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Sept. - Oct. 2011

Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

ORGANISE ON THE JOB AGAINST THE O'FARRELL PUBLIC TRANSPORT PRIVATISATION HIDDEN AGENDA!



The Anti-O'Farrell Rally & March on NSW Parliament on 8/9/11

TRAIN CREW NEWS;

STA BUSIE NEWS;

STA ACCIDENT POLICY;

GRASSROOTS PS CAMPAIGN;

LETTER;

NSW RAILWAY NEWS;

INTERNATIONAL NEWS;

VIC. RAILWAY NEWS;

RAIL-BUS NEWS;

UNDEMOCRATIC UNION;

EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

Some of the most important news lately was the mass rally and march by public service workers on NSW Parliament House on 8th Sept to protest O'Farrell Government attacks on their jobs and conditions. Certainly, the progress of the O'Farrell Government attacks are being watched closely by Big Business and the Abbott Liberals. (See article Page 7)

Its likely the Rightwing ALP faction controlled Unions NSW which is running the campaign will use it as a replay of their campaign against the Howard Government's Work Choices legislation, which focused on getting the ALP elected to Government. The Gillard ALP Federal Govt. "Fair Work" IR legislation has of course proven to be as draconian in many respects as "Work Choices" with many restrictions on the right to take industrial action. Certainly the Unions NSW campaign involving token industrial action and symbolic protests and rallies is similar to their previous Anti-Work Choices campaign. Its most unlikely to force the O'Farrell Govt. to back down on their attacks.

Consequently, its important that the initiative is seized by the grass roots involving organising on the job for direct action and in particular the need to combat O'Farrell plans for the privatisation of public transport. (See article Page 4)

In State Transit, some of the most important news also associated with the advent of the "get tough" O'Farrell Government, is a new draconian accidents policy. Designed to further spread a sense of insecurity and fear on the job. What are the newly elected bus union officials doing to assist the grass roots to fight it? (See article page 9)

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

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SPARKS WEB PAGE -

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RAILCORP TRAIN CREW NEWS

We are still having continuing issues with the new Waratah train. As I mentioned last edition, these issues include the role of guards on platforms in the City Circle, the amount of time for training train crews on the train and the changing of the role of the guard on the trains in regard to watching the train onto the platform and removal of the whistle.

We are also facing major attacks on train crew wages by the bosses. I have heard that RailCorp wants to cut out train crew travel time for foreign depot working and to cut back stand by shifts on weekends by standing you down at on home base pay, have swinger shifts work only Monday to Friday. The union doesn't believe they can do it, and are challenging it. RailCorp are saying it was part of the 2010 EBA pay rise. The union is wanting the dispute referred back to the Industrial Relations Commission for a hearing.

Concerned Guard

A Most Undemocratic Union

By Crimson Coconut

Following on from Member's Voice good showing in last RTBU (Rail Tram & Bus Union) election and gaining somewhere in excess of 40% of the average vote where contested, the RTBU Leadership has decided to ignore the protest vote and continue its old undemocratic ways.

One has to look no further than the appointment of NSW Branch Organisers. Only 2 out of the 6 organisers were fairly elected at the last election. The rest were appointments.

Although the rules of the RTBU allow for this, Member's Voice and many union members believe that this is undemocratic and unconscionable. Union rules should ensure that appointments should reflect the will of the majority of members rather than allegiances to the ALP or the union apparatchiks. The rules must be changed if the union is to be representative of its members.

One of these appointed organiser delegates was soundly rejected at the RTBU National Elections scoring just 410 votes, while several of the others never stood for any position at all.

Not unlike the Health Services Union, which has featured prominently in the news because of corrupt conduct and misappropriation of funds, the RTBU is an incestuous ALP family affair. At least 2 of the organiser appointments have been provided with a paid position because of their ties with the ALP - some may not even be eligible for union membership.

In the RTBU office family members of RTBU Royalty fill several of the paid positions. While this may be just good fortune because of RTBU inter-union affinity it is not a good look and smells of dubious recruiting and appointments.

Unfortunately Members' Voice was unable to dislodge the RTBU leadership at the last union election. Despite our bold showing and the gaining of a respectable percentage vote none of our candidates appears in the new leadership team.

It is the elected leadership's right and will to rule how they see fit. We believe however that the crisis of confidence that the trade union movement finds itself in, the looming environmental catastrophe and the continuing world economic crisis urgently demands change. The RTBU leadership and the rest of union movement only sees the continuation of business as usual. This is not good enough.

This makes the task of building Member's Voice all the more urgent for a future overthrow of (what could commonly be termed) "the unrepresentative swill" as soon as we get the chance.

Stopping Privatisation and Staff Cutbacks

By Crimson Coconut

In the last edition of Sparks we raised some of the reasons why we should oppose privatisation. Here we attempt to discuss some of the ways to do this.

Firstly, How NOT to stop privatisation and government/employer attacks on working conditions!

Typically the trade union movement in NSW is being forced by the union rank and file into a position of fending off Barry O'Farrell's attacks on workers in NSW using Fair Work Legislation. Unions NSW are dragging their feet over an effective response to O'Farrell's attempts at holding down wages and slashing jobs.

The September 8th rally in the Domain was a pathetic response from Unions NSW to Barry O'Farrell's attacks. Not that I am against the large number of people that turned out on the day. There is a groundswell of support for some effective action and all of the workers who attended deserve to win this struggle because of their beliefs and because of their efforts. But really, getting workers to walk from a rail station to the Domain to listen to platitudes about the need to remove O'Farrell from power will change nothing.

It does nothing to involve workers in the decision making process or any other process for that matter that will remove O'Farrell. Workers are being led, rather than encouraged and helped into leading the struggle. A truly representative union response would not have been just about removing O'Farrell, but instead empowering workers to fend off any future attacks. That means putting workers rights and needs above short term political goals.

See Page 6

LETTER

Dear Sparks,

Good to read the paper today for the first time.

I want to say two statements regarding privatisation:

1. Anything without competition should not let go into privatisation. The government should duplicate the Rail Corp and rail systems before selling them. Move over please sell to at least two companies.

2. The government should always control the basic and important infrastructure. The taxpayers are paying the money to government for providing a better and stable environment but not let the leaders to do their business.

This is different from depositing or investing money into the bank by people and let the bankers to do trading.

Government, you are not the banker, don't pretend to be a banker! You get my money, please build and maintain the environment for me!

Regards

Sam

Reply:

This "competition" which you are in favour will only lead to more waves of attacks on railway workers' jobs and conditions and cut backs to services in the interest of profit making for big business. What about "workers' control" of the railways? With the grass roots seizing control of the railways and running it without the bosses via elected and instantly recallable "workers' councils" on the depot, yard and station scales? On January 1st 1990, tram workers operated the Melbourne tram ways under workers' control until the power was cut off. Such action by the grass roots in Rail Corp would inspire the grass roots in other parts of transport to follow suit with "workers' control" and in other industries. Ed

Continued From Page 4 My guess is that they want us to wait until the next election and vote Labor so that Barry and his gang are removed. Guess what - that is just too long and will be too late. The Libs are so entrenched and have such a majority it will take at least another two terms to remove them from office. In the meantime workers will all be screwed waiting.

The Labor Unions are hamstrung by a preconceived idea that they have to portray themselves as responsible managers and responsible unions, so as not to harm Labor's cleanskin image to the "big end of town", those who make the real decisions in Macquarie Street.

Hence the NSW Union movement's dilemma - an angry rank and file membership on one side that wants direct action to stop the continuing attacks on wages and conditions - a Labor Party on the other side that is down and out and out of office needing workers votes to regain lost ground. They believe that if workers suffer enough under O'Farrell that they just might vote Labor. For this reason, there is no urgency to ease the pain and suffering of workers.

Public sector workers remember that it was a Labor Government in NSW that introduced the 2.5% wage freeze. If you listened to the Unions NSW speeches and read their brochures you would think that the wages freeze was something new introduced by B. O'Farrell.

We should support rallies and actions of the NSW Unions despite these shortcomings, with the proviso and recognition that neither Labor nor Liberal gives two hoots about working people. A pox on both their houses I say. However we need to support any moves which strengthens the hand of workers.

So what is required. Instead of a gentle stroll in the park, for some feel good exercise, flex some industrial muscle in the form of STRIKE action. This is not just our industrial right it is an international human right. It would have made the Libs and their bankrollers sit up and take notice.

Show some union leadership; call the workers out with a list of demands. Primarily tell Barry that he should back off and repeal any legislation that impinges on the rights of workers to bargain without limits. Bring Sydney and regional centres to a halt - they will cave in if we really apply the industrial screws. Business will scream at both parties to stop them losing money - the only pain they feel is in their pockets.

Union members were not reassured that they would be protected from employer reprisals if they attended the rally. That's a real failing and lack of communication from the union movement. Anyway, it would have been much better to have called a stop-work day of action. It would have had far more impact and many, many more would have attended the rally.

The union leadership may have reinforced the view that industrial action is illegal. So what? How can we remove this unjust law without challenging it? Is the union going to remain forever a limp and powerless bureaucratic institution that believes that the best way forward is to bend over backwards?

Local campaigns at workplace level, building up to a comprehensive and united fight would work best. Let workers in their workplaces decide what action should be taken - any agreed action should be supported from head office. Workers

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RAIL – BUS NEWS

By The Transport Scrutinizer

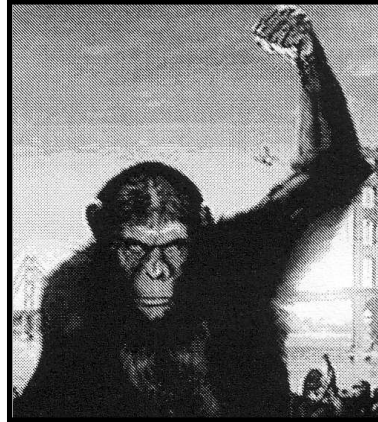
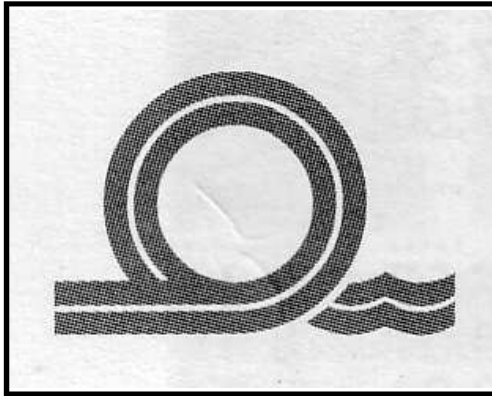
State Government Employees To Become 3rd Class Citizens

The recent decision by the NSW O'Farrell Neo-Nazi Government to impose a below inflation rate 2.5% salary/wages cap on its workforce shows its total disregard for their well being. So too does the NSW Neo-Nazi Government's decision to strip workers' rights, awards and conditions. The Government's domination of the Industrial Relations Commission, also restricts the powers of the Unions to negotiate for better awards and conditions for their members. Therefore it is only fitting to state that the Neo-Nazi Government has basically reduced us all to 3rd class citizens, as it wants us to show blind obedience in return for no rights, no privileges, no fair work awards and conditions, no union powers and no guarantee of work stability.

It is with all of this in mind that over 45,000 Government employees let their voices of protest be heard on September 8 at a mass rally at the Domain in Sydney and culminating with a march past Parliament House. Whilst our voices were most definitely heard, they fell on deaf ears with NSW Premier/Dictator Barry O'Farrell refusing to back down. Unions NSW Secretary Mark Lennon has vowed to fight on and continue with rallies and meetings to continue to put pressure on the Government to show some respect to its workforce by repealing its draconian policies.

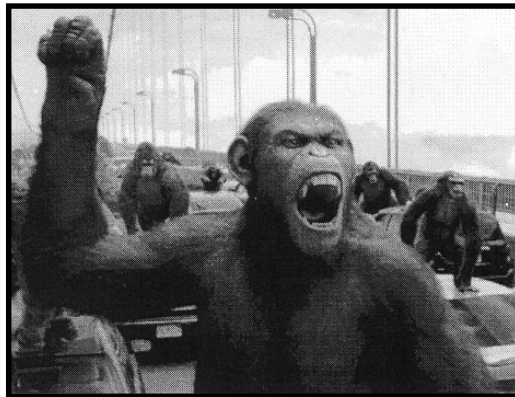
Whilst it is true that even recent ALP Governments have wrecked the awards and conditions of its workers, none of that compares with the evil that we are now faced with. If O'Farrell and his band of Neo-Nazis have their day, we will all become slaves to the system with the worst possible conditions, including less or no penalty rates, no voluntary overtime, reduced annual leave, sick leave, carers' leave, long service leave and less take home pay. If convicted of some trumped up departmental charges, we will also lose the right of appeal, resulting in illegal and unwarranted sackings. In short, we've been HAD. And if private enterprise employees think they are exempt, they are sorely mistaken. As their bosses will side with O'Farrell, to screw their conditions as well.

It was the voice of the people that unseated the Keneally ALP Government and it will be the voice of the people that will turn the O'Farrell Neo-Nazi Government into a one-hit wonder. If the Unions NSW Campaign continues to gain momentum and gains the community support that we need, then we will succeed. In gaining proper pay and conditions and retain government jobs, many communities, particularly those in outlying areas will benefit from financial stability, resulting from Government workers continuing to contribute to generated revenue, which keeps the economies of all shires and municipalities alive.



Return To The Planet Of The Management Apes

A quiet achiever in NASA at Cape Canaveral in the USA has provided Sparks with a weird tale concerning the Space Shuttle during a recent space flight. The Shuttle was caught in a “worm hole” and landed on an earth like planet in another galaxy. On landing, the astronauts discovered that the planet was inhabited by two species of ape like creatures. One of the species had a remarkable resemblance to the STA bosses and members of the Liberal O’Farrell NSW Government and was very domineering and considered itself to be superior to the other species which had a strange resemblance to STA drivers. These “management apes” tried to kill off, the “driver apes” through relentless attempts to cut down on wages, tighten bus running times and squeeze ever more productivity. The “management” apes want to propagate fear and insecurity amongst the “driver” apes via digital cameras and GPS monitoring deployment and a draconian accidents policy. As a result they intend to create



A “Management Ape” threatens “Shed Driver Apes” with a speed up in their work.

an environment to ensure their supremacy and exterminate the other species which they regard as obsolete.

There is an analogy with our current situation where the NSW Govt and the STA are slowly cooking away our jobs and conditions like a frog which is slowly being heated to boiling point. If you voted Liberal put that aside and get together with other workers who are facing major cuts to wages and conditions and a worsening family life. It is this draconian approach many on the job would remember when the Liberals were last in power 16 years ago, which got me initially writing for this paper. We must be vigilant and defeat these aliens who think they are superior to us!

S.T.A. BUSIE NEWS

WAVERLEY DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What's the latest with the union?

Waverley Busie: In the last week of July we voted for a 2 ½ % pa rise back dated to mid June, to allow further negotiations on the Enterprise Agreement. The union officials are encouraging us to have our union dues deducted from our bank accounts to avoid the STA under pressure from the O'Farrell Govt., abolishing pay roll deduction of our union dues. As a result, we would become un-financial. I encourage everyone to do it. Latest news is that the bosses are using the excuse that the new enterprise agreement hasn't been finalised, to stop us from applying for our holidays.

Sparks: What's the latest developments with the bosses' attacks?

WB: Some of the most draconian is the decision of the bosses to change the STA policy regarding accidents. Under the previous policy, if you had 4 accidents, you were sent to be re-trained and then returned to your normal work. Now if you have three 3 accidents, even if the accidents are not your fault, there is a possibility that you can be sacked. A sort of three strikes and you can be out if the bosses don't like you for some reason! What are the full details? We haven't officially been told. Whilst I recently saw on the notice board, a message that drivers should beware that if they don't display their DOT Cards in their buses, they could face \$750 fines. By these initiatives, the bosses are definitely trying to create a climate of fear on the job. Another management initiative is the introduction of rotating block rosters for those on the scrap heap, cleaners, refuelers and shed drivers. You can swop a roster, but you have to take the initiative. Are these new rosters designed to reduce overtime, as a further corner cutting measure? I was recently speaking to a refueler who was upset with the changes to the rosters. Like the refueler, many have been on the same roster for many years and now, the bosses have changed it, in the interests of penny pinching and making changes to suit themselves. Whilst the worker is inconvenienced. Another major attack by the STA



is large cuts to utility middle management jobs in depots. The work performed by such positions is important for the buses to function effectively and avoiding disputes over such issues as getting holidays. The STA with its penny pinching is stealing money from our pockets to make themselves look good in the eyes of the NSW Govt. The STA is stealing money from our hard earned cash. It's ours! Not the STA's! Not the Govt's! Not the people of NSW! It belongs to us!

Sparks: How are the bus services?

WB: The bosses are proceeding to trim back services on many routes. I was surprised to find that the 324 service in the Watson's Bay area, which is one of the most important runs, is roughly one every 30 minutes in the off peak. Another route targeted is the 400 from Burwood to Bondi Junction. Recently I was at a bus stop in a south western suburb, where there were many people waiting for a 400 to make connections. When it failed to turn up as per the timetable, a lady mentioned to me a similar experience she had recently, where due to heavy rain the bus was delayed in turning up and there was no replacement bus run. Many of the passengers were angry about the poor service and decided to catch cabs to meet their flights at the airport. Passengers deserve a better, reliable and consistent service. Especially on big

runs like the 400 which covers a long distance and links to the airport, when a bus on the run breaks down and the driver calls in, it needs to be quickly replaced.

I have also noticed a lot of unswept buses at Waverley Depot. Despite the number of buses in the fleet increasing, the number of cleaners remains the same. Definitely, the cleaners are being put under pressure to sweep the buses quicker. In raising this issue I am not against the worker. However it shows a pattern of STA squeezing more productivity from us via a speed up.

Sparks: What's the latest developments with fare evasion?

WB: It's the STA's responsibility to ensure that people getting on a bus pay for correct tickets. I've noticed many people are getting free rides and get grumpy if they don't get free bus trips. This is fair, because the revenue collected from tickets pays for the service. The STA needs to ensure that shop keepers are properly trained so they sell the correct prepaid tickets to passengers. Why doesn't the STA raise revenue through taking a more serious attitude on reducing fare evasion, rather than trying to squeeze savings from us at every opportunity?

Sparks: How are things at the depot?

WB: Latest news is that "boom gates" have been installed, as part of a security over kill. It's looking like a fortress! The canteen remains closed undermining any social atmosphere. The depot has lost its mojo. How is it that other depots such as Pt. Botany have functioning canteens administered by their institutes? Let's make a canteen across the road in Centennial Park. It would be a beautiful environment! In general the workplace feels dead. Over the years, it's been changed from a great place to work to an empty shell. There is no entertainment allowed. Whilst there are all manner of prohibitions on activities and bringing family or friends on the premises. All we have now is boring Safety meetings to attend. I have also noticed that the workforce turnover is huge. The bosses are clearly putting out the message "We are in control! We are in control!"

On a positive note I have noticed that aspects of the Transport NSW uniforms which we are being issued has greatly improved in quality. However, the business style shirts are baggy and dull.

Sparks: What are your thoughts about the O'Farrell Liberal Govt in NSW?

WB: One of the most important reasons for me writing for this paper since 16 years has been the harshness of Liberal Govt. policies. Despite O'Farrell's talk about a major priority of his Govt. being the privatisation of the Ferries via franchising, no such carve-up has occurred as yet. Latest news is that a stop work meeting by Ferry unions was held for 5 hours on Monday 5/9/11. The meeting agreed to oppose the franchising as the Govt rejected the union offer to maintain ferry workers as public service workers under franchising.

In early August, the O'Farrell Govt. announced plans for massive public service job cutbacks which will comprise part of the Sept. State Budget. The media engaged in scare mongering by spreading the story that 25% of public service jobs are to be cut with the loss of 40,000 jobs. This story was a ploy to encourage compliance to significantly lower job losses of 5,000. Such threats are worsening the current economic down turn in retail industry. As many public service workers in anticipation of being made redundant are being discouraged from their

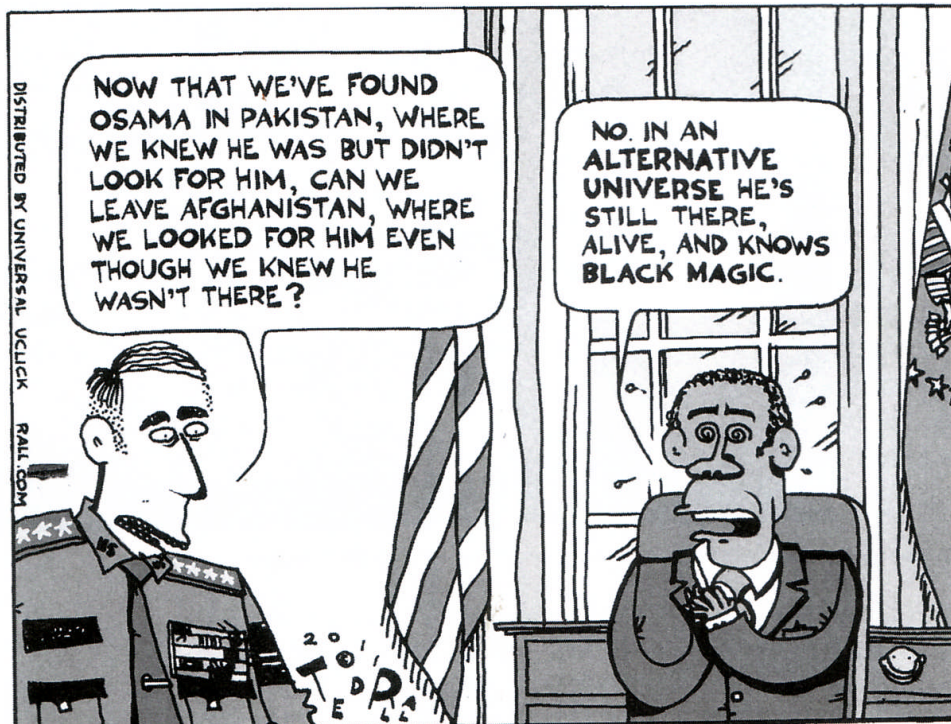
normal level of spending. Whilst also in early August on the 6.30 pm Channel 2 TV program "State Affairs", there was a question regarding whether privatisation of the railways was on the agenda of the upcoming State Budget. The Govt. is justifying these draconian attacks on the basis of a bogus budget blow out.

A particularly disturbing aspect of the new government is its reliance on single issue parties such as Fred Nile's party "The Christian Democrats" and the Shooters' Party, which holds the balance of power in the Upper House of NSW Parliament. I thought such parties would be looking out for and supporting the lowly worker. However, in practice they have gone way off track and are just looking after their own agendas.

Another vicious attack, which Unions NSW is campaigning against, is that under its new IR legislation, lots of our basic conditions are up for grabs in enterprise agreement negotiations and we have no recourse to the Industrial Commission in challenging such conditions losses. However, the O'Farrell Govt. in a two faced manner used the IRC to intimidate teachers from attending the Anti-O'Farrell Rally on Thursday 8/9/11 by outlawing strike action. This is weird. In this way the Liberals are acting like the Nazis.

Sparks: What are your views on the Federal Gillard Govt's Carbon Tax Policy?

WB: I think it will have huge benefits for us, as Big Companies will have to pay for their pollution. The competition between these companies will encourage reductions in green house gas emissions. Whilst use of public transport will be increased.



A positive development associated with the Gillard Govt's IR legislation is that unions are returning to the Pilbara area of Western Australia, where companies such as Rio Tinto and BHP have been able to employ non-union labour on individual contracts as a result of the Howard Work Choices legislation. Despite this legislation being abolished.

Sparks: What's the latest on the entertainment front?

WB: There's a new film showing at the cinemas called "Red Dog" which yours truly had an association. It's based on a true story and is 2 hours long. It focuses on the Pilbara region during the mid 1970's. It captures very well the people there at that time and the adventures of the "red dog". At this time, yours truly was working as a bus driver in the Pilbara and had connections with the "Red Dog". So, if you see it showing at your local cinema, why not go along?

LEICHHARDT DEPOT NEWS

Sparks: What's the latest with the STA's cost cutting drive?

Leichhardt Busie: The STA bosses are pursuing this efficiency drive to a ludicrous extent. They are trying out any measure to corner cut. In early August, a shed drivers supervisor came to the depot and arbitrarily reduced the number of shed drivers on the night shift from 4 to 1. The number of refuelers remained the same. This caused chaos. As the sole shed driver on the night shift couldn't cope with the massively increased workload and the depot yard became a parking lot, crammed with buses. The depot manager had to urgently intervene to tackle the problem, and reinstated the 3 shed drivers. Subsequently, due to pressure from higher STA management, the depot manager made a "U" Turn and put the reinstated 3 shedies back on driving duties. The cramming of buses in the yard has been mostly sorted out. As buses are now refuelled throughout the day, rather than mainly after 6pm following the evening peak.

Sparks: What's happening with the enterprise agreement?

LB: Also in early August, we voted overwhelmingly for the 2 ½% pa pay rise which has been back dated to mid June associated with the Enterprise Agreement. Under the understanding that the EBA would still be subject to ongoing negotiations with the union officials.

BURWOOD DEPOT NEWS

Since the last edition of Sparks our unelected depot delegate resigned. A election was held for a temporary person. The result was declared, but no details were given out for each candidate. Strange result! It looks like the preferred person was declared the winner. A new election will be held soon run by the electoral commission.

STA has started to cut costs in the depots. First it was shed drivers, then the maintenance dept. What is next ,drivers? I don't think so. As we are needed to drive buses? Or top heavy management?

The new government seems to have middle management in its sights in the STA. Rumours abound that certain personal are resigned to being displaced. The lucky ones are hoping to secure a different position or if possible go back to driving. They are renewing their DOT card.

Burwood depot has a new clerk, ex-Waverley depot. It has been reported that the person is the partner of a certain union official from Redfern. This person was reported to have campaigned against Raul and company in the last union election. I understand that STA was not allowed to use bias in that election. Has the Waverley delegate had some hand in this move? Or is this person too close to the union and has been transferred to Burwood to negate this connection?

GRASS ROOTS ORGANISING & THE PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS

As expected the O'Farrell Government has wasted little time since its election in March moving against workers' rights in the public sector. New laws passed with upper house support from the Shooters and the Christian Democrats strip the state industrial court of its powers to arbitrate in pay disputes. New policies also tighten previous Labor requirements for public sector pay rises above 2.5% p.a. to be funded via offsets such as cuts in jobs and conditions.

An enthusiastic crowd of at least 30,000 workers rallied in the Domain on 8 September and showed what public sector workers think of O'Farrell's new IR regime. This rally built on the 12,000 workers who protested in the rain outside state parliament on Wednesday, 15 June.

To date the campaign from the leadership of the union movement has focused on the loss of powers of the NSW Industrial Relations Commission which they refer to as the "independent umpire", but the idea that the court system is independent is a myth. Trade unionists have always understood that they are the bosses' courts and any legal victory for workers is merely formal recognition of what has been forced on the employer by our industrial strength. It is an old adage that what you can't win on the ground, you won't win in the courts.

Instead of a primarily political campaign that seeks simply to restore the power of the court system to mediate disputes and return to the way things were under Labor, unions should focus on an industrial campaign to fight directly for better pay and conditions by mobilising the collective power of the membership. It is only through our collective industrial power that workers have ever won anything from employers.

By taking state-wide strike action on 8 September teachers wisely ignored the predictable threat of fines and showed a glimpse of the power that resides in the hands of workers acting in unison.



NSW public sector unions should plan now for a common expiry date for future agreements across the public sector so that in future unions can unite and the strength of all public sector workers is used to bargain collectively for a common pay rise. This method of 'pattern bargaining' has been employed successfully by strong industrial unions (CFMEU, AMWU) in the private sector for some time and has recently been taken up by the federal public sector union, the CPSU. Currently each union is left to fight largely on its own when negotiating a new agreement which strengthens the hand of the Government and is a key reason why no union going one out has so far managed to break the 2.5% wage cap without making trade-offs.

Organisation

The recent emergence of some independent grassroots industrial organising has raised the possibility of a workers' led revival of the union movement by posing a challenge to the usual bureaucratic, top-down controlled union campaigning that favours the petitioning and lobbying of MPs.

Several cross-union rank and file meetings have recently attracted 40-50 people to discuss plans for actions that involve and engage with rank and file union members. One group involved in these meetings is Power to the People (PtP). Originally formed to fight the privatisation of electricity in NSW, PtP has started meeting again to organise around the pub-

lic sector campaign. In conjunction with the NSW Union Activists network both groups worked together to organise a successful Public Sector Symposium at the MUA office on 16 July and a follow up planning meeting on 27 August that brought together rank and file workers from across the union movement.

One of the speakers at the 16 July symposium was Tony Clear. Standing as an independent candidate in the RTBU elections in early 2011 Clear was elected with the support of Members Voice as NSW RTBU President. At the meeting, after explaining to the assembled audience that he is required by the other members of the RTBU leadership to state that he does not officially speak on behalf of the RTBU, Clear talked of the need to stand up to the employer by utilising the industrial power of the membership. Clear pointed out that union leaders are often reluctant to take industrial action lest they incur the wrath of the courts and risk large fines. By contrast Clear boldly stated that unions must maintain the capacity to strike and that he would be prepared to go to jail to defend workers rights if it came to that. Few union leaders are prepared to make such a stand today and through his fighting words Clear amply demonstrated himself to be a friend of workers on the job.

Neo-Liberalism

Since the 1970s the dominant ideology of neo-liberalism, a form of extreme “free market” capitalism, has sought to demonise and attack the public sector and push for privatisation, lay-offs and cuts to social spending. The major parties, despite superficial differences, have shared the same agenda in this regard. Once proud of demonising the public sector, politicians have modified their rhetoric in recent years, fearful of the backlash from a public that actually wants a functioning social infrastructure and does not like to see workers sacked en masse.



Opinion polls around the world show that a large majority consistently opposes privatisation, lay-offs and cuts to social spending.

Howard's defeat in 2007 was due in significant measure to the widespread perception of him 'going too far in attacking workers' rights with his WorkChoices legislation. Earlier that year NSW Liberal leader Peter Debnam came unstuck after threatening to sack 29,000 public sector workers in the lead up to the state election. For their part Labor planned to cut 10,000 public sector jobs but the unions bargained them down to 5,000 job cuts and considered it a victory. Following Labor's re-election in 2007 those jobs were quickly eliminated. Similarly, in the recent state budget the O'Farrell Government has foreshadowed the loss of 5,000 – 10,000 jobs.

Overseas massive social upheaval provoked by increasingly intense austerity measures continues to convulse the world's markets as the capitalist system lurches from one crisis to another.

Until now Australia has been spared most of these painful convulsions but in a globally integrated economic system this is unlikely to last. Australian share markets have exhibited the same volatility that we see overseas while growth has slowed and unemployment is starting to rise.

The NSW Government is the biggest employer in the country and this battle is being watched closely by capitalists at home and abroad. If successful these changes will establish a pattern for ongoing attacks on workers by employers across the workforce and are a likely precursor to the kind of austerity measures that have sparked upheaval in Europe and elsewhere.

Democracy

The day after the 12,000 strong rally on June 15, in response to simultaneous riots and a general strike in Greece, a headline in the Sydney Morning Herald read "Markets gripped by fear" which commented that "investors get spooked when they see headlines, photos and footage of tens of thousands of protestors standing up to the painful austerity measures that have been imposed on Greece" as \$25b was wiped from the Australian stock market in a "horror day" of trading.

Taxpayer funded bailouts of banks and financial institutions measured in the trillions means this enormous cost has been shifted to governments; in effect we are expected to pick up the tab for the profligate spending of global corporations. But as the growing upheaval shows, with millions of workers on strike, rioting and fighting back, We will not pay and We are the crisis are more than just slogans. The whole global economic/political system is being challenged and with good reason – it is clear to many that the insatiable greed of the corporate elite has imposed an unbearable economic burden on the people.

Democratic alternatives that involve mass popular control of the economy are once again gaining interest among workers weary of the ravages of social war and systemic collapse. It remains to be seen whether the increased level of organising at the base level in unions will continue to grown sufficiently to help build a new movement for mass democracy and workers' control in Australia but the early signs are very encouraging.

by Max Stirner

VICTORIAN RAILWAY NEWS

In the last issue of Sparks mention was made about the removal of a manager at Spencer Street. In this issue Drivers, Conductors, Station Staff and Staff from Head Office have combined to talk of the aftermath to the manager's removal. Once again names have been changed.

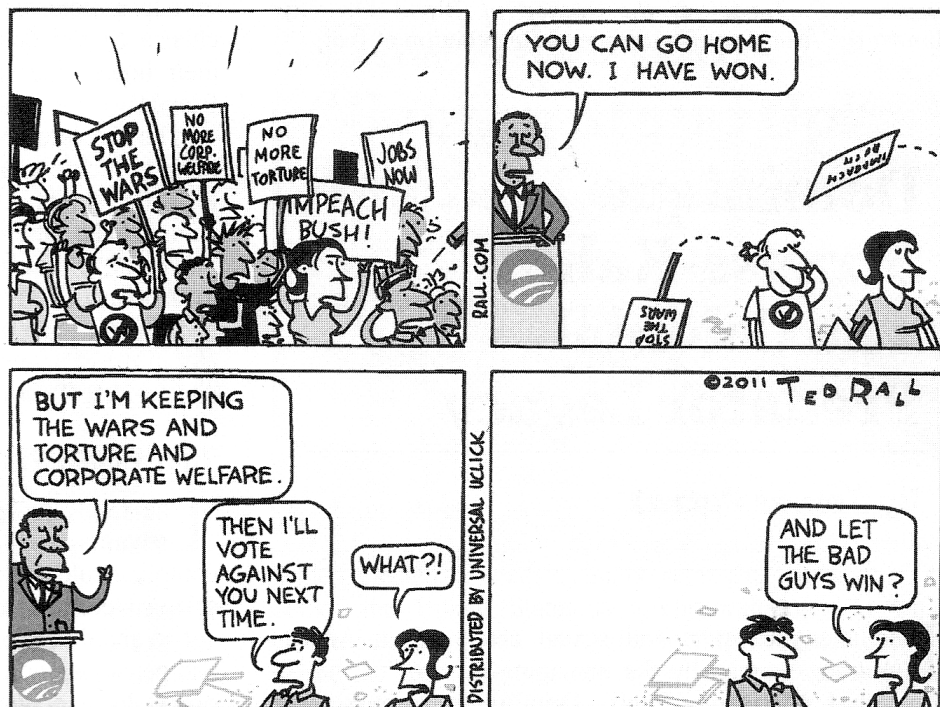
Sparks: Has the manager's position been filled?

Sheona: Yes it has. Contrary to the last issue the job was advertised and it has been filled internally.

Clarence: Yes it has been filled but informed sources have told us that the position is on a lower salary than what the last manager was paid.

Sparks: I have been informed that the rank and file workers at Spencer Street arranged a farewell for the manager.

Jethro: Yes they did and the petition that was taken up in support if the former manager was presented to him. Also a fair number of female workers turned up to show support. Surprisingly only one salaried officer turned up. The rest stayed away.



Clarence: Yes. What a gutless bunch.

Jethro: The manager ended up resigning because the other managers had stabbed him in the back and even if he had kept his job, they would have found another excuse to sack him. As I said in the previous issue, the sexual harassment charges were trumped up. The manager has since obtained another job with another train operating company.

Rastus & Roscoe: A few of our drivers went to his farewell. It makes us sick that he resigned and that our esteemed Dr. Dolittle is now working in training and compliance.

Sparks: In the previous issue, mention was made that the catering manager who was on stress leave, and would not return until the manager was removed.

Sheona: Guess what happened? Two weeks after the manager departed, the catering manager returned to work.

Clarence: Yes, he returned as if nothing happened. In the last issue of Sparks, a question was asked if this person was pulling a rort. Yes, we think he was. You see there is a rumour floating around, that he went on an overseas trip. I wonder if he is after a termination benefit.

Sparks: What of the other individual?

Rastus: A week after the manager resigned a number of our drivers were doing a training course opposite the station sign on area at Spencer Street. The drivers saw this individual walking around grinning like a Cheshire Cat. One of the Station Staff yelled at this person, “Your day of reckoning is Coming”.

Roscoe: This person got on a train gloating about what happened and when they went in the front driver’s cab of the railmotor, the driver told the person to get out of the cab.

Rastus: This person like to dob in drivers for having people in the front cab, yet they wanted to travel in the cab.

Jethro: This person is two faced.

Roscoe: You can say that again.

Clarence: After the manager resigned a message was carved into the notice board in the meal room saying what the RANK & FILE thought about this CRETIN.

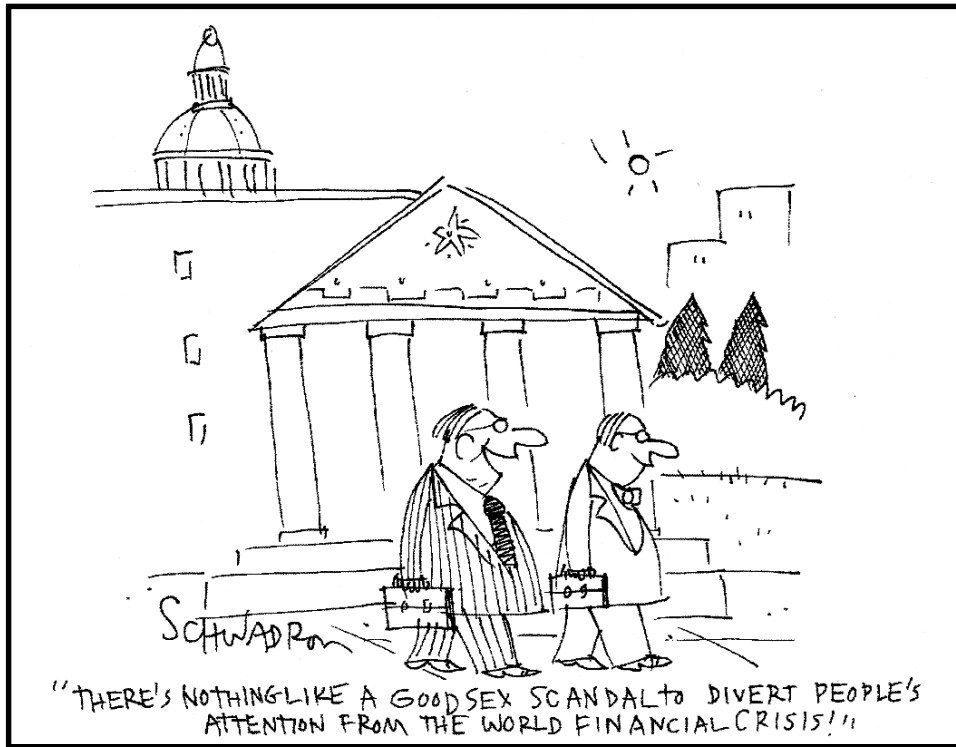
Sparks: The message should have been placed on the board, not carved.

Jethro: The message should not have been carved into the board but RANK & FILE members were upset over what happened.

Sparks: What happened?

Jethro: The board was removed from the meal room and management started giving a number of conductors and station staff the THIRD DEGREE.

Clarence: Yes you see a number of conductors were contacted and told to attend an interview. These people did not know why they were being interviewed. When they fronted the interview, they were interviewed by the Manager of V/Line security plus a goon from Human Resources. They gave these people the THIRD DEGREE. They were distressed and one of the Conductors told the Union who put a stop to these interviews.



Sheona: You see Human Resources wanted to interview all of the employees who were on duty at the time the message was carved on the board and they promised to fire the culprits.

Rastus & Roscoe: Drivers use this meal room between trains particularly Country Depots. A number of Drivers were to be interviewed, but the Drivers said they would not attend.

Clarence: What a waste of time.

Jethro: In the last issue it was stated that management was using this cretin to get rid of the manager and once the manager was removed, then this cretin would be fired.

Rastus: Well it has happened. We Drivers have heard this individual has been stood down pending an enquiry on their attitude to work.

Sheona: Yes! It has happened!

Clarence: As this issue of Sparks it to go to press this person is suspended. This person has been given a number of days to reply to the charges. They are using passenger complaints as the issue.

Rastus & Roscoe: As we have said in the previous issue "What goes around. Comes around." This individual maybe an academic, but when it comes to common sense, they have none.

Jethro: This individual was warned by other people not to report the manager, but did not listen. Now this individual is to be fired.

Sparks: Yes these managers down at Spence Street used this person to get rid of the manager and now they are going to get rid of this person. “The Wheel Turns.”

Rastus & Roscoe: In having the final say, most of our drivers hate this individual. Not only V/Line Drivers, but Drivers at Metro Trains and Pacific National. As for V/Line Security attempting to interview employees over who carved the message on the notice board. FORGET IT. Concentrate on real security issues such as assaults on Drivers and Conductors. Finally once again, we tell all V/Line employees don't turn up, if you have to front Human Resources.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

UK PENSIONS MASS STRIKE

A massive November walkout of up to 2 million public sector workers is now on the cards as the UK's largest unions announce their intention to ballot for strike action over pension reform.

Unison, Unite and the GMB, the UK's largest biggest unions, have announced their intention to ballot for coordinated strike action against cuts to public sector workers pensions.

Other unions which have not taken action over pensions so far also indicated their intention to ballot, including the NASUWT (a teachers' union), NAHT (head teachers), FBU (firefighters), Prospect (civil servants).

Unions which took strike action over the same issue on June 30 will almost certainly join this action as well, including PCS (civil servants), NUT (teachers), ATL (teachers) and UCU (university and college workers).

Importantly, the three big unions have members in the NHS and its contractors, and have stated their intention to ballot them for industrial action as well. Unison has stated it will ballot 1.1 million members at 9000 different employers.

Despite agreeing to enter scheme-specific talks with the government without having achieved any concessions on the main planks of the overall changes, the union leaderships are now talking tough, calling this “the fight of our lives”.

The three big unions have stated they will support a big one-day strike, followed by selective “smart” stoppages rolling on until next summer.

The first increase in workers' pension contribution payments, where workers will see their pay cheques shrink, is due to come in in April 2012.

Behind the scenes, it is rumoured that Dave Prentis, Unison's general secretary, may be prepared to make a deal if local government workers are exempted from our proposed 50% increase in pension contributions. We cannot accept this - we need to all stick together. Because if we let other groups of workers have their contributions be increased, then a couple of years down the line they will be back

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SOUTH AFRICAN BUS NEWS

Bus commuters around Joburg were stranded this morning Monday 1/8/11 as Rea Vaya bus services ground to a halt when drivers embarked on a wildcat strike.

This unannounced action took the City of Joburg, Piotrans (the company which operates the rapid bus transit system) and the SA Municipal Workers Union (Samwu) by surprise.

Eric Motshwane, Piotrans director of communication, labelled this a “mischievous” strike, saying negotiations had been held yesterday with the drivers about shift changes, at their request, and everyone had left the meeting happy.

“We sat the whole day and discussed the shift changes which they demanded. We gave drivers 14 days’ notice of these changes, which came into effect today, as opposed to seven days, to give them time to adjust.

“At the meeting yesterday, we were not deadlocked, and agreed to stay there until an agreement was reached, which we thought had happened.

“We took them through the process step by step. We agreed that if there were problems with the new shifts, these would be addressed,” he said.

Motshwane said he was surprised this morning to find that there were no drivers at work.

Samwu was also shocked to hear of the unscheduled strike action this morning, with leaders saying no word had been given from shop stewards.

“Head office had not heard of the strike action, but we suspect it may be a (Gauteng) branch issue,” said the union’s national spokesman, Tahir Sema.

The union’s branch manager, Dumisani Langa, had also not been informed, saying shop stewards had not reported to him about workers’ unwillingness to work this morning.

“We can try to verify it, but as of now, Samwu cannot comment on the issue,” he said.

According to Langa, almost all Rea Vaya workers are registered to the union, and the lack of notice was “a surprise”. Efforts to reach a shop steward this morning were unsuccessful. Management of Piotrans were to meet today to decide on the way forward, he said. In the meantime, commuters were urged to seek alternative transport.

Thanks to Workers Self Organisation Blogspot.

UK RAIL NEWS

5/9/11 Transport Workers on the Heathrow Express rail service won a significant victory in an improved pay deal after they voted overwhelmingly for further strike action. Heathrow Express management initially offered the rail link workers “completely unacceptable pay offer... loaded with strings” and refused to sit round the table to negotiate. It was only after Workers voted in favour of strike action, refuse overtime and work to rule that the company, whose profits exceeded £6m last year, offered an improved pay package.

Thanks to “Freedom”

for ours, and those workers will think “why should we support them, when they didn’t support us?”.

The unions have a patchy record of defending public sector workers’ pensions. In 2006 when a big wave of pension cuts were proposed, following a one-day strike, further strike action called off, and eventually a deal agreeing to significant cuts in pensions was recommended to now demobilised union members.

If we want to have a serious chance at fighting these cuts, then we have to make this action as effective as possible, broaden it out as much as possible and take the struggle into our own control as much as possible. If we let ourselves be passively led by the unions then we will be defeated again.

Continued From Page 6 need to organise themselves and organise others, come together and organise.

We need to bring our communities and our families along with us, they need to see that the proposed changes affect them too. We also need to link and join with progressive elements within the trade unions, forming an effective block for action.

An education campaign and debate involving shop floor members should be held in all workplaces or in a local meeting places outside of the workplace if meetings are not allowed by the bosses. Public Sector Unions could then hold a ballot of union members over whether and what form industrial action should take.

While the RTBU, has for once, held some sort of information meetings in the workplace, they have tended to stress many of the reasons for not being able to take strike action.

Democratising the unions by building worker controlled industrial committees within workplaces is essential for a long term campaign to defeat the new round of austerity measures and privatisations. That’s because we can’t expect a radical change in policy within the Labor controlled unions any time soon.

At the end of the day we only have one real weapon to force the bosses and our political masters to back down and that is our ability to withdraw our labour. Society and the bosses rely on our labour to keep the wheels of industry turning and the profits churning.

As Joe Hill, songwriter, member of the International Workers of the World put it in a song at the turn of the century:

“If the workers took a notion they could stop all speeding trains; Every ship upon the ocean they can tie with mighty chains. Every wheel in the creation, every mine and every mill; Fleets and armies of the nation, will at their command stand still.”

We might well ask, what has really changed?



What is Democratic Unionism?

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

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

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

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

MEMBERS' VOICE

WEB SITE

[Http://users.tpg.com.au/retepsni/membersvoice](http://users.tpg.com.au/retepsni/membersvoice)

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Democratic