

No.145

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Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

**Large Swathes of RailCorp Staff Face the Axe
under BMI (Body Mass Index)! Whilst ALP
Union Hierarchy clowns about it in the Media!**



Management & Union fat cats work on expanding waist lines at RailCorp. Corporate lunch following BMI approval.

NSW RAILWAY NEWS;	BMI RAILCORP EXPOSE';
STA BUSIE NEWS;	VIC. RAILWAY NEWS;
TRAIN CREW NEWS;	NEWCASTLE RAILLINE;
GREEK BUS NEWS;	THE LIFE OF ROWLEY;

EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

In the last edition, we exposed the brazen complicity of the ALP union hierarchy in the privatisation of railway cleaning. It caused considerable commotion in union bureaucratic quarters. In this edition, we put the spotlight on a much more wide ranging attack on RailCorp staff which the union hierarchy has been complicit. It involves the imposing of BMI (Body Mass Index) requirements, which affects all grades. (See article page 3.)

Other news is the push by the O'Farrell Govt. pressured by its real estate developer business mates to close the rail corridor between Civic and Newcastle stations. The mainstream media has completely blocked out the story of this new onslaught. (See article page 7.)

In State Transit, the most dramatic development has been the appearance of menacing proposed new rosters. The cutbacks to lines of work in the rosters will savage many drivers' wages. (See article page 15.) Whilst the sword of privatisation hangs over State Transit, the union hierarchy in typical lame duck fashion is failing to assist the grass roots to fight it. Involving the establishing of anti-privatisation committees on the job, the launching of a campaign to educate commuters about the negative aspects of privatisation and the holding of a mass meeting to discuss action to fight it.

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

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TRAIN CREW NEWS

Latest news is that Rail Corp is hiring more drivers and guards all the time to replace those train crew members who will be targeted for the sack due to breaching B.M.I. (Body Mass Index) requirements. In sharp contrast to the misinformation spread by the union hierarchy in the media recently that only a tiny minority of train crew members will be affected, in fact quite a wide swathe will be targeted, and lose their jobs. Other news, is that with the loss of the Transit Officers, security on trains has become again a major problem. The police are certainly not adequately tackling it.

Concerned Guard

Management and Union Leadership Manufacturing a Health Crisis

By Crimson Coconut

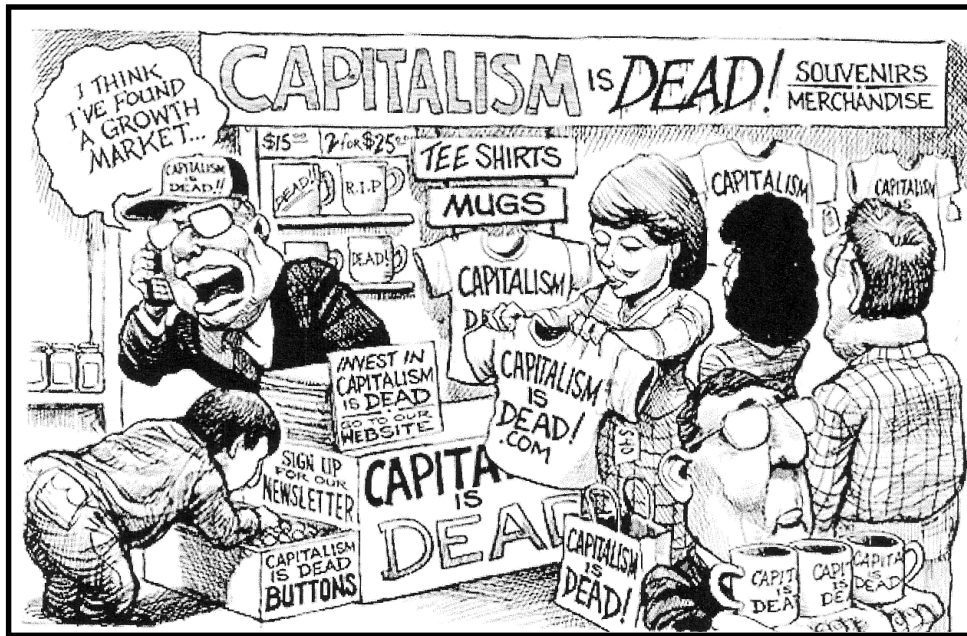
There is an outbreak of “Health Care Initiatives” from Transport for N.S.W. and the

State Government. Programs such as the regular health checks, BMI checks, Quit Smoking campaigns, Drug and Alcohol Testing (urine and blood sampling), Union and Government sponsored Health Fairs, various workplace lectures on diet and exercise etc are all targeting workers in the health firing line.

When is our employer impinging on our freedom to do what we like outside of work hours or to pursue the lifestyle (whether it is right or wrong) that we desire? Where do we draw the line?

If management were truly serious about our health and fitness they would give us:

- * Subsidised staff canteens that serves up healthy food rather than the junk food that is available in the private businesses surrounding railways.
- * They would stop rostering people around the clock inducing fatigue and fatigue related diseases such as obesity and heart disease. It is no accident, for instance, that those that work around the clock shift-work, whether that be station staff, drivers, guards, signallers etc are the most overweight. There is ample evidence to the link between shift work and obesity. The endocrinology and biological chemical evidence is there for anyone to see. So who's fault is it that employees are overweight? What control do you have over your roster, eating habits or sleep patterns?
- * They would provide sporting facilities (subsidised or not) close to work depots.
- * They would provide a stress free environment in which members were respected instead of harassed with a “please explain-request for information” every time a passenger makes a complaint.
- * They would provide an equal opportunity workplace environment free of discrimination and recrimination where “who you know” counts more than individual ability.



* They would realise that society as a whole has changed. From the way our communities and work are designed to the way the food industry raises, produces and serves food, to the way we have less and less control over our everyday lives. These all impact on the health of, not just, rail workers, but the general community. Rail workers would be expected to have a healthier prognosis than the general population though.

* They would freely give us our allotted leisure time without having to jump through bureaucratic hoops just to get leave. Why is it that we have to give some reason for taking our own leave (such as long service leave) when it is due? Why is it up to our level 4 manager to decide when we take leave? Why is it more difficult to get holiday roster swaps than before because we have to provide a written reason for the swap? Why is leave cancelled during special holiday periods and special events depriving employees from enjoying the benefits of social festivals and events that everyone else takes for granted?

* Stop treating injured workers like pariahs rather than as valued employees -a commodity that loses value the longer it is injured.

The onus and proof of good health has been put back onto us, the employees. We are the ones responsible for not getting sick, when they are the cause of ill health in most cases. Very few workplaces are as rigorously health tested as RailCorp.

The latest craze, BMI (Body Mass Index) testing is at the extreme edge of employee health testing. There is no science in it at all. Put simply the BMI is a mathematical calculation of a person's mass in kilograms divided by their height squared. $BMI = \frac{MASS \text{ IN KG}}{HEIGHT \text{ IN METRES}^2}$.

It is a purely mathematical calculation. Using this technique many of our Olympic athletes would be placed in the “Obese” category by scoring a BMI of 30 or more.

In some senses BMI testing is discriminatory as it takes no account of genetic factors such as ethnicity or family predisposition. Theoretically Russian born immigrants will have more fat than say a Somali simply because genetically they have adapted to different environments.

“A further limitation of BMI relates to loss of height through aging. In this situation, BMI will increase without any corresponding increase in weight.” **Sourced at Wikipedia**

That means BMI Testing discriminates against aged employees.

Now new research is discarding BMI Testing as unscientific and outdated. According to a *“study published by JAMA in 2005 showed that overweight people had a similar relative risk of mortality to normal weight people as defined by BMI, while underweight and obese people had a higher death rate.[25] High BMI is associated with type 2 diabetes only in persons with high serum gamma-glutamyl transpeptidase.[26]”*

“In an analysis of 40 studies involving 250,000 people, patients with coronary artery disease with normal BMIs were at higher risk of death from cardiovascular disease than people whose BMIs put them in the overweight range (BMI 25–29.9).[27] In the overweight, or intermediate, range of BMI (25–29.9), the study found that BMI failed to discriminate between body fat percentage and lean mass. The study concluded that “the accuracy of BMI in diagnosing obesity is limited, particularly for individuals in the intermediate BMI ranges, in men and in the elderly. These results may help to explain the unexpected better survival in overweight/mild obese patients.”[20]” **Sourced at Wikipedia**

BMI Testing should be recognised for what it is. It is a mathematical and statistical tool for the general population which, when applied to individual cases, will give a statistical error that discriminates against the individuals concerned.

The RTBU leadership has gone along with this bogus charade of health reforms agreeing to a national health standard for rail operators without recourse to reason and without consulting members.

NSW RTBU Branch Secretary, Claassens is confused as he normally is.

The Daily Telegraph reports:

“Rail Tram Bus Union NSW branch secretary Alex Claassens said there used to be a joke that you weren’t a real train driver “unless you had an overhang” but attitudes had now changed.

“There’s broad support for these changes,” he said.

“The level of obesity is increasing and the fact is this is a sedentary job and people are not exercising as much as they were before.” Only a handful of drivers would be affected by the changes, he said.”

Yet in a bulletin to members:

Claassens“said rail workers were concerned about how the new measures, which include very specific weight and BMI criteria, would be applied.”

“More rigorous health assessments must be matched by the introduction of health and wellness programs to ensure Category 1 rail safety workers, including drivers and signallers, can meet the tough new requirements.”

So which one is it Alex? Is there widespread support OR are members concerned? Can't seem to make up your mind? Maybe you need some psychological testing?

RailCorp is shirking it's responsibility for safety by fairly and squarely placing responsibility on employees. At the same time they have failed to introduce new engineering safety equipment or work methods into the network as quickly as they might have. That is another issue however which cannot be discussed here. The union leadership could have nailed RailCorp over the issues of safety but have instead taken the easy route by siding with them.

Don't get me wrong. We are for safe and secure public transport that ensures the safety of passengers, but the approach taken about safety by the Union Leadership and Management leaves almost all responsibility with employees. Employee's in reality have very little control over the work processes, the equipment that is purchased, reliability or the human factors which interact within the organisation. Maybe it is time to heap criticism where criticism is due rather than clutching at straws and blaming workers for everything that happens. The Union's Leadership, who's job it is to look after members interests, should know better. If they were more in tune with the needs of their members then maybe this could not have happened.

As our workplace freedoms (even outside of work) are slowly removed it is time to draw a line in the sand and say “NO MORE”. The Union Leadership should force management into a position of conceding that their policies are contributing to the bad health of employees. To do this they must meet and campaign alongside affected employees and involve them in the decision making process.

This is unlikely to happen unless we buck the trend and refuse to take part in this absurd circus. The union leadership is strung up on the fact that they have given tacit approval for this to go ahead, despite them not seeking the approval of their members.

Also the fingerprinting of employees signing on and off for duty is one move too many by the bosses. We must also resist this move NOW while it is being introduced. Boycott any moves to take fingerprints in your workplace. This is the equivalent to taking your DNA. It is totally unnecessary.

If we stick together and stop these ridiculous assaults on our rights, such as fingerprint scanning and extreme health assessments that deny the reality of working life we can draw a line in the sand and halt the erosion of our greater rights at work that lead to a fairer and happier workplace.



Save Newcastle Rail Line!

Dear friends,

This is an appeal for support from Save Our Rail up in Newcastle. We really need your help for a moment.

You may have heard of us. Save Our Rail is a grassroots community organisation which has fought off successive attempts to cut the last few kilometres of the Newcastle rail line over the last 20 years or so. We have members from various political backgrounds but are not aligned to any particular party. The Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) is also supporting the campaign as it affects many of their members.

The situation

The O'Farrell government released its Newcastle urban renewal strategy document in December last year and announced they are once again trying to cut the line at Wickham, removing the last two stations (Civic and Newcastle). Despite being on a tough wicket, we are determined to make sure they don't get away with it.

Despite repeatedly bringing our plight to the attention of the Sydney media we have received no coverage. We want to break through that wall of silence and make our voice heard. We don't believe that the government would get away with a plan like this in the Sydney metro area and we think that if a critical mass of people in Sydney hear about the government's plans (and our campaign to thwart them!) it will help us put enough pressure on the government to force them to back down.

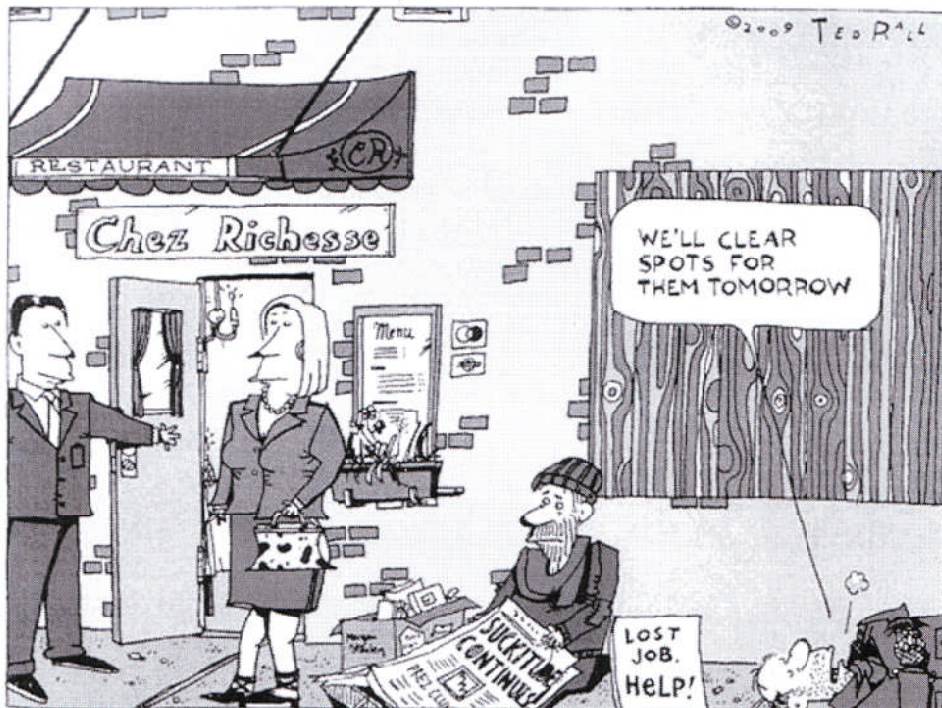
We think putting the blowtorch on the government over this issue feeds into the broader community campaign to discredit them and fight back against their bad planning laws and their attacks on the public sector and the environment.

Why are we campaigning to save the rail?

In a nutshell:

-It is a cardinal rule of transport planning that you do not make people change from one mode of transport to another (eg from rail to bus) unless it is absolutely necessary and unavoidable. Countless examples show that the delay and inconvenience created by making people change over causes them to abandon the service. Most recently in Adelaide the replacement of the Tonsley rail service with buses has seen a 95% reduction in patronage.

-The Government has committed to cutting the line but has not allocated sufficient funding to do so. To follow through with their plan will likely end up costing \$350-500million+ whereas they have allocated only \$110million. This \$350-500m+ figure is based on costing for Wick-



ham Truncation released in 2010 by consultancy firm AECOM; this study, commissioned by the previous ALP government, is the most up to date / detailed / realistic investigation of cutting the line.

-The government claims to be in a 'budget black hole' and has been slashing public sector jobs yet they have committed to this expensive destruction of public transport in Newcastle come what may. Their duplicity is outrageous.

-Previous proposals by Greiner and Costa have openly advocated building on the rail corridor (it is in a prime location close to the Harbour) and a 2008 concept proposal by developer GPT depicted buildings in the corridor. This has been the primary motive all along. After 20 years of having the brazen greed of handing public rail land to developers rejected, the latest plan cynically claims that the land will become a 'green corridor' and will never be built on. Save Our Rail is under no illusions.

-There has been no proposal (from either the current Liberal government nor the prior ALP regime) as to how passengers will be expediently shifted from trains to buses. There are no costing for purchasing and staffing extra buses nor for the major roadwork that will likely be required to deal with new bottlenecks created as existing vehicular crossings are closed in lieu of changed rail movements.

-Cutting the line will disadvantage the elderly, parents with prams, people with bikes and surfboards, blind people and wheelchair users. It will make parents in the Hunter Valley think

twice before sending their kids on the train for a day at the beach as the service will no longer drop people 2 blocks from Newcastle beach.

-The Urban Renewal Strategy document has a bunch of pretty pictures of repaved and refurbished streets, arcades and piazzas in Newcastle. Virtually all of this could be done without cutting the line. Moreover the report says that all of these pretty projects are to be paid for by Newcastle council - not the NSW government.

It is claimed that the rail is underutilised and acts as a barrier. We say if it is underutilised then we should be improving the service and marketing it better, not cutting it. And if it is a barrier we should have a trial of new at-grade pedestrian crossings to provide better connectivity.

Your support is greatly appreciated.

Regards,

Zane Alcorn

Save Our Rail executive member

m:0401466831

For more info, including proactive plans to improve public transport in Newcastle, please visit saveourrail.org.au/



BUS NEWS

SYDNEY BUSES ROUTE OPTIMISATION 2013

by the Transport Scrutinizer, 22/02/2013.

The announcement of Route Optimisation to Bus Operators attached to Sydney Buses comes as no surprise to many seasoned staff. The NSW Government is totally committed to bring about changes to all Public Transport Agencies both State and Private operated, as all are under the total control of Transport For NSW.

The concept of bus route optimisation is not new. From 1932 to the 1980's this was a normal operational practice. In other words, it is nothing to be afraid of. The STA has been ordered by TFNSW to reintroduce the concept to contain operating costs by the elimination of dead running when and where possible.

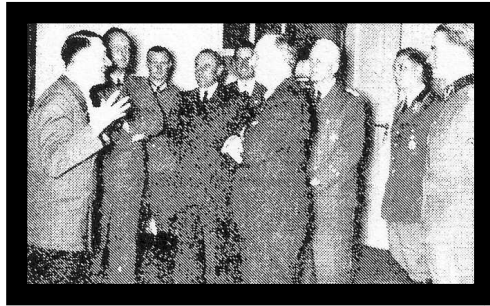
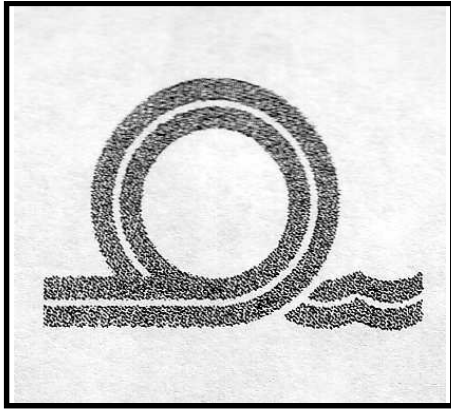
Unfortunately, many readers of SPARKS tend to thrive on the negative aspects of our jobs and don't think about any positive aspects, this author included. The over regulative attitude of TFNSW makes it difficult to think otherwise.

Now for the Pipe Bomb! This is NOT the 1980's THIS IS 2013! In other words this is now!

Route Optimisation may have worked then, but it may not work now. Why? Because back then it was accepted practice. Bus Crews new and old were accustomed to it from the very start. From the 1990's to the present time most bus routes have been the preserve of the closest Depots and only where routes are shared they are worked by more than one depot. Whilst it may eventually work, initially this practice may well lead to some of the most disruptive running ever experienced due to most Bus Operators being unfamiliar with the routes they are operating over. This will lead to many cancelled trips as late running escalates due to Bus Operators becoming disorientated and lost, working routes they have never worked before. The assertion of Management that providing all Bus Operators with route maps with left/right instructions will solve the problem is unrealistic as you can't drive and look at instructions at the same time. In a nutshell it's as simple as this! If STA can't properly train Bus Operators on the routes they are to work on then chaos will surely ensue!

As a result of route optimisation all STA depots will find significant changes to their current work regime. The worst affected is Kingsgrove Depot which will lose 64 lines of work. What happens to the displaced operators as a result? Other depots will also feel the impact with Tempe Depot losing most of its Metrobus routes to depots closer to the affected routes. Tempe was reopened for the sole purpose of operating Metrobuses now it will revert to being a satellite depot to Kingsgrove.

After the dust settles when hundreds of trips have been cancelled due to lost buses and late running, what happens next? Oh sorry, I forgot, there's nothing to be afraid of!



Our spies strike again! STA CEO, with new haircut, snapped expounding to depot managers on wiz bang “psychic management”!

PETER ROWLEY, STA CEO & AUTHOR OF THE SOON TO BE PUBLISHED AUTOBIOGRAPHY “MY WICKED, WICKED LIES”. THIS IS YOUR LIFE!

Dear Peter

As the leader of 3,000 workers, we want to put your life under a microscope. We want to find out what makes you tick. We assume that you know a lot and saw you rise through the ranks from roster clerk. We looked at you with awe. Despite considering yourself a master of illusion, we can see right through you. Under pressure from your Fuehrer O’Farrell and your contract with its performance bonuses, we are seeing you try to crash land your Veolia bus into our domain. Like Rudolf Hess, Hitler’s deputy who crash landed his plane in Scotland during WWII to negotiate a settlement with the British to help out the Nazi agenda by allowing them to just fight Russia. You presented to us at depot meetings your 10 point plan for our extermination. You deceitfully presented it as a means for us to avoid privatisation. However, in fact it fast tracks the carve up.

Under your plan ten different areas are affected.

In regard to casuals you want a percentage of the workforce to be casualised, which means greater control of us, just like your Fuehrer, O’Farrell wants of his NSW 4th Reich. Casuals can be sacked at any time. Whilst the bosses can do whatever they want. It makes the union ever weaker. Is this a step by your Fuehrer O’Farrell to introduce individual contracts and bring in Work Choices again?

In regard to the point in your plan, concerning reducing from 10 to 5 minutes our bus set up and engine running and pay in times. Do you ever run over 5 minutes late getting to work in your office?

Peter, do you realise that STA drivers are in the most heaviest traffic in Australia. We constantly have to avoid the nastiest accidents and you want to cut our pay!

Peter, I recently spoke to a driver who can't get a loan for his house due to the insecurity of his job.

What's it like at home? Does your wife constantly nag you, with those fat bonuses in mind that your Fuehrer O'Farrell will reward you for cutting our wages, "Darling, let's move up market to Hunters Hill!" Do you yearn to smell the roses in the garden of your Hunters Hill mansion?

Peter, why are you allowing shops to sell wrong tickets and some shops to have no supplies of tickets? What don't you get income from increased correct ticket selling, rather than gouging it from us? Why do you want us to drop to private bus operator conditions levels?

You have given us \$350 each to purchase items of the uniform. Are we getting paid to shop around for these items? Is your uniform which is the same as your Fuehrer with all its lightening strikes, swastikas and gleaming brass buttons match your calibre?

How dare you use the STA magazine Transit Times for your propaganda! Making it your Mein Kampf! It's our magazine, not your personal property!

With your letters stuck to our journals, we know your code and see what's behind it.

In the end Peter, we have made a decision. No matter who you are, we will walk out of your meetings. Peter, do you think we trust you after your group got rid of Chris Mansergh by means of dirty tricks. He was a fantastic person for the position of union rep at Port Botany. However, by helping the grass roots fight the bosses at the depot, he posed a threat to your scheme to keep the union weak. Your henchman who are responsible to you, orchestrated his sacking just as his probation period was ending by means of a cooked up harassment charge. You come with a forked tongue. Do you want us to sink to your rock bottom level of deceitfulness and lack of integrity?

Peter, you are not fit and proper to lead this authority. Peter, your authority is now under question. It's cut to pieces. To our work mates this is our judgement. Please leave the job! I have heard there is a vacancy for a Fuehrer in the Nazi Party, perhaps it could suit you?

In conclusion, Peter, I recently overheard a conversation between two retired highly experienced STA staff. One had been an inspector and the other a conductor. They were discussing who had been the worst top boss in the STA. One of them considered a boss from the 1970's was the worst. However, the other considered the present CEO merited this compliment! Peter, is this you?

Peter, this was your life! Are you responsible for this mess? If you say, yes! You are an honest man!



S.T.A. BUSIE NEWS

WAVERLEY DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What's happening with the bosses' attempts to cut overtime money?

Waverley Busie: Recently notices have been put up in the depot on the issue of how we are claiming overtime. The STA is complaining that drivers aren't calculating it properly, involving wrongly showing the amount of overtime worked and that the relevant paper work isn't being properly completed. In particular, the STA is complaining it's not being categorised properly. The STA now wants drivers to check with Inspectors and their supervisor when overtime is recorded, who will show how to write it up correctly via a step by step process. Now, when the bosses query the amount of overtime you claim, they will be putting a little note on your journal. It all appears to be another pathetic scam to nick more money from us.

Sparks: What's the latest with depot fleet?

WB: Waverley has now more gas buses than diesel. We recently received some old Scania buses from Kingsgrove. We are awaiting more. Opinions are divided about these buses. Some are quite in favour of these buses.

However, the STA appears to be favouring diesel buses, over gas buses in the general STA fleet. A likely reason is the bosses and Lib's drive to cut costs and disregard environmental considerations. The STA considers these buses are cheaper to operate, in contrast to the gas buses. The gas buses also require more time to fuel in comparison to the diesels. However, diesel fumes are highly toxic. Whilst gas bus exhausts are much more environmentally friendly.

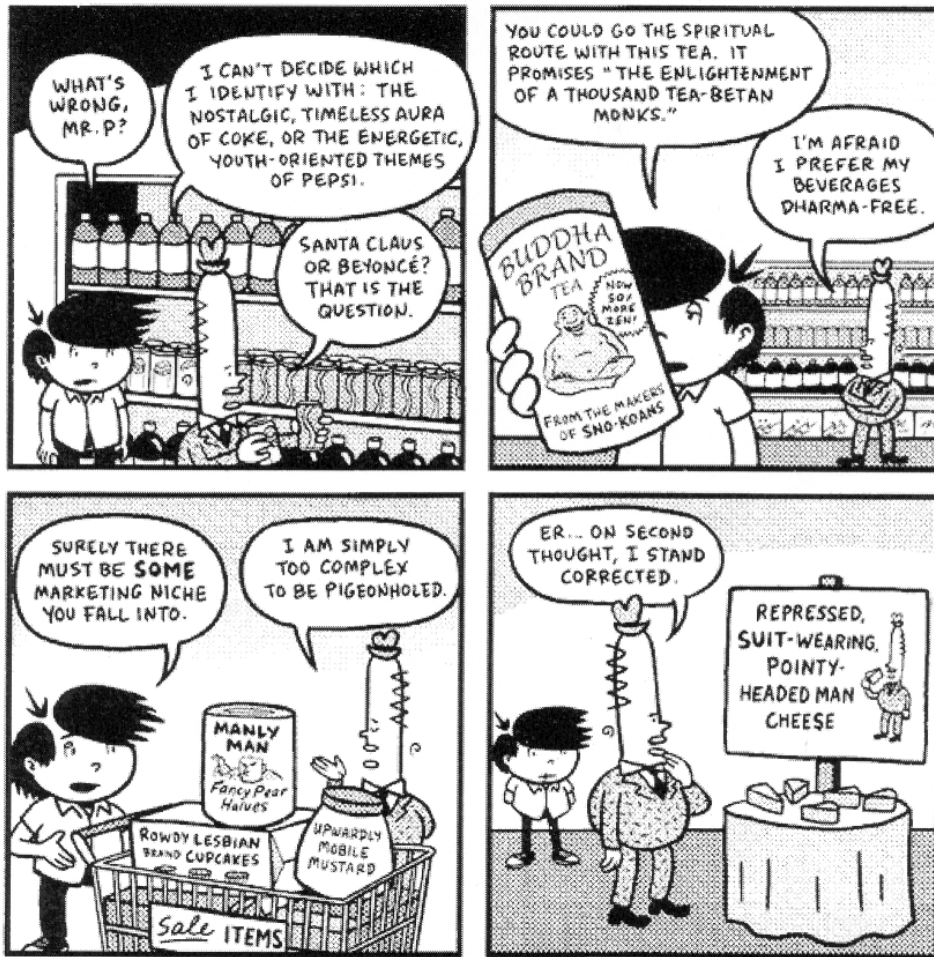
This whole approach of disregarding environmental considerations, in the interests of big business profit making and cost cutting has been a continuing feature of ALP and Lib Govt. policies over the years. One obvious case which comes to mind, is the Rightwing ALP NSW voting against container deposit legislation and the banning of plastic bags at shops. This hostility to recycling and other environmentally friendly policies, seems also about the Libs/ALP not wanting to be seen having environmental policies which have a Greens stamp upon them.

Sparks: How have the depot renovations been proceeding?

WB: Associated with the depot renovations has been the installation of a diesel fuel tank located high up with the aid of a crane. Whilst, all sheds and the admin block are being renovated. Why hasn't some of the revenue the STA has collected over the years been used to fix up the depot in the past? Has it all gone to the Govt's coffers? Why is this money being splashed out on the renovations now?

Sparks: What's the latest with STA admin. Restructuring?

WB: Heaps of inspector jobs are expected to be made redundant, resulting in some who are unsuccessful in gaining the new positions which are being created being put off the job. It just goes to show how the STA is doing things on the run. It's doing everything on the run, with-



out looking at the long term consequences of the loss of these highly experienced staff. When some crisis occurs on the job, the disastrous consequences of this approach will become clear.

Sparks: What's the latest developments with the ferries?

WB: Six months since the privatisation of the ferries, the Telegraph newspaper has been crowing about it being a success. However, there is no other ferry service in Sydney to compare its performance. Consequently, the Telegraph story can only be propaganda for big business and the Libs more aggressive pursuit of the privatisation agenda. Its claims are bogus.

Sparks: How are the bosses treating staff at the depot?

WB: Lately we have noticed them wearing rather menacing "highly polished" 3rd Reich foot ware, apparently due to the performance pressures of their contracts. Their jackboots have particularly been targeting new drivers, resulting in their high turnover at the depot.

Sparks: Is this job making you sick?

WB: It's been statistically proven that in Australia, workers productivity has increased 700% over the last 40 years. The pay of CEO's and upper management is sky rocketing. In the case of the STA CEO, Peter Rowley, he is on a contract of roughly approx. \$450,000 pa. Whilst, employers are screwing us ever more. Both husband and wife are being obliged to work for a family to make a living. Our work place rights and conditions are continuing to be eroded. According to a David Jones worker, I spoke to recently, over 90% of staff at DJ's are casuals! Is the O'Farrell Govt. happy for everyone to be casuals? Is this the capitalist work place "Utopia", which the Neo Conservative Liberals are striving for, which is confusing, undemocratic, frustrating and insecure for workers?

BURWOOD DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What's the latest at Burwood?

Burwood Driver: Recently new rosters have appeared. As they have Leichhardt Depot on them, most drivers are ignoring them. However, those who have examined them, have noticed all shifts have been trimmed back. So the changes will effectively amount to a wage cut. These rosters appear to be in line with STA plans for rosters for different districts e.g. Eastern, Northern, etc. The bosses plan to introduce these rosters, is likely to be in line with the restructure of STA administration. This restructuring which is connected to O'Farrell's public sector cuts involves the abolishing of many management jobs. The higher STA bosses appear to be resisting the loss of their jobs, through saving budget money from operations via cuts to our wages.

Other news at the depot was that on Friday 18/1/13, there were 16 buses with malfunctioning air conditioning systems, due to STA corner cutting on maintenance. Given these buses have no windows that can be manually opened, both drivers and passengers would have experienced considerable discomfort.

Sparks: What's happening with lower admin. Restructuring?

BD: There have been more requests for voluntary redundancy amongst corridor supervisors and duty officers, than there are positions being made redundant as part of the restructure. It's unclear, what will happen with those admin. Staff who want to stay on the job and are unsuccessful in winning the newly created positions.

Sparks: What's the latest with the bosses?

BD: The bosses are becoming increasingly draconian. In the depot they have put up notices, threatening drivers with disciplinary action if we don't wear the new uniform. Despite drivers having ordered the new uniform, they have still not received it. Latest, news is that the manufacturer has advised they have run out of different sizes of it. However, the manager has said this isn't an excuse. As drivers should have ordered it early. This approach doesn't make any sense to me, given the supplier doesn't have the uniforms to supply.

HAMILTON DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What's the state of the fleet at the depot?

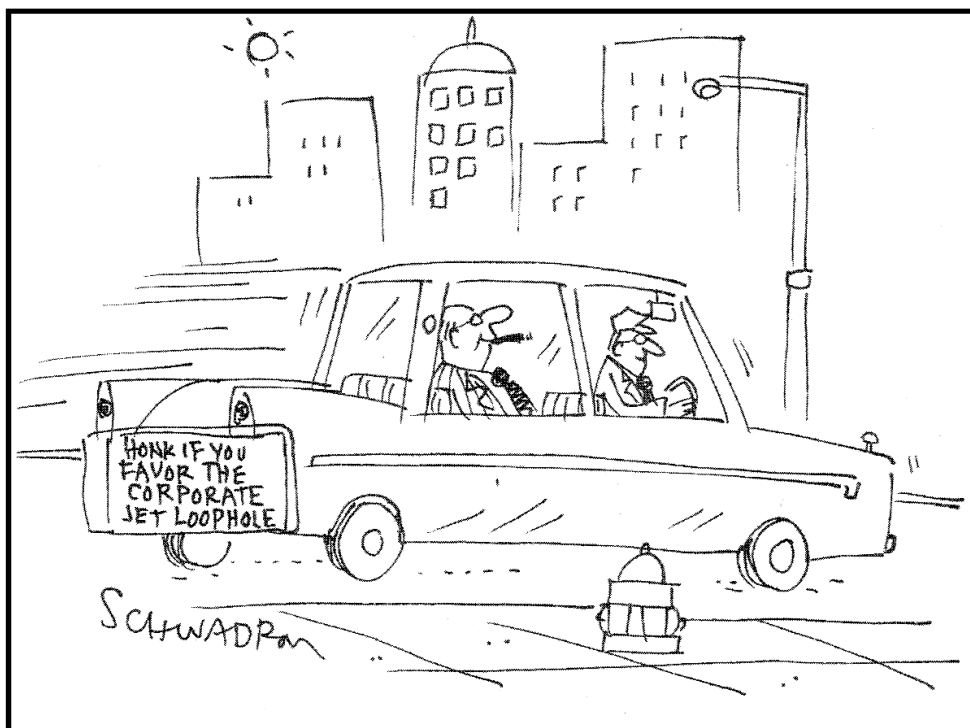
Hamilton Driver: The state of the depot fleet up here is falling into rapid decline. Often the buttons are not working and the doors malfunctioning. We have things like put "in the maintenance book", but the next time a driver get's that bus, obviously nothing has been done to repair it. I am told they have a budget for repairs and once that's exhausted, that's it. Rather than as it should be, the buses are not fixed on demand when broken as they used to be. This used to occur very occasionally in the past, but it is becoming almost a weekly occurrence now. The bosses have run these buses into the ground and replaced nothing for years and now their falling apart.

LEICHHARDT DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What's the latest news at Leichhardt?

Leichhardt Busie: The most important news lately is that the bosses have put up in the depot, new proposed rosters with major changes. Most dramatically, the rosters don't include Sundays. This work will be given to the casuals, they want to also introduce, to boost their wages. Whilst Mid days will have nearly 2/3's of their lines of work cut. These changes will mean major cuts to many drivers wages. The union has made clear that these changes won't be accepted and there will be a fight.

A possible strategy of the bosses to implement these cuts is to wait until the current EBA runs out and then try to implement the proposed rosters. Using some loophole which their lawyers



have advised them about. Whilst some drivers who consider the changes in the rosters don't affect them might vote to accept the rosters.

VICTORIAN RAILWAY NEWS

In this issue of Sparks we will discuss Privatisation of V/Line and recent management changes. Once again Head Office, Conductors, Drivers and Station Staff will discuss these ongoing issues.

Sparks: Can you tell us about a Newspaper article in the AGE for the 2/11/2012, about Privatisation of V/Line?

Clarence: It was only a rumour.

Rastus and Roscoe: We drivers heard of this rumour before the article appeared in the AGE. You see some of our Drivers who work at METRO Trains informed us that about last February, METRO Trains approached V/Line Management with an offer to take over the operation of V/Line. In return its alleged that METRO Trains offered to supply new trains without Government Finance.

Sheona: It was obvious that METRO Trains wanted V/Line trains, as they regard V/Line trains as an obstacle to METRO Trains operations, particularly in the EASTERN corridor.

Rastus: If METRO got their hands on the V/Line line operation, then they could stop trains at Pakenham and make passengers change to METRO trains. This would allow METRO to put out of existence trains using V/Line paths.

Sparks: What happened after the article appeared in the Paper?

Roscoe: As soon as the item appeared, the State Premier appeared on Media Outlets saying that V/Line would not be privatised in the foreseeable future.

Sparks: Why?

Rastus and Roscoe: You see when the Liberal/National coalition won Government in 2010, they only have a majority of one seat in Parliament.

Sheona: One of the reasons the Labor Party lost the election was train delays on METRO train services. The Liberal Party said they would fix up the Transport mess.

Jethro: Labor lost the election but with the exception of two seats lost in Rural Victoria, Labor held on to the other Rural seats, they won at the 1999 State Election. You see due to the Regional Fast Rail, major commuter lines were upgraded and extra trains were placed on these lines. In 2002 National Express packed up and handed the Franchise back to the Government. The suburban trains franchises stayed with the Private Sector and V/Line reverted to Government ownership.

Clarence: After the Regional Fast Rail Project was completed V/Line was to be franchised to the Private Sector. This never happened and it was exposed in the AGE after the state elec-



tion, that a motion had been passed at an ALP State Conference to Keep V/Line in Government hands, the AGE journalist claims this was the reason the ALP held these Rural Seats.

Rastus and Roscoe: We were at a Drivers Union meeting and the Drivers Delegate told the meeting that the STATE MINISTER OF TRANSPORT had told the RTBU officials that if Labor was re-elected, V/Line would remain in Government hands.

Sheona: This may be true, but working in Head Office, some of our STAFF are CARD CARRYING members of the LIBERAL PARTY and they like to see V/Line Privatised as this would put the Unions in line.

Rastus and Roscoe: They may want to put the Unions in line, but when Privatisation occurred in 1999, we retained all our conditions. Other State Railway employees look to Victoria and ask how when Privatised we kept our conditions.

Sheona: The reason V/Line will not be Privatised until after the 2014 STATE ELECTION is that the LIBERAL/NATIONAL Party Coalition does not hold any Lower House seats in Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo and if V/Line was franchised then Country Voters would not vote for the Coalition, thus Labor will retain these Country Seats.

Clarence: It look like V/Line won't be privatised before the STATE ELECTION, so we call all V/Line workers to go out and campaign against Privatisation via Media Outlets and talking to passengers.

Sparks: Moving on I hear the Victorian Government owns the XPT.

Rastus and Roscoe: This is correct. It was purchased by the Victorian Government in 1993, so as to replace the Sydney Melbourne Express.

Clarence: The train is in the XPT pool and is staffed by CountryLink, except for drivers who are supplied by V/Line and run the train from Melbourne to Junee. When operations commenced in 1993 V/Line employees ran the train to Albury. They lost these jobs in 1994 due to Transport Reforms of the 1990's. How V/Line lost these jobs will be discussed in a future issue of Sparks.

Rastus: In 1999 when V/Line was Privatised, an attempt was made to take V/Line drivers of the train. The drivers resisted this attempt and kept the jobs on the XPT.

Roscoe: V/Line drivers working on the XPT may be coming to an end, as there are rumours that the Victorian Government maybe going to sell the XPT, they own to CountryLink. If this sale goes ahead, the V/Line drivers running the XPT will end.

Sparks: Will the sale of the XPT be a prelude to selling CountryLink?

Rastus: Yes it is, for once the NSW Govt. get's their hands on the train, then they will be able to put CountryLink out for franchising.

Sheona: Maybe, not until after the 2015 NSW State Elections, as the NSW Govt. do not have a mandate to sell CountryLink.

Roscoe: Correct.

Sparks: I have heard there has been a management change at V/Line?

Sheona: The Chief Executive Officer Rob Barnett has resigned.

Sparks: Why?

Sheona: Yes, he has resigned, as he was told by the CEO of Public Transport Victoria to cut staff.

Clarence: Mr Barnett did bit want to terminate staff, as he has stated V/Line was a family and cutting staff would lower morale.

Sheona: The Government because it wants to keep a Budget Surplus has ordered job cuts in the Public Service. As V/Line is part of the Government, then cuts have to be made in administration staff. They say there will be no cuts to front line staff.

Rastus and Roscoe: No cuts to frontline staff. They will try to change rosters, so as to reduce the staff by making shifts longer. The cuts should be made in Human Resources. We wonder what they do. In fact over the last seven years, this department has increased at the expense of station staff.

Sparks: It is obvious V/Line is not going to be privatised before the next State Election, but there are to be job cuts. These must be resisted.

Rastus and Roscoe: In having the final say, Privatisation is asset stripping by the Government for their mates in the Private Sector. As for those employees who are card carrying members of the Liberal Party, get to your branches meeting and oppose any further privatisations. Finally, if you hear of any employee supporting Privatisation, EXPOSE THEM.

GREEK BUS NEWS

Bus Workers Fight Austerity with Direct Action!

31/1/13

Last week, workers at ETHEL - OASA (Athens' 'blue buses') decided to hold repeated 24-hour strikes until Tuesday 31 January, and then to convene a new general meeting to decide on the further action. This was in response to pay cuts and as the New Democracy-led government carried out repression of striking Metro workers, imposing martial law to force Metro workers back to the workplace or to face jail. Riot police moved against Metro workers, last Friday, violently taking over Athens' main Metro depot and strikes in solidarity with Metro workers were ruled "illegal".

The bus workers' union, with around 5000 members, the largest in public transport, last week decided on repeated 24-hour strikes, the closure of bus depots, for workers to occupy the depots, the formation of picket lines at each depot and for a march of workers and a solidarity rally with Metro workers.

In response, the government threatened to 'requisition' the bus service and if bus workers refused to work they were threatened with arrest and prosecution. The government claimed it can take this action under 2007 legislation which states that during 'severe national crisis' the State can make such 'orders'. But many legal experts and others say these powers are illegal and unconstitutional.

Despite the majority of bus workers being prepared to resist these government threats and to continue industrial action, a general meeting on Tuesday 29 January ended with a vote to end strike action – a victory for the pro-government (New Democracy and PASOK) union factions.

Below we carry an edited translation of an article by Eleni Mitsou, from the Xekinima (CWI Greece) website, which explains how the right was able to win at the bus workers' meeting and what activists need to do next.

Socialistworld.net

A general meeting (Assembly) of workers at ETHEL - OASA ("blue buses" in Athens), held on Tuesday 29 January, ended with a victory for the pro-government (New Democracy and PASOK) union factions.

This development could have been avoided if the militant factions had agreed a joint proposal, as those workers who wanted to continue strike action were greater in number.

758 employees voted in favour of the proposal of the government union factions which essentially meant to stop the strikes but 1014 voted to continue strikes. However the left was split on the issue, the vote was divided, thus allowing the right (PASOK and ND union factions) to win.

Five day strike

During the 5-day bus strike, participation on picket lines was the largest seen the industry since 1992. Many workers decided to fight to the end because they felt they could not go on with wage reduction that means they are unable to

feed their families. It was also a question of dignity. How could they face their children if they did not resist? “What will I tell my children?” said one of the drivers who took the floor during Tuesday’s meeting.

Many of the bus workers were aware that their struggle was for the whole community. Their fight could keep alive the spark that was ignited by the strike of Metro workers, spreading to other sectors, leading to a resurgence of the movement, in general.

“When I walk alone at night in the wilderness I’m afraid. If we get together, we give courage to each other,” a bus worker explained, speaking at the assembly and calling for the strike to continue despite the government ruling it and all other transport strikes as “illegal”.

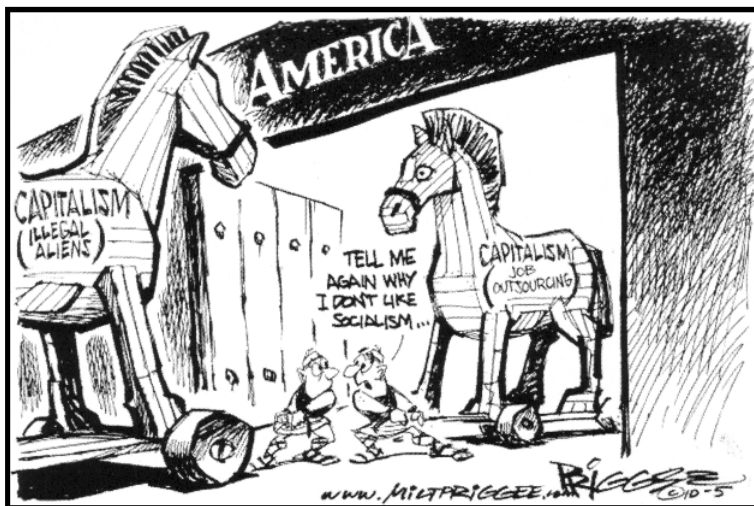
The most powerful weapon against the government’s attacks is mass action by workers. “This is the main thing” explained Apostolis Kasimeris, a Xekinima member and a member of the executive committee of the bus workers’ Union. “They cannot send 6,000 workers to prison. They cannot fire us all. And we are not alone. The Metro workers may resume protests, the dock workers are out, the sailors are planning strike action, and farmers are already taking to the streets ...”

Contrary to the call for militant action against government threats, the pro-PASOK trade union leader, N. Petropoulos, said: “The union cannot take responsibility if the government decides to order you to go to work ...I do not take responsibility ... It is a personal matter of everyone .”

Role of the mass media

The mass media – television, daily newspapers and the “official” online news agencies – recycled false news continually, seeking to break the morale of the bus strikers.

For example, the media constantly announced the suspension of strikes by different sectors of transport workers. They announced an end of a tram workers’ strike but did not report that the decision to end the strike was taken by a majority of the union leadership against the will of the



workers, who built spontaneous strike committees and kept one of the three depots completely closed, while stopping at least half of the trolleys in the other two depots departing. .

The climax of the pro-bosses' media campaign was to claim that the bus strike was over, last Tuesday, a full day before the general meeting on 29 January where the future of the strike was to be decided.

The 29 January bus workers' general meeting

The bus workers' general meeting on 29 January was the largest since 1992, when bus workers fought an historic and heroic battle against privatisation. The right wing union factions proposed a 24-hour strike on Thursday 31 January followed by another general meeting on 14 February - a full 15 days later, when the mood to struggle could have dissipated!

They argued: "If the strike continues, the government will proceed with taking emergency measures against us then we cannot hold any more strikes".

So, in essence, they proposed ending strikes to prevent the possibility of being unable to hold strikes!

Communist Party proposals

The KKE (Greek Communist Party) union faction (DAS) proposed for buses to run again on Wednesday, 30 January, (i.e. to end the strike, which was on its 5th day) in order "to prevent the government proceeding to take action" and for bus drivers to "communicate" with wider society. The KKE trade unionists argued bus workers should hold a 48-hour strike on Thursday 31 January and Friday 1 February, and hold a new general meeting on the second day of strike action. They also put forward a series of other demands and called for a 24-hour general strike by the KKE-linked GSEE union federation, covering the entire transport industry, if the government took action against the bus workers.

But the proposal for bus workers to return to work on Wednesday, breaking the 24-hour repeated strikes, did not actually offer any protection from the government taking action. While the call to the GSEE to take wider action was not, in itself, wrong, as it posed the GSEE's responsibilities, it did not offer practical protection for workers from sackings, given the role of the GSEE leadership.

Anexartiti Paremvasi

'Anexartiti Paremvasi ('Independent Intervention'), the union faction in which Xekinima (CWI Greece) plays a leading role, called for the continuation of repeated 24-hour strikes and for a new general meeting this coming Friday. They argued that the only real protection from sackings or arrest is to build decisive mass workers' action.

"Why have we built this union? It is for situations like the present one. Otherwise we become just a cultural association. Unions mean mass strength. So we have to use this mass strength to fight", a spokesman for the Anexartiti Paremvasi told Tuesday's bus workers' assembly.

The same proposal was made by EAS (linked to ANTARSYA (anti-capitalist left)) and some other smaller union factions.

Communist faction refuses to co-operate with rest of the Left

The day before the general meeting, the Anexartiti Paremvasi (AP) tried to persuade the KKE (communist party) faction (DAS) to agree to a common left position to present to the bus workers' assembly, and even offered a compromise proposal around which to unite the left.

However, the DAS did not accept the proposal and decided to press ahead and put its own flawed position to the meeting, justifying its position on the basis that the CP is a mass party, whereas AP and EAS represent much smaller forces.

This is why the right wing (the joint proposal from the PASOK and ND union factions) got 758 votes, the DAS got 586 and the proposal to continue the 24-hour repeated strikes got 428 votes.

The initial vote was by a show of hands but the outcome could not be decided because the meeting was so big, with many workers outside the meeting hall. So it was decided to hold the vote by ballot.

The show of hands had made clear that to defeat the right wing the whole of the left vote was required. On this basis, the AP and EAS stated that they would withdraw their proposal and would vote for the CP proposal (which at least promised more strike action that could be built on). But the union right wing bureaucracy claimed that this was against the union statutes and refused to accept the AP/EAS proposal.

Many workers were disgusted. They could see the strike breaking role of the majority of the leadership of the union. Workers could see that the left remained divided despite the critical importance of this battle. The right wing was delaying things, as much as possible, to wear down the workers. The final number of workers who took part in the voting was much smaller than those taking part in the proceedings.

So, despite the fact that a clear majority of bus workers voted for more strike action, the votes were split and the right won.

Important lessons

Many bus workers will draw important lessons from this outcome. They see how unscrupulous and openly treacherous the pro-governmental union factions are. Lessons need to be drawn from the conclusion of the bus workers' meeting. The union must pass into the democratic control of the rank and file and away from the bureaucratic grip of the pro-government union factions.

Over the past few days, the Athens bus workers acted as a catalyst to a new wave of struggles, particularly after the "militarisation" of the Metro workers. They had the potential to unite around them the shipyards, the maritime workers, electricity, health and education workers, who are planning new strike actions, and last but not least the farmers who are also taking action. But, once again, the potential to widen this action was defeated "from the inside". This was primarily due to the treacherous role of the pro-government unions but also because of the inability of the Left to fight in a united manner against the Right. The responsibility for this lies squarely with the sectarian splitting tactics of the KKE leadership, which have caused immeasurable damage to the struggles of the Greek working class in recent years.

What is Democratic Unionism?

Democratic Unionism means grass roots controlled unionism, not control by officials. It also means that workers in one industry should be in one union so as to remove artificial divisions that can cause disunity. Such a union should be fully organised and controlled by the membership.

To achieve this we believe a union should be organised along the following lines:

1. That no person employed by the union should earn more than the average income of the membership.
2. The Spokespeople should have no executive power - all decisions should be made by the union membership in the course of mass meetings.
3. Spokespeople are only to act as delegates elected by the membership to carry out decisions made by the membership in mass meetings.
4. That a mechanism is instituted for the instant recall of spokespeople/delegates who break the above rules.
5. That all positions within the union be held on a limited tenure, the duration of which will be decided by the membership.
6. That a programme of decentralised decision-making be implemented within the union structure, so that we won't need full time officials.
7. All loss of earnings incurred by elected delegates who miss work as a result of carrying out union duties will be reimbursed by the union to the extent of the lost wages.

Only in this way will we see the creation of a democratic, united, fighting organisation which can stand up for the rights of workers and their families against unhelpful union officials, bosses, political parties and governments.

MEMBERS' VOICE - GRASS ROOTS MOVEMENT CAMPAIGNING FOR MEMBERSHIP CONTROL OF THE RTBU & DIRECT ACTION

Email: membersvoice2010@yahoo.com

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Twitter: twitter.com/membersvoice

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Democratic