

# The Highball

Official Publication of  
**Railroad Workers United**

## Fall 2020 Brings Carnage to U.S. Railroads – Six Killed on the Job

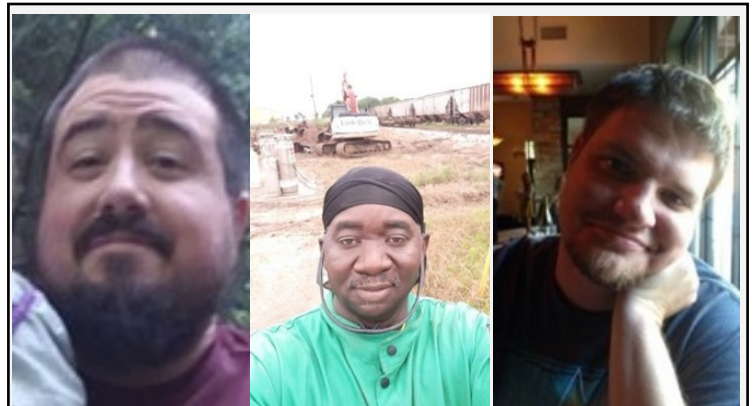
Fall 2020 was a disaster for railroad workers in the U.S. As if the pandemic; job cuts, layoffs, and furloughs; unwarranted discipline and firings; overwork and fatigue; and the stress and hardships engendered by Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR) were not enough, no fewer than 6 rail workers were killed on the job in just a few short weeks, from October 15th through November 22nd. The fatalities occurred in 6 separate incidents on 5 different carriers. Four of them were killed within 17 days in November. Note: On 12/24, a 7th fatality was announced on KCS.

Railroad Workers United keeps close tabs on rail workers killed each year. While last year was brutal (with RWU documenting no fewer than 22 killed on the job in the U.S. and Canada); the year 2020 – until the Fall – did not see near the number of fatalities. In fact, RWU had documented just 4 U.S. and 2 Canadian rail workers killed on the job until October 12<sup>th</sup>. Given the record of the rail carriers the past few years, this was surprising. Speculation was that the pandemic combined with PSR sharply reduced the number of both shipments and trains, and together with fewer employees working, logically meant that – all things equal – there would naturally be some degree of decline in fatalities. In addition, the completion of PTC on nearly 60,000 miles of mainline trackage in the U.S. no doubt has begun to save lives, as it protects against signal violations, train overspeed, unauthorized main track occupations and other causes of train wrecks and resultant fatalities.

Whatever combinations of factors – PTC, fewer employees, fewer trains, less freight, and/or sheer luck – might have helped to keep in check the number of on-the-job fatalities for the first nine months of 2020, they certainly did not come into play by the Fall. Starting mid-month, a series of mishaps took place which would take the lives of a half dozen workers in as many separate incidents across the U.S. on five different railroads.

In 2018 (the first year that PSR was universally implemented by most U.S. Class One railroads) the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) – the agency that keep tabs on injuries and fatalities on U.S. railroads - reported 17 U.S. rail worker deaths, up from 11 the year prior. In contrast, the agency had reported just 4 on-the-job deaths prior to October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Now, when combined with the loss of an MTA worker in early September in the Bronx, NY, the total rail worker on-the-job fatalities in the U.S. for 2020 has reached 11. Note: FRA and RWU annual statistics may not always be in agreement since RWU recognizes both U.S. and Canadian rail workers, and often includes railroad con-

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**Three of the most recent fatalities in the rail industry, from left-right: Paul M. Payne - SMART-TD Local #1397 from Mount Vernon, Ohio; Dexter Earl Scott, contract worker from Laurel, Miss; Ryan Joseph Sandy, SMART-TD Local #662 from Mechanicsville, Virginia.**

## BMWED Threatens Strike Action at Canadian Pacific, Wins Contract

The maintenance of way workers on the Dakota, Minnesota, and Eastern (DM&E) Railroad Corporation (owned by Canadian Pacific) had waited almost six years for a new contract. On September 14, 2020, the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (BMWED) made their case to arbitrator Sidney Moreland. The union hoped to bring light to the wage discrepancies between the BMWED workers on the DM&E and the BMWED workers who work under the former SOO and Milwaukee agreements.

On September 25, 2020, the arbitrator made his decision. Ultimately, the workers on the DM&E were unable to win a contract that matched the wages that are agreed upon within the SOO and Milwaukee agreement, however, they were able to win a significant wage increase, along with supplemental pay for each hour worked, an increase to meal allowances for non-headquartered employees

and a retroactive lump sum back payment. Per the arbitrator's award, the pay increase was to go into effect within ten days after the date of the award (September 25) and the back pay was to be paid within sixty days of the award.

The workers waited patiently for their award to go into effect. Ten days passed and the wages on bulletined positions were still at the level they had been prior to the arbitrator's award. Then, after waiting over a month, the workers received their paystubs which covered the period when the pay change was to occur. To the dismay of all of the workers, the award had not been implemented. The workers began to speak with their union officials and action was set to be taken on October 27.

That day, workers on the DM&E, along with BMWED brothers

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# Railroad Worker Defense

## Amtrak #501 Wreck Revelations: New Evidence that Crew was "Set up to Fail"

As we in the industry are well aware, at the first sign of trouble the employees are first on the list to be scrutinized. In my 35 years investigating these accidents it is far too common that those assumptions are incorrect. For example, disaster struck many years ago at Kelso, Washington and a BNSF train met head on with a UPRR train horrifically taking the lives of 5 men. The headlines in the local papers the following morning were, "Train crew missed a signal." We thoroughly investigated this matter as legal representatives for the Union Pacific Conductor and in fact we were the only firm to push the matter all the way to the courtroom. Information emerged regarding the state of the signal system in depositions, and when faced with "bad facts" the railroad settled the case during trial. In my heart I know that these 5 men died in vain.

Fast forward to the tragic day of December 18th, 2017 and the crash of Amtrak 501. This horrific accident took three lives and left many other's in shambles. Once again, the headlines were alarming ... and false as we now know. As in past Amtrak accidents the Engineer immediately came under fire. His train speed appeared to be excessive. What very few knew at the time is that the training/qualifying of these employees was not only lacking but in some instances, nonexistent. Of course, we know now of these conditions, training conditions that the NTSB has described as engineers and conductors being "set up for failure".

Despite cries from some employees that they were not ready for this new route known as the Point Defiance by-pass, the company apparently felt it had spent all the money it was going to spend on training, so in the reported words of one supervisor to a concerned employee, "Just go do your job".

Now, new information has come forward that indicates that not only was the training inept and severely lacking, but the operating conditions that these crews were being trained under failed to accurately reflect the actual conditions that they would be faced with in actual operations. For example, it is now under question as to whether the training taking place may have ever been under

"clear" block signal indications, thereby failing to properly train the crews at actual track speed conditions. Combined with nighttime training only, which impedes employees' familiarity with landmarks and signage, these employees were ill-prepared.

To expect the best out of the workforce you must put your best forward as a CEO. This was lacking in this observer's opinion, when it came to former Amtrak CEO Richard Anderson. Just prior to the horrendous 501 crash, some 500 managers - many of them highly experienced employees - were "bought out" or retired early systemwide in an effort to improve the bottom line. What is to be expected when you take hundreds of years' experience out of a workforce and then mismanage the remaining employees.

These problems can be added to the long list of other systemic failures present in the training of these unfortunate employees, tasked with the safe and efficient operations of our passenger trains. While these employees twist in the



wind, vilified by the press and public opinion, they are in fact the victims of an employer who is failing not only its greatest asset - its employees - but also failing the folks - the passengers and the public - who trusted the company with their lives.

*John Hiatt, former BNSF Engineer, who now works as an investigator with Bremseth Law Firm, submitted this article to The Highball.*

### 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
- Ron Kaminkow, BLET #51, Amtrak, Reno, NV
- Joe Mulligan, BLET #57, Keolis, Boston, MA
- Hugh Sawyer, BLET #316, NS, Atlanta, GA
- Phil Stevenson, SMART #376, CSX, Ashland, KY
- James Wallace, BLET #621, BNSF, Lincoln, NE
- Andrew Weir, TCRC-LE #240, CN, Sarnia, ON

#### Alternates

- Chuck Abbate, SMART-TD #898b, KEOLIS, Boston, MA
- Tabitha Tripp, (family) BMWED #17, CN, Anna, IL

#### 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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# Fall 2020 Brings Carnage to U.S. Railroads – Six Killed on the Job

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tract workers, transit workers, and others in our tallies. Below is a listing of those U.S. railroad workers killed on the job the past few weeks in the Fall of 2020.

**Ryan Joseph Sandy**, 37, of Mechanicsville, Virginia was killed on **October 12** while working as a Conductor at Acca Yard in Richmond. He was an 11-year veteran, a former Local Chairman, and a member of SMART-TD Local #662. He leaves behind a wife and 5 children.

On **October 15<sup>th</sup>**, **Warren Thomson** age 59, from Monterey, Massachusetts, was working to replace a section of tracks, died after being run over by an excavator in Canaan, CT. Thomson was a longtime member of the local volunteer fire department, worked construction earlier in life, and had worked for the Housatonic Railroad for 20 years.

Then a few weeks later, **Beau Patrick Thomas** died from a work-related accident on Norfolk Southern (NS) property on **November 5<sup>th</sup>**, at the age of 35. Thomas worked for NS for 15 years in various roles, including Engineer, Conductor, Yardmaster, and Switchman, and was killed at the railroad's Rossville, TN inter-nodal facility. He leaves behind a wife and two children.

**Brandon Warnick** – a Conductor with Decatur & Eastern Illinois Railroad, a 126 mile WATCO company shortline - was killed during a switching accident on **November 11<sup>th</sup>**. The incident took place on the grounds of Cabot Corp.'s silica plant in Ficklin, Illinois, an unincorporated area 4 miles west of Tuscola, about 33 miles east of Decatur. He was 35 years old and was engaged in switching out the facility at the time.



*PTC may help reduce mainline incidents, but speed-up, deferred maintenance and fatigued crews will continue to jeopardize safety.*

On **November 17<sup>th</sup>**, workers from Continental Rails Inc. were replacing ties on a 12.1 mile section of track owned by the Canadian National (CN). A CN locomotive operated by employees of Alabama Export Railroad was headed toward the Alabama State Docks when it collided with the Continental Rails crew. **Dexter Earl Scott**, a worker from Laurel, Miss., died in the accident and two others were injured.

Finally, on **November 22<sup>nd</sup>**, **Paul M. Payne** of Mount Vernon, Ohio, a member of SMART-TD Local 1397 in Columbus, Ohio, lost his life in an accident at the CSX yard in Fostoria, Ohio. Brother Payne, a conductor for eight years, was at work setting out a cut of cars in the yard located in northwest Ohio when he was fatally injured. He is survived by his wife and 5 children.

# BMWED Threatens Strike Action at Canadian Pacific, Wins Contract

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from BNSF and UP, showed up to the Canadian Pacific (CP) depot in Clinton, Iowa for an informational demonstration. This demonstration resulted in the company agreeing to process the supplemental pay the next day and that the workers would receive their retroactive back pay for 2020 on November 4. For most workers, the date of the retroactive back payment for the period prior to 2020 was still uncertain. However, on December

3rd, workers who had worked prior to 2020 received their back payment pay stubs which were to be paid the next day. CP was held by the Arbitrator's award and still they failed to implement the changes within the timeframe. For workers waiting over five years for a contract, this was simply unacceptable. The workers reacted by taking their grievances directly to CP, and for that, they were rewarded with the pay they were entitled to. *Direct action gets the goods!*



*On Oct. 27, DM&E Maintenance of Way workers, joined by fellow workers from the UP and BNSF, protest CP's failure to abide by arbitrator's decision on raises and back pay. CP soon relented, proving once again that resistance is essential to confront the carriers' attacks.*



# Political Action

## Twelve Reasons for Rail Workers to Support “Medicare for All”

Railroad workers in the U.S. have some of the best employer-based health care coverage available. This has come about through decades of unionization and contract bargaining. As a result, many railroad workers are rightfully proud of their health insurance and understand that it has traditionally been – along with the federally administered Railroad Retirement System - one of the valuable and important “perks” of working in the rail industry.

But there are many reasons why this insurance is today in danger, and why individual railroad workers and their families could suffer as a result. Increasing out-of-pocket costs, the inability to bargain for improved contracts, impingements upon freedom of choice, and restrictions upon worker and union power should all be of grave concern to railroad workers in the U.S. today. This employer-based health insurance is in fact holding back healthcare progress for railroad workers – and all workers – in our country today.

Below are a dozen reasons why railroad workers need to re-think our current health insurance and get behind an alternative that is far more secure and beneficial for rank & file railroaders:

**1 – The Current Health Care System is a Drain on Our Ability to Bargain.** For decades now, each round of bargaining with the rail carriers has been marred by employer attacks on our health insurance plans. With the last two contracts this has become ever more apparent. Railroaders have seen a dramatic increase in doctor visit and drug co-pays, various deductibles and other out-of-pocket expenses. The carriers threaten major take-aways each bargaining round, and to preserve and protect our plans, we often forego other aspects of the contract. For example, benefits like additional holidays, vacation time, and personal leave or sick time rarely, if ever, even make it to the table as we take a defensive posture with regards to healthcare. Removing it from the bargaining table would free us up to win better working conditions, wages and other benefits. *Medicare for All takes health care off the bargaining table.*

**2 – Chronic Givebacks at the Bargaining Table.** As referenced above, railroad workers have been consistently giving up little by little in the past few rounds of bargaining. As costs escalate out of control, the carriers will continue to come to the table demanding additional concessions when it comes to healthcare. If what has been happening in our industry and most others is any indication, in the next ten years or so, our so called “Cadillac” health plans might not be so good anymore at the rate that we are going. *Medicare for All is designed to be free of co-pays and deductibles.*

**3 – Changes in Insurance Providers.** The union which negotiates on your behalf reached agreement with the carrier on a health network provider. For example, for many years, an agreement may provide for care under the Aetna network, and then the next contract switch to United Health Care. While the contract may still provide for roughly the same level of care, some or all your physicians, specialists, hospitals and clinics may no longer fall within the new network. So, you may be free to continue to make use of those professionals and these facilities, but at your own expense, rendering your insurance useless if/when you elect to go “outside” of network. *Under Medicare for All, ALL medical providers and services are ALL in-network, and you are free to visit any doctor of your choice and use the services and facilities that you wish.*



*Workers rally for healthcare. Within rail labor the BMWED is leading the way. Other rail unions need to get on board with Medicare for All.*

**4 – What Happens if You Lose Your Job?** With the turnover rate higher now than in the past, you just might find yourself without a rail job at some point ... and without healthcare. Thousands have been furloughed the past 18 months, all losing their healthcare along with their jobs. Hundreds more have been fired, and while on appeal, have lost their health insurance. Others have quit the industry in disgust, tired of the long hours, harassment, and exploitation. In either case, lose your job, lose your healthcare. *Under Medicare for All, you may lose your job for any reason, work for any employer, or even be unemployed, yet still maintain your healthcare.*

**5 – Is Your Family Covered? Your Friends and Neighbors?** Your kids may be covered now under your plan, but what about once they fly the coop? They may not be so lucky as you to have a good employer-provided healthcare plan. Jobs with good healthcare are getting harder to come by. And what about your brothers/sisters, grandkids, nieces and nephews, and other loved ones? Under the current system, odds are that at least some of them are either uninsured or underinsured, lacking a decent workplace health insurance plan. By the same token, many of your friends and neighbors may suffer the same fate. Do we not care about their well-being as well? Even if we only care for them from an “enlightened self-interest” perspective, we surely do not wish to be endlessly supporting Go Fund Me Campaigns to help them out while in the meantime we risk getting infected by their untreated condition. *Under Medicare for All, your family, friends and neighbors are all covered, period.*

**6 – Freedom to Choose Your Provider.** As referenced in Reason #3, the current employer-based health care provides a complex patchwork of “in-network” and “out-of-network” providers and services. Depending on which insurance provider the carrier is currently contracted with, certain services and providers will be considered out-of-network, meaning a far higher cost to the worker than an in-network provider. This severely restricts your ability to seek the services from the medical professionals of your choice. *Under Medicare for All, ALL medical providers and services are ALL in-network, meaning you are truly free to choose what is right for you.*

**7 – Freedom to Change Employers.** Currently, there are many railroaders (you may be one!) who might consider leaving your



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current employer – or the rail industry completely - except for the fact that you cannot gamble with the healthcare coverage for you and your family. Most of us know all too well that to assume another position, resign your position, or otherwise sever relations with your employer could be dangerous, leaving you temporarily or even permanently uninsured or underinsured in the future. *Medicare for All would free up railroad workers – and all workers – to leave the industry when they are dissatisfied and assume a job more to their liking. This would have additional benefit, such as giving us even more power at the bargaining table (see Reason #1 on preceding page).*

**8 – Willingness to Take on the Rail Carrier.** Under the current system, rail workers understand that to go on strike is a gamble. And knowing that you could lose your health insurance as well as your job – temporarily or permanently – can put the brakes on workers’ readiness to engage in strike action. *With Medicare for All in place, railroaders would have the confidence to confront the employer – individually and collectively – since they would know that in possibly losing their job (temporarily or permanently), they would not lose their health insurance.*

**9 – The Hassles of Billing, Co-Pays, Deductibles.** Under the employer-based system of healthcare, we waste a huge amount of time researching what providers/services are in-network or out, what is covered and what is not, and at what rate. Every few years we get a new contract with new specifics, and we must start all over again. And even if you think you have it down, you invariably get a surprise bill in the mail. This system is time consuming, wasteful, stressful, and contributes greatly to the spiraling cost of healthcare. *Under Medicare for All, all services and facilities and doctors are “in-network”, there are no co-pays and deductibles and no billing, thereby containing costs and providing choice for all. Gratefully, we would avoid all the stress, the hassle, and waste of time spent trying to comprehend all the fine print of our latest policy.*

**10 – A Nation Divided.** The current health insurance system is a complex and confusing hodgepodge. The American rich have some of the best healthcare in the industrialized world, while the American poor generally have some of the worst, and most of the working class in the middle suffer under a system where some workers may have good healthcare today, bad next month, and none next year. Most of us are worried and concerned about healthcare: Will my insurance cover this? What will the co-pay be? Is my doctor in-network anymore? How much is an emergency room visit now? You may be privileged today with good healthcare and yet tomorrow, have none. *Medicare for All ensures that healthcare is a right of every American. A national system of such nature would bring rural and urban people together and unite people from all social classes, races, regions and backgrounds. Such a system would be a point of pride and solidarity for all of us, united in good health for all.*

**11 – The Largest Source of Bankruptcy.** Millions of American families are bankrupted every year because they are either uninsured or underinsured. A catastrophic illness, accident or other mishap can result in hundreds of thousands of dollars in medical bills that can quickly drive a family into bankruptcy in short order, ruining their financial ability to succeed. You or a railroad brother/sister you know may have suffered this tragedy. *Medicare for All removes this scourge, meaning millions of families would be covered, their hopes and dreams no longer shattered by the heartbreak of bankruptcy due to a health catastrophe.*

**12 – Spiraling Costs of Health Care.** Healthcare in the United States today is twice as expensive compared to other industrialized countries such as Australia, the UK, Germany, and Sweden. All these countries have a national health plan under which all citizens have healthcare as a right. Our system leaves millions of Americans out, some of them our most vulnerable citizens. *Medicare for All will provide quality healthcare to all AND dramatically reduce the costs of healthcare. A look at all these other countries’ healthcare systems proves it. According to a recent study by The Lancet – among the world’s oldest, most prestigious, and best known general medical journals – the Medicare for All Act would save \$450 billion a year, provide universal coverage, and save 68,000 lives.*


# HEALTHCARE-NOW!

**Last, But Not Least.** As was mentioned in the very first paragraph of this article, that other great asset valued by every U.S. railroader is our Railroad Retirement System. We like it because it is self-funded, solvent, safe and secure, unthreatened by private scammers and Wall Street speculators. It pays benefits when we need them. It is professionally run by a single entity, the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB). ALL railroad workers pay into it, and ALL stand to benefit, providing us collectively with a great sense of security. It is *ours*. In a lot of ways, it is just like *Medicare for All*, just on a smaller scale. Like Railroad Retirement, *Medicare for All* would be self-funded (by the American people) and it would be safely out of the hands of Wall Street speculators and private insurance crooks. And it would be there when we need it. Just as our “old age insurance” is now handled by a single entity (the RRB), our health insurance would be similarly administered under Medicare for All. Likewise, we ALL would pay into it, and we ALL would stand to receive benefit. Unlike the current employer-based private-for-profit mega-insurance company plans currently in use, *Medicare for All* – just like Railroad Retirement - would be *ours*.

**Conclusion** – Today we are besieged by pundits and politicians of all persuasions attempting to convince us what is in our best interest. Many of them are funded by big business, including the insurance industry. Like any industry, the insurance companies are in business to make money. They have become some of the most powerful and lucrative businesses on Wall Street. They will do what they can to continue to make money from selling us private healthcare. They certainly have a bias, self-interest, and loads of cash to support their position politically.

Rail workers need to study the question carefully. Seek out both “conservative” and “liberal” sources of information (always checking to see where these sources obtain their funding). Listen to politicians of all persuasions (once again, seeking out the source of their campaign contributors). Then you decide how to best support your interests and well-being.

*Ron Kaminkow hired out in Chicago as a brakeman with Conrail in 1996, promoted to conductor and then engineer. He went on to work for Norfolk Southern (1999) and then Amtrak (2004). He currently works as a locomotive engineer in Reno, Nevada where he is the VP and Delegate of BLET #51. He serves as the General Secretary of RWU.*





# Opinion & Commentary

## Railroad Brothers & Sisters: Why Do We Put Up with This?!

As this issue of *The Highball* goes to press, we are saying good riddance to 2020 and cautiously welcoming 2021. Regular readers of my quarterly, incendiary rants know that my righteous indignation runs at a constant fever pitch on a good day, but with recent current events, my head feels like it's on the verge of exploding. I keep asking myself, "Why do we put up with this?!" That theme is the logical question posed by the four main bullet points at the conclusion of my commentary in the Fall 2020 issue titled, "Workers Need to Look Beyond Trump vs. Biden for our Salvation." To summarize, I attempted to make the case that the working class needs to contemplate the possibility that we are being shamelessly conned by the major entities that run society. I listed what I consider to be four fundamental myths that, at the very least, need to be questioned.

Three months later it's more important than ever that we stop allowing politicians, mainstream media talking heads and even our own union officials too effortlessly control the narrative. More than ever it's imperative that we begin to think for ourselves, question and do our own research on the economic and political power structures that essentially control every aspect of our lives. We need to discuss the role of our unions, especially the rank & file, from the past - to the present - to the future.

The article on page 7, "An Open Letter to President-Elect Joe Biden from RWU", makes reference to how the government has critical, decisive impact on the safety, dignity and quality of life on and off the job for railroad workers. From safety regulations - or lack thereof - to the constant threat of a Presidential Emergency Board, our struggles compel us to question, much less challenge and confront, our political institutions, in addition to evil, profit-driven bosses.

Since each issue of *The Highball* has a shelf life of three months, it's difficult to comment on immediate current events. A lot can happen in the next three months. These days one needs to keep a bag of popcorn handy for the constantly evolving theater-of-the-absurd. Nonetheless, I'm going to make an exception and take a stab at the current state of affairs. By the time you're reading this issue, in theory, Joe Biden will have been sworn in as President, in spite of the planned hissy fit by Trump and his lackeys to disrupt the imminent Electoral College certification. Regular readers of my commentaries know that I'm no fan of Democratic Party politicians either, but these Republicans are really something else.

As a rebellious teen in the early 1970s, I got into learning the history of our founding fathers' war of independence against England, the birth of our nation and studying the constitution. Simultaneously I was livid with then President Nixon's flagrant assault on that very constitution I was being taught to revere - AKA the Watergate scandal. As offensive as that was, Trump's futile (hopefully - a lot can happen in three months) attempt to overturn the recent election makes Watergate look like a petty urinating contest. Some pundits have denigrated this spectacle as Trump's attempted "creeping clown coup" or his traveling "clown show", but that's just not fair to the clowns of the world.

Simultaneously Mitch McConnell, leader of the Senate Republican majority, refuses to allow votes on bills that the House has passed to provide even token relief from the economic carnage brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Why do we put up with this?! I don't know anything about the Senate rules except that they obviously have nothing to do with a democratic process

when one individual has so much unchecked power. It's possible some of these bills could pass even in a Republican-controlled Senate, but by not even allowing a vote McConnell shields Republicans from having to go on the record voting against more stimulus relief. Because I've been convinced for 40+ years that the working class needs to break from the 2-party political con game, I was never an Obama supporter - nothing personal - just political. But it was still offensive on principle when McConnell openly stated at the beginning of Obama's 1st term that his sole objective was to make Obama a one term president. Isn't the government's publicly stated mission supposed to be about doing what's in our best interests? Why do we put up with this?!

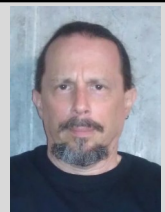
I have the official book on Roberts Rules of Order (RRoO). It's about 2 inches thick, but I've only got as far as the first 5 pages. So admittedly I'm no expert, but every meeting that I've ever participated in that was guided by RRoO was an exercise in participatory democracy. This includes every RWU convention I've attended over the years, as well as the 2011 and 2014 UTU/SMART-TD conventions I attended as delegate from my local. So I don't accept the common narrative that, "Politics is rough business" and that "hardball", "horse trading", and "mutual back scratching" (or worse) are simply the norms - the way it is. All I know is that whatever rules they play by in the Senate are crooked as hell.

**“... the best, most sincere fighters amongst us will always be limited as long as we accept the enemy’s terms of engagement.”**

It goes without saying that women and minorities are scandalously under-represented in our current political system, but I've got nothing against "old white men" per se. A valid case can probably be made that I might qualify for that category. All I know is that when I listen to these vile, arrogant Neanderthals (that's not fair to Neanderthals), usually Republicans, who are not like us, yet they control our lives, sometimes it's all I can do to keep from throwing my beer bottle at the TV.

I hear at least one of you saying, "See Mark, that's why we have to get more Democrats elected." I concede that the more progressive Democrats have some humanity and raise important social justice issues, just like some union officials. But regardless of how sincere some politicians and/or union officials may be, Debs posed the fundamental litmus test question: Are they effectively fighting for our interests? In my personal opinion, the best, most sincere fighters amongst us will always be limited as long as we accept the enemy's terms of engagement. The working class's historical challenge is to establish OUR terms of engagement.

*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.*





# An Open Letter from RWU to President-Elect Joe Biden

Dear President-Elect Biden:

The past four years have not been easy ones for railroad workers. We have seen our numbers drop precipitously in recent years. Last year we saw a spike in FRA reportable injuries and many serious derailments. First Precision Scheduled Railroad (PSR), then the pandemic, together with declining freight carload traffic and passenger counts have combined to decimate and demoralize the workforce.

On the regulatory front, the FRA has been headed by a lifelong rail carrier CEO who has consistently ruled in favor of the rail carriers and against organized labor. His rulings have favored rail corporations – not rail workers – from his stand on single employee operations of trains, to his rejection of ECP braking, from his refusal to issue safety regulations for the movement of LNG by rail, to his refusal to promulgate any rules for dealing with the Covid19 pandemic. Yet when the rail industry came calling for “relief” due to a self-inflicted “lack of manpower”, he immediately granted it the right to abridge countless safety regulations.

Politically, our issues remain unaddressed and/or have been undermined by both the Congress and the White House. Despite excellent rail legislation being passed by the House (HR #2) this summer which would have – among other things – mandated two-person train crews, outlawed extremely long trains, dealt with blocked road crossings, fully funded Amtrak, and provided for infrastructural development and leadership reform there, the Senate failed to allow a vote on the bill. And for four years, President Trump has made it clear his disdain for Amtrak, passenger rail, and two-person crews. And despite promises of massive infrastructure development from all quarters, there has been none.

Railroad Workers United did not endorse Trump, and likewise, we did not endorse you. Railroad workers have seen administrations come and go – Democrat and Republican – and we have not been particularly happy with any of them. They break our strikes, fail to support passenger rail expansion, fail to fully fund Amtrak, side with the freight rail industry on major issues of concern to jobs and safety, and do little to promote rail development, jobs, and rail worker welfare.

We ask you to prove to the railroad workers of this country that we have a friend in the White House, that your promises to expand rail infrastructure, preserve and protect Amtrak, and that your vocal support of union workers – particularly rail workers - is not just a lot of hot air. As “Amtrak Joe”, you have made numerous statements over the years that sound encouraging to us rail workers.

On the question of rail and rail workers, your campaign website clearly states that improving the country's railroads would be a priority under your clean energy initiatives, where you advocate for a “second great railroad revolution.” You have stated that a Biden Administration “will make sure that America has the cleanest, safest, and fastest rail system in the world – for both passengers and freight.” You have promised to work with Amtrak and private freight rail companies to further electrify the rail system. You have promised to restore Amtrak national network trains to daily service. You have pledged to dramatically develop rail transit infrastructure in towns and cities across the country “with strong union protections that create good union jobs.” And finally, you have stated that, “I am going to keep fighting for those crews, requiring two-person crews on freight trains ... to

safely do their job, period!” And on the question of labor and unions, you have stated that, “I am going to be the strongest labor president you ever had,” and that “we are going to have an NLRB that ... is fair, that actually defends workers’ rights.”

RWU has historically not taken a position on candidates for public office. Understanding the words of the great abolitionist and social reformer Frederick Douglas, that “If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Power concedes nothing without a demand, it never did and it never will,” we believe as Eugene V. Debs did, that rail workers must “use your heads as well as your hands and get yourselves out of your present condition.” Ultimately it is up to us to achieve the solidarity, the unity, the power we need to move forward. That said, given your statements of support outlined above, we expect you to aid, abet, and assist us to win our fights and achieve our goals and objectives.

We understand all too well that what a politician says before the election and what he or she actually does once in office are all too often diametrically opposed. We will be watching closely and are guardedly optimistic that you will act on your pro-rail, pro-labor and pro-worker statements. It would be a welcome change to have a President that we can support based upon his/her record of delivering on his/her words, making rail and rail labor a top priority of your administration.

Best wishes in standing up to corporate America – particularly the Class One rail carriers – and their reactionary allies. Railroad workers stand ready, willing and able to play a role in the historic struggle for a bright future for rail transportation and rail workers in the USA.

Sincerely yours,

**Steering Committee of Railroad Workers United**



**Amtrak union workers and their allies rally outside of Union Station in Chicago last Fall. For the past four years, President Donald Trump has consistently voiced his opposition to both Amtrak and to labor unions. Alternately, President-Elect Joe Biden has consistently voiced support for both. Now that Biden assumes the Presidency, will he be good to his word and support increased funding for the nation's passenger rail services, a return to daily service of the long-distance trains, empowered railroad workers and unions; and a more robust, modernized rail system for both freight and passenger trains? Our job is to hold him accountable and demand all this and more.**

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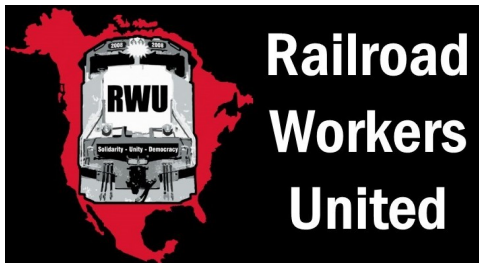
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*'I am opposing a social order in which it is possible for one man who does absolutely nothing that is useful to amass a fortune of hundreds of millions of dollars, while millions of men and women who work all the days of their lives secure barely enough for a wretched existence.'*

Eugene V Debs, Founder of the American Railway Union



# Railroad Workers United Membership Application

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Terminal \_\_\_\_\_ Craft \_\_\_\_\_ Years of Service \_\_\_\_\_

Union Position (if any) \_\_\_\_\_

I'd like to join for (check one):  1 year \$50.00  2 Years \$90.00  3 Years \$120.00

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