

Engineers and conductors: Vote “NO” on sellout White House-brokered contracts! For rank-and-file oversight of balloting!

The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee
21 October 2022

The following statement was drafted and approved by the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee (RWRFC). Contact the RWRFC by sending an email to railwrfc@gmail.com, texting (314) 529-1064 or filling out the form at the bottom of this page.

Sign up for the committee’s text information network: Text “rail” to (866) 847-1086.

Brothers and sisters,

The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee urges our brothers and sisters in the BLET and SMART-TD to vote “no” on the five-year sellout contract brokered last month by the White House. We must deliver a message by turning out as widely as possible to send these deals in the trash where they belong.

A “no” vote, however, is only part of the equation. Workers must organize now to enforce rank-and-file oversight over the balloting process. The experience in other unions—including in the IBEW, where many workers were never mailed ballots or received them too late; last week’s SMART-MD vote, where results were mysteriously announced two days early; and the NCFO vote, where president Dean Devita cursed out a reporter who asked for a breakdown of the votes—shows that the union apparatus cannot be trusted to conduct a fair and impartial vote.

The vote for engineers and conductors is so obscure and bureaucratically controlled that workers don’t even know when, or if, it has officially started. As of this writing, none of the engineers and conductors in the RWRFC have received ballots, nor do they know anyone who has.

Railroaders made it absolutely clear that we want to carry out a national strike. Engineers voted by 99.5 percent to authorize a strike over the summer, and

similar votes have been carried out by other unions. Across all crafts, we are united to fight for what we deserve, including wage increases above inflation, no increases to healthcare costs and—above all—and end to PSR, Hi Viz and other brutal attendance policies.

But what have the unions done instead? They have ignored a 99.5 percent strike vote by engineers, urged Biden to appoint a Presidential Emergency Board (PEB), fled to Washington when it was clear that the PEB’s recommendations would never pass instead of calling a strike, and tried to break our unity by having the other unions signs separate deals. They have subjected us to endless lying statements and evasive appearances at union meetings where none of our questions are answered, or different answers given to different people.

They have told us that we must accept this contract because otherwise Congress would enforce something even worse. But then the BLET had the gall to invite Nancy Pelosi, who has already prepared anti-strike legislation, to its convention. And this multi-millionaire was hailed as a friend of workers! At the same convention, Teamsters President Sean O’Brien lectured workers about not “complaining” and airing the union’s “dirty laundry” in public.

They have even ignored “no” votes, keeping IAM and BMWED workers on the job after contract rejections. The carriers, emboldened by the fact that the unions have refused to sanction a strike, said in a statement Wednesday that they will not make even the slightest concessions to the BMWED. If that is the case, what possible justification can there be for the union keeping maintenance workers on the job and extending its strike deadline to “five days after

Congress re-convenes”? Workers should be on strike right now!

At a recent public meeting held by the RWRFC, workers passed a resolution that declared “our patience is exhausted.” But what is also exhausted is the idea that the union officialdom can be trusted to lead a fight, or at least will give in to pressure from below. The more opposition has grown, the more the bureaucrats have dug in their heels and shown their true colors as pro-company stooges.

If there is to be a different outcome than having this contract, one way or another, rammed down our throats, it will only come through independent action and organization from the rank-and-file, over and against the apparatus.

What does or does not happen must be decided upon and forced by workers ourselves, not a handful of union bureaucrats, management and Washington officials meeting behind closed doors.

The development of our own independent organization and initiative will put us in the best possible position to fight the sellout contract and prepare the way for a national strike.

In the contract vote, this means the fight for rank-and-file oversight of the balloting. We cannot accept as legitimate any vote that is not conducted in a fair and transparent fashion, enforced through rank-and-file oversight.

Engineers, conductors and workers in other crafts should elect rank-and-file oversight committees, consisting only of trusted co-workers and not union officials, to monitor the balloting.

First, these committees will monitor the vote for any evidence of fraud. Workers must insist on the right to have rank-and-file representatives present during the counting of ballots and have the right to challenge the count. For both the upcoming votes and those which have already been completed, workers must have answers to the following questions:

- How many workers have voted? How many voted “yay” or “nay?”
- How many ballots have been sent out? Has every eligible voter been sent a ballot with enough time to return it?
- How many ballots were marked as “undeliverable,” “questionable” or were otherwise disqualified?
- How, where and by whom were the ballots

counted?

If evidence is uncovered of serious irregularities or of deliberate fraud, workers through the oversight committees must assert their right to conduct a new vote, controlled by the rank-and-file. For the IBEW, this threshold has already been met. Therefore, workers should also raise the special demand for a re-vote of the IBEW contract.

Second, the committee must ensure that every worker be given the ability to vote in the manner most convenient for them. In addition to mail-in ballots, workers must have access to online or in-person balloting.

The bureaucracy wants workers to think they’re powerless. But we’re not. The expanding activity of the RWRFC, including informational picketing and the holding of large public meetings, proves that workers can organize and act ourselves.

But we must seize the initiative! So long as we let the management, the government and the union apparatus dictate the course of events, defeat is inevitable. The path to victory is the path of unity!

To take up the fight, contact us today and join the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact