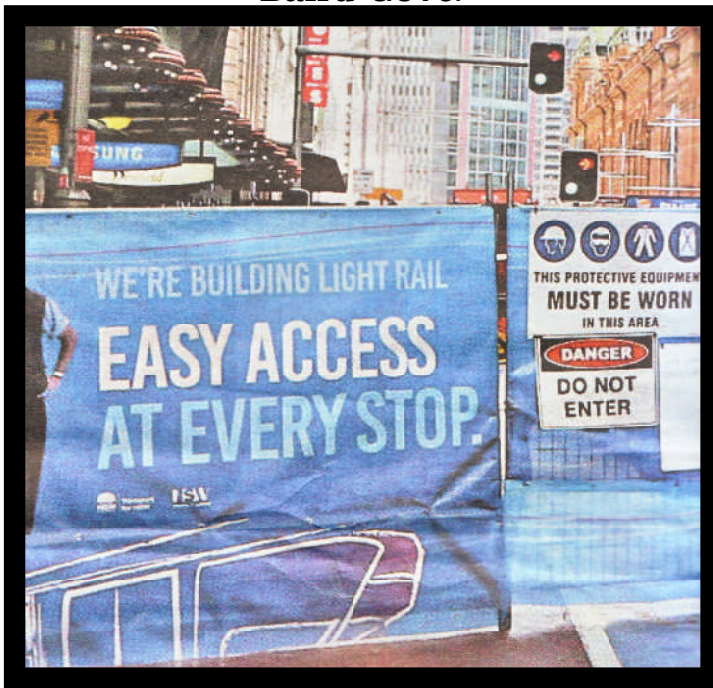


Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

**George Street Closure & Traffic Gridlock
Presents Opportunities for Direct Action to
Blunt the Claws of the Rail & STA Feral Fat
Cats & Win Goodies from the Cashed Up
Baird Govt!**



NSW Railway News;
Opal Chaos;
International News;
Newcastle Rail Line;

STA Busie News;
Victorian Railway News;
“Optimisation” Phase 2;
George Street Closure;

EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

Some of the most important news lately is the phased closure of parts of George Street to all motor vehicles from 23/10/15, associated with the tramway extensions construction. The likely traffic gridlock at this time is an ideal time to fight back with direct action in the shape of “work to rule”, blockades, etc against the various management attacks associated with current and previous enterprise agreements and various management new initiatives. Some of the most vicious has been making station barrier staff stand for 8 to 12 hours during shifts, causing significant health problems for these workers. (See article Page 5.) In the STA, the already draconian disciplinary regime has been greatly worsened, resulting in the sack for many. Whilst various nasties can be tackled via such a campaign at this time, also goodies in the shape of hefty bonuses, improved wages and conditions can also be won from the cashed up Baird Government.

The Opal system malfunctioning has created ever more problems for commuters and staff alike. Whilst it greatly increases State surveillance of commuters, further eroding privacy. (See article page 3.) A further wave of attacks is looming with the Rail EBA 2017, underlining the importance of a campaign to fight it's nasties, being organised by Members' Voice - Rank & File Transport Workers Group. (See article page 7.)

In this edition, we throw more light on the second phase of “Optimisation” in the STA, associated with the George Street Closure and route changes. With this initiative, the bosses are seizing the opportunity for shaving back drivers' wages. Whilst, the deployment of part timers is having ever more harmful effects on full time drivers. (See article page 12.)

Whilst, some may think we at Sparks have been lazing around lately, they are very wrong! We have been beavering away behind the scenes and have secured something quite interesting and enlightening, an interview with a certain Peter Rowley, STA CEO for this edition! (See article page 8.)

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

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N.S.W. RAILWAY NEWS

LOOKING BACK? NO! LOOKING FORWARD.

What a year it has been so far! The reform process for rail and for the buses has rolled on unabated. It seems that this will never end unless we put an end to it.

Reforms are sold to the public and employees alike as an attempt to make things better, more efficient. Yet for many of us it is easy to form the opinion that not much has changed or that in some aspects things are worse than before. But that hardly matters when we are bombarded by Government propaganda that the reforms have transformed public transport in NSW for the better.

While the Opal Card in N.S.W. has been convenient for lots of commuters it comes at a premium price. Despite privacy concerns, and overcharging, a majority of people are using the smart travel Opal Card. There have been problems, such as the card readers on buses losing signal causing commuters being either unable to tap on or tap off. This leads to the maximum fare being charged against the card. Also a few times in the city, peak hour ticket readers at station gates have malfunctioned causing a massive traffic jam of commuters being unable to tap on or off or even get through the gates.

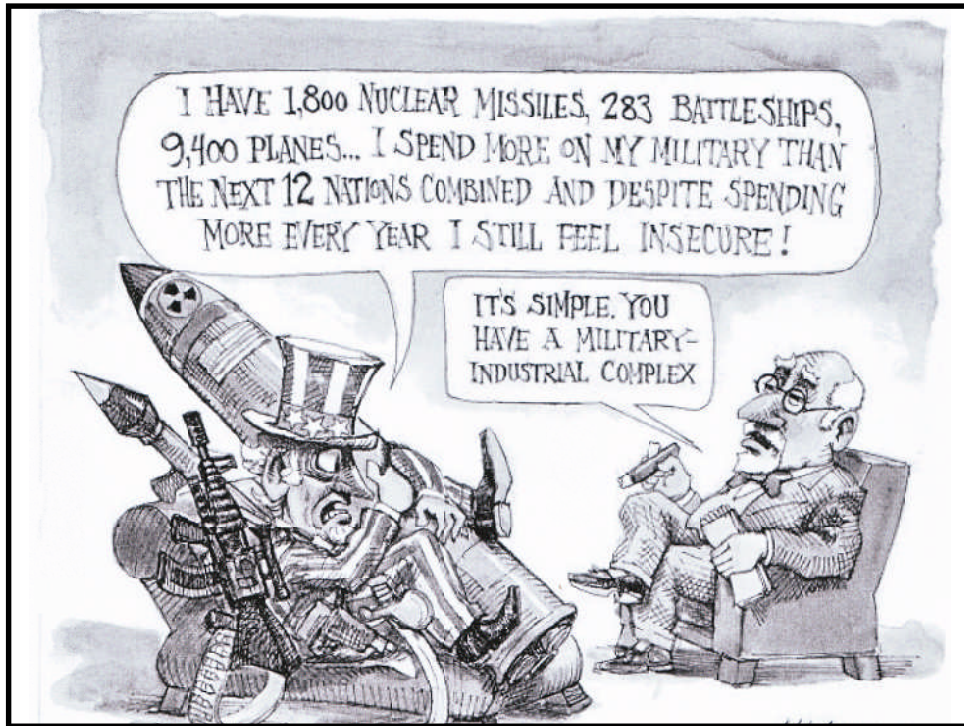
At the end of this year single trip tickets, paper and plastic, will be phased out forcing people onto the Opal Card. This removes flexibility in the way that people travel and disadvantages poorer people who live hand to mouth on a daily basis. It also places many more people onto the surveillance database used by law enforcement agencies who have access to the Opal Card collected data.

What do you do if you don't have \$40 for the online top-up of your card, or the \$10 required for the top-up from a card retailer? The N.S.W Government says, "go jump". Many more unfortunates will be forced to run the gauntlet without any form of authority to travel.

Why remove the flexibility that is already built into the system? It gives people choice. What about those that only have to use public transport once, due to being a tourist, car breakdown, emergency commute e.t.c.?

They will all have to go through the unnecessary rigmarole of obtaining an Opal Card, even if it is to be used only once. Cancelling a card must be done within 90 days or all money contained on the card becomes the property of Opal. Cancelling is not easy if you are a tourist or for some reason you no longer need the card. You are required to fill out a form and send it off for a refund which will be credited to your bank account. Many other countries in our region have a much more flexible cancellation policy, the card holder being able to cancel the card and obtain a refund at the airport or at major rail stations.

The N.S.W Government hasn't invested meaningfully in public transport infrastructure like other comparable cities around the world have. Yet \$billions have been made available here for private sector roads and tollways. The extension of privatisation into many of the areas of



public transport won't reduce costs and does not necessarily mean that we will get an efficient and world class railway. Where rail does best is where it is State run and funded well.

The constant downgrading of jobs has been a feature of the latest reforms. Staff on lower wages and with less experience have replaced skilled and dedicated old hands in most positions. The replacement of full time workers with part-timers is an accelerating trend. The old Team Leader positions on Stations will soon be a thing of the past as will the Station Support Officer positions. They are already being phased out, just as the Trainer Guards have lost any prestige and respect that went with their jobs.

The difficulty for many, is that, if their positions are abolished and they need to stay on the job there is no assurance that they can take a lower graded job, or even a job of equivalent grade and pay, or even more impossibly, a job that is graded higher than their current position. A complicating factor for employees "surplus to requirements" in the future is that under the terms of the current Enterprise Agreement, from October 2017, redundancy payments for long term employees will be half of the current entitlement.

Yet in N.S.W despite all the anguish over the unending reforms, despite all the fear and uncertainty, no fight-back has eventuated. The reasons for this are many and varied. However we, the ordinary members, the rank and file, must bare a burden of responsibility. We can no longer just sit back and expect anyone else to do our bidding when the knife is at our throats. It is high time we prepared to take bold steps.

That the union leadership has by and large failed to heed the pleadings and advice of it's own members is nothing short of unforgivable. They have been prepared to negotiate with management devils at the expense of their own membership, who have basically been blind side-line spectators in a game where the rules keep changing. Really it is just a matter of showing some leadership where there now is none.

One thing that the recent tentative, restrained, Melbourne Metro E.B.A. stoppages, have shown, is that when the leadership does stand up and do anything they will get the support of an overwhelming majority of the membership. The leadership may have to be cajoled and pushed, prodded and reluctantly rolled along by the ranks in this process. However by forcing the leadership into turning the rusty old wheels of inertia, making the impossible seem possible, workers feel their own power. The leadership is much stronger because of this, (no matter what members feel about the organisation of the campaign), simply because it acted positively in the perceived interest of members.

At this point we need to ask "who are the real leaders"? No industrial action can be contemplated without the rank and file. Organisation and leadership make the union strong and so does the support of the membership.

The intervention of the Andrews Labor Government in the negotiation process between Metro and the R.T.B.U. is about taking away the lead provided by the union leadership and the rank and file. Intervention by any political party with an axe to grind can't really help members resolve the issues with the company in any conclusive and meaningful way. There had been criticism of the Andrews Government transport policies and their cosy relations with Metro from both the rank and file and from certain quarters in the leadership, to a limited extent. Perhaps the Andrews Government has inserted itself into negotiations in an effort to limit the damage to the ALP in Victoria. The rank and file should not welcome such intervention which removes the ranks from confronting the class enemy in the form of the company. The problem is that it weakens the union and it's members in the long run by removing them from the battle front and forcing them into a political compromise. Things haven't been resolved satisfactorily in Victoria yet, however the industrial action which was giving the ranks confidence and pride seems to now to be on the back-burner.

In the other States, especially N.S.W. there is little or no organisation on the ground and pleas from members fall on deaf ears. If you put a cracker up the N.S.W. leadership's arse and set it off they would deny the explosion ever took place despite their hemorrhoids leaving them unable to sit.

Recently in Sydney a petition by members was sent to the union office threatening to resign if there was no support for a campaign from the union leadership to halt management breaches of health and safety laws. Several months later little has changed. Station staff are still being forced to stand for prolonged and unreasonable periods causing exacerbation of health related conditions. The consensus of members does not seem to matter a fig because according to the union a "risk assessment" has been done. Baloney! They are not taking our concerns seriously. If we had acted together this issue could have been resolved in our favour. We failed and our leadership failed. To them the bread and butter issues of the members do not matter.

Meanwhile the N.S.W. Government, in an act of bastardry have enacted legislation officially truncating the Sydney to Newcastle line at Hamilton. Neither Liberal nor Labor in Government has really been opposed to the truncation of the line to Newcastle. The City of Newcastle is left effectively with no rail line to N.S.W.'s second largest city. For the Libs developers and money men have always been more important than people, though both the major party's have pandered to these groups. Some politicians from both major party's have been caught with their hands in the honey pot over the years.

This precedent now opens the way for governments to seize public spaces and infrastructure and flog them off to developers. People from around the world are now asking why a government would even contemplate closing an efficient mass transit system to a major city when it is already built, operating and serving the community.

For people employed in this section of rail, job prospects are dismal with unemployment rates running at 9.2% in the Hunter region and near 5% in the Newcastle region. Some of those affected by the closure will possibly be given redundancy, some may be placed in vacant posi-



tions elsewhere. For many other former employees travel distances to jobs in other areas may be just too great.

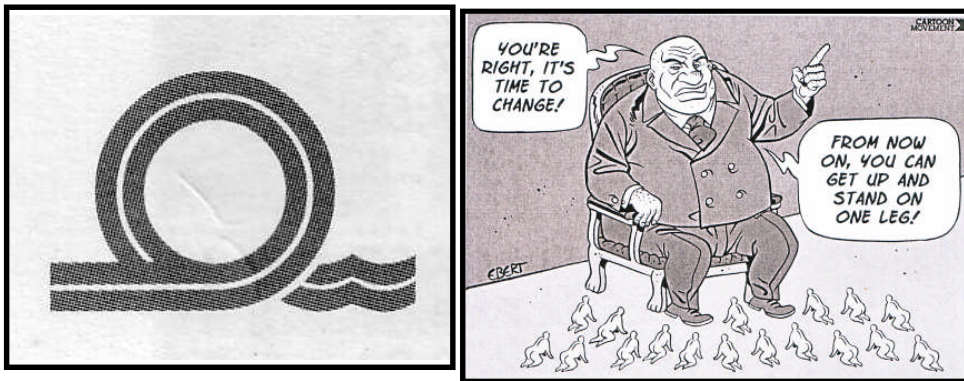
While unions in N.S.W. have supported the "Save Our Rail" campaigns and rallies, nothing much has been organised by them in a concrete way to stop the closure going ahead. Instead they have tended to make political capital out of the closure against the Liberal Party and for the A.L.P. in this State. A massive disobedience campaign involving workers from around the State may have had some effect in halting the closure. However we will never know if such a step would have been effective because such a bold move was never tried.

The N.S.W. Greens and several small left wing party's have been vocal in their support for the Newcastle community, continuing their agitation against the line closure which now looks certain to go ahead.

In the coming year, in the lead up to EBA 2017, lets get together in an effort to be heard loud and clear. We aim to hold a Members Voice meeting later this year which we will advertise across the public transport networks. If you want to have your say in a broad based rank and file network you will be welcome to attend and give your input. Support this network and let's see what's possible in 2016. In the meantime just drop us a line at Sparks or just pass on any information about what is happening in your workplace.

HOW AL QAEDA COULD'VE USED U.S. MEDIA MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES TO WEASEL OUT OF 9/11





INTERVIEW WITH PETER ROWLEY

Recently, we were sent a transcript of an interview conducted by the Journalist, Jana, for a program on a Community TV station, focusing on well known personalities from the Corporate and Politics worlds in NSW. The interview transcript we have been given is for a certain, Peter Rowley, STA CEO.

Jana: Peter, you are renowned in the high echelons of the business world, for your “creative management” style associated with the “Optimisation” initiative in the STA. How is it going?

PR: Very good. We are making our job more efficient. Drivers are thoroughly enjoying the challenge! It’s spicing up their job!

Jana: It’s been alleged that you have been abusing your position to pressure drivers to conform to the unrealistic requirements associated with “Optimisation”, which has dragged drivers down in regard to their health and stress levels. Isn’t your duty of care responsibility as CEO to ensure Government OH&S standards are adhered?

PR: I have never received any complaints from my management and admin. staff about Optimisation! Whilst the drivers’ union executive has assured me, that drivers consider this initiative of mine to be a “piece of cake”!!!

Jana: We have received information that you are planning a 2nd phase for Optimisation. Can you supply details?

PR: Where did you hear that?

Jana: Our source is one of your management staff members and their identity is of course confidential.

PR: Well Jana that’s correct. I have even more exciting challenges for drivers with this 2nd phase. It’s associated with the new bus routes, introduced as a result of the tramway extensions construction. It will also make the STA easier to sell off. This is our way of facilitating privatisation by stealth.

Jana: We have received information involving an allegation that you were responsible for the driver, Chris Mansergh, who was elected as union rep at Port Botany and was very effective in assisting the grass-roots fight the bosses, being sacked over 5 years ago. He had been a trainee, and was sacked just 2 weeks before his traineeship period ended.



PR: Yeah. I vaguely remember the case.

Jana: According to a leaked document, you and the union executive were involved in a campaign to get him sacked involving setting him up on bogus harassment charges. You and the union officials viewed him as a threat! Is this targeting an expression of how you want to control everyone in the STA?

PR: Absolutely not! We always go by the rules!

Jana: Is it true that you were instrumental in blocking him getting back on the job?

PR: I had nothing to do with that aspect! It was the union executive and the ALP octopus, which together with the Liberal Party, controls the legal fraternity. It sabotaged his legal moves to get his job back.

Jana: Why are you still in the job of STA CEO? We believe you are a silent minority at STA head office and the majority are giving you orders. You are just a puppet!

PR: I have a magnificent record on corner cutting in the organisation and the most qualified for the top job!

Jana: Peter, is it true that you have been pushing your managers and depot admin. staff to fit up older drivers for the sack?

PR: Not at all!

Jana: We have heard a few instances that your Admin. Staff have put enormous pressure on drivers to retire early!

PR: Not true!

Jana: Is it true that you have been getting money from the Federal Government to subsidize the employment of more trainees. As a result, you have been encouraged to then target older drivers for the sack?

PR: I see!

Jana: Peter, we have received information that recently groups of roughly 15-16 drivers from some depots were sent to training sessions conducted by driver instructors. These sessions featured a video, about the new runs to be created associated with the Tramway extensions construction. Those who attended were advised that the video had a mysterious sponsor. Following queries from drivers, it turns out to be you! Why all the mystery? Did you fear that the drivers would just walk out of the training session, if you were openly presented as the sponsor?

PR: Absolutely not!

Jana: There has been a report in the media, that Colin Powell's Government in WA is only willing to pay \$2,000 each for aboriginal workers who were effectively employed as slave labourers in the 50's, 60's and 70's, and in reality are owed many millions in back pay. What do you think?

PR: Of course the WA Govt's approach is wrong and these workers are entitled to the full repayment of their entitlements, including back pay.

Jana: But Peter, if you are so concerned about legalities, how come it is alleged that you have been responsible for equally illegal actions affecting your staff. Involving reducing the pay of drivers via heavy fines, who allegedly had been fitted up for disciplinary action by your depot admin. staff and managers?

PR: I'm completely unaware of any such allegations.

Jana: Why are friends and relatives of staff not allowed to enter depot premises?

PR: Security is my utmost concern in the STA!

Jana: According to information we have received there is no evidence of outsiders tampering with bus infrastructure. Is this security phobia of yours just a ploy to impose more control on your staff?

PR: Yes, you could call it a control mechanism, which I have implemented in the organisation.

Jana: We have received criticism from some of your staff, that your management style is autocratic. Is this the case?

PR: It's certainly true that I run a tight ship in the STA, but I'm certainly not autocratic.

Jana: Peter, with this tight ship of yours, your staff complain that they are allowed little leeway in doing their jobs, contributing to accidents, slip ups, a tight fisted and short sighted approach to the supply of buses on runs and commuter complaints. Costing tax payers more money. I'm sure, your style of management will be seen as turning back the clock to the old convict days. At that time it was all about breaking any person, at any time. You need to do a lot of catching up with your job!

Jana: We have received information that this “tight ship” of yours has particularly affected mechanical sections. At certain depots, the mechanical workforce has been cut by half, resulting in the sheds having the appearance of ghost towns.

PR: Yes, we have reduced staff in this area. We had too many in the past. You could even see them with their feet up, having extended tea breaks and long lunches! They were living a life of Riley! Now it’s just right!

Jana: Peter, the information, we have received presents quite a different scenario. These staff cuts have resulted in more bus break downs, associated with electronic problems. Whilst, mechanics believe there is a strong likelihood of a major bus accident, caused by your corner cutting.

Jana: Is it true that you closed down the STA website for a short while, so as to delete criticisms put on it by your staff and then proceeded to send intimidating letters to harass some drivers, who made the criticisms and even sacked others?

PR: Absolutely not! We are fully open to criticism.

Jana: As part of an internal Liberal Party Coup, Tony Abbott was stabbed in the back by Turnbull and his supporters. Do you consider this disloyalty as a very important part of Liberal Party practice?

PR: No! No!

Jana: Peter, are you loyal to the Liberal Party?

PR: Absolutely not!

Jana: But in how you run the STA, you seem more interested in making money for the Liberal Government, than loyalty to your staff.

Jana: Peter, what do you think of the tramway extensions?

PR: As a result of the extensions, we can expect in 3-5 years time for the bus fleet to be much smaller, but well run and meeting customer demand. The trams will make the transport systems fairer.

Jana: According to your staff, they believe that in this time span with you in control, there will be ever more confusion and deception in its running.

Jana: Peter, in finishing this interview, congratulations on your promotion and new job as head of the Corrective Services Department for NSW!



S.T.A. BUSIE NEWS

BURWOOD DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What are your impressions of the impact on Burwood due to the restructuring of bus operations associated with the closure to buses of George Street and various route changes?

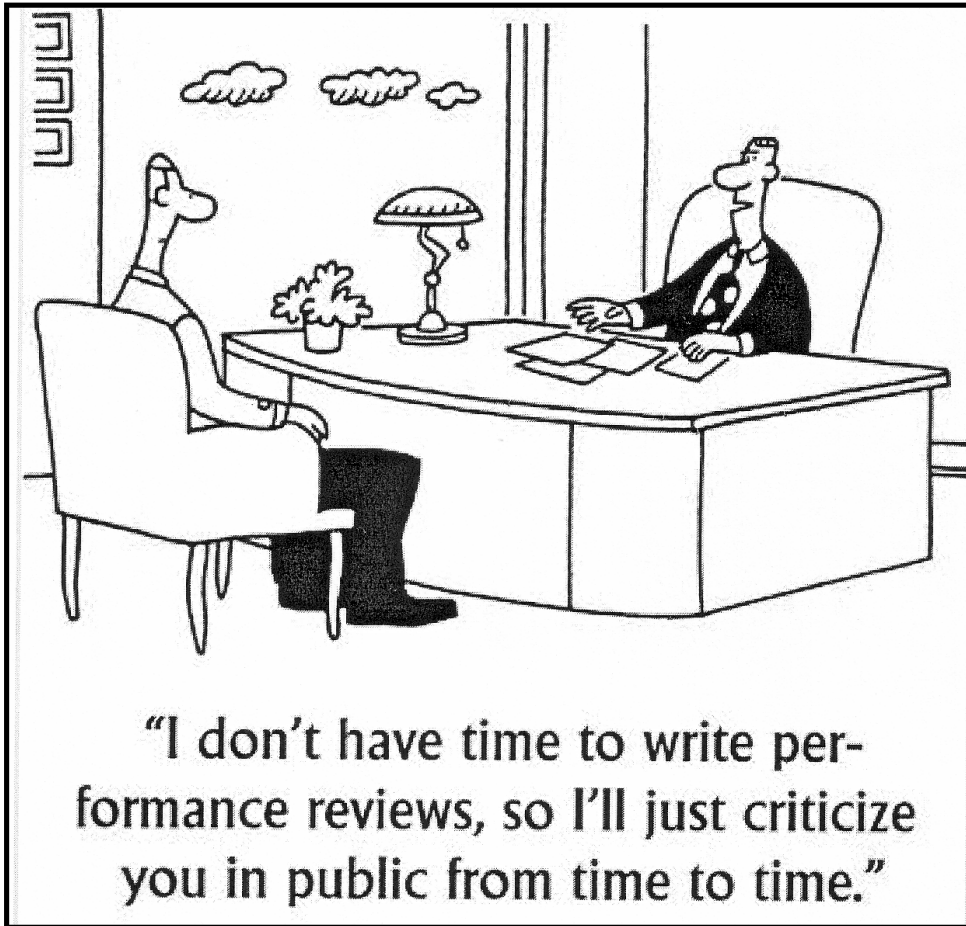
Burwood Driver: I have particularly noticed due to the route changes that much less passengers are catching our buses from the city up to Railway Square. In the past buses would be full when reaching Railway Square. Now there are much less passengers on board at this stop. Many disabled people are angry about the route changes and have made complaints to drivers. They have been particularly affected due to their problems with mobility. The STA's line on the changes is that it's all going well. Whilst, the union has wanted us to report any anomalies. Its early days yet, to see whether our concerns will be listened to. It seems the restructuring is all about a further extension of "Optimisation". We are seeing a lot more runs being cancelled and inadequate staffing levels to do the work. I believe this is a common phenomena throughout the STA. Drivers who have been on the same line of work for many years are now being displaced. The way lines of work are being organised has meant many shifts are being shortened, resulting in lower wages for many of us. Also we are seeing more bizarre aspects of "Optimisation" with quite irrational situations where other depots are now taking over our runs despite the commencement stop for the run being very close to our depot. Whilst we are taking some of other depots' runs. There is inadequate training in regard to these changes. Particularly this has been the case in regard to the turn at Balmain Wharf. Consequently, many are encouraged to take sickies, worsening the staffing problems.

Sparks: What is the situation with the bosses?

BD: Many had been worried that the new "Performance Reviews" would turn nasty. So far there seems to be no serious attempt to crack the whip. However, where we are being severely affected is in regard to commuter complaints. If there is such a complaint, the supervisors are quick to haul drivers over the coals. The driver is always seen to be in the wrong. Consequently its necessary to get the union involved to reinvestigate the complaint and so force the bosses to back pedal. We have now a new manager, who seems quite gung ho. The previous manager, whilst seeming quite distant, when approached on an issue by a driver, often proved very effective in tackling issues. Achieving a satisfactory result for the driver concerned.

Sparks: What are the latest developments with the part timers?

BD: So far no more part timers have been introduced. However, as they don't work on weekends, their deployment has had a major impact on other drivers. Particularly, those with families are being affected. With the driver shortage, they are being denied weekends to be with their families. The overall impact of this aspect, together with the extension of "Optimisa-



tion", the management changes at the depot, and the commuter complaints crack down, has been a state of low morale for many of us at the depot.

Sparks: How is the situation with the Opal system with the depot fleet?

BD: There has been major progress on this front. The bosses recently had the Opal Techs come out and supplied them with a long list of complaints about the Opal malfunctioning on numerous buses. Consequently, the problems with the Opals have mostly been resolved.

Sparks: What is your outlook for the tramway extensions in the City?

BD: I see serious problems resulting from the extensions. I think it will result in much more traffic chaos and commuter disgruntlement over delays. After all what happens, when one of the trams breaks down or two cabs collide in front of a tram on a route along say George Street? It will bring the entire line down and disrupt the traffic flow.

WAVERLEY DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What's the staffing situation in the STA?

Waverley Busie: Overall the STA is 150 drivers short. There is a high turnover of staff. There are never enough drivers. DOC's and overtime is always available. You don't see many older drivers around, you mainly see brand new drivers. The bosses are even training up the new drivers on Saturdays.

Sparks: What's the situation with inspectors?

WB: In the past, corridor inspectors would walk up and down Bondi Junction interchange, so as to sort out problems and assist commuters. Now there is no one doing the job. All responsibility is now being put on individual drivers to cope with the chaos which can occur such as buses parking in the wrong spots. There is no one to guide new drivers and drivers from outside the Eastern Suburbs depots regarding decision making about parking in the interchange. Veteran drivers from the Eastern Suburbs, are finding this situation, with many drivers having no idea what's going on, to be very frustrating. Transport for NSW has put more responsibility on everyone in the STA. We are being pushed to meet the unrealistic timetables by reducing the layover times at the end of our runs from 8 minutes to 6 or 5 minutes. Peter Rowley says this is a great idea. Whilst drivers are under pressure from continuing problems with the Opal system and anxiety from passengers boarding the bus from the back door, due to the confusion on this issue spread by the STA bosses.

Sparks: What are your impressions of the new "performance reviews"?

WB: Recently I attended one of these meetings. These reviews, were introduced by the bosses in recent months, as they found their previous draconian approach to handling drivers perceived deficiencies leading to the sack for many, was considered to be not sustainable. These reviews are supposed to occur every 6 months. The sting in the tail of these cosy little chats is a focus on whether your bus stop leaving times are considered inadequate. If so, you are pushed down the disciplinary procedure slippery slope and ultimately face the sack. Another sting I noticed was an attempt to intimidate me from taking sickies. Most Waverley drivers are not falling for this bullying. Latest news, is that the bosses are continuing with their little intimidation trick of putting stickers on your journal about alleged deficiencies in your work.

Sparks: What is the situation with the mechanical section at the depot?

WB: The section has faced major cutbacks in staffing in recent times. A few years back, the section had been 20-25 mechanics and apprentices. Now it's been effectively reduced to a skeleton staff of only 10-12 staff. The staffing has been cut by over a half. There appears to be a low state of morale amongst the mechanics. Whilst I have noticed a lot of bus maintenance isn't being properly done due to this corner cutting by the bosses. There is always at least one bus breaking down on runs. Definitely the maintenance work on bus engine electronics is not up to scratch. As a result, many bus engines are experiencing spluttering and stalling.

Sparks: What have been some of the ramifications of the new tramway extensions construction and the STA restructuring of bus operations in the Eastern Suburbs?

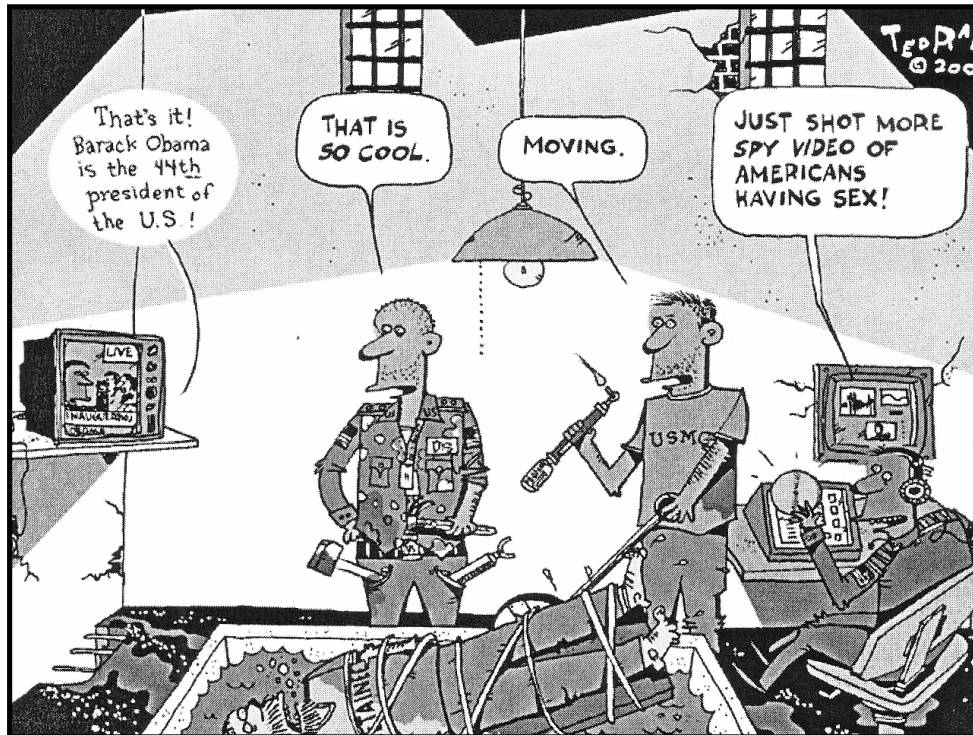
WB: The 389, 378, 311 and 325 are now ending in the western side of the City. We have recently been shown a video about the changes to these routes, sponsored by Peter Rowley, the CEO. There is also a second phase in regard to changes to these routes, with the 440 being merged with the 378, and going to Bronte. Rowley is using the new routes associated with the restructuring to wave the big stick. Threatening us with the loss of the routes if we don't "perform" and meet tender requirements.

Sparks: What are your impressions of the depot?

WB: It's not a bus depot anymore! It's a money making factory! We are constantly being worked ever harder. After a day's work, we are very tired.

Sparks: What's the latest with the ferries?

WB: Recently I was down at Circular Quay and met some of the Ferry workers who are now employed in the franchises since privatisation. They complained about the staff cuts which have followed the carve-up of the Ferries and the current low level of morale. As a result there is a high turnover of staff. They mentioned that the ticket booths have been closed and the ferry wharf area has a very run down look, due to private operators focus on money making and corner cutting. It reminded me of a K-mart store. You don't feel welcome there, as there was an absence of staff to provide assistance.



Sparks: What is the situation with the STA's tight fisted approach toward supplying buses?

WB: On Sunday 6th Sept, there was a Kite Festival held at Bondi Beach, resulting in a major influx of people catching buses from the Bondi Junction interchange. As I noticed on Boxing Day last year, there were 100's of people waiting at the interchange. There was no attempt by the bosses to allocate extra buses to cater for the exceptional circumstances and major passenger influx. The replay of this chaos just goes to show how silly and irrational are the bosses' in their approach to running the buses with their focus on just making money.

Sparks: What are the latest developments with the private bus companies?

WB: I recently heard on "Facts on Radio" that Transport for NSW has demanded that the private buses now adopt the STA blue/white colour scheme. Consequently, there will be no way for commuters to easily distinguish, the difference between private and STA buses. It was not made clear, whether the private companies will have to pay for the new colour scheme or Transport for NSW would cover the costs. In Adelaide, there are currently four bus companies and each has a different colour scheme. It was also mentioned on the program, that for the last five years, the private buses have had a very poor record in regard to late running. Bizarrely, according to ex-Waverley private bus drivers, the private bosses aren't taking a hard line with drivers on this issue. In stark contrast to the draconian attitude of the STA of punishing drivers in regard to late running.

LEICHHARDT DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What are the latest developments with the STA restructuring of bus routes associated with the tramway extension construction?

Leichhardt Busie: A number of routes are being changed and extended. The 440 is being extended to Bronte. Whilst the 443 is to become the 389 going to North Bondi. So far, we haven't been too adversely affected by the closure to buses of George Street. However, the other day buses were having trouble getting through Castlereagh and Hay Streets. It was necessary for police to be called to tackle the problem of cars blocking the passage of buses on these streets. Many commuters are confused about the new bus stops for the route changes. The real trouble for us with traffic congestion on our routes will occur towards the end of the month with the phased closure of parts of George Street. It's to be closed completely for cars over the next 2 to 3 years, and possibly longer, with the current Government in charge. I'm sure we'll be facing traffic gridlock in the City. Other news is that the new depot manager seems more approachable than other managers we have had.

Sparks: What are your impressions of the Performance Reviews?

LB: It seems a major focus of these little chats with your supervisor is to harass you over taking sickies. Whilst, the reviews appear mainly to be a way to create more work for the supervisors.

Sparks: Have you any news regarding the mechanical section?

LB: This section has been hard hit by staff cuts. Whilst the depot fleet is aging and more prone to faults. Currently, you often see the workshop bays full of buses waiting to be patched up.

Sparks: What's the latest with the Opal System?

LB: We are continuing to face considerable problems with it. At each stand, the Opal system is supposed to show the stand on the console. However, it fails to make the update, and we have to do it manually. Another problem is trip hoppers. There are passengers who try to do their 8 trips on the Opal in some cases in one day, by making very short trips. Its causing us considerable delays. However, we have been advised by management that this aspect of the Opal will change.

VICTORIAN RAILWAY NEWS

Over the last few issues of Sparks, we have spoken about V/Line employees and their continuing battles with Human Resources. In this issue, various employees will discuss these issues. Once again names have been changed.

Rastus and Roscoe: We have some good and bad news.

Sparks: What is it?

Rastus: One of the females from Human Resources has resigned and the drivers are elated that she has gone.

Sparks: Was this female, the idiot who walked around the pass yard wearing a vest and high heel shoes?

Roscoe and: Yes. it was and this person was also the slug, who grabbed a Booking Clerk's Christmas Tie, saying he was not in uniform. She got into trouble over this incident. Issue 138 has a description of this incident.

Clarence: Good riddance, but there is a rumour she resigned, before she was shoved.

Rastus and Roscoe: Now we have the bad news.

Sparks: What's that?

Roscoe: Our training classes have been moved from the main office in Southern Cross to another location, so we cannot listen to Conductors lagging in Conductors to management.

Clarence: The drivers may have departed, but we still have our moles in the office.

Roscoe: Unfortunately, there are still stand downs occurring in the industry.

Clarence: Regarding stand downs, may we introduce you to Penelope and Penrod, who will talk about the issue.

Penelope and Penrod: We work as conductors somewhere in the state for V-Line and we have approached your magazine to discuss these stand downs.

Clarence: These stand downs are unjust.



**“Certainly we can provide a separate wakeup call
for your teddy bear.”**

Penrod: You are correct. They stood people down with pay, while they investigate the matter. The person stood down is not allowed to talk to their workmates. The only way, the conductors and station staff hear of a stand down is through a rumour around the workplace.

Rastus: They can stand you down for up to four months, while they investigate the matter.

Roscoe: Think of the shifts they have to cover for a person stood down. Think of the overtime.

Clarence: V/Line knows how to waste money, which could be spent on overhauling carriages and locomotives.

Penelope: The latest stand down is over a conductor leaving the van door open, whilst departing a train at a Country location.

Penrod: This rule about the Guard's van door of a N and H set is unjust and it is used as an excuse to give conductors a final warning.

Penelope: In one case, a conductor shut the van door and was departing the train and as the train was slowly moving down the platform, a passenger opened the door and jumped on the train. The conductor was reported by a manager and had to front a CSM. The union demanded to look at the station camera. The move was opposed, but commonsense prevailed and the matter was resolved in favour of the conductor.

Sparks: Who introduced this rule?

Penrod: The rule was suggested by a couple of WH122 KIOS who had no knowledge of Rail-way Operations, who convinced the gullible conductor manager to introduce this rule, because N sets and H sets are equipped with power doors.

Rastus and Roscoe: Well, that conductor manager is no longer with us, as his contract was not renewed.

Penelope: The conductor, who was stood down was dobbed in by a station employee to a regional manager.

Roscoe: You have those types who are hoping to be in the good books.

Penrod: This rule about the Van Door was introduced without any consultation with the union.

Rastus and Roscoe: The XPT has power doors and the CountryLink guard observes the train from the rear of the XPT, until it clears the platform at Southern Cross. In Sydney, suburban trains have power doors and the guard also, when the train departs, observes the train until it clears the platform.

Sparks: NSW still has guards on suburban and interurban trains.

Sparks: Who introduced the rule that a person, who is stood down cannot discuss the matter with other employees?

Rastus and Roscoe: There is “no” rule. It was just added by some jerk in Human Resources.

Penelope: Some employees have checked through V/Line’s Code of Conduct and there is no rule stating that a person in trouble with management cannot discuss the matter with fellow employees.

Penrod: Human Resources say this is, because if people discuss the matter, it would lead to industrial unrest.

Rastus and Roscoe: As we have said, in previous issues of Sparks, if a person is stood down, call a meeting of your fellow employees and issue an ultimatum to Human Resources. Reinstate the employee by a certain time or else.

Penelope: When the long serving conductor mentioned in issue 150 was stood down, an employee discussed the stand down and was threatened with fronting Human Resources. He told the CSM to mind his own business.

Penrod: I think of the stress a stand down causes to the person’s family. It can lead to tension in the family and to marriage breakdowns.

Rastus and Roscoe: Human Resources would not care what happens to the person’s family, as long as they nail a scalp.

Roscoe: We, drivers say the law of the Van Door should be revoked. We would prefer the Driver to observe the train along the platform until it clears the platform. This rule has been in use, since the railways were invented.

Penelope and Penrod: The conductor who is stood down has been victimised ever since they joined the job by various CSM’s and managers. We think they are out to hang this person.

Rastus and Roscoe: What makes us sick is the double standards of V/Line over this Van Door. At a Country Location a train arrived with the van door open and the conductor was looking out. A driver saw this. Was this conductor put in? No, because he is a well known crawler on the job.

Sparks: Let us hope they do not succeed in terminating this person. What about CSM's?

Penrod: They are now under their respective Regional Managers. In fact, at one depot, a CSM is being bullied by a Regional Manager, because he goes out and helps the conductors he supervises.

Penelope: You see this manager, thinks employees are to be in their place and does not like supervisors sticking up for the troops.

Rastus: We will see how long the manager lasts.

Sparks: Once again we have run out of space. In regards to the rule of the Van Door, it should be revoked and conductors should observe the train until it clears the platform. I thank you, Penelope and Penrod for coming forward. Management will try to find who you are, but they will not succeed.

Rastus and Roscoe: In having the final say, if you are stood down, tell your workmates. As for the CSM, who is being victimised by a Regional Manager, you have support of the Drivers. Finally, we will conclude this article, with the following message. You TOUCH one, you TOUCH ALL.



International Transport Workers' News

UK: Rail strike threat spreads across country

14/10/15

Three more railway companies were today facing the threat of industrial action because of separate disputes over pay as rail workers' unrest spread across the country.

The Rail Maritime and Transport union announced it was holding ballots for action at Silverlink trains and Docklands Light Railway in London.

Train drivers on ScotRail are also to vote on 24-hour stoppages as part of a campaign to win parity with drivers in other regions, the Aslef union announced later.

The moves came as thousands of rail users faced a day of travel chaos because of a strike by RMT (British Rail Union) members at Arriva Trains Northern which crippled services across Northern England.

The Docklands voting will be co-ordinated with a ballot of London Underground train drivers who are involved in a separate pay row.

Any industrial action will be launched against the two companies at the same time, causing huge disruption in London.

The union has rejected a 4% pay offer on behalf of its members who work as train "captains" on driverless trains, arguing that the £22,300 salaries were below the average in the capital and worse than LU staff.

Acting general secretary Vernon Hince said: "We are seeking a realistic increase in pay to bring Docklands rates to an acceptable level for working in London.

"They have fallen below comparable rates on London Underground and we are seeking to redress the disparity."

Aslef repeated its call for a return to national pay bargaining on the railways after decided to ballot its members on ScotRail.

"This dispute underlines the need for a swift return to an organised system of national pay bargaining in the railway industry," said Aslef general secretary Mick Rix.

ScotRail services have been disrupted because of unofficial action by drivers who are not working their rest days.

Talks ended without agreement earlier this month and the Aslef executive today decided to hold an official ballot for 24-hour strikes.

RMT members at Silverlink, which runs trains between London, the northern home counties and the Midlands, rejected a pay offer by 66 to 55, it was announced today.

The union had recommended acceptance of the offer, worth 3.3% from last June, 3% from this June and a cut in the working week.

The fresh ballots were announced as hundreds of RMT members working as guards and conductors for Arriva Trains Northern started a 48-hour strike.

Most of the company's 1,600 services across northern England were cancelled, leaving stations deserted and trains at a standstill.

Finland: Rail Workers' Solidarity for Anti-Austerity Protest

18/9/15

Finnish teachers are set to join the biggest labour movement demonstration in decades on Friday, shutting down schools and daycare centres across the country as they protest in Helsinki against government austerity measures.

The country's rail network will also stop for the demonstration, along with dozens of other industries.

Schools across the country will be closed on Friday as teachers demonstrate in protest of planned government cuts. The country's rail network will also shut down, after the Locomotive Drivers Union's board voted on Sunday to join a broad-based walkout against government austerity and pay cuts.

Finland's labour movement has been up in arms about plans to cut Sunday bonuses, overtime pay, sick pay, public sector workers' holidays and to move two bank holidays to the weekend.



Now the train drivers' union has announced plans to join a protest planned for next Friday, shutting down rail transport for the day so members can attend the Helsinki demonstration.

Meanwhile teachers in schools and daycare centres will also head to Helsinki for the protest, after the teachers' union the OAJ announced it would join in. In practice this will mean that many of the country's educational establishments will be shut down for the day. Matriculation exams, however, will continue as normal, despite the disruption.

Luukkainen expects all of Finland's teachers with permanent posts to take part in the demonstration, even though the law forbids them from participating in political labour strikes. He says OAJ union is prepared to pay the fines participation might incur.

"The plan is to get the whole OAJ membership on board," union chair Olli Luukkainen said.

More information tomorrow

The demonstration in Helsinki is only expected to take two hours and will begin at 11 am. Due to travel distances however, many teachers may be away from the classroom for the entire day. The union says it aims to provide further information for parents as soon as possible.

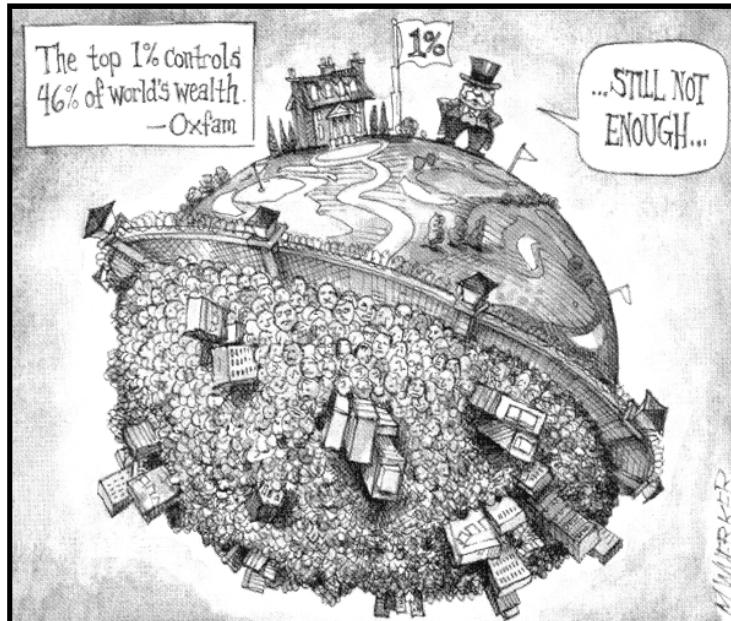
Luukkainen says teachers in Finland last participated in a large-scale demonstration like this in 1984.

"A great deal of time has passed, which also indicates how seriously the teachers are taking this matter to heart," he said.

Representatives of Talentia, a social service employee union, say the day care workers in their organisation will likely participate in the demonstration, but will confirm the scale of their participation on Monday.

More details on the rail shutdown will also be available on Monday, according to the transport union AKT.

STOP PRESS: An estimated 33,000 workers attended the rally from education, but also from other industries, with public transport closed down in Helsinki and Turku.



What is Democratic Unionism?

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

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

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

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

**MEMBERS' VOICE - Fighting for Membership
Control of the Union & Direct Action to Fight
Back! Web Site:**

**User.tpg.com.au/retepsni/MembersVoice Email:
membersvoice2010@yahoo.com**

**Facebook:www.facebook.com/pages/Mem-
bers-Voice-RTBU-rank-and-file-group/531249043
571323?fref=ts**

What is Democratic Unionism?

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