



Railroad Workers United

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The Rank & File in Action!

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Press Release

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For Immediate Release

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Rail Workers Group Supports Public Ownership and Control of the Rail Industry

In response to more than a decade of declining rail service in the United States, the cross-craft rail workers group Railroad Workers United (RWU) has called for public ownership of the railroad system. First discussed at the Third Convention of the group in Chicago a decade ago, on October 6th, the Steering Committee voted unanimously to approve a Resolution to this effect (see attached).

According to RWU Steering Committee member and freight locomotive engineer Paul Lindsey, "The rail industry is alone as the sole means of conveyance that is held privately. Highways, inland waterways, seaports and airports are all in public hands. Given the industry's inability to grow and expand and to adequately meet the needs of shippers, communities, passengers, commuters and workers, it is time that it too become a public entity." Lindsey also notes that most every country in the world with a developed and modern rail network long ago took the rails into public ownership along with other transport infrastructure.

According to RWU, the rail industry has been incapable of expansion in the last generation, while becoming fixated on just one measure of success: the Operating Ratio (OR). This fixation to please Wall Street investors with pumped up stock prices and big dividends while abandoning all other metrics of success has degraded rail service dramatically. Most every shippers group in North America has vociferously complained in recent years as service and on-time delivery of shipments has tanked, passenger trains are chronically delayed, breakdowns and derailments are on the rise, dwell-time has spiked, and trains are held for rested crews. In the last four years the rail industry has shed nearly a third of its workforce, and it clearly intends to continue that trend as it pushed for dangerous and inefficient single crew operation of trains and "self-protecting freight pools." According to Lindsey, "If the carriers get their way at

the bargaining table, the workforce will continue to decline in numbers, along with safety, efficiency, and service. The Class One carriers are moving less freight today than 16 years ago, and they are doing a poor job with that. Rail shipments and travel should be expanding in today's world, not contracting." RWU believes that reliance on highways, cars, and trucks threatens to bankrupt and destroy towns and cities across the country and contribute to ecological disaster. Expanding rail travel is a way forward, but the privately held rail system has proven itself uninterested and incapable of rising to the challenge.

This downward rail trend was accelerated in the previous decade by an operating model known as Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR). It has escalated this irresponsible trajectory to the detriment of shippers, passengers, commuters, trackside communities, and workers. Under PSR, the workforce has been decimated, as jobs have been eliminated, consolidated, and contracted out, ushering in a new previously unheard-of era where workers can neither be recruited nor retained. Locomotive, rail car, and infrastructure maintenance has been cut back. Safety is put at risk. Morale is at an all-time low. The ongoing debacle in national contract bargaining sees the carriers – after decades of record profits and record low ORs – refusing to make even the slightest concessions to the workers who – contrary to what the Class Ones may state – have made them their riches.

Since the North American private rail industry has shown itself incapable of doing the job, it is time for this invaluable transportation infrastructure – like the other transport modes – to be brought under public ownership. During WWI, the railroads in the U.S. were temporarily placed under public ownership and control. All rail workers of all crafts and unions supported (unsuccessfully) keeping the rail under public control once the war ended, and voted overwhelmingly to keep them in public hands. Perhaps it is time once again to put an end to the profiteering, pillaging, and irresponsibility of the Class One carriers. "Railroad workers are in a position to take the lead," according to RWU Steering Committee member and passenger conductor J.P. Johnson. "We can spearhead the drive for a rail renaissance in this country, one that is vibrant and expanding, innovative, creative and environmentally sustainable, one that can properly handle the nation's freight and passengers in the 21st century."

The Resolution of Support for Public Ownership of the Railroads outlines the rationale for taking such a stand, and it calls on other groups - including rail unions, the larger labor movement, environmental and social justice groups, communities and shippers to join the campaign.

Rail workers and others who would like more information and/or wish to take part in this effort are encouraged to contact RWU at info@railroadworkersunited.org.

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