

“The IAM has sold us out once more”: Railroad machinists speak out after union announces sellout deal

Our reporters
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Hundreds of railroaders have contacted the WSWS over the past week with their thoughts about the PEB ruling and the potential for strike action. Add your voice to theirs! Contact us by filling out the form at the bottom of this article. All comments will be kept anonymous. We will continue to publish statements from workers in the coming days.

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A machinist in Southern California: “The majority [of the 300 IAM members at my worksite] have expressed dissatisfaction with the PEB’s recommendation. I would say more than 90 percent have expressed their desire to not accept the contract and strike! But—business as usual—the IAM [International Association of Machinists] has sold us out once more!

“I have worked as an IAM machinist for [a long time] and this is nothing new. A garbage contract comes out, we vote it down, the union officials accept it, and we get the old ‘this is the best you’re gonna get’ speech. Then they tell the members on the East Coast that the members on the West Coast voted for it, and they tell us on the West Coast that the East Coast voted for it! They’re a bunch of liars and corrupt snakes who sit in their cush jobs making 6 figures a year and cheat us every time!

“In my opinion the IAM must go! Nothing but corrupt, greedy politicians themselves who have never done anything for the members! Very sad and pathetic.”

A machinist from upstate New York: “On a daily basis I do the work of multiple crafts. I am a machinist by craft. ... [But] most days I am what they call a middles machinist. In fact, ‘middle’ is actually an electrician, or used to be. I have to inspect and repair electrical components, my capabilities for which are nil. I also perform mechanical inspections and repairs at the same time, as well as utility work such as fueling, sanding and cleaning cabs, dumping and recharging dirty toilets. Multiple times a week, I also have to move locomotives to the shop for repair and load on the shop for

the next shift. And also the secondary flying squad if the other flying squad is in the yard or on the road.

“I typically do the work of what would be 5-6 people a day. Second shift is a skeleton shift. ... They expect everyone to do [everything] all day every day, performing like circus monkeys for what is peanuts in pay. Oh, and we get forced over constantly to do it on third shift. It’s hazardous, exhausting and not fair to anyone.”

An experienced machinist from North Texas: “[Only a few more years and] I get to retire. All that money I have had to pay Railroad Retirement, \$800 or more each paycheck, would give the average machinist take home pay of about \$60,000 a year if he was lucky. This 24 percent raise they are wanting to give us will be swallowed up by all the medical co-pays they are going to double.

“All the outside companies making the same as us, new hires will run to them because no one wants to work a second shift or third shift graveyard with Tuesdays and Wednesdays off. Then I see all these sign-on bonuses they are throwing out there. This is so disrespectful to have to work side by side with a new hire that just received this huge sign-on bonus, and have to train him how to do the things I have been doing for 31 years. Where is my bonus? Not only for having had to work through COVID with no extra pay for doing so.

“The hundreds they have laid off, they expect us to pick up the slack of who they let go. So basically I am told to do three to four jobs in an eight-hour shift to make up the three to four employees let go, and then I get reprimanded for not completing them.

“So if labor doesn’t make their profits, I want to be in their perfect dream land that like Peter Pan, and wiggle my nose to make products disappear from one place and reappear at its destination perfectly, or magically wave a wand and products or supplies get to costumers right on time.

“So I am ready to STRIKE NOW. ESPECIALLY reading

DHLs new contract they just got.”

A woman railroader: “ I am one of the few women engineers working in my area. From a mother’s standpoint on this, the attendance policy they have now is absolutely ridiculous. They say work 28 days straight and get 7 points back. Well that depends, there are a lot of variables that can happen in that time, then they will reset the clock on you. Same with the [federally mandated] 6 days on, 2 days off. They will let you sit in a motel for 24 hours and 5 minutes just to reset your clock. Or deadhead you because even though you have to be at work, for a deadhead it don’t count as a working trip.

“Or they will cut the boards when a bunch are coming up to their sixth day. It’s hard to make appointments, children’s functions, holidays, even births of grandchildren. We get three days in three months off, one day a month basically, without fear of getting fired. Need anymore than that? Tough s***.

“I was off for months due to complications from COVID. I came back to work and had no vacation time (all given while off work) no paid days (since I was off I didn’t get all the starts I needed), no sick time to make necessary appointments for aftercare from being sick for so long. Can’t get FMLA because I was off. You have to have 1,250 hours in before you can apply.

“Then to start on the situation on the engines. The cleanliness of the engines are atrocious. I have to bring cleaning supplies with me every trip to clean my area and the bathroom so I can use it without catching some kind of disease—because we all know you can’t take ANY SICK DAYS. And now they are talking about raising our healthcare, After everything we do, working through the pandemic, putting our own lives and families at risk.

“This company is getting ridiculous. They can’t keep the new hires. The older folks are saying ‘screw this’ and leaving. If you add up all the time we are away from home, from the time we leave for work to the time we actually get home, it could be 36 to 48 hours. Add up all that time with our trip rates, and we aren’t even making 10 dollars an hour.”

A mechanic from the Kansas City area: “There are five unions that make up the labor force [at my facility]. We work 24/7, 365 days a year. Forced holidays, forced overtime. We get zero shift differentials or weekend differentials. The majority of workers have less than desirable rest days. Many of us don’t even know our families anymore and have lost friends due to the odd hours and shifts.

“We worked through the pandemic and received a pat on the back. We didn’t get any COVID bonus money like other industries. We have lost coworkers due to complications of

COVID. We have had many family members exposed to COVID from us taking the deadly virus home who have died.

“One elephant in the room is: how many RR workers, across all of the railroads, have died—family members, friends? What is the value of a life? We are exposed daily to a very unforgiving risk to our lives and safety in our workplace. People get severely injured and or die frequently.

“This all leads into my response to the PEB 250 recommendations. The overwhelming majority of us reject PEB 250 based on the wage increase, that falls short of inflation and doesn’t give us more of a share of the carriers’ record profits, even through a pandemic. It is clear that the PEB sided with the company when the carriers said that ‘labor doesn’t contribute to the profits’ of the railroads.

“The health care recommendations, including an uncapping of the 15 percent [individual contribution towards] the total cost is completely ridiculous. We should never have to take concessions when the carriers are making record profits. The recommendations that we get zero sick days is obviously absolutely abhorrent and feels like a knife in the back!

“The recommendations that we shouldn’t get shift differentials is basically telling the thousands of people that rarely get enough sleep and miss out on their children growing up, that they don’t deserve compensation for making these sacrifices.

“We as Labor must unite against the bureaucracy, the outright dismissal of our contribution to the record profits, home life suppression and abuse we receive from the Carriers! Lives have been lost and blood has been shed so that CEOs can buy back stocks and to appease shareholders. We want a percentage of the profits! We will not concede!”



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