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Unions peeling cash out of Xmas

Paul Nicolaou



Rail unions are crushing Christmas just when small businesses should be having their best time of the year.

Instead of festive joy, Sydney is facing industrial turmoil. Even an eleventh-hour court order to cease industrial action could not stop recent service cuts on the rail system.

We really need new station announcements that properly represent this throwback rail dispute: "Now arriving on platform one is the 1970s Industrial Warfare Express. We apologise to Sydney for bringing back the bad old days. Please mind the gap."

In our hopefully more enlightened 2024, there must be a better way for industrial disputes to be resolved without making long-suffering commuters collateral damage.

It's emblematic of the debacle that inter-city services are among the hardest-hit just days after long-awaited new trains were finally cleared to carry passengers – one step forward and three steps back.

This dispute with all of its uncertainty and turmoil has hit harder than most. It has come just as the city was getting past the dark days of the pandemic.

Hopes of a bumper Christmas for the hospitality sector have been shot to pieces. This return to the industrial law of the jungle has left small to medium-size business owners dismayed.

Uncertainty is a killer. We saw its impact just a couple of weeks ago when a two-day shutdown was narrowly averted.

People had already factored in the threatened disruption and gave the CBD a miss.

Paul Brasch, general manager of the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel, summed up the impact. "It's dead," he said of the CBD.

I spoke to many business operators, who said activity was down 20 to 50 per cent.

Restaurants, cafes and corporate caterers were flooded with cancellations – a terrible outcome when the city should have been humming for the Black Friday sales and the lead-up to Christmas.

The NSW government and the rail unions need to understand there is no appetite for the return of brutal industrial behaviour that takes no prisoners.

There needs to be a greater degree of maturity and sophistication to reach an outcome that doesn't involve bludgeoning the community.

Paul Nicolaou is executive director of Business Sydney