



The Highball

Official Publication of
Railroad Workers United

French Railway Workers' Continued Strike Action - The Concern of All

Fritz Edler, RWU Member, BLET #482, Retired

As this issue of *The Highball* goes to press, the French government's "reform" plan promises a transformation of what has traditionally been the strongest labor sector of the French economy - rail. This attack on labor in France is part and parcel of an international drive to roll back protections, standards and guarantees of rail workers won since World War 2. Nevertheless, the rail unions that have been striking in France since early April have vowed to fight on into the Summer holiday season.

The longest railroad strike in more than 30 years in France is important to rail workers worldwide, including those of us in North America. The issues, tactics and politics are relevant to our own situation. Neoliberal French President Emmanuel Macron, using deceptive language, vowed to "reform" the French railroad labor system, along with the French National Railway Company (SNCF), which has operated the bulk of all French passenger and freight rail operations as a nationalized operation since the 1930s. The so-called reform pact, which passed into law on June 14, includes transforming the SNCF into a private Joint Stock company (with the State retaining partial ownership), which the unions view as a likely prelude to full-scale privatization and the dismembering of the national system. In addition, the new legislation disenfranchises new hires,



French railway workers on the march this Spring in Paris. Their gallant effort to beat back the privatization plans and labor "reforms" deserves the attention and support of railroad workers everywhere, including those in North America.

creating a two-tier workforce with new employees receiving fewer benefits, losing various job guarantees and civil service status, and being forced to work longer and retire at a later age.

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FRA Request for Input on Autonomous Trains Draws Over 3000 Comments

More than 3000 comments were filed with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) on the question of autonomous trains. Other than the rail industry itself, nearly all comments were dead set in opposition. Railroad workers, family members, community and environmental activists all weighed in. As the Spring issue of this newsletter went to press, 800 comments had been received, but in the final week more than 2000 additional comments were submitted, in part thanks to

efforts to mobilize our substantial network of railroad workers and our allies. While the FRA makes it clear that this exercise is not a popularity contest nor a public opinion poll, RWU feels it is still a worthwhile exercise for us, as it serves the purpose of mobilizing and galvanizing public opinion and, more importantly, railroad workers themselves to prepare for the battles ahead. Just because the rail industry may want this does not mean that we have to go along quietly. Stay tuned!

RWU Testifies at OSHA Hearing on Whistleblowers in the Transportation Industries

On June 12th, the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) held a listening session on the question of protection for whistleblowers in both the trucking and rail industries. These industries lead the way in corporate America's attempt to muzzle those who report safety violations, and taking reprisal against those who get injured on the job. RWU member Fritz Edler testified on behalf of the organization. It is RWU's position that the whistleblower law is fatally flawed as it allows for endless appeals by the industry, enabling them to drag out each and every single case for years. The law pro-

vides no penalty for employers who appeal and appeal, over and over, and makes no provision for the worker to be reinstated nor receive compensation when OSHA finds an employer guilty. In the case of rail, apparently every single whistleblower case won by a railroad worker has simply been appealed to the courts by the carrier.

In spring 2016, RWU brought rank and file whistleblowers to Washington, DC to discuss these and other shortcomings with the whistleblower law before the Whistleblower Protection Advisory Committee.



Book Review

“Railroad Collisions: A Deadly Story of Mismanaged Risk” by George Swimmer

Railroads that carry people and freight through the Chicago area have a hidden problem: They have a history of ignoring signal inspection requirements, overworking their crews and punishing those who speak up about safety concerns.

In this book, "Railroad Collisions: A Deadly Story of Mismanaged Risk," author George Swimmer uses well-researched facts to open the readers' eyes to a terrible reality: Only a small percentage of railroad crossing accidents, derailments and trespasser deaths are acted upon or even made public. When such incidents are covered in the news, the blame is assigned to the train's operator, motorists, or pedestrians. But in fact, the blame ultimately falls on the railroad management.

Mr. Swimmer's unique perspective is based in his experience as a concerned citizen. He is not an employee or executive in the transportation industry. Those in his community who were injured or killed in easily preventable incidents touched him.

From the first paragraph of the book through the last, he carefully takes the reader from incident to incident. It paints a vast portrait of an industry that has a long way to go before it can genuinely claim to embrace a "safety culture". Whether it was crossing gate relays that are defective, to "false positive" clear signals or "hot spots" where trespassers are frequently mowed over by trains, Mr. Swimmer's book highlights that most rail transportation companies are focused on the wrong side of safety. That is, they focus more on the management of death and destruction instead of comprehensive safety initiatives.

The United States government is not spared from Mr. Swimmer's analysis: A big player in mismanaged risk is the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). At times, the agency has outright ignored or silenced pleas from train crews and whis-

tleblowers who end up either dying or being involved in a fatality due to the death-risk management culture.

Throughout the book, Mr. Swimmer quotes industry experts, experienced railroad train crews and numerous recommendations by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to back up his claims. None of this should surprise anyone who has worked at least a few weeks on the ground in rail transportation operations.

There is a thread of hope throughout the book in the few - but not insignificant - improvements in rail safety over the past 30 years. Some of these changes were initiated based on Mr. Swimmer's advocacy, as well as many others in Illinois, such as the DuPage Railroad Safety Council.

For anyone working for passenger, freight or rapid transit railroads, this book is a must-read. Personally, if I could afford it, I would give a copy to every rail manager and politician I meet. Not only does it expose and share solutions for the major hazards that exist, but it vindicates most - if not all - operating crews who are blamed for accidents. Don't wait on reading this book. Your life - and that of others - depends on it!



Author George Swimmer receives accolades from safety and environmental activist Ralph Nader.

The author - new to the railroad and to RWU - will remain anonymous.
George Swimmer's book is available through Amazon.
ISBN 9781517106331

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

- Aaron Dixon, IAM #27, UP, Kansas City, MO
- Ross Grooters, BLET #778, UP, Des Moines, IA
- Adam Haslag, IBEW # 1832, UP, Kansas City, MO
- Ron Kaminkow, BLET #51, Amtrak, Reno, NV
- Bernie Mahoney, BRS #16, CSX, Port St. Lucie, FL
- Joe Mulligan, BLET #57, KEOLIS, Kingston, MA
- Hugh Sawyer, BLET #316, NS, Atlanta, GA
- Daniel Stroup, BLET #188, CN, Superior, WI
- James Wallace, UTU #305, BNSF, Lincoln, NE
- Andrew Weir, TCRC-LE #240, CN, Sarnia, ON
- Will Young, IAM #27, UP, Kansas City, MO

Trustees

- Jon Flanders, IAM #1145, CSX, Selkirk, NY
- Ed Michael, BLET #724/UTU #979, UP, Salem, IL
- Chet Whyers, UTU #979, UP, Salem, IL

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International Rail Worker News

Why the Rail Strike in France is Crucial to All Railroad Workers

Continued from Page 1

The entire narrative put forward by the government, in targeting SNCF and its organized workforce, is orchestrated to misrepresent the facts about the French rail situation. North American rails will recognize the signs of this misrepresentation. For instance, the SNCF is said to be in debt \$47 billion dollars. Compare this to pretty much any other state owned sector or entity, for instance, the army. The government never says that the military budget represented a debt. The debt of the nationalized system is a bookkeeping gimmick. Likewise, the targeting of the costs of hard won worker benefits and guarantees that - like in the US - were negotiated in good faith based upon the real world difficulties faced by rail workers.

Our French brothers and sisters are organized and operate under quite different conditions than those that exist for us. Organized French rail workers are not divided by craft. They have traditionally belonged to industrially organized federations. Yet divisions do exist, often due to political and tactical differences. There are four main labor groups representing workers in the French rail system, each with a specific historical outlook and affiliation. The principal unions in the rail fight are the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), the Union Nationale des Syndicats Autonomes (UNSA) and the Solidaires Unitaires Démocratiques (SUDRail), and the Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT). In practice, the

difference between the federations tends to be how much trust each of them places in the government and in negotiations, and how ready and willing they are with mobilizations. RWU members in attendance at the last three biennial conventions have been fortunate to hear directly from rank & file activists from both the SUDRail and the CGT, the two most militant of the French rail unions.

In the current strike against the Macron government's "reforms", the unions have held together in a united front since the April strike actions began. But now that the package of "reforms" have actually been voted into law, there are cracks beginning to appear. The historically more moderate CFDT has announced that it has suspended strike action to which it had been committed until the end of June.

The strike united front by the main rail unions has been able to extract some changes in the "reform" pact. Among those is canceling of \$35 billion of supposed \$47 billion of SNCF debt. The government has repeatedly stated that the transformation to a Joint Stock company is not intended to lead to privatization, that the State will not sell its shares and has included guarantees of employment for rail workers displaced by changes after other rail operators begin entering the French system next year. European Union rules require opening access in the French rail system to other operators by next year.

The struggle continues

The Keolis Connection and Why it is Important in the Rail Workers' Fight

Keolis is a wholly owned creature of the French national rail system and thus a unit of the French State. But it increasingly conducts for-profit rail operations in other countries, including Germany, Britain and the U.S. Keolis now contracts with state owned rail operations in Virginia (Virginia Rail Express) and Boston (MBTA), that had once contracted with Amtrak to provide the service. In all these operations, Keolis is driven by SNCF business interests for profit. In doing so it is developing expertise at running State assets for profit while evading all legacy responsibility for those operations, including responsibility for retired rail worker obligations.

In these cases, Keolis wins contracts by underbidding operators like Amtrak, which by law can't make bids below cost, whereas Keolis regularly bids under cost. Keolis has repeatedly made loss leader bids in an effort to gain a foothold in

the North American market. The firm has rolled out massive lobbying operations that characterize their wholly state owned operation as the little "independent operator" compared to Amtrak which has government support. These bandit profiteering operations by the SNCF's international unit not only take resources that the French national rail system needs, but increasingly organizes the SNCF as a profit-based private railroad which has always involved destroying publicly developed rail assets. This expertise will no doubt be used to further plan to fully privatize SNCF in the future.

In the US, one of the best ways we can show solidarity with our French brothers and sisters is by exposing the fake private operator Keolis and by demanding that Keolis operations completely protect the railroad workers they employ.

U.S. Rail Workers Delegation Meets with Cuban Railroaders

From April 27 through May 6 a delegation of rail and transit workers, together with other trade unionists, visited Cuba on a fact-finding, solidarity, and friendship mission. The people-to-people delegation included four members of Railroad Workers United (RWU). The delegation met with leaders of the Transportation Union of the Cuban Workers Federation (CTC), participated in the May Day celebration and parade, and toured the country.

The Transportation union covers all transportation workers in the country, and includes nearly 200,000 members. There xx

are 29,000 railroad workers, 82% of whom work directly for the state-owned railroad. Cuba has the 4th largest rail network in North America after the U.S., Canada and Mexico. There are five staff persons on a train crew, two engineers, a conductor and two "assistants" (brakemen). The crews work 15 days on, then 15 off.

The delegation discussed wages, benefits, working conditions, safety and more. The next issue of *The Highball* will feature a full report from the participants on what they witnessed and what they were able to discover.



RWU International Steering Committee

2018 - 2020

The Railroad Workers United International Steering Committee (ISC) is the body that meets regularly throughout the year and makes the day-to-day decisions of the organization. Once again, the members present at the 6th Biennial Convention in Chicago on April 5 - 6th, 2018 opted to set the size of the ISC at eleven (11) members. The three (3) new Trustees are listed as well.



Aaron Dixon - Co-Chair
Machinist, UP, IAM #27, Kansas City, MO
Aaron has worked for UP as a diesel mechanic for 11 years, is President of his local and active in the All Rail Crafts Coalition. This is his first term as RWU Co-Chair.



Ross Grooters - Co-Chair
Engineer, UP, BLET #778, Des Moines, IA
Ross has worked for Union Pacific for 14 years, as a conductor and engineer. He previously served as an Alternate to the ISC. This is his second term as Co-Chair.

Bernie Mahoney - Co-Chair
Signal Maintainer, CSX, BRS #16, Port St. Lucie, FL
Bernie has worked for CSX as a signal maintainer for five years. He was appointed to fill a vacancy on the ISC in 2017. This is his first term as RWU Co-Chair.



Ron Kaminkow - General Secretary
Engineer, Amtrak, BLET #51, Reno, NV
Ron hired out with Conrail in 1996, then NS, and has worked as an engineer 19 years in Milwaukee, Chicago and Reno. This is his 6th term as General Secretary.



Hugh Sawyer - Treasurer
Engineer, NS, BLET #316, Atlanta, GA
Hiring out as a brakeman in 1991, Hugh has been a conductor and engineer, and has served RWU in various capacities. This is his third term as Treasurer.



James Wallace - Recording Secretary
Conductor, BNSF, SMART # 305, Lincoln, NE
James has worked as a BNSF conductor for seven years in both in the Midwest and on the west coast. This is his fourth term as Recording Secretary.

Joe Mulligan - Organizer
Engineer, KEOLIS, BLET #57, Kingston, MA
Joe has more than 20 years experience as a conductor and engineer on short lines, regionals, commuter and Amtrak. This is his first term as RWU Organizer.



Adam Haslag - Steering Committee
Electrician, UP, IBEW #1832, Kansas City, MO
Adam has twenty years as an electrician, the last ten of those with the railroad. He serves on the local E-Board and is active with ARCC. This is his first term on the ISC.



Dan Stroup - Steering Committee
Engineer, CN, BLET#188, Superior, WI
Dan has worked for CN - and before that CSX - for 7 years as a conductor and engineer. He served as Recording Secretary. This is his first full term on the ISC.



Andrew Weir - Steering Committee
Engineer, CN, TCRC- LE #240, Sarnia, ON
Andy has worked for CN since 1988 as a conductor and engineer. He serves as a Vice-General Chairman. This is his third term on the Steering Committee.

Will Young - Steering Committee
Machinist, UP, IAM #27, Kansas City, MO
Will has worked as a heavy equipment mechanic for 14 years and on the railroad for seven. He serves as LC and is active in ARCC. This is his first term on the ISC.



Jon Flanders - Trustee
Machinist, CSX, IAM #1145, Selkirk, NY
Jon worked on the railroad for 25 years before retiring in 2013. A founding member of RWU, he served previously as Co-Chair. This is his first term as Trustee.



Ed Michael - Trustee
Engineer, UP, BLET #724/UTU #979, Salem, IL
Ed retired after 41 years with UP, MP and C&E. He is a Founding member of RWU and has served as Co-Chair. This is his first term as Trustee.



Chet Whyers - Trustee
Conductor, UP, UTU #979, Salem, IL
Chet is retired after working for UP and MP for 43 years. He served as RWU Treasurer for 6 years. This is his first term as Trustee.



Fallen Rails News

Despite Industry Claims of a Safer Railroad, Workers Continue to Die

While the rail industry proudly cites the statistics which “prove” that the rail industry gets safer and safer each year, rail workers continue to die at roughly the same rate as they have for more than a decade. Each year, the number of railroad workers killed on the job in the U.S. and Canada has remained just about the same - between 15 and 20 fatalities a year. Keep in mind that the railroad has never moved as much tonnage as it moved in 2006, and each year has fewer and fewer employees. As a result, one would expect that the number of FRA reportable injuries - along with fatalities - should be on the decline, by statistical probability alone. Add in the fact that injuries and fatalities sustained by contract workers are not included in the statistics, because these workers - though working on railroad property most or even 100% of the time - are not considered “railroaders.” And the railroad is contracting out more and more jobs with each passing year, from right-of-way maintenance to locomotive servicing to rail car repair work. And when these workers get hurt or killed on the job, they are not a part of the equation since they are not classified as “railroad employees.” As the old saying goes, there are lies, damn lies... and statistics.

Another factor to consider when making sense of these statistics is the nature of the modern day rail safety program. Railroads large and small employ “behavior based safety” programs, which focus on worker behavior rather than hazard elimination, so if the worker gets hurt, they may be subject to discipline up to and including termination. The railroad claims of course that the company is not firing the worker for getting injured, as this would be illegal. The carrier is firing the worker *because they did not follow a rule - safety, operating or otherwise.* Consider the chilling effect that such a policy might just have on the willingness of employees to report an injury sustained on the job, and how this policy might just contribute to


the “steadily declining injury rate” (see the Whistleblower article on Page 1 regarding how the rail industry retaliates against its employees for reporting unsafe conditions and injuries).

The Brotherhood’s Relief & Compensation Fund (BRCF) - one of a number of organizations that provides income relief to railroad workers suspended/fired from railroad employment, notes that this past year, discipline and firings were at an all time high among their membership. You can bet that a sizable chunk of this was doled out to employees who got hurt on the job.

Already in the first six months of 2018, we have lost 11 railroad workers. A number of them leave behind widows and dependent children (see article below).

While the rail industry would have you believe that these tragedies are the result of worker behavior, we disagree. These fatalities were caused by hazards, and had they been recognized and removed, these workers - like so many others before them - would still be with us today.

**RAILROAD WORKERS
MEMORIAL DAY**



April 28th

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

For more information, call 206-964-3051; see the website: www.railroadworkersunited.org

Edgar Thompson Foundation Assists Daughters of Railroad Workers

The purpose of the John Edgar Thomson Foundation is to assist daughters of railroad employees who die while in the employ of any railroad in the United States. The Foundation provides limited financial aid through monthly allowances and subsidies for eye examinations, dental care, and certain other health and recreational needs. High school graduates receive monetary gifts to help with extra costs. This supplement to family income is to be used in its entirety for the benefit of the daughters. Whatever grant is accorded, however, usually serves to benefit the entire family.



The Foundation assists the daughters of the deceased by supplementing income and providing benefits. The Foundation does not provide college scholarships. Instead of paying for college, Foundation grants focus on daily living expenses of the grantee’s family. Grants are awarded on the basis of financial need and are reviewed annually.

The monthly allowance made under the grant may cover the period from infancy to age 18. Under certain circumstances, the grantee can be covered up to the age of 24 if the grantee pursues a higher educational goal on a full-time basis.

The goal of the Foundation is to assist the surviving family and enable the daughters to mature into responsible individuals. The Foundation encourages each grantee to pursue her education as far as capabilities and interests permit, and to cultivate good health habits in the belief that such encouragement will aid her in achieving a richer, more fulfilling life.

Eligibility is dependent upon the daughter and parent remaining unmarried. The monthly grant, assuming continued eligibility, may cover the period from birth to age 18, or, under certain circumstances, to age 24, to assist the daughter in pursuing a higher educational goal. The size of the grant depends upon the family’s financial need. The grant may be terminated at any time if the financial need ceases, or the daughter or surviving parent cannot maintain the eligibility requirements.

To apply for grant, email sjethomson@aol.com or call 800-888-1278. Website is at www.jethomsonfoundation.com.



Opinion & Commentary

The Profit System's Complete and Total Moral Bankruptcy

Summertime 2018 seems to be as good a time as any for an updated reality check. Where to begin? Let's see, the carriers' relentless drive to increase productivity (and by logical extension - profits), by any means possible, continues to put workers and the public at risk. *Check.* The carriers continue to get more creative in their interpretation and application of existing contractual verbiage. That's a nice way of asserting that their increased brazen arrogance knows no boundaries as they flagrantly violate existing agreements, which were already relatively carrier-friendly to begin with. *Check.* The existing union leadership makes public proclamations expressing their righteous indignation, but the mutually accepted terms of engagement ultimately render them incapable of any meaningful opposition and/or resistance. *Check.* Railroad workers' discontent continues to deepen and fester. *Check.* Unfortunately, the vast majority of these discontented rails remain tethered to the indisputable limitations of being divided into 13 different craft unions. *Check.* The Federal Railway Administration (FRA), after barely offering token, obligatory lip service and feebly going through the motions to validate their supposed mission to safeguard workers and the public, then proceeds to rubber-stamp the carriers' regulatory wish-list. Public comments on autonomous trains anyone? *Check.* Beyond our immediate reality in the rail industry, various corporations pollute our air, water, soil, food, etc. with not only impunity, but overtly sanctioned by the very regulatory entities whose stated mission is to protect us from these hazards to our collective health and well-being, with the same chutzpah the FRA does us. *Check.* In this country and around the world, workers are abused and exploited, forced to work harder and longer hours for less and less pay. *Check.* Contrary to the delusional lies of a few science and fact denying politicians and corporate executives, environmentally and ecologically speaking, our planet is going to hell in a hand basket. *Check.* The world economy is not exactly inspiring working people to dance in the streets, though more and more are taking up marching. *Check.* Every day, dozens of civilians, working-class folks just like you, me, your friends and family, who simply have the misfortune to live in a part of the world with vast energy and mineral resources, are slaughtered in cold blood, virtually ignored by the world's collective conscience as unfortunate collateral damage in an ever expanding geo-political gangland turf war over those resources. *Check.* While certainly not a new development, it now feels like it is a semi-regular occurrence for working class folks, predominantly people of color, to be pumped full of lead, often in the back, by local, state and federal entities whose stated mission is to "serve and protect", for reasons that defy moral justification, regardless of what the "official" investigations conclude. *Check.* Trump's sadistic cruelty towards working-class families seeking refuge from economic, political and/or social oppression south of the border is repulsive, as is the sanctimonious hypocrisy of liberal politicians and pundits who conveniently forget Obama's sordid record on this. *Check.*

"Make America Great Again!" Really? Again?! Maybe I'm missing something but I'm just not feeling any warm and fuzzy nostalgia for a society whose history begins with the mass murder of the continent's original inhabitants because they were inconveniently in the way, and with the violent kidnapping of a half a million Africans, because our original quest for great-

ness required slave labor to do the dirty work. Steel magnate Andrew Carnegie can hire thugs to murder striking steelworkers in Homestead, PA in 1892, then go on to build Carnegie Hall in New York City, and be worshipped as one of society's elites. We need not hurry to return to that level of greatness.

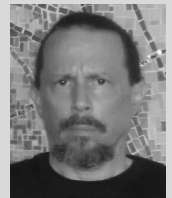
"The carriers' relentless assault on our safety, well-being and dignity - all to increase their profits - is evil and immoral ..."

Though I'm just starting to get on a roll, space limitations compel me to wrap up this raging rant. So what the hell does this have to do with railroad workers in the Summer of 2018, some of you may ask? As rail workers, our lineage goes back to the brave, courageous workers who fought for their dignity and sometimes gave their lives in countless battles - the Great Rail Strike of 1887, the Pullman Strike, the Great Shopmen's strike of 1922 - to name but a few chapters from our as-yet-unfinished struggle for dignity in the workplace and in society at large. Likewise, the ideological lineage of today's breed of bosses can be traced back to the original "robber barons" who reaped such unimaginable horrors on our forefathers. To the naked eye they may not appear to be as overtly ruthless and violent towards us today. I would argue the main reason for that is simply that we are not yet challenging them as past generations of workers did. While today's bosses may appear to be oh so much more sophisticated and cultured, I submit that their forefathers' vile, bloodthirsty lust for profits-at-any-cost, with the prerequisite bankruptcy of morals and values, were handed down from generation to generation.

After the rail bosses tried to literally crucify rail workers Tom Harding and Richard LaBrie to deflect attention from their own criminal culpability and responsibility for the horrific tragedy in Lac-Mégantic, it's not surprising that the bosses at Norfolk Southern are apparently so drunk on their home-brew Kool-Aid that they feel emboldened to sue their workers to recoup some financial losses from a recent accident those workers are alleged to be responsible for. The carriers' relentless assault on our safety, well-being and dignity - all to increase their profits - is evil and immoral, as is their disregard for the public in general. The citizens of Lac-Mégantic can vouch for that. It is the same evil and immorality that is behind the atrocities committed against people like us here and around the world by rogue corporations and governments.

The strong, militant rail unions we strive for will need to drive a revitalized labor movement as part of the universal struggle for social, economic, political and environmental justice. For you discontented rails, joining RWU is a good place to start.

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





Editorial

Applying the Lessons from this National Bargaining Round

In the Nov/Dec 2017 issue of "Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen's News", BLET President Dennis Pierce penned an article entitled, "Applying the Lessons from this Bargaining Round." In it, he pointed to some lessons learned throughout the course of bargaining. Astutely, he noted that, "the BLE, now BLET and the UTU, now SMART-TD, were faulted for years for not working together, but we changed that dynamic in this contract round." Brother Pierce understands that the unity of the operating crafts was essential in this last round and will continue to be in future contract negotiations. He also stated that, "I heard loud and clear that the railroads' callous treatment of their employees has reached an all-time high." He opined that, "We are closer and closer to a return to the days of the railroad 'Robber Barons' when the nation's railroads ran roughshod not only over their employees, but over the very general population that they serve and profit from." He continues, "Knowing all of this leads me to what we can do. First it is more important now than ever that Rail Unions move forward working together to protect the interests of their collective memberships."

To the rank & file, these words are music to the ears! For Railroad Workers United – an organization that has championed rail labor unity and the formation of a universal bargaining coalition for a decade now – such words from one of the myriad craft union leaders are not taken lightly. We see the formation of a universal bargaining coalition as perhaps the single most pressing issue facing rail labor today, because from there, all else flows. And we see the lack of such unity in this last round – as always – as a huge impediment to winning the best possible contract. It is the elephant in the room. The lack of such universal unity is what allowed the Teamster Rail Conference affiliates - BLET and BMWED – to verge on hysterical opposition to one another in November. And it is the reason that we are relatively powerless each and every time we go to the bargaining table, and why time after time, session after session, one union or another, or one "coalition" or another stabs others in the back, settles for a contract, and leaves our fellow railroad brothers and sisters out in the cold.

So while we agree with Brother Pierce, and appreciate those lessons learned, we must immediately undertake the process of building a far greater degree of unity for the upcoming round of bargaining. Pierce rightly identifies the most important development of this last round; i.e., the unity of the operating crafts and their unions. Without a doubt, this is a major step in the right direction. Yet, we cannot ignore the glaring contradictions and pathetic failures of this bargaining round:


- 1 – Instead of a powerful single universal bargaining coalition, there were three irrational and disparate formations.
- 2 – The Teamster affiliates – two of the largest rail unions – did not bargain together, and in fact led the name calling, back biting and bickering between and among the various unions.
- 3 – SMART, the new union that loudly trumpeted the idea of rail labor unity upon its consecration nearly a decade ago, divided itself into two, the Transportation Department in one coalition and the Mechanical Department in another. Even more absurd, the Transportation side of the union made coalition with one of the Teamster affiliates (BLET), while the Mechanical side found a partner with the other (BMWED)!
- 4 – The shop crafts completely divided their energy, and scat-

tered themselves as part of all three coalitions, squandering their potential unity and power.

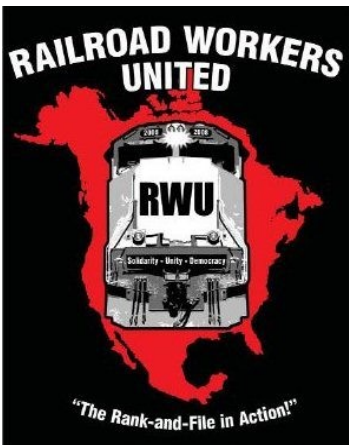
5 – When it came time to vote on the proposed tentative agreement, the unions of the Coordinated Bargaining Group voted on different schedules, out of synch with one another. And when the Boilermakers (IBBO) voted down the agreement, there was no provisions by which the coalition "partners" would stand by this craft.

6 – Based upon #5 above, it is apparent that these coalitions were limited in value in terms of achieving real power. Coalitions that are not predicated upon the notion that *an injury to one is an injury to all*, and agree that *no one settle until all settle*, are relatively impotent at the end of the day.

Unfortunately, President Pierce did not address these failings nor offer concrete and tangible solutions to prevent such weaknesses in future rounds of bargaining. So, we will. First, as Pierce does imply - but does not actually state - the only really effective coalition of rail labor is one of all unions, all crafts, all workers. Period. Second, the Teamster affiliates must put aside their differences and rebuild the moral authority – if there ever was any – of the Teamster Rail Conference, which alone has the ability to move the universal concept forward. Without IBT unity, it will be very difficult to bring rail labor together. Third, SMART must act like a union that it professes to be in the next round and bargain together as a union. Fourth, the shop crafts must learn the lessons of history, and understand that only together will these scattered union fragments have any power. Once numbering more than half a million, together they account for no more than 25,000 rail workers today. Finally, this coalition – to be truly effective – must stand behind one another. When it is time to vote on a Tentative Agreement, all railroaders must cast their ballots on the same schedule. If and when one or more of the affiliates votes it down, then we go back to the bargaining table – as a group. Yes it will be tough, but there is no other way. This is what it means to be a union. Then and only then, will we achieve the power that we must have in order to win - if and when we resort to "self-help". Then and only then, will the carriers respect us and realize they can no longer play one craft or group off against another. Then and only then, can we hold our heads high as dignified railroad workers – UNITED!!



RWU has rolled out these buttons and stickers and plans to be ready for the next round of bargaining, which will commence in Fall of 2019. The unions must start today and plan for a unified and effective strategy to win a good contract for all. Avoid the rush and order yours now at the RWU online Store. See the RWU website.



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T-shirts available in Black only in various sizes. RWU logo at left is on the back (or front) of shirt. See the RWU Online Store for styles/sizes available.

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

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"It is far wiser ... to devote our time, means and energy to advocating the principles of industrial unionism, building up our organization and vitalizing our propaganda by an appeal to the intelligence and integrity of the workers ... while at the same time aiding and encouraging them in all their struggles for better conditions, than to waste time in denouncing, or seeking to destroy, these reactionary old unions and their leaders."

Eugene V. Debs, Founder of the American Railway Union, from a letter to Tom Mann in 1910

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Sustainer

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Railroad Workers United is in it for the long haul. As a result, we have opted to take the organization "to the next level". As such, we are committed to raising the necessary funds to achieve our goals and objectives into the coming decades.

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