

The Highball

Official Publication of
Railroad Workers United

Campaign for Coordinated Bargaining "One Big Labor Coalition"

For nearly 150 years rail labor has been divided into a myriad of craft unions. At one time, 26 different unions represented workers on the railroads of the U.S. alone! Through mergers and craft obsolescence, this number has been now reduced to the current 13 or so. The history of this cumbersome, bureaucratic and divisive quagmire of rail labor is one of ineffectual bargaining at best; and sellouts, back-stabbing, and outright union scabbing at worst. The failure of rail labor to stick together and to build a common strategy and a common platform has historically been one of the greatest impediments to railroad workers achieving their goals.

While most rank-and-filers and many union leaders agree that coordinated bargaining makes sense, there are many obstacles to achieving this worthy goal. Some of these include:

- Desire on the part of some union leaders to protect their own personal fiefdom.
- Lack of imagination and a belief that nothing new is possible.
- Long standing hostilities and distrust among some unions based upon past bargaining experiences.
- Some union leaders who feel the best way to bargain is to win favor with the carrier, be the first to settle, never risk a Presidential Emergency Board, offer the carrier a good deal, etc.

We need to overcome these obstacles and forge ahead, building a complete coalition of rail labor in this round of bargaining. To these ends, with this issue of The Highball, RWU officially launches our campaign coast-to-coast to push for coordinated bargaining. Below are some ways that you and your local union can get involved in the campaign.

✦ Make multiple copies of this special issue of The Highball and distribute them to your co-workers. RWU will reimburse you for the cost of up to 50 copies!

- ✦ Pass a resolution of support for coordinated bargaining at your local meeting
- ✦ Distribute literature, posters and other materials at work (all available on the RWU website).
- ✦ Talk to your co-workers about solidarity and the need to bargain as a group.
- ✦ Communicate with union brothers and sisters of other crafts, get to know one another and talk about the need to stick together throughout this coming round of bargaining.

Under the Railway Labor Act, the carriers and the unions exchange "Section 6 Notices" November 1st, and bargaining will commence shortly thereafter. The time to organize a coalition of rail labor is now!

Much of this issue of The Highball is dedicated to the question of coordinated bargaining, labor union coalitions, and joint action across crafts and unions. We hope you enjoy it. If it all makes sense to you, please get involved in the campaign and together, we can make it happen! Solidarity!



Time to Highball!

Railroad Retirement Reform Campaign Forges Ahead

Ron Friend, BMWED #1509, RWU Retirement Reform Committee Chair

Nine months and well over 6,000 signatures later we are progressing with our initiative to Change Railroad Retirement! To date we have received responses from just two railroad labor leaders. But the response from the rank & file of ALL rail labor organizations has been overwhelming. These proposed changes would not only help older railroaders and our families, but also younger, less senior railroad workers, generations of railroaders to come, our retired and disabled brothers and sisters, widows/widowers of deceased railroad workers, our furloughed brothers and sisters, and the unemployed. And the proposed changes would be paid for by railroaders, for railroaders!

But to move this initiative forward, we all have to move with a sense of urgency. Please share this initiative with everyone. Encourage them to read the proposed changes, sign the petitions, and send copies of the proposal to your labor leadership, asking that they print the proposed changes in your union journal and newsletter. Also, ask them to support the proposal. Also, If and when you receive a contract survey from your union asking what you want in bargaining, staple a copy of the proposed changes to it and send it back. They need to hear from you!

To make it easier for railroaders and spouses to sign the petition, it is now available on-line at railroadworkersunited.org. Click on "Sign the Reform Railroad Retirement Petition". And while you are at it,

please print out hard copies of the petition, the proposal, and the leaflet, distribute them to your co-workers, and collect their signatures too! It is my hope that we can have 10,000 signatures by the end of September. Then we start contacting our Senators, Congressmen, President Obama and VP Biden.

As to the cost of these proposed changes, I have sent a letter to the Labor Member of the Railroad Retirement Board requesting an actuarial financial feasibility study of the proposed changes. Based on a previous study commissioned in 1999, I strongly believe that those figures will prove that the proposed changes will not have a negative affect on our RR Retirement Fund. The 1999 figures show an additional \$347 million, per year, if we take the caps off of taxable earnings of railroad workers. That means that railroad Presidents, CEOs and anyone else that makes over the cap would pay into railroad retirement from January 1 through December 31. Everybody.

I have had some fellow railroaders ask where the money is coming from for this campaign to reform railroad retirement. Some of it is from personal donations, while most is from the \$50 dollars annual dues to Railroad Workers United. That's it. This is a grass-roots movement that draws its energy from the rank-and-file. To date, no international union or other organization (outside of RWU) has provided funding.

If you are not yet on the national email list, please email railroadron@hotmail.com. Include your craft in the subject line. We will keep you updated!

Railroad Workers United

Railroad Workers United was organized in April 2008 at a Founding Convention in Dearborn, MI. RWU grew out of decades of struggle within the craft unions for unity, solidarity, and democracy. We are carrying on a tradition of rank-and-file activity which dates back to the 1890s and the time of Eugene V. Debs.

RWU is a cross-craft inter-union caucus of rail labor activists across North America. All rail workers of all crafts from all carriers who support our Statement of Principles are welcome to join in our efforts. Please write, call or email the address below.

Statement of Principles

- *Unity of All Rail Crafts*
- *An End to Inter-Union Conflict*
- *Rank-and-File Democracy*
- *Membership Participation & Action*
- *Solidarity*
- *No to Concessionary Bargaining*

Railroad Workers United
P.O. Box 1053
Salem, IL. 62881

206-984-3051
info@railroadworkersunited.org
www.railroadworkersunited.org

International Steering Committee

Jon Barron	UTU #662	CSX	Richmond, VA
Ron Davison	UTU #194	CP	Elkhart, IN
Steve Desavouret	TCU #6608	CN	Chicago, IL.
Jim Eubanks	UTU #656 BLET #182	UP	Little Rock, AR
Jon Flanders	IAM #1145	CSX	Selkirk, NY
Ron Kaminkow	BLET #51	Amtrak	Reno, NV
Brian Lewis	UTU #239	UP	Oakland, CA
Ed Michael	BLET #724 UTU #979	UP	Salem, IL
Hugh Sawyer	BLET #316	NS	Atlanta, GA
Matt Weaver	BMWED #2624	CSX	Toledo, OH
Chet Whyers	UTU #979	UP	Salem, IL

A Brief History of Coordinated Bargaining & Action on the Rails

Ron Kaminkow, BLET #51, RWU Secretary

Despite the fact that railroaders in the U.S. have been hamstrung by a myriad of craft unions, numerous efforts have been made over the years by railroaders and forward thinking union leaders to build rail labor coalitions. These efforts have never been easy and have been imperfect. Nevertheless, they are a vital part of the history of rail labor and offer us a lot to learn in our efforts to build a universal bargaining coalition of all rail labor.

The American Railway Union (ARU)

In 1893, a new rail union stormed onto the scene. The American Railway Union (ARU) was an effort to organize all rail workers into one "industrial" union, where all rail workers despite craft, skill or job classification would be eligible for membership. Many rail workers continued to pay dues and continue as members of their respective craft union, but also took out membership in this new "coalition" effort. The ARU was a response of union leaders and rank-and-filers whose experience with craft unions was disillusioning. Craft unions scabbed on each other, curried favor with the carriers at the expense of other crafts and other unions, and in the end, played into the carriers divide-and-conquer tactics, rendering the craft unions all but impotent. The ARU offered what appeared a common sense alternative to unite all railroaders into a powerful organization.



Eugene V. Debs, founder of the American Railway Union (ARU) and an early advocate of rail labor unity regardless of craft, department, or union.

Although the ARU experiment was short lived, the idea of universal solidarity among rail workers proved immensely popular with the rank-and-file. The constant undermining of solidarity by the craft union structure would haunt rail workers to the current day, resulting in numerous efforts over the intervening years to build solidarity across craft and union lines.

The Railway Employees' Department (RED)

In the early 20th century, the shop crafts came to

realized that their best chances for success, fractured as they were, and less powerful than the operating crafts, lay in building federations of crafts on individual railroads, then link these together into a national organization. One of the first of these system federations was formed on the Southern Railway in 1908. The following year, the American Federation of Labor, in response to the appeal from the Machinists, Boilermakers and Blacksmiths unions, chartered the Railway Employees' Department (RED). The new federation was vehemently opposed by the carriers. According to Illinois Central president Charles Markham, he was "afraid of ... the unwise exercise of power that it would give to such an organization."

RED organizers sought uniform agreements between all the shop crafts and specific carriers of union rules, pay raises, hours of work and overtime payments. While the organization won major victories throughout the teens, the coalition was dealt a setback in the 1922 National Shopmen's Strike. Ultimately, the RED's lack of a universal coalition of all rail labor led to this defeat, as the operating crafts, after briefly joining the strike, returned to work, weakening the RED's efforts. The RED survived the 1922 strike and continued to provide an umbrella under which the railway shop crafts would bargain. In 1973, the coalition began to split apart and by the end of the decade was defunct.

Rail Labor Bargaining Coalition (RLBC)

The most recent effort to build a rail labor coalition was the loose coalition of seven unions in the last round of national handling, formed in 2005. For the first time in two decades, seven major railroad unions joined together in the creation of the "Rail Labor Bargaining Coalition" to coordinate contract negotiations with the rail carriers. According to the BLET, "The Coalition ... developed a coordinated contract negotiating strategy and each individual union will not sign off on any tentative agreements with the rail carriers until all the coalition members concur ... By presenting a unified front at the bargaining table, members of the Rail Coalition have taken an important step in combating rail management's divide and conquer bargaining strategy." The coalition was instigated by the Teamsters union and included the IBT affiliates - Brotherhood of Maintenance-of-Way Employees Division (BMWED) and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen (BLET). The three smaller shop craft unions -- National Conference of Firemen and Oilers (NCFO), the Sheet Metal Workers International Association (SMWIA) and the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers (IBB) together with the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS) and the American Train

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Safety Workshop a Hit at UTU Regional Meeting

Ed Michael, BLET #724 UTU #979, RWU Co-Chair

This year the UTU, in a progressive move, expanded the educational opportunities for officers and members who attended regional meetings. Adding to the usual training workshops for local and general committee officers, the UTU International offered informative workshops on the Railway Safety Act, rail security, diversity and the UTU iLINK system.

One workshop at the New Orleans regional that was very well attended and enthusiastically received was the "Blame the Worker" presentation by Nancy Lessin from the United Steelworkers' Tony Mazzocchi Center for Safety, Health & Environmental Education. Ms. Lessin served as the Health & Safety Coordinator for the Massachusetts AFL-CIO. She worked for the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health where she designed and presented occupational safety and health training programs for workers and unions in Massachusetts.

Those of us in the rail industry have had little experience with the behavior modification "safety" programs that some carriers are currently trying to dump on us. The Union Pacific has made a large investment in their "Total Safety Culture" (TSC) program as has the BNSF in their "Work Practices Observation" (WPO) program.

On the other hand, industrial unions have faced the problems with these programs for many years. Ms Lessin explained these are programs that are implemented by management with the intent to decrease the number of reported injuries and shift responsibility for maintaining a safe workplace from management to workers. "Blame the worker" programs include behavior-based safety, safety incentives and injury discipline policies. The theory behind these programs is that almost all injuries are caused by worker unsafe acts. And these programs ignore the underlying causes of accidents, do not address the very real hazards we all face each day on the job and lead to underreporting of workplace accidents and injuries.

Ms Lessin's presentation and the lively discussion and audience participation was a real eye-opening experience for everyone. We all learned just how damaging these programs can be to union solidarity and how we can fight behavior based safety and instead replace it with a true, union-based, safety program which can build and strengthen our union.

We applaud the UTU International for their leadership in presenting Ms. Lessin's program at the New Orleans regional meeting. Many of the local officers who were there said that they hoped many more members would get the opportunity to participate in the workshop and that the UTU would invite Ms. Lessin to next year's regional meetings.

Rail Labor History

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Dispatchers Association (ATDA) rounded out the coalition. While it can be argued that the RLBC met with limited success, one can only speculate what kind of national contracts we might have ended up with had it not been for this effort.

Because the coalition was imperfect and did not include, among others, the largest rail union - the United Transportation Union (UTU), the RLBC was limited in what it was able to accomplish. The Transportation Communication Union (TCU), and the larger shop crafts - Machinists (IAM) and the Electricians (IBEW) also failed to join the group.

Prospects for Future Rail Labor Unity

Given the state of the economy and the decline in freight traffic, we can expect the carriers to go on the offensive this round of bargaining. There are 15,000 less rail jobs currently than there were this time last year. The numbers put enormous pressure upon our unions in bargaining. The idea of the RLBC - and the RED and the ARU before it - needs to be expanded and perfected. For nearly 120 years now, rail workers have attempted to build viable and powerful coalitions.

Recent joint statements from the UTU and BLET on safety and the new hours-of-service law are encouraging signs. If the UTU and BLET can agree on the terms of a grand coalition, then we stand a chance that all rail unions may fall into line. Anything short of an all out universal bargaining coalition is unacceptable. It's time for "One Big Coalition" of all rail labor to stand tall and in solidarity with one another this round. We can do it!



Pullman Strike Mural: The Pullman Strike, waged by the ARU in 1894, was an effort in mass solidarity by tens of thousands of railroaders from all crafts.

Success Story: Coordinated Bargaining at GE

After years of competition, disunity and infighting, workers at GE formed the Coordinated Bargaining Coalition (CBC) in 1966. The big breakthrough came with the 1969 national strike when all unions stuck together and emerged from the strike in coalition, one that has lasted from then until the present, having bargained as a group through numerous contracts in the last forty years or so.

History

But it was not always this way at GE. Throughout the 1950s and into the 60s the unions at GE were badly divided. GE had a field day, instituted "take-it-or-leave-it" bargaining, and essentially dictated the terms of six consecutive national agreements. The wages and benefits of GE workers fell well behind the workers in other major industries where the workers had stayed united in one union. By the late 1960's the situation for GE workers was desperate while the Company was profiting handsomely from the disunity they helped to create.



The unions at GE put an end to this sad state of affairs in 1969 with the 102-day national strike, when virtually every unionized GE plant was shut down. The negotiations, strike, and eventual settlement were coordinated informally between the various unions. It was the first time since 1946 that GE had faced a strike by all of its unions, and the result was a tremendous breakthrough for GE workers. All negotiations since the 1969 strike have achieved progress for GE workers and demonstrated the value of the CBC, a vast improvement from the days when different unions were each trying to tackle a huge corporation like GE on their own.

The GE Coordinated Bargaining Committee (CBC) is comprised of 13 unions which represent GE workers. These are the UE, IUE-CWA, IBEW, UAW, IAM, USWA, SMW, IBT, UA, NABET, IFPTE, IBFO and AFTRA. The CBC is a way for the unions that repre-

sent GE workers to coordinate their work on behalf of their members. It allows the different unions to exchange information systematically, to coordinate their bargaining proposals, and to work together to win the best possible contract settlements from GE. The CBC does not negotiate with GE per se and does not have a union contract with GE. Each union negotiates its own contract. The CBC operates by consensus among the various unions, and does not make any decisions that are binding on the unions involved. Each union maintains its independence and its right, if it chooses, to do something different from what the other unions in the coalition decide to do. However, the CBC assures that all unions at least know what the others are doing with regard to the negotiations.

How The CBC Works

The Steering Committee: Composed of one representative from each Union in the CBC. The CBC Steering Committee is the body with primary responsibility for coordinating the work of the CBC and the member unions.

Contract Proposals: Prior to the start of negotiations, each CBC union has the opportunity to discuss contract proposals. Each union, in their separate negotiations with GE, is free to submit whatever proposals their members want, but through the CBC they try to achieve unity on the key bargaining issues. A union that feels strongly about a particular bargaining goal will try to convince the other unions to adopt it as a proposal so that the union will face GE as a united front on the issue.

Negotiations: During the national negotiations, only the UE and IUE-CWA National Agreements are actually being formally negotiated. However, the other unions send representatives as a sign of unity, and they are given input into the discussions because the UE and IUE-CWA national settlements set the pattern for what the other unions will receive in their local negotiations. For several years, all CBC unions have insisted, and GE has agreed, that the basic settlement with the UE and IUE-CWA be extended to all other CBC unions whose contracts expire at or near the same time as the two national contracts.

When a conclusion is reached at the bargaining table and a tentative agreement is at hand, each union reports on the details of any company offer to the CBC Steering Committee for discussion. Thereafter, each union follows its own procedure for voting on a contract settlement.

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Coordinated Bargaining Efforts in Other Industries

In addition to the long history of attempts at coalition building on the railroad (see article, Page 3), a number of coordinated bargaining efforts have taken place in recent years in other industries. Some of them have met with a degree of success and deserve our attention. We have a lot to learn from their struggles.

At General Electric, the Coordinated Bargaining Coalition consists of 13 unions and has existed for 40 years. Different unions dominate at the various GE plants around the country, but all are in the coalition. The United Electrical (UE) and the International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE) are the largest unions, and are joined in the effort by eleven others (see article Page 5). The locals meet together to prepare a common strategy, then send representatives to each others' bargaining sessions with the company. Each union maintains its own autonomy but agrees to cooperation. No union settles until all settle, and each union agrees to stick up for a common set of demands.

At Kennecott Copper, the Kennecott Coordinated Bargaining Committee consists of five union locals from a number of different internationals - Steelworkers (USWA), Machinists (IAM), Operating Engineers (OPEIU), Electricians (IBEW) and Office Professionals (OPEIU) -- which cooperate as an effective bargaining coalition to represent the entire workforce at the largest open pit mine in the world.

At Armstrong World Industries, Inc., The Steelworkers (USWA) and the Machinists (IAM) began joint bargaining in 2002 for contracts at all locations. Other Unions involved are UNITE HERE (The merged Textile Employees and Restaurant Employees Union) and the Teamsters (IBT). Steelworkers are also working together with the Autoworkers Union (UAW) at Gerdau Ameristeel Steel to improve conditions in the mills. In addition, the USWA coordinates bargaining with the UAW in the automotive parts industry.

At NYNEX telephone, a coalition of Electrical Workers (IBEW) and Communications Workers (CWA) fought back an aggressive company and staved off concessionary demands of the employer by forming an alliance in contract negotiations and the big strike in 1989. While unions were taking a beating all through

the 1980s, this historic alliance and fight back proved the exception. The key to victory was the sticking together of the two unions concerned. Through shared information, joint mobilization publications, cooperation in joint committees, coordination of contract enforcement, and work together on legislative and regulatory initiatives involving NYNEX, the unions maintained their coalition.

These are just a few examples of coordinated bargaining in industries outside of rail. And while the specifics of each industry and each struggle are unique, the basic truth remains the same - unions are more powerful when they act in concert with each other, when they engage in coordinated bargaining with the employer, and when they stand firmly in solidarity with one another.



Coordination at GE

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Conclusion

The union bargaining experience at GE is a valuable one for workers in other industries such as rail, where the workforce is fractured into numerous different - and sometimes competing and hostile - labor organizations. A culture of solidarity has been built up where workers understand the need for solidarity and a united front in the face of huge corporate power in contract negotiations. While we in the rail industry would necessarily tailor our own "coordinated bargaining coalition" to suit the specific laws, condition and nature that govern rail labor negotiations, the CBC at GE certainly serves as a successful model which we can learn from.



Democracy: Membership Mobilization is Key to Victory

While construction of a national grand bargaining coalition of all rail labor is vital if we are to build a future for rail labor based upon resisting concessions and winning good contracts, in and of itself it is not enough. In addition, we need the active participation of the rank-and-file in the whole process, beginning to end. Railroad Workers United has a slogan: "unity, solidarity, democracy". The concepts all work as one. Much of this newsletter has talked about the former, unity and solidarity. This commentary will address the third concept - democracy.

COMMENTARY

A union bargaining committee and union officials have only so much power at the table if they lack an informed and motivated membership to back up the leadership. This is true whether the bargaining team is bargaining a local agreement, a master contract, or in this case, a cross craft agreement negotiated by a coordinated bargaining coalition.

Long before the exchange of section 6 notices and the commencement of contract negotiations, all rail unions should be informing their membership that the process is on the horizon. Members need to be informed of how bargaining works under the Railway Labor Act, how the process will proceed, and a timeline of activity. Importantly, all members should be polled for their opinion as to what is important in bargaining. The membership should be the ones to determine, democratically through various surveys, what are the key issues in bargaining. They should be the ones to outline priorities that the union should strive for. They should be the ones to identify what concessions may be acceptable and which ones are downright intolerable.

Local unions should advertise local meetings in such a fashion to gain the greatest possible attendance. Local unions in large rail centers like Chicago and St. Louis might want to consider this an opportunity to conduct special joint region wide meetings to consider this vital matter. We want to get our members talking, get them fired up about the union and the negotiations process. Announce the upcoming contract talks on the union bulletin board and in the pages of the local union newsletter and on the website. Internationals should mail out survey forms or "bargaining demand forms" to all members soliciting their written input into the process. Information explaining ways in which the membership can participate can be included.

Once the Section 6 notices have been exchanged on November 1, the unions need to communicate to their members the exact content of both the union's and the carriers' exchange. This is vital so that the members are aware of what their union's position is and what the company's position is. In many cases, knowing this information will fire members up to win their collectively expressed demands, and/or to defeat the company's demand for concessions. Also at this time, the unions may want to take steps to mobilize their membership.

January 1, 2010 is the official end of our current national agreements with the National Carriers Conference Committee (NCCC), the umbrella group for most of the major U.S. based carriers. However, under the terms of the RLA, the contract terms continue until resolution in one form or another has been reached. Unions should communicate on a regular basis with their membership as to the state and progress (or lack thereof) in bargaining. Special "Bargaining Updates" can be issued, not just to keep the members informed, but to involve them in the whole process. If the carriers are being intransigent and want to play hardball with us, the rank-and-file can be called upon to fight back. Rallies, pickets, demonstrations, parades, the use of buttons, T-shirts, armbands all have the effect of building solidarity and show the company that the union bargaining team has the support of the rank-and-file. We need to get our families and communities involved. Our unions can take this opportunity to reach out to other unions, central labor bodies, and citizens' groups. We need to impress the carriers that we mean business. Who knows just what this informed and mobilized membership may do next? This is the workplace mood that we need to create to back up our bargaining team.

Unfortunately our union officials are not always supportive of this kind of union activism. Years of cautious conservatism has infected their brains. It is up to all of us rank-and-file members to demand they respond to us. Demand special meetings to discuss contract negotiations. Demand regular bargaining updates. Demand to be kept informed and demand to be brought into the process. We have a couple hundred thousand railroaders in the U.S. today. Let's demand that we all be informed and involved. And this time around let's win!





Railroad Workers United

Membership Application

Railroad Workers United needs you! If you believe that our unions should fight the carriers and not each other, then RWU is for you. If you believe that the carriers' "Behavior Based Safety" Programs do more harm to us than good, and If you want real union-based safety committees built upon cross-craft solidarity and rank-and-file control, then RWU is for you. If you want to help reform Railroad Retirement; if you wish to see an active, informed and mobilized union membership -- of all rail labor -- then RWU is for you. Please fill out this Membership Application form and mail it in today!

Sign Me Up!! *I want to join and help RWU build labor unity, democracy & solidarity!*

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Cell Phone _____

Email Address _____

Union _____ Local # _____ Employer _____

Terminal _____ Craft _____ Years of Service _____

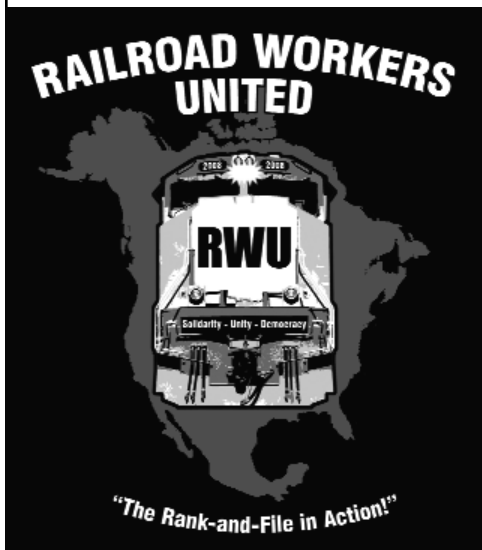
Union Position (if any) _____

I'd like to join for (check one):

1 year \$50.00 2 Years \$90.00 3 Years \$120.00

Clip and mail together with your dues to:
RWU P.O. Box 1053 Salem, IL 62881
 OR join on-line at www.railroadworkersunited.org

Get Your RWU Union-Made-in-the-USA T-shirts and Hats



T-shirts now available in Black or Gray in S, M, L, XL, 2XL, 3XL, or 4XL. RWU logo at left is on the front of the shirt.

Hats are available in Black, Gray or Red, one-size fits all. RWU Logo on the front is stitched embroidery.

Both T-shirts and hats are union made in the USA, 100% cotton and include the RWU 4-color logo.

T-shirts and hats cost \$20.00 each (\$15.00 for RWU members).
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