

Railroaders furious after unions reveal that no tentative agreement exists, despite sabotage of strike

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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. Contact the Rail Workers Rank-and-File Committee at railwrfc@gmail.com.

One day after leading Democratic politicians and the media announced that tentative agreements had been reached between the two largest railroad workers unions, both unions acknowledged that no final tentative agreements actually exist yet and that workers should not expect to view any details of the agreements for weeks.

In an eight-sentence statement released Friday afternoon, one of the unions, SMART-TD, wrote that “a number of posts purporting to reveal the finalized contents or finalized components of a TA have spread rapidly and are being presented as factual. They are not.”

The statement adds, “Anyone who states that they have seen a final copy of the TA, have a copy of the final TA or knows the final contents of the agreement is not being truthful.” The documents, it continues, “have not been fully reviewed by both parties’ legal counsel” and have not been presented “to the SMART-TD District 1 General Chairpersons, nor has it been distributed to officers or membership.”

The SMART-TD statement added that “factual information” regarding the phantom agreement would be posted on their website “sometime next week.” As to when the full actual agreement would be posted for workers to review, the union did not say.

In an interview with *In These Times* published Friday afternoon, Dennis Pierce, president of the other union, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

(BLET), revealed that the union’s general chairman had yet to review the agreement and that members would not get to see it for up to a month.

“This is probably going to take three to four weeks,” Pierce said. He claimed that this was “not a delay tactic, it’s just the way the process works.”

Why it would take BLET “three to four weeks” to post a slightly reworded version of the Biden-backed Presidential Emergency Board (PEB) recommendations, which have already been roundly rejected by workers for failing to deal with inhuman attendance systems and increasing health care costs, was not explained.

“Everyone needs to remain calm,” Pierce begged. The BLET president, who according to LM-2 tax documents, was paid over \$275,000 in total compensation in 2021, added, “We’re not trying to impose anything. We’re trying to give *them* [that is, rank-and-file workers] a chance to decide their future.” (Emphasis added)

Pierce did not explain how sabotaging workers’ desires and democratic vote to strike, on the basis of a non-existent agreement, was allowing “them” a “chance to decide their future.”

The language used by Pierce in his interview is extremely telling. It reveals the vast social chasm that exists between the union apparatus, with its bloated six-figure salaries, and the rank-and-file workers who have seen their social and economic standing deteriorate while producing record profits for the rail companies.

Adding insult to injury, Pierce chided workers, outraged

that their strike was deliberately sabotaged by the union in the 11th hour, not to make an “emotional decision” when the TA finally materializes.

That the unions were forced to make these statements was due to workers’ outrage over “highlights” that had begun to circulate on social media and on the *World Socialist Web Site*. Some of these “highlights” included that the TA gives workers only one paid day off plus three scheduled “medical events,” which can only happen on “Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.”

Reports of the agreement also indicate that workers’ health care premiums would rise every year of the contract and that a cap would only take effect after the contract ends.

Ignoring workers’ central demands for the abolition of the hated profit-driven attendance systems, an article in the industry publication *Railwayage* admitted: “Demands by the BLET and SMART-TD for scrapping of individual carrier attendance polices and more predictable work schedules are not including the tentative national agreements, but are subject for so-called ‘local handling.’”

On social media groups frequented by railroad workers, the response to SMART-TD’s statement and Pierce’s interview was overwhelmingly hostile. One worker questioned Pierce’s assertion that it would take weeks for workers to view the agreement: “If they agreed on something already, it should be available NOW! This is the bought [and paid for] union leaders giving favors out to the [Democrats]. This is all in time for election season.”

Another railroad worker agreed, writing, “I am more pissed off with the union than the carrier right now. It’s one thing for the company, you expect that, but to be stabbed in the back by the f*ckers you pay \$140 a month to, well f*ck that.”

“The union sold us out so this wouldn’t make the Democrats look bad before the midterms. There’s no other way to view considering Pierce’s statements before this deal,” another worker commented. “Three to four weeks to even write the damn thing up, then time to vote, then most likely an additional 30 days cooling off period after that puts it firmly after the midterm elections for a future strike.”

Workers should reject the anti-democratic fraud perpetrated by the union apparatus, which has been working with the White House and the corporations, to sabotage a strike and ram through a contract that meets none of their demands.

The way forward was outlined at the meeting of the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee (RWRFC) held on Wednesday evening, before the agreement was announced. The more than 500 workers in attendance adopted a resolution, with 98 percent in favor, declaring:

1. We will not accept any act by Congress that violates our democratic right to strike and imposes upon us a contract that we do not accept and has not been ratified by the rank and file.

2. We demand a contract that addresses our needs, including a major pay increase to make up for years of declining wages; cost-of-living adjustments to meet soaring inflation; an end to brutal attendance policies; guaranteed time off and sick days; and an end to the push for one-man crews.

3. We inform the unions that any attempt to force through contracts that we do not accept and that have not been voted on, or to keep us working without a contract, will be in violation of clear instructions given by the rank and file.

The meeting and the resolution that it passed provide a powerful basis for the development of the fight of railroad workers. This must now be carried forward by railroaders by developing rank-and-file committees at every yard and terminal, holding meetings to reject the Biden-brokered sellout, share information and elect rank-and-file leaders to assume responsibility for the decision-making process.

Contact the Rail Workers Rank-and-File Committee at railwrfc@gmail.com.



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