

After CEO discussed deploying troops to US cities with Trump Rail unions throw support behind Union Pacific-Norfolk Southern merger

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Railroaders, speak out against Trump's plan for dictatorship! Fill out the form below with your comments. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Two major rail unions have announced deals with Union Pacific (UP), paving the way for its mega-merger with Norfolk Southern to create America's first transcontinental carrier.

The bureaucrats of both the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) and the Transportation Division of the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART-TD) claim their deals are historic victories. In reality, it amounts to their endorsement of the further monopolization of the rail industry. The merger would reduce the number of major Class I carriers in the US and Canada from six to five, down from seven only three years ago.

The announcement comes after months in which the rail unions have been signing separate deals at other carriers, effectively isolating UP workers from the rest of the around 100,000 national Class I workforce. Currently, BLET and SMART-TD are the only major unions that have not ratified agreements at UP; the only contract ratified by members of either union is by the BLET at CSX.

Worst of all, the deals effectively support a major corporate backer of Trump's plans to send the military to occupy much of the US and establish a dictatorship. At a meeting to discuss the UP-NS merger, Trump reportedly asked UP CEO Jim Vena which cities he would like the president to send troops to. Vena chose cities which are major choke points for the rail system: Chicago, Memphis and St. Louis.

St. Louis in particular draws a parallel to the 1877 Great Railway Strike, where the state militia was sent to drown the strike in blood. Unless stopped by the working class, Trump plans to carry out state repression with even more brutality than that meted out against strikes in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

No union has issued a statement about the extraordinary meeting with Vena after more than two weeks. But in its press release on its "deal" with UP, SMART-TD slapped Vena on the back. "I want to thank Jim Vena, Mark George and their

teams for thinking outside the box and putting their employees at ease in unprecedented times," said union President Jeremy Ferguson. The union bureaucrat reserves far angrier language for his opponents in the rank and file.

"I want to thank SMART-TD for its leadership," Vena replied, adding, "I am confident we will unlock new sources of growth for the country and our industry."

In exchange for its explicit support for the merger, the SMART-TD bureaucracy says UP agreed to give its members "job protection for the length of their careers." This "unprecedented agreement," Ferguson claims, means its members "will be guaranteed a job under applicable Collective Bargaining Agreements in train, engine, or yardmaster/yard controller service for their working lifetime with the combined entity, if desired, and will not be subject to involuntary furlough."

There is no reason to believe anything that SMART-TD officials say without seeing the full language of the agreement. The same bureaucrats now claiming to have saved jobs unsuccessfully sought to ram through contracts at Norfolk Southern and BNSF (Burlington Northern Santa Fe). These would have created a pathway to eventually replace the conductor's position with a ground-based role, running trains with only a single engineer. Workers overwhelmingly rejected both sellout deals.

Earlier this year, SMART-TD issued a video statement denouncing "outsiders" (their chosen term for the *World Socialist Web Site*) spreading "misinformation" about the deal. In it, a union official treated technology-driven job losses as inevitable and claimed the only question was who would maintain "the last spot on the road," i.e., which workers would survive a fratricidal struggle over fewer and fewer jobs.

On September 16, SMART-TD announced a second tentative deal at BNSF, which does not appear to include a new Crew Consist Agreement (the contract containing the language which would have created the new Road Utility Position).

The carefully-worded press release does not exclude job cuts, either by displacing workers from other unions or by forcing workers into quitting through massive overwork. This latter

tactic has been used for years to shrink the industry's workforce by tens of thousands. One ominous phrase, "subject to the usual requirements for continued employment," may hint at this.

BLET's contract with Union Pacific is, in all essentials, the same as the deals which have already been rammed through for other workers. The "highlight" is a 17.5 percent wage increase spread over five years, which is even worse than the bipartisan deal imposed by Congress in 2022. While the full contract has not been released, the press release also does not mention any changes to the punitive attendance policies which leave engineers constantly on call.

Significantly, the BLET's announcement does not mention the UP-NS merger at all.

A short time after this deal was announced, the BLET requested Trump intervene to block a strike on the Long Island Rail Road, the largest commuter network for the New York City area. Workers voted nearly unanimously to authorize a strike earlier this month.

This is not the first time that the union bureaucrats, joined at the hip with the government and terrified of a struggle from below which would threaten their positions, sought federal intervention through the appointment of a Presidential Emergency Board. Infamously in 2022, they sought a PEB under President Biden for the Class I carriers.

Workers overwhelmingly rejected a pro-company agreement based on the PEB's proposals, shocking both the White House and the union officials, and workers then pushed instead for a national strike. This was avoided only by the unions stalling for weeks until after the midterm elections, in order to give Congress time to ban a strike and impose the rejected deal.

But to seek intervention from Trump is especially sinister, all the more so given that New York City is one of the places where he is threatening to send the National Guard. It amounts to an endorsement of dictatorship. As for the Democrats, who refuse to fight Trump because they also represent corporate America, New York Governor Kathy Hochul criticized Trump only for not intervening sooner.

Both the BLET and the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (BMWED) are part of the Teamsters union, which under General President Sean O'Brien is one of several major unions to embrace Trump on "America First" grounds. Falsely claiming tariffs will save American jobs—in reality, they are already leading to job losses and price increases—they seek to scapegoat foreign-born workers for the social disaster produced by endless union-backed concessions to US corporations.

BMWED President Tony Cardwell has said that UP refuses to give them a similar jobs agreement to SMART-TD. But, he added, "we feel like we have a close enough relationship right now with the White House that we can have an impact on this."

This is an admission of total hostility to the working class. The administration the union bureaucrats are "close" with is

staffed with fascists, corporate CEOs or in many cases both.

If the merger seems destined for federal approval, a major reason for this is Trump's firing of a member of the Surface Transportation Board who was likely to vote against it. Trump's nominee to head the Federal Railway Administration, David Fink, is a former rail CEO, and his pick for head of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) David Keeling was formerly head of "safety" at UPS and Amazon.

At any rate, it is not that the union bureaucrats are "influencing" or can influence the government but the government whose policies are being supported by the bureaucracy. By trying to suppress all forms of resistance in the working class, they hope to carve out spaces for themselves under a new regime.

No amount of pressure will shift the bureaucracy. It must be overthrown and replaced with new structures which workers democratically control. Such rank-and-file committees are already being built. In 2022, the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee played the central role in mobilizing opposition to the contract, exposing the lies and threats of the pro-company union apparatus and pushing for a national strike.

Organizing workers independently of the two parties and the corrupt union bureaucracy must be the basis for a powerful movement against Trump and the oligarchy. As the Socialist Equality Party explained in a recent statement, committees "must be established in every factory, workplace, school and neighborhood to organize resistance to Trump's dictatorship ... uniting all sections of the working class.

"These rank-and-file committees, spreading across all workplaces, will create new centers of coordinated social power upon which the defense of democracy throughout the country can be based. The mobilized working class will be able to inspire with confidence and unify all the now disparate elements of protest in a massive social movement against the hated government led and controlled by capitalist oligarchy."



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