

Organize a counter-offensive against the Canadian Pacific-Teamsters' anti-worker arbitration deal! Build the CP Workers Rank-and-File Committee!

CP Workers Rank-and-File Committee
28 March 2022

The following statement was extensively discussed and approved at a recent meeting of railway workers held to found the CP Workers Rank-and-File Committee. We strongly urge all CP Rail workers who agree with the statement to join the committee by emailing cpworkersrfc@gmail.com, and to share the statement widely with friends and colleagues. We appeal to rail workers at other companies to contact us to begin building a rank-and-file committee at their workplace.

Dear brothers and sisters:

We, conductors, engineers, mechanics, and yard workers at CP Rail, have formed the CP Workers Rank-and-File Committee to lead an all-out fight against the sabotaging of our struggle for better wages, working conditions and pensions by the Teamsters union. The Teamsters agreed in a backroom conspiracy with CP management, overseen by the Trudeau Liberal government, to a rigged arbitration process that will address none of our pressing concerns. They then rammed this agreement down our throats without so much as asking our opinion about it.

We voted overwhelmingly for strike action last month because we wanted to wage a genuine struggle against CP, the sixth-largest railroad in North America. CP is a highly profitable company that rakes in billions for its well-paid executives and rich shareholders by brutally exploiting us under conditions akin to slave labour. Our strike vote showed our determination to put an end to being at the beck-and-call of management 24/7, under its arbitrary scheduling regime and draconian disciplinary procedures, and to the pension cap.

But the Teamsters had other ideas. Ensnared in "negotiations" with CP management since last September, the union bureaucrats kept us in the dark about the bargaining process until the last minute and, violating our democratic strike vote, refused to issue a strike notice as soon as they were legally entitled to do so. They handed the initiative to CP management, who locked us out on the pretext that our strike would "disrupt" the economy. The reality was that they were not prepared to let worker opposition impede bumper profits for CP's Bay Street and Wall Street investors from the high commodity prices produced by the imperialist powers' decision to launch an aggressive war drive against and impose sweeping economic sanctions on Russia.

For years prior to our strike vote, we have laboured day and night for CP, sacrificing our family and personal lives. We confront a ruthless disciplinary system under which managers try to fire workers for the tiniest of infractions. We deal with an unpredictable scheduling regime that results in us having to drive trains for 10 hours and more, often with flammable and other dangerous cargoes, after an hour or two of sleep. We have no way of challenging safety concerns and the mistreatment of

workers through the grievance procedure because management has intentionally backlogged it, meaning that a complaint takes more than two years to resolve.

The Teamsters, Unifor and other rail unions are complicit in this corporate dictatorship. They "negotiate" collective agreements with the company that are violated on a daily basis, but tell us to "work now and grieve later" with the result that CP is never held to account.

The Teamsters bureaucrats used the threat of government back-to-work legislation to justify their acceptance of a pro-employer, government-appointed arbitrator. In a letter to the membership, Teamsters lead negotiator Dave Fulton said that the union knew that the Trudeau government would force an arbitrated settlement, so they decided to "take control" of the process. In other words, the Teamsters decided to do the Liberal government's dirty work and enforce CP's dictates on us because they didn't want our struggle to become a working class political challenge to Trudeau and his big business government.

The establishment of our committee is part of an upsurge of working class opposition to this corporate-union-government dictatorship across North America. Our fellow railroaders at BNSF established the BNSF Workers Rank-and-File Committee last month to fight the onerous Hi-Viz attendance policy, which allows the continent's largest railroad to determine almost every aspect of its workers' lives.

What we fight for

The Teamsters and the pro-capitalist trade unions as a whole long ago abandoned their role of defending workers' interests. The privileged bureaucrats who head the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference, many of whom have not set foot in a rail yard or locomotive for years, have only one concern: their own careers. They prioritize their corporatist relationships with company executives and government ministers over the interests of the workers they claim to represent.

This is why we are making the fight against the arbitration agreement the starting point for a rank-and-file rebellion of railroaders and their supporters against the unions' sabotaging of our struggle. Our committee will advocate the following demands:

- A 30 percent wage increase with permanent COLA! Inflation is currently running at nearly 6 percent and CP's deep pockets are more than capable of providing us with wages that keep pace with price rises.
- Accurate train lineups visible to all workers! We refuse to be bullied

into driving trains after one or two hours of sleep due to the company's failure to create reliable lineups.

- A return to the 40-hour workweek! We regularly toil for 12 hours and more a day producing profits for CP. We demand a healthier work-life balance so we can spend time with our friends and families. Stop abusing the spare board as a pool of flexible full-time labour and return it to its original function as a backup to allow workers to determine their own schedule and book personal time off whenever necessary.

- Hire more workers to guarantee adequate maintenance and stop the demanning of crews! Rail workers and the public should not be put at risk because CP wants to cut corners on safety, de-man crews and reduce maintenance on its aging lines so it can pay more to its corporate investors.

- Lift the pension cap! The Teamsters agreed to the cap in 2012 because CP said it was struggling. Now, this multi-billion-dollar company is preparing to buy Kansas City Southern and create the "first ever multi-national railroad," in the words of CEO Keith Creel. If the company can afford this massive expansion, it can afford to pay us a decent pension on which we can retire after decades of breaking our bodies for their benefit.

- Down time must be respected! We demand an end to the practice of the company burdening us on our rest days with questions about safety or disciplinary procedures. If investigations need to be done into an incident or breach of safety, they should take place on company time!

- Worker control over safety, scheduling, and train speeds! We will not tolerate the continuation of a rigged grievance procedure that never addresses any of our concerns. We demand that railroaders have the right to immediately refuse work they deem dangerous without the threat of being "pulled from service" for spurious company-led "investigations" that drag on for years. Workers should have the right to halt operations to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- No more surveillance cameras in our locomotives! We demand an end to the constant surveillance of our every move and the intimidation of workers who speak up with petty disciplinary punishments.

- No more secret "bargaining" and rigged collective agreements! We demand that all future negotiations be livestreamed so that workers know what is being discussed. We reject interference by governments at any level with our right to fight for decent wages and working conditions, including through back-to-work legislation and anti-democratic binding arbitration, which always produces outcomes favourable to management, if not its express wishes.

These demands are based on what we and our families need to live and work safely, not what Creel and CP's billionaire investors claim the company can afford. To ensure that the CP Workers Rank-and-File committee fights for these demands, we will organize our committee under the following rules:

- Our committee is completely independent of the Teamsters, Unifor, and all other trade unions. Membership in our committee is open to rank-and-file rail workers only. Union officials and company spies are not welcome. The committee can only be an open forum for free, democratic debate if it is controlled by the workers themselves, not an army of petty functionaries with ties to big business and the state.

- Our committee does not appeal for support to any of the established political parties. The New Democrats, Liberals, Bloc Quebecois, and Conservatives all serve the interests of corporate Canada. This fact was highlighted this past week by the NDP's announcement of a "confidence-and-supply" agreement under which it will prop up the Trudeau Liberals for the next three years, so they can continue to participate in NATO's proxy war against Russia, hike military spending, and impose austerity on workers. Instead, our appeal is to rail workers across North America, as well as workers in all economic sectors, to join us in a unified counter-offensive for decent-paying, secure jobs for all.

Unite the working class behind CP Rail workers

The struggle at CP Rail is a key battleground for workers across Canada, the United States and internationally. As the ruling elites prepare to plunge the world into a catastrophic war potentially fought with nuclear weapons, they cannot tolerate any dissent by workers at home. The arbitration deal that CP, the Teamsters and Trudeau government are trying to impose on us will rob us of any right to strike, perform work-to-rule or bargain for improvements for years to come. If they succeed, similar draconian methods will be employed against working people everywhere.

We issue a special appeal to our brothers and sisters at BNSF, who have already established a rank-and-file committee to fight for their demands, at CN, Canada's largest railway, and at all Class I railroads in the US. Let us organize a common struggle against the rampant profiteering and corporate-union-imposed dictatorship that currently dominates North America's railroads! If Creel and his corporate buddies plan on building a multi-national railway to ship cargo and exploit workers from the Canadian Arctic to tropical Mexico, then we will build a multi-national worker-led counter-offensive of Canadian, American, and Mexican railroaders to stop corporate profiteering at the expense of our health, safety, and very lives. To do this we must reject Canadian and American nationalism, which the unions have used to divide workers for decades and facilitate company-dictated attacks on working conditions, jobs, and wages. We must also oppose the Trudeau and Biden administration's vast spending on the military and subsidies to the corporations and stock markets. Rail workers and all working people have no interest in supporting wars for profit and geopolitical influence!

We make a particular appeal to our most powerful allies, the international working class. Workers everywhere are engaged in struggles for better conditions, wage and pension improvements, and against savage employers. Over 800 ferry workers in Britain are currently fighting their overnight firing by the ship operator P&O, and their replacement by contract workers earning a fraction of the regular wage. In Spain, tens of thousands of truckers are protesting exorbitant fuel prices and facing down a brutal state-led crackdown by thousands of police officers.

The CP Workers Rank-and-File Committee will do all it can to unify these struggles by supporting the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. The IWA-RFC was established last year to provide global coordination to the struggles of workers in every country and arm them with an anti-capitalist, socialist program.

We urge all rail workers who agree with this statement to join and help build our committee. Email us at cpworkersrfc@gmail.com.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact