

Canadian rail worker denounces Presidential Emergency Board's attack on US railroaders

Our reporter
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This week's ruling by the Presidential Emergency Board (PEB) appointed by the Biden administration was a declaration of war against over 140,000 railroaders across the United States. It proposed that rail workers, who have been working without a contract for almost three years, should receive below-inflation pay increases. The recommendation would scrap a cap on individual health care costs and granted management unilateral authority to set brutal scheduling regimes that prevent rail workers from having a family life.

Rail workers across Canada, many of whom work for the same highly profitable railroads as their American colleagues and confront the same terrible working conditions, are closely following the struggle of their brothers and sisters in the United States.

The CP Workers Rank-and-File Committee (CPWRFC) was established in March after the Teamsters sabotaged a strike by 3,000 engineers and conductors by agreeing to send all outstanding issues to binding arbitration. Earlier this week, it was reported that the arbitrator has ordered a miserable 3.5 percent per year pay "increase" for CP workers, which is a massive pay cut when the nearly double-digit rate of inflation is taken into account.

The CPWRFC rejects all attempts to divide rail workers by nationality, job category, or any other artificial division imposed by the pro-corporate unions. In its founding statement, the committee urged the building of a mass movement of rail workers across North America to fight for decent-paying jobs and improvements to the abysmal health and safety conditions on railroads across the continent.

To help build the CP Workers Rank-and-File Committee and let us know what you think of the PEB ruling, you can contact the committee at

cpworkersrfc@gmail.com or join its Facebook group.

A leading member of the CPWRFC sent the following thoughts on the PEB ruling to the *World Socialist Web Site*.

A 3 percent to 7 percent wage increase is between 4 percent to 5 percent too little per year of the contract. While significant wage increases could drive inflation, for that to happen the average worker would need even more significant surplus cash to purchase high-value goods which will never happen even if wages are at parity with inflation. The need to buy food and energy prioritizes where the money goes. At this rate, the proposed wage increases force workers perilously towards poverty. This is particularly loathsome while railways generate vast profits, shareholder satisfaction, and, most nauseatingly of all, distended remunerative packages for executives.

This is not trickle-down economics beloved of Reagan, but slow drip torture extolled by executioners of times past. While it is in everyone's interest to avoid industrial action, wage offers of this type bear no validity where workers carry the economic burdens of global crises engineered by aloof and entitled elites who hardly notice the effect, except the unseemly bloating of their wealth, as others are deprived. The right to strike is the last right we have, itself under relentless siege from repressive labour tactics instigated by governments and employers. Limiting wages and bargaining rights are the most superficial tactics these entities can adopt, doing away with any enlightened thought about how to reasonably and respectfully treat workforces. Profit sharing in real terms, for example, is how an employer can relate to a valuable and skilled workforce, paying a meaningful dividend, as it would, to any other major shareholder. Instead, workers are

regarded as property malleable as clay to the whims of oppressive employers. We are not the enemy of industry but industry posits itself as enemy to us and is callously cruel in its pursuit of spoils, aided and abetted by complicit governments.

One might expect organized labour to fight back through the union movement but, invariably, the old dinosaurs such as the Teamsters, etc., are already bought and paid for by the employer. Most senior union officials are either incompetent, cozy, or corrupt to the core, leaving the membership high and dry.

Profits must not be calculated until workers receive the dignity that they deserve. If this “emergency board” wants to avoid an emergency, it should cater to workers before profits; it’s not rocket science. After all, these people are the greatest shareholders of all, investing their whole lives, equanimity, and opportunities for their struggling families. The crass unfairness of these policies is the weapon of mass destruction in this raging class war.



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