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# Test for Daniel Andrews as Melbourne braces for transport strike



The tram dispute of 1989 - 1990, which saw trams lined up next to the Preston MTA depot over the removal of conductors from Melbourne trams, proved too much for Labor premier John Cain. Peter Cox



by Ben Potter

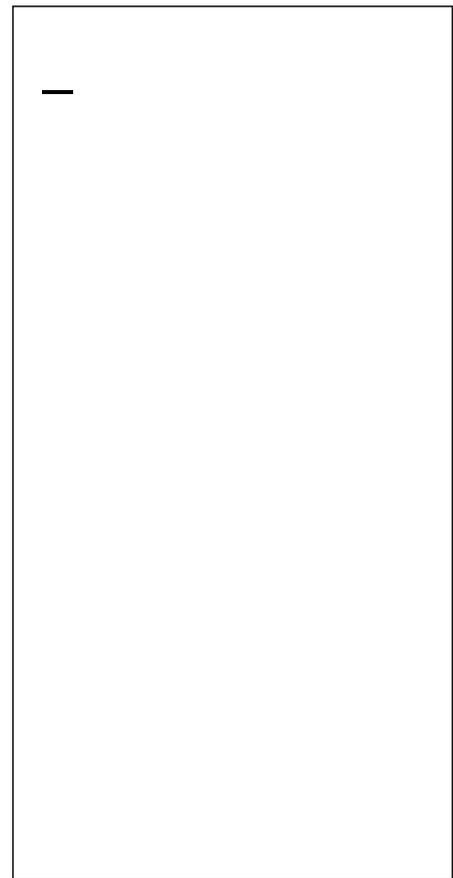
Melburnians face their first public transport strike since 1997 next Friday after a souring of relations between the Andrews Labor government and the public sector unions that worked to put it into power.

Train and tram travellers will have to find alternative transport from 10am to 2pm next Friday after Rail, Tram and Bus Union members voted to take strike action over stalled wage talks this week.

The spectre of transport gridlock in a city where public transport users now make 750,000 trips in and out of the central business district each day is a bittersweet irony for the former coalition government of Denis Napthine but also has uncomfortable historical echoes for Labor.

In the hot summer of January 1990 a blockade of the CBD by tram employees stripped the last threads of authority from the then Labor government of John Cain, whose administration had been wracked by financial scandal.

Cain later handed the Premiership to Joan Kirner, who led Labor to a stunning defeat at the hands of Jeff Kennett's Liberals in October 1992.



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Last year the one term Napthine Coalition government was hit by a campaign by public sector unions angered by stalled wage negotiations with paramedics. The campaign was led by tyro Trades Hall boss Luke Hilakari, who had been a staffer to Labor leader Daniel Andrews when he was a minister in the last Labor government, and unions claimed they were instrumental in tipping some marginal seats into Labor's column.

The United Firefighters Union - now fight the government to reinstate a member sacked for accessing pornography at work - deployed 700 members in 109 seats and claimed credit for swings of up to 4.5 per cent.

Robert Clark, shadow industrial relations minister and attorney-general in the former Napthine government, said the unions were now asking for their cut of the spoils and he suspected the operators - Yarra Trams and Metro Trains - "now feel they are at risk of being wedged".

"Clearly the unions expect they are going to get their cut out of the new government and it doesn't necessarily translate to fewer strikes, it can mean more because the unions just think they can crank up the pressure," Mr Clark said

The actions foreshadowed by the union include Friday's strike and two "free travel days" where union members do not enforce fare collection, and other work-to rule measures.

The strike threat prompted a rare rebuke for the union from Mr Andrews for the union and a plea for all parties to keep talking. "There is no need, absolutely no need for anybody to be taking industrial action, that ought to be the last resort, not the first resort," Mr Andrews said.

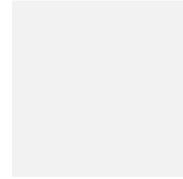
Committee for Melbourne head Kate Roffey said a simultaneous tram and train shutdown would be massively disruptive with a significant impact on the productivity of workers and firms.

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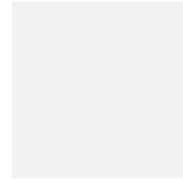
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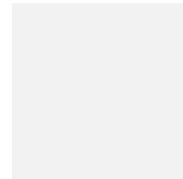
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