



The Highball

Official Publication of
Railroad Workers United

Proposed National "Right-to-Work" Legislation Threatens Rails Too

On February 1st, Republican lawmakers introduced HR #785, the National Right-to-Work Act. If adopted and signed into law by the President, it would outlaw the union and agency shop nationwide. Workers - including railroad workers - would then no longer be required to join a union or pay dues or "agency" fees, potentially decimating the ranks of what is left of organized labor in the private sector and basic industry.

Advocates of the bill state that no one should be coerced to join a labor organization. Yet right-to-work legislation since 1947 has always demanded that the union represent *all* workers in the "bargaining unit" whether they be union members or not. In addition, *all* workers are required to receive the same wages, benefits and conditions of employment that the union wins for its members. "Right-to-work" creates a situation where it is tough for unions to thrive, since the material incentive for a worker to join the union is taken away. A classic "free rider" problem results, as workers are lured into quitting the organization while letting others pay for the benefits that they know they will receive regardless.

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Workers rally against so called "right-to-work." If proposed legislation is adopted, unions - along with workplace conditions - could deteriorate across the country. Railroad workers are encouraged to "Take the Pledge" to remain in the union regardless.

Blueprint Budget Would Decimate Amtrak and Transit Nationwide

In March, President Trump released his 2018 budget proposal, which includes severe funding cuts to Amtrak along with the elimination of federal support for Amtrak's long distance train services. Amtrak served approximately 31.3 million customers last year with many of its trains turning in record performances



Most Amtrak trains and routes - like the "California Zephyr" pictured here - stand to be discontinued under Trump's blueprint budget. For why it's so important to save Amtrak, see Page 7.

in ridership and revenues. The elimination of long distance Amtrak routes would terminate passenger service in 23 states and mean the loss of thousands of railroad jobs, translating into substantially less revenue for Railroad Retirement that all railroaders - freight as well as passenger - depend on.

All railroad workers are urged to take a few minutes and contact your elected representatives in Congress. Please tell them you oppose *any and all* federal budget cuts to Amtrak. Ironically, the regions of the country that stand to lose passenger train services are the same locales that were supportive of Trump's bid for the Presidency (see map on Page 7). Some 35 Republican law makers from such areas - often rural in nature - have been targeted by passenger rail advocacy groups like the National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) for an all-out lobbying effort. Representatives from such districts - while often ideologically opposed to government run and/or provided services - have been known to be outspoken supporters of "their" train and vote funding for Amtrak. Check the NARP website at: www.narprail.org.

Read the full commentary: "Railroad Workers and Our Allies Must Unite in Support of Amtrak" by RWU General Secretary Ron Kaminkow on Page 7.



RWU Information

RWU 2016 Annual Report Available

The RWU Annual Report is now available to all members and the general public. Members who receive *The Highball* by mail may have already noticed your personal copy of the Report inside your copy of this newsletter which you should have received in the mail. All new members who join throughout the course of 2016 will have the Report mailed to them as well. And everyone can access the Report on the RWU website.

The RWU Annual Report began five years ago. It is a summary of what the organization has achieved and accomplished over the course of the preceding year, what campaigns and events it has engaged in, resolutions adopted, along with the general state of the organization. Please take the time to look it over.

Railroad Workers Memorial Day

Railroad Workers Memorial Day "Weed Short Trains"

Annual Report Available

RWU Steering Committee

RWU International Steering Committee

RWU Steering Committee

Official Website

RWU Facebook Page

Annual Report of Railroad Workers United 2016

RWU Steps Up Defense of Scapegoated Canadian Railroad Workers

RWU Organizes in Defense of Railroad Worker Whistleblowers

Annual Report

of Railroad Workers United 2016

RWU Continues to Lead the Fight Against Single Employee Crews

RWU Steps Up Defense of Scapegoated Canadian Railroad Workers

RWU Organizes in Defense of Railroad Worker Whistleblowers

RWU Launches First Ever Fund Appeal Drive this Spring

Railroad Workers United (RWU) is a membership based organization, and as such, the vast majority of our funding comes from our members through their annual dues. We have kept the dues at \$50 a year (that's just \$4.16 a month!) since we were founded nearly 10 years ago. And we hope to keep them that way to ensure maximum membership and participation in the organization. That said, we are living in extraordinary times which call for extraordinary action. And that takes money.

Therefore, RWU will engage in our first ever fundraising drive this spring. We encourage all members and supporters to contribute what they can, either as a one-time or a recurring donation. More details are available on the website.

Things that we have taken for granted for so long - Railroad Retirement (1935); The Federal Employers' Liability Act

(1908); the union shop provision of the RLA (1951); Amtrak (1971); good wages, benefits and working conditions and a minimum of two in the cab (1830), are all under attack by rail CEO's, boards of directors, and politicians alike. We as railroad workers have our work cut out for us. To win the battles that loom on the horizon, we need to educate, organize, and motivate ... and raise some necessary funds to assist us in this effort. Let's face it, \$4 a month from a small group of committed rail workers - no matter how committed - is not a lot of money to run a national organization with.

Throughout the spring, we will be posting notices on the RWU website and Facebook Page, and sending out email appeals to donate. Those of you who get this newsletter in the mail got a hard copy fundraising letter along with it. Please, donate what you can and help build Railroad Workers United!

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 & 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. See the contact information below.

Statement of Principles

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

International Steering Committee

- Ross Grooters, BLET #778, UP, Des Moines, IA
- Ron Kaminkow, BLET #51, Amtrak, Reno, NV
- Paul Matchett, WSOR, Janesville, WI
- Hugh Sawyer, BLET #316, NS, Atlanta, GA
- Cameron Slick, UTU #911, CP, St Paul, MN
- Jim Thomason, UTU #1292, CN, Two Harbors, MN
- John Vitaska, NCF0 #395, CP, Chicago, IL
- James Wallace, UTU #305, BNSF, Lincoln, NE
- Jen Wallis, BLET #238, BNSF, Seattle, WA
- Andrew Weir, TCRC-CY #240, CN, Sarnia, ON
- John Wright, BLET #78, CSX, Louisville, KY

Alternates

- Brian Clark, TCU #3060, CN, Champaign, IL
- Robert Hill, UTU #556, BNSF, Tacoma, WA
- Alan Thompson, UTU #316, UP, Clinton, IA

www.railroadworkersunited.org ● info@railroadworkersunited.org ● 202-798-3327 or 202-RWU-DEBS
RWU P.O. Box 2131 Reno, NV 89505



Upcoming Actions

Railroad Workers Memorial Day Joins National Day of Action – April 28th

In spring of 2009, Railroad Workers United announced the first “Railroad Workers Memorial Day” (RWMD), and have observed the event each year since then on Father’s Day Friday. It is - as announced on the posters and flyers (at right) - “A time for all railroad workers to mourn for the dead and fight like hell for the living.” Each year we have traditionally focused on a particular safety issue, rail carrier, and/or series of events that has been particularly harmful and egregious to railroad workers, resulting in death. All Railroad Workers Memorial Day activities are archived on the RWU website.

This spring, the RWU Steering Committee opted to combine RWMD with the national Workers’ Memorial Day, held every year on April 28th, sponsored by the AFL-CIO and its affiliates. Workers’ Memorial Day - similar to RWMD - is a day to honor those workers who have died on the job, to acknowledge the grievous suffering experienced by families and communities, and to recommit ourselves to the fight for safe and healthful workplaces for all workers. It is also the day OSHA was established in 1971. Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, employers are responsible for providing safe and healthful workplaces for their employees.

Events are scheduled in locations across the country. Check the web for an event near you. And they are not just in big cities. An example of a Workers’ Memorial Day event is a dinner sponsored by the Lee County Labor Chapter in Keokuk, IA. Although local elected officials will be in attendance, the focus of the evening will be on workers who have been injured or lost their lives at their jobs while trying to earn a living to support themselves and their families. Union members and officers from around the region will attend, along with like minded groups wishing to work in solidarity on safety in the workplace and other issues with the labor movement. The event will be held on April 29th starting at 5:30 PM at the Keokuk, IA Labor Temple. If you would want to send a message of solidarity, you can send it to the Keokuk Labor Temple, 301 Blondeau Street, Keokuk, IA 52632.

RAILROAD WORKERS MEMORIAL DAY



Friday, April 28th, 2017

**A time for all railroad workers
to mourn for the dead
and fight like hell for the living.**

For more information, call 206-984-3051; see the website: www.railroadworkersunited.org

Railroad Labor Negotiations “Day of Action” Planned

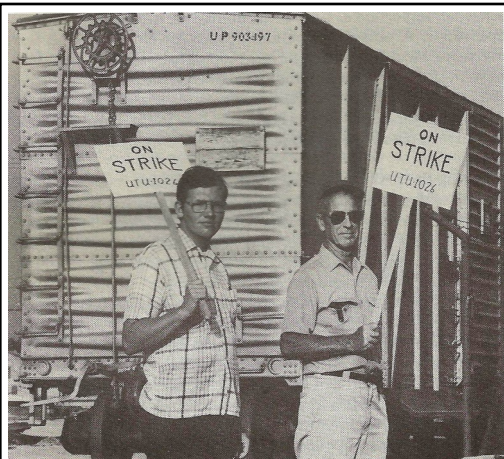
With the rail unions and the rail carriers unable to reach agreement in this round of “national handling”, and the carriers digging in their heels in the face of the most modest of union contract demands, there is movement afoot for some type of “national day of action” for railroad workers and their allies

to vent their anger and frustration. We need to let the carriers know that the rank & file is supportive of their bargaining teams’ efforts to win a decent contract, and that our patience is not endless.

This winter - after two fruitless years at the bargaining table - contract negotiations were broken off between all three union bargaining coalitions (including their component 13 different labor organizations) and the rail carriers (including a total of 32 in all). Because these carriers - represented by the National Carriers Conference Committee (NCCC) - have not presented a reasonable offer that is suitable to any of the three labor coalitions, the situation is at a stalemate. So here we are again, unable to reach agreement with our employers on basic questions of wages, benefits and work rules.

The fact that rail labor is divided into thirteen different unions and three separate bargaining coalitions does not make it easy to organize an action such as this, let alone successfully bargain good contracts. But for the time being at least, we have no alternative. Each and every railroad worker in the U.S. who wants to win a decent contract must get involved in the process. Keep abreast of what your union is doing. Reach out and build bridges with co-workers from other crafts and other unions. Demand to be informed, demand to play a role in the outcome. Be ready, willing and able to take action where you live and work.

For more information and/or to assist in organizing for the day of action, email info@railroadworkersunited.org or call 202-798-3327. Leave your name, phone, email, union and terminal location. While details have not been set as we go to press in April, we expect something more concrete in the coming weeks and months. Stay tuned!



Striking UTU trainmen picket in the 1970s.



International Labor News

Korean Workers Lead the Way - Depose the Nation's President

South Korean President Park Geun-hye was impeached last December and officially removed from office March 17th because of serious abuses of power, influence peddling, and allowing friends who were not elected to use her position to increase their personal wealth. While the 13 charges brought against her will probably result in a lengthy prison sentence, it is important to note that before the corruption scandal broke last fall that her presidency was ineffective, divisive and authoritarian. Before becoming involved in extorting \$37 million from Samsung to organizations run by a personal friend, Park pursued an anti-labor agenda and pushed for national legislation that would eliminate seniority-based pay in favor of a performance-based pay system. She led the effort to dissolve and outlaw an opposition party, pursued aggressive foreign policy that has strained relations with neighboring countries and had union offices raided and union leaders imprisoned.

Unions have been a powerful advocate for democracy within South Korean society since the first democratic elections in 1987. Before the weekly candlelight protests in the fall of 2016 against Park, many - including rail workers - struck and protested against performance-based pay, the contracting out of work and the government's attacks on workers' rights. The protests started to grow once news broke of her corruption and friends' involvement in government affairs. Throughout the trial, impeachment and removal process, Park has maintained her innocence even though all other major players in the scandal are under arrest. It is a stark reminder that those in power will often refuse to listen to opposition until circumstances either force them to listen or concede wrongdoing. Similarly politicians, business owners, and managers have historically insisted that unions are detrimental to profits and inherently bad for our society. As such, they have justified the use of illegal and violent methods to fight unionization until the growth of the labor movement forced them to deal with unions' power in the workplace, on the picket line, at the bargaining table, and in the legislature.

Under the current administration in the U.S. we are facing another serious attack on the labor movement and our railroad jobs. While many railroaders believed Trump's campaign promises would be beneficial to working people (and especially to workers in the coal and oil industries), the breakdown in national bargaining shows that Trump is the president that the rail carriers wanted as well. The last 40 years has seen American workers' wages and spending-power drop while

Income for CEOs has sharply increased. Declining union membership, automation, offshoring, contracting-out, and deregulation have all played a part in this trend. Instead of picking one of these issues and claiming it as the sole cause, it is important to look at the war on workers that is behind all these factors. Our job in the labor movement has always been to fight for what we know to be true - that people will have a better quality of daily life if they collectively fight for better working conditions, hours, pay, scheduling, and safety. In the coming years, union members will have a hard fight against an administration and congress full of politicians who deny that unions should even have a right to exist. They will maintain this position unless we force them to deal with us.

Neither the Democrats nor the Republicans nor any other political parties are going to save us - the responsibility is on us as unionists to fight for our interests. The initial strikes and demonstrations led by union workers in South Korea grew into a huge movement that brought down a horribly corrupt, anti-labor president. This is an excellent illustration of how working people can exercise real political power in addition to voting, calling their congressional representatives, or donating to their union political action committee. We can defeat *right-to-work*, but only if we're willing to make the effort that was ultimately necessary to create our unions in the first place - organize, build solidarity, and fight for what we know is right.



In November 2016, workers rally against the President at an event sponsored by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions. Can their heroic political efforts be successfully emulated in North America?

Rails Must Organize Against "Right-to-Work" Legislation

Continued from Page 1

All union members are encouraged to contact their elected representatives and demand that they not support this anti-union, anti-worker legislation. RWU urges the rail unions and all unions to brace for the coming struggle, prepared to use the organized power of the rank & file to take industrial action in defense of our hard fought for rights. We urge all railroad workers and their locals, divisions and lodges to organize immediately to retain their respective membership in the event that such a law is passed by Congress and signed into law.

Railroad Workers United has adopted a resolution on the question at our April Steering Committee meeting. We are also circulating a "Pledge of Honor to be a Loyal Union Member" for rail locals around the country to make use as a template in an effort to organize the local's membership prior to any legislation being enacted. Should such a national bill become law, we want to be ready for it, and have all unions members committed to stick with the union and vow to have each others' backs. Both documents are available for download on our website at www.railroadworkersunited.org.



RWU Worker Defense Efforts

There's a Little Bit of Lac-Mégantic in Every Rail Incident Since 2013

Fritz Edler, RWU Member, BLET #482, Retired

Every week there's another derailment or runaway train somewhere on a North American railroad. So perhaps it's easy to understand it's hard to focus on a four-year old tragedy in a small town in Quebec, Canada ... Lac-Mégantic. But the fact is, the issues that have been raised in that tragedy remain unaddressed. In Canada, the number of reported runaway trains has increased every year since that fateful wreck. How can that be? Every railroader has a real stake in what is happening about the Lac-Mégantic case right now. Here's why.

First, a quick review of the facts. In 2013, a runaway oil train crashed and burned in Lac-Mégantic, killing 47 people. All evidence exposed now through both official investigations and reporting by journalists show that the wreck was caused by a long series of reckless safety practices, including the threat of discipline from Montreal, Maine & Atlantic (MM&A) management against engineers who made use of the (automatic) air brakes in the securement of their trains. The ever increasing length and weight, along with deferred maintenance of equipment and infrastructure, combined with single crew operation of the most dangerous types of cargoes all combined to virtually guarantee that this was not an "accident", but rather an inevitable catastrophe. July 6, 2013 was that day.

But rather than focusing on known unsafe corporate practices and policies and near non-existent government oversight, the Canadian and Quebec governments scapegoated two railroad workers, Tom Harding and Richard LaBrie. They are both charged with 47 counts of negligence resulting in death, and face penalties that could put them in prison for the rest of their lives. This is despite that fact that the policies and practices were beyond their control. The railroad executives who enforced those dangerous policies and the government regulators who condoned them are not facing even a single day in jail. In fact, the top MM&A managers are running other railroads in the US and around the world to this day!

Every rail incident in North America today has a little bit of Lac-Mégantic as its root cause. Some have a lot. Railroad management and the government want people to believe that Tom Harding and Richard LaBrie caused the Lac-Mégantic tragedy. But they have been off the railroad for nearly four years now, four years of additional runaway trains and derailments and crashes. They didn't cause any of these any more than they caused the wreck at Lac-Mégantic. The truth is every rail incident in North America, including Lac-Mégantic, started with unsafe conditions, policies, and procedures created by management, that put rail workers and communities at risk, all in the interest of private profit. Rather than fixing the hazards, they simply blame the victims - just like in the case outlined above - when something goes wrong.

In April, the Court in Quebec will be considering a key element of the case ... whether or not the Canadian Transportation Safety Board (TSB) Report on the wreck along with related documents can be submitted as evidence. The Defense team also wants to hear testimony from Board members. Without these key pieces of evidence it will be much harder for the railroad worker defendants to get a fair trial, or for the people of Lac-Mégantic to get justice.

We railroaders focus first on our brothers and sisters on the job. But we are not the only ones who suffer from unsafe conditions and policies. Even now, nearly four years since the train wreck, a literal hole remains unfilled in that town where 47 died immediately and lives continue to be broken in the aftermath. Two-thirds of the residents are considered to have post traumatic stress disorder and sadly, there have been several suicides. Their once pristine land and water will likely never fully recover from the toxic impact. Lac-Mégantic is still paying for corporate policies that put profits before safety while government regulators looked the other way.

The trial of course, can go one of two ways. Rail workers have real skin in this game. The trial *could* address the unsafe conditions and culture that MM&A management was able to get away with. Or it could simply focus on what two railroad workers did or didn't do that day. If management policies are put on trial, every job in the rail industry will be made a bit safer. But if the court is allowed to focus on and convict two rail workers, then we can expect all of our jobs to now be subject to the corporate push to cut corners. MM&A was pioneering unsafe practices that are still lauded by the mainstream rail industry, the same industry that is looking to the outcome of this trial to give it the green light to blame the ugly results of every risky policy decision on those who actually do the work.

So many issues that we face on the job - including fatigue, lack of safety culture and single crew operations - are posed in this one case. What can we do to assist? Two things come to mind: *resources and public support*. Harding and LaBrie must have the resources to mount the kind of defense in court that can turn back the scapegoating. Between now and the September trial, we must find ways to pass the hat. It's time to get serious about material solidarity. There is way too much at stake to leave the outcome up to the "justice" system on it's own.

Public support also matters. The Canadian government has to know that people are watching, and Harding and LaBrie need to know their fellow railroaders are standing with them. Now is the time for a round of solidarity messages to their union local with copies to the lawyers working on the defense:

USW 1976 / Section locale 1976, 2360 De LaSalle, Suite 202, Montreal, QC H1V 2L1. Email: info@1976usw.ca

Thomas Walsh, 165 Rue Wellington N. Suite310, Sherbrooke, QC Canada J1H 5B9. thomaspwalsh@hotmail.com





Opinion & Commentary

Railroad Workers Have the Moral and Ethical Right to Resist

At the end of my commentary in the Winter 2017 issue of *The Highball* ("Now that the 2016 Elections are Over, What is the Way Forward?"), I promised that, "This rant-and-rage stream of consciousness to be continued..." However, before I continue where I left off, I'd like to step back and frame this discussion in the context of how it fits into the essence of what RWU is about. The full length version of our Statement of Principles (SoP) can be found on our website: railroadworkersunited.org. The short version bullet points in the box at the bottom of Page 2 are: Unity of All Rail Crafts; An End to Inter-Union Conflict; Rank-and-File Democracy; Membership Participation and Action; Solidarity Among All Railroaders; No to Concessionary Bargaining. While the fact that this document holds up well after nine years is a credit to the ideals, vision and fighting spirit of RWU's founders, this fact doesn't bode well for the situation that rails find themselves in at present, much less for the foreseeable future. I've always summed up RWU's mission in my own words by posing the question: How can we make our unions' stronger, in order to more effectively fight for a safe work environment, as well as dignity on and off the job? Whether you're a long time member/supporter of RWU, or you're reading *The Highball* for the first time, I'm confident that most of us reading this not only agree with RWU's mission, but that we have our work cut out for us. In spite of that common ground amongst us, it's fair to say that there exists a broad range of diverse political opinions, analysis and conclusions that we're not going to resolve today or tomorrow.

In the Winter 2017 issue of this newsletter, the Commentary, "*Drastic Times Call for Labor to Once Again Take Industrial Action*", listed some of the most serious issues that railroad workers are concerned about, such as Bargaining, Single Employee Crews, Railroad Retirement, FELA, Amtrak, and the Union Shop (see lead article, Page 1), just to name a few. But these issues did not make their debut on the morning of January 20th with Trump's inauguration. RWU was founded in Spring of 2008. Obama took office in January 2009. According to the overwhelming majority of the AFL-CIO leadership, rail unions included, Obama was going to be some kind of savior for the working class, since we're apparently so helpless. During his administration's first two years, the Democrats controlled the House and Senate. According to the union leaders' comforting bedtime stories, "If we just get out the vote for our 'friends' of labor, they'll make everything all right for us." So how has all that worked out for us? Our website has all of the back issues of *The Highball*. Well, I went back and checked them out the back issues from those years, 2009 - 2010, and I just couldn't find any articles heralding a new age of workers' paradise in the rail industry. What I did find were plenty of articles that warned of the imminent attacks that we are facing today, and advocated for organizing resistance.


On a day to day basis, at the surface level, it may seem that the enemy is some power-tripping trainmaster or some evil superintendent. But if we dig below that surface, we will find that it is economics and politics that drive their attacks on us. The CEO's, board of directors and other shadow investors demand a higher rate of profit. The field supervisors are simply their servile lackeys and enforcers, mandated to extract as

much production out of us as humanly possible. When we won't voluntarily submit to management's whims at the bargaining table, they have an arsenal of "weapons" to threaten us with, such as arbitration and/or a Presidential Emergency Board (PEB), compliments of the Railway Labor Act (RLA). When a tentative agreement is reached, the union leaders squawk like a parrot tortured by a broken record: "Well it's not as good as we would've liked, but we urge you to ratify it, because if it goes to a third party (i.e., "neutral" arbitrators and/or the government), it could be worse." Many of the politicians they don't want voting on our contracts - and rightfully so - are the exact same ones - the "friends of labor" - whose campaigns they had just recently funded with a portion of our union dues.

Getting back to the essence of RWU's SoP and mission, another way to summarize it is that we simply want strong unions that can defend us and fight for our interests. What is labor's ultimate, last-line-of-defense "weapon" that we have, when all else fails? I call it our moral and ethical right to collectively withhold our labor from a tyrannical employer, aka, a "strike". That all sounds good, but per the RLA, the President can order us back to work, a PEB can draft a contract, and Congress can ratify it, end of discussion. Or is it? The carriers and the government will have the final say *only* if we accept and allow that. Throughout history, when movements for social justice have made progress, collectively voting with one's feet to assert their moral and ethical rights over what they considered to be unjust, laws, injunctions and/or restraining orders has been decisive at critical junctures (for example, see article on Page 4). I need to be clear that I am not publicly advocating that railroad workers defy a Presidential back-to-work order the next time that's posed. If I did that, quite possibly I'd get hauled off to Guantanamo, leaving some of you to wonder, "Whatever happened to that character who wrote those scathing commentaries, seething with righteous indignation?"

What I am suggesting is that this question be on the agenda for personal contemplation and collective discussion. How can we plead our case to the public, in order to build the necessary alliances we need? What kind of political tactics and strategies do we need to effectively fight for our interests? Today's reality is that the corporations and the government freely exercise their legal right to impose unsafe working conditions, poison, maim and kill us, destroy the environment, terrorize indigenous communities, immigrants and minorities, obliterate anyone who has the misfortune to be caught in the crossfire of the international turf war over energy resources etc. But do they have the moral and ethical right to do so? Imagine the possibilities if the vast majority of society decided NO and proceeded to vote with their feet.

Mark Burrows has served as Organizer and Co-Chair for Railroad Workers United. He retired last winter after hiring out in 1974, working as an engineer for a combined total of 37 years for the Chicago North Western and the Soo Line/Canadian Pacific in Chicago, Illinois. He continues to be an active member of RWU and a contributing writer to this newsletter.





Opinion & Commentary

Railroad Workers and Our Allies Must Unite in Support of Amtrak

On March 16th, President Trump released a blueprint budget that proposes to slash funding for the Department of Transportation by \$2.4 billion, including funding for all Amtrak “long distance” trains, along with funding for dozens of transit expansion projects nationwide. In recent months, Trump has voiced support for massive investment in the nation’s infrastructure. Yet ironically, his first proposed budget not only fails to deliver, it guts funding for existing infrastructure.

All railroaders – freight, as well as transit and passenger – should be alarmed and concerned by this proposal. Should Amtrak be defunded and dismembered, it is near certain that nothing would replace it. Privately run passenger trains fail to turn a profit – the reason that the rail carriers abandoned such service in the 1960s. And it is highly unlikely that private vendors – even if there were any – who wished to enter such a market would even be allowed by most – if not all – carriers access to their railroads. Amtrak is barely tolerated by the host railroads as it is, and then only because the act which created the entity in 1970 mandates that it be entitled to operate passenger trains on the nation’s railroads.

Thankfully, the President’s blueprint budget is not the last word on the question. We have the potential to save Amtrak – and transit funding too – over the course of the coming weeks and months, as Congress fashions what will be ultimately be the final budget. We have been down this road before of course, when George Bush was President. We will need to mobilize now like we did then. Because if Amtrak is defunded, thousands of fellow rails will lose their jobs, and as a result, we will all potentially suffer as the income for Railroad Retirement is dramatically diminished.

Ironically, as it turns out, Amtrak is one of the most efficient passenger railroads in the world, covering 94% of its operating costs at the fare box! Adjusted revenue of \$2.15 billion was the most ever for a fiscal year (2016). Amtrak set an all-time ridership record despite record low gasoline prices inducing travelers to drive rather than seek public transportation. Demand for trains is out there! Considering that all forms of transportation – including airline, inland waterway, as well as automobile, bus and anything else that goes down the highway – are heavily subsidized by the states and federal government, far more than Amtrak, we are getting a great deal with the limited subsidy that Amtrak receives to keep the trains running. And in some cases – especially in rural areas – the train is the only form of public transportation available!

And trains are the safest form of transportation known to humanity. Railroad transport utilizes less land and space to transport an equivalent number of passengers in any other mode. And trains emit less pollutants than other forms, and can make use of alternative and renewable energy. As the nation’s highways and airports become ever more congested, we should be expanding passenger train options, not reducing them! As fossil fuel shipments decline, and demand for public transportation continues to grow, passenger trains could fill the void and excess track capacity in certain lanes. And in select mid-range corridors of 400 miles or less; e.g. Chicago to St. Louis, Chicago to Twin Cities; Bay Area to L.A., Houston to Dallas; Jacksonville to Miami; L.A. to Las Vegas, there is great



BREAKING NEWS

PROPOSED BUDGET CUTS ALL LONG DISTANCE RAIL SERVICE

The blueprint budget proposes the elimination of most Amtrak routes across the country. If we are to save the national passenger rail system, railroad workers and their unions must unite with passenger advocacy groups, environmental organizations, and communities across the country. The vast majority of Americans want more - not less - passenger trains. In this fight, just like in others, railroad workers have lots of potential allies.

potential to develop and expand multi-train departures on faster and more reliable schedules.

But to save Amtrak and expand the use of passenger rail – thereby increasing union rail employment, and ensuring the future of Railroad Retirement – will take a gallant effort. Rail unions cannot do this themselves, passenger advocacy groups cannot, neither can environmental organizations nor municipalities, all of whom are supporters of passenger rail. Therefore, we need a “Grand Alliance” of all of these forces to win the day. While all of us may have a specific agenda and focus, we have far more in common with one another than we have differences, there is far more that unites us than divides us. It is high time that our labor unions reach out, network, and build the necessary alliances with these forces, not just for a one-time lobbying effort for a specific narrow goal, as important as it may be. Rather, we need to build a strategic long-term alliance – despite our differences - with these forces, where we come to see one another as natural coalition partners for the long run.

Governments around the world are investing heavily in passenger rail. They understand that it is the safest, most convenient, environmentally sensitive, and often fastest way to get around. We can do it here too. But it will take the political will power and the formation of a lasting progressive coalition to bring it about. What better time than now to get started!

Ron Kaminkow is the General Secretary of Railroad Workers United. He has worked as a brakeman, conductor and engineer for Conrail and NS in Chicago, and now works as an engineer for Amtrak. He is a member of BLET #51 and is the local’s National Division Delegate.



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“The fully developed labor unionist uses both his economic and political power in the interest of his class. He understand that that struggle between labor and capital is a class struggle. That the working class are in a great majority but divided, some in trade unions and some out of them, some in one political party, some in another...”

Eugene V. Debs, Founder of the American Railway Union, 1904.

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