

Speech by TWU (VIC/TAS Branch) Secretary John Berger
2017 Branch Delegates Conference
Moonee Valley Racecourse, Melbourne
Friday, 11 August 2017

Good morning, it's a pleasure to be with you today and welcome. I would like to acknowledge Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews, Federal Senator and former TWU organiser Glenn Sterle, TWU National Secretary Tony Sheldon, and all of today's other special guests, our Branch Committee of Management members and Branch President Alan Taylor – who by the way rode at this track some years ago when he was a jockey.

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The way of life we enjoy today, in modern Australia, and, more specifically, improvements in the lives of working people, can in large part be traced back to the hard work of trade union delegates and occupational health & safety representatives.

Big statement.

But think for a moment about how the things won exclusively by union bargaining units and pushed from the grassroots, in a relatively short period of time, have enhanced our lives.

The five-day working week, minimum safety standards, paid parental, personal, carers and holiday leave, weekends and superannuation so

workers won't die in poverty. The TWU pioneered industry super fund, by the way, was the first of its kind in Australia.

RDO's, overtime, penalty rates, equal pay for women, the creation of sustainable and skilled employment, collective bargaining, income protection, unfair dismissal and redundancy rights. And so it goes.

Now think about life without them.

I have always thought it is a great shame that the bravery, determination and tenacity that union delegates display in performing their duties is hidden from the view of not only most other members, but also the general public.

You never let anyone forget that the TWU is in your yard – but no doubt you are the quiet achievers of the labour movement.

This is a day to celebrate your labour of love, victories, selflessness and sacrifices - as well as talking about the future of our union and industry.

In fact, we are meeting at a crucial time for industrial relations in Australia.

The dismantling of the Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal last year tells us what type of Australia the Turnbull Government believes in. And that was just the start.

Unsafe workplaces, growing pockets of working poor, penalty rate cuts, big business launching assault after assault on workers' rights and conditions.

They are trying to make it harder for us, so we start every negotiation, enter every situation, on the back foot. Blue collar workers, betrayed at every turn.

Opposition leader Bill Shorten – whose electorate office is about 300m away in Hall St – two weeks ago called Turnbull out over the abolition of the RSRT and said truck drivers should have safe rates. Remember that at the next federal election.

Until then, as we know, the only effective answer to organised greed is organised labour. I am looking at the faces of the revolution and we will take a moral stand on the higher moral ground for all Australian workers.

And the one thing about working people is we like a good fight – especially against those trying to exploit and steal from us. It is a good thing delegates are built to last – because you are on the front line, marshalling the troops, and we sometimes have many battlefronts.

Many of you are currently involved in negotiations where companies are crying poor at the bargaining table, but are somehow finding millions to pay union-busting consultants and spin doctors.

Without you in there fighting, your workmates could lose protections and see their wages depressed and safety compromised. Did you know union workplaces have an injury rate 24% lower than non-union yards?

Transport is the most dangerous industry in Australia and so it is imperative that we do not let these standards slip.

Two weeks ago we secured protected action rights against Toll and Toll shortly after signed an in-principle agreement. It is a fact we might have to get militant with some employers to say there will be no shortcuts, that our people have a right to a fair day's wage. That might happen.

What is important is you keep trying to do the best you can every day. If we lose one here and there, you may kick yourself a little for losing, but I can guarantee that you will never regret having a crack.

At the recent ALP State Conference three TWU motions were passed, including one that called for the State Government to develop a Code of Conduct for the tipper industry and Safe Rates for owner drivers.

The Andrews Government have begun to work on this.

The Branch is also proud that bus driver safety systems will be installed in all passenger buses in Victoria. We campaigned for better protections for a decade and there is no doubt our activities directly led to this announcement last December.

Daniel Andrews drove trucks, sold hotdogs and worked in a bottle shop in the early 90s while at Monash University, he joined the ALP in 1993.

In 2000, he was elected the ALP Assistant State Secretary and entered the Victorian Parliament in 2002 as the Member for Mulgrave. He served as Minister for Consumer Affairs and Gaming and Minister for Health. In December 2010, he became Leader of the Opposition and was sworn in as Victoria's 48th Premier in December 2014.

He leads a strong majority Labor Government with a large focus on infrastructure which is, for a variety of reasons, never a bad thing for the average transport worker.

I would like to now hand you over to our Premier, Daniel Andrews.

CONFERENCE CLOSE SPEECH:

The unapologetic mission of the TWU is to defend the rights and dignity of all transport workers and to ensure they have real and decent jobs and a good quality of life.

However high or low the wall stands before us, I am always optimistic of delivering on our mission while you are the eyes, ears, mouth and muscle for grassroots members.

Some delegates could not be here today and are right now driving a truck or bus, flying a plane or loading under the wing, shifting shipping containers, carting cash, milk, mud or prisoners or any of the dozens of occupations held by our members that keep Australia moving.

I want to thank you all for your strength, common sense and conscientious judgments, your faith, imagination, solidarity and ability to

cut through the bullshit, your commitment to a fair go and to what is fair and reasonable and decent for Australian workers and their families.

You keep people in the game and improve their lives and if someone starts to fall behind, or falls down, you reach out your hand and you pull them up and get them running. You never take a backward step.

When it's boiled down this is the sort of thing that keeps this country moving forward.

It is the embodiment of the good old Aussie spirit, of mateship. Most of you are too humble to agree, but I'll say it. People look up to you. They respect and admire you.

i would like to thank all of our special guests who spoke today and for each of you for attending. It has been a memorable day.

Whatever you individually remember and apply from today's event, I want to re-inforce one point that I will finish on as I close the 2017 TWU Victoria and Tasmania Branch Delegates Conference.

Never, ever, underestimate the value of your worth, because the union and your workmates and every working Australian and their families sure as hell do not.

Remember this as you continue to proudly fly the TWU flag.