

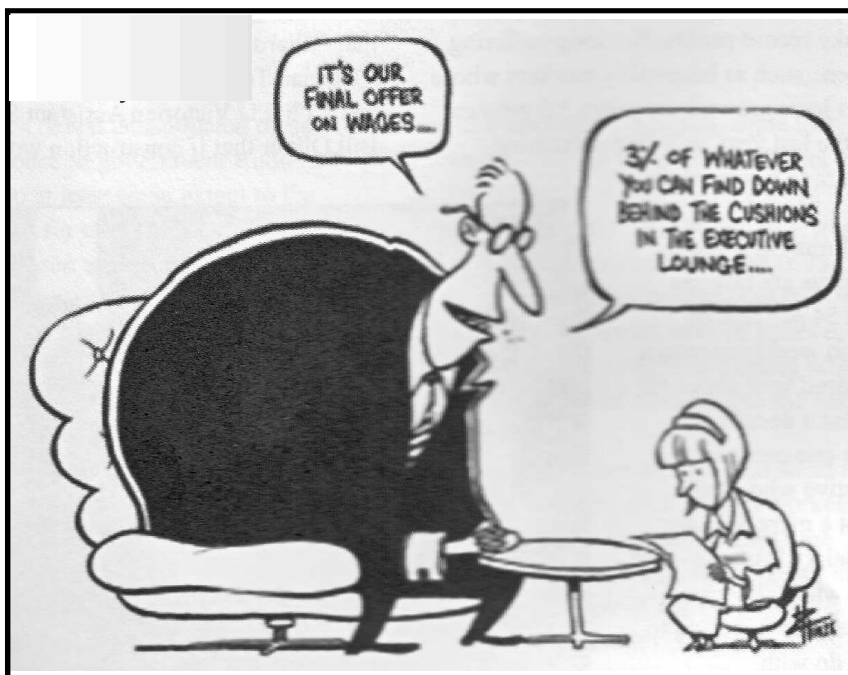
No.129

June - July 2008

# Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

**MAKE PAY RISE HAY WHILE THE WORLD  
MEDIA SHINES ON SYDNEY DURING THE  
POPE'S VISIT WITH DIRECT ACTION!**



CENTRAL STATION NEWS  
STA SICKIE CRACKDOWN  
INTERNATIONAL NEWS  
STA BUSIE NEWS

RAILCORP EBA NEWS  
BUS CAMERAS OUTRAGE  
VIC. RAIL NEWS  
SYDNEY MARITIME NEWS

## **EDITORIAL**

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

Some news of continuing importance is the Enterprise Bargain Agreement dispute in Rail Corp. Latest news has been the breakdown of negotiations between management and the union hierarchy. With the CPI of 3 ½ % pa and likely 30% pa increases in Sydney rents, the union claim for a maximum of 5 ½% pa is hardly adequate. The upcoming Pope's visit will provide an important opportunity to achieve wages and conditions justice. (See article page 3.)

The bitter fruits of the current STA Enterprise Agreement with its meagre pay rise of 4% pa which barely covers the current CPI let alone likely massive rent hikes, has been spotlighted recently by a savage sickie crackdown which the bosses have launched. They have seized on EBA provisions which provide an increased opportunity to check on sick leave to intimidate drivers from taking sickies. (See article page 11.) Another prong of the management offensive in the STA, are the new bus video cameras and the associated pro-management policy governing their operation which the union hierarchy brazenly caved-in over. The case of a driver at Port Botany STA Depot who had an accident and is now facing serious charges highlights the issue and urgency of direct action the job to tackle it. (See article page 7.)



Sparks welcomes contributions by transport workers in the shape of articles, cartoons, poems. Please send to PO Box 92 Broadway 2007 NSW or via our web page [www.sparksweb.org](http://www.sparksweb.org)

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## **SPARKS WEB PAGE -**

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

## N.S.W. RAIL NEWS

### **Sparks: What's happening with RailCorp Management's plans for major cutbacks to staffing in the CityRail Station Network?**

Station Assistant: Following the leak to the Telegraph of management's plans for 400 job losses in CityRail, resulting in major public outrage, Transport Minister Watkins appears to have been embarrassed and denied that any such job cutbacks were on the agenda. Some of the money saved from the cutbacks was to be used to fund our 2 ½ % pa EBA (Enterprise Bargain Agreement) pay rise over two years, which management was offering. At Central 43 jobs were to be targeted, with the money saved from these job losses being sufficient to fund our pay rise. Amongst a certain layer of workers at the station, there was excitement about redundancy packages and they would have gone along with the job losses. It appears now that funding for our EBA wage rise will be funded by both RailCorp and also the Treasury which will also chip in funds.

### **Sparks: What's the latest with the RailCorp EBA negotiations?**

SA: In exchange for a 4% pa pay rise management is demanding major job losses and cuts to our conditions. As a result, EBA negotiations between management and the union have broken down. The union recently called a meeting at Central to discuss the EBA negotiations. A resolution was passed supporting industrial action if such pressure was required to achieve the union claim. I consider that the union wage ambit claim of 5 ½ % pa over two years to be completely insufficient. A more realistic claim would 10% to 15% pa over the two year period. Only such a claim will allow us to cope with the current 3 ½ % pa CPI, high rent increases in Sydney and remunerate us adequately for our increased work load associated with the expansion of the railways and increased productivity. The expansion of the railways is illustrated by such measures as the opening of new platforms at Homebush and Lidcombe. More jobs need to be created to cope with this increased amount of work. However, the HR (Human Resources) has a totally different point of view on the subject.

Latest news is that grass roots activists intend to wait until the Pope's visit in July to press our EBA claim. At that time, we will be in a more favourable situation to pursue it. Whilst the Workplace Relations Act will allow us to pursue industrial action to achieve our demands. The precedent also exists in the case of special events such as the Olympics for the payment of extra allowances and bonuses. A second union meeting has been held at Central. At the meeting the officials expressed their desire to resolve the EBA issue before the Pope's Visit and that they were not backing down on the threat to pursue industrial action to achieve the union EBA pay rise demand.

### **Sparks: How do you compare the cost effectiveness of the Australian railway system to those overseas?**

SA: Overseas railways systems such as in Europe and Japan are much simpler and smaller causing reduced costs and requiring less staffing than exist in Australia. In Australia we have

three systems – a city circle, interurban and country. In other countries all you have is only a city system. Whilst in the case of say, Belgium and France, if you travel 150 to 160 kilometres, you can cross the country costing \$15 per km. Whilst in Australia, the same distance will only take you from Sydney to Katoomba and cost \$20 per km.

## UPDATE ON RAIL CORP EBA 2008

As we go to print, papers are being sent by the Electoral Commission to Union members homes in a ballot seeking approval for “protected industrial action”. Because negotiations over the EBA have stalled the unions are now seeking approval from the Industrial Relations Commission for the ability to carry out industrial action in support of their claims.

RailCorp are remaining steadfast offering only a 2.5% PA wage rise for the next 2 years. 4% PA is on offer, if, and only if, there is an agreement on the shedding of 417 rail station jobs, the cutting of appeal rights and tighter “absence control” measures.

The conditions imposed for getting a 4% rise have been largely rejected by rail workers.

However, approval for the right to flex some industrial muscle, whatever form that takes, is now contingent on the unions gaining a 51% consent from their members.

This is not guaranteed. In most union elections something less than 30% of union members vote. Also some may be frightened away from taking industrial action due to financial stress that would see their pay docked during any industrial action. Some may not be prepared to risk the loss of one mortgage payment. Already workers are being penalised as the EBA was to be finalised by April of this year. Since the State Government is not allowing backdated pay rises rail workers have already suffered a pay cut as inflation is running at close to 4%.

This all takes place in light of a report commissioned by the NSW Independent Pricing Tribunal which recommends that RailCorp expunge all of its CityRail Guards and hundreds of Station Staff. If this doesn't happen according to the report rail fares are set to rise to astronomical levels. This effectively drives a wedge between commuters who already pay exorbitant fares and rail staff who are fighting for their jobs and a very moderate pay rise.

The unions and their members must now get out win the hearts and minds of the travelling public before any industrial action begins. There will be little public sympathy for rail workers if and when action takes place.

So far no strategy or agreed goal has been set in place by the unions. This must be articulated and debated by the union members at the shop floor. We all need to know what the agreed fall-back position will be if we fail to persuade RailCorp to accede to our claims. The acceptance of 2.5% wage rise is not an option. Any reduction in staff numbers and alteration to conditions or work practices should be rejected. What will be our demands?

**Sparks reiterates its position of an immediate 10% pay rise with no trade offs in any form, just so members can keep their heads above water.**

We urge all union members to vote in favour of industrial action against the proposed RailCorp EBA. We urge all members to immediately call for union stopwork meetings (pref-

erably a mass stopwork meeting) once polling confirms that a majority are in favour of industrial action. Any proposed action must be debated, agreed and voted on by all union members. Above all we cannot afford to lose this one and it must be done collectively and democratically if we are to have any hope.

## Its Time for a Campaign on Shift Work

### **Recent health research points to the devastating health effects of working continuing shift work.**

In the transport industry it has all been well documented for years. Train drivers for instance have a life expectancy several years below that of other workers due to the working of irregular rostered hours.

Now new research looks at the mechanisms at play that contribute to worker sickness and premature death. The World Health Organisation's research into cancer announced recently that shift work involving disruption of circadian rhythms was "probably carcinogenic"

Dr Ron Grunstein, the head of sleep research at the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research in Sydney, quoted in the Sydney Morning Herald, admits that "A majority of studies support that shift work – particularly rotating shift work – seems to be a risk for different types of cancer."

Although research is inconclusive animal studies "suggest it's potentially got something to do with the circadian system" according to Dr Sally Ferguson of the Centre for Sleep Research at the University of South Australia.

One line of research suggests that alterations to melatonin levels in the brain due to shift work may have an effect on cancer growth. Grunstein says that "Melatonin is thought to be a substance that retards growth of cancers". Melatonin is reduced in shift workers.

Shift workers are also more likely to be overweight, physically inactive, pay less attention to symptoms and signs and they are more likely to suffer from



stress, hypertension, elevated blood sugars. The effects of shift work on the cardiovascular system have been known for years.

Given that there are now more or less arguable proven links between rotating shift work and shift worker illness and premature death there may soon be fields for litigation against employers opening up.

In the meantime public transport workers should be properly compensated for the threats to their health, their lack of social interaction and alienation.

The present wage arrangements for shift workers are very limited as they only offer a shift allowance on weekday work. In effect most public transport shift workers are only paid an allowance for a maximum of six or seven days per fortnightly roster. Any overtime work or weekend work does not include a shift work allowance. This is a ludicrous situation as it denies workers the recognition that this rostered rotation is creating havoc within their bodies and minds.

A campaign in recognition of the supreme sacrifice of shift workers should begin immediately with the demand that all work out of normal hours is compensated with a reasonable and just monetary allowance regardless of whether it is time worked at overtime or on weekends. This campaign should begin immediately.

## **UK Shell truckers offered 14 per cent pay rise**

*June 20th, 2008 by Ed*

Petrol tanker drivers supplying Shell petrol stations have called off a planned second round of industrial action after being offered a reported 14 per cent pay increase over two years. The last minute offer was made to the drivers' union, the ITF affiliated Unite, by Hoyer UK and Suckling Transport, who are contracted to distribute Shell supplies. It followed four days of peaceful industrial action in the UK, with more planned. The drivers will now consider the offer, which is likely to take significantly increase average earnings from their current level of around £32,000 a year.

The truckers' pay rise is above inflation and the first crack in the governments campaign of below inflation pay rises over the last two years. The truckers can expect 9% this year and 5% the next. This has led to fears amongst politicians and employers that public sector workers such as teachers may begin to protest the offers made the them, which have been more in the region of 8% over three years.

Meanwhile truck drivers in South Korea have also been taking industrial action, demanding lower diesel-fuel costs, raised fees for hauling freight and minimum wages. Observers report that both trade union members and self-employed drivers

have been protesting side by side, with many non-union members deciding it was time for them to seek union representation. Actions by truckers protesting at high fuel prices have been taking place around the world, including Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Hong Kong, Thailand, India and France. Most have been organised by associations of self-employed drivers.

## **S.T.A. BUSIE NEWS**

### **PORT BOTANY DEPOT NEWS**

## **BUS VIDEO CAMERAS USED TO CRUCIFY DRIVER!**

### **Sparks: What's happening at the Depot Lately?**

Port Botany Driver: In recent weeks one of our young drivers here, a really, nice, decent young guy with a young family who wouldn't hurt a fly, recently got toasted by the new digital video system. Due to the intense scrutiny his driving was placed under, courtesy of the 5 cameras on his bus watching him, he's been put him up on criminal charges and he is facing a possible gaol term. The other driver had no such scrutiny placed on his driving because private vehicles don't have 5 digital cameras mounted in them. So all the evidence is loaded and mounted against our guy. As unlikely as it probably is, the other driver could have had his eyes shut or been perving at some woman on the footpath when this accident happened, but we will never know that. All the cops and STA will ever know is every single blink and movement of our STA driver. The guys at the depot are not that happy about the Union's handling of the matter. The way I see it, STA drivers are being subjected to unfair scrutiny that no other driver on the road is subjected to, and the overwhelming amount of evidence taken from bus cameras that STA is going to be able to produce each time there is an accident is always going to weigh heavily against STA drivers where there is any doubt about who was at fault. It doesn't seem to be an even playing field any more.

Our union officials should never have allowed the policy to go through in its present form, but they refused to even consider making changes or negotiating a fairer policy. I've heard that the discussion and suggestions that the Union should try to negotiate a better policy during that Executive Meeting was guillotined by the Randwick Delegate with the support of every other Delegate present, except of course our former PB Delegate. They didn't even TRY to get a better policy out of STA that would have ensured that the cameras would be used for our protection, not our prosecution.

### **Sparks: What are your ideas for tackling the camera monitoring issue?**

PBD: I really hope that some momentum could be built on this issue to push for a Work To Rule campaign. All of us as STA drivers really need to be concerned about what has happened to this young PB driver. We just have to stop doing all those numerous tiny favours we do for STA every day, stop taking those little short cuts we do to keep the buses moving on time. Isn't it ironic that you can work your guts out for STA, rushing around trying to keep the buses on time, then you sneak a split second peak at your journal sitting there on your AFC to make sure you're still on time and wham! A bike, car or pedestrian can come out of nowhere and change your life forever.



*"I knew something was wrong when my orders for Iraq  
came in the same envelope as my oil company credit card bill."*

Is STA gonna back you up and say what a great employee you've been and that accidents happen? No way! They're gonna blame you for looking at your journal, even though they are the ones who gave it to you and told you in your training to put it there on your AFC so you can see it while you are driving. For a start we ought to put those f-ing journals away somewhere so we can't see them while driving, so we're not tempted to speed or cut corners, and just completely forget about trying to stay on time. We can't afford to keep taking these risks if STA are gonna scrutinise our every movement to this level and help put us in the joint.

#### **WAVERLEY DEPOT NEWS**

**Sparks: What jokes have you heard lately?**

Waverley Busie: There has been a joke going around which has great relevance to our workplace. Little balloon is State Transit. He gets out of his bed and tries to get comfortable with his parents on their bed, to better engage with staff and passengers. To fit in between them, he lets a little bit of air out of dad balloon meaning STA staff, but still he's unable to fit in. So he lets a bit of air out of mum balloon, meaning passengers. Still unable to squeeze in, he lets out a bit of air out of himself and then he can snuggle in. When dad wakes up in the morning, he says to little balloon, "son, last night you let me down! You let your mother down! And you let yourself down!"

**Sparks: What do you see as the remedy for the STA bosses' constant corner cutting?**



WB: I was recently speaking to a mechanic who said the STA has the labour and equipment to provide the necessary bus services to meet the increased passenger demand, stemming from increased petrol prices. However, the STA is still lost in the old corporate model of corner cutting to boost productivity. Such as the cutting out of the X84's at Waverley. Instead, the STA should return to being run as a community service, not as a business. Productivity comes from putting more people on seats and providing adequate staffing such as more inspectors. This notion is gold.

**Sparks: What are your ideas for improving the STA's budget to avoid the STA's short sighted corner cutting?**

WB: Currently the STA is allowing thousands of school kids to evade fares reducing revenue. Why isn't the STA taking action on this issue? Another obvious area is the need to eliminate consultants on high salaries. The employment of these fat cats is likely to be just part of some ALP Rightwing jobs for the boys scheme from the under belly of the STA. Management needs to take advantage of our experience regarding how to run the buses. Another area is the money squandered on providing at all depots security guards, 7 days a week 24 hours a day. Costing \$260,000 pa at each depot. Where is the money coming from? Is this expenditure justified? I think not. It's just a result of Howard Govt. inspired anti-Terrorism paranoia and there is no genuine case. If some terrorists want to capture a bus, there are plenty of opportunities for them on the road and at terminuses. The saving of money by such pruning measures would definitely provide the funds for employing more drivers and more buses to be put on runs and greatly improve bus services.

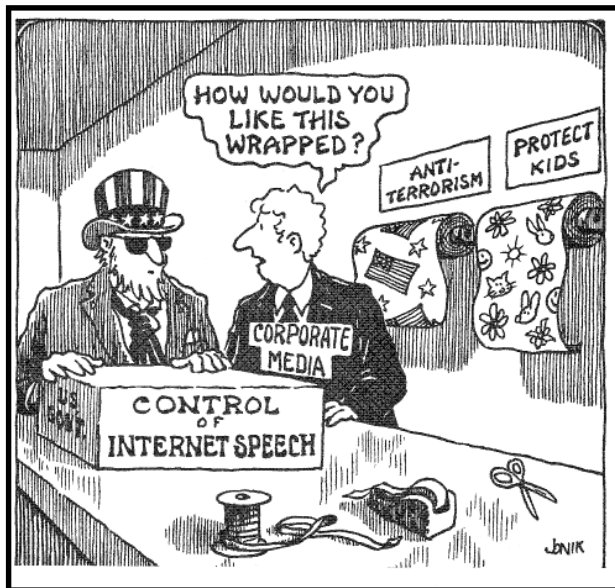
**Sparks: What are your impressions of the fat cats' basket at Strawberry Hills?**

WB: The senior executives certainly have a "Cut! Cut!" approach to running the buses. They are completely missing out on the importance of improving bus services to put more bums on bus seats. A more responsible approach would involve making genuine attempts to connect with us to take account of our ideas for improvements in bus operations.

**Sparks: What are your thoughts on the sacking of Chris Mansergh who was union rep at Port Botany?**

WB: I and others at Waverley are lost for words and thoroughly disillusioned over this dastardly action by management at the depot. Chris was elected by a majority of drivers and was very active in bringing workers together in the fight against the bosses and changing the union culture at the depot away from sneaky and shady ways which pervaded for many years to openness and truthfulness. The STA bosses say "No" you can't have this improvement and sacks him. Subsequently, they also tried to sack our union rep Wendy. Is this an example of how the bosses try to raise productivity? It appears to me an example of arrogance and ignorance.

The union hierarchy also played a contemptible role in the affair, highlighting its phoniness. They were quite uncooperative toward him. They failed to stand behind him when he was under attack by the bosses and their co-thinkers on the job and found lame duck excuses to deny him desperately needed legal help and bad mouthed him. They have also egged on their co-thinkers on the job to spread such slurs as "he was getting above himself". What appears to



have occurred is that Chris was operating out of the slimy and phony box of bureaucratic unionism, which frightened the union fat cats and the bosses.

**Sparks: What's happening at the depot?**

WB: Lately, I've noticed anti-gay graffiti on the depot toilet walls. The graffitist should not worry about other people's private lives. This behaviour may be the result of something happening in the graffitist's own life. Perhaps the graffitist was molested as a child and is now taking it out on others. The graffitist needs to deal with this problem in their

lives. The STA should be taking action on the issue. Rather than putting up some signs or sacking the graffitist if caught writing further graffiti, the STA should consider the rehabilitation avenue. There is new technology available in regard to this approach such as courses of hypnotherapy and life coaches have proved of value in opening people's minds to their problems.

**Sparks: What do you know about the bike bus group?**

WB: I recently attended an environmental fair and met some people engaged in the group. It involves finding ways for push bike riders to get more quickly around the city via using back streets and avoid creating problems for bus drivers and being safer for the bike riders. Currently push bike riders create a lot of problems for us on the road as we can't overtake them and they often weave in and out of traffic, creating hazards. The Government needs to get fully behind this initiative. In South Australia, in Adelaide, there is an excellent push bikeway system. It consists of 6 zones and forms a huge comprehensive system. Pamphlets, maps and guidelines have been extensively distributed about the system. The State Govt has got fully behind the system and is widely encouraging it. In comparison, Sydney is very much in the dark ages in regard to push bike corridors.

**Sparks: What are your views on the STA traineeship issue?**

WB: I recently spoke with a bloke who is a trainee and he said that in 3 months you can complete all the training you need for the job and the STA's so called training program just goes over the same things. The requirement for 2 years is completely bogus. He also complained that at the end of the unnecessarily long 2 year period of the traineeship, that you are still not guaranteed a job. During the traineeship period, you also have less entitlements than permanent drivers. We don't need this bosses' scam! 6 months should be the maximum length of the

probation period for new drivers, as occurred in the past. Whilst, a lot of knowledge of the job, is usually provided to the newer drivers on the job, by the more experienced.

**Sparks: How are things with the bus cleaners?**

WB: I feel for the cleaners. They do an amazing job given the often appalling state of some buses. They are doing it tough stemming from the STA bosses' addiction to the old management model. Involving raising productivity through corner cutting and associated short staffing and relentless speedups.

**Sparks: What are impressions of the ALP lately?**

WB: The underbelly of the NSW ALP Govt. has been certainly been exposed lately over the issue of privatisation and political donations. Despite 85% of people as disclosed by public opinion surveys being opposed to privatisation and overwhelming opposition to Electricity industry privatisation at a recent ALP state conference, the Iemma Govt. is proceeding with the move. After the Ferries which has already been targeted, we are also likely to be in the corporate gun sights. No doubt hefty donations from such corporate heavies as the MacQuarie Bank, CabCharge and Veolia will be playing an important role in the Govt's carve-up of State Transit. I believe big wigs of international capitalism are behind this privatisation surge. The Fortune 500 conference held in Sydney during 2005 was a likely venue where the ALP and Liberal politicians received increased pressuring from major international capitalists to get cracking on privatisation.

**Sparks: What's the latest with the sickie crackdown?**

WB: As part of the current enterprise agreement and the provision of a meagre pay rise of 4%pa over 2 years which the union hierarchy sold to us, the bosses were given greater opportunities to mess around with our sickie entitlements. Latest news is that Depot administrative personnel are ringing up those of us in their jurisdiction who take sickies and are interrogating them regarding the nature of their ailments. Despite lacking medical qualifications. We need to be wary that these admin staff are acting in a patronising fashion seeking to intimidate and pressurise us from taking any sick leave. Particularly those of us from overseas, with inadequate knowledge of their entitlements, maybe put off from taking sickies. In the case of those who take large numbers sickies, there may be some basis for the bosses to check up on them on the sick leave issue. The current sickie interrogations are just like when you have your journal stamped and are called into the office.

My advice is that if you need to take sick leave, you should get a medical certificate. If the bosses query, the sickie, you should direct them to contact your doctor. They have no authority over your Doctor. Due to confidentiality regulations affecting doctors, they can't reveal the nature of your condition to 3rd parties, without your permission. Also we must remember that in our type of job, if you come to work feeling unwell, and unable to cope with the job, there is a strong likelihood that you could become involved in an accident.

**Sparks: What's the latest with the gas buses at the depot?**

Waverley Driver: In recent weeks I have noted a dramatic improvement in their performance. Could this change be explained by senior management reading Sparks and bursting into action? In the past, the gas buses have been absolute slugs on the road. Another development in

regard to the gas buses, is that a new version has been built for the STA fleet to replace the Mk2's and Mk3's. However, the RTA has not allowed the delivery of these buses to the STA, due to issues relating to the weight displacement of the gas bottles in these buses causing them to become overbalanced.

**Sparks: What happened at Waverley during the recent election for the position of the President of the union bus division?**

WD: Overwhelming drivers on the PM shift at Waverley supported Ken Mason for the position. From reading his program presented in his flyer, we were inspired by his genuine intentions to establish grass control of the union and take the union in a militant direction and so return our union to its pedestal on which it was once placed in its glory days, many years ago. We are disgusted with how our existing officials are always caving into the STA bosses' demands. I noticed one of the candidate's flyers were very professionally produced indicating possible union hierarchy assistance. Whilst the flyers of other candidates, were obviously genuinely produced by themselves using their home computers. Latest news is that the officials' candidate has been elected to the President position.

**LEICHHARDT DEPOT NEWS**

**Sparks: What's been happening at the depot?**

Leichhardt Busie: Some of the most dramatic news was a crane falling on a bus being driven by a mechanic on Thursday 8/5/08. The crane was being used in the depot renovations. The mechanic who was driving the bus was lucky to escape with minor injuries despite the wind-



*"But we do love the poor. We plan to create millions more of them."*

screen exploding. The fall of the crane caused the crushing of the cleaners shed and damaging of the gas bus fuelling area. Consequently, gas buses were transferred to Ryde, whilst we received the older Mercedes diesel buses as a replacement. The accident also had the effect of obstructing the entrance of the depot to Balmain Road, resulting in late running on our runs. A story being spread is that a gust of wind caused the crane to collapse.

**Sparks: What's the latest with management?**

LB: We have a new manager, Mark Peters, he was originally seeking the mechanical section manager job, but applied for Dannielle's job whilst she has been on maternity leave, and won this position. He like's flexing his muscles and has been an "iron man" contestant. He appears to be keen to rise up in the State Transit management pyramid and has been pursuing various campaigns. He introduced a large mobile sign in the depot which flashes the message "Watch Your Mirrors". He has also had messages on similar lines printed on our journals.

Management has been carrying out quite a crackdown in regard to accidents. If you have 3 accidents, you have to be retrained. This whole draconian approach is of course quite hypocritical. Given the bosses are imposing upon us quite unrealistic running times which fail to take into account the likelihood of delays. An obvious cause of delays in our runs is the recent depot accident involving the collapsed crane preventing our use of the short route via the Balmain Road depot entrance. In meeting this speedup, there is of course a stronger likelihood you will become involved in an accident.

**Sparks: What are your impressions of the union officials?**

LB: We are very angry over their performance. They went along with the savage cuts to our shifts which hurt many of us on the financial side. The 4% pa over 2 years EBA pay rise in no way compensated for this wages cut. Following the so called wage rise, they increased our union fees. Given this wages cut and our constantly increasing responsibilities of our jobs we are entitled to a much higher pay rise.

**Sparks: What is other news?**

LB: One consequence of the depot upgrading will be when it is completed, that the depot officers will have to reapply for their jobs. On a positive note during the Pope's visit we will be issued with 6 more buses and we will be able to work much more overtime. We have been issued with large keys to open the glass boxes on the gas buses, which some of us find difficult to use.

**Sparks: How are things at the depot?**

Leichhardt Driver: A major issue of great concern to us is the racist behaviour of a certain worker. He has been saying to those he has some hostility toward, that they should return to their country of origin. Management has failed to take any action to curb this behaviour and is making a mockery of its so called "code of conduct". Management has been pursuing quite a crackdown on the issue of damaged mirrors on buses. If you lose or have a mirror damaged, and it's your fault you have to pay \$350 for a new one. So it's important to have a witness. Given the location of the mirrors on the new gas buses there is a much greater likelihood of losing/damaging of your mirror, than on the older Mercedes diesel buses. In the case of the new buses, in the case of a damaged/lost mirror, you have to change buses. On the Mercedes, a

new mirror could be easily installed. There is an urgent need for the STA to approach councils to have the trees near bus stops trimmed to curb this problem of damaged mirrors. The union rep whilst polite to us is failing to tackle the issue of the lack of solidarity amongst many at the depot. This spirit is vital in our fight against the bosses.

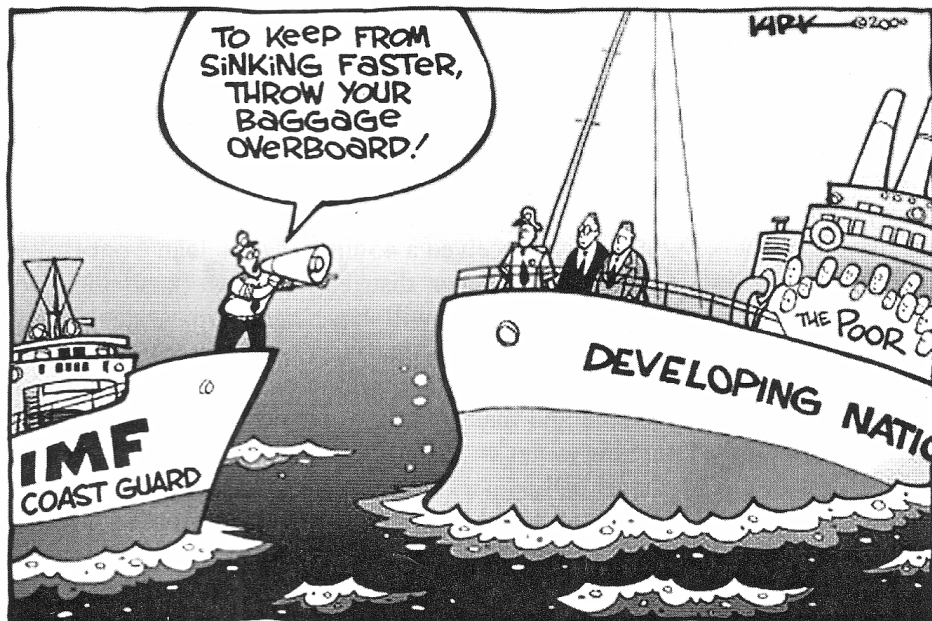
### **Sparks: What's been happening on the road?**

Leichhardt Driver1: A continuing concern is the lack of timetables and other bus information put at bus stops, in sharp contrast to train stations. Signage could also be put up at stops in George Street showing which services stop at key terminuses such as railway square and town hall. In recent weeks, a major dispute blew up over private buses stopping in our stops at the QVB. Clover Moore, the Sydney Mayor is pushing for more tram services in the city which will take over our work. What happens if a tram breaks down on its route. It will create a major obstacle for other trams on the line. This problem doesn't occur with buses which breakdown?

### **BURWOOD DEPOT NEWS**

The election has come and gone, but there was a change occurring. As the Rightwing ALP officials did not win it without a fight.

Do not be surprised to see your traffic fund subs increase. As I believe the funds are used as a slush fund to pay for things like election material. Do not approve an increase in subs without a set of books to show where the money is going. Remember it's our money, not the union officials.



STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT

The management at Burwood is at it again. They love to show us how smart they are, but in fact all they do is show the drivers they can read. They have no people skills and go from crisis to crisis without direction. Complaints about anything are more important, than the drivers. **THEY LOSE SIGHT OF THE FACT THAT BUSES NEED DRIVERS TO OPERATE THEM, NOT THE MANAGEMENT TEAM.** Reduce the numbers in management positions and give us **MORE PAY!**

Also remember the following fact: **THEY CANNOT FORCE YOU TO SIGN ANYTHING.** This includes incident forms. If you have a major problem on the bus, return to your depot. Tell the DI you want ROR and sign off and go home and think. Go to your GP or phone for legal help. **DO NOT TALK TO MANAGEMENT WITH OUT INDEPENDENT ADVICE.** This is your right. Do not be bullied by management.

## **VICTORIAN RAIL NEWS**

**V/Line is the authority which runs the Country Rail Services in Victoria. It is owned by the Victorian Government. Recently our Victorian Correspondent has interviewed a V/Line employee about conditions in the organisation.**

**Sparks: How long have you been at V/Line?**

V/Line Employee: I have worked for over thirty years in the industry in various customer service jobs.

**Sparks: What is happening in V/Line?**

V/Line Employee: We are going through various changes. The bosses are people with no railway experience. They are idiots and they would not know what the operations employees have to put up with.

**Sparks: In other words they wouldn't want to know.**

V/Line Employee: For example they try to make us run trains with defective equipment. If they cannot fix it up in time. If the train is cancelled and replaced with buses, the company is fined.

**Sparks: I have been informed they tried to sack a Conductor who was honest with his passengers about poor carriages.**

V/Line Employee: You are correct, this Conductor was honest with his passengers and told them, why the carriages were defective. Remember it was a hot day and they still ran the train. The Conductor's comments made it into the Border Mail in Albury.

**Sparks: I understand management wanted blood.**

V/Line Employee: You are correct. They sacked the Conductor, but he was reinstated. In fact V/Line's Human Resources Department tried to get other employees to set this person up and make out he was difficult to work with. But the Union said if he was not reinstated, there would be trouble. You see most of us have a policy that it is you touch one employee you touch all.

**Sparks: Good to see solidarity.**

V/Line Employee: Yes but, we do have crawlers on the job, who think the company is great. In fact some of these people think they will get promotion but in reality management uses them up and they get nowhere.

**Sparks: Tell me about the selection process for promotion.**

V/Line Employee: They advertise the job and people apply for the position. This is in theory, but in practice they put their lackeys in the position and they have these people perform the job.

**Sparks: This smells of corruption.**

V/Line Employee: Yes it is corrupt but you have to prove it. Most of the employees think the Human Resources Department is corrupt. In the last few years they have employed these people who have no knowledge of the positions on the railways.

**Sparks: Enough said!**

V/Line Employee: If a customer complains they believe them and they say hang the employee. They only believe the customer not the employee. In fact one of our employees refuses to answer any complaint, so some Service Officers are known to make up an answer to keep the peace.

**Sparks: You know what should be done.**

V/Line Employee: What?

**Sparks: If a passenger's complaint is upheld just call a meeting and pass a motion asking that person who complained to be taken to court for defamation.**

V/Line Employee: This did happen. A Conductor was stood down and when he threatened legal action against the passenger who complained, management went to water and reinstated him.

**Sparks: This is the way to deal with people who like to complain!**

V/Line Employee: Yes it is called fightback and it frightens human resources.

**Sparks: I must close the interview, but in future issues I will interview employees from other areas of V/Line.**

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

### **Israel: Dimona rail workers on wildcat strike**

*June 3rd, 2008*

*By treeofjudas*

Workers at the Dimona train station went on strike Thursday (May 29th) to protest the firing of a veteran comrade.



This employee was the first of some 15 expected to be forced into early retirement this year at the Dimona station as part of an agreement between Histadrut (Israeli bureaucratic union) and Israel Rail. The employees stopped work as soon as they heard of their comrade's dismissal. They claim that representatives from the national union's management have called them and told them that they will be fired, as well, if they expose their horrendous working conditions, consisting of 16-17 hours a day without proper compensation and a variety of other, unspecified safety violations.

As of Sunday (June 1st), workers were still blockading the station, denying passage to passenger and freight trains. A solidarity meeting was held that day, consisting of many sympathetic Dimona residents as well as union representatives from factories in the area.

A website covering the Dimona area (Hebrew) is following developments on the ground.

## **Bus workers wildcat in Liverpool UK**

**May 8th, 2008 by Ed**

More than 100 bus drivers staged an unofficial strike at Arriva's Speke depot yesterday (May 7th) hitting hundreds of services.

At 6am when the wildcat strike was called, the entire 120-strong bus fleet at the Shaw Road depot was grounded. Drivers returned to work at 10.30am and normal services were resumed on all routes by lunchtime.

The drivers walked out in protest against revised working hours proposed for the end of May. Arriva intends to extend its services to the Liverpool One shopping centre to provide transport for shoppers and workers throughout extended shopping hours. As a result drivers may have to work more shifts between 1pm and 9pm.

Their dissatisfaction led to about 120 buses being affected in the south of the city, covering routes 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 86, 500 and 699.

## **Bus drivers strike in Hackney UK**

***June 6th, 2008 by catch***

Bus drivers at CT Plus bus company struck on the 2nd of June following the sacking of a Unite shop steward.

The bus company provides Transport for London, school contracts and special need services, and just won a contract for the 2012 Olympics in London.

Action took place between 3.30am and 9.30am on June 2nd, and a second strike is planned for 13th June between 1.30pm and 7pm.

## **Bus drivers wildcat in Limerick Ireland**

*April 4th, 2008 by Ed*

A wildcat strike of bus workers brought transport to a standstill across the west of Ireland today (Friday 4th April).

Twenty-five workers at the Bus Eirann bus company awaiting the implementation of a new pay deal took part in the stoppage as part of an ongoing dispute. The union, SIPTU, did not support the action, however, as it is still in negotiations at the Labour Relations Commission and urged the striking workers to go back to work.

The action was taken by part-time drivers who are demanding higher wages. They currently earn euro 11.66 per hour and receive no pension, sick pay or overtime rates.

They are seeking parity with other Bus Eireann drivers who receive between euro 13.15 and euro 15.23 per hour. With part-time staff often used to undercut destabilise the conditions of full-time workers, such parity could be crucial in building solidarity amongst Bus Eirann drivers.

Workers said the strike was necessary and they were waiting for negotiations to come to a conclusion.

Areas across the west of Ireland were affected including Co Clare, Portumna and Gort in south Galway, Borrisokane, Nenagh and Roscrea in Tipperary and Hospital and Doon in Limerick by the strike which is said to have lasted approximately an hour and fifteen minutes.

## **More bus wildcats in Ireland**

*April 14th, 2008 by Ed*

For the second week in a row, Bus Eirann workers in the mid-west of Ireland have gone on wildcat strike 29 part-time school bus drivers took part in the action, protesting increasing 'flexibility' in working practices. 2,000 children in Askeaton, Doon, Hospital, Kilfinnan, Newport and Pallaskenry were affected today as part-time school bus drivers carried out a strike at the Limerick bus depot for the second week running. The action also impacted on services in Tipperary and south Galway.

Bus Eireann condemned the action saying that the drivers are in breach of instructions from their union, SIPTU, who advised them to work as normal pending a full Labour Court hearing on April 16th. SIPTU later confirmed that they did not sanction the action.

A similar strike which took place at Bus Eireann's Limerick depot last Friday saw disruptions to both school and public bus services, however no public bus services were adversely affected in today's action.

## POLISH BUS NEWS

**Warsaw, by laure akai on 15 June, 2008**

The public transport system in Warsaw is controlled by ZTM, (the Municipal Transport Board) but various companies are contracted to operate Warsaw's buses. The largest company, MZA, is operated by the City of Warsaw but also several private operators running bus lines. These companies usually have won contracts through public tenders. One of these companies is PKS Grodzisk Mazowiecki (further PKS GM) which is a privatized "worker-run company". (Such companies in Poland usually are worker shareholder schemes, quite far from any idea of collective self-management by the workers.)

PKS Grodzisk Mazowiecki, like most other companies which pay poor wages, has trouble finding people to work and recruits people from impoverished areas of Poland and the Ukraine. In May, members of Union of Syndicalists (worker controlled union) (ZSP) heard about problems people were having in PKS GM from some of the Ukrainian drivers.

Drivers are expected to work very long hours, despite the fact that work time regulations clearly limit the hours a driver can work to 9 per day and require that they have two free days per week. However, it is not uncommon that the drivers were made to work 10, 12 and even up to 17 hours per day - without overtime pay. Many Ukrainian drivers worked 60-75 hours a week or even more. This is not only abusive, but extremely dangerous for both the workers and passengers; one bus driver fell asleep at the wheel in May and had a serious accident. PKS GM also committed other infractions and abuses.

Members of ZSP documented how drivers had money taken out of their wages (even up to almost 50% of their salaries) for going over "gas limits". The company set strict limits (which they often don't tell the drivers about) for how much gas should be used during a typical route. If a driver gets caught in one of Warsaw's notorious traffic jams and burns more fuel than the limit, this gets docked out of their salaries. Other problems that workers experienced included that fact that PKS GM were holding workers' passports so that they couldn't leave and that the company was holding their drivers' licenses. Not to mention poor living conditions, etc. On May 13, workers held a wildcat strike. Not all of them went on strike. Mostly it was the Ukrainian drivers, although a few Polish drivers supported the protest.

We went to talk to the workers and see if there was anything we could do. Basically, workers in this position have limited choices. They can take radical action, but then they should have a plan: storm the office of the company, make an action to get in the media, block the streets or the routes where scabs were driving, or some sort of radical direct action. Or they could go the legal route and file suits against their employees. Unfortunately it turned out that many of the Ukrainian workers were not convinced that anything they would do could help them. It wasn't exactly true. Some pressure was put on PKS GM. A few articles got into even the mainstream news, we also gathered evidence of the firm's violations, sent them to the appropriate authorities, sent them out to the city, politicians, the transit board, etc. so that should the workers want to pursue legal action, the documentation would be there in Polish. Had the workers decided



THE WORLD'S LEADING DEMOCRACY

to organize themselves and take action, whether direct action or legal action, they would be in a good position to stop the abuse.

On June 15, Zenon Marek, the head of PKS GM came to the depot and gave out envelopes filled with cash to the striking bus drivers. Of course this was done without any receipts or calculation as to how much was really owed to people. But it was enough to calm down some people, unfortunately. Additionally, drivers were given a 10-day vacation to go back to Ukraine. Ostensibly, this rest was to make up for being overworked, but in reality it was just another strike-breaking technique. Unfortunately there wasn't much we could do to convince people that they need to stay and fight at that moment so we agreed to meet in June. The bus drivers we knew are no longer working for PKS GM.

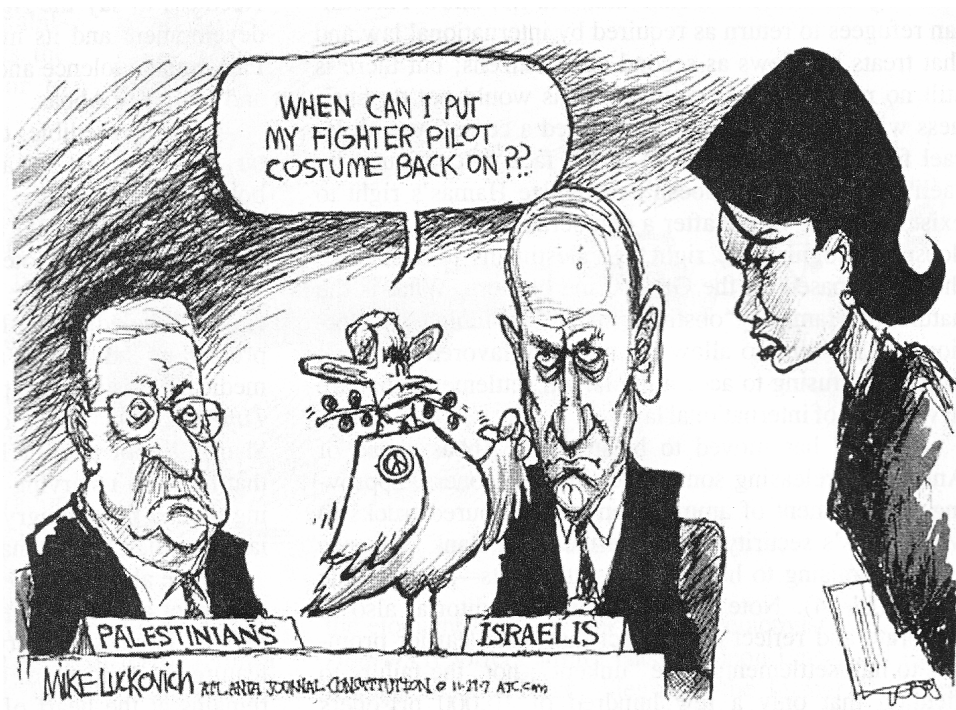
There was conflicting information as to whether they just quit or whether they were not allowed back. We were getting different information from people we spoke to. Disturbingly, it seems that rumours were being spread about the Ukrainian bus drivers. One Polish driver told us that the problem with the gas was that the Ukrainians had been stealing it; it isn't clear whether the source of the rumour is the boss or whether some Polish drivers started it, but apparently new Polish drivers hear that explanation for the labour problems. Some workers seemed very scared to talk to us. Others told us different stories: that the payments were made correctly this month, or that they had illegal deductions made.

We are still trying to work out this conflicting information but it seems now that the company is selectively abusing the workers and that the new guys, the ones just recruited, with no knowledge of Polish, with their passports confiscated, are the ones most likely to have their

rights abused. At the same time, workers in the other bus companies are also dissatisfied, but the workers and unions have not decided to try to get together and cooperate. In fact, the workers in the different bus companies more or less defacto compete against each other. This is especially true since contracts with the city awarded by public tender usually go to the lowest bidder, so in giving this work this way, ZTM is encouraging bad labour practices since these firms offer low prices by overworking people and paying bad wages.

The City Council had allocated money for bus drivers from MZA to get wage increases, but the management of MZA instead decided that this money would be turned into an efficiency bonus. Last year drivers had threatened to strike unless they received more money. This year, some unionists organized a protest on June 5th demanding better working conditions but it was not a grassroots action organized or attended by the workers - instead it was a union action mostly attended by union functionaries, even from other cities. Of course the workers of MZA need to be more proactive and not leave this struggle up to union leaders. MZA has already started hiring bus drivers from Belarus as "an experiment". Rather than improving working conditions so that Polish drivers will consider working in Poland, rather than in Ireland, it's more convenient to find some people who have lower expectations - and who better than workers trying to escape the misery of Lukashenko's regime.

A sad thing may also be that some Polish workers may feel resentment towards these workers or may be inclined against them. Apparently some drivers in PKS GM were eager to believe in



stereotypes about “crooks from the East” and the bosses used this against the workers. By no fault of their own, these workers are used as pawns by the bosses against other workers who are fighting for better conditions. Managers from MZA also openly spoke about why they started to hire women bus drivers: they were more likely to do their work, not make trouble, and to stay on the job than men. Of 3000 bus drivers from MZA, only a couple of dozen are women. Although salaries in MZA differ, most drivers start out at less than 400 euros a month. In Warsaw, this is not a living wage. You can only survive frugally on such wages if you have very cheap housing and are not paying commercial rent, just common charges. If you agree to live like the Ukrainian bus drivers at PKS GM - 4 people to a 10 sq. meter room on bunk beds in barracks built from containers - then you can even manage to save something from this kind of salary. All of the workers have got to get together in common struggle for decent wages but for now, they are divided, passive and not resolute, Direct action, with the support of passengers, who also have everything to gain from the overthrow of the elites and bosses who control the transport board, is clearly the way forward for the drivers.

*From Strike bulletin nr. 3. Write to [warsaw@zsp.net.pl](mailto:warsaw@zsp.net.pl) for an online copy.*

## SYDNEY WHARFIES NEWS

### **Sparks: So what is the latest news on the Sydney waterfront?**

Port Botany Wharfie: The most important news is the ongoing enterprise agreement negotiations that are happening at DP World (formerly P&O Ports).

The national negotiations that deal with Part A of the EBA are still ongoing. The major point to note here is the claim that the Maritime Union is putting forward of a 20% wage rise over the three years of the agreement. Whether we get this or not is of course another story. The new EBA which just got voted up at Toll (formerly Patrick Stevedores) gave wharfies a 5% per year wage rise, so I would be surprised if we ended up with any more than that – not without taking any form of industrial action anyway.

### **Sparks: What about the local component of these EBA negotiations?**

Port Botany Wharfie: This is the interesting part. While the DP World EBA does not expire until the end of June, the local site committee here has already reached in principle agreement with management on the few Part B issues that the committee put forward.

The approach of the local site committee seems to be to demand as little as possible in order to get the negotiations over and done with as quickly as possible.

On the operations side of the workforce, there have been a couple of extra permanent jobs created – one or two extra operations clerks and rail co-ordinators and a new health, safety and environment facilitator.

Since these plum jobs have little to with the day-to-day of stevedoring cargo, some of the more cynical among the workforce think that members of the union site committee will end up with these jobs for “services rendered” to the company. But only time will tell.

Some of the other changes include the inclusion of a requirement for quay crane/portainer drivers to swap with their partner mid-run. This makes good sense from an OH&S perspective. No one should be compelled to drive cranes for 3 ½ hours straight. In practice most quay crane drivers have been doing this anyway.

The problem is that this only covers a minority of crane drivers in the terminal. Most drive the Rubber Tyred Gantries (RTG's) that operate in the yard and not over the ship. Work organisation means that RTG drivers are expected to drive for 3 ½ hours straight, with only a computer-generated message popping up on the RTG screen every hour reminding drivers to take a 5-minute stretch break. Good OH&S should dictate that RTG drivers swap mid-run as well.

The other bone of contention is the alignment of break times which will see all shifts with a 3 ½ hour first run and a 3 ¼ hour second run. To have the longer run at the second half of an 8-hour shift is ludicrous – especially on night shift.

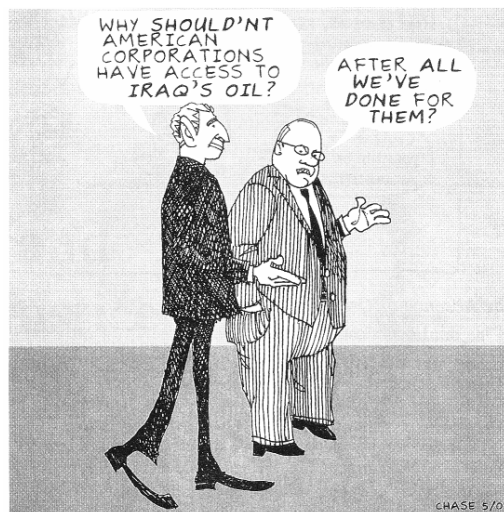
The Part B of the EBA will – if agreed to – see the hours in the general maintenance roster extended from 33.6 hours a week to 35.5 hours a week. Apparently management were complaining that they were paying too much overtime! While it has been agreed to that will be more pay to cover the extra hours worked, whether or not the overtime component has been taken into consideration or not is anyone's guess.

#### **Sparks: What has been the reaction among the workforce?**

Port Botany Wharfie: A mixture of grumbling, cynicism and resignation to the inevitable. The leading lights on the present site committee were also responsible for the last EBA that saw our two breaks (1 30-minute and 1 15-minute) get replaced with one 45 minute break, in exchange for a reduction in roster hours for operations permanents.

The composition of the present site committee is also a sticking point for some. With the exception of the one women's representative that happens to be a casual, the present site committee is made entirely of permanents. So some will feel that (just like the last time) these negotiations are another case of permanents negotiating only in the interests of permanents – and not the whole workforce.

A bright note was the circulation of an anonymous letter a couple of months ago that raised a number of good demands. These included 8% a year pay rises; more permanent jobs; no one to work overtime until all labour was exhausted; an automatic upgrade process up the casual to permanent ladder; an increase in the number of shifts that casuals can make themselves unavailable for; rotation of RTG drivers and a more regular shift allocation for casuals. All good stuff. *See Page 24*



*Continued From Page 23* Some members of the site committee saw this as an attack on their little empire-building games – instead of interest, involvement and constructive criticism of the negotiating process.

**Sparks: So what approach do you think the union should be taking to the EBA?**

Port Botany Wharfie: Well the first would be to actually encourage involvement of the rank and file. Work meetings should have been called to draw up a list of claims that would have the support of the workforce.

The second would be to take into account our longer-term interests as workers, not just the immediate stuff. We certainly should NOT be increasing roster hours, but reducing them with no loss in pay. Similarly, while 20% over three years or 5% a year is better than the current EBA's 4% a year, the only way to really safeguard against inflation is to put in place a cost-of-living / wage indexation mechanism that would see wages always rise in line with inflation (at the minimum).

The third is to realise that, if we are ever going to win demands such as these, we will need to take some form of co-ordinated industrial action. The give-and-take of the present negotiation process will never be enough – we need to flex our industrial muscles.









# What is Democratic Unionism?

Democratic