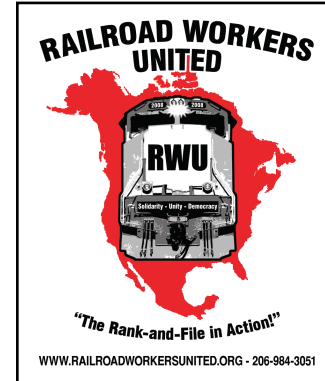


The Highball

The Newsletter of Railroad Workers United



Railroad Workers United Holds Founding Convention

Meeting in Dearborn, Michigan, even as a growing political and economic crisis stoked fears in the United States and the rest of the world, a new caucus of North American railroad workers established an organization that hopes to spur solidarity, unity and democracy within and between unions that represent rail workers across North America. Caucus members came from six different unions in the rail industry, traveling from both coasts, as well as north and south, to attend the proceedings. All came on their own time and their own dime.

In the AM session, those in attendance adopted the name "Railroad Workers United" as the official name of the organization, adopted a "Statement of Principles" to serve as a moral compass for the group, and approved, with a number of amendments, a set of bylaws to govern the organization until the next Convention. In the afternoon, nominations and elections were held. Eleven members were elected to the leadership body – the International Steering Committee (ISC). From this body were then elected an Executive Committee composed of three Co-Chairs, a Secretary and a Treasurer. Finally three Trustees were elected. For a complete listing of those elected to lead RWU, see the listing that accompanies this article. Finally, the participants passed twelve resolutions ranging from safety issues to contracting out work, from questions of diversity in the workforce to support for West Coast dockworkers union members protesting the Iraq War. For a comprehensive listing of the Resolutions passed, see the list on the page 3. For the full text of the Resolutions passed by the Convention, please see the RWU website.

Railroad Workers United (RWU) was born in the Fall of 2007, when members of Railroad Operating Crafts United (ROCU) – an organization of UTU and BLET members who wish to see a



democratic merger of their two unions -- came together with other rail labor activists from the non-operating crafts and laid the groundwork for a new organization of all rail labor to build unity, solidarity, democracy and rank-and-file action among all crafts and all unions that represent railroad workers in North America.

The RWU Convention was held in conjunction with the bi-annual labor conference sponsored by the monthly journal "Labor Notes". Editor Chris Kotalik, together with RWU activist Ed Michael welcomed the participants to the Conference, and encouraged the railroaders to stay for the entire weekend and take part in all aspects of the weekend long conference. In fact, most were able to stay for the entire conference and take part in the numerous workshops and plenaries. RWU staffed and maintained an information table throughout the weekend, handing out leaflets and selling RWU T-shirts and buttons to interested union activists from all over. *(cont'd on page 2)*

FOUNDING CONVENTION (CONT'D)

Many RWU members took part in a noteworthy workshop called, "Aint Misbehavin': Confronting Management's 'Blame the Worker' Safety Programs". Led by Steelworkers Union staffer Nancy Lessin, the workshop explains how management safety programs redirect the focus away from the real hazards of the workplace and attempt to focus our attention strictly on worker behavior as a way of letting the company off the hook. Sister Lessin goes on to explain then what a real union safety program could and should look like, one that takes on the real issues, does not blame individual workers, and one that builds solidarity and worker empowerment, rather than erode the union's cohesiveness.

RWU members were so impressed that Nancy offered to meet together with them the next morning to discuss the specifics of railroad "safety" programs, including the Total Safety Culture phenomenon that is rearing its ugly head on some major Class I carriers. The group of eight RWU members discussed ways to combat this and other management initiatives to expand "Blame the Worker" safety programs. A number of tangible developments resulted, including a video recording of Sister Lessin's workshop, soon to be made available to RWU for all railroaders to watch at their home terminal. See the RWU website for more information on the workshop and video and how you can obtain a copy. A couple of posters have since been designed to publicize TSC and what it is really all about. For more information, contact RWU ISC member Joe Wyman at www.railroadworkersunited.org.

The growing squeeze on the working class weighed heavily on the minds of attendees, which led to the call for an emergency wage re-opener in all rail union contracts. Workers should not have to pay the price for the failures of national and corporate leadership, whether it be the

disaster of the Iraq War or the catastrophe of the sub-prime mortgage meltdown. Nor should workers have to confront skyrocketing living costs without adequate wage increases to relieve increasingly unbearable pressures on the living standards of ordinary people.

The conference closed with a spirited singing of "Solidarity Forever", led by the irrepressible labor troubadour Anne Feeney.

While the gathering was smaller than expected due to a number of expected participants who could not make the trip, those present were all in agreement that the Convention was a success and laid a solid foundation from which to build. And as one Machinist in attendance noted, it was only a dozen or so founding members who originally organized many of the original rail labor organizations. And the American Railway Union of Eugene V. Debs got its start with just a handful of delegates in 1893, and by the following year had made history. RWU looks forward to building the new organization between now and the next Convention, tentatively scheduled for spring of 2010, again in the Midwest. We'll see you there!



Missed the Convention? You can still get the shirt!

Available in S,M,L, XL, XXL, XXXL, or XXXXL. Shirts are 100% union-made in the USA and are \$15 a piece. You can pay with check made out to RWU and mail to: RWU P.O. Box 1053 Salem, IL. 62881. Or use your PayPal account and pay to: treasurer@railroadworkersunited.org Order as many as you like. Give them to your coworkers, friends and family! For online orders, please check out our website at www.railroadworkersunited.org.

RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED AT THE RWU FOUNDING CONVENTION

Support for Building RWU Chapters Across North America

Opposition to the Contracting Out of Rail Union Members' Work

Support for a Coordinated Bargaining Coalition of All Rail Labor

The Need to Take Action on the Question of Crew Fatigue

Support for Diversity and Inclusivity in RWU

Support for an Emergency Wage Re-Opener

Support for withdrawal of U.S. Troops and an End to the Iraq War

Opposition to Remote Control Operations and Positive Train Control Job Eliminations

Support for Universal Rail Labor Solidarity Throughout North America

RWU International Steering Committee (11)

Jon Barron	UTU 662 CSX	Richmond, VA
Ron Davison	UTU 194 CP	Elkhart, IN
Jim Eubanks	UTU 656 /BLET182 UP	Little Rock, AR
Jon Flanders	IAM 1145 CSX	Selkirk, NY
Ron Kaminkow	BLET 51 AMTK	Reno, NV
Brian Lewis	UTU 239 UP	Oakland, CA
Ed Michael	BLET 724 / UTU 979 UP	Salem, IL.
Hugh Sawyer	BLET 316 NS	Atlanta, GA
Matt Weaver	BMWED 2624 CSX	Toledo, OH
Chet Whyers	UTU 979 UP	Salem, IL
Joe Wyman	UTU 807 UP	Tucson, AZ

Steering Committee Alternates (3)

Steve Desavouret	TCU 6608 CN	Chicago, IL
Louis Meyers	BLET 316 NS	Atlanta, GA
Mike Matson	UTU 911 CP	St. Paul, MN

RWU Executive Committee

Co-Chairs (3)

Ed Michael	BLET 724 / UTU 979 UP	Salem, IL.
Jon Flanders	IAM 1145 CSX	Selkirk, NY
Hugh Sawyer	BLET 316 NS	Atlanta, GA.

Secretary

Ron Kaminkow	BLET 51 AMTK	Reno, NV
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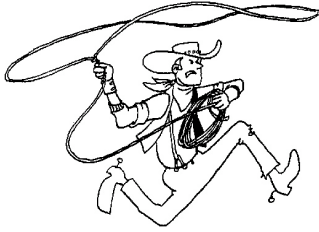
Treasurer

Chet Whyers	UTU 979 UP	Salem, IL.
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RWU Trustees (3)

Jim Eubanks	UTU 656/BLET 182UP	Salem, IL
Joe Wyman	UTU 807 UP	Tucson, AZ
Matt Weaver	BMWED 2624 CSX	Toledo, OH

SOLIDARITY ROUNDUP!



In the last issue of *The Highball*, we introduced a new regular feature called “Solidarity Roundup”. Below is just one example of inter-union cross-craft solidarity that is taking place in rail terminals across North America. Yes - it can be done, as this and future articles will attest to. It is our hope that the efforts of these brothers and sisters featured each issue will serve to motivate and inspire others – like you! – to take similar action. Please submit your story! Send articles (400 words or less) to: newsletter@railroadworkersunited.org or mail to RWU P.O. Box 1053 Salem, IL. 62881.

Local Unions Withdraw from Joint Safety Committees

Across the U.S., numerous union locals are withdrawing from company sponsored “joint” union-management safety committees. While the carriers talk of things like “Total Safety Culture” and focus attention on worker behaviors, they aggressively pursue the expansion of RCO and flirt with the idea of single employee operation of trains. And while the carriers point to their improving safety records, we know that company threats, intimidation, harassment, discipline and firings are somewhat responsible for the “decline” in reportable injuries on the property (see related article on the RWU website concerning FRA citation of CSX for harassment and intimidation of injured workers).

In Selkirk, NY, BLET #867 has withdrawn from participation in the union – management safety committee until further notice. At a recent union meeting – the largest in years – members present voted unanimously to get out. The carrier in question – CSX – has apparently been using the committee to facilitate the observation of worker behaviors, with the result being union members cited and disciplined. And while the company talks safety, it has plans to eliminate another 15 conventional yard jobs and replace the engineers with RCO operators, many of whom will no doubt be young switchmen.

(Already there have been a number of incidents at Selkirk involving RCO which have gone unreported because the company wishes to make RCO “succeed”).

This phenomenon is not new. Over the years, numerous union locals have withdrawn from joint safety committees for various reasons. But there is one thing that they all have in common – they withdraw when they feel used by the carrier, when the hypocrisy of the carrier becomes overwhelming. Rather than continue to participate while the carrier focuses solely on workers’ behavior and refuses to address real workplace hazards, unions will continue as a last resort, when pushed to the limit, the exercise this option.

RWU does not advocate or oppose that a local union withdraw. That decision is up to the membership of each local union. However, what all union members should support is the building of autonomous union safety committees that actively fight for real safety on the job. Ideally these committees should:

- Be led by union members who are elected rather than appointed;
- Rotate the leadership roles so that numerous members share the job, gain the experience, and remain honest to the rank-and-file.

- Survey the local membership to accurately determine what issues are a priority for them.
- Develop an agenda, a program, a set of priorities, and a strategy for achieving its goals and objectives independent of the company.
- Meet with management only with the understanding that the union has the right to its autonomy. Safety programs and policies are subjects to be bargained by the union and the carrier; that is, they are not to be unilateral decisions for the company to ram down our throats.

What’s your union local safety committee up to? Send us your stories – the good, the bad and the ugly – to newsletter@railroadworkersunited.org. In the coming months, *The Highball* will be reporting on safety issues and the struggle to build real union safety committees. It’s up to all of us to combat management’s “blame the worker” safety programs and in their place fight for real safety programs that focus on workplace hazards, build union solidarity, and make for a safer and more secure workplace.



FROM OUR MAILBOX

Proposed Changes to Railroad Retirement II

I am writing to seek your input, help, and thoughts of potential changes to the Railroad Retirement System. I am well aware of the legislated changes to our retirement system that provided us with the current 60/30 and improved the benefits for widows/widowers of railroad workers. I am the same person who wrote the proposed age 55 OR 30 years service in 1997 that led to the previously mentioned changes. It was a struggle from day one, but the main reason that we managed to get any changes is because the perseverance of the rank and file, their families, and friends had forced a change. Our voices were heard and action was taken. It is time to raise those voices again. This is an idea that we - the rank and file - need to address, discuss, and then demand with the same deafening noise. The following are changes that were not, but *should* have been, included in the last changes:

1. Provide an "early out" option for those that wish to retire before age 60, or 360 credible service months, with a reduction of no more than 2% per year, and with the earliest possible age being 55.

Example: Early out at 55 years of age with 30 credible years service (360 service months) would warrant a total of 10% reduction in retirement pay (2% reduction per year for each year under age 60)

Example: Early out at age 60 with 25 years credible service. Again would warrant a total of 10% reduction in retirement pay (2% reduction per year for each year under 30 years)

* Those percentages can be divided for those that have partial years - i.e., 260 service months, 301 service months, etc.*

2. Full retirement benefits for the spouse of a railroad worker on the day the worker retires or dies, whichever comes first, regardless of the spouses age, or medical condition.

3. Carrier-provided insurance coverage for retired railroad workers and their spouses until meeting Medicare age requirements.

4. Carrier-provided full medical coverage for any railroad worker that leaves railroad service due to occupational or total disability until reaching age requirements for Medicare coverage, AND supplement insurance coverage to "bridge" what is NOT covered by Medicare. These same benefits to be provided to the spouse of a disabled

railroad worker, and any dependent minor children of a disabled railroad worker until dependent minor children reach age 21, or 25 if a full time student, or if the dependent child is disabled for the length of said disability. 5. Any disabled railroad worker will continue to accrue service months until reaching full retirement age or required service months, or until death of said worker.

If you are not aware of it, the 60/30 legislation provided the carriers collectively with a savings of nearly \$400 million per year. (1998 figures). That is money that they no longer put into your railroad retirement account. We need to take the caps off of railroad retirement taxable earnings deductions. Everyone from a basic trackman to a railroad CEO pays from each paycheck, all year. That would increase revenue into Railroad Retirement by a projected \$500 million dollars per year (again - 1998 projected figures provided by the Railroad Retirement Board) Between those two projected figures it equals nearly 1 billion dollars per year to guarantee your retirement.

No matter how you slice it, it is wrong that anyone should leave this industry due to disability and then have to pay for their own - and their family's - medical coverage. Should the industry that crippled them continue to pay nothing while our disabled brothers, sisters, and their families, sacrifice? I think not. How many other industries have disabled workers who must find their own insurance? Yes, some have Workmen's Compensation programs, but there are few - if any - in which the disabled worker is left with NO medical coverage.

Should our spouses who supported and stood by us not be able to reap retirement benefits when we retire solely because they aren't old enough? Again, I think not. If we remove the caps from railroad retirement earnings deductions, this will increase the amount of railroad retirement pay to potential retirees. It will also, however, more than offset those increases.

With the last struggle to get changes in our retirement, it was the rank and file who forced labor leaders and Washington to act. Our collective voices - our constant deluge of letters, e-mails, and phone calls, forced them to take us seriously and take action. But they never provided for any change in language if you wished to retire earlier. The current cuts in retirement pay can often amount to 23% or greater.

(cont'd next page)

FROM OUR MAILBOX

(cont'd) This proposal provides you a choice, not a mandate. Who knows your situation better than you? *You* decide when you wish to retire and *if* you can afford a reasonable cut in railroad retirement pay. *You* decide if you want to retire rather than stay because your spouse or dependent children need the medical coverage. These proposed changes take those concerns out of the equation.

The last time changes were proposed, some railroad labor

leaders were more against it than the carriers. Why? You'll have to ask them. The different things that they, and the RRB, threw at us were - "It will never happen." "It will bankrupt the system." "It's a pipe dream." "There's a snowball's chance in hell of it happening." These are direct quotes from some of those labor leaders back in 1997 and '98. Only after the rank and file got their attention did they agree to 60/30.

We must decide if we want to take up this struggle again. Should we

decide to, then we must make our demands perfectly clear to our labor leaders and representatives in Washington.

It is your decision. The rank and file CAN make a difference. We have before, and we can again. And we must not wait!

In solidarity,
Ronald D. Friend
IBT, BMWED
38 years service

Have a feature story, news flash, cartoon, or any other ideas for this newsletter? We want to hear from you! Drop us a line at newsletter@railroadworkersunited.org, or RWU P.O. Box 1053 Salem, IL. 62881.

Longshoremen Strike on May Day -- Invite Rails to Join Them!

On May 1st, International Workers Day - the REAL Labor Day, members of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union, (ILWU), shut down the entire West Coast shipping industry from Long Beach, CA to Seattle, WA in protest over Bush's debacle in Iraq.

The ILWU has a long history of social and political activism stretching from the 1930's when workers refused to load scrap metal destined for Japan to more recent actions against the Vietnam War and apartheid in South Africa. On May 1st, the ILWU took a stand against the Iraq War and idled

work at container ports on the west coast and urged other union members to join them.

In Oakland, CA, the San Francisco Bay Area's active anti- Iraq War community formed the Port Workers May Day Organizing Committee in support of the ILWU action and picketed the Union Pacific Railroad's Oakland facility. They successfully blocked its entrances for two hours preventing UTU, BLE&T, BMWED and BRC members from crossing their picket lines. It was the demonstrators hope that the rail workers would join the ILWU action. Unfortunately, they were unaware of how the Railway Labor Act 'hog-ties' rail workers from engaging in work stoppages that are unrelated to safety or major contract disputes.

After several cellular telephone calls to General Committee offices, it was determined to be an 'Informational Picket' and therefore rail labor was required to comply with management's directives to seek alternative routes free of pickets. Opening an alternative chain-link gate, the local UP trainmaster was able to secret a few workers around the demonstration, but picketers quickly moved their line to block the new access point.

After two hours, enough Union Pacific and Oakland police officers had arrived to stymie the blockade and the remaining rail workers were escorted safely through. The ILWU's solidarity, militancy and independence stand as a model for the rest of organized labor. As a result of the May 1st action, many of UP's newly-hired workers had an opportunity to experience the power of unity and rank-and-file action.