

# RTBU EXPRESS



The Official Newsletter of the Rail Divisions of the RTBU Victorian Branch  
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**Luba Grigorovitch**

State Secretary

## VALE GEORGE ZANGALIS

Our union mourns the loss of our comrade and brother George Zangalis, whose life and contribution encompasses an entire generation of hard fought struggles for union and political rights for working men and women on the Victorian railways.

George died peacefully on the night of March 25th and was short of his 90th birthday.

George served in many positions in the Australian Railways Union (which helped form the RTBU) including Organiser and Branch President.

George was born in Greece in 1933 and was one of 5 children and he immigrated to Australia in 1950.

Georges first job was at GMH and years later he would recount the story of 3,000 workers in groups of 500 battling for position in a queue that stretched over 100 metres to get a hot meal. With a meal break of only 30 minutes those left at the back of the queue were lucky to get slices of bread, of which they paid full price.

George like so many newly arrived migrants of the time were unfairly seen as unskilled or semi-skilled workers and a range of prejudices by employers, governments and some in the labour movement were openly on show.

George became an organiser with the Communist Party of Australia from 1961 to 1969 and witnessed a series of strikes in the car industry, especially the ground-breaking 1964 national strike of GMH 18,000 mainly migrant workforce.

George joined the railways in 1969 and retired in 1996.

In 1972 as, North Melbourne Laurens Street Workshop Committee President George pushed forward on an issue which he was to campaign on for almost twenty years and that was the right of migrant workers to be provided access to be taught English on the job.

The railways had over 55% migrant workforce in the seventies and many had difficulty in reading, writing, or understanding English. Most

worked in large workshops, freight centres, track and construction maintenance and as station assistants.

George always felt that this situation made ripe the conditions for the exploitation of workers as well as denying access to critical safety issues and basic understanding of wages and work conditions.

George along with many of ARU migrant workers was now on a mission to rectify this.

The time for a campaign for Migrant workers' rights and to access English on the Job had finally arrived.

When George was elected as an ARU organiser in 1975 he became responsible for the Ways and Works area which saw many mainly migrant workers treated with contempt, arrogance and on occasions physical violence. Many track workers were forced to work in intolerable conditions often deep in mud and slush or extreme heat with gross violations of basic safety regulations and little to no access to basic amenities such as meal areas and toilets.

George endured physical threats against him at several sites as he tried to address workers in their own language during the lunch breaks over a period of time.

George was particularly proud of the role he played in a dispute of 1976 Car Cleaners and freight workers in West Melbourne who took successful action by occupying the Railway Administration Building in Spencer street where they won their demand for separate lunch and dressing rooms and early in the 1980's infrastructure workers had a cavalcade of trucks, tractors and bulldozers outside the front of PTC headquarters.

The re-telling of these events always made George smile.

Between 1982 and 1984 George was involved in a successful campaign to improve amenities for maintenance and construction works with air-conditioned depots, separate eating and toilet facilities, air-conditioned vehicles and portable

toilets finally been won.

But no workers victory is easily achieved and as the Organiser for the area George played a crucial role in a campaign that saw 50 stop work meetings, 20 strikes and countless job meetings to achieve a great win for all.

Through all these issues and so many more George continued to push for English on the Job.

The ARU and the Migrant Workers Committee made a series of demands on Vic Rail management including demanding that a full-time bilingual staff be accommodated in head office, workshops and depots.

Vic Rail provide information in migrant languages on awards, safety, health, compensation and superannuation and critically that Vic Rail implement the proposal for the teaching of English on the job to be available to all who wish to participate.

In the 1980's as a result of both an industrial and political campaign the ARU gained a Federal Labor Government grant to employ a full time Migrant Welfare Officer for 3 years and was also successful in getting the State Labor Government to support a new system for teaching English on the Job.

The Victorian Branch of the ARU was the first union in Australia to take trainee translators/interpreters on placement in expanding the services the union may provide to migrant members.

George would always acknowledge the work of union Shop Stewards and job Delegates and while some of the gains achieved were dismantled under the Conservative Jeff Kennett privatisation agenda, he never lost hope in union members and the Labour movement and what it stood for.

For recognition of his services to the union George became a life member in 1996.

**Luba Grigorovitch**  
- State Secretary

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**Joe Dennis**  
Organiser

## SILICIA DUST EXPOSURE



Last month I spoke with V/Line regarding the issue with aging plant and raised concerns regarding RTBU members breathing in dust while working in and around the regulator while conducting rail works. It has taken some time to get this to the attention of V/Line management, but we finally succeeded. V/Line engaged AMCOSH, a company who consult in OH&S matters. AMCOSH were engaged to conduct dust assessments on the plant cabin to assess the amount of dust members were inhaling while engaged in rail works. The first test was conducted on the 20th January 2021 was high enough that V/Line believed that someone may have falsified the readings, so they conducted a second round of testing on 8th February 2021 near the town of Brim. As a result of the second test being completed it was reported back to V/Line that the dust that the reading was 13 times the allowable limit accepted by WorkSafe Australia.

This immediately raised concerns within the workgroup and by fellow V/Line track workers throughout Victoria and Australia. It was reported that the “dust” members are breathing is Crystalline Silica, a toxic dust that attaches to your lungs causing inflammation, scarring and can cause fibrosis making it difficult to even breath.

Silica is a very common mineral found in granite, sandstone, flint, and slate which can be found in Ballast. Exposure to this “dust” can cause disease within a year and can take up to 10-15 years for symptoms occur.

On the 7th April I visited the workgroup effected and presented them with the dust report, something V/Line have not yet done since the report was completed in February. Members had asked to see the report but to date had not seen anything. V/Line management did go to site and discuss the issues with all effected workers but left members more confused and asking the RTBU to step in and request the report.

I am happy to report that the plant has now been taken from service, but this piece of plant had been in operation for over 20 years. The RTBU will be speaking with V/Line in the coming weeks to implement safety procedures such as the use of water truck on rail jobs where the dust is an issue. Future plant maintenance and members medical testing will also be raised, as currently members are not tested in relation to inhaling dust containing silica.

The RTBU will continue to fight for the health and safety of all its members now and in the future.

If any members believe they may be affected, please contact me on **0403 863 869**.



**Vik Sharma**  
Industrial Officer/  
Organiser

## V/LINE \$100 ALLOWANCE DISPUTE

As V/Line members are aware, V/Line’s payroll system has been notorious for inaccuracies for years. To address that problem, we negotiated a clause in the V/Line 2019 Agreement that would require V/Line to resolve any underpayments in wages within 72 hours. If they fail to resolve, members were entitled to \$100 allowance.

This clause is focussed on fixing the shortfall in wages in reasonable time so members can manage their financial affairs. There have been instances where there has been shortfall in wages and V/Line has failed to fix it within 72 hours. When this clause was invoked, they refused to pay the \$100 allowance. Their argument is if local timekeepers/supervisors/managers make a mistake in processing the paperwork, the \$100 allowance does not apply. It only applies if the payroll department gets all the information accurately and they make a mistake. We disagree.

This matter is now in dispute. We will keep you posted as the matter develops.

If you have any queries, feel free to ring me on **0413 363 923** or email [vik.sharma@rtbuvic.com.au](mailto:vik.sharma@rtbuvic.com.au).

### Probe - Lack of consultation

Throughout the pandemic, our PTV call centre Probe members have been working from home. Last week, half of the workforce received an email that they were required to return to working from the office with 4 days’ notice. Without any consultation with us and the members, Probe issued the direction.

There are members who have kids, caring responsibilities for family members, other responsibilities etc. Merely 4 days’ notice without any consultation would be hard for any one to organise their personal affairs and undergo this significant change in their working practices; let alone for workers who are trying to juggle their familial responsibilities at the same time.

Consequently, we wrote to Probe to address concerns regarding the notice period, lack of consultation, lack of risk assessment etc. We are awaiting a reply.

Probe members who have been impacted by this direction are encouraged to contact your Delegate or me, via **0413 363 923**.

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