

Railroaders have the upper hand! Organize now to demand national rail strike and rejection of PEB-patterned contracts!

The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee
11 September 2022

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The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee is hosting a public meeting Wednesday, September 14, at 7:00 p.m. Eastern Time, “Organize to prepare for a national strike!” All railroaders and their supporters are urged to attend and register for the meeting [here](#).

On Friday evening, the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee met to discuss the outcome of last week’s National Mediation Board talks and to discuss strategy in the lead-up to Friday’s expiration of a legally mandated “cooling off period.” Workers are pushing for a nationwide rail strike, but the unions are working desperately with the government and the railroads to reach a sellout deal to avert any work stoppages. The committee drafted and approved the following statement.

To join the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee, email railwrfc@gmail.com. Alternatively, fill out the form at the bottom of this article and the World Socialist Web Site can put you in touch with the committee.

Brothers and sisters,

The failure to reach an agreement at last week’s National Mediation Board talks are a sign that we railroaders are in a powerful a position as we have ever been. We have less than one week to go before the cooling-off period expires September 16. We must use every hour remaining to us to organize to demand a strike be called on Friday at 12:01 a.m.

The talks in Washington were a conspiracy between the railroads, the union officialdom and the government to try and forestall a strike and ram through a sellout at the 11th hour. But all indications are that our enemies are in a weakened state. Labor Secretary Marty Walsh tried to lay down the law, declaring, “Don’t mess with the nation’s fragile economy weeks ahead of mid-term congressional elections as neither Congress nor the Biden administration will like it,” according to one source. But he also warned them that “neither side should expect Congress,” which is wracked by crisis, “to intervene to prevent a work

stoppage.” But even if they do, this would be a political debacle which would worsen their crisis right before the midterms.

Meanwhile, less than a month after the railroads told the PEB that our labor doesn’t contribute to profits, the railroads have been forced to contradict themselves by raising warnings about the powerful impact of a national strike on the “economy”—that is, to profits.

The union bureaucracy has been taken off guard by the scale of our opposition. They had hoped to get a Presidential Emergency Board report with enough meaningless fig leaves that they could get the deal past us, perhaps at most with a “choreographed short strike,” according to one ex-union official. BLEET [Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen] President Dennis Pierce pleaded his case to CNN last week, declaring that the lack of a deal was not “a personal choice by the presidents of the unions,” but due to opposition from workers.

For years, union bureaucrats have used the Railway Labor Act as a convenient excuse for endless concessions. We had to accept cuts, they claimed, because the law said that we couldn’t strike. That all goes away on September 16. They no longer have any excuse, but they are still working night and day to ram through a sellout. They are exposing themselves as pro-company scabs.

We must organize to fight for what we need!

The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee (RWRFC) has been formed to organize workers independently to assert our interests. **The RWRFC demands that the unions organize a strike to begin when the cooling-off period ends.**

Only a serious struggle will win what we need and

deserve, including a 50 percent wage increase to make up for years of declining wages; cost-of-living adjustments to meet soaring inflation; an end to Hi Viz, Precision Scheduled Railroading and all other brutal attendance policies; an end to 24/7 on-call status and a guaranteed 40-hour workweek; guaranteed time off and sick days; and an end to the push for one-man crews.

Here is what we need to do to prepare:

1. Begin organizing now! No confidence can be placed in the union apparatus, which throughout has colluded with management and the government to force through a contract on their terms. This is why it is necessary to organize ourselves, building rank-and-file strike committees at every carrier and workplace around the country. We call on all railroad workers to organize meetings of your coworkers, excluding union officials, in your workplace and on social media. The only way there will be a fight is if we take control out of the hands of the apparatus.

2. Once a strike begins, it must be adequately provisioned. We must demand full strike pay, \$100 per day, beginning on the first day of the strike, with no monthly caps. SMART has over \$330 million in assets, enough for months of strike pay. That's our money, paid for out of our dues. Last year SMART's national headquarters alone paid \$17 million in salaries for officials—including over \$300,000 for Ferguson—and zero dollars in strike pay. Similar figures can be cited for all of the other rail unions. To free up funds, all nonessential union officials must be furloughed for the duration of the strike.

3. If you are in one of the unions that have already announced deals, we call on you to reject the contracts by the widest possible margin. Be on guard against any attempts to stuff the ballot. We are already receiving disturbing reports of technical issues plaguing the IAM's online voting process, as well as longstanding irregularities in the distribution of ballots to train dispatchers. Organize your coworkers to enforce rank-and-file oversight of balloting, including that workers are present during the counting of ballots.

Their agreements with the carriers to extend their "cooling off" periods to the end of the month should be considered null and void by the rank and file. Not a single worker voted in favor of that, wanted it or even knew about it! Machinists, train dispatchers, electricians and other trades will not scab on their brothers in the operating crafts if a strike begins!

For decades we have seen contracts with diminishing returns for us, but no diminishing returns for railroad profits and for corporate salaries. They make incredible 50 percent profit margins off of our blood, sweat and tears. The carriers claimed that we're not entitled to a share of profits because we aren't exposed to the "risk" that they are. But every day we risk getting hurt or even killed because of the unsafe conditions which they have created for us. This was tragically confirmed in the most recent accident at Union Pacific last Thursday, where two crew members were killed in a collision on a crowded siding.

The corporate press has been trying to gaslight us and turn public opinion against a potential strike by calling the 22 percent wage increases the most "generous" in half a century. What they don't say, but which every worker knows all too well, is that inflation is also at its highest in half a century.

We can and will get powerful support in the working class! We are fighting against the same things everyone else is fighting for, including the rising cost of living, overwork, unsafe conditions. Other workers will recognize our fight as their own. They will see it as the opportunity they have been waiting for to press for their own demands. We have to organize this support by building up lines of communication and solidarity with workers in other industries, above all dockworkers, truckers and others involved in logistics and supply chains. We must also appeal for support from our brothers and sisters on the railroads around the world, including in Canada and in Britain.

If you agree with us, then join us. There is no time to lose! Contact the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee today and take up the fight. Email us at railwrfc@gmail.com for more information.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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