

THE **TRANSPORT WORKER**

JUN 2020

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



Working through isolation



8 OBITUARY



Union stalwart John Murfitt died in April. His life revolved around unionism and fighting for the rights of the working person. He is remembered by close colleagues.

11 DUNEDIN RAIL



Closed by Covid-19 Dunedin enthusiasts and locals strive to save it.

17 MEMORIAL DAY



Workers' Memorial Day was a different affair this year as individuals remembered colleagues killed at the work place. (1) RMTU organiser Todd Valster is photographed in his garden.

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: Rebecca Hauck, one of the very many RMTU members who worked through the lockdown keeping the country supplied. She is photographed here in the Dunedin yards in splendid isolation! Pages 14 to 16.

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Wayne Butson
General secretary
RMTU

Covid crisis call for kindness from bosses

WE have been back in the office for about three weeks and, as I sit here thinking about what to write, I am wondering where the hell does one begin. The Union was reasonably well placed to deal with the Covid lockdown: our industrial organisers are all well equipped to operate remotely so transitioning to work from home was not a struggle.

Additionally, our network systems are internet accessible and, in the last financial year, we moved our accounting systems into the cloud. This shows the wisdom and foresight of our national management committee which, in recent years, has authorised investment in the hardware and systems to make it all happen.

The fact that we were able to continue to operate at full capacity supporting our members while employers elsewhere grappled to deal with a rapidly altering business and operating state, saw us and our members come through to Level 2 (the level that I am writing this) of Covid in good shape.

I have been astonished at how easily we have adapted to Zoom, Microsoft teams, Messenger and Facebook Live virtual meetings. This is now the new norm and we are looking at seizing the opportunities to expand our Union training to using digital platforms. This will enable us to hold training seminars at remote locations, with fewer participants, more sector focus and out of normal hours – if need be – to get the right shift workers involved and engaged in the Union.

Whilst participating in one such virtual meeting with political and CTU-affiliated union leaders, I learned that the government had spent more in five weeks during level 4 than the funds allocated in the last seven New Zealand budgets! This brought home to me the scale and magnitude of the threat – and the change to our nation and the world. I am very grateful that we have a coalition government that was prepared to support the people by introducing a wages subsidy and other form of welfare support.

I cast my mind back to the global financial crisis (GFC) of 2007 and the cycle trails that were meant to bring the nation back to prosperity whilst we had a minister of finance preaching austerity and the business collapses that followed.

During this Covid time we have seen most of our RMTU port and rail whanau

continue to work and feed the national land transport system (including the ferries) and doing our bit to maintain freight and public transport. We have seen the best from our fellow Kiwis – and we have seen the worst.

Why and how somebody can think it is acceptable to spit on one of our members just doing their job beggars belief. I am especially mindful of our Interisland Ferry Terminal members who were under immense pressure when everyone was trying to get somewhere before the full level 4 lockdown occurred. And the Prime Minister's words of "just being kinder" rang in all our ears – and the vast majority of our employers heard that too and treated members fairly and maintained incomes.

Neo liberalism creeping back

As we come out of Covid managers and board members' eyes return to the bottom lines – meeting budgets, KPI bonuses and right sizing businesses – in this "new normal". We are seeing kindness take a back seat and neo liberalism return to the fore.

One such instance I heard was a CEO tell a heartrending tale of financial woe and of falling revenue and below budget trading and how he now needed to cut costs. He stated that management were taking a salary cut and the workers needed to share the pain as we "are all in this together".

Upon examination it became clear that the enterprise he was wailing about was still going to make a profit – albeit slightly reduced.

This is no reason why workers should have wage reductions or forego agreed increases – and we will oppose any such attempts.

I believe that we are now seeing employers using the Covid crisis to justify what they have wished to do for some time but which workers and their unions would not permit.

These are times where we have to scratch the label off the jam jar and look inside to the facts and seek evidence of hardship – not just the rhetoric of hard "commercial" times.

We must not meekly be herded down the path of a conversation about having "the right people, in the right numbers, doing the right function, at the right time, at the right cost".

This is a recipe for widespread casualisation in my view and not about the safe secure jobs that our Government talks about being the goal to see us out of this Covid situation.

I don't believe that things will get worse before they get better. Rather, I think things are getting better each day and, if we all pull together, we will get our economy and our nation rolling again.

Speaking of rolling I urge you all to get in behind the Let's Keep Dunedin Railways Rolling campaign. This is our 2020 Take Back The Track campaign. If we are to retain what is left of the Otago central rail branch, we have to have this track infrastructure returned to state ownership under KiwiRail. If it is permitted to be mothballed it will be ripped up and added to the Otago Rail Cycle Trail rather than serve its purpose as the feeder line that it is – and could be developed to do better.

Until our September issue be safe, be united and above all else be Proud to Be RMTU! 



Retirements

Dear Editor,

It is with great regret that I hereby tender my resignation from the RMTU effective from April 3, 2020.

Over the years I've been fortunate enough to be the recipient of both the Union's support and lucky enough to be a representative for woman and as a delegate in general.

Some of my fondest memories in the last 25 years is as an employee within rail, my participation within the Union ranks and the interactions within its membership.

My heart will always be Union strong.

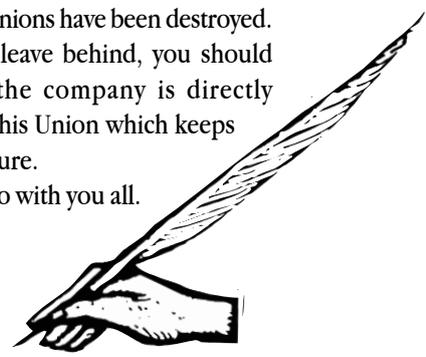
It is my absolute belief that the only reason that I was able to stay working at rail was the fact that it had a strong union which ensured conditions and wages are kept, unlike many other industries in this country which have been gutted by greedy corporates with few checks and balances in place because the unions have been destroyed.

For the colleagues that I leave behind, you should know that your future in the company is directly connected to the strength of this Union which keeps you safe and provides that future.

My thoughts and prayers go with you all.

Live long and prosper.

Jenny Griffin



Dear Editor,

All good things come to an end, so my retirement brings the end of my valued membership of the RMTU. I therefore tender my resignation as a proud member of a "Top" industrial union.

I would like to personally thank you and your staff for the hard work you guys do every day to support the membership.

In the last four years I have been privileged to work alongside you as a work place delegate and I have seen first hand your dedication and hard work for the benefit of the members.

That hard work has meant for the past 22 years, I along with my former colleagues, have been able to enjoy excellent working conditions. May they last.

Take care and a huge thanks from me.

Bruce Stewart

LE, Upper Hutt.

Dear Editor,

Please accept this email as my resignation from the Union.

I have now retired from the railways.

I want to thank you all for the assistance that you have given me over the years, it has been very much appreciated.

Look after yourselves and your families. Stay strong.

Take care

Alistair Stoddart

Wellington.

Methyl bromide - a continuing concern

In 2010 the RMTU backed a world wide campaign to rid the country of the methyl bromide – a toxic chemical used to fumigate logs bound for mainly China and India. The industry was given 10 years to reduce its usage, develop technology to recapture it or seek alternatives. That deadline has arrived and the only proposal being mooted firmly supports methyl-bromide.

A peaceful plot of grassy land, about 30 kms south of Port Tauranga and a stone's throw from Te Puke and popular Papamoa beach is the site selected for a debatable development.

Ten years ago log exporters were told to find better and safer ways to fumigate their product – or to find ways of mitigating the effects of the fumigant they used: namely methyl bromide.

Methyl bromide is a colourless, odourless highly toxic gas used to fumigate pests.

Studies in humans showed that lungs may be severely injured by short-term inhalation and for long-term inhalation it could lead to neurological effects. Neurological effects have also been reported in animals. It may also cause headaches, dizziness, visual disturbances, ventricular fibrillation, pulmonary oedema, ataxia, convulsions, coma, and death and in high concentrations can cause eye, skin and respiratory tract irritation, as well as chemical pneumonitis.

Back in 2010 RMTU president and Port Tauranga worker Aubrey Wilkinson in a Radio NZ interview said "workers are concerned they're being exposed" to a potentially deadly chemical. Last month he said: "Workers are still facing the same exposure and those possible long term effects. We just don't know. There have been instances here of workers who believed they were exposed. Some have had to leave work with extreme headaches, dizziness and nausea. Many go home thinking the cause to be food poisoning, flu or stress."

Currently, two countries demand our logs are treated with methyl bromide (or better) - China and India.

Logs arrive at the docks and are stacked

in enormous piles. Some are treated on the spot by covering the piles with tarpaulins and squirting/spraying the fumigant underneath. They're left like that for 24 hours before removing the tarpaulin and allowing the excess methyl bromide to dissipate in the air – and atmosphere.

Those logs not treated at dock side are fumigated in the hold of the ship once at sea. No doubt excess gas from this treatment is also allowed to dissipate in the same manner.

Between six and seven million tonnes of logs go through Port of Tauranga each year.

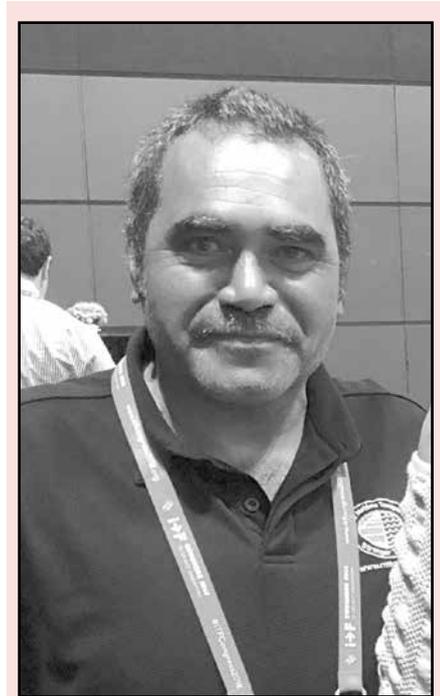
Ten years ago Tauranga locals reported concerns about the gas when it is vented, or if a tarpaulin rips in high winds, as occasionally happens, invisible plumes of gas could drift across the port and surrounding areas, affecting residents, workers, boaties, cruise ship visitors and a nearby marae.

Wharf workers and nearby Tauranga citizens, likely exposed to methyl bromide, have waited 10 years for a solution.

A new plan has emerged to build a series of hermetically sealed sheds on a 35 hectare plot at Rangiora 30kms south of Tauranga. Trains carrying logs can drive into each shed, doors closed and the shed filled with the fumigant. Upward of 15 of these sheds will line up side by side.

The concept includes a plan to recapture any left over gas and either reuse what can be reused by pumping it into an adjacent shed or dumping the remainder, now in a solid form, in a nearby tip.

The gas is recaptured using carbon filters which are buried in a quarantined land fill site for hazardous substances and allowed to dissipate slowly. Studies have



RMTU president Aubrey Wilkinson is also a lead advocate for safety at Port of Tauranga. He doesn't like the use of methyl bromide but says the proposal is "much better than the current practice".

shown that this is a non hazardous way to release methyl bromide back into the environment.

"I don't like it," says Wilkinson, "but it is much better than the current practice."

The dedicated sealed fumigation sheds are expected to reduce the quantity of methyl bromide used by reusing the excess. The health and safety workers – and the environment – could be better assured.

"There are no examples anywhere in the world of facilities of this size and



An architectural drawing showing the scope of the Rangiuuru methyl bromide treatment plant.

sophistication successfully recapturing methyl bromide to my knowledge" said Wilkinson. "Recapture technology, achieving a concentration of up to five parts per million of methyl bromide, was supposed to be in place by the end of October 2020. However, industry have not been able to do this as yet citing logistical and technological difficulties – and now Covid-19. Rangiuuru Park proposers believe they can eventually build a plant which will recapture methyl bromide but it won't be done by deadline. In fact we estimate it may take more than three years before it is fully operational."

The project is being led by privately owned company Rangiuuru Industrial Developments Ltd and largely opposed by forestry companies who would prefer to stick with the current – and cheaper – method.

The RMTU together with the CTU, CTU Runanga, Tauranga Moana Fumigant Action Group, local iwi, Nordiko, Rentokil, some Tauranga legal firms and more all support the project in principle because says Wilkinson: "we believe it will be safer than the current arrangement".

One concern is that the project will fly under environmental compliance regulations by piggy backing on the shovel ready projects being pushed by government post Covid-19.

Some fear it may even bypass the Environment Court.

In e-mails to the RMTU the project is

being openly described as a "lockdown project" and a worthy contender for the government's shovel ready initiative. Further, it is suggested that "if it gets across the line we intend replicating it in every log exporting port" in the country.

While Methyl bromide is a highly effective fumigant the Ministry for the Environment says it is an ozone depleting substance and toxic to humans and while it is exempt from controls under the Montreal Protocol (also signed by New Zealand), countries are encouraged to reduce and replace it. From October this year all usage of methyl bromide will have to show they can recapture any excess.

Rangiuuru Industrial Developments Ltd firmly believe their design will solve the recapture problem.

Alternatives to methyl bromide are being tested but they are not entirely satisfactory.

Wilkinson says: "De-barking is in place at Kaingaroa Timberlands but this is only accepted by China. Debarking of logs works out to be cost neutral. Research is being done with ethane dinitrile but it is not conclusive. Recapture and disposal of methyl bromide is being done by Nordiko in Australia and one other country. One of the best methods for New Zealand is to mill our own logs rather than send them overseas. Mill owner say this is not cost effective but with increased numbers of

people now unemployed maybe it is time to keep the work here and to stop supporting the export of raw logs."

In the final analysis, the jury is out says RMTU general secretary Wayne Butson.

"We have no evidence that this new project will work or whether it will be safer for our members. If it lives up to its hype it will be far better than the current practice to workers, the community and the environment. Meanwhile, the RMTU remains opposed to the use of methyl bromide and believes better solutions must be found.

"Instead of exporting our treated logs we should be adding value to the product and exporting sawn timber or other finished product. Exporting logs is, in my opinion, exporting jobs for Kiwi workers." 🇳🇿



The value of history and international solidarity

I've lost count of the number of times I've been told by employers that they aren't interested in history, that we just have to 'look to the future' and 'put all that behind us'. As a historian by trade I've never found that easy to accept. I'm also a Francophile so when the RMTU National Management Committee accepted an invitation to attend the triennial congress of the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) Fédération des Cheminots (Federation of Railway workers) in early March in Nancy and I was selected to attend I was doubly delighted.

The CGT have a proud history and a reputation for militancy so the opportunity to spend some time at their congress was an honour and a privilege.

Of course, at the time no-one knew that almost as soon as the Congress ended the whole of Europe would go into lockdown as the COVID19 crisis hit us and coming home to New Zealand would prove such a challenge as flights were cancelled and airlines mothballed.

On arrival I visited the CGT headquarters in Paris where, along with other international guests I was hosted by my good

friend and comrade David Gobé. David is a signalman who lives in Boulogne and is chair of the International Transport Federation's rail section. He is also responsible for international liaison in the CGT cheminots (rail workers). The headquarters is impressive, having been built in the 1980s when the French Communist Party (PCF) had members in cabinet, and has the characteristics of a fortress. Historically the CGT has strong links with the PCF, although in the 1990s these were weakened. The importance of history was underlined by memorials to railway workers who were deported to concentration camps during the Nazi occupation.

The Congress convened in Nancy where I had the privilege to be introduced



CGT general secretary Philippe Martinez with John Kerr.

to Philippe Martinez, the general secretary of the wider CGT representing workers across all industries in France. The French industrial relations system reflects the history of the French working class. So whilst only a low percentage of workers are members of unions in France (around 8%, one of the lowest in the developed world), nearly all employees are covered

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by collective bargaining. It is the constitutional right of all workers to withdraw their labour and unions receive fees from employers for workers covered by collective agreements regardless of whether they are members or not. In many industries it tends to be active unionists who are due paying members, but the mass of the workforce have often supported the unions in industrial and political battles by taking strike action.

The railway workers are something of an elite however. They have higher membership and in the CGT, cheminots have a proud history of fighting, not just for the rights of their members, but for all workers. During our visit the international delegation was taken to Metz, where we were shown a very moving memorial to French railway workers killed fighting the Nazis and to Jean Moulin, a resistance leader, who died near the city on his way to a German concentration camp.

During the Nazi occupation the CGT was banned and so its members operated underground and became a resistance organisation. The railway workers led the uprising which triggered the liberation of Paris from the Nazis in 1944 by taking strike action. Many cheminot were shot in the days before liberation. They will never forget this.

Before COVID19 the French unions were embroiled in a struggle to defeat the attempt to increase the retirement age by their neo-liberal president Emmanuel Macron.

By our standards the French have generous retirement provisions and they were not going to give them up without a fight. Many attendees at the Congress had been on strike for months. It looked like it was a struggle that had only been partially successful however, as the government sought to buy off key workers and divide the working class. Of course, now we are facing the greatest economic collapse since the 1930s all bets are off and the battle for a just society will be renewed.

My job at the Congress was to represent



International delegation at the CGT with the Sacré Coeur in the background.

the RMTU during a panel discussion on the value of international solidarity together with delegates from Spain, Austria, Morocco and Turkey. Our comrades in those countries spoke of their struggles against increasing privatisation and de-regulation. It was not a positive message. I was pleased to be able to report of the successes our union has achieved and this was reported in the cheminots newspaper as follows:

'Finally we heard a message about the indispensable value of international solidarity amongst railway workers from a remote country in the South Pacific 19,000 km from France. From the land of the All Blacks we were told about the importance of support from international comrades when fighting global corporations and the role of the ITF in these struggles. International support also helped in the struggle to achieve re-nationalisation of rail in New Zealand 12 years ago.'

What followed my contribution was very humbling: spontaneous applause and singing of The Internationale! I did wonder if my poor French had resulted in me calling for a global revolution! I need not have feared, as when the floor was opened up for questions a very burly delegate from the south of France gave the RMTU a heartfelt thanks and challenged us to a rugby match – a

statement that received much support. So there's a project for when a vaccine is sorted for COVID19, an RMTU rugby team to take on a CGT cheminots rugby team!

Thank you to NMC for sending me to France. I learned a great deal and was proud to represent our union and be part of the international family of railway unions. 🇬🇧

– John Kerr.



Obituary

John Robert Murfitt

15/08/1940 - 28/04/2020

THE RMTU records the passing of another champion of transport workers: RMTU Life Member, John Robert Murfitt who died at his home in Wellington aged 79.

John was born on a dairy farm in Cambridgeshire, England. He'd already left school at 12 and, as his daughter Ann Stephen recalls "dad told us that he made it to Cambridge University – but it was to deliver coal."

He later bought his own ticket to New Zealand where he met his future wife, Catherine from Scotland, and together they had three sons, John, Andrew and Matthew and a daughter, Ann.

He began his union involvement while driving buses in Wellington as a member of the Wellington Tramways Union serving on their national executive. With their employment agreement in his back pocket he was a force to be reckoned with and was well able to advise members of their rights.

It is said, even at this stage of his union activities, he was always able to make sound arguments when speaking at membership meetings.

His next union challenge started in July 1977 as a member of the Harbour Workers Union in the 'Boatman's Section' of the Wellington Harbour Board. John was an integral part of the union struggle during turbulent times for all unionists.

The Wellington branch clashed with the national union over representational issues during which time approximately 12 branch members resigned from the union and formed a friendly society of which John became the president. Shortly after the issue was resolved in court, John went on to serve on the national executive of the NZ Harbour Workers Union.

It was during this period that the Muldoon government 'presided' over political and social divisions including sporting contact with South Africa, wage and price



John on the picket line at the Wellington Port in 2003.

freezes and the emphasis on 'Think Big' projects. Unions on the waterfront led the challenge to stop nuclear warships entering our ports. The Harbour Workers Union's next challenge was to blunt the most devastating results of port reform via the Labour Government's Port Companies Act 1988. John and all the other leaders of Harbour Workers turned their attention to the reality of port reform.

John played a leading role locally and nationally supporting a negotiated restructuring process. He led many long hours of negotiations separately, and then in conjunction with the Watersiders Union, to obtain new consolidated employment conditions in the Port of Wellington. Both unions suffered early retirements and redundancies.

It was during these challenging periods that we all heard John's war cry 'ALL BOSSES ARE BASTARDS' as he went into battle on behalf of his members knowing the bosses wanted wage cuts and job reduc-

tions. John was part of the local and national Harbour Workers Union management structure that helped consolidate separate port working condition documents into the national collective employment contract as required by the Employment Contracts Act passed by the Bolger Government.

Transport workers in rail were then confronted with the New Zealand Railways Corporation Restructuring Act 1990. In 1993 the Government privatised New Zealand Rail Limited and rail workers were faced with employment challenges including restructuring, job losses and changes to union representation structures.

John was part of the challenge to find a workable structure to accommodate all transport workers into a post-restructured strong union. He, like so many others, was disappointed a national transport union was not achieved but he played an important role in the development of the now Rail and Maritime Transport Union.

He undertook numerous roles and positions in the Union and was rightly honoured as an esteemed Life Member December 2006.

He was a great supporter of the International Transport Workers Federation and its work developing transport unions and his leadership continued until recently as a leader in international transport union challenges.

John retired March 24, 2006.

His memory will be cherished for his love of debate and as a wonderful mate to so many of his colleagues. On a Friday evening he would visit the RMTU head office offering his view of the world and offering support of initiatives which might enhance the place of workers in society.

"John was a large presence in my life since 1995 and his passing leaves a hole in

"my heart," said RMTU general secretary Wayne Butson. "I can hear now his strident voice for the rights of the working man. There was nothing that gave him greater joy than stirring the pot with his view of the rights and wrongs of any matter."

While RMTU president Aubrey Wilkinson recalls "a man with a huge heart and a huge passion for the working class and the underdog – and his love and passion for the Maori people."

Another colleague, Myles Carter, says: "It was always a pleasure, and a learning opportunity, to talk with John or even listen-in on his discussions as he would bring so much insight and guidance - along with a generous helping of humour".

And fellow port worker Ruth Blakeley recalls John to have been a "loyal and true trade unionist and a true gentleman with a lovely, calm, gentle attitude – but he sure knew how to 'sort the bosses out'".

John was a working class giant who represented other workers to the best of his extensive ability through some of the most turbulent times in New Zealand labour history.



From pilots to loco engineers

TRANSDEV Auckland (TDAK) have started employing laid-off pilots from Air New Zealand, Qantas and Virgin and are looking to increase these numbers. While airline travel has been drastically curtailed, rail workers have maintained their employment levels and the return to level 2 will see increased numbers. There are clear correlations between the jobs and the pilots will be well suited for these positions. Already

34 have applied for work at TDAK and CEO Peter Lensink has already made it clear he's very keen to see them come on board.

The RMTU also welcomes any pilot taking up a loco engineer position.

There is a long history of unionization amongst pilots and they will be welcome additions to the RMTU family.

There will be no specialised training and no fast tracking for these ex-pilots. 

North Tugz

ALONG with much else around the country, Covid-19 has meant that bargaining at North Tugz has ground to a halt. Fortunately, the government has extended the period for bargaining and for collective agreements so we will be able to get back to the bargaining table soon. A further complication remains in that we are waiting for a decision from the Employment Authority over what constitutes a roster. Once that has been confirmed we can look to providing a settlement that the members will be happy to ratify. 



North Tugz's Bream Bay

Auckland
Christchurch
Dunedin
Gisborne
Greytown
Hanmer
Kaikoura
Mount Maunganui
Napier
Nelson
New Plymouth
Ohope
Orewa
Paihia
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Collision!

IN the late 1980s the newly privatised, Wisconsin Central-owned, Tranz Rail progressively rolled out a new method to control train operations on light to medium density lines. It replaced the tablet and open section system with track warrant control.

The new system relies on rail vehicle operators completing a paper warrant and repeating it back to train controllers and then obeying the instructions on the warrant.

The Union has steadfastly opposed the system as it is highly vulnerable to human error.

These vulnerabilities were highlighted by the Waipahi head on train crash which saw a review initiated by the then rail regulator, however the underlying vulnerabilities remained.

In his Waipahi anniversary speech GS Wayne Butson lamented that track warrant control remained in operation essentially unchanged and the next Waipahi remains a major probability.

This photos shows the recent



unplanned meeting of a train and hi rail vehicle as a result of a clause 4 provision which authorised the hi rail vehicle to depart after the arrival of the train.

To be blunt, unless the hi rail operator is sitting watching the train go past how are they to know that it has?

They know what time the train is due and so if they on track after that time and there is no train in sight then they can be forgiven for ontracking and proceeding.

The question to ask is why is the warrant issued to an operator BEFORE the section is

known to be clear?

Why can't we wait until the train is clear and then issue the warrant for the hi rail vehicle?

How many more workers need to be frightened, injured or killed before we adopt a posture of conservatism and not deliberately place RMTU members in harm's way or danger? 🇳🇿

\$1,500 AD&D

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

Members also have the option to increase their coverage an additional \$10,000 which costs just \$2 for the first year. Please reply on line at ailnz.co.nz/request to have an AIL representative deliver your certificate of coverage and explain the additional insurance coverage available. This is very important to you and your family.

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Dunedin Railways future

RMTU members at Dunedin Railways Limited (DRL) were dismayed by the announcement in April 2020 that management intended to mothball the business.

The potential loss of over 50 jobs and the closure of the iconic Taieri Gorge Railway for an indefinite period was a devastating blow. Shockingly, most staff learned of their jobs being axed in the media or from elsewhere in the community before hearing from their employer.

The board of DRL had gone to the Dunedin City Council seeking to shut down their own business completely. Councillors were understandably reluctant to follow this plan and opted instead to 'mothball' the business until conditions improved – but were not provided with full information about what this might mean.

Now workers at DRL have gained major support for their campaign to Keep Dunedin Rail Rolling.

In the post-Covid19 situation, with closed borders and a radical drop off in tourist numbers, it is a tough time, says campaign spokesperson Dave Kearns, who is the RMTU Otago rail branch secretary and a full-time locomotive driver.

But he says elsewhere, people and industry are adapting to the changed circumstances with innovative and creative responses. In contrast, he says the board of Dunedin Railways has reacted with zero vision.

"It missed the opportunity to explore other opportunities before a disturbingly hasty decision was made public," he said.

The launch of the Keep Dunedin Rail Rolling campaign has meant that those missed opportunities are back on the agenda.

The campaign, with the backing nationally of the RMTU, has quickly captured the popular support of Otago people.

An online petition has gained over 2,000 supporters, a Facebook page has gained similar numbers, and a steady stream of letters to the local newspaper have shown Otago people want to keep DRL on track.

Local MPs including Clare Curran (Labour), Gareth Hughes (Greens) and Mark Patterson (NZ First) are also backing the



campaign, while long term rail advocate Councillor Jim O'Malley has also actively supported its goals.

After meeting with the campaign organisers in May, the Mayor of Dunedin Aaron Hawkins, went back to the Council and moved that the DCC support the goals of the campaign. His motion passed in the Planning Committee with the support of 13 councillors with only two opposing.

But despite the City of Dunedin being 100% owners of DRL through their business arm, Dunedin City Holdings Limited, under local government rules councillors do not have the ability to directly instruct the Board and CEO of DRL to halt their mothballing plan.

Jobs are at stake, and the flow-on effect to other businesses has not been factored in. It is easier to 'mothball' than to 'unmothball'. Skilled staff will drift away under this scenario and the cost and time of rebuilding a quality workforce has not been acknowledged.

DRL has already claimed several hundred thousand dollars from the Government's wage subsidy scheme, but have failed to apply for an extra eight weeks of available wage subsidies for their employees.

There is now work being done with the support of the DCC to get a trial of a commuter rail service up and running between Dunedin and Mosgiel as soon as possible.



A number of other proposals are also under active consideration, including the takeover of the Taieri Gorge track by KiwiRail, and the use of DRL staff to assist with track upgrade projects. There are calls to sack the Board and replace them with new directors including worker representatives.

It seems ludicrous that the main impediment to this process is the CEO and the Board of Dunedin Railways Limited, the very people entrusted with the management of this asset.

At some point, tourism will regenerate and whether this is domestic or a more modest number of overseas visitors, Dunedin needs to be ready to roll with key attractions.

It shouldn't be left to the city alone to carry the economic burden, says RMTU general secretary Wayne Butson.

"This is a regional and national asset. The Government is pursuing the correct course with its programme of investment to help rebuild the economy, and their support is needed."

Out of the campaign to Keep Dunedin Rail Rolling, there is already a sense of focus on ways in which rail can be a bigger and better contributor to our local transport mix and wider economic recovery. 🇳🇿

For more information see the campaign website www.dunedinrail.co

Delegate training - top of the South



Delegates doing the traditional fist punch following the training session with Karen Fletcher and Todd Valster.

LUCKILY, just prior to the level 4 lockdown in March, a delegate training session was still able to go ahead at the fire station in Picton. It was a great day with broad range of delegates participating

in the interactive training.

Delegates from KiwiRail, Port Marlborough, Port Nelson and Nelson C3 attended. A big thanks to the Marlborough branch secretary, Justine Riach, for helping with

the logistics and arranging catering. Further delegate training has been put on hold until the Covid 19 levels drop. Meanwhile, the RMTU is looking at how we could run delegate training sessions remotely. 🌐

25 years young

THE RMTU celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. To mark this important milestone, we have commissioned labour historian Peter Franks to write a history of our Union.

The history will focus on the many ways in which the RMTU has grown since its foundation in 1995 to become the well organised, member-focused union that it is today. It will cover major disputes and negotiations, union campaigns and union organisation. Peter has been combing through union publications and records

and has interviewed a number of present and past union activists like the redoubtable Jim Kelly (pictured).

We have a lot to celebrate. The railway and ports unions are among New Zealand's oldest and most important. While the history will concentrate on the last 25 years, it will also cover the history of the unions that came together to form the RMTU. The oldest of these unions, the National Union of Railway workers, was formed in 1886 as the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants. 🌐



EWF scholarship

THERE was only one application for this year's Ernest William File Scholarship and Abel van Bruchem of Christchurch was the lucky recipient.

The son of Lyttelton Port worker, Ewout van Bruchem, 19 year old Abel plans to study product and industrial design at Canterbury University.

He wrote in his application that he was keen to create products which could change the world in positive ways.

The RMTU wishes him well.

The Ernest William File Scholarship was established in 1978 by members of the New Zealand Locomotive Engineers' Association as a tribute to Ernest William File, the re-

tiring general secretary at the time. It was later adopted and expanded by the RMTU and extended to all members.

The scholarship is to support the sons and daughters of members of the Union in their first year of degree study at a New Zealand university. 🌐

RMTU WOMEN

The RMTU fully supports equal opportunities for women and men

Rata Sidwell

Bay of Plenty Port branch secretary

How long have you been a member of the RMTU?

I have been a member of the RMTU for just over 2.5 years. I became interested in being active when I discovered that the many women who worked around the Port didn't have a voice on the Bay of Plenty executive committee. I felt driven to ensure that a clear voice be present to represent us.

What does your current job involve?

I'm a straddle operator at Port of Tauranga – and just love it! I'm part of group of approximately 160 people, of which six are women. It doesn't phase me to work in such a male dominated space - they do the job just as good as I do! (well... some of them).

Our job is to load and discharge shipping containers. It requires accuracy, a keen eye for being able to 'read the play' and above all, teamwork.

The straddle machines weigh 64 tonne and we are seated about three storeys high in a glass cage. The containers are placed according to a 'yard plan' – determined by our amazing ops team, without whom the

yard would be in a shambles! Essentially it is 'filing' – in a big way.

And what's your role in the RMTU?

The current Covid-19 situation has highlighted a major health issue with personal and community hygiene. Our straddle 'hut' is used 24/7 and accommodates up to 40 personnel per shift. It's where we relax and eat our meals, and it is grubby! Since Covid-19 there have been strict rules to follow around keeping our straddles safe for the next person. For the first five weeks it was operative, but I sense a relaxing of the requirements. Contaminated used gloves and cloths are being left behind, along with chewed gum, lolly wraps, food scraps – ugh. It is a very real issue and I strongly believe straddle cleanliness needs to be drummed into new people during the six week training. Cleaning 101 – let me write the guidelines!

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

The past couple of years I have volunteered to work at the huge careers expo is held at Baypark Convention Centre. I felt it was important to be present and to hopefully inspire women to work in the port environment and be proud of it! With



women being half the working force in our city, and Tauranga having the largest port, it feeds a lot of families in this region.

What would you say to a bunch of women school leavers about working in an industry that's male dominated?

I would thoroughly recommend to anyone who listens to get their Class 2 and give me a call if they need inspiration. So far, we have recruited four of our friends to come and work alongside us, which is great as it means we get to see them more often! 🌍

Toll's shambolic restructure

AS reported in *The Activist*, Toll New Zealand is undergoing a restructuring process. It has been, without doubt, one of the most shambolic and incompetent corporate restructurings seen in this country.

The reason given for the restructure is that Covid-19 will see a decrease of 30% in work coming through the door. The irony is that with the move to level 2 the workload has increased dramatically.

The RMTU has asked that rather than crystal ball gazing, the company look at actual changes in workload before embarking on job cuts.

Our members have provided feedback showing many of these changes will result in increased workloads and with that, a higher risk of accidents and injuries. Toll have

ignored most of this advice from the shop floor and the management making these decisions appear to have little understanding of how their business actually works.

Jobs lost

At least 33 positions have been disestablished nationwide: most disconcertingly, at least nine team leader jobs will be going with much of that work falling on ops managers and those left behind. No recompense has been offered for the extra responsibilities.

The most affected areas are Auckland, Hamilton, Christchurch and Dunedin, but all areas will see some changes even if jobs are not cut.

The Union has pushed strongly for other avenues to be taken like alternative duties

or redeployment but these have not been taken up by the company. Because these options have not been taken, we will be asking for voluntary redundancy to be the preferred option.

This works to keep people in the company who want to work for Toll and give those who want to move on the opportunity to do so.

Unfortunately, communications from Toll has been inconsistent and, at times, non-existent.

The RMTU has had to chase information and we have been drip-fed this in a way which is not consistent with good employment relations and is, frankly, unacceptable. The entire restructuring reeks of panic and confusion and the people who will suffer are the workers. 🌍

Locked down

We check out how some o

Patrick Ogle-Turner

IN the midst of coping with an unprecedented lockdown, Picton Interislander workers were told their job prospects would deteriorate over the coming year.

"What a time to reveal that bit of news," said load marshal and Industrial Council rep Patrick Ogle-Turner. "That sombre picture was painted for us at a staff meeting last week (mid April) without any warning or facts to back up their decision making."

Patrick says that they all understand that things will change, but so it will for everyone. He is disappointed that the company has taken the worst possible scenario to warn of job losses and cost cutting.

"As far as we are concerned, nothing has changed. We're still flat out on the same routine as previous years. Freight hasn't stopped at all and while there are far fewer passengers, we are also one ferry short." He says that ferry was always scheduled to go to dry dock at this time. "It wasn't stopped due to Covid19."

For Patrick and his partner, having four school children home has been the biggest hassle.

"However, before we went into lockdown we bought them all laptops so they could do their school work and play on



them later," he said. "We're also blessed with a large garden which they love and where they have room to move. Picton is a pretty enviable spot with fabulous views and an excellent climate. Yesterday it was 24 degrees!"

Despite the idyllic lifestyle he says lockdown has been a bit rough on his partner who is also trying to prepare lessons for the kindergarten she runs.

"But everyone's in this plight. We're no

different," he said. "Our kids are resilient and after a dodgy first week getting used to the idea, they're now loving it."

He wishes he could say the same for his colleagues who are now threatened with an uncertain financial future. In his view the gloomy outlook appears to be based solely on overseas tourism drying up.

"They don't appear to have counted New Zealanders who would now explore their own country." 🌐



Ian Walker

LOCKDOWN restrictions were barely noticed by Christchurch communications technician Ian Walker, whose wife received significant cancer treatment prior to Christmas and needed to be isolated.

"Her protective systems are particularly vulnerable during the treatment," he said, "which meant we were virtually in lockdown already."

Ian had already arranged to be placed fourth on his roster and while he is available for call outs to service radio equipment he was not finding the routine strenuous.

"I was called out a bit in the first week but it's been quieter since," he said.

His usual routine is to take the radios from the locos and service them on the bench replacing them with one that has been upgraded.

"There's a lot of talk about vibration in cabs and

how it affects the engineers but that's also true for the internal workings of the radios which are not designed to be shaken so severely."

And although he operates in a team of four they can all work independently.

However, Ian prefers much closer contact when talking to the engineers as often all he'll get is a well-phrased expletive in the log book about the radio and little or no description about the actual problem.

"Under lockdown it's somewhat more difficult to get an accurate description," he said. "I believe Covid 19 will change society and we'll have to find new ways of working – not just in rail but all through society."

Meanwhile Ian and his wife have the company of two of his three children at home both of whom work in rail. He says they are good support and company for them both during this difficult time.



and working

of our colleagues made out.

Gaye Kereru

LOCKDOWN couldn't have come at a more inconvenient time for heavy fork lift driver Gaye Kereru of Port Napier.

She had been looking for new accommodation having given notice at her last place and before she could really start looking lockdown began.

"I had to move out and I managed to find temporary lodging in a relative's garage which is ok but it doesn't have any facilities," she said. "And I can't go into the house because they have a two month old baby. I'm an essential worker so I have to stay clear of them."

Instead she has to go to another neighbour's house for those 'essential' services.

"And I can't get out and look for new accommodation because of lockdown. It looks like I'll be in my cosy garage for a little while longer."

Rentals have been quite difficult to find

in Napier but she's pinning her hopes on more coming to the market now that tourist have disappeared and demand for Airbnb has dropped to near zero.

Meanwhile work continues as usual for Gaye and her colleagues with the main differences being less socialising, staggered meal and tea breaks with two or three others and much more rigorous cleaning of vehicle cabs.

"Usually the guys love to get into my vehicles when I'm finished because they're clean and smell nice," she said. "But now we have all got a spray and wipes and they are all doing it too, which is really good."

Like previously, she still suffers a roster-



ing system which doesn't give her the next shift until 4pm in the afternoon.

"Before lockdown that made it more difficult to go out with my children but since lockdown we're not allowed to go out anyway," she said. "But I really miss not going out and seeing my children. We're really close and lock down isn't helping." 🇳🇵



Roz Muir

LOCKDOWN has made life pretty difficult for Napier Port ship planner Roz Muir who can find herself working any time over a 24 hour period with little warning.

The job, already quite stressful, needs considerable brain energy to juggle all the elements of loading and unloading ships

and dealing with the people making it happen.

"We're somewhat understaffed at the moment which means shifts get a little 'randomized' plus the extra stress of lockdown and it all impacts on my ability to think straight," she said.

Further stress is added because she must shop for two homes. Her parents, both of whom are in the vulnerable category, must stay home and live 30km inland.

"The blessing is that my partner works day shifts and is a constant in all this chaos."

delivered and then distributed.

"In fact food is the major issue during this lockdown period," she said. "I find our eating habits are different but more expensive, and it consumes much of my day."

At work everything is tracking normally apart from smoko time and cab cleanliness.

"Keeping a safe distance apart is problematic during the day when more people are on shift. The rooms are simply not large enough. They may have to consider adding more. At night there are only six of us. But the casual way some people hop in and out of cabs without cleaning them is upsetting the regular drivers."

She says there is definitely a paranoia around the yard in regard to cleaning surfaces and the non-compliers are adding to stress levels.

Wider family happenings and being unable to visit is also nerve-racking.

"We haven't been able to visit my sister yet and the family's first baby plus my partner's mother is having chemo for cancer and we can't visit or support her either. But I guess there's a lot of people around doing it hard." 🇳🇵

Continued over the page.



Rebecca Hauck

HYGIENE was the biggest issue for Dunedin rail operator Rebecca Hauck. "We used to be quite blasé about personal hygiene around the depot but now we have to be super vigilant," she said. "It's a big challenge to everyone, especially at the beginning of lockdown where we didn't even have enough sanitiser, dry towels or soap. However, that soon changed and then it was a matter of drumming in the message of keeping the place clean."

Rebecca, who is also the H&R rep, said during those early days, she arrived a half hour earlier each day and went around the whole depot cleaning all the things she would touch during the day.

"The guys would ask why and I had to tell them I was worried about cleanliness and carrying the virus around the depot with me. We talked heaps about the dangers and why we had to start taking it seriously - especially what they could potentially be carrying home with them each day to their young - and/or elderly - families."

Her colleagues quickly realised they touched the same things and pretty soon everyone at the depot was taking responsibility for the depot's cleanliness.

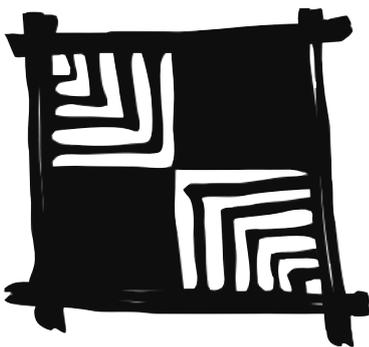
She added that while it was a bit of a problem at first, especially the concept of washing hands at least three times a day along with all the equipment, she now sees everyone regularly cleaning radios, keys, phones and the inside of the cabs.

"That's really good."

As the only person in her household going out to work she has to take special care to leave potential dangers outside.

"I leave my work clothes at work and as soon as I get home I have a shower," she said, and while she doesn't feel stressed she can always "vent" to friends and her partner. One worry she can do very little about is for her family and parents in the USA whom she is trying to educate about staying in their bubbles - an unheard of concept over there.

Meanwhile, she is trying to instil those work rigours on her two teenagers at home - daily showers and lots of hand washing. Maybe a bigger challenge than at work! 🌐



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UnionAID

Better Work, Better World

Inspiring breakfast speeches

ON Friday March 6 2020 I attended the International Women's Day breakfast at Parliament at 6:30am hosted by the Zonta Club of Wellington and UN Women Aotearoa. The inspirational guest speakers included Julie-Ann Genter, Minister for Women, Tiana Epati, the first Pasifika woman president of the Law Society and Dr Lupe Taumoepeau the first female vascular surgeon in New Zealand. Hearing their stories about their struggles and perseverance was very emotional and motivating. I came away from this breakfast feeling empowered and inspired. It is very important to remember what women have achieved in the last 100 years, but



RMTU and KiwiRail staff and members enjoying breakfast at Parliament for International Women's Day.

unfortunately there's still work to be done to achieve equality. Every woman is able to achieve her full potential. 🌐

Chelsea Cardy - RMTU Administrative Assistant

Workers' Memorial Day

THIS year Workers' Memorial Day was marked, largely, in isolation. Not only was everyone locked down and unable to assemble, events were also banned. Significant and poignant reminders took place at almost every RMTU work site – sometimes individually and occasionally in small well separated group.



(l) John Kerr and (above) (l-r) Dan Charteris and Dan Ackroyd from Timaru.

(below) The Dunedin depot and (r) Greymouth guys observe a minute's silence for fallen comrades.



MUA quadrennial conference



RMTU and MUNZ delegates gather for a Kiwi moment!

FIRST week of March I was privileged to attend the MUA quadrennial conference in Australia. I believe there were approx 500 participants from Australia and all corners of the world.

I was blown away by the energy and enthusiasm that engulfed the room on a daily basis. Such a powerful group of people coming together for a common cause, hearing the stories of hardship, persecution by employers, authorities, police, FBI you name it, a common theme no matter what country you are from, the stories are familiar and totally relateable.

The sense of family and support that was present was strong and to know that the fight will continue to make a better place for us all in our workplace, the struggle is real and long, with one thing evident from the stories of success that no matter who we are, what colour or creed or sex we must stick together, keep the pressure on and keep moving forward little steps at a time, never give up or give in, never give an inch, if not for you then stay strong for those who cannot or do not have the strength to do for themselves.

The stories from indigenous groups the traditional owners of the land in Australia, were amazing, such strength and resolve to grow and be heard, their voices and mana where amazing. Gentle people pushed to the edge of their existence, treated like they belong on land they have occupies peacefully for 60000 years! Shame disgraceful!

I learnt so much about Maritime unions around the world there history and the importance of each of our unions place in the global fight for the rights of the working class. The importance of the members understanding the struggle is long term and not to give in for short term gains. "As long as it takes" To lift the consciences of the members with education.

The international speakers spoke about in your unions, building relationships, challenging employers, international solidarity being very necessary, organise for change, change the rules, create justice for tomorrow, needing a strong president to lead and building power together. Building good youth movements for the future, need to ensure they have got the skills and tools to deliver when they take over.

If you want to stay on top of your game you need to be fighting and struggling all the time, be hungry for change. Let us not forget we are the working class, be proud of that, no one is giving us anything we work for it, be proud of that!

So many inspirational international speakers with so many good stories, which will continue to resonate with me for some time to come! 🌐

THE conference was attended by RMTU delegates Ann Wells (Port Nelson), Roz Muir (Port Napier), Dave Marden (Port Napier) and Andy Kelly (Lyttelton Port Company).

The theme for this year's conference was Tjungu, an indigenous word meaning 'one voice, one people together' and as per usual the MUA certainly lived up to this mantra.

There was a large contingent of international guests which in itself shows the expansive inspiration of the MUA.

A march was organised through the streets of the Gold Coast to demonstrate on Australia's fuel security. Under the current system Australia has fuel reserves for three days and is otherwise at the mercy of foreigners. The Australian government has totally dropped the ball on this issue and the MUA are fighting to get Australian companies with Australian owned ships with Australian crews supplying the fuel to Australia.

The MUA have also made a film (Wild Butterfly) which they are promoting. The film tells the story of a young woman and the abuse which she suffered ultimately leading to her death.

There was a seminar with guest speakers who talked on mental health and wellbeing and the programmes available to members. It is blatantly obvious that the MUA is a modern forward thinking union and isn't afraid to tackle issues that 20 years ago wouldn't have even got a mention.

This conference tackled such topics as climate change, indigenous workers, women's rights, justice and the future of the maritime industry.

The international guests had a plethora of topics to capture their attention of which most will already be dealing with.

On reflection Tjungu is unity and the unions of the world are mirroring this in all that they do in the fight to make the world a fairer more just place for all of us.

Union Power. 🌐

New monitors



AT the last KiwiRail (freight/operations) Industrial Council meeting in February, KiwiRail brought one of the new Train End Monitors (TEM) for a hands on look. These TEMs are light, only 7 kg, bright orange, easier to fit than the current model and have a tough plastic shell. Pictured above are Rebecca Hauck, KIC Southern Terminals rep and Logan Rusling KIC Northern Terminals rep trying out the new TEMs. 🌐

Remote control upgrade

FOR nearly 30 years shunt locomotives in New Zealand have been remotely controlled whereby a remote control operator on the ground, via a remote pack, drives the shunt locomotive.

There are three remote systems – Cattron, Arataki 1 and Arataki 2.

Cattron is the original system, Arataki 1 was introduced in the early 2000s and Arataki 2 has been installed on a few shunt locomotives over the last five years.

Each new version added had improved safety features.

The problem now is that half the shunt locomotive fleet still uses the original Cattron version.

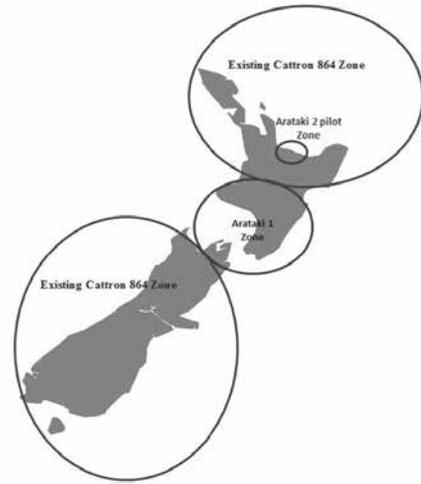
The RMTU was informed in 2010 that KiwiRail were buying 15 new remote systems (now called Arataki 2) to replace the older remote setups.

There were 30 shunt locomotives fitted with Cattron so 15 new ones would never have been enough. However, it didn't happen anyway.

Five years on, in 2015, the pressure was on when Cattron was not going to be supported by the manufacturer and the radio frequency it used was to be discontinued from November 2015.

KiwiRail and the RMTU formed an HPHE work group to work on the Arataki 2 rollout after initial issues with the first Arataki 2 equipped locomotive were sorted out.

Meetings were had, conversion training put in place and the initial locations for Arataki 2 equipped locomotives were agreed. The vision statement was: "KiwiRail aims for safe operation in all instances. The upgrade of shunt locomotive remote control equipment will assist in the vision to provide a safe and functional work



environment with reduced costs and maximum efficiency."

At this time approximately half of the shunt locomotives are still equipped with Cattron, the lower North Island and top of the South Island are equipped with Arataki 1, a few locomotives in the Bay of Plenty are equipped with Arataki 2 and the rest of the North Island and South Island (aside from Picton) are still Cattron equipped.

Why is the safety of shunt operations given such a low priority particularly at this time with major projects being considered and funded!

The lack of manufacturer support and the radio frequency problem with the Cattron system are certainly issues but the safety improvements which are not being realised are what the RMTU is really concerned about.

We strongly encourage our terminal members who operate remote locomotives to not tolerate any remote issues regardless of whether there is a shortage of locomotives. Safety First! 🌐

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.

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- Large Consignment freight



ANZAC DAY

ON the first anniversary of the Gallipoli landings, 25 April 1916, a commemorative flagpole made from kauri and Australian hardwood – symbolising 'the unity of Australian and New Zealand railwaymen in peace and war' – was unveiled outside the Petone railway station and workshops. Railway workers at Hornsby in New South Wales had proposed that railwaymen on each side of the Tasman exchange their national flags to honour the Anzac connection.

By this time it was said that up to 2,000 New Zealand Railways employees had enlisted and at least 37 had lost their lives including Major Norman Frederick Hastings, a 36-year-old fitter and foreman at the Petone workshops who had served in the South African War. It is thought that his workmates' desire to acknowledge his death was another key motivation for the erection of the Petone memorial.

In the years following the unveiling of the flagstaff, Petone workshop staff lowered



Covid-19 didn't prevent KiwiRail's Dave Gordon and RMTU's general secretary Wayne Butson laying wreaths at the base of the Petone flag pole to remember the service and loss of rail workers.

the flag whenever they learned that one of their workmates had died. Their colleagues at the East Town Railway Workshop in Whanganui held similar ceremonies.

The workshops and station building have since been demolished; the flagpole was partially restored in 1995 and refurbished in 2004. 🌐

AROUND THE BRANCHES

WAIKATO RAIL

THERE was a flurry of activity and questions at all the rail branches in this region leading up to the Level 4 lockdown, primarily over how to work,

how employees would be paid if not working and vulnerable workers were to be defined. Once the agreed Covid-19 employee-related and general Q&As were distributed to everyone they all settled into the lockdown.

But of ongoing concern will be the pending RMTU/ KiwiRail collective agreement negotiations, especially as branches have put together 20 remits for the renewal of the agreement, and how Covid-19 will affect the negotiations! 🌐

TAURANGA PORT

THE BOP port branch president Kelven Martin has been working with the POTL and C3 crane drivers on a clearer method of crane allocation in line with the agreed allocation clause of the collective agreement and hopes to finalise the allocation by the end of May 2020. The other issue that is being worked on is the

disparity of pay for the watch house casuals during the lockdown. It looks as though this will end up as a wages dispute.

Apart from the above, RMTU members as essential workers are doing their bit to keep the Port of Tauranga open and in business.

At C3 we have resolved one of the issues namely that of paying those employees who

are at home because they are either vulnerable workers or there is no work for them. If their income is less than the wage subsidy they will receive the difference between the subsidy and their income.

We still have not resolved the question of the definition of "usual pay pre COVID-19" however, we are awaiting advice from MBIE on this question.

The good news is the return of logs ▶

to the wharves under level three. There are six trains a day bringing logs in from Murupara, plus all of the logging trucks from all around the North Island.

There has been a lively debate on whether workers can move from one work bubble to another, which is an issue at Sulphur Point, especially the Tier 1 crane drivers who also work in other areas of Sulphur Point such as the sheds, straddles and stevedoring. It has been resolved that the Tier 1 workers must stay in one bubble.

The new C3 collective agreement has been ratified and the terms of settlement have been signed off. C3 are currently updating the new agreement and hopefully it will be signed off after the lockdown has ended. This means there will be about nine months of back pay for Union members.

A big thanks to the RMTU negotiating team for working through a very tough set of negotiations and a big thank you to the RMTU members who fully supported the negotiation team. Thanks for your patience.

Steve Simpson has stood down as a straddle delegate and has been replaced by Rata Sidwell. Steve has served on the BOP port branch for a numbers of years and was on the recent RMTU bargaining team for the collective agreement negotiations. All the best Steve and thank you for your contributions as a delegate.

As previous reported Walter Naera has retired as C3 general manager, employee relations and been replaced by Delys Tansley. 🇳🇿

NAPIER PORT

I guess this edition of the TW will bring news of the impact of the Covid 19 virus from every aspect of both ports and rail. I am sure there are some tragic stories out there which will be told -- and many that will be unheard.

The latest glitch to come into the fray since our October 2019 CEA negotiations (which were settled in February 2020 with a 3.2% and 3.3% increases over two years) has been attacked by our CEO. Yep, the culprit being the down turn. The message we have been given is that turnover is down and has impacted on the profit margins. However, there is still going to be a profit!

As a consequence of Napier Port being put on the stock market for a 45% sell down in 2019, it would seem by freezing all salary and wages – from the board, management, office workers and all our membership – for the next 12 months at least, will go toward resolving part of the short fall in profit, that the board and CEO wish to return to the Hawkes Bay Regional Council and all our new shareholders.

Enhancing their profit will come at the expense of the workers. The only way the Company can do this with our general collective is by way of a variation for our members. Subsequently, the CEO has done a road show to several departments to spell out the need for the cuts. Morally, I think putting an agreed percentage increase at stake is questionable. In the last few weeks, as we have all endured, many staff were unable to come to work for a multitude of rea-

sons including immune deficiencies, whanau, health concerns and the inability to work from home. To

these staff, who will eventually be coming back to work, they too will be posed with challenges and we must be willing to assist when asked for support!

For those who have been on the essential front line and who have dealt with the staff shortages from a container handling perspective, have dealt with a very busy season in confined working conditions due to the new wharf construction. Your huge contribution to keep the business going is well recognised by the local branch executive of the RMTU.

This forms the essence of our disapproval to any such wage freeze scheduled for 1/10/20 when our next increase is due. It is shameful that the CEO, the senior management team and the NPC board do not acknowledge or recognise the effort put in from workers at the coal face. They've also not paid heed to those who put themselves and their families at risk every day in a very stressful environment. Is this management's way of thanking essential workers? By enhancing the profits to their masters via wage freezes and pay cuts? Words fail me!!

Unfortunately, there is a "however" in this.

The 3.3% increase to most of us is important. The company has also mentioned the threat of what is happening outside the gate in terms of job losses and the economy. Do not for one minute think that RMTU members do not understand the realities of

The RMTU has initiated bargaining for the mobile harbour crane operators collective agreement and the 18 crane drivers are finalising their claims and running a strike action ballot. We believe these negotiations will be pretty hard this year as PONL have indicated that providing PONL shareholders high dividends is more important than workers' wages and conditions! We anticipate these negotiations will be pretty hostile.

Covid 19, the impact it has had on both the local, national and global economies and the wellbeing of mankind. It is far worse than any financial crash. This is about life.

The sad reality in this scribe's view, is it does not just come down to the money in terms of the local branch membership but the moral judgement of either supporting the local branch if the company pursues a variation to the agreement or based on the Company's propaganda for a wage freeze.

Or is this about those members who were able to invest in NP shares when they hit an all-time low? (They have bounced back considerably since the global 'panic' sell off).

It is a conflict of personal choice in terms of which will bring the best return. The share value will have exceeded the 3.3% increase to the Port's average main CEA income, subject to the number of shares owned by a member versus the share value! The certainty however, is that the Board will be seeking to return the best dividend

◀ they can and we know to whose detriment!
 The irony of privatisation!
 Lastly, the monies annually provided through the incentive scheme which comprises of profit share and health and safety targets, has also gone. It is the perfect paradox from this scribe's view – H&S should never be driven by remunerative incentives

anyway!
 Seeking reduced targets or raised incident reporting pushes H&S underground, it becomes inaccurate and deceptive both in recording and measuring and in some cases it can be abused. Targets become unrealistic for the sake of money. It was management who bought these measures

in to align any extra payments with their targeted bonuses. Many years ago it was based purely on profit. It is not part of any of our agreements.

Stay safe, stay well, stay sanitised.
 Noho haumarū, noho pai, noho whakakoi. 🌐

NELSON PORT

It has certainly been a tumultuous start to 2020 and the global pandemic has changed the face of everything. The effects on the Nelson region are yet to be truly felt and may take some time to filter through. The forestry sector was obviously heavily hit pre-lockdown as Covid-19 was being felt in China. Initially there was a lot of confusion around what was considered essential and what was not. There seemed to be a business-as-usual approach initially

for Port Nelson, but the rules were changing daily and it was often difficult to know what would happen next.

Many of our members were uncomfortable about coming to work and doing work that did not seem essential. It was often a hard task to weigh up the benefits of working and putting ourselves and families at risk; and the need for the country to have some sort of economic activity. Car vessels kept on arriving, log vessels came and cleared out most of the logs that were in

the port and the local MDF plant emptied its store of board into the port, most of which was shipped overseas.

Lockdown also coincided with the start of the fruit season— apples, kiwifruit and grapes being essential to the top of the South's economy. This essential work continued all through levels 4, 3 and 2 as this would have had a catastrophic effect on the region's economy. Consequently, the container terminal was busy right through with three to four vessel visiting a week, often with multiple shifts. ▶

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Work habits changed. We had to learn new terms and manage new hazards. We were split into work groups and kept isolated from each other through levels 4 and 3 to minimise the chance of someone getting sick and giving it to the entire staff. To everyone's credit they took it all in their stride and kept the port operating. Being a group used to managing multiple hazards and dangerous work place, these things just became another set of hazards to manage and everyone did it famously.

What was not so easy to manage was dealing with the myriad of different situations that our members were facing. C3 took the decision two days into lockdown to apply for the government subsidy for its workers leaving its employees confused and in the dark. PNL was unable to get the subsidy being unable to demonstrate a 30% reduction in turnover. To their credit they did their best to give everyone something to

keep going but as always there were some that fell through the cracks.

Early during level 4 was a busy time with the branch sending regular updates to the members to keep them informed about new developments and to try to put it in plain English as we were dealing with information overload. It was a really difficult time trying to support everyone but in the end we all got through.

However, all PNL and C3 casuals and PPTs certainly felt the pain of a greatly reduced income at a time of year when they would be expecting make a lot more. They have done their best through this time and have all retained their jobs as our employers had the sense to realise that all their workers would be required when we got back to whatever normal looks like.

Going forward our C3 members will be starting negotiations for a collective agreement in the third week of June. This was

due to happen in March but unfortunately was delayed. PNL workers have taken this time to closely examine the legality of some of the practices around hours of work, guarantees and public holidays with some interesting developments to come in the future we are sure.

PNL continues to rebuild Main Wharf North which saw a sizeable delay due to lockdown. Not sure what the revised completion date for that project is. Also hope to receive their newest crane later this year, an LHM 600 which will be a welcome addition to their ageing fleet of mobile harbour cranes.

The future will no doubt contain many ups and downs for us all we can only hope that we can make it work for us all.

Kia kaha to all the essential workers out there and our brothers and sisters around the country keep up the fight – our workers will be the ones who save us. 🇳🇿

WEST COAST RAIL

AFTER nearly six weeks at Covid-19 level 4 lockdown we were welcomed back to work on the Coast last week with a couple of days of torrential rain which caused substantial damage including extensive washouts and slips.

This caused the cancellation of services for two days given the amount of damage over several different sites. There followed a big effort by all concerned to respond and repair whilst adhering to COVID19 level 3 distancing rules.

As readers will be aware, at the time of writing (early May) we have had several serious track occupancy incidents around the country. Your scribe works on the track and also represents members and it is clear we all need to slow down and ease

our way back into work. Have a yak with your workmates about the risks and don't be pressured into things. We all want to get the job done and take great pride in keeping our railway going but remember we have just observed Workers' Memorial Day – the fact that day even exists is testimony to the risks we all face.

On that point we had to postpone the inauguration of our Memorial at the Grey-mouth Depot – a casualty of the pandemic. We were really pleased however by the way in which management worked with us to enable a physically distanced recognition ceremony to occur on the day. Great stuff, and very appropriate given the number of essential workers who have lost their lives in the pandemic across the world.

Over in operations the train plan is

working back up to strength after some disruption. There's been a need to shift things around as weather, shutdowns and the pandemic have all done their bit to confound us. We're still here however, and intend to be so for a long time to come (well, those of us who aren't looking to retire soon anyway). We are all sorry to see the TranzAlpine service suspended for the foreseeable future. Perhaps a reconfiguration of this is in order. The target market of well heeled overseas tourists isn't going to be there for the foreseeable future. Time to aim at our homegrown travellers?

The West Coast branch are united in giving our support to our brothers and sisters of Dunedin Rail Limited and commend the RMTU Otago rail branch for the great work it is doing campaigning to save jobs, the rolling stock and the track. 🇳🇿

CANTERBURY RAIL

Like all of us, the last few weeks have been dominated by the unusual events occasioned by the pandemic.

Not long ago people were getting extremely wound up by the change in seating arrangements at Midas Place – it seems all it takes is a global pandemic to give us a sense of perspective. . .

Just before the pandemic collapsed the global economy, around the time the last issue of The Transport Worker hit the streets, we had a fire at Midas Place. At the time it was big news.

Since then the hardest hit group of ▶

members in our branch are the wonderful on-board and support staff who operate out of Christchurch Railway Station running the TranzAlpine and Coastal Pacific services. Without a doubt this part of KiwiRail has suffered a major blow, with lockdowns closing our border and restricting travel. We have been pleased that KiwiRail has not moved to immediately axe jobs but has sought to redeploy members in other roles. Given the aforementioned restrictions may be with us for a while, perhaps this is an opportunity to look at alternatives like long distance passenger rail heading south and/or regional commuter passenger rail. Certainly the coalition parties seem well disposed to the growth of rail passenger services and, given we have rolling stock lying idle and some highly skilled staff who don't want to be, let's do this (to coin a phrase).

Our mechanical services members have worked hard through Levels 4 and 3, and as we go into Level 2 at the time of writing we have once again adapted to ensure locos and wagons remain in good condition while keeping people safe. This has required delegates to work closely with management – shifting people from Waltham to Middle-

ton for example. We have been pleased at the way in which management has not been dogmatic and has listened when delegates have raised concerns. One example was when we were gearing up to move to Level 3. At one point it looked like we might move too quickly and go into 'Level 3.5' before Level 4 lockdown was declared over. Delegates raised this and management revised their plans. It's very refreshing to be able to work like this and credit must go to everyone involved.

Whilst the branch applauds KiwiRail's use of special leave to keep paying staff who are vulnerable or who cannot work through no fault of their own, we are critical of the decision to scale back this to base rates from relevant daily pay. The salary sacrifice of our senior managers rings hollow when they are remunerated so highly that the percentage they are 'sacrificing' is a greater sum of money than some people earn all year. Hitting our more vulnerable members in their pocket gives the lie to the idea that 'we're all in this together'.

After that brickbat, a bouquet of sorts to our new regional South Island manager who has grasped the nettle (yes we can

mix metaphors with the best of 'em) and is talking with senior delegates about an HPHE-style approach at Middleton Yard across business units. We also welcome the new Upper South Island operations manager, promoted from his role in Timaru. We hear the latter had really good relations with the Timaru rail branch, and always did his best to 'look after the troops'. Certainly the support given by management to our recognition of Workers' Memorial Day was most welcome.

The next few months promise to be interesting for the branch and KiwiRail as a whole. Hopefully our shareholder, the Labour-led coalition government, will see beyond the short term fall in revenue and match its rhetoric about rail with real investment. There is so much that could be done in our region – double tracking to Rolleston, linking inland ports to the network from the south, sorting out mechanical maintenance and servicing facilities, improving industrial relations across business units at Middleton Yard – the list goes on. Not all of it requires money but it all requires vision. 🌐

LYTTELTON PORT

AT the time of writing the big news is the departure of our redoubtable branch secretary Brian Gilkison who is leaving to pursue his interests in law and, once he's qualified, a legal career. Brian became branch secretary after falling foul of the previous LPC management regime for doing his work as a delegate representing one of our members. The subsequent personal grievances that arose have since been settled amicably between the parties. The branch membership was very supportive of Brian and he was unanimously elected. This is an unusual one in the RMTU as it carries remuneration as a part-time role.

In the 15 months Brian was branch secretary he effected significant changes that sent some long overdue tidal waves through LPC management. The branch vigorously fought the erosion of existing working conditions. For example; securing

the immediate removal of in-cab cameras in straddles following their unannounced introduction and a U-turn on four-person lash gangs (although the fight to have the change from a five person gang to six person gang made permanent beyond COVID 19 continues). There have been numerous other wins along the way.

Our membership numbers have grown significantly, including at our two inland ports. At Midland Port, in particular, we increased our Union density from a greenfield site with no members, to 95%. We then negotiated the combining of the two inland port collectives which will give all of us significantly more leverage in the future – and provide a platform for a coordinated dialogue on safety and productivity should management embrace that approach.

The branch finances have improved steadily over the last year and the branch is being handed over in sound financial and administrative shape. With the main waterfront negotiations around the corner

and a new CEO and management structure now in place, the branch will need all of that strength for the significant near-term challenges that lay ahead.

Thanks for your hard work Brian, we look forward to an appropriate send off once COVID19 restrictions are lifted.

Our new CEO had the misfortune of taking up the reins as we faced the impact of COVID19. One thing immediately became clear: the neo-liberal, market-driven model around which our ports are organised does not operate in New Zealand's national interest. This was demonstrated by a spat the branch got into over the introduction of casual labour into the container terminal, needlessly breaking discrete work bubbles and risking the loss of whole shifts if isolation was required in the event of a positive COVID19 test. Management was still stuck in a commercial mindset and seemed oblivious to the fact that a fully functioning port is critical to the regional and national interest when an exogenous threat, such as a pandemic, threatens to close down the

supply chain. It was also disappointing that the other major union on the waterfront didn't seem to grasp this either.

To be fair, our management have done some good work looking after vulnerable staff and they do seem receptive to ideas passed on from other ports and employers we deal with. If we are to have a professional relationship however, it does need to

be established with agreed protocols and documentation around how we engage. The appropriation of the term 'partnership' as some sort of unequal patriarchal relationship may have gone down well amongst airline staff but it doesn't cut it with port workers.

At the time of writing we are awaiting the reset that our Labour-led coalition tells

us will occur in the post COVID19 economy. It is time to implement a port strategy which operates in the national interest and not those of multi-national shipping companies and business elites. It is the working class that is getting us through this crisis and it's time to sweep away the policy settings of the last 30 years. 🌐

TIMARU RAIL

LIKE everyone else we've been pre-occupied with COVID19. We were pleased that KiwiRail looked after the vulnerable and those that couldn't work with special leave. The gratitude was apparent with the way members responded to the request we use some annual leave to help out.

The gloss was taken off when the special leave was scaled back to base rate and not relevant daily pay. Some of our lowest paid members suffered a big hit through that. It's all very well a senior manager on several hundred thousands of dollars a year taking a percentage cut as a 'sacrifice' but it's really not comparable to someone on a low hourly rate.

That said, we appreciate that we're better off than some other workers. Our branch has observed the debacle at Dunedin Railways with growing incredulity and hopes that by the time you are reading this sense

has prevailed. What an excellent campaign those members are running – perhaps they have struck the spirit of the times and rail really will make a comeback down south in the post COVID19 society. (see story page 11)

Closer to home yard conditions are being improved by the efforts of the thermo welders on many joints. Great efforts guy and thanks! Under the COVID19 lockdown KiwiRail management have taken our roving shunt temporarily off our roster. Our branch is looking forward to its reinstatement when tonnage picks up in the near future.

Workers' Memorial Day seems a while ago now but even that was affected by COVID19. We were very pleased at how management got behind our efforts to recognise workers who had lost their lives fighting COVID19. A big thank you to Steve Pye, our ops manager for his support.

Congratulations to Steve (or should it

be commiserations?) on his secondment as Upper South Island ops manager. The branch has always had good relations with you Steve and we wish you every success.

On a more sombre note we have noted a number of serious track occupancy issues of late. Everyone knows about the collision between a hi-rail vehicle and a loco down south but that's not the only one. The track warrant system is overdue a revision in 2020 surely?

Some of our more conservative branch members are looking afresh at the Green Party now they have proposed high speed passenger trains linking Timaru with Christchurch. Your scribe has assured them New Zealand First also like trains. In all seriousness, the Labour-led coalition seems well disposed towards rail and if the indications are anything to go we could well be entering a golden age for our industry in the post-COVID19 economy.

Until the next issue stay safe and healthy. 🌐

TIMARU PORT

LIKE all branches our focus has been keeping ourselves safe and healthy in the grip of the pandemic. Both Prime Port and Quality Marshalling have, like other port operators, been working to ensure the supply chain remains unbroken. We have been watching some of the dramas at Lyttelton Port with interest. The culture here seems different, that may be because of the smaller scale of the operation and the fact everyone knows everyone else, but we suspect that's not the whole story.

As we've worked through Covid-19

levels four, three and two very little has changed for us on the job. We're trying to maintain separate work bubbles and observe physical distancing. By the time you read this we'll hopefully, be at level one.

At Quality Marshalling our collective agreement is now due for re-negotiation so we're working on how to collate claims and sort out our talks. Like many things we're having to do these days we will probably have to do things a little differently.

The Prime Port collective agreement is also due for renegotiation later in the year so once we start to emerge into the post

COVID19 world that will be our focus.

We were disappointed not to be able to observe Workers' Memorial Day in traditional style this year because of the pandemic but we will make up for this next year. We looked at how the local RMTU rail branch handled it with interest using a combination of photos and social media – very innovative.

We are also closely watching the campaign that is being waged by members working for Dunedin Railways. Keep up the fight – we know what it's like to be issued with mass redundancy notices here on the waterfront in Timaru and we're still here! 🌐

OTAGO RAIL

THIS branch has had a busy time over the past three months – and not just with COVID19. Our KiwiRail members are beginning to slowly return to a sense of the 'new normal'. By the time these notes are read, hopefully, we will have returned to level one.

It is important to remain vigilant not only looking after your health but also your safety after such a long period of lockdown. This also applies to your work colleagues as well.

The COVID19 virus and everything associated with it has affected people in different ways and it is easy to become distracted. So if something does not seem right, question it.

As many readers will be aware we had a serious track occupancy issue here involving a collision between a hi-rail vehicle and a locomotive hauling a train out of Edendale. Fortunately, no one was physically hurt but every rail worker will be aware of the mental impact incidents of this nature can have on everyone involved. Investigations are continuing but surely the time has come to question the suitability of the track warrant system.

Which brings us to the recognition of Workers' Memorial Day in Otago. Traditionally we have made a big effort and worked with the port unions and Unions Otago on this but the restrictions of COVID19 lockdowns hampered us somewhat this year. Proving that necessity is the mother

of invention our National Management Committee women's representative and Rebecca Hauck did some excellent work ensuring the day was marked appropriately and used social media to share this. Thanks Rebecca.

There has been much robust discussion about the Hillside revitalisation project. In network services nobody opposes the move but we do want a concerted effort to get it right first time.

The RSAS members are very keen to ensure their capacity is not reduced. This means maintaining the heavy lift facility which proved so vital post-Christchurch earthquake.

Once again, it's a question of getting it right first time. The unfortunate unintended result was the tension which arose between members and management and their consultants.

With the help of RMTU officials and input by Matt Cordell-Bain (RMTU branch chair Hutt workshops) we have now a better understanding of how we need to engage with each other to ensure proper consultation and co-operation. After all, we all want the same result even if we are coming at it from different directions.

The high performance high engagement (HPHE) principles that Matt will bring to the table will hopefully help us all to get an understanding on how to achieve a result that is beneficial to all.

None of this was helped by the discovery of asbestos at Hillside. There's never a good time to find this stuff but fortunately we

have a reasonably enlightened management and a first class health and safety organiser at RMTU national office with experience of dealing with similar issues at Hutt Workshops and Waltham. So we were able to put in place a plan to contain and remove the asbestos in short order.

Finally, we are waging a major campaign to try and save jobs and assets at Dunedin Railways. Many readers have backed our efforts via social media platforms.

This has been a leap in the dark for our campaign team as we had to develop an approach that focused on our objectives, involving members and the public whilst subject to very stringent lockdown conditions.

With the assistance of a good friend of the RMTU, Victor Billot, the campaign took off and at the time of writing Dunedin City Council is backing a trial commuter rail between Mosgiel and Dunedin as part of a feasibility study and looking at alternative uses for staff and the rolling stock. The branch isn't pulling any punches here.

We think the board and senior management at Dunedin Railways are using the very real impact of COVID19 to shut down the railway when many of the underlying problems the company faces are the results of mismanagement and poor governance. Events are unfolding very quickly and by the time *The Transport Worker* goes to press we hope that sense will have prevailed and this iconic piece of our city's infrastructure is saved. 🇳🇿

PORT CHALMERS

IT'S been a bit of a whirlwind here at Port Otago. COVID19 has brought the worst – and the best – out of people – often on the same day!

As we went into March impact from Covid-19 was already being felt through a fall off in volumes both of container traffic and bulk cargo. The cruise ship visits disappeared entirely as readers can well imagine.

Meanwhile, our relations with man-

agement have actually improved – something of a surprise to all concerned. To everyone's credit, we worked together to ensure discrete work bubbles were set up through an amendment to shift patterns; management moved mountains to source PPE and were willing to try screening tests.

They also organised some decent tucker for those working long shifts. We even buried some hatchets that were hangovers

from our acrimonious bargaining last year.

The litmus test was when one of the marine team was confirmed positive for COVID19. If anything was going to cause conflict this was it. But no, we got through that as well. The worker concerned was featured in what is normally management's little-read weekly newsletter, along with a manager who had to self-isolate, and it was a really informative read.

The story was even reported in our RMTU newsletter *The Activist*. Imitation is

◀ really the sincerest form of flattery.

By now many of you reading this will be rubbing your eyes in wonder. It couldn't last of course.

Our CEO is under enormous pressure and the fall off in revenue has clearly prompted the board to demand cost cutting. At the time of writing we've just had a very difficult meeting where management is making all sorts of demands, including revisiting our agreed terms of settlement and future pay increases, on the basis of pretty flimsy forecasts of the Port's financial performance. It can't help that the CEO is also the chair of the Dunedin Railways board – a body that is copping plenty of flak over the decision to try and 'mothball'

that operation. We know that people under pressure often do things they regret. Both ourselves and MUNZ are happy to work with management in good faith to look at how we can get the port through what will inevitably be a period of temporary difficulty and preserve jobs and good terms and conditions. Our Union is vastly experienced, having been around in some shape or form for 150 years. This isn't the first economic crisis we've faced.

To end on a positive note: Port Otago, the RMTU and MUNZ raised \$4,000 worth of groceries for the local community here in Port Chalmers. We've worked through the crisis to keep the supply chain open and will continue to do so. We understand there

are people who are having a tough time and we all want to help the community. The chair of the MUNZ local branch got some well-deserved and very positive airtime on the radio after that one.

If we can do this for others surely we can work together to beat the forthcoming slump? And looking beyond the immediate future, a reset post Covid-19 economy might move our industry away from the neo-liberal competitive policy settings which only benefit multi-national shipping companies and the like. We could have a ports strategy that works in the national interest. Now wouldn't that be something worth working with management on? We can but hope. 🌐

SOUTHLAND RAIL

It's been an eventful few weeks since the last edition of these notes to say the least.

Firstly, we received an awful reminder of just what can go wrong when there was a collision between a loco driven by one of our branch members and a hi-rail vehicle operated by a ganger out of Dunedin. The loco was hauling a train out of Edendale. Thankfully the ganger managed to stop and get out before the prang and no-one was physically hurt. Everyone involved bears the mental scars however. The investigation is continuing but surely we have to ask serious questions about what appears to be an antiquated track warrant system in this day and age? Another incident took place within the branch area the following week and should have alarm bells ringing: a track warrant was cancelled by train control after a call was made from a hi-rail - purely for location purposes - and not a track warrant cancellation. Thankfully it wasn't a train out there on track without a warrant.

Funny how people like us are classed as essential workers when times get tough. Along with the supermarket staff, health workers, meat and dairy workers and emergency services, it seems transport is vital to keeping the fabric of society together. So we've all dutifully turned up to do our jobs, unless told otherwise. We were pleased KiwiRail did the right thing and paid spe-

cial leave to those who couldn't work through no fault of their own.

However, we were less than impressed when this was pared back to base rates instead of relevant daily pay. The people hit hardest by this are those that can least afford it. And senior management making salary sacrifices doesn't cut it. Swanning around on Microsoft Teams having virtual meetings whilst drinking Nespresso at home after agreeing to sacrifice a bit of your salary, in some cases more than some of our members earn in a year, isn't any way to win friends and influence people.

Still, on the whole KiwiRail has done the right thing. And we're hopeful that the post COVID19 economy is one which will feature a bright future for rail. We contrast our lot with the workers at Invercargill City Council who have had to fight tooth and nail through their union (PSA) to stop the CEO unilaterally imposing drastic pay cuts. We doubt any employer would take on a well organised union like the RMTU in that way.

A good example of what happens if they do take us on is the campaign being run by our members in the RMTU Otago rail branch to save Dunedin Railways. At the time of writing the prospect of the long distance inter-city passenger travel in our region looks like it's back on the agenda. What a great effort and one that has been made in the most difficult of circumstances.

Our LE delegate hasn't been idle. He

was pro-active in ensuring LEs were safe – and with the help of his manager too – ensured disinfecting and cab cleaning was underway. We were the first depot in the country to have that initiative. It was also noted that the majority of the DX fleet was idle so we engaged with RSAS GM to get the DX fleet deployed on all trains on the MSL and we've all enjoyed not getting thrashed around inside the DF and DCs. Long may that continue. Was heartening to see the GM's comments on the DC fleet: 'I will be pleased to be rid of them'.

Congratulations to Brayden Hikawai who was signed off for LE duties under the shadow of CV19.

Congratulations also to ex RO, RCO, LE and OPs manager Nick McLeery who was successful in obtaining the Lower South Island KRM position. We've always had a good relationship with Nick and it's refreshing to have young guys with vision and energy and with the benefit of coal face experience, stepping into these roles. We look forward to Nick's influence spreading far and wide – unlike COVID19 which seems to have been 'flattened' at the time of writing.

Finally a big thank you to Michael Batt who heeded the call in a recent edition of The Activist and set up our branch Facebook group. Excellent work Michael and we're sure that initiative will be appreciated by more and more of our members as time goes by. 🌐

AROUND THE BRANCHES

Frank O'Donnell (l) is from Westport. Peter Todd is from Palmerston North but was working in Westport when this photo was taken.



Napier Port: (l to r) Richard Yovich, Hepa Kereti, Phil Taana, Dave Marden and Gaye Kereru.



Bruce Crosby receiving a Loyalty Certificate from general secretary Wayne Butson.



Rata Sidwell beneath her beloved straddles. She works for C3 at Sulphur Point, Port Tauranga



West Coast structures gang (l to r) Mike Owers track, Brendon Panther structures, Ron Nijssen structures, Trev Grant track and Dean Greaney structures (with earmuffs).