



RTBU

transport **NOW**

THE NATIONAL
MEMBER
NEWSLETTER
— of the —
RAIL, TRAM &
BUS UNION

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National Council edition

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Just a sec!

In late November, the RTBU's peak decision-making body - the National Council - met in Brisbane to discuss issues affecting our members across Australia, and to determine our priorities for the next two years.

The event was also an opportunity to celebrate the 30th anniversary of our incredible amalgamated, national, all-grades union.

National Council made some important decisions. For example, it decided to turn our new Registered Training Organisation (Training Ahead Australia) into a not-for-profit (see pages 4-5). Another significant decision was to establish a national RTBU Enabled Committee to represent members with disabilities (see page 14).

The RTBU Enabled Committee will also be tasked with looking into the needs of neurodiverse members with conditions such as autism. Our industries can be great places for neurodiverse workers **if** they are properly supported. In that regard, I'm sure that the inspiring first-person account from an autistic train driver with our sister union ASLEF in the UK on page 26 will resonate with many members.

National Council had important discussions about using our relationship with other unions to unlock worker power. And we also heard directly from senior politicians about the big issues facing our industries (see Minister King's speech on page 8).

In fact, we managed to cram a lot into just two and a half days.

The RTBU National Office came away from National Council with an extensive 'To Do List' (in the form of our Operational Plan), and we will report back on every single item on that list at the next National Council in 2025.

Of course, the work of the union doesn't stop while we're having our National Council meeting. This edition of *Transport NOW* looks at some of the intense EA negotiations going on right around the country, including with V/Line in Victoria (see page 22), Pacific National IPS in NSW (see page 23) and GoldLinq on the Gold Coast (see page 19). There are also stories on the Memorandum of Understanding giving a pay rise to bus drivers at Metro Tasmania (see page 20), and the campaign in WA to provide better support for Transit Officers affected by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (see page 24).

Just as we were putting this edition together, tragic news came through of a fatal collision between a train and truck outside Bindarra, near the South Australia/NSW border. The death of two enormously well-respected members shocked our entire RTBU family, but was especially difficult for the rail community at Port Augusta.

Workplace safety is and always will be our number one priority. Level crossings, in particular, bring extreme risks for both rail workers and motorists. A huge amount needs to be done to improve level crossing safety to ensure tragedies like this do not happen again.

Mark Diamond
NATIONAL SECRETARY



The RTBU National Council had important discussions about using our relationships with other unions to unlock worker power.

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NATIONAL NEWS

National Council puts training at the heart of RTBU's plans

Over 70 elected National Council Delegates and observers from all parts of our union, and all parts of the country, gathered in Brisbane from 21-23 November for the 15th bi-annual RTBU National Council.

The National Council took place over two-and-a-half days and was sponsored by AustralianSuper. Day One was devoted to separate meetings of our six national occupation-based divisions, while Days Two and Three involved a mass meeting (or plenary session) of all National Council delegates.

This year's National Council also celebrated the 30th anniversary of the

amalgamation of four separate unions into the modern RTBU.

Resolutions passed by National Council included:

- » Turning the RTBU-owned Registered Training Organisation, Training Ahead Australia (TAA), into a Not-For-Profit organisation;
- » Establishing a national RTBU Enabled Committee to better represent the needs of members with disabilities;
- » Recognising nationally-accredited qualifications for bus and tram operations;
- » Developing a strategy to support frontline RTBU members from aggressive, threatening and abusive behaviour;

- » Developing a strategy to combat the introduction of autonomous vehicles;
- » Developing model EA clauses in relation to reproductive leave and bereavement leave;
- » Adopting the Queensland Branch's BUSTED campaign as a national campaign;
- » Recognising the contribution of Tasmanian Secretary Ric Bean; and
- » Conferring Life Membership on Mick Kavanagh from SA/NT Branch.

National Secretary Mark Diamond said turning TAA into a Not-For-Profit would help it focus on delivering union-quality training for members across the country, and would encourage more employers to use TAA to deliver training courses.





“The RTBU is not in the business of owning businesses,” Mark said. “We’re here to support members, and our partnership with TAA is all about helping members get the training they need to advance their careers in the rail, tram and bus industries.”

There were also a number of guest speakers from across Australia and around the world - educating and inspiring National Council delegates with their experience and knowledge. The guest speaker list included:

- » Federal Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Hon Catherine King MP;
- » RMTU (New Zealand) General Secretary Todd Valster;
- » ASLEF (UK) General Secretary Mick Whelan;

- » FMRWTU (Mongolia) Vice President Enkthugs Bat-Erdene;
- » JRU (Japan) Vice President Akinori Yanagai, with interpreter Tomoko Emilie Mukawa;
- » TWU Assistant National Secretary Nick McIntosh;
- » MUA Assistant National Secretary Mich-Elle Myers;
- » Mining & Energy Union National Secretary Grahame Kelly;
- » Co-Convenor of NSW Labor Enabled Andrew Shim;
- » AustralianSuper Head of Intermediary Member Growth Luke Fraser;
- » Union Health Partnerships and Member Growth Manager Rob Buchanan;

- » Training Ahead Australia CEO Danielle Walz;
- » ACTU Secretary Sally McManus;
- » Legendary Queensland unionist and Aboriginal elder Robert ‘Uncle Bob’ Anderson; and
- » Comedian and media personality Nazeem Hussain - who hosted the National Council dinner.

Other highlights included the launch of a history booklet explaining how the RTBU was created, and how it has evolved over the past 30 years, and the launch of a short video commemorating the union’s 30th anniversary.

Links to all the pictures, the videos and the history booklet are all available on the RTBU national website
https://www.rtbu.org.au/national_council_2023_wrap



MARK DIAMOND

A union for the future

This is an edited extract from National Secretary Mark Diamond's speech to the 2023 RTBU National Council Dinner in Brisbane.



One worker choosing to take action on their own is capable of making a difference.

But a united collective of workers choosing to take action is capable of moving mountains.

It's no wonder that employers who don't respect us, have learned to fear us.

Having said that, the RTBU is not here just to have the fight.

We understand that building worker's power is the means, not the end.

We're an industry union, and our goal is to achieve strong, successful industries - providing good secure, safe jobs for Australian workers.

And we can achieve that end through many different ways. Negotiating better Enterprise Agreements and campaigning for better government policies are just two.

A smart, strategic union uses *all* the levers it has at its disposal.

And that's why earlier this year we started looking at how to lift safety standards across our industries through delivering union-quality training.

We needed to find a training partner who had a reputation for doing training well, would not compromise on quality, and displayed union values.

We did our due diligence and we found the partner we were looking

for - Victorian-based RTO Training Ahead Australia.

After some honest conversations, and respectful negotiations, we did the deal.

We're now to chart the path ahead for TAA, to expand operations nationally, and eventually give all of our members, as well as all employees in our industries, the opportunity to access union-quality workplace training.

So why did we do it?

Because we could.

And we could, because, as a united, national, all-grades union, we have the financial and organisational capacity to take on any project that is in the best interests of our members.

I don't know if the elected representatives of our predecessor unions - the AFULE, ARU, ATMEOA and NUR - were thinking of delivering industry training when they were debating the merits of amalgamation in the early 90s.

I suspect they probably weren't, but they *were* thinking about how to future-proof their unions.

And they knew that being part of something bigger would allow them to do things they could not do on their own - like acquiring a training organisation for the betterment of members and all workers in our industries.

And that's why, I believe, the acquisition of Training Ahead Australia, and the decision to expand its operations

nationally, was - in many ways - the moment our amalgamation reached its maturity, because it delivered, beyond a doubt, on the amalgamation promise.

Out Union has come way long way in the past 30 years.

Three decades on, we're still building worker's power.

We're a respected, professional, member-led organisation - 35,000 members strong.

We're a campaigning outfit that doesn't just give our members a voice, it gives them a megaphone.

We're expanding our reach and our influence across our industries - improving workplace safety, lifting the standard of training, and ensuring terms and conditions that allow workers in our industry to live a dignified life.

And it's not over yet. We're just warming up.

The success we have achieved in our first 30 years has given us momentum.

Our momentum opens further opportunities. Opportunities for future, exponential success.

I can't wait to see what the next 30 years bring.

[Catch the video of Mark's full speech on YouTube](#)



We're a respected, professional, member-led organisation ... we're a campaigning outfit that doesn't just give our members a voice, it gives them a megaphone.

CATHERINE KING

Infrastructure that creates jobs & improves communities

This is an edited extract from Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Catherine King MP's opening speech to the 2023 RTBU National Council in Brisbane.



Thanks very much for that warm welcome and with all of the Eureka flags in the room, I feel well and truly home.

Well, back last year when we were a newly elected government, our first cabinet meeting was held in Gladstone. I well remember one of the first groups to greet me at the community opening were members of the Queensland RTBU who presented me with a union shirt covered in beautiful indigenous designs, and that is proudly in my office today.

I know your union solidarity with indigenous Australians runs very deep and I commend you for that and the work that you do.

I really do want to thank you for the work that you do representing your industry across the country and representing the interests of workers in this incredibly important sector of transport.

Our network and our rail industry, in particular the 33,000 kilometers of track is a crucial component of our supply chain.

From the cities to the regions and the remotest corners of Australia, everywhere and every day, Australians rely on our rail systems, our buses, and their workers to get them home safely.

Without a well-functioning and well-equipped rail sector and road infrastructure, Australia simply stops. And that's why we want to support this industry, but we also want to see it grow across the nation.

If you've glanced at a newspaper over the last few weeks or looked at your telly, you'll have noticed that the government has announced its response to the Infrastructure Investment Program review.

What I've found in coming to office is I've inherited a pipeline of infrastructure projects which grew from 150 when we last left office to 800.

Five hundred of those are under \$50 million, so they're not the

big-scale-heavy infrastructure projects you expect a Commonwealth largely to be investing in.

Many projects have simply had no planning. They haven't had informed costings, so we actually don't know how much they cost. And they simply were not ready for Commonwealth investment when they were announced. That's the bad news.

Of course, the good news is I'm really determined that we do have infrastructure that creates jobs, helps wages grow, makes our communities better connected and liveable, and we're committed to building that.

So the projects in the pipeline are projects that we want to deliver that we're investing in, and we'll continue to partner with our state colleagues to do that.

And we've, of course, through that process, reaffirmed our commitment to rail:

- » Metronet - an extra billion dollars over in the West;
- » Melbourne Airport Rail - continuing that project;
- » Logan and Gold Coast Faster Rail - putting the money;
- » Intermodal hubs across the country;
- » and of course, Inland Rail, a really important project - but building it right, making sure we're actually delivering it.

We are maintaining, and in many cases, growing our commitment to rail across the country and going forward you can expect more of the same.

There are a lot of changes occurring, a lot of laws being introduced, but also a lot of cleaning up we've had to do in the first part of our term of Government.

There's a lot that we've learned about how freight moves around this country and about what we might need to do differently. So we've announced that

we'll be undertaking a review of that [the National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy].

That doesn't mean that we are throwing everything out. It means the foundations are okay, but what do we need to do?

What did we learn post-COVID in terms of the disruptions of our supply chains that we need to do differently?

That review is a critical opportunity for us to take stock of what has changed and what has been achieved since 2019.

Also in relation to representations from the RTBU, infrastructure and transport ministers have now agreed that since it's been a decade since the National Rail Safety Law was introduced, it is time to have a look at that as well.

That review, I think, will be an important opportunity to just really see the vision of what we had when then Minister Albanese put the national law together.

It's a really complex system: just seeing where that's up to, and trying to make sure it's still fit for purpose.

So again, I want to thank the union for the input on both of those things.

Collaboration with unions, with industry stakeholders, is incredibly important to shaping how our policies support the ever-changing demands of your rail industry as well as the broader transport industry as a whole.

I want to thank you very much for your work. I want to wish you all the very best in your deliberations as you start to plan for the next two to three to five years of the work that the union is doing.

There are lots of challenges out there, I know, but I do want to commend you for the work that you do, but also the work that you're doing in partnership with the Federal Government.



From the cities to the regions and the remotest corners of Australia, everywhere and every day, Australians rely on our rail systems, our buses, and their workers to get them home safely.

SALLY MCMANUS

You can never crush a belief

This is an edited version of ACTU Secretary Sally McManus' speech to the 2023 RTBU National Council Dinner in Brisbane.



I'd like to pay tribute to the most important people in this room, and that's the rank and file of the RTBU.

Your union is a union of the city and the country. It was the union that built country towns, railway towns, and it's also the union that keeps our big cities running.

Generations of union families have been railway families or bus families. The children of those families have received educations because their parents, like mine, worked for the railways and were members of your union.

The RTBU is also a union for migrants – a union that accepts everyone. So many people who have moved to Australia have started off by working in public transport.

And it's a union that keeps evolving with the times.

30 years ago, the four unions rail and public transport unions [the ARU, AFULE, ATMOEA and NUR] said "Well, we'd better get together."

It wasn't just your union that went down the path of amalgamation - a whole lot of other unions did the same too. Because the leadership of all the unions at that time could see what was coming.

They knew that the Labor Government, Federally, was coming to an end, and there was going to be a change of government. And when that happened, unions were going to be under attack.

And so, I think back at that time, and there were always criticisms of amalgamations. Was it the right thing to do or was it the wrong thing to do?

But when you reflect now over those 30 years, and everything we went through as a union movement, - as working people - not one single one of those unions would have been able to face up to that alone.

In fact, probably some of our unions would've been wiped out.

The last 30 years have been but one of the toughest times for the union movement - without a doubt.

I think that experience says two things about our movement and your union: we are courageous, but we're also indestructible.

Indestructible because they threw everything at us over those 30 years, absolutely everything at us, and we are still here.

And we're still here because we have stuck by our values, and all the things we hold true about fairness and equality for working people.

When you think about it, we're still here, but so many of those people who tried to destroy us are not.

John Howard, Peter Reith, Eric Abetz, Tony Abbott, Malcolm Turnbull, Christian Porter, Jeff Kennett, Nick Greiner, Tony Rundle, Andrew Constance, Steven Marshall, Anna Bligh, Campbell Newman, Richard Court.

All gone. All gone, but we're not.

So know, comrades, that we are resilient, and know that we are on the march again.

And I think that your union is one of the most resilient unions - because this isn't your first rodeo of having hard times, right?

You went through 1917 and the Great Strike – at that time, the biggest strike and biggest mobilisation of labour that this country has ever seen.

After that, they deregistered you and they blacklisted a whole generation of trade unions. That's what they did to you. But what did you do after that?

You went on the front foot again, you rebuilt, you got your density right up,

and you built strong middle-class jobs for people.

When I think back over the history of the Australian labour movement - I ask myself what are the lessons?

You know what - I reckon the lessons are mainly lessons for those governments that decided to take us on.

And these are the lessons those union-bashing governments need to remember:

You can sack us. You can outlaw us. You can vilify us every single day with all your media might. You can set up royal commissions.

You can set up permanent commissions to harass us. You can tap our phones. You can raid our union offices. You can vilify and punish our leaders.

You can bring in laws to police us. You can support laws that make our work harder and take away all the support for unions to grow. And you can even refuse to acknowledge we exist.

You can fine us. You can jail us. You can do all of this, but you'll never defeat us. We are not going away. We will never go away.

And the harder you fight us, the more you teach us, for you can never crush a belief, the right of all of us to be treated equally and fairly.

You can never take away our power, the power of unions, which is a simple act of working people deciding to stick together.

Thank you very much. Happy birthday, RTBU.



We are courageous, but we're also indestructible ... because they threw everything at us over those 30 years, absolutely everything at us, and we are still here.



Early Christmas present for workers as Closing Loopholes bill passed

Crucial parts of the Federal Government's Closing Loopholes bill were passed by the Senate in December, including reforms to stop employers from misusing labour hire to drive down wages and conditions.

ACTU Secretary Sally McManus said the passage of the bill was an early Christmas present for working people.

"The Australian public understands that this legislation delivers better rights for workers which deliver better wages during the cost-of-living crisis," Sally said.

"These changes will make work a safer place to be, as well as give workers a pay boost at a time where they really need it."

Key parts of the Bill that passed were:

- » Closing the labour hire loophole, which will mean better pay for labour hire workers who are brought in by companies like BHP and Qantas to drive down wages in their industries;
- » Criminalising intentional wage (and superannuation) theft, and increasing civil penalties for wage theft;
- » Providing stronger rights for workplace delegates;
- » Introducing better support for first responders diagnosed with PTSD;
- » Strengthening protections against discrimination for employees subjected to family and domestic violence;
- » Including silica-related diseases and safety within the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency; and
- » Criminalise industrial manslaughter.

"The companies that will be crying loudest about these changes are some of Australia's biggest and most profitable," Sally said.

"Mining companies such as Gina Rinehart's or Qantas, whose CEOs are receiving huge bonuses, they don't feel the hardships many Australians are feeling right now.

"They can well afford these changes, but they fought against them as they don't want to see their mega profits take the smallest of hits. A small hit for them, but a massive difference for working Australians.

"The fight isn't over however - the rest of the Bill must pass in the new year, and we won't leave truckies, casual workers and gig workers behind. The job is unfinished until that happens."

ANOTHER WAGES CAP BITES THE DUST

State Government wages caps are a major reason why wages across Australia have failed to keep pace with the rising cost of living.

Not only have these caps imposed real wage cuts on public sector workers, but they have also served as informal industry benchmarks to keep wages down in private sector workplaces as well.

That's why the RTBU has consistently campaigned to see these wages caps abolished.

In NSW, Industrial Relations Minister Sophie Cotsis MP introduced legislation in November to replace the Coalition's wages cap with a new model of negotiating pay and conditions based on "mutual gains".

Sophie Cotsis also has given the NSW Industrial Relations Commission greater power to bring parties together to resolve disputes.

"This reform stops that from happening again and delivers on Labor's election promise to scrap the wages cap once and for all," Sophie said.

"Better public sector workplaces means better public services. If these reforms pass, schools, hospitals and many more public sector workplaces are set to improve."

And now the Western Australian Government has also scrapped its own wages cap and moved back to a genuine workplace bargaining framework.

Western Australian Branch Secretary Joshua Dekuyer said union members had spent years taking action, sharing their stories and explaining to the WA Government how restrictive wages policies have harmed their home lives and put the public delivery of services at risk.

"Critical WA public services ranging from train and road coach services to network, infrastructure, security and customer service, are losing skilled, dedicated workers to other sectors and failing to attract new staff to fill vacant

positions as a result of uncompetitive wages," Josh said.

"This hurts our communities and our economy.

"It is now imperative that the WA State Government and Unions come to the bargaining table ready to negotiate agreements that deliver real wage growth for public sector workers.

"The RTBU stands united with its Public Sector Alliance partners in calling on the Western Australia Government to deliver wages growth of 7 per cent and 5 per cent over the next two years to begin to repair the damage of years of low wage growth under suppressive government policies."

Josh said a raft of public sector Enterprise Agreements in WA are up for negotiation over the next 18 months.

"The RTBU is adamant that the return to genuine bargaining must facilitate the negotiation of real wage increases that enable public sector workers to catch up and keep up with cost-of-living pressures.

"We welcome the return to genuine bargaining for public sector wages and conditions, and look forward to working collaboratively with the WA Cook Labor Government to ensure the ongoing delivery of crucial public services by adequately paying public sector workers."

📍 NSW Minister for Industrial Relations Sophie Cotsis MP signing the RTBU's Build Them Here campaign pledge.

📍 Joshua Dekuyer fronts the media to discuss the new WA Government wages policy.



Representing rail, tram and bus workers with disabilities

Disability advocate Andy Shim at the National Council meeting.



RTBU members come in all shapes, sizes, colours and abilities, but our workplaces are not always as inclusive or accommodating.

In fact, too often our workplaces are designed in ways that make it hard (if not impossible) for people with disabilities.

The RTBU is determined to knock down the physical, organisational and cultural barriers that prevent people with disabilities from participating fully in work and their communities.

With that in mind, disability advocate Andrew Shim was invited to give a presentation to the RTBU National Council meeting.

Andrew, who is autistic, gave a powerful insight into his experiences and the discrimination faced by neuro-diverse people and argued that people with disabilities need to be given a greater say in issues affecting them.

Following Andrew's presentation, NSW Branch Secretary Alex Claassens moved a motion to establish an RTBU Enabled Committee to represent members with disabilities.

Alex - who has been working with the International Transport Workers' Federation to develop a global Railway Workers Disability Charter - said the RTBU Enabled Committee would be the first of its kind in the Australian union movement.

"The purpose of the Committee will be to empower members with disabilities - enabling them to develop strategies for overcoming barriers to employment in our industries," Alex said.

"The Committee will be encouraged view to consider possible clauses for insertion into Enterprise Agreements, and new or amended workplace policies to make workplaces more inclusive."

The motion was seconded by SA/NT Branch Secretary Darren Phillips and passed unanimously.

"There is much more that can be done to reduce barriers to participation for people with disabilities - and

accessible public transport is just one of those," Darren said.

"But if we are going to take the inclusion agenda seriously, then we have to do more than just reduce barriers.

"We need to redesign our infrastructure, our service delivery methods, and our organisations so that they reflect and work for all members of society.

"That includes making sure people with disabilities, including neuro-diverse people, are represented in our political parties, our parliaments and our trade unions.

"The change can start with us - we can do a better job in advocating for members with disabilities, and in giving them a platform so they can advocate for themselves."

The National Office will now work with State Branches to get the committee up and running in 2024.

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AUTISM AND WORK

WORKING ON THE RAILWAY WORKS FOR ME

By Helen Gander (Freight Train Driver & ASLEF member in the UK)

Growing up, I don't think I ever felt different as such, I was just often frustrated and overwhelmed. I struggled to do and understand some things that everyone else seemed to naturally just do. Socially, sensory, my struggles with executive function, the way I see and process things, my clumsiness, my need for routine and my fear of change, I could go on as there are so many more.



Amongst other things, I was labelled as shy, lazy, extra sensitive, anxious or just plain old overreacting. So it was easier and safer for me to simply hide how I was feeling and learn how to fit in.

When I was 18, I got a job on the railway, working on the station platform as a dispatcher, and this was where I really began to feel at ease. The routine, having a roster for me to work to, a timetable for the trains, a despatch procedure, a cleaning routine, every day was a system, I knew exactly what I had to do, and when and how. It was perfect.

I still struggled socially, but back in those days there was a lot of after-work pub time, so I'd just have a few drinks and become the entertainer. But I'd be left absolutely exhausted after a day of having these interactions with the

public and then being the social clown afterwards. I'd go home and have to recharge my social battery, sometimes for days.

My mental health began to suffer and over the years I'd had different episodes of depression and anxiety, and not all the time, but there are some occasions I'm convinced I wasn't actually depressed at all, I'd had what I now know to be an autistic meltdown or shutdown. I couldn't figure out why I still felt so disconnected from the world and under the surface, it was slowly eating away at me.

A few years later, in 2008, I got my driver's job and that truly was the making of me. I struggled with the classroom side of it as that's not my natural environment, but I just knew if I could make it through the exams, once it got to the hands-on side then I'd be

just fine. It played to all my strengths. Again it was wonderfully scheduled and routine. Being given a diagram each day with the exact-to-the-minute timings for where I should be and what I should do was bliss.

My deep focus and concentration on a task were called into order. Autistic people are often really good at repetition and spotting patterns, again perfect for train driving, I'd already got the hang of that driver talk we all do in messrooms: 'long job?', 'got much left?'. It was easy to script conversation, to really fit in. I felt at home, but something still wasn't right. I was still wearing a mask. I'd been wearing it so long, I didn't even realise I was doing it by now.

Fast forward some years, [and] my wife suggested to me that she thought I might be autistic after yet another

adverse reaction to something that might be considered fairly mundane. I initially brushed it off, but then after it played on my mind, and using my excellent research skills and hyper-focus, I found myself down a rabbit hole of information, and it was beginning to look like she could be on to something. I was seeing so much of myself in the traits and behaviours of someone with autism.

I'd been masking all these years, which is something women in particular do. That's why there are so many women who are diagnosed later in life. We are often missed as children for many reasons. Our specialist interests are often considered more socially acceptable, and for a long time, there was also the belief that girls couldn't be autistic.

I wrote a list of all the traits and behaviours where I matched with the diagnostic criteria and examples from my life, it was staring me in the face: I was autistic.

And then it hit me. The fear. What if I am autistic? Are they going to take my key from me? Am I going to be allowed to drive trains any more?

You see, this job is more than just a job to me, partly because of my autism, it's become my identity. Everyone knows me as Helen the train driver, it's the place I feel most at home, most at ease, you can't take that away from me. So out of fear, I did nothing with this new information.

I potentially had something in the palm of my hands that would change my world for the better, help me understand and make adjustments to make things easier, and I felt I couldn't do anything with it. The pressure built up inside me and again, my mental health suffered.

I eventually had a conversation with a trusted driver friend from another train company and he told me he knew of another driver with autism. That it

was ok, that I wasn't going to lose my key, and he gave me the confidence to approach my GP.

A diagnosis isn't for everyone, not every autistic person needs or wants one, but I knew I just had to know. So, I went along, armed with my list, and to my surprise, she took me seriously, she agreed and referred me for diagnosis.

I still hadn't told anyone I worked with or my family at this point. Sadly the National Health Service (NHS) waiting lists are long for adult diagnoses so, after years of waiting, my anxiety was becoming too much and I researched again and found a reputable private clinic.

After various appointments, I finally got my diagnosis.

Around this time I was changing jobs. A massive thing for me. I'd worked for my company for almost 20 years at this point and been driving with them for almost 15. B4

ut an opportunity came up and after giving it a lot of thought and consideration, I was able to accept the job and make the change. It was honestly the best thing I could have done.

I'd not told my old company about my diagnosis as I only officially received it a week before I left, so I was nervous about telling my new employer, GB Railfreight, but I knew I had to if I was going to finally find my inner peace. Telling them I had autism was absolutely fine, as it should be. I've never felt any kind of discrimination or negative repercussions. Quite the opposite in fact.

I'm now part of a neurodiversity working group within the company to help drive change to make the work-place

a better environment for those of us who are neurodivergent. There are people from all over the business who are involved but Traincrew are currently under-represented so I'm pleased to be part of something positive and feel like we could be making a difference.

I spent so long in fear, hiding, worried I was going to lose my job. It really affected my mental and thus my physical health too.

I hate the idea that there are other people possibly going through something similar.

I don't ever claim to be an expert in autism and neurodivergence, but if I can use my experiences to inspire or help just one other person, especially those of us who are late diagnosed, whether that's through my Instagram account (@helen_drives_trains) where I try and champion neurodiversity on the railway, or articles like this, then that's something positive to me.

The railway to me is the perfect place for me as a neurodivergent person for some of the reasons above and many more.

I'll finish by saying that while I can't speak for all train companies, I'd like to think the industry is moving forwards and trying to do better for everyone who works here, and also with legislation like the [UK] equalities act, there is definitely progress being made and that can only be a good thing, for everybody.

This article is reprinted with permission of Helen and of our comrades at ASELF in the UK.





Horror crash marks sad end to 2023

2023 finished in the worst way possible for rail, tram and bus workers with a horror crash at Bindarra, near the SA/NT border, taking the lives of two RTBU members.

Port Augusta Delegate Mick Warren and fellow Pacific National traincrew Kevin Baker were killed when their train collided with a truck at a level crossing on the Barrier Highway.

The 75-year-old truck driver survived with minor injuries but has been charged with two counts of death by dangerous driving.

SA/NT Branch Secretary Darren Phillips said Mick and Kevin were both highly respected members of the rail industry and much-loved members of the RTBU family.

“We are all gutted by the loss of our comrades,” Darren said. “It’s hard to believe they are gone, and they will be dearly missed by everyone who knew them.”

“We send our its deepest condolences to the families, friends and comrades of both Mick and Kevin.”

Assistant National Secretary Shayne Kummerfeld said the tragedy underscores the need for a zero tolerance approach to level crossing safety.

“Anyone who has ever driven a locomotive has probably had a near miss at

a level crossing, with someone trying to ‘beat the train’,” Shayne said.

“The level-crossing madness simply has to stop.”

Shayne said four people were injured in a similar collision between a freight train and a truck at a railway level crossing in Katherine, in the Northern Territory, in June 2023.

“The rail industry has been talking about level crossing safety for years, but the tragedies keep happening.

“It’s time that Governments across the country took a tougher approach to stop people from taking risks around level crossings.

“All level crossings should be equipped with cameras to catch drivers who stray into the rail corridor when a train is approaching, and heavy penalties must apply to people who do the wrong thing.

“Governments should also be putting more funding towards improving level crossing protection - with more grade separations, more boom gates and more warning lights.”

Furthermore, Shayne said governments should investigate options for



in-car warning systems to let drivers know when trains or emergency service vehicles are approaching.

“Police already have technology that lets them know that a nearby driver is using their phone, so that sort of technology should be relatively easy to develop.

“Everything needs to be on the table.

“But ultimately, it is up to all road users to take extreme care around level crossings and obey the law, because anyone who drives across a level crossing in front of a train is putting lives at risk.”

📹 Shayne Kummerfeld speaks to Ch9 News about the Bindarra tragedy.

Fundraiser account for families of Mick Warren and Kevin Baker

SA/NT Branch President Brett Dawson said members at the Pacific National Port Augusta had been shocked by the death of their comrades.

Brett said a fundraising account has now been set up to support the two families. The account is being coordinated by Pacific National with the support of the RTBU.

“Port Augusta is a close-knit community and this tragedy has hit hard.

“But in difficult times, our Union comes together and supports each other.

“There are many ways in which people can help, and making a small donation to the fundraiser for Kevin and Mick’s families is one.”

The families of both Mick Warren and Kevin Baker have thanked the RTBU community for the love and support shown to them since the tragedy.

Please click on the following link (or type in the URL address to your internet browser) to access the online fundraiser:



<https://www.gofundme.com/f/in-memory-of-mick-warren-and-kevin-baker>

GOLDLINQ WORKERS TAKE TO 'THE GRASS'



They call it 'The Grass', and tram workers on the Gold Coast have been taking to it regularly over the past few weeks as they seek a new pay deal to address the escalating cost of living.

A patch of turf just outside the grounds of the tram depot at Parkwood, at the northern end of the Gold Coast tram line, 'The Grass' is the spot where members have been setting up a barbeque while taking two and three-hour work stoppages.

Members also took a 24-hour work stoppage on Monday 22 January.

"Every time a tram gets pulled in off the line, we can see it from where we're on 'the grass'," said Queensland Tram and Bus Division Secretary Tom Brown. "It always gets a big cheer."

The continuing industrial action is hitting the company where it hurts, and disrupting peak hour services.

Management, however, doesn't seem to be listening, which is why members personally delivered a letter from members to GoldLinq CEO Phil Mumford in his Broadbeach office. Although, strangely, no one from management would open the door to collect it.

"I put the letter under the door, and before we left, somebody went up and

checked and before we left someone went up to check and it was gone, so we know they were there," Tom said.

Workers at GoldLinq have been going backwards in their pay for years – collecting a pay rise of just 2.75 per cent in 2022 while inflation was running at up to nine per cent.

Members are now looking to claw back some lost ground and to ensure future pay rises keep pace with the rising cost of living. They are demanding a two-tiered pay rise, with a \$3,700 increase to base pay across the board, along with a 4 per cent pay rise for each year of the proposed three-year agreement.

Keolis Downer, which is contracted to run GoldLinq's tram operations, initially offered a four per cent increase with a \$1,000 one-off payment.

"So by going on strike members have rejected a \$1,000 bribe which would be better added to their base pay," Tom said.

RTBU Delegate and tram driver Ross Preston said the cost of housing was a serious issue for members, with the average house price having gone up by around \$300,000.

Some members reported that their weekly rent had gone up hundreds of dollars over the year, and they were spending around 40-50% of their earnings on rent alone.

It's no wonder that one of the most popular chants on the grass is "4 per cent won't pay the rent."

"A lot of people struggling, but management haven't recognised that," Ross said. "They've offered us something that won't even bring the guys up to anywhere close to a liveable wage."

Fellow RTBU Delegate and GoldLinq CSO Budd Seeto said the situation was tense, with members deciding to continue with their industrial action despite management's offer to resume discussions.

Budd said the dispute has also seen the size of the membership at GoldLinq grow, with around 30 workers joining the RTBU since the enterprise negotiations began.

"There have been a few surprises, with some people who previously hadn't engaged with the union signing up," Budd said.

"So they've seen what we're doing to their improve pay and conditions, and they're liking it."

📷 Above, Budd Seeto (left) and Ross Preston (right) on 'the Grass'.



METRO TAS DRIVERS SECURE 10% PAY RISE

The Tasmanian Government's promise to improve pay and conditions for bus drivers has been delivered after the RTBU negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Metro Tasmania for a 10 per cent "temporary" pay rise, which will lift driver pay until the next Enterprise Agreement can be negotiated.

The State Government's support package for drivers also includes funding for new safety screens and the employment of Transit Officers across the state.

Outgoing Tasmanian Branch Secretary Ric Bean said that after discussions with Metro management, it was decided that an MOU would be the quickest

and easiest way to bring about the intended pay rise.

"We looked into other options, such as going straight into enterprise bargaining, but that would have resulted in workers not seeing a pay rise until well into the new year while also preventing drivers from being able to negotiate new conditions.

"The MOU means drivers can pocket the pay rise immediately, other conditions will be able to be negotiated through the normal EBA process, and all worker rights that apply to EBA negotiations will be maintained.

"This is a significant outcome for all drivers who haven't received an appropriate pay rise for far too long."

Ric said that while the pay rise had been described as temporary, he was confident that it would become permanent once the new EA was negotiated.

"The temporary nature of the pay rise is consistent with the bill which

recently passed through parliament, which provided funding for the Government's support package.

"We will keep the pressure on Metro and the State Government to ensure that this funding is extended into the future."

Ric said there was still a lot of work to do to make Metro Tasmania a better place to work, and next year's EA negotiations would be critical.

"The log of claims for the EA will be developed through member meetings, one-on-one conversations and an online member survey.

"It is essential that Metro Tasmanian workers join the union, get involved in the EA process, and go into the negotiations as a united group.

"A lot of work has gone into turning things around at Metro, now we need to build on that foundation and bring home a really good EA."



Ric sets sight on his next restoration project

After leading the restoration of the RTBU's Tasmanian Branch as Branch Secretary for the past five and half years, Ric Bean has set his sights on a new project: finishing the restoration of a heritage railway station in Northern Tasmania.



Ric officially finished up as Branch Secretary at 5 pm on December 31.

“With almost everything I set out to do several years ago more or less complete, it’s time for new and fresh energy,” Ric said.

“Though as I said to a TasRail manager recently, I will still be around in the workplace to keep them at least a bit honest. And they sure as hell need it!”

Ric said that he was particularly proud of the way the Branch had restructured its finances, and increased its ability to service members through the employment of a full-time Organiser.

“I’m also proud of the standing our small Branch now has within the political sphere, both at the state level and with many of our local Federal representatives,” Ric said.

“Our Branch now has regular direct contact with opposition Members of

Parliament, and in recent times from within the Government as well.

“It’s a big change, and it shows that political decision-makers are no longer taking RTBU members for granted.”

Ric said he was looking forward to spending more time on his many and varied hobbies and interests, which have either been ‘on hold’ or ‘in the slow lane’ for several years.

“I’ve got a number of pinball machines and jukeboxes awaiting either restoration or repairs for starters,” Ric said.

“It will also be great to be able to devote more time to editing historic video footage of the country’s railways and producing videos for my YouTube channel.

“And being an owner/builder on a restoration project of a railway station, cottage and goods shed for several years has been challenging, and this

has also been in the slow lane with multiple permit extensions fortunately permitted by the council.

“This not insignificant project will finally be complete within 2024 now that I have more time.”

The Tasmanian Branch Council met in October and elected Byron Cubit as Branch Secretary.

“I am incredibly humbled to take over as Branch Secretary,” Byron said.

“It is not a role that I will take lightly and will always pledge to do my very best as the custodian of the Tasmanian Branch of the RTBU.”

Byron said the Branch would be putting a renewed focus on developing Delegates, Health and Safety Representatives and activists within the membership.

“The RTBU is a delegates-based union,” Byron said.

“This is especially true in Tasmania where we are a much smaller branch than on the mainland.

“Delegates are the best-placed people in the workplace to represent you because they are chosen by members.

“We will be seeking to increase delegates and activists in our ranks and ensure they are properly trained.”

Byron also thanked his predecessor Ric Bean for his service to the RTBU.

“Ric became Branch Secretary in a difficult time for our branch and began to rebuild from the ground up.

“His hard work and dedication means that we are in a strong position to ensure members’ rights at work are protected.”

Ric Bean’s YouTube channel has some amazing footage of trains, trams and transport infrastructure – you can check it out at <https://www.youtube.com/@tedbear4243> .

Byron Cubit was a finalist in the recent John Curtin Research Centre Young Writers’ Prize. You can read his essay on pages 28-29..

V/Line members bring network to a halt

STOP PRESS

V/Line members have announced they will take further industrial action, with a four-hour stoppage planned for the morning of Thursday 25 January.

Keep an eye on the RTBU Victoria Facebook page www.facebook.com/RTBUvic for updates

Services at Victorian regional passenger rail operator V/Line came to a halt on the morning of Wednesday 13 December after members in the operations grades (excluding drivers) took industrial action over the lack of progress on a new Enterprise Agreement.

Members stopped work between 3 am and 7 am, bringing the network to a halt.

The RTBU notified V/Line of the action a week in advance and made it clear that representatives were ready for intensive negotiations.

Victorian Branch Secretary Vik Sharma said the parties participated in a Fair Work Commission conference on Friday 8 December to work through outstanding items, but members were

not satisfied that enough progress was being made.

“Bargaining on the new EA commenced back in June when the current agreement expired,” Vik said.

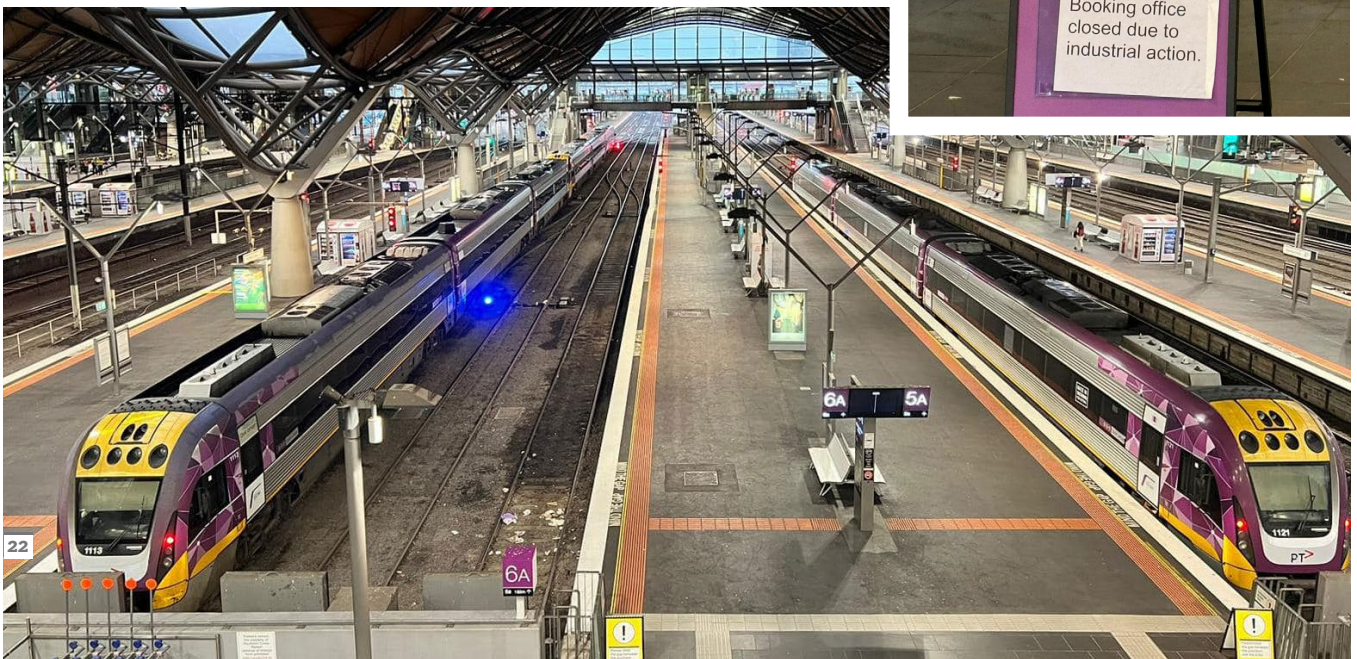
“The work stoppages follow a strong ballot result that saw union members vote overwhelmingly in favour of industrial action.

“V/Line has continued to bury their heads, refusing to acknowledge deep-seated issues throughout their management structures.

“We are disappointed that V/Line has been unable to resolve outstanding issues and the impact this will unfortunately have on commuters.

“In the current climate of automation, major changes and an uncertain economy, members are fighting for what all workers across Victoria deserve – job security and decent conditions.

“V/Line needs to stop blindly driving this corporate cowboys’ train and listen to its workers.”



PACIFIC NATIONAL IPS MEMBERS IN DAVID & GOLIATH BATTLE



STOP PRESS

The RTBU negotiating team reached an in-principle agreement in PN IPS just before Christmas, which will go to a vote of the members early this year.

Keep an eye on the NSW Branch website, www.rtbuexpress.com.au and Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/RTBUNSW> for updates.

BRANCH NEWS NSW

Members at Pacific National's Integrated Planning Service (IPS) unit have been put through the wringer by the multi-billion dollar company in recent years. But together, they're standing united and fighting back.

A number of years ago, Pacific National eyed off workers in the IPS section of the workforce and moved to take them off their enterprise agreement and put them all on individual contracts. It was a tried and tested business recipe for driving down wages and conditions.

The company's plan worked, and the IPS workers - who are responsible for safety critical roles such as scheduling, fatigue management and rostering - saw their pay packets dwindle by about 40 per cent.

Recently, however, RTBU members at IPS decided it was time to fight back and started a campaign to win back fair wages and conditions.

After attempts to negotiate a fair and reasonable agreement with the company failed, IPS members were forced to take protected action, including notifying Pacific National management of a 72-hour stoppage.

In response, the company announced it would lock any worker taking part in the action out of the workplace for a whole week.

NSW Branch Director of Organising Toby Warnes described the move at the time as unprecedented and outrageous.

"This is a deplorable move from Pacific National and a clear attempt to take advantage of a small section of the workforce whose wages and conditions have been slashed by tens of thousands of dollars over recent years," Toby said.

"After being put on individual contracts which cut their pay packets by up to 40 per cent recently, the workers simply wanted to negotiate a reasonable pay and redundancy deal with the company that would put their take-home pay in the same ballpark as other similar roles elsewhere.

"But rather than treat its workers with the respect they deserve, Pacific National management has made the outrageous decision to lock these workers out of their offices.

"These are safety critical workers who aren't asking for much - just to be treated with dignity and respect and for a fair and reasonable pay and redundancy package."

At the time of print, the IPS workers had forced the company back to the bargaining table and negotiations are still ongoing.

Toby said that regardless of what the final agreement looks like, the IPS workers are a real example of unionism and solidarity at its finest.

"These members have shown what is possible when you join together and refuse to give up.

"Just months ago, this was essentially an un-unionised section of the workforce who were being taken for a ride by their employer.

"Now, they've proven the value of being part of the union and the importance of solidarity in achieving fair wages and conditions.

"It's been a real David and Goliath battle, but these workers simply will not give up until they get what they know they deserve. The strength and unity they've shown has been incredible.

"We're hopeful that common sense will finally prevail and these workers can finally get back to doing what they do best - concentrating on moving our freight and their fellow Pacific National workers safely around the network."

Transit officers call for more support on PTSD



Western Australian Transit Officers are calling on the WA State Government to provide more support for workers affected by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Transit Officers at the WA Public Transport Authority want to change the ‘presumption’ in the assessment of workers’ compensation claims for PTSD – so that it falls on employers to prove the PTSD did **not** result from a workplace injury, rather than workers having to prove it did.

WA Branch Secretary and Transit Officer Josh Dekuyer explained that this change would make the rules around PTSD claims for Transit Officers consistent with the rules around PTSD claims for Ambulance Officers, Firefighters and Police.

“Just like other first responders, Transit Officers may experience a gradual build-up of mental trauma over a prolonged period as a result of experiencing or witnessing traumatic events,” Joshua said.

“The standard claims process, which requires workers to prove conditions are work-related, can have a

detrimental impact on first responders by requiring them to relive traumatic events.

“That’s why we’ve been lobbying for the Cook Government to acknowledge the significant and dangerous work Transit Officers do in responding to emergencies and incidents on and along the rail corridor and make amendments to the regulations to provide a rebuttable presumption of work-related PTSD for claiming workers’ compensation.

“This means that if a formal diagnosis of PTSD is made, the onus of proof will shift to the employer or insurer to establish the condition isn’t related to work.”

The impact of PTSD on Transit officers was highlighted by Sean Martin, who has shared his resignation letter to highlight the issue.

In his letter, Sean, who resigned in 2019, listed a series of serious physical

attacks and assaults that he had been subjected to in four years of working as a Transit Officer in Western Australia.

“Your Workers’ Compensation [scheme] still refuses to accept any liability for the distress I have encountered during my employment with the organisation,” he wrote.

“Having spent my time in the Army and having been deployed overseas, to be honest, I feel safer carrying my rifle and kit back in Afghanistan, having insurgents shoot at me, than having to come back to the unit.

“Even when my body had been battered in this organisation. I had seldom taken the time off I needed.”

Joshua Dekuyer has now written directly to the Premier seeking action on this issue and will continue advocating for change until Transit Officers with PTSD are treated in the same way as other first responders.

Ryan joins the team

The growing WA Branch has added a new member to its team, with Ryan Sumner coming on board as the Branch's new Industrial Advocate.

Ryan will work alongside Branch Secretary Joshua Dekuyer, Industrial Organiser George Johnston, and Industrial & Employment Lawyer Kevin Sneddon on industrial matters.

Joshua said many WA members would already be familiar with Ryan, as he previously served as an active Delegate within the Security Sub-Branch.

"Ryan's extensive 12-year tenure in the rail industry, initially as a Transit Officer and later as a Senior Transit Officer - where he often assumed the role of a Transit Supervisor - provides him with a robust foundation for his

role as an Industrial Advocate for our members," Josh said.

"Ryan is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Law as a part-time student and possesses a Diploma in Leadership & Management and Business Administration.

"He also holds qualifications in legal services and information technology.

Most significantly, in the past 19 months, Ryan has served as an Industrial Officer for another prominent Union in WA.

"This experience has equipped him with hands-on expertise in guiding members through industrial and legal processes."



OBITUARY FRANK LACEY

Former Victorian Branch member Frank Lacey passed away peacefully at Preston on November 7 at the age of seventy-six, with his family by his side.

Frank was a prominent rail unionist for over twenty years as Shunters' Section Secretary, ARU Victorian Branch President, Assistant National Secretary of the ARU and Assistant National Secretary Rail, Operations Division of the RTBU.

Frank was an activist in the Victorian Branch in the 1970s and 1980s, an era of great industrial and political change. Always a forward-looking unionist, he promoted and respected full membership involvement in the union's activities. He was part of a younger generation of Victorian rail unionists who became prominent in the ARU.

Within the rail industry, the rumblings of massive challenges to railway workers were beginning to emerge: railway deficits challenged state budgets, technological change was sweeping the industry and deep-seated cuts to rail services and jobs had begun in earnest.

The Victorian Branch leadership fought for alternative industry plans that prioritised community over corporate needs.

Frank was highly competent in all aspects of union work, whether it was meeting with members on the job, strategising around campaigns, preparing, and presenting cases in the

Industrial Commission or the incessant lobbying of politicians.

Frank brought to his union work a deep humanity, wicked humour and an ability to talk issues through with all sides of the industrial and political spectrum. He earned the respect of those whom he encountered.

Frank was a fine example of practising the union values of respect for working people, forthrightness, a fighting spirit, democracy, and the timelessness of solidarity through his day-to-day union work.

Unionists of the calibre of Frank Lacey have made a mighty contribution to the Australian labour movement.



UK TRAIN DRIVERS STRIKE FOR FAIR PAY



British train drivers are continuing their fight for better pay after they took a series of strike actions across December.

The UK train driver's union, ASLEF, carried out a rolling program of one-day strikes and a nine-day overtime ban across the country's 16 Train Operating Companies (TOCs).

ASLEF General Secretary Mick Whelan (who was a guest speaker at the RTBU National Council in November), said the industrial action was designed to ratchet up the pressure on the 16 TOCs and the UK Government.

"We are going on strike again not to inconvenience passengers, but to express our disgust at the intransigence of this government, and the bad faith shown by the private companies which employ us," Mick said.

"It is clear that the Tory Government does not want to resolve this dispute.

"We haven't had a meeting with Mark Harper, the Transport Secretary, since December 2022. We haven't had a meeting with Huw Merriman, the Rail Minister, since January this year.

"And we haven't heard from the employers, the private sector train operating companies for whom we work, since April.

"We are prepared to come to the table and negotiate but the TOCs ... simply can't be bothered. They are happy to see this dispute rumble on, for passengers and businesses to suffer, and to drive Britain's railways – once the envy of the world – into a managed decline."

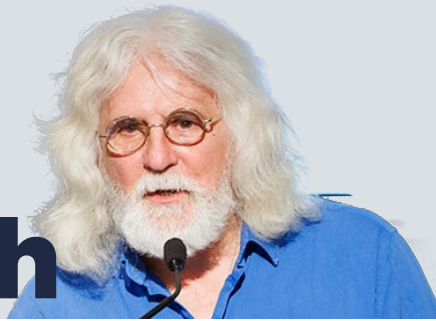
The strikes caused significant disruptions to services across Great Britain and came after train drivers voted to strongly endorse ASLEF's mandate to take industrial action.

"We are determined to win this dispute and get a significant pay rise for train drivers who have not had an increase since 2019 while the cost of living, in that time, has soared," Mick said.

📷 Mick Whelan at the National Council meeting.



Mick Kavanagh



After almost 50 years on the railways, Mick Kavanagh has pretty much seen it all. And as a trade unionist, he's pretty much done it all too.

Mick started out as a Trainee Engineman back in 1975 in Melbourne's Dynon railyards, working on diesel trains and freight and passenger services, but at the time he wasn't planning to build a lifelong career as a train driver.

"They advertised for trainee engine drivers and shunters," Mick recalls.

"There was a big queue outside the shunter's office, so I went upstairs to the engineman's office.

"That was the only difference between me potentially being a shunter or a driver - I just didn't want to stand in a queue!

"To be honest, I took it as a summer job until I worked out what I wanted to, and I never worked out what I wanted to do.

"But driving turned out to be a great choice. I enjoyed the people, most of all."

His traineeship took Mick to Wodonga, where he started to become active in the Australia Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemen (AFULE), under the wing of local union Delegate Rex McDonald. And when Rex stepped down from the Delegate role, Mick stepped up.

Then, as was the norm in those days, the reward for passing his 'drivers ticket' was a compulsory transfer to Melbourne.

"Actually," Mick said, "you did get options - three in fact. You could go to Melbourne, you could resign, or they would sack you."

So followed three years at South Dynon and then another three years on 'sparks'.

When finally accruing enough seniority to get a position in the country Mick found himself in Traralgon.

Here he gradually became fully involved in union politics, mentored by the late great 'Smokin' Joe Geddes. Joe passed on the local Branch Secretary's role ("you young blokes have jobs to fight for and protect, you better take on the role"), so with Joe looking over the shoulder and ably assisted by Graeme Lord, they worked hard to not only keep the depot but make it a better place to work.

Frank Hussey was the Victorian Divisional Secretary of the AUFLE at the time, and when Frank took over as the AFULE's National Secretary Mick was elected as the new Divisional Secretary.

It was an interesting time to be coming into the role. On 3 October 1992, the Jeff Kennett-led Liberals won a majority government in the Victorian state election, with a plan to either privatise or close down all rail and tram services in Victoria.

At the same time, the AFULE was in discussions with other transport unions over a possible amalgamation with three other transport unions - the ARU, ATMEOA and NUR.

Mick could see that a bigger, united transport union would be in a better position to defend itself against the Kennett Government.

The amalgamation in 1993, however, couldn't stop Kennett from his mission to privatise a swathe of Victoria's essential services - public transport, water, electricity and gas.

"We had to concede things in our negotiations with the State Government," Mick says.

"Not everything was popular, but we felt at the time we had to hang on to critical infrastructure and stop lines from being permanently closed.

"Because when governments change, you can get trains back, trams back. And we managed to that - look at Victoria's country rail network now and it is probably the best in Australia."

After the amalgamation, Mick became the first RTBU Victorian Branch President, and he held that position for another decade while continuing to work for Freight Victoria - the privatised freight arm of V/Line.

He moved into a management role, but in 2004 the Freight Victoria business (by then called Freight Australia) was bought by Pacific National, and job cuts loomed.

Mick and his wife Raelyn had a friend in Alice Springs, so they decided to make the big move to Central Australia, and Mick went back into the driving ranks with Pacific National.

He continued as a driver until he tried to retire in September 2022 - only to be brought back for another 4-month stint in the cab in 2023, finishing up in early November.

As a member of the SA/NT Branch for the past two decades, Mick has been a valuable sounding board and source of advice for successive Branch Secretaries, including current branch Secretary Darren Phillips.

Mick says a lot has changed over his time on the railways, and some things are now much better than they were - especially in terms of work practices.

"People died regularly in shunting accidents in the 70s," Mick says.

"People were seriously injured and that was accepted as part of the cost of doing business.

"Nowadays - thanks to the hard work of unions like the RTBU - any workplace injury is unacceptable. So some things we do more carefully, and they might take a little longer, but by and large it's a safer place to work."

The other big change has been in the tendency for people to move between jobs and employers more regularly.

"People aren't going to be in the same job for a lifetime," Mick says. "They don't see themselves as being in the industry for long - they'll do a couple of years on a train and then they might go and work on a cruise ship.

"The transitional workforce is a challenge for unions - and not just in member turnover.

"We need to find ways to protect workers' entitlements, so workers don't lose their long service leave and things like that every time they change from one company to another."

At the 2023 National Council Mick was recognised for his contribution to the RTBU, with SA/NT Branch Secretary Darren Phillips nominating Mick for life membership of the union.

"I was extremely proud to get the Life Membership," Mick says. "It's the recognition of your peers."

"I've been proud to be involved in the union all along, so when someone else says 'we appreciate it too', then it means a lot."

WHAT WE'VE BEEN READING

The Tocsin – Young Guns 2023

The John Curtin Research Centre has released an anthology of the leading entries to its 2023 Young Writers' Prize. All of the leading entries are well worth reading, but especially the following essay by the RTBU's own Byron Cubit.

HEARTS AND MINDS

By Byron Cubit

The once-great Australian Trade Union movement has been on the back foot for over four decades. Where once it showed real leadership and advocated a clear vision of how society should be organised, it has abandoned this in favour of advocating for modest legislative changes. Today's movement focuses on abstract terms like justice and fairness.

Do they have a plan to drag their way out of an era of decline? As of August 2022, just 12.5% of the total workforce were union members, a continuation of a decline beginning in the early 1980s. For young people, just 2% of employees aged 15-19 years and 5% aged 20-24 were members of a union (ABS). This low membership is due to a number of factors, including the insecure work of young people, as well as the decline of industries with traditionally high membership and the rise of service industries with traditionally low union membership. Other factors include tight regulation of industrial action, anti-union media campaigns, a general lack of understanding about unions in creating a more equitable society and leaders who want to maintain the status quo.

Unfortunately, the current strategy will not capture the hearts and minds of young people who want to fight for a better world. As political parties tend to focus on the length of election cycles, unions need to plan for the long term. A functioning democracy requires strong voices that advocate

for the interests of the majority. The movement also needs to understand that its salvation does not come in the form of legislation. This is institutional power. Its strength has always come from the power of people. The movement's diminished power combined with the increased power of capital means its ability to create change is at an all-time low, even with the Labor Party in power federally and in most states. Attempting to exercise power in a weakened state within electoral politics will not result in growth. Therefore, leaders need to look inward and refocus their energy on building power through collective organising and empowering working people. If they are to create real positive change, the next 10-15 years are crucial in rebuilding the movement and it starts with young people.

The first task for unions is to ensure its strongest areas remain this way. Many of these areas have an ageing workforce and an ageing union leadership. This poses a monumental challenge with great risks. How do unions ensure they can maintain and grow through this shift in demographics? They can increase their power by encouraging active participation in young members with proper succession planning. Firstly, by implementing mentorship programs at the delegate level, many young members can begin to receive a proper education. Experienced delegates and leaders can become great mentors and provide a great transfer of knowledge to young members. If this is completed in a widespread and coordinated manner, the identification of new leaders becomes an easier task.



📷 New Tasmanian Branch Secretary Byron Cubit.

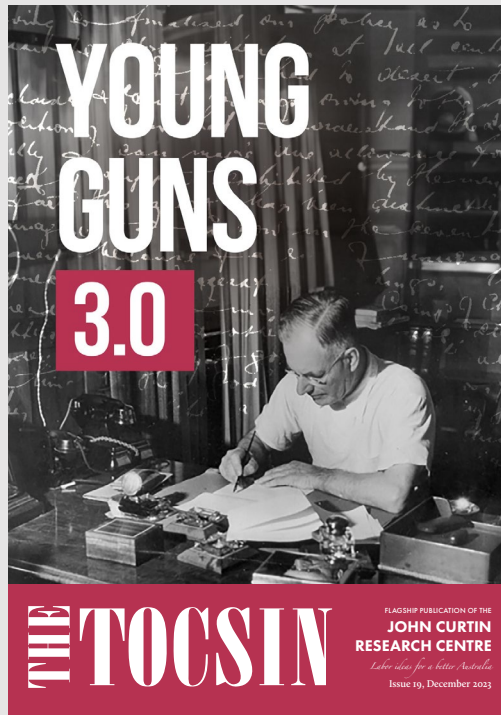
By investing in young workers and developing them at a younger age, they can use their creativity and energy to organise and create new strategies that complement traditional union work.

The creation of youth committees has already begun in some areas. Unfortunately, most are without enough education and thus, many are currently struggling to build. With a strong emphasis on education and development, young members can emerge to effectively lead these committees. The committees should be relatively autonomous and largely focus on recruiting young members, campaigning on issues young members care about, as well as pushing for internal improvements to their union. The committee leaders for each union should meet at the peak body level to discuss their progress and share ideas that can contribute to improving each union's youth committee, as well as developing recommendations for peak body executives. They can also utilise their members to show up in solidarity with different union campaigns.

Furthermore, union leadership needs to reflect union membership. Over time, this active participation will lead to young members becoming delegates, health and safety representatives, organisers and positions in leadership. While many unions have specific leadership positions available to women, unions don't currently have youth positions adequately built into their structures. As young people are the future, they should have a role in the decision-making that shapes their future. This would need to be from the local delegate level through to the peak body executive.

An increase in participation will ensure the best new leaders will rise. This will have a ripple effect over the medium to long term, providing the conditions to rebuild the movement that holds enough power to overcome the challenges young people will face over the course of their careers, such as casualisation, privatisation, automation and transitioning to a green economy.

Rupert Murdoch has kept the flow of information under tremendous control. New media is beginning to loosen this grip, thereby opening a window of opportunity for unions to re-enter



this space in a way that can build support in both young people and the general public. Too many young people have given up hope of a better future. Without hope, apathy follows. Unions can position themselves to become the answer to the problems our society faces, but they don't have an adequate mouthpiece. There is a clear history of unions being at the forefront of rising living standards. As membership declines, declining living standards follow.

Unions need to speak to young people where they are. Generally, young people are creative and malleable, they can be utilised as content creators to make other young people more receptive to unions. This can be communicated through an independent media network, which initially would need to be funded by unions. A network of new media services can include podcasts, online publications, YouTube channels, TikTok channels, books and publishing to provide an alternative narrative and bring it into the mainstream. Opening the Overton window closed by the mainstream media can bring hope and drive people toward a fulfilling set of actions. Anybody with a phone can begin to create, it doesn't require massive capital investment to get started.

A new media network can both create original content and help amplify existing content creators who share similar values and produce content that can shape public opinion. Quality

marketing leading to this amplification can lead to increased audience and therefore monetisation. The network can provide creators with equipment, marketing and editing for a small percentage of earnings that can be reinvested to remove barriers for new creators to join the network. Most creators currently have to do their own marketing and editing. If the network can provide this service, creators can concentrate on creating the best content possible. Alliances with other community organisations have begun to merge and a media network can encompass these messages as well. The effective aim is to make young people more receptive to joining their union or getting involved in other community organisations, building public support for our campaigns and shaping the public narrative.

Real energy and focus on these avenues could build enough growth and power to genuinely consider a campaign to deregulate the conditions of taking industrial action. A fundamental human right, Australia has the tightest regulations on withdrawing labour in the developed world. A decline in work days lost by industrial action contributed to the decline of the movement. A renewed ability to strike will mean unions can better utilise their most effective tool to fight for better outcomes for working people. The direct result is raising living standards for the majority of the population. Collective action leads to more growth.

The trade union movement needs to transition from an era of decline to an era of rebuilding, empowerment and growth. Maintenance of the status quo is proven to fail. The road to rebuilding the movement will be long and difficult. It will require bold leadership who are willing to invest in the future. They will need to provide quality education, allow young voices in decision making and build a media apparatus. Winning the hearts and minds of young people will translate into the long-term, sustainable growth that is required to become a force to be reckoned with, as it once was.

You can read all the leading essays in the John Curtin Research Centre's Young Writer's Prize in The Tocsin – the JCRC's regular magazine: <https://curtinrc.org/the-tocsin-issue-19-young-guns-3-0/>

Australian Rail, Tram and Bus Industry Union National Offices

ELECTION NOTICE - E2023/187

Casual Vacancy and Insufficient Nominations Elections

Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act 2009

Nominations are called for:

South Australia/Northern Territory Branch - Rail Operations Division

- National Divisional Delegate from Branch to National Council (1)

Western Australia Branch - Infrastructure Division

- National Divisional Delegate from Branch to National Council (1)

Tasmania Branch – Tram and Bus Division

- National Divisional Delegate from Branch to National Council* (1)

Queensland Branch

- Branch Delegates to the National Executive* (1)

NOTE: All offices that are followed by an * are identified as casual vacancy election positions.

Nominations, which must be in writing and comply with the registered rules of the Organisation, may be made at any time from 9:00am Australian Eastern Daylight Time (AEDT) on 19/02/2024.

Additional forms are available from the Returning Officer.

Prospective candidates and nominators should verify their financial status and any other qualifications required by the Organisation's rules prior to lodging nominations.

Nominations must reach the Returning Officer via the lodgement method(s) stipulated below **not later than 5:00pm Australian Eastern Daylight Time (AEDT) on 11/03/2024.**

How to lodge nominations, nominations must be lodged via the following method(s):

By Portal: Australian Electoral Commission Portal, www.aec.gov.au/ieb/

By Email: A properly completed nomination form including all necessary signatures and attachments may be scanned and submitted as a pdf file to IEBnominations@aec.gov.au

PLEASE NOTE

1. Emails to the AEC inbox that appear to be spam may be blocked. It is the responsibility of senders to ensure that their email reaches the AEC before the deadline for nominations.
2. In order to be able to be received by the AEC, emails (including attachments) should be no greater than 6 MB in size.
3. You may call 02 9375 6366 or 03 9285 7111 to enquire about the status of your nomination.
4. The subject line of the email should include the reference: ARTBIU –E2023/187– Your Branch/Division – your name.

Withdrawing Nominations

Nominations cannot be withdrawn after 5:00pm Australian Eastern Daylight Time (AEDT) on 21/03/2024.

Candidate Articles:

Candidates may submit an article not exceeding 250 words. A passport style photo may also be submitted with the candidate article for publication. The article should be emailed to Stewart Prins at sprins@rtbu.org.au , not later than 5:00pm (AEDT) on 11/03/2024.

Voting Period

The postal ballot, if required, will open at 9:00am Australian Eastern Standard Time (AEST) on 15/04/2024 and close at 5:00pm Australian Eastern Standard Time (AEST) on 13/05/2024.

If an Attendance ballot is required for the office in Tram and Bus Division, Tasmania Branch, it will be held at the Tasmanian depots on Thursday, 02 May 2024 between 7:00am (AEST) and 4:30pm (AEST) for all offices which represent members within the Tram and Bus Division in Tasmania only. This will be advertised separately at each work centre.

Note: For Tram and Bus Division only: If any voter is unable to vote personally on the day fixed for the ballot, they can apply for a postal vote. Postal vote application must reach the office of the Returning Officer not later than 5pm (AEST) on 8 April 2024. Application forms are available from the Returning Officer via email at IEBevents@aec.gov.au

Scrutineers

A candidate in any election shall be entitled to appoint, by notice in writing to the Returning Officer, another person to act at his/her own expense as a scrutineer on his/her behalf.

A form is available from the Returning Officer for the purposes of appointing Scrutineers.

Other Information

Changed Address? Advise the Organisation now.

Please Note: A copy of the AEC's election report can be obtained from the Organisation or from the Returning Officer after the completion of the election.

Ishtiaq Ahmed
Returning Officer
Telephone: 03 9285 7111
Email: IEBevents@aec.gov.au
25/01/2024



Statements from candidates in the recall elections will be posted on the RTBU national website at

https://www.rtbu.org.au/recall_elections_2024

once nominations have closed.

YOUR RTBU

NATIONAL OFFICE

National Secretary: Mark Diamond

Email: rtbu@rtbu.org.au

Tel: 02 8203 6099

NEW SOUTH WALES

Branch Secretary: Alex Claassens

Email: nswwho@rtbu-nsw.asn.au

Tel: (02) 9264 2511

VICTORIA

Branch Secretary: Vik Sharma

Email: rtbu@rtbuvic.com.au

Tel: (03) 8630 9100

QUEENSLAND

Branch Secretary: Peter Allen

Email: info@rtbu.com.au

Tel: (07) 3839 4988

SOUTH AUSTRALIA & NORTHERN TERRITORY

Branch Secretary: Darren Phillips

Email: theteam@rtbusant.org.au

Tel: (08) 8243 2511 / Freecall 1800 801 063

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Branch Secretary: Joshua Dekuyer

Email: general@rtbuwa.asn.au

Tel: (08) 9225 6722

TASMANIA

Branch Secretary: Ric Bean

Email: tasadmin@rtbu.org.au

Tel: (03) 6228 6188



RTBU