

# THE Transport Worker

ISSUE 3 • SEPTEMBER 2009

## PORT TAURANGA ADDITION



Port Tauranga's latest straddle crane doubles loads, reaches further and is smoooooooooth.

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## COVERED IN MUD



LE Adam Ford thought his days had ended when he saw a slip covering the end of the tunnel.

Pages 8 & 9

## HAVs



Everyday tools and their hidden hazards.

Pages 10, 11 and 14

## Equity issues

# Hillside's women workers find place in workshop



*Hillside's women workers lean out the window of one of the part-built carriages they are working on: (from left) Rebecca Hauck, Lisa McKinlay and Becky Newton.*

By Mike Regan

**W**OMEN comprise just under two percent of Dunedin's Hillside Engineering work force – three out of 180 people – but there's no reason why there shouldn't be more, say all three. Management, their fellow workers and their union agree.

In fact all three are very comfortable with their deci-

sion to apply to work at one of New Zealand's foremost heavy engineering workshops where handling huge loads and cutting, welding and forging components for rail rolling stock is all part of the daily diet.

Youngest of the three – Lisa McKinlay – has been there the least time. She is half way through her first year as an apprentice and is currently learning welding both at the workshop and at weekly night school classes. She

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ISSN 1173-6488



# RMTU – NZ's Largest Specialist Transport Union

says she has only received encouragement from the people she works with and also her family and friends.

She confesses to being a practical person: her father is a builder, and excelling at metalwork, sport and “lunchtime” at school.

“I applied to become an apprentice at Hillside,” she said adding that it was a deliberate decision supported by her family.

Lisa is the only Kiwi among the group – and the only local. She’s from Mosgeil.

Rebecca Hauck was cruising along as a veterinary assistant in Texas until she met her future partner at a rugby game.

“I really enjoyed the game and played it in my spare time,” she said. “I then moved to New Zealand to be with him and applied for a job at Hillside in their foundry about five years ago as a labourer.”

It wasn’t all plain sailing being the only woman on the workshop floor for long periods, but eventually she learnt the skills and her fellow workers appreciated her

## Hillside Engineering

While Hillside Engineering was established in 1901 on its current site, there were numerous engineering workshops nearby – some going back to 1875. Hillside’s workshops were enlarged over time covering over 16 acres and reaching a workforce total of 800 in 1935, up from 365 just ten years earlier. With 180 current workers it is still a significant employer in South Dunedin. It’s only opposition in the rail industry is the workshop at Woburn, Lower Hutt.

Rugby fans will have heard one end of Carisbrook Park frequently described as the ‘Hillside’ or ‘Workshop’ end in recognition of the company’s physical presence. However, that call will soon disappear when the city’s new stadium is opened at the other end of town.

influence - especially in the area of health and safety.

## One accident a week

“When I arrived here we were having about one accident a week, now we barely have any,” she says. “Before Hillside took on Health and Safety as a first priority, there were lots of accidents. Most of them were first aid cases and never reported. The guys just took

care of it themselves unless they had to go to the doctor. But there was a period of time when someone was going to the doctor once a week. Probably my first two years were the worst. In the last two years we haven’t had any major accidents in the foundry, just a few near hits or misses.”

Rebecca, who is a health and safety rep at Hillside, says they now use those “near hits or misses” by reporting them and working

## CTU Biennial Women’s Conference Union women: Organising our world – local to global

Over 170 women unionists attended the Biennial New Zealand Council of Trade Unions Women’s Conference held in Wellington on July 10 and 11 including five RMTU delegates.

A keynote address from researcher Dr Rose Ryan provided delegates with an opportunity to look at the situation for women workers now, compared to 50 years ago at the time of waterfront dispute.

Back in 1951 only 25% of women were in the labour force and only 8% of married women. There were a mere three women members of Parliament. Now 64% of women are in the workforce and 55% in tertiary education. The most common occupations for women today is service and sales work. While positive steps have been made, progress has been slow in achieving real equality with a persistent gender pay gap, women clustered in low paid industries and, while women now are a much greater proportion of the work-

*RMTU delegate to the conference Ruth Blakely (l) with Caroline Mareko at the registration desk*



force, they continue to juggle work and family demands and spend a greater proportion of their time in unpaid work compared to men.

Major legislative changes over the years have benefited women workers including: the 1972 Equal Pay Act; parental leave legislation with paid parental leave introduced in 2002; the Health and Safety in Employment Act 2001; an increase to four weeks annual leave in 2008; regular

minimum wage increases since 2000; flexible working hours legislation; and rest and meal breaks legislation.

Emerging issues which Dr Ryan thinks New Zealanders are going to have to confront are a changing attitude to work, the consequences of climate change on the labour market, an ageing workforce, more Kiwis returning home from overseas and the end of market triumphalism.



out better ways to do the job.

"I also use their families and kids as an incentive to be safe at work, so they can get home to what really counts," she said. "I know it has made a difference because our injury rate is no where near what it used to be."

In the course of her work as H&S rep Rebecca has made contact with other women on site – not just on the work floor but also the office – and brought them together for regular social evenings where they can talk about their work and the issues they might have as women in a predominantly male environment.

The seven minute video shown to visitors before entering the site makes the hazards on site abundantly clear, describing a work area fraught with potential danger. It is also clear that everyone is well aware of them. Not only are signs abundant but workers and supervisors look out for their fellows, warning of potential risk and pointing out hazards. It's not an environment to take lightly, but it's evident that everyone is serious about safety.

Rebecca says it's a caring environment.

Becky Newton came to Hillside with much more experience of engineering than the others having been a lone woman plumber in Norfolk, England. Like Lisa, she was practically minded and helped her father build and weld as a youngster. She later qualified as a plumber and found plenty of work.

As a solo mother she visited her sister in Dunedin in 2000, liked what she saw and was motivated to return. Her sister's husband, who worked at Hillside, suggested, with her skills, she approach Hillside for work.

"I came in, had a chat, did a welding test and got a job," she said. She is now bring-

**"You have to rely on others to make the place safe and I had to stress to the blokes that they needed to accept we were different and that whatever the task, it had to be done safely. There's no problem these days."**

behind initiatives to increase that ratio."

However, says Lisa, "it's an industrial environment and I wouldn't expect anything different. It's how its always been."

"But now it seems more acceptable to see women on the shop floor," said Rebecca. "Hillside is one of the better places to be.

You're not treated any differently - just one of the lads really."

At least one downside of being a woman worker in heavy industry is not being as strong as their male fellow workers.

"It took a while to overcome the difference," says Rebecca.

"You have to rely on others to make the place safe and I had

to stress to the blokes that they needed to accept we were different and that whatever the task, it had to be done safely. There's no problem these days."

Branch secretary for Hillside, Les Ingram, who started work in the shops some 30 plus years ago says the idea of employing women then "would have been laughed at". He says there's quite a different attitude today and that many of the male workers tell him they "like it".

In the final analysis Becky says it's a great place to work: "If women want to do it they shouldn't worry nor be intimidated. I would encourage them to apply for work here." 

- Rebecca Haulk

ing her welding skills up to local standards while going through the hoops to become a permanent citizen. Meanwhile her 9-year old boy is "simply loving school here".

She and Lisa both work in the fabrication shop where they are part of the team constructing the bodies of carriages and engines - often from scratch.

## Two percent, too few

RMTU general secretary Wayne Butson says: "Women comprise half the general population and we should be doing all we can to see that they are fairly represented in our workforce. At around two percent we are far short of the mark. The Union is fully

**O**UR Union is highly democratic, where rank and file members have considerable power and influence over what activities or action the Union initiates and undertakes!

There are those amongst you who will agree with this statement, there are those who will scream “bullshit” and there will be a greater majority who just won’t care.

That is the conclusion that we all must take out of our Union’s recent round of leadership position elections. This year’s elections for the Union’s highest honorary roles (National President, National Management Committee and Industrial Councils) were the most widely contested that I can recall in many a year, which on the face of it, signifies that we have a number of very passionate activists amongst our leadership ranks and that we are in good heart. But the abysmal ballot return rate showed that only a small minority of the Union was voting and thereby, deciding who was elected to office.

## Don't care!

The table below shows each individual ballot and the return rate for voting papers. Essentially the table shows that we issued 8,385 ballot papers and received back 2,875 – an average return rate of 34.29%. This means that;

- A whopping 65.71% of our membership doesn’t care who leads our Union and therefore chose not to vote.
- The leadership of this Union is decided by a third of its membership.
- In order to be elected to office in this



Wayne Butson, general secretary

Union you just need 17% of members to vote for you.

The price of democracy guys, is participation and this abysmal return rate illustrates that 65.71% of you don’t want the RMTU to operate within a participatory democratic framework.

## Spending wisely

Another aspect of all of this to consider is that one of my responsibilities as GS is to ensure that the Union runs under prudent financial management. In other words I am not supposed to waste money or to allow it to be spent unwisely.

So, those 8,385 ballots consisted of at least two envelopes, two sets of postage, at least one sheet of plain A4 paper and one sheet of coloured A4 paper. Each ballot paper has to be painstakingly initialled by two scrutineers (you should try sitting down

initialling 8,385 pieces of paper just to get a feel for the task) and then all of the A4 papers and the return envelope had to be folded and stuffed into an envelope which then had to have an address label added.

## Mind-numbing work

Let us not forget that the workers doing this boring, mind numbing, repetitive task have to maintain 100% accuracy to ensure that the ballot paper number matches the address label fitted to the envelope. This is to ensure that if a member contacts us and requests a replacement ballot paper we can identify the original ballot paper number issued if it is returned as a vote and thereby prevent any attempt at double voting.

Yes that’s right. In ballots where papers are replaced all votes are placed into numerical order so as to allow this check to occur.

All of this balloting cost you, the members, \$14,567 which means that the average cost per ballot mailed out was \$3.19. If we subtract 65.71% from the total cost amount, it is clear that those of you who did not return your vote ‘wasted’ \$9,572 of your fees. It’s wasted, because the money was spent with no result.

You could liken it to spending money on fixing the plumbing so that all leaks are stopped. You spend \$10,000 on a plumber and hardware, you turn on the tap when the work’s finished and there are leaks remaining. Your 10 grand has been wasted as there has been no result.

If all the envelopes had been returned (or all the leaks stopped) the money would have been considered an investment rather than a waste.

Have a think about this, and next time a ballot paper comes through your letterbox for a position within this Union, please vote and help us to serve you by eliminating waste AND giving your leaders the confidence that a majority of members voted them into office, thereby giving them a strong mandate to lead this Union to makes us ever stronger. This factor is surely of greater concern to us all, than who may or may not have won their individual ballot.

Don’t complain – VOTE!

Ballot	Ballot Papers Issued	Ballot Papers Returned	Return Rate
2009 President	4433	1397	31.51%
2009 NMC North Island Rail	887	283	31.91%
2009 NMC Central Rail	1123	427	38.02%
2009 NMC South Island Rail	842	376	44.66%
2009 NMC General	665	205	30.83%
2009 KIC CT Rep	121	47	38.84%
2009 KNIC Mechanical Rep	32	21	65.63%
2009 KNIC Ganger/Foreperson	143	49	34.27%
2009 KNIC Sig/Com/Trac Rep	139	70	50.36%
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>8385</b>	<b>2875</b>	<b>34.29%</b>

## RMTU's Skillful moves

Dear Editor,  
Now that my working life is at an end, it is time for me to write and express my sincere gratitude for the support that I have had from the RMTU, right from when it was first formed. I called on the Union for help several times over that period and always had a good result, but nothing came close to the events of last week. After some very skillful moves by the RMTU and its legal team, all the over 65s finished up by Toll Tranzlink, got a full redundancy payment. It all happened in the space of the one day preceding our final day. Up until then we were to be paid only four weeks in lieu of notice.

I worked in an office where the majority of the staff don't belong to a union and I have always tried to advertise the benefits of being in the RMTU. This victory must be the best example ever of those benefits.

My hope is that all the collective agreements can be amended to ensure that all the "oldies" get their proper entitlement, when they are made redundant.

Once again, many thanks for all the help and the truly amazing result to my predicament.

My best wishes to all.

Kevin Harris

## Trauma effects

Dear Editor,  
I feel I have to write this letter as I feel that after 44 years working for the Railways including seven years at Linwood Christchurch, 16 years in Springfield (including approximately 13 years as a senior driver) and then another 21 years back in Christchurch I like to think that my career is a little more than just filling out a form and that is that. Over the period of 44 years I have had 14 vehicle and personal accidents and, yes, I remember them all vividly. Although, for the first few accidents I thought I was ten foot tall and bullet proof – this is not the case and each accident and near miss take its toll.

The first breakdown I experienced happened about a month after the Rolleston crash where three young women died.

Thinking back, I feel I should have left the job then but I did not. I did not know it at the time but my mental health went downhill slowly from then and when I hit that truck in Linwood about four years ago I became very angry and with depression it is a very bad mixture.

Then the last accident just put me over the edge. Today I am still trying to come back from it. I know it will take some time but I am prepared for that.

Like all engine drivers, I was dedicated to my job and if we ever made the slightest mistake no one was harder on us than ourselves. Although I was never a strong Union man my opinion will always be that without the RMTU the working man has nothing, no help, no safety net, no nothing.

Every time an accident happens on the railway today I feel very deeply for the people involved and I feel as if I should be doing something to help.

If I have any regrets it is perhaps only that I did not work until I was 65 and that I left some very good mates behind.

The only other regret is that the last accident I had with the greaser truck at Inchbonnie, ONTRACK have not once been in contact with me, even though that was the accident that ended my career.

During the bad times I have been helped a great deal by several people especially lately, Alan Prosser clinical psychologist, and Bronwyn Woodhouse who has gone out of her way to keep in touch.

Yours faithfully

Graham Wilson

## Retirements

Dear Editor

As I am retiring on 04-07-09 I tender my resignation from this date to the RMTU. To all my workmates I feel very privileged to have worked with you all. I wish you and the RMTU all the best for the future.

John Foster

LE Wellington

Dear Editor,

Please accept this letter of resignation as of Friday 3 July 2009 from the RMTU.

Thank you and members of head office for their help and support over the years; I

wish the membership of the RMTU all the best for the future.

Ronnie Hawkins

LE, Napier

Dear Editor,

Having decided to retire on the 6 August after 45 years and I hereby tender my resignation as a member of the RMTU. In doing so, I sincerely thank the Union for all the help and assistance over those years and wish the Union all the best for the future.

Bill Newsome

Signal box controller

Christchurch

## Elections

Dear Brother Jim,

Congratulations on your election to the RMTU national president. I was so happy for you when I heard the announcement from Bro. Wayne. You have supported us in JRU's fighting as our longstanding friend and a member of ICLS.

After many years of neo-liberal policies the world economy has gone into a deep recession and economic crisis. As you know, the financial crisis is likely to affect every worker in the world. Worldwide workers' solidarity is needed to defend the rights that we have fought and won so far. It is a role of trade unions to fight in order for their members to work and live without fear.

I hope you will carry on your leadership to strengthen workers' unity and solidarity. Be assured that you have friends who work with you for workers' future here in Japan.

My best wishes to you for your every success in your activities.

Yours in solidarity,

Masaharu Takei

President of JRU

Dear Editor,

Would you pass on for me my congratulations to all who have been elected onto the National Management Committee.

I have been a branch and national official for almost 15 years and I believe I have achieved some good for all the members I have represented over those years.

Continued on the next page

The most horrific time was the outsourcing of mechanical and infrastructure. The exercise itself was not too bad but the way it was put in place and seeing 60 of our workmates here at Hutt frog-marched off the premises was criminal.

The faces of those members will always be in my mind. It acted as motivation to give my best for the membership as a whole.

I am concerned with the behaviour of some of the membership who think that when we go into negotiations that we just ask and the company pleasantly gives all that is asked. If we do not deliver then the negotiators are the biggest pieces of dung and should be attacked. The same happens when these members get into strife and believe we are miracle workers. Most times we do get a good outcome for them but I think that is time for these members to put their hands up and stand for some positions of responsibility. Put up or shut up!

The RMTU fights well above its weight and I am proud to have been involved in the ongoing history of it.

I think it is now time to look after myself and my family and possibly take a more active part in the Labour Party so I will not be standing for any roles in the Hutt Branch.

As I have stated, it has been a great ride and it is good to see some young blood coming through. I wish the elected members well and thanks for the time that I have been involved.

Phil Bosworth  
Hutt Workshops

Dear Editor

I would like to say to you and the NMC it was great working with you.

Congratulations to those newly elected and commiserations to the candidates who were unsuccessful in the ballots.

For me it has been a very interesting four years in which I have learnt a lot and gained a greater perspective and understanding of what happens in our world and outside of it. Thank you to those who voted for me.

The Union membership can confidently take heart that under your's and Jim's stewardship with the support of the NMC, the RMTU will stay strong.

In unity  
Wally Wallbutton

# Meki Vili

**L**ONG time railway worker and RMTU member retires after 41 years

“Leave it on the table, book the time and I cover it for you,” is one of Meki Vili’s favourite sayings.

Meki started his working life in Wellington railway back in August 1968 in the Parcel Department. From there, he moved onto the trains as an assistant before starting as a pilot then despatch officer on the platforms in Wellington.

Meki’s next big move was as the relief officer in charge of Plimmerton, Tawa and Johnsonville.

Yet again, Meki returned to what he loved, as a shunter in Wellington, before commencing his train manager role in 1982.

This position he held until his de-



*Meki Vili holding his RMTU Loyalty Certificate*

parture in July 2009.

He will be missed and all his workmates and friends wish Meki and his family well in his retirement.



*Robin Simmons with a present from the Palmerston North steam drivers acknowledging his helpful support*



*Dave Murdoch (r) giving a speech expressing sadness at driver Phil Gilchrist leaving for Australia.*



*(l to r) Wayne Butson, Barbara and Ross Allen and John Sargent at the retirement lunch for Ross after 45 years on the job. At the function many got up to speak fondly about Ross, one of rail's true gentleman. All the best for a long and healthy retirement Ross.*

# Port of Tauranga welcomes new crane



**T**HE Port of Tauranga's fifth ship-to-shore Liebherr gantry crane is bigger, lifts twice the load and reaches further than the port's older cranes. It's also, says one of its drivers, Roger Penney, a dream to drive.

The new straddle crane arrived from Ireland on May 19 aboard the *Beluga Fraternity*, especially chartered to deliver it to Tauranga. Then, under the supervision of a crew from Ireland, it was assembled on-site at the Tauranga Container Terminal, behind the berth face. A process that took nearly two months.

"It was like piecing together a giant jigsaw," said Roger.

The whole thing was then skidded into position, tested, commissioned and is now fully operational.

"It certainly has come just in time," said Roger as the Port heads towards a busy spell.

At the time of writing Roger said they had

five ships in port waiting to be unloaded and loaded and the new crane would be doing its bit – and a bit more.

"The new rig is bigger all round," said Roger. "It can reach further and carry two 20-foot containers at once."

He says a new type of hoist takes the slack out of the cables which helps make for a smoother ride.

"Without those cables swinging about, sitting in the cab is now really smooth," he said.

The crane has been specifically designed to handle the larger 5,000-7,000 TEU container ships, with an out-reach of 48 metres. This makes it capable of handling container ships 18 containers wide (the largest container ships currently plying New Zealand waters are 13 containers wide). It has a lifting capacity of 60 tonnes under a telescopic twin-lift spreader and up to 80 tonnes under the hook beam.

The decision to purchase a fifth Liebherr

crane was the result of steady long-term growth of the Port's container business. The Port favours the Liebherr brand for proven reliability, energy efficiencies and low operating costs over the life of the crane.

Mark Cairns, Port of Tauranga chief executive, said the new crane is an integral part of the Port's strategic planning, in preparation for accommodating container vessels up to 7,000 TEUs. In addition, "we have completed the assessment of environmental effects for our harbour dredging project, to be able to widen and deepen our harbour channels and sitting basins to 14.5 metres draught at low water, and are about to embark on further consultation prior to lodging the consents," he said.

Training for the new crane all took place at Port Tauranga.

Port of Tauranga has also recently bolstered its strategic land holdings by acquiring 13.7 hectares of land over the past 15 months. This now brings the Port's total land holdings to 185 hectares. 

# Disappearing into a sea of mud

Adam Ford describes the terrifying moments when he hit a landslide near Wellington

By Mike Regan

A scant 120 metre warning was all LE Adam Ford had that the tunnel exit he was heading towards was blocked by a giant slip - maybe five to seven seconds at the speed his train was going.

"I couldn't take my eyes off it," he said. "We were going so fast."

He had time to push on the brakes and then hold on as his loco ploughed into the frightening mountain of squishy soft mud.

"The only thoughts that flashed through my mind were all focussed on my own survival," he said, yet it was over so quickly and



he could do nothing more than apply the brakes and watch it unfold.

He recalls the speed at which the train hit the mud and then how quickly it slowed

down.

"From lightning fast it was suddenly slow motion as the cab's windows disappeared under a wall of mud."

At that stage one of the cab's windows gave way and mud began to pour into the cab.

"And thoughts of others who had perished in similar situations came to my mind and of Graham Orange and I knew then how he must have felt in his last few moments."

Graham Orange died on August 7, 1991, when his loco hit a similar slide at Oio but unlike the one Adam hit, it was longer and



*Adam Ford beside the window in his cab which began to leak a torrent of mud – but thankfully didn't.*

the mud poured in until the cab was near full. (A memorial site and plaque has been erected at Oio to mark his tragic death).

"Thankfully the slide I hit was short," said Adam. "I went right through it before the mud really had time to pour through the broken window."

Only when the train stopped and he discovered he was alive and with no injuries did his thoughts turn to what was behind him – a train load of passengers.

He contacted Control to say he was "off the road" and then contacted his train manager, Derek Thomson to see how things were



back in the carriages.

He then staggered out of the cab into the sea of mud and burst into the first carriage.

"I got a rousing reception. Clapping and cheering. It was amazing."

He didn't venture any further back: "I didn't want to drag the mud through and mess up the carriages."

The loco with its five carriages was on the commuter run to the Wairarapa and hit the slip outside Tunnel 1 at around 1817 hours on August 7.

"I was driving a good locomotive, so we were travelling at about 70 kph as we entered the tunnel and continued to accelerate. I suspect we were doing about 75 to 80 when we hit.



*4818 being recovered*



"It was terrifying sitting there just waiting for the train to stop. And it was so violent. The loco was thrown all over the place," he said. "It was amazing that no one was injured. The passengers were great. Afterwards they bought the crew a box of chocolates each. I didn't even know they knew who I was."

He left the scene thoroughly exhausted. After a couple of sleepless nights his spirits improved and he made tracks back in the cab.

This was Adam's first incident in nearly 25 years

working in New Zealand rail.

"Someone told me to buy a Lotto ticket, so I did – and won \$22," he said. "But I thought that just surviving felt like a Lotto win." 🇳🇿

## Trauma claims getting harder

**A**NOTHER chip is being removed from workers' rights by the new National-led government. This time in they are planning to remove ACC cover for locomotive engineers who may suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following a rail or level crossing accident.

Only those involved in a similar incident will know the horror of seeing someone or something on the track ahead and that absolutely nothing can be done to stop it happening.

For long seconds the driver tries to push the brake through the floorboards meanwhile counting away the seconds it will take before the train will come to a halt. So often, that halt is well beyond the spot where the obstruction once stood.

Labour inserted cover for PTSD following major representations from the RMTU together with other unions whose members faced the possibility of trauma in their daily working lives.

In the event, not one claim has been lodged by an LE since it inserted as a pro-

vision in 2008. Its removal will not see any significant cost savings for ACC, but it will mean that LEs – or other workers – who cannot continue working through no fault of their own and are diagnosed with PTSD will not be covered for either lump-sum compensation, earnings-related compensation or rehabilitation costs. Instead, the cost will have to be covered through vote health or by the workers and their families.

What a great way to begin Rail Safety Week! Well done National!

Rail Safety Week was opened at a special function attended by parliamentarians, unions, workers and celebrities including two Wellington-based LEs (and their wives) who courageously shared their thoughts about level crossing accidents they and their workmates had been involved in.

"They were great speakers and spoke from the heart about the trauma and horror imposed on them by being the unwilling and innocent spectators in level

crossing collisions," said RMTU general secretary Wayne Butson, who also attended the reception adding that while the two workers impressed the audience, unions were not at all impressed by the government's performance in the House.

He cites when Labour party spokesperson for Transport Safety Darien Fenton asked Associate Minister of Transport Hon Nathan Guy what the Minister would say to locomotive drivers traumatised by the doubling of level crossing accident rates this year and the Government's intended removal of accident compensation cover for their mental trauma the answer was "a studied silence".

"He simply ignored the question," said Wayne. "And failed to explain just why the National-led Government is planning to remove it. Shame on you National!"

A campaign to oppose the move by National is being mounted, anyone keen to help should contact the RMTU head office. 🇳🇿

# Dangerous vibrations

- potential problems for RMTU workers



Lawyer Ben Thompson uses his UK experience to look at the potential hazards facing NZ workers with everyday tools

I recently had the pleasure of spending several weeks at Thompsons Solicitors in the UK – the most experienced personal injury law firm in the UK, which acts almost exclusively for trade union members, and is very active in the UK trade union movement.

Whilst I was there, I worked on a number of cases involving workers suffering from Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS). Several of these were track workers who had developed HAVS as a result of their exposure to vibration on the job.

Despite having assisted RMTU members with ACC claims for some years, I have not yet seen a claim lodged for HAVS. Statistics provided by the ACC confirm that the number of HAVS claims lodged in recent years – across all occupations – has been negligible.

Given the number of HAVS claims coming from the rail industry in the UK, this gives rise to the possibility that there has been under-claiming for this condition in the New Zealand rail industry.

## What is HAVS?

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

HAVS symptoms include:

- painful blanching (or whitening) of the fingers, particularly in cold and/or wet conditions,

- loss of sense of touch/temperature, grip strength, and manual dexterity in the fingers,

- numbness and tingling, and/or

- pain in the hands, arms and shoulders.

HAVS is preventable, however, once the damage is done, it is permanent.

What levels of exposure to vibration are dangerous?

Vibration is defined by its magnitude, which is measured in metres per second squared ( $m/s^2$ ). When measuring a worker’s exposure to vibration, this is dealt with on the basis of an 8 hour working day – written as  $A(8)$ . Therefore, a worker’s daily exposure to vibration is expressed in  $m/s^2 A(8)$ .

In New Zealand, there is no official indication as to what levels of exposure to vibration are to be considered dangerous. However, we are able to look to the UK personal injury system for guidance.

In 2005, the UK parliament enacted The Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005 (the Regulations). In relation to hand-arm vibration, the Regulations set out:

1. A ‘daily exposure limit value’ of  $5 m/s^2 A(8)$ ; and

2. A ‘daily exposure action value’ of  $2.5 m/s^2 A(8)$ .

The Regulations provide that all employers must ensure that none of their workers are exposed to daily vibration levels which are higher than the ‘daily exposure limit value’ of  $5 m/s^2 A(8)$ – ie, the maximum allowable level of daily exposure.

If the daily exposure action value of  $2.5 m/s^2 A(8)$  is likely to be reached, and it is not practicable for the employer to eliminate the exposure, the Regulations require that employer take steps to reduce its employees’ exposure to vibration. Under the Regulations, employers in this situation must consider

such things as:

- alternative working methods entailing less vibration exposure;
- different work equipment;
- improved maintenance of work equipment;
- design/layout of work stations and rest facilities;
- information and training;
- limiting the duration of exposure to vibration;
- appropriate rostering; and
- the provision of clothing to protect employees from damp and cold.

The Regulations provide that (in most circumstances) it is actually unlawful for an employer to expose its workers to daily vibration levels in excess of  $5 m/s^2 A(8)$ . This shows that, in the UK, it is accepted that this level of daily exposure entails a particularly high risk of harm.

The Regulations show that, in the UK, the legislature has recognised that where a worker’s daily exposure to vibration reaches or exceeds  $2.5 m/s^2 A(8)$ , that worker is placed at risk and, accordingly his or her employer must take steps to reduce the vibration exposure.

However, this does not mean that any level of exposure below  $2.5 m/s^2 A(8)$  is necessarily safe. In the UK, workers who are injured at work are still able to sue their employers for negligence. If a UK worker who suffers HAVS sues his or her employer, the worker must show that their exposure to vibration was sufficient to cause their HAVS. The decisions from the UK Courts show that, generally speaking, a daily exposure level at or above  $1 m/s^2 A(8)$  may be sufficient to cause HAVS (especially if the worker has been exposed to that level of vibration for several years). Cases brought by workers with a daily exposure level of less than  $1 m/s^2 A(8)$  were generally unsuccessful.

Therefore, from the UK system we are able to conclude that:

- Daily exposure levels of  $1 m/s^2 A(8)$  or

more may well be sufficient to cause HAVS, over time;

- A daily exposure level of 2.5 m/s<sup>2</sup> A(8) entails a significant or recognised risk of harm to workers; and

- A daily exposure level in excess of 5 m/s<sup>2</sup> A(8) places workers at an unacceptable level of harm.

In 2008 the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work carried out a comprehensive review of workplace exposure to vibration in Belgium, Germany, Spain, Finland, France and Poland. The authors of the review noted that, in July 2005, the European Parliament enacted a directive which set out daily exposure 'action' and 'limit' values identical to those contained in the UK Regulations. This shows that the level of risk to workers who are exposed to those levels of vibration is accepted across Europe, as well as in the UK.

One of the conclusions made by the authors of the review is particularly relevant to workers in the rail industry:

As regards hand-arm vibration (HAV), the action level [2.5 m/s<sup>2</sup> A(8)] is likely to be exceeded by operators of most main percussive and roto-percussive tools (such as a chipping hammer, demolition hammer, rock drill, breaker, impact drill, scabbler, rammer or vibratory hammer), or main rotative tools (grinder, impact wrench, sander) and main alternative tools (jig-saw, file). The limit value for exposure to vibration [5 m/s<sup>2</sup> A(8)] may be exceeded if percussive and roto-percussive tools are used for more than one to two hours a day, or in the case of some rotative tools if used for more than four hours.

## Vibration levels at ONTRACK

On 13 August 2009, I visited the ONTRACK Kaiwharawhara depot with RMTU organiser Todd Valster. There, I saw the type of vibrating tools that are used by track workers, including:

- Vessel GT-3500GE Impact Wrench;
- Airtec Master 35 Impact Wrench;
- Husqvarna K1250 Rail Cutter;
- Cobra TT; and
- Pionjar.

The manufacturers of these tools advise that they give off the following levels of vibration:

- Vessel Impact Wrench: 5.32 m/s<sup>2</sup> with a Damper Unit attached, or 19.25 m/s<sup>2</sup> without the Damper Unit.

- Airtec Impact Wrench: between 7 and 11.6 m/s<sup>2</sup>, depending on operator technique and condition of Wrench, fastener and track.

- Husqvarna Cutter: 5.3 m/s<sup>2</sup> at the front handle, 10.4 m/s<sup>2</sup> at the rear handle (where the trigger is situated).

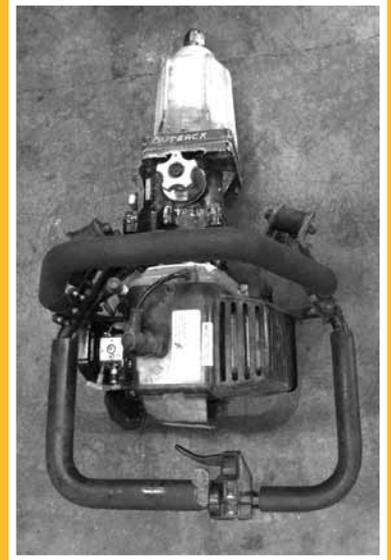
- Cobra TT: 2.3 m/s<sup>2</sup>.

Unfortunately, the manufacturer of the Pionjar (Atlas Copco, the same company which manufactures the Cobra TT) does not publish the Pionjar's vibration magnitude on its website. However, from speaking with staff at the ONTRACK depot, we understand that the Pionjar gives off a substantially higher level of vibration than the Cobra.

It must be kept in mind that these vibration figures, as they come from the manufacturer, will be fairly conservative – particularly be-



Some of the machines RMTU workers use daily and have considered safe - until now



cause the vibration levels would have been measured when the tool was brand new, and in perfect condition. As the condition of a tool deteriorates, the levels of vibration increase.

## How long before workers are at risk?

The UK Health and Safety Executive has published an online vibra-

Continued on page 14



# 45-wagon test snaps

**K**iwiRail are continuing with their controversial plan to haul a 45 wagon coal train from the West Coast through the Southern Alps to the port of Lyttelton, much to the consternation of locomotive engineers from all three RMTU branches as well as branch delegates from ONTRACK and Hillside workshop.

The unified branch structure has once again shown how powerful it is by ensuring that the RMTU consultation team had information at hand covering all aspects of this experiment, ranging from Otira extraction fan capabilities to concerns regarding a number of knuckles (couplers) that may break under pressure, due in part to the tensile strength of the composition of the casting.

The Otira Tunnel raised special concern for our members due to its 1:33 incline gradient, confined space and the possibility of the tunnel environment turning hostile if the extractor fans fail. One locomotive engineer said: "You're pushing every boundary in the tunnel, if it's going to go that's where it will go! You need to do a full simulation worst-case scenario. . . 760 metres in that environment it's a long walk to check the train. I wouldn't be happy with not chocking (the

last wagons) or applying all the handbrakes. All that weight just dangling off the front, hell you'd kiss good bye to Otira if it got loose . . . mind you it would solve that housing issue."

The Otira tunnel has huge extractor fans and an automatic door that shuts behind the train as it enters, thus ensuring the heat and fumes from the locomotives do not surround and smother the diesel generators but are dragged up and behind the train.

Therefore, if a driver needed to work on a stalled train in the tunnel s/he is required to carry a respirator and spare canister, tools and a torch to walk the length of the train to chock (secure) it - then identify and fix the problem, if possible. To add to the situation, if the fans were to fail in, say, a lightning strike, they would be enveloped in a dense, hot cloud of noxious gasses that can clog the filter in 20 minutes. In this situation the driver is advised to "cut and run" – take the lead loco out and leave the rest of the train, or evacuate the tunnel on foot. Sounds easy sitting in an office in Takapuna doesn't it?

For this reason, not too long ago, the RMTU protested plans to raise the maximum load from 16 wagons to 30.

"We are horrified that they are now contem-



21,000 HP heads towards the Otira Tunnel

# knuckles

plating raising it to 45, there are huge health and safety ramifications for our members and the public” said RMTU general secretary Wayne Butson.

## Predicted problems

As predicted there were two breaks on the test run, the first at the 3rd wagon the second at the 7th – and both before reaching the tunnel. Maybe it is time to stop this folly and look at another, more appropriate, utilisation of seven locomotives to move 15 extra wagons.

“In principal we are not opposed to the trial, if they can prove beyond doubt it is safe for our members and the public at the fundamental level. I believe they cannot, not without extensive work in consideration to the member’s genuine concerns,” said RMTU organiser George Laird

More track work needs to be undertaken, he said, to accommodate the length of these super heavy trains including; longer sidings and loops to allow other trains to pass, and work on the dampers for the fans. A question, he said, which begs to be answered.

“With improved tracking more trains could be run with 30 wagons and fewer locos per train,” he said. 🇳🇿



Snapped draw gear knuckle



## HAV hazards continued from page 11

tion exposure calculator. This allows workers to calculate the daily vibration exposure, and to estimate how long a particular tool can be used before it places the worker at risk. The vibration calculator can be found at [www.hse.gov.uk/vibration/hav/vibrationcalc.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/vibration/hav/vibrationcalc.htm).

Using the vibration calculator, we have prepared the following table which shows approximately how long a particular tool can be used in any 8 hour period, before the daily exposures of 1, 2.5 and 5 m/s<sup>2</sup> A(8) are reached. (see graph next page)

These figures show that, given the types of tools used in track work, it does not take long at all before workers are placed at risk of contracting HAVS. The figures confirm that use of the tools for a matter of minutes per day may, over time, cause permanent damage. It is particularly concerning to see that with some tools, such as the Husqvarna Cutter, a daily exposure level of 2.5 m/s<sup>2</sup> A(8) can be reached with less than 30 minutes use in any 8 hour period.

However, what this table does not show is the cumulative effect of using several different vibrating tools in one 8 hour period. This is, of course, the reality of the workplace.

The online vibration calculator can also be used to calculate the daily exposure rate when a worker uses several tools during the day.

As an example, the following usage would result in a daily exposure value of 2.5 m/s<sup>2</sup> A(8):

- Cobra TT for 30 minutes;
- Husqvarna Cutter (rear handle) for 12 minutes; and
- Airtec Impact Wrench for 30 minutes.

As a further example, the following usage would result in a daily exposure of 5 m/s<sup>2</sup> A(8) (the lawful maximum in the UK):

- Vessel Impact Wrench, with a Damper Unit, for 1 hour 45 minutes; and
- Husqvarna Cutter for 1 hour 25 minutes.

Again, it must be emphasised that these calculations are based on the vibration magnitude of each tool as published by the manufacturer, which were measured when the tool was brand new. As the condition of a tool deteriorates, and the vibration increases, these time limits will decrease.

	time to reach 1 m/s <sup>2</sup> A(8) (possible risk)	time to reach 2.5 m/s <sup>2</sup> A(8) (significant risk)	time to reach 5 m/s <sup>2</sup> A(8) (unacceptable risk)
Vessel Impact Wrench, with Damper Unit (5.32 m/s <sup>2</sup> )	20 minutes	1 hour 45 minutes	7 hours
Vessel Impact Wrench, without Damper Unit (19.25 m/s <sup>2</sup> )	1 - 2 minutes	8 minutes	32 minutes
Airtec Impact Wrench (7 m/s <sup>2</sup> , i.e. the lower end of the given range)	10 minutes	1 hour	4 hours
Husqvarna Cutter, at the front handle (5.3 m/s <sup>2</sup> )	18 minutes	1 hour 45 minutes	7 hours
Husqvarna Cutter, at the rear handle (10.4 m/s <sup>2</sup> )	5 minutes	27 minutes	1 hour 50 minutes
Cobra TT (2.3 m/s <sup>2</sup> )	1 hour 25 minutes	9 hours 10 minutes	> 24 hours

## How can workers protect themselves?

The best way for workers to protect themselves against HAVS is to minimise the amount of time they spend handling vibrating tools. The UK Health and Safety Executive has published a pamphlet entitled 'Hand-arm vibration: advice for employees'. This pamphlet sets out that workers can reduce the risks by taking the following steps:

- Ask to use suitable low-vibration tools.
- Always use the right tool for each job (to do the job more quickly and expose you to less hand-arm vibration).
- Check tools before using them to make sure they have been properly maintained and repaired to avoid increased vibration caused by faults or general wear.
- Make sure cutting tools are kept sharp so that they remain efficient.
- Reduce the amount of time you use a tool in one go, by doing other jobs in between.
- Avoid gripping or forcing a tool or workpiece more than you have to.
- Store tools so that they do not have very cold handles when next used.
- Encourage good blood circulation by:
  - keeping warm and dry (when necessary, wear gloves, a hat, waterproofs

and use heating pads if available);

- giving up or cutting down on smoking because smoking reduces blood flow; and

- massaging and exercising your fingers during work breaks.

Remember, although the employer has the primary duty to ensure the health and safety of its workers, each worker also has a legal duty to take all practicable steps to ensure his or her safety while at work.

What should you do, if you are concerned about symptoms?

If you believe you may be suffering the symptoms of HAVS, it is important to take steps to remedy the problem. The longer the symptoms are ignored, the more incapacitating they are likely to become.

The first step is to see your GP to explain your symptoms and the type of work that you do. In addition to recommending treatment options, your GP will be able to lodge a claim with ACC. HAVS is listed in the ACC legislation as a condition which is known to be caused by workplace exposure to vibration. Because of this, the process of obtaining ACC cover for HAVS is made much easier and faster.

This is important; in addition to compensation for lost earnings, ACC cover also results in fast and effective treatment. 

# OUT@WORK conference positive and successful

**T**HIS year's biannual OUT@WORK conference was held on May 14 and 15 at Raumati and was the largest gathering since its inception in 2003.

It was very positive, successful and great to see new faces – and of course the old(er) ones too.

The course began on the Thursday with introductions, some housekeeping and the programme's outline. Participants from all sectors were keen to network and share knowledge and skills.

The areas covered were: Building a strong and viable network; Barriers for GLBTI workers; Workers right are human rights; and Dealing with discrimination which was presented by Ian Gordon and was particularly interesting as some of the case studies were not obviously harassment. And finally – the political agenda. Then there was dinner and



*RMTU delegate Bernard Harrison at the conference.*

guest speaker Bill Hastings, the Chief Censor at the office of Film and Literature Classification. His speech was hilarious pointing out the absurdities of some of the right and far Christian right demands to inflict their ideas and moral fibre onto the nation. And that was

only day one.

Then of course there was the traditional Thursday night relaxation and free time, this year sans the bonfire.

Day 2 started with Working Within the Movement presented by CTU president, Helen Kelly followed by Learning from others and Celebrating strength and diversity with speakers from the Aids Foundation and Transgender Community.

I attended the workshop from the Aids Foundation and found it a personally moving experience as well as very enlightening, especially considering the rise of HIV in New Zealand.

After lunch the Strong and Visible Network was led by Karena Brown and finally Planning for the future – an extension of the previous work shop. 🌐

## Sickness, accident & death

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

In the last ten years 222 locomotive engineers had to retire due to medical reasons. They received a total payout of \$4,316,051 from the above Fund.

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

## Attention LEs

Join this Fund now for your own peace of mind

### You could be next to miss out!

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

**Contact:**

Julia Harrison, PO Box 813, Wellington  
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Fax: (04) 471-0896  
Email: [julia@rmtunion.org.nz](mailto:julia@rmtunion.org.nz)

# ACC roll backs coming

By Darien Fenton MP

**T**HE National Government have confirmed that they plan to roll back ACC entitlements for workers, and particularly those brought into legislation by Labour last year.

This includes cover for workers who develop a mental injury after being exposed to a sudden traumatic event during the course of their work.

Under the 2008 changes to the Injury Prevention, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment Act workers who suffered mental injury as a result of an accident at work became entitled to the same benefits under the scheme as others harmed by their work.

This was a major development for the ACC scheme, and brought New Zealand into line with the cover offered to workers in many other overseas jurisdictions including: most Australian states, Brit-



ish Columbia, Ontario and Alberta, Denmark and the United Kingdom.

During the introduction of this additional ACC provision last year, the RMTU was very active in promoting it because of their experience in dealing with the impact on train drivers who accidentally hit someone on the tracks.

RMTU members came along to the Select Committee to tell us about how much they had been impacted by the accidents they had experienced.

One worker told us how he suffered the terrible tragedy of a young person throwing himself in front of the train that he was driving. He was unable to stop, and that person was killed. He had to stop working. He took a long time to recover.

He received no accident compensation. He went back to work and it happened to him again. He is now no longer able to work, and he was unable to get accident compensation. Because he has no earnings like he used to have, he cannot afford to get out of his house. He lives next to the railway lines, and he has to listen to those trains going back and forth every day of his life.

Those workers came along courageously to the select committee to tell us their stories and about the suffering they have had to endure since. Hundreds of workers are in a situation like theirs — the bank workers, drivers, shop workers and security guards for example.

## Unfair and wrong

So I'm appalled that this important advance will be rolled back, and that once again workers who find themselves in these awful situations will not be entitled to counselling or weekly earnings compensation while off work. They will be left to suffer without any help or assistance the on-going mental injury caused by witnessing the death or maiming of another person during the course of their work.

I think that's unfair and wrong.

ACC Minister Nick Smith has also made it clear that he intends to remove other advances made under the ACC scheme last year, including the calculation of compensation for seasonal and casual workers.

This means around a quarter of the New Zealand workforce are at risk of receiving inadequate or no weekly compensation for injury simply because their working arrangements differ to those of other workers.

The Minister describes the additional entitlements brought in last year as "unaffordable". What he really means is that workers should have to pay for it — and if he gets his way, they will.



**Hui-a-Tau 2009**  
**20-year Anniversary**  
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## BRANCH NOTES

### BAY OF PLENTY PORT BRANCH

A big thank you to our members and executive (including the BOP rail executive) for their responsible stand against the Port of Convenience campaign. If it had taken place it could have led to dire consequences for our members here. However there are still some tensions between the ISL workers and us, which we hope to resolve. Also thanks to the Ports Forum delegates for their support and to the RMTU delegation that went to the ITF conference in Kuala Lumpur.

A warm welcome to new RMTU members who joined as a consequence of the NZL Group losing the lashing contract at

Sulphur Point.

Our delegates training programme for the year will be completed on August 10, and hopefully we will run a training programme in 2010.

Members at the Champion Flourmill, have received their second wage increase of 4% in their two year collective agreement this month (August) while the Quality Marshalling Collective Agreement negotiations have started with a nil wage offer. It looks like negotiations will be interesting!

There has been a change of manager at the Mt Cossi Club, with Dave Hill retiring after 23 years.

UCL members have ratified their collective agreement which includes MUNZ and the Orica members are well into their two year agreement, even though we have yet to see a copy of it. The company is fine tuning it!

We are working through the C3 Eastern Bay of Plenty Collective Agreement, and hope to have it completed by September. There has been tentative agreement with C3 to continue with the partnership programme with the help and support of the Department of Labour, however, how we handle the disagreements that will inevitably arise will determine whether the partnership is a success or not.

### TARANAKI PORT BRANCH

THE RMTU recently initiated for a new Collective Agreement to cover members who are launchmasters. Negotiations are continuing. The recent announcement from Fonterra over their

decision to use other ports will have a significant effect on this port. Due to a complete void in advice of this change, we are only now dealing with the fallout.

*Andrea Chadfield, launchmaster, at the controls of the new launch, Rawinia.*



#### \$1,500 AD&D

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

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



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### TARANAKI BRANCH

**G**REETINGS from the Taranaki. What a crappy winter we have had – cold and wet.

The Whareroa lads have a new acquisition in the way of a port-a-com which houses a drying room and another toilet. Brilliant stuff, it's taken forever to arrive though but not nearly as long as the Stratford yard tower which is still firmly entrenched in some engineer's plans after eight years. Speaking of Whareroa, the guys are raring to go for the milk season. Because of the busy nature of the season the boys elected to have a mid-year Xmas party. A good night was had by all and the All Blacks even won.

As I write, Fonterra and KiwiRail are locked in negotiations to determine which port their products are to go to. Could be interesting times ahead.

Clive Matthews is heading back to Palmerston North into the loco ranks – good luck Clive. Taranaki have been gifted back Leighton Hunt who has been missing the Naki and has decided to head home.

Stratford has been rather quiet over the off season. A new arrival is Tevita Brugger the ONTRACK manager who has moved into Allan Wights' Stratford office.

Two Stratford-based staff have had



*The Rugby Road underpass upgrade*

granddaughters - Kevin Jenkins and Nev Potroz. Congrats to all. Adrian Jenkins (no relation to Kevin) has had another son. Nev Potroz's son, Jayson, has been selected into the Hurricanes under 18 rugby team as well as being included in the New Zealand secondary schools rugby wider training group. Nev was saying that the New Zealand side gets selected on September 7 so good luck to Nev and Jayson.

The Rugby Road under pass is going ahead in leaps and bounds which promises a better flow of vehicle traffic through the area. Unfortunately the track had to be realigned and so we have been hit with a 10kph speed restriction over this area whilst the work is carried out. The ONTRACK guys once again

have been doing their bit keeping restrictions down to a minimum. Thanks guys!

Tunnel 17 over the SOL has had an overhaul, which is great. Trouble is it's part of an eight kilometre track restriction, but bugger it, I suppose that's what they call progress. One day the restriction will be fixed. There have been large number of wooden sleepers replaced with concrete versions between tunnel 24 and Okahakura, so once again that's good positive stuff.

The 20 OM wagon milk test train trials were carried out. While this showed promising results there is still a lot of testing to be done to prove it can be a viable option which can provide service quality and be carried out safely.

The AGM in the Naki has been done and dusted for another year. Glen Hughes has elected to step down from the branch chair. Thanks Glen for your outstanding service, it has been much appreciated. Brian Baldwin has come out of retirement and has stepped up to take his place. We are looking forward to working with you Brian and utilising your Union experience. New Plymouth yard guys and Toll Tranz link have been fairly quiet and we have nothing to report this time around.

That's it from the Naki.

### WELLINGTON FREIGHT YARD BRANCH

**G**REETINGS from the Wellington freight yard. As this is my first attempt at this I hope you will all bear with me.

Firstly, congratulations to our branch secretary Howard Phillips on his election as central representative on the NMC. Commiserations to Wally and Phil but also a big vote of thanks to Wally for his contribution as the previous representative. Congratulations also to John Maguren being elected to the KiwiRail Industrial Council as central terminals rep.

Project 602 – the installation of the third main line in and out of Wellington – is well under way and everyone here will be happy when it's all finished. At least we get tar-sealed access into the yard now which eventually will go all the way into the depot

so that has got to be good. Right?

On the negative side Wellington commuter trains are in the news again – and again and again – through break-downs, power-cuts, and God knows what else and commuters are complaining bitterly. I can understand how they feel. Just try getting 211 express freight through the "Metro Triangle" from Paraparaumu every morning, a real headache for LEs and train controllers alike. It will probably get worse in a year or so when the new trains arrive and train frequency increases not to mention the lengthened running.

In the yard I see team leader Ra Ratia back after his long holiday in the Islands. Welcome back, Ra. We're still doomed! Also welcome to our newest yard TXO Peter Carroll from the GT (car wagons) siding.

LE John Foster retired in July after doing 40 years and all the best to him. We're all looking forward to his "shout" coming up in late August.

The cancelling of some of our freight trains is concerning as it is not providing the customers with a very good service. The trains that are still running are mostly too heavy, too long or too late. Plus late ferry connections are also being missed, exacerbating the problem and inconvenience to customers. I can appreciate the fuel-saving, cost-cutting etc but it should not be at the expense of losing customers through missed connections and late deliveries. If the tonnage is there, the locomotives and crews available, then for goodness sake run the train. Consider all the customers not just a couple of the big ones. If we lose them it'll be hard to get them back.

Well, that's it from Wellington yard.

### WELLINGTON PORT BRANCH

**K**IA ORA brothers and sisters and greetings to all other RMTU branches from the lads at Wellington.

October 2008 saw a successful conclusion to branch negotiations for a combined CEA together with our brothers from MUNZ and the EPMU. Once again RMTU organiser Todd Valster proved his mettle around the negotiating table and many thanks go out to all the negotiating team. Our agreement takes us through to February 2011 when we will next be facing off. Annual percentage increases were achieved on wages and allowances, but one significant gain was finally achieving a payment for 'graveyard' hours (2300 – 0700) in the cargo section. Although monetarily not excessive, it was finally the acceptance from management that a payment for working these extremely unsociable hours would be compensated for. A huge turnaround from all the years of getting the big 'NO' from them and something to work on in future wage rounds. Our port security centre guys are still in limbo with regard to the new 'rest and meal

breaks' act which came into force from April 1. There is no problem with getting the relief during normal working hours but anything after that is falling in the too-hard basket. Ongoing discussions are continuing and I am sure some agreement will be reached soon.

#### Liz Ward

The past year has seen the departure of our CEO Liz Ward. In her tenure here with us Liz convinced the board into finally investing some much-needed finance into the port. New plant including cranes, a tug and most recently six new Noell straddles which have greatly enhanced the operational side of the business. We hope our new CEO Blair O'Keefe will continue in Liz's vein, we shall wait and see. Although belated, this branch wishes Liz all the best in her future endeavours.

The recession is hitting home hard in the industry with volumes falling in most ports. At the time of writing, this branch is in discussions with management in seeking ways too reduce costs. Without going into details,

any initiatives adopted can only mean less money in the pocket on pay day. I am sure this is happening in most branches around the country but it must be remembered, job security, retention of wages and conditions should be our main focus. At least with this management team, constructive employer/union dialogue is continuing. Woe the heady days of post ECA when the boss would put on his kicking boots.

#### Infinite wisdom

In the late mail, management have done another about turn on the employer contribution to the superannuation fund for members who reach the age of 65. In the past, employer contributions ceased for those members attaining 65. This had been a contentious issue with us as many members are electing to stay in the industry longer and we felt that they should not be penalised for this. In its infinite wisdom the employer has come into the light and decided that they will contribute for those members from now on. Well done.

### HUTT BRANCH

**I**T has been awhile since the Hutt Branch has contributed to the Transport Worker so we have a lot of catching up to do. Firstly we have to talk about Ross Green who passed away early this year; he has been a backbone to a lot of members here and Jiminy Cricket to others. The branch turnout to his funeral was excellent with the shops being almost closed as a result. This in itself gives you an indication of how he was thought of on-site. His passing was mercifully quick and he will be greatly missed by us all.

The branch has sent letters to the Wellington Regional Council giving reasons why the refurbishment of the Ganz-Mavag units should be overhauled here and have also met with Phil Goff, Trevor Mallard and Chris Hipkins and have done a presentation to these Labour MPs on this issue.

With Hutt now back in the fold of KiwiRail it is time to stop the fights between the membership and try to work together

and achieve manufacture of all rolling stock here in NZ. This means the next issue to be tackled by the Hutt Branch is to get Locos built in NZ jointly. We see Hillside doing the floor pan down and above being done at Hutt. With the state of the nation there is never going to be a better time to lobby for this work to be done in NZ by our members and in NZ workshops.

#### Knockers

The branch is continually finding it hard to get members to collectively participate in Union matters. As always there are the knockers who are always prepared to complain but will never do anything positively to help. Therefore we issue a challenge to all Hutt members to get involved and remember that the branch Union officials are doing their best for all – at all times.

Most of the problem stems from the membership being pressured from manage-

ment to perform tasks outside of their normal duties without any consultation with the elected site officials. We must all remember that we have a Collective Agreement and that management have to abide by its terms. So any pressure from managers to change what you do should be rejected. If you fail to do this then it falls to your delegates to maintain the collective and your rights.

#### Workload static

Workload is static at the moment with some overtime being worked in areas.

Our AGM is on 28 August. We have invited a member of the Wellington Regional Council, four Labour MPs (Annette King, Chris Hipkins, Trevor Mallard and another to be advised later) and our newly elected NMC central rail member Howard Phillips. As usual there will be a sausage sizzle to start at 12.00hrs with all members invited to feed their face.

Continued on page 20

### HUTT BRANCH [cont]



*Hutt branch secretary Terry Duffy test the new High-Vis vests sporting the RMTU logo that the branch purchased for all delegates to raise their profile. (inset: back view)*

### BAY OF PLENTY RAIL BRANCH

**T**HE branch has been working with the community constable to try and solve issues of kids jumping from the rail bridges in Tauranga, and throwing stones at the trains in Matapihi. A special has been arranged with the Police, Kiwirail, local community leaders and the Tauranga City council.

#### Battling hard

We are still battling with Norske Skog to get Anthony Dawkins back inside the gate. This is proving to be a long and hard struggle.

We have had number of disciplinary meetings with some of our ONTRACK members over the consumption of alcohol. It is imperative

that alcohol must not be consumed during work hours, and certainly not in ONTRACK vehicles.

Shane McNae our branch vice chair and United delegate has been hospitalised for the past four weeks with a severe case of pneumonia, and is finally on the long road to recovery.

In the round of redundancies at Toll Networks, none of our members were affected, but two members were made redundant in Hamilton – one forced and one volunteer. The forced member was Elaine West the wife of Eric West, who was a long standing member at Te Rapa, Elaine herself had completed 19 years and 10 months service, with Toll Networks and its predecessors.

### WEST COAST BRANCH

Hi from the Coast and roll on summer.

I think the Otira banker boys have had enough of playing in the snow for one year. The promised date for the first test train to be loaded at the New Pike River Coal load-out facility situated near Ikamatua has been and gone with no sign, or announcement, as to when coal will actually begin to flow. Rumours abound as to the reason for the delay, such as cash flow, managerial problems and equipment problems but we can only but guess what the true reason is. The West Coast has been ready with an eight train roster since November 2008 to accommodate the extra train for Pike River.

The middle of July saw a meeting of branch reps, KiwiRail management and George Laird from RMTU national office to do a site inspection of the coal load-out facility of Pike River and to nut out a site agreement.

Everyone left the worksite well impressed with the design and the thought which had gone into building this \$12 million facility. It will be impressive if, and when, the coal flows.

The third trialling of a 45 wagon coal train – known as ‘Super Heavies’ – was conducted at the beginning of August (see centre spread of this issue). Some managers

would state it was a success, but the truth of the matter is that the train parted twice between Otira and the Western portal of the Otira Tunnel after chocking tests. Even with kid gloves treatment from one of our most capable banker drivers the train twice broke at the coupling knuckles. We will await the test results from the KiwiRail engineers before we can call it a success.

Remember the 55 New Zealand workers who lost their lives at work last year (one RMTU member Martin Sincoc). Let's all take care out there, and remember that safety is not only the responsibly of management but it is ours also.

Until next time from the wild West Coast.

## Unions have a long tradition of international solidarity.

Becoming a Kiwi Solidarity member is a modern way of expressing that solidarity and helping vulnerable workers in developing countries in our region get a fairer deal.

#### Sign up to UnionAID today

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### CANTERBURY BRANCH

WITH two thirds of the year passed us we are all thinking of Christmas.

And to all of our members who gather their annual leave like pine cones you may receive another 5 or 6 weeks leave. But if your manager says he is going to book you off for a certain length of time do not come crying to the Union here. You will not get sympathy from this scribe. Annual leave has been fought for over many collective contracts. It has been a critical part of your conditions of employment. Our Union encourages its members to take their annual leave with their families to make them a healthy and functional family unit, and a safe person to work with. If you have a problem with your employer about taking annual

leave tell us and we will get something done about it and fix it. When an employer demands that you stay at work or refuses you your entitlement then we have issues with this. This would be a sign of not enough people in your area to do the work. Unsafe unhealthy attitudes like this leads to accidents. We are not in the business of causing accidents, we are there to prevent them.

Recently a bridge gang working near Cass were lucky to escape a serious acci-

dent. A large rock rolled down the hill and went through the windscreen of the bridge

gang truck and struck the driver. The rock, in the range of 15kg, dislocated the drivers shoulder and caused some bruising. A couple of days off work and some rehabilitation has enabled him to make a good recovery. Fortunately he's a weather-beaten and rugged former West Coast coal miner and has experienced mine collapses from time to time. We wish Chris [aka THE ROCK] Houston all the best for his speedy recovery. There are some rumours floating around that the rock fall may have been caused by a moa scratching around for food.



*The rock!*

Two more of our members on sick leave are Moses

Hapakuku, and Bruce Broadhurst. Bruce had a bad accident some time ago at Inchbonnie when he was hit by a train at a level crossing. Both members are from the Marlborough area. Moses was a former Marlborough representative rugby player and must be pleased that they have left Tasman in the Air New Zealand National Provincial Rugby Championship. Get well men and come back to us harder and fitter for another innings.

We also welcome Darren (Blenheim)

Waine as a new carpentry apprentice to our bridge gangs. With the new staff progressions that ONTRACK and the RMTU have been working with over this collective we are going to see some highly skilled and highly paid members working on our infrastructure. In conjunction with this we are working on the hours of work for the metro areas, coupled with comparing our rates with comparable outside industries. To keep staff in our organisation we must make it attractive in the remuneration area. Yes we do have an extremely healthy Collective Agreement in the ONTRACK area but if you do not work on it and support it you will lose it. ONTRACK's management have offered staff a 2.75% pay increase with a complete rollover of their Collective Agreement. Under the critical circumstance prevailing in the transport industry at the present moment this would be a fair deal. CPI is chugging along at 1.9% so let's be realistic here.

We see where Toll are trying it on again by forcing people out the gate with no redundancy and, because they are over 65, they have to retire. The sooner the word Toll is removed from every bit of our advertising the better off this place will be. Apparently we are going to have a little argy bargy to make them see sense.

As for the 45 total coal trains, this has some problems with draw gear failures and gases in the tunnel should you have to stop and chock this long train. But we are working on it. Meanwhile, the coal trains are starting to fire up into a huge coal programme and we are bloody good at moving it smoothly and safely.

### LYTTELTON PORT BRANCH

THE Lyttelton Branch held its 2009 AGM on August 7 which was well attended. Brian Cronin summarised the previous year making particular reference to history repeating itself in this latest National Government. Brian spoke about the policies of the right in stripping public services and increasing privatisation of public assets. Rodney Hide, as the zealous Minister for Local Government Reform has got to be a concern for port workers around NZ given that he shares the ideology of the

right – and then some. Members stood for a minute's silence in respect of colleagues we have lost. Many workers had that morning attended the funeral of Sonny Kemp Senior who worked on the coal and died suddenly of a heart attack at home five days earlier.

Marty Sincock's memorial service and plaque unveiling at the entrance to LPC on June 24 was spoken about. The plaque is set into a large rock just past the security entrance to the Port and across from the container terminal where Marty worked – a

roadway all Port workers and visitors drive past.

Hal Upton brought members up to speed with the Harbour Workers Superannuation Fund and spoke well to gentle ribbing from his colleagues about the (non) performance of the Fund. Clearly members have confidence in Hal as he has been re-elected to continue his role on the Fund's board.

Many thanks to Wayne Butson for attending and speaking to members on a number of topics regarding the broader role and activities of the RMTU.

### PORT NAPIER BRANCH

**W**E are now out of what was a relatively good season at Napier. Container volumes were up slightly as the Bay had an excellent apple harvest which, in terms of container numbers, was well up on previous years. The bumper apple harvest also reflects the fact that a lot of orchards are ripping out the old traditional types of apples and replacing them with the new types which crop twice as many apples and take up less space and allow tighter plantings.

However, quieter times are with us for the duration in relation to container vessels. This in itself is influencing volumes going through Port Pack. I guess the roll on of the downturn will now come into play somewhat here. There has also been a significant drop in fertiliser tonnage as a consequence of the global crunch, which is obviously af-

fecting the farming sector.

We are also up for collective agreement renewal in September so it will make for an interesting negotiation.

Our AGM was held on 30 July here in the port. Visitors in attendance were Wayne Butson, Aubrey Wilkinson and Phil Spanswick our new organiser based in Tauranga. All contributed to the meeting.

It would be appropriate to mention the AGM was fairly passionate as we had a “debate” – to put it mildly – over the performance of the Harbour Workers Superannuation Scheme. As some of our senior members head toward retirement, there are strong concerns over our fund manager’s performances. Sure, we understand there has been a financial crisis globally and a recession to boot, however we are aware that our Union brothers and sisters who manage their own

SAD fund within the locomotive fraternity have fared better through the crisis. No doubt this will be a hot topic at conference as locally it is felt one of the Fund managers has dropped the ball badly and there is a need for change. There are better options in terms of insurance on the market currently. The death and disability cover fees being charged by the Harbours Fund are an issue in a time when performance is poor.

Lastly, on the subject of union officials, we wish to thank Todd Valster for his time as organiser for the Bay. We particularly want to thank him for his assistance during the last wage round and the ‘difficulties’ that went with it.

Congratulations to the newly elected and re-elected members of the NMC, may all your efforts be appreciated.

That’s it from the Port for another issue.

### TIMARU RAIL BRANCH

**T**HINGS have been a little quiet here lately. All members are looking forward to a large increase in work in our region when the milk, coal, meat and wool seasons kick in. There has been quite a downturn in shipping movements at Primeport Timaru and therefore rail tonnage going in and out. We are expecting there to be an increase in container traffic out of Clandeboye (Temuka is the rail head until the line into the plant is laid) of about 500 20ft boxes (TEUs) a week over and above our normal work.

Any boxes that Temuka yard can’t handle will be road-bridged to the Timaru Kiwirail CT site, we understand. The proposed Kiwirail train plan is, as normal, a work in progress with the planning having been done with very minimal involvement from our local team leaders and senior shunt members. This is a shame, as it is not only a breach of the consultation provisions of the MECA but it means that their knowledge and experience has been excluded from the planning and therefore the plan is the poorer for it. As normal though when the shit hits the fan and it all turns to custard it will be the yard members on-site who

will pick up the pieces and get the show on the road.

Our Oamaru members are busy with their area and covering Pukeuri works and the ever growing Studholme yard. Our local manager did a great job in getting an extension of the ‘shunt road’ in Studholme. All we need now is lighting to be installed so we can shunt there during the hours of darkness. Maybe we could also get the back road reinstated to ease shunting movements and facilitate run-arounds.

The rest of our RMTU yard operations team can look forward to a lot of extra work, hours to cover staff shortages and leave as a failure of Kiwirail management who has not employed a couple of yard staff (one in the yard and one in the CT site). Our local manager has apparently hit a brick wall in Wellington (or is it still Takapuna? Never sure nowadays.) when

requesting to employ new staff. Even if – and when – he gets that approval it will be months before any of the guys can be fully utilised, as the training takes time.

The Timaru yard operations members wish to thank the Oamaru ganger Graham Pauley and a local contractor for a month’s great work in the hitherto poorly maintained Timaru yard. The work is valued and will have to last. Normally the only time you see an ONTRACK team in the yard is in response

to a derailment, or the inspecting ganger is putting orange paint on top of the orange paint.

Congratulations to Doug Blakie (pictured) on his re-election to the RMTU NMC.

Well done to the Central Region on winning the Kiwirail Freight Spike Award but remember, it is only on temporary loan from us here in the South.

That’s it for now from sunny Timaru and from the best little rail branch in the country.



### PORT TIMARU BRANCH



**D**USTY MILLER received his life membership from Jim Kelly (pictured above) at our branch meeting. Dusty has since retired to the Catlins, a playground he has always loved. He had been a member for over 30 years and had always been a supportive active member. He has worked in most areas of the port during this time.

Dusty has held most branch positions over the years but will be remembered

mostly for holding office as a casual after he was made redundant from the Orbell dredge.

He always represented from the heart regardless of why or who. His larger than life character will certainly be missed at the Port forums and by the branch.

Members like Dusty are the solid rocks of our Union and while he was humbled on receiving his life membership, he never understood the model role he always took.

He would love to see anyone passing

through the Catlins. Recently some of our members took part in the Relay for Life.

Our members have all been extremely busy at work as we seem to have missed most of the world meltdown, however the storm clouds are looming as the shippers sort out their next season's exports.



*Relay for Life team (l to r) Trish Crump, Vicky Charteris, Emma O'Connell and Wic Hewitt flew the flag for the RMTU. The branch sponsored them.*

### OTAGO RAIL BRANCH

**T**HE realities of the economic hard times have hit our branch yet again, we have lost two members from the Toll Tranzlink Freight terminal and a third person is being made redundant. It is never an easy time when redundancy is being implemented and we can only hope that when the levels of freight return that those who have been displaced will be able to resume their employment. There is a three year provision in the contract to facilitate this and it is hoped that those affected will be either back well before then or have found alternative employment. We wish them all the best for the future.

It is the quietest time rail freight has experienced in Dunedin in living memory and although it creates an environment where getting leave is not a problem it still makes for a feeling of unease. The quiet time has also led to the ability of two of our LEs managing to escape from being service persons during the social experiment called 'outsourcing' during a brief, but much appreciated, sojourn in the KiwRail mechanical

services depot helping to catch up with some overdue scheduled maintenance.

At last we have a position of casual safety observer which will allow the release of signals staff to carry out their normal duties instead of babysitting contractors carrying out the refurbishment of the Mihiwaka Tunnel. There are also efforts being made to recruit another shunter to replace Jono who has left for colder climates in Christchurch. Howard James, who was involved in a serious motor car accident, is making progress and is now at home.

With the creation of a second bridge inspector's position in Dunedin, long time union stalwart George Hatzis has moved out of the structures gang and into the office. We also welcome Trevor Saunders to the work force having taken a vacant position within the gang.

Recently the Magnet Street crossing had to be shifted to allow for the construction of Dunedin's new stadium. No sooner had it been shifted, than the local paper jumps on the band wagon bemoaning the fact that

there were no lights or bells on it. [Only because of the time frame that council wanted it relocated]. Local staff working in the vicinity have observed that most vehicles do not even slow down for the crossing, let alone look. Just another spot to raise our loco brothers blood pressure.

Also in the same area we have a rail bridge across the Leith with a footbridge attached. The foot and cycle traffic has to be seen to be believed, even with Rail and council signage prohibiting the practice. Several of the miscreants spoken to, believed it was their right to use the corridor, and some of them are members of the legal profession and one even an off duty policeman.

These notes are being compiled shortly after the Union Road Show presented by Buzz and Phil. Turnout was down on past meetings, but several questions were put to the presenters, particularly the 2.75% we are being offered versus the 4% KiwiRail enjoyed. We even had a local heckler at the back of the room adding to the occasion.

# Government slashes adult community education

By Maryan Street MP

Labour Spokesperson on Tertiary Education

**I**N this year's budget, the National/Act/Maori Party Government slashed 80% of the existing funding to Adult Community Education (ACE) which is delivered through high schools and the community organisations which they support. They are best known to us as night classes, although they happen during the day as well.

Funding for these programmes was cut from \$16 million to \$3 million and schools have to compete for the bit that is left. From 1 January next year, only those schools which have successfully applied for some of the \$3m will be running night classes.

## Incensed

People are incensed. Why? The Minister calls night classes "hobby" courses and says that if people want them badly enough, they will pay for them. She says that tough times call for tough decisions.

But this isn't a tough decision – this is a wrong decision. As a result, people have taken to the streets, have packed out school halls and community halls, and have signed petitions and postcards in their thousands.

They are trying to explain to Anne Tolley and her colleagues that ACE matters. In some communities, especially rural ones, ACE is the ONLY provider of post-school tertiary education and training in that area.

Why is it so important to people?

Let me give you some examples from the letters which have come to me. A woman in Kaiapoi went to a cake-decorating class at the local area school and now she has a job in the local bakery icing cakes. Or the woman who had been out of the workplace for years raising children and had lost confidence in working again. She went to a drawing class, was so inspired and successful that she went on to get a Bachelor of Fine Arts and is now



teaching art through night classes. Or the young person who didn't do well at school and eased his way back into education as second chance learning through a night class on writing.

This form of education is especially critical for workers. Many of our workers need upskilling to meet modern challenges. When can they afford the time and the money to get formal qualifications? Only through night classes.

But workers also want to keep up with their children and assist with their learning. There is a very popular course run out of Nga Tapuwae College in Auckland which is going to be axed next year. It is maths for Tongan parents. It is taught in Tongan and

**... the worst kind of human vandalism I can imagine.**

helps those low paid working parents to help their children.

And these classes do other things besides. English classes for speakers of other languages, like migrant and refugee workers, which

help them to integrate, adjust, adapt and fit into their community and New Zealand society. So they help strengthen our communities and the relationships we have with each other. That's called social cohesion and it is one of the aims of ACE.

These classes are low cost, accessible through the local high school and respond to what people say they want. And every year, over 200,000 people do classes they want to do through high schools and community organisations.

But schools also have to hand over 9.5% or more of their money to fund courses run through community organisations. These are courses like anti-violence, parenting, boat safety and coastguard training or making step-families work, budgeting, volunteer training – and on and on it goes.

## Worst timing

These courses have existed in New Zealand for 100 years and have provided young and old alike, worker and unemployed equally, a chance to retrain, increase their skills, or develop a talent into a business. Ripping this kind of infrastructure out of the heart of communities, especially in a time of recession when people are looking to upskill and make themselves more employable, is the worst kind of human vandalism I can imagine. Such resources may never be restored.

I have spent much of my life working and fighting for worker education. I used to teach in WEA classes in Auckland. ACE classes have been the most successful, accessible and enduring form of education available to workers, the low paid, parents and young people we have had in New Zealand. It's worth fighting for.

If you want to do something, sign a petition, go to [www.stoptnightclasscuts.org.nz](http://www.stoptnightclasscuts.org.nz) or write to your local Government MP asking them to get their Minister to reinstate the \$13 million she has cut.

