

RTBU EXPRESS

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Luba Grigorovitch
State Secretary

50 YEARS ON, CLARRIE O'SHEA'S LEGACY RINGS LOUD



A 10 piece comic series has been commissioned by the RTBU to tell the story of Clarrie O'Shea & the 1969 General Strike. Comic researched, written and illustrated by Sam Wallman. For the full comic visit the RTBU website: rtbuvic.com.au/clarrie-oshea



****Adapted from the Original publication posted online at www.rtbuvic.com.au on Wednesday 15 May 2019**

Fifty years ago, a Victorian union leader was sent to prison for standing up against tyranny.

The jailing of Clarrie O'Shea triggered Australia's mass post-war industrial uprising, the General Strike of 1969, with around one million Australians taking part in the strike.

The General Strike came at a pivotal moment in the history of modern Australia.

After nearly twenty years of conservative rule under Menzies, Holt, McEwen and Gorton, Australia was finding its modern, progressive voice.

Our First Peoples had finally won the right to vote, support for the Vietnam War was starting to fade following the Tet offensive, and the Beatles were about to drop their seminal Abbey Road album.

The times were a changin'.

Meanwhile, conservative forces were starting to worry that their choke-hold on political power was slipping. They were determined to quell any sense of popular rebellion.

Into this volatile mix strode Clarrie O'Shea – a Melbourne tram conductor, who had been the Secretary of the Victorian Branch of the ATMOEA, the Tramways Union, since 1947.

Clarrie was no shrinking violet. While genial and funny, and a keen punter, he strongly believed that the capitalist system was stacked against working people, and he dedicated his life to upending the injustices he saw around him.

He also believed that workers had an inalienable right to strike. So when the courts piled fine upon fine upon fine onto the Tramways Union for taking unauthorised industrial action, he stood firm and refused to pay.

The authorities seized ATMOEA's bank

accounts - but the Union had taken precautions by moving most of its money elsewhere.

Summoned to the Industrial Court, O'Shea turned up flanked by thousands of workers and unionists.

Before presiding Judge Sir John Kerr (later to become Australia's most infamous Governor General) he refused to take an oath or to disclose the whereabouts of the union's remaining funds.

"I do not wish to be sworn," he said. "I challenge the authority of this court ... because I am a paid servant of my members, I am directed to protect their interests at all times."

"I do not want to hear any speeches from you," Kerr replied.

After adjourning court for half an hour, Kerr came back to invoke the Industrial Court's controversial 'penal powers', and ordered O'Shea be taken to Pentridge Prison.



He was told he would remain in jail indefinitely – to be freed only when he “purged his contempt”, by revealing where the Union’s funds had been stashed.

The news spread like wildfire. Thousands of Victorian unionists walked off the job immediately. Workers in other states quickly followed suit – some through organised strikes, many more through wildcat actions.

Soon over one million Australian workers withdrew their labour in protest over the jailing of Clarrie O’Shea, and the use of state power to attack working people.

The situation became untenable for the Federal Government. As the crisis escalated, a ‘philanthropist’ paid the outstanding fines, breaking the deadlock, and enabling O’Shea to be set free.

Today’s parallels with 1969 are startling.

We now have had conservative rule for 17 of the past 23 years. Across the economy, union density is at historic lows, and the bargaining power of workers has been smashed.

Workers’ wages are barely keeping up with inflation, while jobs are becoming more precarious.

Casualisation of work is rampant, while the much-trumpeted new frontier of the gig economy is little more than a re-badged form of serfdom.

Today, it is commonplace for people to be working two, three or four different jobs just to make ends meet.

The right to strike has been whittled away by successive governments. Last year, striking NSW rail workers – taking legitimate and legal protected industrial action – were forced to go back to work by the Fair Work Commission.

Trade unions have been under relentless attack. The Trade Union Royal Commission spent nearly two years and over \$45 million crawling through union records and publicly grilling union officials.

Permanent quasi-judicial bodies such as the Registered Organisations Commission (ROC) and the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) have been established purely to monitor, regulate and disrupt union activities, and to tie union officials in a web of red-tape, seeking to prosecute Unions, Officials and Activists for their efforts to protect their members’ interests. While the CFMEU has played a big role in the fight against the ABCC,



RTBU Officials from across Australia in attendance to celebrate and remember our important history

Members of the RTBU working on rail projects and infrastructure are also in the firing line.

As we have seen with the botched Federal Police raids on the AWU, the close ties between the Coalition Government’s offices and these bodies has raised serious questions about integrity and the abuse of government power.

Our labour movement has now been through a painful defeat with the outcome of the federal election. The Morrison Government has been narrowly re-elected to office in its own right and the Labor Party opposition, with our union movement’s support, has fallen unexpectedly and disappointingly short of an anticipated victory.

Nothing can alleviate the pain and demoralisation so many unionists and activists will be feeling now. There is much that our union movement and leadership must now reflect on honestly, including the role and direction of the Change The Rules campaign in the election, if we’re to go forward. But the lessons of the 1969 General Strike and Clarrie O’Shea’s example could not be more stark to us now.

As one, mighty movement of working people and the excluded, we must struggle and resist every attack this Government and the bosses make on us. We must defend our living standards, right to bargain and democratic freedoms. And we must dare to do this by using the one weapon we possess, the power of our collective action.

The RTBU continues to bargain within our industry for our new Enterprise Agreements. But our industrial strength disposes us to come

to the aid of fellow workers and unionists should the need arise and they strike to defend their essential rights. Likewise, we will not hesitate to do so ourselves. Should our comrades in the construction industry come under attack for resisting the ABCC, we must stand with them in a battle on behalf of all workers.

Wage earners across Australia rise and fall together on the collective principle. Morrison, his conservatives and the bosses should now: we will not hesitate to strike and struggle to defend our rights and dignity. We dare to struggle and dare to win.

United we stand. Divided we fall.

Luba Grigorovitch
- State Secretary



Bryan Evans
Organiser

METRO’S ROLLING STOCK EA OFFER

Organising is not always a clear-cut affair. It is an Organisers job to consult with, and represent the views of the membership, to park one’s own personal view of the situation, listen to members, refine often differing opinions, and relay that message back to management.

This can present some interesting challenges from time to time. For example when you’re sitting at the bargaining table and management make an offer regarding a replacement agreement, and that offer makes every inch of your being want to wretch and expel its breakfast across the table that you happen to be bargaining at. In this instance, one must pause, breathe, and take that offer back to the members. Funnily enough, that is exactly what I experienced at the bargaining meeting for the Metro Trains Melbourne (MTM) Rollingstock Agreement held on Friday 17 May.

Now just because we cannot act on our own opinions alone, doesn’t stop us from having one, and I personally couldn’t resist the opportunity to relay my personal view on MTM’s latest offer.

In terms of background to date, both MTM and the Unions (RTBU, ETU & AMWU) have spent the bulk of the time discussing and explaining our various claims and the reasoning for them. It has been no secret that the RTBU’s priority this agreement has been job security, skills and clauses that enable members to affect the outcomes of modernisation and recent investment in the railways.

So far some of these discussions seemed to resonate with both parties and potential clauses to cater for them explored. This screamed to a relatively sudden halt at the last meeting, when MTM out of left field decided quite suddenly that it was time to put the below offer on the table.

MTM’s proposes that if you agree to these conditions:

- Limit Salary maintenance for a three-month period (currently indefinite)
- Amend Schedule D (the roster change clause) so that MTM have the ability to proceed with a roster change without seeking agreement, by providing 28 days’



notice and as compensation, MTM would make a once off payment to the value of wages lost over the following three-month period (currently by agreement)

MTM will offer:

- 2% a year over a 4 year agreement, and;
- Increase the amount reimbursed for prescription safety glasses to \$400.

Currently, if MTM were to propose that a classification or grade were to be made redundant and that grade were redeployed to lower paying duties to maintain employment, the member would retain their current classification on an ongoing basis. In other words, you won’t be disadvantaged by the change.

MTM’s proposed change however, seeking that a limit of three months be imposed on this condition during a time of enormous modernisation, change and investment, where a skills pathway or plan has not been agreed but remains under heavy debate with the Unions, indicates that MTM stand to gain enormously from exploiting members whom they perceive as vulnerable to projected changes.

This compounds with MTM’s desire to change your rosters as they see fit while offering a substandard pay rise. It is my view that one does not need to be a clairvoyant to understand what MTM’s intention is here. However, a “trustworthy” source has reassured the unions that this claim and MTM’s roster change proposal are in no way connected.

Perhaps they are simply hoping that the bulk of members have questionable eyesight and that as a consequence the proposed increase to the reimbursement of prescription safety glasses will receive rave reviews.

Regardless of my personal view, the offer must be discussed with the membership. In order to do so, there is a meeting of Delegates from all unions being held on Wednesday 29 May. Please forward your opinion to your respective Delegate prior to the meeting so it can be taken into account.

Members must stand shoulder to shoulder this EA. This is not the time for division or petty squabbling. United we stand, United we will win.

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Infrastructure, Workshops
& Labour Hire
Organiser: Bryan Evans

Industrial Officer
Vik Sharma

Rail Operations /
Administration
Organiser: Joe Maisano



DELEGATES MEETING DATES – JUNE 2019

- **4 June:** Metro Central – Melbourne Central – 1100 – 1200hrs
- **5 June:** Metro NSS / CCTV – 1100 – 1200hrs
- **7 June:** Probe (PTV Call Centre) – 1000 – 1100hrs
- **12 June:** MMAOs – B & D Delegates – 1100 – 1200hrs
- **12 June:** Metro Caulfield – 1100 – 1200hrs
- **13 June:** V/Line Southern Cross – 1000 – 1100hrs
- **17 June:** Malvern AOs – A & D Delegates – 1000 – 1100hrs
- **17 June:** Hawthorn AOs – A & D Delegates – 1200hrs – 1300hrs
- **19 June:** Wilson Security – 1300 – 1400hrs
- **19 June:** Metro Northern / Clifton Hill – Nth Melb – 1100 – 1200hrs
- **20 June:** Pacific National – 1500 – 1600hrs
- **21 June:** V/Line North East – 1100 – 1200hrs
- **21 June:** Metro Burnley – 1100 – 1200hrs
- **25 June:** TfV (Transport for Victoria) – 1400 – 1500hrs
- **26 June:** North Melbourne AOs – B & C Delegates – 1000 – 1100hrs
- **26 June:** TPH AOs – B & C Delegates – 1200 – 1300hrs
- **26 June:** V/Line Control – 1100 – 1200hrs
- **27 June:** Metrol, Timetables, Rosters & Signallers – 1000 – 1200hrs
- **28 June:** V/Line Shunters – Geelong – 1100 – 1200hrs

RTBU SOFT SHELL JACKETS

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per jacket



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Choice of colour: Black or Navy Blue

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