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Sydney Morning Herald (Australia)

May 28, 1991 Tuesday
Late Edition

24-HOUR TRAIN STRIKE CALLED OFF

BYLINE: KARIN BISHOP

SECTION: NEWS AND FEATURES; Pg. 4

LENGTH: 424 words

A threatened 24-hour train strike in NSW was averted at the last minute last night after talks between officials from the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemen (AFULE) and State Rail Authority executives.

The decision to call off the strike came shortly before 10pm and followed two hours of discussions after the Australian Industrial Relations Commission's Justice Peterson deferred any recommendations pending the outcome of the talks.

The chief executive of the State Rail Authority, Mr Ross Sayers, said all CityRail commuter services would be running as usual this morning.

"A few interstate services have been affected but all peak-hour services will be secure at least until Friday, when we report back to the commission,"he said.

About 3,000 NSW freight, country and city train drivers had been expected to walk off the job at midnight for a 24-hour stopwork to attend meetings to discuss the proposed introduction of driver-only trains and the implementation of the Accord Mark

VI wages package.

It would have been Sydney's first rail strike since November 1988.

The strike will go ahead for 48 hours in South Australia, Victoria and Queensland, which will mean interstate trains from NSW will be cancelled.

The NSW secretary of the AFULE, Mr Bernie **Willingale**, said the State branch had been compelled to pull out of strike action at the last minute because of a unique agreement between the NSW Labor Council and railway unions on dispute settling procedures.

Under the procedures - agreed to in 1981 as part of a series of concessions for the 38-hour working week - all railway unions in NSW are compelled to give the council at least 72 hours' notice before taking strike action.

Mr Sayers said that if the AFULE had gone ahead with the strike, the drivers stood to lose additional payments, for up to three months, of \$30 a week which are paid as part of the strike notice agreement.

Justice Peterson noted that the proposed introduction of driver-only trains in NSW was still three months away from being tested and if successful, would not be fully implemented for at least 12 months.

Justice Peterson said that because of the extremely short notice of the commission hearing, he was not able to recommend that the strike in other States be called off.

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Discussions between the SRA and the AFULE on the implementation of the Wages Accord VI have already begun, but so far the SRA has not produced any formal proposal.

The SRA and AFULE will continue discussions this week and report back the Industrial Relations Commission on Friday.

LOAD-DATE: July 21, 2007

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper

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