

RTBU EXPRESS

The Official Newsletter of the Rail Divisions of the RTBU Victorian Branch
VOL 6 | Issue 01 | 21 January 2019



Luba Grigorovitch

State Secretary

ALWAYS REMEMBER THE PAST

2019 marks two anniversaries of historic occasions for our Union.

25 April this year marks the centenary of the death of Frank Hyett, founding Secretary of the Victorian Railways Union. As the son of a working class couple from Ballarat, Hyett left school to become a worker at the age of 13 after his father's death from pneumonia left his mother without support.

Hyett's experience of reality soon led to him become a convinced socialist and trade unionist, moving from working as a grocery store clerk to becoming an Organiser for the Amalgamated Society of Railway Employees in February 1910. An energetic and totally dedicated Organiser, he was often away from home for months on end visiting and recruiting new members across the state.

His dedication led to him becoming the Society's General Secretary just two months later. At the time, public transport Unions across Victoria and Australia were divided on crafts lines that left their members separated from each other on poor and deteriorating rates and declining conditions. At the time, they were often at the mercy of arrogant employers, be they state or private.

Hyett grasped that it was vital that all railway workers combine into a single, industry-wide Union to advance their wages and conditions collectively. By 1911, Hyett's persistence for an industry-wide Union had impressed the many grades of railway workers. They voted by an overwhelming majority to amalgamate their respective associations into one big union, hence forth forming the Victorian Railways Union in July 1911.

The VRU was the first industrial railway Union in Australian history and prefigured the Australian Railways Union which was formed a few years later. Hyett was also politically active and was arrested and jailed for his free speech campaigns against attempts to introduce conscription during the first World War.

Tragically Hyett died on 25 April 1919 from the Spanish flu aged 37. When his coffin was carried by train home to Box Hill, it passed Glenferrie Oval where a cricket match was taking place: both teams stopped playing and stood in silence in respect as his coffin passed. Such was the respect working class people had for their representatives. To this day it is still ranked as one of Melbourne's largest funeral processions.

I am proud to announce that in 2019 the RTBU will be celebrating the life of Frank Hyett given the 100th year Anniversary

The second historic occasion to occur this year is on 15 May.

15 May will mark 50 years since Clarrie O'Shea, militant Union leader and Victorian Secretary of our Tram & Bus Division's predecessor union Australian Tramways and Motor Omnibus Employees Association (ATMOEA), was jailed for refusing to pay penal fines for striking on behalf of the Union. By 1969, nearly 20 continuous years of conservative Governments in Australia and Victoria meant that penal fines had become so manifestly spiked against workers for striking as to make any kind of action against the employers' greed impossible.

O'Shea and ATMOEA refused to pay their fines, upholding that only their Union's members had the right to decide what should be done with their money. The day following O'Shea's jailing saw Victorian transport workers and their Unions leading the way as Union after Union took strike action across Australia in support of Clarrie O'Shea.

No industry was left untouched as a general strike took hold and large demonstrations across the country that lasted almost a week forced the establishment to release O'Shea from Pentridge Prison. The entire Union movement as a result united around the non-payment of fines resulting in reducing the penal laws to a damp squib.

The 1969 general strike was one of the greatest victories for our working class movement and for democracy in Australia, with so many lessons for our labour movement today.

I am immensely proud of the part that our Union's history played in this struggle.

Today when fines and the law have become once again a blatant weapon against the union movement and the working class's ability to defend our interests - to say nothing of inequality, insecure work, permanent unemployment and attacks on wages and conditions having become more endemic than before - the 1969 General Strike stands in our history as a powerful lesson to our labour movement today. We can only change unjust laws and build a better and fairer society if we dare to break those laws.

This year, the RTBU will be commemorating the 50th anniversary of the general strike and Clarrie O'Shea's defiance. More details on this will follow shortly.

The lessons of O'Shea's 1969 General Strike and our Union's fighters like Frank Hyett could also not be more pressing as we approach the expiry of our current Enterprise Agreements for the major operators.

All members of our collective must stay united so we can maintain our EAs' industry standards regardless of the employer demands.

The Union believes we are in a strong position coming up to negotiations, but if the bosses or operators offer us pittance or try to push us into a corner to grab what is ours, we will not hesitate to take industrial action. Our Union rises and fights together. United we stand, Divided we fall.

Luba Grigorovitch
- State Secretary





Bryan Evans

Organiser

V/LINE INFRASTRUCTURE EA DELEGATE MEETING

This week, V/Line Infrastructure Delegates from across the state met to formulate and endorse our 2019 EA bargaining round log of claims for the V/Line Infrastructure agreement.

Signals and communications (S&C) and track were both equally represented with representatives from day and night shifts. Also present were the old guards who have fought for RTBU members since the days of the PTC winning the battles that established the conditions we enjoy today.

We have also brought in some new blood to the table, bringing fresh ideas who will fight the battles and establish the conditions members will enjoy tomorrow and in the future.

The collaboration between grades, the warhorses and the new blood was truly remarkable, and I can say with certainty that the 2019 V/Line Infrastructure EA campaign will not be one focused on "retaining all our conditions" rather it will be one focused on fighting for new and better conditions. A new and better standard for V/Line Infrastructure members in a rapidly modernising railway.

I look forward to working with you all throughout the year and thrashing it out with the companies to negotiate the best possible EA for RTBU members. As always, please give me a call on 0457 006 739 if there are any issues or anything you would like to discuss.



Joe Dennis

Organiser

AROUND THE TRAPS

Happy New Year to everyone, I hope you all had a restful break over Christmas and New Year's. 2019 will be a huge year with the upcoming Enterprise Agreement (EA) negotiations for the public transport major operators Metro, V/Line, Yarra Trams and many more smaller companies where we have members. Meetings are being planned for members and Delegates to attend so please make every effort to come along and put your ideas on the table when these meetings occur.

So far this year I have been approached by members from NSW Trainlink, who work out of Southern Cross station. These members have had their classifications changed and as a result their pay rates reduced. Many members have been working on a casual basis and are too scared to approach anyone to ask for a more permanent position as they are employed by an agency and not employed by NSW Trainlink directly.

I am currently in discussions with McArthur and will try and get to the bottom of these issues.

On an unrelated note, I have also received a number of emails and phone calls in relation to the "personal time" that staff have access to at the Probe (PTV) call centre. Staff are being monitored when they step away from their phones for longer than 2 minutes and

40 seconds. Yes, you read that correctly, 2 minutes and 40 seconds.

Staff members are going to the toilet and managers are alerted to them being away for longer than 2 minutes and 40 seconds and will then go looking for the member. This is causing staff to feel bullied and stressed for simply needing to go to the toilet. Managers feel they are doing nothing wrong and only conducting a "welfare check" but after a couple of minutes, they have got to be joking!

I have also spoken to members at Transclean regarding concern about their Category Three medicals that have come up for renewal. Transclean have informed members they are to pay for the medicals (approx. \$300 - 400) as it is a condition of their employment, however nothing was given to them and nothing signed relating to payment.

After negotiation, Transclean have come to the table and agreed to pay for the medicals for the staff at Southern Cross. I would say that Transclean will be amending the contracts of employment to include that staff are to pay in the future. Before anyone signs the "new" contract of employments, please come and see me.

See you all in 2019.

**Join the RTBU contingent at the
Midsumma Pride March this year!**

11am Sunday 3 February 2019
Fitzroy St & Catani Gardens, St Kilda

RTBU

The power of Union

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