

No.132

May - June 2009

Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

**UNION HIERARCHY'S TREACHERY
EXPOSED IN RAILCORP ENTERPRISE
AGREEMENT TRADE OFF'S! GRASSROOTS
ACTIVISTS FIGHT BACK AGAINST STATION
STAFF REVIEW!**



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EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

Some of the most important news lately has been the revealing of the treachery of the union hierarchy in regard to the selling of the Rail Corp Enterprise Agreement (EA), which was approved following World Youth Day, last year. The grass roots on the job have now discovered there was no victory associated with the threatened rail strike on World Youth Day but an illusion concocted by the union officials with the aid of the bosses and the media. Just a cynical example of “smoke and mirrors” by the union hierarchy and there are in fact, major trade off’s associated with the EA pay rise. (See article Page 3.) In the shape of compliance with a major station staffing review. In Sparks, No.130 Oct.-Nov. 2008, we exposed aspects of this crafty scam by the union officials. Grass roots activists are not taking this despicable sell out lying down, but have been organising a major fight back across the station network, which has received wide support. (See article Page 3.)

In State Transit, the union hierarchy is gearing up for another “smoke and mirrors” performance, with the current EA negotiations. See article on page 11, regarding some food for thought regarding an EA claim. The STA bosses are also moving to tighten already unrealistic bus running times using the excuse of the Prepaid Ticket Services and are meeting significant grass roots resistance. (See article Page 13.)

Other news has been the victory of grass roots activist Ken Mason in the recent national RTBU (Rail Tram & Bus Union) elections. He was successful in winning the RTBU National President position. He received 3483 votes in the election, whilst his opponent received 3,273. The level of grass roots apathy in regard to the election was illustrated by the fact that only approx. 1/5 of eligible voters cast their vote. Ken’s election literature was widely discussed on the job and advocated a sharp move away from bureaucratic way the union has been run for many years and a push for grass roots control of the union affairs and direct action.



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

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SPARKS WEB PAGE - www.sparksweb.org

OPEN THE BOOKS ON THE R.T.B.U. BUS DRIVERS' TRAFFIC FINE FUND & BUS DIVISION ACCOUNTS!

SOME QUESTIONS WHICH NEED TO BE URGENTLY ANSWERED!

The Bus Drivers Traffic Fine Fund has about a surplus of \$60,000pa. Given that \$2 p/f is collected from the 3,000 STA bus drivers - amounting to a guesstimate of \$150,000pa and taking away the \$90,000 that's about what is paid out for the fines. Where does the \$60,000 surplus go? It's paid into the Union's consolidated revenue where it is effectively lost from the Division and can be used for any purpose the officials see fit e.g. slush funds, literature/mail outs for election campaigns of candidates they support, such activities which cannot be paid from official union funds because they are audited. Why isn't this huge surplus used to increase benefits to drivers or to reduce premiums?

Why is it that if any member who ever asks to look at the accounts for these entities or question them, the standard line is that they are audited and therefore are beyond question? When only the State Branch Fund is audited. However, all the money goes through the Divisional Accounts.

Why aren't the Traffic Fine Fund and Bus Division Accounts audited?

Why aren't regular reports issued to drivers concerning the Traffic Fine Fund Status?

Why, at each Bus Division Executive meeting, are the delegates presented only with a list of companies and list of dollar amounts?

There are no dates, no description of what the expenses are for, nothing that anyone could use to determine what the money is being spent on? Why are Delegates given little time to peruse the finances and then it is rapidly put to the vote to accept the expenses and is normally passed unanimously?

N.S.W. RAIL NEWS

Sparks: What are your thoughts on the recent furore over the issuing of the Gold Card to Nick Lewocki, RTBU (Rail Tram & Bus Union) NSW State Secretary?

Station Assistant: In late March there was a front page story in the Telegraph regarding the issuing of the Gold Card to Lewocki due to the intervention of the Rees NSW ALP Govt. despite, his lack of 30 years of employment on the railways. As he became a full time union official since 1979 and has been on leave without pay since that time. The media also exposed the issuing of the Gold Card to a manager who had become an acting senior executive with 13 year's service in this position and should have entitlement to the Gold Card. Why hasn't this breach of RailCorp regulations been picked up by internal RailCorp audit? Given few workers these days last 30 years on the job, the union needs to push for the length of service

required for the issuing of the Gold Card to be reviewed when each enterprise agreement is negotiated.

Sparks: What's the latest with the Transit Officers?

SA: Most of their work is being taken over by the police. Under 200 will be guaranteed jobs in RailCorp. As a result, most are in a state of limbo in regard to their future employment prospects. This decision appears to have been made by a bureaucrat who has now moved to some other department leaving carnage in his wake. The previous system of railway police who were highly trained for the job was much more satisfactory. The current system of Transit Officers is contradictory as they play a customer service role which clashes with their security role as they have power to arrest people.

WE HAVE BEEN LIED TO!

Sparks: What's the latest news with the Station Reforms?

SA: Workers were shocked to learn that as part of the 4% pa pay rise for the current Enterprise Agreement (E.A.), 1½% of the rise was payment for compliance with the bosses demand for 400 job losses in the CityRail Network as part of an upcoming staffing review. Many feel confused about the situation and consider they have been conned by the union hierarchy who gave the impression to us at the time, the threatened strike was called off at World Youth Day, that there would be no trade off's associated with the pay rise and enterprise agreement. As a result, they followed the union officials' recommendation to vote for the E.A.

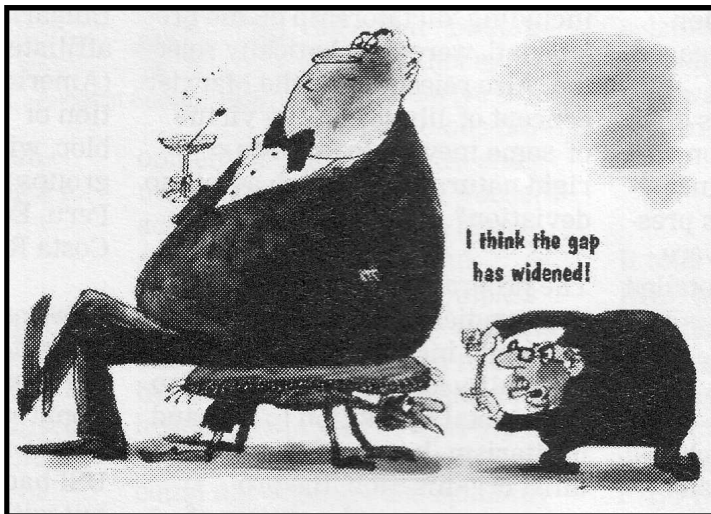
Likely outcomes of the massive staff cuts will be major speedups in our jobs, workers being pushed around to work in different parts of the system and the cutting out of overtime.

A petition is now circulating on the job to the effect that the enterprise agreement cannot be considered enforceable as workers were misled by the union officials into agreeing to it on bogus guarantees. A Member of Parliament is also being approached to raise the duplicity associated with the enterprise agreement in parliament. Whilst workers are being encouraged to not vote for the ALP at the next state election as a result of the treachery. The amount of money the Govt. will save from the proposed job losses as part of the station reforms is between \$10 mill. to \$30 mill., a drop in the ocean in regard to overall Govt. expenditure, but likely to cause much discomfort amongst workers. This money saved is likely to be splurged by the bosses on paying fat bonuses for the increased number of managers in RailCorp and the English managers who are on a type of "working holiday".

Even before this staffing review is implemented, bosses are moving to reduce station staffing. One approach the bosses have taken in regard to reducing staffing at stations and having unattended stations is providing an 18% pay rise to SM's and Duty Managers to compensate them for the reduced hours associated with the increased number of unattended stations and multi control of stations from one central station. The bosses are also proceeding with savage staff cuts on the weekends. In the case of Lidcombe Station there is one station assistant to monitor 4 platforms.

Sparks: What's been the union officials' response to this outcry from the grassroots?

SA: They have held meetings on the job and spread the story that they have things under control regarding preventing the staff cuts, the bosses are demanding. Workers don't believe it, as the EA was signed off and they have been paid the pay rise. The officials are saying they are trying to convince management that the staff cuts to stations shouldn't



go ahead on the basis that it poses a threat to passenger safety. However, management can counter argue that the transit officers will do roving pickets at stations and other measures will be introduced. A better argument to make to retain station staff, is the need to ensure safety for the remaining station staff. Many in the station offices will be female and in greater danger.

Sparks: What's the latest with Rail Corp targeting of train crews?

SA: Wheels are continuing to move behind the scenes, with the new carriages built in China being stored at Auburn and Clyde. The Australian involvement with the carriages has been just the final checking and maintenance. Questions arise over whether these carriages will be faulty given the poor standard of Freight Cars produced by 3rd World Chinese manufacturers. Why didn't the union and RailCorp pressure for the carriages to be built in Australia? Where will the new carriages be parked as with the selloff by the Govt. of much excess railway land there is no space. Already the super signal control boxes exist. There are problems with the T-Card introduction as tendering companies have found the project too difficult as the public transport system in Sydney isn't based on zones like with the Travel Ten's.

Some food for thought is whether passengers want a faceless rail transport system in the future. Whilst in the case of the banks owning part of the railways under a Private/Public Partnership, we have seen the rundown in safety under such an arrangement in the case of the recent violent incident involving bikies at the Airport.

Sparks: What are your impressions of the Govt's construction of new rail lines?

SA: Many of these extensions such as the MacQuarie line and the Olympic Park to Homebush lines are just white elephants or dead ends such as at Cronulla and don't significantly expand the railway system capacity.

The Station Review Sellout!

by Crimson Coconut

Leading up to EBA 2008 Sparks Magazine warned operations staff that a vote in favour of the EBA was akin to signing a death warrant. Within EBA 2008 were several clauses pertaining to the review of station staffing levels and changes to train crew rostering. It handed a blank cheque to management to carry out reforms despite the effects on staff moral and rail worker's conditions.

One reason we cited for not supporting the EBA was that the exact reform process was never spelt out. Job downgrades, job cuts and restructuring were never mentioned anywhere in the documents, although anyone reading between the lines saw that management wanted the flexibility to use part time and temporary employees on stations and that there was a move to reintroduce their plan of Multi Control of Stations.

On the other hand certain union officials were visiting stations assuring workers that they were "not losing anything" for voting in favour of the EBA but that "they were actually gaining something" for a 4% PA pay rise. That "something" is now highly elusive and rail staff have now seen though the bluster and subterfuge of the union's position.

The voting process, unlike previous EBA's where a secret ballot took place, was by a show of hands at various polling stations throughout the state. Union and management representatives presented their cases in tandem at the polling stations. Management encouraged rail staff to vote in favour of the EBA while the unions sat on the fence saying "it was up to us". Staff were duped and coerced into voting for the reforms while not being made aware of the consequences of accepting the 4% pa. This is all despite the urgings of the NSW Transport Minister of the day saying that the pay increase was contingent on a massive station operations reform process to compensate.

Before the papal visit rail staff had beseeched loudly to their unions urging industrial action in pursuit of the 4% pa wage rise during the visit of the pope. While the rail unions sought to publicise the potential of the action in the press they were singled out for criticism from the mainstream commentators as being "old school" bullies. They need not have worried, for the hard talk of union officials was not being followed up by deed. Consequently industrial action was ruled out as an option on the eve of the papal spectacular despite the fact that staff had voted in favour of action. Macquarie Street had been let off the hook once again.

Rail staff are still telling their union representatives in blunt terms that they are opposed to the station staff reviews and that they do not wish to take part in a process that is deeply flawed and would leave them worse off. This is falling on deaf ears as the unions already have representatives on the review committees even though the committees are heavily weighted in favour of management who have the final say on the outcome of the reviews. Staff have threatened to resign from the union if management's proposal gets up.

Sporadic actions at different locations have been organised in resistance to defend jobs and conditions in the face of the the rail unions capitulation. At Central Station a petition against the reforms was circulated, it received over a thousand signatures. This was forwarded on to

the unions and the Industrial Relations section of RailCorp as well as several MP's and the Transport Minister. In response the unions have organised a post card handout to the public at major stations; hardly an adequate response to their members anguish. Jannali Station has had help from a local MP for a public petition signing at the station. Other actions have taken place on the Central Coast and in the Blue Mountains.

Some local MP's such as Blacktown's, Paul Gibson and the Blue Mountains Phil Koperburgh are expressing reservations about the impact on their labour seats. NSW Opposition candidates in several seats are capitalising on the public unpopularity of the proposed cuts to staff numbers. In the Illawarra, to be hit hard by the job losses, several MP's and the local newspaper the Illawarra Mercury have come out against the job cuts. The Mercury in a hard hitting editorial says that while "commuters will pay the price"... "station staff deserve much better treatment."

Meanwhile the review process, which is to proceed line by line, has started in the Illawarra where most station review proposals are still in dispute.

The process whereby stations are picked off line by line should never have been agreed to in the first place. It is a basic tenet of trade unionism that "solidarity keeps us strong". By allowing management to isolate particular locations without the knowledge of the rest of us weakens us as workers. For agreeing to such a course of action the union leadership should be condemned. This is particularly bad policy in the face of widespread condemnation of the staff review process both by the public and especially by members of the union.

If the unions cannot protect their members from job losses, cuts to services and a drop in living standards, that are proposed under the review, then their reason for existing is no longer valid. The failure to consult, the failure to act democratically according to the wishes of members and the unions absolute suspicion of ordinary members points to a general malaise in the transport unions. Why the secrecy? What do they have to hide?

Unionism is not bad, it is absolutely necessary. Leaving or destroying a unions should never be advocated. Yet the present leadership and their cronies must be ultimately held accountable for the failure to carry out their duties to members according to long held and immutable principles of democratic unionism.

In the meantime members must continue to defy management and the staff review process the best way they can. They must support unions where they are active, yet be prepared to actively

Night Shift Penalty Rate Claim Leads The Way forward.

In recognition of the life-threatening health effects of shift work the NSW Nurses Association has launched a claim for higher shift penalty rates in the Industrial Relations Commission.

This follows research in Europe and elsewhere which links shift work with heart and arterial disease, breast cancer and increased risk of all other cancers, eating disorders, weight gain,

miscarriage and a range of psychological effects. Numerous studies have been published, including in the medical journal "The Lancet".

An article in Walkley Magazine about a cancer cluster at the ABC Brisbane studios quoted here reads:

"While testing continues at the ABC's Brisbane studios, experts seem no closer to finding a cause for the cancer cluster that saw 13 women staff diagnosed with breast cancer.

Early in March, shift work was identified as a potential cause of the breast cancer by a panel of experts.

"Working in an illuminated environment over a long period of time leads to unusual degrees of suppression of the hormone melatonin," explained Professor Bruce Armstrong, chair of the panel.

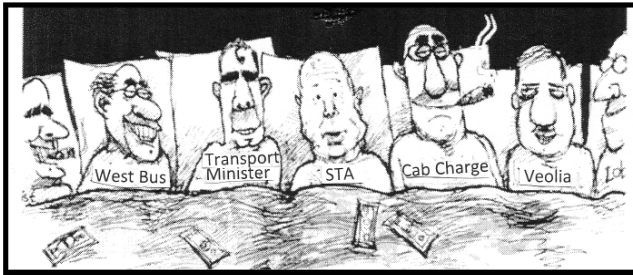
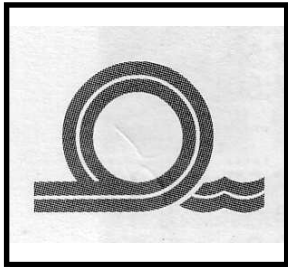
"There is evidence that the hormone melatonin has effects that reduce breast-cancer risk," he told ABC Radio's Health Report. "So if it's unusually suppressed, then in principle the risk of breast cancer is increased."

Just before Christmas last year, the ABC's managing director, Mark Scott, announced the closure of the ABC's Brisbane headquarters in Toowong, due to the high incidence of breast cancer. "Levels were up to 10 times the national average." The claim by NSW nurses follows compensation claims being paid for public sector workers in Denmark and Scotland and rising awareness around the world.

The nurses claim is an important test case that will also apply to workers in the public transport industry. For if the nurses union succeed in the courts the way will be opened for claims from many of us working in the service sector who now know first hand the reasons for our ill health.

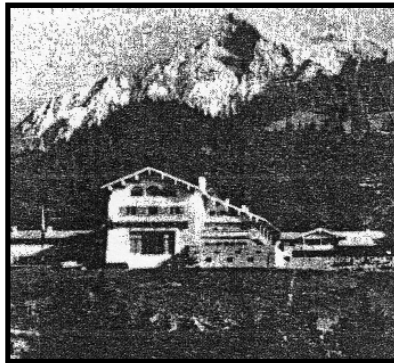
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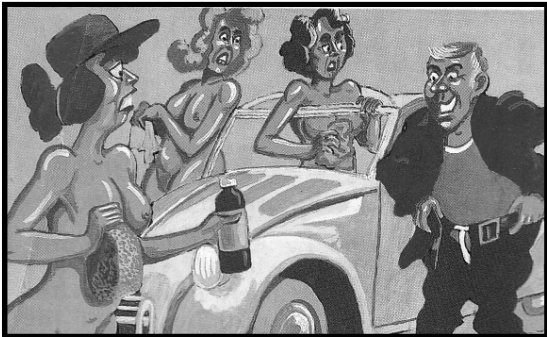


STATE TRANSIT “STRANGE BED FELLOWS”

The STA bosses will be delighted to learn that Sparks has invested heavily in the acquisition of high tech surveillance equipment. We have used it recently to produce an upcoming serial on our web site called STA “Strange Bed Fellows”. As part of the production, we spent years researching the location of the secret State Transit Corporate Lodge hidden away in the mists of the Obersalzberg valley, deep in the Blue Mountains. At the lodge, known as the Berghof, management residential workshops are held, ostensibly to find new ways to cut corners and engineer new speedups in the job,



The secluded STA Lodge, “The Berghof” in the Blue Mts.



“Touch of Class” Management Consultants greet a corporate cowboy arriving at the Lodge for the retreat and were “of service to all.....”

attended by many corporate cowboys bearing little gems of corporate ruthlessness and looking for some fun with their STA buddies. Not all strawberries and cream. However, we have uncovered a surprisingly raunchy dimension to the proceedings.

A Sparks “James Bond” fresh from his triumph in exposing the STA and Corporate fat cat frolicking at the New Years Eve Rio Carnival, was assigned the mission of penetrating the heavily fortified “Lodge” and with the aid of

our new surveillance equipment making a digital video of the risqué antics of the corporate “bed fellows” during a recent corporate “retreat” as part of our serial.

With a bit of aid from a quiet achiever in the SAS, our James Bond successfully tunnelled under the high walls surrounding the lodge and was surprised to see, parked behind the lodge, a large plush caravan with lace curtains emblazoned with the huge logo “Touch of Class Management Consultants On Call for Every Corporate Occasion” and the new union executive BMW sports, soft top with luxurious leather upholstery purchased following the last rise in union dues!



An STA executive discusses the carve-up of profitable runs with corporate cowboys, whilst enjoying the mountain scenery from the Lodge and is snapped by an executive assistant frauline.

Through the windows of a bedroom adjacent to the conference room, our high tech surveillance equipment spied a most lively scene amongst the satin sheets of a queen size bed fuelled by the most expensive crack cocaine obtained specially for the “retreat” following an express special order to the largest CIA backed Columbian Drug Baron.

There was much snuggling up “as it is winter time” amongst STA executives, the heads of Veolia Transport, Cab Charge and West Bus with quite a dark tan from his recent trip to Rio, the NSW Minister of Transport, and the heads of the Business Council of Australia and the Sydney Chamber of Commerce, revealing extensive dollar sign and swastika tattoos.

On one side of the bed amongst frenzied “under the sheets” corporate groping for profits, there was sensitive and intimate pillow talk between the Transport Minister and the corporate bosses on the subject of large ALP donations and the carving up of the most lucrative slices of STA operations.

On the other side, intriguingly the union executive attired in G-Strings was spied cavorting in what appeared to be a lap dancing routine choreographed by Touch of Class Management Consultants amongst the STA bosses! A lead up to the upcoming enterprise agreement dance of the seven veils, stripper performance. Shortly a blue movie entitled the “Deep throat of the Forbes 500” was shown with nubile billionaires frolicking in vast piles of fake dollar bills and engaged in a bizarre contest involving who could stuff the most dollars into a brown paper envelope and the discrete passing on of these envelopes “under the table”.

Whilst the corporate “Jamboree” was in full swing with a pole dancing performance by the union executive greeted by wolf whistles from the STA executives, there was a loud sound of breaking glass. The festivities had been gate crashed by the big money, in the shape of the self styled “Green House Gases Mafia” the high polluting oil, cement, and coal lobby! It’s a title they have no qualms in describing themselves.

Following all these exertions, excited grasping for profits/dollars and camaraderie, the STA bosses and their “strange bed fellows” were exhausted and were last seen being tucked under the sheets together by Touch of Class management consultants.

Stay tuned for the next episode in our series, “STA bosses and their corporate buddies sleaze together on vacation at Monte Carlo” where the fat cats gamble at roulette rather than with drivers’ and motorists’ lives with the imposing of tight bus running times and unrealistic timetables.

S.T.A. BUSIE NEWS

Smarter thinking for the next STA EBA

The time for minor pay adjustments is almost finished.

Union officials in pay negotiations need to think outside the traditional square box. For every three dollars pay increase, we lose 30% in tax. That is almost one dollar in three.

We should be looking for salary sacrifice and salary packages to top up our wages. Other public sector unions have large areas where State Transit fears to tread.

A great example is medical benefits. A typical package costs around one hundred dollars per pay or twenty six hundred dollars per year. To purchase such a package, you would have to have a gross pay increase of one hundred and fifty dollars per pay. If State Transit pays for the package, our take home pay would increase by one hundred dollars per pay!

THAT IS A PAY INCREASE.

1. This is within the bounds of 2.5%pa + 2.5%pa pay increases.
2. We get the pay increase now. Not half now and the rest later.
3. As there is no increase in actual pay, State Transit is happy and they cannot open the award for off sets.
4. We are able to reduce expenses such as the payment of private medical insurance and taxation, so we increase our take home pay.

WAVERLEY DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What’s the latest with the Bondi Junction Interchange?

Waverley Busie: The meal room and male toilets which are used by 100’s of drivers a day, 7 days a week and 365 days per year are a shambles, only after 10 years since it’s construction. The concrete in the meal room is frayed. Whilst the meal room and toilets are very stuffy, lacking air conditioning and drab. The male toilets are a cesspool with cubicles too small and smelly with paper towels and toilet paper often discarded on the wet floor. Do we really deserve it? These are very basic facilities and not a touch of class. In contrast the toilets at

Westfields have a much better design and colour scheme. The impression given of the Bondi Junction Interchange facilities is of shoddy construction and lack of maintenance. How is it that Harry Triganboff who owns Meritons which built the interchange was allowed to get away with this substandard, on the cheap construction, whilst escaping land tax for the 2nd mansion he owns adjacent to his home? The STA bosses who always bray about being of service to all, should be of service to us and pressure the RTA, Meritons and any

other relevant entities to have a facelift done on our facilities at the Bondi Junction interchange. In the case of the Edgecliff interchange a fantastic job was done in refurbishing it - repainting it with a pleasant colour scheme and adding a new roof. Full marks are deserved for the effort.

Would such a shambles in the bosses' facilities at Strawberry Hills be tolerated? Would the cream on their strawberries be allowed to go so rancid?

Sparks: What are your thoughts on the recent union elections?

WB: From looking at the contenders statements in the election supplement of the union journal, there appears to be a clash between the old guard – the existing union officials appeared very stale and were just relying on their track record whilst in office, and the new guard, particularly Ken Mason who ran for the National President position. Ken's statement presented a forward looking approach focusing on some of the critical issues such as privatisation, which surprisingly wasn't mentioned by the other candidates. With the Liberals likely to be elected at the next State election, this is a strong possibility. Behind this privatisation push is



the Forbes 500 conference held some years ago in Sydney, where billionaires pushed both major parties and Govt's to taken down all the barriers to selling off public assets and utilities. The old guard candidates just focused on their past record and had no forward looking approach to prepare drivers to fight the attack such as the development of a contingency plan in the event of privatisation moves. During the elections the union officials again stooped to their usual dirty tricks by issuing a "how to vote" card but without Ken Mason on it! At Waverley this scam was a complete failure as most drivers didn't take the cards. Latest news is that Ken has been elected to the National President position on a grass roots control of the union platform and welcomes grass roots activists to contact him.

Sparks: What's happening with the new timetables?

WB: The STA bosses are engaging in a new push to tighten running times in the Eastern Suburbs under the smokescreen of improving the running times. The bosses are using the excuse of the introduction of prepaid ticket buses from Railway Square for the new attack. The STA is moving city block by city block to have bus services on a prepaid basis. While I have noticed some decline in cash collected for fares, many passengers still like paying for tickets in cash. Our roster committee has found many flaws in the bosses plans for running time changes. Definitely current running times on many runs need urgent revising. The 400's are particularly hard hit. The running times are in urgent need of improving. The STA bosses have to come down from their acid trips and take a trip on this run to understand the problems. A driver from Waverley returned from Burwood on the run 1 hour late. My experience on the 400 is that it's impossible to keep to the timetable, particularly due to traffic congestion through the airport. Whilst on a 389 early morning run which was not over busy I was 10 minutes late at Bondi Junction. I was surprised that it was impossible to keep to the timetable.

If you are unhappy with the running times, don't rush into the office to complain. As you could be stood down. Before taking any action, seek the advice of an experienced person .

Sparks: What's the latest with the STA's moves to change to change bus routes?

WB: There was a protest recently by local residents at Elizabeth Bay over the STA's removal of the second loop on the 311. Many of these residents are elderly and can't cope with the increased walking required to catch the service. In the past I have noticed off peak services on the 327 and 326 services being changed from one in half an hour to one in an hour. By such initiatives in the context of Govt privatisation plans, the STA is doing the hatchet work for private bus companies to increase profitability of routes. It's also not promoting runs. A likely form privatisation would take in the buses involves private bus companies owning specific corridors. Under privatisation we are likely to lose \$10,000 p.a. in pay due to the introduction of casualisation and part timers. If drivers want to jump the ship in the event of privatisation they should be paid a redundancy package.

On a recent radio program Richard Neville journalist and middle class counter culture personality from the 1960's, the son of Bruce Baird who is an MP for the Nth Shore and a medium sized business owner appeared very relaxed about privatisation of public transport. Richard Neville considered under privatisation it's likely that the trains would run better. However I was recently listening to an ABC Radio program where two Public Transport experts were interviewed for the program and stated that privatisation does not make a better system, and

doesn't do anything better. Whilst such a move will be gambling with lives due to likely corner cutting by the private companies affecting safety in the interest of profit making.

Sparks: How do you feel after a day's work now?

WB: As we are continued to be pushed to work harder contributed by our feeling obligated to pick up passengers left behind, rest breaks are shrinking resulting in our working non-stop the halves of our shifts. As a result, there is high turnover of drivers in the job and little time for our minds to rest affecting our sleep patterns causing us to become mentally fatigued. There is now much less freedom due to tiredness from the speedup in our jobs and the STA's alcohol zero tolerance policy, limiting our ability to socialise with friends and family after work.

Sparks: What are your thoughts on the Govt's response to the Global Financial Crisis?

WB: A major aspect of this response, has been the bailing out of the car industry and funding of tollway construction. Particularly General Motors in the U.S.A. which is now on the brink of bankruptcy has been a major recipient of this largesse. It has also been the producer of the largest passenger vehicles in size and most petrol consuming passenger vehicles, such as the huge truck like CNB which no one wants to buy now. Whilst it ignored the development of electric cars

which people want now, due to environmental concerns. If an electric car came out, I'd buy one. I'd love an electric car.

Sparks: What else is happening?

WB: On Anzac Day I was walking past the Entertainment Centre in China Town near Hay Street and noticed plaques with a wreaths on top. It wasn't a war memorial, but a memorial for those in the community who have fared badly - workers who have died on the job, workers who have been injured on the job and women.



Sparks: What's the latest with the depot fleet?

Waverley Driver: 15 new Mercedes gas buses have been added to the depot fleet. Most drivers have now been trained on them and have a favourable impression of their road worthiness. All the Mercedes Mk3's have been withdrawn.

Sparks: What's happening regarding the new timetables and rosters?

WD: On Friday 3/4/09 the new rosters were rejected at a union meeting. We particularly criticised the lousy running times provided for the 324's, 325's and 400's. The depot manager tried to bluff the roster committee into supporting the new rosters by spreading the lie that Randwick Depot was endorsing the rosters. However according to information received from the delegates from Randwick and Port Botany, both depots are opposed to the rosters.

Sparks: How are things going with the Enterprise Agreement?

WD: The proposal for a 2 ½% pa pay rise without trade off's was defeated at Waverley. We are hopeful that Raoul Boanza, our bus division union State Secretary who is well known at Waverley is putting a serious effort into negotiating a decent pay rise for us and the associated removal of the clause in the EA which allows the STA to change drivers shift lengths in a highly discriminatory fashion. This clause allowed the STA to savagely cut certain drivers wages following the approval of the last EBA.

Sparks: How are things with the Transit Officers?

WD: According to the latest ASU(Australian Services Union) Newsletter I was dismayed to learn that Transit Officers are to be disbanded in RailCorp and replaced by police.

Sparks: What are your impressions of the ASU?

WD: In regard to the ASU, I have been very impressed with the head of its Transport Division, John Maher who is a station master from the Northern Sydney Line. He makes a serious effort to keep in contact with union members via constantly travelling in the field. When things are quiet on the industrial front he returns to his job as station master. He is in sharp contrast to certain Rail Tram & Bus Union officials who constantly remain in their offices and have an easy time in industrially quiet periods.

I favour militant leftwing unionism in the mould of such figures from the past as Bernie Willingale of the Train Driver's Union and Pat Ryan Senior of the Bus union, who wouldn't hesitate to achieve workers demands by resort to industrial action.

LEICHHARDT DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What's the latest at Leichhardt?

Leichhardt Busie: Currently at the depot, there is tremendous chaos associated with the depot renovations affecting bus operations. Latest news is that we have been promised that the renovations will be completed by July. However, inclement weather may delay the completion. With the depot renovations we have been given a very unappealing recreational area near the meal room, the only view you have is of the buses and miles of concrete which will be baking hot in summer. Rather than a better location where you could have a view of the city. Many

drivers who are smokers, are angry about management's requirement that following the completion of the renovations, the depot grounds will be smoke free.

Sparks: What's the latest with the Institute?

LB: When the depot renovations are completed the canteen which is the main activity of the Institute will be outsourced. What will be the future of the Institute?

Will the Institute bank account monies which are exceedingly large be returned to the members of the Institute? Or do certain "forces of darkness" have their eyes on the dollars?

Sparks: What's happening with the union?

LB: We now have officially a new union rep, Marta. Following the departure of our previous union rep Darren, to Newcastle, an election was held for the position. There was little to choose from for us between the two candidates. Marta was overwhelming successful in the ballot against John Malaccio. The union officials recently held a ballot at the depot in regard to the log of claims for the upcoming Enterprise Agreement. The proposal presented was a 2 ½% pa pay rise without trade off of conditions. The proposal was overwhelmingly defeated. We demand a decent pay rise, given we are working harder and continually being threatened with the big stick by the STA bosses if we do anything wrong. The increased traffic congestion in the city is making our work ever more tougher. Whilst following the last pay rise there was immediately an increase in union dues and the shaving back of many shifts with 7 ½ hour shifts becoming quite common, resulting in the slashing of our pay. Making a mockery of the so called pay rise. We recently received a letter from NSW Premier Nathan Rees for our work in maintaining services during the recent power outages. However no cheque was attached. In regard to the recent state and federal union elections, I noticed little literature on the policies of the different candidates to make an informed vote.

Sparks: How are things with the depot fleet?

LB: With the completion of the depot renovations, the depot fleet will expand to 400 buses. Every week now, new buses are being added to the fleet. There are many complaints from drivers that the cabins of the new buses are too small and you have no place to store your belongings.



BURWOOD DEPOT NEWS

You would wonder if we had union elections recently, as the Burwood Union Rep has not posted the results on the union notice board. Is he worried about the results? Does it send a message to the Secretary and President of the Bus and Tram Division to start cleaning their desks out?

Safety seems to be the flavour of this month in our depot. The bosses have started to make new driving lanes in the depot I hope for the smaller bus fleet. Management is telling drivers there is plenty of on-site parking at Leichhardt depot, but how many of the parking spaces are for the corporate offices?

It has been reported that the depot manager was trying to dance with the depot duty manager to Karoki music in the depot lobby. Has the depot manager finally lost or has no work to do? May be a spell of bus loading checks would fix this problem!

Have you noticed that a new problem has arisen since prepaid services have been introduced. Not enough tickets are available for sale at Kiosks and no enough change in the kiosk cash trays. The kiosk staff say it's not our problem.

I hear that our resident cats are looking for a new depot to reside.

If they need a reference, Sparks will supply it, as long as they vacate the depot.

Sydney Wharfies' News

Sparks: Has the current economic downturn had any effect on the waterfront?

Port Botany Wharfie: It certainly has. Up until January work here at DP World Port Botany had been going gangbusters. Record numbers of containers had been moved in the previous few months. But then in late January/early February it seemed like shipping levels came to a grinding halt.

The casual workforce suddenly went from regularly working five and even six day weeks to barely making their minimum guaranteed earnings each fortnight. Supplementaries were lucky to get a day a fortnight, while many Guaranteed Wage Employees (GWE's) and Variable Salaried Employees (VSE's) were not making their minimum \$1,040 and \$1,960 gross per fortnight respectively.

While work has since picked up quite substantially in March and April, the resulting uncertainty gave DP World management a chance to once again tighten the screws.

Sparks: Did management get what they were after?

Port Botany Wharfie: Certainly not everything. At one point there were stories floating about that management wanted twenty redundancies from maintenance and were thinking about getting rid of all the 70-odd supplementaries.

Management did end up getting four main things. The first was that twelve maintenance positions were made redundant. This is on top of the five positions that were lost as a result of the EBA voted on last November.

The second was the temporary roster change for operations permanents. This has gone from an average 36-hour to a 35-hour week with a proportionate pay cut. In the sixteen week roster cycle, two weekend shifts have been temporarily removed, but four weekend shifts have been changed from evening only to day or evening. This will, in the words of a DPW letter to employees, help in “improving weekend flexibility and reducing idle time. This ”temporary” change can last anything from 16 to 64 weeks.

Third was the twenty-odd supplementaries that should be upgraded to GWE after their first year of service will remain supplementary until further notice; and the fourth was the increased use of casuals for four-hour shifts of lashing and unlashings on ships.

Sparks: So how did the Maritime Union officials figure in all this?

Port Botany Wharfie: There were two yard meetings in April - one to hear about the proposals and one to vote on the changes. The first meeting was held on April 1 - April Fool’s Day - and the first speaker at the Maritime Union meeting was the General Manager of DP World Port Botany!

Unfortunately this was no April Fool’s joke. I couldn’t help but think of the contrast between how French workers and the “militant” MUA has responded to the economic downturn. While French workers have turned to locking up bosses in their offices and “bossnapping” them to win their demands, the MUA invites bosses to address workers at their union meetings!

One interesting thing to note was the fact that the only MUA official to speak at these two meetings was the national MUA official Jim Tannock. While all four Sydney Branch MUA officials attended both meetings - including our two communists - none of them uttered one single word at either meeting.

It was Tannock that did all the talking. When he wasn’t telling us of all the stevedoring job losses overseas and the downturn in shipping volumes, he was trying to tell us how much he sympathised with our plight because his two sons were also in the industry.

My personal favourite was him repeatedly telling us how we had to “get on the front foot on this one”. After the company approaches the MUA with its cutback wish list, the union responds by negotiating to round off some of the sharp edges of management’s attacks. If this is getting on the front foot, I would hate to see us on the back foot!

The other thing to note is the continued intolerance of the leading union site committee members towards any critical questions and comments that come from the floor. The way these meetings continue to be run - with those asking questions and making comments continually being talked over the top of and shouted down - is alienating more and more of the rank and file from playing any part in these meetings and the union in general.

Sparks: What do you know about the wildcat strike at Patrick Port Botany that was reported in the media in late January?

Port Botany Wharfie Like so much that goes on in the Maritime Union, information about this wildcat strike was one of those things that you have to slowly piece the various bits of information together yourself In order to get something like the full picture.

I first found out about it through an article in the Sydney Morning Herald, which reported on an eight-hour wildcat strike that took place on the morning of January 29 in protest at the sacking of a delegate at Patrick's operations in Brisbane.

The article described how the strike was not authorised by the MUA officialdom, with MUA national secretary Paddy Crumlin calling it a "spontaneous action". Patrick/Asciano chief Don Telford called the strike "Irresponsible and illegal".

Later on I found out that, on the day of the wildcat, one or more of the local officials addressed the labour at DP World and passed a resolution in support of recently sacked MUA delegate Paul Patterson who worked at Patrick's Brisbane bulk and general operations.

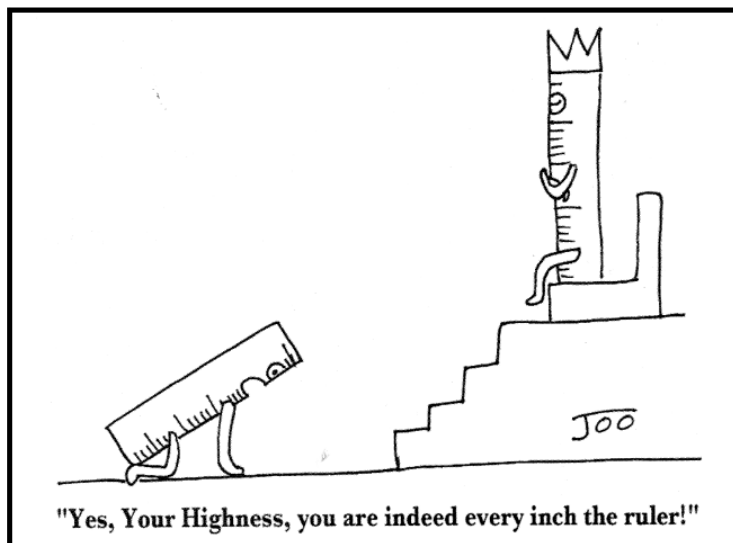
While the resolution said that "the labour stand ready to take whatever action is deemed necessary to achieve no less than Paul's full reinstatement", no action was ever taken at DP World Botany.

But the wildcat action that was taken across the water at Patrick hit the company and the MUA like a bolt from the blue. Resolutions similar to the one I have mentioned were previously passed at Patrick Port Botany, but no one seemed ready for the vote on the morning of January 29 and the walk-off from the site.

As I understand it, all those Involved were issued with warning letters, but that was about it. As far as the reinstatement of MUA delegate Paul Patterson, I have not been able to find out what happened one way or the other.

Nevertheless, action such as this is what is needed to defend our rights. This action would have been so much more powerful if it had been co-ordinated - either through the "official structures" of the union or through informal connections among various delegates and site committees.

[Shane Bentley - the "Port Botany Wharfie" - produces "Vigilance", a socialist bulletin for MUA members in Sydney. See www.vigilancebulletin.org].



VICTORIAN RAIL NEWS

In issue 130, an article appeared about Conductor Supervisors and the way they were appointed. In the last issue of Sparks I appealed to any V/Line employee to come forward and tell us what it's like to work under one of these supervisors. Two employees have come forward and once again names have been changed.

Sparks: What made you come forward?

Misha and Manfred: We have come forward to let you workers know about some of the idiots who have been appointed to this position.

Sparks: Can you explain?

Misha: At one of the country depots, we have a Conductor Supervisor who is a bully as well as an idiot.

Manfred: Yes, this idiot struts around as if he is Hitler. He is right and heaven help anyone who speaks against him. He is known to have a hit list of Conductors, he wants to sack and likes to shoot his fat mouth off about who he hates.

Misha: Some employees know they are on his hit list and have accepted the inevitable that they will be sacked.

Sparks: How did he get the job?

Manfred: I don't know, but when he went for the interview, he was able to convince the corrupt bastards in the Human Resources that he was suitable for the job. You see other people put in for the job who had many years of service but they were passed over. When the job was upgraded to a supervisor's job, it was not advertised for this country area so he got the job.

In other words this particular depot is stuck with this jerk.

Sparks: What a joke.

Misha: You can say it is a joke and you can see why most V/Line employees think Human Resources are corrupt and hate them.

Manfred: When this Conductor Supervisor was a conductor he had an appalling record. He was obsessed with running a train and at a Suburban set down point, a woman had fallen over when alighting from the train. Instead of attending to the passenger, he departed the train. A station employee attended to the passenger and let V/Line know but management hushed up the matter, as the train ran on time. Before becoming a Conductor Supervisor he had ambitions of being a train driver but because he dobbed in a driver at Spencer Street, the drivers let it be known that if he became a trainee driver, they would give him the works.

Sparks: Good to see the drivers standing up to him.

Misha: As regards conductors one day he had to travel to Melbourne for a meeting and he joined a Six Car Velocity and got into an empty driver's compartment. The reason because one of the Conductors on his hit list was working on the train and he wanted to spy on him. The driver of the train saw what was going on and told him to get out of the cab, or the train would

not run. The service officer came forward and asked the Conductor Supervisor to sit with the passengers. He started to sulk.

Sparks: Good to see the driver put the boot into him.

Manfred: Yes it is good, but two months ago the driver asked the conductor to come up to the front of the Sprinter to discuss a problem. This was due to service disruption, due to hot weather. The train arrived at a suburban pick up and this jerk was on the platform. He noticed the conductor up front with the driver and he put a report about the driver and conductor. He thought he could sack the conductor and get the driver into trouble, but what he underestimated was that when he touched one driver and conductor, he touched all employees and the drivers threatened all hell would break loose and the conductors threatened action, so the matter was dropped.

Sparks: What a spiteful bastard.

Misha & Manfred: You can say that again but this idiot does not understand that management is using him up and when he passes his use by date they will give him the flick. Also the other supervisors think he is a joke and just laugh about him to other employees behind his back.

Sparks: Earlier in the interview I heard you say some Conductors are admitting defeat with this jerk and admit he will get the evidence to sack them.

Misha & Manfred: Yes, some Conductors do look at defeat in the eye but if we all stuck together with the Drivers and Shunters, we could get rid of this jerk and if he regressed to a Conductor then we can give him hell. The other problem is V/Line management do not have the guts to stand up to Human Resources. This department is a law of its own and they are the ones who selected this jerk for the job. V/line employs less people than Connex yet it employs more people in its Human Resources people than Connex.

Sparks: What you need is unity among all your employees and if you all stick together and say you won't work under this person, then Human Resources as well as management will have to look at the suitability of this jerk who is holding the position. Also management should stand up to Human Resources. I wonder if management is frightened of them. As for this On Train Supervisor, he should be counselled and he should learn to get on with his fellow employees and not take a dislike to people who have the guts to stand up to him. Finally thank you Misha and Manfred for coming forward.

International Transport Workers' News

Bus worker wildcats spread across Dublin north

by weeler Apr 28 2009

The wildcat strike action taken by Dublin Bus drivers has spread to four new garages as the dispute enters its third day. The dispute began on Sunday after a driver at the Harristown depot was suspended when he refused to work a new schedule. The 450 staff at the Harristown

depot stopped work in solidarity with the driver before the dispute spread to the Clontarf depot. At present just two depots are operating (based in South Dublin) with almost all of the North Dublin routes brought to a total standstill. Dublin Bus recently developed a “Cost Effectiveness Plan” to address their €31 million projected loss for 2009, which included plans to reduce their fleet by 120 buses as well as letting hundreds of workers go. Unions agreed to the cuts at the Labour Court earlier this month and have distanced themselves from the action. The companies says it will only enter talks with drivers if they return to work and operate the new schedules.

Arab railway workers in Israel face discrimination, job loss

Tue, 21 Apr 2009

Here’s an appeal from Sawt el-Amel, an NGO based in Nazareth, protesting the decision by Israel Railways to deny employment to railroad crossing guards who lack a permit to carry weapons. As such permits are usually only issued to army veterans, 150 Arab employees now face the sack. To learn more and to send off your message of protest, please visit the Sawt el-Amel website:

http://www.laborers-voice.org/article_details.aspx?TopID=964&catid=46

Background

In March 2009, Israel Railways, a state-owned company, launched a new policy denying employment to railroad crossing guards who have no permit to carry weapons – that is: who have not served in the Israeli army. This policy will lead to the lay-off of the app. 150 Arab railway workers who monitor and maintain Israel’s level crossings. Israel Railways explicitly stated that the new employment policy is designed to give priority to young army veterans.

Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel have always been extremely underrepresented in Israel’s public sector (including state-owned companies), and despite existing anti-discrimination laws only about 5% of civil servants are Arabs, while they make up almost 20% of the overall population. Exclusion of Arabs from the public sector is mainly a result of Israel’s state security policies, which deny Arabs who have not served in the Israeli army and do thus not have a permit to carry weapons access to employment in public administration and services (such as: communication, water, electricity, public transport and port authorities, fire brigades etc.). This strong focus on state security is also reflected in the biographies of executive officers in Israeli government-owned companies. Yitzhak ‘Haki’ Harel, general manager of Israel Railways, for instance, is a Major General in the Israeli army (IDF). He retired from the army in August 2006, shortly after the July War on Lebanon, and has headed the company since 2007.

Israel Railways’ new policy is an instructive example of the way Arab workers are systematically excluded from the Israeli labour market: firstly, it shows that state security takes abso-

lute preference over personal safety and security in Israel's employment policy; secondly, it reveals that these security concerns are used to camouflage double standards in favour of Jewish Israeli workers because a) the job of crossing guard has so far not required bearing arms, b) other railway workers, such as train drivers, are not addressed by the new policy, and c) some positions are reserved for "minorities who did not serve in the army". This allows the conclusion that army service is in fact an irrelevant employment condition. At this point, it should be noted that the new policy also excludes recent immigrants, ultra-orthodox Jews, disabled persons and conscientious objectors.

On April 7, 2009, the Tel Aviv Labour Court suspended the dismissal of the railway workers until the next court hearing on April 19, 2009. However, workers told Sawt el-Amel that Israel Railways has already started recruiting new crossing guards. On April 8, 2009, Israel Railways responded to Sawt el-Amel's enquiry about the new employment policy, reaffirming that the policy decision is based on 'practical and security considerations' and does not aim to 'discriminate against minorities'.

On the whole, Israel Railways' new employment policy should be seen both as a continuation of Israel's long-standing strategy to exclude Arab workers from the labour market and as an assault on all economically and socially marginalised groups in times of growing economic crisis.

UK: Tube workers strike over safety equipment

by Ed Apr 22 2009

Tube drivers on the Victoria line are staging a 24-hour strike in a row over door safety equipment. About 180 drivers on the Victoria Line stopped working from 9pm on Tuesday. The RMT union claims trains need safety features to prevent doors from opening on the wrong side. The industrial action is being taken by workers from the Seven Sisters depot in north London.

The workers said the correct door-side enabling equipment was installed on all other lines on the London Underground. General secretary Bob Crow said he was also determined to stop "a culture of bullying and harassment" of RMT members on the Victoria Line. A Transport for London spokesman described the strike as "completely unnecessary". "There are procedures in place to deal with these kinds of issues and we ask RMT to return to the negotiating table," he added. More problems with the doors on the Victoria this morning, the driver was running back and forth for 5 minutes whilst the train was stuck in Finsbury Park, though it wasn't specifically due to the enabling equipment as far as I could tell. Not-so-helpful tuts from fellow passengers. Hopefully this will be sorted soon because it's frequently overcrowded, especially 8-10am and 5-7pm, with that number of passengers pushing against the closed side doors it's an accident waiting to happen. Also does anyone know why some of the doors only half open on the Victoria in Kings Cross? Bloody annoying. Good luck to RMT and Aslef on this one.



What is Democratic Unionism?

Democratic