Railroaders: Break the isolation of the National Steel Car strike! Refuse to handle NSCX cars! For a united, cross-border struggle across the railroad industry!

The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee
4 September 2026

The following statement was issued by the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee, formed by railroaders in the United States to oppose the sellout union bureaucracy. To contact the Committee, fill out the form below.

Brothers and sisters,

More than 1,200 workers at National Steel Car in Hamilton, Ontario, the largest rail freight car manufacturer on the continent, have been on strike since August 12. They are fighting to abolish the piecework "incentive plan" that helped kill three of their fellow workers—Fraser Cowan, Collin Grayley and Quoc Le—between 2020 and 2022. The United Steelworkers bureaucracy is isolating the strike and starving workers on $425 a week in strike pay while owner Greg Aziz continues to make money from the cars produced for National Steel Car's own leasing fleet.

In its September 2 statement, the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee, formed against both management and sellout union bureaucrats, appealed to railroad workers in Canada and the United States to set aside every car marked NSCX, leave it empty and refuse to move it. The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee endorses this call. Aziz has workers add NSCX cars to customer orders so that his leasing operation can continue generating revenue during the strike. Railroaders can strike directly at this attempt to profit from the isolation of the National Steel Car workers.

We call on railroaders in every yard, terminal and shop: Organize rank-and-file committees to enforce the refusal to handle NSCX cars! Do not wait for authorization from the BLET, SMART-TD or any other apparatus. The NSC workers have issued the appeal themselves. Our responsibility is to answer it with organized action.

The struggle at National Steel Car cuts directly across the national divisions that the corporations, governments and union bureaucracies are trying to impose on workers. The cars built in Hamilton move through a rail network spanning Canada, the United States and Mexico. The corporations organize production and profits across borders. Workers cannot defend jobs, wages or safety by allowing ourselves to be divided at those same borders.

The Trump administration's trade war and the Canadian government's retaliatory measures are being used to pit workers against one another. "Buy American," "Buy Canadian" and "Buy Ontario" all subordinate workers to the corporations and governments in their own country. The USW bureaucracy in Canada has promoted this nationalist program while presenting NDP and other establishment politicians as allies of workers. The corporations use the trade war to threaten jobs and demand concessions in the name of competitiveness, while the union apparatuses block a common struggle by workers on both sides of the border.

National Steel Car workers face the same basic obstacle confronting railroaders in the United States: a union apparatus that works to keep every struggle within limits acceptable to management and the state. In 2023, the USW isolated the National Steel Car strike for 41 days, kept workers on $260 a week in strike pay and then gave them only days to vote on a contract that left piecework intact. The same apparatus is following the same strategy today. Across the Canadian rail industry, workers have encountered the same methods. CPKC signal workers rejected a company offer by 89.2 percent, only to be sent into binding arbitration accepted by the IBEW bureaucracy.

The problem extends across the Canadian labor movement. The leaderships of the USW, Unifor and the Canadian Labour Congress have lined workers up behind "Team Canada," tying their interests to the Carney government and Canadian corporate competitiveness. Union officials who tell Canadian workers to rally behind retaliatory tariffs play the same role as the US union officials who line railroaders and other workers up behind "America First." In both

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countries, the bureaucracy blocks the independent mobilization of workers and channels opposition behind the economic and political program of the ruling class.

Workers in Canada and in the United States need organizations controlled by the rank-and-file and independent of these apparatuses in order to organize a cross-border united struggle.

Railroad workers have used their strategic position before to defend workers outside their own immediate craft or workplace. In 1894, when George Pullman slashed the wages of workers building sleeping cars outside Chicago, Eugene V. Debs and the American Railway Union called on railroaders not to handle Pullman cars. The boycott spread across the rail system and paralyzed traffic over large sections of the country.

Debs built the ARU in opposition to the old craft brotherhoods, which divided engineer from fireman and brakeman from switchman and preached a "harmony of interests" between labor and capital.

The Pullman boycott showed the power that exists when railroad workers act as part of a single class rather than as isolated crafts. The government answered with injunctions, troops and the jailing of Debs. In prison, Debs studied Marx and emerged a socialist.

SMART-TD's Summer 2026 article, "The Real Enemy," dishonestly tries to cloak the bureaucracy in the legacy of Debs to justify their own support for the same forces whom Debs spent his life fighting against.

The article identifies the "group of people with money, power and control," recounts the Pullman Strike and invokes Debs, but stops at the point where the history demands action. Instead of calling on workers to use their industrial power, it directs them to "vote for the candidates who truly stand with us."

Railroaders should ask: stand with whom? In 2022, both parties voted to impose a contract we rejected and ban a national strike which we had authorized. In doing so, they "stood with" the union bureaucracy, who deliberately stalled for time even after the anti-strike provisions of the Railway Labor Act expired to give Washington the time it needed to pass the legislation. They used lies and threats against the rank-and-file, including SMART-TD president Jeremy Ferguson who absurdly claimed that the US Constitution prohibited workers from striking!

Our committee was founded in the course of that struggle to oppose that sabotage and enforce the decisions of the rank-and-file. In our founding statement, we declared that victory "depends not only on organizing ourselves independently to ensure maximum unity and solidarity, but also that we hold no illusions in the bought-and-paid-for political stooges of Wall Street."

The statement committed ourselves to the principle of internationalism, declaring: "We are part of a world movement. Not only are railroad workers in Canada fighting against a sellout contract at Canadian Pacific; strikes and protests are happening all over the globe."

The National Steel Car strike gives railroaders the opportunity to revive the traditions of Pullman on a world scale. Railroaders in Canada and the United States should establish direct communication with the National Steel Car rank-and-file, organize meetings in the yards and terminals and prepare collective action wherever NSCX cars appear. The same methods must be extended to every struggle in which workers confront concessions, dangerous conditions, job cuts and government intervention.

The USW, BLET, SMART-TD, IBEW, Teamsters and the other union bureaucracies depend on their relations with management and the state. They divide workers by company, craft, union and country because a movement controlled by workers themselves threatens those relations. International unity therefore requires a rebellion against the apparatuses on both sides of the border that enforce these divisions.

The strike of the National Steel Car workers is our fight. Their call has been made. Set aside every NSCX car. Leave it empty. Do not move it. Build rank-and-file committees in every yard, terminal and shop to organize this action and link railroaders directly with the National Steel Car workers.

In solidarity,

The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee

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