

THE **TRANSPORT WORKER**

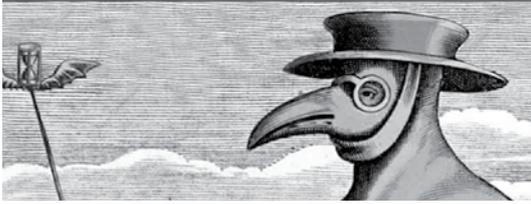
MAR 2021

The journal of the RMTU
– NZ's largest specialist
transport union

Laying rail in Timaru



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Auckland's Jas Giri is recognised for his passionate advocacy with appointment to international committees.

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The RMTU flag flies at half-mast at Hutt Workshops in memory of union stalwart and cherished colleague Phil Boswoth who died in January.



COVER PHOTOGRAPH: Hardworking Timaru crew laying replacement rail through the Smithfield siding. See page 25.

The Transport Worker is published by the Rail and Maritime Transport Union, P O Box 1103, Wellington, Aotearoa–New Zealand.

Design and production by Mike Regan.

Printed by Pivotal+Thames Publications Ltd, P O Box 11–025, Wellington.

WWW.RMTUNION.ORG.NZ

ISBN 1173–6488



Wayne Butson,
General secretary
RMTU

Another active year in prospect

WELCOME to the first issue of our premier Union publication for 2021. The year has got off to a heavy workload start as we rush to finalise the ratification of the KiwiRail MECA in time to do it again as it will expire shortly after signing, provided of course that YOU ratify the proposed settlement.

We are also heavily engaged with Government as an affiliate union as we surge ahead on Fair pay Agreements, the Holidays Act rewrite and a number of other promises in the party manifesto.

There is no denying the government is determined to make a difference to the working lives of New Zealanders this parliamentary term and we have just the minister to lead the changes to workplace law in the Hon Michael Wood. Michael is an ex trade unionist and was actually a class mate of our Todd Valster in the inaugural Organising Works course run by the Council of Trade Unions here in Godzone.

Giving voice to members' concerns

The rail industry continues to ride a major growth wave .

I am sure you will join me in saying our mag is a bloody good read and I think this is attributable to the fact that we run a good balance of the voice of the Union and things union and give voice to the RMTU worker. The branch notes are a must read for most of us as it is an enlightening barometer which signals the temperature of our national membership. That is the reason why we strive to get as many branches as possible to contribute. If your branch is not a regular contributor, please put up your hand and tell us about your branch.

Our magazine is jam packed with live issues, photos and reports that are our current campaigning and fighting targets as we deal with a wide range of employers and employer approaches to organised labour.

Some would have you believe that it is all peace and harmony as we are skipping

◀ down the yellow brick road together. Union matters are important matters and we are dealing with issues on a daily basis which affect the working lives of our members, their families and, in many cases, their communities.

Our work, struggle and battles are important, necessary and essential to the maintenance and constant improvement of terms and conditions of employment at the coalface and to maintaining and developing public assets which others will have either run into the ground or sold off to the highest bidder.

2020 was a year none of us will forget for a while and, of course, 2021 has also thrown a few short sharp scares. But by and large, RMTU members came through those uncertain Covid times relatively unscathed with their employment and terms and conditions intact.

Union elections during 2021

This year is election year for our Union. In March we will call for nominations for the national president – a two year position – and in May we will call for nominations for the national management committee (NMC) followed in July with elections to the KiwiRail industrial councils for positions left vacant following the NMC election.

The rail industry continues to ride a major growth wave. The Government are strongly supportive of rail and we continue to be advised of more funding for various parts of rail in New Zealand.

Because you are members of a strong, democratic and well organised union you can be assured that, with your continued unity, solidarity and support of your leadership, the RMTU will be a powerful force within your workplace and will make 2021 another year we can all be proud of.

I am up for the mahi – I hope you are too!

Kia kaha brothers and sisters. 🇳🇿

Ex-NZ LE in Perth hospital



Ray Anglesea, a Tranz Rail LE before moving to the Australian outback was driving this. At the time of publication he was in an induced coma in Perth. Details are sketchy but it is possible his train collided with a multi-trailer iron ore truck near to Kalgoorlie, WA. The RMTU wishes him a speedy recovery.

Gratitude

Dear Editor,

Thanks for you and Rudd's guidance in reaching a resolve to our new collective agreement. The members are pleased to be moving to a lawful system with a work/life balance and guaranteed hours.

Personally, I had never been in a union before North Tugz and was completely unaware of the benefits.

Although I am still learning, as a delegate, the support and camaraderie throughout the organisation and branches has been exceptional. Just having access to this expertise within the RMTU family has been invaluable.

This experience has opened the eyes of North Tugz members and shown that together we can move mountains.

A big thank you from all the team here at North Tugz.

Chris Shaw

Proud RMTU delegate.

Retirements, departures & changing stations



Dear Editor,

Kia ora koutou katoa.

I would like to announce that I am putting forward my resignation of the Upper North Island KiwiRail Industrial Council representative and will be taking up a new role as terminal operations manager (people lead) in Westfield.

I am extremely excited to take the next step in my railway career and for the opportunity to contribute in this space. I will be taking up this new role on January 18, 2021.

I am grateful for the time spent representing locomotive engineers of the upper north island, which, during my time I believe, have made great progress through the introduction of HPHE projects. These projects have highlighted the importance of understanding the complexity and challenges locomotive engineers have to face which in turn has given the KIC reps a better opportunity to improve our work environment.

In closing, I would like to sincerely thank you so much for trusting me as a KIC representative which I have thoroughly enjoyed.

It has been a great privilege working along side you all. If I can ever be of assistance to you in the future, please let me know. Nga mihi.

Brendon Smith.

Dear Editor,

As we continue to be in receipt of your magazine, The Transport Worker, I wish to inform you of my husband's death.

Dusty Miller passed on 26 November 2020.

Regards

Jackie Miller.

Dear Editor,

As of Friday December 4 2020 I will be leaving KiwiRail on a ▶

medical discharge.

I wish to tender my resignation from the RMTU and thank all the members for the help and assistance given to me over the 50 plus years of service and wish you all the very best for the future.

Keith McKenzie

Mechanical engineer.

Dear Editor,

It is with regret that it has come time, and due to health issues, I have had to resign from Port Marlborough and also the Rail and Maritime Transport Union.

My experience with the Union has been fulfilling and through the years I have learnt the importance of being a member.

I entered the ranks of the RMTU in 2002 and since then have had the privilege of attending annual conferences, port conferences, training groups and educational seminars to name a few key activities.

Through these journeys I have met some great people who have always shown leadership and guidance.

It would be unfair to name anyone (but hang in there Todd and Aubrey).

One highlight of my service was the writing into the Port Marlborough collective agreement the position of a casual delegate.

To all Union members I pass on my best wishes to you all. All the best going forward.

Kind regards

Scott Golding.

Dear Editor,

After 48 years of Union membership, sadly I must resign from the RMTU effective on February 5, 2021 as that is when I retire from KiwiRail.

I have enjoyed my membership of the following unions: Engine Drivers, Fireman and Cleaners Association, Locomotive Engineers Association and the Combined Union of Railway Employees.

Over the last 25 years I have held membership of the Rail and Maritime Transport Union with roles ranging from;

* Locomotive sector delegate

* Branch secretary

* LE Industrial Council

* Trustee LE SAD fund

* National Management Committee.

First and foremost, I have always upheld the Union ideal and its philosophies.

It is with pride that I look back at what

the RMTU has done in greatly improving the work place environment, highlighting safety first and improving working conditions and remuneration. I look back on how we weathered the political storms of governments which wished to destroy the trade unions as an effective arm of the working masses.

Meanwhile another government brought rail infrastructure back within Government ownership and ultimately putting rail back under the Government's umbrella.

Some of my highlights are being on the picket line during the Progressive strike, supporting fellow unionist fight for better conditions.

This strike showed unionism working across the lower half of the North Island, truly inspiring.

Other recollections include being with the NMC and being asked to leave the visitors gallery in Parliament during a debate on the Greens transport policy and the 'Take back the tracks' protest march with the petition to the steps of Parliament and the track guys building a section of track and driving a jigger along 'The Parliamentary Spur'.

While in Japan, myself and Ruth Blakeley attend the meeting of the, International Steering Committee and Second International Council.

We, along with other delegates, addressed the law makers and governments, opposed to trade union workers' rights and free speech.

This was in particular regard to the JRU7 who were sacked and imprisoned in Japan. This was showing true international solidarity with other members of the ICLS

The BMW team of Bernie Snook, the late Murray Dunlop and myself on working on the universal cab option, redesigning the DFB, DXR and DL cab.

Being a Union activist, it is done without reward, mostly in your own time and without expectation. The rewards are hugely satisfying, and I wouldn't have wanted it any differently.

With the highs you have you have the other side, where you are representing a member who is possibly facing losing their employment or dealing with loss of a member through an accident.

There is no training for this situation and they can be quite daunting experiences.

However, I do have a concern with the relationship between those members who don't understand the principles of what a union is. The loss of interest for those members is of a concern and the Union needs to address this.

I want to wish the Union all the best and importantly keeping up the fight for its membership and its principals.

I also wish to thank the Union's officers past and present and in particular, Eddie Dickinson, Paul Corliss, Todd Valster, Wayne Butson the late Brian Cronin.

Also the elected officials, while there are lots, please don't be offended if I miss you: the late Phil Bosworth, Ian Wilkie, Jim Kelly, Aubrey Wilkinson, Ruth Blakeley and Doug Blakie.

Some of the fellow members I have worked alongside.

Thank you for all your tireless efforts in maintaining an effective and well-respected trade union both within New Zealand and in the international trade union family.

Lastly, thank you to the other unpaid part of the team: my wife Glennis who had to put up with my highs and lows.

Yours fraternally

Wally Wallbutton

Team leader

Locomotive engineer/64269

Dear Editor,

I'll be leaving my position as locomotive engineer and team leader here at Transdev Wellington on Saturday, 20/02/2021.

I have been on the footplate and part of a union for the past 36 years, 15 years as a member of the RMTU.

I want to make clear my gratitude towards the RMTU and in particular the great work the delegates are doing. The agreed ROM (still to be implemented) will make a big difference in the lives of our colleagues regarding managing fatigue risk and general health.

The increase in sick leave from six to 10 days is long overdue, especially for shift workers.

It was a privilege to be part of the RMTU.

Please accept this letter as my official notice of resignation. I appreciate your assistance in having my membership removed.

Kind regards

William Delaney

Locomotive engineer team leader.

New life members



(above) General secretary Wayne Butson (left) presents former locomotive engineer Mike Williams (right) with his life membership certificate at the joint meeting of the Canterbury Rail and Lyttleton Port branches in December.

(right) National Management Committee South Island ports representative Andy Kelly (right) presents Port Otago branch stalwart Mervyn Read (left) with his life membership certificate at the joint meeting of the RMTU Port Otago branch and MUNZ Local 10 in Port in December.



Global warming warning



West Coast branch Members give voice to their call for our Union to develop a policy on a just transition for those whose jobs are threatened by the running down of fossil fuel industries and to advocate for the retention of those jobs until a viable replacement for coal is found.

Will the pandemic change our politics?

By John Kerr

ALMOST the first line of the RMT's (our sister British union) rule book, commits it "to work for the supersession of the capitalist system by a socialistic order of society". Here in New Zealand the RMTU harbour no such ambitions in our rules and standing orders, merely that we work to advance the 'interests [of members] and the interests of workers generally in relation to their conditions of employment, standard of living, economic and social interests and quality of life.'

Regardless of the ultimate aims of our respective unions what is not in doubt is the social and economic system we live in is in crisis as the huge human and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is felt across the globe.

Although we were warned about the inevitability of a global pandemic, COVID-19 still came as a shock.

Management guru Peter Drucker once



During the Black Plague years, doctors wore iconic getups that included masks filled with scented herbs to protect themselves from dangerous miasmas. . . .

said the worst mistake you can make is to be prematurely right. It seems the scientists who warned us did just that.

It can be argued that if we don't remember our history we're at risk of repeating it. A good place to start may be with the

impact of the last great global pandemic, the influenza in 1918, just as the first world war was ending.

While that war is remembered for the huge toll it took in human life, the influenza pandemic killed between 50 and a 100

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◀ million people, compared to the 20 million who died in the fighting.

Stunning devastation

In 2017 Laura Spinney wrote *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World*, and argued its devastation was so stunning that people chose to collectively forget it. She argued it was responsible for altering history in ways we have since chosen to ignore:

'It influenced the course of the First World War and, arguably, contributed to the second. It pushed India closer to independence, South Africa closer to apartheid, and Switzerland to the brink of civil war. It ushered in universal healthcare and alternative medicine, our love of fresh air and our passion for sport.'

As the COVID-19 pandemic has run its course, more and more thinkers are turning their minds to its long term economic, political and social impact and asking questions about what kind of post COVID world will emerge. Will it have far-reaching effects similar to that of the 1918 'flu pandemic?

One writer who takes COVID-19 as a potential catalyst for a changed world is former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis whose book *Another Now; Dispatches from an Alternative Present* was published late last year.

In it, this self-proclaimed anti-capitalist tries to answer his partner who has apparently asked him repeatedly since the week he first met her: "what is the alternative? And precisely how would things – like money, companies and housing – work?"

Part novel, part economics text book, *Another Now's* story begins in the late 1970s, covers the global financial crisis of 2008 and the COVID-19 crisis of 2020 – but also continues into an imaginary future, concluding in 2036. There is a moment in the story when, on a Sunday evening in November 2025 to be precise, his characters try to make sense of their circumstances by looking back to the events of 2020.

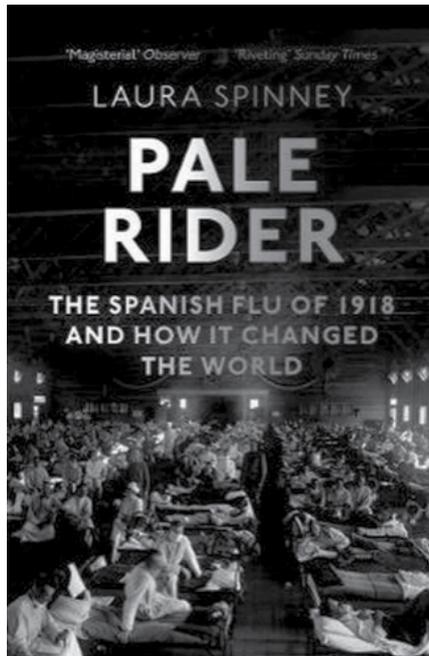
In his own words:

'Before 2020, politics seemed almost like a game, but with COVID came the realisation that governments everywhere possessed immense powers.

'The virus brought the 24-hour curfew, the closure of pubs, the ban on walking through parks, the suspension of sport,



Laura Spinney author of *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and how it changed the world.*



the emptying of theatres, the silencing of music venues.

'All notions of a minimal state, mindful of its limits and eager to cede power to individuals, went out of the window.

'Many salivated at this show of raw state power. Even free-marketeters, who had spent their lives shouting down any suggestion of even the most modest boost in public spending, demanded the sort of state control of the economy not seen since Leonid Brezhnev was running the Kremlin. Across the world, the state funded private firms' wage bills, renationalised utilities and took shares in airlines, car makers, even banks.

'From the first week of lockdown, the pandemic stripped away the veneer of politics to reveal the boorish reality underneath: that some people have the power to tell the rest what to do.'

In other words, there always was another way of doing things and the idea that forks in the road only occur at specific points in time is a 'convenient lie' – 'the truth is we face a fork in the road every day of our lives'.

Virus: greater impact on brown and poor people

Globally, the virus has had a greater impact on poorer and browner people. Their poverty has aged them faster, disempowered them more and made them more vulnerable to disease. Early this year The Guardian reported the 'global vaccine-sharing fund, Covax, says it is preparing to deliver its first doses in February but is competing with nations striking their own, often more lucrative, deals with manufacturers to secure limited supplies of vaccines.'

In other words, rich countries are buying up the vaccines. Here in New Zealand, Maori, who statistically have worse health outcomes than pakeha, are having to advocate strongly to get priority vaccine access.

Varoufakis argues it is naive to believe the exercise of state power will inevitably be a force for good.

The same elites that were responsible for the increased impact of the virus on poorer browner people have been handed immense power.

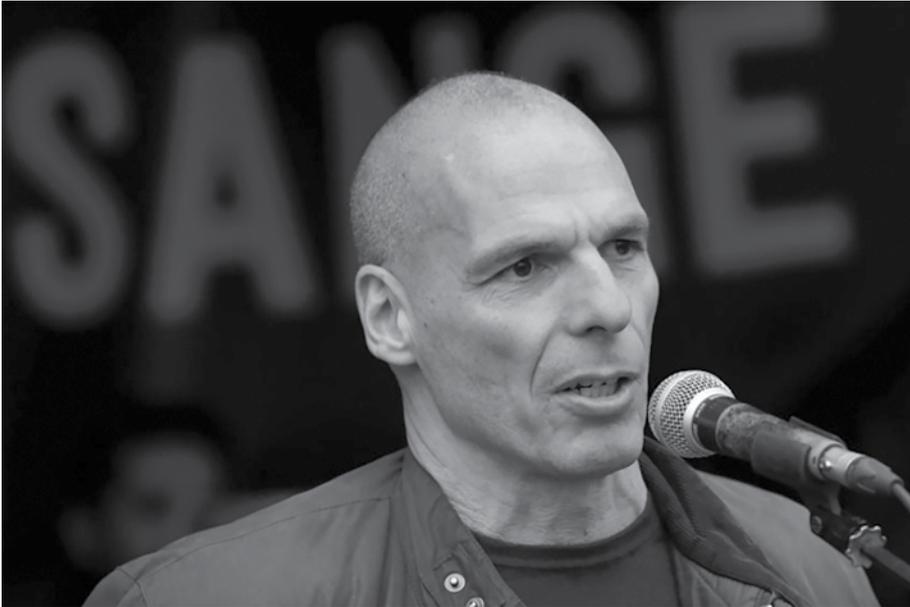
He forecasts the Amazons of this world will flourish, that pollution and carbon emissions – briefly stopped by lockdowns – will return and everywhere borders will close.

Big tech will be used to do the job of the new fascists who don't have to wear brown shirts or even enter government to gain power.

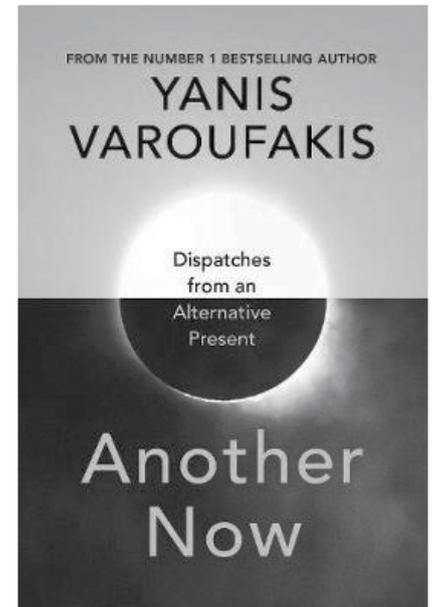
Apps designed to stop new outbreaks can be used to monitor our every move in ways that will make the KGB or Cambridge Analytica seem primitive.

Is this inevitable however?

Since the collapse of the global financial system in 2008, mainstream social democratic parties – Labour in New Zealand ▶



Yanis-Varoufakis, author of Another Now: Dispatches from an Alternative Now.



◀ being one of them – have struggled to come up with an alternative to neo-liberal capitalism. Our Prime Minister's rhetoric may be all about kindness and how capitalism has failed but even with an unheard of overall majority in an MMP parliament her government looks anything but 'transformative'.

Ideas for progressive activists to adopt

Varoufakis offers such an alternative: a society that is fully democratised, economically as well as at the ballot box. In reality his 'alternative future', argued over by his three main characters – a Marxist-feminist, a libertarian ex-banker and a maverick technologist – is perhaps better seen as a menu of ideas that could be adopted and adapted by progressive activists.

His alternative system to capitalism is called 'market socialism' to distinguish it from Soviet style rationing that grants arbitrary power to 'the ugliest of bureaucrats'. In describing it he addresses issues such as the fear that powerful people will manipulate elections even under market socialism; the stubborn refusal of patriarchy to die; gender and sexual politics; the funding of the green transition; borders and migration; a bill of digital rights so on.

Two of the key features of 'market socialism' are a sophisticated universal income and a trust fund scheme granted through a central bank to everybody; and untaxed earnings from working in democratised companies in which every employee-part-

ner has a single non-tradeable share. By granting employee-partners the right to vote in the corporation's general assemblies, the distinction between wages and profits is terminated and democracy, at last, enters the workplace. He calls this 'corpo-syndicalism'.

Under this scheme everyone, from a firm's senior managers to its most junior employees, receives a basic wage plus a bonus that is decided collectively.

The single non-tradeable share system encourages smaller decision-making units, leading conglomerates to voluntarily break up into smaller enterprises, thereby ensuring market competition.

Share markets vanish as shares, like drivers licences and library cards, are non-tradeable.

Once share markets have disappeared, the need for huge debts to fund mergers and acquisitions evaporates – along with commercial finance. And given that the central bank provides everyone with a free bank account, private banking shrinks into utter insignificance.

Government finances are raised through a 5% tax on raw revenues, not profit, of the corpo-syndicalist firms; and proceeds from leasing land, all of which belongs to the community, for private, time-limited, use.

There is a scheme for regulating international trade that shifts wealth to the global south for use as direct green investments, while also preventing imbalances that cause crises. All trade and all money movements between different monetary jurisdictions (eg the UK and the Eurozone or the US) are

denominated in a digital currency.

Being Greek, Varoufakis calls this the 'Kosmos'. If the Kosmos value of a country's imports exceeds its exports, it is charged a levy in proportion to the trade deficit.

But, equally, if a country's exports exceed its imports, it is also charged the levy. A levy is also charged on the speculative money movements that do such harm to poorer economies.

These levies are used to fund green investments in the global south.

An impossible utopian future?

It is, of course, easy to accuse Varoufakis of describing an 'impossible' utopian future and to dismiss his ideas out of hand. But in 1914 very few people imagined the collapse of the German, Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires in the next four years.

As Laura Spinney tells us, even fewer foresaw a global pandemic that would infect a third of the world's population and kill between 50 and 100 million people.

Few imagined universal health care would be achieved within a generation in many West European countries and that India would be independent.

It might just be that time is finally up for neo-liberal global capitalism, and as Varoufakis says 'having conceived of a feasible socialism that blasts [it] out of the water, what must we do, and how far are we willing to go, to bring it about?' 🌐

A tortured voyage to success

THE long voyage of the North Tugz' bargaining is finally over. We have a collective agreement which covers off all the needs of our members and provides the Company with the flexibility they require. A win-win as the academics would say.

The voyage started back on June 16, 2019, when the world was normal (sans COVID-19). The issue for our members was that they were on call 24/7, 365 days a year and they had to be within an hour of the Port when a ship serviced by the Company was in the harbour (Marsden Point).

As a result our members had no work/life balance and, although our members were guaranteed 1300 hours under the Collective, they were essentially in a working arrangement which gave them no certainty of when they would work. In our view this breached the changes to employment law regarding hours of work.

The Company understood this and agreed to work towards a roster that was legally compliant, as long as it was cost neutral. This was a problem as members would have to take a significant drop in pay because the Company needed to employ more staff in order to introduce a legitimate roster.

Things got complicated when the Company disagreed with the RMTU's interpretation of availability to work. This issue went in front of the Employment Authority and a determination came back that was a slam dunk in favour of the RMTU's interpretation, which saw, amongst other things, that the Company must have a way of identifying what hours of work are the guaranteed hours of work whereby employees had certainty for at least some of their hours of work. The burden of the allocation of unpredictable workloads was being disproportionately borne by employees.

By the time we were ready to go back to the table, COVID-19 struck. This inevitably extended the bargaining although we were buoyed by the COVID-19 legislation, passed by our Labour friends, to extend the negotiating period past the date of expiry – necessary because there was still much to be worked out to make the roster work.

While we had eventually agreed to a roster and an acceptable remuneration package, the negotiation hit rough waters as the Company tried to claw back costs.

The most serious of these were a medical coverage package and a superannuation agreement.

Our members stood tough and a strike

ballot meant we would withdraw labour in the run up to Christmas. This meant the probability of oil shortages in the South Island over the Christmas period. This focused the attention of the Company who, after three successive strike notices, came back to the table with an improved offer and both of the key causes of concern returned to the proposed settlement package.

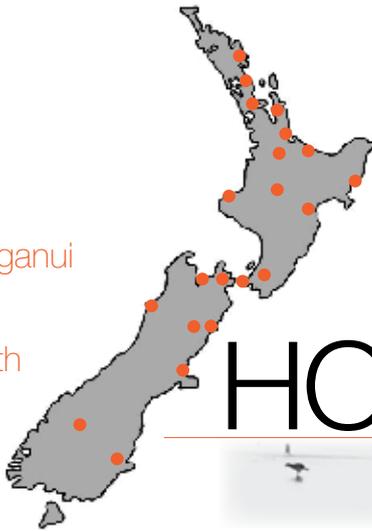
We settled in December 2020 and thought it would be plain sailing from then on.

However, a further squall hit creating big waves regarding payment around the handover period. Again, members stood up and were able to achieve their goal and we ratified this in February.

This ended the tortured voyage for the Team RMTU members and sincere thanks have to go to Ben Thompson (Armstrong Thompson Law) for his sterling legal work, our two excellent delegates, Chris Shaw and Nigel Yellowlees, who navigated through some very tricky issues and lastly, and most importantly, to our members, who showed vast reserves of patience, resilience and courage in fighting for a fair roster with decent remuneration.

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Napier
Nelson
New Plymouth
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Global recognition for RMTU leader

AUCKLAND Rail's Jas Giri has just been appointed to the ITF Young Transport Workers' Committee as its youth representative for urban transport. As a member of that committee he will also join the ITF Urban Transport Steering Committee (UTSC).

His appointment was confirmed during the committee's November 2020 meeting where he was nominated to replace Vincent Ombati (MWU Kenya). The UTSC oversees the implementation of ITF public transport policies and programmes.

Prior to the appointment Jas had participated in several ITF global events and had impressed with his passionate advocacy for a safer and fairer work place for public transport workers.

He was welcomed to the committees by Baker Khundakji from the ITF Young Transport Workers' office who added they were looking forward to working with him.

"Neoliberalism and work place bullying and harassment were key issues which inspired me to do what I do," he told *TTW*. "My aim is to help achieve equal rights for all workers and build power for youth through education and building relationship.

He has been an RMTU member for 11 years where he has gradually taken on more and more responsibility.



"I was nominated and elected branch secretary and a rep to the NMC. At the time, we were having issues regarding demarcation. Multinationals such as Transdev were enforcing so-called 'multiskilling' as a tool to avoid hiring more staff, causing fatigue among those that remained. After skirmishing for months, we were able to enforce demarcation. That was my catalyst to stand up for what was right and to fight the good fight."

As a new member of an ITF committee he is looking forward to "working towards fair pay agreements, fatigue management policies, promoting balance of pay among urban transport workers and youth movements.

"I strongly believe in the collective voice of young unionists and that they should be represented at every level of the union and the wider community.

"This position will give me the opportunity to raise awareness of workers' issues, provide spaces for workers to express themselves, ensure urban transport workers have power in union democracies and educate workers about unions and working rights."

RMTU general secretary Wayne Butson said: "I'm delighted that Jas has received this appointment. His hard work, integrity and passion have been justly rewarded. He will be a fine and valued addition to the international team." 🌐

\$1,500 AD&D

All members of the RMTU are now covered by a \$1,500 Accidental Death & Dismemberment Benefit provided through American Income Life Insurance Company, including \$500 spouse coverage and a further \$500 coverage on dependent children. This is an automatic membership benefit of belonging to the RMTU. **Members have the option to increase their coverage an additional \$10,000 which costs just \$2 for the first year.**

Members must return an AIL reply card or reply online at AILNZ.co.nz/Request in order for an AIL representative to deliver your certificate of coverage and explain additional insurance coverage available. If you did not receive a reply card, please call the number listed below. This is very important to you and your family.

Please note: To qualify for the \$10,000 of additional ADB coverage, an AIL representative must visit you, obtain an enrollment form and collect premium for the first year. You may renew annually for \$5.

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RMTU WOMEN

The RMTU fully supports equal opportunities for women and men

First female ganger in KiwiRail

Emma Little

Dunedin ganger

How long have you been a member of the RMTU?

I joined the RMTU in 2017 as a trainee track maintainer for KiwiRail.

I applied to work for KiwiRail because I wanted to try something new and I could see there were opportunities to learn new skills, career progression and I like working outside.

I like the work and the challenge and proving that females can do it. I started filling in as a ganger in Balclutha and have only just started being a ganger in Dunedin.

What does your current job involve?



I work with a great bunch of people. My job is to lead the track gang with jobs such as resleepering, checking screws, changing rail, renewing road crossings and digging out mud spots. We also make sure there is good track protection. Keeping people safe on the track is also really important. Diggers are a risk to work around.

What do you think about working in a male dominated industry?

It doesn't worry me, if anything it makes me work harder and makes me more determined to succeed.

What would you say to a bunch of women school leavers about working in the rail industry?

KiwiRail is a great place to work and there are a lot of great opportunities. I'd say have a goal, be determined and keep it up. 🌍

Northland rail upgrade

Last month the RMTU placed an advert in the *New Zealand Herald* proclaiming their congratulations to the Government for investing in the long needed upgrade to the Whangarei to Auckland railway line.

The advert stated that there had never been a better time to "have Northland connected to the rest of the the rail system".

"The current issues facing Port of Auckland with shipping movements, loading and unloading plus the added congestion to our roading system makes the rail line to Whangarei a no-brainer" said RMTU general secretary Wayne Butson. "Transferring freight from Northport a short distance to the current rail head is a safe and environmentally sound alternative to putting more trucks on an already congested stretch of highway to and through Auckland."

The advert went on to urge the Government to complete the spur connecting the upgraded rail line to Northport itself.

"This is a critical piece of infrastructure which will be the key to greater efficiency and less pollution," he said.

**CONGRATULATIONS
RAIL LINE TO WHANGAREI REOPENS**

The Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) would like to thank the government for investing in the long needed upgrade to the Whangarei to Auckland railway line.

There has never been a better time to have Northland connected to the rest of the rail system. With current shipping issues at Ports of Auckland and thousands of large, heavy trucks attempting to carry containers from Northport to Auckland, the reopened rail line can now offer the community a safe and environmentally sound alternative to move freight and tourists.

However, the government must not stop here. Northland voted for a Labour government. Now, we want to see our Northland MP's deliver on funding to complete the spur line to Northport. Northlanders expect nothing less than the completion of this critical piece of infrastructure.

The RMTU thanks the past and current government, including the Provincial Growth Fund, for believing in Northland and believing in the benefits the upgraded railway will bring to the nation.

Please look for trains before you cross any railway line.

Photo: Neil Robertson

The advert ends by thanking past and present governments and the administrators of the Provincial Growth Fund for believing in Northland and the benefits of its upgraded railway. 🌍

Phil Bosworth

Life member, union leader

14 July 1951 - 19 January 2021

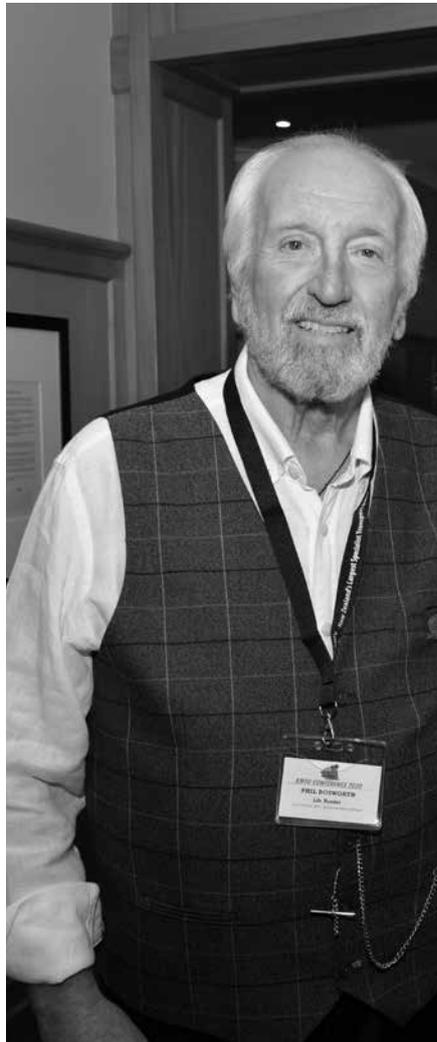
THE RMTU has lost a stalwart with the untimely death of Phil Bosworth who was a life member of the Union, a member of the national management committee and a leader of the union branch at the Hutt Workshops.

Phil was born in Northampton, England. His Dad had his own haulage business and his Mum worked in a chemist shop. He left school at 15 and got a job as an apprentice toolmaker at a shoe factory. He was a good rugby player and his boss, who was on the board of Northampton Saints, offered to get him a job overseas. He got a job at a sister company in New Zealand, arriving in 1974.

He was in the shoe business for a number of years, worked as a maintenance engineer, was an organiser for the Engineers Union for seven to eight years and worked for Dunlops as industrial relations manager. In the 1990s, he went into Railways. After about nine months, he became the delegate for the traction shop at the Hutt workshops. He subsequently became vice-chair of the Hutt branch and secretary of the branch. He then went onto the national management committee of the RMTU.

Phil played a key role in the union's fight to keep Hutt Workshops open and to maintain a strong organisation on the job. After TranzRail's workshops and depots were outsourced to Alstom in the early 2000s, the company tested the strength of the RMTU at Hutt. Interviewed for the union's history, Phil recalled:

'When we first went to Alstom, they laid off 60 people. All the branch union officials except myself had gone. The manager at the time came out to me and said, and these are his exact words,



"Bosworth, the union on this site is dead and I'm going to get you." That was his words. I went out of his office, I went downstairs and I walked round the Hutt Workshops and went up to guys and said, you're on the committee, you're on the committee, you're on the committee, I got all their names and I went back upstairs and kicked his door open literally and I put the names down and said there's the new committee and I'm going to get you. And he's gone.

'That's how good it was. I could go down and say, I need you, I need you,

I need you and it was 'put my name down', 'put my name down' and I had a committee within half an hour. Then we called a stop work meeting and we duly elected them. That was the only way I could do it at that time because I had to shut him up straight away.'

Phil believed in working constructively with management and was one of the driving forces behind the agreement between KiwiRail and the RMTU in 2016 to use the High Performance High Engagement (HPHE) methodology to work together on addressing issues at the workshops. He said HPHE is 'quite good because you get a consensus. Nobody is telling anybody what to do, it's just an agreement and of course when you get workers on the shop floor who can have a say in how things are run they own it. It was very hard for the management side to give up the reins and to learn to talk. Learning to talk and learning to listen and it was the listening side that really helped us.'

Phil described the RMTU as being like a big family. 'You've always got somebody at your back, let's put it that way, you're never without somebody at your back.

'At the end of the day I think that rail is all the better for us. You have to put it down to the leadership of the union. I'm not just talking about Wayne. I'm talking about the whole leadership because it's everybody who works within rail being a leader. It's the leadership there that has enabled the company to be where it is now and the workforce to be where it is now.'

The RMTU offers its sincere condolences and aroha to Sue, Lee and Sarah and the wider whanau. 🇳🇿

- Peter Franks

Railway resistance

Myanmar rail workers stage stop work protest on the tracks.

RAILWAY workers in Myanmar called a strike to fight back against the military coup on February 1 which ousted the civilian government and arrested elected members of their parliament as they waited to be sworn in after recent elections.

In defiance of attempts by the military to recommence train services the workers, along with ordinary citizens, lay on railroad tracks to stop trains commandeered by the military.

According to reports, this action led to more than two dozen men in police uniforms, shields and helmets marching in tight formation through the neighbourhood where state railway workers are housed, no doubt to intimidate.

Despite threats and arbitrary night time arrests, members of the Myanmar Railway Workers Union Federation, established with support from UnionAID in New Zealand, have bravely refused to continue to work for the military government. They are part of a massive civil disobedience movement which has gripped the country, with millions of people protesting in the streets for a return to democracy. The role of civil servants is vital for the success of this movement as they bring business and government institutions to a standstill.

The coup has been met with dismay



and anger by people in Myanmar who, after decades of military rule, poverty and oppression, had seen signs of a better future for their families under the 2010 democratically elected government. These ten years of transitional democracy had brought rapid economic and social development, giving its workers the right to form unions for the first time in 60 years.

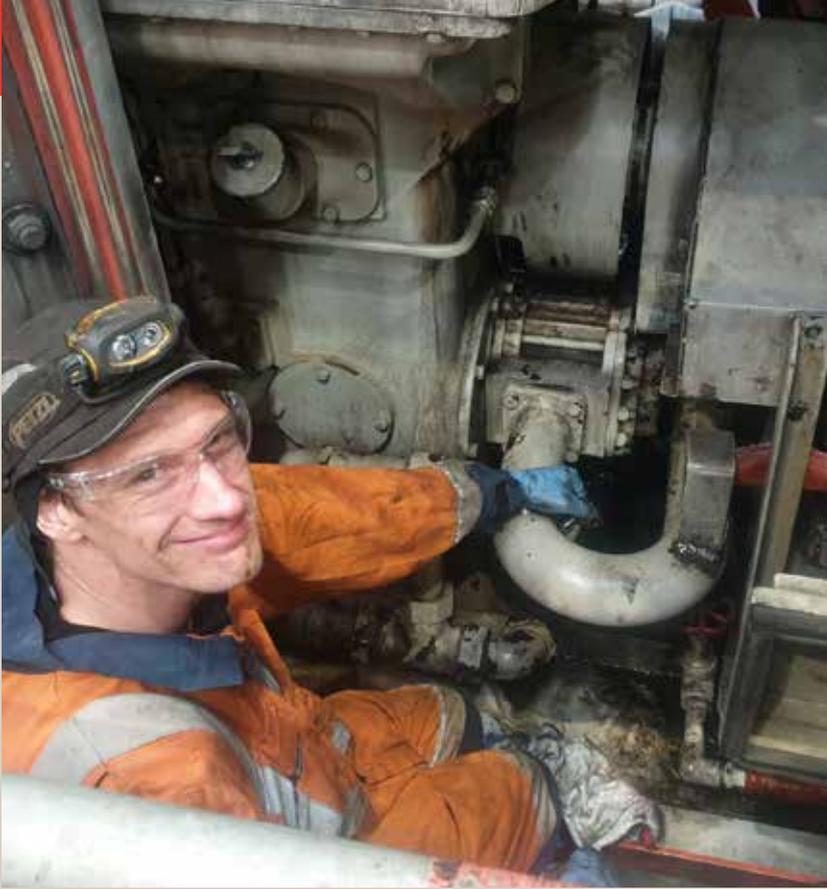
In February RMTU staff joined a solidarity rally at Parliament organised by UnionAID and the local Myanmar community in response to the coup. The assistant secre-

tary of the Confederated Trade Unions of Myanmar expressed just what this solidarity means to workers as they face this daunting struggle. "Thank you so much New Zealand for your solidarity, we need that support. For this fight we do or die, we do not have other options."

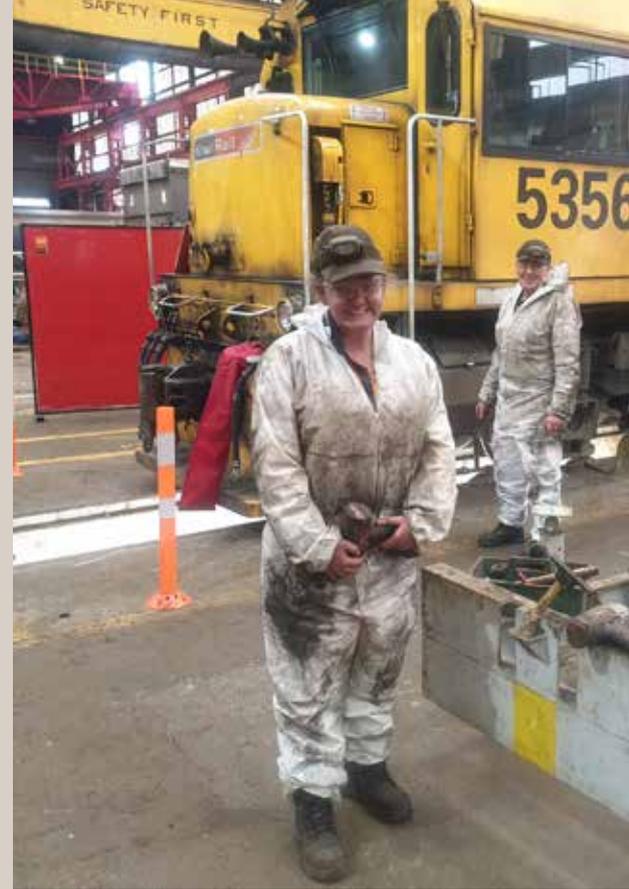
UnionAID has started a special fund to support the democracy movement in Myanmar. You can give practical solidarity through a one-off donation by visiting www.unionaid.org.nz 



RMTU members from head office attended the rally at Parliament in support of Myanmar democracy.



Brent Bower hard at work in Hillside.



Brooke Loper and Kelvin Harris at the revitalised P...

AROUND THE



Hillside's Peter Buckley and Boaz Lovelock.



Clare Curran farewell in Dunedin.



Rolf Christenson an...



Port Chalmers combined meeting.



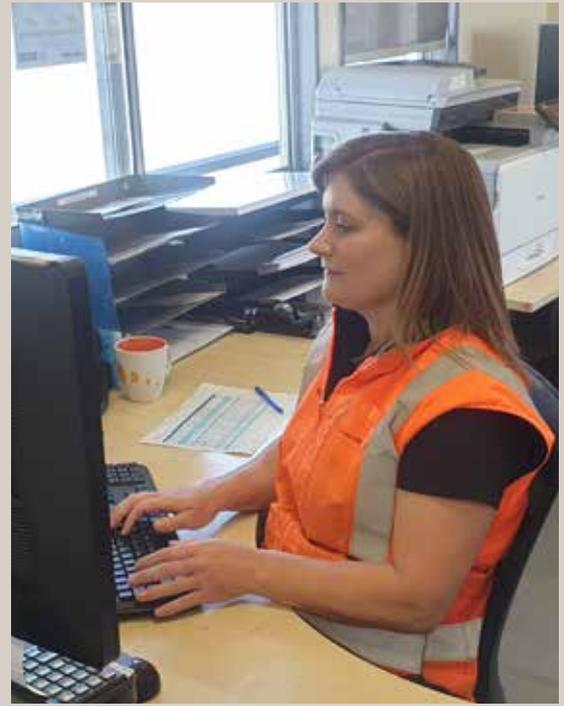
Our cameras have been recording South Island members at work over the last few months. Here is a selection.



Hillside Workshop.



Mike Batt and Daniel Burton from Southland.



Nicola Colley from Invercargill CT site.

E BRANCHES



and Glen Braid at Hillside.



Bridge number 7 at Brougham St Christchurch.



Annette Telfer thanks Gemma Kelley an MIQ nurse and NZNO delegate for her speech at the Canterbury combined branch meeting.



Canterbury combined branch meeting.

Phone App records back abuse

Door opens to entitlements for whole body vibration

JED O'DONOGHUE (pictured right) is an RMTU member who has been a locomotive engineer since 1980. Like many LEs, throughout his career Jed has been subject to whole body vibration and rough riding locos. Also – and again, like many LEs – Jed has also suffered episodes of lower back pain. In recent times these episodes have become increasingly frequent and debilitating.

Jed's most recent bout of back pain was in November 2019, which occurred after a particularly rough ride between Christchurch and St Andrews. During that trip Jed switched on his mobile phone's pedometer – it recorded him as having taken some 5000 steps whilst seated in the cab!

Jed lodged a claim with ACC for a lower back sprain, on the basis that this injury was caused by the exposure to vibration and jarring at work.

KiwiRail is an ACC-accredited employer. ACC forwarded Jed's claim to KiwiRail for consideration, and KiwiRail handed it over



to their claims administrator, WorkAon.

WorkAon initially declined Jed's claim on the basis that there was insufficient information available to establish a link between Jed's lower back injury and his workplace exposures. Jed sought assistance from the

RMTU, who arranged for ACC-specialist lawyer Ben Thompson to represent Jed and file a review application against WorkAon's cover decline. This ensured that Jed had the option of challenging WorkAon's position.

However, WorkAon was then provided with a report from occupational medical specialist Dr David McBride. Dr McBride gave an in-depth discussion of the vibrational forces which LEs are regularly subject to, before concluding that these forces caused Jed's lumbar sprain, and put LEs at a significantly greater risk of suffering lower back problems.

WorkAon subsequently overturned their original decision and granted cover for Jed's lumbar sprain – opening the door for entitlements such as earnings-related compensation and treatment costs.

Jed's advice to any LE suffering from back pain is to report it – get it logged into the system. If you need assistance with a workplace injury, please get in touch with the RMTU today. 🇳🇿

Wally Wallbutton

AFTER 48 years in rail Wally Wallbutton has retired. At his retirement lunch on February 5 Wally's peers, current and past, shared a tirade of anecdotes about a man who spoke his mind and never wavered in his commitment to improving working conditions.

Wally's work history began in Stratford where he qualified as a locomotive assistant before heading to New Plymouth. He arrived in Palmerston North in 1976 and worked his way up to first grade LE before becoming an LE team leader.

He was an enthusiastic representative for LEs who was tireless in seeking to achieve the Union's policies of worker representation.

At his farewell he was thanked especially for all his hard work and dedication to organising and managing the LE trainees.



Congratulations on a standout career.

Southern derailment



Track crews hastily gathered to put the Wairio branch line back into action after an empty coal train derailed at Wright's Bush north of Invercargill. Only days before the line had been saved from closure after Bathurst promised to pick up its \$5.2 million maintenance bill, thereby securing its future until at least 2025.

NORTHLAND RAIL

North Auckland line reopens after cash injection

THE North Auckland Line has reopened, after being closed since June 2020, as part of the \$110 million rail upgrade project, which involved replacing five bridges and lowering tracks in 13 tunnels. The upgrade allows the rail line to take high-cube containers, which are commonly used in international shipping.

The line reopening had an immediate impact with a container ship being diverted from Auckland to Northport. Containers were trucked to the Whangarei freight terminal and loaded on rail to be freighted

to Auckland. This made a mockery of the former National government's 'build it and they will come but we will not' rhetoric spouted by their local MP Dr Shane Reti at one of the popular, RMTU backed, rail forums many years ago.

Incidentally, the Northland branch played a leading hand in the campaign to roll him out of the Whangarei seat, and getting behind the winner, Labour's Emily Henderson. Emily is a strong advocate for Northland rail.

Our members continue to do a sterling

job under trying conditions including Covid-19, huge weather events, having to help out in Auckland with the Metro track upgrade.

The branch has also recently managed to get seven fixed-term track workers permanent positions through tough talks around the table with the bosses.

We welcome two new loco drivers, after saying farewell to two long standing drivers, one of whom is long serving unionist Bill Sweeney. 🌐

AUCKLAND RAIL

Hoping to rewrite ROM before tendering is complete

THERE is a huge amount happening at Transdev Auckland this year. As Covid continues to disrupt our lives we have a lot to address.

We are continuing the rewrite of the ROM. This will increase the coverage of the ROM to all employees. This process has been going for a few months now with a working group made up of management and members including delegates and members of the branch executive. This will be an ongoing piece of work which we are attempting to get finished before the tendering process is finished.

Speaking of which, the tendering process is well underway and the period for submitting tenders has finished. We know there are three competitors and Transdev is one of them. Auckland Transport (AT) has

an appalling track record when it comes to tendering. You only have to witness the mess they made of the bus industry in Auckland to understand that. Their preferred method is to hand out the work to the lowest bidder. This becomes a race to the bottom, where the wages of those who actually do the work get squeezed in order to maintain profit margins. We rather hope AT have learnt from the bus debacle but the best way for us, as a Union, is to face whichever company wins the tender and by maintaining our solidarity and sticking together.

We have also re-entered the HPHE process with TDAK around "the challenging issue". We are currently working through the risk assessment on Driver Door Operations. We have a way to go on this but the

members on the team are very focused on safety and we need to get that absolutely right before we proceed to trials. As we have noted many times before, we have to come back to the membership before any final decisions are made. We will keep everyone updated as we move through this process.

We are also in the last year of our collective agreement. It will be interesting to see who we end up bargaining with given the tendering will be done and dusted by then and we may not be bargaining with TDAK. Our terms and conditions will be carried over, whoever wins the tender. As always, our strength at the bargaining table is the solidarity of our membership. We have had some excellent wins over the last few years and we see no reason why 2021 shouldn't be any different. 🌐



RAIL - TAKING STRESS OFF NORTHLAND ROADS

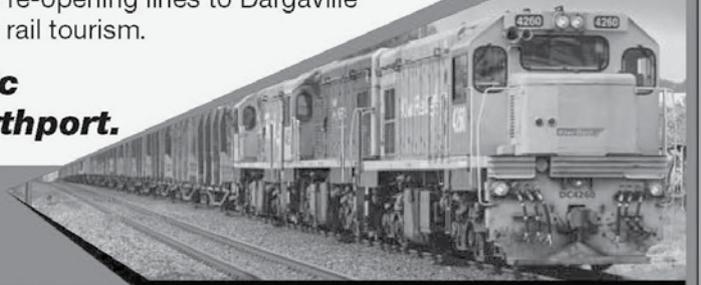
It's time to reconnect Northland's extensive railway network enabling industry to use the safest way to move freight and increase high value rail tourism.

The Rail and Maritime Transport Union Fully Supports re-opening lines to Dargaville and Otiria. Reconnecting rail to Kawakawa - Opuia for rail tourism.



Rail is the Strategic missing link to Northport.

- Logs • Woodchips
- Dairy • Bulkloads • Tourism
- Large Consignment freight



BAY OF PLENTY PORT

Branch award for service



(l to r) Lindsay Girven, Kevin Merrie, Ken McNicol, Lyall Reid and Kevin Pollard, all long serving Unionists retire in luxury, after a long and proud history of fighting for and maintaining decent wages and conditions. They leave behind a strong legacy for those still working.

BAY OF PLENTY RAIL

Cancelled 'cover' services causing concern

TENA koutou katoa, nga mihi o te tau hou. Greetings to you all, and blessings for the New Year.

Arohamai, I was lucky to have had leave from Dec 20 through to Jan 21, after that more leave was granted due to a death in my whanau and as a result, I have very little to report from the branch since our last report.

Firstly, I would like to congratulate our new national Womens Council North Island

rail representative Christie Yule from the Mt Maunganui depot and also acknowledge the other nominees who stepped up to be considered. Thank you all.

One issue that has come up, is the cancelled services due to "no staff to cover". With members looking at retiring later on this year, we will have more issues with cancelled services and are barely able to cover PAL, sickness and training leave. We

need more new staff and the trainers and minders to train them on the job.

With Covid restriction levels we hope everyone is keeping safe, scanning everywhere they can, and following the guidelines to help keep the virus under control.

Thats all for now.

Nga mihi kia a koutou katoa 🌐



WHERE ARE YOU?

When problems arise we may need to contact you in a hurry.

Please check we have your correct address and contact details.

<http://bit.ly/exmEyl>

or

04-499-2066

NAPIER PORT

Pay increases for Port Board members and CEO rankles

HE naumai mahana – trusting this is the year we see a vaccine which liberates us from the dreaded Covid lurgy of 2020. It would seem however, globally we have a long way to go.

On the international front, the inauguration of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris shows they will certainly have their work cut out for them, though they have made a promising start despite the convergence of several massive 'storms': racism, Covid 19, discrimination, civil war and politics. In watching this sad tale of destruction roll out 'freedom' may have an adverse impact on true democracy! We have to have rules, with out them we have anarchy and chaos. No matter how we define boundaries or rules, whether they be political, personal, or as nations, if we are to be free in all categories to have choices, we have to have acceptance around majority outcomes— something some people within the US are struggling to accept. There must be a mutual understanding of ideals.

Concerns have been raised around the processes bought about which gave the Napier Port Board and its CEO their very substantial pay increases. Interestingly, as mentioned in the previous Transport Worker, the local branch membership of the Main CEA (crane operators are on a separate agreement) received a 3.3% increase last October which was agreed to in 2019, though the company were in pursuance of a variation to overturn this. The variation did not happen for obvious reasons. The balance of staff were given a 1% one off

payment, not affixed to wages or salaries. The incentive scheme, which is non-contractual was also removed. None-the-less, guess what? Profits for 2020 were very good. Up on all forecasts and relative to 2019. It would seem privatisation is well and truly delivering to the board, CEO, Hawkes Bay Regional Council and the 45% of private shareholders who invested in the port – all received a 'humble' dividend.

In overlaying the NPC's 2019 annual report on the 2020, the Board has creamed it!

The chairman received 20%+, the board 30%+. The CEO, between the salary, allowances and short-term investments (free shares) in combination, received a staggering increase, too big to mention! Phenomenal increases overall, when everyone else was expected to bite the bullet through a very challenging period to say the least. Don't forget we are essential border workers who put ourselves and our whanau at risk 24/7 to keep Aotearoa moving.

This is why the RMTU's Napier Port branch can stand proud over its stance against privatisation. These are the consequences of such decision making: the fat cats line their own pockets and pat themselves on the back.

Both the crane operators and general CEAs are up for negotiation this year. We are advised, again, the Company's fiscal forecast will be tested. It will be a case 'of watch this space' on both counts of deliberations throughout 2021, as it will be for many of our members in ports and rail.

But knowing the percentages paid to the

NPC Board, the standards have been set!

Bring it on!

Nga mihi to Roz Muir who left Napier Port Company on 31/1/2021. Roz started at the Port just over 10 years ago as a trainee logistics planner after returning from working overseas in the logistics environment for several companies in England and Sweden. She moved into a senior planning role and then into a ship planning position about six years ago. A very capable planner on both fronts.

Roz joined the RMTU not too long after she started and with some encouragement, became an active member. Although very strong on women's rights, it did not matter to Roz who she was fighting for, if the challenge was there so was she, guns blazing. A proponent in the none sale of Napier Port, Roz led the challenge at the Hawkes Bay Regional Council buildings. She was a delegate for our women, vice convenor, and delegate representative for the shipping and logistics planners. She added an intellectual value that was a positive force behind any of our negotiation exchanges. Her potential was boundless.

A smart bubbly personality, an asset which we will truly miss at branch level but also as a member who represented our Union on the international stage also.

A MASSIVE thank you from all our membership Roz, we wish you well, all strength, a treasure to us all.

Mana wahine, haumaru, kia ora, kia kaha. 🌐

HUTT WORKSHOPS

Sadly recognise the passing of Phil Bosworth - RMTU life member

GREETINGS and a great welcome back after well-earned recreational break at Covid-19 Level 1 - a privilege (or a right?) which many other countries were unable to equal. The continuing bad news stories about worldwide Covid responses and the discovery of highly contagious variants clearly demonstrates to the well-informed that this little beast of

a virus and its impacts will be around for sometime yet. We cannot, and must not, slacken-off in our continuing vigilance and adherence to good hygiene and Covid-19 track and tracing processes.

On a more operational note, Hutt has continued to beaver-away at improvements. Since the cut-off date for the December issue of TTW, we had a simple, yet eye-open-

ing and down-to-earth men's health seminar with Dr Ryder-Lewis. Some of the statistics concerning men's health gave the (voluntary) attendees much to consider as we get older and options to improve our quality of life both physically and mentally. Hot on the heels of that initiative, the Stroke Foundation set-up a free blood pressure check service and the opportunity to discuss



options for addressing health issues. We are grateful for these initiatives by the Hutt leadership team as part of their commitment to the health and safety of staff and to our unsung administrators who took care of all those little details which make or break such initiatives.

Progress in the area of growth came with the advertising of some vacancies consistent with the previously announced decision document concerning the structure and future operation(s) of Hutt. A bit of a 'procedural hiccup' occurred with one round of interviews such that complaints were submitted or made known resulting in the particular vacancy being recalled and interviews held to bring trust and confidence back into the process. Needless to say, some education of the interviewing panel was forthcoming and a 'reset' initiated. At the time of writing interviews for the manager, project engineer and planner were being held, with the intention to round off the overall process by calling for several team leader positions, some of which will back fill newly created vacancies. We congratulate the successful candidates.

Sadly we report the passing of former team leader, branch chair and life member Phil Bosworth on January 19. Phil was given a fitting send off acknowledging his sterling service to the Union movement and, in particular, his leadership in addressing the threat of possible closure which was a dark and heavy cloud over Hutt Workshops in 2015. We have come some way since then and continue to grow from strength to strength.

Hot on the heels of the joint statement #3 for the MECA 2020 renegotiations, a meeting to confirm the terms of settlement (ToS) was convened at national head of-

office in early February attended by Wayne Butson, John Kerr and Myles Carter for the Union, and Maryan Street, Paul Ashton and Mark Lennox for KiwiRail. Subject to some administrative obligations being discharged in a timely manner, the report back meetings should be running as you read these notes, complete with the usual mail out for members to cast their votes to accept or reject the proposed offer.

Additional to the ToS meeting, discussions were held about the annoying issue of annual leave deductions. This has been a thorny issue as the Holidays Act talks about payments but not about deductions meaning that those who routinely work shifts exceeding eight hours (eg 10 to 12 hour shifts) get screwed-over somewhat whenever they take annual leave. Both parties have taken legal advice so the lawyers will get to clip-the-ticket until such time as we resolve this problem.

On the training front we were recently introduced to the revamped concept and process of isolation and lockout from Stuart Harrison & Co, along with an introductory session on control verifications by Steve Rosser. There are changes in the wind, but as we all know, the devil is in the detail!

At branch level, our chair Mat Cordell-Bain has stood down to allow him to focus more on his substantive role of senior HPHE facilitator. An interim arrangement has seen a reshuffle of responsibilities between vice-chair Manu Barclay and secretary Myles Carter, supported by delegate Slade Pilcher who will back fill Manu's position as the acting branch vice chair until we can formally satisfy the requirements of Rule 38 (Casual Vacancies) of the Union's Rules & Standing Orders.

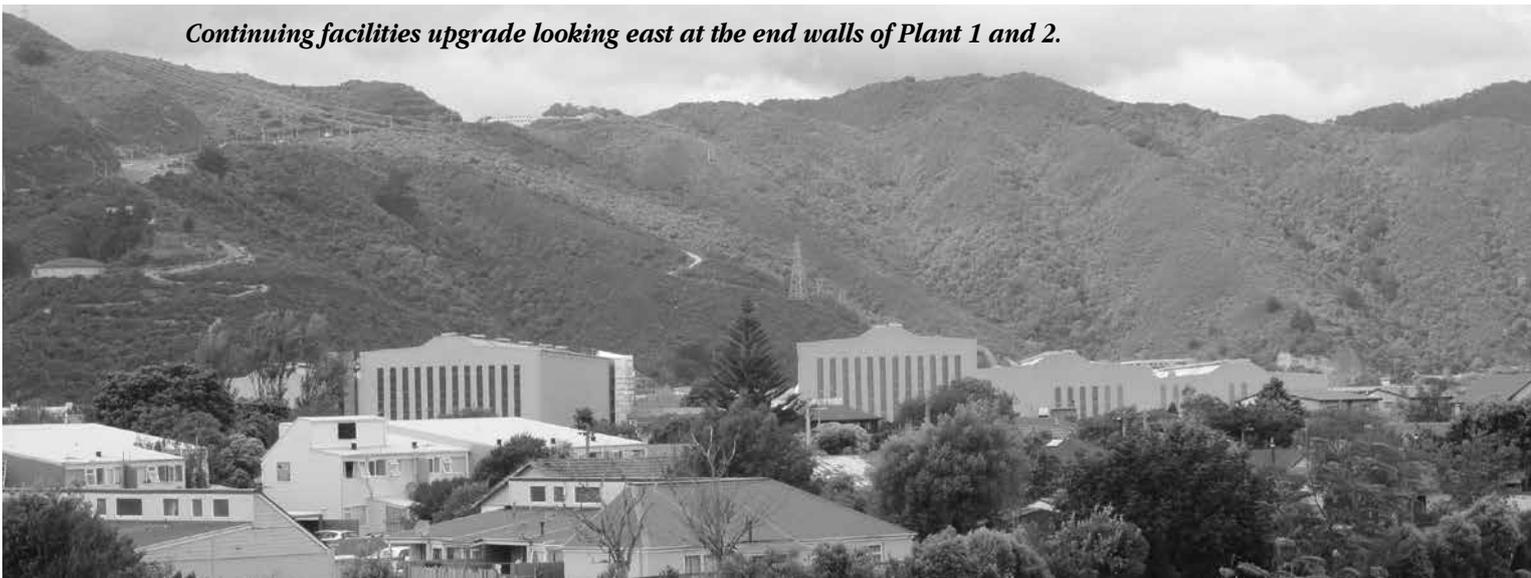
Whilst we're only a few weeks into the



Flag at half mast for Phil Bosworth.

new working year, the workload hasn't let up and we are beavering-away accordingly. This also includes a review of our operations and the additional duties placed on

Continuing facilities upgrade looking east at the end walls of Plant 1 and 2.



◀ individuals either by design or default.

It would appear a number of the industrial councils are meeting at the same time which may well result in some collective thinking and co-ordinated direction this year. A number of market surveys and/or internal pay parity checks of various pay scales and positions have been approved in principle and will be carried out in FY21. This is, of course, a continuation of the company's stated drive towards standardisation and the Union's drive in a similar regard as requested by the membership.

As the close-off for these notes arrived, a timetable for the team leader interviews was issued with 27 people competing for 11 positions. It is noted that the individual vacancies were not stated, that is, the names of the workgroups up for grabs were not openly advertised. Whilst this is a departure from expected norms, it will likely result in job offers to the successful candidates which will either be accepted or declined. Another anomaly is that company policy may not

have been complied with in relation to the acting positions (secondment) thus far, so any unsuccessful incumbents may take umbrage at the result and may well have some recourse. If all incumbents get appointed, I imagine the other candidates may also feel a little miffed and question the process. By the time you read these notes the dust should have settled – or the fighting commenced!

Word has it that the new MECA (2020-2021) and the terms of settlement were recently reviewed by a couple of representatives at national office with a couple of minor corrections/amendments initiated so the report back sessions and the ballot process should occur to the previously mooted timetables. If so, then the call for remits for the next MECA (2021-2022?) should follow that activity in time for the initiation of bargaining in May. That said, members should consider what they want and how much they are prepared to fight for, because if you don't ask, you will probably not get. If your issue affects a larger group outside

your immediate sphere of operations, it is recommended you contact members of other branches to garner support for your remits in order that the negotiating teams can gauge how deeply and widely felt an issue is.

So that's the first quarter of the year in a nutshell. If something is not right – speak up or call it out, and if it's not safe, STOP and consider the problem before continuing.

STOP PRESS: Just as we were closing these notes off, the Government raised the Covid-19 alert levels. By the time you read this, we hope we will have reverted back to Level One and things have settled back down. The company has halted all travel and asked for working-from-home to continue and, where possible, ramped up to keep our people safe. The safety message remains the same: Scan the QR codes or use the sign-in registers as required. Our safety and that of our families and communities remains paramount. Stay safe out there people. 🌐

Sickness, accident and death



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

In the last 10 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 \$219 a year your future – or those of your next of kin – could be better assured.

Contact:

Debby Green, PO Box 813,
Wellington
Telephone: (04) 499-2066
Fax: (04) 471-0896
debby.green@rmtunion.org.nz

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

WELLINGTON RAIL

Farewells to branch stalwarts

Farewell Christine



Christine Fisiihoi, a long standing delegate in the Wellington Rail Branch, women's rep locally, nationally and internationally has resigned

from her role at TransDev Wellington and moved closer to her family in the Bay Of Plenty. Christine is taking on a new role in BOP helping people in emergency and transitional housing. We wish her all the best and thank her for all her mahi supporting RMTU members.

Dennis (Monkey) Williams

After 49 years in Rail, Dennis has hung

up his remote pack and retired. A colourful character who managed to adapt and continue to work in rail when many of his colleagues were laid off in the late 1980s. At Dennis' leaving function at TransDev, many spoke of the strong friendship they have with him, he will be missed.



Here's to a long, happy and healthy retirement for Dennis and as he says, time to get back to the 70s!

Ratiaiti (Ra) Ratia



Another long term Wellington Rail branch member retired in December. Ra, a team leader in the Wellington Freight terminal, retired with 47 year's

service. Many gathered for Ra's send off at the terminal and spoke about him being one of rail's true gentleman. Ra spoke passionately stating, amongst other things, that the safety improvements to shunting practices in the last 20 years must be continued. We wish Ra a long, happy and healthy retirement. 🇳🇿

MARLBOROUGH PORT

Research reveals complex problems relating to Holidays Act

LIKE many workplaces up and down New Zealand, it's been no holiday working through issues arising from the 2003 Holidays Act and how it applies to our members. Different departments across the port plus three marinas, add complexity to a payroll made up of 'lumpy' pays due to seasonal hours and shift work.

Our journey started about five years ago with delegate Mike Adams investigating not only his own pay issues but following up other cases within his department and finding errors. He spent over 100 hours of his own time researching the Holidays Act and seeking advice from those in the know. In the department where he works, management rectified individual cases and there was an agreed payout for the rest of the guys there. Company wide, long service leave payments were also corrected.

Our branch took a view that the payroll software was not up to the task of dealing with the lumpy pays, so we negotiated into our 2018-2020 CEA for a company wide pay

review to take place. After further negotiation to get things moving, management engaged a global financial services firm to highlight problem areas through a discovery report. The review was undertaken over several months, and the report's release was then delayed due to lockdown.

The branch executive requested and eventually received a copy of the full report (with names redacted) which applies to both union and non-union staff. The report explained areas of concern and improvements to be made.

A joint working group, which includes Mike, was established to resolve issues highlighted in the report. The group has now met several times and is dealing with some pretty complex stuff, but making progress all the same.

We thought the pay review might bring about a relatively quick end to what was started back in 2016. But in reality it's only the end of the beginning!

We bid farewell to Brian Carver (BC)



Ray McKay receives his 25 year certificate from branch chair Grant Herbert.

who was with us for 44 years and an RMTU member for all that time. BC was first employed by the Marlborough Harbour Board as a boatman/general hand and then onto leading hand. He was part of a strike over Christmas 1985, where the membership put themselves on the line to keep intact bereavement leave provisions in their collective. BC was appointed as the Waikawa Marina custodian in 1985. In 2015 he moved to Picton Marina where he admirably dealt with a few challenges including the

◀ odd storm and flood. His level headedness and easy going manner made him well liked by both colleagues and customers alike.

We also thank BC for being a delegate

who calmly put across his opinion based on experience and pragmatism. Hey BC happy retirement! We know you like your takeaway coffee - bring us a flat white for a

catch up soon.

Big congratulations also to shipping security officer and delegate Ray McKay who clicked over 25 years in January. 🇳🇿

LYTTELTON PORT

Port's leadership change leads to improved relations

AS 2020 came to a close we were very busy at Port Lyttelton and it would seem that in 2021 we are just going to get busier. In the ten years since the Canterbury earthquakes not a day has gone by at our port that there hasn't been an upgrade of infrastructure or construction going on. Despite all the disruptions this has caused for day to day operations over the past decade, the increase in capacity means that in contrast to other New Zealand ports we have been well placed to cope with the disruptions to international shipping caused by COVID-19. Consequently we are in the fortunate position of continuing to hire new staff and our members have an enviable degree of security of employment in these uncertain times. The success that LPC currently enjoys is in no small part due to the hard work of our members who work day and night in all weathers at Lyttelton and the two inland port sites – City Depot in Woolston, and Midland Port at Rolleston.

For members who regularly read *The Transport Worker*, you will no doubt notice a distinct change of tone in these notes and you will remember that only a couple of years ago we were at constant loggerheads with management following an acrimonious dispute which led to strike action. We had a change in leadership at LPC a year ago and we can now engage with the company on issues using an interest-based approach in-

stead of the adversarial one which had been the norm since anyone can remember. This is, of course, not without challenges, as both managers and our members get used to the new way of doing things. All too often, especially when people are under pressure and the proverbial hits the fan, there is still a tendency to revert to ingrained habits and for both sides to barricade themselves into fixed positions.

We have a number of engagements we are undertaking in which we are taking an interest-based approach, albeit with varying degrees of success and with challenges still to overcome. We want to highlight one case however, which demonstrates what can be achieved when management and members genuinely engage.

Over successive rounds of bargaining over a number of years we have tried to improve the terms and conditions of our members who are lines supervisors who have traditionally been the lowest paid members on the Port Lyttelton collective agreement. Late last year we requested a remuneration review outside of bargaining for these workers. Although there was some initial resistance to this by management because it was a significant departure from past practice, there was a willingness to engage with us and ultimately an acceptance that this case warranted making an exception. We're happy to report that a variation to the collective agreement has been signed

after a thorough remuneration review and job-sizing conducted by the company that took about three months. Our delegate for these members said: "We have never had such a fair offer from the company in all the years I have worked at Lyttelton." This is in stark contrast to the way we used to do things where more often than not, the can would be kicked down the road and everything rolled into the next round of protracted bargaining. The success of this process was a credit to the way the members and their manager talked through all aspects of the issue and focussed on attaining a result that would satisfy both parties.

Ultimately, the intention is to formalise this approach across the company and to negotiate a High Performance High Engagement charter with LPC as part of building a more positive relationship.

We are still dealing with all the challenges our comrades in other ports are facing, notably fatigue management and maintaining safety for members and that of New Zealand in dealing with COVID19 at the maritime border. On the latter, it was very illuminating to hear from Gemma Kelley, a nurse and NZNO delegate working in a managed isolation and quarantine facility, at our now traditional joint Canterbury Rail and Lyttelton Port branch meeting at the end of last year. These workers really are unsung heroes and heroines – our country owes them a debt of gratitude. 🇳🇿

CANTERBURY RAIL

TranzAlpine and Coastal Pacific continuing success in Covid crisis

HERE in Canterbury Rail we are reflecting on what seems a very busy time since the last issue of these branch notes.

As 2020 closed we were able to hold our now traditional joint membership meeting with our comrades from the Lyttelton Port branch. This in itself is noteworthy given

that a few short months prior we could not hold mass gatherings of any sort and, even as the lockdown loosened, meetings of more than 100 people were banned. We must not lose perspective and forget that being able to meet as we did last December was a result of the good work we have all done in suppressing and eliminating

COVID19 in our community.

It was therefore both a privilege and a pleasure to be able to recognise the contributions members made to the RMTU at our meeting. Former locomotive engineer, KIC representative and RMTU National Management Committee South Island rail representative Mike Williams attended and



◀ received his life membership certificate and badge from our general secretary. Mike gave a very succinct speech of thanks which emphasised his genuine gratitude at receiving the greatest honour our Union can bestow and reinforced the valuable work our Union does because we stick together and support our elected officials and delegates. This was followed by recognition of Bobby Boulton, one of our youngest members, for his great work producing a film about our campaign to save Dunedin Railways. Recognising two active members at opposite ends of their careers demonstrates the Union's depth of talent and good prospects for our future.

On a more sober note we had a guest speaker from the nurses' union who is also a nurse in a managed isolation and quarantine facility in Christchurch. Hearing about the responsibility and pressures of her work was a reminder of just how much effort has gone into allowing us to live largely 'normal' lives compared to many people living overseas.

The TranzAlpine and Coastal Pacific continued to run over the summer, another benefit of the successful elimination of COVID19 to date. This is the part of KiwiRail hit hardest by the cessation of international tourism last March and a great deal of work has gone into trying to reconfigure the business to the domestic market. Our members are working long hours, particularly on the Coastal Pacific Service, but are hopeful that the future of long distance passenger rail is secure. We do question the thinking behind the introduction of the so-called premier class service as it appears to us that Scenic Journeys trains were most patronised when discounts were offered to maximise

passenger numbers as we left lockdown mid-year. We'd like to see if the numbers really do stack up behind the introduction of a so called first class service.

Many of our track members have been cycled in and out of Auckland over the holiday period to work on blocks of line, doing the essential renewal and maintenance work to keep our largest city moving.

Closer to home the RMTU has been advocating strongly for increased staffing in network and signals and together with our brothers and sisters on the West Coast our local officials have been successful in securing permanent roles for a number of staff who were employed on fixed term agreements as part of the Provincial Growth Fund culvert and drainage project.

In operations there were a few hiccups during the introduction of a new rule against alighting from moving vehicles, something which appears to have been imposed on KiwiRail by a regulator that, after years of being asleep at the metaphorical wheel, seems to have found its teeth and is acting in an arbitrary and reactive fashion. There has been some good work done by our H&S reps on this. There is a great deal of interest in the forthcoming procurement of new mainline locomotives and shunt locomotives for the South Island. We are well overdue some new kit and its important we get this right as experience suggests we may have to work with this gear for a long time to come. There is no substitute for talking with and listening to front-line workers when taking these type of decisions.

Our members in rolling stock maintenance continue to do sterling work keeping the engines and wagons in good shape.

The new Scenic Journeys service centre at Waltham was opened with a ceremony at the end of January. This is a highly visible new building easily seen by the public from the Wilsons Road overpass. This is physical evidence of the long overdue investment in rail in our region.

Our container transfer terminal members have been flat out over the summer. The congestion and disruption in our ports is only one in a long line of dominoes in the supply chain. Together with our members in the big Toll shed at Matipo Street they are some of society's unsung heroes maintaining the flow of goods we all use in our daily lives. Members at Toll are battling on despite their collective agreement remaining unsettled and the business being sold by Japan Post. The container transfer terminal operation in Ashburton is being sold off by Toll but we understand there will be no redundancies as a consequence. Once again we thank our delegates and active members for all the work they do on our behalf in this part of the rail industry in our region.

One gripe our branch is the time it takes to recruit new staff.

This is a real issue which has an impact on industrial relations, particularly in network services where a lack of capacity can lead managers to consider contracting out our core work, thereby triggering conflict. It also affects our rolling stock maintenance and operations members however, where a shortage of skilled labour can lead to increased pressure to work longer hours. Surely this aspect of running KiwiRail can be sorted out?

We are all paying the price of it not being in one form or another. 🇳🇿

WEST COAST RAIL

Complex discussions and decisions on protest action

THE most controversy our branch has dealt with for a while was generated not by events on our side of the hill but by environmental protestors locking themselves to the track at Dunedin Railway Station in January in the wake of the confirmation that the Ohai to Invercargill branch line would not be closing at the end of last year. As readers will doubtless be aware the protestors were against the transport of coal from Southland to be burned at Fonterra's

Clandeboye works. Demonstrating both advantages and disadvantages of social media, a debate ensued on the branch Facebook group when some members called for the RMTU to advocate for a hard line to be taken against the protestors.

National office argued the issue was complex given that our Union supports the right to protest and has exercised it frequently, including entering the rail corridor on occasion. This cut little ice with some of

our branch members who wanted KiwiRail and the police to throw the proverbial book at the protestors.

The discussion went back and forth and what emerged was that a key concern for our members is their security of employment at a time when fossil fuel-based industries are under threat from government responses to climate change. This resulted in exchanges about the likely future of such industries and whether or not our

Union has a policy on a 'just transition' to protect members' interests in the event of the mines' closure.

Debate on social media only goes so far and soon there were demands that the general secretary and South Island organiser visit and meet with members. This was duly agreed to and a well-attended meeting was held at the Greymouth depot on 11 February. The gathering was useful in that it clarified the issues in question which, while they were related, were separate: that of the tactics of protest and the future of fossil fuel industries and the need to prepare for a just transition.

The conclusion was a resolution that was passed unanimously stating that the branch calls upon our Union to develop

a policy for a just transition for members whose jobs are dependent on the transport of coal, and in the meantime to continue advocating for the retention of these jobs until such a time as a viable alternative for coal is developed. A sub-committee was formed to work on implementing the resolution. As you read this we hope to have put the issue on the agenda of National Management Committee.

In other news, we are progressing with plans to inaugurate a workers' memorial stone at the Greymouth depot ready for this coming Workers' Memorial Day in April. Last year our plans were knocked awry, as was so much else, by COVID19. We remain hopeful that the strategy of elimination continues to be successful and the vaccine

rollout means we can continue to live relatively normal lives this year so our plans come to fruition. The branch also wishes to acknowledge the support of KiwiRail management for this project.

Our branch continues to advocate strongly for members. Together with the Canterbury Rail branch we were successful in persuading KiwiRail to confirm nine structures members employed on fixed term agreements under the Provincial Growth Fund culvert and drainage project as permanent in late January. This gives these members some much needed certainty and boosts the capacity of our network services gangs—always a big plus in fighting the menace of contracting out. 🇳🇿

TIMARU RAIL

New alighting rule causing untold frustration

It has been relatively quiet on the industrial front in our branch since the last issue of these notes – which isn't necessarily a bad thing. Our two local freezing works are putting out good tonnage and being serviced predominantly by our container transfer terminal.

We're busy with cement pods and chilled products. We noticed the protest action against the transport of coal through Dunedin bound for the Fonterra plant at Clandeboye in January. Ironic that the stuff is only being transported on rail thanks to the RMTU vigorously campaigning for the retention of the branch line in Southland

that services the mine.

The photograph (on the cover) shows our hard working track members laying replacement rail through the Smithfield siding.

We hear a review of staffing on this side of the business is imminent with a view to increasing numbers. Makes a change from the years of cut-backs and trimming.

At the time of writing everyone is waiting to hear about the RMTU/KiwiRail MECA settlement. We expect the ballot will be underway by the time you read this.

The arbitrary imposition of a rule banning alighting from moving vehicles by

NZTA has generated huge frustration. If the regulator wants us to stop at every set of points in our yards to pull or reset points then delays will result and management is going to have to factor that in.

There's a bit of heat amongst members around the management of leave. It seems we've vacillated between pressing people to take it to making it difficult to get as the year unfolded. Just another low level impact of COVID we suppose.

Aside from the above, the most important message from our branch is stay healthy and stay safe! 🇳🇿

TIMARU PORT

Chaotic shortage of empty containers causes disruption

It's been very busy at our port since the last issue of *The Transport Worker*. Some of this is a consequence of the disruptions and pressures resulting from the COVID19 pandemic on global supply chains. Some factors, closer to home, have also played a role however. There has been industrial action on the Australian waterfront and the management of Ports of Auckland seems to have been lacking, to say the least.

The cumulative impact of this has been

a shortage of empty containers, which can only be described as chaos in the timing of ship visits, and congestion at the wharves. For example, we shift an average of 6000 TEUs/month and in one eight day period over the summer peak we moved 5000 plus TEUs.

This has had an impact on our members both at Quality Marshalling and Prime Port. The former's operation hasn't been helped by the fact there were two major crane breakdowns which required parts to be

manufactured by the supplier in Germany. The maintenance on these cranes hadn't been the best and the division of the port's operations so they were done by separate companies, all wholly owned subsidiaries of Port of Tauranga after their neo-liberal management model, meant this wasn't picked up until QM became responsible for the management of the container terminal as reported in the last issue of *The Transport Worker*.

QM are on a bit of a recruitment drive, ▶

◀ seeking to replace our local manager who is retiring and to staff up to relieve pressure on members who are at risk of fatigue because of the hours worked at peak flow times.

The joint management/RMTU roster committee ceased to meet which exacerbated an already difficult situation. Members were rightly aggrieved and some prompt advocacy by delegates has seen this re-instated and an undertaking given by management that they will adopt a less

reactive approach to operations.

Time will tell how this plays out.

Prime Port continues to tweak its staffing as reported in the previous issue of *The Transport Worker* with another role created that one of our members has filled. Both the Prime Port and QM collective agreements are due for re-negotiation this year as the employers insisted on one year terms last year given the uncertainty generated by COVID19.

The economic impact of this has been

nothing as bad as forecast for the regional economy and our exporters are going flat out.

This has generated a demand for labour which leads us to the view that we need to look long and hard at wage rates in the forthcoming bargaining rounds.

All this of course is contingent on New Zealand maintaining its excellent record in eliminating the virus and not being subject to the kind of chaos we see overseas. 🌐

PORT CHALMERS

Combined union resistance to aggressive management policy

READERS of the last issue of *The Transport Worker* will recall that the workforce at Port Otago was less than happy in the run up to Christmas at the antics of management. In summary, our members and those of MUNZ were sick of the aggressive management style employed by our CEO and his minions. This manifested itself through a bullying management style, a sinking lid on staffing, and a boneheaded refusal to meaningfully engage with the representatives of the workforce.

Our branch held a joint stop-work meeting with MUNZ and unanimously passed a resolution endorsing the unions' executives' plan for a campaign of resistance to what is going on. This immediately generated some publicity in the local paper with our CEO denying the misbehaviour in one breath while blathering neo-liberal management speak about 'right sizing' and 'modernising' in the next. The call by our South Island organiser for the CEO to step down was

dismissed as being 'personal'. The fact is the policies that are causing such discontent are implemented by people and these people have to be held accountable.

In our view, management is simply not up to the job of running our port. Until the pandemic hit, it appeared the priority of management was to try and make money off cruise ships and property deals with the container and bulk commodity trade a low priority. The impact of COVID19 has blown that strategy, such as it was, apart. Subsequent pressures on the global supply chains, together with disruptions to trans-Tasman and ex-Auckland shipping has left our bosses floundering. Shipping lines have been blanking (missing ports) to get back in cycle because of disruptions. For example MSC stopped calling at Port Chalmers for four consecutive weeks. Leaving aside the point that this demonstrates the need for a co-ordinated national port strategy on a par with our COVID19 elimination

strategy, the implications of running a key part of our local infrastructure, on which our exporters are dependent, for short term commercial gain are self-evident. It simply doesn't work in the interests of the community. As the shareholder Otago Regional Council has a responsibility to step in.

Our campaign has therefore continued with a petition doing the rounds which we plan to present to the Regional Council at a demonstration in late February, as *The Transport Worker* goes to press. We look forward to updating you on progress in the next issue.

Finally a big thank you to Alan Richardson, our now former branch secretary, who took redundancy in one of management's so-called 'restructures'. Alan did a great job as a branch official and has left a big pair of boots to fill. Whatever opportunities come your way in the future Alan, we know you'll make the most of them. 🌐

OTAGO RAIL

Coal trains targetted by protesters

We've had a busy time at Otago Rail since the last issue of *The Transport Worker*. Starting with the good news, it was great to see our former national president and life member Jim Kelly recognised in the New Year honour's list for his services to trade unionism. Richly deserved and a wonderful reflection on our branch and the former Hillside

branch. Late last year Jim was present at the farewell function we put on for retiring local MP Clare Curran, a great friend of our union.

Continuing on the positive theme, the trial of excursion services run by Dunedin Railways seems to be very successful as reported in the last couple of issues of *The Activist*. We are hopeful that this will

provide the momentum to secure the future of the operation after the summer. Hillside continues to be busy with work maintaining the South Island fleet and it's great to see the place being revitalised, to borrow a phrase from our political allies.

Over at freight operations we are preparing to farewell a loyal member and workmate in Cameron Rowse. Cam has ▶



been a rail operator here since 2015, and is moving with his family back to Nelson. Cam we wish you, Mandy and Ted safe travels and all the best for your future. We will miss talking music with you on the Y22 shunt!

We have had two trains targeted by protestors recently which were stopped from leaving Dunedin with coal wagons bound for Clondeboye Dairy Factory via Temuka. While this is inconvenient and could be seen as a limited threat to our members' employment, the union movement supports the democratic right to protest and, on the whole, the same people are huge supporters of rail as a better alternative than clogging up our roads with more and more inefficient and damaging heavy trucks. It should be noted this is in no way connected with the West Coast coal traffic which of course is a different grade and for a different use/purpose.

Three of our RO/RCO members have been targeted and wrongly accused by KiwiRail for taking industrial action and exercising their right, as per the MECA,

specifically, to not carry out minder duties with trainees. The issue has been partially resolved, with the trainees back in OJT. The branch will be seeking, at the very least, an apology and no impact on future opportunities to undertake training.

In network services the topic of track maintenance is front and centre of people's minds. The news that the Wairio line is to remain open and Bathurst will contribute \$5 million plus to pay for required work, after some determined lobbying by the RMTU, was followed by an announcement that new staff will be recruited to undertake this.

Once again our branch has made history insofar as the new ganger who will supervise this work is Emma Little who, as far as this scribe knows, is the first female track ganger in the New Zealand rail industry. Great news for our women members and great news for our Union.

Another piece of good news is once again we have a two man welding gang. Congratulations to both these gentlemen. Bringing the welding back in house was a

no brainer but, as has been mentioned in the branch notes for the mighty Transport Worker before, it has been a long struggle. Both local managers (past and present) and the local union delegates worked together to, as they say, get a result. What a bloody good result as well. Amazing what can be achieved when both sides are on the same page.

The next step, (hopefully) will be to increase the welding crew to four men. Watch this space.

With increased funding from the present Government and a need for a greener alternative to shifting large amounts of freight within New Zealand more staff will be required to maintain and upgrade the rail network. We are already running at reduced levels in many areas.

Let's increase the staffing levels and drop our reliance on contractors as much as possible. As has been mentioned many times before, our people have pride in their work, and do a better job than most contractors. 

SOUTHLAND RAIL

Ohai branch line given new lease of life

STARTING with the good news, thanks to some determined advocacy by the RMTU together with KiwiRail and Fonterra management seeing sense, the Ohai to Invercargill branch line, commonly referred to as the Wairio Branch, has been reprieved. Readers will recall last year the line was threatened with closure after Fonterra and Bathurst threatened to shift the coal from Southland to Clondeboye by truck. It was confirmed in January that Bathurst would pick up a \$5.2 million maintenance bill for the line, thereby securing its future until at least 2025.

With less than immaculate timing, as this was announced we suffered 100 metres or so of track damage when eight empty wagons derailed. Prompt action by our track gangs soon repaired the damage.

The confirmation of the line staying open triggered some action by climate change activists in Dunedin who chained themselves to the track at the city's station in protest at the movement and burning of coal. The irony is that the mining, transport

and burning of this coal is nothing new – the dairy factory is Canterbury's biggest consented single consumer of coal, burning an average of 22 tonnes per hour and has been the target of the environmentalists' ire over the years.

Moving the stuff by train is very much the lesser of two evils as the alternative, barring a shift away from coal as a fuel, is that it would be moved by trucks which have a vastly bigger carbon footprint than trains.

The method of protest generated some debate amongst our members, many of whom looked askance at any intrusion into the rail corridor. Doubtless we will hear more about this in years to come as the whole climate change issue becomes more urgent.

Staying on the topic of track maintenance we have had it confirmed new staff will be recruited to undertake the maintenance of the Wairio Branch – once again after some determined lobbying by the RMTU.

The gangs are doing great work in

Southland, for example destressing has seen the 'Heat 40 kph' restrictions reduced drastically. There are no temporary speed restrictions between Invercargill and Balclutha. The rails have gone into the new Mainfreight shed been built in Gore and although not yet connected to the Gore siding rails, it is looking likely to be connected soon. The extra tonnage will be gladly welcomed here in the south.

Over in operations we have had two new rail operators join our team; Adele Robins and Glenn Hudson while an advertisement for a third has just closed at the time of writing. Welcome to the rail family, you have come on board at a time when rail is expanding at long last and hopefully you both have a great future ahead of you.

Like all of us, we read about the continuing impact of the COVID19 pandemic and remain thankful we are in a country which so far has escaped the worst of it, both in human terms and economically.

Until next time, stay safe and healthy.



HEALTH

Union calls for clean air in Remutaka Tunnel

DIESEL fumes in the Remutaka Tunnel are causing headaches for LEs and onboard staff. The RMTU has alerted the NZTA and Worksafe and asked them to investigate the air quality following a spike of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels.

NO₂ is a red brown gas with an acrid smell, produced by diesel combustion. Exposure can cause lung damage and make people more susceptible to respiratory illness. The RMTU is very concerned about both the short and long-term effects of regular exposure to the fumes and is currently seeking expert advice.

The Remutaka railway tunnel (formally known as Rimutaka Tunnel) is 8.8km long and runs through the Remutaka Range between Maymorn and Upper Hutt. Up to 1000 passengers commute through the tunnel per day plus freight trains.

The build-up of fumes is due to the increasing volume of both passenger and freight trains and the insufficient time between trains for the tunnel to purge of gases.

On 21 January, gas monitors worn by staff working on Transdev Wellington's passenger service registered NO₂ levels above the maximum safe level.

The gas exposure lasted for over five minutes leaving the onboard staff feeling very unwell.



(l to r) Train manager Tangiwai Haney, H+S rep Nic Simpson, relief train manager (in training) and passenger operator Mandy Gibbins and train manager, H+S rep and LNI tunnel focus group rep Tony King. Wairarapa train crew of the 1604 Metlink service about to depart Upper Hutt station prior to heading towards the 8.8km long Remutaka Tunnel for the journey to Masterton. All are concerned about the build up of fumes in the tunnel and its effects on crew and passengers.

have mechanical ventilation to purge it following a rail movement. Remutaka has a chimney which vents to the outside but on a calm day, when the wind isn't blowing, the fumes build up.

RMTU reps on the Lower North Island Tunnel group have called for longer gaps in scheduling between log trains and passenger trains to give the tunnel a chance to purge prior to the passenger trains entering.

LE Graeme Twist said: "If there isn't enough of a gap between the loaded log trains and passenger trains on entering the tunnel you encounter long plugs of fumes built up in the Tunnel and start to see the onboard loco cab monitor registering the presence of an acrid smell of number two gas."

Air quality specialists said there should be a 60-minute gap between log trains and passenger trains to avoid that build-up.

In response to the 21 January incident KiwiRail has issued a bulletin requiring train control to provide at least a 60-minute interval between southbound freight trains and passenger trains.

The workplace exposure standards for NO₂ are likely to be lowered again next year which will mean something will need to be done to eliminate the fumes.

H&S rep Tony King said: "We need to look after our staff and passengers and make sure the air quality is as good as it can be. It's time the tunnel had mechanical ventilation or even electrification to eliminate the fumes altogether." 🌐

Remutaka or Rimutaka?

The Geographic Board first recognised Remutaka in 2015 when it changed the name for the Remutaka Pass.

In October the same year, the spelling was extended to include the forest park, hill, stream and range - and, later to the rail tunnel.

The hills get their name from 'remu' meaning 'to gaze about' and 'taka' to 'sit down'. Rangitane iwi was granted the changing of the name as part of its Treaty of Waitangi settlement, but it took longer for it filter through to official agencies and institutions. Rimutaka Prison, for example, still uses the non-iwi approved spelling. It has no plans to change that. 🌐

Tangiwai Haney who was working onboard the passenger service, said: "The staff felt dizzy at first and then a drunken feeling took over. That night all three staff had a bad cough and were spinning."

She added: "We need information on the long-term effects of NO₂ exposure on our health and the passengers' health."

Unlike the Otira Tunnel, the Remutaka Tunnel does not