

No.159

April - May 2018

Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

**ALP Union Hierarchy & Govt.-Management
slip Rail & Bus EBA's through, concealing
Nasties. Speeding the Way for Job Cuts &
Privatisation! Resist with Direct Action &
Grassroots Controlled Unionism!
Upcoming Union Elections?**



NSW Rail News;

STA Busie News;

Vic. Rail News;

International News;

Review of Rail EBA 2017;

Open Letter From Busies;

Sydney Cabbies' News;

STA Privatisation Insights;

EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

Some of the most important news in the NSW Railways has been the brazen railroading of Rail EBA 2017. As predicted in a previous edition of Sparks no EBA document was supplied to the grass roots prior to the ballot. The ballot was open to rigging and the lack of the provision of the EBA document was obviously aimed at preventing militants issuing critical flyers to expose the nasties. Whilst the Union Facebook Page was censored. Only a management “Road Show” to sell the dirty deal was held. While an “imaginary” pay rise and bonus was supplied to assist the ALP Union Officials electoral fortunes. There was an ominous silence by the Union Officials, Management and the Media concerning some dangerous “trap door” clauses in the likely EBA document. Such as the “Transmission of Business” which gives the Green Light to privatisation and the “Facilitation Clause” exposed in a previous Sparks, which allows management to change anything with the “Consultation” of their Union Official stooges. (See article page 3.)

Due to hearsay concerns about the AEC (Australian Electoral Commission) conduct of ballots in the 2014 union elections, (see article “NSW Railway News” in Sparks No.151 Mar.-April 2015 on our website www.sparksworld.org), we propose a system of voting for the upcoming union elections which would ensure trust in the system. It would involve the holding of individual secret workplace ballots with declarations that day of voting for candidates, the issuing of postal ballots for those on leave and those at work that day not voting counted as informal. Candidates can have scrutineers with AEC officers in attendance. Should there be an inability to gain trust in the system, we propose a formal rank and file structure based on workplace roles in the industry for e.g. different grades have a caucus to discuss different grade’s problems, based on democratic union principles. (See back page of Sparks.)

Following the railroading of the STA EBA, Transport Minister Constance announced the winning tender for Region 6. Whilst the union hierarchy and Unions NSW have waged a bogus campaign to oppose the privatisation. In this edition we explore how this push is part of an international strategy and a sort of repackaging of the STA in a more vicious form. (See article page 13.) The union officials are now talking about an EBA with Transit Systems. With the Rightwing ALP machine in control of the union any new EBA can be expected to contain ever more nasties which will lead eventually to complete casualisation. Highlighting the importance of the push for grass roots controlled unionism. In this edition we throw more light on the wrecking of public transport which has followed the privatisation of Newcastle STA Buses which the union officials totally caved-in on. (See article page 7.)

Sparks welcomes contributions in the shape of poems, articles and cartoons by transport workers. Please send to Sparks PO Box 92 Broadway 2007 or via our website www.sparksworld.org Subs: To subscribe the damage is \$5 pa. Please make out postal notes out to Rebel Worker. SPARKS SITE - www.sparksworld.org

N.S.W. RAILWAY NEWS

RETROSPECT TO AN “AGREEMENT”

For many employees across the New South Wales rail network the Easter Bunny came early. The latest Rail Enterprise Agreements have been accepted by a narrow margin. There are 49% of union members who either never voted or who did not accept the agreement. The pre-Easter egg delivered is inadequate and hollow.

The 3% pay rise deal over 3 years is just .5% over the NSW Government’s salary cap, which we should never accept as a first premise. The premier Gladys Berejiklian says that there will be job losses to pay for the pay rises.

According to SBS news:

“Ms Berejiklian insisted the deal still fell in line with the government’s fair wages policy which caps public sector wage increases at 2.5 per cent.”

“If any class of employees want more than that they have to give things up - and that’s what’s happened in this case,” she told reporters in Sydney on Thursday. Asked if efficiencies the union might have agreed to included potential job cuts, the premier replied: “I understand there are some. I understand there are issues around that.”

“The Rail Tram and Bus Union accepted there would be job cuts when new technology was introduced but believes the latest offer requires proper consultation.”

“I don’t want to see any job cuts. I would love it if they got their numbers all wrong and we didn’t lose anybody,” RTBU NSW secretary Alex Claassens told reporters.

In our opinion wishing and hoping does not cut it, there were many failures that led this agreement to be despised by a large section of the workforce.

According to News.com

“Mr Claassens said workers will now be given the opportunity to hear the details of the new offer at depot meetings over the coming weeks, before determining whether the offer “provides them with the better conditions and a fair wage offer that they deserve”.

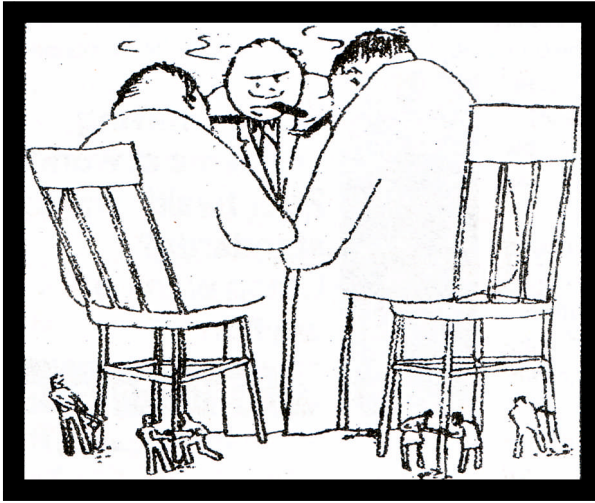
“A previous offer was overwhelmingly rejected by a mass meeting of workers’ representatives last week,” he said.

“We’re talking about people’s livelihoods and working conditions here. It is important workers are given every opportunity to discuss the offer on the table and decide for themselves whether this latest offer is good enough.”

Therein is one of the failures of process. If the rail union representatives were holding out for a better deal including a 4% pay rise and rejected the offer on the table why were they not balloted a second time when the latest deal was presented? From what we can gather there was no further substantial progress, as far as the workforce was concerned, in the offer from the NSW

Government after the first rejection from the elected delegates. Why were there no second ballot of elected delegates who still had no further reason to ratify the new offer?

It seems that the decision had been made at executive level to put the ballot for and against accepting the EBA to the general membership despite widespread opposition from the rank and file. Why was there a rush all of a sudden just inside the expiry of the 6 week ban on industrial action imposed by the Industrial Commission?



There were some signs that the membership was prepared to battle on for a better deal once the 6 weeks imposed ban had been lifted. It is not likely that the Commission was ever going to relent and let strike action go ahead legally. However, what a chance went begging to prove that we can “change the laws” by defying the laws. With the density that the rail unions have here was a chance to change destiny. The other thing is that dozens of other unions were offering their support for a decent agreement. The rail unions were not out on a limb by any means. Without a fully thought out and democratic campaign, involving the members, it automatically meant that capitulation became the preferred option. The power that workers united had to bring the NSW Government and NSW Businesses to their knees was not going to be on show in this State.

Now the Union and their members are in a much weaker position on future bargaining. The Fair Work Commission will have a set precedent from this period to once again impose Industrial Bans based on public transport workers being declared an essential services and an action that “endangers the public”. It will surely be used against other public sector workers.

For members to move forward they must elect members to the union who are prepared to defy the unjust laws. More importantly they must bring the whole membership into the struggle for dignity and justice. The rank and file need to organise themselves because that is where the real strength is.

This latest EBA campaign was a struggle divided. Negotiation took place mostly between elected and unelected union career bureaucrats and Government bureaucrats. The rank and file knew little about the process let alone what negotiations were about. This EBA process was probably the most secretive and closely held undisclosed affair in the union’s history. Why were members treated like dummies? Why were the draft proposals of the EBA never given to the membership to help decide for themselves?

Even after the vote decision, few people have had access to the EBA documents. Is there something that the unions and management don’t want the general membership to see?

From the presentation given to union members before the vote took place:

“Agreement will come into operation 7 days after approval by the Fair Work Commission”

“Once approved a signed copy will be available to staff at workplaces and published on the intranet”

We say that to be fair, that after ratification it is too late to view the EBA documents. All members should have been given a copy of the final proposal before the vote took place. Trust us, listen to us!

One of the biggest criticisms from members was that Trains Crews and Customer Service Staff were all bundled into one agreement. There was however a separate agreement for Sydney Trains and NSW Trains. Train crews believe that they have been disadvantaged by the agreement as they have skills above and beyond those in other areas. This will always be debated but we tend to believe that solidarity always wins, division does not. The whole process was just lazy and many people were left out of the decision making process.

In regards to the \$1000 one off cash incentive. This figure cannot be used to inflate the rate of the pay rise over 3 years. Early on, the Union was saying that the pay rise on offer was somewhere over 4%. This is a convoluted figure that takes no account of the time frame missed by not having the agreement finalised by the expiry date of the old agreement in October 2017. A further 6 months will have transpired from this date before the new payment rates apply. The \$1000 sweetener would only be just compensation for the delay.

Traditionally union elections have taken place just after an EBA pay rise has been granted. This was normally in November just after an October EBA finalisation. There are plans on notice to change the rules around elections in NSW (section 71). Call me a cynic, but watch this space for a propitious date for the election. Will it coincide with the \$1000 bonus payment and 3% pay rise sweetener? Maybe it won't eventuate, but that was the purpose of the dates in the past.

The RTBU website and Facebook page is now allowing for comments after having been closed during negotiation up to the vote. Judging by comments the troops at ground zero are not happy.

It bugs me why full online debate amongst members was discontinued during the negotiation period. Seeing that there was no outlet for the frustrations of punters at the shop floor it seems ludicrous to close, instead of fa-



cilitate, debate no matter how much we all disagree. Was it that the negotiators were worried about the effect of public opinion on the outcome of the vote? Criticism of the Commission is par for the course these days and Commissioners are not above the law. Anyway judging by the comments, when they appeared, the slanderous claims weren't aimed at the Commission but targeted elsewhere. I think it is unforgivable in the circumstances to gag debate on general members of the union for having their say on matters close to their hearts. The leadership of the rail unions must be held accountable for such autocratic behaviour, even it seems a trivial matter. Members need an explanation on why this was done. There is no such limit on criticising the Commission and the Government now that the vote is over. So what has changed?

The whole EBA process was a failure as far as many workers are concerned, this is partly due to the Industrial Rules being "broken" and partly from the lack of a transparent and democratic process for dealing with union issues. Either our leaders are incompetent or they have an agenda which is not aligned with what the general membership aspires to. The poorly thought out hare-brained telephone poll on whether the EBA should be put to the vote is symptomatic of the leadership bumbling in the rail unions. Members must learn from this that there is no Easter Bunny bearing gifts and that this mythical creature does not exist at all.

In the long term a union has to be built that includes all members, one that is prepared to accept the decision of the general membership and one that is made up of a disparate group of ideas that come together in the interests of all. Only an organised rank and file can supply the strength needed so this farce never ever happens again.

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, rail workers AND bus drivers, to demand the sacking of Transport Minister Constance.

As Transport Minister Constance's negotiations with the rail workers of the RTBU have failed to amount to anything that would thwart their postponed right to take protected industrial action in pursuit of conditions & award changes, then bus driver members of the same union should join the rail workers and make it an all-out transport stoppage on this day,- the logical "up-the-ante" demand of such an action, being nothing less than Constance's immediate resignation.

With the recent announcement by PUBLIC Transport Minister Constance, of yet another PRIVATE transport consortium that has won his heart, (this one to be gifted the Region 6 quarter of our publicly-owned employer), State Transit bus drivers in the remaining three contract regions of Government-run bus services, know too well their awaited fates:

Like a funeral carried out in advance, The Minister and his State Transit Authority genetic implant, - terminal STA CEO Stefan Furball, find funding for the commemorative recoating of 12 buses of our 2200 fleet with nostalgic heritage paint jobs, supposedly to celebrate the many public transport eras of our organisation's 85 year old history. After the assaults of Newcastle and now Sydney's Inner West, surviving State Transit Government bus drivers read such patronising devotions as the writing on the wall.

The latest May 2017 decreed privatisation of a quarter of our remaining Sydney bus operations, was shoved down our throats in an un-forewarned "Captain's Call" by Constance that was perverse to the merited performances we earned in having won all four bus region contracts we operated in as recently as December 2016!

Members of the Public at odds with that month's sudden venting of anger and industrial action by State Transit bus drivers, wouldn't know that just five months prior, we had in fact been officially congratulated for our achievement in winning the region now being thrown to a private company, by turncoat Constance's own Ministry! So if there is still a rationale for public sector rail workers to go out on a day in late April or early May this year, public sector bus drivers have every reason to join them.

If Rail and Bus divisions acted together in this way, we would give ourselves the opportunity to beef-up and homogenise our twin campaigns, by elevating our contempt for Constance's treatment of his public-sector transport employees at the same time.

Upping the ambit, by demanding Constance's resignation, puts TV cameras and microphones where they need to be;- in front of our own appointed representatives, where the catalogue of horrors about Constance's disposal of public transport agenda, (and its destructive progress to date) can be told. We need big rationales in order to justify such public actions, and don't we already have them! Read on.....*To Be Continued Next Edition*

Newcastle P.T. Crisis

The Government Bus Service in Newcastle has been privatised and many changes

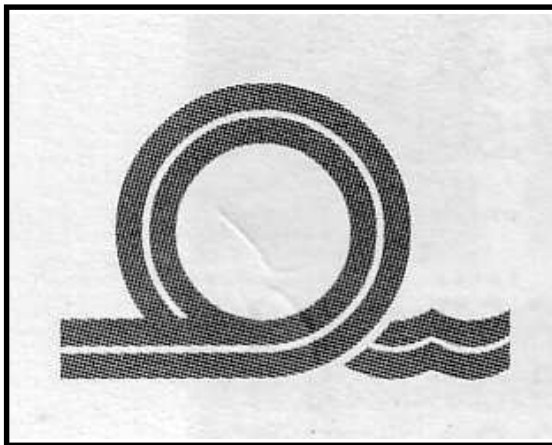
have been implemented recently that are unfair and disadvantage many people.

Newcastle Transport introduced new bus routes and timetables that came into effect on 14th January. These changes significantly disadvantage anybody travelling from anywhere south of Belmont especially.

New route 29 replaces the 350

The new bus route 29 from Swansea Heads to Glendale via Cardiff Railway Station replaced route 350 that provided a direct route to the major centres of Belmont, Charlestown, Adamstown, Broadmeadow, Hamilton and Newcastle West however these centres are more than 9km east of Cardiff and Glendale.

The new 29 route travels the current route to Belmont then turns left towards Cardiff and Glendale via a "scenic" route through the streets of Eleebana - way across the western side of Lake Macquarie, nowhere near the major cen- *See Page 23*



The Iron Stiletto Heel



Madame Lash woke up blurry eyed for her first day on the job at another depot. She had been moonlighting in the private sector to bump up her salary and save money to purchase her own exclusive deluxe bondage establishment following retirement from the STA. That night she had been orchestrating a management conference for Keolis-Downer bosses and the union executive in the dungeon of the Gateway Club in Petersham. Where she had been engrossed in demonstrating techniques of applying the management lash on Newcastle drivers. Today she had to rush to work to participate in a training session for trainee depot Admin. Officers at the other depot. She rapidly dressed in her favourite outfit with leather bra, garters under her clothing with razor sharp stilettos and raced out the door of her apartment.

Following being welcomed by her predecessor and his staff at the depot, Madame Lash strode into the conference room where the various sessions of the training course for Admin. Officers was being held. The session of the course which Madame Lash starred in was a role play involving a counselling session, where a driver had been called into the office over customer complaints. She stood over the trainee who played the “driver” and yelled out to the class, “I’ll show you how it’s done! You’ve got to look tough!” As she stood over the “driver” who she forced to kneel, she viciously pressed the heel of her blood red stiletto into his back. Crying out in a frenzy “I’ve got the power” and pulling up her shiny black leather skirt to reveal her stockings and garters. She continued, “I expect my bus operators to have no complaints. I expect you to be like a robot!”

The “Driver” replied, “It wasn’t my fault! The incident resulted from the STA’s unrealistic running times.” Madame Lash, then started to have some fun. She commenced jumping up and down on the “driver”. The “driver” appealed to his union rep to help out and put a halt to Madame Lash’s wild slashing with her favourite whip. Another trainee playing the union rep

role, announced, “The union’s hands are tied. These counselling sessions are allowed by a clause in the EBA, which you voted for.”

The Madam Lash was satisfied the driver had been sufficiently forced into submission. She continued, ”I’ll show you some mercy today. However, if there is another complaint, you are out!”

Madam Lash then addressed the class. “You see, with this technique applied to one driver, we can spread fear on the job and weaken resistance to the big attacks Transport Minister Constance and his cronies are now demanding from depot management. We can weaken any resistance to the new management team coming to the depot shortly entrusted with squeezing the last drops of productivity before the privatisation selloff.”

Before leaving the conference room, Madam Lash cheerily announced, “The Transport Minister Mr Constance will be shortly making a tour of all the depots to witness how we are cracking the management whip. I’m delighted to announce I have even been nominated to provide a personal demonstration of bondage techniques for the Minister on his visit to the depot in my office. I’ve heard he likes that sort of stuff.”

STA BUSIE NEWS

Burwood Depot News

Sparks: What are the latest developments with the NSW Govt announcing the awarding of the Region 6 tender to Transit Systems?

Burwood Driver: Latest news is that the union has put in a claim for a 52 weeks redundancy payment for Region 6 drivers who are being taken over by Transit Systems. As two STA managers who have “transferred” to the company have received this payment. Another part of the claim is the continuation of our 2 weeks per annum sick leave entitlement in the new company. We have recently received a curious circular from the STA in regard to the continuity of various entitlements such as sick leave, annual leave and long service leave with the new private owner. Whilst stating with the new owner, there will be no change to the entitlements, it also mentions the company can make any changes after 3 months. So we are unclear where we stand. There seems to be double talk here. Another potentially quite nasty twist in the saga is the possibility new drivers in Region 6 will have to be TWU members. Presumably they will be on the worse TWU EBA conditions. So maybe the plan is to pressure drivers to swop to the TWU over time. It seems the whole affair involving the Region 6 selloff was planned by the Govt., the company and the union hierarchy well before the Newcastle buses privatisation.

There has been an important new development. Transit Systems management people have come to the depot. They are wanting us to sign “open ended” contracts with them, using the pretext that they want an idea who will be remaining on the job in the context of the takeover.

It's likely one clause will state we who have worked for the STA and are now working for Transit Systems. Effectively it would be a letter of resignation from the STA. Drivers will be referring the contracts to solicitors to determine their legal employment situation.

Questions arise with these contracts. If we don't sign them will we remain as STA employees from 1/7/18 or will we be made redundant? The Transit Systems people have held

meetings at the depot about the takeover. However, they provide no clear answers to our questions. BOT's and Yard Supervisors are concerned about their situation. They have the impression that in the context of the takeover, they will just transfer over to the company as bus drivers. However, will they be on our wage or a higher rate, given the higher positions which they have held?

The company is recruiting for new drivers for Region 6 in Western Australia, South Australia and even New Zealand. However, they are receiving a poor response.

Sparks: How are drivers coping with the situation?

BD: There are many resignations from the STA and drivers rejoining the union. A certain layer of people are taking a wait and see approach. If there are major changes within 3 months or so of the company taking over, they will leave the job. According to the Govt. the region 6 tender to Transit Systems will be for a 3 years trial and supposedly there are to be no major changes for 18 months.

Sparks: What's the situation with EBA 2017?

BD: Other news was that the union officials and management have secured the so called approval for the EBA, providing a 2.5% pa pay rise. The negotiations occurred behind our backs. Despite many of us voting against it in the internet ballot, the EBA got up. There is a lot of anger amongst us over the whole affair. Whilst the provisions of the new EBA won't be implemented until 3 months time. Latest news is that the RTBU officials are now taking about negotiating a 5 years EBA with the company.



Waverley Depot News

Sparks: What's the latest at the depot?

Waverley Busie: There are major changes in management. With Selina from Randwick at the depot for a short while. She apparently has arrived on the scene to soften things up for the arrival of the old team of Jim Narkos and some deviants. These people are not welcome at our depot. They have an unacceptable attitude toward workers. In the case of Randwick depot, it's becoming rundown. As the land is next to a retirement home, there is a limit on any proposed development to 3-4 storeys in the area. It's likely the land will be sold off to some well known wealthy individual. A rumour circulating is that the remaining drivers will be transferred to Port Botany. With the completion of the Light Rail Extensions, the Light Rail will be sold off together with the remaining Eastern Suburbs depots as a package like which occurred in Newcastle.

Additionally I have noticed an enormous turnover of drivers. With driver instructors constantly training up new people. A major contribution for people leaving the job seems to be a general lack of trust with the Govt. In particular, the feeling Transport Minister Constance can't be trusted. Whilst the looming threat of privatisation of the depot in 6 to 9 months time, creates a sense of uncertainty about future job security and conditions. Given a major goal of a private operator would be casualisation. When becoming a casual you would face all manner of problems such as difficulties with getting loans and maintaining financial commitments.

Sparks: What are your thoughts on the recent scandal involving Andrew Constance the Transport Minister and the Ferries?

WB: The Govt. has squandered \$100,000 on a competition for the naming of a ferry. Whilst Constance has been caught out rigging the competition result and naming the boat FerryMcFerryFace. Following a media expose, the Ferry's name was changed to May Gibbs. It just goes to show the web of duplicity which affects even minor issues involving the NSW Liberal Govt. With the watering down of legislation governing the operations of ICAC (Independent Commission Against Corruption) the doors are wide open for Liberal politicians to be engaged in massive rorts. Similar to the situation with the former Carr ALP Govt. and the notorious corrupt Eddy Obeid. The corruption and the arrogance of the NSW Govt. was highlighted recently in the case of the recycling scandal exposed on an ABC radio program I listened to recently and elsewhere. Where building materials for recycling were transported by 40 trucks a day over the border to Ipswich in Qld for landfill. Despite this rort initially being exposed on a 4 Corners TV show some months ago. Still no action is being taken by the NSW Govt. The illegal dumping is continuing due to the Liberal Govt. favouritism toward their rich business mates.

Sparks: What are your impressions of the spiralling real estate costs in Sydney and the NSW Liberal Govt.?

WB: The outrageous nature of the rocketing real estate prices was recently highlighted to me. I was recently looking into a new big block of units up for sale in Rockdale. When I enquired

about the cheapest unit in the block, I was told by the real estate agent for a one bed room unit. She did not mention whether it had a garage and any views. The price was \$610,000. On the current STA drivers' wages, it would take 6 to 7 years just to pay \$175,000 of the principle. With the threat of privatisation and subsequently casualisation of the work force, drivers would find it very difficult to make repayments.

Whilst driving workers out of the city due to these spiralling real estate prices, the NSW Govt. will be making an estimated \$2-3 Trillion over the next ten years from stamp duty on real estate sales. It will be rolling in money. However, it is squandering vast sums on unnecessary projects such as the rebuilding of one stadium and the refurbishing of another. One was built 19 years ago and the other a decade later, costing \$2 billion.

Sparks: What are your impressions of the recent rail trouble and industrial campaign?

WB: Most people would have been taken by surprise with the decision of the Fair Work Australia Court to outlaw the proposed one day rail strike in late January. It pulled a swifty on workers. Now they have their arms clenched in industrial disputes. This draconian industrial regime is in stark contrast to the less repressive industrial laws in other Western Countries.

Sparks: What were your impressions of the Fix NSW Transport rally on Saturday afternoon 17/2/18 at Martin Place CBD?

WB: The speakers listed a constant stream of bad decisions by the NSW Liberal Govt. Such as the closing of a perfectly good rail line in the case of the Newcastle. Whilst on the new Metro line there will be a tunnel where there is no station for 7 km. Totally disregarding passenger and workers' safety issues. Despite being less than a kilometre from Redfern station, a new metro station is being constructed in Waterloo on Botany Rd. The area is currently just a big hole in the ground. In the case of the Chatswood to Epping line, the NSW Govt. wants to close it for 7 months late in 2018 also to cope with Metro trains. Causing much unnecessary inconvenience for commuters. With the West-Connex, an obvious bad design is the M6 outlet at St. Peters, funnelling more traffic into the Princess Hwy and Gardeners Rd. In the case of the town of Windsor, the Govt. is wanting to construct a 3-6 lane highway through its historic town centre. It is the oldest town square in Australia. Whilst 3 months ago a viaduct under the town constructed by convicts has been discovered. Local people have been protesting the construction with the blockade of a bridge leading into the town for the last 5 years.

The whole transport changes under the Liberals are all geared to tollways and not proper train services. However, the points raised by the speakers were only the tip of the iceberg. There is an endless list of other bad decisions. However, with these bad deci-



sions Big Business is making huge profits.

Leichhardt Depot News

Sparks: What's the latest with the Region 6 privatisation?

Leichhardt Busie: Currently Transit Systems people are working behind the scenes at the depot. They are walking around, but won't introduce themselves. Given certain of the STA bosses have gone over to Transit Systems. Its increasingly looking Region 6 has been sold off as a franchise. It seems as a result of this management transfer, the company was promised the tender and will also get the rest of the pie in the event of the other STA depots privatisation. Spare parts for the buses are being transferred to those STA depots outside Region 6. Whilst our buses aren't being fixed. There is a continuing shortage of drivers which will be greatly worsened from 1/7/18 when many of us are transferring to non Region 6 depots. It's likely the new owner will have to introduce more realistic running times. At the moment it's impossible to meet them. The Govt. can then say only with a private operator have running times been improved. The company is also trying to entice us into signing contracts with them. We have been advised by the union not to sign them.

Sparks: What's the latest with the Timetable?

Leichhardt Driver: Latest news is that Constance is talking about ripping up the Inner West timetable. No doubt due to the looming driver shortage with privatisation from 1/7/18.

New Insights on the Bus Privatisation Conspiracy

The International Strategy

The privatisation of Newcastle and Region 6 STA Buses is part of a global strategy where the State owns the basic infrastructure –buses and depots and sets timetables and the fare structure. The private owners are just leased out the operations and have the right to hire and fire staff. The objective of the privatisation is for the private operator to have more flexibility in cutting bus workers wages and conditions. This is the bottom line of the privatisation.

Uber Buses Plan

The 'Uber' strategy is an attempt by the government to see if they can reduce the cost of providing bus services through the replacement of lowly patronised routes that are currently provided to meet the minimum service levels with a demand responsive service. This is likely to result in passengers paying more for the service.

STA Sell Off

The case for the privatisation of Region 6 was based on complaints of late running presented by Transport Minister Constance is well known in the industry to be bogus. As it is matter of comparing apples to oranges. As Region 6 has much more traffic lights, traffic congestion and other factors, in comparison to the private buses operated in outer Sydney areas. In 2013 to 2014 the NSW Govt. (was to) allocated \$10 million to the STA to fix up its bus running times.

Background on Transit Systems

According to its website Transit Systems is one of Australia's largest public transport providers and is Australia's only multi-national public transport business. They operate services in Perth, Adelaide, Darwin, Sydney, London and Singapore. They employ 4,935 people (2,005 in Australia, 2,030 in the United Kingdom and 900 in Singapore).

Transit Systems has recruited Jamie Sinclair, who was the STA General Manager for Region 6. Presumably he has been recruited to run the region for Transit Systems. They have also employed Peter Rowley, the former STA CEO. So, in spite of all Constance complaints about how poorly STA has performed in Region 6, the new operator is relying on the same management that delivered that performance to keep running it.

Union Hierarchy Fake Bus Anti-Privatisation Campaign

The "Save Our Buses" campaign waged by Unions NSW, the RTBU officials and the ALP was in retrospective appears bogus. It was just a case of kite flying. Looking like they were doing something, but doing nothing effective. Posters, stickers and petitions were condoned but not industrial action or effective public campaigning (eg bus depot blockades). Luke Foley ALP NSW Opposition Leader may make an election promise, in the run up to the State elections in March 2019, of renationalising Region 6 and Newcastle, but its certain he will back off in office. It is on the cards he would follow the Libs and put up for tender the Eastern and Northern Suburbs STA buses. Either once in office in 2019 or after the following State election.

LETTER

Dear Sparks

I have noticed serious cut backs to bus operations in the Eastern Suburbs. In the case of the 333 route Nth Bondi to Circular Quay, it has ceased stopping at the stop provided at St. Vincent's Hospital. Now you have to walk from bus stops either 500 metres or 1000 metres away

to get to the Hospital. Complaints have been made to the STA. However, a deceitful excuse was provided along the lines that the area of the stop at St. Vincent's won't allow the 333 bendi-bus in the allotted stop. However, the 200 Chatswood to Bondi Junction bus which is also a bendi-bus is allowed to stop at St. Vincent's Hospital. Whilst I have also noticed a run-down of 311 bus services on Saturday evenings.

Concerned Commuter

Sydney Cabbies' News

My thoughts on the \$1.00 levy taxis to facilitate so called ride sharing:

To ask a cabbie to ponder on the \$1.00 levy, introduced in NSW by the Min Andrew Constance run transport Authority- aside from the obviously unenforceable nature of it- the bloody thing is hated by almost everyone and few taxi cabs if any are equipped to render the figure unprompted on the fare display thus the potential for driver assault and that's just the tip of the iceberg- However it is as well to ponder these points-

The owners of taxi licenses (plates) had their opportunity to enact their voting rights at Co-op level when all taxi industry companies were taxi co-ops- that was before the vast majority of cab owners elected to take the king's shilling and sell out their co-ops to the corporatized entities that swallowed up those very co-ops and- with the filthy lucre these guys got from doing that, they lost with their voting rights, the same voting rights that determined the way their co-ops interfaced with the NSW government, that is to say their ability to lobby for things that directly affected their businesses and livelihoods- thus, the interests of e.g. the shareholders of Cabcharge were/are now the focus of the board of Cabcharge- not the owner - drivers of the former co- op Red and Yellow Deluxe/ then Taxis Combined/ now 13Cabs- the once co-op bought out by the entity that eventually became a public company, the corporatized Cabcharge Limited.

This analysis does not of course apply to the owners of plates belonging to members of the surviving very small co-ops.

Taxi plate investors obviously think that they deserve to be compensated for relinquishing the value of their cake and the ability to eat it too! Andrew Constance the Minister for Transport has pathetically bowed to these babies and given them a theoretical lolly scramble to pursue. A scramble that doesn't come anywhere near making up for the economic loss experienced by the plate owners anyway- But a lolly hugely onerous on the travelling public as the \$1.00 levy is added to every fare.

Had the co-ops been still in existence the mess would have been mitigated by two things- a taxi industry that had become run down- ripe for rideshare to step in- by way of the owners of plates exercising their powers through voting rights at former co-op level to protect the value

of their assets and- the power of the co-ops to interface those concerns with the government administration of the industry. The owners of licenses could have been able to, for instance ensure that the Green Slip insurance premiums on taxi cabs be kept low by way of remunerating the drivers of those cabs adequately and not have them working for less than \$10.00 / hour- thus racking up accident rates that stem from driver fatigue. Come to think of it, even when they had the chance - back in 1984 when everything was at co-op level- and the co-op representative, the Taxi Industry Assoc. back then entered into, with the Transport Workers Union, one of Australia's most deceitful industrial sell outs of workers in Australian industrial law- the still current taxi industry Contract Determination 1984- a document that became the Rosetta Stone for much that has turned the industry into a sweat -shop - on- wheels fanging down the decades.

The TIA is joined at the hip with Cabcharge- they share the same building in Riley St Darlinghurst and for much of its existence- the same CEO the now deceased Reg Kermode. Kermode oversaw the massive change from a predominantly owner - driver industry to an absentee landlord plate leasing industry and thus the advent of the massively exploitive of bailee - non owner driver labour: the managed taxi phenomenon. Inevitably feeding into the bottom lines of his business interests and the cobbles of the man.

No to compensation- the plate owner needs to suck it up.

'Street Talk' (RADIO SKID ROW) airs every Thursday between 12.00 noon and 1.00pm. There is a big taxi driver component to it as the host - a guy named Demos also a bailee driver, runs the issues of the industry and typically throws the lines open to other cabbies nearly every week. It is very current affairs oriented in other areas too.

VICTORIAN RAILWAY NEWS

In this issue of Sparks, Drivers, Conductors and Customer Service Staff will discuss the issue of V/Line employees who do not belong to a union. As in previous issues names have been changed.

Sparks: What is the situation at V/Line regarding union membership?

Rastus and Roscoe: As regards to drivers at V/Line 99% of drivers belong to the union.

Clarence: The problem in other areas of V/Line is a certain percentage of employees do not belong to a union.

Jethro: Some of these people are not in the union are persons who have a grudge against the union so they become un-financial. Some of the new starters refuse to join the union as they think that by not joining a union, it will enhance their career paths.

Abner: Until recently with induction classes for new employees, they would not let the union speak to the new starters. This has changed and in the last two induction classes, the union has been involved. Metro trains have always invited the union to induction classes.

Rastus: May we introduce you to two conductors who will discuss the issue.

Olwyn and Ostwald: We are conductors and we are fed up with workers who refuse to join the union.

Rastus: We drivers know of one station in the network where nine employees work and only two are in the union.

Olwyn: Membership forms have been given to these employees a number of times but are never returned.

Oswald: In fact one of these non-unionists said to one of the new employees. "Why should you join a union as they will obtain the benefits for you in Enterprise Bargaining negotiations."

Abner: When EBA negotiations commence V/Line sends a letter to these non-unionists, explaining to them that the union will be handling the negotiations and they have an opportunity to obtain the service of a solicitor to represent them at negotiations. That explains why this non-unionist was telling people not to join the union.

Oswald: That is not all, at one station a non-unionist obtained the position of station officer.

Olwyn: In fact a number of long serving employees who were union members were not successful in obtaining an interview for the position.

Jethro: No wonder morale is low around the place. This is a problem at V/Line. They do not want any long serving employees obtaining these positions. They are out to change the culture.

Clarence: Look at what happened at Southern Cross with an appointment. The person who obtained the position was a non-unionist.

Sparks: To read about this appointment refer to issue 158.

Oswald: V/Line brags about being an equal opportunity employer, but it does not encourage long serving employees for a career path.

Abner: Some people have given up applying for positions.

Rastus: Referring back to EBA negotiations. In future negotiations what is stopping V-Line from obtaining a collective agreement which has less conditions in the EBA than now?



Roscoe: V/Line could get some of these non-unionists to sign a collective agreement. Look at what happened at Carlton United Breweries, CUB was able to find some non-unionists to sign a collective agreement.

Rastus: They certainly did and this resulted in a lockout at CUB which lasted a number of months. The unions at CUB won the dispute with no loss of conditions. (Editorial Comment: Following the return to work of the CUB workers and approval of the union EBA, the media mentioned it would entail worker “flexibility” in regard to various conditions and efficiency and productivity improvements according to the union’s media release. Whilst, there is secrecy about the exact details of the EBA, as the FWC(Fair Work Commission) wants a Freedom of Information request to potentially access details of the EBA. Given these aspects, it seems unlikely there has been no loss of conditions by the CUB workers.)

Sparks: Unions at V/Line will have to be on their guard for future EBA negotiations.

Abner: If we say to these people they should join a union, some of them run bleating to Human Resources that they are being harassed.

Roscoe: They are not being bullied, they are being told a few home truths.

Sparks: I understand some of the non-unionists particularly conductors join the union when they are in trouble.

Oswald: You are correct, then after a couple of months they become non-financial.

Rastus: Remember the incident at Broadford.

Olwyn: This was reported in issue 154.

Clarence: The conductor involved was not in the union. Before he joined V/Line, he was a farmer who hated unions.

Oswald: A number of union members felt sorry for him, as he was provoked in this incident, but as he was not in the union, there was nothing they could do.

Roscoe: When he had to front Human Resources, a Conductor Services manager represented him. The union said no union representative was to defend him, as he was a non-union member. He was sacked and he appealed to Fair Work Australia, where he was defended Bro-Bono by a lawyer. He did not get reinstated, but received a financial settlement.

Jethro: Who paid the lawyer after the settlement?

Rastus: As reported in previous issues. This time v/Line has recruited externally for drivers and some of these recruits have not joined the union. They are on their own, if they are in trouble.

Sparks: Once again we have run out of space. Some of these people who refuse to join a union, think they will never be in trouble and think of the elusive career path at the expense of union members. One day they will slip up and they are on their own.

Rastus and Roscoe: Once again in having the final say, non-unionists in the rail industry are parasites and free loaders who bludge off their workmates. We, drivers have one word to describe them. SCABS.

In this issue of Sparks, drivers and station staff discuss recent events at V/Line. As in previous issues, names have been changed.

Sparks: I hear a manager was made redundant.

Clarence: You are correct. It was the manager of Road Coaches.

Jethro: The station staff of Southern Cross remember him as the Station Manager.

Clarence: A new position of Manager Road Coaches was created and he obtained the position.

Sparks: Why is this Division called Coach Division.

Clarence: This division manages all the rural coaches under contract to V/Line. V/Line thinks it is not professional to call Coaches, Buses. To the general public and the media, they are known as Buses.

Jethro: He was made manager of the Coach Division over the existing head of the station. In the meantime another manager was appointed to manage Southern Cross. This lasted two years and he was made redundant and the Division was returned to the former manager.

Clarence: When he was manager of Southern Cross, he hated the RTBU and held a dislike for the Conductors' RTBU Delegate from 2003 to 2007. This Delegate stood up to him and was able to introduce an A and B roster for conductors.

Jethro: The conductors/ A and B rosters put most of the relief jobs into a B roster.

Clarence: Unfortunately the union delegate's position was undermined by a group of conductors over a new roster, this manager introduced in early 2007. The delegate found that he was unable to represent the conductors, so he resigned.

Jethro: The manager was glad the delegate resigned, so in 2007, he was able to introduce a new roster that was not family friendly to conductors.

Clarence: This was reported in issue 140 but in a brief summary the same conductors who removed the delegate were able to convince other conductors that B roster conductors were being paid more than A roster. When a study was made of the master roster, they were being paid the same.

Jethro: A ballot was held to amalgamate the two rosters and was carried. We station staff heard a rumour that some conductors bullied some conductors to vote yes. As a result a combined roster was introduced by this manager which was worse than the previous roster.

Sparks: Was this the same manager who conducted a witch hunt to find out who was contributing to Sparks?

Clarence: Yes he was. After issue 144 appeared he arranged for a CSM to call a conductor into the office on a pretext of obtaining some equipment for his outfit. The CSM gave the conductor a heads up that the manager was going to question him over Sparks.

Jethro: The conductor when questioned cut the manager to shreds, so as a result, the manager placed a notice at the sign in point about people writing articles in newsletters about V/Line. He did not name Sparks.

Clarence and Jethro: Finally, we are glad this manager has gone.

Sparks: I hear there has been a management change within the Drivers area?

Rastus and Roscoe: You are correct. One of our new managers used to be the line manager for the Western Region of V/Line.

Sparks: Was this the manager who removed the two contract employees at Mildura?

Rastus: You are correct. Most of this said event was discussed in issue 156.

Roscoe: As soon as she arrived at the Drivers' Depot, she started causing trouble.

Sparks: In what way?

Roscoe: She took a dislike to a particular driver and started bullying him.

Clarence: She hasn't changed. She tried the same tactics with a station employee at Ballarat.

Jethro: As a result of the debacle at Mildura, the station has now been transferred back to Bendigo.

Rastus: One particular incident occurred a couple of weeks ago. A driver reported in sick and due to a shortage of drivers, a train was replaced by a bus.

Roscoe: The driver who was sick was contacted by this manager and was verbally assaulted by her on the phone. The driver was distressed and contacted his union delegate.

Rastus: The delegate placed the matter into the hands of the Locomotive Division officials.

Roscoe: We do not know what went on at the meeting but a rumour surfaced that she was bawling her eyes out after the union official spoke to her.

Jethro: Drivers hear right.

Clarence: We also heard a rumour that a number of drivers were contacted to work on their rest day. They were unable to work so 17 trains were cancelled on this day.

Rastus: We drivers think that because she is on a contract that due to her unpopularity at Ballarat, she was moved to the drivers' depot to work out the contract.

Rastus and Roscoe: She is hated by 99% of the drivers.

Sparks: Once again we have run out of space.

Rastus and Roscoe: In having the final say, the drivers are glad the former manager at Southern Cross has departed as he was known to dob-in drivers. As for the moron who is in charge of the drivers. We will leave you with the message "What goes around comes around." Finally you would be worried when OPTION time arrives for your contract.

STOP PRESS

As this issue goes to print, this MORON who supervises the drivers has stood down a senior RTBU official of the Drivers' Division. The issue he was stood down over is over is the managing director of V/Line trying to change the current EBA. There will be more about this issue in the next issue of Sparks.

International Transport Workers' News

FRENCH RAIL WORKERS FIGHT PRIVATISATION

3/4/18

PARIS (Reuters) - French rail workers launched a series of nationwide strikes on Tuesday, threatening months of transport disruption in the sternest challenge yet to President Emmanuel Macron's efforts to modernize Europe's second biggest economy.

State-run rail company SNCF, which Macron wants to overhaul, said 48 percent of the workers needed for the network to run smoothly were absent, as they joined the protests against plans to trim benefits including job guarantees and generous pensions.

Just one in four trains ran in the Paris region, while only one in eight high-speed TGV trains were operating. At Gare du Nord, Paris's busiest station, platforms were so crowded that some commuters fell onto the tracks. Other stations were plunged into darkness, the lights and ticket machines switched off.

French media dubbed it "Black Tuesday".

"I do understand why they're striking," said Marie Charles, a Paris commuter. "But today is my first day in a new job so I have to admit I could have done without the strike."

Outside Gare de L'Est, crowds of SNCF workers denounced the government and set off flares that filled the area with smoke.

Many students, who have launched their own demonstrations against education reform, joined the protest, and some workers in other sectors downed tools in sympathy with the rail workers. Others plan to do so in the coming days.

The four main rail unions plan to strike for two days out of every five for the next three months — a total of 36 days of disruption — to fight a shake-up of monopoly SNCF before it is opened to competition in line with European Union rules.

The protests come as France prepares to mark the 50th anniversary of the student-led riots of May 1968, when the entire economy came to a virtual halt. The work stoppages so far pale in comparison with those events.

The last French leader to square off against the rail unions came off worst. The strikes of 1995 paralyzed France and forced prime minister Alain Juppe to pull the measures — a defeat from which he did not recover.

The unions are broadly weaker now and divided over how best to handle Macron's many social and economic reforms — a division Macron hopes to be able to exploit to his advantage.

If the 40-year-old president succeeds it will set the tone for other reform plans, including revamping the education system and overhauling pensions. Macron has already faced down the unions to ease labor laws, making it simpler to hire and fire.

PUBLICITY BATTLE

Speaking to parliament, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said the way the SNCF operated could not continue.

“I respect the strikers because going on strike is a constitutional right... But ... we also need to respect the millions of French who want to be able to get to work,” he said.

Transport Minister Elisabeth Borne urged unions to negotiate, but union leaders hit back.

“The railway workers are not doing this for the fun of it,” said Philippe Martinez, head of the hardline CGT union, the biggest among railway workers.

SNCF President Guillaume Pepy said the strike was likely to cost the company 20 million euros a day in lost revenue at a time when it is already adding three billion euros to its overall debt pile of 47 billion euros every year.

In a bid to boost efficiency, the government wants to end rail workers’ jobs-for-life, automatic annual pay rises and early retirement rights — benefits that date back to the nationalization of the SNCF in the 1930s.

The government has painted the rail workers as enjoying outdated privileges, a notion the unions reject. “The salaries aren’t amazing, the work conditions are difficult, and for some it means working every other weekend,” Martinez said.

Macron will need to keep the public on his side if he is to defy the unions and push the reforms through. An Ifop poll on Sunday showed that just over half of French people view the strikes as unjustified.

SHOWDOWN

Macron wants to transform the SNCF into a profit-maker. The unions say its debt was caused by excessive investment in France’s high-speed network and accuse Macron of paving the way for privatization, which officials deny.

The government has sought to ease tensions with assurances that the arrival of foreign competition on French rail tracks, pencilled in for gradual rollout from 2020, can be delayed.

As well as testing Macron’s mettle, the rolling strike will also challenge the resolve of unions to maintain a common stance. The Communist-rooted CGT wants the industrial action to spread to other sectors but has so far seen limited support.

Some energy sector workers walked out on Tuesday in protest against the planned liberalization of the power sector, but there was little impact on power output.

Air France workers also went on strike over pay on Tuesday, although the company said it expected 75 percent of flights to operate as usual.

Continued From Page 7 tres the 350 route took passengers. To get to Charlestown, Adamstown and Newcastle East/CBD passengers now need to change at Belmont to the 14 bus.

Then if they want to go to Broadmeadow, Hamilton or Newcastle West they need change again at Charlestown for the 28 bus to Adamstown, Broadmeadow Station, Hamilton, Newcastle West and the new Transport interchange at Wickham, To go further towards the new Newcastle Harbour restaurant and entertainment precinct, CBD and beaches they need to change again to another bus and in 12 months the tram/light rail.

New route 45 replaced the 349

The new bus route 45 from Swansea South replaced route 349 that was a direct route to Belmont, Charlestown, Newcastle West and the Newcastle CBD. The new 45 route terminates at Belmont where passengers need to change to the 14 bus and change again to the 28 bus similar to the scenario discussed above.

The 352 is cancelled – replaced by the new 29 route to Cardiff to give us the benefit (tongue in cheek) of accessing all of the Newcastle – Sydney trains, however this route extends the round trip to Sydney by 1 hour at least. Besides who wants to travel to Sydney in the middle of the day?

Some of the impacts: To go to Charlestown passengers need to take 2 buses, To go to the medical specialists at Broadmeadow and Hamilton passengers need to take 3 buses, Passengers need to take 3 buses to go to the: Newcastle Entertainment Centre, Newcastle Stadium, Honeysuckle Entertainment Restaurant Precinct, Newcastle Transport Interchange at Wickham.

Children, the aged and disabled will experience difficulty negotiating the multiple bus changes and the multiple options offered by the trip planner app, that'll own the alternative 5 timetables people will need to carry.

Trip times increase between 30 minutes and 2 hours each way, Total time waiting for bus connections can be up to 60 minutes. Some of the timetabled connections are zero minutes this allows no margin for any delay what so ever, there have been a number of cases reported that the passengers have seen their connection driving off into the distance as they arrive at the connection stop.

Some people who have had a few too many drinks will run the RBT gauntlet rather than having to negotiate 3 bus trips or bus/tram/bus or train/bus from the entertainment venues in town. Bus services from locations south of Belmont have been reduced by 24 despite the advertisements stating that there will be more services and better connections.

Consultation

It is reported that there was a consultation forum set up to workshop the proposed changes and discuss what people wanted as part of the "Voice of Newcastle Programme. However, it is reported that participants had to sign a confidentiality agreement, it is hard to fathom why that would have been necessary if there was nothing to hide.

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.

Continued From Page 23 It is also hard to understand why those consulted would have wanted the bus from Swansea Heads/Caves Beach: to have Cardiff and Glendale as their preferred destination rather than Charlestown, Broadmeadow, Hamilton, Newcastle; to have to change buses twice to get to Charlestown, to have to change buses three times to get to Broadmeadow, Hamilton and Newcastle, to have to wait for up to 60minutes for their connections, to increase their travel times by up to 2hours.

Thanks to Change.org

STOP PRESS: On 19/2/18 a rally was organised by the ALP with the support of the RTBU bosses at Belmont to protest the cutback in bus services in Newcastle following STA Buses privatisation. It was attended by an estimated 1000 angry people. The Local ALP MP proposed a motion to demand Transport Minister Constance review the cutbacks. However, no call was made to oppose the privatisation of Newcastle buses.

What is Democratic Unionism?

Democratic