Railroad Workers United

Solidarity ● Unity ● Democracy

The Rank & File in Action!

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RWU Statement on The Murder of George Floyd

Railroad Workers United (RWU) joins the overwhelming majority of the people of the United States — and of the world who have taken to the streets in huge and unprecedented numbers in solidarity with US protests — in condemning the horrific murder of our brother George Floyd.

We urge all of Rail Labor and, indeed the entire labor movement in the United States, to speak out strongly against this crime and the rigged and racist criminal justice system that spawns outrage after outrage.

This injustice system is marked by mass incarceration; decade-after-decade of racist police killings and brutality with near-total impunity for the police; frame-ups and corrupt prosecutions; and endless, heartbreaking accounts of innocent men, disproportionately Black, enduring years and decades of false imprisonments. It is the weight of this legacy that fuels this social and political mass struggle for justice, which is overwhelmingly legal and peaceful.

We are encouraged and inspired by the unprecedented outpouring of trade-union support and strong statements in response to this latest racist outrage, including from unions representing rail and transit workers – Brotherhood of Maintenance-of-Way Employees Division (BMWED); SMART-TD, Machinists (IAM), Electricians (IBEW), Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) among them.

This fight for social justice should be championed by a reviving US labor movement that draws on our best traditions of struggle against boss and state violence in our history of organizing and defending our unions. But we must also acknowledge, with some honorable exceptions, the US labor movement has had an uneven —generally bad — history of fighting anti-Black discrimination. And perhaps the worst, most openly racist, legacies have been in the railroad industry. Decade after decade, these segregationist policies were shamefully promoted by the rail union "brotherhoods." Exclusion of Black workers from most organized rail labor craft unions did not collapse until the 1960s.

RWU denounces this racist legacy of craft unionism. We advocate for rail labor unity across craft lines. RWU salutes the historic struggle of Black and Latino workers, and women, to break down barriers and create genuine labor unity and solidarity. We venerate the memory of Black rail labor heroes like A. Philip Randolph and E.D. Nixon. RWU campaigns for a national paid holiday across the entire railroad industry in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

RWU supports massive, legal, peaceful, disciplined, and self-policed protests. The overwhelming character of this massive national upsurge for justice has been legal and peaceful. We reject unconditionally the destructive actions of elements that undoubtedly include agents provocateurs and opportunists.

RWU supported the universal demand that all four of the police involved on the scene in Minneapolis be charged and detained. That has now been accomplished. They should be given a fair trial — more than they allowed George Floyd — and spend many years in the penitentiary. This is the only possible deterrent to future killers and brutalizers who are obviously so permeated in police departments from coast to coast.

The supposed "bad apples" rarely if ever get "weeded out" — unless exposed in their careless social media posts or captured video footage. Thugs with a badge and uniform must be made to think twice with the next Eric Garner or George Floyd or Sandra Bland or the child Tamir Rice. They must know they will face consequences and jail time; not the traditional impunity. Only galvanized public pressure as well as legislation that strengthens constitutional rights and constitutional policing can advance this.

We do not trust that justice will be gained without independent mass pressure on the authorities and their system.

This massive national (and international) upsurge for justice, catalyzed by a vicious police killing in Minneapolis, comes at a turning point in the unfolding of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led directly to over 110,000 deaths and rising. The pandemic has spotlighted the glaring, grotesque, and growing social inequalities in U.S. society. These inequalities have gone hand-in-hand with attacks on the US working class, labor organizing, and trade unionists. We now are facing massive unemployment, unsafe working environments, and more pressures on employed workers as the economy tumbles and working people are devastated.

Now is the time for a revived, revitalized fighting labor movement that organizes the unorganized and unites the entire working class.

Black Lives Matter! We Shall Overcome!

Adopted by the RWU Steering Committee 6/23/2020