



The Highball

Official Publication of
Railroad Workers United

Rail Unions Bargaining as ONE!



Above: The logos of all 12 of the United Rail Unions. The Coordinated Bargaining Coalition are: the American Train Dispatchers Association (ATDA); the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) / Teamsters Rail Conference (TRC); the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS); the International Association of Machinists (IAM); the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers (IBB); the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW); the National Conference of Firemen & Oilers (NCFO)/Service Employees International Union (SEIU); the Brotherhood Railway Carmen Division (BRC)/ Transportation Communications Union (TCU); the TCU/IAM; the Transportation Division of the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail, and Transportation Workers (SMART-TD) and the Transport Workers Union of America (TWU). The Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division (BMWED)/TRC and SMART Mechanical Unions are also bargaining as a coalition. Collectively, these Unions represent approximately 140,000 railroad workers covered by the various organizations' national agreements, and comprise 100% of the workforce who will be impacted by this round of negotiations.

All 12 rail unions are now negotiating as one unified entity in this current round of national bargaining. Supporters of RWU have waited for a long time for such a step in the right direction.

As this issue goes to press the United Rail Unions, comprised of the Coordinated Bargaining Coalition and the BMWED/SMART Mechanical Coalition, received a proffer of arbitration from the National Mediation Board (NMB), pursuant to Section 5 First of the Railway Labor Act. The following is an excerpt from a statement by the United Rail Unions, issued on June 15, 2022:

“As previously stated, all of the Carriers’ proposals to date serve as an insult to our collective membership. These essential employees carried the railroads to their record profits throughout the last several years. As much as the Rail Unions would have preferred to reach a voluntary settlement, this has become the only viable path to reaching a satisfactory conclusion. The Chiefs of all 12 Rail Unions wish to thank the NMB Members and the assigned Mediators for their efforts in trying to bring us to a voluntary agreement, and for their recognition that such an agreement was not possible under the current circumstances.

With regard to the proffer of arbitration, the NMB urged the parties to enter into an agreement to resolve the dispute via binding arbitration in accordance with Section 8 of the Railway Labor Act. If either party rejects the NMB’s proffer, or fails to respond prior to the deadline of 5:00 PM (EDT) on June 16, 2022, the parties will enter a 30-day “cooling off” period where the status quo is maintained. While each Rail Union has its own process for

considering whether or not to accept the NMB’s proffer, it is anticipated that we will unanimously reject it in the coming days.

At any point during the aforementioned 30-day cooling off period, President Biden may appoint a Presidential Emergency Board (PEB), which typically consists of three to five members. The PEB will conduct a hearing and issue a recommendation regarding settlement of the dispute. The issuance of the PEB recommendation starts another 30-day cooling off period.

During this second cooling-off period, the parties may choose to accept or reject the PEB’s recommendation. If either party rejects the PEB’s recommendation, or if the cooling off period expires and the dispute has not been resolved, either party may engage in self-help.

If this happens, it is expected that Congress will intervene and end self-help by passing legislation to resolve the dispute. To address this possibility, we have already mobilized our Legislative departments to get the message to our elected representatives. In addition to these efforts, we are urging our members to begin reaching out to their U.S. Senators and House Representatives to voice their support for a labor-friendly PEB, and if necessary, labor-friendly legislation to bring this round of bargaining to a successful conclusion. The time to make our collective voices heard is now!”

For more coverage and analysis on this see Page 6. Please go to www.railroadworkersunited.org and subscribe to our weekly newsletter for updates on negotiations and other industry news.



RWU News

A Message from the Outgoing RWU General Secretary Ron Kaminkow

By Ron Kaminkow

It is with great enthusiasm and excitement that after 14 years serving as the General Secretary of Railroad Workers United, I step aside and welcome another RWU member to that position. Jason Doering, a Union Pacific engineer with many years' experience in both his union and in RWU, has assumed the position as of June 17th. I am sure he will do a great job as the new General Secretary and make the organization proud. Please make him welcome. Meantime, I have moved over to the position of *RWU Organizer*. I will be working closely with Jason to get him oriented to and assist him with the position and its myriad responsibilities.

In 2008, when RWU conducted its founding convention, it was apparent that someone had to step up and keep the organization together, answer correspondence, process new members applications and membership renewals, and generally keep the organization running smoothly. That someone turned out to be me. I committed to serve for two 2-year terms ... but ended up serving a decade longer than I expected! Yes, it has been a lot of work, but it has been an honor and a privilege to serve the organization and help to build and grow it into maturity. I consider this to have been the most important work of my life. As I approach retirement from the rail industry after more than a quarter century, it is imperative that the important position of General Secretary be passed along to a working railroader.

For the last 14 years I have been actively building up the infrastructure, membership and finances of RWU. I vacate the position knowing that it can and will be filled by very competent younger rail workers in the years to come who will inherit a well-functioning organization, complete with a sound financial structure and support staff to get the ever-expanding work accomplished. Meantime, I will spend the next two years "in the field" recruiting new members and building up the legion of activists to create a new generation of railroad workers who are dedicate-



Left: Outgoing RWU General Secretary Ron Kaminkow has held the General Secretary position since the founding of RWU in 2008. **Right:** New RWU General Secretary Jason Doering, former Co-Chair of RWU, assumed the position on June 17th.

ed to building Rank & File power on North American railroads. Thank you to the RWU members and supporters out there for your support and encouragement over the years, your patience and generosity. I have the utmost faith in the new General Secretary and the new Steering Committee to lead the organization forward in the years ahead. We have a dedicated and disciplined organization, one that is having an effect far greater than our limited numbers might suggest. This year just may prove to be a defining moment in the history of rail labor. The battle lines are drawn. The long-held goal of RWU – unity of all crafts and all unions in bargaining – is at hand. The labor movement is rebounding across the board. Workers are organizing and fighting back. I encourage every rail worker in North America to join and get active in RWU. Help us to keep pushing our agenda for "Solidarity, Unity, and Democracy" forward!

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 Abbate | SMART-TD #898b, KEOLIS, Boston, MA |
| Michael Belton | SMART-TD #100, BNSF, Minneapolis, MN |
| Gabe Christenson | SMART-TD #1043, UP, Sparks, NV |
| Jason Doering | SMART-TD #1117, UP, Las Vegas, NV |
| Ross Grooters | BLET #778, UP, Des Moines, IA |
| Ron Kaminkow | BLET #51, AMTK, Reno, NV |
| Hugh Sawyer | BLET #316, NS, Atlanta, GA |
| Phillip Stevenson | SMART-TD #376, CSX, Russel, KY |
| Tabitha Tripp | BMWED #17, CN, Anna, IL |
| Andrew Weir | TCRC-LE #240, CN, Sarnia, ON |
| Tim Miller | NCFO #1218, NS, Conway, PA |

Alternates

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Eric Basir | ATU #208, CTA, Chicago, IL |
| J.P. Johnson | SMART-TD #117, Amtrak, Milwaukee, WI |
| Ian Kaminski | SMART-TD #898, Keolis, Boston, MA |
| Frank Parell | BMWED #2906, NJT, Red Bank, NJ |
| Matthew Grouix | SMART-TD #432, CN, Champaign, IL |

Trustees

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| Ed Michael | BLET #724/SMART-TD #979, UP – Retired, Salem, IL |
| Bill Connell | SMART-TD #1473, CSX, Framingham, MA |
| Jeff Kurtz | BLET #391, BNSF – Retired, Fort Madison, IA |

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RWU News

RWU Eighth Biennial Convention in Chicago: Both Inspiring and Motivational

It's fair to say that most, if not all of the participants from RWU's recently concluded convention, would concur that we left inspired and motivated to confront the deepening challenges we face. In addition to tending to internal business mandated by RWU's Bylaws (see article below) and essential for our continued growth, we were honored to have several esteemed guests present informative workshops on various important issues. A comprehensive list and description of the various workshops, along with the background and credentials of our guest speakers can be found on our website: www.railroadworkersunited.org. The article on Page 4, "RWU Convention and Labor Notes Conference: A Good Partnership", sums up the vibe of the weekend.

It was a great combination of RWU veterans, new members and guests, topped off by the thousands of young and older fighters drawn to the Labor Notes conference. It was also a great balance of serious business and relaxed socializing.

RWU was especially honored to have Sara Nelson, the president of the Association of Flight Attendants, address RWU as part of the "Using the Railway Labor Act (RLA) to our Advantage" workshop panel. Several flight attendants, who are also subject to the RLA, participated in the ensuing discussion.

Getting to know - and to be known by - other fighters is essential to building the working-class solidarity we all are going to need.



Left: Joe Burns, former local union president, strike solidarity activist, labor negotiator, attorney and author, presenting "Using the Railway Labor Act to Our Advantage." The titles of his recent books, "Class Struggle Unionism", "Reviving the Strike" and "Strike Back" sum up the essence of his presentation, the discussion that followed, as well as the spirit of the entire weekend.

Right: From the podium, Gifford Hartman chairs the Q&A following his presentation, "Organizing the Supply Chain." Workers from various points in that chain, from longshoremen to Amazon warehouse workers, contributed to a rich, insightful and inspiring discussion.

Announcing the New RWU Steering Committee, Alternates, and Trustees

As of June 17th, 2022, Railroad Workers United has a new International Steering Committee (ISC). While many of the previous members will continue to serve, there are lots of new faces going forward. A few years ago, RWU was dealt a blow due to "Precision Scheduled Railroading." The pandemic further decimated the ranks of our younger members, so we opted to reduce the size of the ISC from the traditional eleven members to nine at our online "mini-Convention" conducted during the height of the pandemic. Now things are rebounding nicely. At the recently concluded Convention, those assembled elected to restore the ISC to its previous full complement of eleven (11). In addition, the body amended the Bylaws to allow for up to five (5) Alternates to serve. This will allow greater participation of more members in the leadership of the organization, and will assist in facilitating a quorum when regular ISC members are incapable of attending meetings due to conflicts with railroad work.

New to the Steering Committee is Gabe Christenson, a conductor from Sparks, NV who works for Union Pacific. Gabe comes from a railroad family that includes a number of active working railroaders and retirees. He will serve as one of the three Co-chairs of the organization, joined by Ross Grooters, a seasoned veteran at that position, and longtime ISC member Andy Weir, a member of the Teamster Canada Rail Conference who works for CN out of Sarnia Ontario. Tabitha Tripp, from Southern Illinois will continue as the Recording Secretary. And longtime Treasurer Hugh Sawyer will serve one more term at that position. Meanwhile, longtime General Secretary Ron Kaminkow has assumed

the position of organizer, his former role now filled by former Co-chair Jason Doering. These seven (7) Steering committee members comprise the Executive Committee of RWU.

The remaining four members are "at-large" members of the Steering Committee and include members who have served previously: Chuck Abbate, from Boston MA, a conductor on the MBTA; Michael Belton, switchman in Minneapolis MN, who works for BNSF; and Phil Stevenson, CSX Conductor, based in Russel, KY. They are joined by newcomer Frank Parell, trackworker on New Jersey Transit and member of the BMWED.

The five (5) Alternates referenced above include four newcomers: J.P. Johnson, Amtrak conductor and SMART-TD member from Milwaukee; Ian Kaminski, engineer trainee on the MBTA; Eric Basir, carman and member of the Amalgamated Transit Union in Chicago; Tim Miller, hostler on the NS and member of the NCFD who works out of Conway, PA. They are joined by returning ISC Alternate Matthew Grouix, conductor on the CN who now works out of Champaign, IL.

Last, but not least, the Convention assembled is charged with electing three (3) Trustees to round out the leadership of the organization. Retuning Trustee Ed Michael is joined by new Trustees Jeff Kurtz and Bill Connell.

See the full listing on the preceding page for a complete description of all those outlined here, complete with union affiliation, craft, carrier, and terminal. RWU Members are encouraged to share your support, questions, ideas, and wishes with them.



Rail Labor

The RWU Convention and Labor Notes Conference: A Good Partnership

By Joshua DeVries

RWU just finished our Biennial Convention (see Page 3) which we held leading into the biggest ever conference of *Labor Notes*. Why do we do connect our event to theirs? It's fun to have a big party with 4,000 other union folks, but strategically, what's in it for railroad workers?

What is Labor Notes?

Most visible is a monthly labor newspaper, but it's not the tired rag from your international with stories of union officers golfing with CEOs. Labor Notes has a vision of militant unions run democratically by the members. It was founded in 1979 at the tail of the last major upsurge in American labor which was dwindling because there was no organized force to connect across unions. With innumerable strikes over the previous decade, many wildcats by members refusing to accept the concessions demanded by their union "leaders", workers across the country were fighting the same issues: mandatory overtime, safety, workplace control, concessions. But there was no forum to exchange ideas and strategies, to support each other, to build a unified movement to force all industries and the government to respect workers. So the bureaucratic union leaderships were able to regain control. The auto workers, Teamsters, miners, communication workers, and all other reformers who founded Labor Notes didn't want that fact to hold us back next time.

This leads to the less visible but most important element of Labor Notes. It provides a forum for workers across industries to swap strategies, skills and plans and to overcome our differences. They also publish books on building democracy in unions, beating concessions, rights of union stewards, two full versions of their *Troublemaker's Handbook* and so on. They offer local and regional workshops on running for union office, organizing around health and safety, "Troublemakers Schools" and many others. And every two years, they hold the conference.

The Conference

In addition to main sessions with big names like Stacy Davis Gates, the new president of the Chicago Teachers Union, Bernie Sanders and Chris Smalls, the principal organizer with the Amazon Labor Union - that just won the election at the Staten Island Amazon warehouse - there were over 250 workshops, meetings and caucuses, many with standing room only.

Some were old standards. There were meetings for auto workers, Teamsters, educators, telecom workers, longshore, tech workers and so on. Some workshops are so popular, they hold multiple sessions like "Beating Apathy", "Turning an Issue into a Campaign", and "Assembling Your Dream Team."

From long-time standards like "Legal Rights of Union Stewards" to a topical session on "Starbucks Solidarity Organizing" - from "Engaging New Members to Researching your Employer", there is something for everyone. It can be hard to choose with sessions including "Democracy is Power", "Direct Action", "Stewards, Health and Safety", and "Strikes." RWU put together a list of six workshops featuring railroaders and supporters, including "Taking Back our Time" and "Challenges of Organizing in Logistic." It is the single most inspiring event for organized or organizing workers in the United States. There were enough great sessions to fill the next year of Highball issues, but two stand out.

Strike! Reviving Labor's Most Powerful Weapon

Sara Nelson, president of the Association of Flight Attendants

(AFA) is the most impressive national union leader in the country. She facilitated a panel featuring: a Catholic Healthcare nurse fresh off a 35 day strike that won the first patient ratios outside California; a worker from the Nabisco strike who specifically mentioned railroaders refusing to deliver to the plant; and a Starbucks barista from Seattle who struck to win better staffing, telling how they launched their strike after seeing other Starbucks workers winning battles.

Nelson tied it all together. She asked, "What if unions put 1% of what they put into elections into a strike fund," urging us to push our unions. "Using power builds power. A rising tide lifts all boats. But we're not the boats - we're the tide. They've been telling us we're lucky to have a job. The tide is going to tell them they're lucky to have our work. Solidarity is our strategy and the strike is our tactic."

Class Struggle Unionism

Facilitated by an activist from the New York State nurses union, this panel included a Dallas Teamster, a member of AFSCME Council 31 in Chicago and a teacher from the Virginia Caucus of Rank and File Educators, which recently won bargaining rights, and Joe Burns, author of "Reviving the Strike" and "Class Struggle Unionism." He has been a longtime friend and ally to RWU and presented a workshop to the RWU convention earlier that afternoon, "Using the Railway Labor Act to Our Advantage."

He contrasted the recent AFL-CIO convention to Labor Notes. The main division is how we look at the employment relation. The AFL-CIO's narrow vision of unions has led to a drop from 60 years ago, when over 30% of workers were in unions to today it's single digits and falling. They hold up the conservative motto of "a fair day's wage for a fair day's work", seeing the need for unions only to handle the unreasonable employers (as if there is another kind). They think government is neutral.

He contrasted this with "class struggle unionism" which recognizes that "judges will interpret the law in the interest of the class they serve." It holds that "labor creates all wealth and that the working class and the employing class have mutually opposed interests. Every fight is a fight against a class, not just against that employer." In strong words for a lawyer, he thundered that, "We need a labor movement capable of violating laws and injunctions."

RWU and Labor Solidarity

Labor Notes has a vision like RWU's but for the entire working class. They support RWU and will back rail union fights, but no industry can go it alone. Logistics companies pit truckers against railroad workers and politicians pit everyone else against the few unions that retain decent benefits.

RWU strives to build solidarity and unity within the industry, but the railroads don't provide shelter from the rest of the economy. We will need to rely on the rest of the labor movement and need to give that support back. Please subscribe to Labor Notes, check out their books and local events. Railroaders need to develop the skills they bring, and they need ours. When rails strike the Class 1s, we will be challenged by laws, injunctions, and presidential back-to-work orders. We will need to take-to-heart Joe Burns' concept of class struggle unionism, be ready to fight and we will need allies like Labor Notes.

Joshua DeVries has been active in the Amalgamated Transit Union and Association of Flight Attendants, and is an RWU Solidarity member.



Rail Labor and Industry News

Open Letter to Freddie Simpson, Outgoing President of the BMWED

The following includes excerpts from Mr. Simpson's farewell address, which was included in the Delegate Binder for the 2022 BMWED National Division Fifth Quadrennial Convention, held in May, 2022, and RWU's response:

"From the beginning of my career on the railroad, I have always known, like Eugene Debs and the countless railroad workers before me, that railroad workers should recognize that brotherhood should reach beyond our narrow craft-mindedness. We cannot simply preach that railroad workers need to be in the same union, but we need to strategically think about how we can approach that ideal...As Brothers and Sisters within this union we should always ask ourselves before any decision we make, does this strengthen our ties as railroaders, and furthermore, as workers? Does the structure of our union support the further Brotherhood of railroaders and workers?"

"As members of this union, in the tradition of trade unionism that extends back to the Knights of Labor, the American Railway Union, and the early beginnings of our own organization, it is our duty to learn and understand this history. To those of you who have just begun your career as members of the Brotherhood, absorb as much information as possible and continuously remember that the battles for which you witness and take part in today have been had in the past. Learn from those that have come before you and never forget that the way forward lays in Brotherhood with your fellow workers... I have the utmost confidence in our membership to develop our trade union into an org-

anization that the railroad robber barons cower in front of."

"Understand what happened in the past, and have the courage to do what hasn't been done. For future delegates to these conventions, if rail labor does not move towards a more centralized and solidified structure that puts the power into the workers' hands, rather than into the hands of the numerous union officials, then we will be doomed to the rubbish heap of history. But if we are to extend our principles of Brotherhood beyond our craft and throughout our industry, the rights of labor can be secure for generations to come."

Well said Brother Freddie. While other rail union leaders may occasionally pay token lip service to our history, none has ever posed the urgent challenge for our future as you have. To your credit the BMWED made a legit attempt to back up this vision of unity and solidarity with concrete action, organizing the All Rail Crafts Coalition (ARCC) several years ago. Unfortunately the leaders of the operating craft unions wanted nothing to do with this promising development. But now for the 1st time all of the rail unions are negotiating as one entity - better late than never.

It's unfortunate you chose to not use your bully pulpit more forcefully to champion the solidarity, unity and democracy you stand for, as these are the foundational principles of RWU. It's never too late to explore some kind of collaboration, since we obviously have a lot in common. Fight together on the common ground - agree to disagree as applicable. Over time discuss our differences with civility and mutual respect. Call us sometime.

Surface Transportation Board Blasts the Class One Freight Carriers

The following article, "Regulators Scold Railroads over Recovery Plans, Order Improvements", is reprinted from the June 13, 2022 issue of Trains magazine:

The Surface Transportation Board is criticizing the four major U.S. Class I railroads for not providing enough pertinent information on their rail service recovery plans, and it is asking the railroads to supplement what they have already provided.

BNSF, CSX (NASDAQ: CSX), Norfolk Southern (NYSE: NSC) and Union Pacific (NYSE: UNP) "submitted plans that were perfunctory and lacked the level of detail that was mandated" by STB's May 6 order requiring the four railroads to submit rail service recovery plans, the board said in a release late Monday.

STB required the four railroads each to draft rail service recovery plans in response to rail shippers' concerns about deteriorating rail service in recent months. Those concerns were raised to STB in letters to the board and during a late April hearing.

"The plans generally omitted important information needed to assure the board and rail industry stakeholders that the largest railroads are addressing their deficiencies and have a clear and measurable trajectory for doing so," STB said.

STB was also critical of UP's and NS' plans, saying that they "flatly refused" to provide the six-month targets for achieving their performance goals as required in the board's order.

The board is giving the railroads until June 23 to respond with the requested supplemental information and data. The information includes what actions the railroads are taking to improve service and communications with their customers, as well as

data on headcount increases. Monday's decision outlines what each railroad individually must provide to STB. Failure to provide that information could lead to monetary penalties, according to the decision.

In Monday's release, STB Chairman Marty Oberman noted that the board is still receiving reports about "persistent, acute and dramatic problems in rail transportation," which are resulting in the disruption of supply chains and potential shutdown of companies.

The freight rail industry is currently struggling to provide adequate rail service, yet the service recovery plans we received are woefully deficient and do not comport with the spirit or the letter of the board's order," Oberman said. "The plans simply failed to instill confidence that the carriers have a serious approach to fixing a problem caused by their own lack of preparedness to respond to external shocks and fluctuations in demand, including especially short-sighted management of labor forces and other resources.

"While the railroads must always comply with board orders, it is particularly disturbing that the railroads failed to comply with the order requiring them to file adequate service recovery plans. Under circumstances where service is not meeting customers' needs, this is not too much to ask from highly sophisticated companies with important public responsibilities. I had expected a better response from the carriers to the board's previous order, and now with more explicit instructions, which should not have been needed, there will be no excuse for continued lack of compliance," he said.



Commentary

Are Union Leaders Preparing to Fight or Just Going Through the Motions?



I'm probably not the only one who occasionally wrestles with the glass half-full vs glass half-empty perspective. It's nice to contemplate the bright, rosy side, but indulging that temptation at the cost of dismissing critical realities can be problematic.

Is the glass half-full? Referencing the front-page article, all the rail unions are now negotiating as one unified entity under the umbrella group, United Rail Unions (URU - see Page 1). This has long been one of RWU's founding principles/demands. So we'll take it, even at face value, but....

Is the glass half-empty? What the hell took you all so long? It's the Summer of 2022, and railroad workers have been eviscerated in slow motion over the last 40 years.

What once was a comparatively, semi-dignified job when I hired out in the mid 70s, even in spite of the extra board, has over-the-years degenerated into an absolute brutal, barbaric, torturous hellhole. It has gotten so bad that hundreds of rail workers are now abandoning the job and the respectable wages because it's blood money - all too often literally. They don't care about losing the seniority they've invested in over the years because more and more that's becoming virtually worthless.

In the past, railroad workers, after having invested X amount of years, would resolve to tough it out another 10-15-20 years for the pension - that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, if you can make it through 30 years of many brutal, violent storms. For younger workers, having endured the last 5-10 years, and being able to clearly see where it's all going, the prospect of putting up with another 15-20-25 years becomes more and more unsustainable. Many realistically concede that their bodies will not be able to sustain the level of physical abuse - that they won't be able to get their 30 years in even if they wanted to. If they do get their 30 years in, what kind of physical shape will they be in to supposedly enjoy their hard earned retirement?

How the hell did we get here? My personal opinion is that it comes down to this fundamental concept that I've ranted & raged about over the years: The unions, as they are currently constituted, willingly concede to the enemy's terms-of-engagement. This takes two basic forms that go hand in hand:

1) In the political arena, as long as I can remember, the rail union leaders idea of a fight-back is to implore the membership to get out the vote for our "friends of labor" in the Democratic Party, eloquently articulated in the editorial on the following page.

Where has this gotten us?

2) At the negotiating table, when the bosses are so drunk on their arrogance that they can't even give the union leaders a measly bone to toss to their membership to try to pacify them, leading to the inevitability of a possible strike, these leaders readily concede that any conflict will be resolved via arbitration and/or a Presidential Emergency Board (PEB).

This is precisely the situation rail labor finds itself in at present. The excerpts from the URU's statement, that are reprinted on Page 1, are full of glass-half-full vs. glass-half-empty contradictions. I applaud them for defiantly calling out the carriers for their arrogance and rightfully asserting that there is nothing to even discuss under these circumstances. Yet in the same breath they virtually surrender to the bosses, conceding to the inevitability of a PEB, imploring their members to beg their political representatives for mercy and leniency. "...We are urging our members to begin reaching out to their U.S. Senators and House Representatives to voice their support for a labor-friendly PEB, and if necessary, labor-friendly legislation to bring this round of bargaining to a successful conclusion." Gag me - that's pathetic!

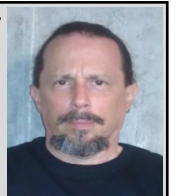
There's not one word about urging rails to take our just cause to the public, and offering the financial and logistical resources to make that happen. RWU's initiatives over the last several years, such as the Labor-Community-Safety-Alliance conferences and other public meetings, have shown there is overwhelming receptivity to our plight when the public understands the hazards posed to them by the carriers rogue operations. Imagine what the unions could do with a bazillion more financial and logistical resources, as well as staff/boots on the ground. What the hell do all these Alternate to the Alternate Vice-Presidents do anyway?

Not one syllable is uttered about organizing rail labor to prepare for the inevitable eventuality that one day, in a righteous, necessary act of self-defense, rail labor will be left with no choice but to defy a presidential back to work order.

Just because the URU fail to acknowledge this scenario doesn't mean that it's not posed on the horizon. Railroad workers, and all workers for that matter, have so much to learn from Eugene Debs. The most important lesson - the one that has to be conquered before anything else can be processed, absorbed and learned - is the need for the working class to learn to think for themselves. In spite of his passionate convictions, that he had learned the hard way, he regularly implored his audience to not take his word for what he was trying to educate and enlighten them about, but to research and study the facts that their reality was based upon and revolved around. He was confident that if the working class would take that basic step, that they would arrive at the same conclusions that he had.

To address tyrannical bosses, deceptive politicians and ineffective union leaders, Debs said, "You have got to unite in the same labor union and in the same political party and strike and vote together, and the hour you do that, the world is yours." Amen!

Mark Burrows has served as Organizer and Co-Chair for RWU. He retired at the end of 2015, 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

To Win We Must Achieve the Political Solidarity of the Working Class

Eugene Debs, who famously led the Pullman Railroad Strike, in 1894, said that “the political solidarity of the working class means the death of despotism, the birth of freedom, the sunrise of civilization.” Presumably, beyond endeavors of regulation and unconvincing rail safety legislation, the eventuality of political involvement in rail bargaining would arise well forgotten out of the provisions set forth in the Railway Labor Act.

Throughout this entire process, often taking years to complete in hopes of achieving political superiority, workers are denied long-overdue wage increases and at the same time are barred from exercising their right to self-help. But who is ultimately helping the railroads achieve their goal of stomping the unions into submission?

Historically, rail labor support goes to Democrats, to the dismay of many union members who more recently favor the Republican Party. Perhaps the lesser of two evils, Democrats today have leisurely pushed labor’s agenda. Responding to the militant labor upsurge in the 1930’s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt astutely demonstrated to labor leaders that having a “pro-labor” party in power could transform life for working people much more rapidly than employer-by-employer bargaining.

In less than 10 years, FDR and the Democrat majority in Congress established a legal minimum wage; created Social Security as a way to eliminate poverty among the old; put millions back to work in public works projects; and set up a legal structure that forced employers to deal with unions that had the support of a majority of workers. While important conquests for the working class, these concessions served to demobilize labor’s militancy.

The Republicans remained the party of big business, and after they swept to power in Congress in 1946 on a wave of anti-Communism, they passed the Taft-Hartley Act, which rolled back union legal gains over Democratic President Harry Truman’s veto. That decade set a pattern that has yet to be broken - unions tend to support Democrats; now more so than ever with rail labor, and anti-union forces supporting the Republican Party.

So, why are many members defying rail union bosses recommendations and voting Republican, knowing that with a more “friendlier” Federal Railroad Administration, National Mediation Board, Biden-selected Presidential Emergency Board, and Democrat controlled Congress, there exists a higher probability for a more favorable outcome for their collective actions?

The answer lies in a Republican strategy to peel away layers of Democrats’ support - by taking socially conservative positions on divisive non-economic issues. Beginning in the ‘60s, Republicans nimbly courted support among those uncomfortable with that decade’s racial and social upheavals. And in the ‘70s and ‘80s, the party appealed to conservative Christians who opposed abortion and the LGBTQ community. The Republican Party platform added planks opposing legal abortion and focused squarely on the Second Amendment. None of these are typical bread-and-butter issues that unions would weigh in on, and yet they are issues that many union members care about. The conservative element in the Republican Party has been brilliant about getting union voters to focus on hot-button social issues, rather than their pocketbook or matters of rail safety specifically, as well as workplace safety in general.

Ronald Reagan’s myths about “welfare queens driving Cadillacs” resonated with many Americans, including some union mem-



25,000 strikers and supporters packed the warehouse district in Minneapolis, in this mobilization of strength and power during the 1934 Teamster strike. In addition to the political necessity of responding to the Great Depression’s hardships, FDR’s New Deal laws were concessions to put out the fire on labor’s growing militancy.

bers, who voted for him even after he showed hostility to the labor movement. It was Reagan, a former actors’ union president, whose replacement of striking air traffic controllers demonstrated to big business that labor’s right to strike could be made meaningless by the employers’ right to hire permanent replacements. Reagan was quite good at getting Democrats to vote Republican over social issues rather than economic issues.

Nevertheless, if the same party that opposes immigration, abortion, same-sex marriage, and gun control also threatens the economic interests and workplace rights of working people, rail labor, and union members who are socially conservative may be forced to choose which matters more.

We need a political party that is based upon working class interests...

So how do we achieve Debs’ vision of that all-important “political solidarity of the working class”, when half of us vote for “tweedledee” and the other for “tweedledum”? When both existing parties are heavily controlled by corporate masters whose interests are diametrically opposed to ours as workers? The task before us sisters and brothers is indeed daunting, but unless and until we can achieve such political solidarity, our hopes of achieving Brother Debs’ “birth of freedom” and the “sunrise of civilization” are slim to impossible.

We need a political party that is based upon working class interests, one that unapologetically articulates a platform and program that is designed to uplift the lower echelons of society, to guarantee good jobs, safe working conditions, ample time off work, decent and affordable housing and health care to all who work, one that gives workers a say in - and some degree of control over - their jobs and conditions of employment. Then and only then will we see Debs’ vision of political solidarity of the working class fulfilled. Whether that party is called Labor, Socialist or otherwise is neither here nor there. The 2-party system does not work for us. Unless and until working people - who represent the vast majority of society - are won over to this reality, we will wander in the political wilderness. We need to get on with constructing such a political party, one we can call our own!



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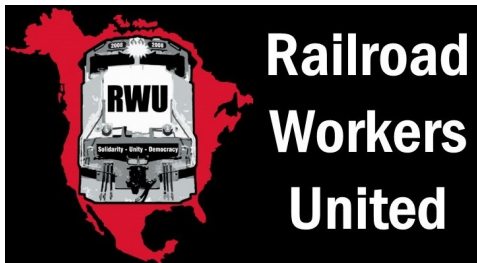
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"In the class struggle the workers must unite and fight together as one on both economic and political fields."

Eugene V Debs, Founder of the American Railway Union



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