

No.151

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# Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

**WHILE ALP UNION HIERARCHY SITS ON THE FENCE, STA BOSSES PUT THE JACK BOOT IN WITH A NEW DRACONIAN DISCIPLINE REGIME. ONLY DIRECT ACTION CAN PUT SANITY INTO THE JOB!**



NSW Rail News;

STA Busie News;

International News;

WestConnex Meeting;

Union Elections Report;

Vic. Rail News

Sabotaging the sabotage;

Letter;

## **EDITORIAL**

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

Some of the most important news has been the union elections held late last year. It was characterised by the typical rotting of the ALP union hierarchy. The AEC (Australian Electoral Commission) officials also got heavily into the act. Brazenly throwing out the window, the AEC's charter, which commits it to the running of elections in the interests of voters and transparency. Secret ballot counting meetings occurred, despite the supposed AEC policy that all candidates can have scrutineers attending ballot counts. Why is this occurring? It engaged in the brazen sabotage of the campaigns of candidates opposed to the ALP machine, in particular Members' Voice. The strong likelihood of "spook involvement" in the outcome should also be taken into account. (See article Page 3.)

A new wave of attacks have been launched by the bosses in the NSW Railways, particularly targeting station staff. Whilst lack of consultation with those on the front lines, by the bosses in regard to their reform programs implementation continues. Staff are also to be targeted for a new unnecessary Drug and Alcohol Testing program. Members Voice, rank and file group which is pushing for membership control of the union and direct action is organising meetings shortly to wage a campaign to fight back. (See article Page 4.)

In the STA, management continues to wave the "pressure hammer". Resulting in an ever more draconian discipline regime. With Depot Admin. "Hitler Youth" and managers seizing every opportunity for fitting drivers up for the sack and pay cuts. Whilst it continues to pursue a tight fist approach to the supply of extra buses on runs in the event of emergencies and busy periods. Some positive news has been the hostile reception given to the union officials when they attended a union meeting at Waverley Depot in late Feb and were forced to leave the meeting! (See article Page 10.)



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

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## Union Elections and Thank You's

**Since this is the first edition of Sparks since the end of last year and after the National Rail Tram and Bus Union Elections anything that we have to say is possibly late and well after the fact. We are not paid for what we do and the work that we do here and on the job is done in any spare time that we have.**

We cannot hide our disappointment at the result where Members Voice Candidates standing for union positions were not successful. We had a different vision to the one that is currently being offered. Unfortunately all spoils go to the winners.

We do not want to sound like sore losers, however there are many things which we could have done better. Hopefully these issues will be discussed at the next M.V. meeting. There are valuable lessons learned from the last election which we hope to apply in 4 years time. We also do not want to become just an electoral machine. We need to create and take part in solidarity actions where we can.

Of concern to all unionists is the very small voter turnout in the elections. It means that members are not engaging in the process for some reason or other. In some ballots people were elected on less than 10% of the vote. We don't have a very healthy union if members do not engage with the issues or they remain disinterested. The reasons for this are pretty clear.

There were a large number of anomalies reported to the A.E.C., who conducted the election. Some of the glaring inconsistencies included, but are not limited to:

- \* Incumbent candidates using the Union logo on flags in photo's for the "How to Vote" brochures.

- \* Delays in delivering the electoral roll. One candidate did not receive the electoral roll till after the ballot had commenced.

- \* Omissions from the electoral roll received from the AEC, including missing post codes etc.

- \* Numbers on the electoral roll not tallying with the final voting figures.

- \* Vote farming by paid organisers or their cronies on the job. In some cases organisers arranged for third parties to harass union members for their ballot papers. This is a misuse of union funds.



***"I have every faith in the postal voting for the union elections run by the AEC. It couldn't possibly be involved in rorting the ballot in cahoots with the union hierarchy and ASIO. That would be illegal!"***

\* Sample ballot papers supplied by the A.E.C. for the NSW Secretary's position contained the wrong voting instructions and procedure.

We would like to thank all those that supported our campaign, especially those that contributed their efforts for a change of direction within the union. Congratulations to all the new office holders in the union. Commiserations to all those people who put their efforts into achieving a different result and placing some hope in the future. Unfortunately we must work harder and more skilfully if we are to turn things around. Our aim must be to create hope where there is now is none.

## N.S.W. RAILWAY NEWS

### **Sabotaging the sabotage.**

*By Crimson Coconut.*

**Just this week a Sydney Trains staff publicity news sheet arrived in the letterbox of rail staff. Included was a card that encouraged people to nominate other employees for Excellence Awards. The blurb on the card went something like this. "At Sydney Trains we believe in recognizing the outstanding commitment of our people".**

This would have been good if it were true! However, staff no longer believe the management hype.

Not long ago the Transport Minister also said that "no front line staff would be lost" under her reform program.

However there has been a gradually whittling away of jobs at the coal face. Surely, Station Managers, Transit Officers, Cleaners, Booking Office Staff, CSA's, Maintenance Staff, Roster Clerks, Station Support Officers, Information Staff, and many others are front line staff.

Where does the Front Line begin and end? There seems to be no end in sight to the jobs shrinkage that is taking place. Everyone is on edge, employees no longer trust management as their promises have proven to be worthless.

The introduction of disruptive work practices has gone hand in hand with the job losses.

One big bone of contention is the requirement imposed on staff to stand for the full 8 or 12 hour of shift. Seats at the ticket barriers were removed. In some instances these shifts have been broken up into 4 hr blocks involving different tasks. This has caused a great deal of hardship for the staff involved, especially older workers who are suffering under this new punitive regime. However policies such as these will affect everyone in the long term.

The health effects of long term standing are well documented yet staff are enduring lower back pain and leg pain and a plethora of other ailments. These issues have been presented to the Unions by members but have been brushed aside as a non-issues after a series of risk as-

assessments run by management in conjunction with Health and Safety Representative and union delegates.

The situation got so bad recently that union members faxed through a letter threatening to resign from the union because it was seen as not being able to assist members. The leadership was nei-

ther willing nor able to win such a simple argument based on the health and welfare of its members. The sentiment in the faxed memo expressed the view that there was no longer any reason to belong to the union if the union leadership continually failed to support its membership over such a cut and dried case of health and safety. Nobody actually has resigned at this stage and the leadership could not have cared less. They did get a couple of organisers briefly involved, however they soon put up the “business as usual” white flag.

There was contemplation of a walk out by staff at one stage, which, while risky, was one way to resolve the push by management to make people stand unnecessarily. The Union organisers were asked if they would back up staff if they decided to walk. They refused, citing the old adages of not wanting to go to gaol for anyone, or not wanting to lose their houses. This was the final nail in the coffin for wildcat action. In the current climate management may have relished such an idea and there was a failure to get the required numbers to be effective. Without the union leadership’s support it would have been difficult to rally the train crews behind the cause. Having them onside is essential, due to their ability to cripple the rail network by withdrawing their labour.

Similar see-sawing games took place over the removal of orange safety vests from station staff. The vests supposedly make station staff more visible to train crews. They were first removed by management. Staff were then told that they were to wear the vests while the issue was being disputed by the unions. Finally the union agreed to a 6 week trial of staff not wearing the vest. Effectively this is tacit approval for management to go ahead without a risk assessment being performed before the changed method of working. It is not likely that staff will be wearing the safety vest after the 6 week trial period.

Likewise the proposed replacement for random urine testing for drugs and alcohol by the use of mouth swabs is to be introduced in a most peculiar fashion. To test the efficacy of the new method 1500 staff will undergo simultaneous urine and swab testing. The union’s agreement to go ahead with this ridiculous plan effectively makes members nothing more than lab



guinea pigs for the new testing procedure. Why do we need such a large sample of 1500 staff members to be tested when the swab technique has been thoroughly tested and documented? It would be easy to understand if the sample was 100 people or so, but 1500 sounds like over-kill.

Numerous studies already exist and this data is readily accessible. Why would NSW transport spend such large sums of money on comparisons of the two test methods? It cannot be justified.

The neo-liberal agenda that is being rolled out across public transport is chaotic and illogical. It's as if the NSW Government and its Transport Managers are sabotaging the whole rail network. The cutting of the Newcastle line is a good indicator of the vandalism that they are capable of.

Reform programs are being rolled out end to end. Many of the newly implemented plans are either incomplete or are unworkable. With each process there has been insufficient or no consultation with the affected stakeholders. i.e. those working on the front lines. From new rostering procedures, to cleaning, to issues with the Opal Card, management has a determination to push ahead despite the outcry from staff and the public. The government just steam rolls ahead with their flat earth policy. They have never revealed their vision of the future, however most staff believe that they are not part of that vision.

Staff, most of whom are union members, are more than demoralised, they are completely disillusioned. Gone are the days of consultation. It has now been replaced with the pig headed and poorly thought-out policies of the new business managers who refuse to budge on even the most miniscule stupidity. "Do it, or else" is the new attitude from management, and they mean it.

Partly this deliberate demoralisation is used to break down solidarity within and amongst transport workers. It is just as effective as having part time workers pitted against full time workers.

Because we are not united, despite some valiant efforts to unite staff, they are able to drive their agenda without much resistance. The long term ultimate aim of the Baird Government is the privatisation of everything that moves. Trains, buses, ferries, property, the whole box and dice is up for grabs. Before selling off the public silverware they are targeting the workforce with new work practices and they seem to be moving towards having a small pool of employees that would make these businesses attractive to investors. A pipe dream really, but they (the government) believe in it.

Despite the utter disgust of most union members their union leadership fails to organise or mobilise any full scale resistance to what is a full onslaught on the workforce. Their record is not impressive. As railway management has worked its way down through the layers from senior management to those at the front lines there has not been any effective campaign from the union leadership to stop the haemorrhage of jobs down through the ranks. They have never and will never organise or support democratic efforts of resistance from the shop floor. Those that have illusions in being rescued by the union hierarchy need to examine their recent record.

So what are we to do? There is only one solution. We need to start immediately organising our own forces into a cohesive and united industrial resistance. This is not something that we do lightly, as we have never advocated in the past for such a bold move. We believe that there is more strength in us all being under one fighting and united force. When that is not possible should we just roll over and give up? No way Jose'.

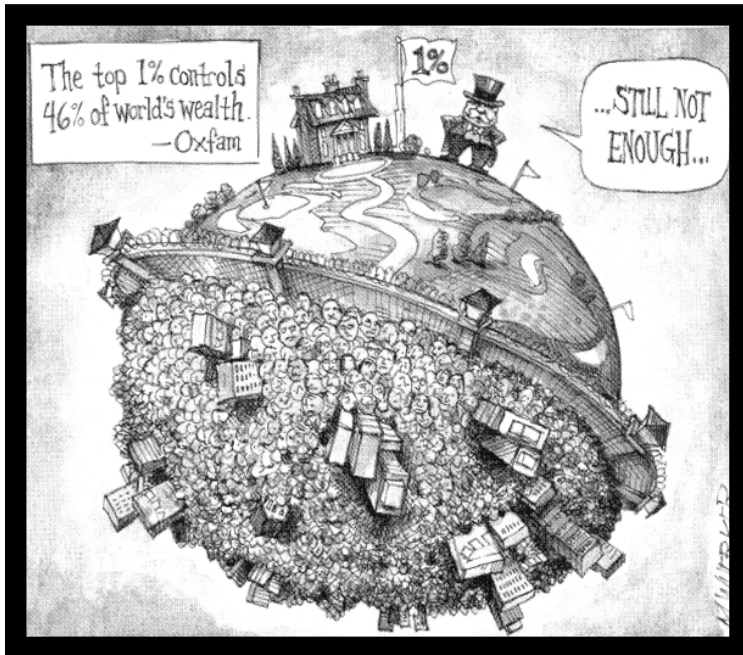
Recent events have become so dire on the job that we can no longer stand idly by while the attacks from management and this government reign down on our heads. Almost every worker is fed up and at breaking point. The truth is that we can longer rely on the union when our backs are to the wall, but we must come out fighting. It's getting to the point where we have very little to lose. We can and must organise a fight back.

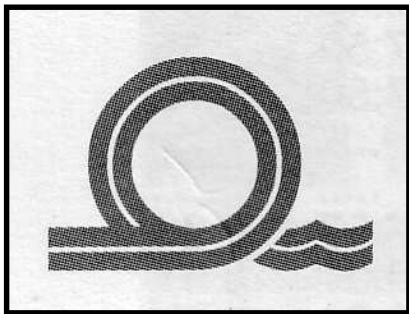
Member's Voice is planning to hold a series of open meetings for which we have not finalised dates and venues. We hope to meet with other public transport workers in NSW who share our vision and who are interested in joining with us to try and work out solutions to the current impasse. We will be attempting to build a united fight back against privatisation and attacks on the public transport workforce. If you are interested

we suggest that you drop us a note on the Members Voice Facebook page or send messages to our email address: [membersvoice2010@yahoo.com](mailto:membersvoice2010@yahoo.com)

I was asking around Sydney Trains whether anyone had received the latest propaganda sheet in their home mailboxes. A common reply was, "I gave up reading this bullshit years ago". Such is the contempt and disregard for the management of Sydney Trains and possibly NSW Trains. Yet management continue to churn out this optimistic tripe while reality moves in the opposite direction.

Please keep your eyes out for the dates and venues for our meetings.



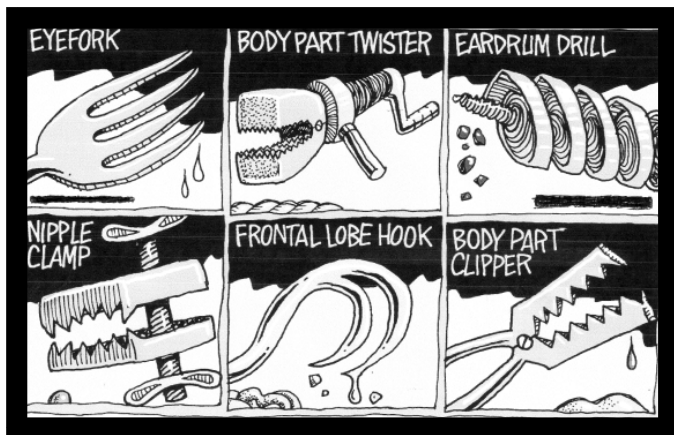


## **“RAMBO” – A STATE TRANSIT REMAKE COSTING MILLIONS!**

Our mole in ASIO had woken bleary eyed after a hard night partying with ALP Godfathers, faceless Transport For NSW Bureaucrats, the union hierarchy, STA CEO Peter Rowley, sleek railway fat cats, AEC (Australian Election Commission) officials, Transport Minister Berejiklian and his CIA “Opposite Number”. They were celebrating the rorting of the recent union elections. Our mole was seizing the opportunity to discretely eavesdrop with the aid of a concealed bugging device on their conversations during the festivities for an upcoming Sparks and Wikileaks expose’.

Today, our mole was on his way again for more “spying in the bosses ‘ office”. He was attending a special conference at the Transport Ministry offices. It was to be addressed by none other than STA CEO Rowley. It was all about hitting drivers harder with the pressure hammer to further cut costs. Particularly focusing on the role of “interrogation techniques”. When he arrived at the venue, our mole was surprised to see

spooks from MOSSAD, which is renowned for its interrogation tactics. Also in attendance were the union hierarchy, the Transport Minister, depot managers and a posse of some “all fired up” young blokes - apparently, ex-SAS, trainee Depot Admin. Staff, sporting highly polished, menacing 3rd Reich jack boots.



*Some of CEO Rowley’s “expensive, new high tech gadgets” to be used when called into the office for a cosy little chat by his gangs of “Rambo” managers and Depot Admin. Hitler Youth.*

Rowley was met with thunderous applause from the audience and cries of “Heil Rowley!” He was all steamed up and in his element. He proceeded to give the low down on his master plan with relish. He outlined how the Minister, together with certain faceless Transport for NSW bureaucrats, wanted a more austere STA, more tempting for corporate cowboys and he was delighted to achieve it. He then outlined how there were to be new infrastructure and equipment costing millions for each depot to facilitate the interrogations of drivers. Water tanks were to be installed for some “Guantanamo Bay” style water boarding. Dental drills, meat hooks, thumb screws and other exotic paraphernalia would also prove handy in cosy, little chats in the office with drivers. Rowley assured the audience it would be money well spent and gave a sly wink to the Transport Minister, in Tony Abbott style!

Rowley continued, “To help compensate for this very necessary expenditure and curb unwelcome “fraternising amongst drivers”, air conditioning and all chairs will be removed from meal rooms! Every dollar counts!”

In Joe Hockey mode, Rowley then produced a barrage of graphs and charts showing an imaginary STA and Railways budget blowout. Then bizarrely Rowley flashed up, a picture of “Rambo” of the notorious American movie of the early 1980’s. Apparently a great inspiration to Rowley in his “gung ho, shoot from the hip” management style. Rowley incited the depot managers and the trainee “Hitler Youth” in the audience to be always on the move to “Cut! Cut! Cut!” “Always have your fingers twitching and ready to pull the trigger” and “Put the jack boot in”, when drivers are called into the office. Turn your bullying technique into an art form!” He foamed at the mouth!

Rowley “helpfully” suggested, “At least six of you “Rambo” managers and depot admin. staff, gang up on each driver called into the office. Feel free to play some “Russian Roulette” like in the “Deer Hunter” movie. Present the driver with the option of overwork to meet cost saving requirements or get the sack!”

Rowley promised large bonuses for staff responsible for long time drivers successfully sacked. Whilst he advised, our “spook friends” from MOSSAD would also be attending the sessions, to provide expert advice.

The union officials in the audience excited by Rowley’s inspiring spiel, suddenly piped up and jumped out of their seats. They assured Rowley, they were only too willing to “rollover” and would put out the word to the union reps to hose down any grass roots resistance to this vicious onslaught.

The conference ended, with Rowley beaming with adulation and the loud rhythmic tramping of the goose stepping jackboots of the “Hitler Youth” and depot bosses. They were all yelling “Heil Rowley!” and paraded in formation past him and the Transport Minister, with the “creeping Jesuses” of the union bosses coming up the rear.

Our mole was angered by Rowley’s mean spiritedness, the futility of the entire proceedings and his arrogance.

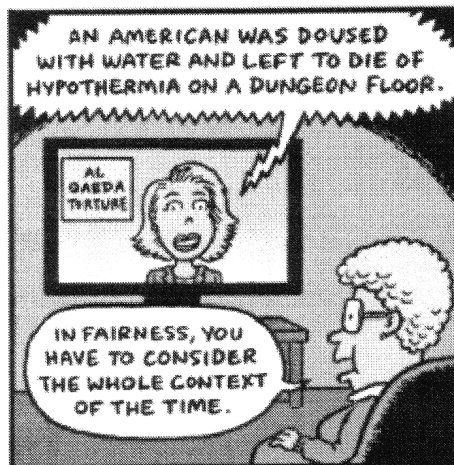
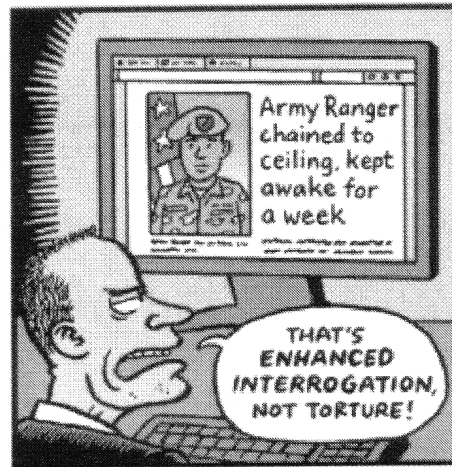
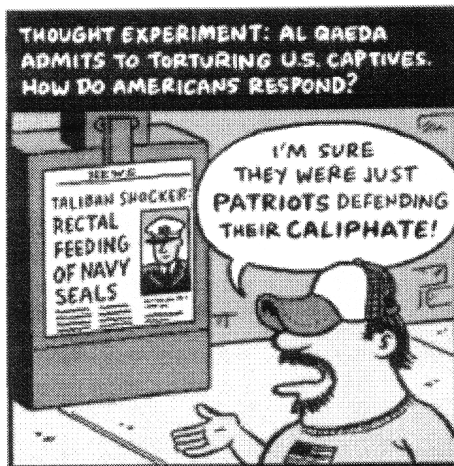
We appeal to the grass roots to rise up against this tyranny! Only with union meetings held to impose bans on “going into the office” and any other forms of direct action can we stymie this management mayhem and the chaos and senseless destruction its wreaking!

# S.T.A. BUSIE NEWS

## WAVERLEY DEPOT NEWS

**Sparks:** What are the latest developments with the tramway extensions?

Waverley Busie: In early January, there was a tremendous blockage of traffic in the city, caused by preparation work associated with the tramway extension construction. The whole city was held to ransom. The level of chaos was unbelievable. Many drivers tempers were fraught.



Why do we need these extensions? In my view if we needed the tramway, it would have been installed years ago. In regard to the extensions in the Eastern Suburbs, over 200 bus driver jobs will be lost from the combined workforces of the three eastern depots. As a result of the extensive trees destruction associated with the extensions in this area, I'm sure there will be major protests by local residents. This latest debacle with the tramway extensions in the city, again shows the short sightedness of the Liberal Government. Eighteen years ago, when the Liberals were in power in NSW and when the M2 was first put up, they refused to consider the option of an O-Bahn, like exists in Adelaide. It would have been a means of reducing traffic congestion in the city and increasing the flow of vehicles. Today, with the construction of the West Connex, more traffic will be spewed out in Newtown and other suburbs. Obviously greed plays a role in the Liberals thinking.

**Sparks: What have been your impressions of STA management under the Liberals?**

WB: To save money, they are putting pressure on everyone. I believe in the case of their push to get rid of a certain percentage of older drivers or at least reduce their wages for 6 months, for each scalp, managers are being rewarded. This is a false profit. The lack of experienced older drivers will just rebound on the bosses. We are being forced to survive in an environment of confusion. As we have seen lately with the tramway extensions chaos. Lately I have heard that Waverley is regarded as notorious for the most authoritarian bosses. However, I believe all depots have some of them. They don't respect drivers and are not thoroughly investigating incidents on the road, before calling drivers into the office. Whilst increased demands are being put on us.

In the STA hierarchy under the Liberals, there are no mates. You can't trust the bosses. They may seem to be nice today. However, tomorrow, when you are called into the office, you can't be sure whether you still have a job. A very much "Us" and "Them" situation exists. They are seeking to screw as many drivers as they can. At Waverley, I've noticed this attitude amongst the new young guys in the Depot Admin. Some of them, seem to be trying to make a name of themselves with their displays of gung ho-ness.

One area I have noticed where the bosses at Waverley are screwing drivers is on the issue of missed runs. In recent years, in the case of a missed run, the STA would be fined \$2,000 per run. This system has been deleted with us. Now the bosses are putting the responsibility on drivers to avoid these fines. They have toughened their stance on the issue and are demanding a more rigid compliance. Some drivers take this push to heart and together with the traffic congestion particularly in the Eastern Suburbs, which causes a mire on roads and extra work they are facing with the Opals malfunctioning, which the bosses now say, we are required to manually correct, they are being pushed into the pressure cooker. Consequently, they are completely exhausted after their shifts. Whilst, those who don't take the avoidance of missed runs push, very seriously and don't ring the radio room when they are likely to miss a run, are being drawn into the office interrogations over the issue. In this way they are also facing more pressure.

Rarely is there WAD on your shift and you are lucky if you have 5 or 8 minutes layover at the end of a run. At a recent Opal training course I attended, the bosses even admitted that they were unable to screw anymore savings from us and the whole push is backfiring on them.

In late February, I heard of an extremely grotesque example of the bosses' corner cutting in the provision of buses and its fallout for commuters. It was a very hot day, and a driver on a bus which was purposely built to have air conditioning as there were no windows to open, rang the radio room that the air conditioning had failed. He pleaded with the radio room, to supply a replacement bus, as it was extremely hot in the bus and there were babies on board, who couldn't cope and were crying. Years ago, a replacement bus would have been supplied without any fuss, but now he was told to just keep operating with the bus on his normal runs! The driver stood his ground, and the bosses agreed to supply a replacement. These days you have to stand your ground to get any action from the bosses. Isn't this saying something about the fallout of the draconian approach of the bosses?

Those drivers who have been on the job for many years are feeling the pinch and say they can't cope. Whilst, even new drivers who had worse jobs such as factory jobs, are now saying that the job is even worse.

## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



This new system follows from “Optimisation” and the lateness crackdown. Both “pushes” put more stress on drivers and encourage the making of mistakes, which the bosses could seize upon for a disciplinary dividend. Resulting in some drivers getting the sack. The bosses often have the approach, when they call you into the office over an incident, that you are assumed to be guilty and that you have to prove your innocence. Whilst incidents, which would have been ignored in the past, are now focused upon intensely by the bosses so as to build a case to issue an E1.

Another area, where the bosses are screwing us and commuters, is in regard to expenditure on extra buses for runs. According to a bloke in driver training, the bosses have a very limited pool of money for the supply of extra buses. Only in the case of the Bondi Beach service when increased demand occurs, will extra buses be provided. The bosses with this tight fist approach to expenditure are acting like the President of Indonesia, who seems determined to execute those blokes, no matter the consequences. He also mentioned there is a very high turnover of drivers, and constant driver shortage due to the draconian disciplinary regime in the buses and all the cutbacks by the bosses.

Since the recent elections, the same the union officials have returned to office. In regard to the management onslaught, they continue to be sitting on the fence and doing little to assist us to fight it! They are on notice from us, that they must be doing their job! I have noticed that definitely they don’t have the right stuff to assist us to stand up to an ambitious Liberal Government desperate to fill its coffers.

Another aspect of the current management under the Liberals, is that they don’t know how to work with people. They are just trying to put us under increased pressure and resorting to the fear hammer. This is no way to treat drivers and workers in any other Government Dept or business.

I’ve worked on this job for over 30 years and I have never seen before this wildest form of management. There is very limited communication with management. Their approach is that you are to do, what they tell you. You can provide feedback to them, but no action is taken by them on the matter.

### **Sparks: What’s happening in other industries with this neo-liberal management rampage?**

WB: My wife who works for a govt. service, has noticed that the workers there are also feeling the pinch of the Liberal’s neo liberal agenda. Out of the blue, the long time highly experienced boss was replaced by a new inexperienced, but highly paid “gung ho” manager. She has been taking a very heavy handed approach to running the service and chopping back everything she can. Whilst workers who weren’t doing their jobs were sacked, others who were doing their work properly have had the wind put up them.

In the STA, I have noticed a similar push under the Liberals to get rid of the good staff who had appropriate training and experience. With the removal of most inspectors, now at the Bondi Junction Interchange, I have noticed buses being parked all over the place steadily creeping in. Only the other day I have noticed 2 buses parked in the drop off area, on the Eastern Side under the cover. No one seems to worry about it. No one is doing the job the inspectors per-

formed of controlling what's happening and clearing these areas. Whilst, the other day I walked inside the glassed area of the Interchange and was gobsmacked to be approached by 4 commuters wanting bus information. I won't be walking into there again! In the past inspectors would be walking around in that area, and commuters could approach them for information. Now only occasionally do we see some police and security guards. On the road, again in the case of problems, we have no inspectors to contact and have to call the radio room. The STA is being run on the smell of an oily rag.

**Sparks: What are views on the defeat of the Liberal Government in the Qld Elections?**

WB: Campbell Newman the Liberal Premier was ex-army with military training. His "short cuts" approach to governing involved cutbacks to many areas to save money and the selling off of Govt. assets to raise money has rebounded on the Liberals with this massive electoral loss.

In the case of the buses in NSW we see similar Liberal "short cuts". I noticed in the public transport news sections of a recent edition of the MX newspaper, the Liberal NSW Govt. is expected to spend approx. \$92 million for new buses for Hills Buses in the North Western suburbs. How many buses can you buy with this and how many new services can these buses provide? However, at Waverley we have recently received just one of the brand new short buses. Whilst, much of our fleet consists of buses on their last legs. This short sighted approach has manifested recently throughout the STA with the terrorism paranoia security crack down at depots. Now only the union and certain individuals are allowed access. As a result, outside organisations which help us out, such as the Encompass Credit Union are being denied access. It's likely this shortcut will result in reduced funding by this organisation to sporting groups at depots. Already we have been hard hit by previous short cuts in the case of the sacking of auxiliary staff which supplied uniform clothes, mechanics and inspectors.

**Sparks: What are the latest developments with the Baird Government?**

WB: As a ploy to raise more revenue, the Govt. is demanding we pay \$80 every 5 years as we are "involved with children". As a result, a wide range of workers in NSW who may only have minimal contact with children such as fire brigade workers who occasionally visit schools, will be drawn into the net. The basis for the charge is completely bogus and ambiguous.

In the case of medical professionals like Doctors and Nurses who in their work, have to physically interact with children. They are certainly involved with children. However, all we do in our jobs, is to pick them up in our bus. If a complaint comes about you harming children, the police are obliged to check into the matter. It's likely only a handful of people would face such complaints. So far, the union hierarchy's "legalistic approach" involving a court case has been ineffective in halting it. With the wide sweep of the charge, the Government could gain initially over 5 years, extra revenue of many, many millions. However, with more workers employed in affected sectors, the Govt. will make even more revenue. Following paying the \$80, we will presumably be issued with a certificate. Will it be transferable to other jobs? Will it be binding? What does the Govt. want from it? I don't see any advantage for us with it. Will it protect you if there is a complaint about you in regard to children on your bus and the whole thing goes to Court or will it count against you in Court? Conveniently, we will be required to have the certificate and have paid the charge by the day before the NSW State election at the

of March, if we are to continue driving buses. Latest news is that there is a long list of drivers who won't pay the bogus charge at the depot. Will they be taken off the job over lacking this certificate, despite having licences to drive buses?

**Sparks: What's the latest with employment prospects in the STA?**

WB: I was recently speaking to someone who had previously worked for a company in a contract situation with the STA and had been laid off. He had knowledge of the structure of the bus driver job and was now looking for employment as a driver in the organisation. He mentioned that he was recently checking the STA website and noticed only part time casual work of 20 hours per week shifts were on offer. Due to the unacceptably low wages, he was unwilling to apply for the job. Interestingly, I have noticed all new drivers are put on full time work, despite the STA's website still only showing only part time employment being available. Again we see a case of confusion and misinformation by the Government. A similar pattern of confusion is occurring in other Govt. Depts., such as the TAFE, where workers are also very unclear on aspects of their jobs. Like the Campbell Newman Government, the Liberals in NSW are showing they are not up front.

Gladys Berejokian you are a joke. A disgrace to the people of NSW. You are screwing every worker in the State. You are a disgrace to everyone under you.

## **BURWOOD DEPOT NEWS**

**Sparks: What's the situation with part time work at Burwood?**

Burwood Driver: I've noticed many drivers queuing up to take it on, if the shift is right for them. They are willing to accept the cut in pay. Encouraging this attitude has been its voluntary nature. If it had been compulsory, I'm sure they would have resisted the push. Another factor encouraging, this acceptance of part time work amongst some, has been the general dislike of the union, due to its ineffectual role in assisting us in the fight against the bosses. It had been taking a "legalistic approach" in the form of a court case to oppose the taking up of part time work.

**Sparks: What is the situation with missed runs?**

BD: I haven't noticed any new major push by management to pressure drivers to do them. However, I have noticed AM drivers during meal breaks are often approached to do overtime, on a voluntary basis.

**Sparks: How are you finding the Opal system?**

BD: We are continuing to have serious problems with them. I estimate that roughly 20% of the fleet have malfunctioning Opals. Despite having visits to the depot from the Opal Tech, the problems just continue. Lately, I have observed only rarely, trouble with the paper tickets for the green machines. Latest news with the Opals is that the bosses have put up a printout in the depot showing 30 procedures for drivers to manually fix up Opal malfunctions. It's certainly an admission of failure by the bosses with the Opals.

## LEICHHARDT DEPOT NEWS

### **Sparks: What's the latest on the road?**

Leichhardt Busie: In early January the major concern to us was diversions associated with the construction of the tramway extensions down George St. On the morning of 5/1/15, there was TV coverage of massive queues of buses over the Harbour Bridge. There were reports of commuters waiting up to 3 hours for a bus. Whilst the diversion down Elizabeth Street to the Quay has effectively become a parking lot. We were in a quiet period at that time. It's likely to be bedlam when schools and workplaces reopened after holidays in Feb. It just goes to show the lack of foresight and planning by the bosses and the Transport Dept. What needs to be done to remove cars from the city is a tax imposed on all cars going into the City. However, no one wants to take responsibility. So the current traffic congestion continues and will worsen.

### **Sparks: There have been reports elsewhere of a new push by the bosses to increase pressure on drivers to avoid missed runs. What is the situation at Leichhardt?**

LB: I haven't heard of such a more rigid approach by the bosses on the issue at Leichhardt. There continues to be a shortage of drivers, with trainees constantly coming and going. It wouldn't work here, as we are just too exhausted at the end of our shifts just doing what we can do. During the holiday period, we have been able to cope with the timetables, now it's a return to the normal shambles. We have no time!

## VICTORIAN RAILWAY NEWS

*In the last issue of Sparks, brief mention was made of employees lagging in their fellow employees. In this issue, we will discuss a number of these issues with drivers, station staff and conductors. Once again names have been changed.*

### **Sparks: Can you tell us what is happening at V/Line?**

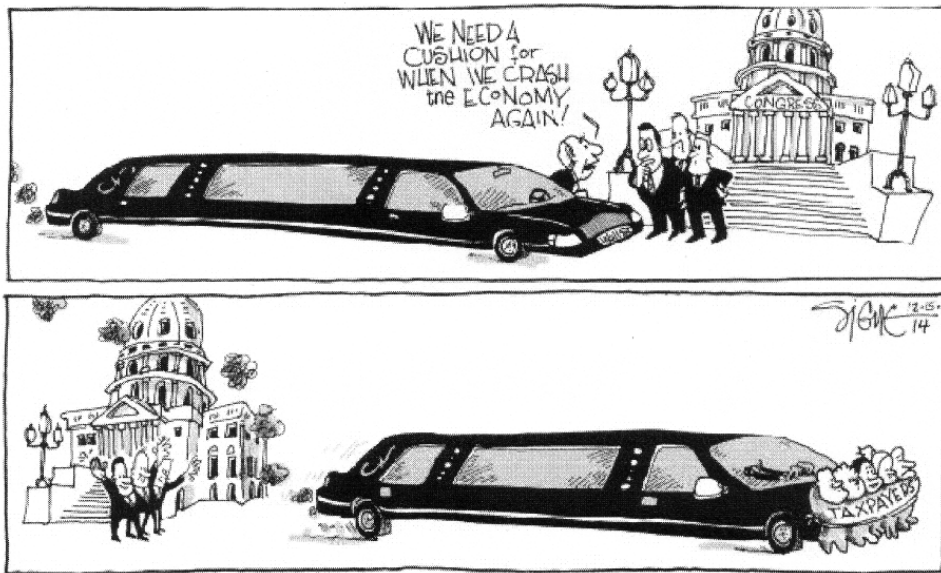
Clarence: Some of our fellow workmates are lagging on their fellow employees. They do so in the hope, they can obtain an easy promotion or favouritism from managers and Department Heads.

Jethro: In fact it has got that bad at Southern Cross, that is has been alleged that one manager has said that at the time when he walks past the staff clerks, he has to PLUG HIS EARS at what is said. He will not listen to these people. He has no time for Laggards.

Rastus and Roscoe: You are correct. Drivers attending classes around the staff clerks area have heard these employees lagging on fellow workmates. They say these employees are letting down the team.

### **Sparks: Can you explain the term?**

Jethro: Conductors at Southern Cross are divided amongst various CSM'S, who are these team leaders. These CSM's encourage employees to report on any employee who lets down the team.



**Sparks: In other words, lag on your workmates.**

Clarence: At this point may we introduce you to Reeva. Reeva works in a Customer Service area.

Reeva: I have come forward, as I was disgusted with the way a booking clerk was given a final warning over an honest mistake on a ticket.

**Sparks: What was the mistake?**

Reeva: The clerk made a keyboard error in spelling a passenger's name on a ticket issued for a seat booked train. You see the passenger's name rhymed with a well known Anglo/Saxon four letter word.

Clarence: Mistakes can be made while using a keyboard in a booking office, as booking clerks are under a fair amount of pressure at peak times.

Reeva: The passenger obtained the ticket and did not notice the mistake. She boarded the train which was on the North East Line and when the conductor checked the ticket, they noticed the mistake.

**Sparks: What did the conductor do?**

Reeva: Well this conductor obtained the ticket and when they returned to their home depot, they photocopied the ticket and handed the ticket to their superior.

**Sparks: What happened?**

Reeva: The booking clerk was stood down for nearly one month.

Rastus: Think of the stress it caused the clerk.

Roscoe: V/Line does not care. Think of the overtime bill. It was said in the last issue, management does not care how much is wasted as long as they nail the person stood down.

Reeva: The clerk was given a final warning.

Clarence: It was an honest mistake and this jerk, who dobbed the booking clerk in, should have gone to the clerk and showed the clerk the mistake. Not lagged him in.

Reeva: This conductor is well known for lagging in fellow employees. This conductor is hoping for promotion. In fact, management is using this jerk for their own ends. If the booking clerk was fired, I hope this conductor had a conscience.

Rastus and Roscoe: Knowing this conductor. No!

**Sparks: Can you explain a rumour circulating around V/Line about a driver, who lagged in a number of drivers.**

Rastus and Roscoe: Yes, you are correct. May we introduce you to Roland. He was in the meal room in Southern Cross when the incident occurred.

**Sparks: How long have you been on the job, Roland?**

Roland: A long time. I will not say what depot I work from, but I was disgusted at this driver. You see I was in the meal room and I was speechless when this jerk spoke.

**Sparks: Can you give our readers a report.**

Roland: The new traffic manager had come to the drivers' depot to talk to the Locomotive Divisions signal sighting committee.

Rastus and Roscoe: The new traffic manager has come to V/Line from CountryLink and is one of the new Chief Executive appointees.

Roland: She came into the meal room just to have a look at the area and this driver got up and went to speak to her.

**Sparks: Then what happened?**

Roland: This driver went over to the manager and went into a tirade mentioning how he was getting all the worse jobs on the roster. He claimed he was on standby and if someone went off sick, he always filled the particular job. He then went on about the roster clerk over favouritism towards other drivers.

Roscoe: He should have gone to his Union Rep.

Roland: He should have, but he thinks he is one up above the other drivers.

**Sparks: Is this driver a know all?**

Roland: He certainly is. Other drivers were shocked, as he mentioned other work practices to the traffic manager. In fact, some of the work practice have been around for over one hundred years.

Roscoe: This is correct, but if these practices have to be altered, then it has to be negotiated by the union with management. Not by this driver going off on his own tangent.

Roland: As soon as he finished, other drivers in the meal room were shocked with what was said and expressed their disgust to him.

Clarence: By what you have said Roland, this is the type of CRETIN, we have to put up with.

Roscoe: You are correct, these are the types of people Human Resources are employing. If you are a good unionist, as a large number of drivers are and you are from day Pacific National or another freight company, then you will not get a job.

Reeva: You are correct. In the conductors area, we have a crawler who wants to be a driver and he is always crawling to the staff clerks, CSM's, managers and Human Resources, hoping to obtain a driver's job. So far he has not been successful.

Rastus and Roscoe: Drivers classes have heard this person crawling and they are disgusted.

**Sparks: What about the driver in the meal room?**

Roland: He went on sick leave, then annual leave and weeks later, he finally returned to work.

Rastus: We drivers would like to send him to Coventry. In other words, not work with him, but under the current workplace laws, it is very hard.

Roland: We don't like this driver and the driver has said just be careful what you say to him or you may front Human Resources.

**Sparks: In concluding, there two examples are just what is happening in the workplace. Unfortunately, in all industries you have employees who want to advance in the workplace and they don't care who they step over to achieve the aim. Thank you Reeva and Roland for coming forward.**

Rastus and Roscoe: In concluding, since the current bunch of people have been in charge of Human Resources, the number of incidents of people lagging on fellow employees has increased. As for the two persons mentioned in this article, you are scum and get out of the job, you are not wanted. Finally, if you are dobbed in, refuse to front Human Resources and if suspended, go to the media. What V/Line hates is bad publicity.

## International Transport Workers' News

### GERMANY: TRAIN DRIVERS' STRIKE

**Berlin (AFP) 6/11/14 - German train drivers on Thursday extended their unprecedented nationwide strike to passenger services, causing travel chaos for millions and drawing fierce criticism.**

The work stoppage by the GDL trade union hit long-distance and regional rail services as well as commuter S-Bahn train networks from 0100 GMT.

The strike — the union's sixth bout of industrial action since September — kicked off with freight services on Wednesday, added passenger trains on Thursday and is due to continue until early Monday.

But German rail operator Deutsche Bahn announced it had taken legal action in a bid to halt the walkout, saying it wanted to "do everything it could" to resume service.

It said in a statement that travellers faced “train cancellations, delays and therefore longer travel times” due to the strike but a contingency timetable was in place.

About a third of intercity trains were running, while for regional and S-Bahn services it was between 15 and 40 percent depending on the region, the company said.

Politicians and industry groups have voiced fears about the impact of the strike, which is the longest in Deutsche Bahn’s 20-year history, and will hit week-end celebrations for the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Chancellor Angela Merkel insisted that the right to strike had to be carried out

“responsibly” and “with a sense of proportion” in comments to reporters on Wednesday.

But she appealed for arbitration so the strikes would “for us as a country do the least possible damage”.

Late Wednesday, the GDL union rejected an arbitration offer by Deutsche Bahn, which has slammed the latest walkout as “pure bullying”.

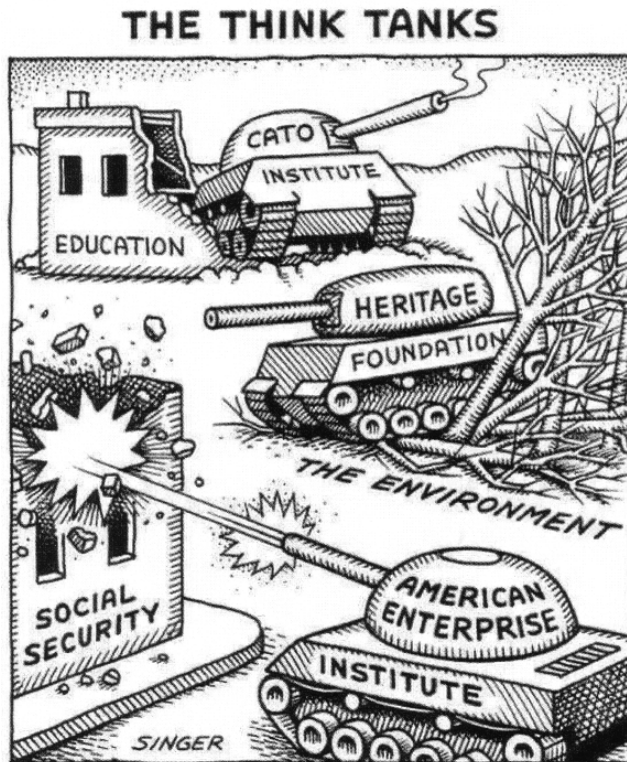
GDL says Deutsche Bahn is stonewalling in talks over workers’ demands for a five-percent wage hike and a shorter working week of 37 hours.

Union leaders also want to represent other groups of employees within Deutsche Bahn such as conductors, catering staff, dispatchers, and not just drivers.

- ‘Irresponsible’ -

Rail users at Berlin’s main train station tried to stay patient despite the disruption during Thursday’s morning rush hour.

Student Gloria Menner said she understood the strikers’ anger but that it was “very annoying” to face a two-hour journey to get to university in the neighbouring city of Potsdam.



“I also work in the public sector and you can’t go out onto the street all the time like that,” another traveller, Anna Serafinska, said.

Deutsche Bahn said in a statement that it was aware its temporary injunction with the Frankfurt labour tribunal could fail as judges in the past had mostly ruled against employers.

“We accept this risk however and have extensively demonstrated to the court what numerous substantial offers we have put to GDL in the past,” said the company’s head of personnel, Ulrich Weber.

Ahead of the court hearing, GDL chief Claus Weselsky said he was “fairly confident” and was applauded in the courtroom by Deutsche Bahn employees.

The BDI Federation of German Industries criticised the union’s action as “irresponsible” and warned of “enormous economic costs”.

“Such a long strike will also lead to empty warehouses and therefore to incalculable risks of production shortfalls,” it said in a statement.

With as many as two million visitors expected to travel to the German capital this weekend for events marking a quarter-century since the Berlin Wall was torn down, media commentators were also scathing.

“The train drivers are damaging themselves, the right to strike and democracy by abusing a celebratory day of freedom for their strike,” Die Welt daily said.

#### **BULGARIA: PROTEST AGAINST RAIL PRIVATISATION**

**On-going actions in defence of Bulgarian railways from depredation and privatization have been carried out by activists of the Autonomous Labour Union (ARS, a friend-affiliate of the IWA-AIT). On January 31/1/15, for the third Saturday in a row, they set up protest pickets – this time in Varna and in the capital Sofia.**

In Varna protesters set up shop at the main railway station, demonstrating their opposition to plans for the secret privatization of the railways. The demonstrators say that the decision to cancel a number of trains (later rescinded) was only an attempt to “test the waters”.

According to protestor Yevgeny Nikitin, it is intended to carry out privatization with the aid two surreptitious measures. First, the transfer as concessions of lines capable of being profitable. Secondly, the transfer of railway funds to municipalities, which will distribute them among private carriers.

Krasimir Dmirov blamed the top officials of the railway administration for the deplorable state of the railways. He emphasized that ordinary workers do not bear any responsibility for this, in spite of propaganda claiming the opposite.

The ARS demands a complete re-organization of the railway system. Their management should be elected in inter-union elections – directly by the workers themselves, and not by parties. The official trade unions should be placed under control of the workers themselves and the workers should take part in decision making by means of “direct democracy” (<http://varna.topnovini.bg/node/568118>).

## REPORT ON WESTCONNEX MEETING

**On Monday 23/2/15 from 7pm-9pm a community consultation meeting regarding the WestConnex was held at the Enmore Theatre. It was attended by 500-800 people, mostly local residents.**

It was addressed by Christopher Swann, director of the planned M5 East Tunnel and Dennis Cliche CEO, WestConnex Delivery Authority. No interjections were allowed from the floor by the Chair. They set aside 55 minutes for questions and discussions from the floor in the agenda. HOWEVER their presentations (which were only meant to take half an hour) went over by 15 minutes and no extra time was added to the question and discussion portion of the event to make up for them going over time. So in essence there was 40 minutes for discussion and questions. As a result of filibustering in answering questions by WestConnex speakers, the time for questions and debate was severely limited.

The gist of the presentation and debate was that a key aspect of the WestConnex is to gain much quicker access to Port Botany and the Airport for 100,000 per year semi trailers coming from the North West and South West of Sydney. Whilst contrary to claims by the WestConnex speakers that it would not result in major pollution increases, it will in fact greatly increase pollution. At various exits from the WestConnex such as in Ashfield, Haberfield, etc, there would be huge smoke stacks, releasing major pollution. Composed increasingly of diesel fumes from trucks and cars. A local resident mentioned that he sold his house in Haberfield recently, due to his concerns about WestConnex and had a \$200,000 reduction in the money received from the sale.

The WestConnex interchange in St. Peters will destroy this suburb and Alexandria due to the inundation of traffic from the expressway. Despite claims by the speakers, that there would



only be a minimal increase in King St. traffic, it's likely there will be a huge increase requiring perhaps a 24 hour clearway. On its M4 and M5 components, there are no guaranteed bus lanes or bicycle lanes. As WestConnex is a tollway, motorists who want to avoid the toll will be encouraged to use back streets in the surrounding suburbs and cause more traffic congestion and pollution there. With the construction, mostly only temporary jobs will be created such as in the construction industry. There will be very few permanent jobs e.g. tow truck operators. Whilst the impression given to most of the audience was that a prearranged decision had been made on the project.

The meeting ended with applause from the overwhelming majority of the meeting for opposition to the project. The speakers only avoided serious trouble from the crowd, because of the presence of security guards.

## LETTER

Hi,

*I just wanted to say I enjoy your magazine when it comes out. I usually find a copy lying around at work.*

*I don't know how you feel about this but I can't join the RBTU. I just can't cop that there is no localised help anymore at a real shop floor level which is what I always believed is the best way to achieve results. Just seems to me anything you hear from the union at my work just comes from head office from people I don't even know. Do they really have concern for my best interests? Not sure they do.*

*Don't get me wrong I have been in different unions many times in the past but gradually felt let down on previous occasions when they just plain ignored certain issues & then a particular delegate got a little bit intimidatory towards me when I spoke up. Since that day I have felt let down. I just can't give my money to these people of who I have no faith in currently. I hope your people can eventually get some positions in the union & make a difference to what really matters & to me it is local issues where you know & can hopefully trust the person to act on the wishes of the real membership.*

Cheers,

Sydney Trains employee.



## 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:

- I. 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 - Fighting for Membership  
Control of the Union & Direct Action to Fight  
Back!**

**Web Site:**

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