

Public meeting sponsored by Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee discusses rank-and-file strategy in advance of December 9 strike deadline

Alex Findijs
25 November 2022

Railroad workers: 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 article.

The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee (RWRFC) hosted a public meeting this past Wednesday following the rejection of a Biden-brokered agreement by SMART-TD members. It laid out a program for workers to build a unified struggle of the working class to support rail workers and workers around the world in the fight against corporate austerity.

The meeting was held just two weeks before workers can strike on December 9. This strike potential has once again placed the entire capitalist system on edge. Dozens of articles from major corporate outlets have screamed out in terror at the prospect of a strike, noting that only one of the 12 rail unions must walk out to force a nationwide shutdown.

Responding to this in his opening report, WSWs writer Tom Hall said that what they were really terrified of was that “a rail strike could be a tipping point... [It] would not only win support, but embolden workers everywhere to wage their own fight against deteriorating living standards. It would encourage dockworkers who have been kept on the job without a deal for months to push for their own demands, the grad students who are on strike, and the hundreds of thousands of autoworkers and UPS workers who have contracts coming up next year and who are also gearing up and pushing for strike action.”

It would be a mistake to believe that Congress, which

has threatened to intervene and impose the deal that workers rejected, could be convinced to change their minds, Hall said. But he also stressed that what ultimately happens will be determined in struggle. “Railroaders have to prepare themselves over the next two weeks. This involves the continued build-up of organized opposition to put the rank and file in charge, and to build support for railroaders within the working class. Railroaders must organize delegations to factories and other workplaces, speak to workers about why they should support the railroaders strike, defend them against any attempt to impose a contract against their will, either by Congress, the White House, or the union bureaucracies.”

The meeting was addressed by an autoworker who gave a powerful statement of support for the building of rank-and-file opposition.

“The carriers, the Biden administration and the union bureaucracy are attempting to dictate not just the terms of your employment, but even the conditions of your lives,” said the UAW member. “You produce all the profits that these companies consume. You have every right to strike and stand up for [your demands].

“Our strength is in unity. The rank-and-file movement is the key to uniting across every industry across the country and internationally. You stand in the front rank of the struggle for the future.

“You have the ability to mobilize the enormous power of the entire working class. Break through the stranglehold of the union bureaucracy, and you will bring the carriers and the Biden administration to their knees, and you will raise new battalions of workers to

their feet.” (Read the full statement here)

Will Lehman, a rank-and-file autoworker running for president of the United Auto Workers, addressed the meeting to voice his support for this effort. “We’ve got so much in common,” said Lehman. “It’s just a matter of breaking down those barriers where we can start moving as a class, especially as an international class.” He also raised the possibility of joint activity between the workers in his campaign’s rank-and-file election committees and the RWRFC.

The potential for a united struggle involving railroaders and other key sections of the working class was the main theme of the meeting. It was prominently raised that nearly 50,000 academic workers, members of the UAW, are on strike against crushingly low wages. WSWS labor editor Jerry White explained that airline pilots, who are also under the jurisdiction of the anti-worker Railway Labor Act, have rejected sellout contracts and voted to authorize strike action.

A railroader from Kansas City and member of the RWRFC described his experience last month visiting a nearby General Motors plant with a campaign team for Will Lehman. “We were there right at shift change and there were hundreds of workers coming and going and they were very receptive of me being there and reaching out to another industry, and I think that has a big effect both ways. We’re showing support across all industries that we’re all going through the same struggles.

“I think that if we keep reaching across like that and showing that we’re willing to go above and beyond that just builds momentum. The companies don’t want to see that, to see us coming together and shooting down these terrible contracts... Obviously, a lot of that comes down to us and how we handle the fight and the struggle we’re going through.”

He noted that many workers voted in favor of the sellout contract. “But with all that said, I still believe they are willing to fight. I still believe they are willing to go on strike. Even the people who voted for it, they voted not because they liked the contract but because they didn’t think they would get anything better. I’ve seen this happen over and over and over.

“So the struggle has not ended; in my opinion it is just beginning. We have two weeks before the strike can technically occur according to the unions and now is the time to start pushing and organizing by

informational pickets and social media, talking to people and getting ready for this strike. I believe that we are actually going to go on strike and it’s up to us how long that strike happens.”

Another worker remarked: “Regardless of the outcome, it demonstrates that the most powerful government in the world feels compelled to respond to our demands. It’s indicative of the power of the working class through the seemingly minor act of standing up and saying ‘no’. We have sent tremors of fear reverberating through the ruling class. They recognize that any capitulation on the part of the railroads will embolden the entire working class and demonstrate that we are more powerful than capital, and that through collective action real gains for the working class can be obtained.”

The meeting demonstrated the power of the working class to take on the carriers, the union bureaucrats and the Biden administration. It outlined a strong program to build a rank-and-file movement, not just within the railroad industry but across all sections of the working class and build a unified movement to fight against corporate austerity and for what workers deserve.

This is the program of the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee and rank-and-file committees around the world. The task ahead for railroaders is to build rank-and-file committees in every workplace, to appeal to other sections of workers for their support, and to develop the unified movement of the working class to defend the interests of railroaders and all workers.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact