

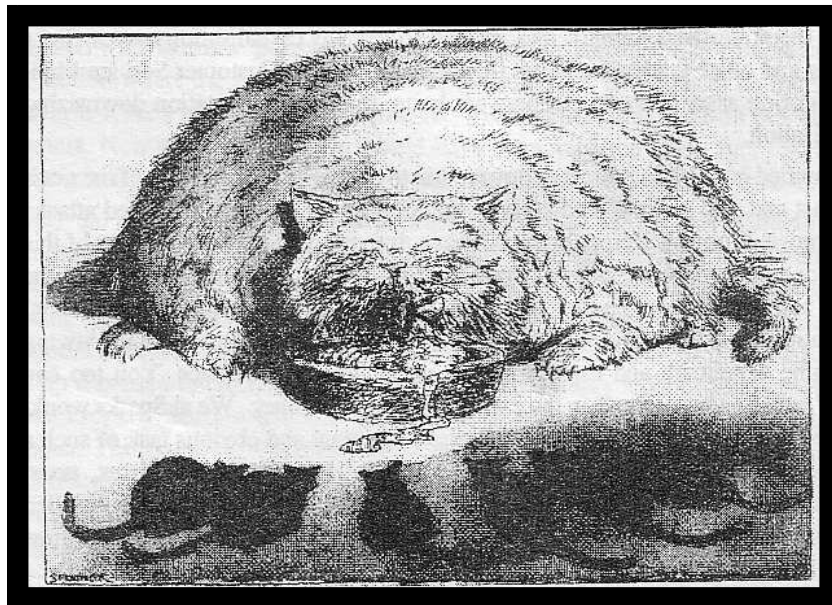
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Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

**RAIL CORP FAT CATS GORGE ON
ASTRONOMICAL SALARY RISES WHILST
OFFERING MEAGRE WAGE RISE SCRAPS TO
LOWER GRADES!**



N.S.W. RAIL NEWS	S.TA. BUSIE NEWS
SYDNEY MARITIME NEWS	CENTRAL NEWS
RAILCORP EBA UPDATE	INTERNATIONAL NEWS
PRIVATISATION PROTEST	SYDNEY FERRIES NEWS

EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

Some of the most important news lately has been the mass protest outside NSW Parliament on Tuesday 26th Feb. to oppose the Iemma ALP's privatisation rampage. Such rallies are of course purely symbolic and unlikely to seriously discourage the Govt. and its corporate masters from pursuing its nefarious designs. On the day the union hierarchy was able to preclude any form of industrial action which might upset the Govt and the corporate bosses. In the case of the electricity industry, skeleton work forces remained on the job. (See article page 19.)

This edition particularly spotlights and provides new details on a particularly brazen example of the treachery of the ALP dominated union hierarchy. Entailing its role in facilitating the sacking of a union rep at Port Botany STA Depot who was doing important work to assist grass roots control of the union in that workplace and fight the bosses' attacks. This case certainly highlights as never before the urgency of overthrowing the ALP octopus in the union structure and establishing grass roots control of the union. (See article page 8.)

In Rail Corp, the Iemma Govt. has been truly fattening up its fat cats with the provision of outlandish pay rises without any regard to the CPI. Whilst demanding give backs of conditions by the lower grades to achieve a meagre pay rise below the CPI. (See article page 3.)



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

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N.S.W. RAIL NEWS

Sparks: What's been the most important news lately in RailCorp?

Station Assistant: Lately, management has been provided with some astronomical pay rises lacking any connection to the CPI of between 8% to 27% per annum and in the case of members of parliament a 6 1/2% p.a. pay rise. Whilst we are only being offered a 2.5% per annum pay rise as part of our enterprise agreement.

The CEO and senior executives which are helping themselves to all this cream are political appointees and secured their cushy jobs from their ties with the ALP Govt. and were never promoted from the lower grades. Consequently, their role is as a buffer for the Govt. when facing public criticism of the railways operations. They lack the on the job experience to contribute to improved rail operations to merit such outlandish pay rises.

The insulting meagre rise offered to us doesn't even match the CPI of 3 1/2% p. a. Consequently there is much hatred of management amongst the grass roots for this double standard. The bosses are also demanding major cut backs to our conditions in exchange for the pay rise. This stance of the bosses in regard to the wages issue strikes me as the old school management approach. It fails to take into account the need to compensate us for the increased responsibilities associated with our jobs and our difficulties in keeping the rail system functioning.

Currently throughout RailCorp there is short staffing and we have been obliged in many cases to work multiple rosters to cope with the situation. The union has made clear its opposition to any of these cut backs in conditions.

Sparks: What's happening with rail infrastructure?

SA: Some important news is that the Railways will again be manufacturing trains. The new Eveleigh is to be located near Clyde. It's unclear as yet who will be operating the facility. However its likely to involve a PPP (Private Public Partnership) concept.

Sparks: What's happening on the stations?

SA: According to latest information, the senior rail bosses aren't very impressed with Australian station managers and are intending to recruit a dozen or so British general managers, no doubt on high salaries to check up on station masters throughout the network. It will create a new layer of bureaucracy in the railways and will result in more rules and regulations being imposed on us to justify the jobs of these fat cats and more squandering of the RailCorp budget.

Sparks: What's your outlook for the railways?

SA: The railways needs a big shake up. In particular an improved ticketing system needs to be introduced, improved ways of dealing with the public, more destinations and more information provided to the public. To facilitate these improvements more positions need to be created. The senior rail bosses who fancy themselves as business men are opposing any such

improvements. Whilst, the Govt. has a very short sighted approach involving just pursuing policies to help them secure further terms in office and so secure their meal ticket.

Sparks: What's been the response on the job to the campaign to oppose the privatisation of the electricity industry?

SA: A contingent from Central attended the Rally outside the NSW Parliament on Tues. 26th Feb. There have been leaflets distributed on the issue and also a poster has been put up in the station on the issue. There is a great concern regarding the negative impacts of electricity privatisation for workers. Most significantly being likely higher power charges and massive blackouts as occurred in New Zealand several years ago following the privatisation of its electricity industry associated corner cutting on maintenance.

Sparks: What's happening with the senior executives?

SA: Latest news is that Vince Graham our current CEO is leaving the job to become the CEO of the Integral Energy. It's rumoured he will be replaced in the position by a former railways CEO Simon Lane, who has been on a jaunt in the Singapore Railways in recent years. He left his position in the NSW Railways several years short of the end of his contract and received a massive golden handshake involving payment of his salary for these years he never worked.

Central Workers Finally Granted Union Representation

There had always been a union sub-branch at Central Station. That was up until a few years ago when the RTBU no longer saw it as "convenient" to hold elections anymore. The previously elected militants were seen by union officials as disruptive and proved a thorn in the side of the union sell out merchants.

Recently a petition campaign was started to have the union positions reinstated. The resulting signatures have been presented to the union who has agreed to the holding of elections for four positions. Although the election process is flawed, since no election date has been fixed and voting eligibility is unclear, nominations have been keenly submitted to the union.

So who should Central Sparks readers vote for? They should NOT vote for self interested apolitical management cronies or union hacks that have traditionally only looked after themselves. Votes should be for representatives that strictly have the interests of all of the workers at Central at heart. They must be prepared to listen and to consult with members on the job and take their concerns to the union and management.

In this regard, two candidates stand out as being worthy of your vote.

Saade Abdallah is well respected on the job and has a very good understanding of the contemporary Australian political context and issues as well as having a keen interest

in overseas political developments. He has always sought to democratically progress the conditions of workers and has not been afraid to voice their concerns to management.

John Coleman is a Booking Clerk at Central with vast political experience in the Australian and International context. John was a union secretary of the Eveleigh workshops until the 1980's who fought hard against the Labor government of the day to prevent its closure. Those who worked at the now defunct Eveleigh workshops still talk of John with some admiration. He has always sought to broaden the horizons of workers and is committed to a wider project of workers international and local solidarity and therefore participates on many independent trade union committees. John has recently returned from a tour of Vietnam and Cuba.

Good luck to all candidates!

EBA Update

Although RailCorp EBA 2008 is set to be finalised by the middle of April much of it has yet to be agreed to. The EBA document is a rewording of previous conditions of employment to fit with current Federal industrial legislation plus it adds compliance for the NSW Public Sector Wages Policy which contributes further Draconian workplace reforms.

There has been little participation of grassroots workers in the negotiation process. In an earlier Sparks Mag we stated that a rank and file log of claims was not up for discussion and no alterations to the unions log of claims were allowed. Despite unions claims of rank and file consultation there is a distinct lack of information and exchange in the workplace. I know of only one informal meeting where a few rail workers attended.

Draft copies of the EBA which were supplied on the RailCorp website show no inclusions of any of the rank and file claims. This EBA is purely a management instrument for workplace reform and cost saving.

However paid maternity leave has been doubled to 14 weeks, something which we whole heartedly applaud. There is little else to be happy about in the EBA documents.

So far 2.5% pa is the only pay offer on the table but this is contingent on the EBA being agreed to unconditionally. This is not surprising since the rail unions ambit claim only amounted to a paltry 5% pa.

Many of the measures such as the ending of indefinite salary maintenance will not get full support from employees who have been displaced from other areas. Likewise the reductions in casual sick pay from 6 to 3 days pa will be unwelcome.

The sneaky inclusion of a family leave provision extension in the EBA is despicable. It will be paid now primarily from paid leave such as long service leave, granted public holidays, holiday pay or sick leave if no paid leave is available. This legitimises an already practiced breach of the current award which had been ignored by the unions.

In the proposed agreement there are other really mean clauses, such as not paying the Bank Holiday or granting a day in lieu if an employee is on leave or absent for any reason on this day.

Workers need to be completely informed about their EBA and be prepared to voice their opposition to some of its worst aspects. If all else fails they should

forego the pitiful wage rise of 2.5%, by rejecting EBA 2008, then start a separate campaign for a wage rise that trades nothing yet grants a realistic cost of living pay deal.



NSW Public Sector Wages Policy Worse Than WorkChoices

The framework for our EBA negotiations is firmly rooted within the bounds of the NSW State Governments Public Sector Wages Policy 2007. This is a strange arrangement. For although RailCorp is bound by NSW Government policies their workers are not. Workers are covered by a Federal Government registered award.

The Wages Policy is an imposed policy that is not written into law (commonly called Costanomics after State Treasurer and ex union boss Michael Costa).

How would a challenge to the policy stand up in a Federal Industrial Court?

The RTBU and other rail unions have no fight in them at all and have gone a long way to appeasing their State Government masters by agreeing to most of the tenets of the Wages Policy which are included in EBA 2008.

Worst aspects of the NSW Public Sector Wages Policy include:

Holding wages to a 2.5% p a increase unless there is some trade off in working conditions or further worker productivity. This is despite inflation currently running at greater than 5% and workers experiencing greater financial stress than at any time in the last 10 yrs.

Setting the parameters in which negotiation takes place including limiting matters up for negotiation.

The wages policy is tilted towards reform and uses a carrot and stick approach to get workers to comply by limiting rises unless they are prepared to give something away. According to the policy papers “The wages policy is predominantly about driving cultural change...”

Like the Accord days it Co-opts the Union movement “in a cooperative and problem solving manner.”

Back pay is not allowed even if a previous agreement has expired before a new one has been negotiated. Back pay will only be considered “in exceptional circumstances and only where approved by the Cabinet Standing Committee”

“Clear no extra claims clauses”.

Every step of the EBA negotiations is stage managed by Government Committee such as Cabinet Standing Committee on the Budget, Wages Policy Taskforce and the Public Sector Workforce Office. So much for democratic unionism and adherence to democratic international labor standards. Basically the whole package is a abrogation of workers’ rights over which the State Government is prepared to ride roughshod. Not even a quasi independent umpire such as the Fair Pay Commission here.

Potential areas of reform according to the NSW Wages Policy paper include, but are not limited to:

“A flexible, mobile and highly performing workforce”.

Reductions in sick leave and overtime. Reducing leave liabilities. (RailCorp employees will no longer be able to accumulate leave to a later date and will be limited to 4 or 5 weeks annual leave only, depending on work classification. All other leave will be “cashed out”.)

Using less qualified staff “that are easier to attract” into “redesigned” jobs. Obviously they will also be paid less.

Flex time not to be “excessively accumulated and used as a substitute for recreation leave”.

The wages policy should have been resisted by all of the union movement in NSW, its more than a shame how easily they have rolled over. I believe they (the unions) have legal grounds for resisting, but they lack the will.

A few unions such as the NSW Nurses Association have advised their members to reject the “simplistic” 2.5% policy. The Fire Brigade Employees Union on the other hand has already won wage rises above the State imposed 2.5% just by threatening to flex a little muscle. As far as I know the Teachers Federation has not committed itself at this stage.

The way that most unions have dealt with this issue dishonours their own members and is a huge blow to the workers that they supposedly represent. Workers have an obligation to let their unions know, in the strongest possible manner, that they (the workers) must placed ahead of any crazy economic agenda imposed by Macquarie Street. Union leaders can and will be replaced just like their political masters when the time comes, if needs be.

S.T.A. BUSIE NEWS

PORT BOTANY DEPOT NEWS

ALP UNION HIERARCHY HELP STAB UNION REP IN THE BACK!

Sparks: What's been the biggest issue at the depot lately?

Port Botany Driver: The sacking of our union rep Chris Mansergh on undisclosed charges last year remains of great concern to us.

Sparks: What do you know about the moves to have Chris sacked?

PBD: In the end Chris was caught by a simple trick. A lot of drivers might not realise that new drivers in their first year or two with STA are not 'employees', even though they are in fact paid to work every day like any other employee. But technically they are not employed, merely 'trainees'.

Now one advantage of that, from the company point of view is that getting rid of trainees is much easier than getting rid of employees. Despite having years of experience as a professional driver behind him, Chris was still a new driver with STA and when his technical 'traineeship' period ended, he got a very sudden message that basically evicted him from the workplace!

No concrete reason given. This is pretty shabby treatment for an elected union delegate, but because Chris was now barred from the premises, there wasn't much he could do to let other workers know what was going on.

Sparks: So Chris wasn't exactly popular with the bosses?

PBD: Ha ha, certainly not! He was a thorn in their side. And there was nothing sneaky or underhanded about his tactics either. As a union rep and negotiator, Chris's style was always up front, he hammered the issues but he did everything by the book, he made sure he read all the fine print and he was a stickler for proper procedure. That was his strategy, and you can imagine how infuriating it was.

Sparks: How was Chris regarded around the workplace?

PBD: Attitudes seemed to be very mixed. Remember he was voted in as union delegate with a clear majority. This was after he put up notices around the workplace with well thought out ideas for improvements. From that campaign, anyone could see he was passionate about workers' rights and had given a lot of thought to how we would actually do the job if he was given the chance. So he had a fair bit of support just for that reason. But once he was voted in, it became apparent he had enemies working to bring him down.



Sparks: You mean the bosses?

PBD: No I mean amongst the workers, actual union members. As soon as Chris was in office a covert campaign got underway to block his program and make trouble for him generally. Chris kept asking for any members with issues to come forward and meet and discuss the problem with him. Instead there was constant backbiting and backstabbing, with union members even going direct to management to complain about their elected delegate. How anti-union is that?

Sparks: When the sacking crisis happened, what was Chris's response?

PBD: He decided to fight it every inch of the way.

Sparks: And the union bosses stood with him to fight the case?

PBD: Obviously they should have. Around the workplace people were saying things like, if the union hierarchy doesn't get behind a union delegate in a case like this, then what hope is there for ordinary members, and what is even the point of being a member? So it was most disturbing when it turned out that the higher union officials wouldn't lift a finger to help the case, and instead were harming him by badmouthing him generally.

Sparks: How was that?

PBD: For example, in a workplace meeting immediately following the sacking, a union official came to address the members about what had happened. The explanation included quite a few bald faced lies all of which put Chris in a bad light, lies which were never later retracted or apologised for. In the face of stalling tactics from the union, Chris obtained his own legal advice and found he had a good case before the Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) for overturning the sacking and getting reinstated. This law firm originally took the case on a 'no

win, no fee' basis. But then during proceedings, they flip flopped and said that while the case still had excellent prospects they were demanding their fees up front. Remember the other side has whole teams of lawyers on a case like this. No ordinary worker can afford to fight them on his own. Without the 'no win no fee' arrangement Chris was stuffed, basically.

Sparks: So that was the end for Chris?

PBD: Not quite, there was one dirty blow left. When his lawyers turned round and demanded fees up front, Chris went to the union and asked again for backing, after all this was a significant case for all trainees, all delegates, all workers, all union members. It was urgent too, there was a commission deadline approaching in days. The union hierarchy told Chris, of course we will consider your need for assistance in this significant case, we will have an answer for you as soon as we put it to a meeting of the executive committee – in another six months time. So there you have it. Chris had no choice but to finally give up and pull out of the case.

Sparks: So what do you think is the moral of the story?

PBD: All I will say is, there is a lot there for us all to think about.

Sparks: What's the situation with fare evasion?

PBD: Particularly in the southern suburbs and housing commission areas where we operate there is tremendous fare evasion which management is failing to take any serious action to tackle. The bus driver on his or her own can hardly do a thing about it. Every bus driver in our area is aware there are whole families of fare evaders, the parent gets on with five older kids and no one pays a cent. It is taken for granted, not just kids but adults will hop on the bus and say 'free ride please driver'. This leaves a bad feeling when you have ten little old ladies up the front of the bus who each get a bus ticket every day out of their tiny pension income. But the driver has little choice but to let it go. Because refusing or even questioning someone about their request for a free ride, could be inviting violence. It has happened often enough. For example, not too long ago one of our drivers got spray painted - right in the face! - by a local kid, for just raising a question about the 'free ride' the kid was asking for. This is what we face on the job!

Sparks: Can anything be done about the problem?

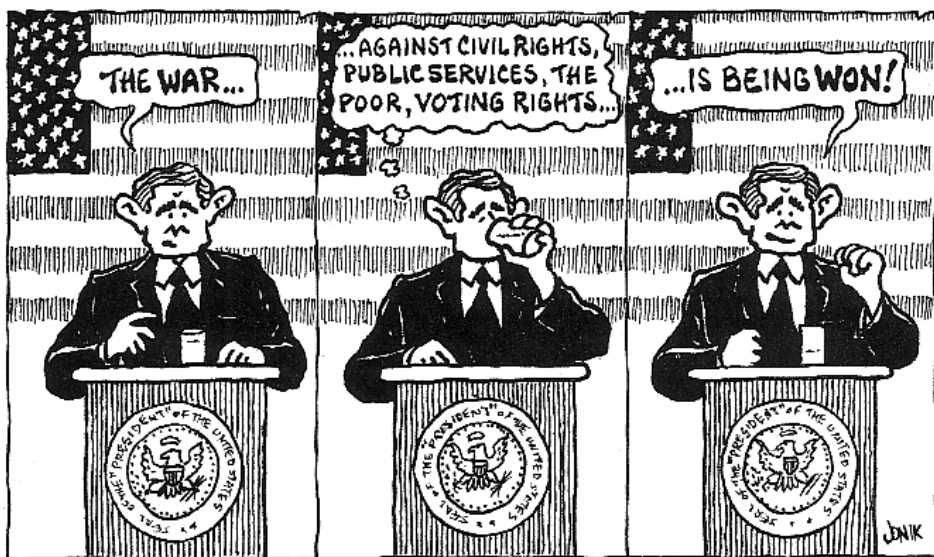
PBD: The decision has to be made, either bus travel is free for everyone - which I myself think is an idea worth serious consideration, or else there is a fare structure that is reasonably enforced in all areas. Leave aside for the time being that the existing fare structure is ridiculously complex and cumbersome, which Blind Freddy knows and which doomed the T-card system to failure in advance. If you have fares, you have to enforce them. What you can't have is self-selected people just opting out and getting away with it day after day, while paying passengers look on and despair. Now the next point is, fare enforcement is not the bus drivers job. Driving is plenty responsibility by itself, and we also operate the trip by taking the fares that are given and keeping an eye on passenger safety. That is why there is that mini army of ticket inspectors on the payroll – to let people see that fare evasion doesn't pay. Those guys have impressive uniforms with leather jackets, the full kit and regalia. You will see whole teams and squads of these ticket inspectors at certain bus stops, usually on Sundays for

some reason. But what you never, never ever see is a handy little squad of ticket inspectors at any bus stop anywhere in those territories which we all know, have known for years, as being Sydney suburban fare evasion headquarters. Until that happens the 'free ride culture' endemic in those areas will just keep proliferating, the message to residents there from the bus company is "this is a lawless area and we just don't care what you do".

Sparks: How is the violence situation?

PBD: It seems that provision of security guards has increased along one of the troublesome corridors, with a guard riding on buses after dark and stationed along the way in cars at certain spots. Still I'm not aware of drivers ever getting any briefings on exactly what these security persons' duties are, what is their job and how are they meant to do it. For example, the driver will pull up at a bus stop, security person gets on, puts a special card in the driver's console, takes it out and hops off the bus again – what is that all about? Also I have seen guards in some confusion about which is the bus they are supposed to be riding on. Reminds me of an illustrative incident happened on one trip I was doing a while back, there was loud arguing going on down the back, and it turned into a sloppy fistfight then temporarily quietened down as we were pulling into Maroubra Junction where there is a bus security guard waiting. At the bus stop I told the security guy about the problem down the back of the bus, and he said "Sorry mate, I've got to wait for some other bus and ride on that one."

Ha ha, the downfall of the system. Down the road the fighting started again up the back, in the end I just pulled the bus over and opened the back door, they all rolled out of the bus, yelling and hitting each other, and I was on my way again. Nice quiet night for that security guard I guess. Maybe it's amusing, but you can see a situation like that might easily have turned very



nasty indeed, and that was with security on hand but just not willing to do the job. So there you go.

LEICHHARDT DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What the most important news lately?

Leichhardt Busie: Many are very unhappy with the EBA (Enterprise Bargain Agreement) 4% pa pay rise over two years. I didn't even notice the rise in my pay slip. Immediately the pay rise came through, typically the union officials increased our union dues.

Sparks: What's happening with the bosses?

LB: Danielle has gone on leave. As a result Peter Smart is doing her job as office manager. Whilst Kerry, the ex-Kingsgrove manager is doing the depot manager job.

Sparks: How are things with the union reps?

LB: Due to personal problems Darren is having, he has been unable to devote himself 100% to the union rep position and has stood down as union rep. Consequently Marta has taken over the position. She has recently taken an initiative which has greatly concerned us. She issued a circular to us advising that we have to use our own time to attend counselling interviews. Attending such sessions is part of the job and is not private business. Consequently our normal practice has been to attend the sessions on the bosses' time. This a very important matter and may have wide ramifications for our conditions in the future.

Sparks: What are your impressions of the gas bus crisis?

LB: During the Xmas, New Year and holiday period, we were hard hit by the problem of faulty steering columns in the gas buses, causing them to be taken off the road. The columns had to be tested by metallurgists and replacement parts had to come from Germany contributing to delays in fixing the problem. Leading to major bus shortages at the depot and elsewhere. Luckily the quiet period of the January Holiday period saved the situation.

Sparks: What the latest with the upgrading?

LB: The bosses are still going ahead with the depot upgrading. Associated with this plan they are intending to increase the number of drivers at the depot. They are seeking recruits from other depots such as Ryde, Burwood and elsewhere. However, there is continuing major driver shortage due to the lack of response to the recruiting campaign. This lack of result is partially explained by the family unfriendly nature of the job.

Sparks: Is there any developments at Loftus Street?

LB: It's still a shemozzle there, with continuing problems when trying to park buses. We were recently advised by management to drop off passengers at the top of Loftus Street on the corner of Bridge Street.

WAVERLEY DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What are your thoughts on the Iemma Govt's foreshadowed privatisation ram-page whose major target is the electricity industry?

Waverley Busie: Major figures in the capitalist world are likely to be behind this push. Such as the robber barons from Fortune 500 which held a conference in Sydney two and a half years ago. At this conference which was attended by politicians from state and federal Govt's and all major parties, it's likely these figures put pressure on key members of the NSW ALP Govt. to get cracking on the privatisation agenda. Hedge Funds heavily engaged in the money markets are also likely to be heavily involved in the push. Here we have a situation of the economy being dictated to by a few robber barons who get richer while most suffer.

Sparks: What do you think are the ramifications for the buses in regard to the Iemma Govt's plans to privatise the Ferries?

WB: Recently, on the ABC TV current affairs program State Line after the 7.30 pm News which explores state news, there was a program focusing on Cab Charge, a very cashed up concern. It has a very aggressive outlook and is a major business lobby group particularly in NSW, but also throughout Australia. Whilst it takes a very hard line attitude toward cabbies who are obliged to process Cab Charge vouchers without any remuneration. It's a major contender to purchase a juicy slice of the Ferries after its carve-up. After its gobbles up much of the Ferries, will its bosses have their eyes on State Transit? We need to urgently organise on the job to meet this challenge.

One serious effect of privatisation would be a major cut in our pay. In the case of South Australia, when the Govt. buses were sold off, and private companies took over, drivers lost between \$10,000 and \$15,000 p a in pay. As a number of full time permanent drivers were replaced by more casuals and part timers. In this way, the private bus companies in Adelaide can provide cheaper bus fares than exist in Sydney.

The STA's carve-up by private companies will also affect our job security, with the likely move against permanent jobs. These moves will not just affect the 3,500 drivers employed in the STA but the entire workforce of 4,000 to 6,000, and if you take account of flow on effects in regard to our families and other sectors, overall 100,000 people could be affected.

Sparks: What are your views on the traineeship system for new drivers in the STA?

WB: The new drivers are effectively put on 2 year trials and they are not guaranteed a job at the end. They are so vulnerable. If you don't fit the bosses' pro-corporate outlook you can get the flick. Chris Mansergh from Port Botany was one such trainee who was sacked due to his good work as union rep at the depot. Urgent action needs to be taken to return to the 6 month trial period for new drivers.

Sparks: What are your thoughts on the Green House Gas Crisis?

WB: The current move of the NSW Govt. to selloff public transport in the case of the ferries and parts of the railways, just goes to show their short sightedness in regard to the environmental crisis. Under private ownership of public transport, there will be much less account-

ability to the public. Whilst, the robber barons are likely to cut services due to greed for profits. The Govt. doesn't want to take on such critical environmental issues and the likelihood that we have only 10-15 years to tackle global warming, before we face dire straits.

Associated with this outlook, is the Govt's lack of seriousness in cutting the number of motor vehicles. Together with Paris, Rome and Los Angeles, Sydney is one of 4 largest car using cities in the world. If all motorists had a taxi meter attached to their cars, I'm certain they would be discouraged in their car usage. Whilst if more parking areas were provided near stations, I'm sure motorists would take up this option and avoid driving into the city. Behind the Govt's lack of action on the issue is the pressure of the robber barons such as Shell which last year made well over \$34 billion on profits and virtually congratulated the Australian public for assisting this profit making.

One measure to tackle the traffic gridlock in Sydney is to have one car free day a year, like the Columbian Govt. has initiated. A great day. A clear quite day. Peaceful and tranquil. However, it appears the Govt. doesn't want it to happen, due to its corporate connections and hasn't the motivation to pursue the extensive planning such an initiative would require. A car free day would be a big step toward curbing the existing dependence of many on their cars. Just as many have felt they can't do without their plastic bags at supermarkets.

Sparks: What are your impressions of STA management?

WB: The STA executives give the impression of viewing us as a type of machinery. They disregard the enormous resource which exists in the case of the collective experience of drivers. They could take advantage of our ideas for transforming the public transport system and improve bus services, without cuts to the STA budget. Some of them behave as megalomaniacs and squander vast sums on consultants' contracts. These senior STA bosses on \$200,000 p a salaries make crappy decisions based on the advice of consultants who have little understanding of bus operations. I feel sad for the STA in its failure to listen to people and take up good ideas.

Sparks: How have the Govt's neo liberal policies affected bus operations?

WB: I was recently speaking to a Pt. Botany driver who mentioned that inspectors are severely restricted in their ability to affect the supply of buses to cater for increased demand. In contrast to the old days when inspectors had the authority to order in more buses to cope with trouble spots, now they have lost this power. Due to service obligations associated with the contract system imposed on the STA by the Department of Transport, the frequency and number of buses on runs can't be altered at all.

Sparks: What's the latest with the mobile phones?

WB: This issue has heated up lately with the sacking of several drivers who have been caught just grabbing their phones whilst operating their buses. The union hierarchy has of course been beautifully useless in regard to defending these drivers. It's very unclear where we stand with mobiles. Can you be sacked when the camera catches you taking your mobile out of your pocket and putting it in your bag? The bosses are jumping over the deep end on this issue to further terrorise us. The media has also been leaping on the issue to harass us. There seems to be a double standard on the issue. While we are being targeted, there is no general crack



down by the Govt. and police on motorists who are caught using their mobiles. If you approached motorists generally on the issue of mobile usage whilst driving, I'm sure 80% to 90% would agree they are at fault on occasion. Recently I came across a graphic example of the problem in the case of a female motorist whose car was wobbling along near Anzac Parade, whilst she was busily texting on her mobile.

An important explanation for this lenient attitude of the Govt. toward this misbehaviour by motorists is the major influence of such robber barons as the Telcos on their policies. If the Govt. is serious and genuine about the issue, why doesn't it spend say \$3-4 million on an advertising campaign to educate motorists that usage of their mobiles while driving their vehicles is illegal. It should make clear that if they are caught, they would face losing their licences.

Sparks: What's the latest with the mechanical section?

WB: Following the hurried departure of the mechanics' former boss Mr Seedy Yates, a new boss has come onto the scene who also has a jack booted approach. He won't let people be people and is always trying to peer over the mechanics' shoulders. I've heard he's not happy with Sparks and I'm sure we'll hear more about him as time goes by.

Sparks: What's happening with the bendibuses?

WB: Passengers are continuing to congregate in the dangerous concertina area in the bendies. The passive approach of the STA bosses on the issue involving putting up “no standing signs” in the area, is completely inadequate. They are just dragging the chain. The STA’s failure to develop a policy on the issue of passengers standing in this dangerous area in the bendies also allows the bosses to evade legal responsibility in the event of an accident and passengers are injured. This issue is a foggy area full of legal minefields. What recourse will the driver have?

Sparks: What are your thoughts on health and safety issues?

WB: Many are unaware of the effects of the considerable amounts of stress we experience in doing our jobs, and on other parts of our lives. Whilst many on the job through daily conflicts with passengers and angry motorists, develop a negative outlook. This outlook which is very destructive for our lives and relationships, needs to be urgently tackled, so we can see the positive aspects of our jobs and enjoy our job. From my experience of over 20 years on the job I’ve often seen how you come home tired from the job and are unable to contribute 100% to family life. The STA is largely oblivious to this whole issue. Every two years they provide for you to go to a seminar, but that’s grossly inadequate.

Sparks: What are your thoughts on the downfall of the Howard Govt?

WB: In pursuing his electoral contest against Howard, Rudd engaged in some smart tactics. He didn’t bite back when attacked by Howard and so avoided ambushes. Certainly the major force contributing to the defeat of Howard, was not the ALP, its politicians and members, but the general people’s involvement in the “Your Rights At Work” campaign. It was particularly inspired by ordinary people being enraged at the effects on workers of Howard’s new draconian Industrial Relations laws. These laws are so bad, it’s likely that if they weren’t removed, that the country would go bankrupt. Another important reason for the defeat of Howard was his very authoritarian approach toward leadership. His old school over bearing leadership approach blocked off the flow of ideas in the Liberal Party camp. He had also exhausted his bag of dirty tricks with his over use of the terrorism scare and demonising of such groups as muslims.

Sparks: What’s your outlook for the Rudd ALP Govt?

WB: It’s just another liberal party. Since the Hawke Govt’s Accord, the ALP has become progressively under the influence of the robber barons. The ALP needs to get away from this rightward shift and get back to supporting of community, union and social groups.

Sparks: What’s the latest on the road?

WB: A dangerous new issue has emerged in the case of gangs of young kids particularly in the Maroubra Beach and Randwick areas, who often wear white caps and are engaging in bizarre and dangerous antics on buses. They also try to intimidate drivers and take free rides. Will the STA back up drivers who stand their ground against this intimidation? There is an urgent need for the STA to liaison with the police to tackle this serious issue. Latest news is that the STA has advised that it has been investigating the situation and will be using cameras on the buses to these trouble spots, to monitor these gangs and only has a few more buses on these routes to have the cameras installed. These cameras are of course a double edged sword and are being used against us by the STA in the case of disciplinary action and are likely to pose a

serious threat to civil liberties in the future. The disks of digital film produced from these cameras are easier to be accessed than the footage from the previous video cameras and can be rapidly issued to the police to assist their investigations into these mischief makers. Will the STA show some integrity on this issue and take effective action to make our jobs easier?

Sparks: What are your thoughts on the steering arm problem which affected the gas buses?

Waverley Driver: As buses go I consider these buses to be all scrap due to its faulty design. The steering arm weakening problem which erupted recently was caused by the excessive weight on the front of the bus caused by the 6 steel gas canisters that the buses carry. As a result of the problem these buses were taken off the road to have new steering arms installed.

Sparks: What happened at Waverley during the Xmas and Holiday period?

WD: Due to the gas bus crisis, we were issued with diesel buses from a range of other depots such as Randwick, Port Botany, North Sydney and New Castle. I found particularly the buses from Newcastle a pleasure to drive.

Sparks: What's the situation after the holidays with the Waverley Fleet?

WD: All gas buses are back in use and now gas buses compose 80% of the fleet.

Sparks: What are your thoughts on the gas buses?



WD: They are too slow, slug like and cumbersome, and always need maintenance. Consequently they always contribute to late running on routes. The gas buses need to be urgently replaced on most services by either MK 5 diesels or Volvos. In the case of the 400's, the gas buses need to be urgently removed and replaced with Volvos which are faster and more reliable.

BURWOOD DEPOT NEWS

IT HAS HAPPENED! BURWOOD DEPOT HAS BEEN DOWNGRADED TO HEN COOP, SECOND CLASS WITH A GLASS CEILING!

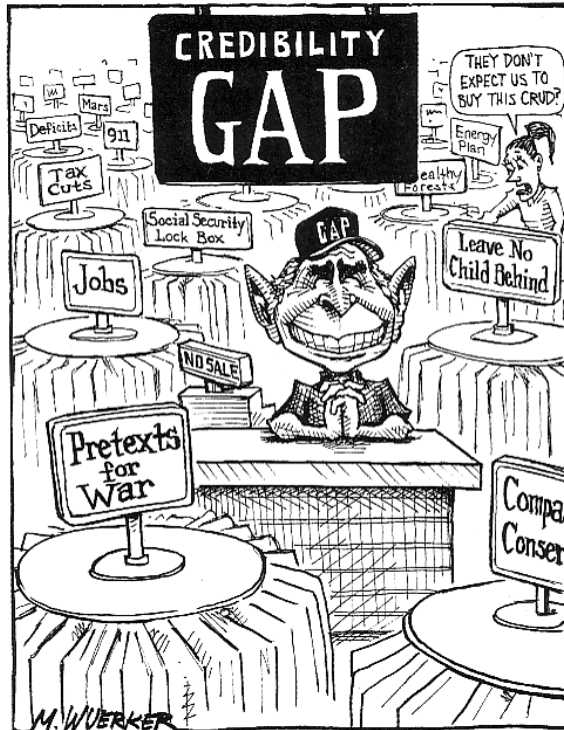
We have lost our permanent depot manager several weeks after being appointed, after waiting for many months for this to materialise.

We have now an actress for a depot manager. A sergeant for an OP's manager and a?????? For an assistant OP's person. The depot sounds like a chicken farm. We can't say much about the Assistant OP's manager as she is subject to a "dispute notice."

I hope the union big rooster Mark D. Can cope with these hens in a "cock fight". Is he big and strong enough to cope?

We have finally got our roster clerk back after the STA lost their stall and starve action in the court. At what cost did they pursue their childish games: 6 months back pay and all those legal eagles' costs. What a waste of money! It could have been better spent on repairing the concrete in the depot yard. We hope the person who started this stupid chain of events is given a E1 and the charge is with "a waste of public money" and as the penalty - given the boot!

We are finally getting a chance to change the Redfern union boss again. He did not last long after the last union election. I hope the drivers elect a stirrer this time. As the STA needs a big boot from the union on those fat cats to achieve a good result.



SYDNEY MARITIME NEWS

NSW Labor prepares to privatise Sydney Ferries

By Shane Bentley

Twelve months ago transport and electricity sector unions campaigned for a Labor Party victory in the NSW state elections.

Workers were told to support the “worker-friendly” Labor Party against the NSW Liberals who fully backed John Howard’s WorkChoices laws.

The re-elected Iemma government is now repaying this support with plans to privatise the Sydney Ferries service, the rail network and the electricity grid. Iemma and Co. are on a privatisation binge that will result in job losses, the undermining of current wages, conditions and safety standards, higher prices and fewer services.

Many would be excused for thinking that NSW Labor has only recently floated the idea of privatising Sydney Ferries. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The NSW Labor government took the first step towards privatising the ferries back in 2003 when it pushed the Transport Administration Amendment (Sydney Ferries) Bill through state parliament.

This Bill corporatised the ferry service in 2004 by restructuring the State Transit Authority and setting up the Sydney Ferries Corporation as a separate entity.

After this initial step, Labor’s privatisation plans had been lying dormant for the last few years - until two tragic accidents put the Sydney Ferries service back under the spotlight.

In January 2007 a RiverCat and a fishing dinghy collided under the Harbour Bridge, killing a 72-year-old man. The Ferry Master was charged with culpable navigation and currently faces trial.

Two months later - and again under the Harbour Bridge - four people were killed when a HarbourCat ferry collided with a 10m wooden cruiser.

These tragic events provided the cover for the Iemma government to establish the Special Commission of Inquiry into Sydney Ferries. With Bret Walker SC at the helm, the Commission began its work in April 2007 just weeks after Labor’s re-election.

Many believed that the Walker Commission inquiry was nothing more than a public relations stunt to enable the NSW Government to privatise Sydney Ferries. They were right.

The 430 page report was handed down on November 1, 2007. It suggested the cut back or winding up of unprofitable services such as the Parramatta RiverCats and the high-speed Manly JetCat. It noted the failure to integrate ferry times with the bus and train networks and recommended the replacement of the aging ferry fleet.



Not surprisingly, the report calls for the ferry service to be opened up to increased involvement of the private sector. Various privatisation options were outlined, including a “public private partnership (PPP)” that would keep the ferries and wharves public but privatise the operation of the ferries.

Despite the disasters with current PPP infrastructure schemes like Sydney’s cross-city tunnel and airport rail link, this appears to be NSW Labor’s preferred option. It is also how privatisation works in the public transport systems in Melbourne, Brisbane and London.

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) submission to the Walker inquiry used the example of the British rail system to show just how wrong privatisation can go.

PPP has lead to the ludicrous situation where government spending on the British rail network has sharply risen after privatisation. Spending on British Railways has more than tripled from £563 million in 1990 to £1.8 billion after privatisation. On the London Underground it has gone up 20-fold, from £44.1 million in 1997 to £1.48 billion in 2005.

The overall profits of the British rail companies grew by 20 percent in 2004 to just under £300 million.

It is no wonder that the corporate sharks have already begun to circle around Sydney Ferries.

One company that is keen is the French-Australian partnership Transdev-TSL, who already operate Melbourne's Yarra Trams, the privatised Brisbane Ferries, Sydney's ShoreLink buses and other public transport in Europe.

Another is Veolia Transport who currently run Melbourne's trains, Sydney's monorail, light rail, 250 buses as well as ferry operations in Europe are keen. Macquarie Bank is also hovering.

The different unions that cover Sydney Ferries workers have come out against the privatisation of the service. Unions including the MUA, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (who cover the maintenance workers at the Balmain shipyard) and the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers have released joint anti-privatisation media statements.

In July last year morning peak hour commuters were given leaflets issued jointly by the various unions and copies of the 10,000 anti-privatisation postcards that were mailed and sent to Premier Morris Iemma.

MUA members also leafleted the thousands of people that watched the traditional Australia Day ferry races at Circular Quay in an effort to raise community awareness about the privatisation threat.

There has been no definite announcement from the NSW Labor government about the future of Sydney Ferries. That is only because Iemma has put the privatisation of Sydney Ferries on the backburner while he concentrates on selling off the state's electricity grid.

The unions at Sydney Ferries could have sent Iemma a powerful signal on the day of the February 26 rally against electricity privatisation.

On that day thousands of blue and white collar electricity workers took part in a 24-hour strike across the state. The rally outside parliament house has anywhere between 4,000 to 10,000 people (depending on estimates).

Solidarity action by workers at Sydney Ferries would have demonstrated to Iemma and NSW Labor that all workers and unions that are threatened by future privatisation are willing to unite and act in the defence of those who are currently fighting privatisation.

Unions such as the MUA and the AMWU did send contingents to the rally (which fell on the same day as the MUA's monthly stop-work meeting).

But a concrete act of solidarity action - ranging from a fare free day to a snap strike to coincide with the start of the rally - would not only send a warning shot across Iemma's bow.

It would also point to the need for joint industrial action by all those threatened with privatisation as the way to victory for the electricity workers who are under fire today.

[Shane Bentley is a member of the Maritime Union of Australia and publishes a regular Sydney maritime industry job bulletin. Visit .]

International Transport Workers' News

Belgium: Bus Drivers Strike Over Safety

January 30th, 2008 by jef costello

Bus drivers from the La Louviere depot walked out on Tuesday after a colleague was robbed at gunpoint.

The strikes come a week after rail workers launched wildcat action after two colleagues were assaulted. Workers voted 29 to 24 in favour of strike action, agreeing that there would be no blockades or impediments to non-strikers.

In spite of this only one bus ran on Tuesday and workers voted to continue strike action. There have also been reports of solidarity action at other depots.

Management has offered some concessions to workers, as well as cctv cameras for certain routes.

Mexico: City metro workers in work stoppages

March 6th, 2008 by Alan

Workers in the Sistema de Transporte Colectivo (STC) in Mexico City - the underground train service - have announced a series of 10 and 15 minute service stoppages in response to government stalling on a list of demands submitted way back in November.

The stoppages will start next Wednesday (12th), with the majority of the 12,000 employees of the service expected to observe it. The list of demands submitted to the STC by the metro union, the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores del Sistema de Transporte Colectivo Metro (SNTSTC) calls for - amongst other things - improved security on the metro, training in line with technological advances, an end to the practice of employing workers on non-permanent contracts and a 15% payrise.

However, doubts persist surrounding the integrity of the SNTSTC and especially its leader, Fernando Espiro Arvalo. The union - like almost all officially recognised unions in Mexico - is affiliated to the Confederacion de Trabajadores de Mexico - the mainstream union confederation established by the then ruling party PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) in the 1950s, and monopolised by priistas ever since.

Malaysia: Bus drivers wildcat ends

February 12th, 2008 by catch

Bus drivers at RapidPenang in Malaysia ended a one-day wildcat strike last week after talks with management.

Drivers demonstrated outside the Sungai Nibong bus depot during the strike, demanding increases in salaries and incentives, and for outstanding traffic summonses to be settled by RapidPenang.

The company's chief executive Azhar Ahmad said the drivers returned to work after receiving a 20% increase in their daily incentive allowance, however they were also given verbal warnings and required to sign an agreement to prevent them taking similar action in the future.

Edinburgh rail workers in wildcat strike

February 6th, 2008 by Ed

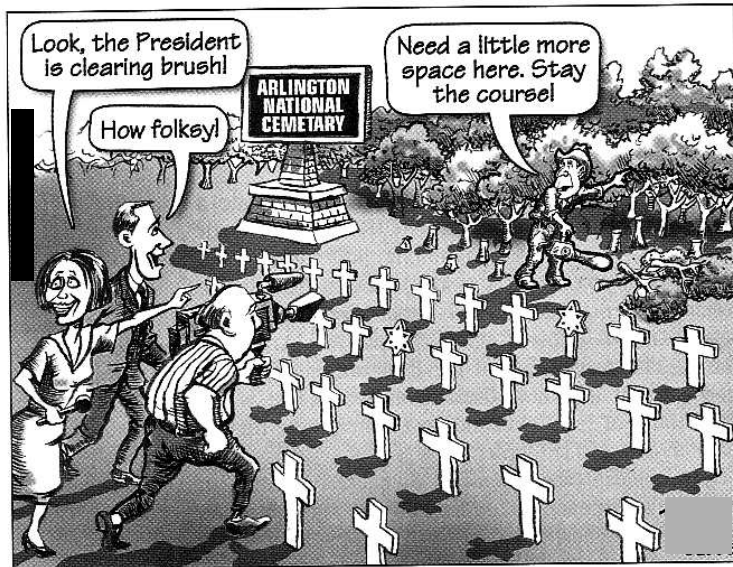
Rail signallers in Edinburgh went on wildcat strike, bringing the station to a standstill for an hour on Monday.

The action at Edinburgh's Waverly station was taken in a dispute over the provision of cover for breaks. David Simpson, of Network Rail in Scotland, said the "deliberately disruptive, unprovoked action" was "completely unacceptable".

Ian MacIntyre, the RMT's (rail union) regional organiser for Scotland, was reported as saying: "Our members took the action in the interests of safety.

"They felt they had been working intensively, looking at screens to ensure the safe movement of trains, working in the same way as air traffic controllers. After four hours, they felt they had to have their personal needs break."

Mr Simpson said the workers left their posts at about 1225 GMT, returning to work at 1335 GMT. Their action resulted in all services being brought to a controlled and safe stop, with no services running through the station for an hour. He added: "We understand that this action was taken due to a disagreement within the signalling centre over arrangements for cover during breaks. Failed discussion Mr Macintyre, the RMT's regional organiser for Scotland, told the media: "Our members took the action in the interests of safety. "They felt they had been working intensively, looking at screens to ensure the safe movement of trains, working in the same way as air traffic controllers. "After four hours they felt they had to have their personal needs' break." He added that the signallers had been trying to reach agreement with management over cover for breaks but this had failed to happen.



What is Democratic Unionism?

Democratic