

No.133

Sept. - Oct. 2009

Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

**Resigning from the Union is no solution
to RailCorp Attacks & Union Hierarchy
Treachery! Organise on the job for United
Direct Action!**



Grassroots organised rally 11/6/09 at Central to protest Station Staffing Cuts.

State Transit Wheeling & Dealing

STA Busie News

International Transport News

Station Reforms

Sydney Wharfies' News

Train Crew News

VIC. RAIL NEWS

Drug Testing Update

SPECIAL EXPOSE ON UNION FINANCES P.18

EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

Some of the most important news lately has been the despicable sabotage and subversion by the union hierarchy of the grass roots campaign in RailCorp to fight the station staffing review. It has involved all manner of shady tactics, rent-a-crowds and general duplicity. In the case of the rally at Central on 11 June, after the union hierarchy initially stated they would get behind the rally they proceeded to undermine the initiative and the last moment only provided minimal support. (See article page 3.) In the case of the rally at Central on 7/8/09 associated with the visit to Central by key figures in the NSW Govt, rail workers weren't even notified of the event which was subverted into a media stunt to assist the electoral fortunes of the Rightwing ALP candidate in the upcoming election for RTBU National Secretary. (See article page 3.)

Whilst many are dismayed by the slimy tactics of the union hierarchy associated with the so called station reforms and the EBA in 2008, which we in Sparks have warned about, resigning from the union is no solution to the problem. In fact it will just play into the hands of RailCorp. As the bosses will be encouraged to move even faster with their attacks and the union hierarchy will ever more rapidly cave-in to these moves. The station reforms are just one prong of a multi-prong offensive by the bosses. It will later down the track involve DOO (Driver Only Operation) and driver less trains. United action by all grades is an important priority. The upcoming election for RTBU National Secretary in October, is an important time to strike a hard blow against the Rightwing ALP machine in the union.

In State Transit a most disturbing development is the bosses brazen use of the bus cameras as tools to harass and spy on drivers. (See article Page 17.) Whilst the "spy world" has come uncomfortably close to drivers. Our Sparks "espionage section" has been deploying the latest in surveillance "digital" equipment to invade the privacy of the STA bosses and their cronies exposing their conniving and cavorting at a recent Transport Conference held at Monte Carlo. (See article page 10.)



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

To subscribe to Sparks, make out only postal orders to Rebel Worker for \$5 for a one year sub. Sparks is published by the Sydney Local of the Network for Democratic Unionism. To subscribe to Rebel Worker, subs are \$12 pa via postal orders. Please send to PO Box 92 Broadway 2007 NSW.

SPARKS WEB PAGE - www.sparksweb.org

N.S.W. RAILWAY NEWS

Sparks: What's been the latest at Central?

Station Assistant: There were two rallies held in late June to protest Rail Corp's planned massive staff cuts as part of the City Rail Station Staffing Review. The smaller was organised by local grassroots activists and the larger was organised by the union officials. At the union officials organised rally, there was a significant presence by police with sniffer dogs, and transit officers in uniform and plain clothes. As there were no disturbances, the police shortly departed. There was also a significant presence by the media camera crews and photographers. Despite this media attendance there was no coverage in the press or the TV. The union officials who addressed the rally presented the usual lame duck approach for us to contact our local members of parliament if we want to fight the Staffing Review.

"Top Secret" Rally at Central- Grassroots not Invited!

On Friday 7th August, there was a further rally at Central. It consisted of a Unions NSW and Rightwing ALP "rent-a-crowd" to confront the NSW Transport Minister and later on the NSW Premier Nathan Rees who were visiting the station, over the staff cuts issue. Despite the great opportunity for a major protest and media publicity to inspire grass roots resistance in the fight against the staff cuts across the station network, the union officials refused to advise union members at Central and other stations about the protest, thus ensuring a lack of attendance by workers! It appears the officials didn't want their rightwing ALP political masters to be upset by a crowd of angry rail workers. Whilst the other protests/rallies failed to gain major media exposure, this rally which was attended by a tiny handful of the "rent-a-crowd" and Phil Kessey Acting National RTBU Secretary, gained coverage on Channel 7 News. It appears to be a media stunt to raise the profile of the Rightwing ALP's candidate in the upcoming election for National RTBU Secretary to be held in October of this year. Click on your computer on the below link to view the media stunt.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kis567IcMqo>

Sparks: What is the role of the ALP Governments in regard to cutbacks in the railways over the years?

SA: ALP Govt's have played an important role historically in cutbacks like the current station reforms. This was particularly the case in regard to their role in the closure of Darling Harbour and the Parcels Office. The Rees ALP is now following suit and is pursuing another cutback despite ever more people using the rail system.

Sparks: How are the reforms being implemented?

SA: Currently workers are being required to attend the Burwood Training College where their jobs are being assessed. However, a similar procedure was used in 1998 as part of Job Redesign. Are these assessments a means to demean staff to encourage them to leave the job? To counter grass roots resistance to the job losses, the union officials are also arguing that RailCorp has already bought workers' compliance not just with the Enterprise Agreement approved in 2008, but also with the Job Redesign Enterprise Agreement. At that time the Agree-

ment which was sold to workers by the union officials without adequate opportunity for them to seriously consider and debate its negative ramifications in the shape of major job losses. It was signed off by workers dazzled by the bosses' money. Associated with the 4% pa pay rise was also large bonuses due to back dating provisions. In some cases these bonuses amounted to \$20,000. New people who came on the job at the time of the Olympics however missed the bonus and only received the pay rise. Later, RailCorp tried to recover much of the bonuses via claims of bogus overpayments.

Sparks: How are staff at Central responding to the planned staff review?

SA: Many are doing their best to keep their jobs. Whilst some have more of a "laissez faire" attitude and say "let it happen". In the hope of saving their jobs, some are providing the bosses with information which further down the track will lead to the abolition of many more jobs. Currently at Central we are facing massive job losses of 100 out of 250 operational positions with 100 staff on shifts each day.

Sparks: What are some of the likely negative aspects for staff and commuters?

SA: One form which the cutbacks are taking associated with the staff review is the cutting out of shifts at stations on the weekends and so reducing workers' wages. Whilst shifts are being retained for Monday to Friday. In certain sectors staffing has been hard hit such as the Southern Line and at Circular Quay. The targeting of Circular Quay is particularly counterproductive as it's a major tourist area and should have maximum staffing. The staff cuts there, have led to the closing down of the tourist information centre. Associated with the loss of experienced staff is the loss of the capacity to provide adequate tourism and passenger information. Whilst RailCorp is neglecting tourism information training for staff at Burwood. As part of the reforms many will have to travel considerably further to the station where they will work from. So some may have to travel to Hornsby and the Central Coast. Will staff be compensated with meal and travelling allowances for the increased travelling? Whilst many cleaning staff will be transferred to PFM (Train Presentation). However they will have no loss in pay.

Sparks: What are the latest moves to abolish most Transit Officer jobs?



SA: Latest news is that these moves are on hold.

Sparks: What's happening with drug testing?

SA: There has been an interesting new development. RailCorp contract Doctors are advising workers not to turn up for work on days they will be affected by medications which they are taking. So as not to be a candidate for the random drug testing. However, there is no RailCorp policy in place to pay workers for their time off the job for this reason.

Stopping RailCorp's Wrecking Ball

by Crimson Coconut

Across the CityRail network the devastation of the Station Staff Reviews is being hammered home like a wreckers ball on a derelict building. A massive loss of 50% of job positions on stations is now the new reality and workers are being pushed into positions against their will and with great resentment.

While most rail staff are upset and disappointed at the outcome and the affect of changes on their jobs only a handful have shown any fight at all. Just about all appeals to the unions for support fell on silent and fallow ground. Yes, there were a couple of half hearted attempts to organise rallies at locations where there was some militancy such and the South Coast, Central, Hornsby and Gosford. These were poorly organised affairs which were disjointed and not linked and never sought any any real objectives except to let off a little anger and thus never really amounted to putting any pressure on management.

The organised rallies were not well attended by rail staff even though it was their own jobs on the line. Militancy, in the form of stopping work to attend the rallies would have added some impetus to the cause of station workers. This option was never entertained by the unions who always cite the legal punitive measures which can be used against them.

When the law is unjust and the bosses can do what they like to their employees (who have no other recourse to defend their positions) then disobedience and unlawful behaviour becomes the duty of every one of us. What is the point of having a union if it can't defend us against the worst aspects of an employer who is swinging the wrecking ball? These are unions who are less about defending their members and more about keeping the status quo, implementing Labor Party policy and balancing union accounts. They have shown no leadership at all in any of the struggles that have confronted rail workers. There has to be a recognition the union leadership – or more correctly, the lack of it – was the main obstacle to station staff combating the reforms and falling for the debacle that was EA 2008.

It is hardly surprising that the unions have behaved this way. Most of their leaders are entrenched in the Labour Party hierarchy and are servants of Labor's corporate mentality. Take the RTBU's deputy Phillip Kessey for instance. Some years ago Phil was shipped of to the United States to attend the Harvard Trade Union Program, the usual grooming process for right wing trade union leaders. NSW State Secretary of the RTBU, Nick Lewocki has also served his time at the Harvard Trade Union School.

Joan Coxsedge, a well respected former Labor MP from Victoria, writing in article entitled “Subverting Australia’s Labour Movement” describes the Harvard School Trade Union Program this way:

Quote;

....“During my stay I looked into the Harvard University Trade Union Program, funded by the Harvard Foundation, because I wanted to learn more about its background and connections. I discovered there were two Harvard Foundations. One Harvard Foundation was genuine. It sat squarely in the centre of the university and was legitimately involved in student affairs. After talking with the people who ran it we found that, contrary to popular belief in Australia, the Harvard University had no connection whatsoever with the Harvard University Trade Union Program. I eventually located the “union” group’s headquarters a little distance away from the campus and nabbed copies of their literature. The Harvard Trade Union Program Alumni read like a who’s who of right-wing unionism. The first Australian to graduate was Ralph Willis in 1964, then working at the ACTU. He was followed by right-wing power-brokers Barrie Unsworth (1966), and Joe Thompson (1968), federal president and NSW state organiser for the Vehicle Builders Union. Other material indicated, however, that the funding body — the Harvard Foundation — wasn’t created until July 1976, so who footed the bill between 1964 and 1976? The initiative to set up the 1976 Harvard Foundation came from AMCHAM Australia, the local branch of the American Chamber of Commerce and agent for US big business in Australia, with “the blessing” of carefully selected senior unionists. Its letterhead named 68 trustees. All were top executives of large multinationals and Australian corporations such as Sir Peter Abeles and Hugh Morgan. Other big companies represented included Comalco, Du Pont, Rothmans, Chrysler, Uniroyal, Mobil Australia, Boral and Amatil — not a group renowned for its sympathies with unionism. Four union officials were listed as trustees, along with Bob Hawke, Neville Wran, Ian MacPhee and Professor Donald Gilson. Another name stood out - Peer da Silva. Described as working for the US giant Honeywell, he had earlier been CIA Chief of Station for Australia. The 68 were each supposed to kick in \$2500 for the “honour” of being part of the scheme. Aspects of the Foundation program were managed by Macquarie University, thereby guaranteeing tax deductibility of 42% for contributors. Program participants — four unionists each year with “proven leadership potential” — received return air fares, tuition, accommodation and study materials, and \$250 a week pin-money for the duration of the 13-week indoctrination course. At its conclusion, the US government also gave each “student” a daily allowance for four weeks of travel around the US to “liaise with their US counterparts, solidify friendships and see those principles learned at Harvard in action”. Joe O’Donnell, described as executive director of the Harvard University Trade Union Program, was the same bloke brought out to Australia in 1977 by an outfit called Enterprise Australia to give us the right-wing line on trade unionism. Enterprise Australia was one of many well-funded, US-modelled organisations zealously promoting Friedmanite capitalist ideology. It was launched in Australia in 1976 by former Liberal minister Sir Allen Fairhall, on behalf of the Australian Free Enterprise Association, “to help Australians understand that our economic and business freedoms are the bulwark of our personal liberties”. Exactly what corporations get for their money from outfits like the Harvard Foundation was spelled out by managing director of Koppers

Australia, Brooks Wilson, to corporate executives attending the 20th Annual General Meeting of AMCHAM in 1981. He said: “there is one very important thing this chamber has taken a lead in doing. And that is in terms of helping union leaders to become educated. Since the program started ... 12 or 15 trade unionists have been and returned. They feel its been an experience that opened their eyes to how the system can work — in other words, to the benefit of everybody. You don’t have to keep knocking it down; you can work with it.”...

It is rumoured that Phillip Kessey, of the RTBU state branch, is now making his bid for the Secretary’s job at the RTBU National Office, an, supposed, umbrella group of all the state branches. The last RTBU rally held at Central, confronting Nathan Rees, was probably more about getting his “militant” message out through the media to voters in the union who don’t know him.

So what can we, as workers, do about this deplorable situation?

The situation should never be allowed to arise again where we are left in the lurch, lied too, not consulted and cajoled into supporting an agreement that was sold on the basis of being harmless. Those union leaders and delegates who failed to show leadership should be expunged from the union movement and replaced by delegates who have the members interests at heart. This lesson should not be forgotten when the time comes to elect office bearers to the union office.

There are aspects of Enterprise Agreement 2008 which some of us believe were breached by management. The RTBU has highlighted the

See Page 18

WHARFIES’ NEWS

Fremantle wharfies fight retrenchments – and WIN!

Wharfies at DP World Fremantle have fought off the company’s push to make the workforce pay for the current economic downturn. A 24-hour stoppage on May 18 and a two and a half week campaign to make the terminal the safest site in Australia have stopped planned compulsory redundancies.

DP World management played hardball for months. They wanted four retrenchments from among the 30-odd maintenance workers. The company also wanted to postpone upgrades that came out of last November’s EBA (twelve wharfies to permanent and twelve to VSE). Delegates had agreed to the delay, but wanted a firm trigger mechanism to ensure the upgrades occurred when conditions improved.

On the issue of retrenchments a compromise position had been reached by MUA national official Jim Tannock and a majority of the local site committee: accept two voluntary redundancies and rearrange the maintenance roster to share a reduction in earnings to keep the other jobs. Management arrogantly rejected this compromise and pushed ahead with the compulsory retrenchments.

WHARFIES STRIKE BACK

MUA members were fed up. A stopwork meeting was held on the evening shift of May 18.

With solid support from the WA MUA officials, a resolution to take indefinite strike action and immediately walk off the job was voted for unanimously. Wharfies on the night and following day shift had the situation explained to them and were urged to attend a mass meeting at 4pm the next day.

DP World scurried to the Industrial Commission and won a return to work order (a “section 496”) in order to force the strikers back to work the next day.

At the mass meeting the next afternoon, a recommendation to go back to work and begin a campaign to make the Fremantle DP World terminal the safest site in Australia was accepted unanimously.

DP World accused the workforce of a “go-slow” and assigned a supervisor to document any evidence. But this amounted to nothing, as safety was improved.

All they found was a workforce diligently following every single safety rule to the letter (along with a regrettable reduction in container movements).

DP World management had another trick up its sleeve. MUA members later discovered a “secret file” that the company compiled – complete with photographs that management claim show delegates turning workmates back at the front gate!

After two and a half weeks of campaigning to make the terminal the safest site in Australia, management decided to come back to the negotiating table.

Management back down

DP World finally agreed to accept terms that were little different from those previously put forward in negotiations.

These include: no forced redundancies (with a reduction in maintenance roster hours and pay to keep the two jobs that would have been lost); four new permanent and four VSE jobs to replace those who had previously retired; an agreed trigger mechanism based on container volumes for backfilling the postponed EBA upgrades; all supplementaries who have qualified to go to GWE to do so; and all disciplinary letters arising from the 24-hour stoppage to be set aside.

The action taken in Fremantle shows that maritime workers do not have to succumb to economic blackmail. We did not create this economic downturn – and we should not be made to pay for it.

The fight in Fremantle was a defensive struggle which was forced to compromise. But it shows that we CAN take on the bosses and win. It once again proves the truth in the slogan of the militant Builders Labourers’ Federation: “If you don’t fight – you lose!”

STOP PRESS: DP World looked set to target two Fremantle delegates. Disciplinary letters alleging breaches of the DP World Code of Conduct were sent to the “ringleaders”. However management decided that taking on delegates who were acting on behalf of members could provoke a showdown with the WA MUA. DP World decided to take no further action against the two delegates. [Article from “Vigilance” No. 42 (July 20, 2009). “Vigilance” is a socialist bulletin for MUA members in Sydney produced by Shane Bentley – the “Port Botany Wharfie”. See www.vigilancebulletin.org].

RAIL CORP needs to implement this form of drug testing. It is less expensive and provides greater privacy for employees.

The Sydney Morning Herald

Drug test ruling gives workers greater privacy

Kirsty Needham
Workplace Reporter

THE indignity of being marched to a special cubicle to pee in a jar – the most common way an increasing number of employers test for drug use – will be replaced by mouth swabs for 200 Shell staff in a breakthrough ruling that could also provide greater privacy for other workers.

The Australian Industrial Relations Commission has ruled that Shell cannot take urine samples when it introduces random drug testing of employees in safety-critical areas at its Clyde refinery and Gore Bay terminal, and should instead test saliva – a less intrusive method used by police to test passing motorists for drugs.

Quite apart from focusing on a less embarrassing bodily fluid, the saliva tests only detect very recent drug use, so are unlikely to pick up recreational weekend or holiday drug taking.

Edward Wray-Bliss, a lecturer at the University of Technology, Sydney's school of management, who has researched the topic internationally, described the verdict as "enlightened".

"This is a very important decision for rolling back and giving that extra privacy that an employee should have in their own time," he said.

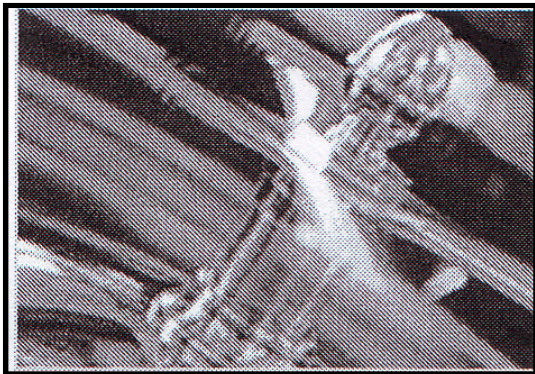
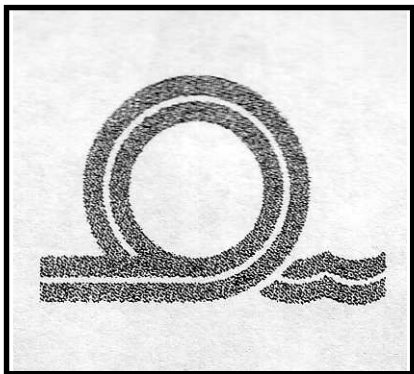
In an arbitration between the CFMEU Mining and Energy Union and Shell, the commission found that "a positive oral fluid test is far more likely to indicate actual impairment than a positive urine test".

The union's national legal officer, Judy Gray, said: "With something like marijuana, somebody who used it weeks before attending work, possibly in a jurisdiction where it is decriminalised, comes back to work with no impairment and suddenly they are being urine tested and ... on their way to a dismissal."

She added: "It is the beginning of winding back this managerial prerogative."

Mr Wray-Bliss said an independent inquiry into the increased use of random drug testing in the workplace in Britain in 2004, in response to an influx of US drug testing companies there, found there was no justification for urine tests to police employees' private lives, and there was no strong link between drug use and accidents in safety-critical areas. Instead, lack of sleep and excessive workloads were more likely to be accident factors.

"Drug testing – intervening into an employee's body, breaking that corporal boundary ... at the moment the evidence for it is not there."



STATE TRANSIT “WHEELING & DEALING”

Over the Queen’s Birthday weekend an international transport conference organised by the “Gold Fingers” of the Forbes 500 Billionaires was held in the Gambling capital of the world, Monte Carlo in Monarco.

It was attended by Australian transport bosses from State Transit who were escaping the “heat” in Sydney from angry bus drivers, passengers and shop keepers upset over the unravelling prepaid bus service fiasco, Veolia Transport, Cab Charge, Hills and West Bus, together with their sidekicks such as David Campbell, NSW Transport Minister. Even the union executive made it along after attending a Harvard union officials training course in the USA tutored by CIA spooks with dab hands at smoke and mirrors techniques and sharp eyes for the next enterprise agreement and privatisation fast tracking ploys. Thoughtfully the union executive members were provided by the spooks with a lift to the conference on a mysterious unmarked plane on its way to Guantanamo Bay, in Cuba. The purpose of the Gabfest being corporate conniving on mysterious contracts associated with the carve-up of public owned transport authorities.



Transport High Rollers & Union Executive get into the “wheel of things” at Casino Royale with the aid of the Bus Drivers’ Traffic Fine Fund Surpluses.

From a quiet achiever at Strawberry Hills, Sparks heard about the affair and seeing that we were onto something big, sent out our roving agent R07 to investigate. Our organisation in

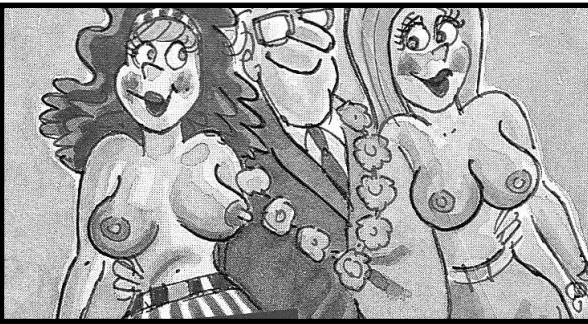
Europe was also called in to assist. To facilitate the mission, our “spook” was supplied with a phial of our specially developed “corporate truth serum” - a handy remedy for detecting and exposing “corruption in the boss’s office” and a useful spoke in the wheels of treacherous privatisation wheeling and dealing.

The conference was held in an underwater convention centre which curiously had the shape of a dollar sign. In murky waters reflecting corporate intrigue and ruthless manoeuvring for fistfuls of dollars and lucrative contracts. It was adjacent to the play ground of the mega rich, Casino Royale.

After tiring executive class flights, our transport high rollers were looking for a bit of lucrative fun before the conference began. They soon made a beeline to Casino Royale. On hurriedly entering the lobby, they suddenly collided into the union executive,



Silvio Berlusconi being rumbled by commercial mermaids at the conference



It wasn't all strenuous conniving at the conference...in the secluded executive suite at Casino Royale, some commercial mermaids greet a State Transit exec and his lavish expense account and “were of service to all....”

also bent on gambling bonanzas, who had to enter via the “tradesmen’s entrance”, causing them to fumble and spill piles of cash from brown paper envelopes. Apparently from surpluses of the unaudited bus drivers traffic fine fund. Causing a mad scramble on the floor, amongst sundry excited fat cats diving for the workers’ dollars. While they sang the merry jingle “Money, Money, you can’t get enough of it!” The suddenly further enriched transport bosses and their cronies soon found themselves at Casino Royale roulette wheels, games of poker with aces up their sleeves and baccarat, mingling with the likes of the Late Kerry Packer. Where \$25 million is lost and gained in a matter of hours. Just like the future prospects for our jobs and community services under corporate control. Where we’ll be forced to take the risks. Whilst Banks, Telcos,

and Big Mining companies reap the jackpots from our pockets like in the case of the \$200 million T-Card.

Whilst the high rollers chased the high stakes, our R07 who had been provided with a frogman outfit and oxyacetylene equipment by our European connection, glided toward the convention centre, eluding submarine nets and contractor security guard divers who were

moonlighting from their bus depot jobs. He reached the conference venue and cut through an escape hatch. On entering the convention centre, our intrepid spy exchanged his wet suit for a dollar sign emblazoned pin stripe and proceeded to infiltrate the suits at the conference opening ceremony. A shoal of “commercial mermaids” were spied gliding amongst the suits with sharp eyes for ample slices of expense accounts.

Just as the cameras flashed and special surprise guest speaker “Mr Italian Capitalism” Silvio Berlusconi was about to address the corporate throng, pandemonium broke out. As he was mobbed by a swarm of “commercial mermaids” dismayed at his lack of business ethics and failure to pay for “bedroom services rendered”. During the mayhem, our “spook” seized the moment to sprinkle the Sparks “truth serum” on the groaning plates of caviar and glasses of champagne for fat cat consumption. Following the hurried departure of Berlusconi from the venue, pursued by the mermaids, calm settled. With the fat cats clinking their champagne glasses and gobbling caviar, our spook’s digital surveillance equipment began to record the revealing conversations amongst the suits concerning the mysterious contracts. Stay tuned for the next edition of Sparks and our web site where we will expose the mayhem caused by the clamouring of the corporate sharks for the contracts, with Jerry Springer having to be called in to adjudicate.

S.T.A. BUSIE NEWS

WAVERLEY DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What are your impressions of the bus layup area at Railway Square?

Waverley Busie: Its currently a shambles. It’s being jammed with Hills buses which are congregating in the area taking over one half of the spaces to pickup outward journeys for 378’s, 311’s, 393’s, 395’s and 372’s, together with North Shore depot buses. Resulting in buses double parking. I’m not knocking the drivers. However, the spaces in the layup area were not designed for so many buses. In this once peaceful place, there are now 50-60 buses sitting around in the afternoon. A mystery is why the Hills buses are coming to this space, when they come all the way from the North West via the M2. One partial solution to the problem would be to have 4-5 buses parking up on the railway colonnade. There appears to be too much back slapping between the STA and private bus companies, in regard to the use of the layup area, but no thought regarding where do we park. Its causing more competition between drivers and more stress. The STA needs to find a solution in the shape of a larger space to cater for the vastly increased bus numbers and to stop back slapping the private bus companies.

Sparks: What’s the latest with the STA’s plan to cut the 2nd loop on the 311?

WB: I believe a likely pressure group behind the cut back to the 2nd loop on the run were the residents on the lower level of the exclusive Manhattan Apartments, which face the harbour. Following the initial construction of the units 10 years ago, the residents made complaints

about noise from the 311's which stop underneath their windows. It may have happened that they succeeded in swaying the STA. The STA proceeded with the cuts to the run removing the 2nd loop and having the run terminating at Gresham Street. Recently passengers complained to me that they had to walk from the Quay to catch the 311. Whilst in the afternoons, taxis are invading the bus zones on Gresham Street to pick up passengers. The STA has been taking a very lethargic and pathetic approach by failing to take action to curb the taxis. Latest news is that the STA appears to have burnt its fingers through the affair. According to a local resident who came on my bus and spread the news, on the last night of the Winter Sitting of the NSW Parliament Lower House, a motion was passed reinstating the route. In September, when Parliament resumes, the motion will have to go before the Upper House to be approved. It's looking to be an important victory for local residents and for us, bus drivers.

Sparks: What's the latest with the Metro Buses?

WB: Tempe Depot has been reopened as the depot for the bendi Metro Buses. Currently the STA is looking for 60 drivers for the Tempe Metros. Drivers need to be aware, that a transfer to Tempe, may have significant negative ramifications such as a lack of overtime and a loss of seniority. If and when they want to return to the other depots.

Sparks: What's the latest news in regard to the STA moves to generalise prepaid ticketing for bus services?

WB: Its proving to be quite a sham and so flawed its pathetic. It fails to take account of faulty tickets. Recently in the Bondi area, particularly the Southern end of Bondi Beach, many passengers have purchased Travel 10 tickets from a large faulty batch. After 1 or 2 rides, the tickets are not operating in the Green Machines properly. Consequently quite an uproar has broken out amongst passengers, shop keepers and bus drivers. Passengers are worried they may be booked by inspectors for having free rides on the tickets. Shopkeepers are facing flak from passengers for selling crook tickets. Whilst drivers are being obliged to field complaints about the tickets from passengers, which isn't part of our job. Overall this foul up is costing the STA thousands of dollars, which could pay for new buses and more bus services. Typically the STA bosses are showing no leadership regarding informing drivers and passengers about what they need to do in the event of the faulty tickets. It's totally unfair for passengers and drivers.

Sparks: What are your impressions of the depot Occupational, Health & Safety Committee?

WB: It was established ten years ago and management continues to fail to take action on a range of OH&S issues such as cracks in the concrete and the old toilets, which the committee has raised. To get some serious action by management on these issues the grass roots has to take possession of OH&S issues and put some pressure on the bosses to tackle the problems.

Sparks: What else is happening?

WB: The medical centre in Bondi Junction Mall which many of us patronise is now refusing to bulk bill. So if you need a medical certificate, you are charged the full fee for the visit and \$30 of the fee can't be refunded by Medicare. Despite the change in policy, many people are

still visiting the clinic. Luckily there is another medical centre 2/3 of the way up the Mall upstairs in the Imperial Arcade. It still bulk bills and isn't as busy as the other medical centre.

Why am I concerned about this issue? It seems to be indicative of how Doctors are increasingly following the ways of Big Business and seeking to cash in on patients. It seems Australia is going the way of the USA, in regard to its health system. For the worker this is not a good option. I was upset about it. It struck me as cheeky. To go see a Doctor and be slugged \$30. Given we are only being paid \$22 per hour with the STA getting top value for their money. Whilst our pay rises over the years are inadequate. In the case of privatisation, we would be facing wage cuts of \$8,000 to \$10,000 pa as occurred in Adelaide following privatisation and casualisation of employment in the buses. It would be a great struggle to pay an extra \$30, when every dollar counts.

Sparks: What are your thoughts in regard to “equal employment opportunity” in the private sector?

WB: One of my work colleagues in his 40's took a career change and commenced an apprenticeship to become a tradesman. Despite EEO legislation, he found it impossible to get an apprenticeship in the private sector. As employers would always find some excuse to deny him a position, avoiding stating the real reason being his age. However, the TAFE put him onto apprenticeships being available in the public sector. Subsequently, he was successful in gaining an apprenticeship in the



railways, where management is obliged to adhere to EEO principles. This experience certainly highlighted to me another important reason to preserve the public sector and fight privatisation.

Sparks: What's happening with the depot gym?

WB: Over 20 years ago when I first came on the job, there were much more opportunities for creating things around the workplace. With the bosses depriving us of much in the way of facilities and space for entertainment, apart from TV's and computers, the gym is ever more important for us. To attract more attendance, the gym is currently holding a "boot camp" program. It involves two personal trainers, Darren Hockey and a trainer from outside. Currently, they will be at the gym on Mondays and Wednesdays at lunch time. They will advise members on fitness issues. Take the opportunity to get some truthful answers to your fitness and weight questions. It's important to get over the barriers some have about attending the gym. Ask yourself, is this barrier stopping you from coming along? It's important to make the decision to become fit and healthy which has benefits in the shape of living longer and not carrying excess weight. Those who don't regularly exercise often suffer depression and anxiety and severe mid life crises with notions that life has no meaning. In my case before I became a gym enthusiast I initially had concerns about developing a bulky appearance through gym exercises. It's important that members take the opportunity to attend, otherwise the trainers will cease coming along. You all, lounge lizards and computer nerds bring your fitness equipment, gym clothes and boots and head off to our gym!

Sparks: What's news with the canteen?

WB: George, the chef who is quite a lively and boisterous character is retiring. Over the six years he's been our cook, he has provided us with European style, good healthy food. Despite being able to retire earlier, he continued to perform the job, which involves getting up early in the morning. He will be sadly missed. We wish him well. Following retirement, he is planning to embark on an overseas trip. To show our appreciation of George, please consider signing a card which will be circulated.

Sparks: What's happening with the cabbies?

WB: I recently caught a taxi and heard loud engine noise caused by a bearings problem. I asked the cabbie about the problem. He told me that as the RTA has ceased carrying out regular inspections of taxi bases and taxis, the owners are now not forced to have taxis repaired before serious problems develop. Consequently, taxis are facing a serious threat on the OH&S front. With privatisation, we as bus drivers are also likely to face a severe decline in bus maintenance and safety on the road.

Sparks: What's the latest with changes to the running times?

Waverley Driver: The STA bosses proceeded with the introduction of the new tighter running times for routes operated by Waverley. Our union rep has introduced a late running book to monitor the running times and prove they won't work. Since the introduction of the new running times, the 400's have proven to be quite hard hit with buses often running an hour late.

Sparks: What's happening with the depot fleet?

WD: 15 gas buses which have had faulty mirrors, have now returned to service following the rectifying of the problem.

Sparks: What's the latest news on the road?

WD: On Thursday night 16/7/09, a driver on a 333 was assaulted by a passenger wielding a bottle. In self defence the driver fought back and knocked out his assailant. The police were called. However instead of charging the passenger, who got away scot free, the police charged the driver with assault. This police action, flies in the face of the guarantees they have previously made to us, that they will always support the driver in any such incident. A petition was subsequently circulated at Waverley to demand that the union provides the driver with a Barrister to defend himself in court against the assault charge. There are rumblings amongst drivers, that if the union takes no action to vigorously defend the driver, that they will take industrial action to defend the driver with or without approval from the officials.

Other important news is that bans have been imposed on 3 dangerous bus stops. At our union meeting on Thursday 6/8/09 we voted to ban the stop at the corner of Darling Point and New South Head Roads going toward the Edgecliff Terminus due to the dangerous situation involving turning right through 3 lanes of traffic to reach the stop. All Eastern suburbs depots have banned the stop on the corner of Liverpool and Elizabeth Streets inward bound toward the Quay, again due to the hazards associated with turning right through 3 lanes of traffic. In the case of the stop in bound near Taylor Square, on Oxford Street, near Flinders Street, a ban from 9pm Friday to 5am Saturday has also been imposed by Eastern Suburbs depots in view of hazards associated with cars being parked in the bus stop. In response to this direct action, State Transit is currently reviewing these bus stops.

Latest news, is that Waverley Depot drivers have temporarily lifted the ban on the bus stop near Edgecliff following a request from the Industrial Relations Commission and pending the outcome of an IRC inspection of the problems with the stop. The bans on the other stops are still in place.

RYDE DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: How are things at Ryde?

Night Rider: Management is shortening the early broken to about 7 hours. Soon we will not need a meal break, a coffee break will do.

The union delegate seems to be a law to himself. After a new driver complained to the union about how some drivers get a lot of Sundays, he changed the system. So if don't want your Sunday, it's now handed to the rosters section to distribute. Is this fair? You swap shifts for personal reasons, but his change benefits management, more than drivers.

I hope the new depot manager reverses this change. It's about time that the current union delegate put changes to the members to approve and not act as a dictator. He only won the position by a few votes, but I think he is a one time man.

LEICHHARDT DEPOT NEWS

Watch Out! There's a Peeping Tom About!

Sparks: What's the latest at the depot?

Leichhardt Busie: We've got quite a serious problem at the moment. Complaints have been made by many drivers about the "Big Brother" problem at the depot. The bosses are brazenly disregarding the guarantee that we were given when the new digital cameras on the buses were first introduced that they would not be used in disciplinary matters and even Rudd's IR laws. One of the supervisors who fancies himself as a sort of "peeping tom" has been noticed locked away in his office poring over digital camera footage apparently in regard to certain drivers targeted for disciplinary action. He particularly surveys the footage to find some excuse to harass them and fit them up on charges. Also of concern to me is that anyone can ring up the depot and make a complaint about a driver, without supplying full name and address. Resulting, in the bosses checking the digital camera footage on the driver. As a result, we face our job being put under the microscope and the bosses' harassment as a result of some anonymous troublemaker. Its urgent that a stop work union meeting is held over the issue to consider action such as a ban on going into the office.

Some positive news, is that I have noticed lately we are being given more consideration for late running. In the past we were often harassed by the bosses over the issue.

Sparks: How are things with the depot renovations?

LB: The renovations are almost completed. The bosses' offices are now located above us. The gym is in a small room with little space for a handful of drivers to exercise. The new no-smoking policy has been implemented. However, there is no designated space for smokers to use. Associated with the depot renovations are moves to expand the depot fleet from the current 140–150. Drivers from Burwood are particularly being approached to come to Leichhardt as part of the fleet enlargement and the difficulties which Burwood depot has with bus operations due to heavy traffic on Parramatta Road.

BURWOOD DEPOT NEWS

Our downsizing is about to start in October. It is said by the union that twenty five buses will be transferred to Leichhardt along with the holiday relief drivers and any drivers willing to transfer..

There is a dispute coming about drivers displaced off the rosters when we lose lines of work. It is said that a block system will transfer surplus drivers to Leichhardt. Is this fair? Just because you're last on, you're first off to drop to the scrap! The person may have been on a roster for years. The last time a roster was lost, the displaced drivers became reserves. Why this time? I hope the same happens to surplus management. Right out of the depot onto the dole queue.

At a recent depot union meeting Malone, RTBU NSW Bus Division President, stated that the union's hands are tied and management could do what they like. I wish he would go one step and Retire and maybe someone else could handle State Transit better.

Where has our money gone?

Comrades, have you downloaded a copy of the 2008 NSW RTBU Branch Operating Report from the

net? - just click on - rtbu-nsw.asn.au/about/topics/4028.html This is the first report available for many years. The pressure from the members is mounting. So keep it up. For there are rumours that the NSW State Secretary Nick may retire this year.

So let's look at the figures in the Report. There was a pay increase for the 8 elected full time officials collectively of \$220,000.00 p.a. which BRINGS THEIR COLLECTIVE SALARIES TO \$1,400,000.00 PA. THAT'S RIGHT. ONE MILLION FOUR HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS. It doesn't end there. The report states that these officials were paid on their behalf approximately \$350,000.00 in Super ..that's about that about \$43,750.00 each. Would you like that amount of money? It's paid by you, the members.

I can only guess at what Nick gets paid, but I get a figure of about \$550,000.00 last year. This is a guess, but I have been told, second hand, that he got a 10% pay rise after the bad RailCorp Enterprise Agreement, the union pushed onto members, last year.

This leaves the other elected officials to receive about \$ 225,000.00 p.a. each. This is still okay in my books. Members please take an interest in the events of the union, to stop this !

Cont. from Page 7 failure of RailCorp to fill vacant positions before the review as one of them and which they are contesting in the IRC.

There are others which we at Sparks would like to get a legal opinion about. The "No Disadvantage Test" is one shady area that could be explored. I won't go into that here as it may be something that can be discussed in a future Sparks article. However if a majority of members vote to rescind an agreement the enterprise agreement can be annulled by the Industrial Relations Commission – something that we can focus on if there is enough support.

For all of these actions to work there must be much greater support from everyone who has vested interest in public transport and self preservation. All of those who have been content to sit on the sidelines need to engage in the process of protecting themselves and their jobs as well of those colleagues who come under attack We all need to forget our differences and start working together, supporting each other. Someone from Train Crewing was saying that "they (station staff) deserve it". This type of attitude is unhelpful as Train Crew looks like it will be in firing line after the new timetable settles down. Station staff should support them when and if they come under attack.

Many of the changes made by management may simply fall down as being unworkable, or if there is a hue and cry from the public about poor support services they may eventually cause political repercussions. The introduction of the new timetable will be a watershed in this regard as it is one that may not endear the public to the Gov- *See Page 19*

ernment or RailCorp. Our other task should be reach out to the public for support, be that in the community or in our workplaces. Without public support and the support of our fellow workers we can do very little.

VICTORIAN RAIL NEWS

At V/Line we have conductors based at various locations across Victoria. This article is about an unfair dismissal of a conductor based at a country depot. Two conductors on seeing previous editions of Sparks have come forward to talk about this unfortunate even. Once again names have been changed.

Sparks: Could you tell us what happened?

Emily and Ezra: About eighteen months ago a conductor was dismissed. The dismissal was that quick, that the other Victorian conductors did not know what had happened.

Sparks: This is incredible.

Emily: Yes it was. I was in the same class as this conductor and she was quite dedicated to the job and if her employment had have been continued, she may have become union delegate.

Ezra: I work at a different depot to Emily but what I saw of this conductor, she would have been a good union delegate.

Sparks: Could you tell us about the conductor class.

Emily: In the class, she stood up to management over the termination of a trainee conductor who failed the ticket checking exam. The trainee was a nervous person. He had his heart set on being a conductor and he had left his previous job for a career at V/Line.

Sparks: Was a former on-train manager involved in the termination of the trainee?

Emily: Yes he was and this trainee was terminated fast, that we did not know he was gone. You see the sacked conductor tried to help the trainee. In fact she challenged management over his termination.

Ezra: Yes she did. At the time, there was a vacancy for a platform supervisor at Spencer Street which this trainee could have been placed into until he could come back in a future conductor class.

Sparks: Why wasn't he placed into the position.

Emily: You see this on-train manager wanted to put fear into the class and as we were trainees we could be terminated at short notice.

Sparks: I have been informed this on-train manager was put into another management position.

Ezra: Yes and good riddance to him. Since he has been removed and in four subsequent conductor classes there have been no terminations for failing the ticket checking exam.

Sparks: What about the sacked conductor?

Emily: Because this conductor stood up to management in regard to the dismissal of the trainee, management tried to blacken her name.

Sparks: What happened?

Emily: Management spread malicious smears about the conductor during her training.

Sparks: What eventually led to her termination?

Emily: When she applied for the conductor's position, she was told she would be in a relieving position at the depot. In the relieving capacity, she would have to work in the office at the station relieving the office staff.

Ezra: A woman who works in the office at that particular station is difficult to work with. It is either her way or no way. She is not liked by the other conductors and her husband was the union delegate for the conductors at the depot.

Sparks: This is a conflict of interest.

Emily: Yes it is. What happened was that the conductor liked her job as a conductor and wanted to stay on the trains. She told this to the regional manager. He called her to a meeting and at the meeting because she had been only working for a month after training she was terminated. The union delegate who was to defend her agreed with management's decision.

Sparks: Could a compromise have been reached?

Ezra: The relief job could have been offered to the other conductors at the depot as it would have given them an opportunity to learn office work. The woman in the office would have to learn to work with other persons. Human Resources would not agree. You see managers haven't the guts to stand up to them.

Emily: This is correct. The crowd that control Human Resources think they own V/Line. They want to put who they want in the job. This is why morale is low. An existing employee at this depot could have done this job and the sacked conductor could have stayed on the trains.

Ezra: I went to the conductor supervisor for the region and expressed my disgust to him over this conductor's dismissal.

Sparks: What was his reply?

Ezra: He said she was a troublemaker and was not part of the team and her dismissal was justified.

Emily: You see he was worried about his future as his position of On-Train Supervisor was being reviewed. In the review he kept his position when the position he was in was not advertised.

Sparks: Yes, I have been told what happened with these Supervisor positions. This was a depot which was not advertised as having a vacancy, but that is another story. What was the aftermath?

Emily & Ezra: The conductor challenged her dismissal in the arbitration court, in which she was defended by an organiser from the Union. As she was on probation, she lost the case. As for the Union Delegate at the depot, the Union called a meeting at the depot. As a result of this meeting, the delegate was removed and a new delegate was elected.

Sparks: In conclusion, this is a sad story. The dismissed conductor would have been a good union delegate, if she kept her job. I say the reason, she lost her job was because of a clash personalities. As for the union delegate who was to defend her, he was scared of his wife. He should have argued for her. As for management, they should have gone for a compromise, but they thought this conductor was a threat. Finally thank you Emily and Ezra for coming forward.

SPANISH BUS NEWS

The Barcelona Bus Drivers Struggle for Two Days Off, 2007-2008

The struggle is also interesting in what it reveals about Spain's collective bargaining system. Under Spanish labour law since the late '70s, enterprises with more than 50 workers in a local area must allow workers to collectively bargain through a committee elected by the workers, the comite de empresa. I'll refer to these as "bargaining councils." Typically unions run slates of candidates and they elect a number of delegates in proportion to their vote. The bargaining councils are not required by law to adhere to a vote of workers in a contract ratification meeting. Although only 17 percent of Spain's workers belong to unions, unions collectively bargain for a vastly larger number of people through the bargaining council system.

People are entitled to 40 hours off with pay per month when elected to the bargaining committee, and unions that can receive at least 10 percent of the vote throughout Spain receive additional perks. At present the only union federations that receive more than 10 percent of the vote throughout Spain are the General Union of Workers (UGT), a union aligned with the PSOE, Spain's governing social-democratic party, and the Workers Commissions, a union influenced by the Communist Party. Delegates and unions receive subsidies from employers and the government through this system. This makes them independent to some extent of workers supporting their work through union dues.

At the Barcelona TMB (Urban Transit Authority), there are separate bargaining councils for the 2,800 bus system workers and the 2,500 subway system workers. There are currently five unions on the bus system bargaining council. At the time of the December 2005 contract negotiation, there was a large meeting of drivers who voted NO on the proposed 3-year contract because it did not guarantee two days off per week. However, three unions with a very narrow majority of the 27 delegates on the bargaining council voted to ratify the contract despite worker opposition. Those unions are the UGT, Workers Commissions, and Independent Workers Union (SIT). Thus the delegates of these three unions signed the contract behind the backs of the workers. The largest union of the bus drivers is the Transport and Communications Industrial Union of the General Confederation of Labour (CGT). Although the CGT voted "No" on the contract, it did not have an absolute majority of the delegates and was unable to block it. The fifth union on the bargaining council is an independent, the Association of Urban Transport Drivers of Barcelona (ACTUB). The CGT transport union is also the largest union of workers on the Barcelona subway system.

A similar problem of the bargaining council voting against workers' wishes happened in the contract struggle on the Barcelona subway system in 2003. In that case, TMB management had been demanding a concessionary contract. Like French transportation workers, the Barcelona subway workers were entitled to earlier retirement than other Spanish workers under their contract. Management wanted to lengthen required length of service to the average in Spain. As in the current bus system struggle, subway workers conducted a series of brief strikes. The CGT union on the subway collected signatures from 1,200 workers demanding an assembly to ratify any proposed contract. But the Workers Commissions held a poorly advertised meeting one night with only 60 people present. Since this meeting approved the contract, the Workers Commissions, UGT and two pro-company independent unions voted to approve the contract. Although the CGT are the largest union on the subway system, they are not an absolute majority on the bargaining council and could thus not block the concessionary contract. The CGT describes itself as a "revolutionary, libertarian" union. The CGT in recent years has been receiving the votes of about a million workers — about 8 percent of the vote — in bargaining council elections in Spain. Thus the union is still too small to challenge the current dominance in Spain of the UGT and Workers Commissions, which receive around 70 percent of the votes.

The current struggle on the Barcelona bus system began November 2007 when the CGT and ACTUB developed an alliance and agreement on how to proceed. On November 21st, a general assembly of bus drivers was held at one of the bus garages. The bus system was shut down for five hours so that this meeting could take place. At that assembly workers voted to approve the demand for two days off with no cut in pay and elected a Rest Days Committee (comite de descansos) (<http://comitedescansos.blogspot.com/>) to conduct the struggle. The idea was for the workers to direct the struggle themselves through their general assembly, "independent of the trade unions." The UGT and Workers Commissions boycotted that meeting.

Assembly of drivers before first strike in December

The first two strikes were conducted around Christmas time and in early January. At the time of the December strike, 54 buses driven by scabs were attacked and tires were punctured or rear-view mirrors were broken or windshields splashed with paint. Bus kiosks throughout the city were spray painted with slogans supporting the bus strike. Meanwhile, the bus workers attempted to gain support from neighbourhood groups throughout the city, and stated their support for a group of squatters living on property owned by the TMB.

The management response to this struggle waffled. At first they said the drivers were already getting two days off. Then they backtracked on that, admitting this was not the case. More recently the head manager of TMB said the workers average only 7 hours 4 minutes per day. But the workers say this is a "lie". They claim that the great majority of drivers work more than seven and a half hours per day.

In March 2008, the management of TMB and local politicians have stated that they could not grant two days off with no loss in pay without either cutting service or raising fares. In response, the drivers' spokespeople point out that workers on the Madrid bus system have two days off and the fare is lower than in Barcelona. The workers point to the large number of very

highly paid people at the top at TMB, the hugely generous pensions that managers get, and the lavish public relations expenditures of TMB.

March to support the drivers' strike

In an interview on Barcelona TV, Assumpta Escarp, president of the TMB, and a Barcelona city councilwoman, declared that she'd be happy to negotiate a change in the driver's work week, but that it had to go through the "framework of the contract." But that would put the issue back in control of the same bargaining council who signed a contract workers rejected last time. Meanwhile, the head of the Workers Commissions in Catalonia came out against the strike. According to Saturnino Mercader, the bargaining council president (a member of CGT), the UGT and Workers Commissions "now count for nothing" in this struggle. "The [drivers'] assembly has swept them aside."

On the Wednesday before the last day of the strike, the independent assembly held a meeting, with about 800 workers present, at the headquarters of the CGT. They voted to continue to strike on Thursdays.

The next day the head bureaucrat of the UGT in Catalonia, Josep Maria Alvarez, and the head bureaucrat of the Workers Commissions in Catalonia, Joan Coscubiela, issued a joint statement of their intention to ask the TMB management to negotiate a solution to the struggle through the official bargaining council, "with or without the strikers." In other words, the heads of the UGT and Workers Commission were stating their intention to ignore and bypass the independent assembly and Rest Days Committee. The UGT thus went back on the pledge they made in February to respect the decision of the drivers' assembly.

Meanwhile, the bureaucrats of the TMB and city political leaders stated their unwillingness to negotiate with the independent assembly and Rest Days Committee, and their intent also to negotiate only through contract negotiations via the official bargaining council. It's clear why the UGT and Workers Commissions bureaucracy favoured the official bargaining council. At that time, the UGT and Workers Commission control a narrow majority of 14 to 13 on the official bargaining council. This gives them the legal power to impose a solution without any ratification vote of the drivers' assembly. This path also clearly had the support of the Socialist Party political leaders who control the city government.

After their strike in March, the independent assembly of drivers voted to reject management's last proposal, criticized their "dictatorial style of negotiation" and decided on an indefinite strike of the bus system for April 15th. The Rest Days Committee posted on its blog a letter of support signed by a long list of members, local officials, shop committee members of the UGT and Workers Commissions. This put these signers at odds with the leadership of the UGT and Workers Commissions in Catalonia.

Facing national and regional elections and with growing popular sympathy for the drivers, the Socialist Party politicians finally capitulated. They agreed that the workers would receive the two consecutive days off but asked that its implementation be postponed to the new labour contract at the end of 2008.

What is Democratic Unionism?

Democratic Unionism means grassroots-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. That 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 be 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 paid 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.

LETTER

Congratulations to Ken Mason and all those who assisted him in his successful bid for the National President position (as reported in Sparks No 132) in the RTBU elections earlier this year. Ken is an ordinary, rank and file worker, not a career union official.

He was able to gain a majority of the vote by doing the important work of gradually building up support amongst members at the grassroots level and successfully making the case for strong, democratic, membership controlled unionism. It is testament to the persistence of all those courageous workers like Ken who have joined in the fight for genuine grassroots unionism and shows that persistence pays off. It also suggests momentum for change within the RTBU is growing. Unions belong to the workers who join them. We pay the wages of the officials with our dues. Union officials are our servants, employed at our behest. We are not here to provide a career path for ambitious politicians in the making. The officials need to spend more time visiting and talking to workers on the job and less time in the office meeting with senior management and walking the corridors of power.

Ken and his supporters now have an opportunity to provide backbone to the RTBU's stated aims of protecting members jobs and conditions from employer attacks on our rights and combating the constant threat of privatisation and contracting out of public transport services. Once again, well done to Ken and all those who have joined in the struggle for a strong, democratic and accountable union. *By Max Stirner*

What is Democratic Unionism?

Democratic