



The Highball

Official Publication of
Railroad Workers United

BLET Rank-&-Filers Vote Big to Retain the Right to Vote

By an overwhelming majority of nearly 3-to-1, the membership of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) voted to retain the right of the membership -- rather than their delegates -- to vote for their union's top officers, in elections scheduled for later this Fall. Opponents of the direct elections had launched an initiative drive in late 2009, in a feeble attempt to roll back the clock and return the election of top officers to the Quadrennial Convention, where some 500 delegates -- rather than the union's 36,000 members -- would make the decision (see [The Highball](#) Winter and Spring 2010)

The union's old guard, faced with a crack up of the "good old boys' network" has faced a major setback in their efforts to hold onto power. However, some officials apparently fail to respect the will of the rank & file. The day the vote was announced, Division #98 (home local of incumbent President Dennis Pierce), failing to win the popular vote by a mandate -- 6,305 to 2,452 -- introduced a proposal to amend the union's bylaws at the Convention in October where a major floor fight is expected.

For more information, see the Commentary on Page 3

CSX Workers Fight Back Against Draconian Attendance Policy

J.P. Wright, Division #78 CSX Louisville, KY. RWU ISC

CSX has a new plan, a new attendance policy that was released as a "System Notice" that is very vague and very unsafe. Under the new plan, that CSX ramrodded through with little or no consultation with the unions, workers are not allowed to mark off sick for more than two days in a rolling 30-day period, regardless of work schedule or job.

The workers responded with various ideas and protests. However, the lack of information about what the union was doing in response was causing some very uneasy feelings. The internal union communication problems that we face here locally is no doubt magnified 100-fold at the national level. It took the General Committee more than a week to get the letter of protest out to the rank and file! After dealing with a group of members from Division #78 who requested to withhold their dues payments in protest, I was faced with a challenge. Regardless of what merit the idea may have held, not paying your dues violates the union shop section of our agreement. What can I do as a leader (Secretary-Treasurer) to give my dues-paying members a voice?

The great organizer and activist Saul Alinsky points out in his book *Reveille for Radicals*: "It is impossible to overemphasize the enormous importance of people's doing things themselves. It is the most common human reaction that successful attainment of objectives is much more meaningful to people who have achieved the objectives through their own efforts."

Taking our cue from Brother Alinsky, CSX T&E workers held an informational picket of our CSX sponsored "Family Day" activities on September 11, 2010. Despite overwhelming support from engineers and conductors in the terminal, pleas for the support of the BLET General Committee and the National Division were ignored. In ad-

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Special Supplement to The Highball for Fall 2010: "Rank and File Action!"

Whether it be the struggle against phony management safety programs, the demand for real safety, fights with the carrier against draconian attendance policies, the battle over staffing, work rules or contract enforcement, rank-and-file railroad workers are taking initiatives, recognizing their strength in numbers and using basic solidarity to fight back.

In this special issue of [The Highball](#), we report on just a few of these struggles, while taking a look at time tested strategies and tactics to wage such rank-and-file campaigns successfully. We hope that you benefit from reading these ideas and these campaigns, and that they inspire you at your place of work to stand up, take action, and join the ranks of union troublemakers!

Track Worker Drafted to Fill Seat on Railroad Retirement Board

Ron Friend, CSX track worker and longtime member of BMWED Lodge #1509, has been "drafted" by a cross-craft grouping of rail workers who want to see reform in the Railroad Retirement system. RRB Labor member Butch Speakman, appointed by George HW Bush in 1994, is stepping down at the end of the year, leaving the seat vacant. President Obama will be making an appointment sometime in the coming months.

Ron has worked tirelessly for reform of RR Retirement since the 1990s, having been instrumental in the fight a

decade ago, and more recently, has engineered the proposal for further needed reform, picked up and endorsed by RWU in 2009.

All railroad workers are encouraged to get involved in the campaign to appoint Brother Friend to the RRB. For more information, including Ron's complete resume for the job, see the RWU website. Or contact Ron at 206-426-7048.



Ron Friend

Workers Fight Attendance Policy

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dition, local UTU leadership shied away from official endorsement through fear of reprisals. The divide-and-conquer tactics that CSX has employed are working. The casualties of the war on labor are starting to pile up. The rank and file desperately needs a voice. We are calling on CSX to cancel their unjust, unsafe and anti-family attendance policy, and to sit down with labor to work out an attendance policy that is in-line with existing labor agreements, to negotiate in good faith a policy that is fair for all.

CSX has become a sick corporation. When the Children's Fund tried to seat members on the CSX board of directors, they sided with the UTU in pointing out that CSX has very unfriendly relations with Labor. And when Warren Buffet bought up the BNSF last year, he pointed out that he has never invested in CSX due to their very poor management style. However, CSX has done nothing to change its stripes and has only gotten worse. All they could do was to produce a new "Policy of Mutual

Accountability", which does nothing for the workers and is simply a bunch of fluff which ignores the real underlying causes of waste due to poorly managed crews, hostile labor relations, delayed trains, job combinations and eliminations, etc.

T&E workers are faced with many challenges from our job. We are called to work with little notice at all hours of the day and night, often have no regular off time or job start time, we work weekends and holidays and rarely know when we will be at work, at home, or at the away-from-home terminal. We work under all conditions in all weather, often for long hours. Having time off to take a break from the strenuous life we as railroaders lead is very important. Since the carrier does not recognize and respect our needs as family members, human beings, citizens and workers, it is up to all of us who are violated by such unjust policies to fight back with solidarity and action. Only then will we win the protection, the rights and the respect that we demand and deserve.

Railroad Workers United

Railroad Workers United was organized in April 2008 at a Founding Convention in Dearborn, MI. RWU grew out of decades of struggle within the craft unions for unity, solidarity, and democracy. We are carrying on a tradition of rank-and-file activity which dates back to the 1890s and the time of Eugene V. Debs.

RWU is a cross-craft inter-union caucus of rail labor activists across North America. All rail workers of all crafts from all carriers who support our Statement of Principles are welcome to join in our efforts. Please write, call or email the address below.

Statement of Principles

- Unity of All Rail Crafts
- An End to Inter-Union Conflict
- Rank-and-File Democracy
- Membership Participation & Action
- Solidarity Among All Railroaders
- No to Concessionary Bargaining

Railroad Workers United P.O. Box 1053 Salem, IL. 62881

International Steering Committee

Penny Artis	IBEW #813	NS	Roanoke, VA	
Steve Desavouret	TCU #6608	CN	Chicago, IL	
Jon Flanders	IAM #1145	CSX	Selkirk, NY	
Ron Friend	BMWED #1509	CSX	Marietta, OH	
Robert Hill	BLET #75	BNSF	Vancouver, WA	
Ron Kaminkow	BLET #51	Amtrak	Reno, NV	
Mike Matson	UTU #911	CP	St. Paul, MN	
Ed Michael	UTU #979	BLET #724	UP	Salem, IL
Jen Wallis	BLET #518	BNSF	Seattle, WA	
Matt Weaver	BMWED #2624	CSX	Toledo, OH	
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Railroad Workers United

Special Supplement to The Highball

“Rank & File Action”

Membership Mobilization -- The Key to Victory

In this edition of The Highball, we focus on the question of rank-and-file action. Traditionally, history is taught from a top down perspective; that is to say, that great leaders create history and make change. While there have no doubt been great leaders of social movements throughout the ages, without the masses, the rank-and-file ready, willing and able to take mass action, there simply could have been no leaders and no progress.

Today most of us tend to go to work, pay our union dues and go home. Some might attend union meetings or even hold office in our local union. But all too often, there is no "movement", no collective action on the job at "the point of production". Yes we may engage in letter writing, phone calling and other forms of lobbying. But sadly, that is about all that the rank-and-file is called upon to do by the union leadership. As for bargaining with the carrier, that is usually performed under semi-secret conditions by the "bargaining team" out of sight and out of mind of the rank-and-filer, until such time as a Tentative Agreement is reached on high. Then we are asked (coaxed, cajoled, persuaded, blackmailed) into voting for this agreement as the "best" possible contract achievable.

In 1877, the nation's first general strike was kindled by a general uprising on the railroad. Breaking out in Martinsburg, WV and quickly spreading from the B&O to the Pennsylvania RR, the strike consumed the entire nation before winding down, spreading all the way to the west coast. It was truly a spontaneous mass uprising, with workers going on strike, burning rolling stock and structures in numerous terminals. A generation later, workers coast-to-coast would again resort to mass strikes and a national boycott in an effort to defeat the notorious Pullman Company of Chicago. And in 1922, railroaders would once more demonstrate their

collective muscle when nearly half a million shop workers walked off the job, striking all the major carriers across the nation.

It was these actions and hundreds of smaller ones that forced the carriers to respect us, to bargain with us, to make needed safety improvements, to pay us better wages, and treat us with some degree of dignity and respect. And while numerous laws are now on the books to defend and protect our rights, those laws would never have become reality had it not been for these countless struggles waged by rank-and-file railroaders.

Today is a time of relative "labor peace" on the railroad. "Claims" are made to various "Committees of Adjustment" and payments are made (or not made as the case may be) by the carrier to the individual claimant. Disputes are settled mostly by boards of one sort or another depending on the level of conflict. Unfortunately, the rank-and-file has been sidelined from the fight, much to the delight of the carriers, the government, and even the union officialdom. We tend to do things "civilized" now. Change must come slowly we are told. It is a process of "give and take", "negotiation" and "compromise" by professional leaders.

Nevertheless, workers still take matters into their own hands, with or without the formal blessings of (and sometimes in direct opposition to) their union officials.

In this special supplement, The Highball looks at the whole concept of rank-and-file shop floor struggle -- from the early days of rail labor organizing up to today. Should you feel inspired by all of this, please submit your own stories for future issues of The Highball. We are always on the lookout for examples of creative rank-and-file action. At its core, this is what the union is all about - workers understanding their common exploitation and taking collective action to correct injustice. Roll the union On!!



The 1922 Shopmen Strike

A Battle Lost ... But A War Won

-- Will Snell, Retired, IAM Lodge #104, Huntington, WV

I began my machinist apprenticeship on the former Chesapeake & Ohio Railway in Huntington, WV in November of 1965. As I carried heavy tool boxes around the shop, I often heard my journeymen mentors mention the "Strike of 22" with reverence. In those days, apprentices worked day shift with Saturday and Sunday rest days. Accordingly, I was able to take some college classes at night. As a student both at work and after work, I decided to do some research on the "Strike of 22".

What were the issues? There were too many to recount here. However, Colin Davis summed it up in his book: Strategy for Success: The Pennsylvania Railroad and the 1922 National Railroad Shopmen's Strike, when he wrote: "The importance of the Pennsylvania Railroad during the 1922 conflict was highlighted by its position within the industry. The Penn was a giant among giants ... The Penn employed 55,000 Shopmen which constituted 15 % of the nation's railroad shop force. Its executives held important and influential positions in the employer group, the Association of Railway Executives (ARE). Vice President W. W. Atterbury was chairman of the powerful Labor Committee of the ARE. Atterbury, working closely with the Chairman of ARE, Thomas DeWitt Cuyler, pursued a course to undercut railroad labor power. Penn officials were also leaders of the more obstructionist group of railroad presidents who advocated the destruction of unionism".

There are many books written on the subject and most, if not all, conclude that we (rail labor) lost the 1922 strike. Today's shop crafts and operating crafts, may be told by today's management to remember what happened in 1922 when the rank and file stood together to take on not only the railroad corporations but the power brokers in Washington, DC including President Harding. Rail labor lost the 1922 strike they say. One historian wrote, "Ultimately the 400,000 shopcraft workers suffered a humiliating defeat in their national strike." Or did they?

My ragged copy of the Shop Crafts Agreement I received when I went to work for the railroad in 1965 reads, "Effective July 1, 1921". How can that be? Contracts effective in 1921 that are still in effect 44 years after the shop craft unions were "crushed" in 1922? Well, the railroad tycoons won the 1922 battle but they lost the 1922 war. Apparently, the goons and thugs the railroads hired were very talented at busting knee caps, terrorizing spouses/children and similar skills but knew nothing about milling a gear, forging steel, welding, soldering, wiring, bending pipe or any other of the thousands of

skills required to repair a steam powered locomotive.

There is no honor among thieves. The individual railroads started cutting deals on their own to get the skilled shop crafts back to work. The New York Central and the Pennsylvania Railroad -- fierce competitors at the time -- each worked to cut deals with the Railway Employees Department (RED) to return to work. Other major railroads at the time also enticed the RED back to the bargaining table to make peace with the unions that comprised the RED at the time.

So one by one the dominoes began to fall. Not only did the C&O Railway Company reinstitute the contract effective July 1, 1921 that I began my railroad career under in 1965, but the contract was amended time and time again over the years to improve the wages and benefits for the Shop Crafts represented by the RED. Eventually, the RED dissolved, but united bargaining (in many contracts over the years) continued to achieve better pay and fringe benefits for all railroad unionized employees.

Like my mentors so many years ago, who spoke of the Strike with reverence, we railroaders should pause to thank those who stayed united, including some who literally gave their lives, in a war to preserve the railroad unions and benefits that all unionized railroad workers enjoy today. The Railway Labor Act (1926) and the Railroad Retirement Act (1937) are just two examples of what later came about because so many union workers of all crafts bent but did not break as a result of the 1922 battle. The railroaders of all crafts regrouped, united on common interests and fought on to achieve so many other benefits that rail labor must now collectively stand to preserve day-in and day-out with our dues, our votes, our conscience and our actions.



Women shopworkers on the Baltimore & Ohio during WWI

The Great Northern Strike: A Great Victory for Rail Labor

A carrier-wide strike in rail labor's early years was able to claim a quick and triumphant victory by using non-violent direct action of the membership drawn from all crafts and all unions.

Ron Kaminkow, RWU General Secretary

Throughout the latter quarter of the 19th century, rail strikes were extremely common. Rail labor began to organize first in 1863 and by the 1880s, there were a number of "brotherhoods", organized on a craft basis, designed to further the interests of rail workers of various crafts. However, they were very often plagued by the fact that each union jealously guarded its own "interests" and ignored those of the other crafts, the result being that one union would often "scab" on another to the ultimate detriment of all. The number of strikes and uprisings by the rank-and-file was remarkable, and while gains were made, progress was stunted by the fratricidal nature of the competing craft unions.

In 1893, forward thinking rail union leaders and rank-and-filers of the day founded the American Railway Union (ARU). With its leader, Eugene V. Debs of the Firemen's Union, the ARU set about the task of organizing all rail workers into "One Big Union" in order to more effectively confront the carriers and win their demands for better wages, benefits and working conditions. The union was quickly very popular among the ranks and soon workers were joining at the rate of 2,000 per week! Within a year, the ARU had hundreds of affiliated local chapters and claimed 150,000 members, drawing much of its membership out of the craft unions. Whole lodges of established craft unions voted to affiliate with the ARU.

The first great test of the ARU came when the union decided to strike the Great Northern (GN). The GN was the property of James J. Hill, the "Empire Builder", known as such because of his wheeling and dealing. He was the archetypal dictatorial robber baron of the day. In August of 1893 The GN began a series of wage cuts that went on through March of the following year. In April, the ARU called a general strike of all crafts against the carrier.

Strikers showed impressive unity and gained the sympathy of communities along the line from Minnesota to Washington State. All crafts were involved in the strike,



from telegraphers to shopmen, train and engine crews to track workers. The Great Northern was shut down tight, despite attempts by Hill and the GN to divide and conquer the workers by appealing to their respective Brotherhoods to intervene. The 9,000 employees of the railroad were united in their efforts. Every train was stopped, except for mail trains, which moved on Debs' explicit orders.

"If the workers of the world want to win, all they have to do is to recognize their own solidarity. They have nothing to do but fold their arms and the world will stop. The workers are more powerful with their hands in their pockets than all the property of the capitalists. As long as the workers keep their hands in their pockets, the capitalists cannot put theirs there. With passive resistance, with the workers absolutely refusing to move, lying absolutely silent, they are more powerful than all the weapons and instruments that the other side has for attack."

Joseph Ettor, organizer, Industrial Workers of the World, 1912

As Debs' biographer Ray Ginger noted, "Instead of weakening the new union, the strike was strengthening it ... From one end of the Great Northern to the other, the men had peacefully left their jobs. Not a drop of blood had been shed, but not a wheel had turned, except those on mail trains. Peaceful and united action had proven the key to success."

After just 18 days, the strike was concluded on favorable terms to the workers. Strike leader Eugene Debs commented that, "The one grand achievement of this strike is to prove to organized labor that there is nothing in violence." Practically all of the demands were met and a contract signed with James Hill. Upon conclusion of the strike, Hill actually deined to commend the strike leaders for their conduct of the strike! Railroaders were now joining the ARU in droves. In just one year the ARU had signed up 150,000 rail workers, while the combined strength of the established rail craft unions numbered just 90,000 men. Clearly, the power of united rail labor, in solidarity without regard to craft or group -- the rank-and-file in action -- was demonstrated for all to see.

"The greatest tribute that was ever paid to me was that of the section men after the Great Northern strike. As my train pulled out of St. Paul, those men with shovels in hand and happiness fairly radiating from their faces, yet with tears in their eyes - those section men stood at attention. That tribute was more precious to me than all the banquets in the world."

-- Eugene V. Debs 1894

“Shop Floor Tactics”

The article below is adapted from Chapter 3 - “Shop Floor Tactics” of *A Troublemaker's Handbook : How to Fight Back Where You Work and Win!* by Dan LaBotz. Every railroader should own a copy of this important book! Order yours today from Labor Notes at www.labornotes.org. Tell them you are a railroad worker and receive a 15% discount!

Many railroad workers believe that the ultimate weapon of labor is the strike. While this may be true, there are numerous reasons - legal, political, structural - while the strike may not at times be a viable option to achieve our goals. In such cases, there are countless other means by which rank-and-file workers can organize to push their agenda and pressure the carrier short of striking. The union and its members have a number of options at their disposal including:

- A "Work to-Rule Campaign" in which workers adhere exactly to company procedures and/or to the contract.
- A "Work Slowdown", in which workers reduce output to an agreed upon amount.
- "Making Scrap", whereby the workforce performs poorly and make a product which will not pass quality control.
- "Getting Lost", a common practice of warehouse workers, truck drivers and others who work in large facilities or on the streets and are not easy to police.
- Refusing to Donate Time. Many workers "donate" unpaid time to the company by arriving early, beginning work before they are on the clock, working through breaks or lunch, and/or staying after work.

Activities that affect production schedules will be taken seriously by management. Meeting a production schedule may be the basis for a supervisor's bonus, for example. The company may lose a customer if it falls behind in its orders. This, of course, is the point.

Therefore such actions must be taken seriously by the union. They require planning, discretion, practice, timing and above all they require the utmost unity and solidarity.



Work-to-Rules

A work-to-rule campaign takes advantage of the fact that management has theoretically one way of doing things ("going by the rule book") but in practice wants workers to take short-cuts in the interest of productivity, on-time performance, getting the yard switched out, etc. In a work-to-rule, workers abide by the contract and any and all operating/air brake/safety rules and any other workplace policies and procedures which may apply. Workers take no short-cuts, show no initiative in solving problems, and if any difficulty presents itself, take no initiative but simply ask management for instructions.

By its very nature, a work-to-rule campaign, properly executed, is not a violation of the contract. On the contrary, it is based upon strict adherence to the rules, and this is its true virtue. Management is sending two contradictory signals about how the work is to be done, and no one can blame the workers for choosing the one that benefits them. A work-to-rule can be used as a pressure tactic on any issue, from getting rid of a supervisor to protesting unfair discipline, to forcing the company to make for a safe workplace, to extra persuasion in a contract campaign.

A variant of work-to-rule is the refusal to do out-of-craft labor, work which is not included in the job description or the contract. Nurses in Boston City Hospital have found this to be a good way to put pressure on management. "We don't have the right to strike in Massachusetts," explains Enid Eckstein, a staffer for SEIU Local 285, "but we have been able to wage fairly militant on-the-job fights by refusal to do non-nursing functions ... I saw one study that said that 74 percent of a registered nurse's time is spent in non-nursing work, so they've got a lot of power there." Likewise on the railroad, a lot of work that we do at times is out of craft and beyond the scope of our contract. We can collectively refuse to perform these mundane tasks and achieve a degree of power in the process.

Follow Stupid Rules

Sometimes when management institutes new rules without having thought out the consequences, following the rules can show that they are stupid, so stupid that they have to be withdrawn. After a bad wreck in Ohio in the late 1990s, Conrail implemented a rule which stated that all trains must call ALL signals and use the train symbol, locomotive number, track number, signal number and/or name, and direction of movement. Clearly the rule would result in constant radio chatter that would not easily allow for other important transmissions like car counts, emergency calls, dispatchers' mandatory directives, etc. The

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“Shop Floor Tactics”

company was adamant that all crews must call all signals and utilize the full script or be subject to discipline. Knowing the rule was ridiculous and in fact unsafe, many crews took the opportunity to drag out the signal calling diatribe as slowly as possible, making the new rule's foolishness obvious even to the company officials. The radio channel was clogged with crews calling signals. Within a few weeks, the company amended the rule to reflect the reality of a busy multiple track mainline operation.

Slow Downs

Most work-to-rule campaigns have the effect of slowing down production, but a slowdown may go even further, since it does not take the strict adherence to the rules as its limit. Slowdowns may lead to individual workers being disciplined, to groups of workers being fired, or an entire workforce being locked out. Management's harsh discipline is testament to the effectiveness of the slowdown.



Tim Costello, a long time truck driver in Boston says that in organizing a slowdown you have to be sensitive to the workers involved. "First of all you can't be too hard on them. You have to understand that people do work at different paces. When you go for a slowdown you have to be realistic about what you are going to slow down to. Getting everybody to do it, that's the thing.... And it's very important that you work, you must work. Between us we understood that ordinarily you did twenty residential deliveries and four tank loads. So we just cutback say, to 16 and 3. It worked real well."

Making Scrap

In the rail industry, a number of us don't exactly produce anything, we transport the product. But there are a wide variety of ways that rails -- including those in the transportation department -- can "make scrap". It is only human to make mistakes. Trains are often blocked incorrectly ("in-wrongs"); air hoses not connected; couplings not properly made; retainer valves, angle cocks and cut-out cocks found in the wrong position. EOT's often fail to

link up properly, and once linked, often develop a "no com" failure. Getting a locomotive consist properly MUed and getting a train's brake pipe continuity straightened out can be one hell of a time consuming chore, leading to clogged freight yards and delayed trains.

Overtime Bans

Many industries and services, including the rail industry, depend on overtime work. Where overtime is voluntary, rail employees can easily organize such an action. Where overtime is mandatory the organization of such a ban will be more difficult - though it is possible.

Sick Outs

Sick outs are particularly common by public employees who by law are not permitted to engage in job actions or to strike, especially federal employees and uniformed services. Police officers or firefighters sometimes collectively come down with a case of the "blue flu". Railroaders across the country have been known to engage in such activity to protest all sorts of things - from lack of time off, to harsh attendance policies, to short staffing. Once again the trick here is to get everybody to do it, as there is safety and effectiveness in numbers. A sick-out is really a strike, but calling it a sick out can sometimes get you through the law.

Conclusion

In real life, the tactics discussed above - from slowing down to mass sick calls to overtime bans - will not be used alone but in combination with each other, and in combination with other tactics such as use of the media and community support. Our unions and the rank-and-file members have some powerful tools at their disposal to fight back with. We need to discuss these ideas and others with our co-workers and begin to build a culture of activism within our workplace. Yes we need to file our claims, we need to submit bargaining suggestions, attend our union meetings and all the rest. But we need to bring the union into the workplace and practice solidarity and action every day we go to work. Because it is right here -- on the job -- where the union's real power lies.

"By Direct Action is meant any action taken by workers directly at the point of production with a view to bettering their conditions. The organization of any labor union whatsoever is direct action. Sending the shop committee to demand of the boss a change of shop rules is direct action. To oppose direct action is to oppose labor unionsism as a whole with all its activities..."

Frank Bohn, *Solidarity*, May 18, 1912

“Direct Action Gets the Goods!”

Shop floor struggles can be waged on a national scale and include tens of thousands of workers, or be waged on a much smaller scale and include just a single terminal, department, or shift. Here we will briefly examine five rank-and-file struggles, starting with an example of an extremely localized fight of just a few workers in a single location, then a struggle at the terminal level. Next we will move through a fight back at the carrier level, on to one at the national level, and finally present how a rank-and-file fight can look at the international level.

From *Trains Magazine*, a story of three yard crewman and their yard shanty cat. The cat was their unofficial mascot and keen mouser who kept their lunch room free of mice. One day, management unilaterally decided to remove the cat and take it to the Humane Society. The crew was outraged and had one demand, "Give us back our cat!". The company, Canadian Forest Products, refused to get the cat back, the union rep was unhelpful and the Ministry of Labor inspector said the workers had no case.

The train crew revolted. The locomotive was bad-ordered with flat spots on one wheel, worn brake shoes, faulty sanders, and air brake issues. The spare yard goat was trapped in the shed. After diesel machinists repaired the locomotive the next day, the crew went to work... but the track structure on the chemical lead



had excessive cross level in the curves. Anyway, you get the idea. By the third day the mill's pulping process was coming to a halt, and a mill-wide shutdown loomed. That night the general manager retrieved the cat from the family that had already adopted him for an undisclosed amount of money. This tiny episode in the history of North American rail labor relations is as fine an example as any that workers can achieve victory -- no matter how small or seemingly insignificant the issue -- by sticking together and taking collective on-the-job action.

Moving from small to medium, consider a struggle at a large midwestern rail terminal a few decades ago. Switch crews, angered by the carrier's attack upon their working conditions, engaged in a work-to-rule campaign that was well received by other crafts in the yard and shop as well. Together, through creative activities on the job, the cross-craft coalition was able to effectively get their message across to the carrier that as long as the company engaged in unilateral changes in work rules to the detri-

ment of the workforce, then the carrier could expect less production, long delays in the receiving, classification and departure yards, a clogged terminal and delayed trains.

It should be noted here that while workers can and have achieved a high level of solidarity and success with such actions at the terminal level, it is vital for these workers to make contact with the fellow workers at other facilities and terminals across the system. Otherwise, they risk having their terminal played off against another, with the work transferred to another terminal. The workers there -- if not aware and tied into the job action -- could conceivably "scab" on the action of their brothers and sisters.

Now we move on to a larger systemwide struggle that included far more workers and involved more locations. In 1999, Conrail was carved up between two other major eastern carriers. One of them sent decrepit power from the deep South, old GP-38s and SD-40s, north to former CR territory. These locomotives lacked toilets and sidewall heaters, they had cracked and missing door and window seals, and besides being beat up and antiquated in most every way, were unfit for service in the likes of Cleveland, Chicago and Toledo, where they were no match for the harsh winter weather.

The former Conrail train & engine crews were outraged. But perhaps worst of all, the seats on the locomotives were torture devices - "toadstool" seats, a simple stool with a hinged back, no armrests, no ability to recline or in anyway adjust for comfort. And this from a railroad that "cares" so much about safety and health! Engineers and trainmen complained to their unions, who promised to bring the whole issue to the joint safety meeting. Nothing happened. Tempers flared, and studies were promised. Then, one by one, the devilish seats -- usually held onto their post by a single pin on a chain - began to disappear. They turned up along the right-of-way where welders found them convenient to use as knee padding when welding on frogs and such. Crews would go to the diesel shop, find their road power and give it a once over before heading to their trains ... and all the trailing units would have their seats missing! The company was beat and they knew it. What could they do but replace the seats, and not with the same ones or they would sure meet the same fate. The carrier broke down and put in more modern seats (granted not the best) but a vast improvement over the toadstools. Train crews could have waited through endless rounds of negotiations and countless studies (and countless visits to the chiropractor!) for years before something was done to correct the situation. Instead, they took "direct action" and won a clear and decisive victory far sooner.

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“Direct Action Gets the Goods!”

Now, let's consider an example of direct shop floor action on a national scale. Probably the classic example from U.S. rail labor history is the Pullman Strike of 1894, led by Eugene V. Debs and the American Railway Union (ARU). Workers at the Pullman works in Pullman, IL went on strike after the owner of the company, George M. Pullman, cut wages but maintained the same rents for his workers, most all of whom lived in company housing. The workers began to join the newly formed ARU - a union for all railroad workers - and appealed to the union for assistance. The end result was a nationwide strike and boycott of Pullman cars by rail workers in solidarity with their brothers and sisters at Pullman. Utilizing a tactic that was bound to succeed, the ARU train crews refused to handle Pullman Palace cars in their trains, and switched them out of the consist. Pullman stood to be defeated in short order as the company would not have long been able to shoulder the economic costs leveled by this action of the gallant train crews. Unfortunately, the U.S. President Garfield conspired with the carriers and Pullman, breaking the strike and boycott through violent intervention by the police and militia, on the pretext that the workers were obstructing the delivery of U.S. mail. Nevertheless, the great Pullman Strike and Boycott provides a textbook example of shop floor direct action where workers across the nation, and across craft, trade union, and carrier, used extremely effective mass shop floor creative tactics to press their point.

Finally we will look at an example of creative on-the-job tactics at the international level. For this we turn to the longshore industry worldwide. On the morning of July 3rd 1979, port workers refused to cross a picket line at the west side of the Saint John harbour on the day they were supposed to ship a load of heavy water to Argentina for the CANDU nuclear reactor. Heavy water is a principal moderator that allows a nuclear reactor to operate with natural uranium as its fuel.

The picket had been organized by the NO CANDU committee, the New Brunswick Federation of Labour and the District Labour Council. With signs and buttons stating “NO CANDU FOR ARGENTINA” and “HOT CARGO”, the protesters demanded the release of 17 political prisoners from the prisons of Argentina, most of whom were trade union leaders and activists.

The action came in response to the brutal anti-union military dictatorship that took power in Argentina in 1976. The picket line was joined by members of many local unions, including the Canadian Paperworkers, the United Auto Workers, the International Association of Machinists, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

As a result of the protest and refusal to load the ship, most

of the 17 political prisoners were soon released. While this example is not from the rail industry, it is easy to see how railroad workers in, say, the U.S., Mexico, and Canada might someday engage in such effective actions of international solidarity and mutual support by refusal to move struck or boycotted goods.

So whether it be local, regional, system-wide, national or international in scope, direct action by average everyday working people on the job is one of the most powerful weapons in labor's arsenal to fight back and win!

And Always, Keep Smiling.....

It was 1985, in the last days of the old Milwaukee Road in the Menomonee River Valley underneath the 35th Street viaduct, workers were grasping at any fight-back they could find. The Soo Line had finally stepped in and bought the last breaths of the Milwaukee. There was nothing left except waiting until the doors actually locked us out...And yet we organized to show support and solidarity with each other...all the workers...in all the shops...and of course when there's really nothing left to be done...what better way is to laugh through the pain. This is one of the ways we did it...This poem is one from "Blue Collar Goodbyes"...Sue Doro

Shop Humor

Anonymous cartoon appears
Is quickly copied at lunchtime
On the machine in the main shop office
Flies like smoke from a diesel
Traveling at ninety miles per hour
Decorating tool benches
Lunch tables
Passed hand to hand
Contagious as a smile
Day before a holiday
American eagle labeled "SOO LINE"
Taking up the whole page
Wings spread talons extended
Bearing down on a little grinning mouse
"MILWAUKEE ROAD" signing its t-shirt
Holding a clenched paw up to the eagle
Middle finger pointed straight in the air
"LAST GREAT ACT OF DEFIANCE"
Reads the caption
Anything to get us through
Another dreaded day

Sue Doro is an RWU retiree member and former machinist, Milwaukee Road shops, Milwaukee, WI.

Building Rank & File Power on The Property

You have a problem in your terminal. Why not simply file a claim? Perhaps the word "file" is the clue. Ask any successful union activist. It's a mistake to simply rely on the contract and the claims process to settle problems. Successful organizing requires rank-and-file action, visible organizing on the shop floor in confrontation with management. For example, when the Local Chairman goes into the office to deal with a renegade Trainmaster, s/he may want to bring along as many members as possible to accompany him/her. Once the TM realizes that it is not just the LC and a single member making the complaint but the whole shift, the TM will be a little more cooperative.

Claims and grievances must of course be filed, but they should also be fought for by backing them up:

- Make them visible and public, so that all members (and others) are aware of what is taking place;
- Make them collective; that is, involve as many members as possible in the process;
- Make them active, getting the members themselves to take action to support the claims;
- Make them confrontational, so that members are mobilized to face the company officials who are causing the problems and have the power to resolve them.

Management's kind of power rests on control from above. When the employees organize themselves from below, and take initiative, that undermines management's control. Any sort of unified action by workers seems to erode management's authority, even if it is a simple symbolic action like wearing the same color T-shirts.

Ridicule

Management's power requires hierarchy, hierarchy requires authorities, authorities have to be serious, and seriousness leads to pomposity. The boss becomes a pompous ass, and ridicule becomes a tool to deflate a self-important supervisor. The railroad -- with its top heavy bureaucracy and out-of-touch managers -- is especially vulnerable here. Hardly a day goes by that rail workers don't see the absurdity and hypocrisy of the myriad policies, procedures, rules and regulations. Poking fun at management deflates the carrier. And humor and ridicule builds comradery and solidarity among the workforce.

The Group Grievance or Petition

To make a collective protest over an issue that concerns a number of co-workers, the union rep can file a group grievance together with a petition with as many names as possible from the department/terminal/etc. The petition can then be presented to the management official, ideally with as many workers as possible present. Again, this tactic unites the workers and deflates the power of the boss.

The Group Protest

In a group protest, a worker or union rep gathers other workers together and they go as a group to visit the management official. This type of action has several advantages: it tends to interrupt production; it can have an element of physical intimidation; and if planned discreetly and carried out suddenly, it has the added advantage of surprise. In addition, having the workers themselves confront the boss as a group is invigorating and empowering. The presence of the union is clearly felt by all.

Pulling Out of Management Run Programs

Often big corporations like rail carriers put great stake in their charitable contributions to organizations like United Way, and attempt to get employees involved. The union may elect to pull out of participation and encourage its members to boycott the program if the company refuses to concede on whatever issue may be at hand. (Members can be encouraged to still make donations, etc. but not go through corporate channels).

Joint union-management safety programs are another target that can be successfully boycotted. Numerous locals, divisions, and lodges from various rail unions have refused to participate in these sham programs if/when the carrier refuses to meet the union on equal terms and address the real safety hazards that exist in the field.

Pickets and Outside Pressure

Sometimes political pressure on the carrier needs to come from both inside and outside the workplace simultaneously. While a campaign of action may be taking place in various forms on the property -- mass claims, group protests, petitions, and various on-the-job actions (see pages 4-7 of this issue) -- the situation may demand other external pressures be applied as well in the form of informational picketing which alerts consumers, community members, customers, passengers, auxiliary workers and others to what's going on. These folks, plus various union leaders and members (both inside and outside of rail), religious groups, political and community organizations can all be solicited to support our side in the fight.

Conclusion

Workers have a vast array of weapons in our arsenal to combat the employer. This special issue of The Highball has outlined just a few, from the simple to the complex, from struggles involving a few workers to hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions. What tactics and what strategy are selected will be determined by you, your co-workers, and your leadership. What plan of attack we employ is limited only by our imagination. Roll the union on!

Struggle on the Kansas City Southern Heats Up

Darrin Cruey, UTU Local #1088 Shreveport, LA

A union brother asked me the other day what would make me happy and make being a railroad employee a good job for me? Without having to think very long, I responded, "Unity and Solidarity". I am totally confident that if we as union brothers and sisters truly have unity and solidarity, then all of our other serious issues will take care of themselves as a result of our standing together.

Since the last issue of *The Highball* went to press in July, the UTU and BLET have both held contract negotiation meetings with the KCS. We do not know what, if anything, will come out of these meetings, but we are hoping for the best. We are encouraged that the unions are truly engaging KCS, and that KCS is at least finally open to a discussion of our issues. We are positive that our finally coming together as union brothers has made the difference, and that our ongoing efforts will continue to make a difference in the weeks, months, and years to come.

In mid-August, KCS engineers and trainmen held our initial "Unity & Solidarity Red Shirt Weekend", which was a resounding success. An estimated 90% of the T&E out of Shreveport participated before the weekend was over, UTU and BLET members proudly wearing their bright red shirts with the words, "Injustice to One, Injustice to All!" emblazoned across the front, while "Strength Through Unity" adorning the back. It is very encouraging and

empowering to see those red shirts every time we meet up with our brothers between Shreveport and Jackson. Even more workers took part in the September action.

We have many more exciting and pro-active showings of unity and solidarity planned for the days and weeks ahead. We conducted our first ever UTU/BLET combined union meeting in August, experiencing the highest turnout ever for a union meeting in memory. Many of us have joined Railroad Workers United (RWU) and Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), and have become more active in our union. Others can be expected to join in the very near future as well. But most encouraging is the fact that the majority of our fellow workers appreciate the basic ideas that both RWU and TDU preach - unity, democracy, and solidarity of all union members.

Our hope is that what is happening in our local unions and on the KCS property in general will continue to spread on every railroad throughout the country! It is a proven fact that doing Nothing produces Nothing. Let's protect our railroad union brothers past, present, and future, as this is our obligation! Through unity and solidarity, there is truly nothing that the Brotherhood Of Railroad Workers cannot accomplish!

Strength Through Unity! Injustice To One, Injustice To All! Never Quit & Never Give Up!

COMMENTARY -- Let the The Spirit of Union Democracy Flourish!

Railroad Workers United commends the BLET rank-and-file for their consistent and unwavering support for direct elections of their union's top officers. In 2006, the membership first took the initiative, and voted 62% (nearly 2-to-1) to amend the bylaws to provide for such one-member-one-vote elections, this despite the fact that the BLET officialdom saw fit to stuff the ballot mailer with literature urging the members to vote no. And now in 2010, the members once again clearly stated their preference for direct elections, despite the efforts of some officials who would have liked to take it away. Once again, the BLET ranks have voted, this time by a 72% margin (nearly 3-to-1), to preserve their hard won rights, and have sent a strong message to their leaders: "We want the right to vote!"

It is RWU's hope that the actions of the BLET membership will serve to inspire the rank-and-file of other unions to do likewise and usher in direct elections in their organizations as well. Achieving the right to vote for officials at all levels of the union would represent for these unions -- as it does in the BLET -- a great step forward in democratizing these labor organizations.

However, as important as they are, democratic elections are by no means a panacea, a cure-all for all that ails rail

labor. Real internal union democracy is predicated upon much more than one-member-one-vote elections. We need to create a "culture of democracy" within our unions, including, but not limited to the following:

- Rotation of officers back into the craft, term limits or other restrictions to keep officers honest.
- A proportional delegate system whereby local unions are granted proportional voting strength at Conventions.
- The rights of initiative, recall and referendum.
- Reduction of officer pay and benefits to a level more in line with the average rank-and-file worker.
- Information sharing at all levels of the union whereby members are informed by all available means.
- Election of all designees who serve on union committees including safety committees.
- Ongoing education to inform the members about their union history, their contract, rights, claim filing, etc.
- Regular (and if needed, multiple) local union meetings to enable all members to attend each and every month.

RWU will continue to support these democratic reforms and to push for their adoption in the various labor organizations. It's high time that the members run their unions!



Railroad Workers United

Membership Application

Railroad Workers United needs you! If you believe that our unions should fight the carriers and not each other, then RWU is for you. If you believe that the carriers' "Behavior Based Safety" Programs do more harm to us than good, and If you want real union-based safety committees built upon cross-craft solidarity and rank-and-file control, then RWU is for you. If you want to help reform Railroad Retirement; if you wish to see an active, informed and mobilized union membership -- of all rail labor -- then RWU is for you.

Sign Me Up!! *I want to join and help RWU build labor unity, democracy & solidarity!*

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Cell Phone _____

Email Address _____

Union _____ Local # _____ Employer _____

Terminal _____ Craft _____ Years of Service _____

Union Position (if any) _____

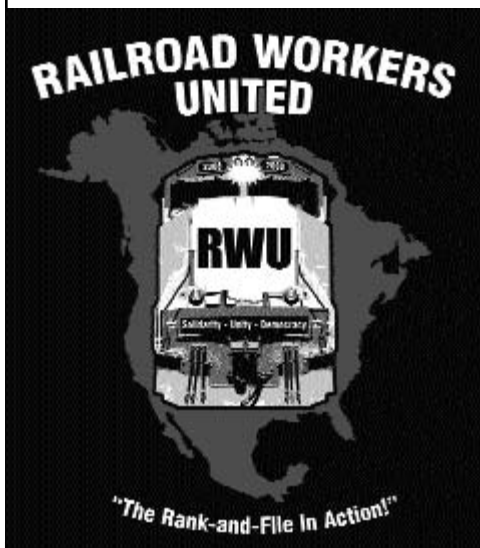
I'd like to join for (check one):

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

Clip and mail together with your dues to:

Ron Kaminkow, RWU Secretary P.O. Box 2131 Reno, NV. 89505

Get Your RWU Union-Made-in-the-USA T-shirts and Hats



T-shirts now available in Black or Gray in S, M, L, XL, 2XL, 3XL, or 4XL. RWU logo at left is on the front of the shirt.

Hats are available in Black, Gray or Red, one-size fits all. RWU Logo on the front is stitched embroidery.

Both T-shirts and hats are union made in the USA, 100% cotton and include the RWU 4-color logo.

T-shirts and hats cost \$20.00 each (15.00 for RWU members)
Postage Paid By RWU if mailed to addresses in the U.S.

Make your check to RWU and mail with your order to:

Ron Kaminkow, RWU Secretary P.O. Box 2131 Reno, NV. 89505

OR

Order and pay with your paypal or credit card via our website at
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