



Railroad Workers United

Solidarity • Unity • Democracy

The Rank & File in Action!

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Press Release

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Railroad Operating Crafts Vote Results Mixed: National Strike Still Possible

Majority of Rail Labor Now Opposes Tentative Contract

The votes have been counted and the operating crafts unions are split on the decision. BLET membership narrowly ratified the tentative agreement (TA), while SMART-TD membership narrowly rejected it, joining the Maintenance-of-Way, Signal Maintainers, and Boilermakers workers who rejected their respective contracts. Railroad Workers United stands behind members of these crafts who are still fighting for the contract they deserve. It is clear the dissatisfaction among rank & file railroad workers of ALL crafts and unions is at an all-time high.

With votes now tabulated from every rail union, unions representing over half of rail labor have rejected their proposed contracts. And in practically all votes, the margin of separation has been slim. Clearly, there is no consensus on the question of the Tentative Agreement in this round of bargaining.

Thousands of railroad workers have not had a raise in three years and face record inflation but have continued to hold out for what they believe they deserve. According to RWU Co-Chair Gabe Christenson, "Despite being straight-jacketed by the Railway Labor Act (RLA), starved into submission, and facing intense political and economic pressure to accept the contract and move

on, more than half of railroad workers have had the strength to reject the contract. Railroad Workers United applauds all fellow workers who have displayed the fortitude to stand firm and fight for what they believe they deserve. We believe organizing this core opposition to the current tentative agreement is critical in achieving future contract victories.

RWU has urged a NO vote on the contract since shortly after the recommendations of PEB #250 were made public. According to RWU General Secretary Jason Doering, "The PEB did not address any quality of work-life issues important to many workers of the various crafts." As a result, "RWU consistently stated that unless and until these issues are adequately addressed in a Tentative Agreement (TA), the organization cannot support it."

"Thanks to deep cuts in the workforce exacerbated by the widespread adoption of "Precision Scheduled Railroading" in recent years, inadequate staffing levels are at the root of this rank & file rebellion," according to RWU Co-Chair Ross Grooters. "Railroad workers are not just fighting for quality of life; we're fighting for the future of freight railroads."

Class I rail carriers are making record profits and harming the long-term health of the freight rail system. Workers are being forced to do more work with fewer people, according to Hugh Sawyer, RWU Treasurer. "Quality of life has suffered because of operating choices Class I railroads have made which embargo traffic, gouge customers, and cut the workforce." The result is long-term harm to the health of our freight rail system and the supply chain. "This agreement does not address those underlying issues and, through yet-to-be-negotiated articles in the contract, it could exacerbate supply chain issues. Unless the labor issues are addressed, railroads will remain unable to move freight, and rail carriers will continue to profit at the expense of passengers, shippers, workers, and our national economy."

Without a better contract for all railroad crafts, service will continue to suffer as rail carriers extract wealth and buy back their shares at the expense of the economy as a whole. Their systems, which were primarily built on public investment, no longer work for the benefit of the people. If rail carriers are fixated on paying out more for stock buybacks than they are for worker benefits, we will continue to see attrition as a once-stable career turns into a revolving-door job.

"Precision Scheduled Railroading" is the straw that broke the camel's back," claims RWU Co-Chair Ross Grooters. "While the conditions of employment have always been harsh and have become even harsher in recent decades, PSR sent the degeneration into overdrive. Not only is the workforce suffering, but so are passengers, shippers, communities, and the nation's supply chains. The rail industry has become dysfunctional, exploiting our vital national infrastructure for the sole benefit of a handful of extremely wealthy and powerful corporations."

Because of the nature of the RLA process, railroad workers feel pressured to accept deals that they know are not in their best interests. Despite this, an incredible number of workers from all crafts have voted no and rejected this agreement. To win in the future, rail labor needs to change its approach in negotiations. RWU believes this must start now, not when Section 6 notices are served in the next round of bargaining approximately two years from now.

In addition to its VOTE NO Campaign, RWU has recently undertaken a campaign to bring the railroads under public ownership and control, similar to how they were run for a brief period during WWI. "Regardless of what becomes the end result of this bargaining round, ultimately, we are facing an uphill struggle," states RWU Steering Committee member Paul Lindsey. "We urge railroad workers, shippers, passenger train advocates, and others to get behind the effort to end the scourge of share buy-backs and remove the rail infrastructure from private hands. The railroads should be operated in the interest of the public and the businesses that rely on efficient transportation, similar to how the highways, airports, seaports, and inland waterways are in the U.S. This would align with how the rail system is run in most countries."

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