

In assault on democratic rights, rail union sanctions victorious opposition candidate for sharing WSWS article

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Eddie Hall, the sole candidate running for president of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) against incumbent Dennis Pierce, has been sanctioned by a union disciplinary committee for sharing an article from the *World Socialist Web Site*. In addition, the committee has recommended that the BLET file a complaint with the Department of Labor against the WSWS on the absurd grounds that its reporting on the union vote constituted election interference.

David Manning, a working railroad engineer who unsuccessfully sought nomination at the convention, was also disqualified as a candidate for the same reason even though he did not appear on the ballot. The WSWS interviewed Manning, who has a wide following among railroad workers on social media, earlier this year.

This is a blatant assault on democratic rights and free speech. It is an attack not only on Hall's right as a candidate but on the right of BLET members to vote for whomever they please, as well as an attack on the freedom of the press. The WSWS demands the immediate rescinding of these measures and urges all railroaders and organizations active among railroaders to do the same.

Late Monday night, the WSWS received reports from knowledgeable sources that Hall, a relatively unknown local officer, had won the BLET presidency. The BLET apparatus, however, has inexplicably announced that it is delaying releasing results until sometime next week.

If confirmed, Hall's victory would be a stunning upset that underscores the depth of railroaders' anger over the role of the BLET, the second largest of the 12 rail unions, and the other unions in attempting to secure the passage of the national contract brokered by the Biden

administration. Two weeks ago, Congress voted to unilaterally impose the contract, after months of delays by the unions, which functioned to strengthen Washington's hand.

However, it appears Hall could still be disqualified as a candidate on the basis of the complaint. The initial complaint demanded Hall's disqualification on the ground that he had accepted assistance from a "non-member employer" (the WSWS). The Election Protest Committee (EPC) found that Hall had violated election rules, in a decision issued November 30, but instead of disqualifying him, it ordered that Hall remove links to the article and issue a public statement disavowing the article crafted by the EPC within 72 hours. But a later ruling on appeal by the union's Advisory Board noted that Hall had not complied with the order and "remands the issue of remedy in the matter back to the EPC for reconsideration in light of Hall's failure to timely comply."

In its ruling, the EPC also declared that it "recommends that BLET counsel refer a complaint to the U.S. Department of Labor for an inquiry to determine if the actions of the WSWS" in writing on the election "constituted a violation of law."

The WSWS article, "BLET national officers 'election' begins—without opposition candidates," reported that 25 out of 26 national leadership positions were "elected by acclamation" at the union's convention at the Las Vegas Strip this October, meaning no other candidates were nominated by the delegates. The sole contested election in the general election voted in by BLET members was that of the presidency.

Eddie Hall later shared the article on his campaign social media accounts and to an email list of the BLET membership which he had access to as a candidate.

Mark Wallace, a member of Pierce's BLET United

Slate, responded with a letter to the membership a few days later. Without refuting a single argument made by the WSWS, Wallace falsely accused Hall of working with a “socialist group determined on destroying the very fabric of our Union movement.”

The WSWS responded to this letter in detail in a comment last month. It is a slander against the WSWS’s principled opposition to the union bureaucracy, which Wallace falsely equates with the “union movement.” Moreover, even the EPC report later acknowledged that “there is no evidence that monetary contributions were ever made by the WSWS to Candidate Hall’s campaign.”

The basis on which the disciplinary committees ruled, that Hall accepted help from an “outside non-member employer,” is absurd.

If the argument of the BLET was accepted, it would prohibit any news publication from writing on the union election or criticizing the union apparatus and would prohibit any candidate from sharing information that is published.

That is, the BLET apparatus claims that it is exempt from any criticism, and anyone who violates this exemption must be legally sanctioned by the state.

The response of the apparatus expresses an extreme fear of mass working class opposition among railroad workers to its collusion with the Biden administration and the companies to ram through contracts. The WSWS has won a broad hearing among workers for its exposure of this conspiracy.

The apparatus is also motivated by the impact of the WSWS’s endorsement of socialist autoworker Will Lehman for president of the United Auto Workers. Lehman won a significant support from workers for his socialist program, which called for the abolition of the bureaucracy and its replacement with democratic rank-and-file control.

The prohibition against assistance from “non-member employers” does not prevent BLET officers from rubbing shoulders with top officials from the Democratic Party, one of the two main parties of corporate America. At the nominating convention itself, high-profile appearances were made by Labor Secretary Marty Walsh and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who later played leading roles in the passage of the anti-strike law.

The other major rail union, SMART-TD, responded to the congressional intervention with a groveling statement acknowledging the “right” of Congress to ban strike action and thanked top Democrats for their “support.” The BLET has yet to even release an official statement on

its website. None of the unions has suggested that the banning of a strike by Congress is an impermissible intervention against workers’ democratic rights to vote to reject the contract and carry out a strike.

The BLET’s effort to sanction Hall and its demand for legal action against the WSWS expose the fact that it has just as much contempt for the democratic rights of workers as Congress. The apparatus has exposed itself as nothing more than a police force over the working class.

In the original article on the BLET election, the WSWS concluded:

This is what “democracy” means to the union apparatus. Workers have the “freedom” to approve of the choice that the bureaucracy has made for them. These organizations claim to represent workers, but workers exercise no control whatsoever over them, while the “leadership” enforces one sellout after another.

The BLET leadership “election” is more proof that, in order to organize themselves to fight for what they need against threats from both the carriers and Congress, railroaders must also reckon with the union apparatus, which is joined at the hip with railroaders’ enemies and runs roughshod over their democratic rights. Workers must shatter the untrammled dominance of the bureaucracy and organize new structures, democratically controlled by workers themselves, in order to put the rank and file in control.

The actions of the BLET since then have proven this to be correct.

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