

United We Bargain -- Divided We Beg !

This last round of rail bargaining witnessed much of the same - a lack of rail labor unity, deal cutting and back-stabbing, a general lack of participation in the whole process by the membership, and in the end, relatively dismal contracts as a result.

However, there were a number of encouraging developments this time around, suggesting that segments of the rank-and-file are stirring. There are two major impediments to winning good contracts: first the rank-and-file's lack of participation in the bargaining process and second, the lack of unity and solidarity between crafts and unions. The first impediment -- the lack of membership involvement -- is the subject of another RWU flyer entitled "Winning Strong Contracts -- An Action Plan for Rail Labor." This flyer here addresses the second impediment -- the lack of cooperation and coordination in bargaining between the various unions.

For nearly 150 years rail labor has been divided into a myriad of craft unions. At one time, 26 different unions represented workers on the railroads of the U.S. alone! Through mergers and craft obsolescence, this number has been now reduced to the current 13 or so. The history of this cumbersome, bureaucratic and divisive quagmire of rail labor is one of ineffectual bargaining at best and sellouts, back-stabbing, and outright scabbing at worst. The failure of rail labor to stick together and to build a common strategy and a common platform has historically been one of the greatest impediments to railroad workers achieving their goals.

Past Efforts at Coordinated Rail Bargaining

American Railway Union (ARU) *In 1894 the American Railway Union (ARU) of Eugene V. Debs struck the Great Northern Railway in an all-out work stoppage by union members of all crafts. The ARU beat the GN hands-down and won practically all of its demands as a result of this unified effort of rail labor.*

Railroad Employees Department (RED) *An enduring coalition of six shop crafts across the U.S. had some success with coordinated bargaining from 1912 to 1975. In 1922 in response to wage cuts, the RED shop craft union affiliates staged a national strike against the carriers. If not for the failure of the operating crafts to support them, the RED could and would have won a decisive victory.*

Railroad Labor Bargaining Coalition (RLBC) *The most recent effort has been the loose coalition of 7 unions -- including the IBT affiliates (BMWED and the BLET), three small shop crafts, the Dispatchers and the Signalman. Because the effort did not include the largest union (UTU), the TCU (clerks, car knockers and others), nor the larger shop crafts (Machinists and Electricians), the effort met with limited success.*

Obstacles to Coordinated Bargaining

While most rank-and-filers and many union leaders agree that coordinated bargaining makes sense, there are many obstacles to achieving this lofty goal, including:

- Desire on the part of some union leaders to protect their own fiefdom.
- Lack of imagination and a belief that nothing new is possible.
- Long standing hostilities and distrust among some unions based upon past bargaining experiences.
- Some union leaders who feel the best way to bargain is to curry favor with the carrier, be the first to settle, never risk a Presidential Emergency Board, offer the carrier a good deal, etc.

Building the Movement for Coordinated Bargaining

Since the whole concept is widely supported, it is up to us to make our voices heard. RWU is running a campaign coast-to-coast to push for coordinated bargaining. Below are some ways that you and your union local can get involved in the campaign:

- Sign the petition calling on all rail labor unions to unite in bargaining in 2009.
- Circulate the petition among your co-workers at work and at your union meeting.
- Pass a resolution of support for coordinated bargaining at your local meeting.
- Distribute literature, posters and other materials at work.
- Talk to your co-workers about solidarity and the need to bargain as a group.
- Talk to union brothers and sisters of other crafts, get to know one another and talk about the need to stick together throughout this next round of bargaining.

It Can be Done -- Others are Doing It!

At General Electric, the Coordinated Bargaining Coalition consists of 13 unions and has existed for 40 years!. The locals meet together to prepare a common strategy, then send representatives to each others' bargaining sessions with the company. Each union maintains its own autonomy but agrees to cooperation. No union settles until all settle, and each union agrees to stick up for a common set of demands.

At Kennecott Copper, the Kennecott Coordinated Bargaining Committee consists of five union locals -- Steelworkers, Machinists, Operating Engineers, Electricians and Office Professionals -- which cooperate as an effective bargaining coalition to represent the entire workforce at Kennecott's largest open pit mine.

Sign Me Up!! *I want to join Railroad Workers United and help build rail labor unity, democracy & solidarity!*

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Cell Phone _____

Email Address _____

Union _____ Local # _____ Employer _____

Terminal _____ Years of Service _____

Union Position _____

I'd like to join for (check one):

1 year \$50.00 2 Years \$90.00 3 Years \$120.00

*Clip and mail together with your dues to:
RWU Secretary P.O. Box 2131 Reno, NV. 89505
OR join on-line at www.railroadworkersunited.org*

Solidarity -- It's Everyone's Job!

Railroad Workers United believes that all union members have a role to play in bringing our unions together as one to take on the carriers in bargaining. We need to educate ourselves about the issues, attend union meetings, run for office, work for reforms inside the union, and hold our leaders accountable. It's up to each of us to personally commit to stand with our union brothers and sisters of other crafts, to demand nothing less of our unions and our union leadership, and to build this spirit of unity on the job every day we go to work. Solidarity!

Are you ready to get involved in the movement for unity, democracy and solidarity? Do you want to help build a united front in the next round of rail labor bargaining? Contact RWU today. Mail in the form above, call 206-984-3051 or email RWU at info@railroadworkersunited.org

Coordinated Contract Bargaining

A Plan For Rail Labor Unity

RAILROAD WORKERS UNITED



"The Rank and File in Action!"

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