

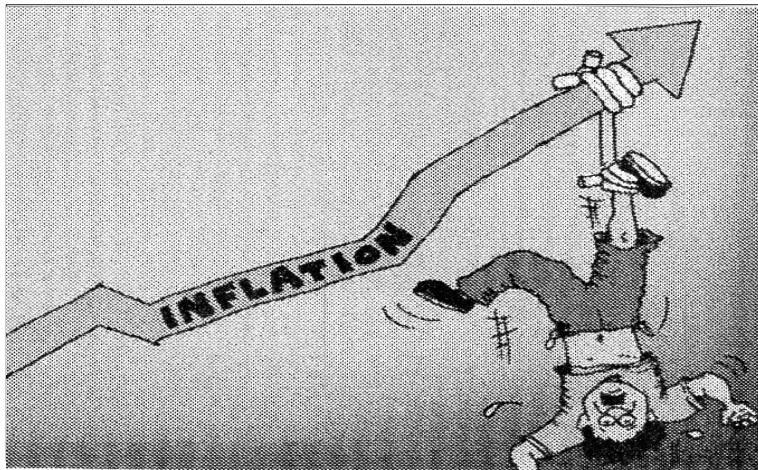
No. 182

May - June. 2026

Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

Trump & Israel War with Iran sparks Fuel Crisis & Soaring Cost of Living! Time to Drop the Curtains on EBA "Stripper Performances" with Fake Pay Rises! Establish grass roots committees on-the-job for a united Rail-Bus-Tram Direct Action Campaign to Achieve the "Real Demands!"



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Punjab Bus News p.27; Vic. Rail News p. 18; Qld Rail
News p.23; German Rail News p. 25; A Family Affair p.8;

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

Some of the most important news lately has been the growing fuel crisis associated with the Trump/Israel war on Iran. Apart from sparking a spike in the cost of living it has also contributed to an increase in demand for public transport and the number of commuters. The CPI is up from 3.7% as of the 12 months to March to now 4.6%. According to Deloitte Access Economics, we are likely to see a further increase to between 6.5% to 7.5% in the coming months, depending on the price of barrels of oil.

The sudden spike in the cost of living highlights again the bankruptcy of enterprise bargaining with the union bosses' and management's "negotiations racket", its fake pay rises and nasties concealed in the EBA document clauses. It also emphasises the importance of establishing grass roots committees on-the-job across rail, bus and tram sectors to network and to send delegations to agitate for common action to wage the campaign of direct action which can get the goods! Achieve the "real demands and settle accounts" such as apart from hefty pay rises to cope with the increasing cost of living, putting some sanity into the job! With securing greatly reduced shift lengths such as say 8 hours shifts without loss in pay in the railways and improved rosters with the provision of adequate running times and layover breaks in the buses. In the lead up to Xmas.

In this edition of Sparks we look at the background to the Metros and the associated privatisation conspiracy and the rolling back of heavy rail by successive NSW Govts. (See article page 3.) We also look at problems with NSW train crews and the Aurizon coal train drivers EBA campaign. (See articles pages 6 & 7.).

In regard to the buses we look at problems with rosters and management. (See article page 12.) We also look at serious safety issues associated with the outbreak of fires on trams, which the union hierarchy is failing to take effective action over. (See article page 15.)

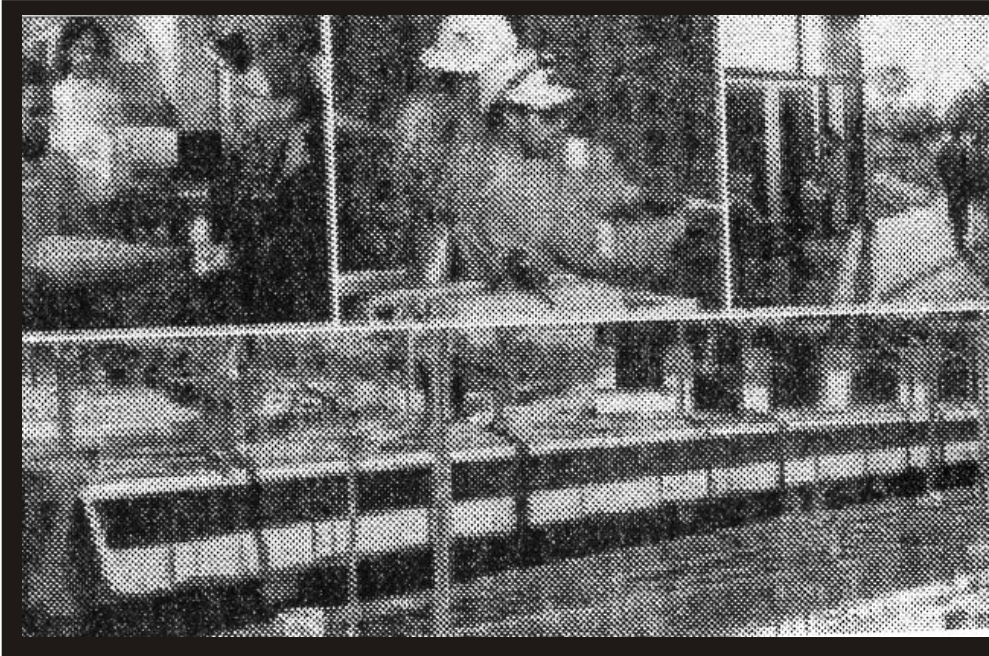
Sparks welcomes contributions in the shape of poems, articles and cartoons by transport workers. Please send to PO Box 92 Broadway 2007 NSW or via our web site www.sparksweb.org

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N.S.W. RAILWAY NEWS

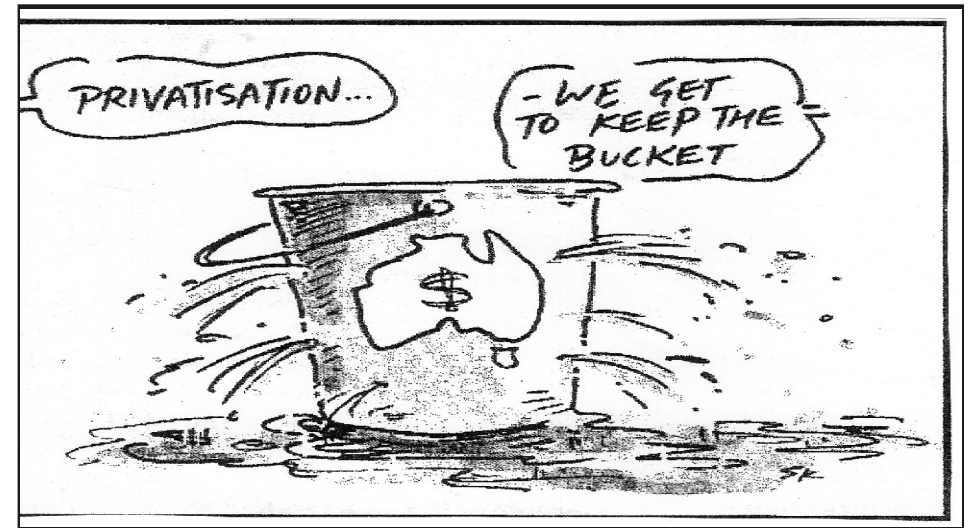
The Metros Privatisation Conspiracy



The decision of the NSW Liberal O'Farrell Govt. in 2012 for the North West Rail Link between Epping to Chatswood to be run as a privatised Metro now Sydney Metro North West with its subsequent extension to the CBD and Sydenham opened in 19/8/2024, must be seen as the thin edge of the push to privatise much of the Sydney railway system via Metros. Power driving this push was also former NSW Liberal Premier and Grandfather of Sydney's Tollway System Nick Greiner and former Secretary of Transport for NSW and key proponent for railway privatisation, Rod Staples.

Some points.

(1) As part of the construction of the North West line as a Metro, the 15 km tunnel between Epping and Chatswood was deliberately modified so as to be 40 centimetres too narrow for City Rail now Sydney Trains rolling stock. It had non



standardised dimensions.

(2) Where the single decker Metro style trains were introduced in much older cities in other countries, heavy rail was not extended into these cities CBDs. Unlike in Sydney where heavy rail extended into the CBD.

(3) As part of the selling of the Metro by the O'Farrell Govt. bogus propaganda was spread that heavy rail double decker trains could not provide services every 5 minutes which the Metro services can provide. However per google search the Paris Regional Express Network is able to provide heavy rail Double Decker trains frequencies of every 2 minutes during peaks. It has progressively moved to replace its single decker carriages with double deckers. Other rail operators in various countries have followed this example.

(4) Other bogus propaganda by the Govt. and the North West Link project team in support of the Metro was the claim that single decker Metro trains have the same capacity to carry passengers as double decker trains. However, this calculation is based on 4 passengers per metre and therefore very cramped for the 37 km trips from Chatswood to Epping and then an extra 10km for the trip to the CBD say. However, double decker trains have 100% more seating than single deckers. Therefore more suited for commuter comfort on long rail trips.

(5) Alex Claassens, former RTBU NSW Secretary would have had advance warning of the O'Farrell Govt. decision to have the North West Rail link to be a privatised Metro via his secret weekly meetings with the NSW Transport Minister. Obviously he okayed the plan with the Minister. Just like with the

privatisation of State Transit Authority buses in Newcastle and Sydney. The members were kept in the dark on the Metro decision and no industrial campaign was organised to oppose it and the associated Sydney railways privatisation conspiracy. Similar to the skulduggery by the current ALP flunky unelected RTBU NSW Secretary Toby Warnes with his caving into the conversion of the Bankstown line to a Metro.

An obvious hidden agenda of the Privatised Metro is to divide the railway workforce and weaken the effectiveness of industrial campaigns particularly during the “smoke and mirrors” performances of enterprise bargaining. Facilitating strike breaking using the pretext of separate EBA's for different “enterprises”. With the EBA industrial campaigns set up to fail particularly using various legalistic pretexts.

By Railway Ronny
Thanks to Sydney Eco Transit

Comment:

It can be said that the Metro is a mixture of old and new thinking. Twenty first century engineering, builds the track corridor, but then we buy new rolling stock from the late nineteenth century design. Then in an effort to break the railway culture (a Liberal Party and ALP view) bolt on automation (driverless) trains and it will be operated by the private sector, and more unwanted equipment that can malfunction, and to confuse the whole operation, platform doors. The overcrowding, the delays due to computer errors, poorly trained staff, overcrowding at Chatswood, With the solution to move the people crush, before the Metro line extensions to the CBD and then to Sydenham. Does all this sound familiar? Yes, its a lift from that now famous BBC comedy of the 1980's "YES MINISTER" bumbling civil servants and out of touch politicians.

Metros & The Dumping of Government Heavy Rail Extension Plans

Of course what is more unbelievable is this mess before the extensions has now finally put an end to the plan for a new rail network built for the future of Greater Sydney development. Plans that I became aware of in the mid late 1990's was to build a new heavy rail corridor from central to the Northwest (Richmond) via St James, Wynyard, North Sydney, Chatswood, Epping (now built) and from

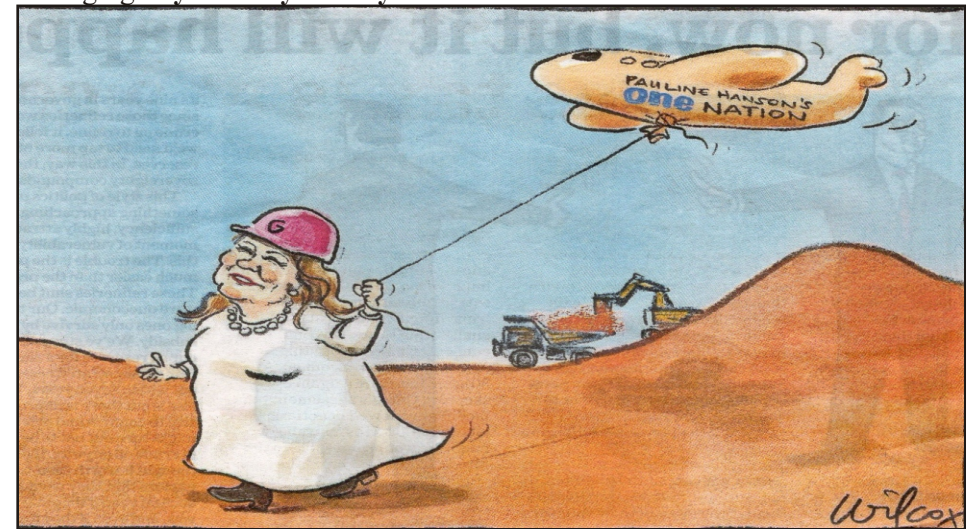
Richmond to St Mary's. A new line south from St Mary's to Leppington via Badgery's Creek with a junction to the south line Glenfield (now complete).

This line would continue to the East Hill's line now complete and to Central (using the empty platforms above the Illawarra line) via Sydenham or the Airport Line. A further extension from Leppington to Camden, the section St Mary's Leppington-Camden would also have been built. Beside it a coal line for western coal to be delivered to Port Kembla via the uncompleted Maldon-Donbarton line stopped by the incoming Liberal government in the 1980's. And I almost forgot this plan also showed the proposed completion of the Northern Beaches line from North Liberal Sydney,(Bradfield concept 1920's) but that will not happen as the NSW Governments from 2013 were going to build a road instead.

N.S.W. Train Crew News

If you wanted to snap at the intercity crew training programme, the trainees have plenty of difficult experiences including rostering regularly scheduling illegal separation between shifts, etc... Then of course late notice changes once trainees notify them - usually having a Sunday shift cancelled and a day off later in the fortnight substituted.

In addition there is a "culture" of trainers spreading their opinions and rumours (yes, like school) about trainees to other trainers who haven't met them yet. Creating significant prejudice. I can only call that highly unprofessional and damaging. **By Railway Johnny**



Problem with the Sydney to Melbourne Rail

8/1/26

Last night I boarded the Sydney night train to Melbourne to check the cool seats there and meet anyone who was around.

About three hours later, around 12:30 am, the train stopped at Goulburn, NSW. There, an announcement was made on the train's speaker system to let we passengers know, the heat of the day and night had broken the train line ahead, that no coaches were available and the train had to return to Sydney. Because, otherwise, the train driver could not continue driving as his driving hours are limited for safety reasons.

Long serving train staff said this had never happened before.

Some 400 travelers got off the train at Central at 4 am where we'd left some hours before.

I was lucky. I walked home in about ten minutes. Gosh knows what other travelers less lucky did with no place to go.

Michael Mobbs/Facebook

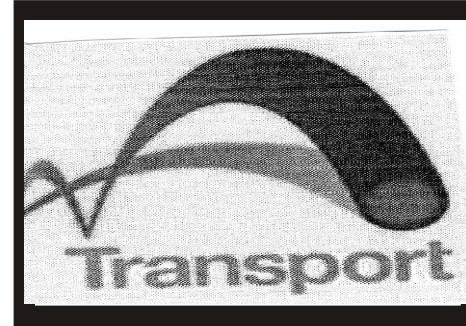
Aurizon Coal train drivers in NSW strike for pay

WSWS Report 18/4/26 Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members from four New South Wales coal rail terminals serviced by Aurizon Coal struck for 30 hours on April 12 as part of ongoing industrial action seeking improved pay and conditions in Aurizon's proposed enterprise agreement. The action followed a two-day strike on March 22 in response to management's refusal to pay workers participating in legally authorised partial work bans.

After 11 months of negotiations Aurizon offered a 19 percent pay increase over four years. Some 97 percent of RTBU members rejected the offer. Workers want a 29 percent wage increase over 3.5 years and a \$7,500 upfront cash payment along with improvements in conditions. Workers are demanding the "reset" pay increase to compensate for sub-inflation increases during the COVID pandemic.

The RTBU said it has "serious concerns" about Aurizon's management culture. The company was recently referred to the rail safety regulator over allegations of bullying and coercive behaviour towards its workforce. Last month the Fair Work Commission found Aurizon had taken unlawful industrial action against its workers, directing employees to leave or not complete work simply because they would not confirm whether they would drive a vehicle displaying an RTBU campaign sticker.

Aurizon transports about 40 million tonnes of export and domestic coal per year. According to the union, Aurizon's net profit for the financial year 2025 was \$303 million.



"A Family Affair"

Warning: Political Satire

At 10 am on Monday 1/12/25 an emergency meeting of the union executive was held in the conference room at the union offices in Pitt Sydney focusing on a looming financial crisis and union office operations restructuring. Apart from the usual suspects of State Secretary Toby Warnes, David Babineau Bus & Tram Division Secretary, Peter Grech from the Bus & Tram Division, Farren Campbell Loco Division Secretary, Alex Claassens RTBU National Secretary, assorted other officials and some union reps and rightwing ALP loyalists. There were also some special guests such the CEO of Sydney Trains Matthew "Light handed" and the CEO of NSW Trains Roger Week, Secretary of Transport for NSW Josh Murray and Mark Moray Secretary of UNIONS NSW, NSW Transport Minister John Graham and others at the gathering. After welcoming all the attendees to the meeting, Secretary Warnes rapidly cut to the chase and admitted to the gathering that the union was facing a worsening financial crisis and would severely worsen after the upcoming union elections were safely out of the way. He presented a series of graphs and flow charts via an overhead projector for the gathering to view. The CEO of Sydney Trains Matthew "Light handed" suddenly, barged in, interrupting Toby's spiel and tale of woe. He announced. "Toby, we can't afford to financially bale out the union, using any dodgy training expenses as in the past. Your ALP comrade Minns has become very stingy lately and won't contribute to our slush fund. He told us the sob story, that his government has to finance in a big way the high speed train link from Sydney to Newcastle. It'll cost approx. \$90 billion, and Albo will only contribute a



Union Bureaucrats helping management to insert nasties in the fine print of Rail EBA clauses.

portion of the cost.”

If Tech and Bank Bros can make the hard decisions so can the Union Executive!

Warnes continued, “Just look at that forward looking “Captain of Industry” Mike Cannon-Brookes, Atlassian CEO, he was taken the right step forward in the private sector, playing an impressive leadership role. Recently, he abruptly downsized his corporate workforce. With 1,600 of his staff sacked via a curt email. The NAB is following suit with outsourcing 447 bank jobs from its Australian operations. We in the trade union movement should be inspired by this downsizing by these corporate bosses to meet likely challenges to their corporation's profitability. With unfortunately the axe having to fall on many of our members following the union elections safely out of the way. With the Sydney and NSW Trains merger coming through and AI implementation we can expect a major reduction in union dues and worsening financial situation for us.” Toby went on to display graphs and flow charts showing likely projected union income declines via the overhead projector for the attendees.

Inspired by the Private Sector Toby pushes “Multi Tasking, Skilling & downsizing” in the union office

Warnes was no more the sweet innocent lamb when he was a rookie union official and as un-elected RTBU NSW Secretary he was enjoying throwing his bureaucratic weight around in the union office. Abruptly he accused Claassens of bludging in the National Secretary job. “Alex, with the union facing this dire crisis, we need some flexibilisation, downsizing and outsourcing in the union office. Its all the rage in the corporate world, and we in the trade union movement should follow suit. Alex you could start doing your bit, pulling your weight and become multi skilled and tasked. Come to think of it, you would make an excellent “shoe shine” boy for our union reps when they attend meetings at the union office. You know, we have to provide them with some sweetening up and pampering for when the axe falls on the members after the union elections are safely out of the way. The AEC (Australian Electoral Commission) Commissioner has assured me, with some of the behind the scenes monkey business, that ALP networks will perform before the official ballot count with scrutineers, I'll be elected unanimously. We'll need to rely on the reps to hose down any push for direct action to fight the job losses. Come to think of it, Alex your beloved spouse could put in some elbow grease at the union office as well to smooth our way through the crisis. She could moon light as a receptionist. I'm sure she'd be delighted with putting in 24 hour shifts to help we in the union power drive the 24 hour economy in Sydney. Naturally there will of course be yearly performance reviews.”

Toby makes efforts to raise the prestige of the Union amongst Trade Union “Leaders”

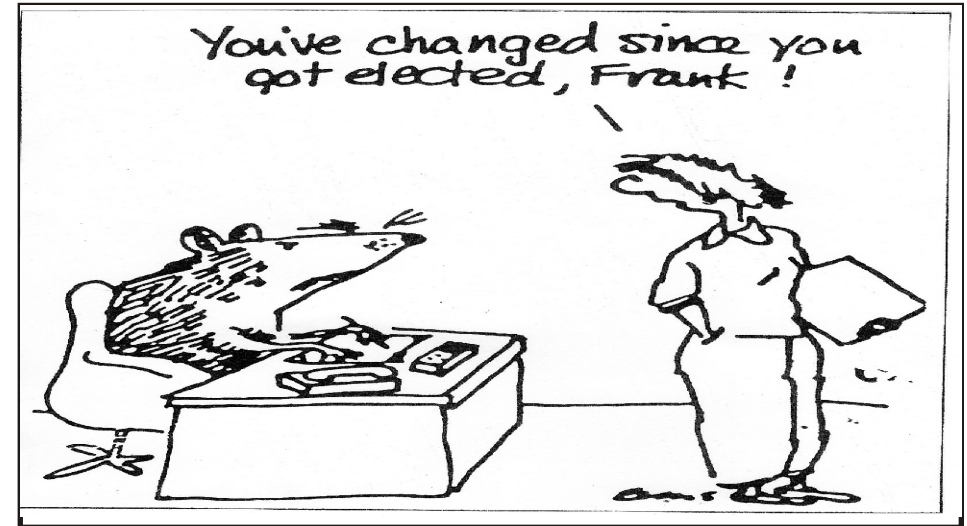
National Secretary Claassens was outraged by Toby's absurd idea for his job. Claassens roared, “Toby are you out of your mind! At ACTU conferences and Congresses the prestige of the union would be fatally damaged if word went around about the National Secretary of the RTBU performing “manual labour”. Queen Sally McManus, Secretary of the ACTU would look at me with pity, even disgust. I and the union will be a laughing stock at ACTU conferences. Our prestige would drop to rock bottom. Transport company CEO's will jeer snickering about me and the union.” Toby responded, “Alex I know you may feel this multi tasking of your role to be demeaning, but you'll

just have to take it on the chin, in the greater interests of our union. I have plans for raising the prestige of the union with the construction of a jacuzzi in the office with exquisite Carrara marble imported all the way from Italy. You could help out pushing a wheel barrow in the construction work. When finished we'll hold a grand opening inviting the cream of trade union movement leaders from across the land. Queen Sally of the ACTU will be supplying a bevy of beauties from her ACTU fully owned subsidiary "Intimate Corporate Companions for Every Occasion." They will provide en suite "performance workshops" for ACTU and other union heavy weights. The jacuzzi is definitely urgently needed for our officials OH&S requirements!"

David Babineau prepares to mobilise his family to help the Union out in its time of woe

"Good Samaritan" Babineau from the Bus & Tram Division, but not so good for bus drivers facing tight running times and inadequate layover breaks with rosters and those in the Northern and Eastern depots which were sold out to privatisation, keenly chipped in with some helpful suggestions to help the union. "Toby, my daughter would be delighted to help out the union in its time of need. She could easily perform, the union wine cellar chief administrative officer position. She's just completed a book keeping course at the TAFE so she could help also with the union office accounting and auditing. With of course 24 hour shifts thrown in with no financial remuneration! Like you she wants to power drive the 24 hour economy and make Sydney city of business! Make Australia Great Again! Alex would scream blue murder, if you demanded he work even 12 hour shifts just as a "temporary measure" like with the Olympics, let alone 24 hour shifts. No need for her new uni studies and time with her boy friend. She loves the union!"

Babineau continued, "Toby, to help the union out I'd even volunteer space in my family's wine cellar for the most expensive, illustrious and ancient of the union's vintage wines collection. I've noticed the union office cellar is horribly and terribly overcrowded!!! The union could have use of my van for the job, free of charge! My daughter, unlike National Secretary Claassens, isn't a bludger! She's no desk bound union bureaucrat, fat cat like Alex. She isn't afraid to put in some elbow grease and isn't horrified about performing some honest "manual labour" for the union. She would gleefully help out. No need for the union to hire expensive equipment like a forklift, a crane or wheel barrow, she has very strong back and shoulder muscles!! My role in the job would of course be purely supervisory, given my high profile position in the union." Toby, found Babineau's latest helpful suggestion a bit risque', announcing, "David, you're getting a bit rich



now. I've been reading in that "underground paper" that gets around about your wine collecting and tasting hobbies. So unfortunately, we can't take up your generous offer of assistance, with the union's wine cellar predicament."

SYDNEY BUSES NEWS

Leichhardt Depot News

Sparks: What are views on the rosters changes issue at the depot?
Leichhardt Driver: In regard to the changes to the AM shifts affecting about 10% of the depot workforce reported in your Sept.-Oct. 2025 edition, the changes were just slotted in by management. We were taken by surprise as we weren't given any prior warning. Before the changes, we were already running late with the AM's with some finishing at 4pm, 4.15pm, 4.30pm and 5pm. However with the merging of the Day Shifts into the AM shifts we are much worse off with the later finishing of shifts. After the slotting in of the new rosters, which have only affected Leichhardt and no other depot in Region 6. It was rumoured the reason for the change was that we were moving from the old depot to the new one. However, so far the location of the depot has certainly not changed. So it seems a very flimsy pretext by management.



The previous two statements have erroneously been a rumour for a while, but I've been informed by a RTBU rep that (1) Leichhardt never had a local agreement, but the other 3 depots did so. (2) As the award allows it, we have to wear it. Unless (3) management would agree to a local agreement, which is unlikely!

Sparks: What are other developments?

LD: Management is continuing on its corner cutting rampage. They have abolished WAD (Work As Directed) shifts. So if a trip goes down it can't be immediately covered.

Sparks: What else is management doing?

LD: Management are currently paying 15 minutes VOT for drivers to be trained on the new BYD Volgren buses. When we were trained on the previous "Ding Ding" buses, Leichhardt got 15 minutes VOT and Kingsgrove got 30 minutes VOT? I am not sure what Kingsgrove are getting this time. Anyway one of our drivers did the training and instead of 15 minutes VOT, they were charged/docked 15 minutes on their payslip!

Sparks: Have there been changes in management at the depot?

We have a new Depot Manager. Colloquially known by drivers and some in management as "Bat Shit". You'll see why. The higher up bosses normally search their networks for a head kicker, but surprise, surprise, they already had one on site working as a staff supervisor. He was always accusing drivers of doing all sorts of misdemeanors without first checking their journal for the date of the incident, despite instructing drivers to write everything on their journals. In one case, he

accused a driver of self adjusting work without approval. On looking at the journal, he then accused the driver of forging the D.O.'s instruction which the D.O. then said wasn't true.

Since taking the job, it's been reported to me that on at least two occasions, he has falsely accused drivers of serious incidents, which turned out to be a mistaken identity.

As a staff supervisor, it was rumoured he was sent to an anger/people management course.

Kingsgrove Depot News

Sparks: What's the latest situation with the routes since late March?

Kingsgrove Driver 1: We are continuing to face management seizing ever more opportunities to cut our wages and routes. In the case of the 445 in the evenings, the bosses decided to cut the route, in the interest of corner cutting. So instead of going to Campsie station it now terminates at Canterbury. In this way cutting 4kms from the run. So the bosses can save half an hour of higher paid wages from us. Commuters have to catch all stops services from Canterbury station.

Sparks: What are your impressions of the situation with running times and layover breaks?

Kingsgrove Driver 2: We are continuing to have problems with both issues. In the case of layover breaks at the end of runs, it varies. Sometimes, 5 minutes, 7 minutes and 10 minutes. The maximum is 10 minutes. However with late running related to heavy traffic and inadequate running times, we often end up with the layover breaks greatly reduced.

Tempe Depot News

Sparks: What are the latest developments at the depot?

Tempe Driver: We are facing a real crisis with the rosters. The bosses have gone on the rampage constantly flipping them. We aren't being given any adequate warning about the constant changes. We are angry over the worsening situation. I have also noticed many new drivers are coming to the depot who can speak little English. Management seems also getting up to favouritism/corruption. One driver was suddenly put on a spare roster. However, there was no advertising in the depot seeking applicants for this roster. Why not?

I find our wages aren't keeping up with inflation. As a result some are seeking better paid jobs elsewhere to cope with the rising cost of living.

Burwood Depot News

Sparks: What's the latest situation at the depot?

Burwood Driver: The situation at Burwood with the rosters is similar to your reports of other depots in Region 6 on the issue. Everyone is complaining about the rosters. A particular gripe is shifts finishing significantly later. Such as in the case of the mid days starts. All the old time legacy drivers are in the RTBU. However all new drivers are TWU members and aren't allowed to change over to the RTBU. The RTBU at the depot seems to have gone very quiet lately in the months around the Easter period. However, strangely enough the TWU has burst into activity. It has been active over complaints drivers have made of bullying by management.

Sparks: What is the situation with management and other issues?

BD: A previous manager was transferred from Tempe to Burwood as a demotion apparently. He seemingly was in the bad books of an area manager. He didn't last long at our depot. One day we received a message from management, that "he wasn't with us any more."

Many have left the depot. Its rumoured management appears to have pushed them off the job as they were considered "dead wood" and apparently weren't toeing management's line. It has been rumoured that management has been recruiting workers in Qld and deploying them here to replace those who have left the job in the roster and radio rooms.

Sydney light rail fire exposes public transport safety crisis

By Leonard Johns

WSWS Report 14/3/26: On Thursday, March 5, light rail services in Sydney's CBD were suspended after a fire broke out on the roof of a tram during morning peak hour. The incident is only the most public in a series of technical failures that have plagued the light rail network in Australia's largest city, highlighting the deterioration of safety and infrastructure under successive Labor and Liberal-National governments.

The tram halted at the Chalmers Street stop, outside Central, Sydney's busiest train station, after staff became aware of the blaze. Emergency services attended around 8:20 a.m. and light rail operations did not resume until the afternoon.

Photos and eyewitness accounts on social media reveal that the vehicle was already on fire before it left the previous stop, Surry Hills. Reddit user uhmatomy wrote: "I was



there. Big BANG and some pops and flames as it left the platform. "It literally caught on fire seconds before leaving the Surry Hills stop and went down the hill."

X/Twitter user Michael Cooper posted photos showing fire and smoke emanating from the tram roof at Surry Hills and wrote that: "We were all banging on the driver's cubicle trying to tell him but he ignored us and continued on to Central."

Cooper's comment, and the fact that the tram continued on to Central, strongly suggest that the driver was not alerted to the malfunction by any warning lights or alarms built in to the vehicle, although the fire and smoke were already substantial enough to be spotted by passers-by.

Services were initially suspended between three stops only, before the entire central Sydney and eastern suburbs' L2 and L3 lines were stopped as a precaution "given recent similar events," private operator Transdev told Sky News.

These unspecified "recent similar events" were further alluded to by Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) Divisional President Peter Grech, who blithely declared it was the third tram fire in a week.

Calling for an "urgent investigation," Grech declared: "Without immediate action, there's a real risk to commuters and light rail workers. What happened today raises real concerns about whether the fleet is being properly maintained."

The RTBU's response poses obvious questions: Why did the two previous incidents (about which no further detail is forthcoming) not "raise real concerns"? Had this highly public incident in the heart of Sydney not

happened, would the RTBU leadership have said anything at all about light rail fires? How many more fires and other safety incidents has the union covered up? Even based on what has been publicly reported, Sydney’s light rail system has a grim safety and reliability record:

In April 2020, there was an explosion at the Randwick depot after a tram’s batteries overcharged and blew off the compartment cover. The Office of Transport Safety Investigations (OTSI), the NSW transport investigator, concluded in December 2020 that among the contributing factors were software data corruption and that “neither Alstom’s validation processes nor fault monitoring processes were sufficient” to detect it. The Australian Transport Safety Bureau, a national investigative government body, stated in the final investigation report that it was “satisfied that the safety actions taken by Alstom will reduce the risk of this safety issue.”

In September 2021, cracks were identified in the wheel arches of the entire 12-tram fleet operating the Inner West Light Rail Line or L1. The OTSI investigation published in 2025 determined contributing factors to be inadequate maintenance and insufficient proactive inspections of the under frames, “despite there being knowledge of similar fractures identified in overseas vehicles and considering the risk of LRV derailment due to a fractured under frame.”

In December 2024, the opening of the Parramatta line, known as L4, was delayed due to problems in overhead wiring which incidentally revealed that half the network’s fastening joints were defective and required replacement, according to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

A video posted on Reddit in July last year shows a light rail tram at Randwick stop with smoke coming from its roof and fire services attending.

Grech’s talk of “immediate action” is nothing more than empty bluster. In the face of “real risk” to passengers and workers, the RTBU is ensuring workers stay on the job, maintaining business as usual for Transdev and the state Labor government.

Rather than a fight by workers to demand safe conditions, the union is promoting illusions in an investigation, to be conducted by Transport for NSW i.e., Management and the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator (ONRSR). Such investigations are invariably protracted whitewashes, covering up the responsibility of private operators, governments and the unions in presiding over unsafe conditions.

At the end of last year, a government-commissioned inquiry into Sydney’s public rail network revealed that incidents, defects and delays were at their highest levels in a decade, largely due to deteriorating infrastructure and unresolved maintenance backlogs.

In May 2025, a preventable wiring breakage cut power to a train pulling into

Homebush station a key transfer junction causing major disruptions across the Sydney train network for two days. The Independent Rail Review found that transport workers’ tools to detect faulty wiring were “insufficient.”

On the same day as the light rail fire, Minister of Transport John Graham announced the deployment of new wire checking technology. In other words, seven months after the inquiry into a crisis caused by government neglect in the first place, new technology is issued, while staffing, salaries, maintenance, other equipment and the public transport budget as a whole continue to be attacked, and vital public services are increasingly privatised.

The Sydney light rail network operates under “public/private partnerships” between the NSW Government and private consortia. Lines L1, L2 and L3 are operated and maintained by the ALTRAC Light Rail consortium, which includes Transdev and Alstom. The L4 is run by a separate consortium.

In Sydney, the light rail, Metro, bus and ferry services have been handed over for profitable exploitation, leaving only the heavy rail passenger transport system in public hands. The decades-long program of privatisation, begun in NSW under the Carr Labor government, has been carried out around Australia by both Labor and Liberal-National administrations and enforced by the RTBU and other unions.

Light rail workers and passengers cannot rely on appeals to the state Labor government, the so-called safety regulators or the RTBU to deliver a safe and reliable public transport system. These are the very organisations that have overseen the years of under funding, inadequate maintenance and privatisation responsible for the dire conditions that exist today.

VICTORIAN RAILWAY NEWS

In this issue of Sparks, drivers, conductors, station staff and various conductors will discuss current issues at V/Line. As in previous issues of Sparks names have been changed.

Sparks: Did you obtain a Christmas Present from V/Line?

Ichabod: Nothing not even a party. All employees received a swipe card.

Ezra: Not even a thank you from management. A new procedure for signing on and off is being introduced across V/Line over the next year.

Rastus and Roscoe: The swipe card has been introduced through the Driver grade. You will have to be at work on time with the cards or you will be docked. When signing off if there is no work to do you will be allowed to go home a few minutes early without being docked.

Archie: This maybe for the drivers but station staff and conductors have to be on time and stay until sign off time.

Roscoe: You should be allowed ten minutes when signing on to cover for arriving late with early shifts and allowed to leave if there is not other duties at least half an hour early.

Sparks: What is the story of a foreign train operating companies seeking business in Australia?

Rastus: These foreign companies have been in Australia since 1995.

Ezra: The current government in Britain is re-nationalising the passenger network. As the franchises expire the Government is taking back the operations.

Rastus: This does not apply to open access operations. These operations operate on open access agreements with the office of open access. Examples of open access operators are Hull Trains, Grand Central. These operators will be able to continue competition with the passenger network.

Ichabod: One train operation company which has recently opened an office in Australia is the Go Ahead Group. They operate a train Operating Company in Britain and Buses in the UK, Ireland and parts of Europe.

Ezra: The Metro Trains franchise is up for renewal next year and Go Ahead and other companies will bid for Metro.

Sparks: What about V/Line?

Rastus: With V/Line, privatisation will be decided by politicians. They will decide whether V/Line is privatised.

Esah: One of the problems with V/Line is when construction of Airport Rail commences there will be a fair amount of construction work taking place between West Footscray and Albion. Will a TOC tender for V/Line occur in these conditions?

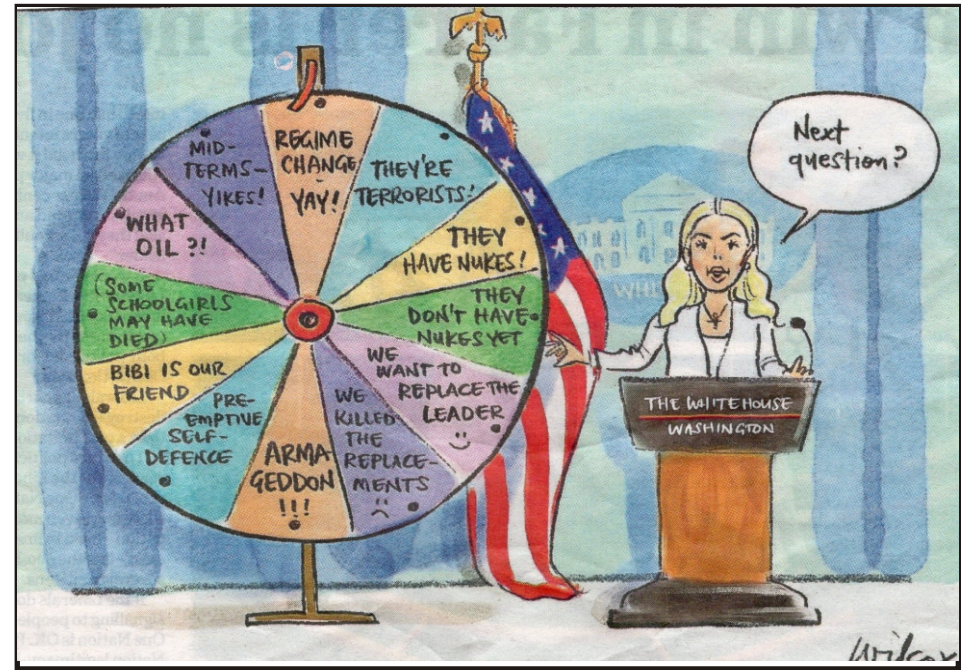
Rastus: V/Line was privatised between 1999 and 2002 and when Regional Fast Rail was planned, V/Line was to be returned to the Government. The operator National Express returned V/Line to the Government and has remained as a Department within the Victorian Government.

Ezra: There are also works to commence on the Geelong line. Privatisation only works when things are operating smoothly. If a major disruption or a Recession occurs these train operating companies incur heavy losses. This happened in Britain. The train operating companies there threw in the towel.

In Britain the Government has a TOC called "Operator of Last Resort". This operator operated the trains until they were Re-Franchised but over the last five years the companies stayed with the UK Government.

Sparks: Is overcrowding still occurring?

Allison: Overcrowding is still occurring on the Shepparton, Warrnambool and



Albury lines. On these services compulsory test braking applies on the Albury and Warrnambool lines. With Shepparton and Bairnsdale lines there are separate carriages which are reserved.

Ichabod: During the Christmas Holidays there were problems on Warrnambool and Albury lines. These trains were overcrowded so back up buses were provided. Passengers preferred trains to buses. In other words, they preferred to stand.

Rastus: Questions have been raised in State Parliament about overcrowding on these trains. One Member of Parliament who holds an electorate in North Eastern Victoria has suggested four car Velocity trains on the Albury line. V/Line has replied to this person with "No".

Archie: The Velocity trains operating the Albury line are classed as "Intercity Velocity Trains" of which only six units were constructed. These units have buffet cars. In peak periods they operate as six car units. The fifth unit is the spare unit. That is in theory. If one unit is defective, the timetable is out the door.

Ichabod: Bairnsdale, Warrnambool and Shepparton lines use the Velocity trains classed as Interurban Velocities.

Allison: V/Line could operate four car trains to Albury and Warrnambool but

some platforms would have to be lengthened. This could take years to complete. In fact five stations on the Traralgon line, six car trains have the last carriage overshooting the platform.

Sparks: What about service disruptions?

Roscoe: One word: chaos.

Clarence: One disruption is Track Faults. Employees have observed over the years that these faults occur during peak hours. During January a fault occurred and half the platforms were out of action.

Rastus: This problem also happened at Metro Trains. The companies should have maintenance crews stationed where these track faults occur.

Clarence: In January there were major works at Melton, Deer Park and Tarneit over a two week period, Ballarat/Melton trains were replaced by buses between Bacchus Marsh and Melbourne. Geelong trains were replaced by buses from Wyndham Vale to Melbourne. There were express buses from Geelong to Melbourne but passengers traveled on trains from Waurin Ponds to Wyndham Vale. Buses to Werribee then suburban trains to Melbourne.

Roscoe: They could have the Geelong train to connect at Werribee with suburban trains.

Ichabod: This suggestion is positive thinking in theory but in practice it did not happen. Not all trains from Geelong would run to Werribee but a mixture of trains and buses to Werribee could have been planned.

Rastus: A fair number of drivers are not trained to operate trains via Werribee.

Sparks: Once again we have run out of space.

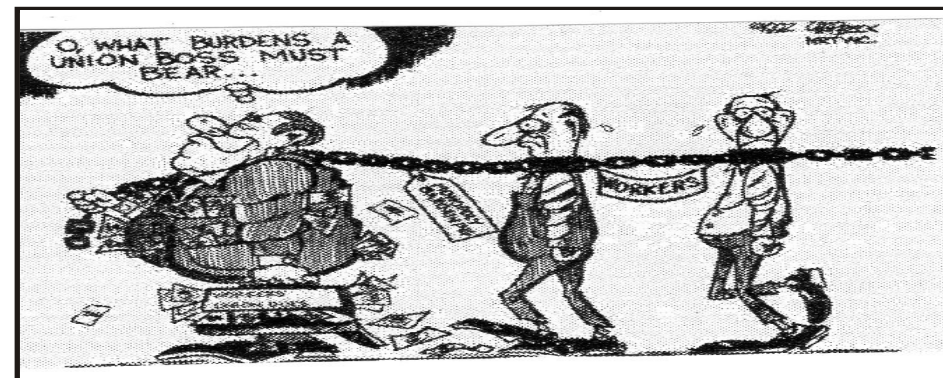
Rastus and Roscoe: In having the final say, V/Line management should adopt these suggestions, but our opinion is some of these managers do not have the power of positive thinking.

In this issue of Sparks we will discuss the forgotten fire trains of Victoria which operated during the fire season. In this article we will give a brief history of these trains.

Sparks: Can you tell us the origin of these trains?

Irving: In Victoria there is a record of these trains operating in the late 19th Century to various locations around Victoria. In those days the Railways produced a train of four wheel wagons behind a locomotive. These trains were manned by railway employees.

Ezra: These trains were also used to replenish water tanks and employee housing water tanks at railway stations, fire trains were used during bush fires in 1926, 1939 and 1944.



Irving: There were also special trains used to transport volunteers from Melbourne to Warragul in 1938 to fight the fires.

Ezra: In 1962 there were bush fires in the Dandenong Ranges and a fire train was kept on standby on the Fern Tree Gully line.

Sparks: When was a permanent fire train established.

Alvin: After the bush fires of 1962 a fire train was established during the fire season from November to April.

Rastus and Roscoe: Some of the older drivers remember the train. The train consisted of two Guards vans plus oil tankers. These tankers were thoroughly cleaned and filled with water. The train was stabled at either Melbourne Yard or Jolimont Yard.

Alvin: On days of acute fire danger, if a fire occurred, the train would be despatched to the location of the fire. Country fire authority volunteers would man the tanks and fight the fire. Railway trains would operate under the supervision of a railways official. The use of the word TOTAL FIRE BAN instead of Acute Fire Danger was introduced in 1966.

Rastus: In 1966 a grass fire around St. Albans was severe. The train was despatched to the fire location what is now Keilor Plains and Watergardens and was used to fight the fire. The train received praise from the general public, The train was also written up in the Victorian Railways Newsletter.

Alvin: In 1968 the train was despatched on two occasions to fight fires on the Belgrave line around Upwey.

Rastus: There was a drought in 1968 and a second train was established and kept on standby. On one occasion both trains were utilised at two different locations.

Alvin: The railways held exhibitions in 1968 and 1972 at Spencer Street and the fire train was on display. Both times the train was used to give a

demonstration in fighting fires.

Sparks: Why was the fire train disbanded?

Roscoe: We do not know when the train was last used but we think it was around 1983.

Alvin: The train would be a useful asset but with the use of fire aircraft and infra red technology the train has become redundant.

Sparks: Could a fire train be an asset in today's environment?

Ezra: One word NO! With the breakup of Victorian Railways in 1983 and privatisation in 1999 who would operate the trains?

Irvine: With deregulation of Oil in 1992 there are hardly any Oil tankers. Most oil wagons were scrapped.

Rastus: The train would be a useful asset today in fighting line side fires. Fire aircraft cannot be used if the weather is a high wind on a bay.

Aurizon refuses to pay unionised rail workers

WSWS Report 4/4/26: A long-running dispute between the Rail Train and Bus Union (RTBU) and Aurizon over a new enterprise agreement has escalated, with Aurizon refusing to pay workers imposing legally authorised work bans. Workers responded to the effective lockout with stop-work action on March 22f23.

In early March, workers voted nearly unanimously to proceed with industrial action including strike action and work bans to secure their demands.

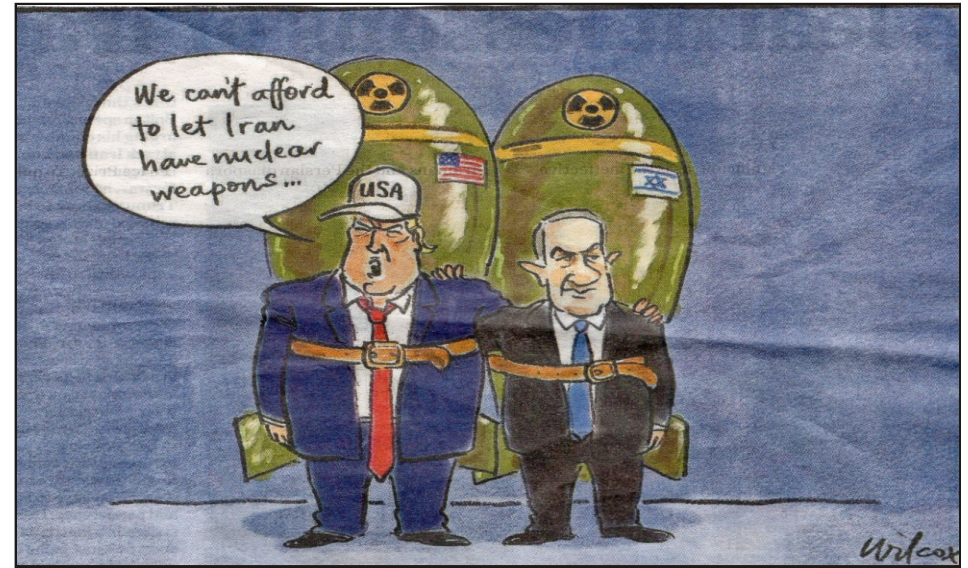
The RTBU is seeking a 15 percent “wage repair” increase to combat the rising cost of living, noting that transport and food costs have significantly outpaced recent 10 percent pay rises.

Further industrial action is expected.

Pacific National rail workers in Queensland strike for improved pay offer

WSW Report 14/3/16: Over 300 Pacific National (Coal Queensland) (PNC) train crews stopped work for 24 hours on Monday and picketed depots across the state. Members of the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) and the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Employees (AFULE) were locked out without pay for refusing to do overtime while taking protected industrial action.

Workers began industrial action last November, after six months of failed negotiations. They are opposed to any cuts in conditions and PNC’s low pay rise offer in its proposed enterprise agreement. The unions claim that the company has ignored members’ key demands.



Ongoing industrial action includes bans on overtime and altered rosters. Management warned on Monday that any worker who chooses to not agree to alter their shift during the protected ban will be locked out. Another 24-hour stoppage is planned from noon on March 18.

Queensland rail workers locked out

WSWS Report 4/4/26: On Wednesday, around 200 train controllers in Queensland, covered by the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU), were set to hold limited work bans intended to impact only privately owned coal and freight trains. They are opposing a real wage cutting offer of just a 10.5 percent nominal increase over four years.

Queensland Rail (QR) and the Liberal-National Party government responded by shutting down 300 passenger services between Darra and Rosewood on the Ipswich line and Central and Cleveland and disrupting 20,000 commuters’ travel plans.

The following day, 150 QR workers covered by the Electrical Trades Union also took protected industrial action, saying they would only come into work to repair faults on the network if there was a safety risk. Queensland Rail however told them they would not be paid unless they performed their full duties.

Queensland rail workers resume industrial action

WSWS Report 2/5/26 The Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU), representing

train drivers, controllers and maintenance workers at Queensland Rail (QR), announced this week that it would resume industrial action over the next two weeks following failed pay talks with the Liberal-National Party government in the Fair Work Commission.

The union said the government’s wage rise offer did not keep up with inflation and increased hours for some workers whilst reducing their penalty rates. It claimed management’s offer was like the one already rejected by members. The RTBU said rolling strikes would affect different parts of the workforce, including maintenance workers and train signalers.

QR locked out 200 train controllers and shut down 300 passenger services on March 31 and affecting 20,000 commuters after workers engaged in minor industrial action, which, the union claimed, would not have affected commuter traffic.

Electrical Trades Union and Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members are also taking industrial action and are involved in pay negotiations. The government has threatened that anyone taking industrial action, including partial work bans, will not be paid, even if still at work.

GERMAN RAILWAY NEWS

WSWS Report 9/3/26: The collective agreement negotiated by the German Train Drivers’ Union (GDL) with the German rail company Deutsche Bahn (DB AG) on February 26 amounts to a real wage cut that stabs local transport workers, who are also engaged in collective bargaining negotiations, in the back. With this agreement, the GDL is providing the German government, which owns Deutsche Bahn, an indispensable service against the working class.

First, the agreement includes a real wage cut. The new contract, which begins with a six-month wage freeze and a 5 percent wage increase in two steps starting in August 2026, will not compensate for the real wage losses during this period. Two linear wage increases of 2.5 percent each are planned, the first on August 1, 2026 and the second on August 1, 2027.

The new agreement also includes a one-time payment of 700 Euros for employees and 350 Euros for trainees and student trainees (as well as for employees who have been with the company for 35 years, the new pay grade 8). However, the one-time payments are only intended to ease the pressure in the short term. They are not included in the pay scale and therefore do not represent a permanent improvement in purchasing power.

The Informationsdienst Wissenschaft (idw) recently calculated the real wage

cuts based on the wage agreement negotiated with Verdi, the German services union. Verdi had accepted a 5.8 percent wage increase for state employees over 27 months. As stated in the idw declaration, “due to the significant increase in social security contributions and the progressive effect of income tax in 2026, the real net wage is likely to be lower than in the previous year” (Emphasis added). Professor Oliver Holtemller from the Leibniz Institute for Economic Research in the city of Halle explained: “Although the agreed wage increases raise the wage table, employees will still have to make do with less disposable income in real terms.”

This is precisely what has come to pass with the new wage agreement for train drivers and conductors. Although the GDL claims in its latest circular that the agreement includes “structural adjustments to the pay scales” and “improved pay grades,” these are not specified.

What is particularly striking is that the GDL is concluding negotiations and agreeing to a two-year strike ban at a time when anger and militancy among colleagues are growing.

Deutsche Bahn is in the process of launching a massive attack on jobs and working conditions. Just last week, the Deutsche Bahn executive board announced that “thousands of jobs” would be cut at DB Cargo. According to internal sources, only 8,000 of the 14,000 jobs in the freight division will remain by 2030. This will inevitably affect many train drivers and massively increase the work pressure for the rest.

In addition, the latest sell-off comes at a time when the German Merz-Klingbeil government is planning far-reaching social attacks to finance its war policy. It is attacking the eight-hour working day, continued pay in the event of illness, protection against dismissal and pensions. Last year, Chancellor Friedrich Merz declared: “We can no longer afford the welfare state.”

In this situation, the GDL’s agreement has deprived train drivers and conductors of the opportunity to effectively fight for better conditions and against the government’s war policy in a joint struggle with tram, bus, light rail drivers, pilots, flight attendants and other sections of the working class.

Local public transport has held its third warning strike of its current wage dispute, and the GDL is stabbing these workers in the back with its agreement, making it easier for the Verdi service union to sell out all these struggles and push through real wage cuts so that the federal government’s insane war policy can be financed.

When news of the GDL agreement reached the Verdi warning strikes on Friday, discontent spread among the strikers. “We could have struck together to achieve more,” said a striking tram driver in front of the Munich

tram depot. "Sixteen years ago, it was the other way around; back then, the GDL went on strike and Verdi didn't." Others said that Verdi could not be trusted either and that nothing would come of it in the end. "But it's not true that there's no money," said one striker. "The money is just going to the war in Ukraine."

The GDL agreement confirms what the WSWS has been writing for years: The GDL, which initially presented itself as more militant than the other German Trade Union Confederation unions representing rail workers, EVG and Verdi, has proven to be just as compliant a prop of management and the government against workers. It has repeatedly called off strikes prematurely out of deference to the federal government and German business. The GDL has even set up its own temporary employment agency for train drivers, Fair Train, and elected the ultra-right-wing Rainer Wendt as its supervisory board chairman.

After the last wage agreement, the WSWS wrote:

The GDL is following the same path as all the trade unions. Deprived of the opportunity to negotiate limited reforms within a national framework by the dominance of global financial institutions and corporations, they have turned into company policemen. While asset values and share prices are rising, they are responsible for falling wages, job cuts and increasing workloads. They are fully behind the government's pro-war policy and help it to pass the costs of rearmament and war onto the working class.

This has been clearly confirmed by the latest collective agreement with its real wage cuts. It effectively separates train drivers and conductors from other employees and is proving to be a strike breaker. With its gag clause stipulating a two-year ban on strikes, the GDL is tying the hands of train drivers and conductors in an explosive political situation.

The attacks on wages, working hours and public services are international, as are the increasingly threatening preparations for war. Train drivers, train attendants and all workers must counter the nationalist policies of the GDL, EVG and Verdi with international cooperation among the working class. The working class can only defend itself by building independent rank-and-file committees and uniting with their colleagues in local and long-distance transport, workshops, on-board staff, public transport depots and other public services.

Punjab bus workers hold statewide strike

14/2/26 WSWS Report: About 8,000 Punjab Roadways and PRTC contract workers from 27 depots held a state-wide strike on Wednesday. Workers complained that many who had been there for 10 to 20 years were still contract employees and that their conditions were precarious. See page 28.

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:

That no person employed by the union should earn more than the average income of the membership.

1. The Spokespeople should have no executive power f all decisions should be made by the union membership in the course of mass meetings.

2. The Spokespeople have no executive power f all decisions should be made by the union membership in 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.

Cont. from page 27 Their demands included reinstatement of 34 workers who were terminated during the previous struggles, regularisation of services, timely payment of salaries and withdrawal of the contract system, which they described as exploitative. They also want the government to reverse a decision to open tenders for 100 air-conditioned buses under the kilometre-based bus scheme. Workers claimed this was a backdoor attempt to allow private players to operate on government-notified routes. Under the scheme, private operators lease buses to the transport department and are paid a fixed rate per kilometre. Workers fear that the move threatens thousands of jobs in the state transport sector.

