

“Trust and respect given to others must be earned”: Railroad worker demands accounting of BLET finances, moratorium on officers’ salaries

30 October 2022

The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee has received the following open letter from a Chicago-area railroader which was forwarded to the WSWWS for publication. It has been lightly edited for clarity.

Are you a railroader? The WSWWS wants to hear from you too! Fill out the form at the bottom of the page to tell us what your thoughts are on working conditions, the contract vote and the union bureaucracy. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Brothers and Sisters,

The entire argument used for denying our members the right to strike was based on claims that it would negatively affect the US economy. While this may be true, a market-based economy (supply and demand) has always dictated the prices that businesses and consumers pay for goods and services.

How many times have our legislators in Washington shut down the US government (and thereby negatively impacted the US economy) simply because these lawmakers wanted to force the passage of a particular bill or to block proposals that their wealthy corporate sponsors and special interest groups opposed? (See chart in the attached link.)

These politically motivated government shutdowns have cost the American taxpayers billions of dollars. And yet, never once did I hear the type of public outcries that are now heard when railroad workers attempted to assert their labor rights through a peacefully conducted bargaining process!

So in review, it’s OK for our elected officials and lawmakers to shut down the government for their own demands and to essentially hold the American people hostage until those demands are met. But labor cannot

use its collective influence to negotiate for reasonable workplace terms and conditions. If this isn’t a glaring double standard, then someone please explain why not.

The entire approach to our contract negotiations was a sham from beginning to end. The BLET hierarchy never imagined that they’d be faced with a majority vote to authorize an actual strike. What followed was pure political theater which left the rank and file of the BLET with little to no recourse.

However, there may be another reason that our union leaders were secretly hoping for the strike vote to fail. I suspect it has something to do with the current financial status of the BLET strike fund. Does anyone actually know how much money has been set aside or reserved in this fund? Have these resources ever been used by our union leaders for other purposes without the express knowledge or consent of BLET members?

If we’re never going to be allowed to strike, then every penny of this fund should be immediately returned to the membership. We don’t need our dues money sitting around in a union slush fund to be used in a manner that does not directly benefit every member. We should be asking for a full accounting of our union’s finances, including executive compensation, their generous benefits, expense accounts and other business-related expenditures.

If the income of our members can be exposed to public scrutiny [as it was in press reports falsely claiming we are overpaid], then we should expect the same level of disclosure from our union leaders. This speaks to the ongoing issue of transparency and personal accountability or, in this case, a lack thereof! If engineers and trainmen are expected to perform their

duties with live cameras recording their actions, then it shouldn't be a problem for our union officials to be subjected to similar performance monitoring. After all, what's good for one should be good for all.

In addition, BLET members should demand an immediate moratorium on their dues and a salary freeze for every union officer, until such time when members can conduct a fully independent audit of our union's financial and political activities. We need to know who our leaders are actually serving, and if there are any conflicts of interest that may be harming our ability to negotiate contracts that are fair and equitable.

Under the current so-called "leadership" of the BLET, our members continue to experience stagnant wages, rising health care costs and increased levels of workplace responsibility. Mr. Pierce and his obedient footmen may see this as progress, but I would call it something else entirely.

I'm certain that many members would agree with my personal assessment and that an equal number no longer believe in a union that keeps losing the fight for workplace justice and equality. President Dennis Pierce and people like General Chairman Dewayne Dehart and others seem to think that their self-proclaimed knowledge and experience is worthy of blind trust and loyalty. But where I come from, any trust and respect given to others must be earned through honest actions and unimpeachable conduct. Those mentioned above have not, in my opinion, demonstrated these traits.

In fact, it was President Pierce and other high-ranking union officers who had some real explaining to do when it was discovered that they had on multiple occasions received "gifts" from United Healthcare and other health care vendors or providers. The attached file is a MUST read for every BLET member! After reading this document, you will certainly have a better understanding of why our health care costs and contributions have steadily risen.

Most Sincerely,
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To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit: