

No.158

Dec. 2017- Jan. 2018

Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

**ONLY ON-THE-JOB ACTION CAN
PIERCE THE WEB OF THE BUS & RAIL
PRIVATISATION CONSPIRACY & WIN
EBA 2017 GOODIES!**



NSW Rail NEWS;	Rail EBA 2017;
STA Busie News;	VIC. Rail News;
"The Demi Gods"	Bus Privatisation Conspiracy;
Newcastle Bus News;	Sydney Ferries News;
Randwick Council Opposes Bus Privatisation See Back Page	

EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

The most important news continues to be Sydney Trains and NSW Trains EBA (Enterprise Bargain Agreement) negotiations. Already some very bad nasties are becoming obvious in the case of the door being opened to Labour Hire Companies recruiting for the railways and the loss of free travel for rail workers in the context of privatisation. Whilst the union hierarchy continues to run the so-called campaign in a very bureaucratic fashion and is finding a legalistic lame duck excuses to cave-in to the management agenda. (See article page 3.) The loss of free travel just makes a greater mockery of the imaginary 2.5% pa pay rise cap imposed by the cashed up Berejiklian NSW Govt. which the union hierarchy is mesmerised. Certainly the union hierarchy fat cats, who will be selling the rotten deal are handsomely remunerated and won't be as hard hit by the soaring rents, power bills, private health fund charges, etc which will affect grass roots union members. The importance of launching a grass roots controlled campaign to secure some goodies and put the brake on the privatisation express remains a crucial priority.

In this edition we throw more light on the bus privatisation conspiracy, in particular the likely orchestration of the so-called lightning strike affecting the Region 6 depots. Another aspect which we shine the spotlight on is the subsequent block on any industrial campaign to fight privatisation imposed by the Fair Work Australia Commission. We also look at another intriguing aspect of the conspiracy involving some tacky moves by the union hierarchy to claim a fake victory over foiling the alleged inclusion of Ryde with the Region 6 depots for privatisation by 1/7/18. (See article page 12.) The Govt. has been spreading the lie that there will be no changes to drivers' conditions, bus services, etc under privatisation. However, latest news from Newcastle where Keolisdowner has taken over STA routes tells a different story. (See articles pages 8 & 14.)

STOP (Sydney Transport-users Opposing Privatisation) has been organising various community pickets outside STA depots to protest the privatisation push. It's of vital importance that drivers' friends and families get behind this very important initiative. If you want to raise the No Privatisation of Ryde & Willoughby depots slogan in the last week (9th-16th Dec.) of the Federal Benelong (Lane Cove) By Election contact STOP which will be campaigning over the issue via: Facebook STOP Privatisation (@STOPPrivatisation)

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

Subs: To subscribe, the damage is \$5 for a year's sub. Please make out postal notes out to Rebel Worker. Sparks is published by the Sydney Local of the Network for Democratic Unionism. To subscribe for Rebel Worker Paper of the Network for Democratic Unionism, subs are \$12 pa. Please send to PO Box 92 Broadway 2007 NSW.

SPARKS WEB SITE - www.sparksweb.org

N.S.W. RAILWAY NEWS

EBA, What Agreement?

Never before have we needed a more active rank-and-file movement in our unions than now. With privatisation looming on all fronts, not just on the buses, but the whole of the rail network and workplace agreements limiting wage rises to two and a half percent P.A. over the last decade, something drastic needs to be done.

The Leadership of our unions seem to be clutching at straws and has run out of ideas. The latest Enterprise agreement in New South Wales rail is a prime example where they are bereft of solutions to combat management's onslaught. The filing of a dispute in relation to management "failing to bargain in good faith" with the Fair Work Commission shows that they are ignoring the real force that they have with the membership. Do we really believe that management would bargain in good faith, ever? Are Managers not to just out to further their careers and to save money for the New South Wales government? They've never given a s*** about workers in all the years that I've worked there. So why would they listen to a bunch of union delegates when there is so much more at stake for them. Unionism is not about niceties, it's about getting the best deal for members by members.

The differences between the union leadership and us is about the way we go about getting the best deal. They say, "well you elected people to represent you, they make decisions on behalf of you".

We say that true leadership is about taking the membership with you and giving them a voice, being guided by the membership, respecting the wishes and thoughts of membership and lastly building trust and solidarity so that you always get the best possible outcome using the strength in the collective will that they exert.

At the moment the Union is divided up into separate entities, often with their own budgets, their own leadership, acting autonomously only for a narrow range of disparate groups.

The whole of the membership in our industry, acting in solidarity, could bring much more pressure to bear. This has never really happened due to the sectional interests where guards and drivers issues are going to be very different to those working in the customer focused areas. This is to say nothing of the chasm that exists between those workers on the buses and ferries and those charged with the day to day running of trains. It's a case of "Never the Twain Shall Meet".

That's why it has been easy to get rid of Booking Clerks, Cleaners, Station Managers, Duty Managers and the like. Guards and drivers may have cared, but they never were organised to be part of a much larger industrial campaign. They never cared enough. Once again sectional interests as well as self preservation was the driving force. Likewise many station staff counted themselves lucky when they saw others, rather than themselves, on the chopping block.

My question is Why? When management has more tools in it's armory than ever before, why are we not bringing the whole of our industrial workforce to bear on outcomes that affect us all? We have much more in common across the various sectors than is commonly realised or acknowledged.

Privatisation, for instance, affects us all.

At stake in the latest EBA is the loss of free travel for public transport employees that get moved over to the private sector. At the moment this proposal is only targeted at employees who will be part of the privatised companies that run the railways, from what I can gather. However there are no guarantees that the removal of free travel will not be carried across the workplace for all public transport workers.

The Facilitation Clause should be struck out of the agreement altogether. As it currently stands, the clause, if included in the Agreement, would allow management to bring in workplace change without proper consultation and without fair compensation. The union believes that the current proposal will cut them out of negotiation for workplace change. All management would have to do is hold a ballot to bring about the changes they needed. Seeing that no workplace change has been positive over the last few decades I don't see why we need to accommodate this clause at any level. Let's not give them this right.

We know that in the future these changes will pave the way for privatisation if they go ahead. How many of the current permanent jobs will just disappear into the privatisation ether. Metro Trains on the Bankstown and Epping Chatswood line will employ fewer station staff than at present. Also guards are certain to be cut from the "driver only" operation that Metro Trains uses. In the future even the jobs of train drivers is precarious.

If you are unlucky enough for your job to be abolished in the privatisation lottery then under present proposals your redundancy payments can be reduced from the current 65 week maximum payout. What they are planning in terms of redundancy is yet to be spelt out in full. What is on offer however is far a less generous redundancy package than you have now. You also will never be guaranteed to be taken on by the new private transport owners.

Management want to use Labour Hire companies to supplement the workforce. This is an attempt to weaken the unions operating in the workplace. It is basically the contracting of a non-union workforce in an attempt to water down the working conditions of existing employees. Wherever Labour Hire companies have operated in the workplace it has led to lower wages and much lower conditions of the existing workforce.



So now the Unions have sought a Protected Action Ballot from the Fair Work Commission umpire who decides what actions can be taken, when they can be taken and for how long. Strike action is a distinct possibility because of the intransigence of management but as in the past it is highly unlikely.

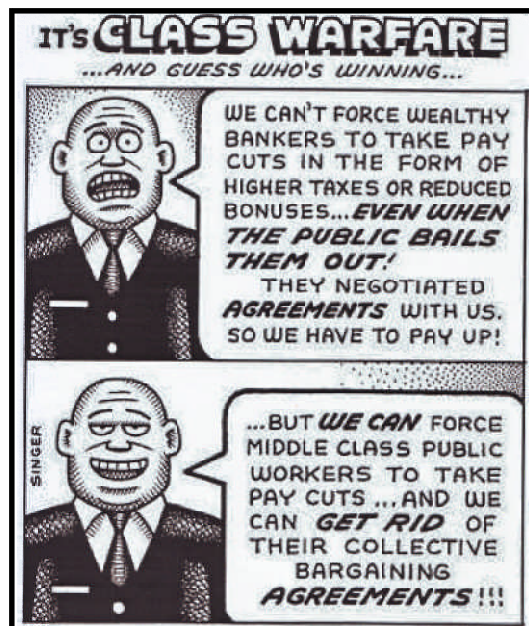
What the actions of the union's leadership do however is put the blame fairly and squarely at the feet of the employer. If the Commission on the other hand decides that enough is enough and calls a halt to any action then the unions can say that they are hamstrung and throw their hands in the air, like they have in the past, with exclamation "We've done all we can".

Resorting to systematic processes rather than organic organisation at the grass roots level does not serve us or the struggle well. There is no substitute to the pressure that can be applied from the ranks when it is done democratically and well.

We urge all members in the public transport industry to get together and organise themselves as one. We need to be bold, we need to work together, we need to build strong roots, we need bonds that cannot break under the pressure of Management.

This cannot be done by appealing to hierarchical forces within the bureaucratic Union leadership. We need totally new ideas, only you can provide that. However it is much better if you all are working together to achieve the same goals, with strength, determination and utter solidarity, rather than sectarian, narrowly politically focused, opportunism.

Sparks wishes you all the best in the New Year and a successful struggle against the worst aspects of your Enterprise Agreement.



Calling all Aspiring Journalists

Sparks magazine which is published several times a year needs people at the shop floor level to tell us of their experiences in the workplace. Sparks tries to encourage people who believe that the best way to win the industrial struggles is by helping yourself and your colleagues by organising in solidarity on the job.

The best source of information about what is happening on the job comes from those who work on the front lines. We want to know about your struggles, your frustrations, your wins or losses against management, or your opinion about the ways the struggle can be improved.

This is about you and your work colleagues. This is not about waiting for a union delegate, that usually dismisses your grievance, to come and save the day for you.

Sparks needs to know about struggles that are happening in your workplace, so that the experiences can be shared across the board spectrum of sectors from buses, ferries, trains, stations, offices, trams, workshops and all manner of workplaces. Drop us an article if you work in public sector transport or even in private sector transport.

To save yourself from reprisals you can even use a nom de plume (pen name) Sharing our experiences helps build solidarity, something that is sadly lacking.

So grab your pen or computer and send us your thoughts. Our shared experiences enrich us all and makes us stronger together. Contributions can be sent to:

PO Box 92 Broadway 2007 NSW and Email: rebworknet@y7mail.com

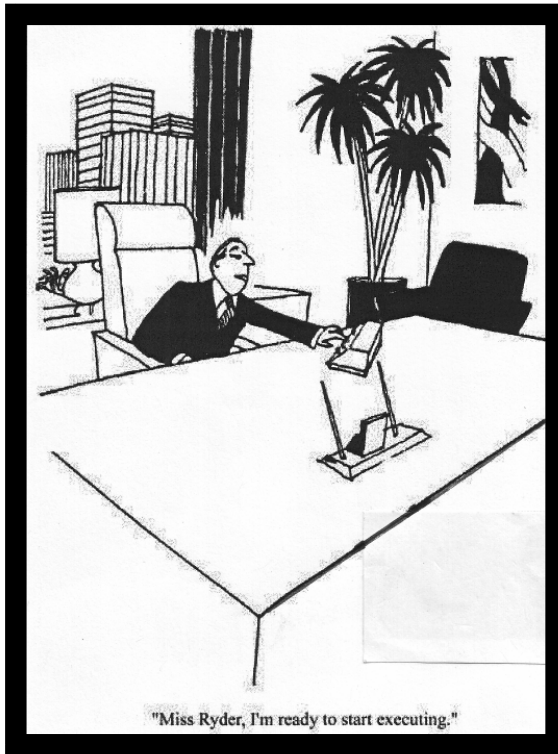


“THE DEMIGODS”

After another arduous day meeting unrealistic running times and massive traffic congestion curtesy of the NSW Liberal Govt., our correspondent was desperate to get a sound night's sleep. After much tossing and turning, he fell asleep. Even here the Liberal tentacles invaded his dreams with an alarming nightmare, causing him to wake up in a cold sweat. The nightmare featured him dying from overwork, going to heaven and being terrorised by Liberal “Demigods”.

Rather than being welcomed by Saint Peter, he was confronted by the NSW Transport Minister “Mr In continence”, looming above him in the sky. Whilst above him partially covered by clouds was Gladys Berejiklian, the NSW Premier, appearing to have grown a pair of horns and attired in a gold dollar sign emblazoned sinister black cloak. He noticed an evil look in her eyes. Bowing before their demigods was a long queue of CEO's and executives of

such corporations as Transurban, Veolia, Transdev, Westpac, MacQuarie Bank, Keolisdowner, Meritons with outstretched hands. The exec's were intent on rewards for services rendered to the Liberal NSW Government. They were in a frenzy in the expectation of more contracts associated with white elephant projects like the Light Rail extensions in the Eastern Suburbs, the Anzac Parade overhead bridge, the Metro and the Westconnex. They were cheering on frantically their Liberal Demigods, yelling "We're doing well, but we want more, more and more money!" They then started chanting rhythmically "Greed is Good", "Greed is Good", to the sound of ringing cash registers. Egging on Berejiklian into writing out cheques in the hundreds of millions, awarding access to public land, and bending environmental laws for the corporate cowboys.



As our correspondent was dreaming, where he was standing he was watching with his own eyes a spectacle which he could hardly believe was possible. There was a steadily growing roar from the crowd of big bosses and a hellish red glow from flaming torches. Ominously, "Mr Incontinence" was seen brandishing a razor sharp axe aimed at the heads of an enormous line of workers and poor people who had dared to stand up to the Liberal onslaught. Berejiklian loomed over the crowd of Liberal true believers who were saluting her like in a big Nazi rally. She cried out "Resistance to my NSW State of Business and Liberal Juggernaut is Hopeless!" The crowd of corporate cowboys became frantic and yelled encouragement to Mr "Incontinence" to "swing the axe!" Our correspondent was staggered to witness shocking blood curdling scenes reminiscent of the "Texas Chainsaw Massacre" movie. He heard a steady drum beat which built up into an ominous crescendo. As Mr "Incontinence" lopped off each worker's head which rolled into a dollar sign patterned bucket, the crowd of CEO'S and exec's yelled hysterically "Greed is Good!" "Greed is Good!", "Greed is Good!", "Greed is Good!" Urging him on to further gory diabolical mayhem.

After the end of the ceremonies, the corporate cowboys returned to business as usual in NSW ripping off workers. They were anxiously looking forward to another NSW State of Business show next week.

S.T.A. BUSIE NEWS

KINGSGROVE DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What are your impressions of the Inner West depots 24 hour strike on 18/5/17 over the privatisation announcement?

Kingsgrove Driver (1): The union is a joke at the depot. On the day of the strike I was out on the road doing my runs when I heard on the ABC News that I was supposed to be on strike for 24 hours! The union rep didn't even bother to be at the depot when I and other drivers arrived for work that day to advise us about it! I am thoroughly pissed off with the union. But recently the union delegate at Kingsgrove has had a change of heart and realises that the union hierarchy is the main problem. He is angry with them for selling us out.

Sparks: What are views on the role of the union officials in the fight against privatisation?

Kingsgrove Driver (2): After the lightning strike and free fare day, Fair Work Australia Commission imposed a 3 month block on the union taking industrial action. When this period ended, Chris Preston the RTBU (Rail Tram & Bus Union) Bus Division Secretary held a press conference at Leichhardt depot where he advised the media that he was not ruling out further industrial action over the NSW Govt's proposed Inner West Region 6 depots privatisation. Our impression is that this announcement by Preston was a ploy by the union officials to find an excuse for not waging further industrial action on the issue. We are very angry with the union officials over their treacherous and ineffectual role in the fight against privatisation. There is tremendous interest amongst us in building the campaign for the picketing of all the depots in December advocated by STOP (Sydney Transport-users Opposing Privatisation).

Recently on two occasions Chris Preston and a local member of the NSW Parliament have come out to the depot to hose down the enthusiasm for the campaign.

WAVERLEY DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What are the latest developments following the privatisation of Newcastle STA buses?

Waverley Busie: In contrast to Transport Minister Constance promises that there would be no changes for drivers, trainee drivers now employed by Keolisdowner which has taken over the STA routes are getting \$6 per hour less than the non-trainee drivers in wages, in contrast to the STA, where the trainee's wages were \$2 per hour less. As the new owner is trying all lurks to cut wages and increase profits. It's certain further down the track they will impose more savage attacks. It goes to show that privatisation is a device for employers to save money and that the dark clouds are coming. In the past Waverley and other depot drivers had transferred to Newcastle, for a better life due to lower rents and house prices in comparison to Sydney. Now with the advent of privatisation, many Newcastle drivers, including some former Waverley drivers have transferred back to Sydney depots as they don't like the new Keolisdowner management. Roughly 50 drivers from the Inner West depots want to transfer to the other depots in the hope of escaping privatisation.

Sparks: What are impressions of changes to routes connected with the privatisation push?

WB: Associated with the new rosters for the upcoming new timetables in late November, there is a significant change affecting the depot. Route 389 which is a long route which we previously shared with Leichhardt, will now be exclusively operated by Leichhardt. It will go from Pymont to Bondi Junction. We will operate a new route the 379. The new route will go from Nth Bondi to Bondi Junction then to Bronte. However the 379 is shorter than the new 389, and as the STA is paid per kilometre of bus running, so with this new run, the STA will receive less income. There seems a case of favouritism with these changes. Associated with the privatisation push a juicy route for Leichhardt has been provided and more income for its proposed private owner. We appear to be gradually being acclimatised to privatisation.



Sparks: What are your views on the changes to bus stops?

WB In Region 6, Transport for NSW has removed 90 bus stops. They are using the rhetoric and propaganda of more efficiency to disguise giving a helping hand to the profitability of the bus services under proposed privatisation. Whilst significantly undermining the buses as a community service

Sparks: What are other ramifications for Waverley from the privatisation push?

WB: There has been an influx of drivers from the Inner West – Region 6 depots. As a result there is much less overtime available. Consequently the pay of drivers at the depot is often lower. There is also strange situation developing with the broken shifts. Now there are often 3 sign on times.

Sparks: What is the latest news with the Light Rail extensions?

WB: I recently attended a public meeting on the issue at the Masonic Centre in Kensington. There was hardly anyone attending. Only representatives of the Light Rail builder attended. There were no NSW Govt. or Transport for NSW representatives. It was largely an exercise in self promotion by the Light Rail builder. There were no speakers, just a model on a table of the Light Rail extensions. I spoke to an engineer from the builder, who advised that the Light Rail was all about relieving transport problems and an opportunity for the Govt. to spend money on building new infrastructure.

In my view it's a completely unnecessary construction. There is a similar situation with the Metro rail line. It's completely unnecessary and will require 25 bridges to be replaced or modified. The hidden agenda of the project being the opportunity to construct apartment towers in the area. In the case of the West-Connex outlet at St. Peters, the adjacent land near the Prin-

cess Hwy which was once used for a brick works and the rail line is having limited height apartment blocks constructed, as a result of restrictions associated with the nearby Airport. In the Marrickville area I recently noticed a massive parcel of land has been flattened for the West-Connex, with the loss of many terrace and heritage homes. These projects will just benefit Liberal Govt. business mates and a small layer of workers employed in such sectors as building and construction.

A disgusting example of favouritism toward business mates associated with the NSW Govt. privatisation push was illustrated by the recent news that in Nov. 2015 the Vales Point power station was sold to Sunset Power International, now Delta Electricity for \$1 mill. This price was allegedly above the retention value. However, now in 2017 the power station has been valued at \$739 million. Through selling off assets to the rich and business mates and stamp duty on real estate, the NSW Liberal Govt. has made ½ trillion dollars in revenue. Whilst NSW has the highest tolls in the world for privately operated tollways, highest parking fines in Australia and highest housing prices in Australia. A new area on the chopping block are 4 TAFEs. These cut backs will seriously affect the number of apprentices and skilled workers. Whilst employers already are now obliged to recruit overseas for skilled workers.

Sparks: How are drivers responding to the proposed privatisation of the Inner West depots and routes?

WB: Many are experiencing anxiety over the issue. They have serious concerns over a range of related issues, such as the impact of privatisation on their super funds, rosters, runs and transfer procedures and availability. They are also concerned that the privatisation of the Inner West depots will encourage the bosses to orchestrate ever more competition between remaining STA depots. There is a lack of certainty of having a job in the years to come. They seem dispirited. Interestingly a recent survey by union groups has revealed that privatisation does not deliver cheaper or better services. In the case of Adelaide, according to a friend there, most drivers in the buses which were privatised are now mainly casuals and part timers. Whilst, the frequency of buses on routes has been reduced.

BURWOOD DEPOT NEWS

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

Burwood Driver: In recent weeks, we had a visit from the CEO in the mid afternoon. Apart from the CEO claiming to be on our side regarding privatisation, we received little enlightenment on the subject. There is a general sense of uncertainty with many drivers transferring to other depots and some leaving the job. There are various rumours about the issue, but nothing concrete. Constance seems to be keeping things on the issue close to his chest. Other news is that the STA is intending to get out of the way its Admin. Restructure before privatisation. Its aiming at finalisation by the end of Nov. 2017. In the case of the Staff Supervisor, the current occupant in the job, will have to reapply for the position.

Sparks: What are your impressions regarding the removal of bus stops?

BD: Like in other parts of the STA there have been the loss of many bus stops particularly along Parramatta Road. In some parts you now have to walk 2 to 3 kilometres to get to a bus stop. Many commuters are angry about the cuts. In the case of the University side of

Parramatta Road in Glebe and Camperdown, 4 stops have been removed and replaced



with 2 of equal distance. However in Burwood there are bus stops every 50 metres. With the removal of bus stops on Parramatta Road as I mentioned, drivers on AM and broken shifts are finding they can now meet the running times. Whilst there has been serious safety issues with the location of the previous stops. Drivers had complained about it over the years, but nothing was done. Now with the privatisation threat, suddenly the bus stops have been changed. We have heard nothing further from the union on privatisation or the enterprise agreement.

Sparks: What are your impressions of the so called “lightning” strike over Constance’s proposed privatisation announcement?

BD: One the day of the announcement we were told unofficially that it was likely there would be a strike next day. If the strike was called off, we would be advised by phone or SMS. On the day of the strike, there was also no official advice from the union that we were on strike. As a result some drivers did their runs without knowing there was in fact a strike. We believe the whole strike was highly manipulated by both the union officials and the STA.

LEICHHARDT DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What is the situation with privatisation?

Leichhardt Busie: Latest news is that Keolis Downer has got the contract for the Inner West depots as the other companies interested in the tender have dropped out. As presumably, the Liberal Govt. had promised Keolis Downer the tender. This company however doesn’t like working under Govt. supervision in the operation of public transport. Since the announcement of the proposed privatisation, many drivers have transferred to other depots which are supposedly not targeted. In reality all depots will be subsequently sold off. Others have left the job. Other news is that we have had a visit from CEO. He was very uninformative and just talked rubbish.

Sparks: How are developments with the bus stops?

LB: We have noticed lately a big pruning of bus stops in our area. One of the most important which has been removed is at Leichhardt Plaza. It’s likely to make many locals angry. It’s all about helping the privatised buses run faster and meet the timetable. We have heard nothing further from the union officials on the enterprise agreement.

Sparks: What are your impressions of the changes to bus operations with the new timetables?

Leichhardt Driver: On Nov.24-25 with the new timetables the 440 will terminate at Bondi Junction, as the proposed new private owner does not have the legal foot print beyond Bondi

Junction. So now travellers from Leichhardt or Central will have to take catch two buses to travel to the beach. The word coming down from Newcastle is that under privatisation no more coffee cups, water bottles, etc will be allowed whilst on our runs.

NEW INSIGHTS ON THE BUS PRIVATISATION CONSPIRACY & HOW TO DEFEAT IT

A fortnight before the announcement by Transport Minister Constance of the proposed privatisation of the Region 6 Inner West depots, there was a union reps meeting at the RTBU office. At that meeting, the reps were advised that Constance was going to make the privatisation announcement on Wed Fortnight from then. At that meeting it was decided to hold a one day strike of all depots in Sydney on the Thursday after Constance announcement. It had unanimous support. However interestingly, the reps were called into the RTBU office again, one week before the announcement for another meeting. At this meeting Mark Morey Unions NSW Secretary or one of his delegates talked the union depot reps into not holding an all Sydney depots 24 hour “fake lightning” strike, only the initially affected 4 depots were to hold the 24 hour strike.

Some drivers suspect that the STA/Transport for NSW bosses may have been in on this decision. After all they had plenty of time to organise scab buses from out of town. (Only 4 depots in the strike would have greatly helped the strike breaking and Liberal electoral fortunes in what were the upcoming local council elections.) Despite Television News reporting quote “a late night union delegates meeting”, immediately after the Constance privatisation announcement, no mass meeting of all the Bus Division was held to discuss the industrial campaign. Only a “rally” was held near the NSW Parliament on the day of the so-called “lightening” strike. It appeared on the TV news that only 30-40 drivers were there. Yet hundreds of drivers were affected. No “official” advice was given at the depots of the strike either by union reps or via a union “Strike Bulletin”. Only “un-official” advice and media reports. This no doubt contributed to unintentional strike breaking and confusion. Particularly with other depots doing cross-city runs.

BLOCK ON INDUSTRIAL ACTION PLOY?

After the free fare day and so called “lightning strike” the Fair Work Australia Industrial Commission imposed a 3 months block on industrial action by the union. At the end of this period Chris Preston RTBU Bus Division NSW State Secretary held a press conference - where he advised that “he didn’t rule out further industrial action”. Whether he intended it or not, this announcement was used by Minister Constance to apply immediately to the Fair Work Australia Commission to impose a further 3 month ban on industrial action. Constance must have been rubbing his hands with glee over the RTBU “mistake”.

“RYDE MYSTERY”

According to a marginal Lefty newspaper source who often rely on union bureaucrats for info, Ryde had been added recently to the Region 6 Inner West depots for privatisation. The announcement seemed to be missing from the daily mainstream press. Sparks has checked

the Ministry of Transport Press Releases for all of October-November. No mention of Ryde anywhere. So when Chris Preston from RTBU leaked the story to the Inner West Courier and a week later on Friday 10th Nov at 10am orchestrated a lame duck protest outside Ryde depot without any media interest, it is clear that he and the RTBU were the only ones in the know from the Minister himself? Is this what the RTBU calls “mass campaigning”?



There was a very poor advertising of the event and only a small crowd of Local ALP hacks attended. In addition there were drivers from Ryde on their meal breaks who wandered out to the gate in curiosity. In attendance apart from Chris Preston was the Mayor of Ryde and Luke Foley, Leader of the NSW ALP. It had all the appearance of another ALP election stunt, with the union hierarchy looking like they are doing something on the privatisation issue? Some drivers were asking had had a dirty back room deal been made by the union officials to include Ryde now on the chopping block in exchange for Minister Constance reinstating of the industrial allowance. This allegedly occurred 9 weeks(?) after Constance ripped it up in Parliament last June. Why was there no jubilation by the RTBU with the members over the “victory” of the return of the industrial allowance. Their silence on this issue has led to the members speculating of a Ryde depot trade off. Why was there no mention on Bus Express web site of the date and conditions of the return of the Industrial Allowance?

Another much more likely scenario drivers have discussed is that the leaking of the info about the alleged proposed privatisation is a ploy by the union officials to claim a “fake” victory. They can say “We saved Ryde, but unfortunately we couldn’t save the Region 6 depots.” As Ryde is not targeted just yet, until after the next State elections. For Ryde to be targeted with Region 6 a new separate tender would need to be made and Constance would have made a press release.

THE RIDDLE OF THE UNIONS NSW MARCH & RALLY

On Thursday 16/11/17 Unions NSW organised a combined unions march from Belmore Park to, according to Preston to Parliament House where it would be associated with the second stage of the debate inside Parliament over Bus Privatisation. However, strangely the march was diverted to the “Perfumed Garden” behind St. Marys Cathedral for a rally on workers’ rights from a range of industries, but no mention of the buses. No announcement was made by the union officials at the Rally that the bus privatisation debate on was now “delayed” until 4.30 pm on that day. Drivers around the depots were misled on this point and thought the

RTBU were building broader union support for their cause. They weren't. However, commuters who completed the Unions NSW "Save Our Buses" petition were advised about the changed time of the debate and told to turn up by 4pm at Parliament. Given the ALP politicians grandstanded inside, it must have impressed the 80 odd(?) commuters in the gallery. It did not impress Transport Minister Constance who walked out of the debate. The 20,000 workers at the union rally remained oblivious to the busman's plight having already returned to work after a half day stoppage.

IDEAS FOR ON-THE-JOB ACTION

Some suggestions have come in from drivers on types of on-the-job action to fight privatisation. We neither endorse or oppose these ideas because they fall into the grey area of the law and we cannot take any responsibility for bus drivers facing the consequence of their own actions. But to win this battle the drivers will have to take their own initiatives to draw attention to their opposition to privatisation of their jobs and to keep the community on side.

Lightning "union meetings" at choke points in traffic where there is a natural build up of delayed buses, accidentally blocking more than one lane, may draw attention to the essential role of the industry in traffic flows. Obviously drivers would have to discuss their rostered position on the road beforehand to avoid any suggestion that they were intentionally in breach of the law.

NEWCASTLE NEWS

Keolisdowner Underpays Bus Drivers

TRANSPORT Minister Andrew Constance has put Newcastle's private transport operator on notice after again underpaying its bus drivers this week.

Keolis Downer underpaid more than a dozen bus drivers, with regular pay and entitlements affected, on Wednesday night.

It comes despite promises in August from the French-Australian company, which won the contract to operate the city's buses and ferries last year, that the issue would be resolved as a "priority" after more than 70 workers were reportedly previously shortchanged.

The Herald has been told some workers were out of pocket by more than \$500 following Wednesday's bungle. Other drivers missed out on their entitlements

One driver told the Herald "morale is at an all-time low".

Mr Constance demanded Keolis Downer resolve the issue urgently after a series of questions on Thursday.

"Keolis Downer needs to fix this. And fix it quick," he said.

Wallsend MP Sonia Hornery – who earlier this week slammed Keolis Downer management for mounting cancellation of bus services – said the situation was "completely unacceptable".

“Drivers are now left facing not being able to pay their mortgage and other bills. So not only do they not get paid correctly, they will now be slugged with additional fees and charges from their banks,” she said.

“This is completely unacceptable and the Minister for Transport should step in and ensure his pet privatisation project is functioning properly.”

The Rail, Transport and Bus Union revealed it had taken Keolis Downer to the Fair Work Commission over the payroll issues.

“The company has since committed to a series of written undertakings to fix the problem,” RTBU secretary Chris Preston said.

“It’s vital that the company get this situation sorted out as quickly as possible.”

Keolis Downer chief executive Campbell Mason said the underpayments were caused by “issues associated with the migration of data between rostering and payroll systems”.

“An eight person taskforce is working to address the issues which have caused these errors,” he added.

“Our staff are the key to the effective delivery of services to the Newcastle community. We are growing our pool of drivers to deliver a more resilient operation.”

31/8/17 Newcastle Herald

LETTER TO THE INNERWEST COURIER

Privatised transport serves only profiteers

As a former public transport driver at Waverley and Randwick bus depots, I am opposed to Premier Berejiklian’s plans to privatise Sydney metropolitan public bus routes.

Her media sideshow in your edition (Courier, August 23) over a proposed minibus, taxi or Uber service is no more significant than local councils running its own minibus transport for shoppers.

It has existed here in Leichhardt for years without fanfare.

Premier Berejiklian should be addressing her proposed secret deal with the RTBU union leadership to cut bus stops, off peak-services and turn peak-hour mass transit runs into money-making “cattle trains” for mates in the profit-hungry private sector.

Not just in the inner west but in the eastern and northern suburbs as well. How else are they going to run the Bronte-Leichhardt, Kingsford to Abbotsford and Sydenham to Chatswood cross-city runs?

Jefferson Lee, spokesman,

Sydney Transport-users Opposing Privatisation (STOP),

Leichhardt - *Innerwest Courier* 6/9/17

SYDNEY FERRIES NEWS

Sparks: What has been the situation with the Ferries since privatisation?

Ferry Worker: Sydney Ferries Corporation was privatised on 28/7/12 via franchising involving a 50%/50% arrangement between Transdev Australasia and Broad spectrum. Subsequently the staffing of the Ferries including deck hands, engineers and skippers has been cut in half.

Balmain shipyard which does Ferries maintenance has had 200 redundancies, after the workforce was “battered up” for 1 or 2 years when no staffing cutbacks occurred. After this period fitters and turners have been retrenched. The bosses also commenced spying on workers at the shipyard. When they go to the nearest pub for lunch, the bosses set Govt. drug testers on them when they return to work. 6 or 7 have been sacked on the spot. As the tests revealed the workers being over 0.05.

Sparks: What is the state of repair of the Ferries?

FW: Since privatisation the Ferries have become run down. There is a lot of corner cutting going on. The fleet is not being painted enough. Consequently, passengers have had accidents due to slipping on the boats, particularly near the entrance, where the paint is wearing off.



Prior to privatisation you could book up a Ferry on the repair sheet and it was repaired and back on routes in 24 hrs. Now you can wait weeks or months for it to be repaired. Torn seats are common. Exhaust fumes are leaking into the engine rooms of Ferries affecting workers. As a result of the lack of repair, there are near misses in Darling Harbour.

Sparks: What are your impressions of the current training in the Ferries?

FW: The training of workers in safety procedures is going by the way.

There are Marine courses at Ultimo and Brookvale TAFES. In the past marine training involved all teachers with 12 years experience as captains with cargo ship experience. They would teach costal mapping, sextant use and other skills. So that skippers with master certificates would be trained by professional and retired captains. Now teachers fresh from university teach the courses.

In the past, trainees were examined by master mariners. Now only paper tests are involved. Consequently, deck hands and mariners have inadequate training. The TAFE sacked the master mariners as it was cheaper to employ uni graduates. The Govt handles revenue and the company cuts back staff.

Sparks: How is solidarity on the job?

FW: The workforce is divided by membership of three unions, the MUA for deckhands, the AMOU for skippers, and the AIMPE for engineers. In the past ferry workers worked as a team but now the Ferry bosses are encouraging divisiveness by victimisation and workers informing on their workmates. The last stop work occurred as part of a NSW public sector protest last year and involved the deck hands.

VICTORIAN RAILWAY NEWS

In this issue of Sparks we will discuss various issues facing V/Line employees. Once again Drivers, Conductors and Station Staff will discuss these issues. As with previous issues of Sparks names have been changed.

Sparks: I hear that V/Line is being investigated over issues of corruption.

Rastus and Roscoe: The Independent Broad Based Anti Corruption Commission is investigating V/Line.

Denzil: The issue is about a former Rolling Stock Manager and his partner being involved in a scam. In other words these ripped off V/Line.

Sheona: This issue is ongoing and we will have to wait for the final report. There could be prosecution through the courts.

Clarence: I hope the I.B.A.C investigates Human Resources and the way they select employees for various positions.

Peneope: Yes we hope so, as the way Drivers are selected was corrupt.

Jethro: So is the way other positions were filled at V/Line.

Sparks: These issues were discussed in previous issues of Sparks.

Rastus: The last way they selected Drivers was corrupt.

Roscoe: You can say that again. A number of Spark Drivers applied for the positions and did not pass the selection test.

Diedre: I can say it was rigged. Firstly some of these Spark Drivers were former V/Line Customer Service employees who applied for the Drivers positions as V/Line was not recruiting Drivers due to the Right of Return policy.

Rastus: The Right of Return policy which operated until 2009 was discussed in the last issue of Sparks.

Roscoe: Over the last eight years there has been internal recruitment plus Drivers from the **Sparks and Freight Companies. This is the first time no one has been selected from the Sparks or Freight Companies. Drivers are upset.**

Sheona: As has been said in a previous issue, V/Line wants a compliant workforce. Some of the persons who have been appointed to become Trainee Drivers are engineers, academics and former executives. No wonder they can pass the selection test.

Denzil: A number of people have applied for internal positions a few times and now they do not obtain an interview.

Rastus: No wonder morale is low.

Sparks: We must move on. What is the Rolling Stock situation?

Rastus: It is like a third world railway operation.

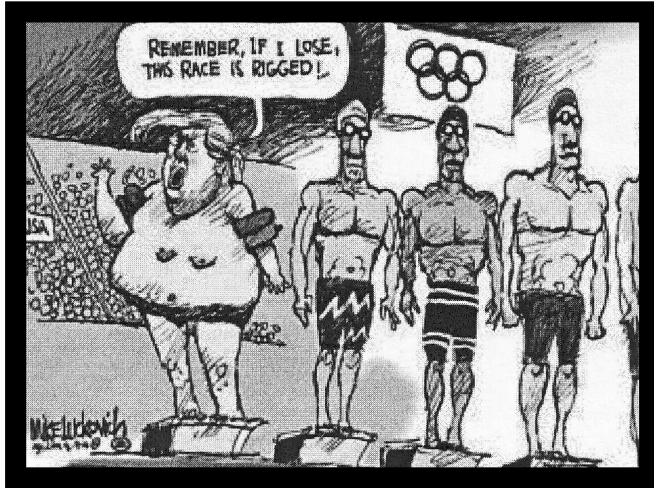
Sparks: What do you mean?

Clarence: Due to budget cuts, which happened under the previous Government, where \$130 million was ripped out of the V/Line budget only maintenance was carried out for the system to operate safely. Hardly any money was spent on upgrades to rolling stock.

Penelope: An example was the refurbishment of Buffet Modules. All eighteen Buffet Modules were to be upgraded, but after six modules were upgraded, the project was suspended.

Jethro: In the last State Budget money was allocated for the upgrade of the Regional Carriage Fleet.

Denzil: What should be happening is consideration being given to replace these carriages with Diesel Multiple Units with Buffet facilities similar to the Explorer units in NSW.



Rastus: In the meantime if maintenance is not concluded or a breakdown occurs in the Rolling Stock, on some trains, the carriages for these trains will be replaced by carriages only suitable for short commuter runs.

Penelope: Look at the Shepparton line. In the last six months certain trains have been replaced by commuter carriages.

Denzil: Imagine if you have booked first class to Shepparton and you arrive at Spencer Street to see a notice “NO FIRST CLASS ACCOMODATION” and “NO BUFFET”, how would you feel? You get a refund on the difference of fare, but you feel cheated.

Penelope: If you are travelling economy the journey is rough.

Rastus: V/Line does not care. You see as long as the train is running, they are not fined. If the train was replaced by buses, they would be fined.

Clarence: This is not the only thing to happen. Trains which are operated by Six Car DMU’s are sometimes operated in peak hours by a three car DMU. Imagine the crush load in the train. Sometimes V/Line has buses to back up the train but people want to get home quickly and very few use the buses. Sometimes the conductors working these trains do not know until they arrive at the platform. They are subject to abuse. The reason they run a three car DMU’s is because it is a train and they are not fined if it is cancelled. Local Media in country Victoria is getting stuck into V/Line on these issues.

Sparks: I wonder what is the future of V/Line?

Clarence: V/line is a Government Department of Public Transport Victoria.

Rastus: V/Line is supposed to show how a Government Rail Operator is operated, but due to their misadventures over the last few years, they have let the side down.

Sparks: Once again we must close the interview.

Rastus and Roscoe: Once again in having the final say, we hope employees come forward to IBAC about corruption. Finally we only hope V/Line can improve.

MELBOURNE TO ALBURY LINE ISSUES

In this issue of Sparks we will discuss problems in the Melbourne to Albury line. Drivers and Conductors will discuss these issues. Once again names have been changed.

Sparks: What are the problems on the Albury Line?

Rastus: V/Line has had problems with both track and rolling stock.

Roscoe: May we introduce you Arlene and Abner who will discuss on train issues.

Arlene and Abner: We work as conductors at a depot which rosters us on the Albury Line.

Sparks: What is happening when you sign on?

Arlene: When we go on duty we are informed the train has been cancelled and is replaced by buses.

Abner: We do not go out, but we check passengers' tickets for the replacing buses, copping abuse from passengers then we do customer service duty around Southern Cross until the conclusion of our shifts.

Sparks: Why the bad track?

Rastus: Originally the line was broad gauge with the standard gauge line running parallel to the Broad Gauge line from Broadmeadows to Albury.

Roscoe: In 2008 after years of deferred maintenance of the Broad Gauge line, the Victorian Government handed over the Broad Gauge to ARTC for conversion to Standard Gauge.

Abner: In 2011 passenger services resumed and by 2012 a full service of three a day serviced the line.

Abner: For these services 3 five car N sets were overhauled at Newport Workshops. Two for the service plus one spare set.

Rastus: These N class locomotives were converted for the service. Two for the service plus one spare locomotive.

Abner: To provide power for the N sets their power vans were converted to standard gauge.

Roscoe: This work of converting the broad gauge line was contracted out and after 12 months mud holes appeared in the line and speed restrictions were imposed. This was the reason it had taken a longer period to restore passenger services.

Rastus: When services resumed and the mud holes reappeared so special restrictions were imposed. As a result springs on the carriages were breaking, thus trains were cancelled due to a lack of spare parts.

Abner: V/Line operated on the just in time principle for spare parts.

Rastus: ARTC controls the line and due to the condition of the track, decided to take back track maintenance in house with their own labour.

Roscoe: Over the last few years a fair amount of work has been done to bring the line up to standard.

Abner: Another reason why the trains are cancelled is due to defects of the rolling stock and a number of times the trains have been cancelled due to no spare carriage sets.

Arlene: Due to these cancellations questions have been asked in State Parliament about these cancellations. So V/Line decided to operate some trains with reduced carriages and sometimes the train was operated with these carriages but no Buffet Service.

Abner: One day the Buffet Cars were operated but due to defects in the cars no buffet service was provided. Free drinks of mineral water were handed out to passengers.

Arlene: That is not all. When the service was resumed, the Buffet service was continuing but to save money because the Buffet conductor was working a rest job and to save on shift penalties, some Whizz Kid decided to have a crew change midway in the service.

Abner: The Buffet service operates to Echuca and also Seymour where crews change over. As a result of these changes, the Buffet car has to close down between Seymour and Echuca.

Sparks: Think of the inconvenience to passengers.

Arlene: Because the Buffet cars use a point of service system, the conductor has to close down to balance the takings and check the stock sheet.

Abner: Because of the political toll over bus replacements of trains as on one occasion, a train was delayed up to ninety minutes so as it is run as a train. Conductors were left in the dark over the delays. No one gave them information and the conductors were coping abuse.

Sparks: How was V/Line going to solve the problem?

Abner: Some Whizz Kid came up with the idea if a fourth carriage set to be used as a spare set to cover for unforeseen breakdowns.

Sparks: Where was V/Line to obtain the carriages.

Arlene: Reduce the Albury trains to four carriages but where were they going to obtain a power van?

Rastus: We, drivers heard a rumour that v/Line was to obtain an old air conditioned carriage from NSW. We do not know where the carriage was to be procured from but it was to be converted to a power van.

Roscoe: A number of drivers on locomotive transfers to Newport saw a guttered NSW carriage on a siding in Newport Workshops. One of these drivers asked what this carriage was being used for and was told the car had been stripped to a shell so a diesel engine could be installed.

Rastus: The car was stripped then it was discovered that the carriage frame could not support a diesel engine. You see power vans were built with a stronger frame.

Sparks: I think of the amount wasted on this project.

Abner: They wanted to produce a power van at least costs. They should have constructed a new power van.

Rastus: They should be looking at new rolling stock for the line. A suggestion would be to build new Velocity Trains with Buffet facilities. The manufacturer of these trains has said they could be constructed.

Roscoe: With the Power Van debacle now V/Line is looking at an option for a new shunting locomotive.

Sparks: What is that?

Rastus: Obtaining a Locomotive from a defunct Tourist Railway, overhaul it and use it as a shunting locomotive. Drivers have only heard the rumour and have no evidence to back it up. The rumour will be discussed in a future issue of Sparks.

Sparks: Once again we have run out of space but V/Line should look at purchasing new rolling stock for the Albury Line.

Rastus and Roscoe: In having the final say V/Line should stop wasting money on second hand rolling stock and construct new rolling stock. To Arlene and Abner we thank you for having the guts to have come forward and discuss the issues.

International Transport Workers' News

IRISH RAIL NEWS

Irish Rail workers were out on strike recently. The WSM recently caught up with J, an activist and worker at Irish Rail, to find out.

WSM: Hi J. So why have workers at Irish Rail been out on strike recently?

J: Hi. Yeah - so workers have been in pay talks with the company through the unions over the last number of months. We've had a pay freeze since 2008 and there have been pay cuts. We have given in terms of productivity and we've just been putting in for pay increases. In the negotiation we were looking for an increase with no conditions attached. The company were saying that there was no money and it was looking like nothing. We were looking for a 3.75% increase. The company were offering 1.5% with about 20 conditions attached to it in terms of productivity.

We were about to secure a deal for 2.5%, I think, within a 12 month period with a 500 euro voucher at Christmas. The CEO refused to sign it. The CEO was not engaging with the unions at all and sent the HR director to negotiate with the unions. When that document was agreed by the unions and brought back for the CEO's signature he refused to sign it. The workers, the unions and the Labour Court were frustrated to say the least. The CEO is over from the UK, could be described as Thatcherite and does not negotiate with unions. He was brought over with an agenda presumably - privatisation and cuts - and is very anti-worker.

At that point the company started lying saying that we were the ones not negotiating and that we walked out of talks. They put out there PR spin but at that point we were balloted for industrial action. And the anger of everybody! I think there was 80% or so voted for strike action. We went out then over a series of days.

WSM: What form did the strike action take? What happened?

J: Pickets were formed at each work location. We worked a rota on the pickets of workers doing that duty.

[J later added: The cleaning workers respected the picket and didn't cross it. They are members of SIPTU as well. They should get strike pay because they help our strike by not crossing it. But they don't get strike pay. They're down pay and they're low paid workers. It's something we should put pressure on the unions to do].

WSM: Strike action has been called off for now. What have been the latest developments?

J: We were called back in to the Labour Court just before the third day of action. This would have fallen on the day of the Ireland-Denmark match which would have caused the company some disruption. The Labour Court has delivered a recommendation. It's a peculiar one in that it's complicated. You read it back around to see what they are actually saying.

Basically, they recommended a 2.5% increase over three consecutive years and a 500 euro voucher bonus. (It's in voucher form to avoid the tax aspect of it).

The unions are interpreting the recommendation as saying that there are no conditions attached to that. There are a few - I think they're called initiatives' - that workers will have to comply with the railway safety legislation - you know, things that we would have to be complied with anyway. Then there's a list of further conditions, items to be discussed. We agreed to go into talk again with the company on these items. Some of them are outsourcing and pay roll reform. There's a list of them.[J later added that the company's initiatives' feature increased performance management', including GPS tracking on the workers' vans].

They are also saying that there is be a no strike' agreement.

WSM: What do workers think of all this?

J: The concern with workers is that those conditions are tied to the agreement. Anything mentioned in the agreement or in the recommendation, we can't strike for. But then you have to go back to another paragraph which says that the company can't bring in those items without - now it doesn't say without agreement', it says without productivity discussions' and referral back to the Labour Court if needs be. I suppose, of course, the fear would be that the Labour Court, because it is not impartial, would deliver a recommendation that we would have to comply with those conditions further down that road.

So the unions, on the one hand, can see that it is something over a three year period. They're saying that any sort of productivity or pay talks that have happened in the past have had a no strike'[presumption]and that hasn't prevented us from acting anyway. We take it that there are still ways.

Some workers are saying[...that they would take action...]if the company does try to bring in anything unilaterally without our agreement or without some sort of payment attached to each of those conditions. They see it as tying those conditions into payment separate to what we have. If the company tries, then they are, in effect, breaking the agreement. Then we would be able strike on that basis.

I don't know. It remains to be seen how that will play out. Some people are talking about voting against until it is explained to them more. Other people are saying that they want to take this and fight further battles down the line. They think that these conditions are now tied to something in return. The agreement did say that no extra costs are to be claimed by the unions but something in return for those conditions would be cost-neutral in a sense.

WSM: Is it difficult being in a union at Irish Rail?

J: No. It's part of the culture. It's a very unionised environment. You're encouraged to join a union.

WSM: What effect has the strike had on the way that your colleagues, fellow workers relate to one another?

J: Between workers who scabbed the strike and those who were on the picket, there is the obvious tension there. Between workers who were on the picket together, you can't beat the feeling of just walking past

See Page 24

STOP PRESS: New Insights into the Bus Privatisation Conspiracy

Special General Union Meeting

Disgruntled drivers launched a union petition for a special general union meeting to discuss the “Don’t Sell Our Buses Campaign”. Due to general dissatisfaction with the Union’s inadequate response on the industrial front. The petition got 500 signatures.. In response, the union officials booked a tiny room in Pitt Street CBD in early Dec. for the holding of the meeting. Drivers were advised of the meeting via personal letter, email or text message. It was made clear, that there would be no catering, not even coffee. To attend the meeting drivers would have to use their day off. Some officials said they would attend to field questions. Sparks would appreciate a report of the meeting.

OPAL FREE FARE DAY

On loan to Willoughby a driver headed out at 5.30 am only to be abused by the public, they heard on the radio it was an Opal Free Day. After the third complaint in two bus stops the driver could only say “it’s news to me, suit yourself.” So much for the depot level union organisation of industrial action that led to a three months Industrial Court ban on industrial action by drivers?

Continued From Page 23 and there’s a how-are-ya?’ acknowledgement. You know that you have each other’s backs. You know the solidarity.

WSM: What would you say to any worker at present - not necessarily those at Irish Rail - who was afraid to go out on strike?

J: I would say that it is scary. The way to overcome the fear is through the collective action.

Find just one other worker who thinks the same as you in order to organise. If it’s not a workplace that is organised, find just that one other person because often times they try to keep you isolated within a workplace. Two great - but even just one other person! You can organise from there.

RANDWICK COUNCIL OPPOSES BUS PRIVATISATION

At Council’s Ordinary meeting of 28 November 2017, a Mayoral Minute regarding the opposition to privatisation of Sydney Buses was approved as follows:

“RESOLUTION: (Her Worship the Mayor, Cr L Shurey) that Council voice its opposition to the privatisation of Sydney buses, and its support for the STA bus drivers, on Council’s website and Facebook page, as well as in the Mayoral Column. Further, Council write to the Transport Minister for NSW, stating our opposition to the privatisation of Sydney buses.”

What is Democratic Unionism?

Democratic