



# The Highball

Official Publication of  
**Railroad Workers United**

## Workers Strike CN Over Crew Fatigue, Long Hours, General Safety Issues

In late Fall of 2019, workers at Canadian National (CN) mounted what was the longest rail strike in Canada in more than a decade. On November 19th, 3200 conductors, yardmen, and yardmasters went out on strike when contract negotiations failed to produce a result that was acceptable to the members. A strike vote taken in October revealed that an overwhelming 99.2% of them had voted to authorize a strike.

After a week on strike, a Tentative Agreement (TA) had been announced, when CN realized that the workers solidarity and their strike could not be broken, and that a government back-to-work order to bail the company out was not forthcoming. On November 27th, the parties penned a "Return to Work Agreement" under which – among other things – the strike period be recognized as time worked, so that benefits and entitlements accrue without interruption; that the union would be held harmless; and that the carrier would take no reprisal against any of the union's officers or members.

As this issue of *The Highball* goes to press, the TA is being circulated around the system as workers vote on its contents. It is expected to be adopted. RWU will issue a full report and analysis once the results are released to the public sometime in January.

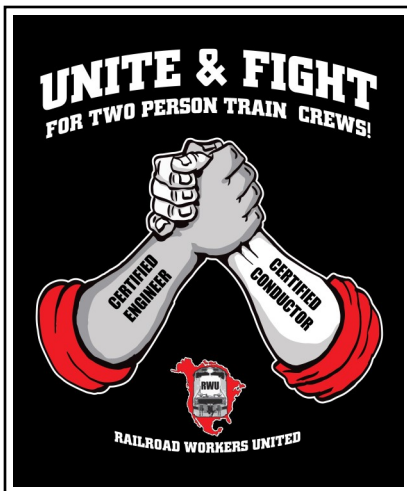
The strike had broad support across Canada, as the union made clear that the contentious



**Members of the Teamster Canada Rail Conference walk the picket line in the longest rail strike in years in North America. The conductors, yardmen and yardmasters struck largely over issues of hours of work, fatigue and safety. Through solidarity and creative tactics, they were able to force CN to the table. See Page 3 for more rail strike news.**

issues were not financial ones, but rather those concerning safety of rail operations that had been placing the members – and Canadian society at large – in danger. Still reeling from the devastating rail disaster at Lac-Mégantic, Quebec of 2013 - in which that rail carrier attempted to blame the workers for the tragedy - Canadians understood the strike in terms of worker and public safety. The carrier had hoped to win public support for supposed propane shortages, but the union disclosed that the carrier had stocks of propane at the ready for needy customers. Farmers' hostility was likewise mitigated and somewhat refocused upon their learning of the overwork, scheduling, and fatigue issues involved.

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## Rail Carriers Push for Single Crews in Section 6 Notices

As expected on November 1st of 2019, the major rail carriers in the U.S. formally unveiled their long held desires to reduce train crew size, making it clear that they intend to bargain the subject of crew size in the upcoming round of national handling. While it has been 15 years since the National Carriers Conference Committee (NCCC) first raised the specter of single employee train crews, the carriers have had almost no success in pushing the issue forward. However, the carriers have become more and more emboldened in recent years, as various technological and political developments have coincided, providing the carriers with the confidence to make a full court press for an end to the standard two-person crew (see Editorial, *The Highball*, Fall 2019).

As our *Editorial* in that issue of the RWU newsletter makes clear, while the carriers have gained some tactical and logistical advantages in the struggle, so have workers, their unions, and groups like Railroad Workers United. This fight is far from over, and there is no saying which side will win this round of the war. We remain optimistic. If the unions can stick together, and if the members rise up like they did against BNSF in 2014, victory is possible.



# RWU News and Happenings

## RWU 7th Biennial Convention Planned for Chicago, Illinois in April

RWU conducts a Convention every two years, starting with our Founding Convention in the Spring of 2008 in Dearborn, MI. After a few 1 day affairs, we expanded the Convention to be 2 days. This year's Convention format has been expanded to 3 days, and will be more integrated into the big Labor Notes conference that has traditionally followed our Convention on the weekend. This year, RWU will conduct our internal business on Friday, April 17th, the first day of the Labor Notes conference. Then on both Saturday and Sunday, RWU members will take part in a myriad of workshops and presentations on subjects of importance to railroad workers and our allies in labor and other sectors. Workshops being organized include: 1 - Organizing across supply chain; 2 - Building rail and air solidarity under the RLA; 3 - Precision Scheduled Railroading and lean production; 4 - Rail's centrality to a Green New Deal; 5 - Building the labor and community alliance around rail safety. All members in good standing are encouraged to attend for all three days. (See the RWU website).



Members hear a presentation from French rail worker at the 6th RWU Biennial Convention in 2018. The upcoming Convention April 17 - 18 - 19th promises to be the biggest and best yet!



## New RWU T-shirts Sell Like Hotcakes

A few weeks after the major rail carriers announced their intentions to run trains with a single crew member, RWU took delivery of hundreds of T-shirts, and made them available to all at one LOW rate, just 50% off cost! That special price lasted until the end of 2019. While we were happy to provide the first batch of shirts to rail workers, absorbing 50% of the costs of production (about \$6.00) for each shirt, we know that this is unsustainable and therefore as of January 1st, raised the price to what it costs the organization to produce them (about \$12 a shirt).

It is important for rails to wear your shirts to work and send a message to your co-workers, the company, and your union that this issue is one that is important, it is winnable, and it is worth fighting for. See the back page of this issue of the newsletter for more info on how to order your T-shirt. While you are at it, get a yard sign, some stickers, buttons and a bumper sticker or two as well. If we are in it to win it, then it is going to take all of us to spread the word, to build the enthusiasm, optimism and solidarity we need to win this important fight.

## 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

- Chuck Corsini, SMART #587, UP, Chicago, IL
- Jason Doering, SMART #1117, UP, Las Vegas, NV
- Ross Grooters, BLET #778, UP, Des Moines, IA
- Adam Haslag, IBEW # 1832, UP, Kansas City, MO
- Ron Kaminkow, BLET #51, Amtrak, Reno, NV
- Ryan McEldowney, SMART #867, UP, Des Moines, IA
- Mark Moylan, BRC #6030, CN, Twin Harbors, MN
- Joe Mulligan, BLET #57, Keolis, Boston, MA
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www.railroadworkersunited.org ● info@railroadworkersunited.org ● 202-798-3327 or 202-RWU-DEBS  
RWU P.O. Box 2131 Reno, NV 89505





# Railroad Strike News

## Rail Workers Take Strike Action Worldwide as Decade Comes to a Close

In the last few months of 2019, railroad workers in a number of countries took strike action for a variety of reasons. Most notably, railroaders in France took the lead - together with airline and other transport workers - to stage a general strike that continues in various forms as we go to press. Thousands of workers and their allies took to the streets while shutting down large sectors of the economy. The strikes have been largely aimed at preserving the French pension system, one which is of great benefit to railroad workers there.

In the UK, workers continued to take strike action at various railroad companies in defense of the "Guard." Analogous to the conductor on U.S. trains, the Guard has been under attack for the last six years or so now, as rail companies seek to implement Driver Only Operation (DOO); i.e. single person crews.

Meantime, members of the Korean Railway Workers Union (KRWU) struck South Korea's national rail operator Korea Railroad in late November over wages and staffing issues. It appears that agreement was reached between the parties in December.

Finally, Canadian rail workers at carrier Canadian National struck for just over a week in November, reaching a TA by the end of the month, apparently winning a number of demands around safety, hours of work, and crew fatigue (see Front Page article).



As 2019 drew to a close, rail workers went on strike worldwide, including in Canada (safety issues), France (pensions), the UK (driver only operations) and South Korea (staffing/wages). RWU member Fritz Edler (above) was on hand for the Paris mass strike. Perhaps U.S. rail workers may join with their fellow rails worldwide in the coming years.

## Workers Strike CN Over Crew Fatigue, Long Hours, General Safety Issues

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For years now, CN has been trimming its workforce to the bone under the rubric of Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR). In many cases, the railroad had made such deep cuts to the ranks of trainmen, that the carrier was caught shorthanded due to severe winter weather, bumper grain harvests, and increased traffic flows through the west coast Port of Prince Rupert, BC, all of which have combined to delay trains and hamper fluidity of the rail system. Time and again, CN has expected its train crews to step up and work themselves literally to death in order to keep the railroad from a "meltdown." While crews have the right under the contract to file rest on the road and be tied up by the 10<sup>th</sup> hour, and file rest in the yard and be tied up by the 9<sup>th</sup> hour, the carrier wholesale violates this agreement, resulting in exhausted and demoralized train crews. Ultimately, this strike was a venting of a frustrated workforce that had finally come to say, "Enough!"

The union - Teamster Canada Rail Conference (TCRC) - had proposed that its members have more time off work by improving contract language that would mitigate against crew fatigue and make for safer train operations. In the last two years, nearly a dozen TCRC members have lost their lives at CN and the other major carrier, the Canadian Pacific (CP). The union claims that the short staffing and resultant overwork and crew fatigue are a direct contributor to increasing fatalities, accidents and injuries at both railroad carriers.

Rail strikes are relatively frequent in Canada, but just like in the United States, workers are often hamstrung by labor law that allows strikers to be ordered back to work in short order, mitigating against their effectiveness. The rail carriers - both north and south of the border - have little incentive to negotiate in good faith as a result, knowing that the striking workers will soon be ordered to return to their posts. In this strike however, the Canadian Prime Minister opted to not intervene, and encouraged the

company and union to reach a voluntary agreement. Thus, the CN was brought to its knees within a week.

Just prior to the inking of the TA on November 27th, the union released a voice recording of an interaction between a Chief Train Dispatcher and a train Conductor, in which the Conductor was pleading his case that the crew was unfit for duty as a result of overwork and fatigue, while the Chief Dispatcher was adamant that they continue their tour of duty. Apparently, it had the desired effect of "blowing the whistle" on the carrier's unsafe behaviors, being repeatedly played on television and spread on social media. This outrageous example of disregard for both safety and the union agreement appeared to be a powerful catalyst. Within hours the carrier would reach agreement with the union on a TA that addressed at least some of the union's primary safety concerns. The voice recording is available on the RWU website under Campaigns - Stop Crew Fatigue.

NOTE: The major rail carriers and the rail unions in the U.S. commenced bargaining for a national contract on January 1<sup>st</sup>. With PSR now in full swing in this country, and the carriers likewise intent on further reductions in employment, look for safety to be a top priority in bargaining. US unions would be wise to start now in educating the public and political officials about the process and alerting them to the safety crisis at hand. Rail workers need to understand that the public, together with elected officials, can make or break a rail strike. Rail workers should consider candidates for office who will be sympathetic when push comes to shove. Because the Canadian brothers and sisters were not ordered back to work, CN workers were able to bring the carrier back to the table. Like them, U.S. railroad workers have immense power to achieve a safe, properly staffed railroad, complete with a two-person crew on every train, if we are freed up to exercise our power.



# **PSR Threatens to Gut America's Freight Rail System**

**Statement from the Transportation Trades Department of the AFL-CIO Policy Statement No. F19-03 Adopted October 29, 2019**

Since the first U.S. freight trains departed from Baltimore nearly 200 years ago, the freight rail industry has served as the backbone of domestic commerce, providing reliable, safe and responsive service and in the process creating and sustaining good union jobs. The success of the rail industry is premised on the fair treatment and utilization of its frontline workforce, balanced economic regulations and an expectation that railroads will meet their service obligations. Unfortunately, the introduction of an operating model known as Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR) threatens to weaken these conditions and undermines our freight rail industry.

Freight railroads today are generating record revenues and operating at high levels of efficiency. But for some, these profits are not enough. To satisfy their outsized needs, short-term investors and hedge fund managers have forced PSR on large segments of the freight rail industry. This decision is not based on what is best for customers, workers, or even the long-term needs of the industry - it is about satisfying what Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Peter DeFazio described as the "Wall Street Jackals" who now dominate this sector.

Whereas carriers once sought to accommodate shippers' unique requirements and schedules, PSR dictates that rail cars operate on a set and often arbitrary schedule, arriving and departing at specific times regardless of the needs of its customers. PSR proponents claim that this improves train velocity—how quickly they can move trains from one location to another. However, we know the ultimate goal of PSR is to cut every possible corner and to slash every penny out of a capital-intensive industry that needs a long-term perspective to survive.

Mass layoffs have been a disturbing and central component of PSR operations. In just the first two years after CSX implemented this model, the carrier fired 22% of its equipment maintenance workers, 16% of its train crews and 11% of its maintenance-of-way employees. In a 2018 interview, Union Pacific's CEO proudly stated that, "We're in the process of eliminating about 500 jobs [and] there's more of that to come." Railroads may want us to believe these workers are extraneous, but it has become clear that reductions are simply about cutting costs, even if those cuts result in the degradation of safety. Workers who remain have been forced to do more with less, and are faced with discipline or dismissal if they refuse to comply. The consequences of these choices are no longer hypothetical. As carriers that have prescribed to PSR run fewer trains, understaffed shop craft facilities are reporting increasingly idle locomotives and equipment, but lack the workforce to keep the equipment in a state of good repair. In some cases, carriers are closing facilities entirely, increasing the workload for employees elsewhere who are already overwhelmed.

Carriers are also compensating for reduced staffing by requiring remaining employees to perform work outside their craft in addition to fulfilling their regular duties. At best, this may involve employees performing tasks with which they are not experienced. At worst, employees may be forced to do work for which they are not qualified. Furthermore, rather than maintaining appropriate staffing levels, carriers are mandating overtime for workers who are already stretched thin. In an industry where fatigue is a constant risk factor, exposing employees to additional fatigue by asking them to work longer and faster while performing multiple jobs is a recipe for disaster.

When TCU and IAM conducted a membership survey on the impacts of PSR, the answers painted a deeply disturbing picture of day-to-day operations. One responding machinist reported being sent, by himself, to work with dangerous and heavy equipment that once required two workers, and expressing fear that no one would know to call for help if he was injured. A carman wrote that at his yard, management now demands brake inspections be performed at the extraordinary and unsafe pace of just 60 seconds per car. Employees of both crafts say critical safety rules designed to protect employees from being hit by equipment are being ignored in the name of speed. Numerous employees stated that re-shift safety briefings - a common industry practice - are being eliminated in order to better utilize man-hours. And commonly, carmen are being forced to ignore FRA defects. One consistent theme emerged throughout the responses: railroads value getting trains moving and moving quickly above all else, including safety.

Rail carriers are also increasingly turning to longer and heavier "PSR-optimized" trains to increase efficiency. A recent GAO report found average train length has increased by approximately 25 percent since 2008, and carriers are regularly operating trains up to three miles long. Frontline workers told GAO they are not receiving adequate training on how to safely operate these longer trains. And current rail networks are simply not designed for trains of this magnitude, which risks delays to both freight and passenger service. Furthermore, local communities are not included in discussions about the use of longer trains in their jurisdictions that often block grade crossings and can make it difficult for emergency personnel to respond if an incident does occur. The FRA has failed to address the substantial safety challenges these operations present.

In fact, the FRA has done nothing at all to address PSR's effect on safety. Recently, on a private conference call to FRA employees, a senior staff member dismissed PSR issues as mere "hiccups." Yet, FRA's own data shows far more than just a hiccup. Derailments, fatalities, and collisions have all increased over the last several years. Accidents involving injuries to Class I carrier employees will increase across most railroads in 2019. The total number of employees injured at Kansas City Southern and Union Pacific have already surpassed these carriers' employee injury totals from 2018. The Class I carrier slated to do better in 2019 is BNSF. Not so coincidentally, BNSF is the only carrier who has not moved to PSR.

Between reports from frontline employees and the FRA's own data, it is clear that PSR puts rail workers and the public at real and unacceptable risk. The FRA must take aggressive action to address these concerns before conditions further erode. The agency should start by not ignoring safety violation reports filed by frontline workers that describe a PSR culture that is not conducive to safe operations. More broadly, the FRA needs to conduct detailed analysis of rail operations - even when the letter of the law or regulation is not being explicitly violated - in order to prioritize safe operations.

We are also deeply concerned with the impacts of PSR on the future viability of freight rail and existing networks. At a recent hearing on the subject, witnesses discussed a Tennessee Pringles factory nearly driven out of business due to delays in shipments, a Kellogg plant that had to suspend production entirely, and federal intervention that was required to get grain moving to Florida farms. Even while providing substandard service, railroads are padding their pockets with fees they assess when shippers cannot comply with the carrier's demanding schedule. In 2018 alone, Class I's levied a record \$1.2 billion in fines against shippers. The lack of compatibility between PSR and customers' needs has even led to questions of whether carriers who have adopted PSR are abiding by their common carrier obligations. While Wall Street may enjoy the fruits of this model now, it presents long and short-term risks of pushing away customers whose business models rely on freight rail service.

Impacts to shippers will have far-reaching economic effects. In 2017, freight rail networks moved approximately \$174 billion worth of goods. Disrupting the flow of commerce by degrading service or cutting off rail shipping options entirely will have cascading effects throughout sectors that directly or indirectly rely on freight rail to move their goods.

Precision Scheduled Railroading works for the few—wealthy investors who have little concern for anything other than their bottom lines. These investors are fickle, and when they have extracted every last cent out of the railroad industry, they will move on to the next sector. Meanwhile, we will be left with a hollowed-out system that does not serve its customers, has abandoned safety, and has pushed out thousands of skilled workers who may never return. This trajectory can be changed, but doing so will require active engagement from Congress and federal safety and economic regulators, as well as a serious rethinking of operational strategy from freight rail carriers. TTD calls on them to reverse the damage caused by PSR before it becomes too late.





# Railroad Safety

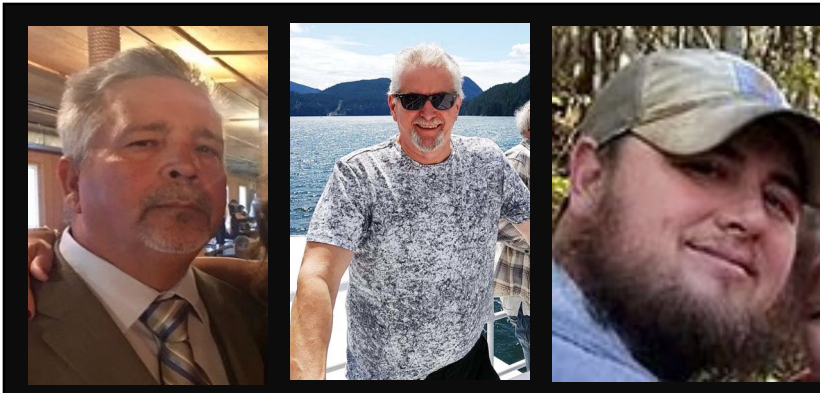
## Six Rail Workers Killed Within Weeks of Each Other Across North America

The rail industry is very fond of citing its statistics that “prove” a decline in rail workers injuries. The carriers like to promote the idea that it is their enlightened policies, procedures and operations that are solely responsible for this supposed decline. But other factors are often at play that may be responsible for any decline in injuries. For example, with 20,000 fewer railroad workers on the property in the U.S. alone this year, one might naturally expect at minimum a proportionate decline in rail accidents and injuries. In addition, as the rail industry, technology, industrial materials, communications and other aspects of industrial society develop and improve, one would expect these changes to translate into a safer rail workplace environment.

When it comes to fatalities however, the rail industry does not crow so loud. They are of course a little harder to cover up, and workers fearing discipline cannot hide or cover them up. As such, the number of fatalities on the railroad stubbornly refuses to de-

cline in the past decade in both the U.S. and Canada. While the numbers are still being crunched, RWU has documented 22 rail worker fatalities in 2019. See the RWU website. (NOTE: our numbers may not match the rail industry’s nor those of government oversight agencies since RWU considers contract workers who do railroad work to be *railroad workers period*, regardless of what boss they may be collecting a paycheck from).

A “safe” rail system could not experience what occurred in five brutal weeks in late 2019. Coming on the heels of Amtrak CEO Richard Anderson crowing about the great safety record achieved by the new safety program at that carrier, Amtrak would lose three workers in the space of three weeks in three separate incidents. All told, six union brothers would be killed in those five weeks. It goes without saying that neither Anderson nor other rail CEO’s claimed that their amazing “safety” programs were responsible for these (or the other) losses in 2019.



Starting with the death of Chicago Amtrak machinist Christopher Blaess on November 9th, a total of six railroaders would die on the job in the next five weeks. Amtrak BMWED member Juan Diaz (photo, far left), would be killed 4 days later, followed by CP engineer Kirk Charles McLean (photo, center) killed in Port Coquitlam, BC December 2nd. Conductor Chris Seidl on the Wichita Terminal RR in Wichita, KS was killed the very next day. Yet a third Amtrak worker Jarrett Erhart would die during this period, in The Bronx, NY on December 5th. Finally on December 14th, CSX conductor Curtis C. McConihay (photo, right) was killed in a switching derailment near Parkersburg, WV.

## 2019: The Year of the Derailment

As railroaders, we are used to hearing of derailments. Many of us may have been involved in a minor or even a major derailment over the course of our working lives. This is the nature of the transportation industry. Heavy objects in motion sometimes do not perform the way we expect them to. These things happen.

But by summer of 2019, it had become apparent to those who work in this industry that something was amiss. For those paying attention, it seemed like hardly a week went by that we learned of yet another derailment. Yes, of course many were minor, slow-speed derailments and yard mishaps. But there were an inordinate number of high speed mainline wrecks of all sorts, wrecks that - while thankfully sparing the lives of both crew members and trackside community residents - were often dramatic and cataclysmic, many resulting in dozens of cars spilled, locomotives wrecked, fires and explosions, toxic chemical releases, dramatic rescues and citizen evacuations.

Railroad Workers United has begun an effort to track the number of derailments, and has compiled a comprehensive listing of them on our website Home Page. In early January, the list was emailed to our members, supporters and public officials. While more thorough and complete research is necessary, it seems to us that is no coincidence that the same year that PSR took hold on most all Class One railroads across North America, that a surprising number of major mainline derailments and worker fatalities (see article above) would occur. While it might be impossible to prove the connection, draw your own conclusions.



While most of the year’s derailments did not result in rail worker fatalities, a number of train crews were injured and hospitalized. Such was not the fate of the year’s first major derailment of the year, when three CP crew members lost their lives in a runaway train wreck in the Canadian Rockies on February 4th, and CSX conductor was killed in a West Virginia derailment on December 16th. Miraculously, the crew was saved from drowning in this derailment - on the final day of 2019 - near the Montana-Idaho border (above photo), when a BNSF train derailed, plunging into the icy waters of the Kootenai River.



# Opinion & Commentary

## “Those Who Cannot Learn from History Are Doomed to Repeat It” - Part 1

We've all heard this quote or some variation of it over the years. Perhaps many of us have heard it so often that we inadvertently become indifferent to the true essence of the concept. Recent events in the current news cycle reinforced to me just how critical and essential it is for the working class to conquer this concept, so that it becomes part of our moral, intellectual and ideological DNA. For the sake of accuracy, there are several variations/versions of the above quote, attributed to the European philosopher/writer, George Santayana. This may not be the original verbatim verbiage, but my intent here is to focus on the content, the need to study and learn our history. Only with a thorough understanding of where we've come from, are we able to put our present conditions into an accurate context, in order to most effectively chart our course for the future.

So what the hell does any of this have to do with rails trying to draw a battle line in the sand against single-employee crews as more and more of us are being tortured by the implementation of Precision Scheduled Railroading? Glad you asked. The short answer is one of the basic reasons for RWU's existence: A major contributing factor to the carriers' ability to effortlessly eviscerate our working conditions, dignity, safety, quality of life on and off the job over the last few decades is the fact that we remain divided into 13 different craft unions. This is an insult to our intelligence and every rail should be outraged. They play rail labor like chumps, manipulating divisions in crafts, properties, terminals, etc. On our website, [www.railroadworkersunited.org](http://www.railroadworkersunited.org), in addition to current news and analysis, you'll find the archives of *The Highball*. There's a wealth of informative and educational articles and commentaries that unfortunately stand the test of time. Check out the "General Info for Railroaders" link on the left, which leads to the history and legacy of Eugene Debs, founder of the American Railway Union (ARU) in 1893.

For newer readers, the "cliff notes" synopsis: The ARU's mission was to organize ALL railroad workers into ONE industrial union, the first such union in labor's history. Rails signed up in droves, sometimes at the rate of 2,000 a week. At its peak, the ARU had more members than the combined total of all the existing craft brotherhoods. The ARU's first challenge was against the Great Northern. After a 3-week strike, rail labor had its first victory. The 1894 Pullman Strike evolved into a major battle throughout the country. The ARU was winning on the picket lines, and had overwhelming support in the working class, but was ultimately crushed by the federal militia. At least two dozen were killed, with several dozen more injured. Several ARU leaders, including Debs, were imprisoned, their supporters blacklisted and forever banished from the industry. 125 years later we remain divided as the carriers slobber all over themselves in glee. A little known fact is that leaders of the existing craft brotherhoods at the time - which would evolve into our existing unions of today - encouraged their members, sometimes ordering them to cross the ARU's picket lines. So, in essence, the existing brotherhoods were utilized as a strikebreaking apparatus, to assist the carriers in crushing the ARU. Isn't that special?

So how does this brief history lesson apply to our plight today? Armed with this history and the fact that very little has changed, placing blind faith and trust in our existing institutions, as they are currently constituted, to effectively defend us from the carriers' relentless assaults, is tactical suicide. We must pressure and challenge from within, to whatever extent possible. But

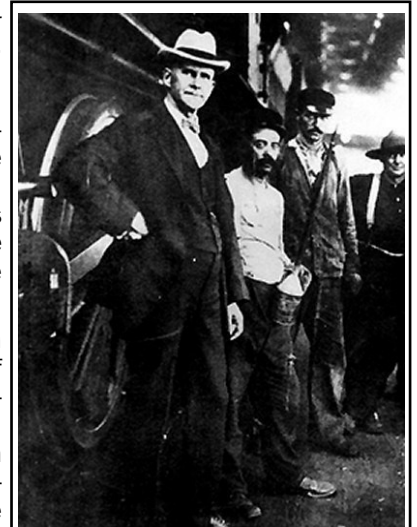
nothing less than an educated, organized, mobilized, inspired, determined and confident rank & file will suffice to effectively challenge the bosses and the politicians that support and enable them - Democrats and Republicans - while sweeping aside ineffective leadership along the way.

Over the years, I've been given props for my stream-of-consciousness rant-and-rages in these pages and various public forums. I'm grateful and humbled, especially to whatever extent I've been able to inspire my peers. But once upon a time, I was just a hot-mess "rebel without a clue". In the late 1970's, I began to develop some union consciousness,

getting active in my fireman's local, as the bosses were flagrantly violating our contract, while also transfixed by Solidarnosc, the uprising of the Polish working class. What started as an industrial skirmish in the Gdansk shipyards evolved into a broad social movement, as the workers utilized their economic power to champion the just demands of society. Since we're robbed of our history, that was the first time I'd ever heard of a general strike, though the first such strike was actually 100 years earlier, led by my forefathers in the industry I was working in. "Hot damn, what a great idea! We need to try something like that here." Yet simultaneously, as the Democratic mayor was trying to break the striking Chicago Firefighters Union, I lapped up the media's narrative that, "...those greedy workers are putting the public at risk by extorting the city to cave in to their selfish demands...", hook-line-and-sinker. Fortunately, I soon encountered some veteran activists/fighters for social justice on the job, who opened my eyes to just how much I needed to learn. We have a responsibility to seek out the truth and facts about our history. Little to none is taught in school or found in the mainstream media. While we're at it, we need to educate ourselves on economics, because that drives everything from our conditions on and off the job, to politics, the environment and foreign policy.

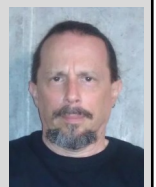
As this issue goes to press, Asarco, one of the world's major copper producers, is trying to bust the USW copper miners in Arizona. In 1983, when the union struck Phelps Dodge, the AZ Democratic, "friend-of-labor" governor had the National Guard break the strike and the union. "Those who cannot learn from history..."

*To be Continued in the Next Issue*



**Rail labor pioneer Eugene V. Debs worked to unite all railroad workers into one union, and urged rails to count themselves among the working class movement of his day.**

**Mark Burrows has served as Organizer and Co-Chair for RWU. He recently retired after hiring out in 1974, working as an engineer for a combined total of 37 years for the C&NW and the Soo Line/CP Rail in Chicago, Illinois. He was SMART-TD 1433's Delegate for the 2011 & 2014 International Conventions and continues to be an active member of RWU.**







# Editorial

## RWU Position Statement on the “Coordinated Bargaining Coalition”

Railroad Workers United (RWU) commends the union officials of the ten rail unions in the U.S. that recently announced their intentions to bargain as a group in this round of national handling with the rail carriers as the *Coordinated Bargaining Coalition* (CBC). It is unprecedented for the operating crafts and the shop crafts to come together on such a scale as this. The ten unions - American Train Dispatchers Association (ATDA); Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET); Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS); International Association of Machinists (IAM); International Brotherhood of Boilermakers (IBB); National Conference of Firemen & Oilers/SEIU (NCFU); International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW); Transport Workers Union of America (TWU); Transportation Communications Union/IAM (TCU); Transportation Division of the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail, and Transportation Workers (SMART-TD) - will no doubt be stronger and more able to win better contracts if they are able to hold this coalition together. RWU has been pushing for such a universal coalition of *all* rail since our founding in 2008.

### Shortcomings

Just a few short years ago, the operating crafts were at one another's' throats, and the shop crafts were hopelessly divided into numerous “coalitions”. The rail unions were hopelessly divided, at best into several, ineffectual, irrational groupings, or at worst, facing off with the carriers independently. In comparison, this near universal coalition represents a drastic improvement for rail labor. While RWU sees this historic coalition as a step forward, it is not without shortcomings. To ensure that rail labor is strong and united at the bargaining table, more work needs to be done. As it now stands, the Coalition fails to include two unions, the Mechanical Division of SMART and the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division (BMWED). The latter is one of the largest of the rail unions and is also - like the BLET - a member of the Teamsters Rail Conference. Together, the BLET and the BMWED represent a sizable block of rail labor, and for them to not both be in the same coalition is extremely harmful. Both unions had historically bargained together under the Teamster “umbrella” for the initial bargaining rounds following their respective mergers into the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) some 15 years ago. There is no good reason for them not to be able to work together inside the same coalition today. We urge rank & file members of both BLET and BMWED to call upon their respective leaderships to make the necessary compromises to ensure that there is room for both IBT affiliates in the CBC. Likewise, it is absurd to have the two sections of SMART not be united in bargaining.

Both the IBT and SMART have extolled the virtues of unification when they sought merger approval from the membership. It is an insult to the membership that these union officials are incapable of putting aside whatever petty jealousies, personality clashes, past differences, jurisdictional and/or financial concerns that apparently stand in the way of total unity. Leaders from these unions must put this BS aside to reach accommodation and unite for the sake of their membership. Failure to achieve the universal coalition that is at hand will critically weaken the CBC.

In addition, there is apparently no provision for the myriad unions to stick together. To be truly effective, and to ensure that the rail unions are able to resist the carriers ability to divide-and-conquer as they have done so effectively for decades, we need a coalition that is bound by the adage, “no union settles until all

settle.” RWU believes wholeheartedly in the traditional union slogan that “An injury to one is an injury to all!” If the rail carriers can placate one union or group of unions, while simultaneously attacking others, we will have failed. The rail unions cannot simultaneously be in coalition yet fail to make a true and binding commitment to one another.

While this Coalition is no doubt a step forward, RWU has grave concerns that their members were left out of the process.

Union leaders continue to see this as their private domain, a theater in which they alone cut deals with one another as to whom will partner up with whom. The rank & file is not invited to discuss, debate and vote on these merger agreements. But the members vote on contract Tentative Agreements. They should likewise be party to these negotiations among union leaders. But the CBC was constructed in the traditional “back room” manner, in the dark, behind closed doors, with little or no participation by the rank & file. What really were the negotiations like? What is the common ground? What is the basis of the Coalition? How solid is it? And how much information does the coalition intend to share with the membership going forward? The members have little to no idea. This undemocratic and outmoded way that the unions do business must be scrapped.

Finally, this Coalition should have been consummated months - if not years - prior to the start of this round of bargaining. Ironically, the unions made the announcement just after the exchange of the Section 6 notices with the National Carriers Conference Committee (NCCC) on November 1<sup>st</sup>. The unions would have entered this round far stronger had they taken the time necessary to not just coordinate their Section 6 Notices, but to involve and mobilize their membership for the coming struggle. It is absurd to have waited to consummate this coalition when bargaining is about to begin. The work necessary to win a good contract starts long before the actual commencement of bargaining.

### Conclusion

Despite these obvious shortcomings, RWU supports this development. It is not too late to perfect the coalition. The unions remaining outside the Coalition can still be brought in. The participants can still endorse a binding statement of unity. And there is still time to involve the membership in the bargaining process. Let's build the coalition “on the ground”, where the rank & file play an intrinsic and vital role in supporting and developing a culture of solidarity among all crafts and between all unions. Rail labor is currently facing a crisis in the face of Precision Scheduled Railroading, furloughs and layoffs, downsizing of the physical plant and reduced freight movement, threats to train crew staffing and other work rules. A principled and democratic Coordinated Bargaining Coalition of *all* offers rail labor a golden opportunity to change the entire balance of forces and to rebuild our power. The CBC is a definite step forward. Now it is time to address its shortcomings and make it develop into a long-lasting, democratic, vibrant and powerful force for progress.



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*"I have expressed my commitment to (SMART-TD) President (Jeremy) Ferguson that our two proud Unions should bargain together again in the upcoming round ... Our solidarity is crucial to our success."*  
BLET President Dennis Pierce regarding the two-person crew fight, Fall 2019.



# Railroad Workers United Membership Application

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City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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Union \_\_\_\_\_ Local # \_\_\_\_\_ Employer \_\_\_\_\_

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