



Local Authorities Newsletter December 2009

Good result for ASU members at Keilor Cemetery

Members at Keilor Cemetery, with the help of the Australian Services Union, have successfully negotiated a new three-year Enterprise Bargaining Agreement despite the threat of stop work action.

Assistant Secretary Igor Grattan said that after management came back with an offer than was unacceptable, ASU members were ready to strike to fight for better pay and conditions.

"There were a number of outstanding financial issues which weren't agreed upon. The negotiators of the trust got to the stage where they said they had no room to move and weren't able to address any of these outstanding issues. Negotiations broke down, so the ASU members filed for a secret ballot which was granted with the assistance of the Commission. The ballot got up unanimously, with everybody voting to support numerous stopwork or strikes on days of employment if their needs weren't met."

"We went back into negotiations and members agreed on an EBA that would transmit to cover Keilor Cemetery members for three years, despite the State Government's decision to rationalise the number of cemetery boards," added Igor, who

highlighted the importance of retaining the already fair rights of workers at Keilor.

"These employees will become part of a bigger collection of cemeteries, so it was important to protect their current terms and conditions and consolidate them into one document. It was important that their terms and conditions were carried across into this new agreement, and the outcomes they received were great, including improved industry and maintenance allowances. The members were willing to go all the way. Their resolute stand was what got us to a place where they could enjoy a satisfactory outcome."

ASU delegate at Keilor Cemetery employee Peter Manning echoed Igor's sentiments.

"We are very happy with the outcome. All our main claims were met and the members really stuck together, which was pleasing. The ASU helped us get over the line, and their presence actually united everybody."

"The other promising thing was that people who weren't members of the ASU jumped on board. Since the great result, you can just see the difference in attitude some people have towards the union, which is also a great sign."

Pesticides and Parkinson's links

Important information has been released in regards to the use of certain pesticides that could affect ASU members working in parks and gardens. ASU Assistant Secretary Igor Grattan believes the information below is something that members should be aware of to ensure that they are being as safe as possible in the workplace.

Pesticides and Parkinson's links

Gardeners and farmers who use pesticides as part of their job are up to three times more likely than others to develop Parkinson's, according to a new study. Overall, the study, published in the Archives of Neurology, found that those whose job involved using pesticides were 80 per cent more likely to develop the condition, which affects 120,000 people in Britain. However, exposure to any of three chemicals, a weedkiller called 2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid, or 2,4-D, an insecticide called permethrin, or another weedkiller called paraquat, increased the risk three-fold. Although paraquat was banned by the European Union in 2007, the other two are still available for use in Britain. Paraquat is still used in Australia. The study, by a team from the Parkinson's Institute, in Sunnyvale, California, asked 519 patients with the disease and 511 healthy people about their jobs and exposure to a range of chemicals. In total 44 of the patients with Parkinson's and 27 of the healthy volunteers had been exposed to pesticides through their occupation. The study found that people who had worked in agriculture but who had not been exposed to pesticides through their work were no more likely to develop the disease.

Caroline M Tanner and others. Occupation and risk of Parkinsonism: A multicenter case-control study, Archives of Neurology, volume 66, number 9, pages 1106-1113, September 2009

Fear GPS systems are used for spying

The Australian Services Union fears that GPS systems that have been installed to machinery such as garbage trucks and street cleaners could be used to spy on the whereabouts of ASU members.

Contractors have fitted the devices to many of the trucks across the state, claiming that the data collected lets them respond to ratepayers who may have a complaint about garbage or street cleaning. The GPS systems are also believed to be a handy device in the event of an accident.

But ASU Branch Secretary Brian Parkinson believes that the systems could be used to spy on the whereabouts of workers, with evidence pointing to such occurrences recently.

"Despite management's explanation as to why these GPS's have been installed, many members who operate these types of machinery are regularly called in to explain themselves as to their whereabouts. In one case, a member was just 250 metres outside their working area, simply using a toilet while during their rounds, and was asked to explain why they were out of their jurisdiction."

"This type of questioning is highly counter-productive, and leads to a situation of frustration and the feeling of micro-management that is certainly not conducive of a good working relationship."

"The only protection against this potentially intrusive technology is to make it very clear - preferably in writing - that you do not consent to operate machinery unless there is a clear agreement on why the tracking system is being used. Unfortunately, privacy laws mean that consent can be implied, so agreements should try and be made with employers to avoid issues later down the track."



Quarter of a century and still going strong

Some 25 years ago, Glenelg Shire Council worker David Boness was approached by his employer to see if he was interested in becoming the union delegate.

Back then, David seemed a perfect fit for management - somebody they could presumably rely on not to cause unrest in the workplace, even if it was at expense of the pay and conditions of fellow workers. How wrong they were.

David – now a Construction depot leader at the Council – has recently celebrated a quarter of a century as an ASU delegate, full of success stories and praise from fellow employees who watched on as David relentlessly fought for the rights of workers. In a measure of his success, all current depot workers in Casterton are now a member of the union.

Getting everybody on the union train is something David believes is very important when pushing towards successful negotiations.

“I always strive for full union membership in the workplace as this always equals strength in numbers. I’m really proud of the fact that our depot has such high union numbers. It has taken me a long time but it was worth it and you need to push for that sort of thing.”

Like was the case across many Councils in times gone by, re-structures and amalgamations within Councils did have an affect on David, who watched on as 45 positions within the Council were squeezed down to 28, back in 1994.

Despite working tirelessly to get all 45 employees of the depot signed up to the ASU, David witnessed all of his workmates, including himself, go through the process of re-applying for their jobs with just 28 positions available. The change did have an impact on the community, explained ASU Organiser Nicoletta Vasilakis.

“There were obviously some job losses, but David and the bond he had with his fellow employees meant that people were making sure those with families weren’t left to fend for themselves. Through the help of the union movement, real community support came to the fore.”

David – who has worked with the Council for 33 years and remembers the times where he, as a delegate, was responsible for collecting his workmates’ union dues – says his time with the ASU taught him some valuable life lessons.

“Being part of a union has taught me to stand up for myself and my fellow workers. It helped me to converse with people and hold meetings. Being a delegate has taught me how to network, not just in working relationships, but also on a social level. I believe I have earned the great respect within my colleagues because of the way I have looked out for them over the years.”

“One of the best aspects of my association with the ASU is that I now have a great relationship with ASU Organisers and I can remain good friends with them,” said David, who, according to Nicoletta, is set to continue in his role as delegate.

“David will continue as ASU delegate at the depot and we congratulate him for his tireless work through EBA negotiations and the general work he undertakes to protect members. We hope he continues in this role for years to come.”

Glenelg Shire Council worker David Boness

Australian Services Union Annual Award for Women

The ASU Annual Award for women honors ASU members who make or have made outstanding efforts to promote women’s participation in the ASU.

The criteria for the Award incorporates characteristics such as:

- i An active branch member;
- ii Outstanding service as a Delegate, EEO Delegate, OH&S Delegate;
- iii Women’s Committee member and/or other member to promote and encourage women’s participation in the ASU;
- iv Nominated by the Women’s Committee.

The Award was first presented in 1995 and has been awarded annually each year at ASU Women’s Conference since that time. If you know an outstanding candidate for this award at your workplace then please nominate them!

Nominations should include a brief description about why you are nominating the person, in line with the above criteria if possible, and sent to Maria Kaplanis via email mkaplanis@asuvic.com by close of business on February 12, 2010.



On behalf of all at the ASU I’d like to take this opportunity to wish everybody in the Local Authorities sector a safe and happy festive season. Make sure you take the time to read the important handout on LGI and how it may affect you. See you in 2010.

Assistant Branch Secretary Igor Grattan

