

Second CSX worker killed on the job in two months

Leon Gutierrez
9 August 2023

On Sunday, a conductor trainee for CSX railroad died in an accident at a Maryland rail yard, according to an internal communication sent to workers by CEO Joe Hinrichs.

Forty-year-old Travis Bradley died shortly after arriving at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC), according to local news outlet *The Cumberland Times*. The police told them the incident occurred at 11:53 pm the night before.

Travis leaves behind a wife, two daughters, and a stepdaughter. An investigation into the incident is ongoing. In response to the incident, CSX ordered that all trainees be returned to their home terminals for “half-day sessions focused on critical rules and riding equipment.”

Another conductor trainee, Derek Little, was killed on the job in an incident at the Seagirt Marine Terminal work site in Baltimore, Maryland two months prior in June. Little was run over when he was thrown from the rail car he was riding.

Bradley’s death took place only a week after the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail, and Transportation Workers - Transportation Division (SMART-TD) announced they would work with CSX to extend training by one week for new hires, from four weeks to five. The additional week, they said, was to increase “trainee’s exposure to railcar switching scenarios, radio communication, securement of equipment, brake tests and other fundamentals of the conductor’s role.”

Jeremy Ferguson, president of SMART-TD, said, “More training directly translates to better safety for our members and demonstrates our shared commitment to the CSX safety culture.”

In reality, these workers’ lives have been sacrificed for record profits on the railroads. The National Safety

Council (NSC) found in its latest report that, ‘Railroad deaths totaled 893 in 2021, a 20% increase from the 2020 revised total of 744 and the highest since 2007.’”

This is the product of relentless cost-cutting by the carriers, which are owned by Wall Street firms like Berkshire Hathaway and super-wealthy individuals like Bill Gates. The rail industry has lost tens of thousands of workers in recent years, and critical maintenance is being increasingly deferred. Engineers and conductors are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with overwork contributing to even more unsafe conditions.

On average, three derailments take place every day in the United States, many involving hazardous chemicals, such as the February derailment in East Palestine, Ohio that poisoned the air and water of the region.

This is also the consequence of the union bureaucracy’s betrayal, in alliance with the carriers and the Biden Administration, of the railroad workers’ struggle last year. SMART-TD and the other unions ignored overwhelming strike votes, sought to ram through a contract brokered by the Biden Administration which met none of the workers’ demands, and then bought critical time for Congress to prepare an anti-strike injunction following the midterm elections in November. Ferguson openly defended this, declaring Biden “had to put the country first and the economy first.”

Since the strike ban, the railroads have been pressing ahead with even more cuts, moving towards one-person crews and contracting out locomotive maintenance. CSX has also left 40 car haulers locked out at a railhead facility. Last June, the Biden administration cut railroaders’ unemployment and sickness benefits by 5.7 percent.

Multiple accidents have occurred at a heavily polluted

CSX facility in the Curtis Bay neighborhood of Baltimore, Maryland. In January, CSX was given a wrist-slap fine for a 2021 explosion at the site which sent a plume of smoke into the air and caused a shockwave which could be felt around the city. Last month, a fuel locomotive crash at the rail yard released toxic substances into the air surrounding this community. CSX has been met with virtually no resistance from the rail unions for these corporate crimes.

Two CSX maintenance workers shared their comments on their situation with the WSWS. One worker said, “When will corporate greed stop superseding human life? Railroads were built and currently run on the backs of young men who become way too old too fast. With little to no regard for their safety or well-being” and that CSX is “continually sending improperly trained or insufficiently trained workers to their demise”

Another maintenance worker, said, “In their unquenchable thirst for profits, CSX has either not learned or doesn’t care to learn. Derek Little was a trainee killed working at night. Now Travis Bradley was also a trainee killed while working at night. There is no good reason for having trainees work at night. The inherent dangers of railroading are magnified. Empty slogans of ‘deepest condolences’ will not suffice. The training program at CSX is woefully inadequate.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact