

# RTBU EXPRESS

The Official Newsletter of the Rail Divisions of the RTBU Victorian Branch

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**Luba Grigorovitch**

State Secretary

## ALSTOM MEMBERS ARE READY TO FIGHT

Members from Alstom Ballarat Train Workshops have voted resoundingly to take industrial action in a bid to secure an agreement in-line with standard rail-industry conditions.

While negotiations with Alstom Ballarat have dragged on for months, union members from the Rail Tram & Bus Union (RTBU), Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) have voted unanimously in a ballot conducted by the AEC to endorse industrial action including indefinite stoppages to work.

Our members have been pursuing a fair outcome for just over a year, enough is enough!

Management needs to come clean on their commitment to the local workforce and stop peddling lies about a lack of work in a hope that this will intimidate members into accepting a sub-standard seal.

Adding fuel to the fire, the local manager recently denied members a chance to meet with myself & Organiser Bryan Evans down in Ballarat during their lunch break. This was a routine visit simply to update members on Enterprise Agreement (EA) negotiations.

I was proud of the unity when the entire workforce walked out in disgust to the car park to meet with both Bryan and I. Members from all unions should be congratulated on the solidarity shown that day.

The workers clearly are not scared to stand up against this new management and that has again been proven with the resounding YES vote in favour of industrial action.

This behaviour from Alstom is odd given the shortage of rolling stock across the state, also given the Government has indicated intentions of awarding further train orders to the Ballarat Workshops.

Relations between Alstom and workers have traditionally been quite good, but under new management it is clear that the same commitment to a working relationship doesn't exist. It is clear that members are fed up with the games of Alstom. This State is in the middle of the biggest uptake in train building in a generation, yet all Alstom care about is the bottom line.

If Alstom don't want to respect our workers by rewarding them with industry wages &

conditions then they are telling the State government that they don't want to build trains here in Victoria. If this is the case then there are a number of companies waiting in line to employ the workers at the Ballarat Workshops.

Alstom Ballarat is currently fulfilling a Victorian Government order of new X'Trapolis trains to meet booming demand on the Melbourne metropolitan network.

The company can continue its rhetoric of trying to rip off members, or we can settle this dispute and get back on with the job - to me it's an easy decision!

Members are aware that a mass meeting is being held on Monday 9 April 2018 at 1:45pm in Ballarat. I hope to see you all again soon and thank you for your ongoing solidarity!

**Luba Grigorovitch**

- State Secretary



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**Alice Dunn**  
Industrial Officer

## ENTERPRISE AGREEMENTS AND BARGAINING

This year started with major attacks from Metro and V/Line which have been fiercely fought off by RTBU members. I am referring, of course, to Metro's attempt to close control desks on the Clifton Hill line and V/Line's attempt to cut driver training provisions from the V/Line Rail Operations Enterprise Agreement 2015–2019. These attacks got me thinking about the importance of the entitlements and conditions set out in our Enterprise Agreements and the protection afforded to us by our union density.

Many people don't realise that Australia's industrial system is quite unique with some strengths and some weaknesses. These systems informed the strategy we adopted in each dispute and will influence the way we approach bargaining in the near future.

One of the strengths of our system is that Enterprise Agreements that are certified by the Fair Work Commission have the force of legislation. This means that the entitlements can be enforced by our court system and this is very unusual by world standards. Another strength is that a breach of an Enterprise Agreement is a civil remedy provisions which means employers risk facing financial penalties if they breach a clause in an Enterprise Agreement.

There are, however, many weaknesses in our system. One includes our inability to bargain

across an industry or industries. Another important weakness is that the so-called "Fair Work" legislation prevents protected industrial action outside a bargaining period. These are major issues with our system and are out of step with standards set by the International Labour Organisation. In both disputes it is outrageous that we were not able to exercise our fundamental human right to lawfully withdraw our labour.

The strengths were important in that we were able to highlight the risks to the employers for breaching the Enterprise Agreements. With the Metro dispute we used the consultation, dispute resolution and status quo provisions as leverage.

The V/Line dispute was different in that we weren't able to rely on those provisions and the law was almost no help to us. Therefore the battle had to be won as a collective. For me this illustrated the importance of our strength in unity.

In fact, our unity won us both disputes and it sets us apart from most of Australia which is suffering declining union membership.

Looking to bargaining in the near future, it will be important to maintain our entitlements. Of course, improving our living standards

through fair pay rises is important but these disputes highlight the importance of less sexy but no less important provisions like the status quo clause which we must never give up, no matter what the incentive.

Our strength at the bargaining table will be our strength as a collective. It is no coincidence that the decline in union membership has corresponded with stagnant wage growth and rising inequality. I have previously been on a bargaining table where union density was less than 50% and the result was cuts to entitlements and pay increases that were well below inflation. Corporate enterprise is not altruistic by nature and the employer will not give anything in bargaining unless they feel they have to.

Our power is directly related to union density and this is our strength. It protects us from declining wage growth, from attacks on our entitlements and it protects us from individual attacks. However, it should not be taken for granted. In particular, younger people are less likely to understand this concept. As younger people join the industry they need to be signed up to the union in order to preserve our collective strength. The responsibility is with all of us to educate the younger generation about the importance of joining the union.

As said before – united we stand, divided we beg!





**Bryan Evans**

Organiser

## DEDICATED TFPCs FOR SIGNALS

On Tuesday the 28 March 2018 the RTBU held a meeting of Signals Members at E-Gate to discuss the safeworking practices throughout signals grades. Demands imposed upon modern Track Force Protection Coordinators (TFPCs) have finally been accepted as being a stand-alone full-time role in recognition of the critical importance of safeworking.

A TFPC's primary duty is to establish a safe work environment for infrastructure workers. They are subject to high levels of scrutiny and must be on top of any changes to track access procedures delivering a safe working environment throughout a network of ever increasing complexity to all working on track.

Breaches of safeworking procedures often lead to lengthy standowns, suspension of tickets and loss of employment as a consequence of thorough investigation by network safety, infrastructure and often HR.

The RTBU has long fought against the casualisation of TFPCs to provide stability delivering safer decision making in this safety critical role. The push to establish dedicated TFPCs throughout infrastructure is critical to addressing these concerns.

Recently Metro have begun consultation with the RTBU to establish 36 fulltime TFPCs. This is a huge step in the right direction, however, to

date there are no apparent plans for these new TFPCs to service the Signal grades. Further, changes to Pro 54 has formalised the process that enables signals members to hold dual roles i.e. supervisor/TFPC. Due to the pressures of the TFPC role, this is unacceptable.

**At the meeting the RTBU members voted unanimously in support of the RTBU launching a campaign to address the issue and demand that each signals work group receives a dedicated full-time TFPC.**



**Joe Maisano**

Organiser

## STATION CLEANING

Once again, fears have been raised around the cleaning standards at metro stations across the network. Concerns have been raised around the hygiene of common areas such as the booking office, meal room and toilets. The RTBU has been told that some staff are not comfortable using the toilets at their station, due to the state that the toilets are being left in. Often, staff are waiting till they get home to use a rest room which is completely unacceptable and disgraceful that they feel the need to do this.

Members are frustrated and they have every right to be. Since the takeover of ISS we have received numerous calls and emails from

members highlighting many of these issues across the network and enough is enough. Workers deserve to work in a clean and hygienic environment.

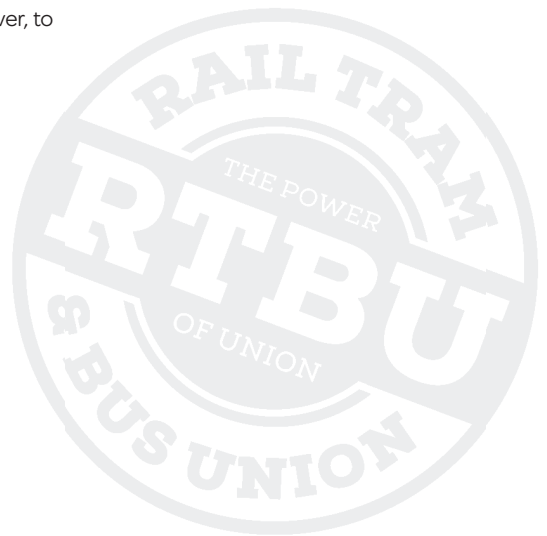
From day one of ISS taking over, the cleaning standards were completed at a very low standard. A slight improvement in the cleaning standards followed in the following weeks, this was due to the outrage and complaints from the RTBU membership.

I can honestly say that the passengers travelling on the Metro Trains network will see for themselves what a mess the stations are at this time, and I hope that Metro will act on this and

ensure that ISS are doing their job correctly, for the safety of both passengers and staff.

The RTBU has written to Metro to raise many of these concerns in the hope of getting something done about this. In Metro's response, they have advised us that they have initiated a higher level of audits and inspection programs for ISS and that they are in daily contact with ISS management and operational personnel to ensure adherence to their contract is met.

We will keep members updated with any movements on this issue.







**Cathy Birch**

Organiser

## UNIFORM BLUES

One of the astounding things I hear from members on a regular basis is that their uniforms make it harder for them to do their jobs. Most of the issues are reported by women in operations.

Female Authorised Officers (AOs) have shown me how buttonholes which are too big for the buttons make their shirt buttons undo themselves and some have resorted to stitching their shirts closed permanently. Others wear their equipment bearing vests closed over their shirts all the time to make sure they aren't inadvertently exposing themselves.

Equipment bearing vests are heavy with all the weight carried on the front. This means many of our members have sore backs, some members have resorted to attaching stuff to their pants belt loops. If companies looked to other industries where people are required to carry equipment a better arrangement could be found, without too much effort.

One staff member told me of requesting the same replacement item THIRTEEN times before she finally received it. The correct documentation was submitted each time. And this is not an isolated incident. Frequently the uniform store can't supply items because there is none in stock. New staff go out without the right uniform as it is not available to be issued.

The quality of the garments is usually poor, and synthetic fabrics are known for causing allergic reactions and noted for their inability to breathe. Staff are exposed to the extremes of heat and cold and don't consider their uniforms adequately protect them from the elements. The women's pants are stitched together by a single seam from hip to knee. On more than one occasion the thread has broken with women then exposed from hip to knee. Staff often can't

get new pants. The pockets on the women's trousers are too small for a phone or wallet and are literally not deep enough to put your hand in.

Only in this year have women's safety boots been added to the Authorised Officer women's uniform order form, and only then because staff and the union pushed for it. Prior to this it was only by special order.

Wearing scarves for AOs was made mandatory from 1 March 2018. Because of safety concerns with scarves not being able to be safely ripped off, velcro scarves have been introduced, but only recently and only after much pushing from members and the union. Staff have not been able to get these on request and Velcro scarves are still not on the order form.

Staff in stations are issued with five shirts when recruited and may claim two new ones each year. So the last shirt will be at least three years old before it is replaced, while two would be only a year old. It is also common for new staff to find stores do not have their uniform in stock and they get sent out with only parts of their uniform, therefore taking weeks to get it all.

Because AOs are often exposed to the elements, thermal underwear was issued to staff two years back. These were 'non replaceable items' which means once they are no longer wearable, you get to chuck them out and you can't have new ones. Additionally, a single set was issued despite the fact that staff work nine days straight as part of their roster.

V/Line Conductors were issued shirts which became see through when wet. Attempts to get this uniform item recalled were unsuccessful with V/Line making the concession of allowing conductors to

wear drivers' shirts which are dark blue.

Negotiations to allow station staff to ditch the scarf and tie during summer and at other times when 27 degrees and over was a hard-won concession which to date Metro still refuses to confirm with the union or with staff in writing. Negotiations to have shorts, even smart shorts, added to the uniform as optional has been repeatedly stone walled.

Some may read this article and say that I am simply 'having a rant', others might ask 'well what is the union doing about it?'

The answer to both of these questions I can state that I, I am venting and that is because I hope managers read this article and realise that when staff are required to wear uniforms which make it harder, not easier for them to do their jobs, they feel their employer does not care about them. When staff are required to wear uniforms, which do not increase comfort levels in weather extremes, they feel their comfort does not matter to their employer. Rail operators expect their staff to be well presented and professional in appearance. They also can't understand why women leave rail in the high percentages they do. Might some of the answers be here?

The second part, the union has countless uniform wins for members over the years, but the truth is that still no uniform is perfect. In saying that, if something is wrong with your uniform, or if you simply don't feel comfortable then please email your uniform concerns to [rtbu@rtbuvic.com.au](mailto:rtbu@rtbuvic.com.au)

You are the Union and you can make a difference!

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