

Railroaders: Build support from workers in other industries for our fight against Congress, the carriers and the corrupt union bureaucracy!

The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee
14 November 2022

Take up the fight for rank-and-file control! Join the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee by sending an email to railwrfc@gmail.com, texting (314) 529-1064 or filling out the form at the bottom of this page.

The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee is launching a campaign to build support for railroaders among workers across the country and the world. We urge all our coworkers to join us in the fight to build ties of solidarity and unity with workers from all industries, in order to put us in the best position to defeat the threats of injunction by Congress and acts of sabotage by the union bureaucracy.

Last week, the BMWED announced yet another extension of the “status quo,” after consulting Labor Secretary Marty Walsh—but not railroaders. In a statement worthy of George Orwell, the union spun this delay as necessary to “educate” Congress, where both parties in fact have already drafted anti-strike legislation, but which it claimed was too “distracted” by the midterm elections to support railroaders.

In a bald-faced lie, they insinuated that Congress must first pass legislation to allow us to strike, a claim that not even Congress makes. Finally, after months in which the apparatus in all 12 unions has divided up workers by craft and forced them to vote separately on identical contracts, they now cynically claim that the delay will help to unite maintenance workers with signalmen and train crews.

But real unity is only possible through a fight to mobilize the strength of the rank-and-file against the apparatus, which is engaged in a conspiracy with

Congress and the carriers to enforce the sellout contract on us. To do this, we must leverage the enormous latent support in the working class, activating it, organizing it and preparing for joint actions.

If Congress intervenes to violate our rights and force us to work under this contract, then the response of workers must be a general strike to force them to back down. This is what we propose to use the next several weeks to prepare for: to educate and build support from our real allies, the working class, not Congress.

We must use every avenue at our disposal to do this, including using social media to both distribute statements from railroaders and gather statements of support from other workers. We must go out to the most important, strategic factories and worksites in our areas—auto plants, Amazon warehouses, port facilities, hospitals, high schools et cetera, and speak to workers there directly about our situation, and provide them practical means through which they can assist us.

The corporate press wants everyone to believe that railroaders are overpaid and selfish. But to the extent that workers know what we are really fighting against—massive overwork, understaffing, lack of time off, wage increases below inflation, attacks on our health care—they recognize our struggle as their own. These are the issues affecting workers in every industry, from low-wage and blue-collar workers to more “professional” sectors such as health care and education. They will be outraged to hear that the government is prepared to move against us, with the support of our own unions.

This will also serve to counteract the attempts by the union bureaucracy to sow discouragement and fatalism within our ranks. Critically, it will embolden engineers and conductors, who are currently voting on the White House-brokered deal, to reject their contract, effectively killing the attempt to enforce the contract through sham “collective bargaining.”

The BMWED and the other unions present even the possibility of congressional intervention as being the end of the story. They even spin wild legal theories, such as SMART-TD President Jeremy Ferguson claiming that the US Constitution prevents us from striking. This is a recipe for abject surrender. If our ancestors, for whom every victory was earned in the face of court injunctions, anti-strike laws and even the deployment of police and state militia, took the advice of the bureaucracy, the unions would never have been built in the first place. We would still live in company housing, earning a dollar a day.

It would be a mistake to underestimate our enemies, but equally mistaken to overestimate their position. Who, after all, is Congress to declare what we can and can't do? This is a body made up of millionaires, many with stock in either the railroads or the hedge funds that own them. It is among the most unpopular institutions in America, with approval ratings hovering between 10 and 20 percent.

Moreover, Congress has just come out of the midterm election deeply divided, in which voters gave no clear mandate to either party. No doubt this was a primary factor behind the extension, announced the day after the election. When they initially extended the status quo to November 19, they foolishly thought that the election would restore some measure of stability to Washington that would put them on firmer ground to act against us.

We cannot “pressure” a Congress that is bought and paid for by corporate America to come to our side, but neither is Congress all-powerful. This is proven by recent events only a short distance away. In Ontario, Canada, tens of thousands of educators this month defied an anti-strike law, even more sweeping than the draft legislation being prepared against us. They won enormous support from workers throughout the province and across Canada, forcing the unpopular provincial government of Doug Ford on the back foot. Workers were also outraged by attempts by the unions, who are just as corrupt as their American cousins, to

sell out the strike. The unions were even on the verge of being forced to call a general strike, or risk losing control of the situation.

At the point when the movement was at its strongest, the union bureaucracy swooped in to save the government, calling off the strike in exchange for lifting the anti-strike laws. But the experience as a whole proves, in both the positive and negative, the critical importance of independent action by the rank-and-file.

The condition for a broad movement in defense of jobs and living standards are greater now than they have been in decades. Workers all over the world are rising up against or in defiance of pro-corporate regimes.

In France, refinery workers launched a strike in defiance of former investment banker and “President of the Rich” Emmanuel Macron, and 300,000 workers took part in a one-day sympathy general strike around the country. In Britain, a series of strikes by railroaders, dockworkers, transit workers and others have rocked the government, contributing to the resignation of Prime Minister Liz Truss. In India, the largest strikes in human history have taken place in the last two years, including a general strike with 250 million participants in 2020. In Sri Lanka, an island country to the south of India, a mass movement of workers and rural poor against inflation forced the resignation of the president earlier this year, who then fled the country.

The RWRFC will be releasing more information about our campaign in the coming days. But we urge all our coworkers who are interested to sign up to get involved now. To build the campaign in your area, contact us by emailing railwrfc@gmail.com or by texting (314) 529-1064.



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