

The Local Union Delegate and You

A relatively obscure but important position within the railroad local union is that of "delegate". While the position's duties may vary somewhat from union to union, basically the duty of the delegate is to represent the local at the national (international) union level through participation in the Convention and/or other forums as may be designated by the union's constitution and bylaws.

Who Can Best Serve as the Local's Delegate?

Unfortunately, the position of delegate is often overlooked by the membership and more often than not, is simply assumed by the local chairman. While the LC may in some cases be a fine representative, the argument can be made that the LC should NOT also be the delegate. Here's why:

- The Local Chairman is often subservient to and beholden to the General Chairman, who often is entrenched and autocratic, insisting upon strict allegiance, obedience and conformity from his local chairmen in "his" committee.
- Policy questions, political direction and the bigger picture facing the union and organized labor are the rule on the convention floor. These are hardly issues that are the strict domain of a local chairman any more than any other member of the union, members who are in a more independent and objective position to do what's best for the union as a whole.

In any event, the local union membership should have the right to elect their local union's delegate(s), which is currently not the case in some rail unions.

What Positions Should the Delegate Take?

RWU encourages its members and supporters to consider running for local delegate in order to help move the respective unions in a more activist, democratic, progressive direction. Once elected, the delegate is responsible for taking a position on numerous questions. While some of these are specific to the individual union, others are more general and are relevant to all rail unions. Regardless of who ends up being your local union delegate, what position should s/he take on issues of concern to the local, the national, and the labor movement and the working class as a whole? RWU believes that all delegates should consider taking the following positions:

- 1 -- Support for one-member-one-vote for all officers at the local, general committee and national/international level;
- 2 -- Solidarity between all crafts and all unions of rail labor;
- 3 -- Support for coordinated bargaining between all rail labor unions;
- 4 -- Support for resolutions of solidarity, material and logistical assistance to

any group of workers fighting to defend themselves from the corporate attacks on their wages, working conditions and/or quality of life. This includes, but is not limited to raising awareness of important struggles, fight backs, strikes, lockouts, organizing drives or other current labor activities

- 5 -- Condemnation of and disassociation with any and all "Behavior Based Safety" Programs (BBS); support for real union-based safety initiatives.
- 6 -- Condemnation of any and all attempts by the rail carriers to employ single employee crews;
- 7 -- Support for a limit on union officer salaries to keep them more in line with what the average rank and file member makes;
- 8 -- Support for officer term limits and or rotation of officers back into the ranks to keep union leaders honest and in touch with the membership and the craft;
- 9 -- Support for future union convention to be held in major rail hubs (Chicago, Kansas City, etc.) as opposed to the current practice of "fun lands" (Las Vegas, Miami, etc.).
- 10 -- Opposition to any and all premature motions to adjourn the Convention while time still exists to complete the necessary work of the union; support for adequate time for democratic discussion from the floor on all issues.
- 11 -- Support a break with the two-party system that is controlled by the corporate agenda and back the creation of a Party of Labor.

Obstacles to Watch Out For at the Convention

Should you as a rank and file member choose to run for delegate, and should you be successful in your bid, there are bound to be roadblocks designed to break your independent will and your desire for reform. Here are a few tips to be aware of if/when you attend your union's Convention:

Strong Arming & Intimidation: The union officialdom, the "Old Guard", the "Good Old Boys", the "Bureaucracy" or whatever you choose to call them, together with their foot soldiers ("whips") often do not take kindly to "boat rockers" and "troublemakers" who hold dissenting views (see the previous listing of suggested RWU positions on issues). Politely ignore their threats and slander and vote your conscience.

Schmoozing: While the above is the "stick" approach to achieving conformity, the powers that be also make use of the "carrot" as well. Special invitations, introductions, glad handshakes, minor appointments, meals, alcohol and other petty perks are used liberally to rein in delegates who might otherwise wish to chart an independent course. Be aware of what lies behind such schmoozing and accept such offers with caution.

Distractions: Union conventions are usually held in fantasyland locations such as Las Vegas, Miami, Atlantic City, etc. (see item #8 from the list of RWU positions on the issues). Sunshine, sex, entertainment, alcohol, partying and other distractions abound. Whether intentional or **not, the net result is to remind the delegate that they are here to have fun, enjoy and relax** (see "Schmoozing above). But do not forget, you are there to serve the members, to conduct the work of the union, and are being paid to do so. Resist these temptations that are sure to dog you.

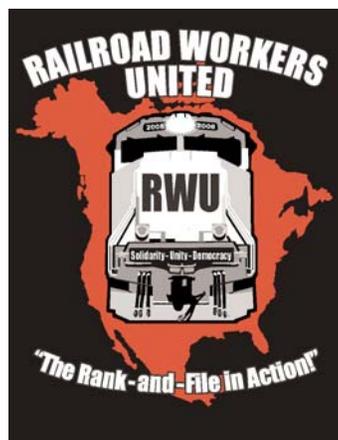
Parliamentary Maneuvering: The union machinery can orchestrate the convention to its advantage through control of the agenda, committee appointments, recesses, "special events", early adjournment, etc. Better bone up on your Roberts Rules of Order.

Microphone Time: The union machinery is organized and equipped. They hold the levers of power. And at the Convention, you can bet that they have their foot soldiers and their agenda (which of course, is the status quo). If you and your cohorts wish to be heard and to have an impact upon the debate and discussion, you need to get to the microphones as soon as your issues hit the floor.

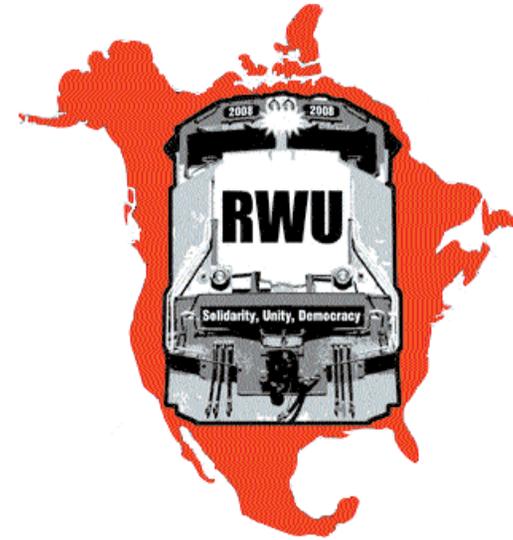
Conclusion

The role of union delegate is a significant one. If rank & file delegates to the Convention take their job seriously, pay attention and maintain their independence, we just might be able to make some much needed changes for the betterment of our respective labor organizations. Conventions are generally the highest decision making bodies of the union and while in session, offer a means to influence the direction of the union in the years ahead. So what are you waiting for: Jump right in and run for your local union's delegate!

This flyer is one of many produced and distributed by Railroad Workers United (RWU), a coalition of railroad workers in North America working to build a democratic fight-back movement among railroad workers regardless of craft, union affiliation, carrier, etc. For more information, contact us at the listings on the front of this leaflet. Join us!



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How to Represent Your Local at the National Level

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