

How to defeat the government-union sellout and put rail workers in control

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

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

The RWRFC is hosting a public meeting Wednesday, September 28, at 7:00 p.m. Eastern Time, “Organize independently to defeat government and union-backed sellout!” All railroaders and their supporters are urged to attend and register for the meeting here.

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

Brothers and Sisters,

The government-brokered deal announced by the unions has no support whatsoever from railroaders. We are discovering new concessions all the time which makes it even worse than the PEB (Presidential Emergency Board), including automatic bid scheduling for yard workers, extreme restrictions on when we can take time off for doctors’ appointments and even a cap on health care contributions by the carriers which they will take out of our retroactive pay in the next contract.

The unions know perfectly well the deal is massively unpopular. It is in flagrant violation of the will of the membership, which was expressed in a three-point resolution that 500 workers passed at our last public meeting on September 14 which the unions violated only hours later.

But they have no intention of yielding to the democratic will of the membership. They are prepared even to override a “no” vote and enforce the contract through binding arbitration, as was leaked last week to the press. They are also delaying the vote for engineers and conductors past the midterm elections in order to strengthen Congress’ hand should they issue an

injunction. In fact, the endless delay is itself a de facto injunction, enforced by Congress and the White House through the medium of the unions. Moreover, there is every reason to suspect they will try to “pass” the contract through ballot fraud.

Only two days before a self-imposed strike deadline, the IAM announced today a “new” contract, identical to the one that the machinists already rejected by 60 percent. The union also announced another extension of the deadline into December. Not a single worker was consulted on this; the machinists had already voted to strike by 80 percent. The IAM extended the deadline because they knew that a strike would shut down the entire industry since none of the other crafts would cross the picket line.

To add insult to injury, in a Facebook post announcing the deal, in which the union turned off the ability to comment, the IAM had the gall to claim, “the membership will have the final say!” No, as far as the union bureaucrats are concerned, the carriers and the government have the final say. There is no line which the union bureaucracy, in collusion with the carriers and the government, will not cross to violate our will and jam sellout contracts down our throats.

We know what they—the government, the railroad companies and their accomplices in the unions—will do. The question is: What are we going to do?

If this carrier-union-government conspiracy is to be defeated, we must be the ones to do it. Nobody else will do it for us: not the media, not the government or the legal system, and certainly not the union bureaucracy.

We are not their helpless playthings. We have immense power. Nothing in the country can move without us. They are afraid of us more than anything else. In a recent interview, Biden yawned at COVID and the danger of a nuclear war but perked up when a

rail strike was raised, which he described as “not thinkable.”

But the advantage that they have is that they have the organization through which to strategize against us. Railroaders are angry and determined, but this is, so far, unorganized. This can and must be corrected. We have to develop new, alternative organizational structures that provide us with the ability to decide what we must do and act in unison, with the discipline and democratic control that we need to fight for our rights.

This means building up a network of rank-and-file committees, uniting workers across all 12 unions, all seven Class I railroaders, and every terminal and yard. Only this type of organization, consisting only of railroaders, excluding union officials and with no unaccountable apparatus, will provide the means for us to countermand the decisions of the bureaucracy, to enforce democratic oversight of voting procedures and balloting and to prepare for strike action to fight for what we urgently need, not what the carriers are willing to dispense with.

We have a world movement of the working class on our side. Workers are fighting everywhere against union betrayals and forming rank-and-file committees to do it. Over the past week, the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee has also received two statements of solidarity from rank-and-file committees of transportation workers in Germany.

Here is what we urge our coworkers in the railroads to do:

- Attend our meeting called for Wednesday night, at 7:00 p.m. EDT, “Organize independently to defeat government- and union-backed sellout!” You can register here. Tell all your co-workers about it, and make sure they plan to attend. Share the page on social media and get the word out!

- Begin discussions with your coworkers on the establishment of a local rank-and-file committee. Call meetings of your coworkers to pass resolutions declaring the sentiment of the membership and a common program, and elect a leadership from the rank and file. Union officials should be barred from participating to guarantee that workers retain control of the committee and that the activities of the committee can be kept confidential.

- Affiliate your local committee to the national Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee. Contact

us at railwrfc@gmail.com or by texting (314) 529-1064. We can also assist in the formation of local meetings.

- Appeal for the broadest possible support from workers in other industries. Organize informational pickets at major factories and other industrial sites, including docks, airports and warehouses, in order to develop lines of communication between railroaders and other critical sections of the working class. Our real allies are not prominent media figures or the corporate press, but the working class, who have the same interests and are fighting against the same types of conditions as we are.

If you agree with us, join the fight! Contact the RWRFC by emailing railwrfc@gmail.com or by texting (314) 529-1064.

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To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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