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Dec. 2018 - Jan. 2019

Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

HILLS BUS DRIVERS SHOW THE WAY TO STRUGGLE IN 2019 OVER WAGES, PRIVATISATION & CONDITIONS! WHOEVER WINS THE MAR. 2019 NSW ELECTIONS - ALP OR LIBERALS - FURTHER CUTS TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT WILL FOLLOW!



Commuters waiting for buses during Hills Bus wildcat strike.

NSW Railway News;	Sydney Buses News;
Victorian Railway News;	Bus Drivers' Collective Letter;
Elections Timeline;	War of the Corporatoids;
Hills Bus Wildcat Strike;	Political & Industrial Crisis;

RTBU ELECTIONS: Were They Rigged? See article page 5

EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

Some of the most important news lately in the NSW Railways has been the decision of the Berejiklian NSW Govt. to keep guards on the new interurban trains. Showing the duplicity of the propaganda campaign of the union hierarchy which pushed the line that Driver Only Operation (DOO) on these trains was inevitable. Associated with this campaign, were attempts by the officials to bribe drivers with “thirty pieces of silver”. With the “Facilitation” clause in EBA 2018, DOO would be “facilitated” to the Millennials and Waratahs.

In this edition we put the spotlight on the extremely likely roting of the RTBU 2018 elections by the AEC (Australian Electoral Commission) and the Rightwing ALP union hierarchy. We provide a detailed timeline of the elections. To cover-up the likely rigging of the election for a key position, the union hierarchy is peddling the misinformation that the sitting candidate for this position had the solid support of Freight drivers. (See article page 5.)

Whether the Liberals or the ALP win the upcoming March 2019 NSW elections, continuing attacks on rail and other public transport workers will be the order of the day. In this edition we provide some back ground to the nefarious role of ALP NSW Governments in this onslaught and the need for grass roots on-the-job organisation and action to meet the challenge. (See article page 3.)

In Sydney Buses some of the most important news has been various new nasties associated with the privatisation of Region 6. Most significant is the creation of a “two tier” work force in Region 6. With the new drivers encouraged to join the TWU on lower wages, than the older drivers in the RTBU. New rosters with worse running times look to be in line with driving the older drivers off the job. (See article page 11.)

The recent “mass sickie” wildcat strike by Hills Bus drivers in Sdney has inspired many with the “direct action” path to fighback against the bosses and the compliant union hierarchy. (See article page 16.)

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

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N.S.W. RAILWAY NEWS

The Political and Industrial Crisis in Australia We Must Overturn.

There is a crisis of credibility in Australia, (and the world for that matter). The malaise that affects and infects the body politic is serious because it extends down to the workplace and the workplace organisations that represent working people.

As the paralysis, that comes from lack of leadership, spreads fear onto the shop floor the probability of speaking up and fighting back becomes less. A general apathy is likely due to irrational threats over job insecurity and punishments for standing up, organising or speaking out.

However, how real is the fear of repercussions for organising on the job or speaking out? Sure the possibilities for protection are much better guaranteed within a union with a large and active membership. But our unions in public transport unions long ago stopped helping or defending those of us who stepped up to the plate or outside of the system. I have seen cases where workers have been thrown to the wolves by their union because they dared to challenge the status quo. They are not very tolerant of people who think differently or express an opinion which is vastly different to the leadership of the union.

Having said that and realising that yellow unions are also part of the problem, all is not lost. It just means that different tactics have to be used and new structures and alliances have to be forged. Change needs bold moves and bold planning in solidarity with your fellow workers.

In Paris we have seen the “gilets jaunes” (“yellow vests”) movement express outrage on the streets because French workers are fed up with the belt tightening and austerity being imposed on their families by government Neoliberal economic policies. They have very little to lose since their take home pay barely covers their food and rents. The petrol price hike announced by French President, Macron was the straw that broke the back of French workers.

These are similar policies to those that Governments around Australia have imposed on working people. The “yellow vests” is a movement initiated and born of social media where outrage has spread like wildfire onto the streets. Supposedly, there are no leaders for the “yellow vest movement” and so far despite this there is a loose coordination that seems to only express the frustration of workers in demonstrations and anger. The demands are well known, i.e. and end to austerity, for the petrol hike to be scrapped and for Macron to step down. A delegation of “non-leaders” is due to meet with the French President. As we go to print this movement shows no sign of slowing and has spread across the border to Belgium.

However to be successful in your workplace and in your industry a much more thought out strategy needs to apply. Solidarity and trust has to be built up on the basis of mutual trust, honesty and solidarity. The problem is not just one of expressing anger (which in itself is a great

motivator) but actually exercising and exerting some power in the workplace so that changes do take place.

Workers in the public transport industry are at a crossroads where they are faced with many challenges in the future. A future that is based on the failure of yellow unions to fight the good fight in the past.

Privatisation and outsourcing is hanging like a sword over public transport workers as the workforce is forcibly downsized without much of a whimper. The fight back against private operation of Inner West Buses by the transport unions was a fizzer. The pretence of a fight back too quickly led to a “fait accompli” that was too awful to contemplate by bus drivers on the Inner Western Sydney routes.

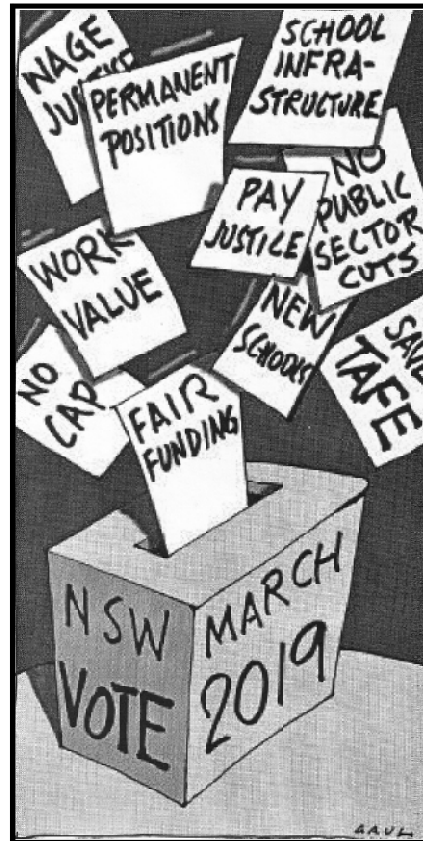
But what would a fight back have looked like? If the unions had been fair dinkum it should have been a case of “touch one, touch all”. Despite strike bans all buses depots could have stopped work indefinitely. If this wasn’t enough to bring the Government to its knees then call out all sectors such as rail workers, ferries etc despite the threats. For chrissakes they can’t put us all in prison without major repercussions. If that’s what it takes, that’s what it takes. If the union can’t defend you what is the point of the union.

Instead we got platitudes from Labor Leaders that promised nothing substantial, yet they had the audacity for a campaign plea for the election of a Labor Party Government in NSW. The Liberals are doing so badly in the polls after riding roughshod over the people in NSW that we have the spectre of a Labor Government being elected in NSW.

People who remember the Wran, Unsworth and Carr Labor Governments being in power in the 70’s and 80’s in NSW will recall that this was a period of unprecedented attack on transport workers. Who can remember Michael Costa the NSW Transport Minister, He was the first to put the 2.5% wages cap on public sector workers including transport workers. Later this was extended by the Liberal Party in power. Sometimes a Labor

Government can achieve for the bosses what the Tories cannot. This is because the unions are even more passive when Labor is in power then when the LNP are in power (if you can believe that they can be more passive and ineffective than they are now).

Outsourcing by Labor in the 1980’s started in earnest with the closure of the Eveleigh Workshops swiftly followed by the closure of Chullora Workshops and others. Trades people such



as painters, track maintenance workers, electricians employed by the railways and buses were all made redundant. When the L.N.P. came to power in NSW they just continued on by getting rid of cleaners, station masters, sales clerks, station staff, admin staff and outsourcing the operation of ferries and buses.

In the coming years work will become even more precarious no matter what Government takes control. The closure and privatisation of the Bankstown Line, the Epping - Chatswood Line along with more bus routes earmarked for privatisation will put immense pressure on the public sector transport workforce. We also realise that the current union structures in NSW, which also oversaw the privatisation of the Newcastle bus services and the closure of the rail line to Newcastle, will most likely not lift a serious finger to halt any of the pain for their members. Their track record is not inspiring.

Every public transport worker in NSW and possibly in other states should be asking what they can do in the face of the political and industrial crisis that is affecting them and their comrades. Well the bold moves need to start now! Self reliance needs to be built into every local workplace in the absence of a fair dinkum trade union that values diversity and new strategies. Clearly their tried and tested ones have not worked and are not working.

Organisation needs to start by talking to fellow workplace comrades who also have ideas and strategies. Maybe it will be possible to hold meetings of your own work colleagues and thrash out solutions to problems that you have in your workplace. "From little things big things grow" - (yes it was a song). Once you get organised it may be possible to make leaflets to help convince the undecided in your workplace that the struggle is both worth it and possible. Linking and sharing information with other workplaces and other sectors is also valuable and necessary to advance any struggles. Standing waiting for someone to act on your behalf is no longer an option as the privatisation juggernaut rolls over the country.

History and change is made by those that make the bold and measured moves.

Be bold and encourage others to stand and be bold alongside you.

THIS IS A TIMELINE OF HOW THE "PROFESSIONALS" RUN ELECTIONS (RTBU ELECTIONS 2018)

Of the three candidates for NSW State Secretary, Tony Clear was the only candidate incorrectly listed for work location. He argued this would have an effect on the ballot outcome. The AEC had a responsibility to call a fresh election. The AEC promising they would upon receiving complaints on errors in the ballot papers. AEC then consulted the RTBU union who advised them it was entirely the AEC's responsibility. However the sitting leadership of the RTBU advised their membership that they would follow the advice of their unnamed lawyers on the issue. The RTBU leaders claimed these lawyers advised ignore the errors and allow the ballot as existing to determine the election. This clearly favoured the sitting State Secretary Alex Claassens who had the advantage of being correctly listed on the

ballot paper. So who made the decision not to call a fresh ballot? The AEC or RTBU's sitting leadership? It is clear that the AEC and RTBU have now both washed their hands of the consequences of the ballot paper errors. Independent observers would not be calling "foul" had not similar "errors" occurred in the three prior AEC-controlled union elections. Consider if the AEC made a significant "error" on a Federal or State Government election ballot paper? Would the AEC allow the election to proceed or would they issue a new ballot with an adequate time lapse? Finally, would the AEC rely on advice from the sitting member over the issue (in this case the RTBU incumbent leadership) in order to arrive at a fair decision?

SEPTEMBER 3.

The ballot closed.

SEPTEMBER 5.

The returning officer from the AEC contacted candidates by phone to let them know that the ballot for the position of Branch Secretary had the details (work location) for one candidate incorrect. The returning officer suggested two

possible solutions. The first she do nothing arguing the ballot error would not affect the result unless it was very close. Alternatively, she suggested a reissue of the Secretary's ballot in 7 days from the end of the existing ballot.

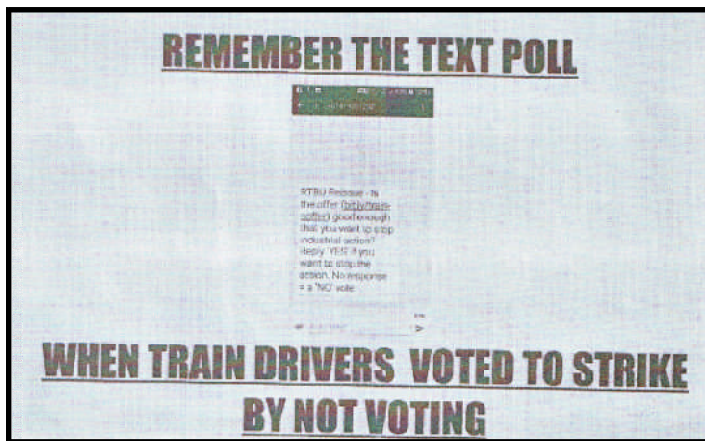
Neither option appeared fair to the affected candidate as the victim of incorrectly-issued ballot paper. Either choice would leave the ballot open for later dispute, or create confusion with voters thinking they had already voted and not return the second paper. The affected candidate suggested that the ballot should be cancelled and re-run in 30 days to be fairer to all candidates.

SEPTEMBER 6.

A formal complaint is lodged with AEC by train driver Tony Clear affected by the ballot error.

SEPTEMBER 7.

By the 7th it had emerged that there were other errors with the Branch Ballot, the errors and affected positions were:



* Work location for one candidate on one ballot paper is incorrect, also some had wrong closing date with the year 2014 not 2018.

- * Instructions on how to complete the ballot paper are incorrect for one ballot paper.
- * Some voters have received ballot papers they should not have received.
- * Some voters have not received ballot papers they should have received.
- * NSW Branch Secretary (NSW1)
- * NSW Branch Delegates to the National Council Locomotive (N7)
- * NSW Rail Operations Train Guards Hornsby Maintenance Centre (R4) depot Sub Divisional Secretary.

SEPTEMBER 7.

Tony Clear received an email from an Assistant Director at the AEC stating the matter was receiving attention and when a decision was made the AEC would inform the Union and candidates.

As the affected positions are all in NSW Tony refers the matter to the NSW Ombudsman for consideration.

The RTBU issued a notice informing members of the “technical issues” and stating the AEC was working to correct the problem, the notice also directed members to contact the AEC directly if they had been affected. That phone number was connected to an answer machine.

SEPTEMBER 10.

The returning officer has gone on leave and candidates are not informed of the identity of the relieving returning officer.

SEPTEMBER 12.

A reply arrives from the NSW Ombudsman and, as the AEC is a Commonwealth agency, the matter is referred to the Commonwealth Ombudsman. They acknowledge receipt of the complaint on September 14.

SEPTEMBER 14.

An email was sent from AEC by an Acting Assistant Director stating that the issues had been identified and that,

The AEC will conduct fresh elections for the affected positions after 24 September 2018.

THE AFFECTED POSITIONS WERE:

- * NSW Branch Secretary (NSW1)
- * NSW Branch Delegates to the National Council Locomotive(N7)
- * NSW Rail Operations Train Guards Hornsby Maintenance Centre (R4) depot Sub Divisional Secretary.

The elections for unaffected positions will proceed according to the published time table ballot closing on 24 September.

The RTBU issues a notice reiterating the AEC advice but adds,

“The RTBU is now seeking clarification from the AEC on specifically which positions it intends to run fresh elections for, and all members will be advised once this has been confirmed.”

SEPTEMBER 19.

The RTBU sends a brief notice stating that the NSW branch ballot has had technical issues. The Union states the elections are conducted independently by the AEC and the RTBU has not been in the mail out or ballot paper process. Further, the AEC will conduct fresh elections for the affected positions. Further, the AEC is yet to advise which positions it intends to run fresh elections for. Members are advised to fill out and return (existing) ballots.

SEPTEMBER 21.

Tony Clear wrote to Alan Barden Assistant National Secretary of the RTBU asking for an update, because in an earlier conversation with an AEC representative Mr Clear was told that the AEC was working in collaboration with the Union on a decision as to what papers would be reissued.

SEPTEMBER 24.

Alan Barden wrote this.

“The AEC has provided time to the National Office of the RTBU to lodge a submission on this matter.”

“The National Office has independently sought legal advice from experts in electoral law. That independent advice has, in whole, formed the basis of the submission to the AEC.”

“This submission, which has been drafted and submitted by the independent lawyers, is the only input by the National Office on this matter to the AEC.”

“Any final decision by the AEC will be respected by the National Office.”

“Be assured that that the National Office share the frustration of all the NSW Branch candidates and members that have been by affected these uncertainties in the balloting process.”

Tony Clear has asked Alan where was the advice was sought, exactly what advice was sought and given. He was informed it was paid for using Union Funds and the Acting Branch Secretary (NSW) would have been privy to the advice then all candidates should be able to access it.

The advice the Union received has not been shared with candidates.

SEPTEMBER 24.

Ballot closed.

SEPTEMBER 25.

The RTBU issues a notice stating that

“As previously advised, a number of issues have been found with the ballots for the NSW Branch elections. The AEC has advised that counting for a number of elected positions has been put on hold while a decision is made on whether or not to re-contest those ballots”.

Also on September 25 the Commonwealth Ombudsman’s Office replied to Tony Clear’s request.

“I refer to your online complaint of 14 September 2018 about the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) regarding the Australian Rail Tram and Bus Union election.”

“I have considered your complaint and have decided not to investigate it. I have made this decision because while I acknowledge that you have lodged a formal complaint with the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), I understand you have not received a final response to your complaint. Where a complaint has been lodged with an agency and no response has been received, our Office generally suggests that a complainant follow up with the agency via telephone in the first instance.”

SEPTEMBER 27.

An Acting Assistant Director from the AEC issued an email to all candidates stating the advice of the 25th had been changed and the ballot for the position of Branch Secretary will be added to those which will be counted in the initial ballot.

OCTOBER 5.

The AEC returning officer reappears and she sends an email to candidates announcing that the AEC has considered the matter of the Branch Secretary ballot and have decided to proceed with the initial ballot and she will be declaring the result of the count in a week.

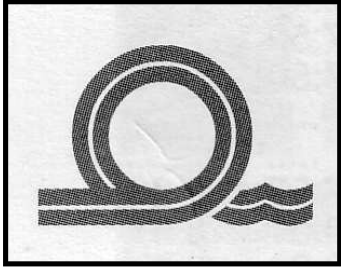
OCTOBER 12.

The returning officer declares the results for unaffected ballots including the affected Branch Secretary ballot which was counted.

In regard to the ballot for the position of NSW branch secretary the fact that 10 days before the ballot closed members were told that the ballot paper was going to be reissued caused many people to only return the Divisional envelopes and not the separate envelopes for the State Secretary’s position.

The final counting margin of 258 after preferences could have been altered by the voters who held off waiting for the paper to be reissued. The result between the three candidates for State Secretary may have indeed been different.

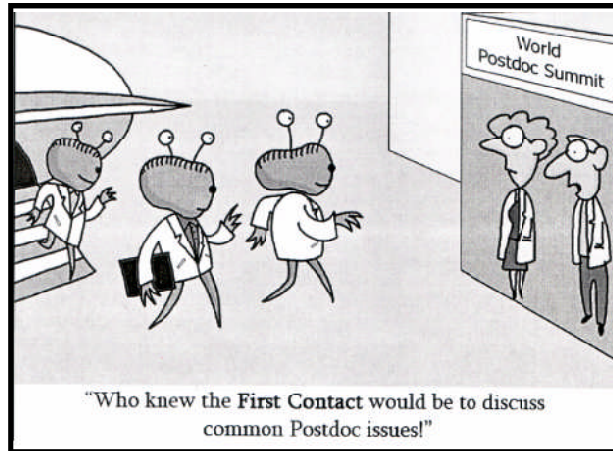
Please Note: A breakdown of final voting figures has been issued as a separate document.



“The War of the Corporatoids”

Way above planet earth in the stratosphere, in an orbiting flying saucer, a conference was being held by aliens hell bent on invading Australia. The aliens were from planet Corporation Centauri from a far distant solar system. They were determined to invade and conquer other planets to escape their own planet which had been devastated by their corporate pillaging. They spoke with all manner of corporate buzz words and weasel talk to disguise their ulterior motives. Their speech included a strange gobbly gook of weird acronyms. They talked about the deployment of a new weapon in the onslaught. It was a “privatisation” ray to be beamed down on unsuspecting Liberal Government ministers and high up bureaucrats. When struck they would be blinded by massive luminous dollar signs and corporate logos. The assorted big bosses and polties would then slowly fleece the people of NSW without being noticed.

After the ray barrage, aliens were teleported down to earth to gradually infiltrate Govt. Departments such as Transport for NSW, State Transit, Private Bus Companies and the Railways. The aliens would suddenly materialise on the job as Elon Musk clones and attempt to program workers into robots with the aid of mysterious management technique manuals and the studies they



had made of unsuspecting public transport bosses following their abduction from their offices. Consequently the aliens were able to now cunningly imitate and worsen this behaviour with the aid of their ultra advanced technology. It involved what sounded like loud yelling, much goose stepping around the work place and all manner of skulduggery tactics. They were able to impose inhuman working conditions on staff such as standing throughout shifts on station platforms and bus runs without layover breaks, together with imaginary pay rises and bonuses.

The union officials who required no alien brain programming did their bit to mesmerise workers into compliance with the soul destroying workplace regime and the illusionary wages increase. When approached by the grass roots, the union officials would engage in weird “alien speak” involving constant chanting of “we are powerless”, “we can do nothing”, “it’s all allowed in the EBA”, “our hands are tied”, with tongue in cheek “we always obey the law of the land,” but apparently not in the union or AEC(Australian Electoral Commission) offices and best of all, the intriguing questions, “why did you vote for the EBA?” and “why did you vote for us?” The officials of course naturally failed to notice their role in rigging the ballots with the “behind tightly closed doors” assistance of the AEC, but luckily without the need for any high tech extraterrestrial intervention.

Whilst massive projects which devastate communities and the environment like the West-Connex were given the green light by the aliens who had infiltrated the higher circles of the Liberal Party and the NSW Govt.

However the aliens stranglehold over the politicians and Govt. bureaucracy was suddenly threatened by a fight back by the grass roots. It followed the uproar over the revelations of the Banks, Superannuation and Religious Institutions Abuse Inquiries. The false impression that the “Corporatoids” were effective bosses was exposed to all. Workers and local people suddenly saw through their smokescreen of lies and deceit. They knew what these intruders were really after such as a lucrative public transport system. Strikes and mass protests broke out over low wages and deteriorating working and environmental conditions alarming the aliens. Hastening them to be teleported back to their orbiting mother ship. Now heading for Uranus where they will feel at home. After checking, it will take years to uncover the full extent of the catastrophic damage that these “Corporatoids” have wreaked.

SYDNEY BUSES NEWS

Kingsgrove Depot News

Sparks: How are you finding the situation on the job since privatisation?

Kingsgrove Driver: We are currently facing new tricks by the bosses to trim our wages and corner cut. The other day due to late running my scheduled 45 minutes lunch break was replaced by a ½ hour crib break. I approached the union rep on the matter and got nowhere. In regard to payins of cash, the auto cash machines have been removed and we are not being issued receipts for the payins. Whilst our wages are now paid monthly. As our wages are paid

in arrears, the company can now earn a tidy sum from interest on the 29 days of our pay. In the case of our super, there has also been a change. The money deducted is now paid to the fund on a 3 monthly basis, so the company can earn some interest on this money. Whilst, now we have to supply an email address to get a payslip for our wages.

On the road, the 400 is now being significantly changed. This route was from Burwood to Bondi Junction. Now it is only to go from Burwood to East Gardens. So for a passenger to get to Bondi Beach, they have to catch 3 buses. One to East Gardens, then one to the Bondi Junction Interchange and then one to Bondi Beach. The \$5,000 prize for fast drivers, is proving quite a scam. A group of drivers have been declared the winners, despite an estimated half of them running late on their runs. Each got a portion. However, it's not a prize, but a bonus as they have to pay tax on the money. Whilst \$5,000 is paid by the NSW Govt., not the company. The talk of the NSW Govt. that privatisation would result in improved efficiency in bus services is proving to be just laughable propaganda. As since the privatisation we are seeing even more specials and empty buses running, than occurred with State Transit.

Waverley Depot News

Sparks: What are your thoughts on latest developments with the Berejiklian NSW Govt?

Waverley Busies: The latest outrageous development has been the Govt's agreement to the advertising for the Everest event on the Sydney Opera House. I went to the event previously. It was so dull, with no entertainment. Just a DJ and the Melbourne Cup. It shows again the desperation of the NSW Govt, to find a means to promote NSW and the tremendous power and influence of Alan Jones, who is a sponsor of the event. In regard to the Govt's plans to further upgrade the Warragamba Dam wall. In the 90's the wall was increased by 3.5 metres due to the threat of one large flood in 100 years. Now 25 years later, the Govt. wants to construct a 14 metre high extension similar in height to a 4 storey building on the wall. The construction seems all about further boosting the NSW economy particularly the cement and steel producing and construction sectors to keep it booming. It's not about improving safety for the 300,000 more people to live on the flood plain below the dam. Despite the Federal Govt. indicating the construction isn't a good idea, the Berejiklian Govt. is determined to proceed with it.

Sparks: What are latest developments with the Govt's privatisation of the STA buses?

WB: It has favoured multinational companies which pay little tax in Australia. According to media investigations these companies are paying as little as 1.5% pa to 2.5% pa of their income in Australia as tax. Transit Systems recruited 70 drivers from WA and SA to make up staffing levels following the privatisation of Region 6 because of a huge shortage of drivers at the 4 depots. They were flown to Sydney and provided with 2 weeks free accommodation in hotels with meal allowances. Overall \$750,000 may have been spent by the company. They can splurge such large sums but claim to be poor and run their operations on a shoe string. Their whole push will be about reducing services such as cutting buses from 3 trips per hour to 2 trips per hour. In this way commuters will be discouraged from using low patronised runs. Whilst the company will make every effort to cut corners and put everyone on as casuals or

part timers. In Adelaide following the privatisation of Govt. buses, this casualisation was subsequently imposed by the private owners.

Sparks: How has the job changed at Waverley over the decades?

WB: When I first started on the job in the 80's, things were much more relaxed with ample off driving time and great camaraderie. In the last seven to 7 to 8 years the situation has worsened for drivers. Now with the privatisation of Region 6, it has gone much more downhill for both drivers and commuters. There looks to be skulduggery going on with the bosses and the union executive. We now have the worst boss in State Transit who has no idea how to deal with people.

There has been a big change with the inspectors which we call the Kellies. In years gone by we had a good relationship with the inspectors. Some were quite likeable and real characters. Like Reg Varney in that old British TV show "On the Buses". They would stand by you and there was a lot less bookings. They were most professional. Even the police looked after you. However in recent years that bond between us and the inspectors has been weakened. They have been bent to the bosses' jack booted agenda. Now they are out to get you. Whilst with your bus going through red lights you face the threat of losing your licence and getting the sack.

The rules set by management apart from the Health and Safety issue are being used to target particularly the older drivers for the sack and demoralise many off the job. There is a great sense of insecurity and lack of support.

Consequently there has been an enormous turnover of staff. There was once a good reliable bus service for commuters. Now our bus services have been significantly worsened. As seen with the 378 being taken over by Transit Systems and now only going from Railway Square to Bondi Junction, the 379 going from Nth Bondi to the Bondi Junction Interchange and then to Bronte in a loop and the 357 going from Mascot to the Bondi Junction Interchange. There is also a lot of disconnectedness with the 400's, 420's and 357's. Recently a driver complained to me about the congestion caused by so many buses such as the 343's and 418's parking at the Gardeners and Bunnerong Roads layup area. The 389 which now operates from Bondi Junction into the City via the Maritime Museum has been taken over by Transit Systems. Only the 324's and 325's remain unchanged. With this slight-of-hand associated with these route changes, the bosses and Govt. are one step ahead in cunningly doing the ground work for the next



privatisation of depots/routes carve-up. It's become obvious this is the agenda by the route split ups.

Consequently much confusion has developed amongst commuters about bus services. The split-up of the routes is farcically frustrating for passengers. Now they have to catch two or even three buses, when previously one bus would take them to their destination. Particularly the elderly are being hard hit as they now have to get off their bus and walk to the Bondi Junction interchange to catch another. We now mainly operate the short runs. Whilst there are a lot more 333's and less 380's. Drivers are now being encouraged to get articulated vehicle licences. Transit Systems depots are taking the more lucrative runs. According to a protestor against the 378 changes I spoke to recently, the deal has already been signed off for the slipping to different shoes of all three Eastern Suburbs depots when the Light Rail comes into operation in 2020. It's a year behind schedule. The depot has become a shadow of its former glory. Just another factory and is awaiting its fate.

Sparks: What are your thoughts on the latest developments with the Light Rail?

WB: It has been reported in the media that the NSW Govt. will have squandered \$3 Billion on the extensions in the Eastern Suburbs. It will never recoup this money which could have been used on Hospitals, Schools and other infrastructure. Even over 50 years with the imposing of \$10 fares on all users would the money be recovered. I consider the main objective behind the extensions is the connection with Randwick Race Course and pressure from the racing, Clubs and gambling industries. The gambling industry in NSW is like the NRA(National Rifle Association) in the USA, and has tremendous sway over the state Govt. The NSW gambling industry is the 2nd largest in the world taking into account the per capita money spent on gambling. In this state gambling has become a way of life. The clubs are particularly benefiting from the Govt's 3 am closure of licensed Venues law. As they now have much more clientele for their heaps of pokies. The industry is making more money than they know what to do with. So they now can pour their profits into grants for schools and charities to extend their influence. With this close relationship with their state government buddies, it's not too surprising that on a ABC radio show in Mid Nov. there was an item which divulged that the Berejiklian Govt is currently looking at having TAFE's utilising clubs as a base for their operations.

Burwood Depot News

Sparks: What is the situation at the depot since privatisation?

Burwood Driver: There has been a number of developments we don't like. Transport for NSW are cracking the whip on us. It monitors the bus service operators. Drivers are now being called into the office over leaving terminuses 10 seconds early. Over my many years of experience of the job under State Transit, I've never heard of this sort of thing ever happening. We have great concerns with the training of new drivers. New drivers now need their heavy vehicle licence and MOT rego. However, they are only given 2 days so called training before going on their runs. It's in reality just route familiarisation, not training. Consequently, we are seeing a lot more bus accidents occurring. The other issue we are unhappy with, is the cuts being made to weekend shifts. The shifts are being cut to 7 hours. Whilst in the past some were 8 hours and others 8 hours and a bit.

Sparks: What are the latest developments at the depot?

Burwood Driver2: The new Transit Systems bosses are showing their claws. New drivers are being paid less than those who have been on the job under the STA. The bosses are intending to use the new rosters in December which have totally unrealistic running times to drive off the job, some of the older drivers and replace them with the cheaper new drivers.

Leichhardt Depot News

Sparks: What is the current situation at the depot?

Leichhardt Busie: We are very concerned by the upcoming new rosters. The bosses appear to be using the Labour Day Long Weekend to trial them. As the private operator Transit Systems is paid by the kilometre, the bosses are trying to squeeze as many runs into our shifts as possible. Consequently there is no layover time allocated at terminuses. This speed up in our jobs seems also in line with the upcoming EBA which is likely to have important new nasties. Many more are leaving the job as they can't cope with its increasing harshness under privatisation. Since privatisation there has also been a huge number of accidents at the depot, with an estimated 360 by Sept. These accidents have mainly involved new drivers who lack experience in the job.



Sparks: What are your thoughts on the \$5,000 prize for fast drivers?

LB: According to latest news 32 drivers shared the prize on the first occasion and on the second occasion, 84 drivers shared the money. It's likely the whole thing was a stunt by the NSW Govt. with the winning drivers being picked out of a hat. As most of them would be unable to meet the unrealistic running times imposed by the bosses.

Sparks: What's happening on the union front?

LB: There has been significant new developments. The bosses are demanding that new drivers join the TWU. Whilst there is a court case between the RTBU and the TWU over coverage of drivers in Region 6. Other news is that drivers in the STA are complaining of a lack of DOC'S. Whilst there has been a strange development since privatisation. With the STA we put cash from fares into machines which issued receipts to us. Now these machines have been removed and we have to put the cash with receipts from our ticketing machines into bags, but we are not issued with any receipts for the payins.

Sparks: What are your impressions of the situation since privatisation?

Leichhardt Driver: In contrast to Govt. propaganda about privatisation improving bus running times, the situation has been getting worse. On one day in September the depot was down 26 drivers due to absences associated with sickies. Resulting in much late running.

STOP PRESS

Tom Herlihy was re-elected RTBU union rep at Leichhardt depot – 70 for and 9 against.

Hillsbus Wildcat Strike

115 Hills Bus drivers called in sick in Sydney's north west on Wednesday 7/11/18, causing a number of service cancellations. People travelling from the CBD to the north west faced the longest delays, with Hillsbus urging customers to leave work early if possible.

“We are working to operate as many services as possible, however, there will be some cancellations and delays,” a Hillsbus spokesman said.

“Hillsbus sincerely regrets the disruption and inconvenience caused to our customers.”

The spokesman confirmed that the extremely high number of drivers calling in sick is due to ongoing negotiations around a new enterprise agreement between drivers and Hillsbus.

“This is action by a group of drivers that is not authorised by their union,” the spokesperson said.

During Wednesday morning peak hour, long lines formed at bus stops with many of the few buses that stopped unable to take on passengers.

Tiff Ng usually catches a bus to work from the M2 Oakes road interchange in West Pennant Hills, but after watching six busses pass without picking up passengers, she “gave up” and got the train.

“Every now and then this happens, but this one, I’ve never seen a line this long and I’ve been catching this bus for a good five years,” she said.

“It was a bit of disbelief that nothing was happening ... just a lot of confusion.”

One Twitter user said they missed their exam due to the delays.

“How can there be so many drivers off today? I’ve never seen the bus lines so bad before. Absolute madness,” wrote another user.

The bus drivers had called in sick at Hillsbus depot in North West Sydney. Hillsbus is contracted to service the areas of Blacktown, Rouse Hill, Castle Hill, Dural and Parramatta.

“All school services operated as normal this afternoon and we have worked with the operator to deploy additional drivers from other areas serviced by CDC Hillbus to assist with the afternoon peak,” said a Transport for NSW spokesperson.

VICTORIAN RAILWAY NEWS

In this issue of Sparks, we will discuss the issue of stand downs and sackings in V/Line. In this issue Drivers, Conductors and Station Staff will discuss these issues. Once again names have been changed.

Sparks: In the last issue mention was made of a Union Official being stood down and a Booking Clerk being sacked.

Rastus and Roscoe: The Driver who was stood down has been reinstated and has resumed duty.

Sheona: There is a rumour that V/Line Management backed down and a compromise was reached.

Roscoe: The settlement is confidential and no one is talking.

Sparks: We hear that the MORON who supervises the Drivers has been removed.

Rastus and Roscoe: You are correct and when the Driver who was stood down returned to work, she was absent.

Sheona: The Driver was stood down for nearly six months. Think of the cost to V/Line.

Roscoe: V/Line does not care how much is wasted in standing down the Driver. This money could have been spent fixing up rolling stock.

Rastus: The MORON has been removed to SPECIAL PROJECTS and the Manpower Clerk, she tried to remove is still on the job.

Sparks: What about the Booking Clerk who was sacked?

Jethro: Two Booking Clerks were stood down for four weeks. When Human Resources completed their sham enquiry, one Clerk was given a final warning and the other Clerk was sacked.

Clarence: When the Clerk was sacked the other Clerks were called into the office one by one and they were told by the Station Manager and the Acting Station Master that no one was to talk to other employees about the Clerk's sacking. These two managers acted like thugs over the Booking Clerks. Some Clerks were not interviewed.

Sparks: Yes the Acting Station Master, the individual mentioned in issue 157.

Rastus: Yes this is the person.

Sheona: These managers think they can stand over employees.

Sparks: Where was the union?

Jethro: They acted quickly and when the union found out, these interviews ceased.

Abner: After a number of months a large number of employees did not know about the sacking.

Sheona: The sacking was over an email about staffing issues and as the case is heading for Fair Work Australia, it cannot be discussed. Management at Southern Cross has had it in for this Clerk.

Clarence: The Clerk wants his job back and will not accept any monetary settlement.

Sheona: The Fair Work Commission can order that the Clerk be reinstated, but V/Line could refuse to abide by the unfair decision which means the case will head to the Federal Court.

Jethro: As a result of the case heading to the Fair Work Australia a number of clerks have been interviewed by management trying to support VLine for sacking the Clerk.

Sheona: This is kept quiet but word has leaked out about these interviews but this time a Union Delegate was at the interview.

Sparks: Let us hope the Booking Clerk wins his case. What is the story about a Conductor being sacked at a Country Location.

Abner: You are correct. The Conductor had completed his shift and when signing off, a Regional Manager handed him a letter which said to the effect that his work was not up to V/Line standard during his period of probation. Also in attendance was a Station Master who asked for his equipment.

Sheona: When you commence employment at V/Line you are on probation for six months. If you STUFF UP during this time and you are dismissed you have no comeback.



Clarence: In other words you cannot go to an industrial tribunal. This has happened to a number of employees over the last couple of years. There is nothing the Union can do to help unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Abner: We do not know what the Conductor had done wrong during his probation, but if he had done something, then he should have been counselled.

Rastus: What we do not like about the case is that one of the Drivers at this location heard the Station Master gloating about the Conductor's dismissal. This Station Master thought the whole affair was a joke.

Sparks: Once again we have run out of space. We hope the Booking Clerk is reinstated. As for employees who are on probation, we hope something can be done to change their conditions of employment.

Rastus and Roscoe: In having the final say the MORON in charge has now departed which is good riddance. As for the Station Master who was GLOATING when the Conductor was dismissed. We will leave you with this message. What goes around comes around.

In this issue of Sparks we will discuss ongoing issues facing Conductors, Station Staff and Drivers at Spencer Street. As in previous issues of Sparks, names have been changed.

Sparks: What is the situation at Spencer Street?

Jethro: The working environment is toxic. You have management treating employees as if they are dirt. Goodwill has gone out the door.

Clarence: May we introduce you to Emily and Elrond. These employees have been around for a number of years at Spencer Street.

Sparks: What has made you come forward?

Emily and Elrond: We have come forward to discuss various issues at Spencer Street. Once upon a time V/Line was a great organisation to work for. Not now, you see, there is a culture of backstabbing and fellow employees dobbing in their workmates.

Rastus and Roscoe: Drivers noticed the difference over the last four years and it is sad to say that some of the new Conductors have decided to dob in Drivers over trivial issues. This is to gain favours from management.

Emily: There is now a culture of bullying amongst the STAFF CLERKS, particularly towards new employees.

Elrond: In one instance, a conductor stood up to one of the staff clerks and said that he wanted to be treated with respect.

Sparks: What happened?

Clarence: The staff clerk ran bleating to a conductor service Manager and the CSM spoke to the conductor. As a result of this interview, the CSM sacked the conductor.

Jethro: The Staff Clerks went easy on the Station Staff for a while but after a couple of weeks went back to their old habits.

Rastus: Staff Clerks are supposed to work with employees, not treat them like dirt.

Sparks: Speaking of CSM's who have filled the vacant positions at Spencer Street.

Emily: These positions have been filled by employees from other areas of V/Line. Not the individuals in the last issue.

Elrond: In the last issue of Sparks mention was made that the existing conductor On the Job Trainers would have been favoured for the positions.

Emily: Fortunately this did not happen. Some OJT's at Spencer Street were disappointed at the way CSM's were selected, decided not to apply.

Elrond: Some CST's based at Spencer Street applied for the positions were not given an interview for the positions.

Sparks: Why?

Emily: They were told they did not possess the skills to be a CSM.

Elrond: Human Resources did not have the guts to inform these CST's that they were not suitable for the position, so they used a manager to inform them they were not to be interviewed.

Rastus: What a gutless bunch!

Abner: At my country depot a CJT was appointed to a CSM's position.

Elrond: This is correct but this person was acting in the position for a couple of months. In fact at Spencer Street no CJT has ever relieved a CSM. When a CSM was on leave a CSM from country depot did the relief.

Abner: We are of the opinion that V/line should have sent the OJT's to a training college to equip them with the skills to fill the position.

Emily: V/Line doesn't want to spend money on training. They look at the resumes from outside appointees and if they have certain management skills these people are given the nod for the positions.

Roscoe: No wonder morale is low amongst long serving employees.

Elrond: The same thing happened when Authorised Officers were advertised. Conductors applied for the positions and they were told they were unsuitable.

Sparks: Why?

Abner: It costs money to train an Authorised Officer, so V/line said the Conductors were suitable, advertised externally and recruited existing officers from Metro Trains.

Rastus: They may have saved money on training but they left a large number of V/Line employees unhappy.

Sparks: Previous issues of Sparks have mentioned V/line's Intent Pool. Is this staff operating?

Roscoe: This is still going and now it has been extended to Drivers' positions.

Rastus: Last time Driving Positions were advertised both internal and external and both kinds of applicants were informed they would be placed in an Intent Pool.

Elrond: The same thing with a number of Station Staff who applied for vacant conductor positions. They were told they would be placed into an Intent Pool.

Emily: Outside applicants are sent for a Medical and then placed into the Intent Pool.

Elrond: The Intent Pool is used to put fear into employees. If someone is in trouble and they are dismissed then the vacancies are drawn from the Intent Pool. Some managers mention the Intent Pool when employees who are in trouble are interviewed.

Abner: The catch with the Intent Pool is you are placed in the pool in the order of the score you obtain in the interview. After twelve months if you have not obtained a position, then you have to reapply for the position.

Rastus: The setting up of an Intent Pool is opposed by both Rail and Locomotive Divisions of the RTBU.

Sparks: In the last issue of Sparks mention was made of employees being sent letters for being late over a period of time. Has this matter been resolved?

Emily and Elrond: One word. NO.

Abner: The matter will be heading for Fair Work. The union does not recognise the letters sent to employees.

Sparks: Once again we have run out of space. Thank you for Emily and Elrond for coming forward. It seems that certain people in management think they can bully employees as a way to climb the promotion ladder. As for the Intent Pool, it should be scrapped. This Pool causes a great deal of stress. Imagine if you are unemployed waiting for a position and you see a career gone after a wait of up to twelve months.

Rastus and Roscoe: In having the final say we Drivers have noticed the toxic environment around Spencer Street. We see these LITTLE HITLERS amongst the management bullying staff. As for the employees who dob-in their fellow Workmates we Drivers have one word for you. You are just scum.

Ten ways in which Andrew Constance is physically destroying Sydney and NSW's rail and bus public transport infrastructure. (From) An open letter to the Rail Division of the RTBU, from a collective of bus driver members of the same union, calling for a combined industrial action, train drivers AND bus drivers, to demand the sacking of Transport Minister Constance.

A HISTORY OF ACHIEVEMENT: AN UNFINANCIAL RECORD OF THE COMBINABLE COSTS OF BUILDING NEWCASTLE'S GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY OVER 180 YEARS!

(Continued From Last Edition)

10 Dec 1831: Opening of the AA Coy iron-railed railway at Newcastle – Australia's first industrial railway, following the 1829 establishment of the "A" Pit of AA Company's Hunter River coal mining monopoly.

May 1849: AA Coy commences construction of a 2-mile standard gauge railway to its 'D' pit. 3 Oct 1851: Burwood Tramroad Act passed, which allowed Dr James Mitchell to extend his horse-worked tramway over AA Coy land to wharves at Newcastle

Sept 1853: John Eales commences construction of the 6-mile Minmi to Hexham railway – opened early 1857.

Nov 1853: Newcastle Coal & Copper Company commenced construction of the standard gauge Glebe railway and the Beach railway. Opened as horse-worked line in June 1854 and converted to locomotive operation December 1857.

8 Nov 1854: Turning of the first sod for construction of the Hunter River Railway

May 1855: Immigrant contract labourers (navvies) arrive for construction of the Hunter River Railway, following the 1852 agreement of the NSW Governor-General to pay for the assisted passage of 500 labourers from England for railway construction

16 May 1855: Transfer of the Hunter River Railway Company to the NSW Railway Commissioners

26 Sept 1855: Official opening and first steam train running of the historically celebrated first railway line on the Australian continent,- the Sydney to Rosehill (Parramatta) line. .

30 March 1857: Official opening of the Great Northern Railway (“GNR”) from Honeysuckle Point, to a temporary station for East Maitland, by the Governor General, Sir William Denison. .

28 July 1857: Opening of extension to West Maitland by the Governor-General,

3 Jan 1861: Newcastle Wallsend Coal Company branch line from Wallsend (Hanbury) Junction opened, and coal traffic commences on GNR

1863: Branxton station, and Singleton stations open

2 May 1864 East Maitland to Morpeth branch line opened to serve the river trade port.

19 May 1869: GNR extension to Muswellbrook opened, and wool traffic diverted to the railway.

April 1872 Opening of GNR to Murrurundi.

1874: Expansion of Honeysuckle Railway Workshops to service GNR locomotives. Expansion of coal export from Port of Newcastle and opening of coal loading facilities at The Dyke, Carrington. Coal traffic on GNR reached 1 million tonnes in 1877-78

1877: Ardglen Liverpool Range Tunnel completed. Tamworth lattice iron bridge opened

1878: Second Newcastle Railway Station opened.

Oct 1878: Opening of GNR to Tamworth

Sep 1879: Werris Creek to Gunnedah branch line opened.

1880: Second West Maitland station opened.

1882: Gunnedah branch line extended to Narrabri

1883: Opening of GNR to Armidale

Sep 1886: Opening of GNR to Tenterfield

April 1887: Opening of Strathfield to Hornsby Rail line

1887: Extension of Hornsby line from Strathfield to Hawkesbury River. Opening of Hawkesbury River Station. .

Aug 1887: Opening of Islington Junction to Gosford line. Opening of Fassifern and Hamilton railway stations.

Jan 1888: Opening of the Gosford to Mullet Creek tunnel along the GNR’s southern approach to the Hawkesbury. Opening of the GNR’s most northerly reach to Jennings (Wallangarra), near the Queensland border.

1 May 1889: Opening of the first Hawkesbury River Railway Bridge

1 Apr 1897: Narrabri-Moree line opened

Mar 1902: Moree-Inverell line opened

Sep 1908: Tamworth-Barraba line opened

Nov 1908: Narrabri-Walgett line opened

1912-13: Record 5.24 million tons of coal shipped through Port of Newcastle

June 1930: A line opened from Kyogle to South Brisbane, and a second northern rail route via the coast approaches the GNR.

May 1932: Grafton rail/road bridge opened 8. Introduction of Brisbane Limited Express as premier train on new line.

1936: Upgrading of Newcastle suburban network with opening of Civic and Wickham stations and improved signalling

1937: Civic signal box and Newcastle signal box mark introduction of power-controlled signalling in Newcastle Yard.

1939: Construction of a replacement Hawkesbury River railway bridge commenced

July 1946: 2nd Hawkesbury bridge opened

Apr 1949: Premier McGirr announces rail electrification to Newcastle, as part of inter-urban area electrical services to Lithgow in the west, Port Kembla in the south, and Goulburn in the Southern Highlands.

1954: Awaba-Wangi Wangi branch line opens for coal haulage

Feb 1955: Railways closed for a month in the Hunter and many areas across the State due to record floods. Maitland North signal box swept away with loss of 3 lives

Aug 1961: Introduction of 620/720 Class diesel railcars on Newcastle suburban services

1967: MSB coal loader at Port Waratah (Hunter River at Newcastle) commences operations

21 Jul 1971: Last regular steam-hauled passenger train services in Australia cease, along the Newcastle-Singleton line.

22 Dec 1972: Last use of standard goods steam locomotives on Hunter coal trains

1974: Upgrade of Broadmeadow station completed under the Urban Public Transport Improvement Program

1977: Port Waratah Coal Services open coal loader with capacity of 16 Mt pa.

Oct 1982: Opening of Sandy Hollow-Ulan line to serve coal mine

June 1983: NSW Government completes the northern electrification to Newcastle.

1984: Kooragang Island coal loader opened

June 1985: Extension of Sandy Hollow line to Gulgong provides link from Port of Newcastle to interstate lines to Adelaide and Perth.

Apr 1999: NR (Newcastle Rail? Northern Rail?) commences operating coal trains in Hunter Valley in competition with Freight Corp.

(Continued Next Edition)

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:

1. That no person employed by the union should earn more than the average income of the membership.
2. The Spokespeople should have no executive power - all decisions should be made by the union membership in the course of 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.

MEMBERS' VOICE - Fighting for Membership Control of the Union and Direct Action.

Web Site: [User.tpg.com.au/retepsni/ MembersVoice](http://User.tpg.com.au/retepsni/MembersVoice)

Email: membersvoice2010@yahoo.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/pages/Members-Voice-RTBU-rank-and-file-group/Members-Voice-RTBU-rank-and-file-group/531249043571323?fref=ts

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Democratic