

# RTBU EXPRESS

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**Luba Grigorovitch**  
State Secretary

## UNITY IS STRENGTH: THE SUBURBAN GUARDS' STRIKE OF 1987

As a union we've recently commemorated the Great Strike of 1917. In this strike, Rail and Tram unionists revolted against management attempts to make their work harder. Rail workers downed tools for over a month in protest and the strike spread into other industries across the country. But this wasn't the last managers or governments heard from the mighty solidarity of rail workers.

33 years later, now 67 years ago in 1950, Drivers and Guards also led a huge campaign to enforce overtime limits. In this long stop work even the rail bosses in Victoria were on side while the Fair Work Commission of the day would not allow a resolution. The issue in this case was unpaid overtime – which we now call wage theft. The Victorian government of the time was not happy with the situation at hand and ultimately, they intervened to save its bottom line.

These were the two longest railway strikes of the Twentieth Century. But there was a third. It happened 30 years ago over a job role long gone: the Suburban Guards' Strike of 1987.



Our "friends" in the management of what is now PTV had long harbored a grudge against the Guards Section of the Australian Railways Union. A diverse group of men from working class backgrounds, including "migrants" from Italy to India and Sri Lanka, they had a history of standing up for themselves and proudly for each other.

So, when in 1987 it was proposed to get rid of the people in charge of the safeworking of suburban trains, the stiff necks of the Guards stood proud.

37 years after the end of the 1950 strike – to the day, although at the time they did not know it – the Suburban Guards Section voted (almost unanimously) to strike in the lead up to Christmas.

Why? Well here's the thing: it was not just about the mortgage, or the trip overseas. The staunchest of the strikers were the older men. I am told by a proud retired RTBU unionist that when some asked the question of why they should go on strike in the union meetings the answer was simple:

"It's not my job; I'm just holding it for the next person who comes along. It might be my son, it might be somebody else's kid, but we have to keep these jobs for the young people."

The guards won that dispute and in-turn every one of our members kept their jobs.

This was a huge win in 1987. However, this wasn't the end of the fight for the guards. In 1993, the Kennett union-busting juggernaut hit our Union and the Guards were altogether "abolished". At this point it only took a trivial 24-hour strike for the government to negotiate jobs for people who wanted to stay and redundancy deals for those who wanted to leave.

Looking back it is obvious that the government of the day were afraid of the stiff necks of our members who had already weathered the storm; they were afraid of the power of unionists.

Now, if you are an Authorised Officer, a Driver, Signaller, a Track Worker, or work in the Stations or Train Control and you find that one of your work mates was a Suburban Guard, buy them a cup of whatever they drink and ask them about their experience of 1987.

Their stories of past battles and experiences are stories of our strength, the history of our jobs and our industry today. These are the unionists who have weathered the storm and offer us a wealth of knowledge.

This is what a unionist looks like.

Every time you stand up against workplace bullying, unfair management practices and social injustice in general, you can look in the mirror and know, this is what a unionist looks like!

The jobs we defend are not ours: we must hand them on. 1987 is a bloody long time ago, but tomorrow beckons. Here's to a future based on solidarity, looking out for each other, hard work and ensuring that our union thrives.

There will no doubt be many more battles on the horizon. United may we stand. United may we win!

**Luba Grigorovitch**  
- State Secretary





**Cathy Birch**

Organiser

## APPROACHING THE FESTIVE SEASON

As the festive season approaches, employers are always looking for reasons to call members in for formal meetings.

When the "request for meeting" letters arrive for members, RTBU Delegates and Organisers fight to best represent the interests of those affected members. However, members need to be aware that more and more these days, employers are keeping an eye on sick leave being taken.

Employers are always attempting to minimise the amount of sick leave taken, and attempt to hold staff to account if they take sick leave and the employer believes they are not in fact sick.

In this industry, most office workers don't have to decide until an hour before they are due to start work whether they are well enough to return from sick leave. However, for reasons

of rostering, shift workers in many areas must report back from sick leave anything up to 18 hours before their next shift or it will be reallocated to someone else. This can result in what is seen as an unfair situation, where you are better and are ready to come to work but may not be able to due to not being able to provide enough notice. This day is then also taken as sick leave.

Therefore, here is where a problem could arise: You are seen out and about behaving as if you are not sick while being paid sick leave. This causes most of the problems. The impression could be created that you are fraudulently taking sick leave although in fact it is the system which prevented you from returning to work.

An additional issue which is not immediately apparent is that this is considered to be "a breach of the trust necessary for any ongoing

relationship" which might result in your employment being terminated.

So please members, be smart. If this applies, call in and say you are well enough to return to work before you go out and get seen being festive. This will save you the traumatic and possibly job ending experience of an investigation and disciplinary. And isn't that the best outcome for everyone?



## RTBU Women Gold Coin Donation Morning Tea



Thank you to all brothers and sisters of the RTBU who attended the RTBU Women Gold Coin Donation Morning Tea.

The morning tea was a great success in raising money for beyondblue to assist them in achieving their vision of all people in Australia achieving their best possible mental health.

## Freedom in a home loan isn't hard to find.

**For an appointment contact Doris Brunetti on 0439 353 267.**

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**Joe Maisano**

Organiser

## RECRUITMENT IN METRO AND V/LINE

### Metro

For some time now, there has been an ongoing issue with the Matrix recruitment system which Metro implemented for the station grades.

The Matrix was brought in by Metro some months ago in the station grade and has been expanded to cover all grades across Metro.

The matrix is a tool that is used to short list candidates when applying for roles, instead of the previous interview panel. The recruitment method has seen many members unjustly denied opportunities for career

progression and in turn, has left them feeling underappreciated.

Previously in the station grades, anything SO2 Full Time and above was recruited through the interview process, however since the introduction of the Matrix, all grades are now being put through the matrix, rather than the interview process. This takes away the opportunity for members to have face to face interaction with the management and therefore disadvantages them.

This is currently in formal dispute and has been for many months now with MTM being reluctant to meet and resolve the issues. Going forward, the RTBU will formally write to MTM outlining the objections of the membership to the Matrix and requesting a meeting to discuss the points outlined in the letter.

We hope this can be resolved as soon as possible so that members will no longer be disadvantaged.

### V/Line

In V/Line we have also put in a formal dispute for the expression of interest recruitment pool process. This process disadvantages members for many reasons, some of which being:

- Members who miss the opening and closing period of applications are having to wait for the next recruitment drive for them to be able to apply for a different position in V/Line. This can be a wait of up to 12 months in some cases.
- Members are disadvantaged by the recruitment drive process, where if they are not currently in the recruitment pool, they will not be considered for any roles during the six-month validity of that recruitment pool/list.
- Members are reluctant to apply for the pool as it is unclear what roles are vacant. Roles should be advertised individually for each vacancy, not collectively through the recruitment pool.
- V/Line are not exhausting all internal applications before moving on to external applications.
- If members are working in a role under secondment provisions and another position becomes available, the seconded staff should be required to apply for the new position through the normal processes as do other staff.

I have written to Jonathan McKeown, Acting Executive General Manager Customer to attempt to resolve these issues. Since then, a meeting has occurred between Jonathan, V/Line management, RTBU Delegates and I.

While many issues were outlined in the letter and meeting, V/Line have addressed a mere one of those points, with their position remaining that the recruitment pool is transparent and fair.

The RTBU will continue to work towards a resolution for both of these issues with both operators so that members are no longer disadvantaged.







**Darren Galea**

Organiser

## CONDUCTORS ON ROAD COACHES

Some months ago, through the monthly delegates meeting it was brought to the attention of the RTBU that there are many safety risks with Conductors travelling on replacement road coaches.

Conductors voiced fear in travelling on buses with potential troublesome passengers, as there is no protection or place for them to go where they are safe and protected.

RTBU representatives have fought tooth and nail to get a risk assessment done, however there was much resistance from V/Line, making this a lengthy process that dragged out for far longer than necessary.

Through pressure from the RTBU and Delegates, we were able to get a working party together with representatives from every

region in Victoria. Since then, there has only been one meeting of the working party prior to going through the risk assessment.

Many safety concerns were highlighted in the risk assessment some of which being;

- Travelling one up on a road coach with no refuge
- Carrying large sums of cash while being exposed to the public
- Carrying blank tickets and Mykis while being exposed to the public
- Travelling with aggressive passengers

RTBU representatives have been promised by V/Line management that we will receive information and feedback from the risk assessment within the next few weeks. Once this occurs, we will be in touch with the membership to update them on the situation and its progress.

I would like to thank the Trades Hall OHS unit who have been assisting me with this risk assessment and many others recently. Their assistance has been invaluable in getting this risk assessment done.

Remember, your safety is the number one priority, so if you feel unsafe at work for any reason, let the Union know.



**Organiser Darren Galea with members at Camperdown station**

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