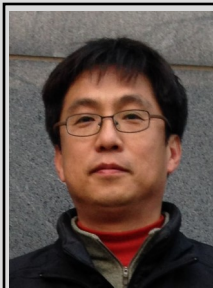


# Building Solidarity with Railroad Worker Movements Around the World

Fritz Edler



Ho-Joon Song

Railroad workers are on the move around the world, fighting back privatization schemes, employer attacks on staffing and pensions, and an erosion of safety and working conditions. While these disparate struggles are unique and face specific conditions, they often are aligned against the same forces of international capital that push austerity for workers and profits for the wealthy. Join international rail workers for a discussion of ways to build linkages and solidarity between these railroaders struggles.

*Ho-Joon Song is a member of the Korean Railroad Workers Union (KRWU).*

*Fritz Edler was a long time officer of both BLET Division 482 in Washington DC and the BLET DC State Legislative Board. He is an RWU Delegate to the Labor Network for Sustainability (LNS) and the Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED).*



Fritz Edler

# The RWU Campaign for a Universal Rail Labor Bargaining Coalition

Matt Weaver

Railroad Workers United exists because railroad workers have long desired—and been denied—a powerful “industrial union” that encompasses and unites ALL railroad workers throughout our industry. Since our founding 16 years ago we have relentlessly pushed for a single bargaining coalition of all rail unions in order to win better contracts vs. the nation’s rail carriers. While the vision of a single industrial union may have proven elusive to rails over the last 150 years, we can at least form an ironclad coalition of all existing rail unions to strengthen our position vis-à-vis the carriers and win decent contracts. This workshop will discuss how to build this important Campaign and—for the first time in history—ensure that rail labor enters this upcoming round of national handling as a single and unified coalition.

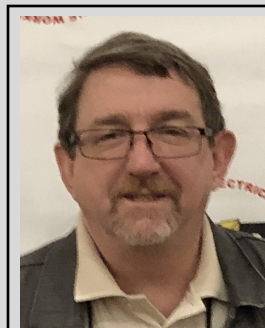
*Matt Weaver is a Founding Member of RWU and currently sits on the RWU Steering Committee. After a stint on staff with BMWED, Matt is back working in the craft as a B&B Carpenter Foreman and is a member of BMWED Lodge #2624. He currently serves as the union’s Ohio Legislative Director.*



Matt Weaver

# Organizing the Non-Union and Contract Rail Sector

Chris Townsend



Chris Townsend

There were once well over a million union rail workers in the U.S. That number has been decimated not only by labor saving machinery, the demise of the passenger train, and the abandonment of 40% of the nation's trackage. but also by contracting out of work and “spin-offs” to short lines and regional railroads. Tens of thousands of rail jobs still exist in this sector, but they are generally non-union operations. In an industry with a dozen or more splintered, weak, and divided craft unions, it is a monumental task to bring this work back under union contract. This workshop will explore strategies and tactics for organizing the non-union rail sector.

*Chris Townsend is a 45-year union member and leader. He was most recently the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) International Union Organizing Director. Previously he was an International Representative and Political Action Director for the United Electrical Workers Union (UE), and he has held local positions in the SEIU and UFCW. He may be reached at: [cwtownsend52@gmail.com](mailto:cwtownsend52@gmail.com)*



# Railroad Workers United

*Thanks to all of those who took the time to come to the RWU 9th Biennial Convention. RWU Members, Solidarity Members, and our Guests come together every two years to make this event happen. We hope to see all of you again at the 10th Convention in the Spring of 2026. In the meantime, there is a lot of work to do. If you wish to be more involved in the activities of Railroad Workers United, there is a place for you! This is a dynamic and growing organization in a vital industrial sector. The possibilities of your involvement and participation are boundless!*

[info@railroadworkersunited.org](mailto:info@railroadworkersunited.org)

# RWU Ninth Biennial Convention

# Presentations & Workshops

April 18-19, 2024 Chicago, Illinois



# Using the Railway Labor Act to Our Advantage

Joe Burns

The Railway Labor Act (RLA) was in full view during the national freight rail contract fight in the Fall of 2022. While upwards of 90% of railroad workers were poised for a national strike for the first time in three decades, no strike materialized. In this workshop, we will discuss the role and history of the Railway Labor Act (RLA) in limiting and controlling worker actions. While the Act restrains worker action to a degree, there are still ways for unions to effectively wage contract campaigns despite its restrictions. We will then discuss the fundamental right of airline and railroad workers to strike as we examine the attempt by government officials to use the RLA in an effort to undermine our rights. Finally, we will discuss how airline workers have built the power to resist despite these constraints, and how railroad workers can likewise build effective bargaining campaigns under the RLA.

*Joe Burns, a former local union president active in strike solidarity, is a labor negotiator and attorney. He is a longtime negotiator in the airline industry. Joe is the author of a number of books including: Reviving the Strike and Strike Back. His latest book is titled Class Struggle Unionism.*

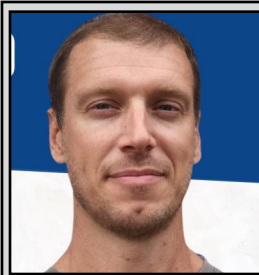


Joe Burns

# Building Internal Reform Caucuses in the Rail Unions

Martha Grevatt - Reece Murtaugh - Deven Mantz

All too often, the union is led at the local, and especially at the regional and national level by officials who have not worked in the craft for years, sometimes decades. How do we organize internally to challenge ineffectual and stale leaders, and continually bring fresh new and militant leadership to the forefront? This workshop will examine three examples of workers who are building caucuses to keep the union democratic and moving forward. First, we will explore the caucus that came together around the national elections in IAM (Rail Machinists) District #19 in 2023 and fronted the Challenger Slate for top office in that union. Next we will examine the BMWED Rank & File United Caucus as a model that other rail union members can learn from in their efforts to build a caucus in their own unions. Finally, we will check out the United All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) in the Auto Workers (UAW) which was able to win one-member-one-vote direct elections for top officers and went on to assume power in that union.



Reece Murtaugh



Deven Mantz



Martha Grevatt

*Reece Murtaugh has worked as a Machinist for 13 years for a Class One railroad and is running for President of IAM Rail District 19.*

*Deven Mantz is a member of BMWED Lodge #1326 in Minot, ND and a member of the BMWED Rank and File United Caucus.*

*Martha Grevatt has worked in the auto industry since 1987. Now retired, she has a long history of union and social activism. She serves on the Steering Committee of the caucus Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD).*



# Railroad Workers United 9th Biennial Convention: Program of Presentations & Workshops

## Building the Campaign for Public Rail Ownership

Maddock Thomas - Tabitha Tripp - Adam Barrington



Maddock Thomas

North America is unique among most of the world in that our rail network is largely in private hands, where a handful of powerful carriers actually own and control 90% of it lock, stock and barrel. With the advent of PSR, the curtain has been pulled back and the ugliness of such a system has been laid bare for all to see. The inability and unwillingness to attract additional freight traffic, and the hostility to passenger train operations is restraining railroad expansion and development. In this workshop we will explore alternative models of ownership and control, and discuss ways that the North American railroad system could potentially be operated to meet the needs of shippers, passengers, workers, trackside communities and the nation as a whole.

*Maddock Thomas is an urban studies student at Brown University. He has been working on a Public Rail White Paper with RWU for the past year. He has also been a visiting researcher at the B&O Railroad Museum and supports several other transit advocacy groups.*

## Building Alliances: Rail Advocates, Environmentalists & RR Workers

Meredith Richards

The majority of the American people want a modern, expanded, and robust rail network of trains - both freight and passenger. Despite widespread support, little seems to get done. Amtrak's network has not grown in more than 50 years, while the Class One freight carriers move 24% less freight than they did a generation previous. This workshop will explore the emerging alliance between railroad workers, rail advocacy groups, environmental organizations, transportation justice groups, and others to build the necessary coalition that can bring to fruition the modern rail system we all need and want.

Meredith Richards is the first woman to lead the nation's largest rail advocacy group, the Rail Passenger Association (RPA). Meredith formerly served as the Charlottesville, VA Deputy Mayor and City Councilor. She is also the President of the Virginia Rail Policy Institute, and has been at the center of the passenger rail revival that is taking place in the state. Under her leadership RPA has embarked upon a course focusing more on diversity, equity, and inclusion.



Meredith Richards

## Building Alliances: The Fight for Transportation Justice & RR Workers

José Miguel Acosta Córdova



José Córdova

This workshop will highlight how rail yards create Environmental Justice (EJ) issues in local communities adjacent to the tracks in Chicago and beyond, and suggests that rail workers should be just as concerned as these vulnerable trackside communities. A "just transition" whereby local communities and railroad workers benefit is key to the EJ work of the Little Village Environmental Justice Coalition. Therefore, it's important that railroad workers and communities have a unified vision of what rail transportation has the potential to be: a healthy and safe, clean and efficient, robust industry that serves both rail employees and neighborhood communities alike.

*José Miguel Acosta Córdova, serves as the Transportation Justice Program Manager of the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO) in Chicago, IL*

## Building Alliances: The Green Locomotive Project & RR Workers

Ryan Calbreath and Tommy Carden

The Green Locomotive Project is forwarded by the United Electrical (UE) union, and is designed to create good union jobs, address climate change, and clean up pollution in communities adjacent to rail yards. It brings workers and unions together with rail yard communities and environmental justice groups to demand a future of good union jobs, livable communities, and a sustainable planet. By upgrading locomotives to modern existing technologies, the rail carriers could significantly reduce emissions, but they refuse. This Project is building a worker/community power to compel them to upgrade, adopt green technology, and ensure that new technologies lead to jobs at existing union factories

*Ryan Calbreath is an organizer for the Green Locomotive Project, a national initiative put forth by UE to compel Class One rail carriers to adopt low-to-zero emissions technology.*



Ryan Calbreath

## Building Up the Committee Structure of RWU

Tabitha Tripp



Tabitha Tripp

RWU has a host of Committees including newsletter, website, organizing, social media, finance, etc. But many of our Committees are simply the efforts of one member or are moribund and not functioning at all. This workshop will explore ways to build up an active Committee structure. We will identify what Committees we should focus on, which are essential to the proper functioning of the organization, and what is the role of each Committee. We will pinpoint time commitments and roles for each committee and then hopefully, assign members and a Chair for each!

*Tabitha Tripp is an RWU Family Member, partner of a railroad track worker, currently serving as the RWU Grant Writer and Assistant Organizer for the PRO Campaign. She is experienced with lobbying, organizational development, protest art, paper wrenching, and is generally a "thorn in the side" of wealthy and powerful corporations. Eric Tripp - a track worker (BMWED #17) at Canadian National in Southern Illinois - and Tabitha both joined RWU in 2016 to work with a broader network of progressive railroaders for a safe, fair, and just work environment.*

## Building and Maintaining RWU Membership

Like many organizations, RWU has neglected the necessary and vital work of organizing: bringing in new members and getting those members actively plugged in and involved. In the organization. How can we actively recruit new members? How do we keep them in good standing once they join? And how do we get them committed and involved? This workshop will consider how we can build up the membership roster, bolster our treasury and financial resources in the process, and most importantly, recruit and retain a cadre of rail worker activists to propel the organization forward.

*Ron Kaminkow currently serves on the RWU Steering Committee as the Organizer, after many years as General Secretary. He recently retired from the rail industry after 27 years in Train & Engine service with three different Class One railroads.*

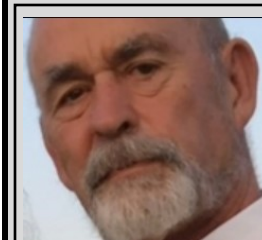
## Building a Sound Financial Base for RWU

Like any organization, RWU needs money. Over the years our income has grown and expanded along with the number of members, donors, merchandise sales etc. Likewise, our expenses have grown dramatically in recent years as the organization develops its scope of activities and campaigns. Last winter, RWU began contracting with a grant writer which has born fruit but generally "restricted funds" for specific campaigns. Our base income remains the dues of our members, contributions from donors and Sustainers (members and non-members alike), and merchandise sales from our Store. Recently we have begun solicitation of donations of stock (which we immediately liquidate into cash) as well as estate donations. Our **Grant Writer Tabitha Tripp** (see her bio above) will lead a discussion on ways that RWU members and supporters can go the extra mile and assist RWU to raise the funds we need to keep the organization thriving.

## Striking to Win: Identifying Choke Points along Supply Chains

Gifford Hartman & Peter Olney

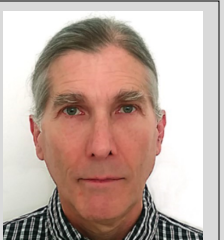
Half a million workers went on strike last year, but West Virginia education workers began this resurgence in 2018, sparking a strike wave of teachers elsewhere. In 2023, SAG-AFTRA and WGA struck successfully, as did Los Angeles teachers and workers in several other sectors, including UAW's hugely successful strike in auto. Drawing on John Womack's *Labor Power & Strategy* book, this workshop will analyze those successes and strategize how to identify choke points to win future strikes, especially by railroaders and other supply chain workers.



Peter Olney

*Gifford Hartman has been an RWU solidarity member since 2014 and is a trainer for the Global Labour University. As a labor educator, he has participated in organizing training sessions, workshops, conventions and conferences with workers from Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America.*

*Peter Olney is a retired director of organizing for the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU). He is co-editor of Labor Power and Strategy (by John Womack Jr.). He was Associate Director of the University of California's Institute for Labor and Employment (ILE) and teaches building trades union organizers as a member of the faculty of the Building Trades Academy at Michigan State University*



Gifford Hartman