

# RTBU EXPRESS

The Official Newsletter of the Rail Divisions of the RTBU Victorian Branch  
**VOL 6 | Issue 09 | 18 June 2019**



**Luba Grigorovitch**

State Secretary

## REMEMBERING FRANK HYETT

This year, RTBU Officials, Members, Delegates, family members and other comrades gathered for two events to commemorate and remember the life of the great Frank Hyett, socialist, militant unionist and inaugural secretary of the Victorian Railways Union from 1911-1919.

Frank Hyett (1882-1919) was a fighter for the working class for his entire life. Entering the workforce aged 13 to support his widowed mother and siblings, he soon became an activist in the Victorian Socialist Party (VSP), a radical working class political party which set itself against the whole of the capitalist system and class society and sat to the left of the Labor Party. In 1910, Frank joined the Amalgamated Society of Railway Engineers as an Organiser and hit the ground running - his energy, zeal and dedication to the role saw him rise to become the Society's General Secretary just two months later.

Frank shared the vision of establishing one united, industry-wide railways union to unite all railway workers and collectively advance their wages and conditions and real down the barriers of the smaller craft-based unions which left them divided, weakened and at the mercy of employers.

Frank's ambition came to fruition in July 1911, when an overwhelming majority of organised railway workers voted by plebiscite to amalgamate into one Victorian Railways Union. The VRU prefigured the Australian Railways Union formed in 1920 and with Frank assuming the VRU's secretaryship, Victorian general railway workers made huge strides advancing their rates, conditions and standing on the job. This was no easy feat as it was then illegal for railwaymen as public servants to strike.

With the coming of World War I in 1914 and the attempts by the treacherous government of Billy Hughes to impose conscription for Australia's armed forces, Frank threw himself into the labour movement's struggle against conscription. He served on the Victorian Trades Hall Council's Anti-Conscription Committee



*Adam McGrath with Branch Secretary Luba Grigorovitch & Rail Operations Divisional Secretary Darren Galea*

and contributed much to the triumphant defeat of both referenda to introduce conscription in 1916 and 1917.

Frank Hyett tragically died on April 25th, 1919, struck down by the pandemic of the Spanish influenza, aged only 37. He was survived by his wife and fellow Socialist, Ethel and their three children. His funeral procession from Melbourne to Box Hill Cemetery was flanked and attended by thousands, and when the train carrying his coffin arrived at Box Hill the local cricket team playing on the green paused their match in silence.

Frank had been a champion footballer and cricket player, rising to a first league cricketer on the Victorian Cricket League at the time of his death. Such was the way working class people and their leaders enriched their communities in all walks of civic life. Frank is also notable for his close friendship with John Curtin, then a fellow VSP activist and anti-conscriptionist fighter who would become Australia's wartime Labor Prime Minister during World War II. Hyett was perhaps Curtin's closest male friend of his lifetime, and his death left him utterly devastated.

On Wednesday 24 April 2019 at Box Hill Cemetery, comrades gathered to lay a wreath

at the grave of Frank Hyett. The RTBU has revived Frank's memorial at Box Hill Cemetery and is proud to see it returned to its former glory 100 years later.

We have also created an award in honour of Frank Hyett which will be awarded annually to one recipient who has made an outstanding and meritorious contribution to our collective. An RTBU member who has time and time again shown their dedication to the Union through hard work, persistence, comradery and leadership.

The first recipient of this award was Adam McGrath. Adam is the Delegate for Pacific National (PN) Melbourne Freight Terminal and was instrumental in the negotiations for PN's Enterprise Agreement (EA) which is a National Agreement covering freight terminals across the country.

Adam is hard working, staunch and dedicated to the cause, travelling across the entire country for the EA Vote No campaign when a shonky deal was offered to the members by PN. In a difficult and toxic company, Adam has excelled as Delegate and through his and many other Delegates and Officials hard work, a 90% vote against the proposed agreement was achieved.

I was proud to present Adam with the award on Thursday 2 May and I look forward to continuing to support Adam fighting the good fight.

Further, in paying our respects to Frank Hyett's life and struggle, the RTBU and our members must always reaffirm its' significance: a faith of action in the working class and its ability to organise and fight for its rights and dignity, and a belief in the cause of socialism, peace and solidarity as the working people's rightful rewards. In an Australia and world more beset by social inequality, exploitation, injustice and war than ever before, the lessons of Frank Hyett are all the more salutary.

Frank Hyett, your memory lived on.





**Joe Dennis**  
Organiser

## AROUND THE TRAPS



So far this month I have been busy with several issues relating to rostering. Both Metro and V/Line have been busy getting rosters out to members without the proper consultation process that should have taken place. As a result of operators trying to “rush” these rosters into the workplace, the RTBU has held the process up and advised the companies that they need to go through the correct process by consulting with the union and forming a working party prior to the rosters being sent to all members.

The city loop stations are currently in a trial with the platforms now being staffed in the PM peak periods. Staff are now two-up on busy platforms and the barriers are left open with one staff member available to answer customer enquiries. Staff have been informed that they are to walk away if they feel that they are in danger. Staff safety is the number one priority and members should always be safe.

If you don't feel safe, walk away.

Probe Enterprise Agreement has now been expired for over five weeks and the company is yet to come to the table and begin bargaining. Probe has three sites around Melbourne, and members are becoming frustrated with the company, banding together in solidarity to force this company to begin bargaining.

Call centre employees are vastly underpaid and conditions are in desperate need of being strengthened. The lack of cooperation from this company has strengthened our position as a union in the workplace, people are joining the union to show Probe we stand united in the struggle for decent conditions. A majority support determination has been filled in and the next step is to lodge for Protected Industrial Action. Watch this space.

### Update your details

Have you moved house, change jobs, phone numbers or emails recently?

With Enterprise Agreement negotiations for all of the major operators occurring this year, it is important that your details are up to date so that you receive updates about your Enterprise Agreement.

Email [rtbu@rtbuvic.com.au](mailto:rtbu@rtbuvic.com.au) or call 8630 9100 to update your details.



**Darren Galea**  
Organiser

## SHORTS FOR SHUNTERS

For a number of years, the RTBU has been fighting for Shunters to be able to wear shorts while at work.

Many years ago, Shunters had the ability to wear shorts, however it was taken away. Through many years of negotiation and consultation, frustration continued to grow within the membership as this dragged on. V/Line continued to reject the claim for shorts under the pretence of trying to protect workers from skin cancer.

The Shunters along with Delegate Tim Ashcroft and I continued to fight and requested that a Risk Assessment occur. The results of the risk assessment showed that there was minimal risk of a Shunter being harmed by wearing shorts while at work.

There was an overwhelming positive response from the Shunters when this result was communicated, and after many years of fighting management, the shorts have now been



V/Line Shunters from Southern Cross

reinstated.

I would like to thank Delegate Tim Ashcroft and Health and Safety Representative Tom Ruff for

all their hard work in getting this done. Without the hard work of Tim, other Delegates and HSRs for the Shunters, this outcome would not have been achieved.

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