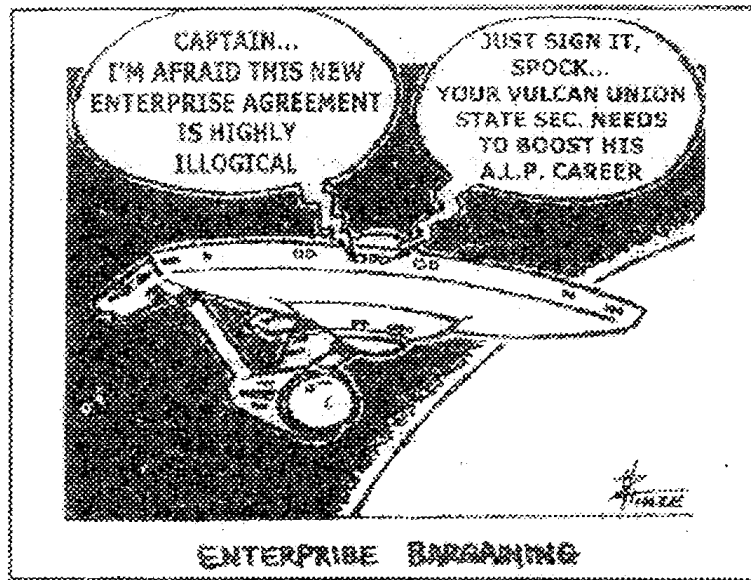


Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

RAILCORP EBA OPENS DOOR TO WIDE RANGING STAFF CUTS & ROSTER CHANGES!



RailCorp EBA Update

STA "Free Fall" Olympics

Sydney Wharfies' News

Adelaide Tram News

UK Bus News

Super & Financial Crisis

STA Busie News

Vic. Rail News

NZ Bus & Tram News

Canadian Bus News

EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

The most nefarious news lately has been the union hierarchy's brazen sell out of the RailCorp EBA (Enterprise Bargain Agreement) campaign. When there was massive public support (54% according to the Telegraph) for industrial action during World Youth Day to press for hefty wages and conditions gains and rail workers had management on the ropes. The union hierarchy let the bosses off the hook.

They engaged in a "smoke and mirrors" performance with the considerable help of the corporate media, the bosses and ALP State and Federal Governments involving creating the illusion that the wage rise achieved of 4% pa which barely meets the CPI via the threat of industrial action and subsequent calling it off, did not involve a trade off involving job/conditions losses. In fact according to the EBA document, the wage rise is connected to compliance with "station/cleaning reforms" which no doubt will involve major staff cuts affecting station staff and roster changes affecting train crews. (See article Page 3.)

In State Transit there are dramatic moves towards a radical shape up of its organisation and operations. According to a "quiet achiever at Strawberry Hills" there is consideration by management of the privatisation of the bus workshops. Other related moves are the abolition of many inspector jobs and the sabotage and cutback of bus routes viewed by the bosses as unprofitable. (See article Page 8)



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

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SPARKS WEB PAGE -

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N.S.W. RAIL NEWS

RAILCORP EBA UPDATE

By Crimson Coconut

Final voting for the RailCorp EBA is taking place across the state as Sparks goes to print. It is expected that a majority of voters, who are in desperate need of a pay rise, will sanction the Agreement for a 4% PA increase over the next 2 years.

Many rail workers had not seen the contents of the Agreement and there had been little or no discussion before or after the unions gave their approval. In previous years copies of agreements had been mailed to workers homes for perusal. In the case of EBA 2008 things were played very close to the chest, although there were copies for viewing on the RailCorp Intranet and a few booklets were delivered to the Station Masters office at the various locations.

Despite this, RailCorp and the unions gave joint presentations across the state on the virtues of the agreement despite there being little or no actual discussion or debate on the changes contained therein. It still doesn't sit right with me seeing union and management singing from the same hymn book on the virtues of the agreement during their joint presentations. Surely there are some disagreements and differences of opinion or would they have us believe that it is all rosy and harmonious in RailCorp as things stand?

EBA 2008 marks another stage of the "award modernisation" process that is required by the Workplace Relations Act which continues under the Rudd Labor Government. The new EBA is allowed to contain only the basic award conditions. Elements of our old conditions of employment are now contained in a separate deed between the custodians union and management. This part of the EBA has seen little or no change.

The new award contains a clause that spells out a commitment to "station reform" and "station cleaning reform" by April 2009. Changes to Train Crew rostering is also highlighted. I personally could not vote in favour of the EBA while RailCorp refused to list their intended reforms. If such a clause referring to the reforms was contained in the EBA and didn't give us the details of them, we should ask why was it inserted in the EBA at all.

If and when the planned reforms go ahead the "no extra claims" clause contained within it will ensure that no compensation productivity pay rises will be forthcoming from the improvements envisioned. Even if they had been promised, we still have fresh in our minds the lack of action over the share of the productivity savings which were to come out of the "Job and Work Redesign" project from 10 yrs ago. They never eventuated.

The usual platitudes about "management prerogative", management's right to use staff reviews in consultation with the unions over any reforms also begs the question as to why the clause was included at all. Once the EBA is ratified by the commission a timetable will be for-

mally set in place for the reform process to begin. Issues of consultation make a mockery of trade union representation within RailCorp, so we can seek no satisfaction on being consulted there.

Except for an extension of paid and unpaid maternity leave, none of the demands made by the unions or shop floor workers in the log of claims succeeded in being included. Many of the anomalies such as those that exist in the areas of family leave and “absence control” which rail workers raised as issues earlier in the process were still not addressed satisfactorily. Areas such as “shift work” which needed to be looked at remain as they are.

My main concern though is over the voting process. The fact that rail workers had to attend a briefing session to be able to vote is rotten.

What was wrong with the way votes were carried out for previous EBA's when ballot papers were sent to people's homes? If the cost of mail outs was an issue then why did RailCorp go to the expense of doing a mass mail out of Federal Government propaganda telling us what a Workplace Agreement is?

The whole voting process has been carefully stage managed in case there was any dissent along the way to the vote. This may have had something to do with the ballot to go on strike in the middle of EBA negotiations. The ensuing vote ended in almost unanimous support for industrial action. This was rescinded at a later date by the unions without any consultation with members. Was there fear and uncertainty about the result of the EBA vote because of the previous rejection by rail workers?

Backdating the agreement to April and approving the full 4% during negotiations with the State Government paved the way for general acceptance of the agreement. It was a hollow victory of sorts since we had given little away and have lost little, though the 4% pay increase is not enough for us to keep up with the high cost of living. The government by comparison had been seen to have backed down from confrontation and acquiesced. At the time Transport Minister, Watkins, writing in the Sydney Morning Herald warned that all the conditions for achieving the 4% were conditional on the planned reforms and that the Government had certainly not backed down.

Since then there have been big changes in the composition of the NSW Government amid charges that NSW finances have fallen in a hole. Big business on the other hand is openly calling for heavily pruning the rail workforce. EBA 2008 opens the door to staff reviews which can expedite that process.

Superannuation - A Rational Alternative Needed

As workers slowly see their hard earned retirement savings squandered away in speculative deals by big capital they despair that they will never have enough money to retire on. For many impending retirees the credit crash in the US this month has had its effect on pension funds, it brought into focus the ridiculous situation regarding retirement pensions. Workers' hard earned cash is being shuffled around the world in a lottery that benefits only a small global elite.

The loss of retirement savings coupled with rapidly rising prices for transport, fuel, food and rents will see many retiring workers poor and desperate. Many will be homeless, forced onto the streets and into parks where they will be forced to live on the scraps of the working throw-away society.

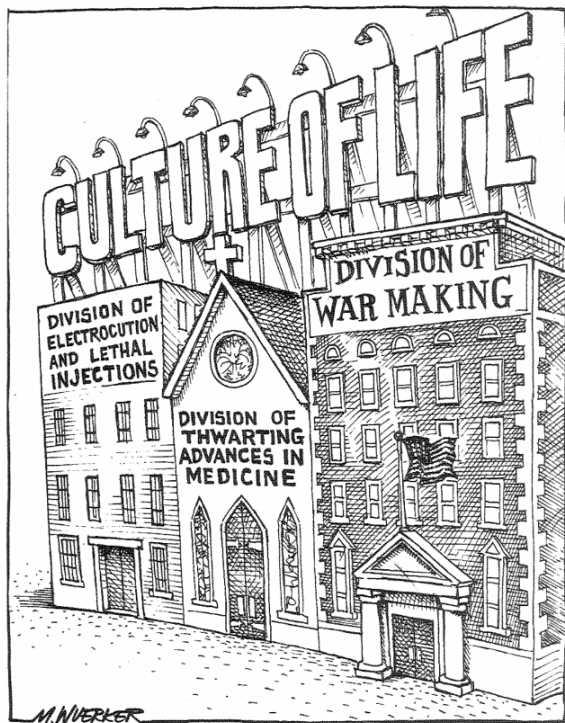
The traditional trade union movement has provided dubious financial impetus to a flawed retirement scheme that it holds up as beacon of success for the Australian trade union movement. Its real success though is to continue to position Labor union spin doctors at the head of the lucrative superannuation feeding trough in a jobs for the boys scheme that is neither moral nor politically progressive. The huge size of the industry super funds (now worth over \$1 trillion and quadrupling in size every 10 years) has dire consequences for working people if and when they fail. The need for a safer and more socially responsible method of self funding for retirement is absolutely necessary. Not that self funded retirement is the ideal method for providing for our non wage earning years. Events show that we could and never will be able to rely on the market to ensure that we have a comfortable retirement.

So, what is the solution to all this gloom and doom for retirees?

A national pension (superannuation) scheme is what we, unions and pensioner groups should be advocating. All contributions to such a scheme would be consolidated into one large national pool controlled and guaranteed by a government agency inside Treasury. It would be similar in scope to the original Medicare scheme before it was emasculated and broken up.

There should be watertight guarantees that contributors could never lose their investment, something that the private sector could never do. That's how things were 15 to 20 years ago. State Super was once guaranteed by the State Government, as were savings in the Commonwealth Bank which were guaranteed by the Federal Government. Re-regulation, or should I say deregulation, since then, has exposed workers savings to the chaotic vagaries of the international financial system which is itself flawed.

Government's borrow heavily on the open money markets at international interest rates to fund large projects. Quite often much of this borrowed money is advanced for start-up pro-



jects in the private sector, for example, the new Clyde train maintenance facility or the \$700+ million that was advanced by government for the construction of the Airport Line and the M5 motorway which is still attracting subsidies. Government interest on this borrowed money flows out of the economy and the country and eventually becomes a burden for all taxpayers who are the real underwriters of such projects.

This adds to our balance of payments problems as no goods are exchanged for this repayment of interest. That's why the NSW State Government is so concerned with its AAA rating. Any lower international financial rating than AAA would mean higher interest rate charges for government loans and action taken by the World Bank and IMF to open up the economy further to reforms which benefit private capital.

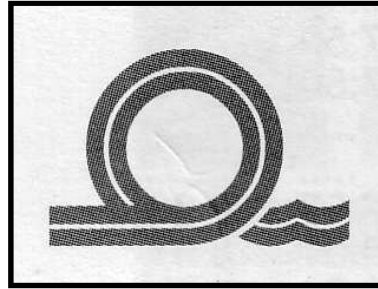
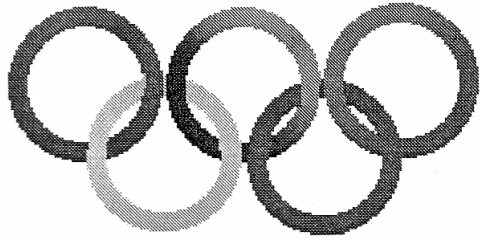
If there was a large national pool of retirement funds, governments could use these funds to create jobs at home, rather than exporting them overseas. New and bold conservation projects could be undertaken, such as funding and extending public transport services throughout the country. Also privatisation of government assets such as electricity generating plants could be avoided because governments could no longer use the arguments about funds not being available to build new ones.

Other major environmentally friendly projects such as water conservation infrastructure and construction of solar power alternatives could be undertaken on a massive scale with money from the readily available retirement funds. The funds would also become part of our social capital as it would add to our quality of life through completed projects.

In return for adding our contributions to the funds a guaranteed interest rate payment equivalent to what would be paid on the open money markets for borrowed money should be returned by government. This naturally adds to the value to the funds. Superannuation benefits could be paid as it is now (i.e. according to the amount contributed) or preferably as a pro-rata retirement pension that is universal, but, based on the level of contributions and needs. Government funded pensions and top-ups should never be dispensed with and are essential for promoting equity in our communities.

If the existing private funds failed it would be catastrophic for the government and people alike. In a worst case scenario of a substantial financial meltdown the provision of government pensions for all would add a further burden to tax payers and retirees that is unjustified and yet is completely avoidable. If the government was unduly exposed financially then maybe no pension would be paid out at all as a retirement safety net.

With a National Superannuation Scheme that excludes the private sector we could have had some small measure of control through the ballot box. With the present self appointed union, Labor Party hacks and merchant bankers presiding over our nest eggs any talk of democratic control over our own funds is classed as heresy. We won't hear the call for a National retirement savings scheme from them or any of our present elected representatives. But we should raise our voices loudly despite their opposition for a superannuation scheme that's owned by us all and that we take responsibility for. A better world and a better retirement system is only possible if our representatives have the vision and they govern in our interests.

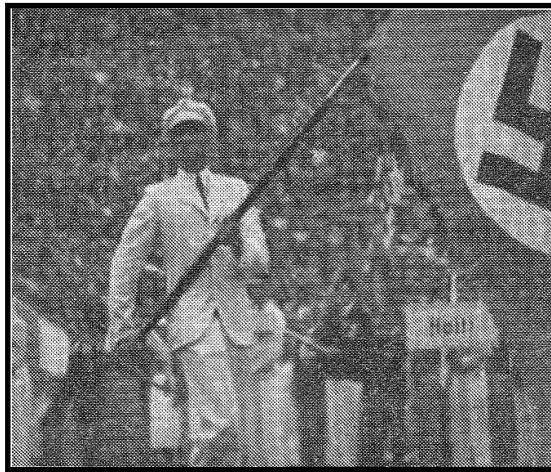


STATE TRANSIT “FREE FALL” OLYMPICS!

Did you know the STA bosses are running an Olympics without our knowing about it? Their own Olympics!

The corporate athletes will be wearing slightly bizarre sports outfits in the shape of business suits. That sounds like the ideal cover for these corporate athletes. Their “physiques” will be also somewhat unusual for the usually thin and trim sports people in the form of massive beer guts and expansionist waist lines achieved during many merry STA Corporate lunches and dinners. However like many Olympics contestants the high octane STA bosses will be reliant on performance enhancement drugs which are apparently legal.

The usual suspects, the ALP and Liberals power brokers who like them cut each other’s throats and strive for the most “gold” through insulting each other will be sponsoring the “games”. Together with the Business Council of NSW, the RTA, Veolia Transport, Taxi Council of NSW, the boss of Cabcharge and the Coach and Bus Owners Association. Like the many suspect characters in the business world, these sponsors don’t expect to get something for nothing. No matter what, they expect huge amounts of return. They outbid each other in who does the worst job. How far they can go. The Forbes 500 billionaires will also have a considerable finger in the affair.



A scene from the STA Olympics Opening Ceremony snapped by a Sparks “James Bond”. A corporate athlete proudly and triumphantly carrying the new STA flag which cost millions in budget monies for consultants to design.....

According to a reliable source, Olympics merchandise will include plastic steering wheels, bongos, Turkish water pipes, and cubes of crack cocaine all tastefully inscribed with the STA snail logo.

Whilst the Olympics toys will include STA Corporate Gorilla suits and cowboy hats with dollar sign patches and stamps and coins with Bill Gates of Micro Soft profile.

I have found out that like the IOC (International Olympics Committee), the STA consultants will dictate the holding of events such as the bus route and budget “axeman” competitions where routes such as the 311, 360 and others across the city will face the chop. Whilst the finalist of the most incompetent boss in State Transit competition will be awarded by Sparks a gold plated medal. With this medal and 10c, he will be able to buy a cup of coffee.

For the STA boss razor gang paranoid about spiralling overtime costs for urgently required bus maintenance - silver plated medals.

What was the score? I have no idea, as we weren’t invited. However, we know the severe impact in regard to STA staff, the community and bus routes.

In place of such corporate events, a genuine peoples Olympics needs to be organised free of corporate racketeering open to all people.

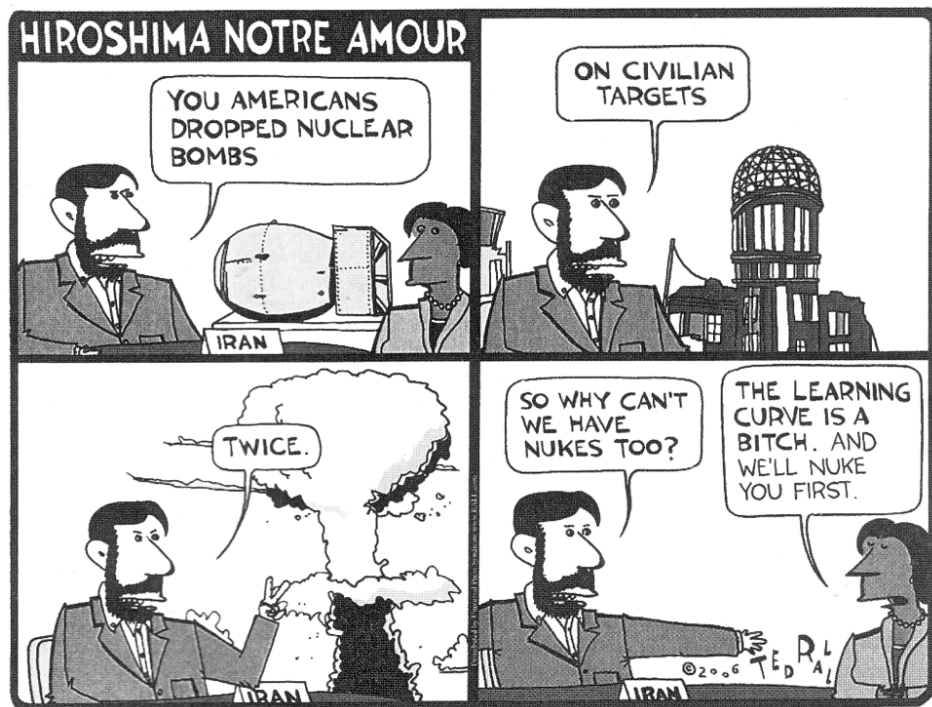
S.T.A. BUSIE NEWS

WAVERLEY DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What’s happening with the routes?

Waverley Busie: An important development on this front is the proposed shortening of the 311. It’s proposed that it terminates at the park outside St. Vincent’s Hospital. The shortening of this route is of concern to us, as there are no facilities for drivers to have ablutions at the new terminus. Whilst there is a likelihood of trouble with drug users in the summer. It’s definitely not a safe place at that time. The shortening of the route will inconvenience a range of groups such as general passengers, elderly people, tourists and those visiting Elizabeth Bay House, as they will now have to change buses to get to their destinations. There is now much less buses going through the area. Particularly given the elimination of the 312 during peak hour which used to service the area. Whilst drivers will lose runs and have shifts reduced. In taking this highhanded action, the STA bosses are showing their inability to be open to drivers and passengers concerns. The STA architect of the route shortening was invited to attend a community meeting to discuss the change to the route. However on learning he would be facing a hostile reception, he declined to attend the meeting. The elimination of the second loop in the route is a likely move by the STA bosses to sabotage the entire route and discourage commuters patronage. So later on, it can be completely abolished. Another route facing cuts is the 360.

Sparks: What are your thoughts on drivers’ health?



WB: We need to encourage self help programs to help tackle the health problems which we suffer due to the job. One important problem we often face, is excessive body weight. A good way to reduce the kilos is via taking advantage of alternative Chinese medicine. A likely flow on effect of this therapy and drivers' improved health particularly in regard to diabetes, control of your body and self esteem will be better relations with passengers. Currently some drivers are having difficulties with the bosses over this issue.

Sparks: What's the latest on the Global Warming crisis?

WB: Is the STA looking down the barrel of a gun? Will the bosses and the Govt take measures to massively increase the number of passengers on buses to curb car usage? The build up of atmospheric green house gases is the biggest issue confronting us in a lifetime. It's just as important as WWI and WWII combined to other generations. There are a range of different ways for the STA to become environmentally friendly and reduce green house gases and budget expenditure. By taking such measures, the STA can adopt the slogan, "Take a ride with us. We are taking cars off the road and reducing your carbon foot print!" Is the STA going to do it? No. They are still caught up in the old management model of survive and fix it, lack of relatedness, withholding information, not working as a team, being manipulative and defensive. Is your union executive also doing these things on this list?

There are several ways to tackle the problems of reducing green house gases and wastage in the STA.

One simple way of tackling green house gases and general waste is improved plumbing so as to eliminate leaky taps and blocked toilets requiring 2-3 times to flush which are at chronic levels. At Waverley the men's toilets are in an appalling state. The STA bosses are totally oblivious to the whole issue. I recently spoke with the manager of the Captain Cook Hotel near Moore Park, who told that he had improvements to the plumbing in his pub and was able to completely eliminate leaky taps. As a result he was able to reduce his water and electricity costs by \$50,000 pa. The scale of water wastage in the STA is on a much greater scale and the savings from plumbing improvements such as electronic taps which stop running when you remove your hands would be enormous. Solar panels could be installed on the roofs of all STA installations to provide electricity for hot water systems and massively reduce power costs. It has recently come to my attention that an environmental shop in the new Westfields complex at Bondi Junction successfully negotiated with the complex management to have solar panels installed on the roof to power the shop.

There is great wastage in the STA in regard to tissues. Instead of the usage of 6 tissues now when washing your hands, a better quality paper towel could be introduced. Requiring the usage of only a single paper towel. The STA currently wastes considerable sums on fumigating buses with poisonous chemicals to counter cock roaches in the buses. This expenditure could be drastically reduced and harm to the environment eliminated with the usage of cockroach baits sold at shops in China Town. You can get two boxes for \$5. One box would be sufficient for each bus and its effects would last for years.

By the STA putting its corporate physique behind such ideas it could win an award from environmental groups for the most innovative in adopting power saving measures.

Sparks: What's the latest with the inspectors?

WB: There is a move afoot by Strawberry Hills to eliminate over 40 inspectors. Why? Is this just another cost cutting measure. Where is the STA's vision? They are an extremely valuable group in the STA, given their extensive experience in tackling on the job issues

Sparks: What's happening with fare evasion?

WB: A culture has been built up which has encouraged certain groups in the community to become dependent on free rides. The STA has refused to take decisive action over the years on the issue and usually fails to back up drivers who take a stand against fare evaders who try to bully them to get free rides. To help tackle this problem of bullying fare evaders we need training in the usage of the digital cameras. Currently no one on the job knows how to effectively deploy them to help sort out these bullies.

Sparks: What are your thoughts regarding the issue of "communication" on the job?

WB: This issue has been highlighted to me recently involving several incidents. When off duty I boarded a Pt Botany bus and tried to get into a conversation with the driver. I mentioned that I was a driver like him. However he remained unresponsive. At terminuses during the cold weather, I have noticed that drivers keep the bus doors closed while they wait for their run to begin. Rather than opening the doors to allow passengers to get on and so be able to establish a rapport with them. This indicates to me a failure of communication with passengers. Involving some drivers lacking confidence in dealing with passengers. To change this atti-

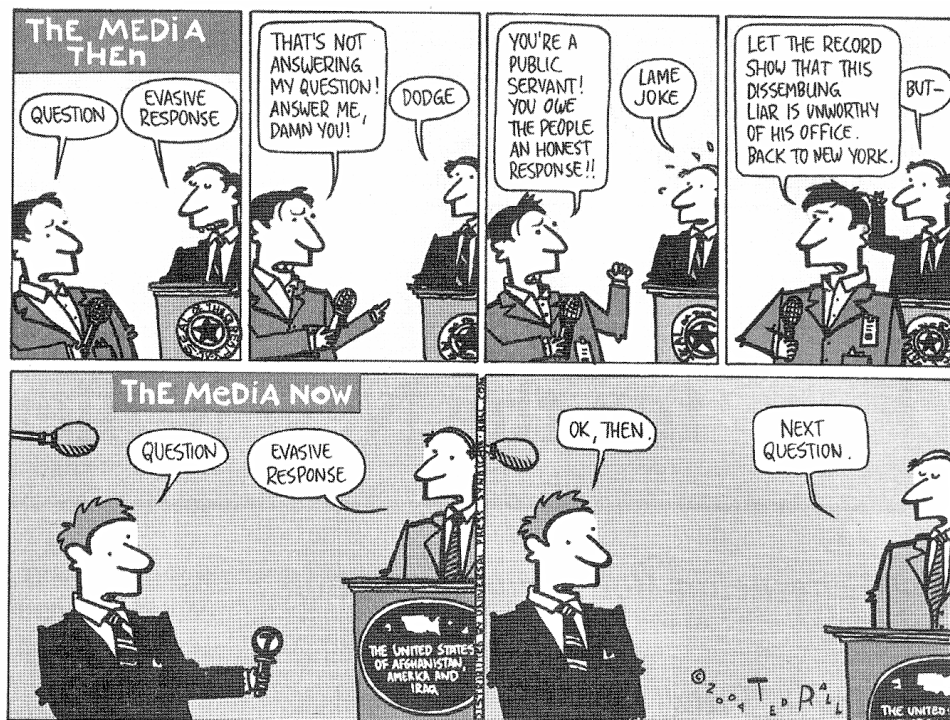
tude, retraining schemes introduced by the bosses are inadequate. Drivers need to be encouraged to see passengers to be people just like themselves and relate to them appropriately and so be comfortable with them on the job.

The STA has refused to open lines of communication with drivers as illustrated with the problem of the bendy bus brakes. They refused to take any action when drivers raised concerns on the issue. Eventually a crisis occurred involving the problem which got on the TV. Here again we have a case of the STA taking a defensive and unresponsive stance on an issue, until it explodes into a major crisis.

Sparks: What are your ideas for increasing union membership?

WB: I was recently speaking to a fellow bus passenger who I regularly sit with on the way to work. He had been a union rep in Canada. He told me that the Canadian unions introduced a universal free dentistry scheme for all members owned by the unions. As a result, their membership increased enormously from 20% to 60% of the workforce in Canada. One union in Australia which has adopted a similar scheme is the CFMEU based in the construction, mining and forestry areas. Do I hear Unions NSW and the executives of other unions in Australia hearing about that?

Sparks: What's the latest with the mechanics?



WB: STA corporate axemen have their eyes on the workshops. Are the bus workshops being looked at for privatisation? Whilst the overtime budget for the workshops has been further tightened up. Only 100 hours per month is now being provided which is grossly inadequate given the need for urgent bus maintenance.

Sparks: What's happening in regarding to the union at Waverley?

Waverley Driver: Phil Hope, our assistant union rep who was injured on the job and is now on workers compensation is facing the sack. Nobody should be sacked for being on compensation. When I was a clerk in Rail Corp from 1973 to 1979, I never came across an instance of someone being sacked for this reason. With this highhanded and draconian approach, I consider the STA bosses are definitely going in a neo-nazi direction.

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

WD: 255 buses are being introduced into the STA fleet. The new gas buses and Volvos are being sent to Ryde, Leichhardt and in particular Pt Botany. Whilst as usual Waverley is receiving no new buses, only hand me downs. On a separate note, Waverley has for the second time been nominated as depot of the month. However there has been no mention of this accomplishment in Transit Times. Any other depot would have had article on the front page regarding such an achievement. The STA bosses must hate Waverley!

PORT BOTANY DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What's happening with new buses at PT Botany?

Port Botany Driver: The new Scania 14.5 Metro 10's are being started at Port Botany now. They have a new cattle class standing only section with apparently little in the way of safety features for passengers to stop them falling over...sounds like STA trying to pack more passengers onto less buses and even more reduced bus frequency in future.

Sparks: What's happening on the road?

PBD: STA bosses are wanting to make changes to many routes and are seeking community comment. One route operated by Pt Botany which they propose to shorten is the 303. It's from San Souci going from Anzac Pde up to Bondi Junction instead of via Supacentre and Surry Hills to the city. If they do that, then city bound 303 passengers from the San Souci to Kyeemagh suburbs will need to transfer at Mascot to a 309 or 310.

Sparks: What else has been happening:

PBD: Some of the most sizzling news is that recently the BOT3 Paul Snell at Port Botany, was seen conducting customer service training at Strawberry Hills following being taken off the road for DUI. Drivers at the depot are very concerned about the blatant favouritism and want to know why he is not cleaning buses like everyone else in his situation.

LEICHHARDT DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What's the latest at the depot?

Leichhardt Busie: The bosses are continuing with their onslaught over drivers who have 3 accidents. I have noticed lately that Drivers with 10 and 20 years experience on the job and who have had accidents are being sent to retraining. This seems to me a waste of resources. A more appropriate way of tackling the problem would be for the bosses to sit down with drivers who have been having accidents and give them a lecture. They are also continuing with their rampage in regard to damaged bus mirrors. They fail to take into account that due to the location of the mirrors on the gas buses that, there will always be a likelihood of damage which is out of drivers' control and we should not be held responsible. Why isn't the union organising a petition on the issue to get some action?

Another worrying development is drivers who are scabbing on each other. I've noticed on weekends drivers who are running a few minutes late on their runs back to the depot, having their next run pinched by other drivers.

On a positive note, a certain worker who has engaged in racist abuse of others at the depot has disappeared from the scene for some strange reason. Construction work in regard to the depot enlargement and renovations is continuing. It's expected that the depot fleet will be expanded from 110 to 260 buses. An underground car park for drivers' vehicles is currently being dug. It's likely that the renovations won't be completed for years. I've noticed lately we are having a lot of Burwood buses at the depot, pointing to the eventual move of the Burwood fleet to Leichhardt with the completion of the renovations.

Sparks: What's happening on the road?

LB: We are continuing to have problems in regard to Loftus Street. We now are not allowed to drop off passengers in Loftus Street as occurred in the past. Consequently we are facing considerable complaints and swearing from passengers over the issue. The passengers are particularly unhappy about having to walk in the rain to the Quay. Many drivers are unhappy over the issue. Action needs to be taken urgently to remedy the problem such as a sign at the corner of Bridge and Loftus Streets that advises this is the last stop before the Quay and we don't terminate in Loftus Street. There is great chaos in Broad way near the shopping centre, due to buses on different routes stopping there. Its urgent that a series of bus stops say 1,2 & 3 is created for buses on different routes. Like which exists at Railway Square. Currently we even have situations of buses blocking Bay Street.

Sparks: What do think of the moves to eliminate many inspectors?

LB: When you need one, you can never find one. They always in their vans driving around. I have noticed over the years a dramatic reduction in their role in regard to bus operations. In the past they would be located at quite a few locations, checking buses i.e. Market Street, Railway Square, Johnston Street, Leichhardt Town Hall, amongst other places. Now you only see them at Victoria Rd Rozelle and Druitt Street in the city checking the Ryde buses.

BURWOOD DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What's the latest at Burwood?

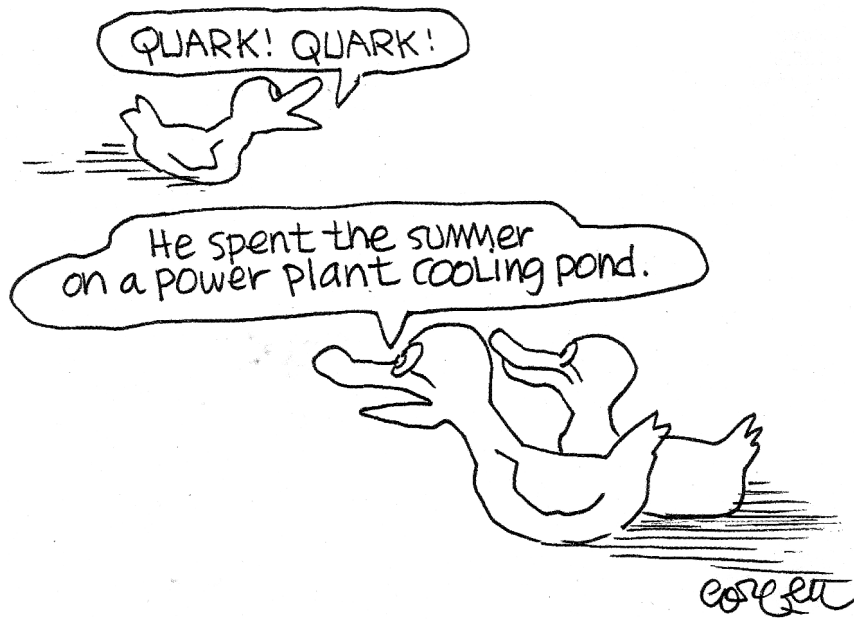
Burwood Drover: There has been a major management shakeup which the bosses have been very secretive about. The position of Depot Operations Manager is being split up. Its being replaced by two duty managers and three staff managers. The operations manager positions are to be performed by those who held CSC 2 and 3's positions which has now been abolished. The 3 staff manager positions are being created which will be filled by existing management. However, their role in operations has not been up to expectations and so their management role has been changed. Associated with these changes the shed drivers will be removed from operations work which will be taken over by white shirts who have lost their positions in other parts of the STA.

Sparks: How are things with the union rep?

BD: It seems we'll be seeing less and less of MD and he will be doing less and less in the position, as he has put out the word that he won't be running for the union rep position when the next elections occur.

Sparks: What is happening with the workshops?

BD: I've noticed constant out sourcing of mechanical work which was in the past done in the workshops. It has involved body work and air conditioning. This outsourcing has led to considerable delays in getting buses back on the road. In one recent case, so far it has taken 3 months for maintenance to be completed on one bus. It's still not been returned to the depot.



SYDNEY WHARFIES' NEWS

Sparks: I understand that your last Sparks article has caused a bit of a stir at DP World Port Botany?

Port Botany Wharfie: It certainly has. A handful of people took offence to the part of the article that, when referring to the few permanent jobs on offer (including a health, safety and environment facilitator position) stated: “some of the more cynical among the workforce think that members of the union site committee will end up with these jobs for “services rendered” to the company. But only time will tell”.

The article clearly did not take an opinion on this question one way or the other. It merely reported the existence of this sentiment among the workforce. But that was enough to get me accused of causing “disunity”, “undermining elected committees” and everything else under the sun.

The stupidest part of all this was that I was accused of photocopying and putting on a noticeboard only the portion of the article that contained the offending paragraph. Why would I stick up only one of three pages on a noticeboard when I distribute copies of Sparks with the whole three page article in it?

I should at this point explain who the “Port Botany Wharfie” is. I am Shane Bentley and I have worked on the waterfront for over nine years. Not that I thought the identity of the “Port Botany Wharfie” was any real secret. I regularly and openly leave copies of Sparks in the lunch room. I even put my name to the article I wrote about the planned privatisation of Sydney Ferries in the March issue of Sparks.

Yet some have accused me of writing “anonymous shit sheets”.

As I have explained to workmates, the only reason I chose to write under the moniker of “Port Botany Wharfie” was to fit in with the general approach of Sparks, where contributors use pseudonyms to avoid victimisation in the rail and bus industries. Nothing more.

I am so anonymous that local delegates and officials knew exactly who to ask about the Sparks article –me. The whole saga is more than a little ridiculous.

Sparks: Last time you filled us in on the state of EBA negotiations at DP World? Have negotiations progressed at all?

Port Botany Wharfie: Yes, they are drawing to a close. In principle agreement was reached on September 10. The new EBA at Port Botany will be put to the vote in the next few weeks.

In June I told you about how I thought the Maritime Union’s claim for a 20% wage rise over three years would most likely get whittled down to a 5% per year wage rise. Unfortunately, I was spot on. That is the exact figure that the national negotiators have decided to accept. With inflation currently running at 4.5%, 5% per year isn’t exactly hitting home runs.

The sweetener in the deal this time around is the company agreeing to pay back pay back to July 1, something it hasn’t done in the last few EBA agreements.

But as always - what they give with one hand, they take with the other. The company want to outsource the first aid position, which has traditionally been a job for MUA labour. In fact the position is nothing short of a waterfront institution. What has got people's backs up even more is the fact that the latest Maritime Workers' Journal reports that the MUA held on to the first aid position at Patrick / Toll in their recent EBA - and still got the new health & safety facilitator position. We are being told we have to lose the first aid position to get the health & safety job!

The system of upgrade payments for higher skilled jobs is also under attack. The company seems to have got its wish, with the proposed EBA making it so we have to work for 2 hours in an upgraded position before getting paid for it. In the case of a workthrough (working 45 minutes while most people are on a break), the full shift upgrade will now be halved.

Maintenance workers are also going backwards. For instance, the company plans to change the general maintenance roster from 33.6 hours a week to 35.48 hours per week. I am unsure if these workers will be fully reimbursed for the extra hours they will have to work.

Sparks: Is there anything else to report about the DP World EBA?

Port Botany Wharfie: Yes, we had a two hour yard meeting on Tuesday September 16. The most interesting thing was the local MUA branch secretary's response to a comment from the floor. A member asked why the union isn't taking action for better conditions – now that John Howard is gone and we now have a Labor government in power. After all, the Liberal government has been the excuse for the not taking action for the last ten years.

MUA Branch Secretary Warren Smith's response was interesting. It was certainly passionate. In essence, he said that if we are willing to take action, the MUA Branch is 100% behind you. But he then warned that it was not his job on the line, it was ours.

The purpose of the speech was twofold – retain an air of militancy while in effect scare off the ranks from actually taking action.

Many took his speech as good coin. Others saw through it. But it might just backfire – for some are starting to see that the only way to makes gains is precisely by taking action on the job. It's becoming increasingly obvious that the EBA process – in its present form - will never deliver solid gains in the wages and conditions of the waterfront workforce.

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

VICTORIAN RAIL NEWS

In the last issue of Sparks we touched upon the alleged corruption in the Human Resources area of V/Line Passengers. In this issue we interview two people who currently applied for new conductor/supervisor positions within V/Line. Names have been changed to protect the people.

Sparks: I wish to know what made you to apply for these jobs?

Marla: I applied for a position of Conductor Services Manager as the job description said it was a career path for Conductors.

Melvin: I applied for a training position for Conductors.

Sparks: How long have both of you people been on the job?

Marla: I have been on the job for just two years. I was in the teaching profession and was looking for a career change and promotion.

Melvin: I have been a Conductor for over three decades and before that I worked on the stations.

Sparks: I understand that quite a few people applied for the positions.

Marla-Melvin: Yes it was like a Melbourne Cup Field. There were five positions in Melbourne for both jobs and there were about 40 applicants.

Sparks: I understand that V/Line had supervisors already doing these jobs. What was the reason for the change?

Melvin: They want to create an empire so some manager will have to justify his job.



Marla: Yes they do but what we did not know was that in Country Locomotives such as Thewelyn and Seymour, the acting on the job supervisors were automatically given their jobs and the positions were not advertised.

Sparks: This is contempt. If they want to create new positions, then all jobs should be open for all comers. Not automatically give these O.T.S. people the jobs.

Melvin: Correct! These OTS people have an unfair advantage over other people who have applied from within V/Line as management has trained these people and sent them to training seminars. Thus they have the qualifications.

Marla: So much for equal opportunities.

Sparks: Who got these jobs?

Marla – Melvin: They were filled by existing OTS persons and their supervisors. In other words No Conductors obtained the positions. So much for Conductor Career Paths.

Sparks: In other words the interviews were conducted so as to keep Human Resources in a job. What a sham.

Marla: You are correct I have been informed that V/Line employs less people than Connex and have more staff on Human Resources.

Sparks: I must close the interview but in a future issue I will try to probe further corruption.

LETTER

Dear Sparks

A little bit of history and enlightenment.

In 1995 I was employed at Port Botany when the cameras were first introduced. They were used in conjunction with audio recording.(Contrarily to the listening devices act.) I approached the

Attorney General's office which informed me that the Attorney General is not interested in prosecuting State Transit.

This was the end of my protest regarding the cameras. I would like to add that there was no support from drivers and particularly the union and my forewarning of the issues you mention in the No. 129 June-July 2008 sparks.

So when the opportunity was there, it was not taken. Now it is definitely too late.

Unless all drivers force the union to do something but this will never happen.

When I was employed with STA I exhausted all avenues on my own in bringing to the attention of the ombudsman and ICAC matters of nepotism and corruption at the end of the day I was shafted.

My advice is forget it ,you are beating a dead horse.

My advice to any employee not happy with the situation, is quit!

I forgot to mention I received 6 months pay in the unfair dismissal court

Regards 0427264705

Reply: Certainly the STA treats workers in a draconian manner and this level of disenchantment is the result. If this is how the conditions make a bloke feel about the employer, no wonder they have trouble getting and keeping staff. And yes, unless the workers are organised, and united, the boss will always win - and this situation is inevitable with the lousy union bureaucrats in the office now. It would be better if the operation was run under workers control.
Ed.

Adelaide Trammie News

August 17, 2008

TRAM drivers called a snap strike on Tuesday 19th August, asking for extra money to compensate them for the stress of driving through the city. The tram system halted for four hours as staff walk off the job as a 12-month pay dispute with Trans Adelaide reaches crisis point. As part of the dispute, drivers wanted higher wages because the tramline extension last October has put them at a greater risk of accidents with pedestrians and traffic, their union says. They also believe that TransAdelaide has not adequately compensated them for improvements in productivity. The Glenelg to city service stopped from 10am to 2pm to allow staff to attend a stop work meeting, where it is expected they will reject TransAdelaide's offer of a 12.5 per cent wage increase, spread over three years.

The strike action comes as it has been revealed by the tram union, that Trans Adelaide wants to remove conductors from the city's popular free shuttle service between South Tce and Victoria Square, introduced when the tramline was extended last October. Staff had been under unprecedented pressure since the tramline was extended to the city's West End with drivers facing greater risks of accidents, with pedestrians and traffic cutting in front of trams. The workload would only worsen in future, following the State Government's Budget announcement to extend the tram system down Port Rd to the Entertainment Centre. Melbourne's tram drivers were paid about \$903 a week, and Adelaide trammies had not received a pay increase since January, 2007. Trans Adelaide wants to remove conductors because it's a free service. However, Trammie union representatives have countered by raising the issue regarding who is going to handle wheelchairs or advise passengers who might be from out of town? Even if they are not selling tickets, they are still performing a service role and other duties.

STOP PRESS August 19, 2008

TRAM workers have rejected a pay offer, opting for less money to maintain conditions. About 60 Rail, Tram and Bus Industry Union members voted earlier today not to accept the offer of 12.5 per cent over three years. The 2 per cent above the standard State Government offer was in exchange for introducing fixed-term employment clauses and removing conduc-

tors from shuttle services. Tram services were stopped between 10am and 2pm while the driver discussions were held at the Adelaide International Motel on Anzac Highway.

NEW ZEALAND TRAMMIE NEWS

Wellington Tramways Union rejects Go Wellington Pay offer and elects union exec

05 Sep 2008

At Wednesday's stop work meeting The Wellington Tramways Union rejected Go Wellington's latest inadequate pay offer and elected a new union executive.

According to company figures, drivers in Wellington had their annual income reduced by 19% in 2007 as a result of shift changes desired to restrict access to penalty rates. The company's current pay offer stands at only 6.2% and in addition the company wishes to introduce a draconian complaints procedure for drivers. This offer was rejected by 208 votes to 23 and drivers also voted to take limited industrial action if the company didn't come up with an improved offer.

The stop work meeting also elected a new executive for the Wellington Tramways who represent drivers at Go Wellington, Valley Flyer in the Hutt Valley and Mana Newlands buses out in Porirua and the Kapiti Coast.

Kevin O'Sullivan was elected the new Wellington Tramways Secretary. The former secretary Phil Griffiths passed away suddenly in June of this year. Kevin worked alongside Phil for 15 years as the Wellington Tramways President.

"Wellington bus drivers have held onto conditions such as double time on Sundays which most other drivers lost after the employment contracts act and deregulation of the bus industry in the late 1980's", said Kevin. "I hope to continue to good work of the Wellington Tramways Union that happened under Phil's leadership".

Former Victoria University Student Association President and Workers Party member Nick Kelly was elected as the Wellington Tramways President. This position was held by Engineers Union official Paul Tolich in the 1980's.

"It's important that drivers stand together and fight for better pay and conditions for themselves and all other workers. Previous attempts to divide Wellington drivers by employers have failed such as the attempt to introduce a flat rate contract at Go Wellington in 2007" said Nick. "I am optimistic that this unity will continue in the future".

Long serving driver and Tramways Delegate Chris Morley was elected as the Vice – President.

Also at the stop work union delegates at Go Wellington were elected.

2008 is the 100th anniversary of the Wellington Tramways Union. The new executive team intend fighting for a better life for drivers in Wellington as the union has done for the last century.

New Zealand Bus Drivers Lockout!

From Thursday 25th Sept. Wellington bus drivers will be locked out of their jobs, after hopes to raise some of their wages from a mere \$12.72 an hour was denied by their employers, Go Wellington. This means there will be no buses running for an indefinite time in the city of Wellington.

Of course, you'll hear the mainstream media discuss this issue with regard to how the strike will affect traffic in Wellington — already Channel 3 have ended their news story with 'parent's will have to take their kids to school themselves', or 'get to work yourselves', side-stepping the real issues such as the shameful rate of pay for these workers. By focusing on the disruption of city traffic the media help the company's cause, getting the public to call for a return to normality — which is in short, a return to wage slavery and a defeat for the bus drivers. The fact that this kind of disruption may occur shows how the valuable a service the bus driver performs, and should be rewarded accordingly.

As workers ourselves, we should support the Wellington bus drivers and their requests. By showing solidarity, contributing to the strike fund, or even striking in sympathy in our own unions or workplaces, we realise the fact that the dispute is not just a local one — that indus-



trial issues relate across the board to all of our working lives: in our own jobs and in our own workplaces. Such is the nature of 'the beast'.

Garage Collective calls for solidarity with the Wellington bus drivers, their unions, and any unions, groups or individuals who stands in support. An injury to one is an injury to all!

<http://indymedia.org.nz/feature/display/71951/index.php>

London bus strike solid

August 31st, 2008 by Ed

The Unite union says that its 24 hour strike at First Capital East Buses and First Centrewest Buses remained solid.

The strike by workers at one of London's largest bus companies brought 50 routes to a stand-still and a spokeswoman for the bus company said that only "very, very limited services" were running on several lines in the capital.

The union is warning that FirstGroup faces further disruption unless it returns to the negotiating table with an offer which recognises the hard work of these bus workers and the rising costs of living in London.

Unite regional officer, Peter Kavanagh, said: "This strike has been solid. It's a clear indication of our members' determination to get a fair deal. It's time for FirstGroup to return to the negotiating table with an offer that our members deserve. FirstGroup is extremely profitable - it's only right that these workers should get a fair share of the rewards."

A further 48 hour strike is planned beginning Friday 12th September.

Strike ballots are also taking place in most other London bus companies in disputes over pay. The union submitted a London wide claim to all bus operators in March of this year to challenge the current system whereby drivers (and other grades) performing identical jobs within the TfL regulated industry, receive hugely varying pay and conditions. In many cases the pay disparity for drivers working for different operators can be as much as £6,000 a year.

BAHRAIN BUS STRIKE

July 22nd, 2008 by catch

More than 50 bus drivers from the Cars Transport Corporation were on strike in Bahrain yesterday for higher pay.

The workers earn around BD200 per month, and were striking for a minimum 40% increase. Workers had originally demanded a rate of BD380, but during long negotiations between their union and their employer, the demand has been reduced several times. The Labour Ministry trade union affairs director Abdulkarim Al Fardan branded the strike as illegal "based on the Prime Minister's edict number 62 from 2006, related to where strikes are banned".

CANADIAN BUS NEWS

Bus Driver Rehired After Co-workers Wildcat

July 8th, 2008 by Ed

A driver for Coast Mountain Bus Company near Vancouver who was fired in late June is now back at work after his colleagues took wildcat strike action.

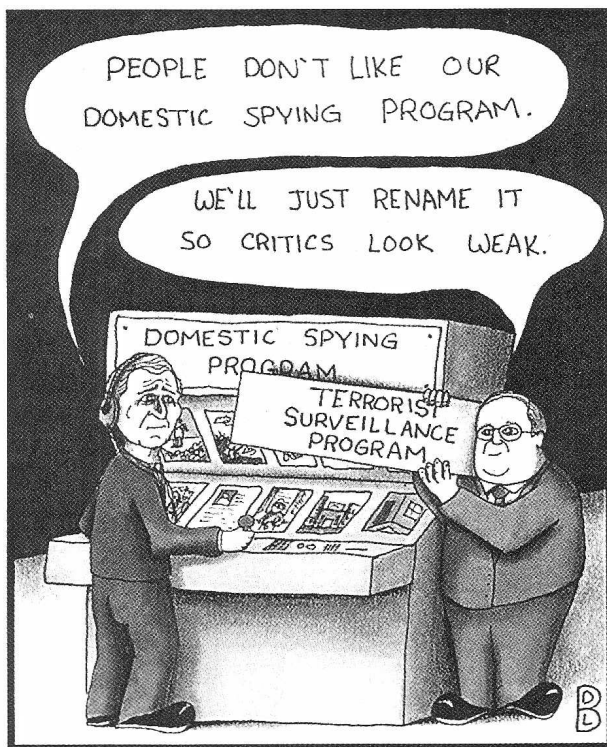
"The employee is back to work. I think both parties realized that this is something that should be resolved between the parties rather than go through the grievance process and through a third party," said Canadian Auto Workers Local 111 president, Don MacLeod.

Coast Mountain fired the driver after his bus became stuck on the train tracks at 203rd Street and Hammond road on June 21 as the West Coast Express train was approaching. The driver pulled forward and tore a safety arm off the crossing signal. Last week's meetings also produced agreements that changes need to be made to the crossing at 203rd Street in Maple Ridge to prevent further incidents.

He added that Canadian Pacific Railway employees have already begun removing brush from the area to improve sight lines and that CAW Local 111 safety officials will be in contact with Coast Mountain to see that articulated buses are not used at that intersection anymore.

The worker's firing prompted a 45-minute wildcat strike by bus drivers on June 27 and a series of meetings between the CAW Local 111 and Coast Mountain last week.

Maple Ridge Mayor Gordy Robson sympathized with the fired driver. "We put a guy on his first day on the job in an articulated bus, through construction sites and poorly designed railroad crossings and we blame him for the mistake? That doesn't seem right," he said.



STOP PRESS : NZ BUS DRIVERS LOCKOUT OVER

The Lockout of GoWellington bus drivers is over, after 1 day. The driver's will be back at work tomorrow (26th Sept.) from 5:30am, after Go Wellington agreed to go back to the negotiating table. As far as we can gather (still not much news has come out) the union hasn't withdrawn any of its demands yet (which Go Wellington had said would be a prerequisite to continued negotiations).

