

No. 174

Sept. - Oct. 2023

Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

Don't Fall for "Mr Pinnochio" Claassens & Mainstream Media Lies! "Unsafe" Non Renoed N.I.F. To go in service with early 2024 timetable! Opening the Floodgates to D.O.O. & Privatisation! Put the brakes now on trials of non-renood N.I.F. For 2024 timetable before too late!



N.S.W. Railway News p.3; Sydney Buses News p.14; Vic. Rail News p.20; 'The New Regime in NSW Inc.' p.7; UK Rail News p.26; Letters p.5; Vic. Railway News p. 20; NZ Bus News p.28; Rail Marshals Push p. 5 ; UGL Rail Strike p.6;

EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

The New N.S.W. Minns Regime & Claassens's N.I.F. Lies

The most significant news in its ramifications for the NSW Railways was the election of the Minns ALP Regime in the March 2023 elections. Latest developments such as the new 'Regime' okaying moves to rip up the Bankstown rail line and replace with a Metro and the other Metro developments points to the Minns Regime continuing the pro privatisation policies of the previous Liberal Regimes of Baird, Gladys and Perrottet and a continuing drive to cut wages, conditions and jobs. This push is likely to even worsen with Albo's support for the AUKUS Nuke Subs commitment which will involve the shocking squandering of half a \$ Trillion of tax payers' money for the Subs and ancillary expenses such as the proposed Subs base in Pt. Kembla and the Nuke waste dump. So there will be a major push to gouge and corner cut as much as possible to pay for this lavish expenditure to help out Uncle Sam and the Brits and facilitate a future nuke war with China. As part of this drive will be a renewed push to introduce D.O.O. With the N.I.F. (New Intercity Fleet) without the renos likely introduced with the new timetable in early 2024. Followed by the replacement for the XPT also 'secretly' set up for D.O.O. This D.O. O. push will open the floodgates for privatisation as the new operators as part of franchising of Sydney and NSW Trains will significantly reduce their wages bill.

Increasingly information is coming to hand that Claassens's and Perrottet's claim to have achieved a break through in the Rail EBA 2022 with the NSW Govt's agreement to renos on the N.I.F. To maintain the role of the guard in safe working is a brazen lie. As no work has ever been done to do the renos on the N.I.F. (See article page 3.) Other news is the introduction of new rail Marshals in Sydney Trains (See article page 5.) and workers at Cronulla Station have faced serious health effects from management's disregard of serious OH&S concerns. (See article page 6.)

In Sydney Buses the most important news has been the finalisation of the Region 6 bogus Two Tier EBA campaign. Like the Rail 2022 EBA campaign it was set up to fail and has delivered major real wages cuts due to the soaring level of inflation and various increases in Super payments. The corporate media and the union hierarchy has of course failed to raise these important issues as part of the 'smoke and mirrors' performance to sell the EBA. (See article page 8.)

Sparks welcomes contributions by transport workers. Please send to PO Box 92 Broadway 2007 NSW or via our web site www.sparksweb.org Subs are \$5 pa. Please make out money orders to Rebel Worker. Sparks is published by the Sydney Local of the Network for Democratic Unionism.

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N.S.W. RAILWAY NEWS

Mainstream Media Cover-up of New D.O.O. push with the N.I.F.!

An analysis of SMH 22/6/23 article "Intercity train fleet delayed again" page 7 is that the article is again disinformation to camouflage the introduction of the NIF with DOO(Driver Only Operation) toward the end of the year late Nov.- Dec. 2023. Its introduction in services was likely intended last year 2022 following the fake break through in Rail EBA negotiations.

Revealingly the article admits that as yet no work has been done re the supposed renos on the trains to maintain the role of the guard in safe working. Despite now 7 months since the making the supposed deal - the bogus NIF Deed between Claassens and Perrottet re doing the renos! The SMH doesn't raise any issues with this suspicious inaction regarding the renos.

Nothing has been done and as we know nothing will be done! But the article refers to talk by TfNSW that the trains would be operating in services 'vaguely' sometime in 2024. So creates the illusion that renos will still have time to be done eventually. Also the article talks about 'trials' on lines of the unrenooed NIF trains, but if they were genuine, they would have to trial renovated NIF trains with the changes to the guards

Intercity train fleet delayed again

EXCLUSIVE
Matt O'Sullivan
Transport and Infrastructure editor

The rollout of NSW's new intercity passenger trains has been delayed until 2024, which means commuters will have waited more than four years longer than originally planned for the multimillion-dollar fleet.

The latest delay came as the chief executive of one of NSW's two state-run passenger rail operators departs the top job amid plans to place the troubled intercity train fleet under the control of a sister agency.

NSW TrainLink chief executive Pete Allaway last week left the role he had held for the past four years overseeing intercity and regional rail operations.

His departure comes weeks after an interim review into the performance of NSW's rail network recommended the

government consider shifting responsibility for the intercity trains from NSW TrainLink to Sydney Trains.

Transport for NSW acknowledged that the new intercity trains would not enter service until 2024, saying it was working with the main rail union and the safety regulator to ensure the fleet could be rolled out next year.

"This includes changes to the truckside infrastructure, and surveying has begun across the network to determine the scope of work required for infrastructure modifications," the agency said.

It has not previously given an updated timeframe for the trains to start services.

The new Korean-built fleet was at the centre of a protracted dispute last year between the Rail Union and the NSW Government. The standoff was settled last November when

the government agreed to union demands to modify the trains to allow guards to monitor passengers getting on and off at stations.

Despite the deal seven months ago, modifications to guard cabins have yet to be made. NSW said it was working with the main rail union and the safety regulator to ensure the fleet could be rolled out next year.

The new fleet had undergone testing on several rail lines to examine mechanical and electrical systems, and preliminary testing of crew doors was taking place.

"These tests are needed to inform the detailed design of the modifications," the agency said.

Opposition transport spokeswoman Natalie Ward said the previous government had promised to deliver the new fleet and now after industrial action by unions last year, they were still not servicing customers.

Under the original plans, the trains were to start services on lines from Sydney to the Central Coast and Newcastle in late 2019, and to the Blue Mountains and Lithgow the following year.

The hold-up to the rollout of the new intercity fleet has been a result of a series of delays, including the resignation of decades-old V&S chief of Oscar trains to Sydney's suburban lines.

The delays came as the government has hired executive headhunter NGS Global to search for a new chief of the state's main transport agency.

Long-time senior bureaucrat Howard Collins is acting Transport for NSW secretary and is regarded as the leading internal candidate for the job.

The agency has been criticised for its handling of the intercity fleet, which is heavily unionised. Transport for NSW did not say whether Allaway would be permanently replaced, confirming

only that chief operating officer Dale Merrick was now acting TrainLink CEO.

Labor set a goal - matched by the Coalition - during the state election campaign of cutting senior public servants by 10 per cent in the next financial year.

After winning power in March, the Labor government commissioned a review into Sydney's rail network. Among 12 recommendations accepted by the government in an interim report released last month was advice that it consider shifting responsibility for the intercity trains.

If adopted, it will place all electric trains under Sydney Trains' control and effectively re-establish the old CityRail operations bounded by the boundary in the south, NSW's rail north and Lithgow in the west.

The previous Coalition government created Sydney Trains and NSW TrainLink in 2018.



cabin already made. In reality they are preparing for running the un-renooed trains for the new timetable early in the new year for the new push.

The article is a means to counter Sparks on the job re enlightening the grass roots about the fraudulent nature of the renos and fake EBA break through. In line with launching the surprise attack - introducing the un-renooed NIF for the 2024 timetable. Also revealingly Minns since gaining office as Premier has talked about new legislation to protect Sydney Water from privatisation but no such legislation to protect the railways from privatisation is being considered. Meanwhile the Minns Govt. is intending changing the TAHE (Transport Asset Holding Entity) which owns all the railway infrastructure to become a non-commercial state owned corporation. Similar to Transport for NSW which played an important function in the privatisation of Sydney Buses via franchising.

By Casey Jones

STOP PRESS Latest News:

Daily on-lines notices have been received about testing the NIF without the guard

controlling the doors. The new timetable due early next year is dependent on the NIF running.

6/9/23 Further news on the NIF is that the traction interlocking modifications haven't been done for the guards to be able to work trains from the platform so the trains don't stop at platforms. Except where they terminate of course.

Sydney Trains Customer Service Marshals

Management is looking at the revival of the customer service Marshals, but won't say in what capacity and are keeping it quiet. These used to be sent to a station and do duties like stand around and help people with directions etc.

Management used to say . "We'll use them in degraded modes on stations to help with crowd control etc." The problem was a lot of these were P/T staff that didn't know how to deal with a lot of situations. These marshals were paid extremely well, not sure what the regular marshals were but Team leader = SDM3.

By Railway Johnny

LETTERS

RAIL EBA 2022 & Covid

Dear Sparks

It seems obvious to me that the whole EBA charade was orchestrated to coincide with the Covid charade. The delaying tactics, starting with the idea of just adopting the 2018 EA and forgo any negotiations.

And of course, the Covid charade was a test to see how much of their civil and political rights people were willing to lose/give up. Obviously, people are willing to give up all rights, as the test showed, and this includes workplace rights.

As I said this was a test in preparation for "the great reset" that according to the "world economic forum" and regurgitated by politicians everywhere, we all need. Also called the "fourth industrial revolution" and perfectly timed to coincide with the climate charade.

All designed to condition people into accepting even more industry being shut down and exported to some new location with a slave workforce, who know nothing about civil and political rights, let alone workplace rights. And/or to accept their jobs being automated in AI run factories.

"The great reset" and the "fourth industrial revolution" along with climate alarmism are planned operations to normalise the taking away of all civil and political rights

along with workplace rights because there will be no jobs.

And let's not forget land rights. This is where the "voice" comes in. They need a referendum to change the constitution and strip away any ideas of land rights, but it won't be returned to the Aboriginals. It will be managed by an unelected cadre of useful idiots who will do as they are told, for money. Just like the politicians.

People will be packed into "smart cities" also known as 15-minute cities and most will receive "a living wage". These are being built around the world in plain sight, but mainly in developed nations. In reality, these are high-tech open-air prisons until Mr Gates can perfect his vaccines, because he says there are too many people in the world.

So, you see, we won't be needing an enterprise agreement soon and perhaps the useful idiots and order followers jumped the gun a little in 2020 and thought the mandates and lock downs were permanent.

Regards

Railway Kenny

Cronulla Station OH&S Issue

Dear Sparks

Workers at Cronulla station, have been victimised over their concerns with mould in the office, which is significant, and has made them ill.

A certain CAM, who is now female, has constantly fobbed it off. This has been going on for a long time. It is the same CAM that gave all the office space to train crewing. Now station staff have only this tiny little room to work with and have to go through the crewing area to use the toilet. Latest news is that the mould problem has been fixed but this doesn't help workers' health issues which hasn't been resolved.

Also there's an interim T/Table coming out in a couple weeks but the new full T/T is on hold as they were looking at dropping services instead of adding.

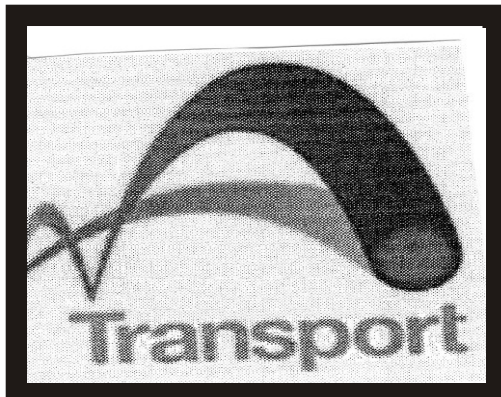
Sydney Trains reader and supporter

UGL Rail Services workers in New South Wales hold third strike

From WSWS Report: Over 120 electricians and mechanical trades workers from the UGL Rail Services Facility at Broadmeadow, Newcastle, walked off the job for 24 hours on Friday. The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) are in dispute with UGL over its proposed enterprise agreement. The action followed a strike by 60 workers on July 14 and 200 workers on July 5 at the company's Ganinan facility in nearby Georgetown.

Their current agreement expired in April with negotiations for a replacement agreement ongoing for eight months. An ETU representative told the media that the unions had already compromised on some of their claims.

While the AMWU and ETU say workers are paid \$7 an hour less than their peers at competing companies, the unions are only seeking an 18 percent pay rise over three years, or 6 percent annual increases. This is below the current annual inflation rate of 6.8 percent and fails to compensate for years of below industry standard wages.



The New Regime in NSW Inc. Warning: Political Satire

Following the election of the Minns ALP Regime to power in the NSW elections in March 2023, a gala celebration for Minns and his henchmen, ALP loyalists and the 'big end of town' was held at RTBU NSW Secretary Claassens's luxurious mansion in the exclusive Eastern Sydney suburb of Point Piper on Sunday evening 9th April. It had jaw dropping harbour views. The gala event featured a reception, banquet and other 'extracurricular' activities with no expense spared. All paid from the clandestine union slush fund contributed from surpluses worth millions of dollars over many decades syphoned from the surpluses of the Bus Division Bus Drivers Traffic fine and Picnic Fund.

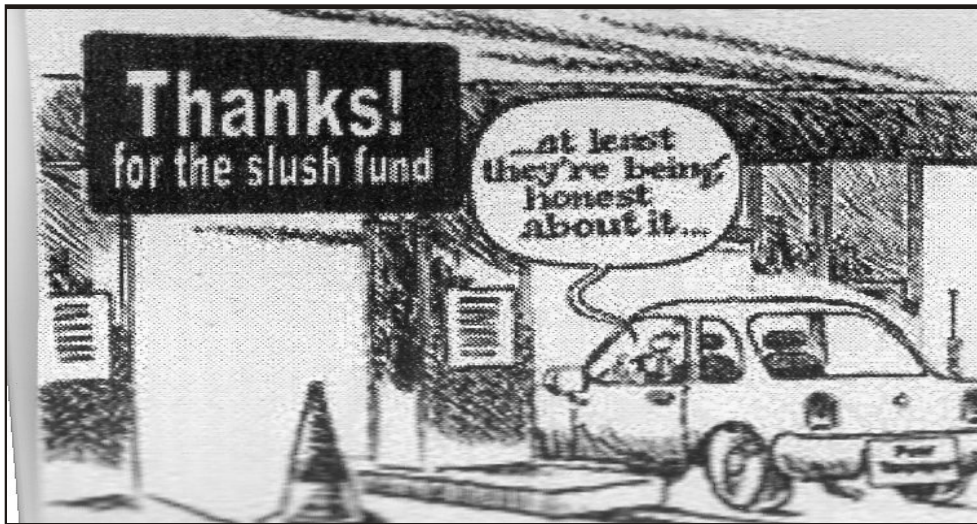
It was hosted by Claassens and was attended by a galaxy of ALP mega stars such as Albo, his ministers, Mark Moray Secretary of Unions NSW, Queen Sally McManus of the ACTU Royalty, various RTBU dignitaries such as David Babineau RTBU Bus Division Secretary, Peter Grech RTBU Bus Division President, Farren Campbell RTBU Loco Division Secretary, the TWU's NSW Sec. Richard Olsen, the CEO's of Transit Systems, Trans Dev and Keolis Downer, and the CEO's of Sydney Trains, NSW Trains, Transport for NSW, amongst others. Together with Sydney Chamber of

Commerce Exec. Director Katherine O'Regan and Business Council of Australia CEO Jennifer Westacott. Some ancient loyal ALP retainers set for lucrative jobs, also attended such as Josh Murray Chief of Staff for former NSW ALP Premier Morris Iemma later to be slotted in as Transport for NSW Secretary and John Lee former STA (State Transit Authority) CEO and managing director of two private bus companies, later to be appointed by NSW Transport Minister Jo Haylen to head a bus industry task force on a one year lucrative \$442,000 contract. With the new Minns Regime there would be no more of Gladys and Darryl Maguire's 'pork barrelling' but plenty of the traditional 'jobs for the ALP boys'.

At the conclusion of the previous union executive meeting, Secretary Claassens had called together all his ALP loyalists and henchmen for a 'top secret coven' intimate meeting in his office. He announced to the gathering, "Just imagine you all could have the opportunity to rub shoulders and enjoy the glamour of associating with assorted ALP mega stars and celebrities such as our brand new NSW Premier Minns and even Albo our esteemed ALP Prime Minister. You did a great job with the rigging of the RTBU elections ballots in association with our great ALP friends in the AEC, (Australian Electoral Commission) in 2022 just like the 2014 and 2018 elections. Now the union just needs your help with some catering and chauffeuring for a celebration party for Premier Minns and a 'special project' at my place. Remember there's room at the top, but you have to earn it! Don't forget when serving Premier Minns and Albo to bow and address them as 'your excellency' and when serving Queen Sally of the ACTU to bow and address her as 'your majesty'." It was an offer they couldn't refuse, if they wanted to rise up the hierarchy and climb the ladder of success.

The Man on a fake White Horse Enters

Dramatically the host of the festivities, Secretary Claassens flanked by adoring and fawning Loco Division Reps chuckling amongst themselves about Alex's great 'fake Renos on the NIF (New Intercity Fleet)' joke with the media, providing a 'guard of honour' for the 'great man who helped the union win such magnificent pay rises and fat bonuses with the rail EBA campaign last year' appeared on the scene. Mounted on piggy back! As the union was broke and couldn't afford him mounted on the traditional white thorough bred stallion! After a little prodding two sturdy Loco reps stepped forward and were 'absolutely delighted' to volunteer, quipping "Alex is worth his weight in gold for his great work with the long drawn out Rail EBA campaign." On making it to the party venue room, they were not so cheery and enthusiastic. They looked about ready to collapse with a torrent of sweat pouring



down their brows. Their backs about to buckle under the weight of their esteemed union leader! Achieved with his attendance at many lavish corporate Sydney and NSW Trains, Transit Systems, Keolis Downer and TransDev corporate lunches and dinners.

As Alex dismounted from his 'steeds', he appeared attired in a magnificent snow white, gala RTBU Secretary uniform with white silk gloves, gold braid, epaulettes, rows of 'secret' ALP medals and of course his RTBU sword of finest steel in its scabbard. There was a dramatic hush in the room with many of the guests gaping and gasping. One of the Guards Union reps who had played such a notorious role in cajoling and conning interurban guards to go along with the bogus, 'Devil may care about safety' N.I.F. (New Inter City Fleet) Deed, now had been 'multi-skilled' with 'on-the-job training' perhaps for a new career after the guards are sacked. Following the implementation of D.O.O. (Driver Only Operation) after 4 years and then an abrupt trip to the dole queue. Without a worry in the world about meeting spiralling mortgage repayments on their homes or sky rocketing rents. He had been dragooned by the host for his services as a waiter and now abruptly fainted just after pouring drinks for Albo and Queen Sally McManus. Causing all manner of bottles of scotch whisky, French Champagne and expensive French vintage wines and glasses he had been carting around to crash and shatter on the floor. Resulting in mayhem amongst the crowd. He had been apparently overcome by the glamour of his esteemed professional union leader's splendid outfit. Claassens as master of ceremonies welcomed all the ALP Godfathers, union bosses and loyal retainers amongst the corporate heavy weights to the celebration of Minns electoral victory and then

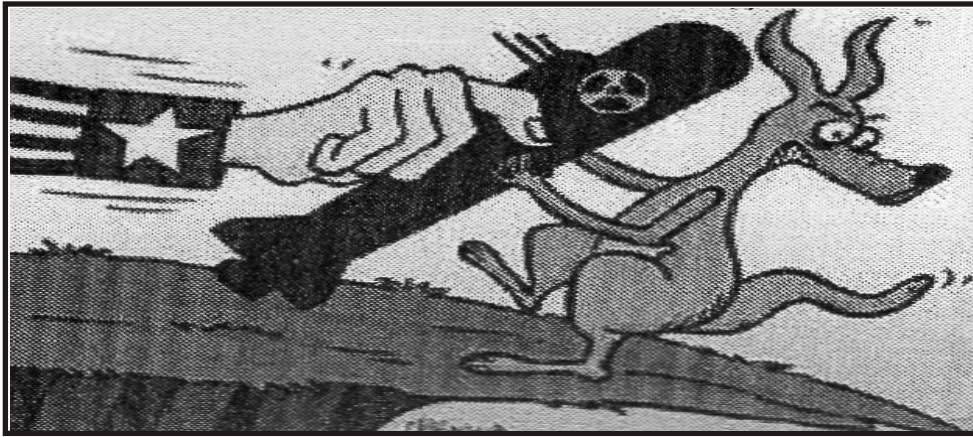
announced the list of speakers.

The AUKUS Subs Hidden Agenda

First off the rank to address the proceedings was Mr Prime Minister Albo. Albo waxed lyrical about Minns electoral success and the great work of his team and ALP henchmen and Corporate Heavy Weights in assuring the victory. He then came down to the real business. He lectured the crowd about the importance of the AUKUS Nuke Subs deal to make Australia great, a great mate of the USA and the splendid opportunity for Oz to participate as an ally of the USA in WWII via a war with China over Taiwan. However he noted there was a down side, his and other Oz Governments would have to meet a 'bargain basement' price tag of up to \$368 Billion and 'only' an extra \$145.3 Billion for the construction and maintenance of a nuke waste dump in Oz. His Govt. was already putting the knife into the lower end of town via the Taxation racket with the abolition of middle and lower incomes tax offsets, raising the age for entitlement to Age Pension and savage cut backs to health expenditure and incomes of low wage earners. Minns and his team would have to do their bit also to cut, cut, cut Government expenditure, wages and jobs to help out.

Next Chris Minns, brand new ALP Premier of NSW, the star of the soiree and celebration strode triumphantly to the rostrum, enjoying a thunderous applause. He thanked the various ALP godfathers and polities, union boss henchmen and CEO's for their tremendous help in the elections to get the ALP and his team into office. He was profuse in his praise for the host Secretary Claassens for his professional union leadership and 'honesty' he had displayed over many years in office. He spoke rapturously about Claassens's role in securing 'moderate' pay rises, and bonuses with his conduct of the 2022 Rail EBA campaign. On hearing the praise from his esteemed leader, Claassens's face was beaming with a bright red, swollen head. Suddenly one of the guests became cheeky and yelled out to Claassens, "Alex didn't you learn about inflation when you were at school, cutting the EBA pay rises and income tax affecting the bonuses?" Claassens was astounded and replied, "what's inflation? Never heard of it! When the EBA campaign was successfully concluded, there were articles in the SMH and other media outlets. There was no mention about this inflation business or income tax savaging the bonus. So why should I and the members be bothered about it?"

Minns continued his speech after the interruption, announcing how his Govt. would be continuing the great work of his Liberal predecessors such as Mike Baird, Gladys, and Perrotett and would continue the privatisation push in the NSW Public Sector with the exception for electoral reasons of Sydney Water. Particularly in Minns's gun sight was the NSW Railways. He assured the crowd, Secretary



Claassens was enthusiastically behind a new push to introduce DOO (Driver Only Operation) with the N.I.F. with the new timetable for 2024. A necessary cost cutting measure for the new private operators. Minns also praised Babineau and Grech from the RTBU Bus Division and Olsen from the TWU for their bogus set up to fail 'Two Tier' EBA campaign in the buses securing a bogus 3.2% pa pay rises and real wage cuts with continuing soaring inflation and nasties in the EBA clauses.

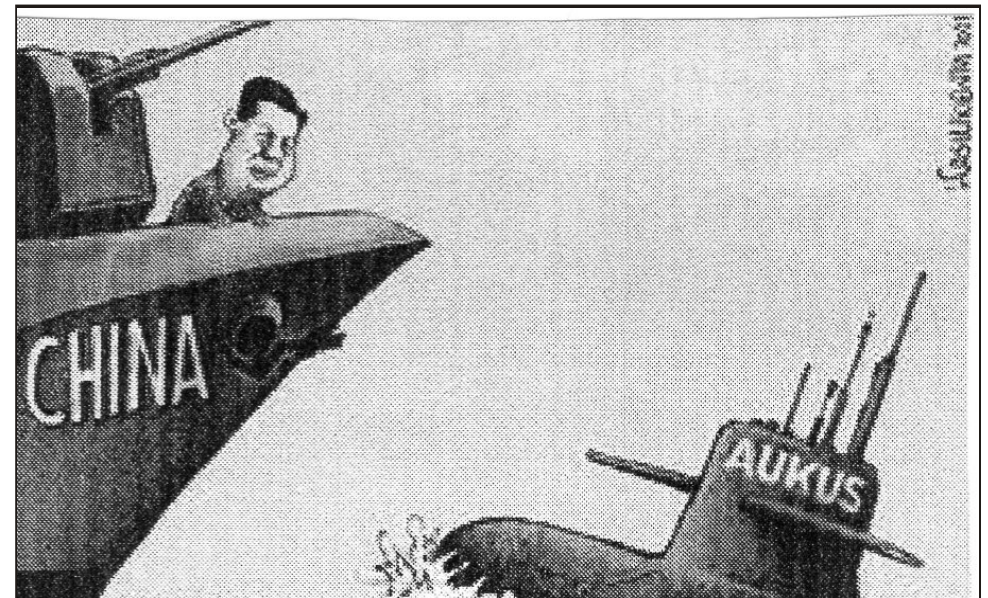
Secretary Claassens Chock Full of Fantastic Ideas for his 'Public Spirited' Members Particularly in the Illawarra....

Following the conclusion of the speeches by the polties, Secretary Claassens rushed dramatically to the rostrum and had the final word which was greeted with thunderous applause. He announced unctuously to the crowd, "My members would be delighted to share the financial burden for the bargain basement priced nuke subs. However, they would object to foreign made nuke subs, we can build them all here. They are patriotic and public spirited. Always obey the law of the land. I can assure you they will cope with the necessary belt tightening and the trip to the dole queue for many, to help defend our nation with the budget cuts necessary to fund the subs purchase in these troubled times. My members on the South Coast and the Illawarra line are so public spirited and patriotic they would be glad to have the Nuke Subs base located at Pt. Kembla. Why, I'm sure they'd be delighted to have the Nuke waste dump for our subs and those of our great allies, Uncle Sam and the UK located in their area as well! It will only require a couple of hundred thousand years to be secured. If they cop a retaliatory nuke missile or two from China on a rainy day, I'm sure they'll cope with

their bargain 'do-it-yourself' underground nuke fallout shelters built in their back yards during their days off and even annual holidays!

Albo has had such a great idea with imposing deductions from my members super balances for Aged Care. Why not an extra deduction from their Super for the AKUS Subs purchase? I'm sure when I'm out visiting the depots and stations the members will yell out excitedly after they hear about the further cuts to their super balances for the Subs, "what a great idea, Alex! That's just what we've been thinking! Our super has been getting too fat lately after the magnificent EBA pay rises. Our Super nest eggs could do with some slimming down for the national interest and our powerful friend Uncle Sam!"

Then just after the polties, corporate bosses and 'professional union leaders' had started tucking into the banquet and splendid spread from tables piled high with lobster, all manner of high end meats, caviar and other assorted goodies, they were rudely interrupted by the sounds of picks and shovels being wielded and loud groaning, yelling and cursing from Secretary Claassens's back yard! Perturbed guests rushed to the back window and gaped at a bizarre spectacle. Sundry union reps were observed engaging in truly back breaking labours. They were profusely sweating while furiously digging up a vast tract of the back yard. Others were noticed weighed down with heavy bags of tiles, sacks of cement, huge blocks of concrete and stacks of bricks on their backs! They looked to be on their last legs and



could have a stroke any time from their strenuous exertions!

Some guests desperately asked their host Claassens, "Alex, what in hell is the racket in your back yard all about?" Their host calmly replied, "its just some of our union reps from the railways, buses and tramways, they're working on a 'special project' for their union leader. As you should know, we in the union are avid defenders of OHS (Occupational Health & Safety) on the job such as mould, toxic fumes, passengers caught in closing train doors due to DOO(Driver Only Operation) with the N.I.F. and so everyone on the job would appreciate for OH&S reasons we union officials deserve Olympic sized swimming pools installed in our homes backyards." Some guests queried why, the union couldn't even afford wheel barrows for the construction work. Claassens seemed bemused and stunned by the bizarre absurdity of the question. He was initially speechless. He then replied unctuously, "the union's broke! Why, there were no wheel barrows used by the ancient Egyptians when the Pharaohs had the pyramids built! For OH&S and body mass index reasons, the exercise will do the reps a load of good! Don't you know, they're from the lowly 'working class level of the organisation?' Isn't it obvious to you? They couldn't possibly appreciate any pampering with expensive, high tech stuff like wheel barrows. Its on their day off! If they weren't helping the union here, they would be just down the pub on the grog or with their missuses. It's all a win, win situation for them and the union!"

The celebration party concluded with the traditional 'wild orgy' orchestrated by Queen Sally McManus, CEO of the ACTU's fully owned subsidiary 'Young Blondes of Sydney & Melbourne: Intimate corporate companions for ever occasion' with the aid of her employees flown in from across the land. Following on from her role in orchestrating an orgy of real wages, jobs and conditions cutbacks for her 'Very Best Corporate Friends For Ever' commencing in earnest during and after the COVID Lock Down. Prior to the 'Bunga Bunga' proceedings, Queen Sally had slipped into an appropriate scanty, see through outfit emblazoned with gold dollar signs. It was held in Claassens's former extensive wine cellar which had been refurbished by compulsory 'moonlighting' union office staff as a luxurious Sauna/Spa with gold plated taps, crystal chandeliers and other expensive fixtures. As the well heeled crowd entered, they were startled to observe some union reps which Secretary Claassens had generously allowed to attend as a reward for their efforts for the festivities, queuing up to enter via the 'tradesmen's entrance!' Some of the guests quizzed Claassens about the bizarre non-egalitarian behaviour. Stunned by the enquiry, Claassens fumed, "We, Professional Union leaders have no time for all that democracy and equality garbage a certain underground paper preaches! Just imagine the grass roots running the Union. It would be horrible, absolute chaos!"

SYDNEY BUSES NEWS

The Smoke & Mirrors of the Two Tier EBA Campaign

Tempe Depot News

Sparks: What are your thoughts on the Two Tier RTBU/TWU EBA campaign?

Tempe Driver: In the middle of July 2023 the EBA campaign was finalised. I heard we secured 3.2% pa rises. (Editorial Comment: the current CPI is 6% pa and the likely actual rate of inflation being much higher due to spiralling rents, food prices, power charges, etc. The official inflation rate for the 12 months ending in March was 7 percent, while the Wage Price Index increased by just 3.7 percent over the same period. So in reality there is no wage rise, but real wages cuts. Also the Federal Budget in May 2023 maintained the Super Guarantee's legislated increase to 12%. From 1 July 2024, the Super Guarantee will increase to 11.5%. It will continue to increase by 0.5% on 1 July each year until it reaches 12% in 2025. So the real wages cuts is much worse taking account of the Super increases.) No mass stop work mass meetings of all union members in Region 6 were held. The deal was voted upon at depot union meetings. According to the union officials allegedly 90% approved it. In terms of its contents, from what I have heard it will mainly favour the Transees (those who were recruited to Transit Systems following the privatisation of the STA) rather than the ex-STA drivers.

An interesting development with NSW Public Sector wage rises, is that according to latest news ALP NSW Premier Minns has now reneged on his election promise to abolish the NSW Public Sector Wage Rises Cap. He is reintroducing it through the back door. In the case of the Teachers' EBA he gave the nod for a 4% pa pay rise and .5% for Super for the first year of their 4 year EBA, but from the 2nd year onward the 2.5% pa wages Cap is to be reintroduced. (STOP PRESS: According to ABC TV Report: Latest news is that the Govt. agreed to between \$4,000 to \$9,000 increases for different teacher grades but only for permanent teachers which amount to about 60% of the workforce. It is for the first year of the EBA which extends to the end of 2024 ravaged by income tax and super increases with likely nasties in the EBA clauses fine print and foreshadowed budget cuts to recoup the pay rise. The



corporate media and union bosses have conjured up the illusion all teachers will receive the pay boost. However with all the cut backs in the EBA fine print and budget cuts it may mostly be an illusion as well. Pay rises for the rest of the EBA period have not been determined.)

Sparks: What are your impressions with the shifts?

TD: There has been quite a bit of discrimination against ex-STA drivers at the depot by management. As a result of the better conditions of the RTBU/STA EBA which has been in force since privatisation and the Traineeship system whereby new drivers conditions are much worse, than for the older/ex-STA drivers. For some time now the Transees were getting the much longer shifts rather than the ex-STA drivers. Now with the shortage of drivers the ex-STA drivers are now getting their share of these much longer shifts and so improving their wages.

Leichhardt Depot News

Sparks: What are your impressions of the latest developments with the Two Tier EBA campaign?

Leichhardt Driver 1: In mid July the EBA campaign was finalised following a vote approving it. As part of the EBA we receive the alleged pay rise without making major concessions to the bosses. Management backed off from their initial demands to attack our 5 weeks per year recreational leave and sick leave entitlement. They also

backed down from demanding that we clean our buses after our runs. So many of us weren't so opposed to the EBA. However it is unclear to me about the situation of the so called 'traineeships' in regard to the new EBA. It was introduced under a previous RTBU EBA before the privatisation of the STA whereby the traineeship was extended from 6 months to 2 years. Resulting in much worse conditions and pay for these drivers. They have been heavily exploited by the bosses.

Sparks: What are the ramifications of the approval of the EBA?

LD1: Currently there are two rosters in operation. One for the ex-STA RTBU members and the Transees who were recruited following the STA's privatisation and often TWU members. Both rosters will now be merged. So consequently all the PM's and other rosters will become one roster. Seems the new rosters are likely to disadvantage ex-STA drivers in regard to wages.

Sparks: What is other news?

LD1: Following our previous rep Tom going on sick leave and leaving the job, a new guy was elected. He is continuing to do a good job and is very approachable. Electric buses are continuing to be introduced into the depot fleet. It seems likely the bosses and the Govt. intends for the fleet to become eventually completely electric buses.

Sparks: What are your impressions of the EBA?

Leichhardt Driver2: Many at the depot amongst the ex-STA drivers went along with voting for its approval as the campaign had gone on too long. The union rep also encouraged us to agree to it as he indicated we were unlikely to get anything better. Associated with our voting for the EBA was the payment of a lump sum bonus. However, the bonus to entice us to agree to the EBA gross amount is likely to be significantly depleted due to income tax. It seems likely the EBA provisions will disadvantage those on the broken shifts in regard to wages. There certainly should be equality on the job. Currently the new drivers only get 4 weeks annual leave. As of mid August the EBA has not been implemented.

Sparks: What are other issues?

LD2: For many years now and associated with the complete implementation of the cashless Opal system which replaced the 'green machines', the bosses have imposed on us a cut back to our sign on/off time as we now don't do cash handling. Prior to the change we had 10 minutes. This time has been reduced to 8 minutes and with staff buses to 9 minutes. As this corner cutting involved thousands of drivers the bosses would be saving a considerable amount of budget money. The bendi shifts are still continuing at the depot.

BURWOOD DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What are your impressions of the RTBU/TWU Two Tier EBA

campaign?

Burwood Driver: As of early August, the new EBA provisions had not been implemented. Regarding the issue of wages associated with the campaign, this situation for us has been ridiculous. There have been numerous Opal fare increases over the last 4 to 5 years. However, we have only received one pay rise in this period.

Sparks: What's the latest with the union?

BD: For some years the TWU has been fighting the RTBU for coverage of drivers in Transit Systems Region 6, prior to privatisation, the STA (State Transit Authority). We have been advised recently that the TWU has won this fight in the Industrial Court. We have been directed to join the TWU. Meanwhile on the depot level the RTBU has done nothing much for us with the EBA campaign being very long and drawn out and a range of depot level issues. So as of late July I and many other former RTBU members at the depot have joined the TWU.

Sparks: What are other issues at the depot?

BD: We are continuing to have serious problems with the cleaning of the buses at the depot. In the early morning, the buses are supposed to be sparklingly clean. In reality the buses are often still dirty. It seems this poor level of cleanliness stems from budget cutting by management and their attitude of seizing any opportunity for corner cutting to save money. Other news is that we are continuing to face a significant shortage of drivers at the depot. We lost several routes to Kingsgrove such as the 480 and 483. While the 439 was cancelled.

STOP PRESS: 3/9/23 Free Opal Cards for all NSW Bus Drivers

To help overcome the crippling shortage of bus drivers, the NSW Bus industry Taskforce is recommending free Opal Cards for drivers. So as to encourage the recruitment new drivers and the retention of existing drivers at Bus companies.

Bus drivers on Queensland's Gold Coast hold more fare-free days

22/7/23 From WSWs Report: Transport Workers Union (TWU) members and other bus workers from global bus conglomerate Kinetic on Queensland's Gold Coast are continuing limited industrial action in their long running dispute for a new enterprise agreement. TWU members turned off their ticketing machines for three days from Wednesday, giving passengers free rides. The action followed fare-free days in June and May.

The union ended a series of half-day and one-day strikes in February by drivers, refuellers and cleaners after it struck a pay deal with Kinetic. Workers had not been consulted and opposed the deal which provided paltry pay increases that took drivers'



base rate to just \$30 an hour, and cleaners/refuellers to just above \$23 an hour. The TWU tried to justify February's betrayal by saying it would deliver a pay rise until a new two-year enterprise agreement could be negotiated with the company.

Separately from this week's action, workers covered by an officially-registered Independent Bargaining Representative (IBR) group will turn their ticketing machines off next Thursday and Friday.

Kinetic bus drivers in Queensland continue industrial action in long running pay dispute

Transport Workers Union (TWU) members and other bus workers from three Queensland subsidiaries of global bus conglomerate Kinetic turned off their ticketing machines for three days on Thursday 24/8/23 in their long running dispute for an improved enterprise agreement. The action by drivers from Clarks Logan City Buses, Sunbus and Surfside, Southeast Queensland, followed a 24 hour strike on August 16 and fare-free days in June and May.

The TWU ended a series of half-day and one-day strikes in February after it struck a pay deal with Kinetic. Workers had not been consulted and opposed the deal which provided paltry pay increases that took drivers' base rate to just \$30 an hour, and cleaners/refuellers to just above \$23 an hour. The TWU tried to justify February's betrayal by saying it would deliver a pay rise until a new two-year enterprise agreement could be negotiated with the company.

The workers, including drivers, refuellers and cleaners, are fighting for a higher pay

increase, higher standards of safety and better consultation in a new enterprise agreement. They are determined to improve on the substandard deal struck by the union in February.

Canberra bus drivers reject extending weekend work

2/6/23 From WSWS Report: Transport Canberra bus drivers at a four-hour stop work meeting at 10 a.m. on May 25 rejected the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Labor government's plan to extend weekend rosters with no real increase in staffing levels. The plan was part of Chief Minister Andrew Barr's proposed enterprise agreement currently being negotiated with the Transport Workers Union (TWU).

Workers accepted the government's proposed pay offer which would increase drivers' base salary from \$41.72 per hour, as of June 2022, to \$47.21 per hour by December 2025.

Workers rejected the government's plan to trial increasing the frequency of buses on weekends with an offer of a 15 percent penalty rate and a new part-time weekend category, where ordinary hours would be limited to weekend work only and to a maximum of 15 shifts per depot.

A TWU spokesperson described the government's claim that the offer would boost the number of weekend drivers as 'tokenistic.' He said that there were not enough bus drivers rostered on during the week, which meant those currently employed were doing too much overtime to qualify for weekend work.

The ACT government, with the full support of the TWU and ignoring opposition from commuters, reduced weekend services in 2019 because of the continued cancellation of buses due to a lack of drivers. The union never took up a genuine struggle to force the government to increase its driver workforce. The government announced that recruitment of additional staff was planned but that would not commence until May 29 next year.

VIC. BUS NEWS

ABC Melbourne and Regional radio 774 yesterday Monday (7.8.23) had a phone-in over safety on buses. Many people who travel are concerned over personal safety on public transport.

The TWU spokesman for Vic./Tas. branch gave an extensive interview on the threat to drivers safety as well. Many drivers have been assaulted, verbally abused and spat on by unruly customers, usually disaffected youth.

The TWU has ongoing negotiations with the State government over improvements needed in the system. The government plans to make transport available 24 hours a day heightens concerns.

VIC. RAILWAY NEWS

In this issue of Sparks we will discuss the latest fare reductions plus the number of freight lines that have been booked out of service. Conductors, Drivers and Station Staff will discuss these issues. As in previous issues of Sparks names have been changed.

Sparks: Can you explain to our readers the reduction in passenger trains fares since March 31st?

Shem: As a result of promises made by both Political Parties in the last State Election, fares on V/Line services have been reduced. If the Liberals had been returned the fares were to be reduced from January 1. The Labor Government was returned and set March 31st as the day to commence the new fare structure.

Sparks: What is the new fare structure?

Archie: The new fare structure is on average \$10.00 single to anywhere in Victoria and \$5.00 for Concession. The zone extends 60 kms over the State Border. Return fares are double single fares.

Forsyth: There is a catch with these new fares.

Sparks: What's that?

Reggie: Peak and Off Peak is now abolished and Family Savers have been discontinued. Children under 18 no longer travel free being charged half fares.

Shem: The boundaries interstate are Merimbula, Holbrook, Berrigan, Deniliquin in NSW. Mount Gambier, Bankstown and Pinnaroo in South Australia. The reduced fares are not available on V/line Bus Services beyond these points. We do not know if these fares are available to Bombala or on XPT from Melbourne to Albany.

Archie: Train units are still the same and as usual some Bairnsdale and Albury trains are reduced to 3 car Velocity trains if a unit is defective. In one instance an Albury train arrived at Seymour as a three car Velocity train, over crowded. We don't know how the Conductor managed.

Rastus and Roscoe: As we have said in previous issues of Sparks we drivers feel sorry for the conductors. They have to sort out the problems and if there is a complaint they cop it from Human Resources.

Sheona: If a passenger complains he is usually given a free ticket.



Sparks: What about the V/Line bus services?

Forsyth: Fares on these services have been reduced. These bus services are under the umbrella of Public Transport Victoria.

Sparks: What are the main freight lines that had been booked out of service.

Rastus: The lines are Toolamba to Echuca, Castlemaine to Maryborough and Eaglehawk to Inglewood.

Roscoe: On a number of these lines the main traffic was grain and due to consolidation of Grain Received areas, VICTRACK who owns the lines say they are not viable. In other words if these lines come up for major works VICTRACK says they are not worth repairing.

Archie: If these lines are closed V/Line hands the line back to VICTRACK to dispose of the assets. This has happened in the Strathmerton to Cobram line. No hope of the Passenger service returning.

Shem: Track can be removed from these lines booked out of service. All V/Line has to do is to get permission from the Minister of Transport to remove sections of track and Point work to use elsewhere. As these lines are laid in heavy rail, it saves V/Line the cost ordering new rail.

Ahmed: With the Castlemaine to Maryborough line there is a group based in Maryborough that wants a passenger service restored from Geelong via Ballarat and Maryborough to Castlemaine then Bendigo. This group was active in both 2014 and 2018 State Elections about restarting the services and the local radio did mention

the removal of infrastructure.

Roscoe: With the Eaglehawk to Inglewood line a group is campaigning to run a local passenger service from Bendigo. A Container Terminal was proposed for Marong for an inland port. There is Housing developments around the area.

Forsyth: Despite the Boom Barriers being intact along the line the junction at Eaglehawk has been removed plus sections of track between Bridgewater and Inglewood. What hope is there for a return to service?

Archie: The Echuca line is closed for the next six weeks for track upgrade. We do not know if the Deniliquin Rice train will operate. If there is rice to clear at the mill it will have to be sent by road as the line to Toolamba is out of service.

Sparks: What about the line between Ballarat and Wendouree?

Shem: This line was singled from Wendouree to Ballarat with the second line extended to service local industrial sidings.

Roscoe: The situation in 2023 is all industry served by rail has closed down. The old Down line is still intact but sections of Pointwork and Rail have been removed for use elsewhere.

Roscoe: When the major works were carried out on the Ballarat line the Double line should have been restored from Warrenheip to Wendouree. This did not happen so as to save money.

Forsyth: If a train is delayed you have to wait at Ballarat in the train until the other train arrives. Sometimes trains for Wendouree arrive late at Ballarat and the train terminates and Wendouree passengers wait for the next train.

Sparks: Once again we have run out of space. VICTRACK and V/Line due to budget cuts are forced to remove infrastructure from lines that are mothballed which makes return of services a later date difficult.

Rastus and Roscoe: In having the final say, removing points and sections of track are a false economy. We hope that community groups keep campaigning for the retention of these lines.

In this issue of Sparks we will discuss West Coast Railway who operated the service from Melbourne to Warrnambool between the years 1993 and 2004. As in previous issues of Sparks names have been changed.

Alvin: In March 1993 rumours were circulating about this as well as withdrawal of services on Country lines, two lines were to be operated by the private sector.

Rastus and Roscoe: This was confirmed at the end of April 1993 with an announcement that South Geelong to Warrnambool was to be operated by a company named Victorian Railway Company Pty Ltd trading as West Coast Railway. Seymour to Shepparton was to be operated by an old established

Company Hoys Roadlines, but only from Seymour to Shepparton with the service to Cobram being replaced by Bus.

Ahmed: The two operators had to operate the same number of trains that were operated by V/Line per week.

Sparks: What was the difference between the two companies?

Shem: Hoys had operated School Bus, Charter and route services around Wangaratta for over forty years. Hoys were to hire carriages and locomotives from V/Line with their own on train staff plus station staff at Shepparton.

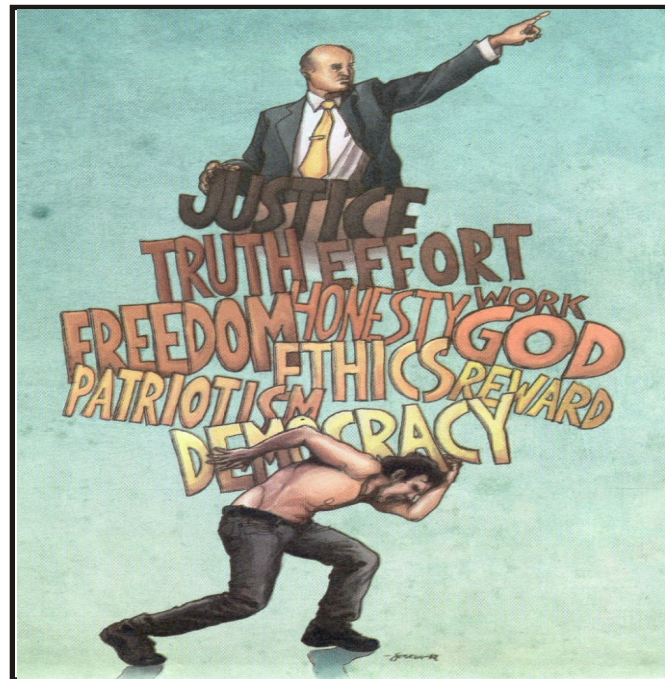
Rastus: West Coast Railway said in a press release they were to operate their own trains with train crews based in Warnambool and Geelong where their operations were to be based.

Sparks: What was the attitude of the Union?

Ichabod: The union was opposed to the two services going out to tender but the union was in a dilemma. If they opposed private trains, buses would replace them and the union would be hated by the communities of both Warnambool and Shepparton. The union commenced negotiations with both companies.

Sparks: Who owned Victorian Railway Company?

Ichabod: Victorian Railway Company was formed by a group of Railway Enthusiasts who were board members of a Tourist Railway who operated a Tourist Railway from



Queenscliff to Drysdale. From day one they stated their operation was to be Customer oriented and would provide a superior service to V/Line.

Shem: West Coast went shopping for a number of Locomotives and Carriages on winning the tender which were declared surplus by the PTC due to service cuts.

Sparks: Were V/Line staff made redundant?

Rastus: Drivers who were made redundant were transferred to Freight operations. Some drivers decided to take

redundancy or transfer to other depots.

Ichabod: It was the same with conductors and station staff. Some were picked up by the New Company mostly conductors and station staff. Others transferred to depots where there were vacancies, while others decided to take redundancy packages. Staff who worked in freight divisions at these locations kept their positions.

Rastus: V/Line decided that both companies could run their services from both Warnambool and Shepparton to Melbourne. No V/Line or train staff were to operate these services. V/Line drivers were to operate the trains.

Sparks: What was the story about West Coast planning to use Retired Drivers to operate these trains.

Roscoe: This rumour was circulating but the Drivers' Division knocked it on the head. It was mentioned in a Union newsletter, but V/Line drivers operated the trains through to 2004.

Sparks: What was the story of West Coast obtaining a lease of the former Ballarat Loco Depot?

Shem: West Coast was able to lease Ballarat Depot at a peppercorn rent. They obtained publicity in the local media but what was not mentioned was Ballarat Depot was closed with staff being made redundant.

Rastus: When the PTC announced Ballarat Locomotive Depot was to close as a maintenance depot. A manager tried to force the staff to take a Voluntary Departure Package. The staff refused and wanted redeployment. Some were redeployed but the majority were given a Targeted Separation Package which was superior to the VDD package but not superior to the Package that was given to Ballarat Tramway Employees when the Ballarat Trams closed.

Ichabod: As well as a Govt. subsidy to operate the service West Coast Railway was given a Govt. grant to commence the operation. This Govt. grant was unique because the British Railways were being privatised and the companies in Britain were not given a start up grant. When the PTC was privatised in 1999, no start up grant was obtained.

Archie: The grant was questioned by the Auditor General in one of their reports. This and other reports led to the Auditor General having his powers stripped by the Kennett Govt. in 1997. The Auditor General's powers were restored after the 1999 State Election.

Forsyth: The date for the major above cuts to V/Line plus transfer of trains to West Coast and Hoys was set for the week end of the 21st and 22nd of August.

Archie: The 22nd saw Hoy's take over of the Shepparton service, but due to issues of Accreditation, V/Line continued to operate the trains with West Coast taking control of the attended stations on the line. On train catering was taken over by West Coast from 29/8/1993.

Ichabod: With the exception of Drivers, West Coast commenced full operations on

Sept. 19th. This was given large publicity along the line with a Headboard on the locomotive and a send off by the Minister of Transport.

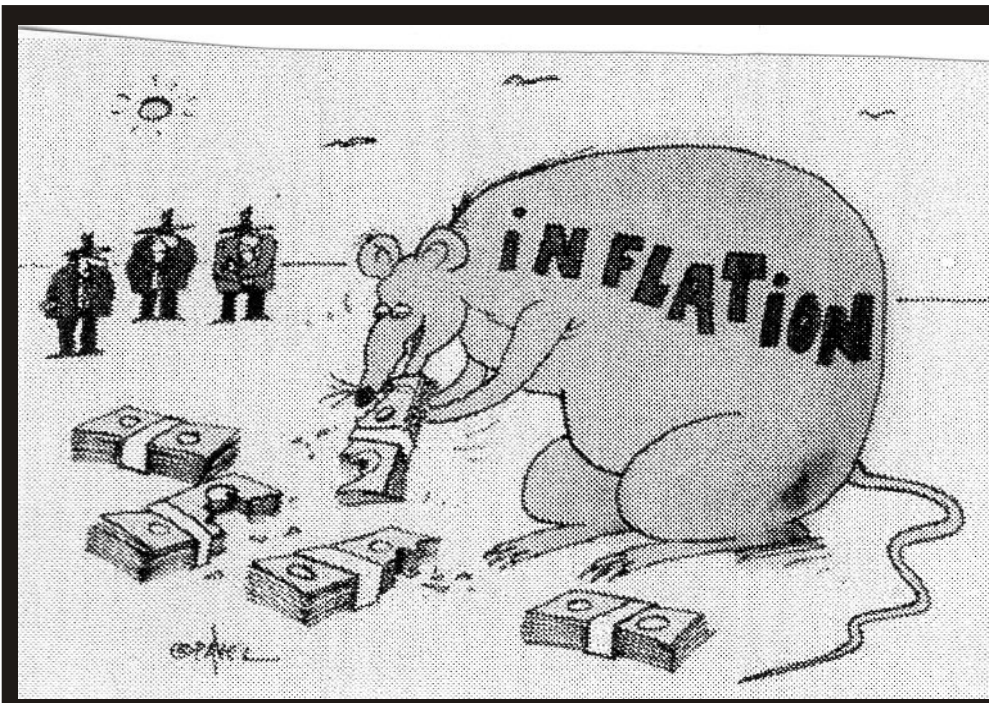
Sparks: Unfortunately we have run out of space but the West Coast and its relationship with V/Line will be discussed in a future issue of Sparks.

Melbourne commuter train workers vote in strike action ballot

From WSWS Report: 9/9/23 RTBU members, including train drivers, station staff, authorised officers, signallers and other rail operations staff from commuter transport provider Metro Trains Melbourne, will vote at the end of September regarding future industrial action.

Workers have twice rejected Metro's sub-inflation wage rise offers put to them during negotiations. Industrial action could include a ban on overtime and unlimited 48-hour stoppages.

The RTBU has been trying to reach a deal with Metro for a new agreement since negotiations began in March. Metro's latest wage offer was for 4 percent annual increases in a four-year agreement, well below the current annual inflation rate of 5.6



percent for Melbourne.

The last pay increase was 2.5 percent in January, a real pay cut. Workers want pay rises in line with cost-of-living pressures and job security as new ticketing and signalling systems are rolled out.

INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT WORKERS NEWS

U.K. RAIL NEWS: TICKET OFFICE CLOSURES

31/8/23 The decision by transport bosses to close nearly 1,000 ticket offices across the UK network would discriminate against older people and those with disabilities and force them to stay in their homes.

The transport bosses claim ticket offices are no longer needed because most passengers buy online, through smart phone apps or at station machines. This discriminates against older people because they are less likely to book online or use apps. They plan on axing ticket offices at 974 stations, nearly everyone in the country, and say staff will be re-deployed to platforms and concourses.

This decision follows pressure by the Tory government for rail operators to cut spending after the Covid pandemic led to a drop in passengers.

Over one million people have given up their broadband contracts, most because they cannot afford them, and so have far less access to online booking.

Older and disabled people rely on staff at ticket offices helping them. Ticket machines do not have a full range of tickets, they do not take cash, and don't always offer a good deal. In addition, ticket office staff have a wide knowledge and experience of travel on the rail network and can find the cheapest and best routes to destinations.

Ticket office sales still stand at 180 million journeys, so the line that ticket offices are no longer being used is tosh. In the drive for everyone to get a smart phone, be online. The drive for everyone to be online, have a smart phone, use AI, marginalises those who cannot afford to do so, or are reluctant or puzzled how to use these technologies.

In the process, older people, disabled people and the impoverished are pushed aside. Thanks to ACG

U.K. RMT & ASLEF Railway Strikes

The RMT strike on Saturday 2 September, is designed to affect the travel plans of millions of passengers, particularly families returning from holidays and football supporters travelling to matches. It will also hit travellers arriving back from overseas holidays by air, many of whom would normally complete their journey home by rail.

The Aslef walk-out on Friday 1 September was announced after the RMT strike was called. The aim: to deepen the disruption to passengers.

Typically with a one-day strike, travellers switched to adjacent days; with two days in which tens of thousands of trains are cancelled, the pressure on Thursday 31 August and Sunday 3 September was even more intense.

The train drivers' action also hit weekenders attending a range of smaller end-of-summer events, including the British Country Music Festival in Blackpool, the Sundown Festival in Norfolk and the Moseley Folk Festival in Birmingham.

Overseas visitors arriving at English ports and airports for a weekend or longer stay were affected, along with people who were stranded abroad by the collapse of the air-traffic control system on Monday 28 August.

Sunday morning services will also be hit. Southern, which runs trains in south London, Surrey and Sussex, warns: "We expect first services to be extremely crowded and you may not be able to board your chosen service. You are advised to start your journey later on in the morning."

Why is Aslef calling its members out on strike?

Mick Whelan, Aslef's general secretary, told The Independent: "This is a political dispute caused by the government. If it had been an industrial dispute left solely to the employers and the unions, I think it would have been resolved by now.

He called the changes stipulated as part of the deal as "basically a land grab for terms and conditions right across the board for a 20 per cent pay cut."

He said: "That isn't going to happen. This is going to go on until the government give us a solution."

What does the RMT say?

The basic position as stated by the general secretary, Mick Lynch, is: "Our industrial campaign will continue as long as it takes to get a negotiated settlement."

But on the day of the most recent RMT strike, Saturday 26 August, Mr Lynch wrote to the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), representing train operators, with a more conciliatory tone: He said: "I believe that both parties are of the view that we need to navigate a way through the dispute."

He outlined a "road map" that includes:

Backdating a pay rise for 2022-2023, with negotiations for 2023-2024 to start on 1 December 2023.

A guarantee of no compulsory redundancies.

Deferring further discussions on changing working arrangements until 1 December 2023 at the earliest.

"Workforce Reform" proposals should be negotiated with individual train operators.

Mr Lynch said: "All of the change agenda that the companies wish to propose will be known in full and then addressed appropriately through the respective machineries in each of the companies."

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.

New Zealand bus drivers strike

From WSWS Report: Bus drivers in Auckland, New Zealand's biggest city, held a series of rolling stoppages this week. Beginning Monday, the strikes in the first hour of morning shifts affected up to 700 bus trips daily during peak hour commutes on routes operated by NZ Bus. The Tramways Union said no resolution to a pay dispute has been reached through mediation. The drivers are seeking the same \$30 per hour wage paid to drivers in Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. Auckland drivers are currently paid an average \$26.76 per hour. The list of demands also includes a reduction in shifts from 14 to 12 hours. Although the Labour government subsidises private bus companies' wages by \$61 million, in cities around New Zealand there are major shortages, cancellations and service disruptions. The unions have agreed to \$31 per hour for the minority of Auckland drivers on 'flat rate' contracts, but for most on traditional contracts including overtime and penalty rates NZ Bus is offering that rate only starting from March 2024. Despite media claims that the strikes were held at short notice, a First Union spokesperson said it was not a surprise to NZ Bus, and the unions had delayed strike action twice during the last month as negotiations continued 'fruitlessly.'

