

# RTBU EXPRESS

The Official Newsletter of the Rail Divisions of the RTBU Victorian Branch  
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**Vik Sharma**  
State Secretary

## WORKERS UNITE!

Over 160 years ago, Victorian workers rose up to fight for their right to an 8-hour work day.

On 21 April 1856 stonemasons working on the University of Melbourne downed tools and marched to the Belvedere Hotel, demanding a radical improvement in working conditions not yet won anywhere else in the world: a limited 8-hour working day, with no loss of pay.

This milestone win was celebrated on 12 May that year with workers coming together to march and celebrate, kicking off the annual May Day celebrations we know today. This is also the history behind the Labour Day public holiday that Victorians enjoy.

Initially only a minority of workers, mainly in the building trades, won the 8-hour day. Most workers, including women and children, generally worked longer hours for less pay. It was not until January 1948 that the Commonwealth Arbitration Court approved a 40-hour, five-day working week for all Australians.

The fight for work-life balance unfortunately did not end in 1856, nor in 1948, but the lessons of this fight live on. Unity amongst workers is where our strength lies.

Today workers face new challenges with their working conditions. New technology and the gig-economy have created jobs and roles that were not foreseen years ago. These have brought new challenges for workers safety and rights.

In 2023, we are seeing more and more workers experiencing burnout. Capitalism has forced us to contend with an increasingly complex and fragmented workforce.

Unions worldwide are battling with an increase in shift work and extended hours, understaffing, rostering issues, inflexible work arrangements, casualisation and attacks on job security.

In light of the new pressures on workers and the rising cost of living, unions have continued to fight for a shorter 36-hour week with no loss of

pay for all industries. This campaign continues to grow after its success in the building industry, and hopefully one day we will see celebrations for the four-day work week.

May Day is an important day for unionists to come together and celebrate our wins and solidarity, as well as to strengthen our demands for workers rights and conditions.

This year, May Day celebrations are being held at 1pm on Sunday 7 May, out the front of Trades Hall on Lygon Street, Carlton.

**If you're keen to join the RTBU contingent, let us know at [rtbu@rtbuvic.com.au](mailto:rtbu@rtbuvic.com.au).**

Prior to May Day celebrations, like every year, Victorian Trades Hall Council will host a memorial service to remember those Victorians who lost their lives at work.

International Workers Memorial Day is a globally observed day where unions, workers and their families join together to remember those who have been killed or injured at work.

On the Trades Hall building is a plaque in remembrance of Tony Massaria, an RTBU Organiser who lost his life on the job.

This day is an important reminder to all in the union movement that we must continue our fight to ensure that workers' health and safety are protected.

Every work-related death is preventable.

If you'd like to show your solidarity, you can join the RTBU at 10:30 am on Friday 28 April, at Argyle Square in Carlton.

The ceremony will include a minute's silence at 11am and an opportunity to lay wreaths.

For those who cannot attend in person, we suggest observing a minute's silence in your workplace at 11am, Friday 28 April.

Remember the dead, fight like hell for the living.

**As many heroes sang:**

**"Eight hours to work,  
Eight hours to play,  
Eight hours to sleep,  
Eight bob a day.  
A fair day's work,  
For a fair day's pay."**



**Vik Sharma**  
Victorian Branch Secretary

**RTBU**  
The power of Union

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**David Paton**  
Organiser

## WOMEN'S CONFERENCE 2023

The RTBU recently hosted our annual women's conference which was highly successful. Women delegates, HSRs and activists from across the network came together to discuss matters that were relevant to them and their workplaces.

### In today's Australia:

- Women's superannuation retirement balances are 47 percent lower than men.
- Women are reaching retirement with an average of \$113,660 less superannuation than the average male. As a result, women are more likely to experience poverty in their retirement years and be far more reliant on the Age Pension.
- Australia's current gender pay gap for full-time work is 15.3 percent. Women earn on average \$253.70 less a week than men.

- Employees in female-dominated industries such as health care and social assistance are paid significantly less than employees in male-dominated industries.
- Women are more likely to be in casual employment than men: 25.5 percent of all female employees in Australia are casual compared to 19.7 percent of male employees.
- Women spend 64.4 percent of their average weekly working time on unpaid care work compared to 36.1 percent for men.
- Raising children accounts for a 17 percent loss in lifetime wages for women.
- On average, Australian women have to work an extra 56 days a year to earn the same pay as men for doing the same work.

- 22% of females have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace at some point.
- 50% of women have experienced sexual harassment.
- 33% of women have experienced sexual or physical violence.
- 20% of women have experienced violence by a partner.

Across the combined networks, women make up approximately 25% of our workforce. In traditionally male dominated industries women often have to work harder, smarter and faster to achieve success. Therefore, it is crucial that women are given a safe space where they can discuss and address these issues together.

The RTBU as always will continue to support our sisters at work.



**Amanda Swayn**  
Industrial Officer

## ENHANCED RIGHTS FOR EMPLOYEES SEEKING FLEXIBLE WORK

One of the legislative changes brought in by the Secure Jobs Better Pay Act is to flexible work arrangements. These changes will commence from 6 June this year. The right to request flexible working arrangements will be expanded to include employees where they are pregnant, or where they or a member of their immediate family or household, experiences family or domestic violence.

The new flexible work laws introduce changes to employers' obligations in relation to how they respond to a request. It will now be compulsory for the employer to discuss a request for flexible working arrangements with the Employee, genuinely attempt to reach an agreement and consider the consequences of a refusal for the employee.

This is a positive step given many members often report receiving a refusal letter with no prior discussion with management taking place prior.

The new laws also expand what detail must be included in the written response letter in the event of a refusal:

A written response must now include:

- An explanation of the reasonable business grounds for refusing the request and how these grounds apply to the request.
- Other changes the employer is willing to make that would accommodate the employee's circumstances or that says there aren't any changes.
- Information about referring a dispute to the Fair Work Commission.

The 21-day time limit for an employer to undertake this process and provide an answer remains the same.

The RTBU have assisted many members with disputes regarding flexible work requests and be successful in negotiating suitable arrangements. These new legislative changes will strengthen our ability to achieve outcomes that support employees who require adjustments at work to manage personal circumstances.

There are significant benefits for workplaces

when flexible work arrangements are managed well. Employees can achieve greater work-life balance, better health, lower childcare costs, and improved attendance.

Contrary to some common views, the right to request flexible work is available to a wide range of employees not just for mothers of young children. Fathers, over 55s, employees with disabilities, employees caring for elderly parents, those seeking a transition to retirement can all benefit from flexible arrangements for help with those periods in life where managing both work and home becomes challenging.

If you are considering requesting flexible work, speak to your local delegate or organiser for advice and support, or call the RTBU office.



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