

Worker at meeting of Rail Workers Rank-and-File Committee: We must bring power back to the rank and file

A railway worker in St. Louis
15 September 2022

A rail worker from St. Louis delivered the following remarks at the meeting of the Rail Workers Rank-and-File Committee Wednesday, which was attended by more than 500 workers. The statement was issued before the announcement of a sellout deal brokered between the White House and the unions.

The meeting adopted, by a vote of 98 percent in favor, a resolution opposing the conspiracy between the unions, the White House, and the corporations.

Contact the Rail Workers Rank-and-File Committee at railwrfc@gmail.com or by submitting the form at the bottom of this article.

I come to you today as one of the RFC members to call on everyone to join the committee. This committee was formed by railroaders of all crafts across the nation. I became a member because I share the same sentiment of distrust in the railroads and the union apparatus that you all have. Our union leaders wanted us to believe that we were stronger than ever and had the perfect scenario to obtain the best contract, because we all had remained unified across 12 unions, and because Congress and the president were the most labor-friendly that we'd seen in modern history.

They told us that requesting to be released from mediation, in a historically short fashion, would reward us with a labor-friendly PEB [Presidential Emergency Board, set up by the Biden administration]. After about 30 days, the recommendation was released by the PEB, and it quickly became evident that their claim couldn't have been further from the truth. Immediately, the tentative agreement was all over social media, and the word spread like wildfire before the unions had announced anything official. Union reps were contacted. Emails were sent to Congress telling them

how this recommendation was a subpar contract that doesn't come close to inflation, or a fair share of profits. No sick days, no shift differentials. It didn't even bother to recommend anything on the draconian attendance policies. And to top it all off, an increase in the cost of healthcare premiums.

What did we get? Nothing. The union reps accepted it anyway without our approval. After being deemed "essential" when convenient during a global pandemic, I lost workmates and friends. Workers lost loved ones. We were put into a situation where we were exposing each other and our families to this deadly virus. People were denied using vacation days if they had to quarantine, a quarantine which was demanded by the companies. All while record profits were being made by the fat cat CEOs. We were never compensated with a bonus or hazard pay, like so many workers in other industries.

Today we got the news that the machinists' union voted no on the tentative agreement and yes to the strike. However, the District 19 president included in his notification that "out of respect for the other unions we will postpone our strike until the 29th of September," once again making a unilateral decision that the workers had not agreed upon.

We voted to strike. We voted to strike at 12:01 a.m. on the 16th of September, the end of the cooling off period. For contract after contract, we've taken concessions in pay and benefits. We risk our health and our lives every single day. Our families have to make sacrifices that most families don't endure: rescheduling holidays, birthdays, family gatherings, funerals, etc. These are all reasons why I joined the rank-and-file committee. To get organized, to ensure our democratic

right to vote—and have those votes honored, not determined by 60 people in the Senate hell-bent on stripping those rights away—abolishing the RLA [Railway Labor Act] that cripples our right to strike, getting rid of the bureaucracy and the union apparatus, and bringing the power back to the rank and file.

Brothers and sisters, I call on every one of you: Please, join us in solidarity, in this united front, in opposition to the corrupt relationship between the government, the railroad carriers and the top officials of the unions.

In history, labor was victorious when workers found it in themselves to get organized, put their differences aside and stand and fight together as one united front. The time has come for us to do the same. These are unprecedented times that call for action. Stay vigilant, and unwavering by the demands of Congress. Do everything you can to spread this message of unity and strength. Because when we unite as one, there isn't anything that can stand in our way.

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