

Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

Lead up to Xmas! Time to organise grass roots committees on-the-job & wage a united Rail-Bus-Tram Direct Action Campaign to settle accounts with soaring inflation and achieve the "Real Demands!"



NSW Railway News p.3; New TfNSW Strategy p.3; Sydney Tram News p.17; Sydney Buses News p.14; NZ Railway News p.24 Vic. Rail News p. 20; "We can work together to Make Australia Great Again!" p.9; Letters P.7:

RTBU ELECTIONS 2026 RIGGED! P.8

EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

Some of the most important news lately has been the new flare up in the Trump Regime's continuing war with Iran steadily stoking the flames of inflation. According to what economist Bill Mitchell wrote earlier this month, "real wages have declined in the last 3 consecutive quarters and are now 6.4 per cent lower than they were in the June-quarter 2020." "Over the last 25 quarters, there have been only ten that have delivered real wages growth." The real value of workers' wages is now at the same level as in September 2011 eliminating a decade of wage increases. Making a mockery of enterprise bargaining and its so called wage rises. The lead up to Xmas is a great opportunity to organise on the job to build grass roots committees to wage united rail, bus, tram direct action to "settle accounts" on the wages front and achieve the "real demands".

According to WSWR Report, 1000's of transport workers across Australia stopped work on Thursday 10/9/26, in a national 24-hour strike involving truck drivers, forklift operators and warehouse workers employed by FedEx, Border Express, K&S ChemTrans, Qube and Sadleirs. However TWU officials have been working to limit the impact/scope of the action and likely selling out the campaign. With the officials having EBA's being struck already at the largest trucking companies with wage rises not meeting the soaring inflation or recouping previous losses.

Meanwhile in Transport for NSW and particularly in the NSW Railways, the RTBU officials are giving "right of way" for a new management strategy involving making adverse changes defying EBA clauses and provisions. (See article page 3.)

In Sydney Buses, we look at management changes and a worsening situation in Region 6 with rosters and associated inadequate bus running times. However we can report on a positive development at Leichhardt Depot. We also look at the EBA campaign being waged in the Northern Sydney depots. (See article page 14.) In regard to the Light Rail in Sydney, we look at a worsening safety situation associated with fires on Trams, a nefarious effect of privatisation. (See article page 17.)

Sparks welcomes contributions in the shape of poems, articles and cartoons by transport workers. Please send to PO Box 92 Broadway 2007 NSW or via our web site www.sparksweb.org

SPARKS WEB SITE - www.sparksweb.org

N.S.W. RAILWAY NEWS



EXPOSE: TfNSW's Internal Strategy to Undermine Worker Rights: And the Silence Enabling It

A coordinated system of consultation failures, fragmented rule-making, managerial compliance, and union inaction is reshaping the working conditions of thousands inside TfNSW.

Workers across TfNSW have encountered the same pattern: decisions imposed without consultation, entitlements re-interpreted without authority, and internal directives treated as binding despite having no basis in the Enterprise Agreement. These incidents have often been dismissed as isolated misunderstandings.

They are not misunderstandings. They are not isolated. They form a deliberate, coordinated strategy.

A strategy designed to circumvent laws, the Enterprise Agreement, and even TfNSW's own policies without ever admitting it.

This expose' outlines how that strategy operates, how silos enforce it, how management at all levels willingly participates, and why unions have remained silent while rights are being eroded.

The Strategy: Circumvent, Fragment, Enforce

The behaviour occurring across TfNSW follows a consistent, deliberate pattern:

1. **Circumvent consultation** Decisions affecting workers are made without proper consultation, despite clear legal and Agreement requirements.
2. **Replace Agreement provisions with internal directives** Silo - specific rules are invented and enforced as if they were contractual obligations.
3. **Fragment interpretation across silos:** Each silo applies its own version of entitlements, creating confusion and preventing coordinated challenges.
4. **Diffuse accountability through structural ambiguity:** Workers and managers are told: "A decision has been and we've been told to implement it."
5. **Enforce compliance through managerial obedience:** Managers at all levels willingly issue unsupported instructions, even when they know they cannot explain them.

This is not incompetence. This is a strategy- a deliberate structural method for reshaping workplace rights without renegotiation, consultation, or scrutiny.

Silos: The Engine Room of the Strategy

TfNSW's internal architecture is built on silos: Rostering, Payroll, HR, Operations, and others. Each silo operates as a self-contained regime with its own internal logic, its own interpretations, and its own unofficial rule book.

How silos enforce control

Silos are not accidental organisational structures. They are functional tools, also known as compartmentalisation:

They fragment responsibility so no one can identify who authorised a directive.

They control information so workers only see the version of "rules" each silo wants them to see.



They create inconsistent interpretations, so challenges become isolated and easier to neutralise.

They prevent workers from recognising patterns by ensuring each silo operates differently.

Above these silos sits TfNSW itself - coordinating the overall strategy while allowing each silo to carry out its part.

This layered structure ensures that every decision appears local, disconnected, and untraceable, even when it is part of a coordinated plan.

Management: The Enforcers of Unsupported Directives

Management at TfNSW does not resist this system. Management enables it.

Across all levels, managers routinely:

Issue instructions they cannot explain;

enforce rules that do not exist in the Agreement;

repeat directives without knowing who made them;

refuse to provide reasons because they do not have any;

comply instantly with any instruction passed down, regardless of legitimacy;

Attempts to obtain clarity from managers are futile. Not because managers are powerless, but because managers are willing participants in the strategy.

They do not question directives. They do not seek justification. They do not challenge unsupported instructions. They simply enforce whatever they are told, without hesitation and without accountability.

This is not passive compliance. It is active enforcement.

Managers have become the delivery mechanism for a system designed to bypass the Agreement while maintaining the appearance of procedural legitimacy.

Union Silence : The Most Damaging Element

While TfNSW expands its internal rule-making and managers enforce unsupported directives, the unions remain silent.

Workers have noticed. Workers are asking questions. Workers are not receiving answers.

The silence is now impossible to justify.

Three explanations are being openly discussed among workers:

1. Ineptitude: A failure to recognise the scale and deliberate nature of TfNSW's strategy.

2. Complicity: A willingness to allow TfNSW to reshape workplace rights without resistance.

3. Misplaced priorities: Where "social justice" branding, external activism, and political posturing take precedence over the core responsibility of defending members inside TfNSW.

Whatever the reason, union silence enables the strategy. It accelerates the erosion of rights. It leaves workers exposed to a system designed to circumvent the Agreement.

The Consequences: And Why Members Must Recognise the Strategy

Workers inside TfNSW are facing:

a coordinated plan to bypass consultation;

a structural system designed to fragment accountability

A network of silos used to manipulate both workers and managers; a growing reliance on internal directives that override the Agreement; a union movement that appears unwilling or unable to confront any of it; This expose is not speculation. It is a description of what is happening now. The question is no longer whether TfNSW is undermining rights. The question is why unions are allowing it.

By Railway Johnny

LETTERS

Dear Sparks

It has been brought to attention that at the farewell function for Andrew Holt, RTBU representative at Blacktown, selected attendees were provided with wristbands entitling them to complimentary alcoholic drinks funded by the RTBU. While other union members required to purchase their own drinks. If this is accurate, it raises a legitimate concern about fairness and transparency. Given that RTBU activities and expenditure are ultimately funded by members' contributions, members could reasonably expect to be treated equally rather than seeing certain individuals receive privileges paid for from collective union funds.

J.

Station Under Staffing

Dear Sparks

I've caught 6 trains today. 2 more to go later tonight.

So far, I've spent 58 minutes waiting on platforms and was asked / told I needed to wait for the next train because there wasn't enough time for the CSA to board me.

I get that there's a procedure, but I missed my south coast train this afternoon because I was delayed by staff at two stations because they didn't have time. At one station, they had to choose between boarding me or boarding another passenger on a different train on the adjacent platform with both trains pulling in at the same time.

I was okay about them going first because I thought I had time.

And then the lift breaks down while I'm in it at Central station. So I miss the South Coast train by a few seconds!

I normally have a pretty good rapport with most of the staff at stations I

regularly travel to, but today was not a good day.

I'm just hoping the guard remembers to tell the next guard. I'm on the train when they change crew.

P.

RTBU 2026 ELECTIONS RIGGED!

Dear Sparks

The RTBU officials didn't tell members about nominations for the coming union elections apart from mention on the RTBU Express Web Site. They put nothing on notice boards. They sent no emails to members and nothing in the journal regarding the period for nominations in the elections.

I am an elected member of the salaried division and weren't even told. So I missed out being on the ballot. However, the RTBU officials tapped those they wanted on the shoulder to nominate.

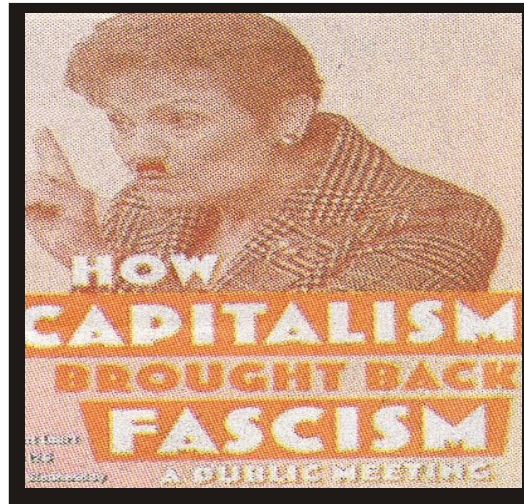
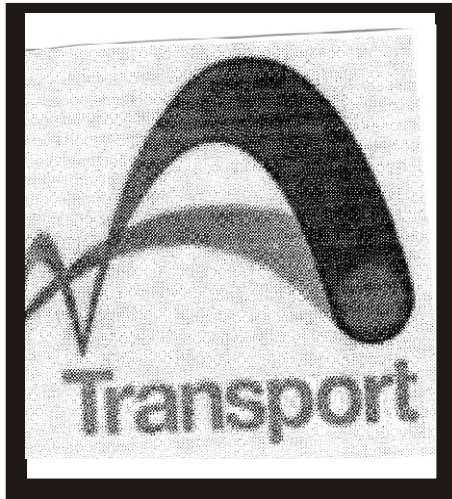
I complained to the Electoral Commission and they stated all is in order. If this goes ahead then I will be making a formal complaint against the Electoral Commission.

Railway Jeffery

Pacific National train crews continue industrial action

WSWS Report 22/8/26 Train crews employed by freight operator Pacific National have expanded industrial action after enterprise bargaining negotiations failed to resolve disputes over rostering, safety and wages. Members of the RTBU on Wednesday began a 7-day overtime ban, as well as a ban on driving any locomotive that does not display an RTBU campaign sticker.

The dispute centers on Pacific National's rostering practices, which allow management to alter shift start times to respond to operational disruptions. The union argues these arrangements undermine work-life balance, contribute to fatigue and create unnecessary safety risks. Workers are also seeking more weekends off, stronger disciplinary protections, tighter controls on unsafe driving practices and annual wage increases of 5 percent.



“We Can Do Business Together to Make Australia Great Again!”

Warning: Political Satire

A special top secret Rightwing ALP machine conference was held following union elections where Toby Warnes was unanimously elected as RTBU NSW Secretary courtesy of ALP quiet achievers in the AEC(Australian Electoral Commission) and ASIO. It was held at 10 am 10/12/26 in the RTBU's Pitt Street Sydney offices in the conference room. It was to focus on a new political alignment by the union and the courting of a certain “Red Head” and establishing an illicit and discrete political relationship with her and her party.

Toby's Union Office Renovations Inspired by Colourful Entrepreneurs

On the day of the conference, union reps coming to attend from far and wide, on accessing the entrance of the union office, were confronted by some startling and bizarre signs. Advertising pole dancing, stripper performances and steamy intimate encounters. Some of the startled reps confronted one the few remaining



office staff left at the union office. Others had been sent on a trip to the dole queue following Secretary Warnes' downsizing of union office staff as part of a new efficiency drive to resolve a union financial crisis, inspired by the private sector. Some of the reps cried out, “what in hell is going on in the union office these days? What's this all about? We were expecting advertising about where we would attend this conference about a new but discrete re-orientation of the union associated with Pauline Hanson and her party.” As they pointed to the signs.

The receptionist replied, “that's just Toby! He's undergone a transformation since becoming State Secretary. He's no longer a drab conservative, strait laced and old fashioned Unions NSW/Sussex Street ALP Bruver style union boss. He's become flamboyant and colourful. Like certain private sector entrepreneurs he now admires and inspires him such as John Singleton, Darryl McGuire, Alan Bond and James Packer. Now he's always chirping some cheery corporate jingles like “money, money, you can't get enough of it” or “money, money, it makes the world go round.” He's sublet most of the union office to various adult entertainment and other businesses which have formed partnerships with the union and the ACTU. Such as the trio of the ACTU, Gina Rinehart and Pauline Hanson joint venture “Intimate Corporate Companions for Every Occasion” and the choice, “Young Blondes of Sydney and Melbourne for Senior Executives”. It's been rumoured that following current ACTU Secretary Sally McManus's and President

Michelle O'Neil's retirement from their seats on the plush row, they will become joint CEO's of this outfit as a side hustle when not bird watching."

RTBU and ACTU Business Partnerships

Another union office girl, chipped in, "on announcing the ACTU duo's retirement, they were showered with praise in the press. Some accolades included, "the longest-serving ACTU leadership team since 1969," and McManus "the longest-serving ACTU secretary since Bill Kelty." The Australian's Ewin Hannan hailed their willingness to collaborate with the big end of town: "McManus and O'Neil successfully worked with Scott Morrison through the Covid pandemic, even striking up a relationship with then Business Council of Australia boss Jennifer Westacott and then workplace relations minister Christian Porter, who memorably told me that he had become "best friends forever" with McManus."

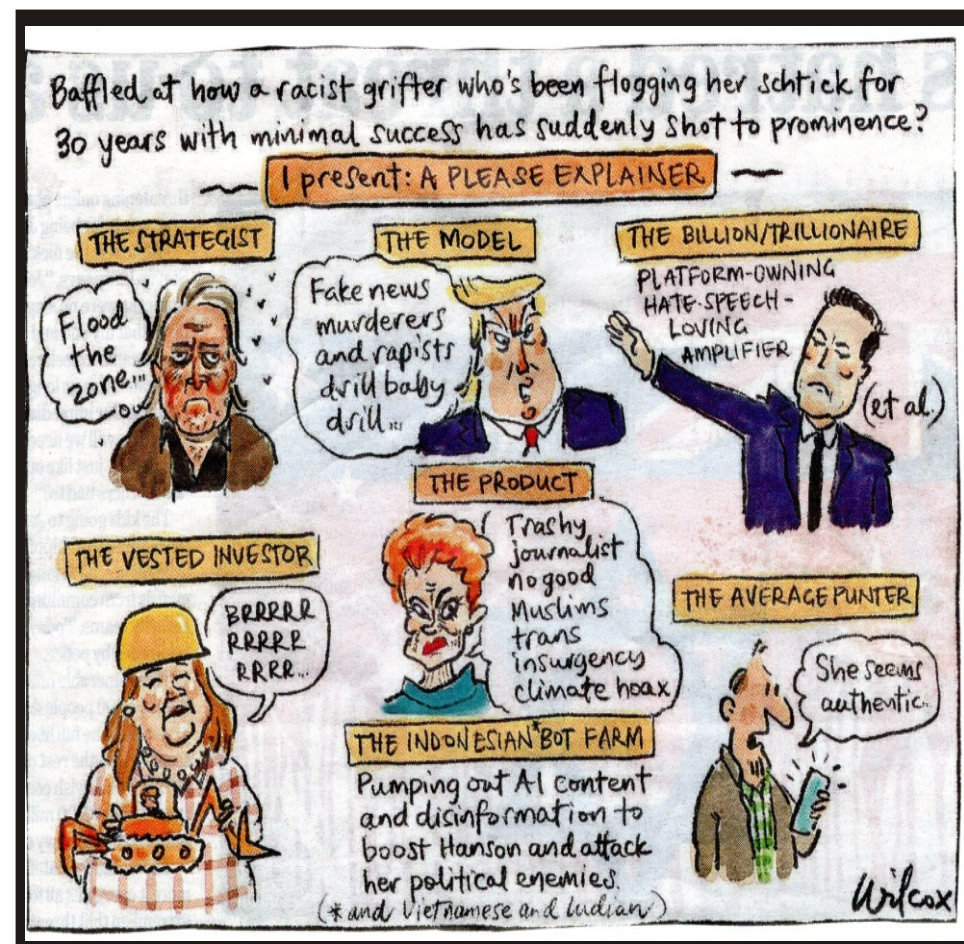
She continued, in the NSW Secretary's office, Toby has even had put on its walls, framed favourite quotes of a certain Tim Gurner, No. 159 on the 2026 Australian Financial Review Rich List and corporate "influencer". Such as "we urgently need unemployment to rise to 40% or even 50%!" and "we need pain in the economy!" so Australia can become great again!"

Union Reps meet an old Familiar Face at the union office, David Babineau formerly of the Bus & Tram Division

The reps were startled by another addition to the union office. Part of the union offices had been renovated into a luxurious wine bar where they encountered its manager an old familiar face, but now in disgrace, and pushed sideways in the union. "Low and behold!" they yelled, "it's David Babineau, our former NSW Secretary of the Bus and Tram Division, of all people!" The wine bar was another ACTU/RTBU operated franchise. Babineau had been sacked from his position in the union following a scandalous indiscretion. His daughter had now found gainful employment moon lighting as a topless, bikini clad bar maid in the operation. Her day job was in a massage parlour in the ACTU and their business partner's new venture located at the union office.

Report on Banquet with the Red Head, her Gal Pal and their Corporate Consorts

The conference opened with Toby, regaling the audience about a union delegation consisting of himself, National Secretary Claassens and other officials which just returned from an intimate dinner party at the Mining Billionaire Gina Rinehart's mansion perched above Brisbane behind high walls. Toby raved about the splendor of Gina's mansion. The junket only cost the union a bargain basement \$10,000 each plus the cost of hiring a private Lear Jet and of course the hiring of



limos with chauffeurs attired in the RTBU uniform for each of the delegation to attend the event venue with naturally five star accommodation for the entire delegation.

One of the reps became cheeky and inquired “Toby, why didn't you catch a more economical train, try some hitch hiking and find some rock hard bunk beds at Brisbane’s not so salubrious Salvation Army mansions with a likely minus 5 stars rating, with the big fella Alex probably requiring two bunks, if the union's so broke?” The rep joked that perhaps for old time sake Alex wouldn't mind driving the train. The rep received some dark looks! Angrily Toby roared in response, “are you insane? The union has to maintain its prestige in the eyes of important business and political leaders. We would be looked at with disgust or even pity by them if they heard that we pulled such stunts with our professional union leaders. Imagine if Madam Rinehart heard about it? She'd probably have her butler slam the front door of her mansion in our faces! While deriding us as representatives of uncivilised, uncouth “lower classes” only worthy of entering her palatial premises through the tradesmen entrance via a dark alley!”

Toby continued, “The dinner was a great opportunity to get acquainted with various captains of industry, of course madam Gina Rinehart and Pauline Hanson our next Prime Minister. Pauline and Gina were excited and delighted by the union delegation's ideas for 24 hour shifts and trains running 24 hours, and AI to have right of way in the NSW Railways. They proclaimed me as a most modern, forward looking and idealistic union leader.” Toby did note one difficulty the union delegation experienced at the luxurious do. When Gina's servants brought in a tray of ancient vintage wine bottles from her cellar, the delegation missed the services of their unofficial union wines expert good, old David Babineau formally Secretary Bus & Tram Division. He could have helped the delegation greatly navigating the treacherous waters of the wines on offer from Gina's vintage collection imported from the most illustrious of French wineries.

In his concluding remarks, Toby lectured the audience on the importance of the union being aware of how the political wind was blowing. That the union needs to have a bet on different political horses. The ALP of course but also now the Red Head with her party rising on the political scene. To get on the good side of the Red Head, the union would need to contribute a few millions into her electoral war chest. He emphasised, “obviously we will need some of you reps and officials to help out “discretely” with the hard yards on election days for Pauline's party.”

SYDNEY BUSES NEWS



Leichhardt Depot News

A Positive Development for a Change

Sparks: What's the latest situation with management at the depot?

Leichhardt Driver: In the previous May-June 2026 edition of Sparks, if you read that issue the reference is to “Bat Shit”. There was mention of a new depot manager at the depot. He was in reality an acting Depot manager. He had moved his personal belongings into the depot manager's office. So it seemed he definitely had the job.

However something “mysterious” occurred and he did not get the job. He has returned to his staff supervisor position. It seems word got around in management circles about his record of “unorthodox methods” and bad relations with drivers. We now have a former Leichhardt depot manager as depot manager. He held previously an area manager position.

Sparks: How is the magazine going down at the depot?

LD: I have noticed quite a bit of interest. With many finding the content amusing. Especially the “Bat Shit” statement in the last issue.

Sparks: What is the situation with the depot yard?

LD: There has been a lot going on in the depot yard associated with the introduction of the electric buses and the devices to recharge them. There have been cables everywhere. While the lanes have been narrowed. As a result there has been some bus accidents in the yard. However two drivers who were hauled into the office over bus crashes were not actually driving the buses involved. One was on his day off and not at the depot that day and another was not in the yard at the time of the accidents.

Kingsgrove Depot News

Sparks: What's the situation at the depot?

Kingsgrove Driver 1: The big issue for most of us remains the rosters. We are angry with them, but it's not clear to us how to tackle the issue. The rosters are rubbish! They are steadily getting worse. In particular the bus running times are steadily deteriorating. As a result we are facing a constant erosion of our lunch/meal break times.

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

Kingsgrove Driver 2: I'm a part timer, our rosters don't change for better or worse. They remain at 7 hours 30 minutes. Other news has been an influx of the new electro buses into the depot. So far I haven't noticed any issues with them. However I prefer the older diesel buses.

Tempe Depot News

Sparks: What's the situation at the depot with the rosters?

Tempe Driver: In regard to issues of shift length I personally have no problems. However we are having a continuing very serious problems with layover breaks and associated bus running times. Mostly the layover breaks are inadequate with only some being adequate. In many cases you reach the terminus and you have to start your run back again. There is absolutely no time to have some exercise and going to the toilet. Often there are no toilet facilities available at the terminus. You feel guilty to take more adequate layover break time because commuters are waiting for your buses at the run commencement stop.

Sparks: What is other news at the depot?

TD: At Tempe the depot fleet has received 10 new electro buses. So far we haven't had any problems with them. Particularly regarding such issues as cables and recharging

facilities.

Keolis Downer bus drivers in Northern Sydney begin industrial action for better pay and conditions

WSWS Report 27/6/26: Keolis Downer bus drivers in Sydney's northern beaches are taking industrial action for an improved enterprise agreement. Rail Tram and Bus Union members stopped wearing uniforms on June 2 and on June 18 turned off their bus Opal card readers following seven months of failed negotiations.

As well as a pay increase that keeps pace with the increasing cost of living, drivers want the new agreement to resolve issues like the driver shortages, cancellations of services and overcrowding. The union claimed Keolis Downer was ignoring these key issues.

Dream job as a Sydney bus

Max Maddison
State political reporter

When a job driving public buses for Keolis Downer, a private operator on Sydney's northern beaches, was posted on a recruitment website, Brendan Cunningham couldn't believe his luck.

"The job sounded amazing. Almost too good to be true," the 62-year-old says.

The promise of free airfares, three months of accommodation and the lifestyle was too appealing to pass up, he says.

But the South African-born Cunningham resigned last week, lasting less than five months. He said the job was extremely stress-

ful, intense and emotionally taxing, with the company offering little support.

Cunningham is among New Zealanders recruited to address Sydney's bus driver shortage, which has fallen from more than 500 at its peak to 168 last month. According to the NSW government, nine out of 10 bus drivers who are trained and begin work, leave the industry within six months.

Cunningham moved to New Zealand in 2008, and began driving coaches and school buses before the pandemic. Already looking to migrate to Australia, he stumbled upon the Keolis Downer job.

Within two weeks of his first day

in March this year, Cunningham says he was driving a bus with passengers on Military Road - a busy arterial road that bisects the lower north shore - an experience he describes as "overwhelming".

"I'd never driven a vehicle in Sydney, let alone a bus. My stress levels were through the roof. There wasn't anybody that I could go to to confide in and speak to about it," he says.

A spokeswoman for Keolis Downer said 14 drivers were currently employed through the New Zealand recruitment program. Those who received relocation assistance signed a written agreement. If they left before the completing the agreed period, Keolis

driver quickly turned sour

could recover relocation costs by withholding pay and leave entitlements.

"To date, no additional action has been taken to recover relocation costs from participants in the program," she said.

"All new drivers complete a fully paid induction and on-the-job training program before operating services independently. Drivers are rostered and paid in accordance with the enterprise agreement, workplace laws and fatigue management requirements."

One of the most stressful aspects of the job, Cunningham said, was trying to navigate the city's streets; finding his way between where a route ended; and the next

one began. Much of his spare time was spent on buses and also in his car trying to learn where he needed to drive.

Cunningham says his roster pushed him to the brink of exhaustion because he had to drive eight to nine hours across six days, including finishing with a Saturday night shift.

He criticised the cleanliness of Keolis' buses, saying he regularly began his day removing "beer cans and burger boxes" so people would not have to pay to ride on dirty buses.

Transport Minister John Graham credited Keolis for trying new ways to address the driver shortage, but said the contracts im-

posed by the company "appear harsh".

"Bus drivers aren't getting paid enough for what is a tough job. That is why the driver shortage is impacting on passengers," he said.

"We need to pay drivers more and that's why the government has contributed \$200 million to improve the wage offer from bus contractors to their drivers. That is good for passengers and good for drivers."

The Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU), which represents drivers on the northern beaches, said the contractual requirement to repay thousands of dollars if they resigned within 12 months left workers feeling trapped.

The first July 11 fire occurred at 7:53 a.m. as a tram approached the King Street stop in the city centre. Smoke was observed rising from the roof of the trailing carriage and passengers were evacuated.

The second broke out at 10:22 a.m. near Moore Park, again forcing an evacuation after smoke was seen coming from the roof. This tram, vehicle X21, had already caught fire once before at the Randwick depot on February 27, where it was "isolated within the depot for investigation" before being returned to service.

Following the second July 11 fire, the entire fleet was temporarily withdrawn. A reduced fleet returned to service the next day after Transdev conducted an internal safety assessment.

A spokesperson for the company said it had "identified that the incidents involved batteries from a specific batch, which have now been withdrawn from service." Vehicles still operating, they assured the public, "do not use the affected batch of batteries."

However, the batteries that caught fire last month were installed as part of a replacement program that was "brought forward" after the three fires in February and March suggesting that the problem may run deeper than a single dodgy production run.

Transdev Australasia chief executive Brian Brennan told the Sydney Morning Herald, "We didn't anticipate that we would have the level of difficulty with the new batteries."

Asked who supplied the batteries, Brennan claimed not to know, describing them only as "industrial batteries also used in the aviation industry." Nevertheless, he confidently assured the Herald the trams in service are "perfectly safe."

In an attempt to downplay the seriousness of the repeated fires, Brennan claimed the lead-acid batteries self-extinguish within three to five minutes and that the fire would not spread to other parts of the tram.

The Office of Transport Safety Investigations (OTSI), the state transport investigator, published an "Interim Factual Statement" on July 14. It documents the six fires since February, all originating in the same roof-mounted battery system:

The first two fires occurred on February 27, one at the Randwick depot and another at the Royal Randwick stop while the tram was in service.

The third incident was on March 5, when a tram caught fire at the Surry Hills stop with flames visible on the roof. Passengers reported banging on the driver's cubicle to alert him, suggesting no automatic warning system had detected the blaze. The vehicle was driven to the next stop. The entire fleet

Australia: Multiple fires on Sydney trams in 1 day highlight deepening safety crisis

By Leonard Johns

WSWS Report 7/8/26 On July 11, two light rail vehicles caught fire in separate incidents on Sydney's CBD and South East network, forcing the evacuation of passengers and the suspension of services. This puts the tally of Sydney tram fires at six since February.

The CBD and South East light rail lines are operated by the ALTRAC Light Rail consortium, comprising Transdev and Alstom, in a "public-private partnership" with the NSW government. Under this arrangement, the state owns the infrastructure while a private consortium operates and maintains the network for profit.

was withdrawn from service and returned later the same day.

A fourth fire occurred on June 29. Bystanders reported seeing smoke coming from the tram's roof as it left the Town Hall stop, and flames were visible once it reached the Queen Victoria Building (QVB) stop, where passengers were evacuated and firefighters extinguished the blaze.

While it is not mentioned in the report, this year is not the first time Sydney's light rail vehicles have encountered serious battery-related issues. In April 2020, a tram battery overcharged at Randwick depot, causing an explosion that blew off the battery compartment cover. At the time, OTSI concluded that contributing factors included control software corruption and that "neither Alstom's validation processes nor fault monitoring processes were sufficient" to detect the overcharging, which had also affected other trams.

The July 14 statement does not differ from OTSI's previous report in March, except to include the details of three most recent fires. It provides no insight into how the investigation is proceeding or probable causes of the incidents, and does not indicate when the final report will be issued.

Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) divisional president Peter Grech complained that Transdev "had not been transparent" about the source of the fires, telling the Herald he suspected the problem was not the batteries, but the trams. Grech rhetorically asked Transdev, "What's going on? What are you doing to fix it?" A similar question could well be asked of Grech and the RTBU: Why has the RTBU taken no action to halt the safety crisis developing in the public transportation system?

Grech declared after the March 5 fire that "without immediate action, there's a real risk to commuters and light rail workers." But four months on, the reality is that the RTBU has ensured that workers continue to operate trams that have caught fire six times this year.

Instead, the union is promoting illusions in investigations conducted by Transport for NSW that is, by management and OTSI. Such investigations are invariably protracted whitewashes, covering up the responsibility of private operators, governments and the unions in presiding over unsafe conditions.

What the safety regulators and union bureaucracies are covering up is the fundamental cause of deteriorating public transport infrastructure and safety: capitalism, under which social need is entirely subordinated to private profit.

The privatisation of Sydney's public transport was initiated under the NSW Labor government of Bob Carr (1995-2005) and has been extended by every administration since. Buses, light rail, ferries and the metro have been handed to private consortia. Only the heavy rail passenger network remains in public hands.

While the RTBU bureaucracy occasionally postures as an opponent of

privatisation, they have been complicit at every stage. The union leadership has ensured workers have never been mobilised against the sell off and has enforced the demands of private operators and the government in successive enterprise agreements throughout the public transport sector.

Light rail and other public transport workers need to build new organisations of struggle, rank-and-file committees, led by and accountable to workers, to oversee safety inspections, demand full disclosure of maintenance records, and implement a ban on the operation of vehicles unless they are proven safe, to workers' satisfaction.

VICTORIAN RAILWAY NEWS

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

Sparks: What is the issue of Velocity trains with three carriages having to stop at the same end of the platform as six carriage trains?

Rastus: A new manager for drivers has been appointed. He comes from outside and he claims some drivers of six carriage Velocity Trains are stopping short on the platforms. He has introduced a new rule where all Velocity trains whether they be of six or three carriages have to stop at the end of the platforms.

Sparks: Was there any consultation with the Union over this new rule?

Roscoe: One word: "No".

Allison: The first conductors knew of this rule was when three carriage trains were stopping at the end of the platforms. The Customer Service Managers were not informed and it was only drivers who told the conductors what had happened.

Ichabod: An example is Morwell where the platform on the UP platform is six cars but the Booking Office is at the Traralgon end of the platform. As a result the three car train goes to the end of the platform. Regardless of the weather, passengers have to walk to the end of the train. This also happens at Ballarat, Traralgon and Lorne.

Sparks: What is the situation at Footscray?

Roscoe: Footscray, Sunshine, Tarneit and Wyndham Vale can take nine carriage Velocity Trains in Peak Hours. Nine car trains are to be introduced on the Melton

Line.

Rastus: At these stations, the Velocity trains stop where the six car trains stop.

Ichabod: A number of drivers operating these trains of three cars are stopping short on the platforms. The passengers in these trains are happy with the arrangement, particularly during wet weather when the train stops under the Verandah.

Allison: At Footscray, a three car train stopped under the Verandah. A customer service employee who was on duty that day DOBBED the driver of this train into management.

Sparks: What happened?

Roscoe: The driver faced management. We don't know what disciplinary action he faced, because another rule has been introduced where if you front Human Resources, you are not allowed to talk about these issues.

Allison: The majority of conductors and station staff did not like what happened in Footscray. You see all new starts are told during training that its their duty to DOB in their fellow workers. A number of people have informed these trainers they will not DOB in fellow workers.

Archie: This role is causing tension between train drivers and conductors.

Sparks: Is there a way to solve this impasse?

Rastus: Yes, there is. In the Suburban Electrified area, they used to run 2 car, 4 car and seven car trains. In off peak, trains were reduced in size to cater for the demand.

Roscoe: In every station in the electrified area, there were signs on the light stanchions, two car, four car and seven car. These signs stated where these size trains were to stop.

Rastus: V/Line at the country stations have signs painted on the platforms. These signs are painted yellow. They should be painted white. These signs for 3,6 and 9 cars should also be placed on light poles on stations in the V/Line area. In the Suburban Area, a sign V/Line train 3 or 6 cars could be placed on light poles with agreement with Metro Trains. These signs only need to be erected at twelve Metropolitan Stations.

Ichabod: This suggestion could be implemented but knowing V/Line management the answer for the suggestion would be "NO".

Sparks: Once again we have run out of space.

Rastus and Roscoe: In having the final say, V/Line should erect 3 and 6 car stop signs on light poles at V/Line Stations. As for the slug who dobbed in the driver at Footscray station, drivers have a word for you, GET OUT OF THE RAIL INDUSTRY!

In this issue of Sparks we will discuss an event which happened fifty years ago in



Victoria with the Rail System.

Sparks: Could you discuss this event?

Alvin: In the Victorian Parliament in September 1976, the Minister of Transport commented that a number of Country Passenger Services were to be replaced by buses under contract to the Victorian Railways.

Rastus: Most of the services to be replaced were operated by Rail Motors. These Rail Motors were built between 1920 and 1952. The latter built Rail Motors were nearing the end of their economic life.

Sparks: Were any new Rail Motors purchased?

Roscoe: In early 1970 two Rail Motors were purchased for the Ararat Portland service. Two similar Rail Motors were purchased from the NSW Railways in 1975. These Rail Motors were to operate certain Ballarat and Geelong trains.

Ezra: The Rail Motor services to be replaced were Bendigo Sea Lake, Korong Vale, Robinvale, Bendigo Cohuna, Bendigo Echuca Deniliquin, Swan Hill

Piangil, Kerang Koondrook, Ballarat Linton, Castlemaine Maryborough, Tallarook Mansfield, Traraglon Maffra and Nyora Wonthaggi.

Irvine: The passenger service to Port Fairy was to be replaced by buses beyond Warrnambool.

Ichabod: Before 1975 Country Passenger services were shut down after a Public Inquiry. The closure procedure was part of the Railways Act. The closure could be refused. The Inquiry was held by the Transport Regulation Board. The TRB would issue a licence to a Bus Company to operate a replacement service with passenger prices set by the TBA. Most of the objections to Passenger train closures were that rail tickets could not be used. The services to close in 1976 could be operated by the Railways but now with services operated by buses under contract with the Railways.

This idea was copied by Ireland where a large number of Rail Services were replaced by Buses operated by Rail Operators, but in Victoria the services were to be contracted to Private Bus Operators. The Victorian Railways was not to run these buses.

Rastus: The first service to be replaced by this arrangement was Murton to Hopetoun which closed in July 1975. Despite objections, the closure was accepted by the population in the district.

Alvin: What the Public was not told was that after two years if passenger numbers did not pick up the Railways would go to the TRB to discontinue the service.

Ezra: The Rail Services were replaced between November 1976 and February 1979. Employees who worked these services were redeployed if they wanted to remain in Railway Employment.

Rastus: What surprised Railway Employees was the service from Woodend to Daylesford was not included in the round of closures.

Irvine: This service was reprieved for Political reasons. Due to deferred maintenance, the track deteriorated and after the speed was reduced 20km on the branch. The service was replaced by buses in 1978.

Rastus: The Passenger service closures continued. Due to a large Grain Harvest in 1978-1979 to provide the train crews to move the harvest, certain passenger trains were replaced by buses. Some of these services never returned. Examples being Benalla, Yarrawonga and the Cross Country service from Geelong to Ballarat. The closure of the passenger service to Yarrawangee was confirmed in 1979. Geelong to Ballarat in 1981.

Irving: There were further cuts to Country Passenger Trains in 1980 and 1981. These service cuts will be discussed in future issues of Sparks.

Alvin: In 1981 a revival of Country Passenger Trains in Victoria on the main lines happened. A new "Deal for Country Services" was introduced and despite



further cuts to services in the 1990's improvements have been made to services to Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Seymour, Traralgon services. Finally most of the buses that replaced the services discontinued in 1970's are still operating under contract to V/Line.

Rastus; What should be remembered about the 1950's, 1960's, 1970's was both Political Parties did nothing to improve Country Train services. Hardly any new rolling stock was constructed. It was the Unions and Community Groups who fought to retain what country services remain in Victoria today.

NEW ZEALAND RAILWAY NEWS

15/6/26 WSWs Report: Four passengers and two workers were injured when a passenger train in Wellington crashed into a concrete stop block south of Khandallah station on Saturday June 6. The incident raises serious questions about safety on the rail network in New Zealand's capital city.

According to media reports, the crash occurred around 7.20pm when a two-car suburban commuter service traveling from Johnsonville to Wellington entered a runoff siding a dead-end safety track whose purpose is to intentionally divert out-

of-control trains just south of Khandallah station. The train, traveling at 30 kilometres per hour, collided with a concrete buffer at the end of the siding.

Nine people were on board: seven passengers, a locomotive engineer and a train manager. Six were taken to hospital, including three children.

Tonia Haskell, managing director of Transdev Wellington, which operates the trains, later confirmed both workers sustained head and concussion injuries. One worker is still in hospital as of this writing.

Local resident Chris Myatt, one of the first people to reach the crash scene, told Radio NZ that passenger seats had buckled and been pushed upwards by the force of the impact. “When I entered the driver’s cabin there was a lot of blood,” he said.

Bede Crestani, who lives below the station, told RNZ that the buffer prevented the train from continuing beyond the railway boundary and towards nearby houses.

The Transport Accident Investigation Commission (TAIC) has opened a formal inquiry. Chief investigator Louise Cook told the media it would investigate the train, staff, infrastructure, signaling systems and operational procedures.

TAIC investigations often take a year or longer to complete. The agency has said it will release interim findings on the cause of the crash as soon as possible to ensure that they are acted on.

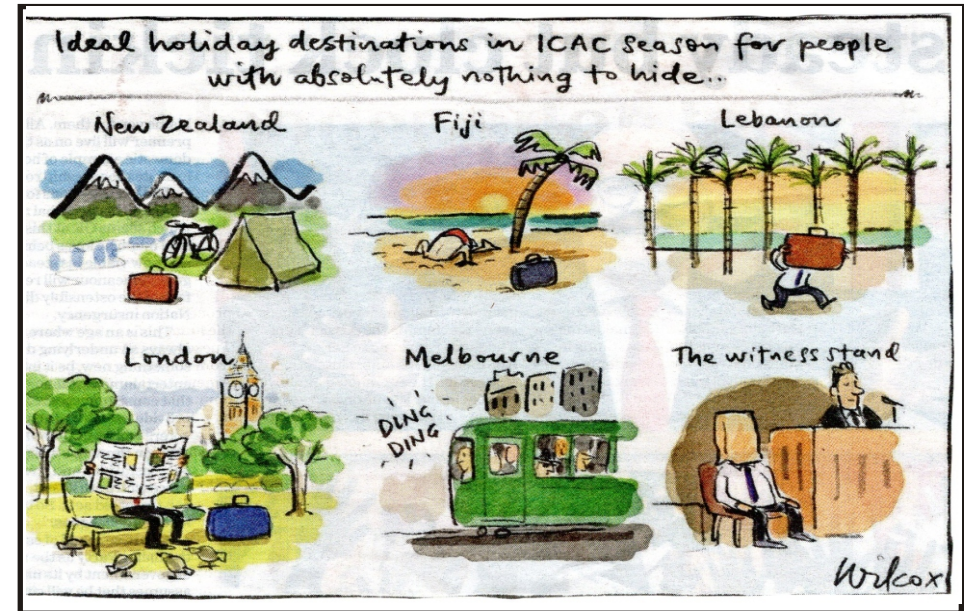
It is not clear why the train entered the siding. Transdev has said publicly that it may have passed a red light termed a signal passed at danger (SPAD) but this has not been confirmed. It is not known whether the accident involved a signaling fault, a braking problem, other equipment malfunction, a problem with the track, human error or a combination of factors.

The protracted nature of the official investigation itself raises serious concerns. Thousands of passengers use the Wellington region’s rail network every day. The Johnsonville line remains suspended and replaced by buses while repairs and investigations continue. No date has been announced for the full restoration of rail services. Management has not explained what measures are being taken now to ensure a similar incident cannot happen again.

Despite these unanswered questions, government officials declared that all safety mechanisms had worked as intended.

Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) chairman Daran Ponter, a Labour Party member, told the New Zealand Herald that the “safety system” was “designed to stop the train moving beyond the railway line. That’s exactly what happened in this case.” Without the concrete block, installed in April 2025, “the train could have found itself in somebody’s backyard.”

Deputy Prime Minister and acting transport minister Winston Peters similarly



wrote on X that “the network is designed with multiple layers of safety.” If a train passed a red signal at Khandallah, it would be diverted to the runoff line “to prevent any risk of collision with another train.”

While the incident was “concerning,” Peters said, the diversion had prevented “any risk of collision with another train” and the “carriages also appear to have responded as designed while the images are alarming, two critical safety systems appear to have functioned as intended.”

The minister did not mention the fact that six people two thirds of those onboard were hospitalised.

The assertion that the system functioned as intended does not answer whether the system itself is adequate. The safety mechanism in question involved diverting the train onto a siding where it struck a concrete barrier with enough force to cause serious injuries.

The Saturday evening service had only a handful of passengers. Had a similar incident occurred during a weekday peak-hour service carrying hundreds of people, including schoolchildren, the consequences could have been catastrophic.

The Khandallah crash was not an isolated event. Wellington’s rail network has experienced repeated signaling failures, infrastructure faults, service disruptions and ongoing operational problems associated with ageing infrastructure and

decades of underinvestment.

According to Stuff, if investigators ultimately determine that the Khandallah accident involved a train passing a red signal, it would be the fourth SPAD involving Wellington passenger services in the past 12 months.

One of the most important issues highlighted by the crash is the absence of automatic train protection technology, which is standard in many countries.

On June 11 KiwiRail chief metro officer David Gordon told Radio NZ that Wellington's signaling system is "much less forgiving" than modern systems used in Auckland, Australia and Europe. Unlike those places, Wellington does not operate the European Train Control System (ETCS), which can automatically reduce speed or apply the brakes when trains exceed authorised movement limits or pass signals incorrectly.

Gordon estimated that implementing the ETCS in Wellington would cost between \$500 million and \$750 million. Ponter told RNZ that an ETCS had been discussed for years but governments had not provided the necessary funding.

The TAIC recently recommended the use of such technology after a near-collision involving a freight train near the town of Morrinsville in 2024. That incident involved a train passing a signal at danger.

In February 2018, TAIC warned of a "heightened risk" of collisions near Wellington Railway Station, following a number of near misses. KiwiRail at the time raised the possibility of installing an ETCS on the network, but said it was not a priority.

Signal failures are also a recurrent issue. On May 25, 2026, a nationwide signal outage just after 9:00am stopped trains for almost half an hour.

Responsibility for Wellington's rail network is divided. The state-owned company KiwiRail is responsible for maintaining the rail infrastructure, while the GWRC contracts private operator Transdev, a French-based multinational company, to run the services.

There have been decades of privatisation, cost-cutting and pro-business restructuring by successive governments and councils. Infrastructure has aged, major upgrades have been delayed and investment decisions repeatedly postponed while workers and passengers face deteriorating conditions. Train workers face chronic staffing shortages, heavy workloads and roster pressures that contribute to fatigue.

Neither the current National Party-led coalition government nor previous Labour governments have committed the resources required to modernise the network. Last month's austerity budget provided just \$106.9 million for unspecified upgrades to Auckland and Wellington rail networks much less than would be needed for an ETCS in the capital.

The Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) has suppressed opposition to

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 f all decisions should be made by the union membership in the course of mass meetings.

2. The Spokespeople have no executive power f 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.

Only in this way will we see the creation of a democratic, united, fighting organisation which can stand up for the rights of workers and their families against unhelpful union officials, bosses, political parties and governments.

worsening conditions for decades. The union has not called a meeting of Transdev Wellington workers to discuss the Khandallah incident. Instead, it joined the company and politicians in promoting complacency. According to RNZ, RMTU Secretary Todd Valster "said train crashes were incredibly rare and this was the first significant incident involving these types of train."

Meanwhile, Transdev is telling workers not to speak to the media or to post comments on social media about the crash.

