

“This is basically the same as the PEB”: Railroad workers denounce deal reached by White House and unions

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Railroad workers: Tell us what you think about the White House deal. Contact us by filling out the form at the bottom of this page. All submissions will be kept anonymous. Contact the Rail Workers Rank-and-File Committee at railwrfc@gmail.com.

Click here for live updates on the rail worker struggle.

Railroad workers have reacted with disgust and anger to a last-minute deal brokered by the Biden administration between the unions and railway carriers to prevent a strike by more than 100,000 workers at 12:01 am Friday. The tentative agreement is fundamentally the same as the pro-company deal recommended last month by Biden’s Presidential Emergency Board (PEB), which retains the punitive attendance policies and includes below-inflation rate raises and other concessions.

“Read the proposal, it’s the same as the PEB,” a BNSF engineer in Washington State told the WSWs. “The union did this. They caved at the 11th hour. Even medical goes up. It’s only frozen after the contract ends. So, during the next dispute it doesn’t keep growing. It’s well past time to rid ourselves of the corporate unions. Thankfully they never fail at giving us reasons why. It’s time to move forward together, the other crafts, the other industries, the other workers. We make things function not Wall Street. They need to be reminded.”

A BNSF track worker in Kansas City told the WSWs, “This is basically the same as the PEB, with a few numbers changed. They say there is an up-front 14 percent raise, but that’s basically for the last three years. Health care costs are supposed to remain the same, but we haven’t seen the details. The attendance policies are still in there.

“The media makes it sound like we are getting a 24

percent raise. If that was for one year, ok, we’d take it. But it is over five years. This contract is no good. We need sick days, PPHs or something else to get time off for events beyond vacations. Engineers and conductors don’t have time off, signalmen are on call except for 12 hours a week. This agreement doesn’t change things in real world.

“We have a ‘pro-union’ president, a secretary of labor from the unions. They should have said to the railroad, ‘Give them what they asked for.’ But that didn’t happen. It doesn’t matter whether it is the Democrats or Republicans, they’re not for us.”

Commenting on the meeting of the Rail Workers Rank-and-File Committee attended by hundreds of workers on Wednesday night, the worker continued, “The rank-and-file committee is a good thing. We need to keep each other informed, across multiple crafts and unions. Direct engagement will give us more power. This contract affects us drastically. It will determine our livelihoods and could even lead to us getting killed. The union, the companies and the president agreed to this contract. Now our voice and our words needs to be heard.”

Workers in unions that previously agreed to the tentative agreements based on the PEB also spoke out. A CSX locomotive mechanic from Tennessee spoke about the agreement reached by the International Association of Machinists (IAM) earlier in the week. “We voted against the contract and to strike. But the Machinists union agreed to extend the contract to September 29. They never asked us, they just did it. Everyone is down for a strike even if it means defying Congress. It would take a lot of risk, but people want to strike. They just want to know how to

organize it. Before today, the deadline was the 16th, and the IAM just made up the extension to the 29th.

“They negotiated away our right to strike without asking us. At some point, this has got to come to a head, and you say this is the day we walk out. Our union is horrible, and they showed it again. Every time, they push us back more and more. A few weeks ago, they were running around saying this was the best deal, and we should vote ‘yes.’ The union has been working with the companies for years. The Railway Labor Act gives the railroads no reason to negotiate. They expect Congress to make us work. There are no repercussions if the railroads refuse to negotiate.

“How is Biden the most ‘pro-union president’? If he cared, he would force the railroads to give us what we need. He’s for the union tops, not for us. The unions are working for the company and against us.’

Workers also spoke out on social media. One worker wrote: “They just repackaged the same PEB shit sandwich we were already being offered with a few more things the company already wanted. Yes, read the actual language of the contract when it comes out. But let’s not bury our heads in the sand here. We’ve been sold out and gained nothing we weren’t already being offered.”

On the Brotherhood of the Maintenance of the Way Employees (BMWE) Facebook page, workers, who are awaiting ballots to vote on the BMWE-backed agreement, said, “I want to know who’s getting the little orange envelope discretely slid across the table to them. Seems these officials are getting the Tentative Agreements knowing we’re going to vote ‘no’ on them. Question is: Why are they doing this? To prevent a strike? If so, why? [Isn’t] the craft union [supposed] to represent each member and not the company? In what way does anything on the table make it better for any of us? Yeah, a lot of unanswered, logical and simple questions.”

Another worker posted, “I worked on the railroad for 40 years, and after a few strikes I do think that now it is the right time to strike because the companies need you more now than before. I am saying this because they shorted the labor force, so they do not have too many people to get the job done. Before they had a lot of people, so they [could] find somebody to continue working. [This] is not the case now.”

Another worker replied, “Do you realize the reason why they don’t have a lot of employees is because the working conditions has gotten so bad that people can’t take it anymore. Since this new Hi-Viz attendance policy came into effect. I know of two individuals that have passed away from these horrible working conditions. One was driving to work. He hadn’t had a day off in two weeks. He pulled over on the highway and died from a heart attack. Another man went to use the restroom on the 2nd unit and passed out. Conductor found him, and he was already gone. I grew up with the railroad.

“My grandfather and aunt [said] conditions were never this bad. Now you are required to be available 24/7/365. They need day off and they get penalized. If you try to use a PLD day most of the time they are denied. This is why the strike was going to happen.”

Workers around the country and, in fact, the world are looking to railway workers to break through the stranglehold of the pro-corporate unions and use their power to overturn these conditions. Rick, a leader of the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee in Dublin, Virginia, where workers conducted a powerful strike last year said, “The railroad workers have to stick to their guns. You guys have them scared. Organize, organize. Tell everyone working person.

“They will come back and say, ‘We better take this offer, it’s the best we are going to get!’ Bull crap. It’s junk, and they know it. They are hoping you guys and gals are too dumb and poor to turn it down. Hold the line.

“The Volvo workers did for three months until the company and the United Auto Workers union dangled just enough carrots to enough people and a good scare tactic it finally broke us. But now that everything that they didn’t show us is coming out, those people are kicking themselves.

“Demand to see the entire contract with enough time for people to read and understand what they are looking at. Volvo’s rank and file is supporting you.”



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