

No.136

Aug. - Sept. 2010

# Sparks

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

**Union Head Office Schemes for half hearted Rail  
Corp EBA Campaign & Sellout! Grassroots  
Activists Organise for Membership Control &  
Serious Action!**



STA BUSIE NEWS;

INTERNATIONAL NEWS;

CANBERRA BUS NEWS;

RAIL-BUS NEWS;

NSW RAILWAY NEWS;

SYDNEY WHARFIES' NEWS;

VICTORIAN RAIL NEWS;

RAIL CORP EBA NEWS;

## **EDITORIAL**

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

Some of the most important news lately in RailCorp has been the calling off of industrial action by the rail unions hierarchy in regard to EBA 2010 to assist ALP prospects in the Federal Election. When the so called EBA campaign resumes, its likely that the union officials will orchestrate a “smoke and mirrors” performance. Similar to which occurred in July 2008 associated with World Youth Day. At this time, the union hierarchy with the aid of the bosses and the media conjured up the illusion, that a wage rise had been won associated with EBA 2008 without any tradeoffs, through a threatened strike. Later after the EBA was approved, savage trade offs were revealed such as draconian station staffing reviews. The nasties associated with EBA 2010 are much more savage such as the abolition of redundancy packages and further staff cuts in various areas. Grassroots activists are organising to put a spoke in the wheels of this duplicity and are pushing for grass roots control of the EBA campaign and effective action to improve wages and conditions. (See article page 3)

In the STA, the second 3% of the wage rise associated with EBA 2009/10 has been paid. Again as in the case of RailCorp EBA 2008, a “smoke and mirrors” performance was orchestrated. A token one day strike was called which was called off in the afternoon after a so called breakthrough in negotiations. The illusion was created that a wage rise had been won without any tradeoffs. Later on, after the deal was signed, the extent of the nasties in the EBA were revealed. Such as the agreement to casuals and cuts to shifts which were always part of the STA’s EBA demands. In this edition, we reprint an STA letter to the union officials which reveals aspects of this EBA sell out. (See article page 11)



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 webpage [www.sparksweb.org](http://www.sparksweb.org)

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# N.S.W. RAILWAYS NEWS

## **Time for Action NOW on Rail Corp EBA 2010**

*by The Crimson Coconut*

Latest news in regard to the RailCorp EBA Campaign is that industrial action was called off by the rail unions hierarchy to help out the ALP in the Federal elections. Without seeking members advice and despite a massive mandate from members to continue.

It is almost 4 months since the expiry of the old Enterprise Agreement and the start of a new Agreement. That's 4 months that RailCorp have refused to pay us a pay rise.

RailCorp will be happy to cruise along like this right up to the NSW Election when a sweetener in the form of a small pay rise may be delivered. An eventual 5% pay rise, if granted, will already be discounted by the period within which it was withheld. A 4 months delay of a 5% pay rise would mean that the effective pay rise in the first year would be just 3.35%. The longer this goes on the more we lose.

So far RailCorp have not entertained any of the progressive claims in the log put forward by the unions. Simultaneously the Unions have been unable to apply any pressure at all to RailCorp for the Unions log of claims. This is both a result of incompetence on behalf of the Union leadership and compromise tactics that have their roots embedded in the NSW ALP.

The Members Voice believe that industrial action in its many forms is an essential weapon in the armoury of workers defending their living standards and conditions. However industrial action should never been used in isolation and must be tied to concrete demands.

While rejecting outright the extravagant claims of management, many rail workers will relish the chance to dish out a rebuff to RailCorp and the NSW Government. Most of us are, however, left in the dark due to the lack of a concrete set of demands during any planned industrial action. A "fallback position" or "line in the sand" that we will not cross has never been discussed.

Claims around industrial action will remain hazy in the minds of most rail workers because they have not been part of the negotiating process.

If approval for industrial action is gained then mass "stop-work meetings" should be called so that workers on the job have a chance to have an input into the fight back process and understand why they are taking action.

The Members Voice calls on the Transport Unions for mass "stop-work" meetings where discussion and voting takes place on the demands, type and duration of the industrial action.

The outcome and success of any actions decided on is difficult to judge before it takes place. Success will depend on how willing workers and the unions are to pursue their own log of claims and how willingly management and the NSW Government are willing to hold their ground.

The very fact that the unions are prepared to contemplate industrial action shows just how the ranks are no longer prepared to sit back and accept the rollback of working conditions and cuts to income. Also, there is a widespread contempt for politics and politicians amongst workers. Laid out before them to see are the double standards where they are continually asked to tighten their belts and constrain wage demands while politicians and RailCorp management line their own pockets and feed from the public funded trough with no restraint at all.

We should all support protecting our jobs, wages and conditions. Industrial action is necessary in this case, as management and the NSW government want us to trade our conditions away for a pay rise at a time when rail workers household budgets are strained and work has intensified.

As the quality of public transport deteriorates the need for decent and affordable public transport in the community increases. We will have to fight for public services to be maintained and improved. Taking action helps all of the people of NSW, as any industrial action is going to send a strong message to the NSW Government that cuts to public transport will not be tolerated.

This time a failure by the unions to carry out the wishes of members or just to let off a bit of pressure from below will be seen for what it is. Members must keep them on their toes



and punish them when they don't live up to the hype. The Members Voice will be continuing to do that in no small measure (and a lot more). Contact: The Members Voice email: [membersvoice2010@yahoo.com](mailto:membersvoice2010@yahoo.com)  
Website: <http://users.tpg.com.au/retepsni/membersvoice>

### **TRANSPORT FORUM STAGE MANAGEMENT**

The RTBU Union Hierarchy brazenly showed how in the pocket of the NSW ALP Govt they are at the recent Transport Forum. At the forum Rail Corp union reps were to be supposedly allowed to quiz the Transport Minister on various issues. However, when reps attended the forum, they were informed by "order of Union Head Office", they could only ask set questions, which the Minister would feel comfortable in answering!!

#### **RAIL - BUS NEWS**

#### **RAILCORP**

It is very obvious that the last lot of Staff Reviews fell flat on its face. Staff shortages and unmanned stations are not doing the image very well, are they? Not only that but constant complaints from customers on intercity services about crowded 4 car Oscars and V sets, especially on the Newcastle, Central Coast services aren't doing the Rightwing ALP Government any favours either. It was transport that won the day for Neville Wran and it will be transport that will lose the day for the Keneally State Government.

With more trade-offs being offered by RailCorp in EA 2010, we can only hope that sanity prevails and the grassroots Union membership force the Unions to strike for the right to better pay and conditions. Rail workers unite! Fight for your rights!

#### **STATE TRANSIT**

The second lot of 3% pay increases have been implemented, giving Bus Operators a total of 6% for 2009 and 2010, something that may not have happened if Bus Operators did not strike for their rights (Rail workers take note). Meanwhile new buses continue to be delivered and old buses slowly retired. However, all is not as rosy as it seems. As heavy traffic, cyclists clogging bus lanes, taxis illegally pulling up in B-light bays and some of the most unworkable schedules in living memory, continue to cause stress and decaying health for Bus Operators. Whilst some Band-Aid solutions have been implemented, something more realistic needs to be done.

At Kingsgrove and Waverley Depots, Union Delegates and Members have forced STA Management to conduct timing checks on Route 400 Burwood to Bondi Jct services. As many of these runs can arrive at either terminus, anything up to an hour late. Hopefully new timetables with improved running and recovery times will be introduced.

With the introduction of Metrobus, one wonders why a separate livery and a separate operations system is necessary to operate it. Is this setup a model for eventual privatisation? Speaking of privatisation, our world famous Sydney Explorer and Bondi Explorer are all set to be sold off to private enterprise. Yet another example of transport doom for the Keneally Government. *By the Transport Scrutinizer*

## SYDNEY WHARFIES NEWS

### **DP World Pt. Botany Labour Review: the good and the bad**

DP World (DPW) Pt. Botany's long running labour review looks set to be finalised on June 16. MUA members will vote on a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that offers 24 new permanent operations jobs, three new maintenance jobs and a new roster for 48 operations employees. The MOA also proposes the setting up of a joint employer-employee productivity forum, 24 staggered GWE to VSE upgrades linked to productivity benchmarks and changes to the VSE panel system. On June 16, MUA members voted for a MOA (Memorandum of Agreement) that offers 24 permanent jobs and a new roster for 48 operative employees.

#### **New jobs**

Twenty four new permanent operations and three new maintenance jobs are on offer. This is not to be sneezed at. But only last year twelve maintenance jobs were lost as a result of the economic downturn. Along with the round of voluntary redundancies, around 20 jobs disappeared. These 27 new jobs only get us back to where we were before the downturn. But container volumes have greatly increased since then. DPW reports show that container volumes bounced back in the second half of 2009 and grew another 6% to 9% in the first quarter of 2010 (see [www.dpworld.com](http://www.dpworld.com)). These new jobs are a big step forward. But is there scope for a continued push for more permanent jobs? Absolutely.

#### **New roster**

The new 35 hour Operations Roster for 48 permanents gives DP World the extra weekend coverage it has been pushing for (with five weekends out of every eight to be worked). On the other hand, it also has one full week off work every eight weeks and higher earnings than the current roster. The problem is that this new roster opens the door to the phasing out of the current roster come EBA time.

#### **Productivity Forum? No thanks**

The proposed Productivity Forum, where company and MUA members discuss how to improve productivity, must be opposed.

Industrially, such a forum can only lead to the company devising ways to make us work harder with less labour. Besides, any productivity gains that a company makes will not benefit workers. They will only boost profits.

Ideologically, such meetings are based on the idea that workers and bosses have common interests. This is wrong. While we want higher wages, they want to hold our wages down. We all want job security, while they would prefer to undermine it. Workers have no common interests with the company. Their productivity should not be our concern. The MUA should have no involvement with any proposed Productivity Forum.

### **PO Death leads to 24 hour Strike**

On the morning of 14/7/10, Steve Piper was killed at PO Appleton Dock, Melbourne. By midday work had stopped at all 15 PO docks for 24 hours.

### **Don't link GWE to VSE upgrades to productivity**

The proposal to link 24 GWE to VSE upgrades to various container rate benchmarks must also be opposed. Linking job upgrades to productivity encourages workers to speed up, cut corners and work unsafely. This is a dangerous precedent that must be stopped dead in its tracks.

### **Don't touch the VSE panels**

The MOA also proposes to change the day that VSE panels change over from Sunday to Tuesday. Why? It is of no benefit to VSE's, but it does make it easier for DPW allocators to roster VSE for the weekends.

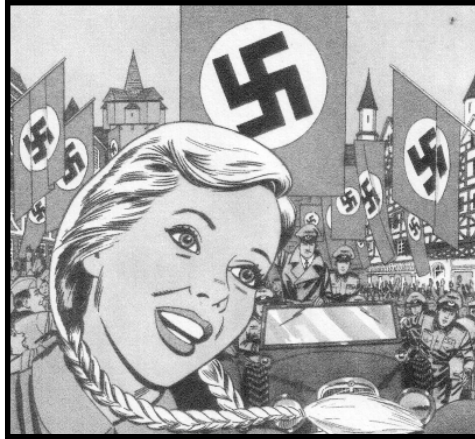
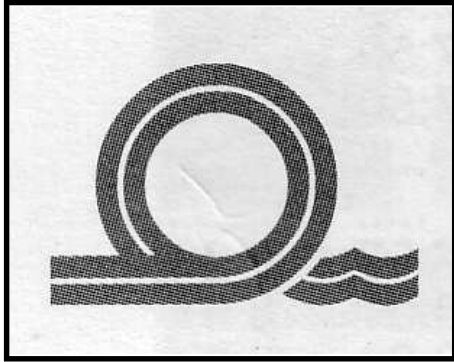
### **If we fight – we can win!**

The May 18 yard meeting at DP World voted for a range of measures to pressure DPW into handing over more permanent jobs. Within a week the company was forced to come to the MUA and negotiate in good faith. The speed with which the company came to the party and agreed to the Memorandum of Agreement surprised many of us. It is possible that agreement between DPW and the MUA had progressed further than what we were told at the May 18 yard meeting. (One rumour suggests that the figure of 24 permanent operations jobs and a list of who will be getting these jobs was decided as far back as in March). Even if this is the case, the fact that the company did return to the negotiating table only a week after May 18 yard meeting point to one fact. And that is – if we fight, we can win. The 20 plus jobs on offer are a step forward. This number of permanent jobs has not been offered to us by the company for years. The new 35 hour Operations Roster is, apart from the extra weekend work, a step forward. On the other hand, the Productivity Forum, the productivity-linked GWE to VSE upgrades and the changes to the VSE panel system need to be knocked on the head. The way forward is to lock in the best parts of the Memorandum of Agreement now, and continue the fight to overturn the parts of the MOA that are of no benefit to us.

### **Fight called off without a yard meeting vote**

On May 18 the MUA held a yard meeting in a bid to break the deadlock in the DP World Botany labour review (see previous article). The two-hour meeting voted in favour of a range of measures that would pressure management into handing over more permanent jobs.

It appears that these measures had the desired effect. By May 26, the company had agreed to meet with MUA site committee members on June 4 and negotiate in good faith – as long as the measures that MUA members had voted for were lifted. This was agreed to and the workforce was informed of this decision. Problem is, site committee members should not have made such a decision. Basic union principle dictates that any vote made at a mass meeting can only be reversed at another mass meeting. (*Articles from "Vigilance" No.46 & 47 (June & July 2010) "Vigilance" is a socialist bulletin for MUA members in Sydney produced by Shane Bentley - the "Port Botany Wharfie". See [www.vigilanceBulletin.org](http://www.vigilanceBulletin.org)*)



## THE RISE & FALL OF THE N.S.W. 4TH REICH

**The date and time: 10am 1/7/2040.**

**The place: The visitors room in the deluxe white collar criminal wing of Long Bay Gaol, just above the NSW Police Drug Squad and outlaw bikie gangs' amphetamine and crack cocaine manufacturing lab.**

Following the uncovering of the embezzlement by members of the union executive of \$100,000's of the bus drivers' traffic fine fund, stemming from investigations by our Sparks union boss corruption hit squad and various media sources, police raids were conducted on the union hierarchy "pad" at Matthew Talbot Mansions in Woolloomooloo at 4am on the morning of 1/7/10.

At the sound of breaking doors and shattering glass, with guns drawn, a combined strike force of Australian Federal and NSW Fraud Squad police, with investigators from NSW ICAC (Independent Commission Against Corruption), ASIC (Australian Securities and Investments Commission) and the AEC (Australian Electoral Commission) in tow, burst into the "pad". Shrill shrieks and screams were heard from scantily clad "Touch of Class" management consultants who had been holding an intimate, late night "Performance Management" workshop in the "pad" and now dived for cover. One of the officials tried to escape. He became trapped in a back window whilst following the evading "Management Consultants", due to corpulence achieved through many a merry State Transit Corporate lunch and dinner. He was shot down in a blaze of police gun fire. The other union officials cowered in a corner. They were strip searched, cuffed and carted off to the "Big House".



At the trial, they were exposed to be on the take, via the disclosure of bank statements of the Bus Drivers Traffic Fine Fund going back many decades. They received "long vacations" in their new residence and had to pay drivers massive refunds of the rorted monies from the fund.

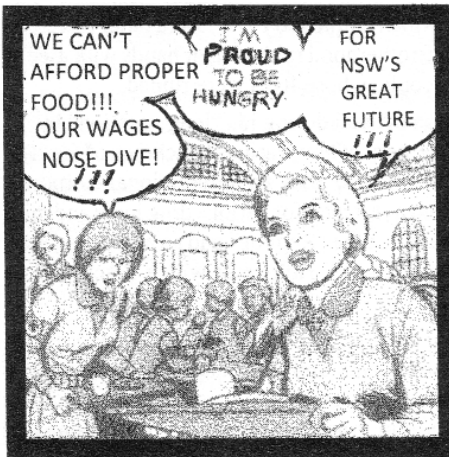
On this particular day, 1/7/2040, one of the former officials, had been enjoying a conjugal encounter in the gaol visitors' room with his "discrete" union rep girl friend "on the side" who attended on alternate

days to his beloved wife. His spouse had also become a driver working 12 hour shifts, 7 days a week, at \$5 per hour in one of the privatised bus companies, to repay her spouse's massive

gambling debts and the refund of rorted surpluses of the bus drivers traffic fine fund. To keep him entertained during the "enforced long vacation", his union rep girl friend, presented him with the gift of a book entitled "The Rise & Fall of the NSW 4th Reich" which she had found at a second hand book shop.

It had a remarkable resemblance to the State Transit Code of Conduct handbook with the STA snail logo replaced by the swastika. It particularly focused on the rise to power in the State of NSW of a certain Herr Barry O'Farrell- Hitler, former NSW Liberal Opposition Leader and his side kick and arch privatiser Tony Baird-Goring Shadow NSW

Treasurer and Member for the seat of Manly, son of the Former Liberal Transport Minister Bruce Baird-Goring. This power grab was cooked up by various members of the Bormann Brotherhood who pulled the strings on the new "Regime" to achieve their Grand Vision of



wrecking the lives of ordinary people. They included Graham Bradley -Krupp of the Business Council of Australia and Nicholas Moore-Tyson of the MacBank. A certain Dr Joseph Goebbels was the link with the Murdoch and Fairfax Media Empires which orchestrated the propaganda campaign which helped usher in the "Regime". As a result, many of the electorate were swept up in a frenzy of support for the Liberals, voting them into power and turned a blind eye to their later excesses. Sweeping everything unsavoury under the carpet and ignoring the screaming and yelling of those ordinary people harshly affected by the Liberals path of carnage.



On obtaining power, the "Regime" proceeded with a blitzkrieg of all out privatisation against public utilities and super charged expressway autobahn construction to be supervised by a certain Mr Albert Speer, an architect and best mate of Herr Barry O'Farrell-Hitler. Resulting in the further grid locking of Sydney with traffic. The "Regime" also proceeded to smash up any workers resistance to employer attacks with the aid of NSW and Liberal Federal industrial legislation and Gestapo like tactics of the NSW Police under the new Police Commissioner, a certain Herr Heinrich Himmler. So as to create a situation of industrial slavery like occurred in the war industries in Nazi Germany which employed POW's and other forced labourers. Whilst behind the scenes, the Bormann Brotherhood rubbed their hands with glee as their profits surged at the expense of ordinary people, whose lives were ruined.

The next book given to entertain the former union official during his "long vacation" by his girl friend, was "The Boys from Brazil". It tells the story of how various henchmen of the "Regime" escaped to Brazil with the aid of the Vatican and an international corporate privatisation conspiracy. Where they moon lighted as hit men for various drug lords and military death squads. Following a public backlash against the "Regime" and an associated massive decline in its electoral fortunes, stemming from the Holocaust which descended on public services in NSW during its reign of tyranny.

The lesson to be drawn from this tale, is that we can't rely on the union hierarchy or politicians, who are likely to be enmeshed in various scams and machinations, to defend us against an intensified Neo-Liberal Offensive. Only via grass roots organisation and direct action on the job, can we tackle the threat of privatisation and worsening corporate rampages orchestrated by a future Liberal or ALP Government.

## S.T.A. BUSIE NEWS

### What Conditions Bus Drivers Have Lost in EBA 2009

The main item is the loss of a build up to 8 hours on our shifts. If you refer to the letter below, you will find State Transit offered it to our senile Bus Committee and then withdrew the offer. I understand that they wanted in return, was access to more casual drivers. That was never disclosed in the Depot Union meetings. How much does the stupid game cost you, the drivers, day in, day out, you are given 7 hour shifts. The loss in wages would amount to thousands of



1 December 2009

Mr Raul Baonza  
Rail, Tram and Bus Union (NSW Branch)  
83-89 Renwick Street  
REDFERN NSW 2016

Reference: C09/0438

Dear Mr Baonza

I refer to your letter of 30 November 2009, in which you refer to the union's Divisional Committee decision to reject State Transit's current, formal proposal of a two year Enterprise Award with a 2.5% increase in wages and allowances for each year of the proposed award. The agreement reached between the union and State Transit concerning the enhanced income protection conditions is an integral part of the 2.5% wages and allowances increase proposal. The understanding between the union and State Transit concerning the enhanced income protection provisions, including the commitment to make up shifts to eight hours, is withdrawn on the basis of the union's rejection of the formal offer.

Your letter also indicates the union is no longer committed to any further discussion on the union's proposals for employee related cost savings. State Transit will therefore not pursue any further activity on those proposals.

The Log of Claims, included in your letter is outside of the current Wages Policy of the New South Wales Government and cannot be considered by State Transit.

State Transit is committed to resolving the gridlock between both parties and will now seek the assistance of the Industrial Relations Commission of New South Wales.

Yours sincerely

Jamie Sinclair  
General Manager, Southern Region

dollars over the coming years. The only build up given was to the casuals' wages. What a joke are our Bus Division Secretary and Bus Division President.

The second condition lost is the On-Call allowance. Did you vote for this allowance to be dropped? This alone saves State Transit over 100 thousand dollars a year. The loss of this Allowance is straight out of your pockets.

For the Depot Delegates not to know of these conditions losses and if they knew, not to act against the Enterprise Bargain Committee, is nothing short of criminal. All Depot Delegates should resign along with the Bus Division President and Secretary, to make way for Officials who care about ordinary Bus Drivers, not just to take the money and bury their heads in the sand.

Remember in November, these so called elected Officials are up for re-election. Vote them back to bus driving!

## **WAVERLEY DEPOT NEWS**

### **Sparks: What's the latest with the union hierarchy?**

Waverley Busie: A couple of months ago, a female organiser from Unions NSW came out to the depot to gather our suggestions for a campaign to oppose privatisation. At a meeting of 30 to 40 drivers I attended, she expressed her openness to hearing our suggestions regarding courses of action. However, she was also pushing the approach of the union hierarchy entailing getting both ALP and Liberal candidates in the upcoming NSW State elections to endorse a statement that public sector workers should be left as public workers. As we are more capable of running the remaining 6 or 8 Government owned utilities, still in existence due to our ongoing experience. This approach by the union hierarchy appeared to me to be a little too late and the union hierarchy was again being caught on the hop. It also seemed quite naive, given the monumental lies that the major parties engage in about their secret agendas. In the case of South Australia, when the Liberals got into power they promised not to privatise the electricity industry. However, 6 months later they did just that. Under privatisation, power prices rose and the Liberals lost the next election, for lying to the public about their plans.

One contender for large slices of Govt buses in NSW is Veolia. It has won a huge lot of contracts around Australia for public services. It appears to have a monopoly of such contracts in some areas. Recently, it won the contract for operating the Kurnell Desalination Plant. The Unions NSW campaign certainly doesn't have enough clout. At the meeting I argued for a major action to gain media publicity for the anti-privatisation campaign by public sector workers. It would involve a march from 3 different directions to one large rally involving 20,000 to 30,000 people. I noticed at the meeting a state of complacency and an associated lack of a sense of urgency to meet the privatisation threat. In emphasising the seriousness of the issue, I made the point that some consequences of privatisation for us could be large cuts in our pay such as \$200 per week, casualisation, loss of superannuation and long service leave entitlements. Why hasn't the pay out of these entitlements to those who don't want to be employed in a private company, been looked into?

Recently, I was speaking on the bus to a woman who works as a driver in Bus West which is operated by Veolia in Western Australia. I was surprised to hear her mention that she was on \$27 per hour. Whilst we are on \$23-\$24 per hour. This relatively higher hourly wage, no doubt was a bribe by the Veolia bosses to secure trade-offs in conditions by Bus West workers and their compliance with the selloff.

**Sparks: What do drivers who have worked for private bus companies think of the privatisation threat?**

WB: Recently I spoke to one driver who had previously worked for a private bus company. He agreed with me that privatisation of State Transit will have major negative effects for us. It's likely everyone would be made a casual with shifts being offered to a pool of casuals. Safety would also go downhill with much more accidents. However, he thought it wouldn't work. Due to all the corner cutting and after 2-3 years, the privatised bus system could be at the point of collapse.

**Sparks: What's the situation with social life at the depot?**

WB: Everything is tame. The workplace has lost its spark. Everything is contained, deodorised and sanitised. The bosses frown on kids with their parents coming into the yard. There are no more shows or parties at the depot. Even the Xmas party has to be held off the premises. There is little for entertainment apart from the computers and TV's. The boot camp was also cancelled. The STA appears to be encouraging a fear factor in the workplace, in line with the anti-terrorism phobias encouraged by ALP and Liberal Governments. Is this all part of some hidden agenda, that the bosses aren't telling us about? There is no room anymore for fun on the job. There is no encouragement to be on the job. The STA just hopes that you survive. Strawberry Hills is too tough on workers. It's one way. Their way or no other way!

**Sparks: What's the latest with overtime?**

WB: Some drivers have complained that they are not being paid OT when its booked up for late running. According to our union rep, the STA has not been willing to conduct internal checks to ensure we are receiving our correct wages entitlement. It doesn't want to reaudit the payslip. Despite its duty of care responsibility.

**Sparks: How are things with the mechanics?**

WB: The mechanics have mentioned that there are serious problems with 6-8 of the old Mercedes low floor gas buses, some of which are 12-14 years old. The problem which affected these type of buses, a while back, involving fine hair line cracks in the chassis has re-appeared. In the previous episode, all these buses had to be taken off the road for maintenance work, which disrupted bus services. Lately, the mechanics' union, the AMWU has raised the issue again with the STA bosses, who had been again ignoring it. Threatening that all these buses would be taken off the road, if the chassis weakness was not remedied.

There needs to be a balance. If we are having to put up with reduced leisure time due to having to work ever more overtime, through sitting in traffic on our runs, Strawberry Hills should at least fix the buses.

**Sparks: How are drivers handling the job?**

WB: I was recently speaking to one driver who said he can't be with people. However to do your job you can't ignore passengers. We need to be happy with people and work with people. As it makes our job easier. As part of this approach toward passengers it's important we help passengers regarding paying correct fares, so they don't get fined. The approach of the STA is to ignore the whole issue. Their attitude is we should just focus on driving and ignore the whole issue of passengers being fined for paying incorrect fares. There needs to be some interaction with people and to be of service.

**Sparks: What are your thoughts about the Liberals in the upcoming Federal Elections?**

WB: I was recently reading a book called "Chain of Command". It focuses on Top USA Govt officials and generals during the Bush Regime who allowed all manner of abuse and torture to occur among those captured in Afghanistan during the US invasion and locked up in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Prisons. Tony Abbot and other senior Liberals who are running in the elections, failed to criticise this barbaric behaviour of the Bush US Govt and supported it all the way. We can't allow this Tony Abbot monster to win another election!



## **BURWOOD DEPOT NEWS**

It seems that the only talk in the depot is when the RTBU (Rail Tram & Bus Union) elections are coming. The union members are asking who is running against the pretenders. The union hierarchy's only move this week was to remove Transit Times (STA Staff Magazine) from the depot due to a mistake in the information supplied in one of the articles on working hours. This was in response to a fax from the sleepy Redfern union head office, but still it took two days to be received.

The depot manager has a new bee in her bonnet for the Burwood yard. In short, boom gates and a fence inside the yard to stop trespassers. What a waste of money. What is required is a new front fence with TWO GATES IN A DIFFERENT POSITION, so the longer buses can exit the depot in safety without hitting the fence. The depot was built for 10.5 metre buses?

I hope Kingsgrove enjoyed our Volvos they borrowed.

## **LEICHHARDT DEPOT NEWS**

### **Sparks: What's the latest at the depot?**

Leichhardt Busie: Since the renovations, it's become very much a show depot, with all manner of managers bearing clip boards and even OH&S (Occupational Health & Safety) people coming out to check us out. It's become very impersonal. Our union rep Marta has been off for some time on sick leave. Its expected she will return to work within a month.

### **Sparks: How are things with the rosters?**

LB: The union hierarchy has been spouting about so called "Life Style" rosters. These rosters lack Saturday shifts. While most of us hate working Saturdays, we need the money so we work them. The union officials disclaim any salesmanship and say that they are just seeking our opinions on the rosters. There is quite a bit of roster queue jumping, with some drivers on shifts commencing early in the morning when they are not supposed to be and some who should be on these shifts, but are not. Our current roster clerk is doing a very good job, in sharp contrast to previous holders of the position.

### **Sparks: How are things with Compo?**

LB: For those of us who get injured on the job and go on compo, they aren't being properly supported. Recently, in the case of one driver, who returned to the job following being off on compo, she has faced difficulties with the bosses. She presented a medical certificate stating that she can only work 4 hours per day. However the bosses are demanding that she works 5 hours. Recently, two drivers were sacked. One was "retired on medical grounds" following going on compo due to head and neck injuries caused by looking into Mercedes mirrors. He is fighting the sack in the courts. It is rumoured another driver who was sacked received a large payout.

## VICTORIAN RAILWAY NEWS

*In Sparks editions 131, 132 and 134 issues have been raised by V/Line employees in various grades regarding work issues, Human Resources Department interfering in award conditions and discipline of employees. In this issue a few employees from the Locomotive Division, Salaried Section plus daily paid employees have combined to talk about these issues.*

**Sparks: It is sure good to see the Locomotive Division, Salaried Section and daily paid employees combine.**

Rastus and Roscoe: Being drivers, we see the need for employees to unite.

Seamus: Yes we have a number of issues at Spencer Street. What makes myself sick is various employees who dob in their fellow employees, so as to gain favours with management.

Clarence: Yes in one instance a Service Officer dobbed in another Service Officer to the Station Manager. He claimed the other Service Officer was loafing in the back room of the coach terminal. It is unbelievable what happened but the Service Officer who was lugged in was having a break after working his guts out despatching buses that were replacing buses.

Rastus: What a snitch!

Clarence: Yes when the other employees heard what happened they avoid the snitch.

**Sparks: What about the CONTROL ROOM at SPENCER STREET.**

Seamus: This room is for the operation of trains but it was being used by this particular snitch to spy on employees during his shift.

Rastus and Roscoe: This room would be used to spy on Drivers. We do not trust Service Officers. In fact they may dob in drivers.

**Sparks: I have been told that the Government has given the Green Star parcels to V/Line.**

Seamus: You are correct. When the station authority was disbanded when the new station was completed. The information centre was transferred to Metlink and Green Stars was taken over by V/Line. V/Line Senior management did not want the business so they are trying to kill off the business. So you see Green Stars handles all the urgent blood supplies and these parcels have been banned from being carried on Sprinter and Velocity trains. The parcels can only be carried on passenger trains. This effectively means Green Stars on the Ballarat line has to go by road.

Clarence: The Government through the Health Department subsidises this service as the private couriers will not handle the service because it would lose money.

Seamus: Management hates running this service and would like to kill it.

Rastus: The same with the operation of Heritage Trains. This operation was placed in V/Line hands because the Heritage Groups could not obtain accreditation to operate these trains with



their own crews. You see the drivers want to operate these trains and not having these Heritage groups use volunteers to operate these trains.

**Sparks: I hear these groups use their own crews in Tasmania and New Zealand.**

Roscoe: This is correct but the Union has input and the Heritage groups use drivers from KIWI RAIL who volunteer on their rest days. I do not know about Tasmania.

Rastus: If you give these train lovers the right to run these trains, you may create a future scab force which could be used if a dispute happens within a Freight Company.

Clarence: These train lovers think they own the railways and at times some of them try to bully station staff, but one call to the signalmen and train examiners will block these trains. These train lovers soon understand. Finally V/Line tried to get out of running Heritage trains years ago and the union stopped them.

**Sparks: What about the Career Change within Spencer Street?**

Clarence: What career change? They only place their mates in the job. In fact the last issue of Sparks mention was made about a number of conductors applying for Authorised Officers. The conductors were unsuccessful. In fact the person who obtained the position was a friend of one of the managers of the security department.

**Sparks: It smells of corruption.**

Clarence: It certainly does. I will tell your readers about a conductor who was declared medically unfit to work on trains and was placed in the booking office on light duties. After a couple of months, Human Resources tried to remove her saying there was no position in V/Line for her. The union intervened and was able to get her trained as a booking clerk. She was trained and when a position became vacant she applied for the position and was not successful. She was then told by Human Resources that the only vacancies at V/Line were for conductors so she was terminated as medically unfit.

**Sparks: It was obvious that Human Resources wanted to get rid of the conductor.**

Rastus and Roscoe: You are correct. You see both of us observed the conductor whilst driving motor trains and travelling per passenger trains and she was doing a good job. She got stuck into fare evaders and people placing their feet on seats. This upset V/Line management as it did not suit their image. You see management wants conductors and station staff to be punching bags with the public. They do not care conductors cop it from the public. If the public complain, they always believe the public.

Seamus: The union found the conductor a position with another train operating company.

**Sparks: Regarding the booking office, V/Line employees should be give an opportunity to leave the position.**

Clarence: You are correct, but management does not see it that way. You hear management say they will put who they want in the booking office.

**Sparks: You mean the crawlers. Also what about the conductor who was given the final warning over the person who jumped on their train.**

Clarence: This issue is still ongoing. You see there is a woman in Human Resources who wants to put employees on a 12 month final warning. It is either her way or no way.

Rastus and Roscoe: This woman thinks she owns Human Resources. Most of the Drivers hate her guts.

Seamus: You see a Platform Supervisor saw this incident but management put pressure on the supervisor not to make any statement. I think the supervisor is frightened because Service Officers may put the boot into the person.

Clarence: You see the union is trying to get the case reopened but this woman will not budge. We will keep on trying.

**Sparks: In concluding, most employees have no time for snitches. Regarding Green Stars, if any attempts are made to close it down, then industrial action should take place. The case of the Conductor who lost her job due to being medically unfit was sad. She should have been employed in the Booking Office. All employees be given a chance to learn the booking office as well as the control room.**

Seamus: In having the final say, there persons who dob in fellow workers. One day you will slip up and be cast adrift.

Clarence: As regards the conductor who was given a final warning. Human Resources should be reminded – Touch one employee, you touch all.

Rastus and Roscoe: As we said issue 134, we have no intention of retracting our statement about Human Resources. If you have to front them, don't turn up! If station staff, conductors and drivers unite you could give the Bludgers the boot!



## Canberra bus drivers – industrial ACTION!

A 24-hour strike by ACTION bus drivers in Canberra on Friday, 25 June brought Canberra's public transport system to a halt. The strike was the result of months of futile negotiations between management of the publicly owned bus service and the drivers' union, the Transport Workers Union. All 600 drivers at ACTION's two depots refused to drive buses for the day, with about two thirds of the 600 drivers attending picket lines outside the depots from 4am throughout the morning. TWU organiser, Klaus Pinkus, addressed mass meetings of workers at the two depots reporting back on the state of negotiations and presenting options of ongoing industrial action to the assembled drivers.

Further action favoured by the drivers would see a ban on collecting fares from passengers which would enable services to the public to continue, giving members of the public a free ride while hurting the financial interests of the employer.

The main issue in dispute is management's insistence of removing a long-standing requirement that a minimum 60% of ACTION bus drives be employed on a full-time basis. Instead the bosses would like to have no limitation on the amount of part-time drivers that could be employed in future. Drivers are already waiting up to four years to become full-time with many choosing to leave because of this long wait. If the proportion of part-time drivers is increased there could be no limit to the amount of time drivers are left waiting for a full-time job. Also at issue is that many part-time drivers often work 40 hours a week or more but only accrue superannuation on their base hours, at most 30 hours per week.

Management also want to force drivers to work weekend shifts without penalty payments. After eight months of negotiations ACTION bosses have refused to make any offer of a pay rise even though other ACT public servants have recently been offered a 2.5% pay rise, without trade-offs. Bus drivers are the only public sector workers in Canberra who are being required to give up hard won conditions for a pay rise that is likely to be less than the rate of inflation.

The drivers' claim is simply to maintain their existing level of pay, currently an annual 4% pay increase, and conditions.

The morale of drivers and their willingness to continue fighting has been significantly boosted by the widespread public support for the recent strike action and campaign to protect their conditions. This public support has been generated to a significant degree by a team of campaigners from an emerging grassroots network of rank and file workers – Workers Solidarity Network (WSN) – who have locals in various cities, including Canberra. WSN activists were busy in the weeks leading up to the strike circulating a petition and distributing leaflets written by the drivers to bus passengers explaining the background to the dispute, organising a rally and march through central Canberra on the day of the strike and putting up banners on overpasses; other solidarity actions and events by WSN including a rock music benefit show are also planned.

For more information about the dispute contact: [wsncampaigns@gmail.com](mailto:wsncampaigns@gmail.com)

by Max Stirner

## International Transport Workers' News

### **Metro strike in Athens in response to mass lay offs threat**

*by taxikipali on Jun 17 2010*

Metro workers in Athens have decided to strike for a third continuing day in response to the lay-off threat to 286 colleagues last week. Meanwhile the Greek government is unveiling labour relations sweeping changes. The Metro workers' stance in response to a threat to fire 286 colleagues in Athens has been portrayed by the media as a torment to the general public amidst the current heat wave that has plunged Athens to temperatures of 40C and beyond. Yet the third day of strike announced today by Metro workers comes as the Greek government is announcing a new packet of austerity measures that are sure to torment the public more than any mass transport stoppage.

The plan which was revealed by the Socialist Party today includes a reduction of 20% for the basic salary of workers in their 20s (from 740 to 595 Euros per month in total, a real approximate of 400 Euros at hand), a 50% reduction to compensation payment for lay-offs, the raise of pension age to 65, and granting freedom to bosses to perform mass lay-offs. Yet apart from sector-specific strikes like the Metro one or the refusal of high school teachers to mark final exams that has paralysed the educational system, little is moving on the labor struggle front, with rallies called by the private and public umbrella unions attended by less and less people. Rather than this being read as a move of workers away from the Party controlled unions and towards autonomous syndicalism, it reflects a general wind-down of reactions to measures since the tragic events of the 5th of May that has still to be properly analysed rather than attributed simply to the summer heat and the vacations spirit of the season.

### **Indefinite Transport Workers' Strike in South Africa**

*by Django on May 15 2010*

Transport workers in South Africa have been on strike since the 10th of May. Major South African exports, including fruit, metals and wine have sat idle in warehouses following the walkouts of railway and port workers. The strike has involved some 50,000 workers, including members of the South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union (Satawu), the South

African Railways and Harbour Workers' Union and the United Transport and Allied Trade Union. The workers are in dispute with Transnet Ltd., South Africa's largest rail and port operator and freight logistics company. The walkout was announced following the failure of pay negotiations with management, with an official demand of a 15% pay rise in opposition to management's offer of 11%. Duncan Speilman, a Satawu shop steward, commented "Management is offering a conditional 11 per cent. That is unacceptable for our members. The way forward is that we will keep on engaging. We won't stop engaging. But the strike will go on until our demand of 15 per cent is met. You can't compromise on 15 per cent at this time. Over the years there has been a growing gap between the salaries of management and junior employees and we can't compromise this time around."

The citrus fruit trade, second only to that of Spain, has come to a total standstill as the strike prevents crops from being transported. Cold storage has been reported to have filled up at the end of the week, meaning future shipments will decompose in the heat. South African exporters have posted notice of their inability to deliver shipments as the strike has paralysed sections of the economy. A number of companies, including Samancor Ltd, Ruukki Group and Xstrata Plc – all Ferrochrome producers – and Anglo-American Plc subsidiary Kumba Iron Ore Ltd posted force majeure, a legal clause that states their inability to make shipments due to circumstances beyond their control. Four weeks' worth of coal stocks are left. The strike has been accompanied by protest marches in major cities. On the 11th of May demonstrators marched through Cape Town, Mafikeng, Port Elizabeth, East London, Richards Bay and Vryheid. Protests took place in Durban and Polokwane on the 12th, and the 14th of May in Johannesburg.

This has led to a backlash from the state, with thirteen protesters arrested earlier in the week for "violence and intimidation", according to Transnet management. The Transnet strike has been accompanied by an 'illegal' strike by Rea Vaya bus system workers in Johannesburg and strike action by the South African Communication Workers Union during the week. The bus workers struck to demand recognition for the the SA Municipal Workers' Union (Samwu).

## **Poland: Workers at bus company strike against Privatization**

*by akai on May 7 2010*

Workers at the state-owned bus company PKS in Gostynin have been striking since Tuesday. They are against the privatization of the company and demand its communalization. And they are threatening to escalate protests. Workers are also demanding pay rises. The State Treasury announced in December that it wanted to sell PKS bus companies in seven cities in the Mazowsze region. Besides Gostynin, they want to sell the companies in Minsk Mazowiecki, Ciechanow; Mlawa, Ostroleka and Przasnysz. The workers are afraid of what may happen after privatization. Typically, privatized bus companies have seen stark cuts in workplaces and wages, and the introduction of worse working conditions and precarious con-

tract labour. On Tuesday the State Treasury announced that it would not stop the sale of this PKS. The deadline for receiving offers is today. However, the State Treasury decides selectively about the fate of such companies, tending to sell off the profitable ones, or the ones with property. On the other hand, there was communalization of the PKS in Siedlce, Osice and Sokolow Podlaski and local governments took them over in places such as Wadowice, Nowy Sacz, Krakow and Starogard Gdanski. And on May 6, the State Treasury transferred ownership of PKS to the local governments (poviats) in Lukow and Raciborz. In response to the strike, PKS Gostynin is trying to hire strike breakers. 88 of the 109 workers, including all the drivers, are on strike. There are 4 unions operating in this workplace. The strikers have occupied the building and have been staying there overnight. They are presently considering how to escalate the protests and which actions they can take.

### **29-09-06 STOP PRESS**

It seems that strike breakers are already in place. The company is also using drivers from two nearby cities which aren't striking. A strike breaker told me that in one city they are more or less forced to take the extra hours. To make matters worse, (and perhaps a harbinger of what is to come, once it is privatized), not every route is being covered. The buses are not running on local runs to some villages which primarily serve to bring poor children to school (and practically no cost, making it "not profitable").

So these people are very inconvenienced by the strike. (Of course there is nothing to prevent the drivers from commandeering a few buses and taking the kids to school for free.) At this point, the strikers fear permanent job loss and are getting nervous.

Unfortunately a couple of workers from other towns are among the scabs. One scab who I spoke to yesterday claims that a couple of bus drivers in the next city (which is less than 25km away), are being forced to drive extra hours to cover a few routes.) I do not know how that is possible being that all the bus companies are either unionized or have a work council. Obviously top priority for people today is to deal with the scabs somehow. Workers from another city are having a strike referendum today and we know a worker from yet another city and will try to see what they are planning. But it is obvious that they have to cooperate for there to be a good success - or at least the unionists there have got to prevent scabbing and show support. About the unions - as you know we are famous in Poland for our trade union pluralism. In the case of Gostynin, there are 4 unions at a 100-person workplace. This means that there are two mainstream unions (Solidarity and OPZZ) and two independent ones. One of the independent ones seem quite radicalized - but you know, it is less than 20 people. A lot will depend then on Solidarity, which has structures in most PKS- and would be the most likely force to coordinate something in the places affected. Of course we can make propaganda there, but since we do not have activists on the spot (only a parent of one anarchist), we have to sit down today and see what the locals do. And Solidarity HQ is in Warsaw so I can go there and make a scandal about scabs and maybe centrala will do something.

There was supposed to be a meeting with the director of the local PKS but he started threatening that if the workers don't stop the strike, he will file for bankruptcy of the company. Currently they are occupying the director's office.

There was a meeting with the board of PKS, the State Treasury and a representative of the workers yesterday in Warsaw, which ended in nothing except the management telling the workers that they can't even negotiate with them until they go back to work. The tactics have still not been radical enough, although the strike and occupation continues. Today the workers are discussing what to do next. Forgot to mention the scab situation was

See Page 24



## What is Democratic Unionism?

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

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

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

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

*Continued From 23* taken care of last week. Interestingly enough, one of the companies that submitted a bid to buy the company is a so-called worker-run company, PKS Grodzisk Mazowiecki, a firm we had some experience with a few years ago in Warsaw, when they were screwing Ukrainian bus drivers who then had a small wildcat strike. The working conditions in this company remain miserable, although the worse abuse ended after this strike action.

Finally, after the fiasco of talks, they will finally all come to Warsaw tomorrow. But we will see how radical or not they will behave.









# What is Democratic Unionism?

Democratic