

Reject the sellout railroad contracts! Build a rank-and-file rebellion against the sellout union bureaucrats!

The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee
8 October 2024

Take up the fight for rank-and-file control! Join the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee by sending an email to railwrfc@gmail.com or filling out the form at the bottom of this page.

Brothers and Sisters,

The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee urges our coworkers across the industry to mobilize against the latest round of sellout contracts. We demand a national contract with real gains which will set an example for workers everywhere.

The tentative agreements contain a miserly 17.5 percent pay increase over four years. Why should we accept this? It's even less than what was imposed on us by Congress and the White House. Worse, the contract for SMART-TD at BNSF paves the way for one-man crews by creating a ground-based facilitator position.

Today, we are in an even more favorable position than we were two years ago, because workers all over the country and the world are striking. Thirty-three thousand striking Boeing workers are demanding 40 percent wage increases, and 45,000 East Coast dockworkers demanded 70 percent wage increases over six years. Even in a sellout of that strike by the longshoremens' union, they still got 61 percent. Why should we, who have among the worst conditions of any industrial workforce in America, accept anything less?

The bureaucrats know this and are terrified of us. That is why they are lashing out, with Jeremy Ferguson and SMART-TD declaring anyone not content with their wage proposal is "a bad faith actor." The union bureaucrats are the bad faith actors, not the rank-and-file workers opposed to the contract. Otherwise, why did BNSF CEO Katie Farmer go out of her way to thank union officials "who have worked collaboratively with us to reach these tentative agreements"?

The truth is the union bureaucracies are doing the dirty work for the company. The deal at BNSF recalls testimony by Jim Foote, the former CEO of CSX, to the Surface Transportation Board when he said, "Let us run trains with

one employee, and the problem is solved."

Two years ago, the bureaucrats in the rail unions defied our vote to strike and used lies, threats and delaying tactics to help Congress and Biden ban a national strike. This was a major experience for the whole working class because it showed how the pro-company union officials work with the two corporate parties and management against us. Months later, the Teamsters at UPS and the United Auto Workers in the auto industry pushed through sellouts, which are being used to lay off tens of thousands of people.

Earlier this year, the White House responded to a lockout on the railroads in Canada by pressuring the government there to intervene with binding arbitration, ripping up even the right of workers to vote on their own contract. The railroad union apparatuses there, including the Teamsters union, predictably rolled over.

Now they are up to more dirty tricks. Bypassing the framework for national negotiations entirely, they are dividing us up into dozens of separate contracts, union by union, carrier by carrier, to break our unity. They want to avoid another rebellion from below, like what happened in 2022, at all costs.

The union officials claim this is because workers do not want the process to be dragged out for years like normal, as though our complaint was that the sellout was not carried out quick enough! In fact, we want not just major gains to make up for decades of concessions. We want an end to the whole process of government-mandated "cooling off," mediation and so on under the Railway Labor Act that the bureaucrats hide behind.

Already, they claim that a number of smaller unions have "ratified" agreements. But who can believe this when they have not even published a full breakdown of the votes, when members themselves were taken off guard by the announcement?

The union bureaucrats want us to believe that things have gotten better because of a handful of sick days and empty

“regulations” on two-man crews. In fact, things are worse. More people have been driven out of the industry, and derailments such as the East Palestine, Ohio, disaster threaten the health of our communities. Inflation, while officially slowing down, has made us poorer, while stockholders and executives have gorged themselves on record profits.

We formed the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee in 2022 to “put the power into the hands of the rank and file, in order to prevent the unions’ sabotage of our struggle.” By organizing independently of the apparatus and taking the initiative into our own hands, we wrote, we “will put [ourselves] in the most powerful possible position to defeat any attempts at injunctions, management retaliation and other strikebreaking measures.”

We conducted a national campaign, organizing large-scale online meetings, holding informational pickets at major rail yards and answering the slanders and lies of the bureaucrats. We issued statements warning our coworkers about what was being done and explaining what we had to do about it.

Now, the fight continues. You are all rightly outraged. But if it just stays at that level, without being organized, we will let the opportunity to fight back pass us by.

This time, we are better prepared because of the experience two years ago. Organizing on the principle that we workers have the right to prepare any and all actions deemed necessary to protect and improve our conditions, we must take control out of the hands of the bureaucrats and the corporate parties.

We propose to you, our coworkers, the following 9-point program, subject to revision based on more input and discussion from you, to unify our campaign:

- ▲ 70 percent general wage increase
- ◆ Annual cost-of-living adjustments pegged to the consumer price index rate of inflation
- ◆ No less than 10 days of accruable annual paid sick leave
 - Fully company-paid health and welfare plan with no reduction in current benefits
 - An end to Precision Scheduled Railroading, Hi Viz and similar attendance policies
- ◆ Committees, made up solely of active railroaders, to make decisions on improvements to infrastructure, manpower, rest time and operations, which are binding upon the railroad companies
 - ▲ a maximum train length limit of one mile
 - ◆ Mandatory minimum two-person train operations
 - Abolition of the anti-worker Railroad Labor Act, and no “no-strike clauses” in our contract

A critical factor is rank-and-file control over the voting process. Two years ago, the IBEW, the NCFO and unions

“passed” contracts with massive irregularities. Last year, the IAM was caught red-handed trying to stuff the ballot in the latest District 19 leadership election, although new District 19 President Reece Murtagh is one of those pushing the new contracts today.

Workers must conduct a full audit of the supposedly “ratified” contracts and exercise full oversight of ongoing and future ballots in order to ensure their integrity.

The power of the working class is our strength in numbers. To maximize our strength, we must not only unite across the rail industry but with workers in other industries as well, across the US and the world who are also fighting against sellouts. We are already in contact with rank-and-file committees internationally, including at Boeing, the auto industry, UPS, post offices in five countries and others. We must also reach out to other key segments of the supply chain, including dockworkers and truckers.

By mobilizing the working class behind us, we will be able to answer the threat of another government intervention. Justifying themselves on the so-called “national interests,” the two parties are really at war against workers at home and abroad. They are trying to justify war with Iran by claiming Israel “has the right to defend itself.”

But while pretending Israel has “the right” to commit genocide, they try to deny us the actual right to defend ourselves, using the Railway Labor Act, the union bureaucrats and a thousand other measures against us. They try to make us powerless in a political system controlled by two corporate parties.

At bottom, this is a fight to transfer power to the working class. We have to end the control of the rich and reshape society for our own interests, the interests of the majority. Many times in the past, railroaders have given the lead to a broader movement of the working class.—This is why they passed the RLA in the first place. We can and must lead a struggle again.

If you agree with this, join us! Contact us by emailing railwrfc@gmail.com. It is only through the independent collective action of the working class will we get what we deserve.



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