

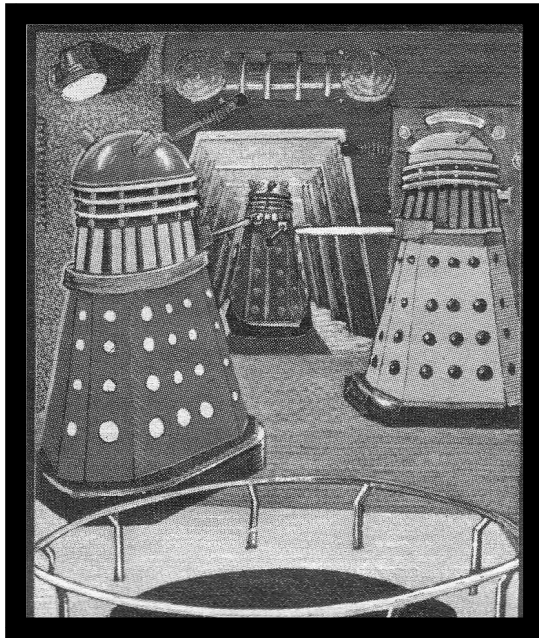
No.146

July. - Aug. 2013

# Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

**Only Direct Action can Tackle the Chaos of  
the Optimisation Rosters and Put Some Sanity  
into the job!**



*Concealed by the “smoke and mirrors” of enterprise bargaining,  
with the aid of the ALP Union Hierarchy, STA Dalek managers  
forge the “Optimisation Rosters” clause of mass job destruction! .*

NSW Railway News;  
Fingerprinting & You;  
Victorian Railway News;

NSW Rail Uniform Blues;  
STA Busie News;  
International News;

## **EDITORIAL**

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

Some of the most contentious news in the railways has been the introduction of the new uniform by the Railways NSW. Due to the uniform's uncomfortable features and associated dress code, it has caused much uproar on the job. Like other more serious initiatives by management and the O'Farrell Government such as the split up of Rail Corp and the outsourcing of station and train cleaning, the ALP union hierarchy has displayed again a total disregard of grass roots concerns and incompetence. (See article page 3.)

Whilst the media lately has been a buzz about the massive spying of the U.S. National Security Agency, a new dangerous invasion of privacy is threatening public transport workers in NSW. It takes the shape of fingerprinting. (See article page 6.)

In the STA, the most important development in recent months has been the introduction of "Optimisation Rosters". A subtle worded clause in the EBA has opened doors to this new attack. Whilst, on one hand the new rosters appear to be in line with cutbacks to overtime. On the other, the rosters create an important step toward privatisation. The union hierarchy are typically "beautifully useless" with their obsession with "legalities", in assisting the grass roots to fight this savage attack. (See article page 9.)

**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](http://www.sparksweb.org)**

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# N.S.W. Railway News

## UNIFORM BLUES

*By Crimson Coconut*

Many are unhappy that the Sydney Trains/NSW Trains new uniform is sub-standard. The shirt/blouse being made of a clingy polyester material is ill fitting as it follows the contours of the wearers body. This is not too bad if you have a slim physique, which is not typical of many of us, but wholly embarrassing if you don't fit the stereotypical fit and youthful body shape.

Some wearers of the micro-fiber synthetic shirt/blouse have complained of skin rashes, while others have complained of a definite chemical odour emanating from the material. One staff member said that the material started to unravel in his washing machine. Maybe after some time we may all be wearing rags.

RailCorp is instructing staff with rashes to visit their nominated doctor as they try to get a grip on the causes of the skin eruptions.

The uniform has been introduced in haste despite a consultation period that expired before consultation had finished. We were told what uniform we were getting before the consultation period had concluded, management were pretty adamant what we were going to get from the start.

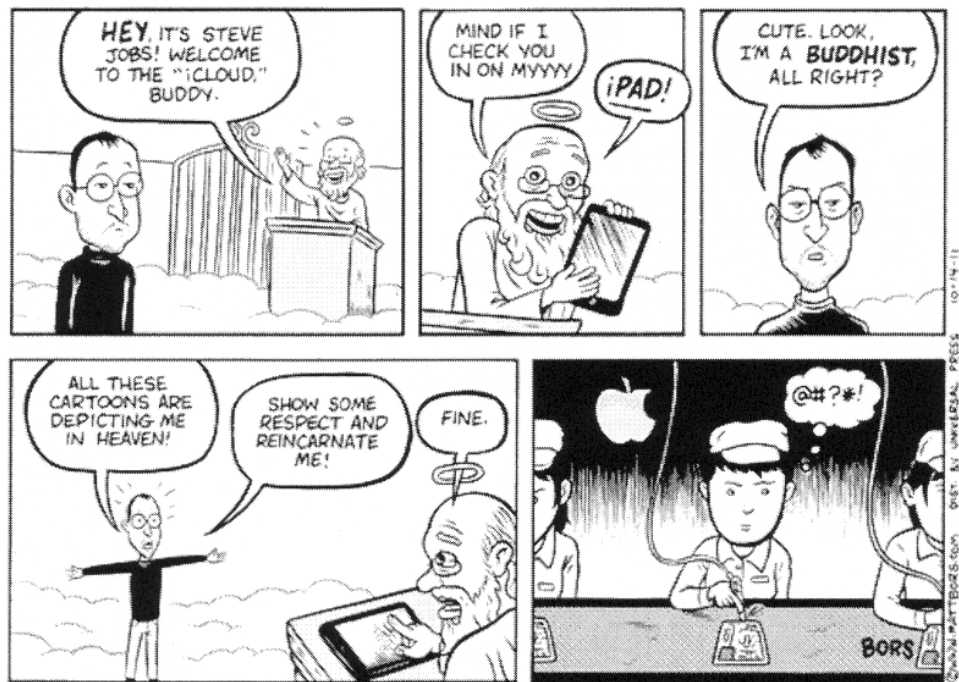
The NSW transport unions also appointed delegates to the Uniform Committee. Yet if you ask staff on stations who those representatives were, few if any can tell you. This is major failing within the transport trade unions even if it is over a fairly insignificant issue such as the new uniform.

Once again they failed to consult effectively with the rank and file, the ordinary members at the coalface. Many members were making it known that they were not pleased with the uniform, yet this fell on deaf ears.

I do not here want to blame those seemingly invisible representatives on the Uniform Committee for the complete inability to have members views represented and respected by management. After years of going about union business this way it has become the normal way of doing things, if not a most undemocratic way of conducting union business. Those on the committees probably know no better, they are not to blame.

The blame must lie with the union leadership, who in it's day to day business feels that the selection of a staff uniform is rather trivial compared to the big picture of State and Federal politics. This is sloppy trade unionism at best and a "couldn't care less attitude" toward worker representation at worst. This is a leadership issue.

The same attitude was displayed during the more significant issues, such as the last EBA in 2010, the removal of the Station Manager from stations and the continuous reform and division of RailCorp into two new entities, NSW Trains and Sydney Trains. At no stage had or have members on the shop floor been involved, informed, consulted or asked their opinion on



any of the changes. This is inexcusable, it results in many members wondering why they need to belong to a union at all.

The exact same uniform is to be rolled out to Sydney Trains train crews. Gone are the days of shorts, tattooed arms and legs and broad brimmed hats that made train crews much loved characters. Similar consultation provisions occurred with train crew staff, (ie. none at all).

According to the RTBU leadership "Unfortunately the Minister for Transport had already decided, on the design and colour of the uniform before there was any consultation with the staff who had to wear the uniform." Can we expect a Train Crew backlash?

Democratic unionism is not so much about appointing or electing a union representative to do your bidding but about being the conduit through which the members aspirations are articulated and realised. That is what is missing within our representation.

One of the side effects of this top-down "we'll do it right for you" approach is that you actually bypass the members wishes, often signing off on agreements before members get the gist of what the deal is. Consequently, elected delegates are, at a later date vilified by the membership over an agreement which has to be revisited, often with no satisfactory resolution.

It is no longer OK for the leadership to say, "we did our best, but management refused to budge" when you didn't bring in the real force within the union, the general membership. That would be akin to acknowledging that the members exist and have real muscle. The Membership, to the leadership, is a sleeping dragon that must not be woken under any circumstances.

Once awake the membership dragon may be difficult to put back to sleep and some may be trampled in the attempt to pacify it.

#### A side note related to the uniform

It is difficult to comprehend that our union has agreed to the purchase of uniforms manufactured in third world sweat shops, namely Fiji and China. Taking advantage of cheap labour amid the absence of workers rights and an appalling human rights record is unconscionable. This is especially poignant when the peak trade union body the ACTU is actively campaigning for labour rights in Fiji.

An acknowledgement of the horrible working conditions by the transport unions should have been in order, even though a statement falls short of ensuring that the new uniforms were made in such a way that the workers involved were not disadvantaged. Raising consciousness about the appalling working conditions in the third world clothing industry is an admirable cause. However this is not an issue so far as the RTBU and their members are concerned.

In the wake of the recent deaths of a 1000 or so workers in a Bangladesh clothing sweat shop which collapsed crushing the poor workers there and previous fires in other factories, also in factories in China which led to large loss of life, the issues of safety and workers rights should have been taken into account by our unions. Failing to do this is a sure measure of where our union leadership is at. Once again this horrid government has been let off the hook.

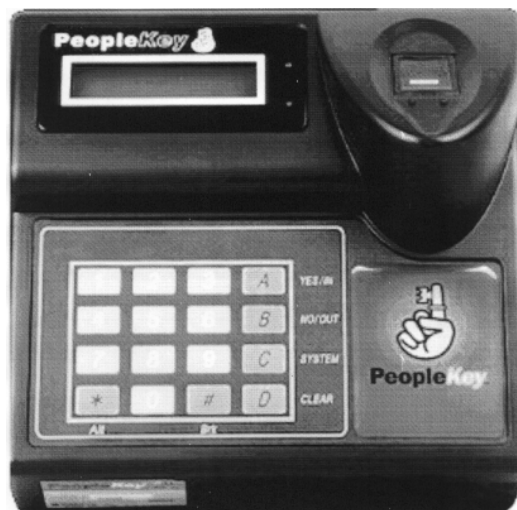


## Should you be worried about fingerprint sign-ons?

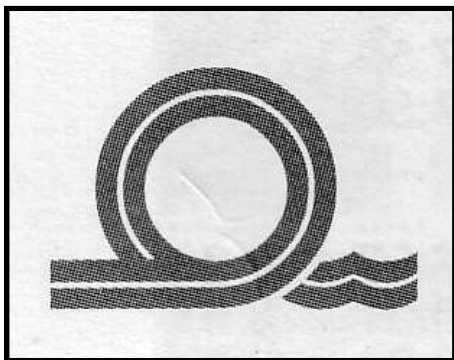
**Not much has been mentioned recently about the introduction of fingerprint scanning in the public transport workplace. According to management, it is to be used in conjunction with the My Time and Pay system. The real possibility of fingerprint scanning is still on the agenda as the pay system is being rolled out in 3 stages. The third and final phase will include the use of employee fingerprints when signing on and off.**

The main humiliating feature of using fingerprinting in the workplace is one of trust. There is a management/government perception that employees are defrauding them or the public by falsifying time sheets. This is despite the fact that no evidence has been yet produced to prove that this is happening at all. We are all considered to be guilty in the eyes of our employers. For that reason many employees will regard fingerprint scanning as an invasion of privacy and a demeaning exercise.

Recent revelations around the world that all of our personal electronic communication is being recorded and stored, despite repeated denials, shows that we cannot take them at their word. They, our would be controllers, have lied in the past and will lie in the future. Companies such as Google, Facebook, Twitter and many others have been passing on information about users to US, UK and other Western government spy agencies without our consent. Private phone calls and text messaging is all intercepted and stored in case it is ever needed to build up a case against individuals. Spying is so widespread that it reaches into every part of our lives. It is all pervasive.



Just think about how much information your employer already has about you. They have your bank account details, they know how much you earn, they know your address, phone number and birth-date. They have your drivers licence details in some instances, as well as detail of your next of kin. They have your Tax File Number, and your Superannuation Account details. They have your medical records and doctors certificates. They have your references from previous employers and your qualifications and a whole lot more that we have volunteered over the years.



*Gladys and her Fuehrer Barry Relaxing*

## The Bottom Line

It had been a jewel of a morning at the Transport for NSW Ministry retreat known as the Berghof, deep in the Blue Mts. Gladys Braun had been in bed comforting her Fuehrer, Barry O'Farrell-Hitler with some good news about the STA. To save more money from the STA budget, she had regaled him about how she borrowed his highly polished jack boots and had been busy goose stepping on the STA CEO to new ferocity.

The most draconian new initiative by the CEO was the imposing of fines on drivers for not wearing the vest in depot yards. Is this the bottom line? The implications are by means of this Nazi style, over the top, strong arm approach, more fear is spread on the job. It has followed another Nazi style technique by the CEO to spread insecurity and fear amongst the various layers of the STA admin, as they had to compete again for their jobs. In turn, these lower rung bosses have spread more fear amongst the grass roots by cracking the whip on disciplinary matters. So as to look good with the higher bosses and keep their jobs. Undermining our morale and resistance to further management attacks.

Whilst, to get closer to her Fuehrer and aid the STA's



carve up for the Liberals' business mates, she had 3 depots' buses in the Eastern Suburbs put together. Is this the bottom line? Its implications are the creation of further confusion and disarray amongst drivers and commuters. Undermining the reliability of bus services and disrupting drivers' family life. Carving up a package of routes to sell off.

She was also behind the purchasing of new ferries for the privatised ferry system in Sydney. Is this the bottom line? Its implications are a further boost to the fortunes of her Fuehrer's business mates and the privatisation push in NSW.

Looking toward keeping, the public on side with her Fuehrer, she has also supported the redevelopment of Darling Harbour. Is this the bottom line? Its implications are the further waste of public monies. It comes from our wages and is unnecessary. Whilst she will take advantage of the advent of a Abbott Govt on the Federal level to cut out our penalty rates. In regard to a recent address by Abbott to a Liberal Party meeting about the closure of Ford car manufacturing operations in Australia, and with his victory in the upcoming federal elections being assured, he brazenly stated his intention to put the axe into workers penalty rates and impose individual workplace contracts. Is this the bottom line? Its implications are the further cutting back of our wages.

In conclusion, with Gladys and her Fuehrer, there is no bottom line! It's all about them looking good and not looking bad! Highlighted with the new uniform and new bus colour schemes. It's already difficult to discern the difference between Veolia and Government buses. Whilst, this whole onslaught and the total cave-in by the union hierarchy, has led many drivers to become disconnected from the public and lose any happiness in the workplace and sense of rapport amongst ourselves. We are becoming Transport for NSW robots.

## S.T.A. BUSIE NEWS

### LEICHHARDT DEPOT NEWS

#### *Sparks: What are your views on the new "Optimisation rosters"?*

Leichhardt Busie: There has been complete upheaval at Leichhardt over the rosters, since commencement. The new rosters were introduced as a result of a seemingly benign clause slipped into the EBA by the STA. Either because of the "nods and winks" of a secret deal or gross incompetence, the union officials went along with it. Similar nefarious, subtly worded, clauses have been common features of previous EBA's. As the introduction of these rosters were allowed by the EBA, union meetings at the depots were not held to approve the rosters, as has been normal practice.

Associated with the new rosters has been major arbitrary changes to the runs we work, causing considerable anger amongst us. One group hard hit are AM drivers, which includes many of the most experienced drivers at the depot. Only at the morning of the next day after finishing their runs are they learning what their runs for that day will be. Whilst 20 of our drivers



have been sent to Ryde and 15 drivers have come to us from Kingsgrove. The bosses are providing no adequate training for those drivers affected by these major changes to their rosters, causing considerable confusion. It poses a major threat to safety, due to many drivers' unfamiliarity with the new routes, they are suddenly expected to operate on. The midday shifts have also been cut out. It appears the bosses have demanded that these drivers have to take up new part time positions which have been created, as their previous positions have been abolished. The length of the broken shifts have also been extended.



**Sparks: What do you consider are the next moves of the STA?**

LB: These new rosters do not include most of the severe changes, of the proposed rosters informed by the STA CEO's original 10 point list of demands, which appeared some months ago. There has been no removal of Sunday work or the creation of casuals, which were to be given the Sundays to boost up their pay. Whilst there have been no cuts to our time to start and finish work. However, the mid days have been eliminated and it's likely the bosses will little by little with the help of the union hierarchy, impose other changes they are seeking with the previous proposed rosters, such as the casuals.

**A Cage of "Optimisation" Battery Roosters**

**Sparks: What are your views on the new Optimisation Rosters?**

Leichhardt Driver: The new rosters are particularly creating havoc for those on the broken shifts. The law says that there has to be at least a 10 hour break between the end of a shift and the beginning of another. However, with the extension of the spread of the broken shifts to 13 hours and overtime due to late running, we can be unable to do our next day's shift. If you are not on a broken shift, you can be suddenly be sent to other depots, often quite distant from Leichhardt. Whilst, with many people living in such places as Penrith, our working and travelling times can be quite extended, causing exhaustion and increased tension in the home.

**Sparks: How do the new rosters connect with O'Farrell Govt. plans for public transport?**

LD: The bosses strategy with the “Optimisation Rosters”, appears to be about using these rosters to help implement Govt. plans for privatisation. It involves creating a new workforce in the buses by drastically worsening our job, so experienced drivers are encouraged to leave. Whilst, rookie drivers who lack experience of better conditions, can be put on the job, who will put up with the worse conditions offered by the private operators.

The union officials who worship the “legalistic road”, discourage industrial action to fight this massive attack, by arguing that a clause in the EBA provides for the new rosters and so “official industrial action” would be illegal. Whilst, senior management in introducing the new rosters has not broken the EBA.

On the job, there is widespread anger with the new rosters. Whilst even depot management is angry with it. As they consider the new rosters reduce productivity.

## **BURWOOD DEPOT NEWS**

### **Sparks: How have the new “Optimisation” shifts being affecting people?**

Burwood Driver: There has been quite a bit of anger amongst many drivers with the union officials over the new shifts. However, the officials have been trying to cover themselves, by blaming the previous union administration for the new shifts. I have noticed that the PM shifts haven’t been negatively affected. However, other shifts such as the mid days have been affected with many runs being changed and several shifts cancelled. Also the first half of the mid day shifts has been extended to 5 hours with much more heavy lines of work, causing much late running. As part of the “Optimisation” shifts our depot has taken on sundry odd runs from other depots such as the 504, 406, 443 and 423. Oddly enough, the 423 which we have taken from Kingsgrove, commences from that depot. One depot, which has been very hard hit by the new shifts is Tempe. It was supposedly to just have the red prepaid ticket buses. Now with the new shifts, it has had to take on the blue buses. As a result, it has needed to have a revenue clerk and cash machines installed there.

### **Sparks: How has depot management been lately?**

BD: The bosses have been taking quite a hard line on accidents. I’ve noticed quite a few guys who have had mishaps with their buses, being placed on stage 1 of the disciplinary procedure. I have also noticed quite a few drivers who have been called into the boss’s office over disciplinary issues are not taking the union rep with them. This isn’t good and seems to stem from the disillusionment many have with the union which is becoming increasingly common at Burwood and at other depots.

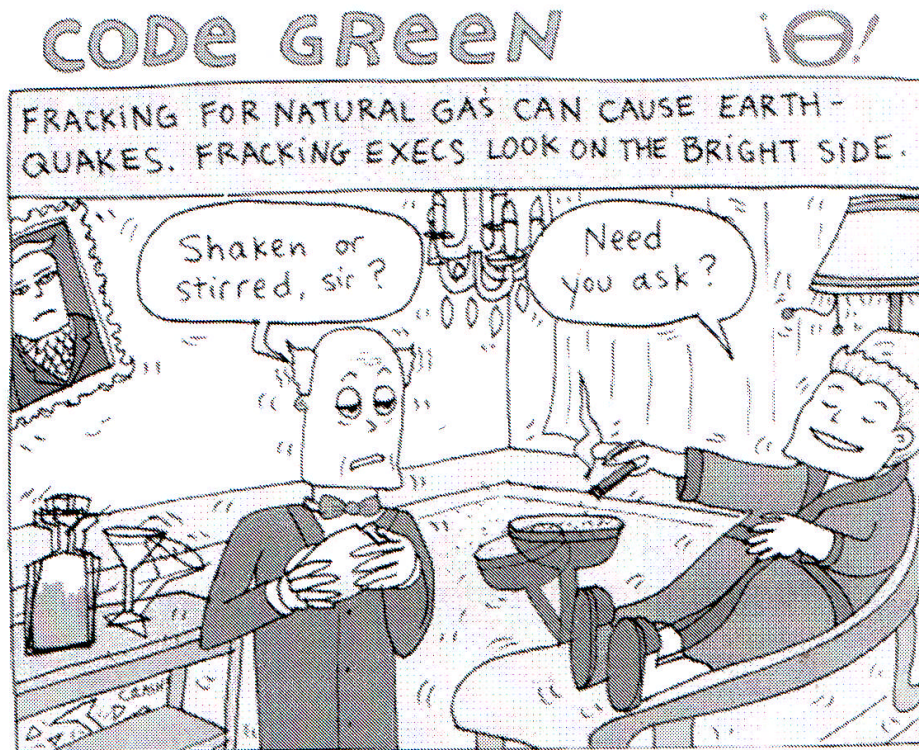
## **WAVERLEY DEPOT NEWS**

**Sparks: What’s the latest with STA plans for implementing the new transport smart card?**

Waverley Busie: We have been advised that Waverley, will be the first depot to trial it in Sept. With the implementation of the smart card coming in a few months and no guarantee that it will work properly, the bosses remain unconcerned about the loss of millions of dollars due to not tackling the current massive fare evasion. The bosses have instructed us not to check tickets. People in many cases are still not paying for the correct tickets. Whilst shop keepers continue to be selling incorrect tickets. Recently I went to a small booth at Martin Place which sells tickets. A year ago, I had noticed that this shop keeper had been selling the wrong tickets. On this occasion I noticed he was still doing the same thing. A lady had wanted to purchase a ticket to Paddington. He issued her with a \$2.20 ticket, rather than the correct \$3.60 ticket. The STA isn't bothered about educating shop keepers about issuing the correct tickets. Ticket inspectors are rarely seen patrolling buses. We are getting savaged by the STA to claw back budget monies, but they don't bother about the massive revenue loss from fare evasion. There is a definite conflict of interest.

**Sparks: What are your views on the bosses' plans to have drivers in the Eastern Depots work together on all the routes covered by these depots?**

WB: The bosses have wanted drivers at Waverley, Randwick and Pt. Botany to operate on all the same routes in the Eastern Suburbs. It has commenced since mid May. The bosses have



spread the smoke screen that it's just a cost saving measure to reduce special running time. However, in reality there is no difference. Whilst, intriguingly, the STA has now, after years of neglect, suddenly spent \$5-7 mill on renovating and sprucing up the entire Waverley Depot. So it seems to me, the real agenda is about creating a cluster of depots and routes to sell off to the Govt's business mates as a package. Also it's likely O'Farrell won't make the move until our current enterprise agreement runs out next year and he won't want to rock the boat with the public, until the Federal elections to be held in Sept this year, are out of the way.

A likely purchaser of this cluster is SERCO. It won the contract to operate the North Western rail link and in Adelaide has the contracts to operate the prisons and public transport. As a result, it has been guaranteed millions of dollars in profits by the Government, which it can now play with. It highlights the absurdity of private operators running public services which in turn leads to reductions in government revenue and encourages further privatising.

The union hierarchy appears unwilling to assist the grassroots to fight the move. In typical STA "you work it out yourself" approach, we have been told to pick up a DVD from the office, which will show the new routes, we will have to work. We will have to have the DVD burned and learn the new routes in our own time. Why aren't we being paid for this extra work?

**Sparks: How is the situation with the STA's corner cutting?**

WB: Many back up staff jobs such as mechanics and inspectors have been cut out. Particularly with the loss of inspectors, our work has become more difficult. If say a ticket or pass is stuck in the green machines, there is now no inspectors to remove it. Those left on the job are doing other jobs. In the past, there would be inspectors at say Bondi Junction interchange who could help with the ticket removal or you could contact radio room, and an inspector would later make contact to help with the problem. Now, we have to take the affected passenger's name and address, so they can be later reissued with the lost ticket or pass. Consequently, in the case of say a 3 day or weekly pass, passengers can lose significant money. It just goes to show how the bosses are doing things on the run and failing to consult with workers in the running of the buses.

**Sparks: What's other news at the depot?**

WB: I've noticed some STA staff hanging around the corner of York Road and Oxford Street checking buses coming into and leaving the depot. I have confirmed they have been checking buses running times. Apparently as part of the STA's push for reducing start up and ending time on buses down from 10 to 5 minutes. Drivers leaving late from the depot are being issued with please explain letters. It's becoming quite common now for suddenly, out of the blue, to receive these notices, about one's alleged short comings. No doubt, as part of the bosses "flexing their muscles" on discipline.

**Sparks: What's happening at other depots?**

WB: Recently, I was speaking to a Kingsgrove driver. He mentioned that 60 lines of work, involving roughly 90 drivers have been removed from Kingsgrove and allocated to other depots. A likely objective of this initiative is to cut down on overtime, through filling vacant

spaces at different depots. With this moving around of drivers, it's going to put more strain on many families. Making the job ever more, not a family friendly environment.

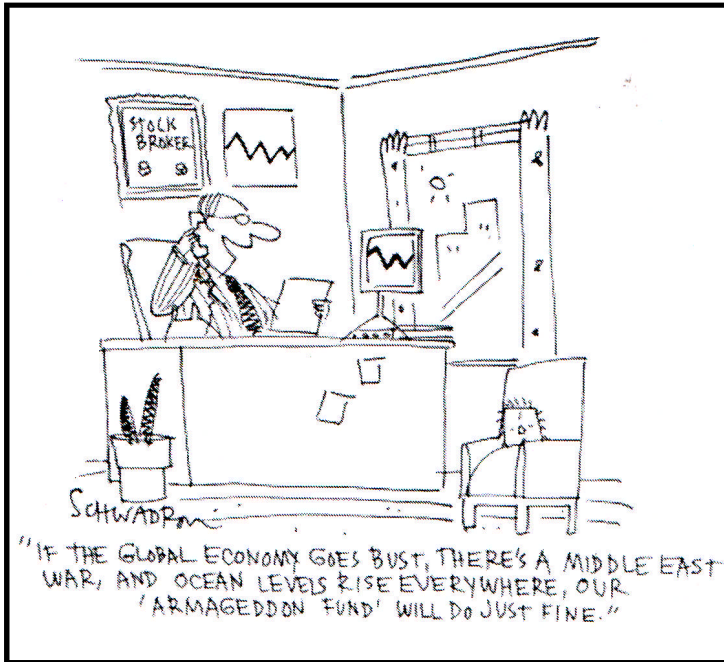
A friend of mine, who has a wife and young children has been particularly hard hit by the changes to his shifts associated with the new lines of work, we are being expected to operate. His shifts have to be coordinated with

when his wife goes to and returns from her job, so his children can be looked after. Under the new regime affecting his shifts, to fit his family requirements, he is now often being given only 7 hour shifts. As a result, he is facing a wages cut and has difficulty meeting his mortgage obligations. We should all be offered the same share of overtime. Given the strenuousness of our type of job, we should all be well paid.

It's also going to put more pressure on roster clerks and driving staff. In the case of those transferred to Port Botany, it's not an easy place to get to. This experiment seems to be a ticking time bomb. As a lot of passengers are getting late for work and are being shoved off buses at wrong terminuses, due to these drivers being inexperienced with the routes. This type of work must be run by routine.

**Sparks: What are your thoughts on the O'Farrell Govt's expenditure on public transport?**

WB: The O'Farrell Govt. has been saying it has no money to spend on expanding Govt owned and operated public transport. However, it is splashing out on the construction of the M7 and associated tunnels in a big way. Rather than expenditure on new freeways, there is an urgent need for the existing roads to be fixed up. The current Liberal Govt. appears to be copying the Greiner Liberal Govt. over 18 years ago in regard to its policies. At that time Greiner splashed out on the construction of the M2. Whilst rejecting consideration of a more public transport friendly solution. Such as an O-Bahn, like exists in Adelaide, which has greatly increased commuter bus usage in that city.



## VICTORIAN RAILWAY NEWS

*In previous issues of Sparks, mention has been made of Human Resources hanging around various departments of V/Line. In this issue, once again Conductors, Head Office Staff and Drivers will discuss these issues. Also two employees who have had to front Human Resources, will speak of their experience. Once again names have been changed.*

**Sparks: Can you explain to our readers about these hangers on.**

Sheona: These people from Human Resources are assigned to the various departments of V/Line such as Track Workers or Drivers. If employees are in trouble, then they have to face their respective supervisors and these people from Human Resources are sitting in on the interview.

Clarence: You may be interested, but Southern Cross Station has a woman from Human Resources assigned looking after Conductors and Station Staff. Some of the Service Officers and Station Staff hate her, but some Conductors and Station Staff crawl to her.

**Sparks: Are they frightened of her?**

Jethro: Yes they are. With tension over job cuts around Southern Cross, some people are crawling to her, thinking they will be in her good books. We do not know where she worked before V/Line, but some managers say she is dangerous.

Sheona: She is only using Southern Cross as a step to a career path in V/Line and if she achieves this, then, she will move on to a better career with another industry.

Jethro: In other words, bash a few heads. At this point I will introduce you to Anthea and Alvin. These two conductors have had to face Human Resources over the last eighteen months.

**Sparks: Where are you stationed?**

Anthea and Alvin: We will not say what depot, we are based as management will try to trace us.

**Sparks: What was the reason you had to front Human Resources?**

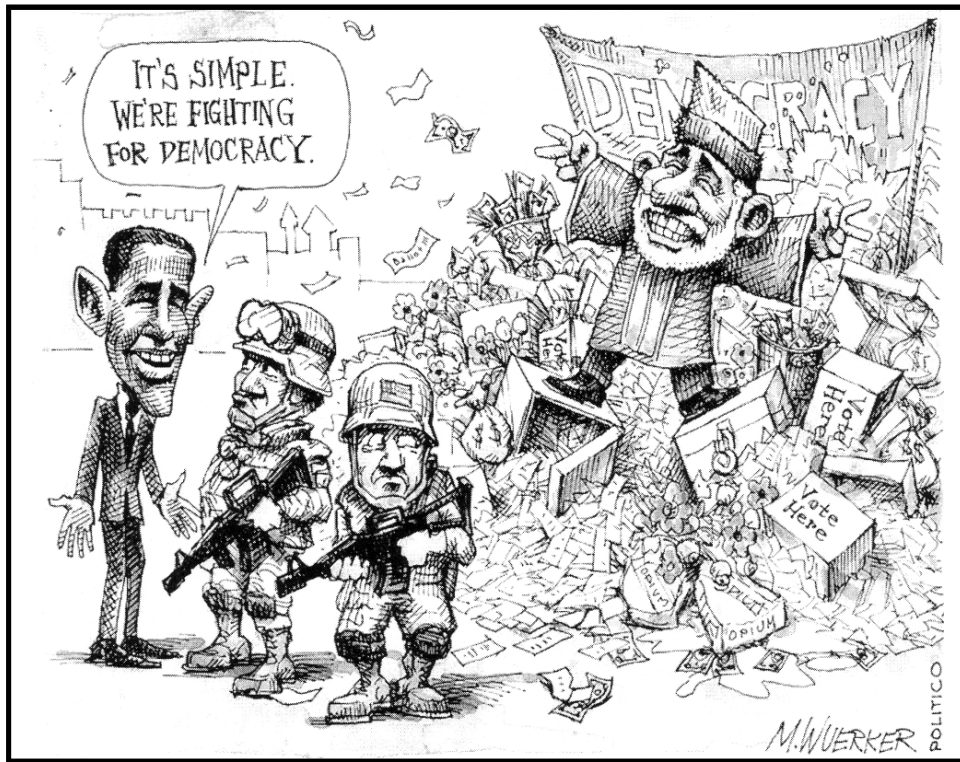
Anthea and Alvin: Leaving a Van Door of the Conductors' compartment open, as the train was arriving into Southern Cross.

Rastus and Roscoe: At this point may we join the discussion. Up until 2009, the conductor on a Locomotive hauled train would observe the train on departure and once the train cleared the platform, the Conductor would close the door. On an arrival the Conductor would open the van door and observe the signal. Some of the platforms are long with intermediate signals and can accommodate more than one train. If the intermediate signal was red on the platform, then the Conductor would release the doors for the passengers to alight.

**Sparks: Why was this changed?**

Clarence: At the end of 2009 all of V/Line locomotive hauled carriages were equipped with power doors and then Occupational Health and Safety Officers for the conductors suggested





to the Conductors Manager that Conductors once a train departed, did not need to clear the platform, as the train was locked like a railmotor.

Rastus: This particular Conductors' Health and Safety Officer was a loafer with no railway knowledge and we drivers had arguments with her over a number of issues.

Jethro: There was no consultation with the Unions, when this rule was introduced. It just appeared as a controlled docket, which everyone had to sign.

Roscoe: The XPT when departing Southern Cross, the Senior Passenger Attendant has to observe the train whilst it clears the platform, then he shuts the van door.

Anthea and Alvin: When we had to front Human Resources, we were given a letter naming the charge, we had to face and when we had to front them. The letter, also said we were not to discuss the matter with our fellow employees.

Rastus: As I said in a previous issue of Sparks, discuss the matter with your fellow employees.

Alvin: I spoke to my fellow conductors and they said I was being treated harshly.

Sheona: You actually were signalled out as management wanted to make an example of you.

Anthea: We had to appear before the Conductor Manager, at different times, but not together.

Rastus and Roscoe: They just want to belittle us.

Anthea: When I went for the interview, I went with a Union Official, who defended myself. I walked into the manager's office and sitting next to the manager was the woman from Human Resources. She started giving myself a lecture about V/Line policy and did not consider my work record or the compliments I received from passengers.

Alvin: They do not care about how long you have been on the job or your work record. This person does not care your length of service. I will tell you what I was alleged to have done. I opened the van door because the train was detained at a signal on the long platform. I wanted to know when to release the door. The signal changed to a yellow caution and the train moved down the platform. I forgot to close the van door and the train stopped at the end of the platform, I released for the passengers to alight.

Anthea: In my case the train had stopped and the signal changed to yellow. I was making a P.A. announcement and two drivers came through the conductors' compartment and alighted, but forgot to close the door. I was making the announcement, so I could not shut the door, as the train moved down the platform. When the train stopped I released the doors for the passengers to alight.





Rastus: The two drivers would have walked through the train to alight via the van, as they had to sign on.

Clarence: Apparently this person was hiding behind a curtain in one of the offices spying.

**Sparks: What was the outcome?**

Alvin and Anthea: After a couple of days, we both received letters. These letters stated that the next time, we were in trouble, we would both get a final warning. They did not consider our many years of loyal service to V/Line. We were devastated.

Rastas and Roscoe: When preparing a train, we saw this SPITEFUL WOMAN spying on the station staff and conductors.

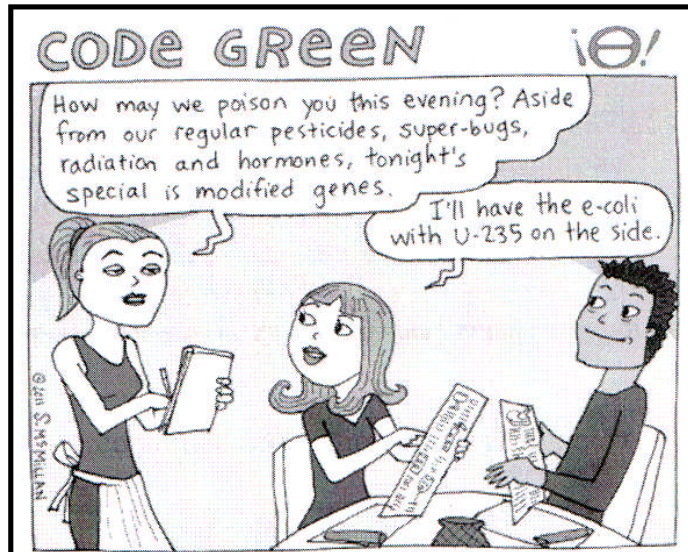
**Sparks: Was this the woman mentioned in issue 138?**

Clarence: Yes, this was the idiot, who grabbed a booking clerk's Christmas tie, saying the clerk was not in uniform. She was made to apologise to the booking clerk.

Sheona: They are threatening long term employees, as Human Resources are trying to change the culture at V/Line. They say that if you are in trouble, you are out the door. You see, they have a talent pool of people wanting to be conductors, who have been interviewed and are on a waiting list. There are also conductors on short term contracts, because other employees are on maternity leave or on long term secondment to another job. Thus if a long serving employee is terminated, these people may obtain a position. Due to constraints in space, this issue will be discussed in a future issue of Sparks.

**Sparks: In concluding, thank you Anthea and Alvin for coming forward, Long term employees are being treated like dirt and it is about time, this rule concerning the conductors van door is removed. If CountryLink, still observe the train departing along the platform, why should V/line conductors be disciplined for doing the same?**

Rastus and Roscoe:  
Again in having the final say, long term employees in trouble are treated shabbily. Regarding the woman assigned to Southern Cross, one day we saw this person walking around Southern Cross, wearing a vest, and wait for it. She was in HIGH HEAL SHOES. Finally, if you have to front any manager at Southern Cross, and Human Resources are in attendance. WALK OUT!



# International Transport Workers' News

## **Union Hierarchy sabotage Irish bus workers' strike**

*By Jordan Shilton*

**17 May 2013**

Up to 1,000 bus workers went on strike across Ireland Sunday. The employees of national bus company Bus Éireann took action against a cost-cutting programme by the firm totalling €5 million (US\$6.5 million).

The strike had a significant impact. According to reports, up to 95 percent of services were affected, including major routes in Dublin and longer inter-city connections. On Monday, an estimated 70,000 passengers were impacted by the work stoppage.

By Monday evening, with the impact of the strike growing and with fears in government that a broader strike movement could develop among the working class, unions and management agreed to a 48-hour "cooling off" period to enter into negotiations.

The move was a desperate attempt by the government to contain the impact of the work stoppage. An Irish Independent article noted that the government was fearing a "wave of public sector strikes" and cited an official warning that the bus drivers' strike could not become a "showpiece dispute."

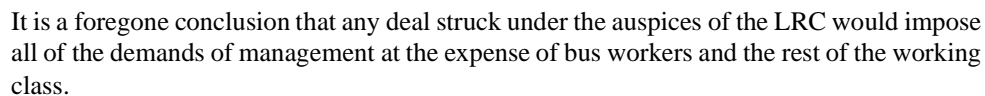
The unions involved, the NBRU (National Bus and Rail Union) and SIPTU (Services, Industrial, Technical and Professional Union), were prepared to unconditionally enter talks because they are completely hostile to any defence of the interests of the bus workers.

Following the talks at the Labour Relations Committee (LRC) it was announced that services would resume as normal following unspecified "commitments given". The company issued a statement that 24 hours' notice would be given before any resumption of the strike.

The response of the employers' group, Ibec, to the union's collusion in ending the strike was to call for the reform of Irish labour law, bringing in provisions guaranteeing the delivery of key services. This is a fairly unambiguous call for the banning of strikes through measures like those presently being imposed against striking teachers in Greece.

The strike was provoked when Bus Eireann management sought to implement recommendations from the self-same LRC, a state-funded arbitration body with a record of enforcing the demands of the employers. The savings of €5 million would have included pay cuts, reductions in overtime pay and longer working hours.

The state-owned company has been suffering deepening financial problems. Government ministers have sought to blackmail striking workers with the threat that the company could collapse as it was losing €200,000 per day during the strike. Alan Kelly, minister for public

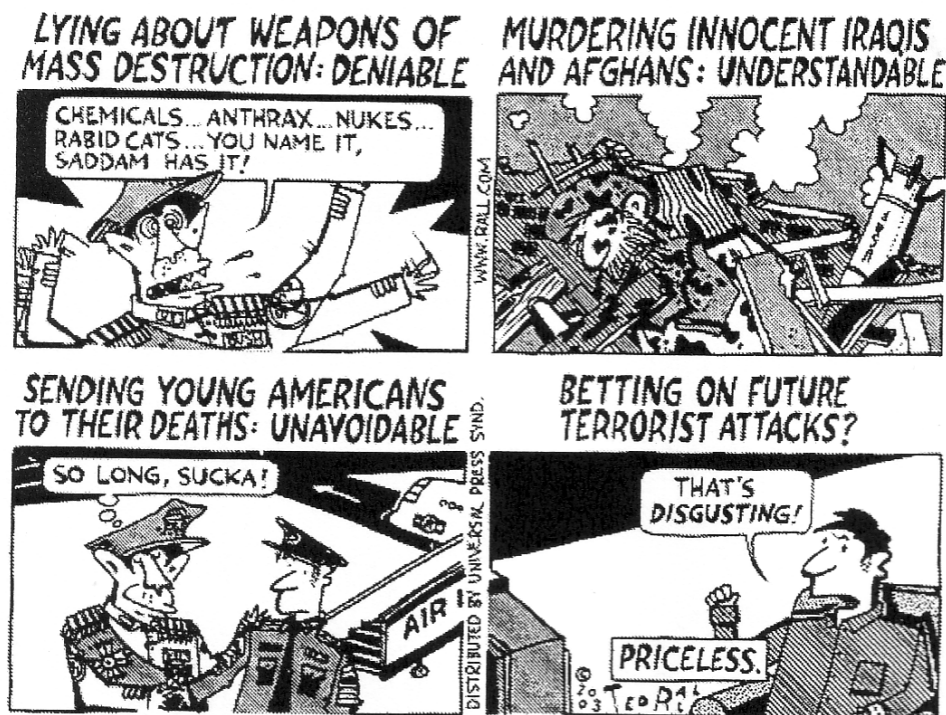


This is the institution that played a leading role in the drafting of the first Croke Park Agreement in 2010, which imposed a four-year strike ban, pay cuts and “voluntary” redundancies that cut the number of workers in the public sector by more than 10 percent. In the private sector, the LRC legitimised the firing of all Aer Lingus ground crew in 2011, many of whom were subsequently rehired on far lower pay.

Bus Eireann spokesman Andrew McLindon confidently stated, “That’s why it’s a very short sharp process of 48 hours where we’ll all sit down and try to get agreement on this so we can bring in the cost saving measures designed to protect the future of the company.”

The only demand made by NBRU leader Jim Faherty before entering discussions on Monday evening was the call for them to be “constructive.”

SIPTU has also worked to isolate the bus workers. The ballot for strike action of its 500 members at Bus Eireann was only to be announced on Thursday, five days after the members of the NBRU initiated strike action. This is in spite of the fact that those bus workers in SIPTU faced the same attacks, which went into force last weekend. In the meantime, SIPTU claimed that its members would not cross pickets during the first days of the strike. In fact, the union simply ensured that the buses that SIPTU members would be working on were parked at locations where there were no pickets of NBRU members.



None of the unions sought to mobilise support more broadly for the strike, in spite of the fact that such a call would be met with widespread enthusiasm under conditions in which similar attacks are being imposed across the economy. SIPTU, which represents more than 60,000 workers, also remains locked in talks with the government to force through a second Croke Park deal against the wishes of public sector workers who have already voted down the first agreement last month.

All indications are that the union bureaucracy is preparing to accept the government's demands for €1 billion in savings by 2016, albeit in a repackaged deal, which they will seek to sell to their members. The only viable way for workers to take their struggles forward is through a rebellion against these organisations.

*Thanks to RNF News*

## **NEW YORK SCHOOL BUS DRIVERS' STRIKE**

**23/1/13**

TWENTY-FOUR-a-day hour pickets, established by members of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1181, have surrounded bus depots from the Bronx to Staten Island since workers walked out last Wednesday.

At the heart of the dispute are Employee Protection Provisions (EPPs), which defend workers from layoffs when bus routes are passed from contractor to contractor. In February, the city plans to open the special-needs routes, which Fuerges and other senior drivers navigate each school day, to bidders exempted from EPPs.

Citing a 2011 state appeals court ruling that declared the EPPs anti-competitive and struck the provisions down, Bloomberg and Walcott duo say their hands are tied. Legislation passed in Albany last year would have enshrined the EPPs into law, but Gov. Andrew Cuomo vetoed the bill after Bloomberg sent him a letter saying the measure would interfere with the city's "business judgment."

Though the court decision applied only to pre-kindergarten routes, it is being used to attack job security across the board. Special-needs drivers and attendants are up first. "If the EPP is not inside the contract," says Fuerges, "then we just lose our jobs, and that's that. They'll just hire a hundred drivers at a lower rate without the experience, and we'll lose everything."

Carin van der Donk, the mother of a 13-year-old with autism, stands with the ATU. She's on a first-name basis with the team that chaperones her child, and she sees the attack on the union as an assault on the quality of her child's education. "All these special-needs kids get on a bus every morning—6:30, 7 a.m.—and sit there for hours. They exist during that time, and they need to have qualified personnel. That person needs to be treated with respect and needs to be paid a living wage."

Special-needs transport constitutes three-quarters of the city's \$1.1 billion busing budget, which Bloomberg wants to slash in half. Children with mental and physical disabilities as

well as those with behavioral disorders would bear the brunt of the mayor's cuts, since senior staff would be thrown to the curb.

"I like to work with special-ed children," says Fierges. "Some of these kids don't come from good families. I feel like not only can I drive them, but I can give them some type of education about life. I've seen bad kids turn to good because they can understand that I can relate to them, and that's important."

Rather than undermining the job security of people making \$35,000 a year—the average driver's salary—critics say the city could save money by reconfiguring its complicated network of bus routes, a web that has grown all the more entangled during Bloomberg's tenure. The mayor has closed more than 100 neighborhood schools and is gradually pushing the city towards a charter-school model, meaning more students traveling greater distances to get to the classroom.

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ATU LOCAL 1181 won the job protections it is fighting to preserve in a bitter, three-month strike in 1979, during which New York City corrections officers stepped in as scabs. In what was dubbed "Operation Kiddie Lift," jailers drove children to school in buses normally used to transport prisoners to Rikers Island—essentially, cages on wheels.

This time around, if Bloomberg manages to break the union, he will have succeeded where his predecessors, including Ed Koch and Rudolph Giuliani, failed. While Koch and Giuliani sat down with the union and negotiated, Bloomberg has not.

And that is because he's got a weapon up his sleeve that those who came before him didn't: complete mayoral control over the school system. Under a 2002 law that Bloomberg himself championed, the Wall Street mogul has the ability to stack the governing board of the city's Department of Education with his handpicked favorites. Members of the Panel on Education Policy can be plucked off the board at any time, ensuring Bloomberg gets his way.

Mayoral control has not only been bad news for the school bus union, but teachers and students have also been hit hard under Bloomberg's reign—140 schools have been shuttered since Bloomberg took office in 2001, and another 27 are slated for closure this year.

Under attack from the same forces of austerity, teachers and drivers are now working together. The Movement of Rank-and-File Educators (MORE), the social-justice caucus of the union representing city teachers, has issued a statement of support for the striking drivers, and teachers have been walking the picket-lines in front of bus depots in the wee hours of the morning.

On the other side of the aisle, a consortium of bus contractors has filed complaints with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to force employees back behind the wheel. They claim that Local 1181 has no right to strike since their conflict is with the city, not their employer. In the meantime, the contractors are rushing replacements through training.

If the NLRB emerges from its den of legal study and declares the strike legit, the battle could continue into the winter. We may also see a freshman crop of scabs start attempting to wheel yellow buses out of garages. But first, they'll have to get past Sergio Fierges and thousands of his colleagues who are refusing to watch their livelihoods be driven away.

***Finger printing Continued.*** Imagine if much of this information could be married to a fingerprint profile on a database. This is not an impossibility some time in the future. What they would have is instant access to crucial information about you.

So no matter what the assurances are, can we trust the biometric companies with our fingerprints? Fingerprints are a lifetime unique identifier of an individual. Employers should not have access to this information. Fingerprinting or print scans seem totally unnecessary. A temporary identifier such as a swipe card would suffice. Having a unique biometric fingerprint also gives employers possible access to information about a person outside of work. Where do we draw the line on personal privacy?

Another worry is over the increasing widespread use of such techniques as fingerprint scanning in other areas of operation such as shopping centres, getting on and off the bus, clubs, pubs and hospitals etc. Even if the exact image of the fingerprint is not stored in a readable form there is nothing stopping the stored representation being cross matched with other data bases using the same techniques. So that if you were, for instance, using your fingerprint scan to enter a nightclub, a casino or just to pay for your groceries the linked information about an individual could be shared if similar technology was in use. For instance, if your employer using the same fingerprint scan technique as some other owner was to share information on an individuals habits they might learn where they go, what they buy etc.

Well you might say that under Australia's privacy laws that can't happen as this is illegal. No such watertight laws exist. Some people are even above the law – most employers believe that they are. We all remember the Murdoch expose' on illegal phone tapping – despite it being illegal it still was carried out. Phone tapping is still widespread today.

In an article posted in the News.com website Civil Liberties Australia raised the issue of fingerprint scanning to enter licensed venues.

“Civil Liberties Australia director Tim Vines said the machines were overly intrusive and there needed to be national guidelines on their use.

“Facial recognition and fingerprints we consider to be quite intrusive into a person's privacy,” Mr Vines said.”

People could be barred from pubs, clubs and other venues because a misdemeanour had been recorded against their fingerprint profile. The problem occurs when this data is shared between venues and linked to things like drivers licences or other ID, photos etc. Then there is the question of security of the information. No such guarantees can be given, especially since the smaller holders of the information would lack the technical expertise and financial capability to secure the data. Could the stored data be sold to employers just like Facebook profiles of employees presently are?

What it all comes down to is that this is one more method of control, all the more important control tool than other methods because it is linked to a unique identifier of individuals. When you add this extra layer of control to all of the others in the Government Transport workplace it becomes a tipping point where workers rights are trampled in the

*See Page 24*

***Fingerprinting Continued*** name of security and efficiency. But workers have no such  
***From Page 23*** security and no such recourse to justice.

Workplace surveillance has reached an all time high. Your web surfing habits at work are recorded for the sites that you visit and the amount of time that you spent doing it. Web sites are blocked or filtered because some one else has decided that you should not see it or get access. Your email is monitored and is considered the property of the NSW Government rather than your own. In most circumstances your telephone conversations on the job are recorded when we use departmental phones. Once again this is done under the pretext of safety. Yet it is possible for the powers that be to record private conversations, their duration and to find out the identity of the person making the call. This has been standard practice for decades.

Monitoring involves exercising control over workers and control over the data related to specific workers.

CCTV camera's record your every move in public areas and can alert bosses that you are not where you are supposed to be. Likewise random urine and breath testing reaches into the most private areas of your life in another indignity that can be foisted upon you at any time. Health testing while done in the name of prevention of accidents and OH&S is a whole lot more than that. It is management's attempt to intervene in your lifestyle and lifestyle choices despite whether you agree that the safety aspects are worthy or not.

"Workers are to be controlled and never trusted", that is the message which comes from this type of subtle control.

Fingerprint scanning is the thin edge of the wedge of a whole range of control mechanisms that have been introduced over the past few decades. It is an attempt to criminalise employees rather than regard them as fellow human beings who are trusted and respected. Our freedoms are slowly being whittled away in the name of safety and in the name of security, denying what's best for us. We must draw a line in the sand over the issue of fingerprint scans as a means of signing on and off of duty. At the very least the whole process should be voluntary and no one should be forced into giving a fingerprint profile.

Fingerprinting which is definitively used in the workplace to correctly identify employees is an unnecessary technique for ensuring that time sheets are correct. It is a permanent record that can and is forever linked to a persons fingerprint. Your employer should not own you or your data for all time. Temporary identification techniques over the period of employment with that employer would suffice and would be more in tune with the human rights of the employee concerned. Swipe cards or other temporary electronic devices and computer logins etc. are all that is really needed to verify start and finishing times. These should be preferred over permanent records which linked in some way to an employee number.

When they ask you submit yourself for fingerprint scanning to create an identity profile, say NO. You are not refusing work. You are not refusing to submit details of your working hours. However you will be keeping just one more one piece of dignity by preventing management from tightening the screws of control just that one bit tighter. That alone will be satisfying victory of sorts.









# What is Democratic Unionism?

Democratic