

# Membership Newsletter

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## RTBU WA PTA BRANCH UPDATE



### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

1. Secretary's Address
2. Union Meme!
3. A Quote with Relevance
4. Out on Track
5. A Legacy of Service
6. The Public Good!
7. Negotiations
8. Prospecting for Members
9. Industrial Organiser

### Secretary's Address

As Branch Secretary, I value harmonious industrial relations between our Union, the PTA, including the Government by extension, and the connected private railway employers.

I know of the difficult position that we have all found ourselves in, during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as through involvement in the attempts to support recovery in WA as quickly as possible. We have all strove to maintain cooperation through this unusual time, but cooperation requires mutual consideration of priorities.

The PTA has been reluctant for many years now to enter into serious negotiations around improving the operational capacity of Agreements to which our Union is party. I am of the belief that this is due to the handcuffs placed upon the PTA's negotiation capacity around Public Sector Wages Policy and the impact on bargaining.

It is no secret that COVID-19 has put the WA economy in a very challenging economic environment. Unfortunately, there is a now the prospect that such severe limitation will continue, if not get worse.

I have written to government encouraging them to reconsider the constraints of Wages Policy and its application to Public Sector bargaining and to give serious consideration to improving the bargaining situation for Public Sector workers.

While we are no doubt all thankful that the State Government saw the sense in protecting Public Sector wages during the height of the COVID-19 uncertainty in WA, we must remind them that we sit at the table demanding fairness, not begging for favours.

### UNION MEME!

#### WHEN WORKERS UNITE



### A Quote with Relevance

*"I am not afraid of the pen, or the scaffold, or the sword. I will tell the truth wherever I please."*

- Mary Harris "Mother" Jones

## Out on Track

By Joshua Dekuyer



Below are just some of the recent and current issues/matters attended to by our Union:

- Wrote to the Transport Minister arguing that public sector RTBU Members should be recognised for their contribution and cooperation through the pandemic with an easing of State Public Sector Wage Policy.
- Supported a member through a stressful investigation by the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator.
- Investigated evidence in a disciplinary matter, resulting in significant further investigation by the employer to properly justify the decision-making process.
- Refined plans around structure of an amalgamated RTBU in Western Australia and how the PTA Branch's areas would function.
- Significant work undertaken around the management of commercial properties owned by the State Branch of the RTBU, with pursuit of owed monies and finalising of tenancies being vacated.
- Took up a position on the Steering Committee for "The Public Good" campaign through UnionsWA.
- Moved work on the new and improved RTBU WA website to the development phase, including significant improvement of content and layout.
- Organised access to template graphic design documents through National Office to improve options for workplace and external communications.
- Attended staff mediation meetings to support members with their workplace grievances.
- Assisted with drafting responses to Discipline investigations and allegations for multiple members.
- Referred and managed members interaction with lawyers for Worker's Compensation.
- Finalised Enterprise Bargaining Agreements for PTA Customer Relations and N&I.
- Engaged in Fair Work Commission conciliation for Unfair Dismissal, resulting in settlement between the parties.
- Led discussions around equitable solutions to TTO Railcar Driver rostering issues.

*"Refined plans around structure of an amalgamated RTBU in Western Australia and how the PTA Branch's areas would function."*

## THE POWER OF UNION



## A Legacy of Service *By Joshua Dekuyer*

One of the features we love about the transport industry is that it can become a life-long commitment for the people that join it. Though the nature of the job market has changed over, there are many people in our membership who have had the industry as their companion for most of their lives.

In the picture to the right, I had the pleasure of being part of a celebration of service of three such gentlemen, Norman Williams, Leo Agnello and ex-RTBU Branch President John Olding.

Over the 150+ years of combined time in the railway that they share, these men have seen all manner of changes. Norm tells me that when he started there were still some steam engines getting around! Honouring the time these gentlemen have put in and recognising what they've been through is a good reminder to us all to look after the industry for our future as well as generations after us (that we just may work alongside if we follow their lead!) and to look to our colleagues as more than "just" work mates but inspiration in a long productive life. Congratulations!



## The Public Good!

Without a doubt, the tone of many conversations has changed since the novel Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic struck the world a heavy blow that Australia did not escape from. One issue that has been pushed to the forefront of people's minds, who may not have considered it in the past, is total employment in the population.

In an economy such as Australia, where so many livelihoods depend on provision of personal service, public interaction and the free-flow of customers, including tourists, the crippling effects of restricted movement and customer demand have highlighted a fact of our modern world:

Few jobs exist in a vacuum and many cease to exist when money cannot flow into the hands of a confident locally-spending public.

A continuous message at all levels of response to the pandemic has been the importance of keeping people in employment and economically safe. In Western Australia, a very important component of that has been the maintenance of positions and conditions in the WA Public Sector.

[As of March 2020, the WA public sector employed 146,343 people in the equivalent of 115,548 full-time jobs.](#) The importance of this resource when it comes to options for the state, in the face of an employment crisis, cannot be overstated.

Consider this - on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, WA Public Sector employers and employees were assured that the State Government would continue a significant portion of their salary or wages throughout any temporary [stop to work or significant alterations, due to government directions caused by COVID-19.](#)

Great for them, right? Sure - but that's only part of the picture.

4 days later, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, the [Federal Morrison Government announced the JobKeeper payment package](#) with the statement, "This is about keeping the connection between the employer and the employee and keeping people in their jobs even though the business they work for may go into hibernation and close down for six months." The people of Australia have generally come to understand that this continued security of income and employment is of incredible importance, as knowing that you will keep having pay coming in and food on the table keeps people safe, [keeps the creeping negative mental health effects of economic instability at bay](#) and gives people the confidence to put their money where their mouth is and spend at local businesses that are struggling for custom and keep OTHERS employed.

Where the JobKeeper package has been surrounded with accounting complexities and controversy, there has been no such concern with the WA Public Sector protecting the employment and income of WA residents, as the cost and mechanism is known and governed by existing awards, agreements and WA legislation. Where confidence in income can remain high, confidence in spending can remain high, supporting all the local services and valuable entities like sporting clubs, community groups, niche businesses and art creators that make WA a vibrant and exciting place to live or visit.

[\*"Consumer spending is a more significant influencer on the economy than many people realise. Even a small reduction in Australian spending habits has a dramatic impact."\*](#)

Public sector employment means that the pooling of public resources that State Government represents can directly ensure that WA people can work for the good of all in the state, support their community and take action to ensure a bright, just and productive future for all in WA.



*"Consumer spending is a more significant influencer on the economy than many people realise. Even a small reduction in Australian spending habits has a dramatic impact."*



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## Negotiations *By Joshua Dekuyer*

With the Customer Relations and the Network & Infrastructure Agreements having now been lodged with the WAIRC and only awaiting ratification it will only be a short wait till their back payments (calculated from late May) are processed by the PTA.

We now move onto the EDI Rail Bombardier Transportation (Maintenance) EA which is set to expire 31 October 2020. George Johnston (RTBU Organiser) is about to commence buckling down in his final preparations for what is ahead with this.

## Prospecting for Members

This month George Johnston and I took a weekend trip to Kalgoorlie to visit our Delron and TransWA members (and prospective members) who work on the *Prospector*.

It was great to be able to put a face to the name of many of our Kalgoorlie counterparts. We are proud of the work our members do and we are glad to welcome onboard some new members to our great Union, all of whom will soon be 'back in-house'!

## Industrial Organiser

Whilst your workplace delegate should be your first port of call for all things Union. George Johnston, our Industrial Organiser, has the role to help you, and your workplace delegates, with tasks that they one may not have the experience to tackle, or are too "big" to handle (depending on one's own experience).

George's job involves (but is not limited to):

- Training and developing delegates and members so that we have organised workplaces.
- Providing support and backup information.
- Assist in the handling of disputes and grievances.
- Recruit new members in workplaces and build membership numbers.
- Assist with and negotiate Enterprise Agreements.
- Help develop safe and healthy workplaces.
- Ensuring workers are protected after an accident (including return to work and workers' compensation arrangements).
- Visit members in the workplace.
- Provide advice on employment conditions, employment rights and RTBU services to delegates and to members when visiting workplaces.
- Represent the union, and its members, at various tribunals such as FWC and the WAIRC on a case by case basis.

George has an excellent working knowledge of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Industrial Relations Act and the Fair Work Act.

George can be contacted at the office (9225 6722), via his email ([georgej@rtbuwa.asn.au](mailto:georgej@rtbuwa.asn.au)) or on his mobile.

With the TransWA Agreement set to expire 31 January 2021 and the TTO Drivers Agreement set to expire 16 March 2021 times are about to get very busy!

To make matters worse, we have a State election fast approaching (13 March 2021) and will see the government go into 'caretaker mode' in its lead up (usually 6 weeks prior to election). Caretaker mode results in specific restrictions and practices being applied which will affect the ability to negotiate the upcoming TTO Drivers Agreement. So, we better get cracking!



*A beautiful day at Kalgoorlie station*



*Industrial Organiser George Johnston at National Council*



Rail Tram and Bus Union  
 Unit 2/10 Nash Street, Perth WA 6000  
[www.rtbuwa.asn.au](http://www.rtbuwa.asn.au)  
[general@rtbuwa.asn.au](mailto:general@rtbuwa.asn.au)  
 (08) 9225 6722