

# THE Transport Worker

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## SUPPORTING THAI RAIL WORKERS



Wayne Butson assists the ITF in bringing justice to Thai rail workers

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## GLASSY ISSUE



Weakness in cab windows revealed

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## PORT MARLBOROUGH SPOTLIGHT



The cruise ship Volendam visits Port Marlborough.

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## Political football

# ACC in the gun for major modification



Wellington branch secretary Howard Phillips and GS Wayne Butson carry the RMTU banner at Parliament in support of KiwiBikers.

ONCE again ACC is being used as a political football as National prepares the organisation for privatisation – and Labour promises to wrest it back. And who do you think will pay? Correct – YOU - the New Zealand taxpayer who struck a deal with governments past to give up their right to sue for a no fault accident insurance scheme.

And as we watch, National has begun the process by raising ACC fees, cutting back on services and generally making it more difficult to obtain rehabilitation so as to get back on the road to recovery.

Last month the RMTU joined other unions and

worker organisations together with ACC lobby groups in a rally on Parliament grounds arranged by the NZ Motor Cycle Club (KiwiBiker) – one group of New Zealanders already targeted by swinging rate increases by National.

Former RMTU general secretary and ACC chair until sacked by the National government, Ross Wilson spoke strongly about National's rhetoric and lack of

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# RMTU – NZ's Largest Specialist Transport Union

**“They said ACC is insolvent. Not true. It has over \$11 billion in reserves. That doesn’t sound like insolvency.”**

**- Ross Wilson**



over \$200 million a year from a privatised ACC.

“Merrill Lynch were John Key's employers and they were reporting to Australian insurance companies,” he said. “With that sort of profit, no wonder they’re interested.”

He wondered if there was more to National’s programme than simply profit for Australian insurance companies. Profit, he says, which is sucked



*MPs Rick Barker (l) and Phil Goff chat to one of the bikers who organised the rally.*

comprehensive entitlement, complete rehabilitation, real compensation, and administrative efficiency. He recognised that the various activities we undertake in society are all inter-related, and that benefit and harm flow on to others, rather than rest solely with the people undertaking those activities.

Sadly, Sir Owen’s vision came under attack from vested interests almost from day one. Politicians responded to their lobbying and began to compromise the principles Sir Owen set out, and the ACC scheme we have today is littered with inequities.”

He went on to castigate National’s plans to privatise ACC calling them “government of the very worst sort. It suggests decisions may have been made not in the interests of the country but as a result of secret deals with corporate interests who very likely - but we’ll never know for sure because of the lack of transparency in electoral funding - were significant contributors to the National Party’s election coffers.”

The National government appears to be preparing the ground nicely for privatisation.

Privatising ACC would see injured Kiwis locked in disputes with insurance firms over coverage, rather than getting back on the road to recovery.

Those most likely to suffer the consequences are New Zealand workers and we all know that working in New Zealand’s ports and on rail can be hazardous.

Heed the rally’s message: Don’t privatise ACC and put your weight behind a campaign to stop it. 

interest in the facts.

“They said ACC is insolvent,” he said. “Not true. It has over \$11 billion in reserves. That doesn’t sound like insolvency.”

He said a report prepared by Merrill Lynch before the 2008 election, showed that private insurance companies could make

out of New Zealand and from New Zealand taxpayers.

Meanwhile, Labour leader Phil Goff warned Australian-owned insurance companies against investing in the scheme here should it become opened for privatisation to cheers and applause from the rally.

“Privatise ACC in New Zealand at your peril, because when Labour is back you are going to be out of here and we are taking it back,” he said.

A consensus of opinions from those who spoke at the rally concluded that private insurance companies need to make profit, it which case ACC will be more expensive to run and levies will need to be increased.

Private insurers will also try to minimise pay-outs making it more difficult for New Zealand citizens to claim following an accident.

Nick Smith has already revealed he’s been considering proposals to make workers pay a \$100 excess and cut compensation levels by a quarter. Cutting coverage, and calling ACC insurance rather than social security, just makes it easier to privatise.

Green Party Kevin Hague spoke strongly against the Bill at its second reading saying: “Sir Owen Woodhouse’s vision for an accident compensation scheme was that of a no-fault scheme, based on the principles of community responsibility,



**CTU embraces mankini**

**New CTU ad campaign features one Borat, two Brunos and a bright green mankini.**

What happens when you take the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, a serious issue like cuts to ACC and a target audience of drunken Sevens fans?

The answer is a CTU campaign like you’ve never seen before. Complete with a mankini, slapstick humour and shot in less than a day the CTU’s “That’s gotta hurt” advertising campaign is a departure from the usual union style.

And that’s something CTU president Helen Kelly is pleased with. She voiced the commercials and reckons a bit of laddish humour is just what’s needed to get the union message through. “What unions do is serious business but that doesn’t

mean we can’t have some fun to get our point of view across.”

“Most union members already know what the Government is doing to ACC is wrong but to win the argument we need to go beyond preaching to the choir and talk to audiences that might not have politics at the front of their minds.”

“That’s why we figured the mankini adverts would be perfect for the sevens,” she says, “and hopefully by using a bit of rough and ready humor we’ll get people thinking about ACC when they wouldn’t have otherwise.”

View the new CTU ads at: [www.youtube.com/NZCTU](http://www.youtube.com/NZCTU)

**For more information and to register your support go to:**

[www.fairness.org.nz/acc](http://www.fairness.org.nz/acc)



## Joint vision

**D**URING late 2009 the Union and KiwiRail sent joint teams around New Zealand to brief members on the 2010 wage round. At each location speakers presented the KiwiRail and RMTU strategic vision for the employment arrangements for the rail industry.

KiwiRail's vision is to join together under one brand and to raise performance and market position. This vision complements the RMTU goal of restoring common conditions for all rail workers and to restore the feeling of the rail family amongst workers within the industry.

It is felt that in this way we will all band together to ensure that

the performance of rail is lifted to restore the trust and confidence of the New Zealand public in their rail service.

Following the report-back meetings the Union commenced a nationwide postal ballot seeking authority for a single Multi Employer Collective Agreement for the rail industry. This process is required by the Employment Relations Act 2000. 🇳🇿

## 58 years service to rail

1952 – the year a young Bill Veale joined the railways and the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants as a junior porter in Wairoa at one shilling and three pence an hour.

For some of us that may sound like history but for Bill it was the start of a very long attachment with railways. The duties back then for the porter were primarily cleaning railcars and stations.

Bill transferred to Gisborne with the same duties but after six weeks Wairoa Station was said to be overstaffed. While at Gisborne, Bill was also called upon to assist the express trains and railcars.

At the age of 20 Bill teamed up to do the train lists and assisted the goods trains using WW and BB engines to Moutahao where there were 12 stations, shunting and signalling sometimes working 14 hour days. Unfortunately he was the first person to derail a railcar when he failed to check the facing points.

He transferred to Napier in 1957 as a traffic assistant, shunter, signalman and

number taker until he turned 29 when he moved over to the role of train guard.

In 1971, Bill was struggling with his eyes and after three months of testing, had to have his left one removed. This was the start of a new career in the clerical branch office doing parcels and goods as well as a major move to Wellington.

Bill took up the role for P9 and suburban ticket office and was appointed to shift clerk cashier during a time when there were only four shifts.

During a restructure, Bill was reduced back to a ticket seller, a role he has held now for a number of years.



Bill has been a member of the RMTU for the past 23 years, since 1987, and after this long and industrious career, we all wish him a few more years yet as he arrives at 58 years of service. 🇳🇿

**M**OST of you will now be back on deck having long forgotten the holidays you had and how rested and stress-free you became as the realities of the modern NZ workplace return to your shoulders. The truth is, that we all have a busy year in the offing as we struggle to improve, or just maintain in some cases, our working conditions and our jobs under the current economic climate and Government policies.

### Feeling the effects

The vast majority of our members work within, or have occupations which support, the Transport Logistics supply chain. Therefore, it is us who feel the effects of an economic downturn shortly after our brothers and sisters in manufacturing. We shared the job losses and the belt-tightening that followed the meltdown of the world financial markets just like everyone else. 168,000 New Zealanders are now unemployed and amongst them are far too many ex-RMTU members.

Employers may have cut back on laying off people of late but they are most certainly not recruiting widely anymore. It is going to take a while to return unemployment to the levels enjoyed under the previous Labour Government.

We are hearing analysts, and others, talk about an economic recovery but the reality is that there cannot be any sort of economic recovery whilst large numbers of New Zealanders are unemployed.

We must all avoid doing excessive hours at the expense of creating new positions for people seeking employment. We are seeing some employers looking at importing skilled workers from overseas to fill gaps at the expense of Kiwis. Personally I find it astounding that KiwiRail, a state owned enterprise, is considering importing train drivers from the United Kingdom.

Government entities should be made to toe the government line and if John Key and his cabinet colleagues are sincere in getting Kiwis working again then no Government entity should be permitted to import labour.

The reality of the situation is even more graphic in condemning the importation of



*Wayne Butson, general secretary*

**Whilst discussions have continued between the RMTU, C3 and the Port of Tauranga Company, a satisfactory resolution for this Union has eluded the parties to date.**

labour. It will take at least six to seven months to obtain the necessary immigration clearances, conduct the selection processes and to just get the people and their families on to our shores. Once here they will require six months training to be able to operate trains on our system. A total of 13 months from

the start of the process. On the other hand, if we moved now to set up training schools and take on new students they will be out in 12 months fully qualified. Come on let's get NZ working!

### Crucial postal ballot

As I write this we have our largest ever postal ballot for a Multi Employer Collective Agreement [MECA]. This ballot, if carried in all five companies, will form the basis of bringing all rail workers in NZ back under one core employment instrument. This will see us almost complete the unravelling of the privatisation and outsourcing of the last century. I am aware of at least one author who is putting together an exposé of the cost to New Zealand of the corporatisation, privatisation and colonisation (outsourcing and break up) of rail. If all of the money involved had been targeted to the asset and the industry instead of the pockets of a few then we would most certainly not have a rail network where train transit times are now longer (slower) than they were in the 1950s. And even as I write KiwiRail is publishing full page apologies for poor service in national newspapers.

### Tense in Tauranga

A tense situation exists in the Sulphur Point Terminal within Port of Tauranga. Port of Tauranga has advised C3 that ISL is to be given 6,000 hours of straddle crane driving within the terminal. ISL is a non-union company and the move is viewed as being hostile toward the RMTU and prejudicial to the ongoing job security of our members within C3. Whilst discussions have continued between the RMTU, C3 and the Port of Tauranga Company, a satisfactory resolution for this Union has eluded the parties to date. Meanwhile the RMTU has continued to seek support domestically – and internationally – in preparation of a major dispute erupting. As with all disputes you play to win and so shall the RMTU if it becomes necessary. We will expect each and every RMTU member to play their part as it evolves. Rail workers, port company workers and C3 members will all stand together on this one as we are – stronger together! 🌐

# Arguing for a Taupo branch line

**E**STABLISHING a new branch line to Taupo will be an uphill battle, discovered RMTU LE Isaac Broome, who wrote to the Minister of Transport, Stephen Joyce seeking to establish a link between Taupo and Tauranga via Rotorua.

He argued that while the benefits to the region would be numerous the two most significant would be a clean, secure transport for its timber industry and another link in the growing popularity of the train tourist network.

Work was started on such a line in 1928 but was stopped a year later as the depression deepened.

“Had it been completed,” he wrote, “it would be one of the most well used rail lines in the country, carrying forestry traffic and tourist passenger trains between Auckland, Rotorua and Taupo.”

A side benefit, he points out, would be a decrease in heavy traffic on our main roads.

His reply from the minister was predictably negative especially as he represents a government keen to make rail less of a financial burden and which is committed to pouring money into roading.

Joyce argues that the cost of a branch line

to Taupo would be “prohibitively expensive” and went on to knock the previous government for buying Toll NZ’s assets for \$690 million claiming that it is now valued at “just \$388 million”.

## Road over rail

His government’s position in favour of road over rail becomes clearer when he writes that: “Currently the company, in association with the Ministry of Transport and the Treasury, is reassessing its strategic direction and working out how it can ween itself off government subsidies. Part of this process will identify new ways for KiwiRail to grow its customers and therefore its revenue, but it cannot afford the significant capital cost that construction of a new line into Taupo will entail.”

“We want to encourage an environment where rail can operate as efficiently as possible, with strong commercial imperatives to provide the greatest benefit to the New Zealand economy. However, we also now need some hard-nosed realism about future investments. We need decisions that make sense when stacked up alongside other modal options, including sea freight and roading.”

He ends by saying the government “will continue to review what investment is required to ensure the ongoing viability of rail in the future”.

RMTU general secretary, Wayne Butson told Isaac that a line to Taupo had “always been a lost opportunity” and agreed with him about its potential benefits.

Unfortunately, he said, it was low on the Union’s list of priorities as “we are locked into a silent, non-violent battle to retain the rail network we have”.

“It is particularly distressing for me to find that after 16 years of privatisation we are looking at the first major line closure after rail was returned to crown ownership.”

He was talking about the potential closure of the Stratford/Okahukura line where maintenance work was recently deferred indefinitely.

“There is no doubt in my mind that the current government does not support rail and is being dragged kicking and squealing to provide the least amount of money it can get away with.”

Meanwhile, Isaac is pursuing his lone campaign and this magazine will keep you informed of any developments.

## Iran unionist released from solitary confinement



**A** protest letter from the ITF and action by affiliates has been linked to the release of bus workers’ leader Mansour Osanloo from solitary confinement in Iran. Last month, the ITF learnt that Osanloo, president of the ITF-affiliated Tehran Bus Workers’ Union, had been moved into solitary confinement at Rajai Shar prison. He has spent almost three years in detention for his trade union activities.

His transfer prompted a strongly worded protest letter from the ITF’s general secretary to Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, as well as protests from affiliated unions, including the seafarers’ union, Kesatuan Pelaut Indonesia. Following these protests, Osanloo was transferred to the general section of the prison within

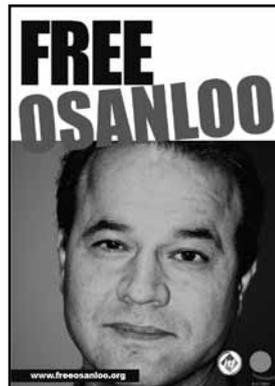
a couple of days.

The Iranian government’s recent attempt to clampdown on Osanloo coincided with the universal periodic review of the United Nations, which, every four years, looks into human rights in each of the 192 member states. On 15/02/10, it considered the situation in Iran. During the course of the review, Iranian trade unionists – including representatives from the Tehran Bus Workers’ Union – submitted a statement urging the UN to take on board a list of claims to improve labour rights across the country.

In September 2009, the International Trade Union

Confederation and global unions submitted details of Iran’s violations of workers’ fundamental rights, including information on the repression of the Tehran Bus Workers’ Union and of the continued imprisonment of Osanloo and union vice-president Ebrahim Madadi.

ITF inland transport section secretary, Mac Urata said: “We are relieved that Osanloo is out of solitary confinement. . . . Whatever the promises of the Iranian authorities at the UN, they ring hollow as long as genuine trade unionists remain in prison on trumped up charges.”



# Line closure would be a big mistake

**I**T would be a big mistake to close the Stratford-Taumaranui rail link east of Stratford, say many people connected to the district.

“The government need to invest in this line to keep it open,” says Rob Stone, a locomotive engineer and branch secretary of the Rail Maritime Transport Union.

“Once mothballed that’s the end of it. It will never open again,” said Rob, who lives in Stratford.

Last November an 8km stretch of the line was badly damaged by a train derailment giving cause for KiwiRail to review the future of the Stratford – Okahukuru rail line (as it is known).

Mr Stone said the union is not just concerned about job losses, but the major impact of losing a viable transport option for Taranaki.

“It’s not just that goods going north would be sent quicker from Taranaki, but this line is also a backup if the main trunk line goes down,” he said.

“It took 49 years to build the line. We now should be looking 49 years ahead.”

“About three years ago the option was being considered to run 2000-tonne coal

trains from Ohura to Stratford seven days a week, to ship the coal to Port Taranaki to send to Japan. That coal is still there, and the road out east couldn’t handle big trucks shipping it out.”

## Considering options

He added that 18 months ago options were being considered to cart whey by train from Northland to the lactose factory at Kapuni seven days a week.

“We don’t want to regret a kneejerk decision in the future,” he said.

“Situations change. There are a number of lines around the country that were once earmarked for closure, but they carried on and are now busy lines.”

He said the Stratford – Okahukuru line hadn’t been maintained for a “long time” and now needed government finance to “get it back in good condition”.

Rob Phillips, operations manager for Taranaki Regional Council, said the council has formed a working party, which includes the Ruapehu District Council and interested parties. Their submission to KiwiRail and the Minister of Transport will be lodged this week.

Stratford District Mayor, Neil Volzke said the commercial viability and the freight volumes on the line will be foremost in the minds of the KiwiRail decision makers. “Just how much value they attach to the strategic worth as an alternative route to the main trunk line is unknown. It would be very sad and disappointing if the SOL line is closed. The SOL has been in action for over a century, serving the people of Taranaki well, providing employment and other opportunities. There is much history and many stories associated with this line. There are maintenance workers and supporting businesses that depend on its existence.

“If it is not possible to keep the line open we will be working with the Government to ensure all other alternative uses are fully explored and that the Taranaki region and communities will not be disadvantaged in any way.”

He added: “We will be demanding that the rail corridor remains in public ownership to ensure those opportunities can exist.”

A petition is circulating around Stratford to keep the line open. A decision by KiwiRail on the future of the line is expected as this magazine goes to print. 🇳🇿

## Drew retires

**A**T the November 2009 Trustees’ Meeting Drew McFarlane retired as a Trustee of the NZ Harbours Superannuation Plan. Drew began his long association with the Super Fund as an Alternative Trustee of the Plan representing the Bay of Plenty region. He was appointed a full Trustee in 2002 at the RMTU annual conference and more consistently made a valuable contribution to the Plan during his period as a Trustee. A gift in recognition and



*Drew is all smiles when receiving his gift from NZ Harbours Superannuation Plan chair David Stevens.*

appreciation of his contribution and service to the fund on behalf of members was made to Drew by the Trustees of the Plan and the National Management Committee of the Union.



*General secretary Wayne Butson farewells a close comrade and thanks him for his valuable work on behalf of members whilst a Union Trustee to the Plan.*

# MUA youth conference

By Christopher Lydiate (Port Chalmers branch)

**I**N December 2009 the Maritime Union of Australia held its third Youth Conference in Brisbane.

Over 70 delegates from branches from throughout Australia, including three Kiwi guests from EMPU, MUNZ and RMTU attended the three day conference.

Many topics were addressed over the three days which included special guest speakers for the MOJO (Miscarriages of Justice Organization) Gerry Conlon and Joe Hill. Both told their story of being wrongly accused for IRA bombings which happened in the 1970s in England and who were held in prison for over 15 years. MOJO is a human rights group they set up to assist innocent people both in prison and after their release.

A representative of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) also talked about this and many stories were shared where, through the efforts of ITF and union affiliates in ports, ships' crews' pay have been increased and conditions dramatically improved with the efforts of the Flags of Convenience (FOC) campaign. It is clear that port workers have been the assault troops for FOC and is probably the reason why port workers and organised labour are being attacked worldwide by the creation of Ports of Convenience (POC) and the utilisation of non union or yellow union labour. It is time now for seafarers to pay back the solidarity of port workers.

It was great to see so many young people willing to take an active role in their union and ready to carry on the efforts from those before.



Deputy national secretary for the MUA Mick Doleman, in talking about our jobs and the conditions we fight for, said these inspiring words: "It's not my job. I'm just looking after it for now, and if I can pass it on with the same or better conditions to someone else then I have done my bit."

This statement sums up the theme for the conference which was "Know the Past, Own the Future" and in doing so, if we prepare and work in the present, together in solidarity then as unions, whether in Australia, New Zealand or anywhere, we can make a difference for the worker.

STRONGER TOGETHER! 

## Political briefs

### Holidays threatened

The Government is moving to implement changes to the Holidays Act recommended by the working group assigned to do a review of the law last year.

The recommendations, which had an employer majority, included making the fourth week of leave saleable and changing the way annual leave is calculated.

The Council of Trade Unions has come out against the changes, stating each one is designed to reduce the entitlements New Zealand workers are currently eligible for. It says the calculation of holiday entitlements is a technical issue and that the risk changes to the formula that look like mere simplifications with result in actual entitlements can

be dramatically reduced.

For example, taking the new formula proposed in the report for sick leave and applying it to annual leave, annual leave entitlements are reduced for any worker who has increased their hours during the year.

The CTU also fears that making the fourth week saleable could mean vulnerable workers are forced to sell their leave, and that it will open the door to removing the fourth week altogether in the future.

The Government is expected to implement the changes early this year.

### Smoko breaks in danger

The last Labour Government's meal break legislation is set to be repealed by National via a bill that the Minister of Labour,

Kate Wilkinson, is claiming will 'increase flexibility'. The changes have been tabled despite official concerns that they have been developed at speed and without adequate consultation and may result in unintended consequences.

The current legislation required employers to provide at least two paid ten minute smoko breaks and an unpaid half hour meal break over the course of a normal working day, something many workers in areas such as hospitality and retail were not receiving.

The amendment is designed to allow employers to restrict workers' breaks by requiring them to remain partially on duty while taking them, requiring breaks to be taken all in one go, or allowing breaks to be bought via some form of negotiated compensation. The bill is expected to be passed once Parliament sits this month.

Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome is a constant hazard for many RMTU workers.

# HAVS revisited with track-worker's experience



Lawyer Ben Thompson revisits the potential hazards facing RMTU workers with a real-life example.

**I**N August 2009, I wrote an article for the Transport Worker focusing on the risk of track workers contracting Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome, as a result of exposure to vibrating tools at work.

In that article, I set out that (based on vibration measurements published by the manufacturers of particular tools) a track worker could be placed at risk by being using certain tools for as little as 30 minutes a day.

I also explained that, despite having assisted RMTU members with ACC claims for some years, I have not yet seen a claim lodged for HAVS.

## Real-life example

Since then, however, I have come across an example of a real-life New Zealand track worker – and RMTU member – who now suffers from HAVS as a result of his exposure to vibration at work. His story is set out below (please note that all names have been changed, in order to comply with the member's wish to remain anonymous).

## What is HAVS?

HAVS – which is also sometimes referred to as 'vibration white finger' – is a condition which is caused by vibration being transmitted into a person's hands and arms. It affects the nerves, blood vessels, muscles and joints of the hand, wrist and arm. If ignored, it can become severely disabling.

*Rangi began working on the railways in approximately 1971, as a track worker. He initially worked up and down the North Island, but moved to the South Island in the early 1990s. He lives and works in the South Island still.*

*Like all track workers, Rangi was required to work for many years with vibrating tools. In the mid 1990s, he started being troubled by pain in his hands. However, in these early stages the pain was not major, and tended to disappear when he was not working.*

*However, Rangi's symptoms continued to gradually worsen. By 2001, as well as pain he was experiencing paraesthesia (abnormal skin sensations, such as tingling, tickling, itching or burning, usually associated with peripheral nerve damage) in all 4 fingers of both hands.*

*As well as Rangi's*

*symptoms being more severe, they also became more enduring – instead of disappearing after work, the symptoms would persist throughout the weekend. The symptoms had also begun affecting Rangi's non-work activities, such as driving, mowing the lawns, and using tools such as screwdrivers.*

*In light of this worsening of his symptoms, Rangi decided to lodge a claim for cover, for Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome, in 2001. This claim was lodged with WorkAon, whom Tranz Rail had contracted to administer the ACC scheme on its behalf.*

*WorkAon referred Rangi's claim to a specialist rheumatologist, Dr Smith, for an opinion regarding the diagnosis and cause of Rangi's condition. On 9 March 2001, Dr Smith undertook a physical examination of Rangi, as well as visiting his workplace in order to observe the how the gang carried out their track maintenance tasks.*

*In relation to Rangi's workplace environment and practices, Dr Smith took note of the fact that the size of the gangs has steadily decreased over the years, whilst the use of vibrating machines had steadily increased. More machines and fewer men meant more individual exposure to vibration.*

*Dr Smith observed that the gang would be physically using vibrating machinery (including pionjars, disc saws, bance and pro-line machines)*

for approximately 6 hours per day. He was told by the gangers that anti-vibration gloves had been provided to them approximately 5 years previously. However, the gangers did not feel that these gloves made much difference to their symptoms – especially where the symptoms had come on prior to the issuing of the gloves.

After examining Rangi, Dr Smith said:

"I think it is clear-cut that the pain he is getting in the small muscles of his palms and paraesthesiae in his fingers is secondary to the severely vibrating machines he has been using during the past 27 years. There are no non-work factors that may be contributing to or causing his symptoms. This condition is caused wholly by having to use the vibrating machines, and not by any aging process."

Dr Smith also noted that Rangi was using anti-vibration gloves, but recommended that he either needed to use vibrating machines less frequently, or preferably stop using them altogether.

On the basis of Dr Smith's opinion,

Rangi was granted cover for HAVS.

However, as the vibrating tools are an integral part of the job, Rangi continued to use them, and his symptoms have continued to deteriorate. He was seen in September 2007 by a specialist occupational physician, Dr Wilson.

When asked by Dr Wilson to rate his pain on a scale of 1-10, Rangi replied:

"At night it wakes me up because my hands are sore. They burn. Right through to 9 or 10."

Rangi also explained to Dr Wilson how his condition had progressed since 2001:

"Sometimes the fingers feel swollen up and tight. They're wicked in the cold. They go cold and white. Holding onto things is a problem. I have difficulty taking off the tops of milk bottles. It's hard to hold a hammer – I sometimes let go when I'm hammering. Nobody wants to stand near me."

Rangi's case is a sobering illustration of the effects of long-term exposure to vibration at work. Unfortunately, due to the nature of

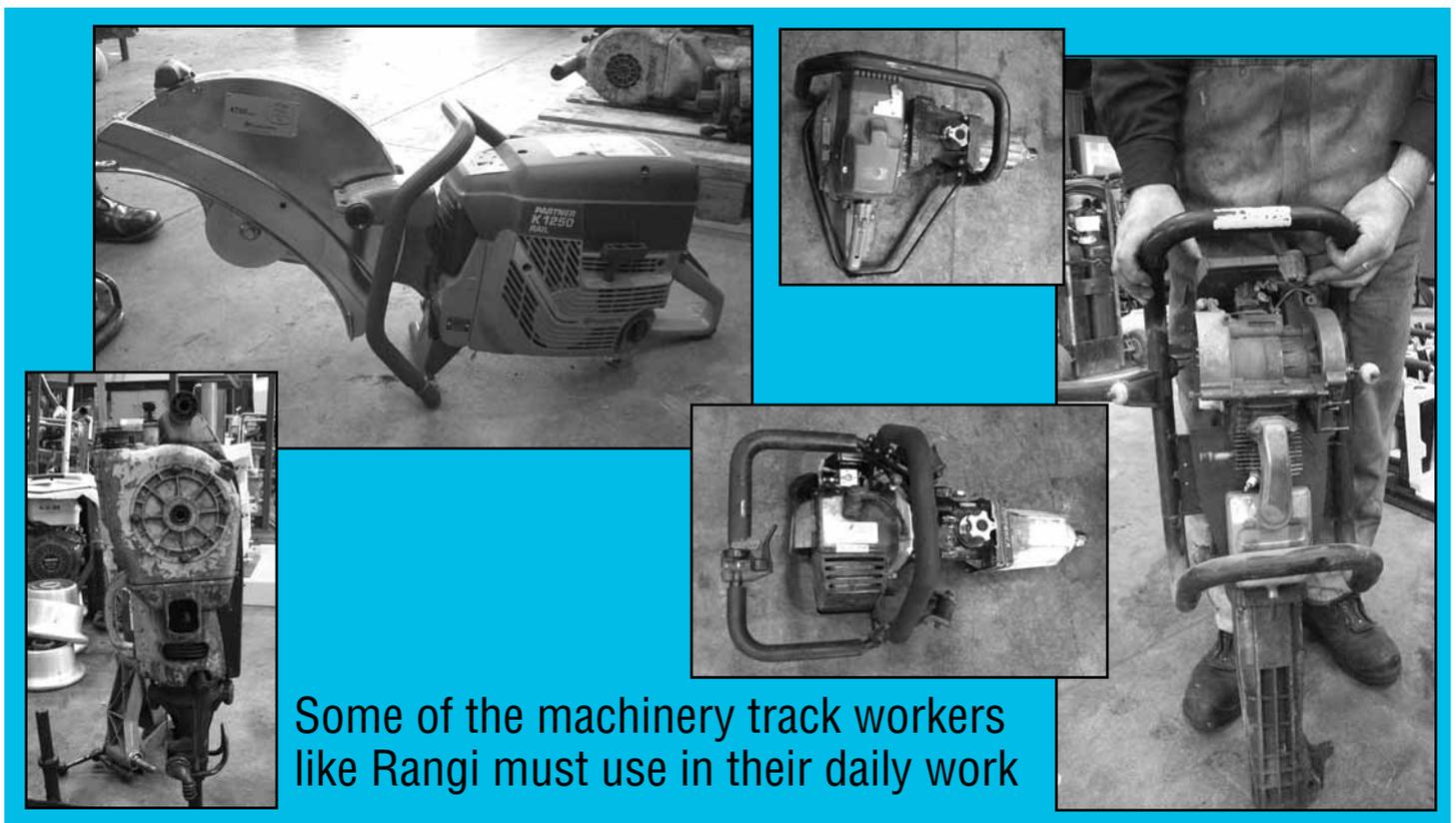
HAVS, it is unlikely that Rangi will experience an improvement in his condition.

Also interesting are Dr Smith's comments regarding Rangi's workplace. Particularly, it is clear from Dr Smith's report that Rangi was not the only member of his gang who was suffering from these kinds of symptoms. This lines up with Rangi's own assertion that he is certainly not the only one who is dealing with these problems. Furthermore, the workers who spoke to Dr Smith expressed concern that their anti-vibration gloves did not make much difference to their symptoms.

## Important message

The case study has some important messages for all track workers, the foremost of which is that long term exposure to the levels of vibration given off by the tools of the trade can lead to irreparable damage. Whilst precautionary measures such as anti-vibration gloves are to be encouraged, they are no substitute for workers limiting the amount of time that they are actually exposed to vibration.

Both the RMTU and Hazel Armstrong Law urge all track workers to see your GP as soon as possible, if you begin the experience the same types of symptoms as Rangi. 🌐



Some of the machinery track workers like Rangi must use in their daily work



# Further breakdown



**T**HE head of a delegation that investigated problems for workers' on Thailand's state railways has reacted angrily to news that conditions and morale have deteriorated further.

employers and the government.

Writing to Yutthana Thapcharoen of the State Railway of Thailand, Aslaksen stated: "The Mission made it very clear in our meeting with your deputy governor, Prachak Manodham and later at our press conference on 15 January in Bangkok that the SRT management must cease its current anti-union stance towards SRUT and establish a co-operative industrial relationship with the SRUT and its members. The goal should be for SRT and SRUT to both strive to improve the safety standards within the Thai railways. In this regard, the ITF general secretary, David Cockroft, wrote to the Thai Prime Minister on 18 January requesting your organisation to stop its anti-union activities and respect and fully implement the decision of the Tripartite Panel on 15 January, which voted against the dis-

Øystein Aslaksen, ITF Railway Workers' Section chair and president of the Norwegian Locomotive Drivers' Union wrote to the head of the State Railway of Thailand to register his and the ITF's dissatisfaction with the deteriorating situation on the country's railways. Aslaksen headed an international delegation of railway trade unionists who went to the country in January to investigate reports of poor rail safety standards and anti-union practices by





# on Thai railways



## Derailment blamed on insecure sleepers

As an indication of the dire state of Thai Rail, last month's derailment in the southern district of Na Mom, injuring about 20 people, is suspected to have been caused by old sleepers or ties supporting the tracks. They had failed to support the train on a notorious bend. Reports said the locomotive and one carriage jumped the tracks on a curve where several accidents have previously happened, shortly before the train reached Hat Yai station.

At least two of the injuries were serious and all, including three rail workers, were taken to hospital.

dismissal of the six Branch officials of the SRUT in Hat Yai."

He added that despite the requests continued action was taken against the union.

He said they also had reason to believe that some union members were influenced by senior management to sign a petition against the current SRUT leadership in November 2009.

management to interfere with the democratic procedures of a genuine trade union are bound to fail. SRT's attempts were, in fact, defeated firmly by the members at the union's extraordinary meeting."

He ended the letter calling once again for the SRT to stop its anti-union policies.

"Should you cease your hostility and aggression towards the SRUT, the ITF is prepared to assist your organisation in rebuilding a better industrial relationship and social dialogue with the union and to restore and improve the reputation of your organisation globally."

"This resulted in an extra-ordinary meeting of the union being held on 3 February 2010," he wrote. "History demonstrates that all attempts by



รถจักรเลขที่	ไปสวน	ต้นทาง - ปลายทาง	กลับสวน	ต้นทาง - ปลายทาง	Call ๑๑๑	หมายเหตุ
3124	สวน	สวน - สวน	สวน	สวน - สวน		
4033	สวน	สวน - สวน	สวน	สวน - สวน		
4203	สวน	สวน - สวน	สวน	สวน - สวน		
4216	สวน	สวน - สวน	สวน	สวน - สวน		
4220	สวน	สวน - สวน	สวน	สวน - สวน		
4230	สวน	สวน - สวน	สวน	สวน - สวน		
4411	สวน	สวน - สวน	สวน	สวน - สวน		
4417	สวน	สวน - สวน	สวน	สวน - สวน		
4128	สวน	สวน - สวน	สวน	สวน - สวน		
4135	สวน	สวน - สวน	สวน	สวน - สวน		
4139	สวน	สวน - สวน	สวน	สวน - สวน		





## Back to the future

**I**T was back to the future for the ART DECO celebrations in Napier this February as Locomotive Engineer Steven Brabender of Palmerston North was certified competent to operate J class Locomotives fitted with the A6ET brake valve.

This is the final stage of Steven's apprenticeship which began when he was selected for steam training 5 years ago and has seen him gain his Unit standards 21755 and 11158. The unit standard 11158 was completed in time for him to be the driver of Locomotive WAB 794 which was to play a large part in the main trunk celebrations at labour weekend 2008.

Steve comes from a railway background being the son of an Engine driver and sees a great future for steam operation in the coming years. 🌐



## Death & Loss of Certificate benefits bonus

**F**OLLOWING receipt of the Actuarial Report from Aon Consulting the Trustee's considered the use of the Funds' Surplus as an opportunity to increase benefits paid to members. The Auditors have approved this being done. At the Trustee's meeting on the 23rd February 2010 the Trustees approved a recommendation to amend the Trust Deed to increase the Death & Loss of Certificate Base Benefits by 30% effective from 23 February 2010. All additional benefits to remain unchanged.

The current Additional Insured Benefit on Death to Pre-2004 Members will continue at the same level as the Insurance Policy is

in place until 1 October 2010. Prior to the expiry of the insurance there will be a review of this policy to determine how this benefit will be continued at a minimum cost to the Fund.

Generally, Death benefits increase by between \$3,806 and \$19,030 and Loss of Certificate from \$2,283 and \$22,846.

Detailed changes from the existing benefit to the benefit payable including the increase of 30% can be found on the RMTU website.

[www.rmtunion.org.nz](http://www.rmtunion.org.nz)

# REGIONAL ROUNDUP



*LEFT: RCO Richard [Richie] Max (l) discusses the next shunt move with RCO/shunter Opera Piper*



*RIGHT: Interislander commercial freight manager Ross Allen (l) caught looking the other way with RMTU Picton Interisland delegate Tania Haraki*

## Wellington ferry terminal

*Kinleith "Keith" Manamana sitting in the driving seat*



Car marshalling, lines, shunting and repairs are all part of the loading and unloading of an interisland ferry in Wellington, but what was not a common site is Working Party Picton representative Tania Haraki talking to managers Ross Allen (top right) and David Sheppard (bottom centre) about the operation as part of the consultative process.

*Barry Layne shows how he feels about being an RMTU member*



*Tania Haraki has it out with the boss David Sheppard*



*Anthony Sweetman is not bappy*

# Xing accident reveals window problem

**O**N February 10 LE Leo Rust's train collided with a truck at Racecourse Road, Manunui on the NIMT in yet another case of road vehicle drivers ignoring the dangers of railway crossings.

But this case brought up another - and significantly important - issue for LEs: How firmly are the cab windows held in place?

In Len's case, following the impact, his face was less than 750mm from the stove in front cab window.

Len was lucky. The truck was unladen. However, he is concerned about what could have happened if it had been carrying a load.

The accident happened where trains are travelling at high speed and although the loco was seriously damaged the real concern was with the LE's protection.

KIC and KiwiRail have been advised and a field manager for KiwiRail has responded



adhesive safety film fitted to the side windows as the glass has shattered. I am also surprised the drivers wind screen has broken out from the window frame with there being so little damage to the surrounding structure. Are these screens supposed to be bonded to the frame?"

The case is ongoing and RMTU management will report on the findings and the action taken. 🇳🇿

by asking that the KIC [KiwiRail Industrial Council] team review the windscreen and cab side glass on the class 30 locomotives.

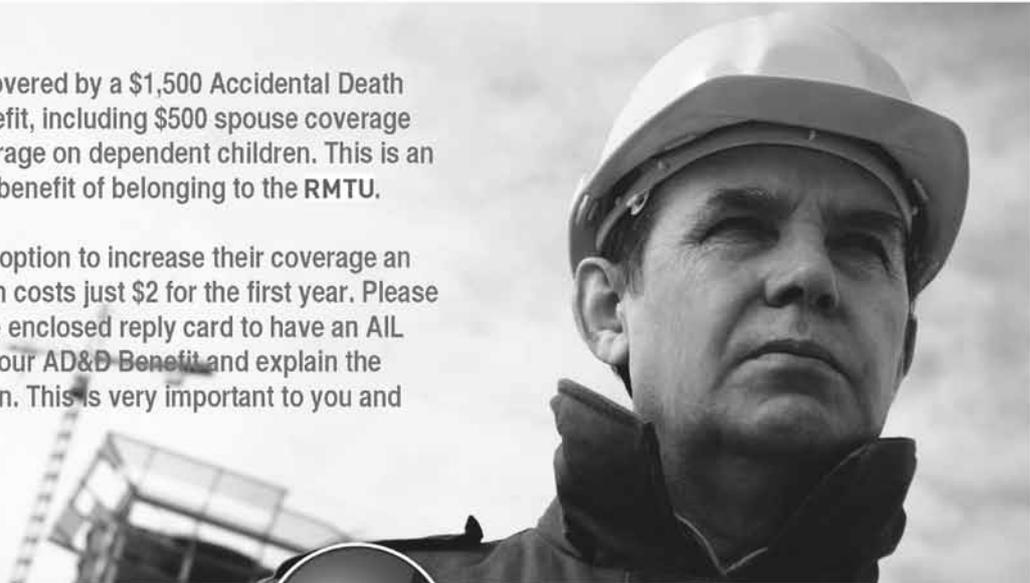
"Particularly check the glass specification against what is actually fitted to these locos and the retention system of the windscreens into the frame," he wrote. "From the photos it appears there is no



## \$1,500 AD&D

All members are now covered by a \$1,500 Accidental Death & Dismemberment Benefit, including \$500 spouse coverage and a further \$500 coverage on dependent children. This is an automatic membership benefit of belonging to the RMTU.

Members also have the option to increase their coverage an additional \$10,000 which costs just \$2 for the first year. Please complete and return the enclosed reply card to have an AIL representative deliver your AD&D Benefit and explain the additional \$10,000 option. This is very important to you and your family.



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# Commitment to organise women workers

By Ruth Blakeley

**O**N February 5 and 6, 220 women from 59 countries gathered at ITF house in London for the Women's Transport Workers Conference.

The Conference was titled 'Making a difference - women transport workers in the 21st century'.

We believe that we must strengthen gender equality to meet ongoing economic, social, environmental and political challenges facing all transport workers across the globe.

We developed strategies to network together and organise campaigns to work harder at increasing women's union density across the workforce. We need to educate our young that being a union member is important and has huge benefits for them.

Globalisation and the economic crisis were the main topics on the agenda with latest estimates from the ILO Global Employment Trends report showing the number of jobless worldwide at 212 million at the end of 2009 – a sharp increase of 34 million from 2008. There was an increase of 6.6% in global unemployment rate. Poverty levels also increased, with the report finding that 633 million workers and their families were living on US\$1.25 per day!

The civil aviation sector has the highest density of women members in the transport



industry and in 2009 this sector saw the worse job losses because of the recession in 50 years.

There are varying views regarding whether we are starting to recover with the IMF talking of a pickup in economic growth of 3.9% in 2010.

We also agreed that we need to link local struggles with the global struggles for gender equality.

In third world countries we need to organise women transport workers to guarantee them decent jobs as a way to end poverty achieving this through local struggle for trade union rights and social protections through gender-friendly clauses in collective

agreements. These struggles are ultimately linked to the global struggle to shift economic policy-making to a sustainable path that redistributes resources to support economic growth with equality.

We, collectively, need to work on both fronts for real improvements in conditions of work and life of women transport workers.

In NZ we experience a good standard of living and with mostly decent working conditions. However, there are still 27 countries that have no rights to maternity leave with cash benefits with sexual harassment and violence still major issues – although policies are developing slowly.

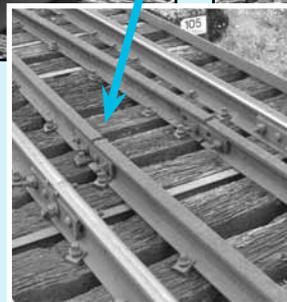
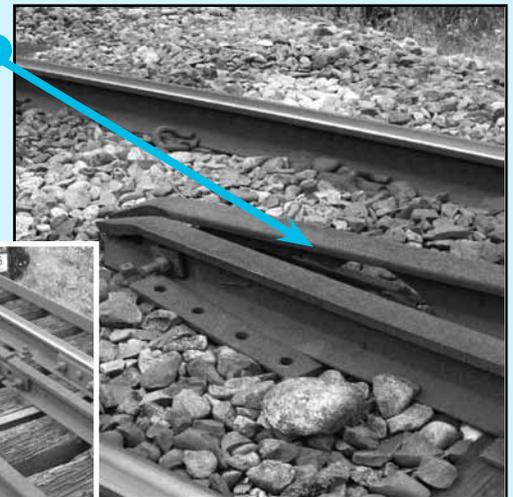
A highlight of the conference was meeting a very inspiring young Jordanian women who single-handedly organised the formation of a cabin crew union. In the last three years she has gone from strength the strength with increasing membership numbers and is now in the throes of negotiating a collective agreement with her company and getting very good results, I believe!

The conference was fabulous and I will continue to try and improve working conditions for my union sisters and brothers and it was especially great to catch up with some old friends!

Remember:

**THE UNION IS YOUR FRIEND AT WORK!**

## Buller check rail in dire condition



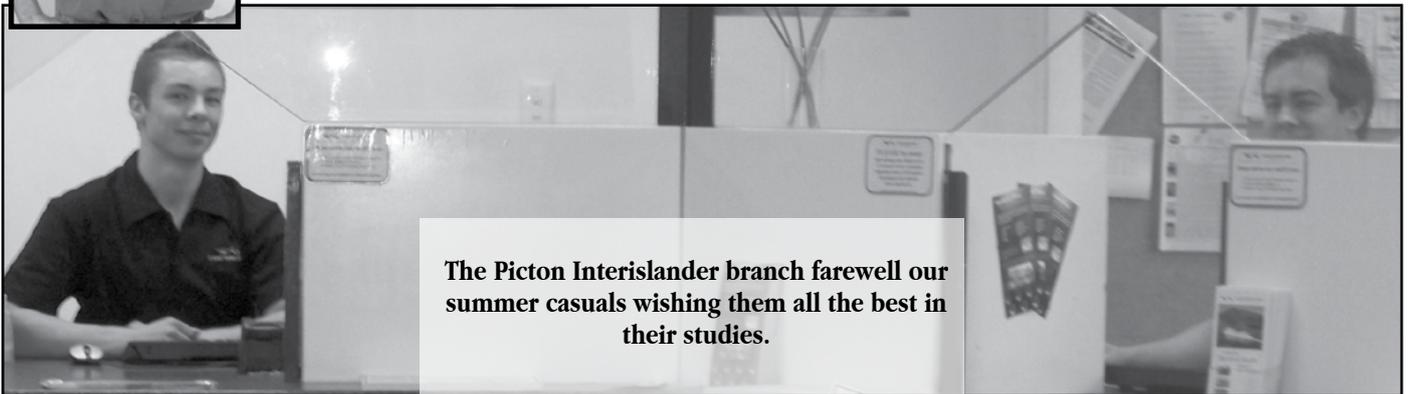
Kiwirail has varied its safety case to allow passenger trains to recommence operating through the Buller Gorge. The RMTU disagrees with this decision as it believes the infrastructure is not fit for passenger trains as these photos show. The check rails, expected to hold passenger carriages on the bridge if a derailment was to occur, are severely corroded and definitely not fit for purpose. We have warned KiwiRail! 

PORT MARLBOROUGH BRANCH

**Shown the ropes:** The arrival of the Cruise ship Volendam gave organiser George Laird an early morning opportunity to observe the ship's lines operation. As expected from an RMTU organiser he was very interested in the Health and Safety aspects of the job and appreciated the chance to spend time there. The branch also celebrates the medical all-clear given to long-time member and workshop manager Terry Beech (pictured) and welcomes him back to the job (Ed: Note, we haven't said back to work!).



workshop manager Terry Beech (pictured) and welcomes him back to the job (Ed: Note, we haven't said back to work!).



The Picton Interislander branch farewell our summer casuals wishing them all the best in their studies.



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PORT NAPIER BRANCH

**W**ELCOME brothers and sisters to 2010. I trust we made the most of the festive season and made good of the time off (if you got some!).

At Napier Port we achieved a negotiated settlement of the main collective agreement just prior to Christmas, finalising a two year settlement. Thanks to Phil Spanswick our RMTU organiser who is based in the Mount. Now a month into the New Year, it would be easy to ramble on about the issues that face our port alone; however there is a wider picture that, in my view, affects us all.

When listening to other workers outside of the port, there seems to be a common theme of mismanagement or a lack of understanding in how things really work, not just across the rail and port sectors but industry as a whole. There once was a time when management would discuss, meet and generally take on board what the ground

staff knew in order to make success out of experience, a balance of ideas. Staff promotions were made within businesses based on knowledge, experience and ability.

**Dog-eat-dog**

In the world of dog-eat-dog, which affects the NZ port industry in particular, more is the pity that management chase the mighty dollar for the share holders and enhancing their own targeted bonuses.

Before taking or making silly decisions based on dollar values, management should consult with their workers with their experience at the coal face. By doing so they may come to equitable solutions before

cutting and slashing.

I guess this identifies at times the inexperience that we see at the top end of business. People who have screeds of paper credibility and parts of the alphabet behind their names, who rely on spreadsheets for financial solutions but who have no practical experience or knowledge of how things really work. Spreadsheets make for poor foundations, and at times don't show the real costs. (Not

unlike a National government's spin on the tax review – made by the wealthy for the wealthy).

At the end of the day, it is about mutual communication, the flow-down effect from management which should provide for the ability to negotiate if there is friction or a better way.



**Sickness, accident & death**

**The New Zealand Locomotive Engineers' Sickness, Accident and Death Benefit Fund**

In the last ten years 230 locomotive engineers had to retire due to medical reasons. They received a total payout of \$4,737,097 from the above Fund.

LEs who didn't belong to the Fund and who were forced to retire did not receive anything.

**You could be next to miss out!**

For as little as \$403 a year your future – or those of your next of kin – could be better assured.

**Contact:**

Julia Harrison, PO Box 813, Wellington  
 Telephone: (04) 499-2066  
 Fax: (04) 471-0896  
 Email: julia@rmtunion.org.nz

**Attention LEs**

**Join this Fund now for your own peace of mind**

### PORT CHALMERS BRANCH

A happy new year to all from the Port Chalmers branch. It is hard to believe that as I write six weeks of 2010 have already passed. It's been a steady start to the year with a total of 69 ship visits to Port Chalmers and Dunedin to date (12 February) a mix of container (23) passenger (19) conventional (27) – enough to keep the port ticking over. However, we can always accommodate more.

#### Major upgrade

A major upgrade of the plant maintenance building and amenities has been underway for a number of weeks. The amenities and lunch room refurbishment are all but complete. The new layout with

paint job, new kitchen, lowered ceiling and air conditioning is a welcome improvement. Work has started on the straddle garage upgrade which is a major undertaking but necessary to accommodate our new generation straddles.

#### New era

The dredge 'New Era' is back working after completing a period of dredging at Lyttelton and completing a period of maintenance during January. Work will be concentrated on the entrance channel, plus other claims in the lower harbour when conditions are unsuitable at the harbour entrance.

Lisa Adam who served on our executive until recently, leaves the company in a cou-

ple of weeks to become a full time mother. We wish Lisa and her family all the very best for the future. On a sad note one of our long-time members recently retired due to a serious illness. His departure was brightened a little with members of both unions at Port Chalmers donating approximately 95 days of their leave (which the company will turn into cash) towards his immediate well being.

#### President Ruth

Our president Ruth is enjoying a very well earned holiday and is currently somewhere in Europe. We look forward to her returning in March hopefully refreshed and all set to get into negotiating mode as our collective expires in July.

### HILLSIDE BRANCH

GREETINGS from Hillside workshops, we hope you and your families enjoyed a restful holiday season.

The last SA refurbished carriage is making its trip towards completed fit-out. When it's finished this will bring the total to 128 ex British Rail refurbished carriages out of Hillside – a feat we should be justifiably proud of.

The new AK carriages for the Trans Alpine are in the initial stages, with jig making progressing and some components being fabricated. There is a mock-up of a one third of a carriage taking shape, with the exterior nearing completion and awaiting interior fit-out. This class are a complete new build and a chance for Hillside to demonstrate its versatility.

#### Lobby group formed

Over the summer, national president Jim Kelly, Hillside branch chair Grant Donaldson and secretary Les Ingram have met with Dunedin's MPs, Councils and the CEO of the Chamber of Commerce, seeking to form a lobby group to demonstrate the value of New Zealand-built rolling stock. There is a huge amount of support in our community and it is heartening to see the bipartisan attitude of the MPs. Friday 12 February saw our acting manager Andy Bisset join us at the latest



*Proud grandparent Les Ingram with his daughter Erin and the grandson Oliver Haden Ryan Ingram.*

meeting to bring his expertise in engineering and quotation/costing to the forum.

#### Closer to Hutt

On Thursday 4 February the branch executive met with Workshop and Inventory manager Elena Trout. We discussed the closer relationship which Hutt and Hillside branches had been working towards with previous managers. We were pleased that Elena wanted the relationship to develop, and to that end we will endeavor to send representatives to Hutt Workshop to gain an understanding of their workplace.

#### New policy

A new Drug and Alcohol policy has been released by KiwiRail for RMTU members to make submissions on. None of us want our workplace safety put at risk by drug taking. If any member thinks they have a drug or alcohol problem please approach an RMTU rep who will confidentially assist them to enter a rehabilitation programme. If members are detected with illegal drugs or alcohol in their system it is highly probable their employment will be terminated.

On Thursday 4 February, a contractor truck driver was observed reversing his truck between two buildings while talking on a hand held cellphone. He didn't stop when called to do so. This was reported to management through an H91 Incident Form, and it was reported back that the driver in question was to be re-inducted to the site.

This took place on Friday 12 February. Later that morning this same driver was observed driving the same truck on site texting. This has been reported. This is a serious breach of site Health and Safety rules and a breach of the Road Rules. Would an employee be treated in such a lenient manner? If Drug and Alcohol screening wasn't carried out, why not? We await the outcome with extreme interest.

## OTAGO BRANCH

If you have a hard look at our industry, you will find, apart from the political uncertainties facing us, that our main problem is 'age' – not only do we have an aged infrastructure and equipment, we are also a rapidly aging work force.

On the infrastructure side the average age in this district is 47, but this can be deceptive as in some gangs the age is much higher. Your scribe works in the area of Signs & Communications where a quick head count reveals an average age of 52.

### Driver age

Consulting the Wharf St Castle reveals the average age of drivers to be in the higher end of the 40s. It used to be higher but if not for the retirement of three drivers recently it would have been in the low 50s.

Where is this leading to? An aged work force is becoming more prone to injury and medical incidents. Staff are not as quick to react to uneven ground surfaces. Some are even suffering from uneven track surfaces when travelling in aged seats in aged locomotives. In some areas the company relies on expertise that can only be learnt on the job and with more frequent retirements and promotions the remaining staff are left with fewer experienced to staff.

This correspondent has partaken in the creation of an advancement and progression document for his section. The team were congratulated for a well researched and laid out document, but it is of no value as there has been no recruitment for this section – and not likely to be if we gaze into the crystal ball. A well-intentioned document, but it

doesn't answer the problems posed by an aging occupational group.

To train an electrician takes five years, to convert to a signalling person (electrical registration is the base qualification) another three years. Both can be done concurrently but usually there is a lead time of eight years.

To become a fitter takes 9,000 hours to achieve the base level, further training is required for specialist strings.

### Bridge training

To train a bridge inspector is, literally, a life time. A favourite saying of our inspectors is : "Bridges are living things – they may rest a lot, have sudden bursts of usage, but they live, they change, they age". It takes a long time for a new bridge gang member to learn the trade.

Training in today's trades is through NCEA which does not give you the all-rounded end product that we have become used to in the last 30 years. Your scribe holds qualifications that took five years to obtain including two correspondence courses, four residential courses and trade courses. Today, to achieve the same level of qualification, takes a correspondence course and at least five individual strings, which could take ten years to achieve if there are enough trainees to warrant running the courses.

So where does this lead us to? As an industry we have to balance

the numbers the business can sustain with training requirements and staff retention. It needs to retain the staff they are training with adequate salaries and promotional avenues along with honest estimates of retirement (providing government don't extend the pension age).

At some time I would wish to retire  
But I will let them play the guessing game  
For by law it's up to me  
The eventual date to name

To add fuel to the fire  
I will never let on when I will retire  
To keep the bosses guessing  
Is my financial blessing

However, when my time is over  
And I have moved to pastures green  
I will not be worried by my departure  
My demise or departure should be foreseen

My departure should have been factored  
An action plan enacted  
But never mind that due to my inaction  
Has influenced the outcome but a fraction

For management's crystal ball  
Cannot reveal all  
It's up to you  
It's your call

For all your knowledge  
And your passion  
Cannot be replaced  
In an offhand fashion.

## Unions have a long tradition of international solidarity.

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Marion Square, Wellington, email: unionaid@nzctu.org.nz  
Or phone 0900 UNAID (0900 862 43) to automatically donate \$30.



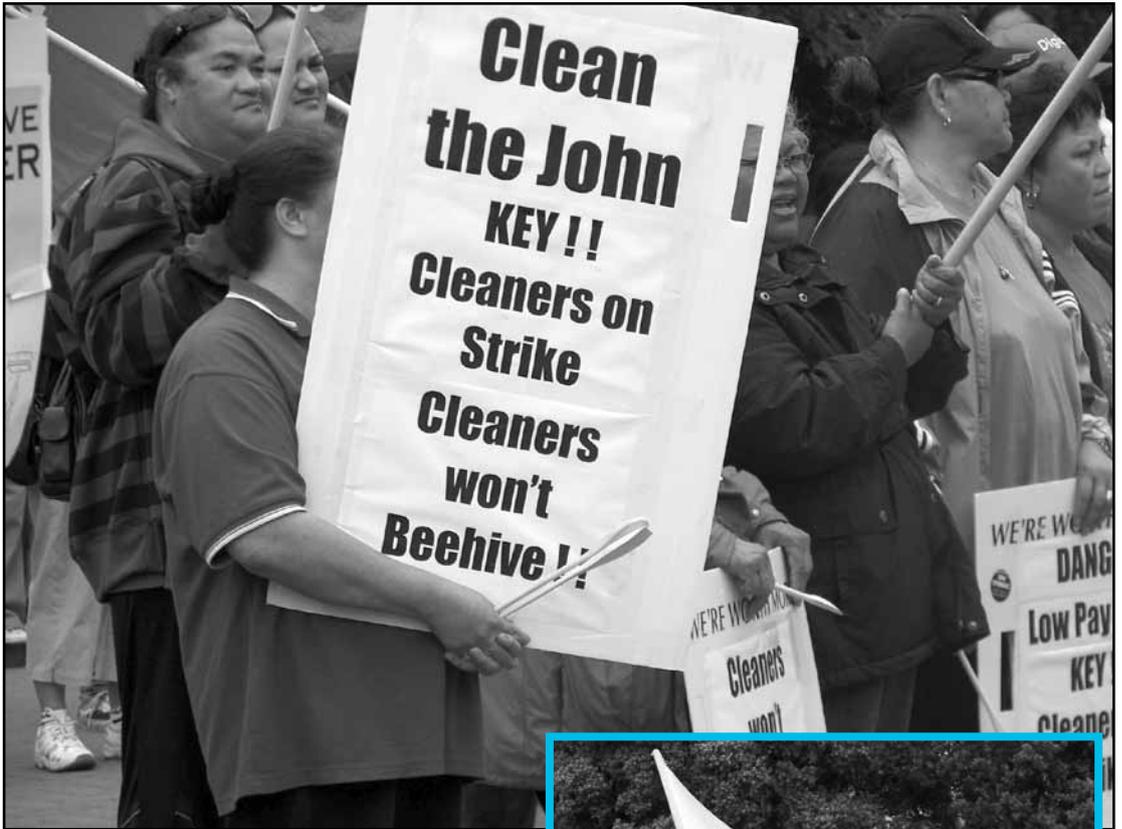
WELLINGTON RAIL BRANCH

**W**ELLINGTON branch members took to parliament two days running to stand up for New Zealanders' and workers' rights.

The first protest was to take action in the combined bikers and ACC coalition rally to protest against the privatisation of ACC. Members came into work early so as to participate. One member was heard to say we have seen how ACC partnership providers treat workers we don't want our families to be treated that way.

The second rally was in solidarity with the Service and Food Workers Union members who are employed by cleaning contractor Spotless Services Limited (SSL), to clean parliament building, including John Key's office, for \$12.55 an hour. Shamefully, this company already

pays their cleaners working in public hospitals and schools \$14.62 an hour but do not deem it necessary



to pay their parliament employees a living wage.

Interestingly enough Bill English gets \$20 an hour to pay the cleaner who cleans his house but the cleaner who cleans his office is paid just \$12.55 an hour. Does he care? We doubt he's even noticed.

When the rally broke up RMTU workers walking back to the station were stopped and thanked by the cleaners for their support. To the cleaners we say: kia kaha.

