

Canadian Pacific Workers Rank-and-File Committee launches Facebook page to fight hazardous working conditions on railroads

Our reporter
4 August 2022

Workers at Canadian Pacific (CP) Railway organized in the CP Workers Rank-and-File Committee have launched a Facebook page to allow rail workers to speak out anonymously about the horrendous working conditions they confront and coordinate a struggle for better health and safety across North America's railroads.

The Rank-and-File Committee was established in March by workers determined to reject the repeated betrayals of rail workers' struggles by the Teamsters, Unifor and other unions, which are fully complicit in the enforcement of grueling work schedules and life-threatening working conditions.

A mission statement for the page drafted by CP Worker Rank-and-File Committee members states, "Recent years have seen the dereliction of standards in the workplace across the board from employment to health and safety at Canadian Pacific. The Calgary Terminal alone, in a much unpublicized fact, suffered four fatalities in a three-month period between November 2018 and February 2019, three of which occurred in the horrific Field derailment. The same management regime in place then still remains intact today, with no one being held to account or accepting responsibility for these deaths.

"Other workers have succumbed in brutal and horrifying circumstances, ripping parents from children, children from parents, and friends from friends. Still more have suffered life changing illnesses and injuries and have received no support or recompense for their suffering. Many of us have been infected with the potentially deadly COVID-19 virus due to the refusal of management and the unions to provide us with adequate protection. Make no mistake,

every affront, every omission, every appalling tragedy is an offense to everyone in this workplace and an affront to one is an affront to all. We all have a right to life until nature deems it naturally over, we all have a right to return home in the same condition that we left it. These rights are, however, squandered and ignored daily and our plight as railway workers becomes desperate as desperation stalks the industry on a global scale."

The statement goes on to denounce the involvement of the trade unions and federal government in supporting CP's ravenous pursuit of corporate profits at all costs, declaring, "Transport Canada, to all intents and purposes, is a facilitator of the wanton graft that elevates profit over safety in the ideological mind of a collective management. The Teamsters Canada Rail Conference, Unifor, and other unions, legally bound to represent without discrimination, arbitrariness, or bad faith, are incompetent in all respects and have become nothing more than appendages of corporate management and the pro-business federal Liberal government. In March, the Teamsters robbed workers of any legal right to use our collective power to fight for our rights when they sabotaged our struggle for better conditions by sending the contract dispute of engineers, conductors and yard workers to anti-democratic binding arbitration. The employer, CP, is rabid and ravenous for burgeoning profits from the Canadian Arctic to tropical Mexico at your cost and your sacrifice."

In conclusion, the statement explains how the new page will strive to develop a political struggle by rail workers across the continent to oppose corporate deregulation and capitalist austerity, which have

allowed railroad operators like CP to become a law unto themselves. The statement explains, “The role of the CP Workers Rank-and-File Committee is to provide the mechanism to mobilize rail workers in struggle against the horrendous conditions we confront on a daily basis. The CPWRFC asserts that you are valuable and that your presence is to be much more than an automaton that runs the railway for those who watch us suffer and die while management and super-rich shareholders reap obscene rewards devoid of conscience or accountability. On this page, we will educate each other on our rights as workers, regardless of your departments or work location. Here, you can share your stories, good or bad, about life as a railway employee...

“This is a safe space that will eventually serve as a foundation for rebuilding the rail industry in the image of the workers who maintain its vital role in the Canadian and North American economies. Such a task demands that rail workers collectively take matters into their own hands through the building of rank-and-file committees in opposition to the corporate-government-union dictatorship that prevails across North America’s railroads.”

The launch of the page comes at a critical time for rail workers across North America. Although over 140,000 Class I railway workers in the United States voted overwhelmingly for strike action earlier this summer, the rail unions refused to enforce their strike mandates. Instead, they appealed to US President Joe Biden to appoint a Presidential Emergency Board (PEB), a mechanism that has been used time and again to press for the imposition of the railroad bosses’ demands and during whose deliberations strikes are outlawed. President Biden appointed such a board in mid-July.

In Canada, the unions have been no less ruthless in selling out workers’ struggles. The impetus for the formation of the CP Workers Rank-and-File Committee in March was the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference’s acceptance of anti-democratic binding arbitration, a process which will end in the employer getting everything it wants and prohibit rail workers from striking or bargaining collectively for years to come. Over the past three months, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers has similarly strangled powerful strikes by signals and communication workers at Union Station in Toronto

and at Canadian National Railway and imposed binding arbitration on them. And Unifor recently ignored an overwhelming strike vote at passenger carrier Via Rail, repeatedly extending a strike deadline to reach a rotten sellout with company management that Canada’s largest private-sector union subsequently succeeded in ramming through.

These experiences underscore the urgency of developing a continent-wide counteroffensive by rail workers to secure decent-paying secure jobs, a safe working environment and predictable work schedules to allow workers to spend time with friends and family. As the CP Workers Rank-and-File Committee proposed in its founding statement adopted in March, “Let us organize a common struggle against the rampant profiteering and corporate-union-imposed dictatorship that currently dominates North America’s railroads! If [CP Rail CEO Keith] 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 encourage all rail workers to join and help build the CP Workers Rank-and-File Committee Facebook page. Share the page with your work colleagues and friends. **To share your story anonymously with the Committee, email cpworkersrfc@gmail.com or send a private message via Facebook.**



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