

Union Pacific CEO advising Trump on where to send National Guard

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President Donald Trump announced that he was sending the National Guard to Memphis, Tennessee, during an interview last Friday on Fox News' show *Fox and Friends*. During the announcement he noted that he had chosen Memphis because it had been suggested to him by Union Pacific CEO Jim Vena.

This revelation by Trump himself is further proof that his fascist program is being carried out on behalf of the capitalist oligarchy, which is dismantling all democratic forms of rule to protect its profit interests. It follows a high profile, friendly White House visit September 4 by leading tech CEOs.

It is also further proof that Trump's primary target is the working class. Workers must become the basic social force in a mass movement against dictatorship and war, independent of the capitalist parties, including Trump's Democratic Party enablers. Such a movement must be combined with a fight against the trade union bureaucrats, who worked with Biden in 2022 to prevent a national rail strike and are doing everything possible today to sabotage opposition from below.

Trump claimed during his interview that Vena had complained about crime in Memphis, saying, "Sir, ... when I walk one block to my hotel, they won't allow me to do it, they put me in an armored vehicle with bullet-proof glass to take me one block." He said it is so terrible."

According to Trump, he asked Vena during the discussion what cities he should send troops to next, after initiating the military occupation of Washington D.C. last month and threatening to send the National Guard to Chicago and New Orleans.

Trump said of Vena, "I said to him: 'Where else should we go? Where would you say?' He said, 'Sir, please, do me a favor. St. Louis has been so badly hit. It's very hard. Very very hard.'"

Vena also suggested Chicago. Trump said, "He said, 'Sir, please, don't lose Chicago. We are about to lose Chicago. It's a great city. You can save Chicago.'"

In fact, while Memphis does have one of the highest crime rates in the US, it has fallen 11 percent since 2022. St. Louis has similarly seen a 17 percent decline in crime since just last year.

National Guard double as policemen for rail mega-merger

Vena's meeting with Trump last week was scheduled to discuss the proposed \$85 billion acquisition of Norfolk Southern by Union Pacific. If approved by the federal government, it would create the first transcontinental railroad under a single company in US history. (The famous "Transcontinental Railroad" completed in 1869 was in reality operated by different companies based in each coast.)

Vena's three chosen cities—Memphis, St. Louis and Chicago—are critical rail junctions for Union Pacific, in particular. Should the merger go ahead, there will be five major cities where the two company's rail lines connect: New Orleans, Memphis, St. Louis, Kansas City and Chicago. Of these, only Kansas City has not faced direct threats of military occupation so far.

Memphis is of particular importance for Union Pacific, being its only major junction crossing the Mississippi River between Missouri and New Orleans. It will also improve connections between major cities and ports that must currently undergo longer routes or change rail carrier, slowing down travel times and decreasing profits.

St. Louis is the site of a powerful strike by thousands of Boeing workers at a defense manufacturing site that produces jets and missiles for the US and its allies. Significantly, the International Association of Machinists (IAM) bureaucracy is claiming absurdly that this would be to workers' advantage. But the statements by Trump himself show that he is prepared to deploy troops to the city on behalf of big business to crush working class resistance.

Lessons from 1877 and beyond

The threat to send troops to St. Louis carries historical resonance. The city was the center of the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, America's first nationwide strike, which brought the entire country to a halt in response to efforts from rail companies to cut wages in half.

The strike spread along rail lines and inspired other sections of workers to strike, threatening a revolutionary upheaval. During the strike, workers in St. Louis took effective control of the city under the leadership of the Workingmen's Party.

The strike was bloodily suppressed through the deployment of federal troops across the country. Soldiers, augmented by

vigilantes and the infamous Pinkerton agents, were routinely deployed in the following decades to cut down strikers fighting for the basic right to organize and for livable wages.

Legal restrictions on strikes led to the Railway Labor Act in 1926, whose extreme limits on the right to strike are aimed at preventing another national strike movement centered on railroad workers. (The law was later extended to the airline industry in 1936.)

Nearly 150 years later, the ruling class has not forgotten the lessons of this experience. But workers must also learn the lessons. From these experiences, the most dedicated working class leaders, including rail union leader Eugene Debs, came to the conclusion that they were in a fight against not just greedy employers but the capitalist system itself and joined the growing socialist movement.

Railroads and the military-industrial complex

The railroads play a key role in the American war machine. Union Pacific (UP) services 25 US military facilities, and if merged with Norfolk Southern (NS), it would serve an essential role in transporting troops and military equipment for domestic military occupations and war plans against China, Venezuela and Iran.

Again, Memphis will play a critical role, better connecting the Anniston Army Depot in Alabama and the Holston Army Ammunition Plant in Tennessee with the Pine Bluff Arsenal in Arkansas, the Red River Army Depot in Texas and the McAlester Army Ammunition Plant in Oklahoma, along with dozens of military bases and other military equipment facilities operated by federal contractors.

While the Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern merger still awaits approval, it is appearing likely the federal government will give the green light. Vena reportedly told investors at a Morgan Stanley conference in California after his meeting with Trump, “Listen, I was in Washington D.C., yesterday, made a trip out there. I was here before. And at the end of the day, meeting with very senior people in the administration, and they get it. They understand the value of what we’re proposing and they think it’s an absolute win for the country.”

The frank discussion between Trump and Vena about which cities to occupy militarily cannot be separated from the railroads’ deep attacks on the workforce. Through Precision Scheduled Railroading, “Hi-Viz” points-based attendance policies and other measures, rail crews are on call virtually 24/7, unable to plan time with their families or even visit the doctor. The railroads are also pushing for changes to federal regulations to allow them to operate their trains, which now often stretch two miles or more, with a single engineer. This would lead to thousands of layoffs, especially among conductors whose positions would be eliminated.

This has generated tremendous anger among railroaders, who are among the most militant in the country. Only barely was the Biden administration able to prevent a national strike three years ago, after workers shocked the political establishment by rejecting a

contract brokered by the White House.

The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee was established to push for a national strike and organize workers against the sellout of the union bureaucrats, who stalled for time, lied and threatened workers to give Congress the space they needed to impose the contract workers rejected. That bill was passed with bipartisan support, in particular, with the Democratic Socialists of America and “socialist” Senator Bernie Sanders playing a key role in ensuring its rapid passage.

The open collaboration of the union bureaucrats with management and the government has only deepened. The Teamsters, led by yesterday’s “reform” candidate Sean O’Brien, is an open Trump supporter. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET), which is part of the Teamsters, has launched a racist campaign to deflect anger onto Mexican rail crews.

At the same time, the bureaucrats are currently trying to ram through a new sellout contract union by union, carrier by carrier in order to divide workers and prevent another rebellion. Significantly, they have helped UP deliberately isolate its workforce, the only railroad where no major union has yet signed a contract, in order to pave the way for the merger.

The meeting with Trump and Vena is a serious warning to workers that the capitalist elite are actively preparing to crush their resistance through dictatorship. It must be opposed by the working class, combining its fight against exploitation and inequality with a powerful movement in defense of democracy. Railroaders and other workers must organize rank-and-file committees to create new channels, independent of the bureaucrats who run the unions as petty dictatorships, to bring to bear the immense power of the working class against this conspiracy.



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