

## “A wildcat strike is about the only option left”: US railroad workers speak out against BNSF’s “Hi-Viz” attendance policies

Our reporters  
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*The World Socialist Web Site has received a large volume of correspondence from railroaders at BNSF, in response to an interview published earlier this year. We are reproducing a selection of these letters below.*

*To have your say, fill out the form at the bottom of this article. All submissions will be kept anonymous. We also encourage workers to join the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee to build a rebellion against the sellout union bureaucracy.*

**A Colorado railroader:** Very well written article. However, you don't have to go past zero to get in trouble for attendance, if you even hit zero you get a letter of investigation. Therefore you effectively only have 29 points.

Also, they have a low hours policy, where if you have points and you DO take time off, and if your hours fail to meet their requirements (which are unknown to us, there is no policy or anything anywhere stating minimum number of hours), they will send you a letter of investigation stating that you're not meeting the requirements of a full time employee.

They also recently sent out letters stating that using paid time off, paid leave days, or vacation to extend time off is a manipulation and indifference to duty so we can get fired for that too now.

Plus, they can require doctors' notes for any sick time you take, even if you just happened to take time off for diarrhea or something. That then requires you to take more time off in order for you to go see the doctor.

When I first hired out, there weren't points, you had to

be available 75 percent of the days for whatever month you were in and it was based off a 3-month rolling period.

**A railroad worker:** Personally I think a wildcat strike is about the only option left unless, somehow, the RLA [Railway Labor Act, which imposes sharp limits on workers' right to strike] can be eliminated. We could use the same excuse that the carrier used to change agreements in the past: 'it's a very old agreement and needed to be looked into again.'

**A railroader from Montana:** BNSF's draconian attendance policy has gotten completely out of control. You've heard all the stories on points and what it takes to get them back.

What you haven't heard is the anger, frustration, and hopelessness over not seeing family and friends, or just getting time to decompress and get some rest. The comments about workplace violence are getting more frequent. The hostility of employees towards management is a daily thing now. People talking about catching someone outside of work, etc.

Then there is the constant lies and harassment from managers. Retaliation against employees for booking company mandated rest. And the constant blaming of trainmen taking that rest time for the delays in freight service.

**Worker from the Texas Panhandle:** "Class I railroads need oversight because their focus on profit over performance is threatening the economy. Their excessively long trains move slower and cause more delays, clogging supply chains and blocking communities. On top of that, harsh attendance policies

are burning out workers, risking safety and pushing skilled employees out. Without intervention, these practices could grind freight movement—and the economy—to a halt.”

**A railroad machinist from Nebraska:** “Conditions in the mechanical shops that cover machinists, electricians and pipefitters are just as bad. Tension is at an all time high. The micromanaging is so bad that a superintendent of a shop cannot even make decisions anymore without approval over the most basic things.

The workforce has been reduced to about half at this point with no hiring in sight. People are forced [to work overtime] because of under-staffing. BNSF preaches safety everyday, but it’s all talk, no action. Anytime production would be affected, they take every opportunity to pressure workers to keep working even in unsafe conditions.

... the railroad shareholders have created a very dangerous work environment, and in my opinion safety will fail at some point creating another East Palestine incident again. It’s just a matter of when.

**An engineer from Illinois:** We get penalized for using the 5 sick days we get per year. The carrier (BNSF) has been sending intimidating emails stating that using sick days could create a pattern, and they will be monitoring those who use them and discipline accordingly.

Out of 365 days a year, we get our [attendance] points which are basically non usable. We get 5 whopping sick days. And then our vacation/personal days. They allow a certain amount of people off each day for vacation and personal days. Even if there is an opening for us to use a personal or vacation day, they still deny it and tell us there aren’t enough people available. So we can’t even use our earned time off.

Most normal jobs know what hours they work and have set days off. Not just Saturday/Sunday off. People get Friday night until Monday morning off every single week. If we took Friday night until Monday morning off once a year, we would exhaust all of our points and would have to work 6 months straight to get them back. It is absolutely ridiculous.

I’ve seen many coworkers with mental health struggles. Their families are ripped apart. And several others that are suicidal. It’s terrible.

**A railroader from Oklahoma:** What good is having days off, just to put them in and have the carrier decline

your request? I’m gone away from home over 220 days a year. With trains made to go slower and slower all in the name of fuel economy, I’m rarely on duty under 10.5 hours. And getting a relief crew ordered for you is always a last minute decision. They let people make decisions that are not qualified to work a fry station at McDonald’s. I’m at the mercy of those idiots.



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