

# What is Democratic Unionism?

Democratic Unionism means grass-roots-controlled unionism, not control by officials. It also means that workers in one industry should be in one union so as to remove artificial divisions that can cause disunity. Such a union should be fully organised and controlled by the membership.

To achieve this we believe a union should be organised along the following lines:

- 1. That no person employed by the union should earn more than the average income of the membership.
- 2. That spokespeople should have no executive power – all decisions should be made by the union membership in the course of mass meetings.
- 3. Spokespeople are only to act as delegates elected by the membership to carry out decisions made by the membership in mass meetings.

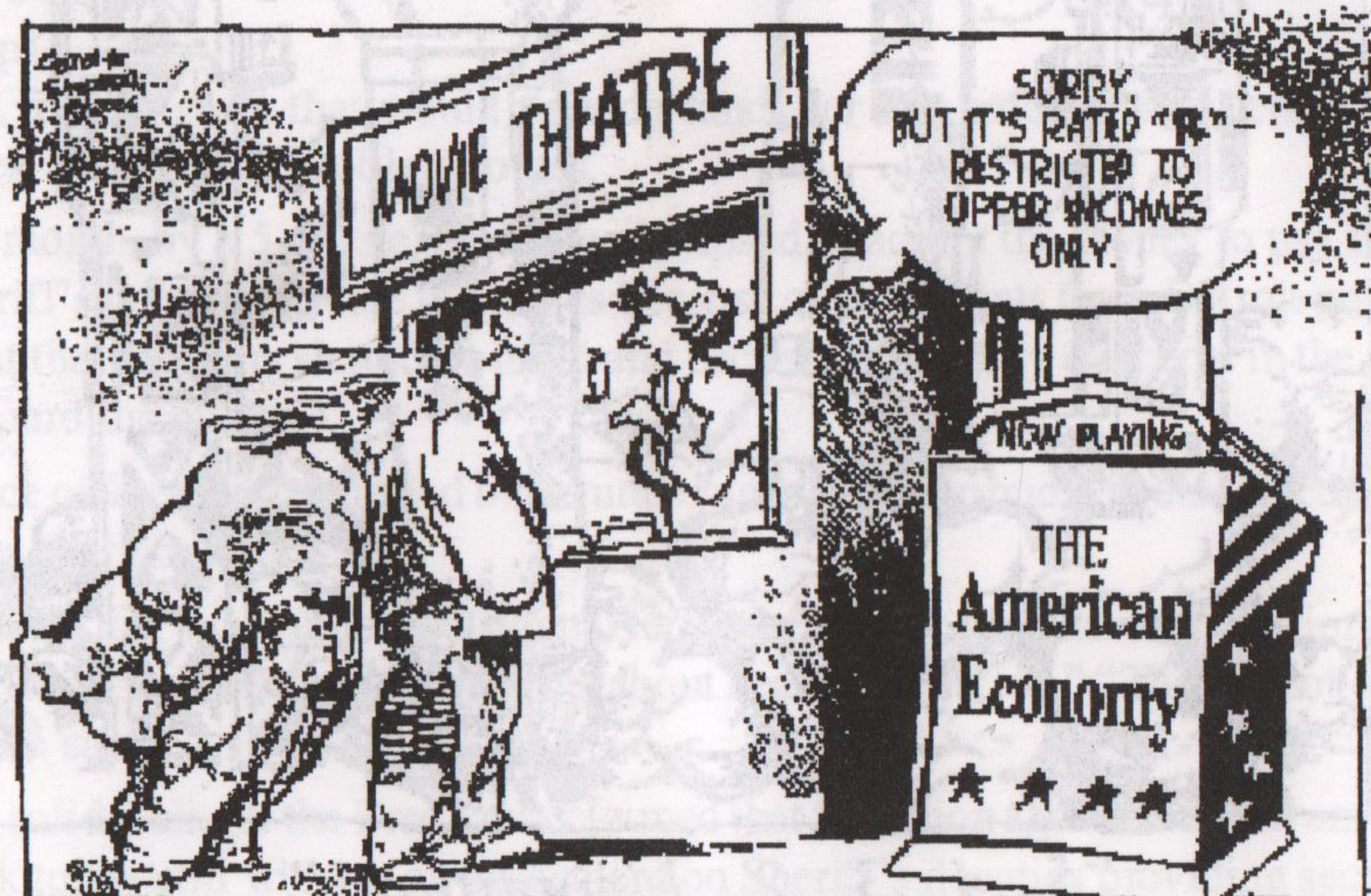
4. That a mechanism be instituted for the instant recall of spokespeople/delegates who break the above rules.

5. That all positions within the union be held on a limited tenure, the duration of which will be decided by the membership.

6. That a programme of decentralised decision-making be implemented within the union structure, so that we won't need full-time paid officials

7. All loss of earnings incurred by elected delegates who miss work as a result of carrying out union duties will be reimbursed by the union to the extent of the lost wages.

Only in this way will we see the creation of a democratic, united, fighting organisation which can stand up for the rights of workers and their families against unhelpful union officials, bosses, political parties and governments.



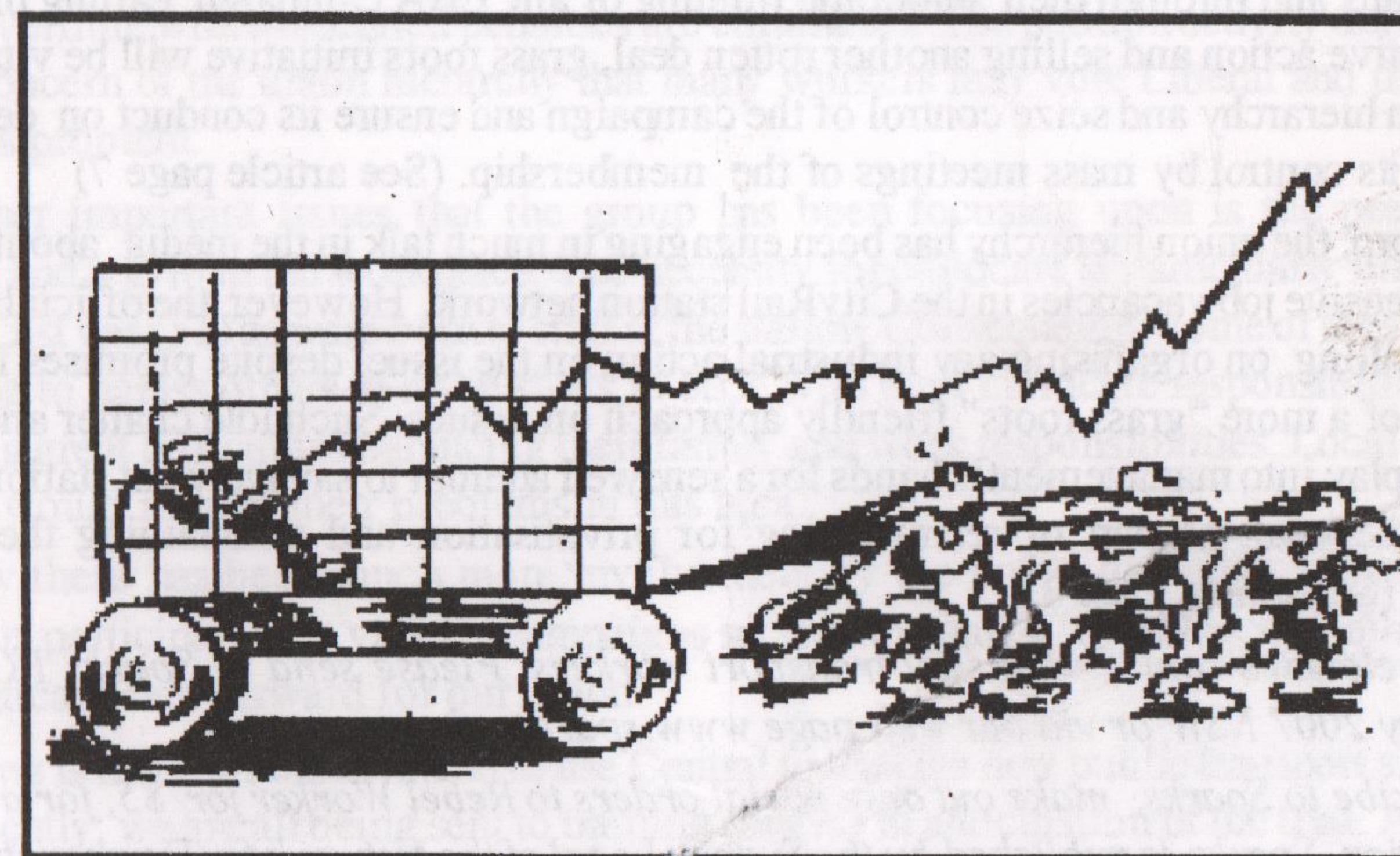
No.125

June -July 2007

# SPARKS

THE RANK-AND-FILE TRANSPORT WORKERS' PAPER

**ONLY DIRECT ACTION ON THE JOB CAN PUT A SPOKE IN THE RAILCORP/S.T.A. SPEED-UP DRIVE!**



CENTRAL NEWS  
 S.T.A. BUSIE NEWS  
 ARGENTINE RAIL NEWS  
 DETROIT BUS NEWS  
 S.T.A. EBA NEWS  
 S.T.A. SICKIE CRACKDOWN

N.S.W. RAIL NEWS  
 SYDNEY WHARFIES' NEWS  
 CITYRAIL STAFF CRISIS  
 DIGITAL CAMERAS  
 BELGIUM RAIL NEWS  
 S.T.A. "FISH" PROGRAM

## EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of Sparks.

Some of the most important news lately in State Transit is the current Enterprise Bargain Agreement (EBA) negotiations. Already the union hierarchy has displayed a very autocratic and duplicitous approach with the secret "backroom meeting" of the union officials and their cronies drawing up and approving the draft union EBA log of claims. Fortunately due to some effective agitation by grassroots activists in the shape of the circulation on the job of the "Suggestions for a Grassroots Log of Claims" leaflet, the official's initial manoeuvre via a so called EBA "survey" to lower drivers expectations, and then push for a much lower pay rise in line with their Rightwing ALP masters' agenda, was foiled and a 7.5% pay rise each year over 2 years claim was adopted. Latest news is that other unions in the NSW public sector have also adopted this demand for their upcoming EBA campaigns. It just goes to show the effectiveness of grass roots activism.

Given the strong likelihood of the union hierarchy ditching the log of claims early in the EBA negotiations and through their autocratic running of any EBA campaign, calling off rapidly any effective action and selling another rotten deal, grass roots initiative will be vital to defy the union hierarchy and seize control of the campaign and ensure its conduct on democratic lines via its control by mass meetings of the membership. (See article page 7)

In RailCorp, the union hierarchy has been engaging in much talk in the media about the need to fill extensive job vacancies in the CityRail station network. However, the officials are constantly stalling on organising any industrial action on the issue, despite promises made late last year of a more "grass roots" friendly approach on issues. Such idle chatter and stalling can only play into management's hands for a renewed attempt to savagely cut station staffing later in the year, as part of restructuring for privatisation and maintaining the existing speedup. (See article page 3)

*Sparks welcomes contributions by transport workers. Please send to Sparks PO Box 92 Broadway 2007 NSW or via our web page [www.sparksweb.org](http://www.sparksweb.org)*

*To subscribe to Sparks, make out postal orders to Rebel Worker for \$5, for a one year subscription. Sparks is published by the Sydney Local of the Network for Democratic Unionism.*

*To subscribe to Rebel Worker, subs are \$12 pa via postal orders, send to P.O. Box 92 Broadway 2007 NSW.*

## SPARKS WEB PAGE -

# [www.sparksweb.org](http://www.sparksweb.org)

## N.S.W. RAILWAYS NEWS

### Sparks: What's been happening at Central lately?

Station Assistant: At Central, the local "Workers' Rights" Group has been very active lately. It has been involved in the circulating of a petition which is encouraging workers to look beyond the personality of John Howard and seriously examine the policies of the Howard Govt. such as the GST and WRA (Workplace Relations Act) and take account of its negative features for workers' conditions and wages. The conclusion they would be hoping workers would draw from such reflection, is to vote for the ALP in the upcoming Federal elections to be held towards the end of the year. This petition, represents a turn toward grass roots canvassing by the ALP. Its in line with the canvassing done by Westmead hospital workers in their local area some years back. I think we should support the petition, as in the event that the Howard Government has another term in office, our conditions will be seriously jeopardised when our EBA comes up for renewal in 2008. As under Howard's Work Choices, such conditions as overtime with associated penalties are eliminated. The petition activity definitely reflects a concern of the union hierarchy that many workers may vote Liberal and the need to tackle this problem.

Some other important issues that the group has been focusing upon is the provision of childcare and a gym in the workplace. The necessity for childcare is particularly important at Central. Last year 5 kids were born to staff at the station. Consequently some of these workers are having to harass others to swap shifts to cope with their childcare responsibilities. They are having great difficulties balancing their family and work responsibilities. Local childcare facilities would resolve their problems in this area.

Generally there has been much more involvement by the union hierarchy in encouraging grass roots participation in various campaigns such as the anti-Work Choices Rallies, which is a significant step forward for our union.

Other news is that the bosses intend to use Central to trial the new public transport smart card. Consequently, we are all being sent to training courses in anticipation of the trial. Associated with this move, the RailCorp General Manager has been attacking barrier staff, creating obstacles to the performance of their jobs.

### Sparks: What were your impressions of the accident some months ago on the Harbour Bridge involving a train being halted by the falling of overhead power lines?

SA: As a result of this accident there was no power for the train to operate for 3 hours. Whilst passengers were obliged to remain in their carriages for this extended period. An important contribution to the failure to allow passengers to escape the stopped train was the bureaucratic nature of RailCorp. The indecision of Train Operations management prevented any action to release the passengers from the train being taken. The train crew were unable to act on their own initiative, and had to wait for Train Operations to give the go-ahead. Train Operations whilst having too much authority regarding running trains, has insufficient responsibility to passengers and workers.

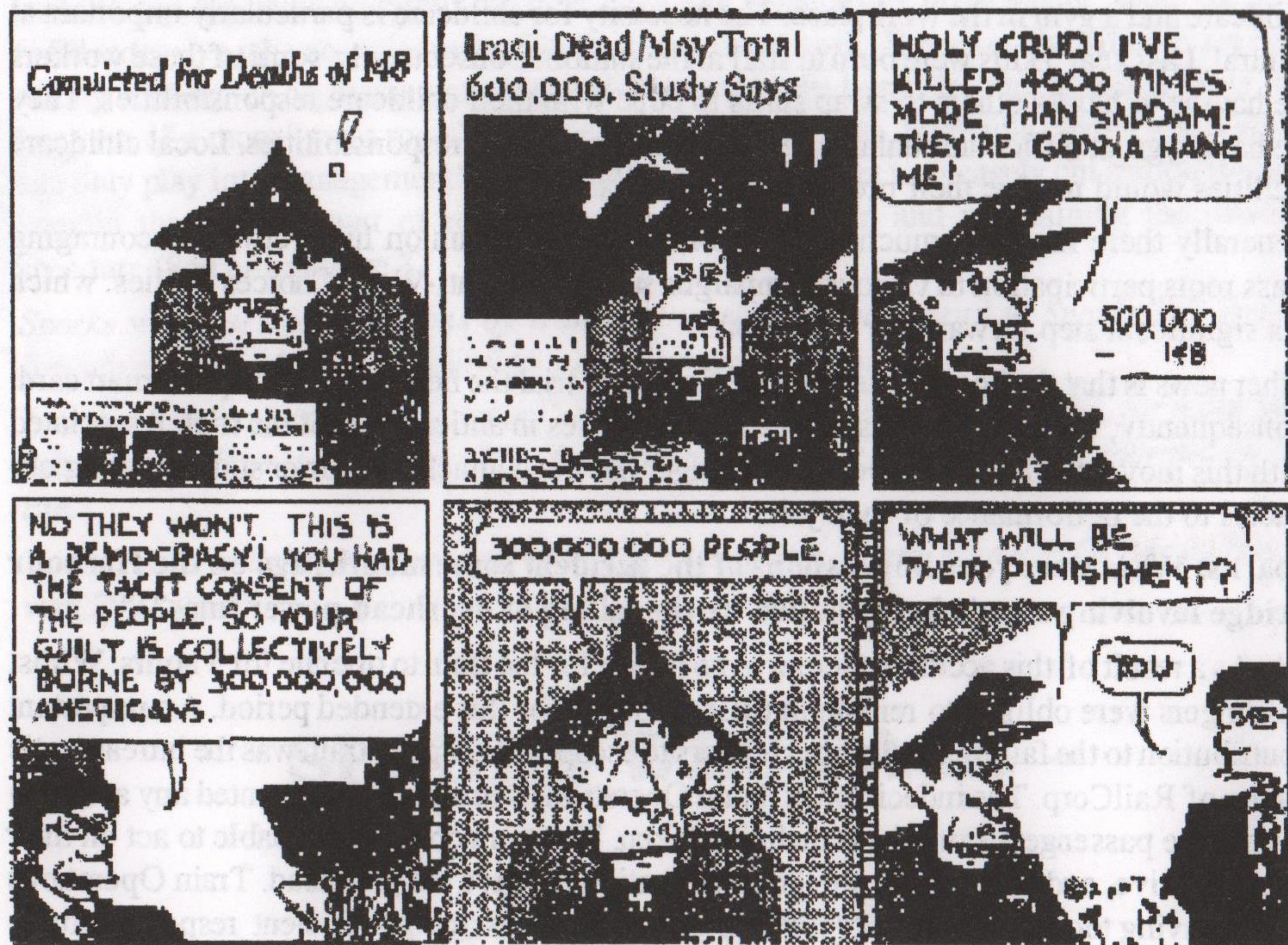
**Sparks: What's happening with the carriage cleaners?**

SA: The junior management responsible for carriage cleaning continues to act in a high handed manner and ignores workers' concerns regarding such issues as injuries and safety.

**Sparks: What's happening on the staffing issue?**

SA: Lately Nick Lewocki, RTBU (Rail Tram & Bus Union) State Secretary has been protesting in the media about stations in the City Rail network being understaffed. With over 200 positions not being filled at these stations. He has also criticised station masters for not providing clean stations. Rail Corp has replied to this criticism, stating that they consider only half of these positions need to be filled to ensure adequate customer service, cleanliness, amenities and safety at stations. Both sides however, agree that there is a staffing shortage.

As a result of this staffing crisis, many station staff are having multiple rosters imposed on them. This speed up in workers' jobs and the associated increase in stress levels, has been worsened by a senior Rail Corp executive. He has been placing increased duties on staff, particularly at the major stations, without providing appropriate compensation. As part of the new procedures, he has introduced, he wants more station staff allocated to the barriers and to operate the wide gates to help with commuter overflow at peak periods. However, due to station staff performing their normal duties, plus security duties which have been added to their jobs, they can't cope with the new barrier responsibilities.



**SYDNEY WHARFIES' NEWS**

**Sparks: Before you start, please explain the change from P&O Wharfie to Port Botany Wharfie.**

Port Botany Wharfie: Well, last year the whole worldwide P&O operation was bought out by Dubai Ports World (DPW) for around \$6 billion. DPW is owned by the royal family of the United Arab Emirates.

So I can't use P&O Wharfie any more – and Dubai Ports World Wharfie or DPW Wharfie are both mouthfuls. So Port Botany Wharfie it is.

The DP World buyout is not the only change of ownership that has happened over the last 12 months. Patrick Stevedores has been bought out by Toll Holdings in what was a very hostile takeover. This of course left the Maritime Union's arch enemy Chris Corrigan out in the cold.

More recently DP World sold its newly acquired P&O Trans Australia truck fleet and the Bulk and General arm of its stevedoring operations to an Australian consortium that involves none other than Chris Corrigan.

There is also a rumour flying around that DP World wants to offload its Australian stevedoring arm. After all, Australian ports are small fry compared to the massive Asian ports that DP World wanted to gain control of.

If the rumour is true, you can probably guess who would be first in line to buy it . . .

**Sparks: So what has been happening on the Sydney waterfront?**

Port Botany Wharfie: One by-product of all the ownership changes is the terrible treatment that wharfies at the Darling Harbour P&O/DP World operation are coping. The state Labor government decided a few years ago to phase out shipping in Sydney Harbour. After much tooting and frooing it looks like the Darling Harbour P&O / DP World operation will close down in a few weeks and the Patrick / Toll operation will quickly follow.

This is all complicated by the fact that P&O / DP World sold its bulk and general operations (which includes Darling Harbour) to the new Corrigan consortium. The 20 or 30 P&O / DP World permanents left down at Darling Harbour have been offered either redundancy or transfers to the DP World Port Botany terminal.

While the redundancy isn't great (it's capped at 40 weeks of service), DP World originally offered to transfer the permanents to Botany as non-permanents! And this is to blokes that have 20 and 30 years of service, it's disgraceful. P&O / DP World management certainly have a nerve. More importantly, if they can get away with undermining permanency in this instance, it would no doubt quickly flow through the industry. Like the waterfront isn't casualised enough already!

More recently I have heard that, after numerous rounds of negotiations with national MUA officials, the company has now offered to transfer them to Botany on their existing conditions for 12 months. That's when the current Botany EBA expires. Who knows what will happen then.

**Sparks: Tell us about the other news from the Botany area.**

Port Botany Wharfie: Vopak Terminals, a bulk petroleum and chemical storage plant just across the road from DP World, sacked 12 workers who refused to sign AWAs. They were all dismissed on April 26 and given 15 minutes to clear out their lockers and get off site.

Management used the old "dismissed for operational reasons" line on them and replaced them with labour-hire casual workers. The members of the National Union of Workers had been negotiating a new collective agreement since September last year. Apparently they had won the right at the Industrial Commission to take protected industrial action, which was to start the Monday after their sacking. Unfortunately management got in first.

Vopak have used WorkChoices to sack skilled terminal operators with 20 and 25 years experience and replaced them with unskilled and untrained casuals. I have already heard stories about truck drivers getting accidentally covered in chemicals by the inexperienced casuals.

As far as I know the 12 workers are still picketing out the front between 6am and 2pm. A heap of us, MUA members marched over during one smoko break and handed over hundreds of dollars that was collected at work. The address is 49 Friendship Road, Port Botany for anyone that wants to show their support.

**Sparks: Any other news?**

Port Botany Wharfie: There were serious dramas down at Port Kembla at the end of May. The Capo Noli, a ship carrying gypsum tried to get the Filipino crew to discharge cargo using the ship's cranes. This is despite international agreements that state that loading and unloading of ships is wharfie's work - not seafarers' work.

Canada Steamship Lines who chartered the ship, had the gypsum loaded in South Australia by MUA members, so why they decided to try and get the seafarers to unload it is anyone's guess. Long story short, after a four-day stand off and "community assemblies" that stopped trucks from getting the gypsum, it was agreed that MUA labour would unload the cargo after all.

**Sparks: Finally, how are the MUA national elections going?**

Port Botany Wharfie: To be honest, they are just plodding along. Part of the problem is that there is not much competition this time around. Federally both the National Secretary and Deputy National Secretary will be re-elected unopposed. The two Assistant National Secretary positions are being contested by two incumbents and one outsider. Similarly in Sydney both the Branch Secretary and Deputy Branch Secretary will be elected unopposed. The two Assistant Branch Secretary positions are being contested by four people, but one of those asked at the start of the voting period that he not be considered as a candidate.

So in effect it's another three-way contest for two positions. The lack of competition will probably mean that the historically high voter turnout that the MUA experiences will be lower than usual. The campaigning by the various candidates has also been very lacklustre. None of them have raised any of what I would call the "big questions". Actually fighting to get rid of WorkChoices (instead of just wait for Labor to partially repeal it), planning to win better conditions and more permanency with industrial action, democratising the union with

more frequent elections and the right to recall any elected representative - none of these ideas have got so much as a mention from any of the candidates.

So I dare say that, no matter what happens, it will be MUA "business as usual".

## S.T.A. BUSIE NEWS

### PORT BOTANY DEPOT NEWS

**Sparks: What's the latest with the dispute over the new Digital Camera equipped buses?**

Port Botany Driver: The most significant news is that management had told us that as of 21/5/07, all buses at the depot would be equipped with the cameras and we would have to drive them. However, due to our continuing concerns that these cameras will be used in disciplinary matters, our union rep has told management that any bus fitted with the new CCTV's would not be driven by our members, until the dispute was settled. This response, caused a sensation amongst the bosses, who had been acclimatised over the years for the union reps at the depot rolling over to their demands.

Latest news is that, we have lifted the ban on driving the digital camera equipped buses. This decision was made after management gave some verbal assurances to the Union that, until the dispute was resolved properly, only one camera on each bus would be activated, that the new CCTV policies would not come into effect until it had been agreed with the Union, and that the entire issue would be aired before a full Executive Meeting in the next week so that the Delegates would have the opportunity to discuss and decide on the policy and issues. So, we are still driving the buses, but expect STA to fulfil their end of the deal and resolve the dispute properly, otherwise all bets are off.

**Sparks: What are some of the nefarious aspects of the new cameras?**

PBD: On the TV recently, there was talk that the footage from the cameras would only be kept for 12 days and then destroyed. This is incorrect. It can be stored on hard disk indefinitely if the bosses so wish. Whilst the bosses via transponders at the depot can check up on drivers instantaneously within 1 Km. With mobile transponders, they can check up on us anywhere. With developments in the technology they will have finger tip indexed access to this footage and can call it up on us over a period. These cameras appeared to be aimed to focus on passengers entering the bus and are likely to be fitted with optical character recognition technology.

**Sparks: What's the latest with the enterprise bargain agreement (EBA)?**

PBD: The whole union hierarchy involvement in the process, has been characterised by undemocratic and manipulative features. Initially the officials sent out a so called "survey" regarding the EBA which was highly slanted toward accepting a ceiling of 3% pa on any pay rise achieved, which the union officials' ALP masters want. However, following the circulation of the "suggestions for a grass roots log of claims" leaflet which pushed an EBA with a 15% over two years pay rise, the union hierarchy made a dramatic "U"-Turn and adopted this

demand. The "suggestions for a grass roots log of claims" has been generally well received on the job.

Subsequently, the officials together with some of their union cronies, held a secret "back room" meeting, which our union rep was not invited to attend to draw up the union EBA log of claims. In developing the log of claims they took up points raised in the survey and elsewhere, entailing 20 items. Why this secrecy? Why wasn't a mass meeting held to decide upon the union EBA log of claims? Despite these brazen undemocratic features, members seem to be happy with the union log of claims. To the union officials credit they have stated that they will consider adopting any further items members want to add to the claim. One member has raised the issue of lowering the limit of 35 years service to qualify for a Gold Card. The union log of claims had nothing to say on this issue.

**Sparks: What's your outlook in regard to the log of claims?**

PBD: I'm not optimistic that the officials will seriously pursue the claim, due to their strong connections with the Rightwing Faction of the ALP. Whilst the ALP State Governments, as I have mentioned want to impose a 3% pa ceiling on pay rises and there is the Federal Election coming up toward the end of the year. Consequently, we are likely to see a situation which is common to other unions, where the whole drawing up of a "log of claims" by the officials is a cynical charade, and when negotiations commence with the bosses, its abruptly thrown out the window. Any industrial action is largely token and is rapidly called off, due to the officials' stranglehold over the EBA campaign and their desire to appease their ALP masters' electoral considerations. The EBA negotiations become a ploy to sell a crook deal to the membership via slimy tactics.

**ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF GOVERNMENT:**



As a result of these factors, we must be super vigilant and should the officials make moves to roll over to the bosses, we must take rapid action to stymie it. We must defy them and establish grass roots control of the campaign.

**Sparks: What are your ideas for pursuing the EBA campaign?**

PBD: A "Work to Rule" style campaign would be a most effective means of waging it, particularly given the shortage of drivers in the STA presently. In the past, such campaigns have been ineffective as they have not been properly organised. Some ways to ensure the effectiveness of this action, would include the following: the issuing of an info sheet to drivers outlining driving rules and an emphasis that drivers shouldn't corner cut on rest breaks and be prepared psychologically to book up VOT for late running. Whilst, with the introduction of the STA's "big brother" digital cameras we will be obliged to strictly adhere to their rule book.

**Sparks: I've heard that the STA has taken a bizarre new turn with their efforts to recruit new drivers?**

PBD: This is certainly the case, as spotlighted with the appearance on the clip up board near where the driver sits on the bus, of an advertisement, which offers \$21 per hour if you become an STA driver. No driver in the STA is on such a wage rate. If by this advert., the bosses mean to put new drivers on AWA's (Australian Workplace Agreements) involving the loss of penalties and other conditions, we currently enjoy, in exchange for this higher wage rate, such a move would certainly be in breach of Howard's "fairness" requirements regarding AWA's. Another slimy aspect of the STA's new driver recruitment campaign is the offer of a \$500 "spotter's fee" to anyone who can find a recruit. These measures certainly indicate a desperation of the bosses to employ more drivers. It raises the issue of why they don't improve our wages and conditions, so more drivers are retained. With their meagre EBA wage offer of 2.5% pa and unacceptably tight running times which they impose, there is little evidence of such a sensible approach.

**Sparks: What were your impressions of the "Seniors & Safety" courses?**

PBD: We were recently treated to seminars on this topic. At the end of the courses, we were approached to sign off, on some statement about attendance. The likely hidden agenda of the bosses of this ploy was to make us legally responsible later down the road in the event of some injury to an elderly person on our bus, and so allow the STA to escape its responsibilities. We weren't caught by this scam and no one at our depot signed the document. At other depots I've heard there were mass walkouts from the seminars.

**Sparks: What's the latest on Safety issues?**

PBD: Associated with the introduction of new "gas buses" at the depot will be the installation of new safety shields. Some drivers such as those on the PM shifts are likely to vote against operating buses with these shields, as they consider they can cope with the safety problem. By taking such an approach, they could be jeopardising some positive efforts the bosses have made on the issue. They have spent considerable sums on such measures as having security guards in buses and security guards in cars following buses, in the evenings. As a result of

these drivers opposing the shields, the bosses may be encouraged to dismantle various safety improvements.

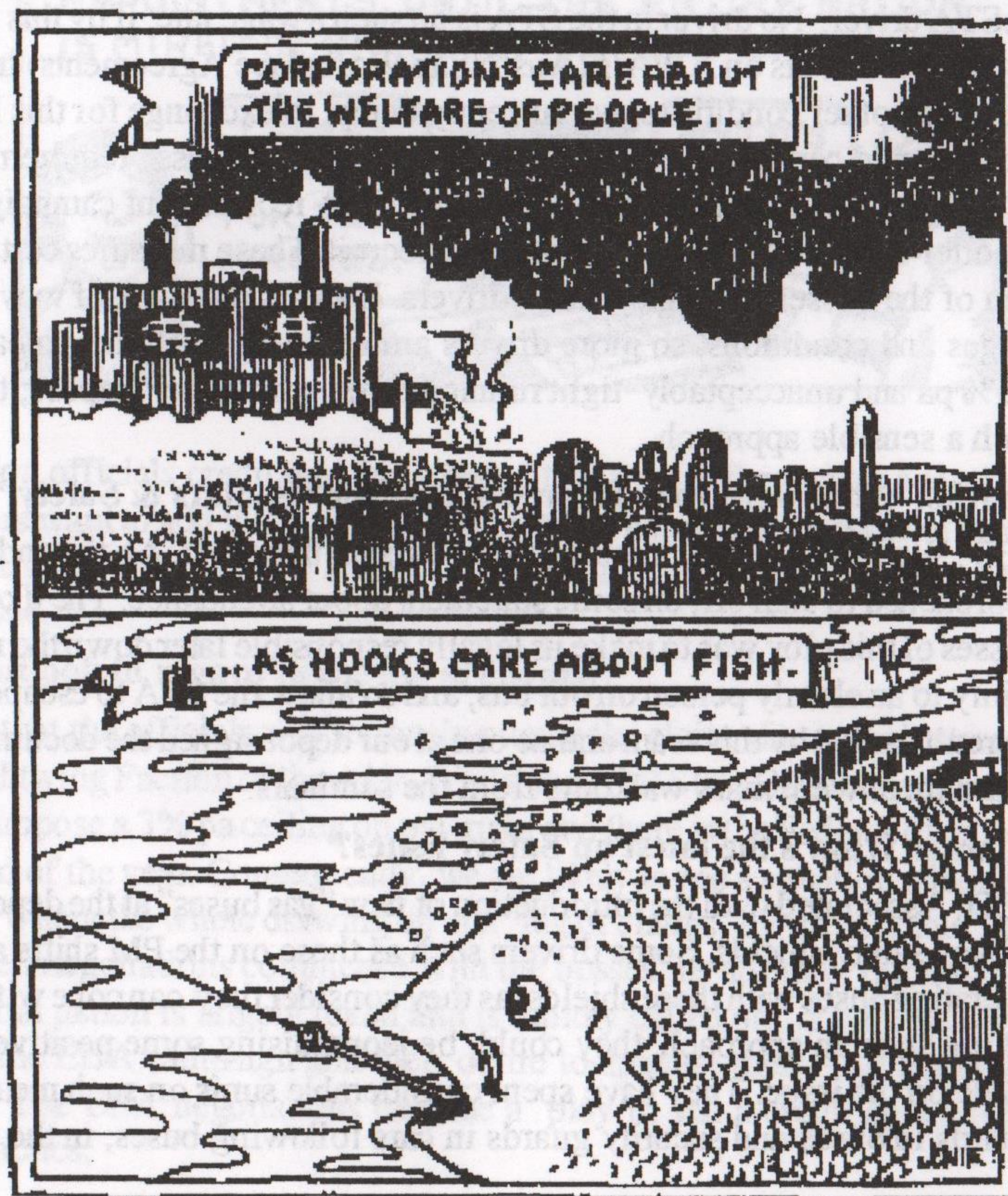
As a result of an agreement with management, depot inspectors are supposed to report all safety breach incidents on the road to the union at the depot. It appears due to likely management pressure, they have not been fulfilling this requirement, with some incidents not being reported.

**Sparks: I understand the bosses have been pursuing a "sickie crackdown" against drivers?**

PBD: Lately, we have been issued letters concerning our attendance absences from management. Due to the bosses' poor record keeping, major errors are being made in regard to the alleged absences. Consequently, we decided at recent union meetings not to accept the reports and to speak to the union rep about having a thorough investigation of the issue.

**Sparks: How are things with the union?**

PBD: Since Chris became the union rep, we have been having plenty of yard meetings to discuss various issues, which is a big step forward at the depot. We need more people to get on the union and roster committees, to help out with the good work. Chris has expressed concerns regarding the officials handling of union expenses. At the last regular executive meeting, he voted against approving the branch expenses. As he considered that the expenses were presented in breach of correct accounting procedures. There was only a list of business names with various sums of money. There was no mention of the period and service for each sum spent.



### WAVERLEY DEPOT NEWS

**Sparks: What are your impressions of the prepaid 333 services?**

Waverley Busie: There is quite a bit of discontent amongst some drivers concerning the run. Many who went over to the 333 may have sought to avoid the responsibilities associated with collecting cash fares, but now face the responsibility of operating a much larger bus. With 20 buses of the depot fleet and 50 to 60 drivers going to the 333's, there is much less opportunity for overtime particularly on Sundays. Whilst those on the 333's are complaining that shifts in their rosters are either too long or too short. With some complaining of boredom due to the same old routine of work. Prior to the advent of the 333's, there was a much bigger pool of shifts to swap. Now there is much less scope for swapping. However, there is much more work for the 380's which are mainly patronised by people such as tourists wanting to go to the Bondi area and unaware of the 333's. Whilst the 333's are mainly patronised by locals.

An important safety issue has cropped up with the bendi-buses operated on the 333's. The concertina/fabric section in the bendi is a vulnerable spot, where in the event of another vehicle colliding with the side of the bus, passengers could be injured. As its construction is very fragile. In this section there is nothing for passengers to hang on to in the event of a collision and its likely they would be knocked to the floor. Whilst the driver is too far down in the bus to intervene. Despite these factors I have noticed groups of 6-7 standing in this area unaware of the dangers, perhaps due to their unwillingness to sit with other passengers. There needs to be clear signs installed stating that this section on the bus is a strictly no standing zone whilst the bus is in motion. Given the STA bosses have the means to put up such signs. Why they're in action on this issue? Could it be a ploy for State Transit to avoid legal responsibility? As without such a warning sign, the driver would be made responsible in the case of a passenger injury.

I recently spoke to a 333 driver who had some good ideas for remedying these problems. He mentioned that he was unable to look back far into the bus, particularly due to the screen bars near where he sits and the high seats prior to the turntable, preventing him from turning around. He suggested that the camera in the bus rather than being focused on the driver, be focused to look down the corridor in the bus and that a speaker should be installed in the problem area, so the driver can advise passengers to move down further into the bus. He also mentioned that he had observed plenty of fare evasion and that the bosses were failing to take any action on the issue.

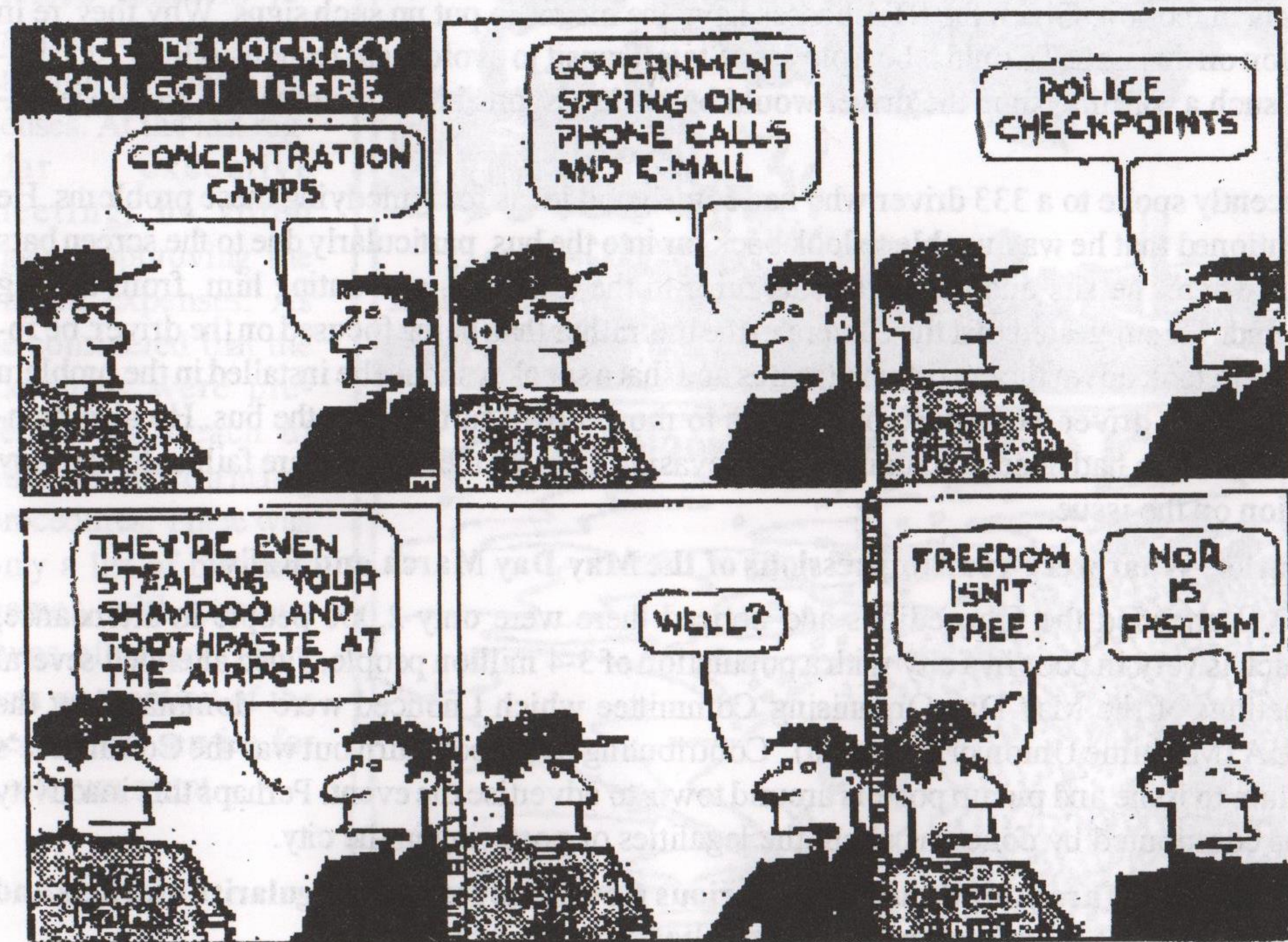
**Sparks: What were your impressions of the May Day March and Rally?**

WB: I attended the proceedings and noticed there were only 2,000 people in attendance, which is very poor in a city with a population of 3-4 million people. I also attended several meetings of the May Day Organising Committee which I noticed were dominated by the MUA (Maritime Union of Australia). Contributing to the poor turn out was the Committee's failure to issue and put up posters around town to advertise the event. Perhaps this inactivity was contributed by concerns about the legalities of postering in the city.

**Sparks: What are your thoughts on various Govt's moves to de-regularise markets and push the Neo-Liberal Agenda in Australia?**

WB: Since the Forbes Gathering of Billionaires held at the Opera House two years ago, I have noticed moves by the Howard Govt. to tone down market regulation and encourage free trade, so as to assist large multinational companies profiteering. These summits which are held periodically as Global capitalist jamborees are particularly used to coordinate free trade initiatives and overawe people with the power of international capitalism and so discourage resistance.

The Forbes conference was attended by key representatives of both the Liberal and Labor parties who appeared to have been spurred on by major figures in international capitalism who sponsored the gathering, to step up these deregulation measures in Australia. Such international organisations as Forbes and such multinational companies as the 6-7 multinationals which dominate the global food industry such as Nestles are waging a war against measures by such organisations as Auspan to encourage fair trade agreements. These fair trade measures ensure that the workers and farmers in the 3<sup>rd</sup> World who are engaged in production of such crops as coffee are better off financially than if they were facing "free trade" conditions. In the Australian context, Howard has been encouraged by such organisations as Forbes to remove tariffs, resulting in Australian workers and companies facing levels of competition from the 3<sup>rd</sup> World countries which they can't cope with, resulting in the loss of much manufacturing industry, with Australia increasingly relying on such niche sectors as coal and iron ore production.



The ALP has lately shown its sensitivity to major players in Australian trade and markets with its sudden coolness to the visit of the Dalai Lama to Australia. Obviously they are responding to the perceived concerns of the Chinese Govt which annexed Tibet in the 1950's and currently occupies it.

**Sparks: What's the latest with Howard's attacks on the aboriginal community?**

WB: This is another sector which Global capitalism via the Forbes summit has swayed Howard into targeting. Currently Howard is trying to bribe land councils and other aboriginal organisations to sell off their land which will result in a decline in collective aboriginal land ownership and a big door swung open for large corporations to gradually acquire the land. As part of this deal, aboriginals in Alice Springs had been offered \$60 million for the construction of new homes. However, the condition was attached that they would not own their homes, but would only have 99 year leases. Following Howard's payment of \$12 million to the Aboriginal Northern Land Council, it suddenly agreed to the development of a low and medium radioactive waste dump on Federal land near Katherine in the Northern Territory. Previously, it had always opposed such a nuclear waste dump.

Deceitfully Howard has given the impression, that only radioactive residue produced in Australia will be stored there. In fact, the storage facility will be used to store a significant chunk of the rest of the world's radio active waste. These tactics used in softening up and weakening the aboriginal community for nefarious corporate agendas are a common feature of Howard's policies in regard to many other sectors. It's particularly highlighted with AWA's which atomise workers and fundamentally weaken workers' resistance to the bosses' attacks. If you sign an AWA and you are subsequently unhappy with your job and employer, you would need to spend a considerable sum on lawyers to wage a Federal Court case to tackle the problems. You are effectively trapped. If anyone is interested in reading more about Howard's divide, weaken and conquer tactics, there is a good article about it, in the latest edition of "This Quarter" magazine.

**Sparks: What's happening with the enterprise agreement?**

WB: Recently there was a petition circulating at the depot initiated by the Central Station organising committee to demand that if the ALP's Rudd is elected into the Federal Govt. that he won't attack workers' conditions secured by such agreements. It particularly emphasised securing such conditions as union representation, collective bargaining, paid holidays. This petition has now been closed at Waverley, with 370 people signing it. Involving both drivers and their friends.

At a recent union meeting, we were read a document outlining the STA's offerings for next the EBA which focused on a meagre 2.5% pa wage rise which is below the CPI and various fringe benefits and salary sacrifice items to divert our attention from the paltry wage rise. This insulting pay rise offer by the STA, just goes to show they are ignoring the issue I raised in the last edition of Sparks concerning the 10,000 years of collective experience we possess and the good ideas we have for reducing costs and improving services which would provide for a decent pay rise. Instead of listening to us and taking advantage of our knowledge, they squander huge sums on expensive high flyer consultant fat cats. We should get the benefit. Another

way to save money for our pay rise is to eliminate all the security guards which serve no useful purpose, apart from encouraging Howard's Terrorism Hysteria.

**Sparks: What are your impressions of the 310, 343 and 309 services?**

WB: As a result of having family in the south-western suburbs, I often travel on these routes. I've noticed that these services are poorly patronised. Why is this situation occurring? Is it due to the lack of safety and the infrequency of the services, which discourages passengers? Certainly in regard to off peak periods, commuters have to wait half an hour for a bus on these routes. Cooling their enthusiasm for catching buses. It's a very pathetic situation. I have noticed that the drivers I've had, appear to be numbed by their driving and have a low morale. They gave the impression of a lack of connection with the passengers.

To tackle and remedy these problems, why don't the bosses rather than guzzling champagne and viewing their favourite explicit videos of "executive action" workshops conducted in the State Transit Corporate bedroom at "Touch of Class" management consultants via cleverly concealed digital cameras remarkably similar to those to be installed on our buses at their late night office parties at Strawberry Hills or tinkering with their new co-production with the union hierarchy at considerable cost to us, of an upcoming, sizzling "stripper" performance, involving the "shedding" of our conditions through the seven veils of the enterprise agreement negotiations, and come out in the freezing night. Travel in buses on these routes and discuss with drivers in a non-judgemental fashion about the situation. They could also sink some budget money into promoting these services. Rather than following the usual short sighted path of let's save some money, as we are now a corporation and the Govt. says we need to cut back. One promotion idea is for adverts with such slogans as "Take a bus, we need you on one" or "Take a bus, young man and young lady and swing on our poles" to be placed in bus shelters.

**Sparks: What are your impressions of the Rudd led Federal ALP?**

WB: I felt sick when I have heard how the Federal ALP under his leadership has caved into adopting many aspects of Howard's Industrial Relations initiatives. I am disenchanted with the ALP and find its latest performance on the Federal level to be quite pathetic. Its been transformed into Another Liberal Party so as to appease and swing over to them conservative voters. It raises the whole issue of who is the "Sheriff of Nottingham" and who is "Robin Hood"? We desperately need a new "Robin Hood" to adopt radical policies and push workers concerns in place of the opportunist ALP.

**Sparks: What's happening with the Paddington Ghost?**

WB: I've heard he's dropped out of weight watchers, ditched his masterplan to become "Mr Invisible Australia" and is becoming the ghost of Friar Tuck, one of Robin Hood's merry men.

**Sparks: What is the latest with the buses at Waverley?**

Waverley Driver: A major concern I have lately is that we have been sent 4 clapped Mercedes Mark II's. There seems to be a trend where the bosses send the most worn out buses to Waverley, the hardest working depot in State Transit. Whilst, other depots get the new Volvos.

However, I must acknowledge that when the Mark II's were new, they were very suitable to city bus routes.

**RANDWICK DEPOT NEWS**

Sometime in May last year there was an allegation that BO Dewi El Khoury had access to the Assessor's office. She reported to the Operations Manager, Eric Graham in writing and made a statement backed up by a witness that BOT III Talita Brooks had accused her of having a key to the assessor's office. Nothing was done and consequently the depot Manager Nick Lazarou was informed who promised to solve the situation but as usual nothing was done.

It amazes me that so much importance was attached to such a trivial thing as who may have had a key to the assessors office because of their records, but no importance seems to have been attached to the allegation that **Brad Austin** had a key to the revenue room where his fiancé works. So, reader, what do you think about this case....??? "Important files" or your money in the Revenue Office. A lot of drivers have shortages in big amounts and are suspended and sacked because of it. Well done STA....keep up the good work.... Ask your butler to open the champagne to celebrate for this gross injustice. My source informs me of another story that you might like to hear about concerning large amounts of money.

Our Explorer Drivers often go to the information booth at Loftus Street to change, count and also separate the sale's money from the float. This needs to be done due to the large amounts of money that our explorer operators deal with. The operators for safety reasons do not have the key to the booth, but the person on duty opens the door for them, it is impossible to open the door from the outside without a key. However on one occasion the Explorer Liaison officer Jan Radford told an operator not to go inside the booth so as not to disturb the person on duty. It seems though that the Liaison Officer must have access to the booth though as she is quite often in there eating breakfast and having coffee etc. Does this mean she has access to the Booth, perhaps a key????? This booth in Loftus street belongs to Kingsgrove Depot and not Randwick.

You, the reader, can take whatever you like from the above but the important thing to think about is how much importance is STA placing on your money? We know that you are responsible for your money but they should also have some responsibility to make sure that they take steps to protect your interests. How many people have been disciplined or even sacked because of shortages which may not have been theirs in the first place????

On that note, how often is it that you don't get a receipt when you pay in. I heard someone complaining that it was nearly three weeks since he has had one. On a lighter note I believe that Jan Radford roused on a driver for wearing the explorer uniform while they were driving an explorer shift because as she stated that as a relief they were not entitled to the uniform. Don't you think that this sort of thing is a bit small minded in the scheme of things. Looking smart would be my priority. Perhaps the driver concerned is being victimised, Oh well join the queue. Equity at work again. We have new managers at Randwick Depot, do you think that they will be any better than the others? I have heard of something big about to explode on the scene at Randwick, so keep your ears to the ground and look forward to next month's edition of Sparks.



You would all have read the articles on how short we are of Bus Operators and what STA are doing to recruit them. Well, Well, how interesting to hear we are short. **Management just don't get it do they!** For years and right at this moment they have treated anyone with a blue shirt as unintelligent and not worth taking any notice of. If you resign they simply take the resignation and off you go. No effort to find out your reasons and certainly no effort to correct any problems that the Bus Operators may have. Perhaps the answer is not looking to recruit new Bus Operators but looking after the ones we have and this is not always by paying more but simply by treating us as they would be treated. A few people skills from our Managers and clerical staff would go a long way.

**When you have read this give it to your friends even if you don't agree with the comments, because we need to start debate and to get people interested in their workplace and to take an interest in things, that may not be as good as they could be. You are held accountable for your actions, as you well know it is guilty before proven innocent so start to hold management accountable for their actions. All revolutions and change have started out in small ways, but gain momentum when people take an interest.**

#### LEICHHARDT DEPOT NEWS

**Sparks: What's been happening at Leichhardt lately?**

Leichhardt Busie: Several weeks ago, there was a serious incident involving the previous manager and a group of 12 drivers. Due to a malfunction in the operation of the green machines, 12 drivers including the union rep were accused of short pay-ins. Despite management being aware of the technical problem, the manager went on a savage rampage against them. One driver was brazenly accused of stealing and when the driver mentioned he was going to see the union rep over the false allegation, he was greeted with a tirade of obscene abuse from the manager who was standing over him. As a result of the stress, the driver was put on under by the boss, the driver had to go off on sick leave. Other drivers were also dragged into the manager's office over the allegation.

**Sparks: What else has been happening at the depot?**

LB: Shortly after this manager departed the scene, an amazing event occurred, entailing the installation of a change machine at the depot. For at least two years, drivers had complained to management about the lack of a change machine, without any action being taken. Despite change machines existing at other depots. Consequently, we have had to go to banks in our own time to get change, and constantly scrounge amongst ourselves for change. The excuse, the bosses gave for inaction on the issue, was that change machines were being phased out.

Another related problem is the inadequacy of the \$10 float we are issued with when starting on the job. We are expected for that this inadequate sum will last us forever. In reality we mainly have to use our own money as a float. This sort of thing doesn't happen in shops, but we have to put up with it. The float we are issued, should be increased to at least \$50 or \$100.

**Sparks: What else has been happening?**

LB: Michael Nassif, the shed driver was sacked due to being caught using his mobile phone. Whilst a particular nasty has featured in the STA's proposals for the EBA, with a demand that our meal breaks be reduced to half an hour.

**Sparks: What are your impressions of the new union rep?**

Leichhardt Driver: He gives the impression of just looking after a clique, whilst ignoring many outside this charmed circle. This seems to me to be a completely unacceptable approach for a union rep. He should make clear that he is open to the input from all union members at the depot and take account of their reasonable concerns.

**Sparks: How was May Day?**

LD: I was concerned that there was a very low turn out at the march and rally. Contributing to this poor showing was the May Day organising committee's disturbing apparent failure to put up any posters or leaflets to advertise the event.

#### BURWOOD DEPOT NEWS

**Sparks: What are your impressions of the "fish" program?**

Burwood Drover: It's a purely motivational program which was introduced by our General John Lee, STA CEO. It's run by a driver instructor and a peer. It costs State Transit \$2000 a package. I think the major reason for the bosses' introduction of it, is their fear that many drivers will resign en masse after the new super changes come into law in September of this year. Drivers who have been on the job for many years and have built up considerable super, may resign to take advantage of these changes and also take their long service leave entitlements. These changes allow tax free super lump sum payments on termination of employment for taxed super funds and 15% taxed lump sums for non-taxed super funds. According to surveys which the bosses have conducted, there is a very low level of morale amongst many drivers and the bosses consider there is a strong likelihood of mass resignations, which would create chaos for bus operations. Consequently, they consider a bit of corporate brain washing of drivers may assist retaining employees.

**Sparks: What's happening at the depot?**

BD: I have safety concerns about 15 new buses which are coming to Burwood. In particular regarding the additive of urea used in the turbo cleaner of these buses. This chemical is used in making explosives such as the bombs which exploded in Bali and is highly dangerous. As yet the bosses have provided us with no information on possible hazards of this chemical.

**Sparks: What's been happening with the union?**

BD: Recently, the union rep at Burwood got into a spot of bother. Early one morning, he had banned several buses for faults. However, the STA bosses retaliated by unleashing a "legal eagle" to threaten him with legal action over causing late running of depot fleet buses and breaching the STA's contract to the Department of Transport. In regard to the enterprise agreement, at the last union meeting at Burwood, there was talk of industrial action being taken over the issue and rumour is circulating that the union's draft log of claims features a claim for a 7.5% pa pay rise over two years.

Latest news is the union hierarchy is now facing a major crisis associated with the Howard's new IR laws. Under these laws, State Transit will be obliged to cease the pay roll deduction of our union fees. To get around this initiative, the union officials want our union dues directly

debited from our bank accounts, and if we refuse, we are being threatened with being tossed off the traffic fund.

**Sparks: What's the latest with the bosses' plans for restructuring grades?**

BD: They plan to eliminate the CFS 2 & 3 positions. My feeling is that those who occupy these positions aren't considered by the bosses to be over brilliant with computers, so the bosses can't transfer them to some other administrative job. So they are going to wait for them to retire, and then abolish the positions.

**Brookvale Bus Depot News, Opinion & Other Side of the Story!**

**Sparks - You are Government employees and as such you must have certain legal rights. Do you know what your rights are?**

Amigo - Not really. Apparently down town they have this fat book with all kinds of employment rights and conditions explained in it but only very few people have access to it.

**Sparks - Can you give us an example as to how rights are suppressed maybe to prove your point?**

Amigo - I'll try. The other day I asked a manager something like this " Mr. Manager, the RTA

are giving some Bus Drivers a hard time renewing their authority cards on medical grounds. Apparently you have to be a superman in health otherwise you will be subjected to so many tests which will cost the Driver up to \$1000 or more in doctors reports, exams, etc, just to prove their fitness. I know one Driver who was ordered to provide a specialist endocrinologist report just because he disclosed the truth on the form that he had 6.3 glucose in his blood ! Now Mr. Manager, these Drivers have been serving the STA for a long time so will the STA pay for the medical reports? He re-



plied not one penny! What happens if they are found to be medically unfit I said do they get the boot, redeployed, retrained or what rights do they have?

**Sparks - Very interesting question. What did the Manager reply?**

Amigo - He gave me the most cryptic and ambiguous reply I feel. He said something like this ' well it depends on what other training the Driver has, it depends if we have any vacancies etc' I felt this was like saying 'it really depends if we like you or not as to whether we keep you on'. But I said surely there must be a blanket policy for all not just pick and choose. I said can you give me your reply in writing so that I can cross check it for accuracy etc? The Manager flatly refused to give me a reply in writing. So why would he refuse to give me the policy in writing ? Is it because the policy is discriminatory?

Is it because they don't want you to know your rights? Or do they want to be able to shift the goal post when it suits them or what?

**Sparks - How many days Carer's Leave are you allowed?**

Amigo - Well as far as I know they give and pay us for 5 only, but as far as I know (check it out) in work choices it should be 10.

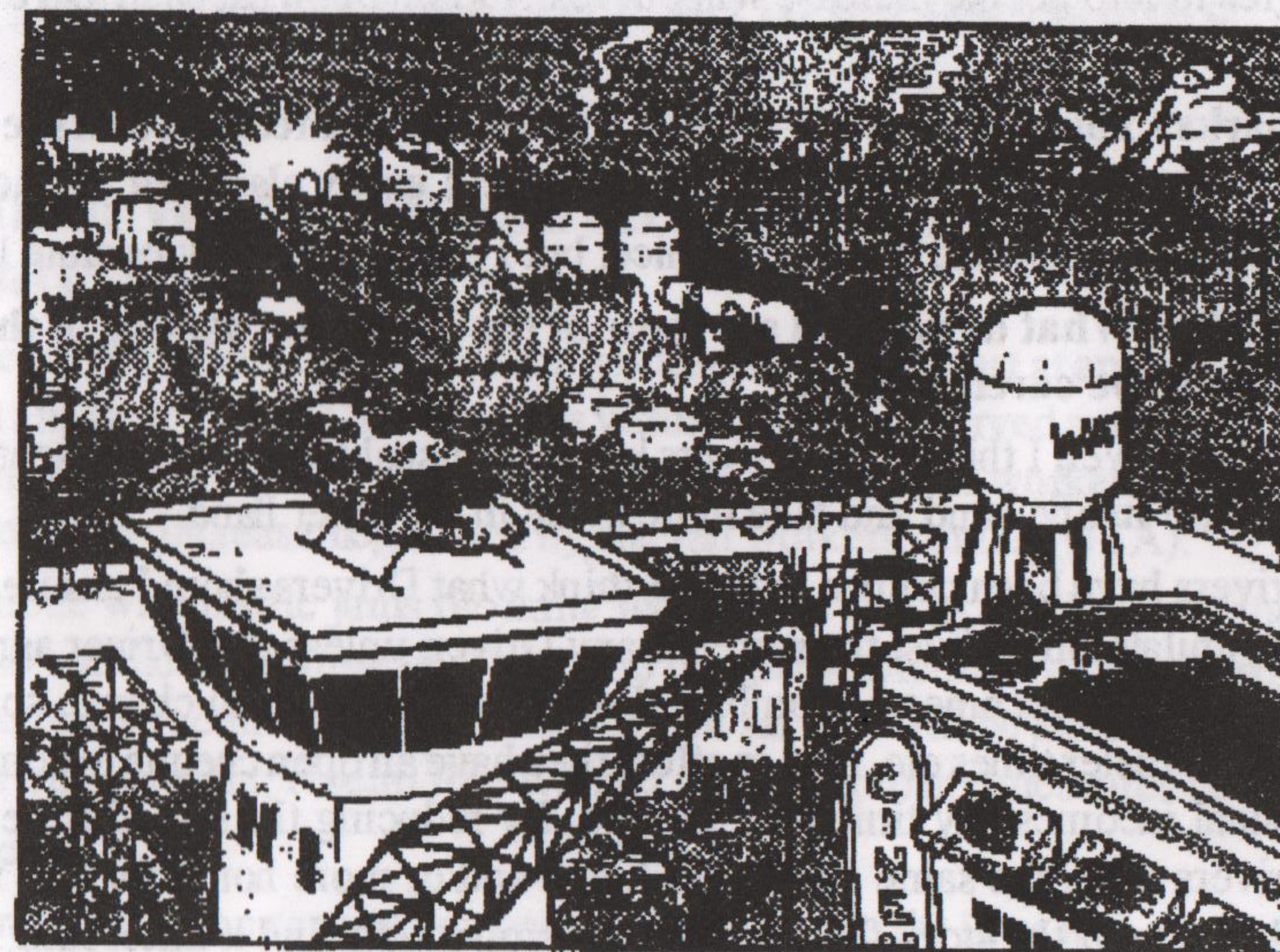
**Sparks - Is the STA going to pay out sick leave as per work choices?**

Amigo - I don't think they are addressing this question. Some Drivers have asked if they can cash in their sick leave, but have not received replies or the reply was we don't know, or don't know if the entitlement is going to be applied from the date work choices came into effect or if its going to apply to the whole of their accumulated sick leave entitlement.

It could be big money as some drivers have over 12 months of sick leave that could be worth up to \$40000 or more.

**Sparks - If our memory serves us correctly, Drivers EBA runs out in June. Has a new one being drafted yet and explained to Drivers?**

Amigo - I don't think so I have not seen it. I would think it will come out late and there wont me much time to discuss it or debate it. I think, as previously, many Drivers will probably



**IRAQ'S IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE**

agree to it to get the increase without really knowing what each and every clause of the EBA means.

**Sparks - You mean the STA Union will not hold a meeting, or issue an explanatory booklet with the EBA, to explain what each and every clause of the new EBA will mean?**

Amigo - If they did it would be nice, but I don't think they operate like that.

**Sparks - What do you feel are some of the important aspects of the EBA which Drivers ought to be careful about?**

Amigo - Well I think most Drivers know the usual trickery that might take place e.g. give an increase in one hand and take more away in the other hand.

Drivers have been conned before. I think what Drivers should ensure is that the STA cannot just unilaterally adjust the roster of any Driver, unless that Driver agrees to it, otherwise the whole thing becomes a shambles. I mean if the STA can change spread times, if they can change roster times etc, then in effect they have an open cheque to control and reduce Drivers annual incomes any time they want to. By reducing the spread for example they can make Drivers work the same number of hours and/or more hours for less money! Check out this other side of the story for yourselves as you might find it interesting.

**Sparks - What about Health & Safety ?**

Amigo - I am very worried STA and Councils are still operating Bus Stops right on pedestrian crossings. Unbelievable but true? Check out Woodbine street in North Balgowlah near Bangaroo. I think it's a death trap waiting to happen. The bus stop is just centimetres before a busy pedestrian crossing. What happens is even school buses stop there and as soon as the children get off they want to cross the road in front of the bus which is ofcourse obscuring the crossing. Offcourse irate motorists want to zoom past the bus but they cant really see the children. How can they when the big bus is obscuring them?

Also, we are having problems with the Volgren buses which have high entry and exit platforms. We have switches intended to lower (kneel) the bus but they do not work. I have booked up this problem but nothing has been done!

**Sparks - We heard that Brookvale Bus Depot has been secured with cameras, gates, boom gates, security guards etc looking a bit like Fort Knox. What do you think about that?**

Amigo - I think its over the top. I don't really think its effective enough to justify the tax payers money being spent on it. Its good that those security contracts provide profits for the contractor and wages for his/her employees, but could that money not be spend on other things which provide real benefits to people?

I mean if they are so genuine about safety etc, how is it that anybody can just walk on any bus and put their bag or luggage unattended in the luggage compartment behind the Bus Driver and walk away? One would think there would be a big sign there saying something like "Luggage Bay Closed - No unattended luggage is to be left here" or something like that.

## INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT WORKERS' NEWS

### Argentina: Wildcat Strike on Buenos Aires Metro

May 21st, 2007 by Jef Costello

Metro Workers in Buenos Aires launched a 24-hour wildcat strike in protest at an agreement between management and their union. The strike was virtually 100% observed and shut down the entire network, which is used by over a million people every day. The workers called the strike in protest at the salary increase negotiated by the rail workers' union (UTA).

Buenos Aires was chaotic with traffic jams blocking most of the city as hundreds of thousands of people tried to use the roads instead. The metro company, Metrovias, responded by releasing details of the pay structures offered, claiming that salaries will be almost doubled. The vice-minister for employment, Noemi Rial warned that disciplinary measures could be taken against strikers.

Management tried to run a skeleton service but workers jumped onto the lines and prevented the trains from moving. Lines B & E ran occasional trains, but workers rushed to reblock the lines. A portion of line A was supposedly taken control of by management but they claimed that they could not run trains because objects had been placed on the lines.

Metro workers, have taken to organising outside of the union, using general assemblies and elected delegates to organise themselves. In 2004 Metro workers won a pay rise and a reduction of the working day to six hours after organising a massive wildcat strike. The UTA (rail-workers' union, an affiliate of the CGT) was completely bypassed. Update 22:38 BST - In a press conference held today at the worker cooperative Hotel Bauen, delegates of the Metrovias workers announced they would release the turnstiles tomorrow and allow free rides from all stations and follow with another twentyfour hour strike Wednesday or Thursday. Thanks to libcom

### DETROIT BUS DRIVERS ON WILDCAT STRIKE

May 24th, 2007 by John.

All of Detroit's bus drivers walked out yesterday over concerns about safety and crime. About 800 bus drivers of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 26 were involved in the stoppage.

Union president Henry Gaffney said that the strike grew from his members' frustration with the growing dangers on the unpatrolled buses - two drivers were assaulted in the last two days.

The latest assault occurred Tuesday evening when a driver refused to accept an invalid transfer, Marchel Curtis, a member of ATU Local 26 told the Detroit Free Press. The driver was struck repeatedly in the head and face and had to stop the bus. The assailant was allowed to continue riding to avoid further confrontation and later got off the bus, he said.

Curtis said the driver, whom he would not identify, was treated at a clinic and reported for work again this morning. He emphasized that Tuesday's attack was not the sole reason for the walkout. "This has been ongoing over years," he said.

"It's not our intention to hurt the public," he said. The drivers "were sorry they had to do this." Curtis said "riders are in support" of the union's insistence that the council deal with the safety concerns. Curtis said the walk-out today was not organized by the union, but said union officers have joined drivers in not operating buses in support of their safety concerns.

The drivers reported for work early yesterday morning, but did not run scheduled routes from 3:10 am to protest the council's failure to accept an

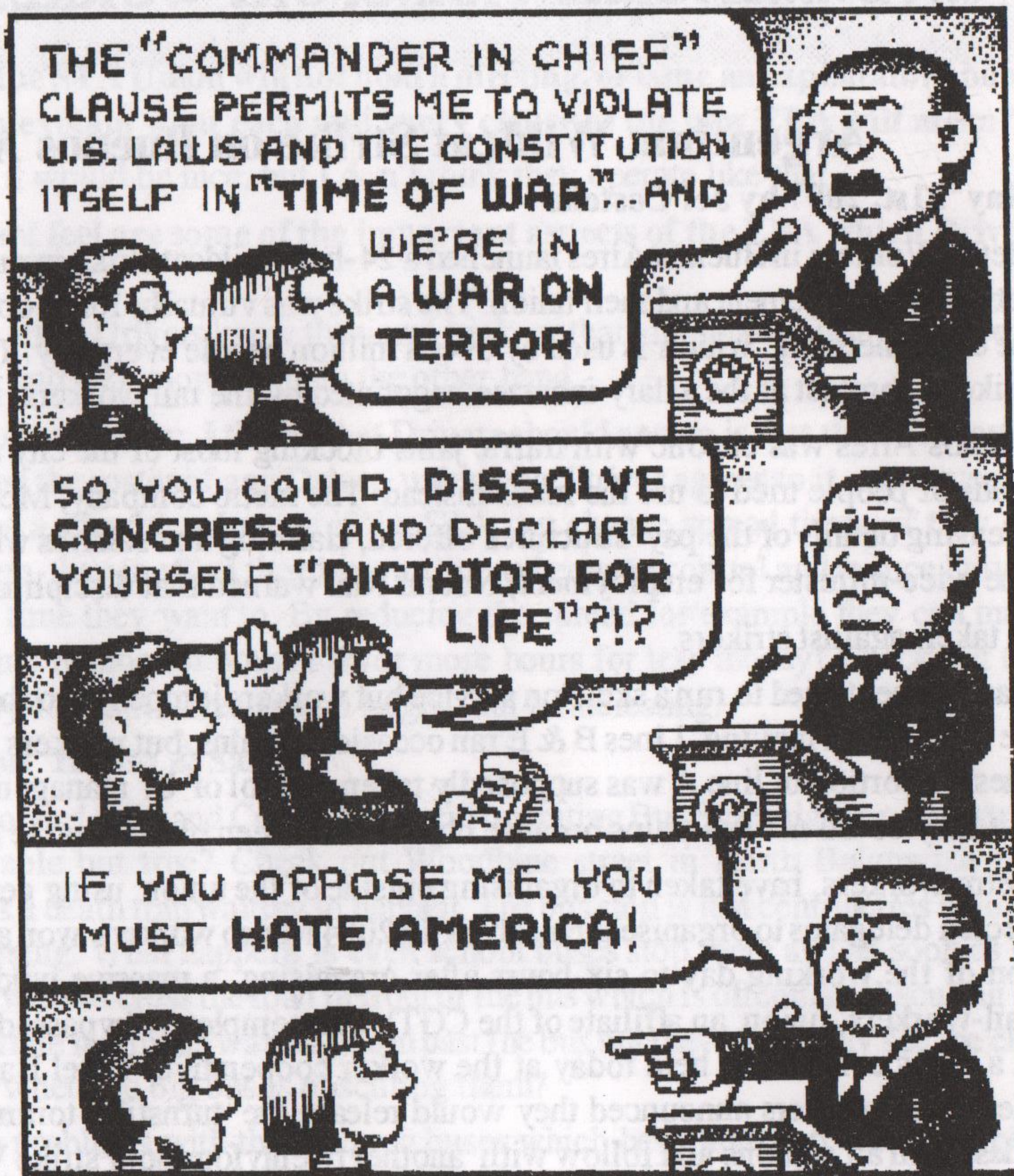
\$12-million federal grant that would provide funds for law enforcement personnel to ride aboard buses, particularly problem routes.

Earlier this month, by a 5-4 vote, the council refused to accept the money to pay for Wayne County sheriff's deputies to ride the routes because of complaints from Detroit police union officials that their officers should be hired and because of liability concerns in the event of a problem aboard the buses.

Detroit police officers had patrolled buses until late 2005 when budget cuts forced the department to stop the patrols.

"We're not striking," said union president Gaffney, "but the city has an obligation to supply us with a safe environment to work in. It's about health and safety." "There's not one bus on the street," he said.

Despite the solid walkout the Free Press claimed that the union agreed that drivers would return to work today still without an agreement on Sheriff's deputies providing security.



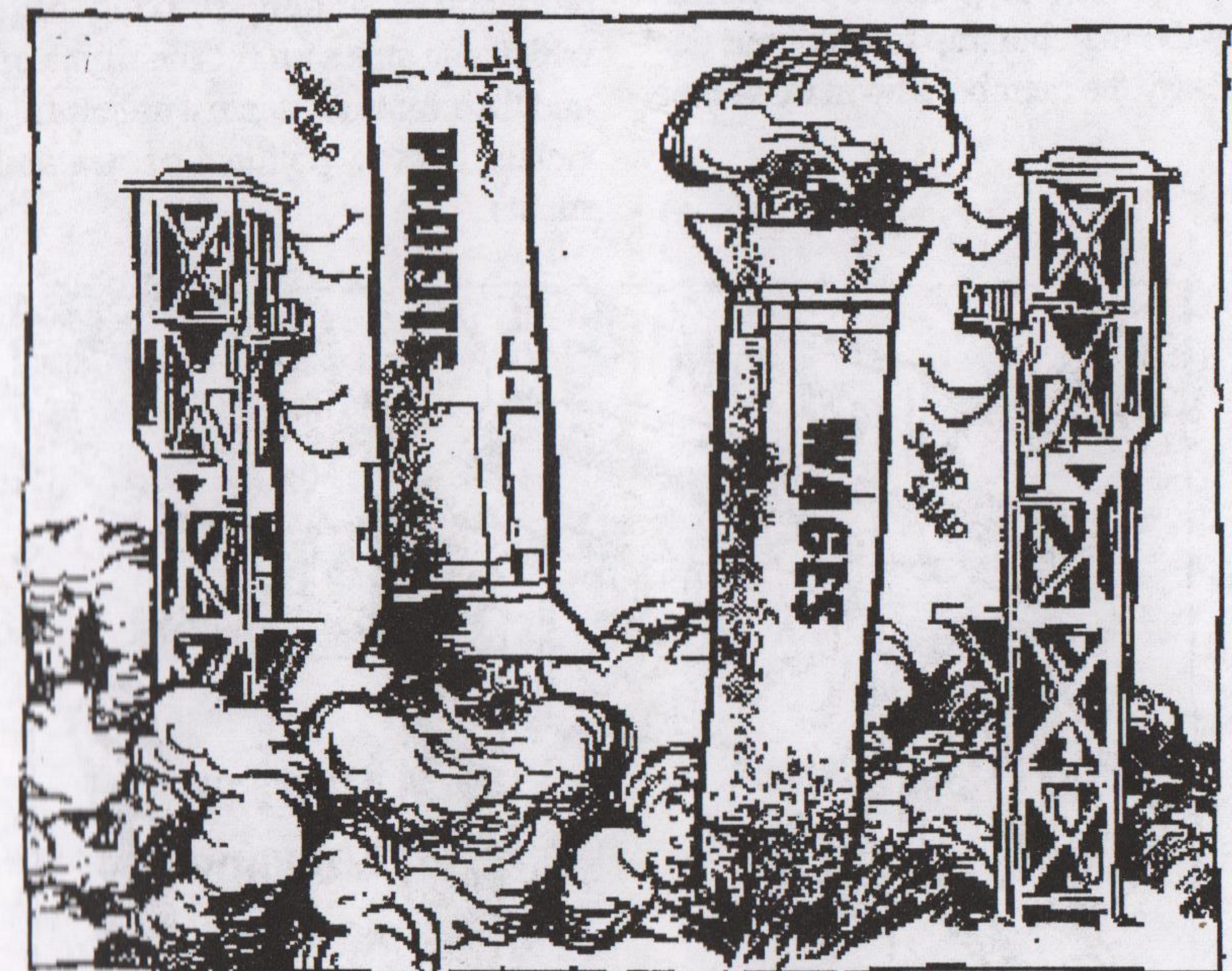
## Belgium: Strikes across rail network

February 22nd, 2007 by Jef Costello

Last Thursday a wildcat strike by train drivers at the Belgian station of Termonde lead to the cancellation of many services, a spokesman for the railway claimed not to know what had triggered the unofficial action.

A strike by conductors in Wallonia on Monday paralysed most of the rail services in the south of the country. The conductors were protesting at unsafe working conditions after three conductors were assaulted in the space of a few days. They have accepted a return to work a commitment from the justice system to crack down on those using violence on the railways and a promise to increase cooperation between police districts. 1/4 trains ran between Charleroi and Brussels, the Namur to Brussels and Namur to Charleroi routes were mostly shut down for the entire day. The strike was very well observed, Louvière et Tamines stations ran a skeleton service, Jemelles and Arlon were very seriously affected with only one train leaving the latter station all day.

The SACT (Independent Conductors Union) has threatened a "zeal strike" across the entire country to begin Friday, by this they mean that conducteurs will no longer check tickets or attempt to act against those without them. This is in relation to staff bonuses. In votes conducted by the union conductors have shown themselves to be heavily in favour of a reform of the bonus system. If the "zeal strike" is ineffective the next step will probably be an official strike ballot. Thanks to Libcom



"5...4...3...2...1...ignition!"