

# BMWED announces new deal at CSX as sellout of US railroaders continues

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*Railroad workers: 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.*

The Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees released details of a second sellout agreement at CSX last week, following the rejection of the first deal in October by a two-to-one margin.

The October deal contained inadequate wage increases of 17.5 percent over five years, a two-tier healthcare plan, the return of a “catch and hold” policy, which the BMWED has previously made concessions to eliminate, and minor improvements in the vacation policy. The latest deal is virtually identical to this, with only cosmetic changes.

Over the past several months, the US rail unions have been attempting to ram through separate agreements in as many bargaining units as possible, in a divide-and-conquer tactic. National bargaining with the National Carriers Conference Committee began in early November, but by then nearly two dozen separate deals had already been announced between the 12 unions and six Class I carriers.

They are also moving rapidly to push through sellouts as fast as possible through the national framework. Two smaller unions, the Transportation Communications Union and the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen, have already claimed to have ratified national deals with the NCCC.

Workers must oppose this attempt to pull a fast one against them, aimed at pre-empting a rank-and-file rebellion which nearly torpedoed the national deal two years ago. When workers sent that contract, worked out to great fanfare with the Biden White House, down in flames during voting, it was only imposed through an act of Congress, while the union bureaucrats blocked a national strike.

The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee played a major role, fighting to mobilize the country’s 100,000 railroaders independently of the sellout bureaucrats and corporate parties.

There is widespread opposition to the new contracts. Train conductors have also rejected contracts brought by the SMART-TD union at Norfolk Southern and BNSF. The latter contract included provisions aimed at ultimately eliminating the conductor position and operating trains with one-man crews.

Almost immediately after the rejection of the original CSX deal, BMWED sent a survey to members pretending to “uncover” why workers rejected it. In reality, the reasons were obvious, chief among them being the pathetic 17.5 percent wage increase over four years. Workers saw no reason to accept this while enduring record inflation, while Boeing workers received 38 percent in a new contract following a two-month strike and East Coast dockworkers have been promised 62 percent in their next deal.

But the survey itself showed the fix was already in. Almost all the questions in the survey pertained to the “catch and hold,” as if that were the sole reason workers rejected the agreement.

The new tentative agreement is identical to the one rejected by workers, with two minor differences. The new agreement allows for workers that are subject to the “catch and hold” provision of the newly defined “critical positions” (track foreman, bridge foreman, welder, etc.) to bid off before the expiration of their one-year hold to another critical position, or to an assistant foreman flagman position.

The only other change is the ability to carry over into subsequent years unused sick time up to a maximum amount of 20 days. This thin gruel, however, is fraught with stipulations. The new language states:

Effective January 1, 2025, BMWED represented employees will have the option to carry-over up to four (4) days of unused sick leave in any calendar year to a maximum bank of twenty (20) days. Banked sick leave days may only be utilized after all current year sick leave days are exhausted in any calendar year, and only for documented critical or long-term injury or illness. The carrier may require the employee to provide a note from a healthcare provider to document the need for utilization of any banked sick leave. Unused banked paid sick leave days will be paid out at 100% of the value upon the employee’s resignation or retirement.

## Hatred of the rank-and-file

The December 5 Zoom meeting was heavily moderated,

CSX Sellout, Round Two

expressing the bureaucracy's contempt and fear of the membership. Its main focus was not so much to convince workers to support the deal, but that there was no choice other than to accept it, because it is supposedly impossible to fight back. BMWED President Cardwell constantly threatened that a rejection of the new agreement may result in an even less favorable agreement being imposed by arbitration or a Presidential Emergency Board appointed by an anti-labor Trump administration.

But while the fascist Trump is an enemy of the working class, he also enjoys the close support of the top leadership of the Teamsters union, of which BMWED is a part. General President Sean O'Brien met with Trump repeatedly, spoke at the Republican National Convention and declined to endorse a candidate in November, seen as de-facto support for Trump. Other unions are falling into line, with the bureaucrats seeking to preserve their own bottom line and to support Trump's "America First" nationalist poison.

Other unions have ratified the agreement, Cardwell continued, claiming this established a "pattern agreement." But responsibility for this lies with Cardwell and the other rail union bureaucrats, who established this "pattern" through separate talks, which had no authorization from workers. While they claim many of these deals have been ratified, there is no doubt that other crafts were browbeaten in a similar manner. Moreover, among many unions there has been little to no transparency on the voting, including the release of basic information such as vote totals and turnout.

Cardwell is invoking this so-called "pattern agreement" to try and convince workers that they are alone and have no choice but to accept the deal. This is a total lie. First of all, even after the separate contract votes the majority of workers still do not have any new contract. And there is massive anger and hostility to the deals, including among workers in unions which have already "ratified" deals.

The mass rejections by conductors in SMART-TD show that there is immense potential for a united struggle. A strike at any craft would be automatically honored by the entire workforce, regardless of whether they have had a contract rammed down their throats, and they would use the strike to push for their own demands.

Only one thing stands in the way: the union bureaucracy, which works with the capitalist political parties to rip up workers' rights through the anti-strike Railway Labor Act and other measures. A real fight requires the independent organization of the rank and file, rejecting the entire framework of the talks as illegitimate.

Cardwell further stated that there is "0 percent chance of getting higher wage" increases, and tried to rationalize why they agreed to 17.5 percent in light of Boeing workers receiving 38 percent and dockworkers 62 percent. He claimed that the CSX agreement was already a year and a half in the works and was not the first offer put on the table by CSX.

The claim that there is no chance of getting decent wage increases is only true as long as Cardwell and company remain in control of the process. The bureaucrats could barely conceal their hostility to workers during the Zoom meeting. In the question and answer session, one worker asked if union representation would be

available during the night shifts which the new contract allows. A bureaucrat became incensed and berated the worker for asking the question and called him a "smart ass."

This is the language of a railroad junior executive, not someone even pretending to be a workers' leader. It is also of a piece with their hysterical denunciations of the *World Socialist Web Site* for its criticisms of the contracts and for giving voice to workers' opposition. SMART-TD President Jeremy Ferguson denounced the WSWS' reporting of the Union Pacific deal because a decisive factor in the contract's defeat was workers' access to information which the bureaucracy tried to conceal.

### **Rank-and-file rebellion needed**

The maneuvering over the new contract is fresh confirmation of the observation, made by Leon Trotsky in 1940, of the "degeneration of modern trade union organizations in the entire world," and their "growing together with the state power."

This passage was written more than 80 years ago, but perfectly describes the role of the unions in enforcing the dictates of Wall Street, which runs the railroads as piggy banks for major hedge funds and billionaires, through their collaboration with capitalist governments both Democrat and Republican.

The alternative is for workers to organize themselves to prepare a real fight. Railroaders must break the divide and conquer tactics by linking up across all crafts and Class I through the development of a network of rank-and-file committees. They must use these new organizations which they control to make an appeal for unity with the entire working class, including logistics workers and East Coast dockworkers, who may resume their strike as early as next month, and who are also fighting against corporate attacks on their living standards.

Above all, this must be an international fight, linking up especially with coworkers in Canada and Mexico. North of the border, more than 50,000 postal workers are on strike, and thousands of railroaders struck briefly earlier this year before the intervention of the Canadian government. This shows the immense potential for a global working class movement more powerful than any national government or union bureaucracy.



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