

RTBU EXPRESS

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20 YEARS ON AND STILL FIGHTING!



**Luba
Grigorovitch**
State Secretary

March 6 2017 marked the 20th anniversary of one of the most significant union disputes in the history of the

Victorian labour movement and one which affected every Rail, Tram and Bus worker in this state.

The fore runner of the RTBU, known as the Public Transport Union (PTU) consisting of the recently amalgamated Australian Railways Union (ARU), Australian Tramways and Motor Omnibus Employees Association (ATMOEA) and the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemen (AFULE), were involved in a bitter industrial dispute with the Conservative Liberal Government led by Jeff Kennett and his Transport Minister Robin Cooper.

The union faced a series of attacks from the conservative Government who had obviously fallen deeply in love with Margaret Thatcher's UK privatisation agenda.

The Kennett Government was seeking to break up the Public Transport Corporation (PTC) while attacking workers' rights. Some of the major issues included:

- No guarantee that existing employees will be offered jobs in the new corporations/private operators.
- No guarantees as to the wages, terms and conditions of employment under the corporations e.g. loss of leave entitlements, pay etc.

- No guarantee that new superannuation arrangements will not disadvantage existing workers e.g. loss of benefits, reduction in retirement benefits etc.

On 6 March 1997 members from the PTU and other unions involved in the Public Transport sector filled the Collingwood town hall to the brim and an angry and determined meeting supported a joint unions campaign strongly opposing the Kennett Government's campaign to slash and burn jobs and working conditions across the industry.

The Kennett Government's media supporters at the Herald Sun went off their heads as headline after headline blurted out the massive disruption caused by a 48-hour strike from midnight Friday 7 March which impacted on Kennett's beloved Grand Prix, Moomba, Flemington Races, and Ansett Cup football preseason to name a few.

In April, Kennett announced a massive privatisation process for Public Transport, hoping to defeat the union to enable a smooth transition to a privatised network with a humiliated and defeated workforce.

The unions stepped up their campaign, targeting the Minister for Transport Robin Cooper's proposed changes to superannuation which would have seen workers in the industry losing large amounts of funds at retirement (Unions fought this and made examples of the potential impact on workers). Pressing home on this issue, the Unions released stickers and leaflets that said "ROBIN COOPER, ROBBIN' SUPER", a slogan that would come to haunt him and the rest of the Kennett Government.

The unions also seeking wage increases under a new enterprise agreement were informed by the PTC that any offsets would have to be funded by cutbacks equivalent to twice the value of the wage increase. This meant cuts to jobs and in typical fashion, management put on the table in the following weeks and months, further cuts.

Cuts to annual leave, leave loading, sick leave, shift allowances, and longer work hours to name a few.

Due to the intransigence of the Kennett Government and the on-again off-again negotiating style of Robin Cooper the dispute continued to harden. Maintenance Workers held stop work meetings and bans, stop work meetings were held across the industry, and flying pickets were set up at Flinders Street Station when management tried to scab on a stop work meeting.

It is a symbol of union job organisation and unity of purpose that the dispute continued for months with a campaign of continuing non-cooperation, workers not cutting corners to assist management, and working to rule with agreements strictly enforced.

In August 1997, the Government responded with stand downs and harassment of Union Officials and Delegates. The Government stated that due to maintenance bans and work to rule, the operation of several lines were suspended including the Upfield, Alamein, Williamstown, Hurstbridge, Sandringham and Epping lines.

The Government also faced another self-inflicted fiasco with the new automated and privatised ticketing system known as "Onelink" and a major dispute with Victorian Nurses. The Government was desperate to keep the issue of public transport privatisation front and centre of its strategy to defeat the union campaign to keep hard won pay, conditions and superannuation and to lessen the subsidy to any new private operators of the system.

In the end Kennett and Robin Cooper's wish list to roll back workers' entitlements and defeat the union floundered.



Some 20 years later the current enterprise agreements that have maintained hard won conditions such as pay rates, hours of work, leave loading, sick leave and annual leave, are a testament to the courage, determination and sheer bloody guts of those who fought with the bosses breathing down their backs against a privatisation hungry Government intent on destroying workers' pay, conditions and livelihoods.

20 years on Australian workplace law has changed and federal Liberal Governments have gone to great lengths to try strip away the rights of workers on the job, hinder our right to organise and blocked our right to strike. But we stand above this, in unity there is strength and we continue to find ways to make an impact and continue the fight.

If you don't fight, you lose. ■



Luba Grigorovitch
- State Secretary



BALLARAT LABOUR DAY DINNER



Joe Maisano
Organiser

Last Friday evening
RTBU Organisers,
Delegates and
members from
different divisions of

the RTBU attended The Trades Hall Dinner Function in Ballarat.

There were many guest speakers throughout the evening and some inspiring speeches from the ACTU President, Ged Kearney, pro-union Federal Politicians Doug Cameron and Catherine King and more.

Many Unions working in the region were in attendance supporting past and present Delegates and members. I had the pleasure of meeting Delegates and Members from the different divisions of our Union as well as other unions that were in attendance.

It was an honour to attend the function with our brothers and sisters of the union movement respecting past and present unionists in the Ballarat Region. ■



FRANKSTON SIGNAL BOX



Jamie Porter

Organiser

Many members will be aware that the Frankston signal box is one of the last mechanical signal boxes in the suburban network

Even though this is a great piece of history, the truth of the matter is that this box is causing physical harm to our members each and every shift.

Out of the 80 levers in the box, 14 of these levers are pulled and pushed every 10 minutes during off peak and this is doubled during peak times.

It is estimated that there are up to 1600 pulls and pushes per day. As if it isn't hard enough for one person to push and pull the levers that much, some levers are so difficult to move that they need the full force of your legs, back and arms to push and or pull into position.

Members working at Frankston signal box are dropping like flies, going on and off sick leave and in worst cases, needing to go on WorkCover and never returning to the job.

These injuries are not from an accident at work. These are injuries sustained from simply doing their day to day role.

The Signal Box currently has 4 air assisted levers out of 80 and in the last 4 years there has been no major maintenance performed on any of the levers, pins or points. Enough is enough.

Last week I visited the Frankston Signal Box and spoke to members about the concerns they have and ideas on how we can resolve this issue.

Meetings are currently being organised with RTBU Delegates and Metro Management. The RTBU will be pushing for two-up signallers at all times, more air assisted levers and regular maintenance.

No member or worker deserves to be physically hurt every shift just to ensure trains can move. ■



RIGHT TO REPRESENTATION



Darren Galea

Organiser

If you are called in for a meeting by your managers, you must be aware that you have the right to ask for a Union representative.

It is really important that you ask for the representative as the employer is not required to offer you that option, the obligation on the employer is that they are not allowed to unreasonably refuse your request for representation.

You need to also be aware that the representative is of your choice, and your manager cannot allocate or pick a representative for you. Even if your managers tell you the meeting is informal, or a 'quick chat' you still have the right to representation, and if you have suspicions about the reasons for the meeting, best to call the Union or contact your Delegate. ■

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FRANCHISE Public Transport, MR4 2016 AGREEMENT Public Hands

Early in 2017, the State Government has the rare opportunity to make a move against the damages of Kennett's privatisation and protect the interests of Public Transport workers and Victorian Taxpayers.

The **RTBU** firmly believes that Metro and Yarra Trams are not the best companies to run Victoria's Public Transport – our network would be better off back in the hands of the public, or as a bare minimum with the contracts out to market to ensure Victorians get the best possible deal. **We won't stand by as the bosses do a cozy deal with the Politicians at Spring St.**

We are calling on the State Government to make a bold move and put the **public** back into **public transport**, and return democracy to our transport and our workplaces!

To get involved in the campaign for our chance for change, visit:

www.publictransportpublichands.com

or look us up on Facebook (**RTBU Victoria**).



Health insurance premiums risen?

They haven't for RTBU members with rt's Premium Hospital cover

RTBU (Vic) members with rt's Premium Hospital cover won't pay a cent more for their cover this year. And, new Victorian members who join with the same level of cover can take advantage of the price lock benefit, too!

Remember, RTBU Health Plan members also get:**

- ✓ A 5% discount
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- ✓ A \$150 petrol or grocery voucher.

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