

The rail unions have violated our rights. Organize the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Network to countermand their betrayal!

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

The following statement was issued by the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which has been established by railroad workers to organize and unify their struggle independently of the union apparatus.

The RWRFC issued its founding statement on September 1. On September 14, it sponsored a meeting attended by over 500 workers to plan a nationwide strike. That evening, the Biden administration, the rail corporations and the unions announced a deal to block a strike. This statement is the response of the RWRFC to this sabotage.

To join the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee, email railwrfc@gmail.com or text (314) 529-1064. 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.

Dear brothers and sisters,

The rail unions' agreement of September 15, worked out behind our backs in the dead of night, is not only a betrayal of railroaders that seeks to enforce the Presidential Emergency Board report with only minor tweaks. It is also a flagrant violation of the democratic will of the membership and the bedrock principles of the labor movement. By their own actions, the bureaucrats that run the BLET, SMART-TD and the other 10 unions have shown that they don't represent us, but the railroads, the government and Wall Street.

We now have every right, and the duty, to organize ourselves independently of the union apparatus to countermand this agreement and all future violations of workers' rights. The will of railroaders is not something to be ignored whenever it is convenient for the bureaucrats. **The basic principle that railroaders must adopt is: The authority of the rank-and-file is**

absolute and unimpeachable. Anything less is an unacceptable violation of our democratic and social rights.

The will of the rank-and-file was clearly expressed on the night of September 14, in a representative national meeting of 500 railroaders sponsored by the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee. That resolution, which passed by 98 percent, read:

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 deal between the unions, the companies and the White House, which was worked out as railroaders were meeting, is a flagrant and deliberate violation of all three points:

First, it is a de-facto injunction, enforcing through the

collaboration of the unions and the White House a ban on a national strike that both the Democrats and Republicans were prepared to pass in Congress on September 16.

Second, it includes pay increases below the rate of inflation, maintains Hi Viz, PSR and other punitive attendance policies, would give us only four sick days for an entire year (only one of which would be paid) and does nothing to end the push for one-man crews.

Third, it keeps us working while the unions work to delay a strike. The unions have admitted that a contract does not even exist yet. This is a violation of the basic principle of the labor movement, “no contract, no work.” The unions are now stretching the voting process out for weeks in a bid to demoralize us and soften us up so that they can pass a contract we do not support.

The agreement is only the latest in a long train of violations of our most basic, elemental rights, including:

- Hoarding our dues money to finance their salaries while paying \$0 in strike pay;
- Loyally enforcing court injunctions and threatening to expose workers to legal action;
- Ignoring a 99.5 percent strike vote in July, and instead calling for Biden to appoint the PEB;
- Censoring us on social media and suppressing discussion at local meetings;
- Dividing us up by union, announcing separate deals in a bid to break our unity and solidarity.

The task now is to develop the rank-and-file structures through which our rights and our will, expressed in the rank-and-file resolution, can be enforced.

What we *cannot* do is limit ourselves to petitioning, pressuring or begging the union officialdom to change course, while leaving the initiative in their hands. The problem is not the occupation of top posts in the apparatus by “bad apples,” but the existence of the apparatus itself. Therefore, it is not a question of reforming the bureaucracy from within, but *shattering its influence* and domination over the rank and file.

This means the development of a Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Network, with representation of workers from all crafts and across all carriers.

Here is what we urge our coworkers to do:

Hold meetings with your coworkers at every terminal

and yard, excluding union officials and including participation from all crafts. Organize a discussion, pass resolutions declaring the will of the rank and file, and elect a leadership, consisting of the most trusted rank-and-file members, to fight for it. Send delegates from your local committee to the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee to establish it as a national leadership body, consisting of and accountable to the members themselves.

The first item of business for this Network will be to countermand and defeat this illegitimate deal, organizing to fight for an end to pointless delays that only benefit the company and members of Congress with elections coming up in November. The Network must also fight to enforce rank-and-file oversight of balloting to prevent fraud.

We must then prepare for the next phase in our struggle. The bargaining teams that participated in this White House conspiracy must be thrown out and replaced with ones chosen from the rank-and-file. At the same time, the committee must prepare workers for strike action if our demands are not met.

We cannot be intimidated by the threat of Congressional intervention or by media attempts to demonize us as “selfish.” As far as American workers are concerned, railroaders have far more legitimacy than Congress or the corporate media. We must activate this by fanning out to dockworkers, warehouse workers, teachers, autoworkers and workers in every industry in our areas, to build up the broadest possible support.

The unions, the railroads and the government had hoped that announcing a deal would take the wind out of our sails. In their arrogance, they have miscalculated. The struggle is not over, it is only just beginning. What terrifies them is that we will learn how to leverage and use our power. This is what we must now do.

If you agree with us, join the fight! Contact the RWRFC by emailing railwrfc@gmail.com.



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