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Dec. 2022- Jan. 2023

Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER



N.S.W. Railway News p.3 ; Sydney Buses News p.11; Vic. Rail News p.18; 'The Empire Builders' p.8; UK PT News p.20; Newcastle Bus News p.13; RTBU Elections 2022: Are They Rigged? p. 7; Sydney Ferries News p.17; Bogus NIF Deed p.3 & p.6;

EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

Some of the most important news in the NSW Railways was the 'smoke and mirrors' performance by Alex Claassens NSW RTBU Secretary and NSW Liberal Premier Dominic Perrottet, associated with the alleged 'break through' in the NSW Rail EBA negotiations. It was connected with the so called 'sudden and last minute' clinching of the Top Secret NIF (New Intercity Train Fleet) Deed and bogus renovations on NIF trains to maintain the role of the guard in safe working. In this edition we put the spotlight on this dirty con of the grass roots on the job, commuters and the public in NSW exposing its duplicitous aspects and role in facilitating DOO (Driver Only Operation), major job losses and opening the flood gates to privatisation. We also focus on some effective work of Sparks in assisting grass roots activists to expose and fight the above con and attacks. We also raise many questions about the new Rail EBA and likely major nasties and the importance of legal eagles assessment of the full EBA and Deed Documents with adequate time for this assessment and consideration and the importance of holding stop work mass meetings to debate and ratify them. Given the threat of ballot rigging and rail roading by the union officials, Rail Bosses and the Corporate Media. (See articles page 3 & 6.)

Other important news is the continuing saga of the RTBU 2022 union elections and the extreme likelihood of ballot rigging to get Claassens and his team back into office as ring masters of a new vicious EBA circus. Highlighting again that the electoral road is closed and the importance of establishing grass roots committees on the job and coordinating committees on the regional level to run industrial campaigns. (See article page 7.)

Some of the most important news in Sydney buses is the ruthless pressuring of drivers to make up for a chronic shortage of drivers to patch up rosters and savage cutting of runs. Meanwhile the TWU and RTBU bogus 'Two Tier' EBA campaign is being dragged out which threatens major real wages and conditions cuts. (See article page 11.) In this edition we also expose savage cuts imposed on former ex-STA Newcastle bus drivers following privatisation. (See article page 13.)

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N.S.W. RAILWAY NEWS



DEFEAT OF NEW DOO PUSH WITH NIF, NO NIF RENOS & BOGUS BREAKTHROUGH IN NSWRAIL EBA NEGOTIATIONS!

There has been brazen dis-information spread by an important section of the corporate media the Sydney Morning Herald with a circulation of over a million readers, see article SMH 8/12/22 page 15 "Years late new trains finally start rolling" concerning the introduction of the NIF (New Intercity Fleet) and talk of bogus renovations on it. Some significant points regarding the article: its located way back in the paper, rather than on front page or near front to crow about the so called victory. Also no similar report in the Telegraph on 8/12/22 or subsequently, although the Telegraph has had two recent hysterical and vicious front page spreads about it and related issues. The Australian has also been quiet on the issue and other Corporate Media outlets.

The SMH article is really a facing saving measure to help Perrottet in up coming NSW elections and sugar coat cover the defeat and retreat of the Government, the rail bosses and the union hierarchy in putting the NIF into service around late Nov. and early Dec. It would also be about helping Claassens a bit in the likely rigged again RTBU 2022 elections.

Timing of the so called 'Break Through' in Rail EBA Negotiations

The timing of the so called break through re NSW Rail RTBU EBA (Enterprise Bargain Agreement) negotiations and in particular the sudden clinching of the 'NIF

Deed' is connected with a number related issues. It occurred during the middle of the RTBU 2022 elections, so Claassens Team could take electoral advantage of it and tiredness of Members First team members and supporters, the opposition team in the elections. Meanwhile if we look at previous pushes to deploy the non-renovated NIF trains - its was around this time of late Nov.-early Dec. However quick work by Sparks with the rapid issuing of a special Sparks Bulletin Dec. 2022 (See reproduced in this edition page 6.) stirred up the grass roots about the bogus NIF Deed, fake NIF renovations and lack of grass roots ratification of the Deed. As a result the RTBU officials and Rail management backed off the NIF introduction on services.

The Bogus 'NIF Interim Model' & the Deed

The article refers to the RTBU officials concerned about non-renovated NIF trains being put into service. However in reality per leaks from WWS about the Deed - they agreed to a so called 'interim model' without the renos which was raised in the flyer/bulletin. Another leak from WWS raised in the Bulletin was that NIF Guards and other workers only had jobs for 4 years re the NIF when the so called 'interim model' would presumably cease. Really meaning there are no renovations on the NIF

SAFETY MODIFICATIONS

Years late, new trains finally to start rolling

Matt O'Sullivan
Transport and infrastructure editor

The first of NSW's new intercity trains will be introduced into service, years later than originally planned due to a long-running dispute with the main rail union over modifications to the multibillion-dollar fleet.

Transport Minister David Elliott confirmed yesterday that the first of the Korean-built intercity trains, which have been mothballed on the Central Coast, were about to enter passenger service.

"Commuters have been waiting way too long and I'm very confident that in a very short space of time the premier and I are going to be putting on the Fat Controller's outfit," he said.

Confirmation that the first of the new trains will soon enter service comes almost a fortnight after the government reached a breakthrough with rail unions by agreeing to sign a deed to modify the fleet.

While the government has insisted the new intercity trains already meet safety standards, the Rail, Tram and Bus Union claims they will pose risks unless the changes are made to surveillance cameras and doors.

Elliott said the modifications would cost about \$300 million, which is considerably less than some government estimates aired during the protracted dispute of about \$1 billion.

"We have saved a significant amount of money by making sure this agreement goes through and having these modifications done," he said.

However, the modifications will still increase the total cost of the fleet to \$3.2 billion.

The intercity trains were first slated to begin carrying passengers from Sydney to the Central Coast and Newcastle by late 2019, followed by the Blue Mountains in mid-2020 and the Illawarra last year.

Labor transport spokeswoman Haylen said it was good the new trains were about to finally enter service but they were originally meant to be on the tracks in 2019.

Back on track

- The new Korean-built fleet comprises 610 carriages which will form passenger train sets of various lengths.
- Unlike the reversible seats on the existing intercity fleet, the new trains have two-by-two fixed seats in the double-deck carriages.
- The trains will run on lines from Sydney to the Central Coast and Newcastle, the Blue Mountains and the South Coast.
- The government estimates the cost of safety modifications to the trains at about \$300 million, which will increase the total outlay for the fleet to \$3.2 billion.

trains were stuck in sheds, not carrying passengers and costing taxpayers up to \$30 million a month," she said.

The introduction of the trains comes as the government is about to put out to tender a \$568 million upgrade of the Opal ticketing system, which will involve a replacement of electronic readers and back-office billing.

The Opal system was rolled out over several years from 2012, ending paper tickets. It has 25,000 payment terminals and has clocked up 4.5 billion tap-ons by commuters since it was introduced. In a sign of changes in commuter behaviour, 40 per cent of trips by adults are now paid for using credit or debit cards.

Elliott, who is retiring at the state election in March, said the upgrade would allow other forms of transport such as ride-share to be paid for using the Opal system.

He declined to give a timeframe for when the upgrade would be completed but noted it had taken about 18 months for the original Opal system to be rolled out.

Transport for NSW executive director Kurt Brissett said the upgrade would improve the ability to

intended! The SMH article talks about the fantasy of \$300 million being spent on the renovations. In reality that's just spin doctoring and a smoke screen. It seems logical that this so called 'interim' model lasts for 4 years which is also DOO (Driver Only Operation) with the guard in a non-functioning compartment on NIF Trains and so not performing a role in safe working. They are also sitting ducks for the sack as they lose their industrial muscle. Then its all 'unvarnished' DOO! So no need for the NIF renovations and millions of dollars in Govt. expenditure! With the notorious MOU (Memorandum Of Understanding) on DOO, for the NIF back in early 2017, there was a plan then discussed in the media for guards on the NIF to 'transition to customer service/first aid roles'. Similarly to the Deed's 'Interim Model', with the guards also losing their industrial muscle - so could work out at 4 years before the sack like with the Deed.

While information about the bogus NIF Deed was obviously provided to inter-urban train crew RTBU members, a full copy of the NIF Deed must be put on the RTBU web site for all NSW rail RTBU members to view. Four weeks must be provided for NSW Rail RTBU member train crews to consider the Deed and assessment by an industrial lawyer prior to ratification involving debate and voting at a stop work mass meeting. The SMH article says nothing about grass roots ratification of the Deed.

In reality the union officials will definitely avoid at all costs putting the full Deed on the RTBU web site or other publicly accessible website- as its aspects and ramifications are too explosive for them, the NSW Government and the Rail bosses. Particularly if assessed by an industrial lawyer or such. So the union officials can always deny leaks about the Deed or amend information details. Some what similar to the MOU re DOO on the NIF back in early 2017 which the RTBU officials refused to put on the RTBU web site and was only uncovered years later and placed on the Sparks web site.

Per the 'Facilitation Clause' in RTBU EBA 2014 and subsequent EBA's, once DOO is implemented on the NIF, needless to say it will be 'facilitated' by Claassens to other trains such as the Tangaras, Waratahs and Millenniums. With the generalisation of DOO on different train types, the flood gates will be opened to privatisation and massive job losses as major expenses of private operators will be cut.

Interestingly Claassens early in the year was talking in the media about awaiting the break through in EBA negotiations re putting the NIF in operation in 2 months or so. Seeming quite ridiculous as the renos would involve major rebuilding of the trains taking much more time. However, behind the scenes there was this Deed - which provided the okay for the bogus 'interim model'. So not the renovated trains.

Finally in the SMH article there is no mention when the new trains exactly would be introduced. It gives the impression to readers of being "renovated" trains which will "start rolling". In reality - it was obviously all planned to put the NIF non-renovated into service, shortly after the alleged 'sudden break through in EBA negotiations'

and so called clinching the Deed. But the Government, management and the union hierarchy were out manoeuvred. It needs this period around holiday period for the NIF to be put into service like in previous years. According to the leak from WSWS - it would be these non-renovated trains - as part of this "interim operating model" put in service.

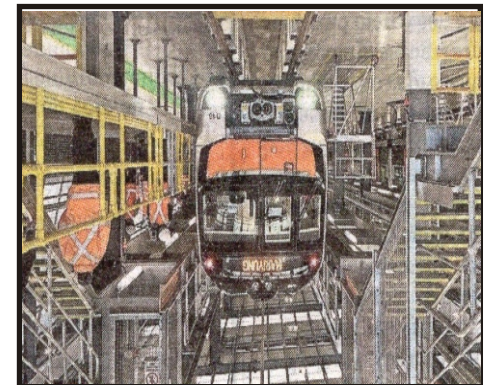
SPARKS BULLETIN DEC. 2022

CLAASSENS DEED WITH PERROTTET: SELLOUT ON EBA (Enterprise Bargain Agreement), DOO (Driver Only Operation) ON NIF (New Intercity Train Fleet) & PRIVATISATION! LET'S SEE THE DEED!

There is an urgent need for RTBU (Rail Tram & Bus Union) members in the NSW Railways and in particular train crews to be provided access to a full copy of the deed regarding renovations on the NIF, with adequate time for consideration of the document and assessment by an industrial lawyer and ratification by voting. New information has been leaked about some serious and completely unacceptable nasties in the

deed. What are the other nasties?

Some news in WSWS report 28/11/22:



1. According to the union, the new fleet will be pressed into service even before the alterations are made, under an 'interim operating model' requiring two guards on each train. Hypocritically Claassens has stated in the media on numerous occasions that the NIF are unsafe to operate without the renos!

2. The agreement has only guaranteed the positions of guards and other workers on the NIF for four years.

3. Other information received is bribery of guards with \$14,000 for sitting in the non-functioning guards' compartment on non-renovated NIF trains. Approved by management and the RTBU officials. Again shows the hypocrisy of Claassens and other RTBU officials regarding the above safety concerns with the NIF.

Will workers voting for the new EBA (Enterprise Bargain Agreement) amount to approving the deed? Has Claassens agreed for the deed not to be ratified by

members voting? Similar to the 'top secret' MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) on DOO on NIF back in early 2017. If we can't get the deed now it will be buried like the MOU! Are there conditions in the deed which are illegal? In the deed is there agreement to privatisation by RTBU Sec. Claassens? This deed is totally linked to the EBA and fake pay rises according to media reports. So called wage rises as part of the Rail EBA to be 'Arbitrated' by the Bosses Un-Fair Work Court are likely to be way below rates of current inflation. Are there further wage cut backs associated with the 'fine print' of clauses? Are there aspects of privatisation such as outsourcing of jobs? Is your pay further cut by legislated increases in Superannuation payments? Is this deed in breach of union rules?

Is the sudden alleged 'break through' in the rail EBA negotiations connected with camouflage for the rigging of RTBU elections 2022 to get Claassens and his team back in as ring masters of this vicious rail EBA circus? (See 'RTBU Elections 2018: Were they rigged?' Page 5. Sparks No.161 Dec.2018 Jan. 2019 www.sparksweb.org) Will this deed be an issue for ICAC (Independent Commission Against Corruption) - bribery and inducement of a union official to sign the deed?

DEMANDS:

1. A copy of the full deed document be placed on the RTBU web site for all members to view.
2. Four weeks are allowed for RTBU train crew members to consider the deed before a stop work mass meeting is held to debate and vote to ratify the deed.
3. Four weeks are allowed for RTBU members in NSW railways affected to consider the full rail EBA docs and a stop work mass meeting is held to debate and vote on it.

<https://www.smh.com.au> 25/11/22 NSW Transport Minister David Elliott said the government and rail union had reached a breakthrough on Friday afternoon

<https://www.abc.net.au> 25/11/22 rail-chaos-set-end-after...NSW government, rail union sign a deal paving way for end to ...

25/11/22 The Transport Minister David Elliott says the agreement reached with the union is a win for Sydney commuters. (ABC News).

Rail strikes to end as NSW govt makes deal - Yahoo Finance

25/11/22 The NSW government has finally carved out a deal with the rail union to ... Minister Damien Tudehope and Transport Minister David Elliott.

LETTER

RTBU Elections 2022 'Will They be Rigged?'

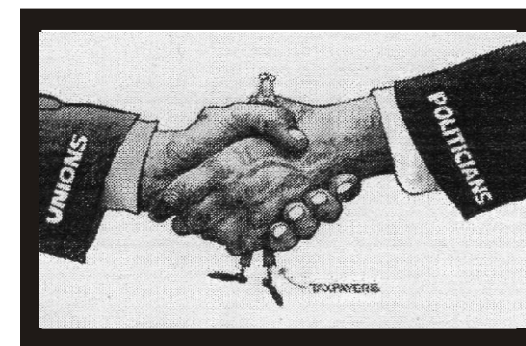
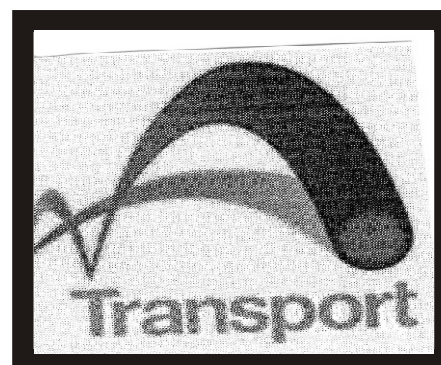
Dear Sparks

In regard to the RTBU Elections 2022, the AEC (Australian Electoral Commission)

has admitted Ballots not being sent to numerous people. Grass roots activists asked the AEC that since the voting closes on 12/12/2022, how will those that missed out, vote. The AEC stated that ballots will be sent out by 15/12/2022 and returned by mid January 2023 and this will include a second count. How could there be a second count? Things are being stacked up to ensure Claassens re-election!

Angry Sydney Trains worker

Editorial Comment: Such so called 'mistakes' by the AEC has been a noted in numerous RTBU Elections over the years run by it such as RTBU Elections in 2014, 2018 and on many other occasions. (See Sparks No.151 Mar. - April 2015 Union Elections Report page 3 and See Sparks No.161 Dec.2018 - Jan. 2019 'RTBU Elections: Were They Rigged?' page 5 on www.sparksweb.org)



'The Empire Builders'

Warning: Political Satire

In the weeks following being elected as Premier after the success of the ALP in the 25/3/23 NSW elections, Chris Minns was coming under considerable pressure from assorted figures in Big Business to take action to curb a sudden upsurge of wildcat strikes across industry stemming from continuing spiraling levels of inflation. The Ukraine crisis and war was continuing to supercharge inflation rates which had now exceeded 8% pa and were soaring. The union hierarchy's strategy of exhausting the grass roots with long drawn out EBA (enterprise bargain agreement) negotiations and half hearted token industrial action to 'let off steam' and accept below inflation so called pay rises and other nasties on the EBA 'fine print' clauses was clearly not working. The corporate heavy weights were demanding an urgent meeting of NSW Inc. to tackle the problem and help raise

'business confidence' in his new government. Minns checked his meetings schedule and came to an agreement with the bosses for an NSW Inc. conference on Monday 24/4/23 commencing at 10 am sharp in the Transport for NSW Head Office conference room.

On Thursday 13th April at 10.30am Minns rang Alex Claassens now joint NSW State Secretary with Richard Olsen (formerly TWU NSW Secretary) of the Teamsters Australia

Franchise formed from the merger of the RTBU (Rail Tram & Bus Union) and the TWU (Transport Workers Union) on his mobile. Minns's call caught Claassens while addressing the inaugural executive meeting of the new 'organisation' in the conference room of its magnificent newly acquired premises in the exclusive Sydney suburb of Double Bay. Fittingly for today's corporate unions the premises featured a 'neo classical' look with marble columns, marble statues of various revered ALP god fathers and a magnificent imported from Italy white Carrara marble stair case with gold leaf wall paper and expensive antique Persian carpets through out the labyrinth of offices.

Inaugural Executive Meeting of the Teamsters Australia Franchise

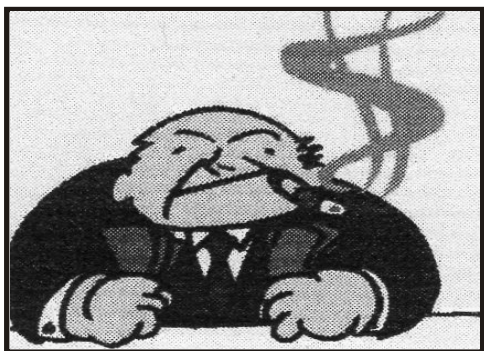
After welcoming the executive members, Claassens announced, "I'm sure you are all impressed by our new sumptuous union HQ premises. However the union is still paying off the mortgage. I'm sure you shouldn't have any objections to donating the \$4,500 rail EBA bonus to the mortgage repayments as I have been shocked to learn the union is now broke! As generous 'wedding gifts' from NSW Trains, Sydney Trains, Transit Systems, Transdev, Keolis Downer, Lin Fox and other transport companies we have been inundated with bottles of vintage wine, French Champagne and bottles of Scotch Whisky. We have placed it all in expensive storage facilities costing members ever more money. I'm sure you all would also have no objection to some back breaking wielding the pick and shovel on your day off excavating an urgently and desperately needed wine cellar under the union HQ building. Unfortunately as the union is broke we can't afford any new labour saving technology



for the job. Just think if Albo came to visit us and enquired about our wine cellar. I'd die of embarrassment and you wouldn't want that, if I had to tell him we didn't have one yet! After you have finished that job, another priority is the excavation and construction of another urgently required facility - a jacuzzi. So your union leaders can relax after stressful back room negotiations with the bosses." David Babineau joint NSW Secretary of the bus division, interrupted Claassens and telling him "Alex, your mate Minns wants you urgently." The meeting was temporarily adjourned while Claassens took the call. After agreeing that he, Ricky and David Babineau would be delighted to attend the NSW Inc. meeting, Claassens in coded language given the likelihood of ASIO surveillance referred to the dark clouds and scandal building up over him and Olsen and the new union associated with the ongoing Federal ICAC investigation over ballot rigging involving the AEC (Australian Electoral Commission), the union bosses and the ALP Godfathers of the RTBU 2014, 2018 and now 2022 elections and massive union finance rorts. Minns proceeded to jolly up Claassens, "No worries mate. Of course I've heard about your grief and had a quiet word to 'cool it' in the ear of the relevant party. Just relax, mate." A relieved Claassens thanked Minns profusely.

AFP Raid on Teamsters Australia Franchise HQ!

Suddenly there was the sound of smashing doors, crashing and shattering glass. Shortly afterwards AFP (Australian Federal Police) cops with guns drawn burst into the conference room led by Federal ICAC Commissioner Peter Hall. They charged Alex Claassens wildly pepper spraying stunned ALP loyalist union reps from the Loco Division and Guards who played such a key role in conning interurban guards to go along with the shonky NIF (New Intercity Fleet) 'Smoke and Mirrors' Deed who sprung up to repel the onslaught on their revered 'professional' union leader. Claassens caught a full blast of the pepper spray. He was blinded! A squad of burly cops sprang on him wildly swinging truncheons. Then tackled him, placing him in a head lock, pinning him to the floor and 'accidentally' furiously kicking him with their jack boots. Then some karate chops as 'icing on the AFP cake'. He was then cuffed. Hall from the Federal ICAC yelled triumphantly, "Freeze! Its a joint Federal ICAC and AFP raid!" Claassens was being bundled off to AFP HQ for interrogation over alleged numerous 'illegal' electoral practices in RTBU union elections in 2014, 2018 and 2022 in cahoots with ALP networks in the AEC (Australian Electoral Commission) and massive fraud associated with RTBU Divisional accounts also associated with ALP Octopus tentacles. As the cops carted Claassens out of the conference room, Hall threatened the executive members menacingly, "we're taking Alex to the AFP's new hi-tech dungeon! We'll inject him with our newly developed



at AFP laboratories 'truth serum'! We'll break his code of silence over the union and elections rorts and smash the ALP network spiders web of conspiracy!!!"

Secretary Claassens Urgent Bail Money Appeal!

Several hours later the union executive meeting was resumed. Farren Campbell

Loco Division Secretary who had just returned from AFP HQ tearfully announced that Secretary Claassens's bail had been set at an extraordinary \$1 million! He pleaded with the executive members to find some spare cash to free an 'innocent' union official. "Its all a frame-up. You all know Alex, he couldn't possibly be party to this ALP conspiracy involving AEC union elections ballot rigging and rorting of union finances. Its outrageous! Alex always 'obeys the law of the land'! His favourite mantra he constantly chants at Loco Division delegates meetings is, 'its legally binding on both parties. My hands are tied!' Just look at the rail EBA campaign. He was terrified of 'illegal' industrial action, constantly calling off the ban on the Opal machines at stations. I'm sure you'd give the shirts off your backs to help our esteemed professional union leader in distress! Perhaps you could make some withdrawals from your super. Take the hat around the depots and stations. I'm sure members will be delighted to contribute and even have a levy imposed on their wages perhaps amounting to the amount of the EBA fake pay rise."

However, the response amongst the grass roots to the appeal proved to be cool as a result of the suspected influence of a certain underground paper and the bail could not be raised. Even the normally 'friendly' NSW and Sydney Trains managements proved unhelpful for the fund raising. Consequently Minns had to cancel the planned meeting of NSW Inc. until a much later date. As Secretary Claassens would be unavailable for attendance.

SYDNEY BUSES NEWS

Leichhardt Depot News

Sparks: What are your impressions of the situation at the depot?

Leichhardt Driver1: In late November the situation had become quite dire at the depot for us. We were 60 drivers short which would mean 300 trips cut per day. However

management has not made any public announcements to alert commuters about the cutbacks. Compulsory DOC's (Days Off Cancelled) were being imposed on us and work on other rosters. You are working half of your normal roster and the other half on another. So the bosses can patch up the short staffing of rosters to some extent. A dispute is developing with the local union over this issue. The bosses are cutting runs, left, right and centre. Due to the harshness of conditions for new drivers, they often only last only a fortnight to a month on the job. They are being told by the bosses to join the TWU. Meanwhile many ex-STA drivers who are RTBU members can't cope with the job now and are resigning. They are not being replaced. Soon there will be parity between ex-STA RTBU member drivers and the new drivers who are TWU members. Our RTBU rep Tom was in hospital having an operation and so he couldn't do anything to help us tackle the crisis. Other news is that management has been short cutting runs such as the 440 to Bondi Junction being terminated at Central and cutting off peak runs on routes to cope with the short fall of drivers at the depot.

Sparks: What's the latest at the depot?

Leichhardt Driver2: The most important news as of late November was union elections being held. So far we have not heard the results. While there was a vote on the union officials' 'Two Tier' EBA (Enterprise Bargain Agreement) proposal (Ed. The Two Tier EBA deal would lead to massive wage cuts as only 2.5% pa rises offered way below current over 8% pa and soaring inflation. The cumulative wages cuts over 3 years look to approach levels of the 1930's depression years where two 10% wage cuts occurred. Other conditions cuts are also included in the deal.) which they have secured with Transit Systems management. There was massive opposition to the proposed agreement at the depot. Only 8 at the depot have voted for the deal. It should be considered illegal. As the deal reduces our conditions and so disadvantages us. Why aren't the union officials waiting until next year for presenting and voting on the deal? Other news is that trips on the timetables have been reduced due to a continuing shortage of drivers at the depot. With the 19th December timetable changes, the bosses will seize the opportunity to cut out more runs. As of mid Dec. the roster problems at the depot are worse than ever.

Sparks: What are the latest developments?

Leichhardt Driver3: For several weeks now in November a massive blue has erupted at the depot between the local union and management. It focuses on issues of who gets seniority on rosters, DOC's and other issues.

Sparks: What are your impressions of the situation at the depot?

Leichhardt Driver 4: The morale here is terrible. Depot management can't keep drivers as the conditions and treatment are appalling. Services are cut without notice constantly because of under staffing. The TWU rep at the depot doesn't seem to turn up to anything.

Burwood Depot News

Sparks: What are latest developments at the depot?

Burwood Driver: As of late November there continues to be confusion over the rumour that the RTBU is going to merge with the TWU (Transport Workers Union). However management is definitely intimidating new drivers to join the TWU, so as to divide and weaken us industrially. However most of the new drivers do last long on the job due to harsh conditions and we continue to face a shortage of drivers. We are all having compulsory DOC's (Day Off Cancelled).



Tempe Depot News

Sparks: What are your impressions of the current situation?

Tempe Driver: As of late November we are continuing to be hit by a shortage of drivers. Management still can't get enough of them. From 19th December the new timetable focusing on the Xmas and holiday period is being introduced which will see further cut backs to services. We are particularly angry with the union officials in regard to the 'Two Tier' EBA (Enterprise Bargain Agreement) campaign. They are dragging the campaign out into next year given grass roots dis-satisfaction with the below inflation so called pay rise on offer.

Axe Falls on Newcastle Bus Drivers' Conditions following Privatisation

From WSWS: Ben explained that since the bus service in Newcastle was privatised in Dec. 2016, new drivers no longer start as 'fixed' part-time employees, with guaranteed hours, but as part-time 'variable,' enabling the company to slash hours through roster reviews. He said: "When they did their last roster review, they cut 2 percent of our wages across the board. In the review they did before that they took 1.8 percent."

Ben said workers had been told to expect further cuts to their hours. "We've lost 5.8

percent of wages through roster reviews in the past few years. One of their first offers was 2 percent per year for 3 years and the company has already taken 4 percent the year before through the review."

The company used the previous review to slash shift allowances paid to workers. Ben explained: "If your shift finishes after 8 p.m., one of the conditions is you get an allowance per hour on top of your wages. It's a 15 percent loading on your wage, which works out to an extra \$4 per hour. The company changed the rostering so that drivers who previously started at midday now start at 10 a.m. and finish at 6 p.m. so the company can avoid paying that allowance."

The last roster review also targeted split-shift workers. Ben said that split-shift workers are paid double time starting 10.5 hours after they sign on. "So, what they try to do is get casuals to start in the morning, then sign off, then the same casual will start twice in the same day. The morning and afternoon travel peaks are covered but the company doesn't have to pay the spread any more."

Mark told WSWS reporters: "If you make any mistake, they can sack you. For example, with a school route, if you take a wrong turn, they can sack you for it. It's easy to do, we have over 100 school routes and there's no way you're going to know them all."

"We've got TFNSW [Transport for New South Wales] watching us on the screen. They brought in telematics, which is a little key that you plug in which checks the performance of your driving, it makes sure you're not speeding or going around corners too fast or braking too hard or accelerating too hard. If you have one customer complain, you're in trouble. They are watching you your whole shift. Let's say you take your hand off the wheel to pick up a piece of paper to know what your next turn is, there's a written warning."

"When we were State Transit, we had 300 drivers between both depots. We're now up to staff number 800, that means we've gone through 500 drivers in the space of four years. There were times when they would put on 30 drivers and now there are only two or three of them left. Most of the attrition is new drivers, because the old guys can't afford to leave. There are so many new drivers because they're lying, they'll say in the advertisement, 'family friendly roster,' and then you end up on split shifts working six days a week without weekends off."

Max said: "We are feeling the brunt of being short-staffed and the impact of COVID. For example, I was a close contact with my daughter, and I had to take a week off. We have been short of drivers this whole time. They have had to cancel routes because they didn't have enough staff."

"Most of the buses that operate now, you only have about 20 percent of passengers who come on wearing masks. Most people don't wear masks on buses because they don't have to wear them at shopping centres or anything like that. We don't want to wear them either, but we have to, it's our only protection."

“To reduce their labour cost, when the company does a review, they reduce the time in the routes until they can’t reduce it any more. They tweak it to the point where you can’t keep up with it. If anything happens or something goes wrong, you won’t be able to do the route on time.”

BUS PRIVATISATION IN NSW & OTHER STATES

In this issue of Sparks the Victorian Team plus some NSW Bus Drivers will discuss Bus Privatisation of State Transit and other operators. Once again names have been changed.

Sparks: What Government and Municipal Operators remain in Australia?

Clyde: We will commence with Western Australia. The Operator is TRANS WA which operate the former Western Australian Railways bus routes to Geraldton, Albany, Meekatharra, Busselton, Esperance. When Westrail was privatised in 1999, the Buses remain Government owned.

Sparks: What was the situation in Kalgoorlie?

Clyde: In Kalgoorlie the Government operator was GOLDEN LINES. This was the trading name of the Eastern Goldfields Transport Board which was established in 1962. A few years ago the Western Australia Government decided to tender the route services in Kalgoorlie. Golden Lines lost the tender but remained in business as a Charter Operator as they had mining and school bus services. Golden Lines was absorbed by TRRWA who now operate the charter service.

Rastus: In Victoria buses were fully privatised in 1998. South Australian Government and Municipal buses were privatised in 2000. Northern Territory Darwin around 2012.

Bruce: In Tasmania METROBUS operate services in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie. The company is 100% Government owned. Recently a Canadian company named KINETIC has acquired the bus company who operates provincial services in Tasmania. This company also operates buses in Victoria and Queensland.

Archie: In Queensland the Brisbane City Council operate most of the Bus Services in Brisbane. The Council has operated transport in Brisbane since 1925. The Council of Rockhampton privatised their bus services in the 1990's.

Roscoe: In Sydney the Askin Government wanted to contract some bus routes to Private Operators over a dispute regarding the use of Leylands Atlantean Double Deckers as one man buses. (In 1971 this was the term used. The first women bus drivers were recruited in 1972.) Scab labour was used during the dispute and the scabs operated these buses with police escorts. This dispute will be discussed in a future issue of Sparks. In 1975 a further attempt was made to contract some bus routes in the Kogarah district.

Clyde: One of the reasons this tendering did not happen was that there had been a change of government. Since 1941 Pensioners received half fare concessions and if these routes were handed over to Private Operators, pensioners would have lost this concession.

Bruce: This would have been put in the too hard basket. This issue raised its head in Victoria from 1968 and when the trams operated by the SEC were replaced by private buses, the SEC had to subsidise the Pensioner fares for these years.

Allen: Once the private bus operations started to honour State Transit style fares State Transit's future was under a cloud.

Clyde: Once the LNP Govt. was elected in NSW the future of State Transit raised its ugly head. In 2012 the ferry operations were put up for tender. It was planned under a Labor Government.

Bruce: During the second term of the LNP Government Newcastle Buses and Ferries were privatised as well as Sydney's Region 6. It was not an even playing field as State Transit was not allowed to submit a tender.

Rastus: These issues have been discussed in previous issues of Sparks and in April 2022 State Transit ceased to exist as a route operator.

Sparks: What were the travel conditions of State Transit employees?

Clyde: In the 1950's the travel conditions of employees working in Government Buses were:

- (1) Free Travel to and from work.
- (2) During annual leave the employee and his family received a Holiday Pass which the employee was entitled to use around NSW.
- (3) An interstate travel pass.

These travel conditions were introduced in the 1880's when the NSW Railways ran

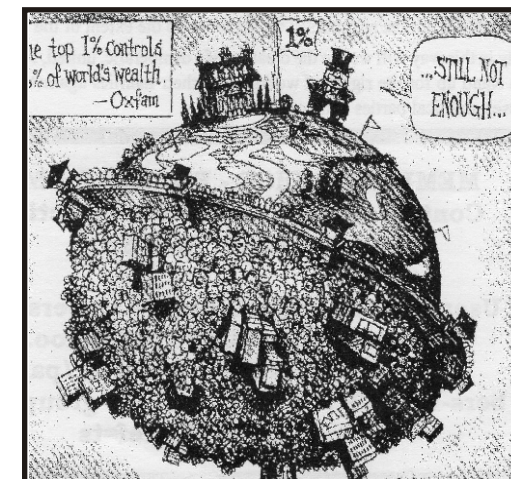
the trams.

Bruce: If you complete 30 years service, you receive a Gold Pass which gives you free travel for life.

Rastus: In Victoria Tramway workers obtained the Railway Benefits in 1930, due to the ETU refusing to restore power to the Tram Network at the end of the OPO dispute.

Sparks: We will investigate the current situation in NSW as regards the Gold Pass.

Bruce: Due to the high living costs in inner Sydney a large number of State



Transit workers commute long distances to work. They travel as far as Campbelltown, Wyong and Katoomba.

Rastus: Employees in Victoria are watching developments in NSW towards the NSW Government proposing the removal of the Home and Duty Opal Card. The opinion of drivers is Unions NSW should be co-ordinating industrial action around this benefit.

Bruce: If the benefit is withdrawn the various transport unions should implement a free travel agreement for these bus workers who travel long distances to work. In Victoria an inter-union transport agreement for employee travel was used from 1985 to 1990 and it was a success. Now all railway, tramway and private bus drivers who work route service and V/Line bus contracts enjoy free travel around Victoria.

Clyde: As of November State Transit is still in existence with a skeleton staff working for Transport for NSW. We do not know how many State Transit employees have lost their jobs. Eventually a Bill will be presented to Parliament to wind up State Transit.

Sparks: Once again we have run out of space. It is good to see interest at what happened to State Transit.

Rastus and Roscoe: In having the final say State Transit was destroyed due to Government ideology. It is the destruction of a State Asset. We, Victorian employees call on Unions NSW to take the lead for returning the Home and Duty Opal Card.

SYDNEY FERRIES NEWS

The new owner following privatisation of Sydney Ferries is Transdev. The NSW Govt. has admitted there are continuing serious issues affecting the operations of all the foreign built ferries operated by Transdev i.e. the Chinese built River Cats used on services along the Parramatta River and the Indonesian built Emerald Class ferries used on cross Harbour services due to faulty manufacture.

A major factor contributing to these problems was the lack of ferry workers or bureaucratic union officials involvement in the design of these ferries. The decisions regarding design and requirements were all made by Transport bureaucrats and the NSW Liberal Govt. which lack technical and operational knowledge. Both the River Cats and the Emerald Class ferries used on the cross Harbour services to Manly have chronic design faults. Shoddy welding and asbestos has been detected in the Emerald Class. On 26 September 2022, all Generation 2 Emerald class ferries were removed from service after a near miss with the cruise ship Coral Princess, due to a steering fault. These Ferries were placed in the workshops for testing by technicians. Meanwhile two River Cats have had minor collisions around this time on Manly to Parramatta services. As a result of these problems with

the Emerald Class the old Queenscliff Freshwater class ferry has been put back into service. Interestingly the Freshwater class ferries can cope with up to 5.5 metre swells, while the Emerald Class can only cope with 4.5 metre swells. To not show up this inadequacy of the Emerald Class in comparison to the Freshwater Class, Transdev and Transport for NSW bosses have decided that the Queenscliff is only allowed to operate with up to a maximum of 4.5 meter swells in the Harbour.

STOP PRESS: 19/11/22 Second generation Emerald Class Manly Ferry "Fairlight" suffered a steering failure near the entrance to Sydney Harbour less than two months from when Transdev withdrew the Rivercat and two sister ferries from service after similar incidents. It had just been cleared to continue services after almost two months out of operation. It had another steering failure in September.

According to the SMH 5/12/22 one of the new Emerald Class Manly ferries Fairlight remains in the Balmain shipyards until steering defects are resolved following a steering failure at the entrance to Sydney Harbour in mid November. The overall number of steering failures affecting the Fairlight is now eight. Other ferries of this Class with these failures are the Balmoral with three and the Clontarf with one.

VICTORIAN RAILWAY NEWS

In this issue of Sparks, Drivers, Conductors and Station Staff will discuss current issues at V/Line. As in previous issues of Sparks names have been changed.

Sparks: What is the current situation at V/Line in regard to N sets?

Moose: N sets are to be phased out over the next four years. The Standard Gauge N sets have been withdrawn having been replaced by Velocity Trains with buffet facilities. These N sets have been placed in storage with a few carriages transferred back to Broad Gauge.

Archie: With regards to the Broad Gauge extra Velocity sets are being ordered which will replace N sets on Warnambool, Bairnsdale, Shepparton with Swan Hill being the last service to use N sets.

Sparks: What about catering services?

Ichabod: With the exception of Swan Hill all Broad Gauge catering operations are to be phased out.

Clarence: One of the managers wrote a submission to the V/Line General Manager to abolish broad gauge catering.

Ichabod: It is rumoured that V/Line management do not want buffet services on Broad Gauge trains because they would have to have two carriage rosters for the Broad Gauge Velocity Trains.

Forsyth: V/Line claims the rosters would at times of disruption have buffet Velocity drivers operating on the wrong trains. Management claims it would be uneconomical to have trains with buffet modules on commuter trains.

Archie: For the last forty years N sets were operated on Commuter Trains with no Buffet service.

Ichabod: The empty buffet modules in these N sets were charged towards the Catering Division. This added to catering losses. This added to catering losses.

Forsyth: The Catering Division suffered during the COVID crisis when no catering services were operated. When catering was resumed takings were reduced. The service has not recovered.

Moose: V/Line management haven't the power of positive thinking. They could build these broad gauge Velocities with Buffet facilities and create a separate carriage roster. One way is to stable the Velocity trains with Buffet facilities in a separate location away from the other Velocity trains keeping these trains on an intercity roster.

Ichabod: It could be done but siding space has to be planned for these broad gauge Velocities with buffets but V/Line wants to take the easy way out. In other words no buffets.

Sparks: What about the H sets?

Rastus and Roscoe: A few H sets have been overhauled for Geelong, Seymour and Bacchus Marsh commuter services.

Sparks: What about the N class locomotives?

Rastus: Currently 25 N class locomotives are used for these services. The rumour is ten of these locomotives are to be leased to various freight operators such as CUBE, Southern Short Haul and other freight companies.

Sparks: What are issues of conductors and station cleaning?

Finbar: V/Line has gone to the Government to obtain permission to employ Platform Staff at country locations. If this submission is knocked back then one manager suggested using conductors to do station duties during conductors standby time.

Clarence: The proposal is to ask the conductors to work overtime for the cleaning duties.

Archie: To do these cleaning duties protective clothing will have to be supplied and training would have to be provided. Cleaning of stations is not a conductor's duty.

Jethro: Some conductors would jump at the overtime but further down the line these duties would be placed on conductors' rosters.

Clarence: The union is opposed to these proposals so the message to conductors is not to work the overtime.

Rastus and Roscoe: We drivers are watching this dispute as we wonder if cleaning duties could be found for drivers. In the United Kingdom there was a train operating company called Heathrow Express. This company was operating trains between

Paddington and Heathrow Airport. These trains were DOO (Driver Only Operation) operated and the drivers on standby time had to clean trains. These cleaning duties were mentioned in Modern Railways in 1999.

Clarence: We wonder if V/Line will try and make drivers clean these times whilst in the yards.

Jethro: Knowing V/Line some manager will bring up this idea.

Sparks: What is the rumour V/Line employees are of 'dobbing in' fellow employees?

Rastus: It has reared its ugly head over the last twelve months.

Sheona: Some employees are dobbing in their workmates over trivial issues.

Roscoe: It has been happening to drivers as well. It has been reported in previous editions of Sparks.

Isobel: Sadly some employees think that by 'dobbing in' their work mates they will get a promotion.

Rastus: These employees will not get promoted. They do not realise they are being used by Management.

Sparks: Once again we have run out of space. V/Line should fit a Broad Gauge Velocity with a Buffet Module and run the unit as a trial. Abolishing buffets on broad gauge is a retrograde step. V/Line are taking the easy way out.

Rastus and Roscoe: In having the final say using conductors to perform cleaning duties is a form of cheap labour. As for employees who 'Dob in' their work mates we have one word for you. Get out of the industry!

U.K. Public Transport News

Hull Bus Workers

13/11/22 250 Hull bus workers including drivers, cleaners, engineers and customer assistants also finished a five week strike which began on October 7th pending a pay deal from their employers Stagecoach. The pay demand was for 13 pounds an hour, compared to the 11.14 pounds some workers were earning.

Stagecoach profits rose from 48.1 million pounds to 72.7 million pounds to April this year with reported revenues of 1.2 billion pounds. The company was bought 595 million pounds

takeover in June by the global finance company DWS Infrastructure. While these enormous profits re being accrued, bus workers suffered a pay freeze.

Stagecoach attempted to break the strike hiring agency staff and by using management and drivers from other areas. Unite, the union representing the bus workers, has done little about this strike breaking operation.

600 bus workers at Arriva Kent recently won a 13.92 percent increase after six days

of determined strike action after rejecting below inflation deals agreed on by Unite in London at Go-Ahead-10.5%- and Arriva London North- 11.1%. Hull bus workers need to take a similarly determined stand. *Thanks to ACG*

Interview: Transport for London worker and RMT (Rail Union) rep- On recent rail strikes 27th Oct. 2022

We are seeing an increase in strike action in the UK, which is a good thing, but we don't know much about the experiences and views of workers who are involved in them. We rely on the official statements of the trade union press officers, which doesn't help us to answer the main questions when it comes to strikes: are the strikes actually effective, do they hurt the bosses? Do workers overcome divisions between different contracts, departments, professional groups or sectors? Do workers themselves learn how to conduct their own struggles and decide about form and goals?

The following interview with a comrade who works at Transport for London is a small step towards a more general debate between striking workers. We have to create independent forums to lead the debate, independent from political parties or trade union headquarters who have their separate interests when it comes to the strikes and mainly see them as recruitment grounds. If you feel the same, get in touch. If you want to talk about your strike experiences, get in touch. You can read a previous interview with the comrade about the situation during the Covid pandemic here. For a good general overview of the current crisis in global transport, check this out.

***** The current rail strikes**

The recent strikes have been declared the biggest rail dispute in a generation, with 50,000 workers from rail services to track maintenance to Transport for London. Was there a different quality to that strike, for example, was there more communication between workers from the different rail sectors?

The experience of the strike wasn't really different for us on London Underground. The strikes are still organised separately within the RMT. The disputes aren't really coordinated by the RMT, they are more coordinated by the government. The government decides which of these different departments of the railway industry are under attack and the union reacts. We only really had two days of coordinated strike action where the London Underground and the National Rail have been on strike at the same time. That was a conscious decision to call everyone out on the same days. So are we, as workers, coordinating our disputes? Not really. The two days that were coordinated were called by the head office of the RMT. We don't seem to have much influence over how many days or dates of the strikes.

It seems odd to me what we are actually doing at the moment, because we don't seem to have any tactic to win. How do we win this dispute? People want to see a tactic. There just seems to be an acceptance that this dispute will drag on for years. People just get fatigued if you drag it out, without actually escalating. The CWU just announced 28 different strike actions over a month. Why don't we do something like that? That is a tactic to force some sort of concession from the company. You couldn't have a government that is in a weaker position really. Do they really want a prolonged, two week-long strike action on the railways? Do they want that on their case? Maybe they do, I don't know. They would have a public enemy then, but then, public support still seems with us. And the government couldn't be more unpopular. If you target your strike action against the government, then there is a lot of piecemeal strike action in the country, but not much coordination.

Did you get in touch with any striking dockers, through the RMT?

No, I don't know what happened to the Felix Stowe dispute, for example.

Within the rail sector, is there coordination about the issues of the strikes? I mean, when it comes to Transport for London it is about pensions, with rail maintenance it is about introduction of new work practices, and with National Rail it is about ticket offices. Is there something like a common list of demands, in the sense that the Transport for London workers would support the demands of the rail maintenance workers and potentially continue the industrial dispute in their support?

In an ideal world we would love to come out in support of the rail workers, but it's not going to happen. Even inside of London Underground, although it's a pension dispute, it's also a dispute about staffing on the stations, because they want to cut station staff by 600 jobs. Station staff took one day of action, on their own. That was in August I think. Since then we didn't have more station staff going out specifically over this issue. From the train drivers side within London Underground, no one seems to be too interested in solidarity with the station staff. People focus on the pension aspect of people like that, because it affects the whole workforce. ASLEF, the other main union, on the other hand haven't come out on strike at all, and are actively trying to undermine the dispute by crossing picket lines. So there are divisions amongst workers even about that issue. So it is hard to get solidarity even just within London Underground. So a solidarity strike across the whole rail industry hasn't really been discussed.

With the pension dispute, management has put forward a document to the government saying that implementing the changes to the pension system itself would cost more than you would save from the new pension system. The government said to TFL, you have to make 100 million pounds of 'savings' from the pension scheme a year. The pensions were reevaluated in 2020 and the company reduced their contribution to it, saving 70 million. The fact that management now

tells the government that further changes would not save further money is also a consequence of our strikes. In 2020 management and Sadiq Khan still agreed to changes, since then we had a few strikes. But we don't know if the government will listen to that.

What about the dispute for London Underground cleaners, the campaign for an hourly wage of 15 pounds? Was that taken on as part of the current strikes or does it remain separate? There was a cleaners' strike at Churchill a while ago, but in the current strikes, were the cleaners involved?

No, not really. Sadiq Khan announced some weeks ago that all cleaners who are working on the Underground will get a free travel pass from April next year. That is something that we have been campaigning for for years. That is a pretty big victory for them, that could save some of them several hundred pounds a year. That is for outsourced cleaners, there are 2,000 of them. We tried to get a strike vote on this over the line before Covid, but it failed by a margin.

Another question I asked one of the ASLEF guys was about freight services and why they are not engaged in the industrial action. You could hit the economy more, couldn't you?

The Network Rail dispute, the signallers, is nationwide, that should be affecting freight, as well. But then freight drivers would probably be in ASLEF. ASLEF are only involved in seven, eight train companies. I don't know if the other companies have all agreed pay rises, at least that's what I have heard. ASLEF also called strikes on different days from the RMT, at least during the first three days. There should be more coordination, really. This is sectionalism at its worst.

***** The dispute over night-tube trains**

At Transport for London we were in fact in two disputes, one about the night-tube issue, because the company was trying to force us to work night-tube shifts. Previously we had part-time drivers who would work Friday and Saturday nights. With Covid the night tube closed down. As Covid is easing they wanted to bring that back in. During that period they had made most of the former part-time drivers full-time on normal shifts and therefore had no staff to cover Friday and Saturday nights. They came to ASLEF and the RMT and said, "we'd like to bring Friday and Saturday night into the normal full-time roster, as part of your regular working roster. ASLEF met with management separate from the RMT and agreed to this deal. They announced it as a great deal, with a little overtime bonus. Currently 55% of unionised drivers are with ASLEF, the rest with RMT. It was a fait accompli, they shouldn't even have met with management without the RMT. We were all up in arms, we didn't want to work Friday and Saturday nights. Crowbarring something like this into a roster is stressful, you end up working Monday, Tuesday Wednesday on a late, Thursday off, Friday, Saturday night, Sunday off, back on Monday. It's a real headlock to switch between nights and lates. We went into dispute over that. The

whole dispute was always difficult, because ASLEF said this deal is done, there is nothing you can do about it. Initially we had two successful days of strike action, where we shut down the five night-tube lines. Then we moved to a strike that was every Friday and Saturday night, only on the Central and Victoria lines, because these were the only two lines they brought back initially. Central and Victoria are majority ASLEF lines, that is perhaps why they decided to bring them back first, as night tube lines. The pickets on the Friday and Saturday nights, the reps would come out during the winter till midnight, it was hard work and there were not many people with them, often only two people on the picket. Especially on the Victoria line the pickets lasted only through the first four or six weeks. The service on the Victoria line was pretty good then. In June they brought in the Northern and the Jubilee line. There were no real pickets against this. The strike seemed to be pretty ineffective at that point.

I work on the Piccadilly line, where the RMT has 80% of drivers. They hadn't brought weekend night tube back and we were looking forward to going on strike over it. They knew that if they had tried, there wouldn't have been a night service on the Piccadilly line. It would have been an effective strike. The week before the night tube was supposed to start they called a rep meeting and called off the whole dispute. The main reason was that the strike at the Northern and Jubilee were so ineffective. So the night tube is now in. We lost a lot of weekend rest days. It's now much harder to get a weekend off. You only get the bonus if you work actual nights, so 90% of drivers don't get anything for it. There was no increase in pay or increase in holidays. For management this only saved them 3 million pounds a year, which is a minuscule amount of money for the organisation. It was kind of annoying, because the reps that agreed to the deal at the same time told us that "we won". Because the company told them that they will try it so that "no one is forced to work these night tube shifts, we will try and cover it with volunteers". But in the same sentence they say that if there are no volunteers you have to work these shifts. The reps were just repeating what the company was saying.

***** The current political situation**

With Mick Lynch and the recent strikes there has been a bit of a shift though. During previous strikes the RMT tended to speak about 'the public' and how their strikes are not against 'the public' or 'the customers. Now this has shifted a bit towards 'the working class', there is more talk about how the strikes within rail relate to other working class disputes. That's a political step forward, isn't it?

Yes, I have noticed that. People used to focus more on their own terms and conditions, they look at their dispute now in a broader sense. More as a conflict between the working class and the government or the Tory party. So, though it is political in a sense, it is always against the Tory party. The Tory party are the bad

guys that are standing in the way of pay rises or better conditions. Still, there is a feeling of being part of a wider movement, which is new.

How much is it that and how much is it that the infrastructure is actually underfunded, the profit margins minimal and the companies therefore in need of constant subsidies? Or both?

The actual management of the rail companies isn't particularly profitable. The main profits are made by the ROSCO companies, the rolling stock companies, the companies that lease engines and wagons and stuff. They are basically like investment funds. The trains are then rented to the rail companies. These companies have no operational involvement. The rail companies in turn keep on threatening the government that they walk away from the business, to get bigger bail-outs. The government is on the back-foot and offers better deals for them to stay. At the same time the government has to take them off frequently, because they are so bad at operating the rail services.

Amey, an outsourced service company that runs stuff like waste collection, street cleaning or army facility management in the UK has just been sold by the mother company, which is a Spanish rail and airport company, after years of fragile contacts with local councils. These structures are actually shaky.

Yes, mass transport is not a profitable business. The infrastructure is too complicated, there are too many unknowns, the investment is too long-term for quick returns. They knew all this in the 20s and 30s in this country, when they had privatised railways in this country. It wasn't working, the companies were constantly going bankrupt or services became unaffordable. The state decided to nationalise the system to get things on track. They figured that out back then, but had forgotten about it by the 1990s.

***** The attacks in form of legal changes and restructuring**

One change the government brought in was the possible use of agency work to replace striking workers. They have now used this for the first time to replace striking school staff in Romford. Is this relevant on the railways, was it relevant during the strike?

I think on the railway this is nonsense. There is no such a thing as an agency signaller. If you have trained as a train driver, you are directly employed. There are track workers that are from agencies, but they are not trained to a standard that they could run the maintenance, they are generally labourers, they can't do inspections, for example. I mean, people would die if they would try to replace staff with agency people.

They also talk about changes to the work practices for maintenance crews and signallers, forcing people to do more varied job tasks that they might have been trained for, but have not actual experience in doing. The strike is partly opposed to this plan. What do they actually want to change and how relevant do you think it is?

I think in general they want to reduce the amount of inspections of the infrastructure. There was a rail crash in Scotland in 2020, during Covid actually, three people died. An Intercity train hit a lot of gravel that had spilled out of a drain. The train derailed, the driver and two passengers were killed. That drain had been put in wrong ten years previously and was never inspected for ten years. If it hadn't been for Covid this train would have been much busier. It's a clear example that not enough inspections are being done. Another thing they want to change is the regulation about where to start your shift, I think. They want more flexibility in that, because normally, as a track worker, you would first go to your depot, that's where you start your shift, and then you travel to wherever you are working, and end your shift at the depot. They could get two, three hours more work out of the track workers if the shift would start on the actual track site.

With the legal screws getting tightened to curb strike activity, is there any discussion how to react to that? There are campaigns, like "Free our Unions", but on a direct tactical or strategical level?

That has actually been quite encouraging. The conversations we had in the workplace. People are tired of having to jump through legal hoops, where it takes you weeks between raising the issue and actually taking action. People struggle to understand what the minimum service law means. They try to hold the RMT and ASLEF legally accountable to provide a minimum number of trains on strike days. If these trains don't run it would financially cripple the unions. It raises the issue of going back to more wildcat kind of actions. People do seem kind of receptive to that kind of idea. I say to people that, we technically don't really need a union to go on strike, you don't need the legal entity of the RMT. If they use the legal structure or the brand of the RMT to restrict us, then you have to be prepared to take strike action without the RMT. That's possible, strike action just means that you are not going to work. We can just set up shadow branches. Some people respond that then each person could be held individually responsible for illegal industrial action. But that's difficult if, let's say, 10,000 people walk out. Can the state really prosecute 10,000 people or press criminal charges because they don't go to work that day? The company doesn't have the resources to discipline 10,000 people. If you have 10,000 people on a disciplinary, you create another strike action. There is pretty much a sense of lawlessness and general chaos to the country at the moment. It feels like the government or the politicians are breaking the law quite consistently for a number of years. And then they want us to stick to the law.

But are they not willing to train new people or not able to?

They want to reduce the amount of trains and services running. Managed decline. They spend less money. With Avanti, it's not how many tickets they sell, they get a flat-rate from the government. With the London Underground, it's the same number of people paying to travel, if you run less trains, you just pack them in. That's what

they want to get back to. Pre-Covid they were running over 100% capacity.

What about the issue of driverless trains? That is also presented as a possible attack on workers? They always present that as a scary thing, but is it actually a threat?

It is part of the latest bailout that Transport for London has agreed, the possible introduction of driverless trains. They agreed to set aside a sum of money to start an investigation into driverless trains. Which is crazy. Driverless trains will probably cost more than Crossrail. Crossrail is obviously a new line, but they still put drivers on there. If you build a brand new line, it is far easier to make it driverless, but they didn't. On the brand-new Elizabeth Line people have to switch trains when they enter the underground sections of the line because they could not make the signaling software of the national rail correspond with the underground signaling. Singapore had driverless trains, but they put drivers back on there, they realised that the service worked better. The whole system has to be designed from the bottom up to be driverless. You have to eliminate any possibility that the train is going to hit anything. If the train hits an obstacle and there is no driver, what will it do? Carry on or stop? And if it stops, what happens? Because you don't know what it hit. Something like the Victoria Line, which is entirely underground, if you put platform edge doors on every platform of the Victoria Line you could eliminate any variables. But then to put platform edge doors on every platform, to retro-fit new technology on old infrastructure you know how tiny the Victoria Line platforms are and you know that some of them are curved. How do you put platform edge doors on a curved platform?

You encounter so many problems that you were not expecting, trying to upgrade old infrastructure. Some of the signals on the national rail, like in Devon, still need electrifying and they talk about driverless trains, for god's sake! They don't realise how far behind some of the technology is. The signaling on the Piccadilly Line is from the 1950s. They cancelled the signaling upgrade on the Piccadilly Line just before Covid, to pay for Crossrail. A totally new signaling system on the Piccadilly Line would take ten years to build. Even though driverless trains are phantasy stuff, they still force TFL to spend money on it. It only cost them £3 million to force us to work on Friday and Saturday night tubes, that is a minuscule amount in comparison, but then they complain that drivers are expensive.

*****The rank-and-file within the RMT**

Back then during Covid the NEC called off the pay strike. The structure that allowed this to happen, is that still in place? Are people more weary of such top-down decisions?

If anything, it is probably worse now. Mick Lynch who won the general secretary election is now pretty much untouchable. At the moment, whatever is recommended by head-office regarding settling of these disputes, will be accepted by the rank-and-file. This is the flip side of his large media personality.

What is Democratic Unionism?

Democratic Unionism means grass roots controlled unionism, not control by officials. It also means that workers in one industry should be in one union so as to remove artificial divisions that can cause disunity. Such a union should be fully organised and controlled by the membership.

To achieve this we believe a union should be organised along the following lines:

That no person employed by the union should earn more than the average income of the membership.

1. The Spokespeople should have no executive power all decisions should be made by the union membership in the course of mass meetings.

2. The Spokespeople have no executive power all decisions should be made by the union membership in mass meetings.

3. Spokespeople are only to act as delegates elected by the membership to carry out decisions made by the membership in mass meetings.

4. That a mechanism is instituted for the instant recall of spokespeople/delegates who break the above rules.

5. That all positions within the union be held on a limited tenure, the duration of which will be decided by the membership.

6. That a programme of decentralised decision making be implemented within the union structure, so that we won't need full time officials.

7. All loss of earnings incurred by elected delegates who miss work as a result of carrying out union duties will be reimbursed by the union to the extent of the lost wages.

There is no new rank-and-file initiative? We've got stuff happening inside Unison at the moment, "Time for a Real Change", but that is pretty much a left party vehicle.

Is there a stronger rank-and-file tendency within the RMT?

There was a rank-and-file tendency behind Mick Lynch, Alex Gordon and Ed Dempsey, called the Broad Left, to get these guys elected into these positions. But because they were successful and got them elected, they have taken a back-seat now. The Broad Left is now in charge of the union. They were in opposition to a rank-and-file movement that we were trying to set up, but that didn't get going anyway, the "Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Union". That never got fully off the ground, because we couldn't get any agreement between the two main left parties inside RMT, the AWL and the Socialist Party. It all fell apart and the Broad Left was building their support base. Some people who were involved with the "Campaign for a Fighting Union" have moved towards the Broad Left, seeing that they were dominant. If you want to have any position within the union, you have to suck up to them. If there will be a rank-and-file movement again, I think it will have to be cross-union, and involve ASLEF and others, as well. We need a public transport rank-and-file movement, that involves workers on buses, as well and other transport sectors. Rather than just a rank-and-file within the RMT. *Thanks to Angry Workers World.*

