

No. 179

May - June 2025

Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

Don't be Conned by Toby's Rail EBA Circus & Bogus Bonus Bribery! New Back Door push for DOO with NIF & other Trains and further nasties in the fine print of the EBA Clauses! Seize control of the Driver's Seat of the Campaign with grass roots committees to achieve the Real Demands! At least 14 days to assess full EBA doc. before ballot: rigged if required!



NSW Rail News p.3; Rail EBA Circus p.3; Letter p.6;
Sydney Buses News p.11; Vic. Rail News p.18; French Rail
News p. 25; Jo Haylen Downfall p. 6; Newcastle Bus News
p. 15; Electric Buses Scandal p. 16; Tas. Bus News p. 18;

EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

The most important news in the NSW Railways remains the drawn out Combined Rail Unions EBA (Enterprise Bargain Agreement) circus/campaign. In this edition we throw new light on 'the method in the madness' of Toby Warnes RTBU NSW Sec. delaying tactics. We look at the role of the EBA and the 'ring masters' timing in the circus, to provide a new back door for DOO (Driver Only Operation) on the NIF (New Intercity Fleet) and other new and re-furbished trains and privatisation pushes. (See articles page 3 & 5.) Other factors contributing to the EBA circus timing would be the obvious need of the ALP Godfathers to have industrial peace to help their mate Albo and the ALP in the Federal Election circus. They would also want to finalise the Combined Rail Unions EBA circus, before the EBA circus for the Metro gets revved up with negotiations commencing from late August. To head off any ideas amongst rail workers of a united much more effective industrial campaign.

The spider's web of the DOO and Privatisation conspiracy provides a key back drop for some mysterious personnel changes. Such as the kicking upstairs to RTBU National Secretary of Alex Claassens from the RTBU NSW State Sec. job and the down fall of Transport Minister Jo Haylen associated with a cooked up media scandal. (See article page 6.)

In Sydney Buses, we throw light on some RTBU/TWU 'monkey business' and a worsening speed up in drivers' jobs in Region 6 associated with new rosters. (See articles page 11.) We also throw light on a scandal regarding Electric Bus Procurement and industrial action in Newcastle Buses (See articles page 16 & 15.)

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

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N.S.W. RAILWAY NEWS

Opinion: Is the NSW Government Playing Dirty to Weaken Rail Workers' Deal?

By Railway Johnny



Sydney's rail workers are stuck in a tough fight with the NSW government over a new enterprise agreement, and the Fair Work Commission's (FWC) ban on union action until July 1, 2025, has made it tougher. The government wanted the ban to last until September 2025, hinting at a sneaky plan to force arbitration and push a weaker deal that could bring back driver-only operation (DOO) on the New Intercity Fleet (NIF). For workers: drivers, guards, and support staff: this dispute is a battle for decent pay, safe jobs, and respect. Let's break down the fight and why the September timeline smells like a set up.

The dispute kicked off when the last agreement expired in May 2024. The Combined Rail Unions (CRU) want a 32% pay rise over four years and a \$4,500 one-off payment, but the government's offering just 15%. For nine months, workers used work bans, slow trains, and sick days to push for a deal, causing chaos: like 90% of services cancelled on February 14, 2025. The FWC stepped in, saying the disruptions hurt commuters too much, and banned union action to give both sides time to talk. But

the government's push for a September ban, which could lead to arbitration forcing a deal, raises red flags.

Here's the battle: workers want fair pay to keep up with rising costs and a guarantee that guards stay on NIF trains for safety. The NIF, a \$4 billion fleet, started running in December 2024 with drivers and guards after years of union fights. Back in 2018, the government promised guards, but in 2019, it flipped and pushed DOO, where drivers handle everything using CCTV. A 2021 court ruling slammed DOO's safety risks: CCTV can miss kids or prams: leading to a 2023 deal to modify trains for guards, costing \$300 million.

The Conspiracy Angle: Why September? The government's September 2025 timeline isn't random. With only 8-car NIF trains running and modifications unfinished, September could mark when the full 10-car fleet is ready or safety checks are done. If the government drags this out, it could force arbitration, where the FWC picks the deal. Arbitration might give workers a weaker agreement: lower pay, no guard guarantees, or even a step back to DOO. This fits the government's old tricks: cut jobs to save cash and prep for privatization, like Sydney Metro's driverless trains.

What It Means for Workers:

Guards are crucial for safety, especially for kids or disabled passengers, and losing them risks accidents. Drivers would be overloaded without guards, making mistakes more likely. Support staff need pay that covers bills, not a cheap deal that leaves them struggling. The government's been dodging talks for 44 days, blaming unions for "wrecking" the network, while unions say it's stalling to wear them down. Both sides are slinging mud, but workers are caught in the crossfire.

This fight isn't just about pay. it's about keeping jobs safe and fair. If the government gets its way in September, arbitration could gut the agreement, leaving workers with less pay and no guard protections. Unions need to keep pressure on without losing commuter support, but the government's delaying tactics could be a set up to shaft workers and sneak DOO back in.

For Workers:

Keep Guards: Lock in the driver-and-guard model past 2027 for safe trains.

Better Pay: Push for a 32% rise and \$4,500 payment to match living costs.

Fight Smart: Negotiate hard but avoid commuter backlash to win public backing.

Rail workers power Sydney's trains: they deserve a deal that protects their jobs and wallets, not a government plot to dilute their rights.

Opinion: Are Rail Unions Missing a Chance to Fight Back with ILO Standards?

Sydney's rail workers are locked in a fierce battle with the NSW government over a new enterprise agreement, demanding a 32% pay rise over four years, a \$4,500 one-off payment, and guaranteed guard roles on the New Intercity Fleet (NIF). The Fair Work Commission (FWC) slammed the brakes on the Combined Rail Unions' (CRU) industrial action: work bans, go-slows, and sick leave: suspending it until July 1, 2025, to ease commuter chaos and push talks. The government wanted a longer ban until September 2025, hinting at a plan to force arbitration and ram through a weak deal, possibly reviving driver-only operation (DOO) to cut jobs and costs. For workers: drivers, guards, and support staff: this dispute is about fair pay and safe jobs. But why aren't the Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) and Electrical Trades Union (ETU) challenging the FWC's suspension as a violation of International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions?

The ILO, a UN agency, sets global labour rules that Australia follows, like Convention No. 87 (freedom to strike) and No. 98 (collective bargaining). These protect the CRU's right to strike and negotiate, rights the FWC's suspension arguably restricts by killing union leverage for four months. The government's stalling: dodging talks for 44 days and push for arbitration by September could weaken the agreement, slashing pay or guard roles. The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), which includes the RTBU and ETU, links unions to the ILO, letting them file complaints if rights are curbed. The ETU's Federal Court appeal to overturn the suspension shows some fight, but neither union has flagged an ILO challenge, despite precedent: like unions citing ILO breaches in the 2024 CFMEU crackdown.

Why the silence? The RTBU's quick back downs, like pausing a go-slow after government promises, suggest a cautious approach, maybe to avoid legal blowback or keep public support. The ETU, splitting from the CRU to negotiate alone, might be too focused on its court battle to push an ILO case. Both may doubt an ILO complaint's impact, as Australia's Fair Work Act aligns with ILO rules, and complaints take years. Yet, not using the ILO risks letting the government's delay tactics: possibly a set up to force DOO by September: win out, leaving workers with a raw deal.

For Workers:

Push Pay and Safety: Demand 32% and guards, using ILO-backed bargaining rights. Challenge the Ban: RTBU and ETU should explore an ILO complaint to expose the suspension's overreach. By Railway Johnny

LETTER

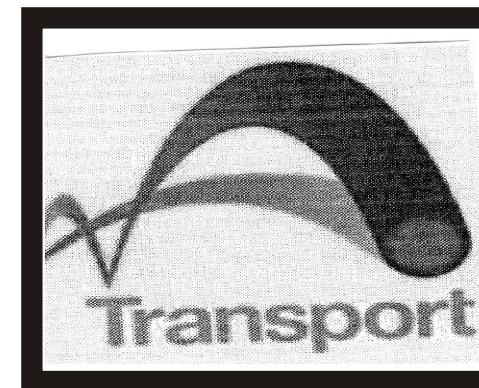
Dear Sparks

We are all waiting while the Industrial Commission puts together the new EBA. Management has been refusing to deal with the unions unless in the Commission. We are coming into year 2 of pay rises on 01/05/2025.

Yet workers still wait even with a cost of living crisis.

After the EBA is finalised, the real fireworks with new technology and AI will occur taking out many jobs.

Railway Jeffrey



The Fall of NSW Transport Minister Jo Haylen Warning: Political Satire

On Tuesday December 3rd 2024, the running of the first new South Korean built N.I.F. (New Intercity Fleet) train on the Central Coast line received a fanfare in the corporate media. Then NSW Transport Minister Jo Haylen basked in the media adulation for her accomplishment. The introduction of the new trains had been delayed by 5 years. NSW ALP Premier Minns also enjoyed the acclaim of his Government in the media. The media outlets deftly concealed the real reasons for the delay. Particularly the curious situation that despite the extended delay only two of the new trains were to be put in service. The media outlets gave credit to the RTBU officials for achieving various changes to the new trains. Covering up the key issue of a functioning guard's compartment on the new trains and the related

issue of the frustration so far for the D.O.O. (Driver Only Operation) push for the new trains. Setting precedents for other new train types such as the replacement for the XPT's and the "refurbished" Tangaras. In turn opening the flood gates to privatisation and the carve-up of the NSW Railways for franchises.

Meeting at Transport for NSW HQ

Flash Back to Thursday 16/3/23 10am when an emergency meeting was convened in the conference room at Transport for NSW Head Office. The meeting was held over a looming crisis in the NSW Railways over the issue of NIF renovations and the Bankstown line Metro conversion. The meeting was attended by Transport Minister Haylen, Mark Morey Secretary of Unions NSW, the CEO's of Sydney Trains, David Babineau acting RTBU NSW Secretary, Josh Murray Secretary of TfNSW and the CEO of Metro Trains.

Minister Haylen opened the conference following welcoming all the guests with a dire warning of a looming crisis over the Bankstown Line conversion and the need for urgent decisive action over the issue. David Babineau from the RTBU acting NSW Secretary, then addressed the gathering. Bizarrely and inappropriately he was slurping from a bottle of rough red concealed in a brown paper bag during his address. Apparently the cupboard of the union office cellar was bare from his and other officials over indulgence in fancy vintage wines. Babineau announced to the gathering of big wigs, "boys, a big crisis has built up in the union's loco division over DOO with the NIF. There is too much grass roots anger about the DOO issue. You'll have go along with the Court's ruling that DOO is unsafe and agree to renovations for a functioning guard's compartment on the initial few NIF trains. When the next rail EBA is finalised in 2025 you can put in the fine print of one of the clauses approval for DOO on all new and refurbished trains."

Mark Morey then intervened: "Jo, I've bad news for you, we and the RTBU are withdrawing our approval for the Bankstown line Metro conversion, unless you can provide the RTBU with a fake victory to con the members. Like having Passenger Journey Co-ordinator officers on the Metro trains. They have no actual industrial muscle. You can flick them off the job further down the track when the dust has settled."

Jo Haylen, feeling the pressure and facing a tough decision, replied "The Minns Government has been under heavy pressure from various multinational transport companies hungry for juicy franchises in Sydney and NSW Trains. Premier Minns will hit the roof if there is another set back with the privatisation. After all since the late 1990's we have faced continuous defeats. However I guess I have no alternative if we'll face serious direct action in the Loco Division over DOO with the NIF. The



Minister Haylen feels the heat from the media spotlight over the cooked up roots scandal

running of the new trains on the Central Coast line in Dec. 2025, will certainly enhance our electoral prospects in the Central Coast electorates." Haylen also okayed Moray's idea of the Passenger Journey Co-ordinator ploy with the Metro trains. She replied, "Yes Mark, that sounds a great idea to help con union members and smooth the way for our Driverless Trains takeover of the city rail system."

An urgent call received by Secretary Warnes at the Union Office

At 4pm on Thurs. 16th January 2025, Toby Warnes, new boy as RTBU NSW Secretary had just finished an inspirational speech to his coven of ALP loyalist henchmen amongst the union reps in his palatial room in the union office following the holding of a union executive meeting. He was attired in the new stylish RTBU T-Shirt emblazoned with the slogan '24 hour economy for Sydney! RTBU members demand 24 hour shifts in the NSW Railways to make Sydney City of Business!' He was handing out bundles hot off the press of new bright yellow stickers with the same slogan to his enthusiastic henchman to stick up on stations and depots. In his speech to the coven, he spoke lyrically about the need for 24 hour shifts in the railways to make Sydney 'a City of Business'. He confided with his henchmen,

"boys, members have coped with the 12 hour shifts as a 'temporary measure' for the 2000 Olympics which then became permanent. I haven't heard a peep of disgruntlement from them. They seem to be loving it. If I did hear a murmur of discontent, I wouldn't hesitate to meet the disgruntled elements on the job, of course accompanied by the CEO of Sydney Trains. I have a feeling I wouldn't be hearing any more murmurs of discontent from these union members!"

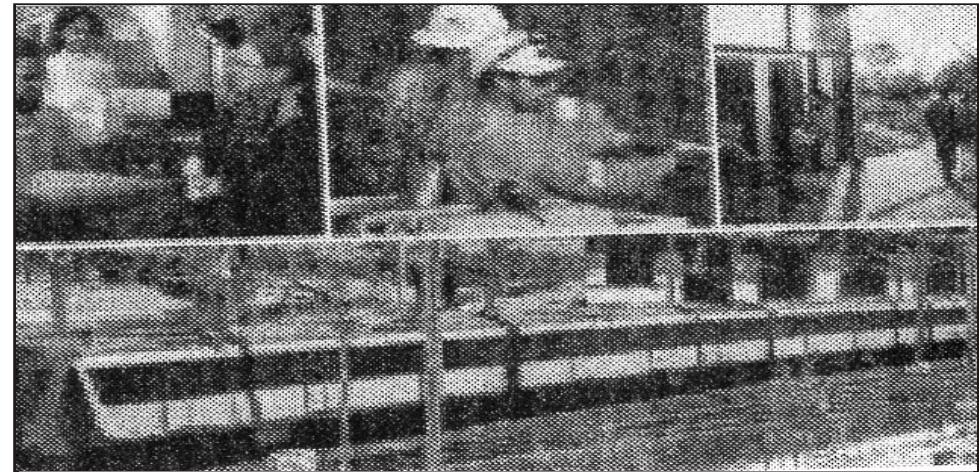
I intend slipping the approval for DOO on all new and refurbished trains and the shift length increase in the fine print of seeming benign clauses garnished with legalese buried in the coming EBA document. I'll just run the EBA approval circus like previous EBA's under Alex's stewardship. There'll be just a brief summary with some inoffensive highlights and fake pay rises presented before the voting by members. As a sweetner a bogus \$4500 bonus bribe will be dangled before members. They'll never notice it will be heavily taxed.

Our ALP comrades in the AEC (Australian Electoral Commission) will handle the ballot rigging if required just like with the rigging of the union elections for 2014, 2018 and 2022. We won't have a worry in the world. I've presented the great idea of the increased shifts lengths to meetings of the Sydney Chamber of Commerce, Business Council of Australia and even the Sydney Masonic Society Executive. I received thunderous applause for the genius idea! I even received flattering compliments such as 'what a far sighted, innovative and forward looking union leader!' Warnes received thunderous applause from his henchmen with even such calls as: "Why not 36 hours shifts for our members in the railways?" and "Toby, you're definitely feeling the pulse of our members in the railways!"

Following his speech Toby was suddenly interrupted by a call on his mobile from NSW Premier Minns. Warnes was fawning and obsequious to his big boss Minns. He advised that he and Babineau from the Bus Division would be delighted and feel privileged to attend the special emergency conference to discuss the future of Transport Minister Haylen at Minns Parliamentary office.

Conference at NSW Premier Minns Parliamentary Office

At the commencement of the conference at 10 am Monday 20th January 2025 Premier Minns welcomed all the transport company and union bosses, including Toby Warnes and David Babineau RTBU Bus Division Secretary, the CEO of Sydney Trains Matthew Lighthanded, Josh Murray TfNSW Secretary, the CEO's of Transurban, Metro Trains, Mark Morey Secretary of Unions NSW, the CEO's of the Telegraph, SMH and other media outlets and curiously, Mike Burgess Head of ASIO, for attending the top secret meeting at such short notice. He then cut to the chase, and engaged in a heated spiel attacking the performance of Jo Haylen as Transport



Minister. His government needed a scapegoat over the set backs with DOO on the NIF and Rail Privatisation issues. "I know many of you from transport companies and good friends of the ALP were angered by Haylen's cave-in to not implementing DOO on the NIF trains when first commenced on the Central Coast line. The decision was all Jo Haylen's fault. I know you were eyeing some juicy NSW railway franchises. She stymied so far our plans for DOO on the other new train types like the replacement for the XPT's and Tangara refurbishments. She's in big trouble. She has to be sacked. We need a scandal which our representatives of media outlets can help cook up to create the pretext for her downfall."

A Tale of Two Media Fit Ups: Fake Anti Semitic Terrorism Wave & Jo Haylen Scandal Rorts

Various media CEO's then joined the fray. The CEO of the SMH, announced to the gathering, "look what a good job we did with our contribution to that fake wave of anti Semitic attacks. That icing on the cake of the caravan at Dural packed with useless gelignite was a master stroke. We certainly provoked hysteria among the population to help you fast track through State Parliament your new legislation to restrict civil liberties. We can easily cook up a good scandal for you to sack Haylen. It'll be too easy".

Mike Burgess ASIO boss disguised with dark glasses and a large black fake beard which kept falling off, in line with his spooky back ground and 'trade craft' expertise, had been lurking in the back ground. Perhaps doing a bit of unofficial spying. However, suddenly he perked up and helpfully intervened in the conference

discussion. He announced, "what a great idea to cook up a media scandal to depose Haylen! We worked wonders with our MOSSAD and NSW Police liaison officers on that fake Anti Semitic campaign. My operatives have been conducting intense surveillance of Haylen for some time now looking for useful 'dirt' to drop on her on a rainy day. We've confirmed she has been using her ministerial car and chauffeur to travel to a Hunter Valley winery for a big feed with one of her girl friends. She has also been using her Ministerial car and chauffeur to make various trips to her holiday home. This is great dirt. Our media outlet bosses here should have no trouble getting the wheels going on the Haylen scandal fit up."

However he ended his spiel with a sour note. He continued, "my organisation is now working together with another 'clandestine' organisation. They put out that underground paper that gets around. We are jointly investigating corruption involving ALP networks in the AEC involving rigging of union elections and EBA ballots and certain members of the trade union movement such as the RTBU officials. I certainly hope we won't dig up any compromising rorts which could discomfort our esteemed Premier Minns and the ALP Godfathers!"

SYDNEY BUSES NEWS

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

TWU & RTBU Monkey Business

Dear Sparks

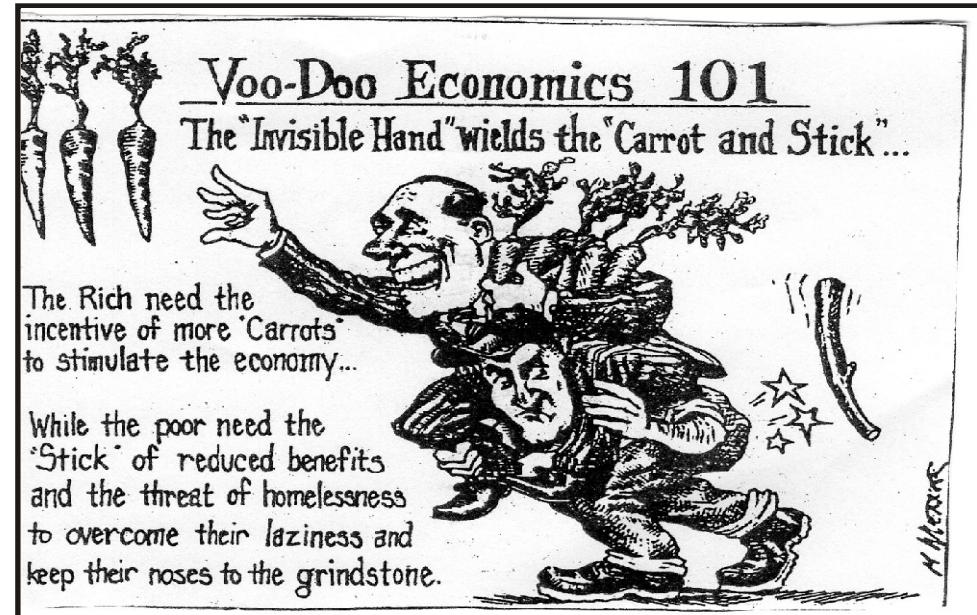
What a joke is the sell off of Region 6 by RTBU officials to the TWU!

The RTBU membership fee is \$24.40 per fortnight which is equal to \$634.40 per year. Whereas TWU members pay \$17.68 weekly or \$35.36 fortnightly, which is \$919.36 per year. Which is around 45% more than the RTBU members pay. Thanks to the RTBU official, namely Mr Alex Claassens for selling Region 6 to the TWU, the puppet of the NSWALP.

What the TWU does in Region 6 is shocking, as it only collects union fees. The RTBU Vice President being a TWU delegate at one of the Region 6 depots and Mr Claassens is toothless to deal with it. As he is scared to rock the boat and suspend the RTBU Vice President which is against the RTBU rules. The TWU members pay more union fees to get one week less annual leave and the TWU officials have no balls to fix this.

A Concerned Driver

Editorial Comment: Alex Claassens was mysteriously bumped up stairs by the ALP



Godfathers from the RTBU NSW Secretary position to the National Secretary position from 1/7/24. He was replaced in his old job by Toby Warnes long time ALP flunky. Meanwhile David Babineau Bus Division Secretary was slotted in as Acting NSW State Secretary for many months. As Claassens was apparently 'missing in action' prior to his change in position. These changes are likely associated with major opposition to DOO (Driver Only Operation) on the NIF (New Intercity Fleet) in the Loco Division.

Tempe Depot News

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

Tempe Driver: We are in a very bad situation. The latest rosters as of early April are rubbish! They are worse than the previous rosters. We are continuing to have inadequate running times and layover breaks Monday to Friday. On Saturday and Sunday we are facing an even worse situation with no layover breaks. We have approached the roster committee to remedy the situation and introduce much more realistic running times with adequate layover breaks. However, we have got no where with them. The roster committee just accepts the existing rosters. As a result of the speed up in our work imposed by management, many drivers at the depot can't cope with the job. They have left the job. Last month there was a surplus of drivers,

now there is a shortage at the depot.

Burwood Depot News

Sparks: What is the situation at the depot?

Burwood Driver: In mid April before Easter we have been in a dire situation! We have been facing constantly worsening rosters, with ever more tightened scheduling and running times. As a result of the tightened running times we are constantly chasing our tails. This situation seems to be particularly affecting runs going into the city such as the 461. However according to other drivers doing other routes at the depot it seems a more widespread problem. With the 461, when you get to the terminus in the City you are already running late. Our layover breaks are being wiped out. Then you have 3-4 minutes to get back to the run return start position. Years ago with the 461 we had adequate layover breaks. The origin of this tightening of running time goes back to when we were under the STA (State Transit Authority) prior to privatisation. Under the STA we first started facing the running times tightening. One reason now for the tightening of running times and the elimination of layover breaks, is that we are doing many more routes so there is inadequate space for standing in layover areas. So the bosses brazenly eliminate our layover breaks.

Leichhardt Depot News

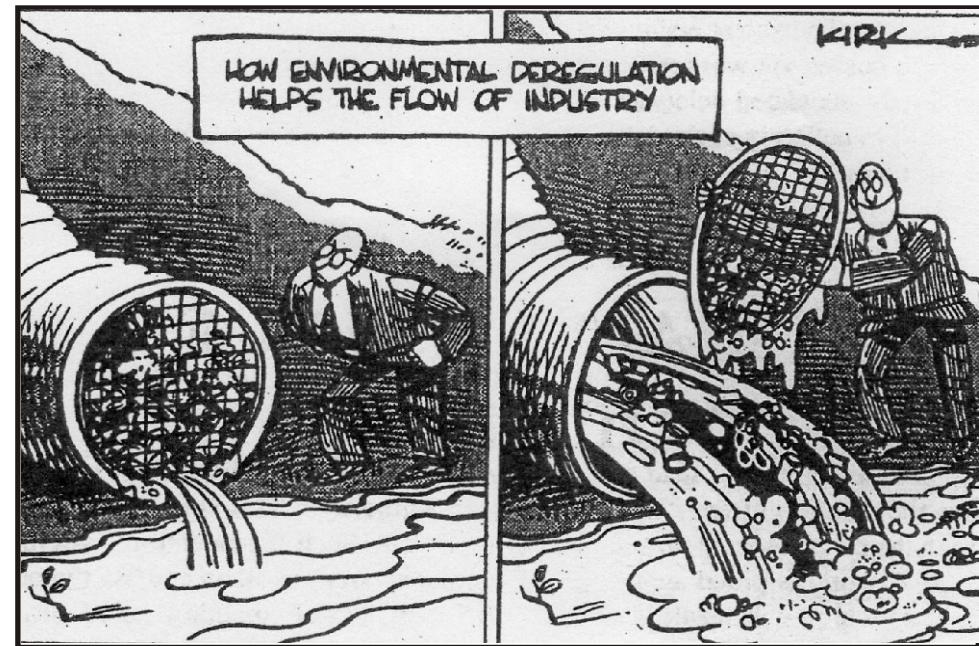
Sparks: What are latest developments at the depot?

Leichhardt Driver: We are constantly facing worsening rosters. The bosses are continually orchestrating them to cut corners to save money. When we were first privatised and taken over by Transit Systems, we received a forewarning of the nasties to come from management. The new boss brazenly announced to us that he wanted to get rid of all the older drivers! He said, "we don't need you and you can be easily replaced with new drivers." The high up private company bosses which took over following privatisation, seem to have an outlook similar to Elon Musk, who is acting as Trump's hatchet man. I heard the situation is similar or worse and other depots. In the case of Ryde, drivers complain that the new management following privatisation is 'cut throat' with their constant drive for saving dollars.

Kingsgrove Depot News

Sparks: What are the latest developments with the merged rosters associated with the Region 6 RTBU/TWU Parity Agreement at the depot?

Kingsgrove Driver: There has been a great improvement with the merged rosters



from the end of 2023. We now have generally similar rosters with similar lines of work. There has been extended running times introduced.

Sparks: What your impressions of the union rep?

KD: Our union rep William has done a good job. He was very militant in the campaign to improve the rosters situation. As part of the campaign he mobilised us to get out for a yard union meeting associated with a strike. However, we are still having problems with inadequate layover breaks at the end of our runs. Associated with such issues as late running.

50 Cent Public Transport Fares for NSW

Our community deserves affordable public transport that gets us where we want to go when we want to get there. Unfortunately, Sydney's public transport system is often unreliable, with fares far higher than other states in Australia and other countries around the world.

That's why we're calling on the NSW Labor Government to introduce 50 cent public transport fares across the state. Lowering fares to 50c would save full-time workers a whopping \$2,160 a year. In a cost of living crisis, savings like this can make a huge difference.

K. Shetty

NEWCASTLE BUS NEWS

Newcastle bus drivers take action for pay rise

WSWS Report 5/4/25: Keolis Downer bus drivers in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, in New South Wales, have turned off their Opal card readers (fare collecting machines) indefinitely to force the company to resume negotiations for a new enterprise agreement. Commuters will have free travel.

A spokesman from the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) claimed Keolis Downer had repeatedly delayed negotiations by rostering local union delegates on shift leaving them unable to attend meetings. He said two key demands were a pay increase and at least 72 hours' notice for changes to driver's shifts.

Keolis Downer bus drivers continue industrial action in Newcastle

WSWS Report: 19/4/25 Keolis Downer bus drivers in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie in New South Wales turned off fare collecting machines indefinitely on April 3 to force the company to resume negotiations for a new enterprise agreement. The drivers, members of the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU), are maintaining free travel for commuters. A spokesman from the RTBU claimed Keolis Downer had repeatedly delayed negotiations by rostering local union delegates on shift leaving them unable to attend meetings. He said two key demands were a pay increase and at least 72 hours notice for changes to drivers' shifts. Over 250 Keolis Downer bus drivers in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie in New South Wales stopped work for 24 hours at 2 a.m. 24/4/25 over stalled negotiations for a new enterprise agreement.

Keolis Downer bus mechanics in Sydney strike for higher pay

WSWS Report: 19/4/25 About 50 heavy-vehicle maintenance mechanics employed by commuter transport contractor Keolis Downer struck this week at the Brookvale and Mona Vale bus depots in Sydney's northern beaches this week. They walked off the job for three hours on April 11 at 6 a.m. and 1 p.m. to demand a substantial pay rise and improved conditions.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) accused Keolis Downer of failing to negotiate proper pay and conditions. A union spokesperson alleged that members' pay has not kept pace with industry rates, saying Keolis Downer is paying \$41 an hour while other companies in the industry are offering \$48 an hour. Workers

want pay parity with other mechanics doing the same job.

ELECTRIC BUS PROCUREMENT SCANDAL

New South Wales Anti-slavery Commissioner James Cockayne is reviewing the state government's procurement of hundreds of electric buses amid concerns that parts of the vehicles were manufactured using slave labour.

In December the state government announced that it had ordered 319 electric buses as part of its goal to get 1,700 of the vehicles onto Sydney roads by 2028.

The contracts were awarded to Australian-Chinese electric vehicle manufacturers Foton Mobility Distribution (FMD) and VDI Australia, which distributes Yutong buses.

The vehicles use batteries made by Chinese firm Contemporary Amperex Technology Company Limited (CATL).

Last year the United States House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party claimed it had indisputable evidence that the production of CATL batteries was connected to forced labour camps in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

CATL strenuously denied those claims in a statement, saying information about suppliers had been cited in an "inaccurate and misleading way", noting that it had ceased trading with certain suppliers "long ago" and insisting that it adhered to the "highest business and ethical standards".

Former Coalition transport minister Andrew Constance first procured CATL-powered buses from Yutong in 2020.

CATL makes about 35 per cent of the world's electric vehicle (EV) batteries. China processes 60 per cent of the world's lithium needed for EV batteries and the majority of the work is carried out in the Xinjiang region.

In a statement to the ABC Dr Cockayne said he was monitoring the government's electric vehicle procurement "given the high modern slavery risks inherent in EV supply chains".

"I have commenced gathering information on government agency due diligence related to modern slavery in relevant supply chains," he said.

The commissioner will report his findings to the NSW Attorney-General, who will then provide the report to the presiding officer of each house of parliament.

FMD has announced it will build a manufacturing hub at Nowra, on the South Coast to assemble the buses.

The company told the ABC in a statement that it had complied with all government procurement regulations.

'Tainted by Uyghur blood'

Australian Uyghur Tangritagh Women's Association president Ramila Chanisheff became an activist in 2017 when the People's Republic of China began establishing "re-education" camps for Muslim minorities.

An estimated 80,000 Uyghurs, ethnic Turkic people indigenous to China, were moved out of the Xinjiang province to work in factories between 2017 and 2019, according to a 2020 report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

About 5.8 million people were living as slaves in China in 2021, according to the Global Slavery Index 2023.

Ms Chanisheff said most people within the Australian Uyghur community knew someone who had disappeared.

"Our uncles and cousins and, in some of our cases, it's our parents and sisters - our people have disappeared into these camps and we've lost connection with them," she said.

Ms Chanisheff said she had been lobbying Dr Cockayne to help prevent Australia from purchasing goods made by slaves.

She said too many imports were "tainted by Uyghur blood" and she was shocked the government could be potentially complicit in its procurement.

China's auto industry is expected to be worth upwards of \$US2 trillion by next year. A study by the Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice at Sheffield Hallam University found that 96 mining or manufacturing companies in the automotive sector were operating in the Uyghur Region, including at least 38 that had documented engagement in state-sponsored labour transfer programs. Ms Chanisheff called for government contracts with FMD and Yutong to be cancelled. "It needs to be further investigated because anything that comes from there is not an independent industry and is not separated from forced labour," she said.

Calls to mandate provisions

Under the Public Works and Procurement Act reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that goods and services procured for and by the government are not the product of slavery.

The Anti-slavery Commissioner lists measures online to help governments adhere to the law, including reporting templates and identification tools, but Ms Chanisheff said the law was failing.

"There seems to be so many loopholes that industry can get around to bring in these products," she said.

A spokesperson for NSW Minister of Domestic Manufacturing and Government Procurement Courtney Houssos said the state government was "reforming and strengthening the government's procurement framework".

The spokesperson said in a statement to the ABC that the government would look to

implement recommendations made by a recent Legislative Council inquiry into government procurement, "including mandating modern slavery provisions for government contracts in high-risk areas".

A spokesperson for NSW Transport Minister John Graham said in a statement Transport for NSW had been asked to review provisions in the contracts and advise the government whether the deed and financial assessment processes should be strengthened.

The statement said that suppliers appointed to deliver the buses were required to undergo an independent financial assessment and comply with the applicable provisions of the Modern Slavery Act 2018.

TASMANIAN BUS NEWS

Tasmania's Metro bus drivers protest against passenger violence and privatisation

WSWS Report: On Wednesday 19/3/25 , bus drivers from state-owned Metro Tasmania protested outside the entities business office against the run down of the commuter service and the Liberal state government's plans to privatise the wholly-owned government enterprise.

The Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) allege that chronic underfunding of Metro Tasmania is aimed at preparing the public service for privatisation. Workers say the government's cost cutting has led to chronic driver shortages, unreliable services and a failure to deliver promised safety and technological improvements.

The RTBU is demanding increased funding and implementation of driver safety reforms the government committed to two years ago, including transit officers and safety screens. Drivers reported eight assaults in the past week with one assault resulting in hospitalisation of the driver. The RTBU has said Metro Tasmania bus drivers, starting Saturday, will not collect fares from passengers on the Hobart network.

Brisbane City Council bus drivers strike for higher pay

22/2/25 WSWS Report: Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) bus drivers at Brisbane City Council (BCC) struck for two hours at 4 a.m. on Thursday over concerns about the long delay in reaching a pay deal in a new work agreement. Their current agreement expired on October 7, 2024. It has been over a year since their last pay increase.

Drivers want a 'fair' pay rise, four months of back pay and improved safety amid the

rising assaults on drivers. RTBU claimed that BCCEs latest offer falls short, with drivers struggling to keep up with inflation. Drivers are maintaining work bans put in place on January 30, which include working to rule and not wearing the BCC uniform.

VICTORIAN RAILWAY NEWS

In this issue of Sparks we will discuss the use of Velocity trains on Bairnsdale, Warrnambool and Albury services. As in previous issues of Sparks names of contributors have been changed.

Sparks: What is the current situation as regards locomotive services?

Rastus and Roscoe: These services are to be phased out over the next couple of years. The N sets which operate these services is being withdrawn. Some sets have been donated to Heritage groups based in Victoria and South Australia. The H sets converted from suburban carriages have already been withdrawn.

Sparks: What about N class locomotives?

Roscoe: These locomotives are to be leased to Freight Companies for use on grain trains. Already some of the N class locomotives have been leased to Southern Fleet Haul.

Sparks: What locomotive services are left in Victoria?

Rastus: All services to Swan Hill, a couple of Geelong trains and two services to Warrnambool.

Archie: These services maybe around for another two years.

Clarence: With Swan Hill V/Line services on the line from Bendigo needs a fair amount of upgrading for the operation of Velocity trains. The rumor circulating around V/Line is that the service will be suspended while the line is upgraded.

Ichabod: We will have to wait and see what happens with Swan Hill.

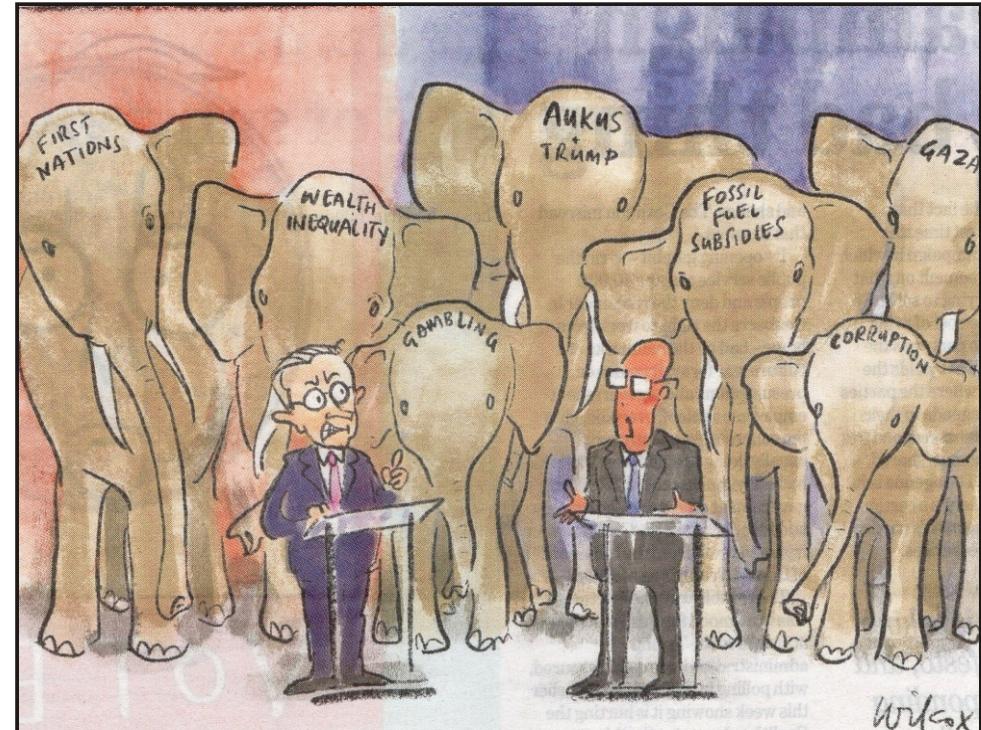
Sparks: What is the situation regarding the Albury line?

Florence: V/Line has put in a Saturday train at 8.45 am Albury and a 2.30 pm train from Southern Cross to Albury. Extra services with Buses from Albury connecting with trains at Seymour have also been introduced.

Archie: Compulsory seat booking has been introduced on all services. The problem is the Politicians lowered the fares but did not provide extra carriages.

Ichabod: Most passengers from Albury do a day return to Melbourne, as there are no trains other than the XPT services to Sydney. The first train is about Mid Day for Albury thus an Albury resident cannot go for example to Wagga, Cootamundra or Arden for the day.

Fergus: V/Line fares to Melbourne are unavailable on the XPT trains.



Florence: The Albury trains have Buffet cars but only one person in the Buffet. This works out well as in a three car trains, but what if the train is six cars. The solution: The person in the Buffet works the rear carriage set to Euroa. After Euroa this person transfers to the front set and opens the Buffet and operates the Buffet to Albury.

Sparks: Does this happen around the world? We wonder. For Countrylink for example, services on the North West line are staffed on both trains to Werri Creek where the train divides.

Ichabod: Due to ARTC controlling the Albury line, the Saturday 8.45 train ex Albury was moved to 7.55. In the latest Line Talk Change, the departure was changed to 8.45 am. Line tables were printed and V/Line put these out at stations, but at the last minute ARTC placed the departure back to 7.55 am.

Florence: An amended time table for Saturday was produced and from February 1, the 8.45 am was to be restored. ARTC said 7.55 am was to apply.

Archie: Local stations were notified but someone failed to notify VICRESS resulting in some passengers being booked for the 8.45 am. The passengers showed up for the 8.45 but no train. A friend drove them to Seymour where they caught a

local train.

Sparks: What is the situation regarding Warrnambool?

Florence: The same as Albury. One word: Bedlam.

Archie: The passenger trains were a locomotive and five carriages. These trains have been replaced by three car Velocity train.

Ichabod: One extra train both ways have been introduced. There are now five trains a day to Warrnambool on week days and four on week ends plus compulsory seat bookings.

Rastus: This will not solve the overcrowding. What is needed are four car trains and stations beyond Waurn Ponds extended.

Sparks: What is happening on the Bairnsdale line?

Ichabod: Most trains to Bairnsdale operate as six car trains except Saturday nights and early Sunday morning when a three car Velocity train is operated.

Archie: This could be a problem on Saturday nights with regard to services to Melbourne because of sporting or social events.

Rastus: V/Line doesn't care. They operate to suit their operational issues not passenger comfort.

Florence: There are no compulsory seat reservations on Bairnsdale trains. Two carriages are reserved on a six car train. The rest are unreserved.

Roscoe: The only problem is when a unit is removed and the train is operated as a three car unit. It happens regularly if they are short of Velocity trains.

Sparks: What is the situation with the Melbourne Metro Tunnel test train?

Rastus: Due to questions being raised in State Parliament, since early December V/Line services to Southern Cross have been operating.

Ichabod: They could have operated trains for the last twelve months at certain times instead of forcing passengers to change to buses at East Pakenham.

Sparks: Once again we have run out of space.

Rastus and Florence: In having the final say V/Line should be looking at instituting Velocity trains to boost Albury and Warrnambool trains. As for the family who missed the 07.55 ex Albury due to a VICRESS bungle. V/Line should give them free tickets for a future journey.

In this issue of Sparks we will discuss Human Resources. As in previous issues of Sparks drivers, Head Office staff and conductors will discuss these issues. Names have been changed.

Sparks: How long has the current management of Human Resources been controlling V/line?

Diedre: Since V/Line resumed government ownership. Before December 2002 V/Line Human Resources was a department of National Express who obtained the



franchise to operate V/Line in August 1999.

Archie: In December 2002 National Express placed the franchises of V/Line, M/Train into receivership. One of the outcomes of this receivership was V/Line in October 2003 reverted to Government control. M/Train was absorbed by CONNEX and M/Tram was absorbed by Yarra Trams,

Ichabod: With V/Line reverting to the Government control a new Human Resources department was set up with outside appointees.

Clarence: Recruitment for conductors and station staff was by advertising in the media. A job applicant had a complete normal aptitude test. If successful you obtained an interview before a panel who consisted of a Department Head, Senior Manager and sometimes an employee from Personnel. Most times it was a Department Head. The procedure was the same for internal appointees. The head of the Department judged whether you were suitable.

Jethro: For internal appointee if a candidate was unsuccessful you had a right of appeal. At the appeal you had to show why you were superior to the successful candidate.

Rastus: Drivers from V/Line were recruited from second persons who were successful in passing out for driving. From 1998 onwards due to line closures in

rural Victoria, drivers were compulsorily transferred to the Suburban Trains with a 'Right of Return' to V/Line. (Before 1983 it was Victorian Railways) This agreement was continued when Privatisation was implemented. In 1999 National Express appointed drivers internally. A number of conductors were successful but until 2009 the Right of Return applied.

Roscoe: From 2009 driver positions were open to internal applications within V/Line.

Diedre: From 2004 V/Line employees noted that Human Resources was not the old style Personnel Branch.

Sparks: In what way?

Archie: Employees noticed that the heads of the HR were anti union and started to throw their weight around. It was also noted that 'Yes' men were appointed to various supervisory positions who did not have the guts to stand up to this department.

Jethro: The 'Right of Appeal' was removed. It was HR's decision who they appointed and that was final.

Ichabod: Over the years job vacancies for conductor service managers, station managers, administration officers and Authorised Officers were advertised. Long serving employees applied for these positions.

Clarence: Sadly most of the long serving employees were passed over and morale amongst employees hit an all time low. External applicants were appointed.

Jethro: A new type of test was introduced. This test was a psychometric test. This test was used by HR Department overseers and was now being applied throughout V/Line. HR stated this test was the way to obtain a suitable employee.

Roscoe: HR also said employees had to dob in their fellow workers if these workers had done something wrong.

Archie: The unwritten rule around the rail industry was that you did not dob in your work mates. With OH&S issues, if a fellow employee was doing the wrong thing, the union delegate spoke to this employee.

Rastus: By 2014 the drivers noted a certain conductor was dobbing in drivers on Customer Service issues. This conductor was not in the union and thought that dobbing on drivers would get him a promotion. It didn't happen.

Clarence: Two employees had to face HR. The union defended both employees and they were cleared. The incident was the result of a customer complaint. The customer alleged one of the conductors was rude. With the other conductor, they tried to discipline was told by HR that he should have dobbed the employee in.

Rastus: You are correct. Employees who make this list are employees who stood up to HR over job selection. Appearing as witnesses to employees who are facing disciplinary hearings.

Ichabod: About 16 years ago a conductor service manager dobbed in an employee

saying this employee did not close the power doors on the train. Another employee appeared at the inquiry to support the employee. HR did not want to hear this employee. The union intervened and the employee was cleared.

Archie: This employee was marked for the rest of his employment at V/Line.

Diedre: These incidents are just two examples of what has happened over the years.

Sparks: Once again we have run out of space. If you want a report of all incidents with HR over the last 12 years refer to the following issues of Sparks. Issues, 129, 130, 135, 139, 143, 147, 154, 156, 157, 160 and 170. These issues are available on-line.

Rastus and Roscoe: We will close this article with a full paragraph of an article which appeared in an English Railway Magazine: Backtrack Volume 35 No.11 November 2021 'The Shadow Franchise 1988-1991' by Richard Clarke.

'Psychometric Test being applied for Job Interviews. This test was springing up in every HR Department as a new service for recruiting employees as well as promotions. Many unsuitable individuals were getting into quite senior positions through this process.'

This was being applied in the United Kingdom. You can see where HR copied it from.

STOP PRESS

As this issue of Sparks goes to press V/Line has had a shake up in its Human Resources Department. A new head of Department has been appointed from outside. It is rumored, he is going to appoint his friends to the various HR positions.



FRENCH RAILWAY NEWS

Privatisation of French Railways

The digestion of the public railway service is reaching a new milestone in 2025. The prospect of a reduction in "public spending" and the opportunity to challenge social gains whet capitalist appetites.

Public transport is not spared from being sold off piecemeal. ---- If we stick to the SNCF (State owned national French railways) alone, we can no longer count the "reforms" undertaken over the last forty years. They have led to a notorious disorganization of the railway system and a disintegration of the very meaning of the work of railway workers. This privatization goes hand in hand with internal restructuring. In contrast to a century and a half of railway history, the complementarity between infrastructure management and transport is over. Instead, absurd customer/supplier relationships are imposed. This process, which is accelerating, now also concerns public transport. It is in reality only one aspect of the class struggle, with its advances or setbacks depending on the balance of power.

Status-K.O

From the 1970s onwards, we witnessed an increase in the number of railway workers "out of status". On the one hand, with immigrant workers who were refused status - only the CFDT (bureaucratic union confederation) opposed this discrimination at the time. On the other hand, with the hiring of part-time contract staff, particularly in sales departments. Struggles for equal rights and permanent employment allowed for progress and slowed down employer attacks. But the majority union passivity led to numerous subsidiaries and transfers to subcontracting. To conclude with the end of the status for all hires at the SNCF from January 1, 2020.

After 1995, the Chirac government, with Bernard Pons and Anne-Marie Idrac, Minister and Secretary of State for Transport, organized the breakup of the railway system, by separating the management of the infrastructure (creation of Réseau ferré de France) and rail transport (SNCF). However, by definition, in the railway system, infrastructure and operation are totally linked and interdependent. Creating two entities that defend opposing interests can only lead to a weakening of quality and safety. But above all, it is a question of breaking up the railway workers' social body, after the long strike of November-December 95. At that time, only the CFDT and SUD-Rail (leftwing French union confederation) refused this solution, explaining its absurdity and dangers. The CGT (French Communist Party controlled



bureaucratic union confederation) refuses to organize action against this law, which it even initially presents as an achievement of the 1995 strike.

Two years later, under the left-wing government of the PS/PCF/Les Verts, the Minister of Transport J.C. Gayssot (PCF) presents a "reform of the reform" which, in fact, ratifies the Chirac/Pons/Idrac law.

The incessant restructuring has had devastating effects. 15 years ago, the SUD-Rail federation noted that "SNCF freight traffic has fallen below that of the railway companies... in 1911!" Since then, the fall has worsened.

As for passenger transport: delays, train cancellations, deserted stations, unprovided connections, opaque fares... A deterioration that no one disputes. The solution? More privatization! Since it didn't work for Freight, we are being asked to do the same thing for passenger traffic!

And meanwhile at the RATP...

The privatization, called "putting into competition", also affects the Autonomous

Paris Transport Authority. According to a schedule that spans about twenty years, everything is affected: each bus, RER, tram, and metro line in Île-de-France will be subject to a call for tenders. As with the SNCF, the RATP will be able to respond to calls for tenders. But on condition that dedicated entities are created where workers' rights will be revised downwards. As the SNCF does on networks in other countries, the RATP company will thus be able to "win markets" elsewhere than in Île-de-France. It would then no longer be responsible for ensuring public transport in the Paris region in the best possible conditions (which it does not do properly due to lack of resources), but for generating profits throughout France and even worldwide.

"talking points" and political choices

However, things are simple. Rail transport of goods and passengers and public transport meet a collective need, a social, ecological and economic necessity. It must therefore be provided by a public service with the means to assume this mission. By definition, this cannot be the objective of private companies whose function is to generate financial profits for their shareholders. In other words, to defend the interests of a minority, including against the needs of the community.

Through their work, workers create collective wealth, in the form of products and services. Since no one works for us, no one decides for us! Who better than the employees in the sector knows how to make this activity work? Why be managed by profiteers who go from company to company to plunder the common good? Direct management of the public service by those who make it exist is possible. Is it difficult to implement? Probably because everything is done in capitalist society to make us believe that we are not capable of this. But what can we say about the magnificent successes of these "leaders" who have been destroying public goods for years! Let's take back control of the public rail service and that of public transport: with our professional and interprofessional union organizations, it is up to us to decide, as workers in the sector as well as users.

Christian (UCL Paris banlieue sud-est)

What is the railway group today?

It is structured around a parent company or holding company, the public limited company "SNCF SA". This includes other SAs and private law subsidiaries[1]. All this feeds off a multitude of sub-subsidiaries, the break-up going as far as creating subsidiaries line by line to respond to the calls for tenders that are multiplying. Because, and this is a major point that must be understood in order to fight better, the employers have no problem with it being "the SNCF Group" that wins markets. What they need is opportunities to destroy social gains. And the SNCF management is doing it with zeal.

The four public limited companies form what is called the Unified Public Group

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.*
- 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.*

(GPU) of the railway sector, of which the Simplified Joint Stock Company (SAS)

Fret SNCF is no longer a part. In short, a Group that is less and less public, unified and railway! The multinational SNCF has 283,000 employees. 115,000 are in the GPU and only two thirds are on the Statute. To give you an idea, 40 years ago there were 245,000. Traffic, on the other hand, has not decreased.

The employers' branch of the railway sector has 150,000 employees. But "forgetting" entire sectors[2] who are still denied access to the sector's collective agreement.

Validate

[1]SNCF Voyageurs, SNCF Réseau and SNCF Gares et connexions; GEODIS and Rail Logistics Europe (for freight), KEOLIS (for passenger transport).

[2]Railway catering, railway cleaning, station reception, prevention and security in railway installations, etc.

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