the beans on a supposedly corrupt CountryLink manager. This is despite employee verification of the shenanigans over a number of years.

A bulletin has been circulated by RailCorp warning that any criticism of Government policy, any comment that is not sanctioned or any publication that brings RailCorp or any of its employees into disrepute will have disciplinary action taken which could lead to dismissal.

This is despite "whistleblower protection" legislation at State and Federal level. Adding to this was a recent circular that had to be signed by employees forbidding the use of electronic devices such as mobile phones and computers in the workplace and the accessing of "social media" websites. This ban extended to use of social media at home to make comment on RailCorp or Government matters.

Next we receive the bombshell circular from the RTBU warning that internal RailCorp email or computer systems could not be used for circulating election material.

"We are a strong collective Union and want all members to be well informed about their candidates and involved in choosing who will represent them for the next two years"

"However, some members in previous Union elections have used the RailCorp computer email system to send out election information which has resulted in a management reaction against them" Alex Claassens, Branch Secretary.

The Union bulletin then went on to quote the relevant RailCorp Code of Conduct.

No doubt that there was also a Union reaction against them as they did not defend the use of members email for union purposes. What is the real difference between circulating bullshit Union bulletins by email or circulating election material?

This bulletin was reinforced by a later RailCorp release warning of the consequences of use of RailCorp's computer email for Union elections. Was there some collusion here between Management and the Union to stop rank and file members from getting their message out? So much for wanting all members to be well informed. When is too much information too much? When is it not coming from them?

EBA 2010 states:

"40.2. *Union delegates' access to the Employer's facilities*

(a) *The Employer will allow reasonable access to telephone, computers and accessories, meeting rooms, facsimile, postal, photocopying, e-mail and intranet/internet facilities for the purpose of carrying out work as a Union delegate and consulting with workplace colleagues in accordance with this provision.*

(b) The Employer shall provide a notice case for the display of authorised material in each workplace in a readily accessible and visible location.

(c) *The Employer provides the above facilities (including access by a Union delegate to Employees) provided usage pertains to the relationship between Employer and Employees, and on the basis*

*that they are reasonable and do not unduly interfere with the Union delegate's primary duties as an Employee – unless such interruption is authorised by management on site."*

If delegates have these rights then they should be extended to all members/non-members. This is a restriction on freedom of association that is enforced by a union/management agreement. Access to debate and opinion must be shared equally by all. Anything less is dictatorship.

THE RTBU'S BLANKET BAN ON PO-

are no longer covered for workers compensation. Workers will have to resort to common law injury claims which can be challenged, possibly costing tens of thousands of dollars.

Previous Workers Compensation claims were no fault claims. It didn't matter much how you were injured. Except if you were under the influence or involved in something illegal you were mostly sure to be covered.

Generally the trade union movement, with a few exceptions, failed to adequately rally against the new legislation by calling stop work meetings of State employees. A union wide workplace campaign never eventuated except for one rally to let off a bit of steam. The majority of workers were never mobilised.

I have no doubts that this legislation could have been stopped by widespread stop work union action and disobedience campaign. Alas, such is the lack leadership in



LITICAL DISCUSSION IS RIDICULOUS AND SHOWS A DEEP MISTRUST OF MEMBERS AND A LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF HISTORY AND POLITICS. POLITICS IS THE STRUGGLE OF CLASSES TO OBTAIN THEIR FAIR SHARE OF THE SPOILS. RAILWORKERS BELONG TO THE WORKING CLASS WHO AT THE MOMENT FACE SOME STARK CHOICES. STIFLING DEBATE OF UNION MEMBERS IS NOT JUST A BASIC DENIAL OF HUMAN RIGHTS BUT A HINDRANCE TO THE EMANCIPATION OF WORKERS. FOR THAT REASON WE HAVE ISSUED THE RTBU LEADERSHIP A FAIL.

#### **Workers Compensation Changes.**

Before the O' Farrell Government changes to Workers Compensation, rail workers and other public transport workers were covered for injury from the time they stepped out their front gate to work until the time they returned back through it. This no longer applies. If you are injured to or from work, if you are assaulted in the train or injured in a car smash you

NSW unions that in the end it was easy passage for O'Farrell's Workers Compensation Amendment Bill.

Now several of the public transport unions including the RTBU are examining the options of a separate insurance scheme to cover journeys to and from work. Typical of the union leaderships approach of "If you can't beat em. Join em".

The ASU is already offering insurance for journey claims.

The prospects of a separate insurance scheme is fraught with danger as insurers motives will be hell bent on keeping claims low or stop them altogether. Employees will end up paying the premiums in one form or another. Why let employers off the hook anyway? You wouldn't be traveling unless you were going to work for them. Seems employers are responsible for nothing these days.

THE RTBU FAILS THE TEST ON WORKERS COMPENSATION FOR FAILING TO MOBILISE IT'S WORKFORCE AGAINST CUTS TO WORKERS COMPENSATION. THIS IS ONE THAT GOT AWAY.

### **New Medical Standards.**

New medical standards have been “negotiated” for Category 1 and 2 Safety Critical Workers. How many of us were consulted on these changes? The Union leadership saw fit to negotiate with Federal Government representatives and Employers to set new standards for medical assessments. Changes coming into effect January 2013 mostly relate to hearing loss, obesity and sleep apnoea. Will they be used to tighten the screws on rail workers who are the most stringently regulated workforce in Australia?

Every aspect of your private life is regulated by RailCorp. Erectile dysfunction may one day be a factor which rules a rail worker as being “over the hill” and unsuitable for a job. Watch out for the “small arms” inspectors.

It is widely known in medical circles that RailCorp’s work practices are the main contributor to obesity, sleep apnoea and other indicators of morbidity. Shift work and poor rostering practices are the killers. To blame workers for not being ship-shape is like blaming someone for inadvertently drinking poison rather than blaming the person who administered it (the poisoner).

Instead of agreeing to these punitive measures and after the fact medical procedures the union should have been pushing for the implementation of preventative measures. These would have a better outcome for their members.

We call for subsidised staff canteens with decent food, rather than the fat and salt laden foods available through retail outlets. At larger depots this could be a revenue neutral exercise for RailCorp. The savings would come through reduced medical diagnosis and better health and happiness for employees.

We call for staff gymnasiums at major points throughout the network so that a culture of exercise becomes easier to achieve and the level of fitness is more easily attainable.

We call for ridiculous rostering practices to end. Roster Clerks need to understand the medical implications of what they are doing.

Instead, the Union leadership has implemented the “can’t beat em, join em” doctrine again by setting up with the help of RT Health Fund a “Fit, Healthy and United” road show. This “road show” (come circus) will measure the BMI, blood pressure, blood sugar etc of rail employees.

**ONCE AGAIN THE RTBU HAS FAILED IN IT’S DUTY TO MEMBERS BY AGREEING TO A PUNITIVE APPROACH TO MEMBERS FITNESS AT WORK. THE BLAME FOR THE LEVEL OF FITNESS OF IT’S EMPLOYEES RESTS SOLELY WITH THE WORK**

**PRACTICES AND AMENITIES PROVIDED BY RAILCORP. THE UNION LEADERSHIP ONCE AGAIN HAS FAILED BECAUSE IT LET MANAGEMENT OFF THE HOOK AND PUT THE ONUS FOR HEALTH BACK ON IT’S MEMBERS.**

This small sample of expedient solutions by the RTBU leadership show that they cannot manage in the interest of members. This along with large numbers of employees illegally “acting up in grade” because of their relationship with this or that manager or the Union, continued blatant breaches of the EBA by management without consequence, restrictions on when leave can be taken, all at the whim of local managers, job appointments that are often decided by relationship rather than merit all point to a union which is not effective at addressing the real concerns of members.

The abolition of the Transport Appeals Board also (although not a perfect instrument), with the Union as the overseer of it’s death, is just one more obstacle on the road to justice for workers pursuing that route.

### **A Forecast of Further**

#### **Attacks on Working Conditions**

The latest NSW Auditor General’s report into RailCorp believes that overtime rates are too high. But instead of cutting overtime they suggest attacking working conditions.

They believe that \$millions can be saved by ridding RailCorp employees of penalty rates and allowances. (IE weekend penalties, shift penalties, Leave Loading, overtime penalties, travel and meal allowances etc). I’m sure these are the things that are going to be up for grabs at the next EBA negotiations - if not before, if Barry O’Farrell get his own way.

Also the potential for job losses through the formation of Sydney Trains and Country Trains is enormous. There has been little consultation with those affected by this reform by either the Union or Management. Nobody knows where this is going, but going it is.

The Union leadership these days sees itself as a quasi arm of RailCorp Management, selling negotiated positions to those on the shop floor and hosing down dissenters.

The road ahead is a hard road. Continuous reform over a number of years is taking its toll. Expect the reform process to accelerate from this point....

UNLESS we make stand and fight back the tide of right wing reform will sweep us all up.

#### **What can we do to stop O’Farrell’s Anti-Worker Crusade?**

The RTBU and other transport unions will be weakened considerably and will be left with little credibility if they fail to protect workers against O’Farrell’s planned onslaught.

The Union leadership needs to be out talking to members and listening to them. It should be setting up local committee’s in workplaces which can be mobilised against any attack against members. Regular workplace meetings which respect and follow up input from ordinary members needs to be taking place in all workplaces.

If this does not happen, start your own Rank and File Committee. Use this to pressure the union to take some action. Some actions may be possible by an organised group.

In recent Public Service Association elections the old corrupt Labor Party Officials were replaced by a rank and file group within the union, the Progressive Public Service Association (the PPSA). They were able to garner 54% of the vote on a platform of democratising the union from the bottom up, previous union leadership corruption and involving members in the decision making process. Most importantly they pledged to fight back against the public sector cuts, something the previous leadership failed to do. This is one of the most exciting developments in the NSW trade union movement in recent times.

Why exciting? Because it shows that it CAN be done. It’s not an easy task to throw out the incumbents, it takes years of organising. Sometimes there are defeats, sometimes disappointment. But it CAN be done! With ORGANISATION it can be done.

We urge those RTBU members voting for candidates in the upcoming elections to carefully consider their vote. Vote for candidates who are not part of the party machine but candidates who put members first and those that promote the voice of ordinary members. The member’s voice, not some preconceived idea about what they need or want.

Members’ Voice did not succeed at first attempt in tipping the scales in favour of ordinary members. But you can be sure that we are not dead, as some people have suggested. We aim to continue to build and reinvigorate a grass roots movement which has to be part of a much bigger project. A project that has to rid the RTBU of party hacks and spivs that answer to no one.

We need to do this rather than finding ourselves on our knees somewhere down the track. “It’s always better to have fought and lost than never have fought at all”. Now is the time for that fight, if ever there was one.

# STATE TRANSIT NEWSFLASH

## WAVERLEY DEPOT NEWS

### **Rebel Worker: What's the latest on the privatisation front?**

Waverley Busie: According to unconfirmed sources, O'Farrell has already signed a contract with Veolia to sell Sydney Buses for \$880 million, with this sum the red buses are no doubt included. However, Veolia isn't interested in Newcastle Buses. Under Veolia, we are set to face many cut backs to our conditions such as reduced sick leave entitlements, no more broken shifts, cuts to penalty rates, rotating shifts, etc. Despite the illusions some drivers hold that Veolia is less harsh than the STA in how they treat their workers. Their ultimate goal would be breaking down our rosters and gaining full control. If you don't like it, the only option for you will be to leave. This privatisation process will lead to the collapse in workers' conditions in industries with both public and private sectors. Where currently the public sector helps maintain conditions for the private sector. We would go down the same road in minimising conditions as the railways, hospitality and the Fire Brigade. Watch this space.

### **RW: What are your views on the O'Farrell Govt's transport policy?**

WB: As a result of such motives as the filling the coffers of big business such as the MacQuarie Bank, seeking votes in the country electorates and wanting to get rid of unions, the Govt. is stealing money from workers to construct more motor tollway freeways. However, Mike Baird admitted on ABC radio recently that the O'Farrell Govt. had found an additional \$100 Billion "lying around", undermining it's credibility. In the papers, the headlines spread the furphy that it's going on a \$100 Billion spending spree on transport infrastructure. This is a hell of a lot of money. This approach will just put more cars on the road and create more traffic congestion. It's just a waste of money. In the media recently, experts have said O'Farrell and Greiner are way out of kilt with their splurging on new tollways.

What should be done is expenditure on resurfacing roads, signs and other road im-

provements which would greatly enhance traffic flow around the city, without bringing more cars into the city and major upgrading of public transport.

In 1976, the city of Toronto in Canada stopped the construction of new roads as it would just encourage people to put more cars on the roads. It currently has a much better public transport system than in Sydney. Back when Nick Greiner was the Premier and pushing for the construction of the M2 and other highways, I wrote two letters to Bruce Baird, the then Transport



Minister pointing out the virtues for enhancing public transport usage with the construction of an O-Bahn in Sydney, like which exists in Adelaide. I didn't receive any response to the main issue. A lesson I've learnt, is that if you want to write letters to the Transport Minister, you should focus on one issue per letter. At the time there was a big protest about plans for the construction of the M2. Greiner disregarded the O-Bahn option and proceeded with the M2 and the Eastern Distributor, as well which were highly costly. If you want to further research the effectiveness of the O-Bahn for public transport, just google O-Bahn Adelaide.

### **RW: What are your thoughts on how bus drivers' wages compare to other groups in the public sector?**

WB: Other groups in the NSW public sector are receiving preferential treatment

from the O'Farrell Govt. The police have been awarded a 12 ½ % pay rise over 3 years. The NSW Fire Brigades have also received a significant pay rise.

A recent ABC Radio programme "Background Briefing" has highlighted to me another dimension of this "preferential treatment" of police, so as to facilitate O'Farrell dirty work. It was an investigation of the recent police killing of a young Brazilian tourist in the City involving dirty tactics. The chief witness complained of the police involved as acting like thugs. Whilst, the young Brazilian who had been tasered numerous times, suffocated due to heavy handed police action. Rather than coming out against the police involved and taking severe action, the Govt. has supported them. Apparently to be seen in the media as "getting on side" with police.

In contrast our wages have gone backward as a result of the Govt's "Austerity Drive", which I call a "Hostility Drive". Both private and public sector bus drivers need to put aside their differences and hold a meeting to develop a strategy to fight the O'Farrell attacks. In Brisbane, the Campbell Newman Govt. is willing to do the same thing. Whilst conservative Governments are all taking an increasingly Thatcherite direction. Flogging off assets and running services to make money due to the demands of Big Business. Whilst Thatcher was notorious for selling off public housing.

### **RW: What's the situation with the uniform?**

WB: We are facing a continuing shortage of parts of the uniform.

Currently there is a shortage of new boots. Whilst, some drivers are wearing just the vest or part of the uniform or their normal clothes. Contributing to this situation was a hold up in deliveries of the uniform by the suppliers.

There has now been a new twist in the uniform saga. According to a recent union leaflet, the STA is intending to pay us an allowance of between \$280 to \$350 to purchase the uniform. We will have to shop for the uniform and keep the receipts to be reimbursed. Why aren't we paid for the time shopping for the clothes? The STA's handling of the issue is wrong. It's confusing, demoralising and frustrating. It definitely shows a lack of direction by the bosses.

### **RW: What's the latest with the depot?**

WB: As far as I'm aware there has been no upgrading of the depot buildings for over 30 years. Only some touching up has occurred. The depot buildings are quite run-down. The STA's plan is to refurbish the

main building. What had been our meal room on the ground floor, will become offices for the bosses. Despite many offices already located there. As they intend to close Strawberry Hills. Will it be offices for STA or Veolia bosses? Our locker room will also remain on the ground floor. Whilst on the first floor, a new kitchen and canteen will be built for us. How come the STA is able to pay for these extensive renovations, when it claims to be short of money?

**RW: How is the STA's economy drive progressing?**

WB: On my way home recently, I noticed an inspector in his van shuffling a lot of papers. He mentioned that the paperwork was associated with the STA's cutbacks to lower management jobs. Each paper related to the options in the event of the abolishing of his job: taking redundancy or coming back to the STA as a driver. Intriguingly I noticed recently a lot "brown envelopes" from personnel section to be distributed to admin. staff at Waverley apparently regarding job applications for re-advertised positions.

In carrying out these cutbacks of positions, the STA doesn't think of the consequences. If the green machines break down or there is a bus accident or a fight on a bus, there are no inspectors available to help with these problems. Many drivers are unaware of the extent of the authority of inspectors. Instead of intervention by the inspectors when problems arise, the bosses want to just rely on inadequate electronic fixes such as GPS and us contacting the radio room. In the case of the radio room, this is one sector which staffing has been increased. In the case of the cutbacks to mechanical section staffing, I have seen bus break downs everywhere. Recently, after working Saturday and Sunday, I noticed less buses on the road. One theory which explains this reduction, is that management staff who supervise

*In a previous issue of RW mention was made of the Catering Manager picking on Conductors for minor shortfalls in Buffet Cars. In this issue once again Conductors, Head Office staff and Drivers will discuss Catering at V/Line. As in previous issues of RW, names have been changed.*

**RW: Can you give us a brief history on V/Line catering?**

Clarence: Years ago Catering on V/Line trains was run by the Trading and Catering Department. In 1993, as a result of Kennett's Transport reforms, Multi Skilling was introduced whereby Conductors performed Catering Duties. Displace Catering Staff who did not take a redundancy package were trained as Conductors.

budget allocations, situated at Pt. Botany, are behind this arbitrary action to save dollars. They can make long term changes, but also short term, even by the end of the day. These management personnel just rely on information provided by consultants and want to wash their hands of everything. What a false economy! Following the implementation of these cuts, it may look good in regard to costs saving for the first 6 to 9 months, but you will then see the reverse happening. With less inspectors, drivers will be in dire straits. Whilst O'Farrell fiddles, the buses will burn!

**RW: What are your thoughts of the outlook of the STA higher bosses to staff?**

WB: Their general approach seems that we are held responsible for the running of our jobs. We have been receiving a constant flow of notices. By this means, the bosses are saying this is what you should know and we are therefore held responsible. An example of this approach is in regard to overtime. We now have to keep dockets showing our late running. I know it's not always legit in regard to drivers claiming for overtime, but in reality the bosses are sneaking into every corner of our job to save money.

With the recent introduction of the new roster as of 1st October, some drivers are being targeted with a merry go round in their jobs. A handful of new drivers at Waverley are being sent to Port Botany. East Sydney depots are receiving 6-7 drivers from other depots. This initiative is likely to cause much disgruntlement amongst those drivers targeted. Whilst, the previous practice has always been that you are assigned to the depot of your choice and you remain there. I think we are seeing a rekindling of the game management played due to Liberal manipulation of the STA during the Nick Greiner Government.

## VICTORIAN RAILWAY NEWS

Jethro: This was agreed to by the Union so as private contractors would not be employed on the trains.

Sheona: Also where a train goes over a certain distance, a Buffet Car has to be provided. This is a Department of Transport rule.

Clarence: This has worked well for the last eighteen years. Also some Conductors who were too nervous to work in a Buffet

I have also noticed an ever more colder approach to us by the STA, they are no longer supporting us in any way. Recently, they stopped funding depot games clubs. They are no longer proud of us and have the attitude that you do what you are told or you get the sack!

According to our union rep Wendy there has been a bit of good news due to grass roots action. Grass roots activists launched a petition complaining about harassment by lower echelon admin STA staff of drivers over minor glitches. Following the presentation of the petition to the bosses, things have calmed down. People are now being treated as people. I was recently speaking to the union officials who mentioned that the boss at Burwood has a jack booted approach and is not heeding the warning signs, which management at Waverley has taken.

On another front, there has also been some good news. Transport NSW bureaucrats had wanted to cut out our entitlements to various loadings. We have won a reprieve. As a Govt. authority told them that such action would be illegal. So they have had to back off.

**RW: What's the latest with Veolia?**

WB: The other day I was talking to a Veolia driver. He complained to me about the new ticketing system they now have. It's very slow. He considers the previous system, which was the same as the current STA ticketing system was much more reliable. You can imagine what it could be like working under these people.

**RW: What's happening with the new ticketing system?**

WB: I have heard that there will soon be a new rollout of arials for all buses associated with the introduction of the new smart card ticketing system. Will it be similar to the new Veolia ticketing system – another bee in a bottle.

Car could swap out of Catering Duties and work in Conductor Duties. In fact until 2008, we had a B roster of which 60% of this roster were jobs which were Buffet duties, and the Conductors on this roster were dedicated to the Buffet duties. The reasons this roster was discontinued was discussed in issue 142.

Jethro: In 2006 a Point of Sale System or DOS was introduced on the trains which is similar to what CountryLink uses.

Sheona: In 2000, there was reshuffle of Managers and a Manager was brought into Head Office as Conductor Manager. The previous manager was placed in charge of on train Catering.

**RW: At this point our readers would like to know how this person became on train manager.**

Clarence: This person was a Conductor and he was able to be promoted because he could convince the managers that he would be Conductor Trainer.

Sheona: In 2000 when a Conductor Manager was appointed it is alleged that this person would run to Head Office saying the manager did not know how to supervise Conductors and that he would do a better job. Eventually the Conductor manager was moved to another position and this person became the On Train Manager. Clearance: This person also used to train Conductors. The new people would commence training and if he took a dislike to a particular person, he would make sure that this person would fail ticket checking and would be terminated.

Rastus and Roscoe: Being drivers we also have a story about this person. In 2000 the son of a driver was in his Conductors class. He failed tickets on the first attempt. He sat for the exam again and failed by two marks below the pass which was 85%.

Roscoe: He was terminated. His father went to the regional manager to see if his son could do an oral test. The manager said the Trainer did not want this person as a Conductor.

Rastas: His father tried to see this trainer to ask him where his son failed in tickets but this person avoided this driver for months. When confronted, this person denied he picked on his son.

Clarence: When Conductor trainers were introduced, he made sure his yes men were appointed to these positions.

Jethro: One Conductor applied for the position. He was not interviewed. The union got him an interview, but he was not successful. The trainer took a dislike to the union delegate.

Clarence: As a Catering Manager, he treated his employees like dirt. He extends their shifts for his PEP talks. They are paid for his meetings, but after working a shift, you just want to go home.

**RW: Is this person one of the people who forced a manager to resign at Southern Cross?**

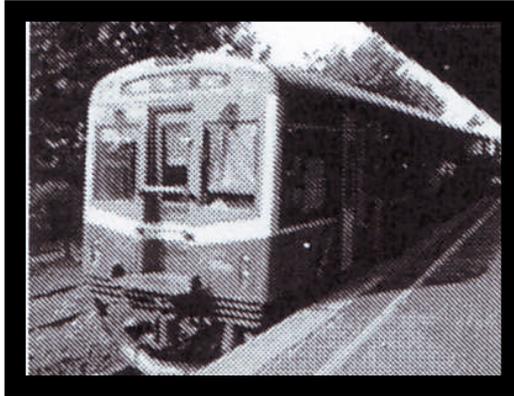
Rastus and Roscoe: Yes, he was. This was discussed in issues 139 and 140 of Sparks.

Clarence: Yes, he was on stress leave and as soon as the manager was removed, he returned.

Rastus: The Department ran okay, while he was away. As I said in issue 139, get rid of him. We drivers, said we wondered whether he was pulling a ploy for a disability termination.

Clarence: Recently a Conductor was asked to see the Conductor Manager over Buffet short falls. They said he was giving away too many promotions.

Jethro: What upsets the Conductors was when he fronted this manager, there was a



person from Human Resources. The manager for Conductors should have sorted this matter out alone.

Rastus: We wonder why this person from Human Resources was at the interview. If the Conductor was doing the promotions as advertised on the Price Board, there is no theft. The Conductor was doing his job.

Roscoe: As we said in issue 134, we drivers consider Human Resources as bludgers. Was this person at the interview, so as to justify her job?

Clarence: The Conductor was devastated. This manager said the Conductor was do-

up to high summer temperatures (Winter? In wonderful, magical Westfield land we don't have unpleasant things like winter, unless we can have sales for it!)

This meant that people like myself who actually dressed for the weather had to strip off several layers each time we entered or left the shopping centre. This was also the situation on trains, most of which I find uncomfortably hot during winter these days as they seem to be heated for middle class women who treat life like a fashion show rather than dress sensibly for the actual weather.

As I understand it the overheating on NSW trains comes from the middle-class

ing too many promotions. He may have been doing too many promotions, but at least he made an effort to sell the stock. At least the perishable stock would not have to be thrown out.

Jethro: This Conductor is a hard worker and would help management, if they were having trouble running trains.

Rastus and Roscoe: Some of our drivers saw this Conductor working whilst travelling passenger and think he was a credit to V/Line.

Clarence: A couple of weeks ago, one of the Staff Clerks asked this Conductor when signing on, if he would change his shift. It was a Buffet shift and he would have to extend his shift. The Conductor agreed to help. The Catering Manager was behind the Staff Clerk. The Staff Clerk said to this person, if this Conductor had not changed his shift, the Buffet would not operate.

**RW: Did the Manager thank the Conductor?**

Clarence: No!

Rastus: You think he would have thanked him, but being the PIG he is you would not expect it.

Roscoe: It is obvious this Conductor would help out by having him in over the promotions was wrong. This Catering Manager has nothing better to do.

**RW: In concluding, it is obvious that the Conductors hate the On Train Manager. Also he is taking them to task on minor issues. He should be removed.**

Rastus and Roscoe: In having the final say. We drivers say to the Catering Manager GET OUT! The department would run better without him. We drivers don't like him over the way he removed a manager and how he failed the son of one of our drivers in ticket checking. Finally, a message to Conductors. If you have to front the Conductor Manager over shortages in Buffets and if HUMAN RESOURCES are there. WALKOUT!

**We Care We Recycle!**

This past winter I was forced into the uncomfortable heat in the various shopping centres' I visited for luxuries like food and medicine. What struck me as unbelievable was the number of people walking about in shorts (or skirts) and short-sleeved t-shirts (even thongs!). Outside it varied between 5 and 10 degrees but inside the Westfield shopping centre the heating was cranked

train-complain-campaign (One of working class O'Farrell's primary soap boxes strangely - grass roots campaign? Yes grass roots Liberal Party) that whinged about trains not running on time (so services got cut at stops in working class areas to accommodate them) which was propelled by a woman as I recall. In amongst the various middle class angst was also this complaint about the temperature of trains in winter. Let's forget about hot little environments being dangers to public health as perfect breeding environments for viruses, women want to walk out of heated houses

in fashionable clothes, enter a overheated train and then an overheated office, not wear big jackets that cover today's outfit up.

Lets not wear jackets or actually dress for the weather, let's pretend its summer all year round, and people wonder why Australia produces so many greenhouse gases. Fashion is obviously more important than the environment and sorry but women are the main perpetrators at least during winter. Of course during summer the number of men I see in woollen business suits moving from one over air-conditioned environment to another astounds me. Typical colonial arrogance, move population from a freezing environment like England (where let's face it, it never really used to get hot even in summer) and dress the same in a hot country like Australia whilst making fun of the indigenous population who actually dress for the weather. OK Victorian prudery comes in there somewhere, but it still astonishes me that men are still only considered dressed properly for work in offices in summer in ties (useless piece of clothing descendant from the scarf), long trousers and suit coats. Never mind we can always just crank the air-conditioning up a few notches and throw some more coal on the fire.

I read an interesting article recently which discussed the real cost of electric trains. Its author suggested that if NSW reverted to steam trains burning coal we would actually produce LESS green house gas then we do currently burning coal to drive generators to provide electricity to run "clean" electric trains. In fact trains are one of our largest consumers of electricity; we just don't see the coal burning to produce it so have been duped into believing it is a clean alternative. The opinion may have some merit as we slowly we are realizing that alternative electricity production does not produce nearly enough to meet demand.

This leads me nicely into the point of this article: recycling. Every single person

walking around in short sleeves in shopping centres in winter and woollen suits in summer is simultaneously religiously recycling their bottles and separating their waste believing they are doing the right thing. However if you look just below the surface you will realize recycling is the greatest government con job in history - it has people feeling guilty and that they can abate this guilt by recycling, this while capitalism continues unabated pumping out toxic chemicals into the environment wastefully producing cheap TV's and cars. "It's a good first step" the leaflets



say.

No it's a drop in an ocean of filth produced by capitalism, and if it becomes unfashionable for industry to pollute in Western countries then we move those industries to third world countries (let's face it the labour is cheaper and more exploitable anyway) and hide exactly the same pollution away. That way we can still have cheap TV's and Car's but not see the pollution.

A friend was discussing with me recently how sad the demise of the Movie Theatre was, that everyone just stayed home and watched their TV's these days. Yes, where once hundreds of people watched a large screen and the cost to the environment was reduced, now those same hundreds all watch their plasma TV's at home individually consuming hour after hour of coal produced kilowatts (..of course just before bed they put the rubbish out and make sure they put the recycling in the right bin). If Australian's care about the environment,

then why are they not going to Movie Theatres? Maybe because then industry would not be able to sell so many plasma televisions!

Now we have the carbon tax to the rescue on its white stallion, this will surely once and for all show Australians how wasteful their lifestyle is right? Maybe the theatre is on the come back? Actually not.

Australia's tax system is modelled on a GST thanks to the dark lord of the South John Howard (and who could forget Meg "GST" lee's unforgivable contribution). The only way that a GST based tax system can work is for the rate to climb every so often, for this very reason the VAT just recently increased in the UK. Of course in the last few elections Australia's politicians have been shown that the most popular party in Australia currently is "none of the above" so right now at GST-increasing time such a move would be political suicide for either political party.

So we get a "green" tax which pretty much amounts to a rise in GST. But it sounds nice and let's face it if it only kicks harder those people at the bottom of the society, already struggling paying the same GST tax contribution as someone that earns half a million dollars a year, well it's not so bad...

I will start recycling when Australia's industries stop polluting the environment and destroying the planet with production based on cost-effectiveness rather than regard for the environment. I am not recycling a single thing (GASP!), instead I am going to spend that little bit of religious time everyday working on ways I can change the cause of the problem, rather than accepting the guilt of which I own a microscopic miniscule amount. That time will be better spent at work each day encouraging through industrial action either in my industry, or in solidarity with others, reform in the way Australian industry designs, manufactures and markets goods and materials.

Sean

**A recent election in the 42 000 strong NSW Public Service Association (PSA) saw a rank and file group of members and delegates called the Progressive PSA (PPSA) secure a stunning victory. The PPSA captured the top position of General Secretary when their candidate Anne Gardiner deposed the long serving incumbent John Cahill. The PPSA also won all 45 delegate positions on the PSA Central Council, giving them control of the union.**

The PPSA were able to win all 45 delegates to Central Council with 57% of the vote because prior to the last PSA election in 2008 the leadership team abolished the

## Rank and File Takes Control of the PSA

democratic proportional representation method and replaced it with a 'winner takes all' system of bloc voting. This undemocratic change was introduced to remove the PPSA from having any representation on Central Council because the old leadership group was frightened by growing membership support for the PPSA. That change has now turned around to bite the former ruling group as they are now left with no delegates on

Central Council, although they narrowly retained a majority of positions on the Executive. The PPSA has pledged to restore proportional representation after consulting with the membership.

The Progressives campaigned on a platform of putting power in the hands of members and delegates by consulting widely and involving members in an industrial campaign to combat O'Farrell's attacks on the public sector. Members be-

came increasingly frustrated with the former leadership group's failure to develop an industrial strategy or involve members in an organised campaign of mass action to fight the NSW Government's wave of cuts to public service jobs and conditions.

The PPSA also attracted membership support with their plans to significantly reduce the enormous salaries of the paid elected officials and implement a raft of transparency and accountability measures to prevent the careerism and complacency that became a hallmark of the former leadership team during their time in power.

The prospect of increased industrial militancy from a strong, fighting public servants' union in NSW should help to strengthen the resolve of other public sector unions such as the NSW Teachers' Federation and the NSW Fire Brigade Employees Union. The PSA now plans to

work closely with these unions to organise a united sector wide response to O'Farrell's anti-worker public sector attacks.

These developments will place additional pressure on the leadership of the RTBU (Rail Tram & Bus Union) to take strong, membership led action to defend the public transport sector from the threat of job cuts and privatisation. Many members feel that the RTBU under Claassens' leadership has been far too quiet in regard to the O'Farrell Government's attacks on workers' rights and threats to the public transport system.

The PPSA victory will provide a boost to the RTBU's rank and file group, Members Voice, as an example of what can be achieved when a team of committed members works persistently over many years to build up support until victory is possible.

At the last RTBU election in February 2011 Members Voice ran on a platform of developing a strong membership led industrial campaign to protect jobs and conditions, to cut the huge (and still undeclared) salaries of the paid elected officials, implement transparency and accountability measures in the affairs of the RTBU and firmly place control of the union in the hands of rank and file members.

At that election Members Voice supported a ticket of 19 candidates who challenged the current leadership team and assisted nine of them to be elected to the NSW RTBU Branch Council.

*For more information about Members Voice contact:*

*membersvoice2010@yahoo.com*

## BRITAIN TODAY

### ELECTRICIANS & PRIVATISATION

*A SolFed (Solidarity Federation) member who has worked as an electrician since the late 1970s shares his experience of the electric supply industry, privatisation and the trade unions.*

**I started an apprenticeship at 16 from school in the local electric company. It was then a nationalised industry and everyone was in one of the recognised (by the company) trade unions (a closed shop). There were many different departments and staff could move between them as workload dictated. As an apprentice I spent time in each department to give me experience of each and to hopefully decide in which one I would ultimately stay.**

There were problems with management as in all workplaces (still very much us and them), there was also a great divide between office staff and the industrial staff (we never mixed). I think that was due to the fact that they (the office staff) would work as normal when we were in dispute and their wages and pensions were far more generous.

The unions had many nationally negotiated agreements with management. Our particular union was extremely right-wing, the full-time official always consulted privately with management before listening to our grievances. We eventually formed a breakaway union that was under the umbrella of one of the other main recognised unions but this created di-

visions between us and the colleagues who remained. As bad as this was from a solidarity point of view I could not have paid subscriptions to that bunch of phonies any longer (a Pyrrhic victory I know).

We were privatised in 1990 and received our 30 pieces of silver in shares, but to be fair I knew of no one who admitted to be in favour of privatisation. However, there was no campaign to try to prevent it that I was aware of. Just prior to privatisation a number of the better shop stewards were



sacked, all very convenient for the calamity that was about to befall us.

The first assault was to split up some of the business into separate parts each with their own management and budgets, this had the desired effect of isolating the various sections of the work force which enabled the implementation of different wage structures and conditions. The company was then able to use its mantra: "though

the main business has made millions we cannot give you a wage increase as the regulator will not allow us to cross-subsidise to other parts of the business".

The second was their weapon of mass destruction which is still often wheeled out when a purge is required. I speak of nothing less than the TUPE (transfer of undertakings) which has all sorts of assurances and guarantees that when you're transferred to the new company all your pay and terms of conditions are protected. This, as you may guess, turns out to be another load of bull, after a certain amount of time you will usually end up out of work or with a far inferior paid job and this obviously with the connivance of your trade union who you have been paying subs to for years. You may also be given the option of redundancy or applying for any vacancies within the main company, but rejection after rejection takes its toll and very few find this to be the route to their salvation.

The company has also been very busy allowing a host of other smaller companies to be trained and authorised to work on the electric network, this allows them to have little fear of industrial action as they have a ready-made replacement workforce waiting in the wings. Some of these companies employ some of the staff who were TUPE to other companies and feel aggrieved at their former colleagues, so any solidarity from them is unlikely.

Our company has been taken over a number of times each resulting in fewer workers but strangely management seems to increase. You cannot draw any other conclusion than it is the company's ultimate goal to prevent us from being able to carry out our jobs and then make a business case for passing it all over to subcontractors with us via the dreaded TUPE.

The corporate image is a joke. We regularly receive colourful proclamations and requests for our input, but in reality are advised to be quiet and just carry out what you are told. I recently attended a team briefing where we were read out a company proclamation which stated it was our duty to highlight any matter that we were not happy about carrying out. That same week I attended a briefing on company policy concerning a technical matter, after listening to the lecture it was pointed out to the manager that the policy was flawed and did in fact pose a danger if implemented. The response from the speaker (who obviously did not have the knowledge to understand the point) was that if you did not like it you could resign. The company knows that further down the line, if an incident does occur, then they can pull out their announcements that we were all sent and show everyone that obviously they had done all in their power to prevent an incident.

One final point I feel that should be made is about the myth that private companies cannot be inefficient. Believe me when I say that the company that I work for jumps from one debacle to another, carrying out costly reorganisations without any benefit, lots of managers and very few productive staff. It's a good job that it is a private monopoly and even the most incompetent people cannot fail to make a profit.

It is blatantly obvious that the trade unions we have paid into all our working lives have failed us dismally, at best it could be described as incompetence, but a more accurate term would be complicity. The only way forward, I believe, is for us to reject the old structures that have continually stifled our aspirations and form one revolutionary union controlled completely at every level by the membership.

*Taken from solfed.org.uk.*

## THE FIGHT AGAINST AUSTERITY

*The ongoing struggle against austerity have brought into focus the differences between the "left" and "right" of the trade union movement. But they have also shown the inadequacy of the trade union left and the illusions it promotes. So what hope do militant workers in the UK have of going beyond the limitations imposed on us from above?*

**On Monday Mark Serwotka, General Secretary of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) Union, declared that the British trade union movement faced a "crisis of leadership." It is safe to say that he summed up the feelings of an awful lot of trade union members and**

**activists when he did so. It is a common sentiment amongst workers being constantly shat upon by the government and employers.**

However, the fact that it's so common underlines what's wrong with it. Taking the admittedly anecdotal example of where I work, it isn't hard to find a significant amount of people who agree that "the leadership of unions [is] way behind the pace" of what needs to be done to fight austerity. Why are we only having a one day strike? Why aren't we striking over this issue, and that one, as well? Why doesn't the TUC just call a general strike already?

Yet so few of those voicing such sentiments are active. Whether as reps or as activists who will help hand out leaflets, attend protests, join picket lines, etc, we have a fair few militant members - but they are distinctly a minority. Even amongst those who would agree 100% with Serwotka's words. People are embattled and disenchanted, but it's almost entirely passive. Why isn't someone else acting on our behalf? We need a fightback, but we need leaders to do it for us.

This isn't to blame the people I described above. They're not passive because they're lazy, or apathetic, or demanding easy answers. They're passive because the trade union movement over the last thirty years has conditioned its members to act that way. Pretty much demanded it of them, in fact.

It's easy to blame this on right-wing unionism, and many do. But it's just not that simple. Anarchists and libertarian communists within "left" unions will be able to point to examples of them sabotaging workers' disputes in much the same way as the right. The fact is that trade unions play a structural role within capitalism as mediator between labour and capital and, though there is a spectrum which allows some wiggle room, this demands ultimately selling industrial peace no matter which faction runs the executive.

But to point that out raises questions of going beyond official bounds and workers' self-activity, so the left versus right narrative is a much safer one. Which is the point - it's not just a wrong-headed analysis of how trade unions work, but it actively promotes illusions in the leadership.

Mark Serwotka was right when he "rejected the idea of any intrinsic difference between workers in Britain compared with those in other countries." But his only answer is to call for better leadership precisely because he and the rest of the "awkward squad" offer themselves up as that leadership. Even to suggest acting in-

dependently of the top of the TUC hints at how workers might act independently of them when the time comes that they, too, have to sell industrial peace.

As an illustration of this, it is worth asking the same question Serwotka asked during the 14 November European General Strike - "why isn't that happening today in Britain?"

Why didn't those "left" union leaders, who spoke so passionately of a general strike on October 20, use what live ballots they had to bring workers out that day? Why not coordinate action to what degree possible then in order to add weight to their demand for a proper general strike?

For that matter, why did PCS and others not coordinate more action over pensions? Taking the initiative in such a way would have maintained momentum, whilst delaying so that March 28 became May 10 and then fetishising "joint action" in order to prevent further action altogether effectively killed the pension dispute.

The answer, a thousand times over, is that this is what unions do. They need to maintain their subs base by selling themselves to workers, but they also need to keep their seat at the table by selling themselves to bosses. The left wing ones may put up more of a fight, but their limitations are still structural and inevitable.

In opposition to this, workers need to take control of their own struggles. Not by appointing new mediators, but by acting independently, taking direct action wherever possible and implementing horizontal decision making structures. As for that general strike, it's no good "calling upon" others to deliver it for us - we need to organise on the ground, build our numbers through action and gain the momentum to reach that point of our own volition.

Hardly an easy task, and one we are a long, long way off accomplishing. But we have to start somewhere. Let's face it - even if the TUC were to defy expectations and the law to call a general strike, that would still leave all impetus with those whose material interests will demand that they police our struggle long before we effectively challenge the dominance of capital.

Whilst too much of the UK labour movement tends towards begging of leaders, there is a hint of the kind of movement we need.

The most obvious example remains the Sparks. The rank-and-file electrical and mechanical construction workers are still going strong after their defeat of the BESNA agreement last year. Most recently, they have been taking on blacklisting and on 14 November they were out at a mass picket of Crossrail.

I often cite the Sparks as the most instructive example of virtually everything in how rank-and-file workers relate to trade

union structures. From the fact that they are viewed as “cancerous” for challenging the leadership, and that only an unstoppable momentum and fear of being outflanked from below will make the leadership proffer nominal support. To the reality that, even in support, the leadership will try to sell you out and only persistent self-activity can score real victories.

That example has recently inspired a similar movement in the civil service. The Civil Service Rank & File Network (CSRF) is in the extremely early stages of development, however already it has made incredible leaps and bounds. Not only did calling a day of action on 14 November force PCS into emulating them on 30 November, the threat of walkouts and a “communications meltdown” apparently led to the Cabinet Office openly threatening to sequester the union’s funds if it supported anything that its members did on the day of the European general strike.

The CSRF has called for further sporadic actions across the country, and is likely to

call another day of action on 5 December to coincide with both the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement and the student demonstration in London. It remains a very small movement, and in practice a militant tendency amongst PCS reps in some places as much as a genuinely member-led movement in others, but there is enormous potential to grow. The fact that it rattled the Cabinet Office early on with just talk and that it forced PCS to fill the void until a fresh strike ballot in the new year speaks to that.

Elsewhere, we are seeing workers previously unorganised workplaces and sectors begin to fight back, and often outside of the TUC unions. To give two current examples, the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) cleaners at John Lewis have won the latest in a succession of victories and we’ve seen the emergence of the Pret A Manger Staff Union which has already taken on management repression.

The hope now is that these trends - fresh organisation in non-unionised industries

and militant rank-and-file movements in the established unions - can take hold and spread. It is the task of all militant workers and all who want to see an effective, grass-roots-led struggle in the UK to help foster that.

It is increasingly clear that the government is confident to attack every aspect of our lives under the banner of austerity. If we pin our hopes on the “left” at the top of the unions, we only delay their betrayal and prostrate ourselves before the same illusions that have allowed the spiral of defeat that has dominated trade unionism for the last three decades. If we start organising horizontally and commit to the idea of fighting for ourselves, then there’s every chance that we might actually start to win.

*Phil*

*Nov 21 2012*

*Thanks to Libcom*

## The Strike Wave and New Workers’ Organisations: Breaking out of Old Compromises

*by Leonard Gentle*

**Over the past weekend, the striking mineworkers of Amplats gathered at a mass rally in Rustenburg and howled their defiance of a series of ultimatums issued by the company. At De Doorns, farm workers are on a wildcat strike - the latest of a series that has become a feature of the South African landscape over the last three months, knocking Mangaung off the front pages. Something is stirring from below...and it is time we got beyond the fear and trepidation that have become the stock response in the media.**

After the Marikana massacre President Jacob Zuma appointed the Farlam Commission and also convened an emergency Social Dialogue meeting of Business, Labour and Government in October. The partners released a statement calling on strikers to return to work and for the police to defend law and order and noted that “the wave of unprotected strikes...[could]...undermine the legal framework of bargaining.”

So far the Farlam Commission has heard evidence of a police conspiracy, intimidation of witnesses, and a hotline line between Cyril Ramaphosa, Lonmin and the police. But with the strike wave continuing is it not also time to ask: Where did this



much-vaunted “legal framework of bargaining” come from? And how virtuous, from the perspective of democracy and social justice, has that system been?

South Africa’s Labour Relations Act (LRA), Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) and their associated institutions of the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA), the Sector Education Training Authorities (SETAs) and National Economic, Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) came out of a series of engagements around the National Economic Forum, the Labour Market Commission and the National Training Board between 1990 and 1995. Like the World Trade Centre negotiations at Kempton Park, which shaped South African political compromises, there was a similar set of trade-offs being enacted within the labour market sphere between Labour (essentially COSATU) and Big Business.

Under apartheid industrial relations legislation had been based on the racial alliance between Big Business and white workers, and the suppression of black workers. White workers could form trade unions and use their muscle to establish minimum

wages, industrial councils to have industry negotiations and have systems of labour protection and training through apprenticeship and training boards.

For black workers, however, strikes were illegal and they were excluded from labour protection and industrial councils.

However the illegal strike wave amongst black workers outside Durban in 1973 saw black workers defy the labour laws and eventually set up strong unions and forge Recognition Agreements with large employers. New unions, like the Metal and Allied Workers’ Union, even broke into the Industrial Council system, eventually forcing the apartheid state, in 1979, to amend the LRA to grant African workers the right to form trade unions and to compel employers to deduct membership dues.

By the time the labour market negotiations began in the early 1990’s, COSATU wanted the state to legislate a legal duty to bargain on the part of employers, impose centralised bargaining and demanded that the new democratic state should provide a high degree of social protection for workers. Big Business, in turn, wanted maximum labour flexibility, little state intervention and little social protection.

These opposing views appeared irreconcilable.

The deal breaker was to take labour legislation out of the sphere of criminal sanction and state enforceability completely. Instead the state, and Big Business and Big Labour agreed to a system of what came to be called “voice regulation” and “social partnership”.

So strikes and employer lockouts, unfair labour practices, unfair dismissals and in-

correct wages, etc. would no longer be illegal but subject to discussion and rational persuasion through institutions like the CCMA. If your employer summarily sacked you or underpaid you, you couldn't get a labour inspector to reinstate you or have your employer compelled by law to honour a contract, you went to the CCMA where you could get a mediator to try and reach a compromise solution.

Similarly, while there was no compulsion on the part of an employer to negotiate, you could invoke the power of your strong union to make life difficult in time for such a recalcitrant employer. And you could strike, albeit only on what was deemed to be a matter of interest (as opposed to unfair dismissal, which is deemed to be a conflict of right, over which you couldn't strike but had to refer to the CCMA for mediation and/or arbitration). So the labour movement got its plethora of rights, but which were dependent on their real organised power to exercise, because the state was not going to be involved. But Big Business got its demands for labour flexibility because there were no laws involving the state imposing any kind of criminal sanction or legal enforceability.

The whole system presumed a scenario whereby Big Business would get the benefits of labour flexibility, industrial peace and skilled labour and Big Labour would get skills, job security, higher wages and a seat at the table of all labour market institutions.

But neither the state nor Big Business kept their side of the bargain. Whereas the LRA, the SETAs and NEDLAC were unveiled during the period of the RDP, the government unveiled GEAR and its neo-liberal prescriptions without any consideration of its Big Labour "partner". And Big Business, instead of seeking beneficiation and skilled labour, took the gap. At least the biggest South African monopolies did — unbundled, financialised and then jumped ship to London, New York and Melbourne. Making money via releasing "share holder value" on global stock markets was so much more profitable than extending employment and promoting skills, let alone hanging out with its "social partners" in NEDLAC.

That left COSATU with nowhere else to go. After responding with anger in the early days of GEAR, the federation has more recently been happy to slag off the betrayals of its tripartite partner, the ANC, while its leaders, organisers and even shop stewards rake in the money involved in attending NEDLAC, SETAs and the myriad other tripartite and centralised bargaining fora.

And how did the institutions of South Africa's industrial relations perform?

Well, from the viewpoint of peace and productivity they certainly did their job. Strikes have shown a steady decline since 1995 with only 2010, the year of public sector strikes showing an increase in the number of strikes and days lost, as unions and state departments found themselves at the end of a 3-year agreement in that year. The CCMA in the meantime has increased its case handling exponentially and has become an established part of the industrial relations landscape.

But from the side of ordinary working class people the system has been a disaster on every score.

Firstly, at the macro level, inequality is increasing and all the indicators show increased unemployment - now peaking at 40% - according to Census 2012; and the increased informalisation and casualisation of workers. The labour peace has



come at the cost of the restructuring of the working class towards the very flexible labour demanded by Big Business.

But what about the layer of full-time workers who have permanent jobs and are the backbone of the trade unions today? It turns out that, apart from those who benefit from the perks of sitting on the various negotiating fora, it didn't work for them either.

In the main, company-level wage negotiations have settled on and around the annual inflation rate. And seeing that this is a figure roughly representing cost of living increases over the year past, this means that real wage levels have been eroded.

And what about the achievements of the Bargaining Councils?

Well, the statistics on centralised bargaining are revealing. In the history of the labour movement this was supposed to be a powerful means to even things upwards - to win victories in enterprises or sectors where the workers were strong, and then have that victory extended to companies where the union was weak via the ministerial signature extending the agreement to

non-parties. So for years employers resisted centralised bargaining or Industrial Councils (as they were called then) fearing that it would push wage costs up.

In 1995's LRA the industrial councils were rechristened Bargaining Councils and the compulsion on the part of the minister weakened so that s/he had some discretion in this matter and only if there were thresholds reached in terms of employer and union representativity.

So what has been their performance? In cases of holidays, working hours, maternity benefits, etc., Bargaining Councils have either settled on the minima already enshrined in the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (meaning no protracted negotiations and strikes were needed when workers already had these rights established in law) or, shockingly, have reached settlements where these are actually below the minima set in the Act.

The average weekly working hours have gone up from 44 hours to 45 — a mass increase in the working year without a commensurate increase in pay.

In other words, far from Bargaining Councils being instruments used by the unions to level conditions upwards they have become instruments for the employers to level conditions downwards! Cape Town's Labour Research Service's 2011-2012 Bargaining Indicators had this to say: "The BCEA looks more like a ceiling than a floor of minimum conditions.

Put another way, actual conditions of employment tend to cluster around the legislated minimums. We see few significant upward variations."

In COSATU's internal review tabled at its recent Congress, some 60% of members express dissatisfaction with wage increases negotiated.

Overall workers' wages and salaries as a percentage of national income have been dropping every year and were overtaken in 1999 by profits. In other words there has been a massive transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich in the era of the current industrial relations system.

If the striking workers of the last three months are - horrors of horrors - challenging this system of industrial relations, then they are doing us all a service for which they should be applauded and not condemned.

Internationally, the trade union movement has often gone through periods of stagnation and co-option only to be revived by internal rebellions against the established industrial order. Trade unions originated in Britain as "trades unions" — where the

older term, “trades”, referred to the skilled trades of craftsmen. The movement arose from two sources: one conservative and protective of the old guilds and craftsmen resisting the hordes of newly proletarianised, deskilled workers; the other a militant offshoot of the 19th century radical Chartist movement. The first shop stewards were factory (or “shop”)-based representatives who led a radical democratic movement against the craft unions in the late 19th century and established the modern labour movement.

Similarly in the USA, the older craft-based American Federation of Labour (AFL) experienced a revolt by industrial workers in the 1920s against the sweetheart nature of the AFL and its protection of skilled white workers. These militant industrial workers, newer immigrants and many Blacks – grouped under the Congress of Industrial Organisations - fought the labour elite and forced it into an amalgam, the AFL-CIO, which is still America’s trade union centre today.

So worker rebellions against “their own unions” and against the “legal framework” for collective bargaining have a distinguished history.

Since Marikana there has been a strike wave of some 100 000 workers across the country – from the platinum province, to the coal and gold mines of the North West, Gauteng and the Free State, and from the workers at Kumba in the Northern Cape; to Toyota in KZN; and even home-based textiles workers in Cape Town. And now farm workers in De Doorns.

A common feature of these strikes has been that they were led and driven by self-organised workers’ committees in defiance of the existing unions and of signed collective agreements made with these unions. This exercise in self-organisation

was even to impact on existing procedural wage negotiations – notably the transport sector, where employers and unions were about to reach an agreed wage settlement only to find that membership on the ground rejecting the proposed agreement and forcing through a protected strike.

The appellation, wildcat, may invoke images of an unruly mob. The appearance of a Julius Malema at Marikana may play to perceptions that striking workers are easily swayed bumpkins willing to believe any snake-oil salesman. And the demand for R12 500 may appear unreasonable and outrageous to commentators who can’t credit workers with any power to think for themselves. But what has been the most striking feature of the strike wave – particularly in the mining sector - has been the level of sophistication displayed, with no full-time organisers, no back up offices and no administrators; and against all the whole gamut of the state and civil society - from the mine owners media, to the political parties and the trade unions themselves.

For example AngloPlat declares, a month ago, that it has dismissed 12 000 workers. Then it says that they can return but by their imposed deadline. Then it meets with NUM and Solidarity, where they sign an agreement for a return to work. But still they can’t get back to full production and they can’t bring in scabs. The workers simply say “the Strike Committee speaks for us” and defy AngloPlat.

With each back down by management the strength of the Committee is enhanced until, against all the procedures enshrined in the LRA and the collective agreements with NUM, they are forced to sit down with the Strike Committee and recognise its de facto power. As at Lonmin – where the company was forced by the power of

its strike committee to pay a 22% wage increase – the workers at Lonmin and AngloPlat have changed the face of industrial relations in South Africa. And this has been repeated at AngloGold and across the mining sector.

As ever there are no guarantees and the best efforts of the striking workers may be defeated by the sheer range of forces lined up against them. But for now the Strike Committees across the mining industry have formed their own structure, the National Strike Committee, and within this there is lively debate about where this initiative will go and what its strategic orientation will be – whether a broad labour front or a new union or a mass enlistment in one of the existing registered unions.

The strike wave has been greeted only with doom and gloom in the mainstream media. Strangely enough, the same media and many commentators have also lined up to speak to the threat to democracy posed by an increasingly authoritarian and beleaguered ANC leadership. Business figures such as Nedbank Chairman Reuel Khoza were lauded for having the “courage” to speak up, while World Bank luminaries like Mamphela Ramphele are celebrated for “speaking the truth to power”.

So why when striking workers challenge this self-same intolerant government and the whole cosy edifice of the current order they are treated to this discourse of fear and loathing? Surely it is time to celebrate the possibilities for an expansion of democracy represented by the current strike wave? Or is democracy only an effete experience for the well to do?

*Thanks to Libcom & SACSIS - The South African Civil Society Information Service (www.sacsis.org.za).*

## ANARCHISM IN CHILE

**Chile has a relatively rich history of anarchism similar to many of the countries of the southern cone of South America. A large and militant anarcho-syndicalist movement was present in Chile since the 19th century and built some of the first unions.**

Chilean anarcho-syndicalists built libertarian traditions within the labor movement that continued to have resonance even up till the 1940s or beyond. Yet ultimately anarchism entered a dormant period after the 1920s when the Ibañez dictatorship successfully dislodged and attacked the anarchist movement and its bases with a few key exceptions. In the 1950s anarchosyndicalism had a significant revival which reverberated into later

eras in influencing Chilean unionism after key strikes of that era. There were some anarchists also active inside of the Movement for Popular Resistance during the 1970s, and some other ex-MIR members moved onto anarchism because of their experiences in MIR. In general however it wasn’t until the period of the 1980s-2000s that anarchism was reborn in Chile.

The first anarchist project to be reborn in Chile during this period was perhaps *Hombre y Sociedad*, an anarchist communist publication with analysis of Chile’s situation that brought together exiles and different generations of the anarchist movement. By the 1990s, disillusionment with traditional politics and the strain of the official left with the fall of the Soviet

bloc contributed to a revival of sorts of anarchists. Some Chilean youth turned to anarchism to answer the problems raised by integration of the opposition into the Chilean state. In 1999, anarchist communists founded the Congreso Unificación Anarco-Comunista (CUAC) after working struggling to build a specific anarchist organization across years. The CUAC brought together anarchist militants to develop within the struggles of the working class and orient to social insertion. Today two national organizations exist (Federación Comunista Libertaria, & the Organización Comunista Libertaria) as well as other smaller local groups such as the Corriente Acción Libertaria of Valparaíso. Organized anarchism in Chile today carries with it the traditions of over 10 years of work within social movements, and broader connections to the struggles against the dictatorship.

### Today's Social Struggles

In the present period Chile is witnessing five fronts of struggle across the country: students, workers, neighbourhoods, territorial battles, and indigenous struggle. All have roots in struggles from the era of the popular front government, and in some cases even earlier.

Chile catapulted into the news and into the consciousness of activists in 2011 because of the student movement. Aimed at combating debt-servitude, poor quality, and untenable prices, the student movement organized widespread actions, strikes, and social disruptions to achieve free quality public education for all, and in many cases a liberatory vision of education as well. Chile's system of education resembles in some ways the US because of its reliance on debt, similar cost (but with Chilean wages), and a public/private divide that has deep class implications. Chile, like Quebec, has been going through regular cycles of student struggles around such issues. The most recent period was in 2006 under Bachelet in the 'March of the Penguins' (named for the students' uniforms) around issues of fees, bus passes, and the system problems with funding and regulation of education in Chile. The struggles ended with concessions, but without resolving the larger issues. Many of the leaders of the 2011 university struggles were militants in the high school organizations (liceos) of 2006. At its peak, the movement of 2011 led to near urban shutdown with hundreds of thousands in the streets, the will of the public on their side, and solidarity strikes by workers in the strategic sectors of the economy.

Anarchists built a base in the student movements with the work of the Federación Estudiantil Libertaria (FEL) more than a decade ago. Beginning as an intermediate tendency within the student movement, the FEL built a libertarian praxis both inside the official student movement and in the streets. Chile has a system of political representation which resembles elements of both governmental structures and unions. The organizations are built on a departmental basis with their own constitutions and structure, but largely they are all accountable to base assemblies. There are larger coordinating structures where different political tendencies compete and engage in negotiation with administration, and coordinating forces. FEL engages in both organizing the student struggle, and activities around political formation, popular education, and intervention in maintaining a libertarian revolutionary character of popular student struggles. Presently it's a network across the Universities and high schools of Chile, and has won several key victories in establishing a presence for FEL and its

networks. In 2012 the movement will face challenges due to the inability to win its significant system demands in 2011. University students are being attacked both by the state targeting any further protests through retributory action within the school system, and by the economic burden of their loans and loss of classes. Occupations of high schools continue however, and the movement is facing a crucial juncture at this time. Regional elections occur in 2012, and much of the left will mobilize to funnel the energy of the student movement into institutional politics. With the autonomous power of the student movement, the libertarian presence of the FEL, and the world crisis unfolding, 2012 may prove to be a pivotal year in either direction. Today, as we speak mobilizations are already returning



to the streets and demonstrating a power that has not yet been defeated by either the crisis or the government.

The repression of Pinochet led to a weakened official workers movement. In Chile, the official union rate hovers around 10% similar to the US. Chilean labor law combines the worst of Europe (strikes are illegal without certain specific parameters) and the worst of the US (widespread evasion of labor law through exclusions, independent contracting, and the ability to replace workers who strike). More than a decade of anarchist organization and agitation however has built a libertarian presence in key sectors of Chilean society. Construction workers for example are excluded from collective bargaining largely in Chilean labor law. A relatively new union, SINTEC, was built in construction with a strong libertarian current and on a combative libertarian model. The port workers likewise have a tradition and presence of libertarian unionism, while at the same time occupying a strategic position within the economy as the means of exporting all of Chile's wealth. Depending on the region, anarchists have built maturing roots in various sectors of the economy strategic to their position (mining, health, education, transportation, forestry, and fisheries).

Alongside a presence in social struggle, the anarchist movement has a broad base

of activities both within the left and the popular neighbourhoods for the development of a libertarian praxis. Anarchists are active in community radio stations across Chile where residents engage in popular education in tandem with the struggles of their neighbourhood on a liberatory model. The movement has a number of media projects both of organizations and of broader libertarian networks. For example "Politica y Sociedad" (originally "Hombre y Sociedad") is an anarchist communist journal founded in the 1980s that represents a collaboration between various organized anarchist groups and individuals. There are anarchist journals like Erosion. The Federación Comunista Libertaria has both print and web publications. In Santiago there's a network of around 12 popular libraries in particular

popular neighbourhoods. Insurrectionists and lifestyle elements had active squats until largely closed down during el caso de bombas where the state targeted them for insurrectionist bombings. Subsequently the defendants were all cleared, however the squats have not since returned to pre-repression levels of functioning.

### A Panorama

The position of the libertarian movement in Chile shows the direction a mature movement can have when it invests in becoming rooted in popular struggles and communities. Chile faced unique challenges due to the social disruption that the combined terrorism of the dictatorship and neoliberalism. Building often with very little, the anarchist movement has grown roots and stand in strategic positions today within Chilean social struggles. There is much to be learnt from these experiences, when taken with our analysis of our time, our place, and our conjuncture. The future of both Chile and its anarchists lies today in their fight within Chilean society, and with the fight of the international working class against imperialism and new methods of submission in this era of crisis.

*Thanks are due to Jose Antonio Gutiérrez for his input concerning Chilean history, and to all the compañerxs in Chile who assisted in my research, writings, and travels. Edited*

**Indonesian anarcho-syndicalist comrades of the Workers Power Syndicate and other fellow workers face retribution including sackings for attempting to organise in response to various labour law violations and other summary behaviour at PT Garmino Jaya KNH, a garment company in Bogor, West Java.**

PT Garmino Jaya KNH is a garment company in Bogor, West Java, Indonesia, with approximately 700 workers (women and men).

Here a lot of labour law violations occur; the KNH don't comply with them. These are some of the offenses they have committed:

1. Working hours are more than 12 hours
2. Overtime wages that do not comply with the regulations
3. Agreements that are unclear.

The Workers Power Syndicate tried to make the workers of the KNH aware of the oppression. We started holding discussions in the beginning with 6 workers. Af-

ter this discussion more labour comrades there began to realise what was happening, and there was a great follow-up discussion.

On Saturday 22 September 2012, we met with 50 people, and at the KNH our friends became aware of the need for an organisation to fight for the rights of those who are constrained by the factory.

## INDONESIA

After the discussion, on September 25, 2012 one of the labourers KNH named Patrisia Rumiati was called by the head of human resources. KNH chief personnel questioned her about the discussion at Christmas, and then when she explained the intent of the discussion, the chief of personnel was angered, assuming that the union was the provocateur. Then the labor force signed a letter of resignation.

Labor's comrades present at the discussions were called to face the head of human resources, as well as experienced friend Sumiati Patrisia they were interrogated. Finally they were forced to sign an agreement not to organise or establish a union at the factory, and if they violated this told they will be put in jail.

The factory workers using bags were also searched in the presence of soldiers. This made our friends very frightened because they did not understand why, or about the laws that are said to apply.

We ask for support in addressing this matter whether through mass action or position statements.

*Bogor, September 29, 2012*

*Workers Power Syndicate comrades can be contacted via freak-zone at live.com.*

*The WPS is on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/workerspowersyndicate/>*

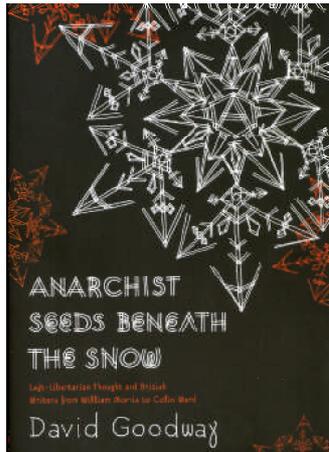
## Book Review Corner

*Anarchist Seeds Beneath The Snow: OR "It's Ok to be Middle Class Now" by Those Feeling Guilty*

**I note that David Goodway is on the promotion trail for the re-publishing of his book decrying and insulting the history of struggle of British anarchists. His hypothesis being that England has no real history of anarchism other than people like Oscar Wilde and George Orwell.**

This is a very comfortable view for those people who have spent decades doing nothing towards a change in society themselves yet choosing to adorn themselves with the tag "Anarchist" (Indeed it is an extension of the same argument that suggests that every single little thing is art from a flicking fluorescent tube to the Mona Lisa!)

I am an anarchist, you are an anarchist, we are all anarchists in our own little special way; of course some of us actually get involved in industrial grass roots actions to try and make a change in the very real problems that confront us in our daily life, others are anarchists by writing funny books and making money from them.



I could make an argument that Benny Hill, Stephen Fry and any other British comedian who makes jibes at a politician or politically flavored jokes is an "anarchist" by this same logic. I could suggest that anyone that writes good works of fiction with a quasi-anarchist theme is an Anarchist.

Of course the fact that most of these so-called "Anarchists" end up as wealthy members of the middle class is something we will just sweep under the carpet.

I seem to recall Ursula K. Le Guin (often held up as an Anarchist icon) was once asked if she considered herself an Anarchist or a Libertarian, to which she responded "I am an Author". Now personally I like most of Le Guin's Science Fiction books immensely, but are her

fictional stories really to be considered with the same importance to Anarchists as for example "The ABC of Anarchism" by Berkman? I suppose if you are someone who is looking for answers to your own guilt at doing little other than "identifying" as an anarchist over many decades, then the answer is yes. "I am an Anarchist just like Ursula was an Anarchist. No one knew it and I never mentioned it, but secretly I was when we total up all the Anarchist points at the end and because I have published books took a stand on middle class issues for the middle class or told

funny jokes more people heard I get more points" (so what if I'm comfortably wealthy and vote for the ultra-conservatives). Who will it be apologists like this claim as Anarchists to stave off their own guilt-ridden angst next, J.K. Rowling?

Personally I believe this is precisely why George Orwell ended up in Spain fighting alongside Spanish Anarchists – a realization that just being "considered" an Anarchist on the basis of commercial fictional books was not enough.

David Goodway's book is an insult to our comrades in the UK and the long history of industrial struggle. My Grandfather was a coal miner in the North of England, he could barely read or write like most of his peers. He had little time for it when you never saw the daylight going down a pit at dawn and leaving at dusk. I can't see how the clever, witty writings of Oscar Wilde or the dramatic, serious writings of George Orwell helped him in his daily industrial struggle against an employer that considered the life of Pit Pony's over his (when ever there was a gas leak they would get the Pit Pony's out before the men – men were replaceable, Pony's took money to re-train). When the miners starved during strikes for the barest of conditions I am sure they found solace in the liberal-minded, witty and clever people Goodway chum's up with. It seems the book has received a very hostile reception in its native country; little wonder therefore I suppose that he is trying now to peddle it out here among the apathetic in Australia.

*Sean*

# A FEATURE REVIEW by Graham Purchase

*Continued From Last Edition*

## Part 2 Academic Anthropology, Anarchism & Activism

### Rejection of the “Identity Politics Machine”:

Conceptions of the timelessness, consistency and inheritability of ethnic identity stretching back into pre-history is closely allied with the discredited primitivist model.

Scott and Graeber are forthright in rejecting the ethnological/graphical and anthropological validity of rigid forms of identity politics within which an individual is strongly identified with one particular ethnicity that often, for example, has only been adopted recently or externally foisted upon a population by the colonial and post-colonial state.

Scott concludes that S.E. Asian hill tribes frequently assumed multiple identities for evading state taxes etc and/or for purposes of engaging in trade between hill tribes and valley states. A perceived member of one people in one context can be perceived as another in another context:

“Given the porosity of ethnic boundaries, the bewildering variation within any particular identity, and the historical vagaries about what it has meant to be a “Kachin” or a “Karen” a healthy agnosticism about the category of ethnicity itself seems just the right move. It is perhaps one of the features of shatter zones located at the interstices of unstable state systems that there is a premium on the adaptability or ambiguity of identities. Most hill cultures have, as it were, their bags already packed for travel across space, across identities, or across both.”(p.328-9)

These radical anthropological theories question and sometimes reject the concept of ethnic categorization altogether. Graeber considers how the lessons and consequences of modern anthropological research should ideally impact upon the contemptible philosophical confusion that characterizes contemporary society, identity politics, racism and radical activism. Graeber concludes that Identity Politics’ focus upon ethnicity has little foundation in modern anthropology. Identity politics needlessly and harmfully perpetuates primitive notions and traditions of racial-cultural difference and division whilst denying the mass of humanity the freedom to individually define themselves as they please:

“Since all debates about the nature of political or economic possibilities are now over, the only way one can now make a political claim is by asserting some group identity...For the most part what we call identities are forced upon people. In the U.S., most are the products of ongoing oppression and inequality: someone who is defined as Black is not allowed to forget that during a single moment of their existence; his or her own self-definition is of no significance to the banker who will deny him credit or the policeman who will arrest him for being in the wrong neighborhood...Nobody has any idea how most people would choose to define themselves—if everyone really were left free to define themselves however they wished...What would it take to live in a world in which everyone really did have the power to decide for themselves, individually and collectively, what sort of communities they wished to belong to and what sort of identities they wanted to take on” (p.101-2).

Graeber insightfully observes how the “international media” used concepts generated by the new-left “Identity Politics Machine” to muter the Zapatista message: “Rather than a band of rebels with a vision of radical democratic transformation they were immediately redefined as a band of Mayan Indians demanding indigenous autonomy” (p.104).

Graeber correctly and intelligently rejects primitivism and identity politics and suggests that anarchists should concentrate their efforts on creating a classless society by “gradually” moving beyond growth orientated capitalist economics.

### Evolutionary Anarchism Versus Revolutionary Syndicalism:

Graeber endorses the syndicalist/wobbly/IWW goal of abolishing “wage slavery” (p.79), but categorically dismisses any possibility of realizing a classless society through worker’s revolution preferring instead, a gradualist, evolutionary or “constitutional” (p. 36) progression towards the sort of anarchist-syndicalism outlined in Kropotkin’s book *The Conquest of Bread* (p.82). Whilst Kropotkin envisaged rapid social change by means of a worker’s revolution Graeber feels a similar outcome will be more realistically and naturally achieved through gradual evolution of anarchist, acephalous or mutual-aid organization in a globally fully networked world:

“If we identified the work that really did need to be done to maintain a comfortable and ecologically sustainable standard of

living, and redistribute the hours, it may turn out that the Wobbly platform of the 16-hour week (4-day week, 4-hour day) is perfectly realistic” (p.80-1).

“Revolution has been so relentlessly cheapened in common usage that it can mean almost anything. We have revolutions every week now: banking revolutions, cybernetic revolutions, medical revolutions, an internet revolution every time someone invents some clever new piece of software” (p.42).

“The process of one system replacing the other won’t take the form of some sudden revolutionary cataclysm—but will necessarily be gradual, the creation of alternative forms of organization on a world scale, new forms of communication, new, less alienated ways of organizing life, which will, eventually, make currently existing forms of power seem stupid and beside the point” (p.40).

Graeber places his faith in peaceful and essentially liberal notions involving the societal evolution of a multitude of liberal organizations variously networked in the movement of movements. But this state of affairs already exists. As Kropotkin observes, the everywhere, everyday practice of mutual aid is the background fabric that allows society to function and makes revolution both desirable and realizable. The self-organization of the people is the bedrock without which no progressive social change is either possible or desirable. But a networked collaborative world is not by itself ever likely to automatically evolve into anarchism as Graeber argues. The failure of the anti-globalist/capitalist network to achieve anything since Graeber finished writing this pamphlet in 2003 reveals the feebleness and defeatism of left-liberal pacifist networking and especially its tactic of staging predictable periodic demonstrations coinciding with major international state-capitalist conferences around the world.

### Political Process and Productivity:

Graeber describes how the “Seattle protesters” of 1999 revealed in having “no coherent ideology” because the disparity and “diversity” of groups and causes active within the pre-protest organization “was a function of the decentralized form of organization, and this organization was the movement’s ideology”. “The key term in the new movement is ‘process’, by which is meant, decision-making process...almost invariably done through some process of finding consensus” (p.84).

*To Be Continued*

## Debate on “Revolutionary Unionism”

**What makes a revolutionary union revolutionary? or in other words, what is the content of the ‘political’ in a political-economic organisation?**

**Academic historian Marcel van der Linden says this, which I think can be used to think about an answer:**

*In practice there seem to be at least three analytical levels which quite often are not, or not sufficiently, distinguished. In the first place, we could distinguish the ideological level, at which one thinks about the movement in a general, political-philosophical way. At issue here are questions such as: what is the world really like? What is unjust, bad, etc.? Who are our enemies and friends? What social changes are possible, and how can they be accomplished? Secondly, we could distinguish the organisational level: how is the trade union structured (for example subscriptions, strike funds) and how does it behave in daily practice, when labour conflicts occur, towards employers and the state? Thirdly, there is the shopfloor level: are the workers who are members militant and strike prone? What forms of action do they favour? A source of confusion is that these three levels sometimes point in the same direction, but often do not. Everyone can agree that an organisation which ideologically defends anarcho-syndicalism, organisationally possesses a federative structure without a strike fund, and on the shopfloor is extremely militant and strike prone, can be defined as revolutionary syndicalist. But things become more difficult when a movement does not correspond to the ideal type at all three levels. Then where should we draw the boundary?*

At the moment, joining SolFed (Solidarity Federation – syndicalist grouping in the UK) operates almost entirely on the ideological level – i.e. most people come to SolFed of their own accord because they have similar ideas and like the sound of what we’re saying. We don’t have much of an ‘organisational level’ beyond the industrial strategy and an aversion to works councils and the like, but this is mostly hypothetical as we’ve been more of a propaganda organisation than one that organises struggles. The organiser training we’ve been rolling out over the past 12 months could be seen as trying to develop both the organisational and shop floor levels – both developing how we engage in struggles and giving SolFed members the skills and confidence to act in a militant way in their own workplaces. But it’s still early days for those.

The CNT-E (Spanish Anarcho-Syndicalist union confederation) is almost the exact reverse – all the emphasis is on the organisational level (‘the three NOs’ of works councils/union elections, liberados and state funds) and the shopfloor level (militancy and a will to fight). I would say that although they say “your political ideas are not important” there is an implicit ideology behind the organisational and shopfloor aspects, and they’re open that this is anarchism. CNTistas need to act consistently with this ideology, even if they don’t identify with it.

I think the less a union makes its ideological element explicit, the more it creates a void to be filled by either entryist political organisations or well-meaning but problematic ‘ideological leadership’ by groups like the FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation). Personally I think the ideological element should be explicit, but not exclusionary in terms of identity politics



(i.e. whether you identify as anarcho-syndicalist is not the issue, but whether you share principles and goals). As a comrade put it in internal discussions: We should not think of anarcho-syndicalism as a faith – we should think of anarcho-syndicalism as a practice (to be more precise: as the practice of militant workers organising in a manner based on the principles set out in our constitution, and it matters very little what label individual workers apply to their politics). Of course a revolutionary union is not just a vehicle for everyday struggle but for social transformation, and if it is democratic/member-controlled then its members need to share that goal as well as the corresponding methods. This matters because often the bosses really are as skint as they claim, and unless you have some kind of revolutionary perspective they open the books and you’re forced to accept the logic of cutbacks, and can at best seek a partnership role in softening their effects on workers (like most TUC (Trade Union Congress – British ACTU) unions are doing at the moment).

This leaves two related issues: education and the relationship between a (proto) revolutionary union and militant workers breaking with social democracy but not necessarily revolutionary. Rudolf Rocker (German Anarcho-Syndicalist) has argued that class struggle serves as a “practical education in social philosophy”. This is essentially correct, but this education isn’t automatic or homogenous. Different workers may draw different conclusions from the same struggle. Early syndicalism (CGT General Federation of Labour – French syndicalist grouping, IWW (Industrial Workers of the World – US based syndicalist union) developed under conditions of harsh repression, which made it easy for agitators to educate the idea that “the working class and the employing class have nothing in common”. Today’s bosses are often smarter, and seek to use methods of class collaboration to blur class lines and divide and rule workers between militants who preach conflict and moderates who seek co-operation.

Revolutionaries are made not born, but it’s an open question how much political development should take place inside a revolutionary union. Set the bar too low and the union, democratically run, will fill with non-revolutionary workers, and it would be no surprise if they signed no strike deals, or joined works councils, or pursued other methods rejected by revolutionary unionists – potentially compromising the union as a whole, or at least creating tensions and splits. But set the bar too high, and the development may never even take place, as workers feel rebuffed from joining an exclusive club and perceive the revolutionary union as elitist – instead driven into the arms of less discerning trade unionists, or less democratic Leninist-controlled formations eager for foot soldiers (who need not worry what their members think, since they don’t have much say).

So this question of education is bound up with the necessity for a healthy periphery around individual members or branches of a revolutionary union, organising stuff together at work or outside it, and on the basis of this joint work broaching some of the ideological rationale behind our methods; that direct action is the bridge between everyday struggles and social transformation, and if you also desire the latter then both you and the union benefit from you joining (the inverse also being true – if you don’t share this goal, it’s better to not join but work together wherever you can). So far, membership has been considered on an individual basis. This is all well and good, but what about groups of workers breaking away from mainstream unions, or approaching a (proto) revolutionary union?

*See Page 20*

**NEWS & NOTES**

Some of the most important “behind the scenes” news lately is the privatisation push in public transport in NSW by the O’Farrell Govt. It constitutes a key spearhead of the employer offensive. In RailCorp, its currently being characterised by “outsourcing” of key sections such as station and train cleaning. The ALP controlled hierarchy of the RTBU (Rail Tram & Bus Union) has been brazenly helping the rail bosses to fast track it.

The ASN hasn’t been sitting around being “beautifully useless” like such groups as the Greens with enormous resources and membership and various Leftist sects, but has been efficiently assisting militants to fight back. Resulting in the RTBU officials being compelled to organise a rail delegates meeting which passed resolutions to fight O’Farrell restructuring of the railways, as a big step toward privatisation. Whether the officials sabotage the taking of serious action, given past performance - stay tuned to this space. (See article page 3.)

A major inspiration to militants fighting the O’Farrell rampage in NSW and the ALP Left and Right Faction “octopus” control of the union movement, are recent developments in the NSW PSA (Public Service Association). With the rank and file seizing control of the union in recent elections. (See page 9. )

Lately in State Transit, the CEO and the Transport Minister have been terrorising drivers with threats of privatisation to agree to major cutbacks to their conditions. Has a secret deal already been made regarding privatisation of Sydney Buses? (See page 6. )

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**Where we stand:**

1.Our aim is to create a free and equal society

2. We are a revolutionary labour movement that uses as its only means of struggle, direct action in all its forms – occupations, strikes, boycotts, sabotage, etc. We are independent from all reformist and hierarchical unions and political parties, and we are creating an alternative to these and to existing society. We do not seek to gain political power, but rather to see it distributed amongst all.

3.We are a network of anarcho-syndicalists practising co-operation and mutual aid. We have an equal part in the making of decisions. Responsibilities within the network are subject to agreement by the members.

4.We are engaged in struggle where we work and where we live, to develop self managed production, distribution and servicing for the world community, to meet human needs rather than profit. We give solidarity to others in these struggles.

5.We are fighting to abolish all authoritarian institutions such as the State (including its communist variety), capitalism, all hierarchical and oppressive divisions between people.

6. We have no country and are organised on an international basis in opposition to oppression everywhere. The ASN is striving to build a viable revolutionary syndicalist movement in Australia as part of a world wide movement able to meet the challenge of the global employer offensive.

**TO FIND OUT MORE**

I would like more information about the Anarcho-Syndicalist Network. Please send me information.

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Something like this happened with the London cleaners, who ended up working with the IWW after breaking from Unite British bureaucratic union affiliated with the TUC). This is no problem for the UK IWW since they want to be a militant rank-and-file union rather than a revolutionary one, and seem to have little criticism of mainstream trade unionist methods compared to many of their state-side counterparts. But if a revolutionary union initiative gets off the ground and starts having some successes, it will likely be approached by such break-away groups, or want to actively approach them. Saying people can join on an individual basis is likely to be taken as a rebuff, foreclosing any future working relationship and thus the chances of a development in a revolutionary direction. But let the branch join on mass, and you're not operating as a revolutionary union anymore but just a militant one (with all the problems that such branches may well do all sorts of things that revolutionary unionists would oppose).

Of course, it is workers right to do things revolutionary unionists oppose! But imho they shouldn't be doing them as members of a revolutionary union. So is there some middle ground between 'you're not revolutionary enough' and 'omgz workerz join us nao pls!?' It shouldn't be beyond the bounds of possibility that there's some kind of formal relationship of mutual support short of membership, that allows a (proto) revolutionary union formation to work with break-away militant formations while both retain their autonomy. It would seem to me that such practical solidarity expressed regardless of membership would be the best conditions for workers to come to share revolutionary practices - e.g. favouring direct action over mediation in principle rather than out of the necessity many small militant unions face.

This is basically a restatement of the idea that an organisation-as-thing exists to do

organisation-as-process, and membership is not a precondition of that. But building practical relationships of solidarity with non-members seems like the best way in a medium-long term for them to respect and come to share revolutionary practices, and thus in the long run to swell the ranks of a revolutionary union. Pulling all such people into the organisation-as-thing as a precondition of organisation-as-process from day one may well lead to faster growth, but it would be building something different, lacking the three elements of a revolutionary union, and therefore risking lacking them all as it bureaucratises and goes the way of all the other unions that don't explicitly reject capitalism in both theory and daily practice.

*Joseph Kay Thanks to Libcom*

**COMMENT:**

*The author seems to confuse syndicalist sect building with union building. Associated with the former approach which the author appears to subscribe is the absurd notion of tiny groups like the Solfed in the UK, becoming the nucleus of a mass syndicalist union confederation. Achieving a mass membership via relatively minute dribs and drabs which would involve recruiting individual workers and small breakaways from the bureaucratic social democratic unions. In the UK, the TUC affiliates. However, the objective reality, is that without massive industrial muscle, such a formation, would be little different in its operation from the existing bureaucratic and pro-business unions, perhaps being more democratic, but working in the framework of enterprise bargaining and associated repressive IR legislation in say the Australian context.*

*Absent from the author's consideration of the formation of "revolutionary unionism" is the importance of a base for such organisations in strategic industrial sectors, and the launching of major upsurges in direct action such as strike waves to check prongs of the employer offensive and turn the tide. Given the highly unionised character of such sectors the importance of a "boring from within" approach*

*involving long range serious work to create syndicalist unions, should be obvious. Whilst in the context of such waves of direct action a great deal of practical "education in syndicalism" would be occurring amongst workers. Particularly understanding of the "class struggle" and such related features as solidarity, decision making on the basis of workers assemblies, class consciousness, etc. In this way workers change and develop the experience and self confidence to establish workers control of industry and they and their families control of communities.*

*Today, militants can facilitate the emergence of such a mass movement via helping the networking of militants, helping counter management propaganda and raise morale via publishing work place papers, particularly in strategic sectors, advise on legal matters, etc.*

*Tomorrow, with the formation of mass syndicalist combative organisations, militants can assist the workers self education process via running schools, lectures, forums, etc, at union halls informed by a scientific and rational climate.*

*Unfortunately for many involved in such sects as Solfed, syndicalist activity and education is often warped into a sort of "party building" notion. With the the sect inhabitants due to their pretensions to be or becoming eventually a mass syndicalist union, being involved in all issues and campaigns under the sun and being drawn into all manner of navel gazing and oppression mongering and political correctness displays. Fashionable amongst middle class elements, workers with high levels of autonomy in their jobs, long term unemployed and students which form a considerable section of such groups membership. Contributing to this outlook is also the unwholesome influence of the "Left subculture" informed by the Stalinist and Trotskyist legacies and an associated "party building" orientation.*

*Mark McGuire*