

The IBEW contract vote was fraudulent: Demand a re-vote under rank-and-file oversight!

The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee
30 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 struggles independently of the union apparatus.

To join the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee, email railwrfc@gmail.com or text (314) 529-1064. Sign up to the committee's text update list by texting "rail" to (866) 847-1086.

A pdf version of this statement can be accessed [here](#).

Brothers and sisters,

On Wednesday, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers claimed that its sellout contract for railroad electricians, patterned after the Presidential Emergency Board (PEB) report, narrowly passed by 150 votes. This came as a shock to most of the more than 4,000 electricians in the unit. Many have said they hardly know any coworkers who were in favor of the deal. How could this have passed?

We now know how: It was passed through massive fraud. This is not a matter of speculation but of fact. Here is what we know:

- There are widespread reports of workers not receiving their ballots, which for many areas were supposed to have been sent in through the mail. This consists largely of people who have lived in the same spot for decades and know for a fact that the IBEW has their correct address on file. "I was told: 'tough sh*t,'" one Missouri electrician said after she didn't receive a ballot. She also said that she personally knew at least five other coworkers who also did not get ballots.

- According to internal figures from the IBEW itself, there were 93 "undeliverable" and 142 "questionable" ballots. Put together, this is more than the margin of

"victory." In addition, there were 161 ballots which were marked as having been sent out twice.

- The overall vote total was suspiciously low, at only 56.33 percent. This is the most hotly contested contract in decades, which workers know has the potential to impact the railroad workforce for generations. How could nearly half of electricians have failed to have cast ballots?

More and more workers are coming forward to say they never received a ballot. Workers report that the IBEW Railroad Department head Al Russo is blaming the vendor for what he acknowledges are problems in the vote.

Our democratic rights were violated even before the first vote was cast. In a letter dated September 20, the IBEW "agreed" with negotiators for the carriers that the contract would be ratified by September 28. If the electricians, however, did not stay on message and voted the contract down, then the union would extend the strike deadline to December 8. But the acceptance or rejection of a contract, and certainly whether and when a strike will be held, are decisions which can be made by the membership alone, not through secret deals between union officials and company negotiators.

No contract "passed" under these conditions can be considered valid. Electricians should consider it null and void. The IBEW has not only trampled over basic democratic principles but electricians' legal rights.

The irregularities are so severe that they cannot be remedied by a recount.

The only way to remedy this wrong is to hold a re-vote—this time, under the control of the rank and file. The IBEW has proven that it cannot be trusted to conduct a fair, impartial vote and that it will not accept

any decision by members that contradicts its secret deals with management.

This time, the basic right to vote must be enforced. Everyone must have the ability to vote through whatever option works best for them, including mail-in voting, electronic voting or in-person. The distribution, collection and tabulation of ballots must be overseen by delegates chosen from and by the rank and file.

Rank-and-file oversight must be enforced for the elections for all the other unions. The sham vote in the IBEW shows what is in store for all the other crafts, including the engineers and conductors. What is most remarkable about the IBEW vote is that it was entirely predictable and conducted in a way which conforms with all of the other unions.

The BLET and SMART-TD are organizing votes in which everything is being done to intimidate and discourage workers, both by dragging out the voting itself past the midterm elections and by sending material to engineers threatening them with an even worse deal imposed by Congress if they reject it. Meanwhile, press reports indicate they are considering overriding a “no” vote by sending it to binding arbitration.

At our last rank-and-file public meeting on September 28, attended by hundreds of railroaders around the country, workers passed a resolution which declared, in part: “The unions ignored [the will] of the rank and file. In the past two weeks, the unions have worked nonstop to sabotage our struggle. They are postponing deadlines until after the midterm elections. They are presenting TAs that we already rejected. They are planning to ram through the PEB recommendations no matter how we vote.

“We, the rank-and-file workers, declare that our patience is exhausted. We are not going to accept contracts stuffed down our throats through the methods of injunction and dictatorship, whether through the mechanism of Congressional decree or the treachery of the unions. We have the right to take collective action, up to and including a strike.”

We reaffirm this right. However, we as railroaders must organize to enforce it. This means building up a new organizational network, consisting of rank-and-file workers organized independently around the country, which gives us the ability to organize action independent of and against the union apparatus. The

enforcement of a re-vote for the IBEW and the establishment of democratic oversight can only be done by building such a network.

We call on workers in the IBEW and all rail workers to distribute this statement as widely as possible. Set up information pickets at your work location to hand it out and talk to your co-workers. Urge them to send any information they have on voting irregularities to the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee.

We are fighting to help workers do this. Contact us today to get started.

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