



Railroad Workers United

Unity – Solidarity – Democracy: The Rank & File in Action!

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For Immediate Release

Caucus of Concerned Rail Workers Call for Observance of a "Black Shirt Friday" June 19

With the death of Railroad Conductor Jared Boehlke on Mother's Day, May 10, the number of fatalities on the nation's railroads surged to a record pace for the year 2009. In all, twelve rail workers have been killed on the job so far this year.

At the end of March, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) issued an appeal to all railroad organizations and employees for help in stemming this disastrous record.

The FRA letter said in part, "If a culture exists whereby workers feel they are put in situations where they are making poor decisions for fear of losing their jobs, we must work together to change this culture. The elimination of fatalities, injuries, and accidents depends upon it. "

Railroad Workers United (RWU), a cross craft, inter-union caucus of rail workers agrees with the FRA that something must be done to change the current situation. For over a year now, RWU has actively campaigned for a safety approach that would put eliminating hazards first and foremost on the safety agenda for the nation's railroads. Unfortunately, the rail carriers have continued to emphasize worker behavior over hazard elimination. As a result, the carriers tend to downplay, overlook, or ignore altogether the problems and hazards that are created by management practices. Job cutbacks, job combination, and massive layoffs have left too many rail employees working without the extra support and assistance needed in places like dangerous classification yards where Jared Boehlke met his death.

Railroad Workers United is asking its members and supporters across the U.S. -- and all rail workers that hear this call -- to wear a black shirt on Friday, June 19, the Friday of Father's Day weekend. RWU hopes that this relatively modest action will play a role in putting to an end any "culture" as the FRA described it where "workers feel they are put in situations where they are making poor decisions for fear of losing their jobs."

Furthermore, RWU urges all of rail labor to consider officially demarcating Father's Day Friday in the future, "Railroad Workers Memorial Day", a day when all rail workers remember our brothers and sisters who have lost their lives working in the unforgiving railroad environment.

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