

## RWU Survey on Task Overload

Chronic fatigue, new technology, coupled with a multiplicity of complex and ever changing work rules, policies, procedures and directives can lead to "task overload." To determine if the problem actually exists, RWU designed a short survey and urged railroaders to take the time to fill it out over the summer. We also sought to know, if such a problem does exist, how serious is it? Questions on the rules and policies, manpower issues

and technology were included. A comment section was added to gather ideas for how we might proceed to deal with this issue, reduce task overload and make for a safer workplace.

Over 200 workers completed the survey and the results were posted, clearly demonstrating that task overload is a real problem and a real safety issue that must be addressed. To view the results, please see the RWU website.

## Tax-Exempt Status

RWU set up a sister organization, the Railroad Workers Education & Legal Defense Fund (RWELDF) which is still in the process of achieving tax-exempt non-profit 501 c3 status. All paperwork has been filed with the state of Illinois and the federal Internal Revenue Service (IRS). We hope to achieve our tax-exempt status for the organization in early 2014. Those railroaders, retirees and supporters of the RWU mission will soon be able to make donations to this foundation and get a tax-deduction. While it cost RWU some initial investment to get this Foundation up and running, it is bound to pay for itself in the coming years. To make a donation to the RWELDF, please contact RWU General Secretary Ron Kaminkow at [secretary@railroadworkersunited.org](mailto:secretary@railroadworkersunited.org).



# Annual Report of Railroad Workers United

# 2013

## Summary & Overview

In 2013, Railroad Workers United continued to grow modestly and gain more stability. Our finances are in order and we have invested in the future, creating a tax-exempt 501c3 sister organization. We have continued to build a rank and file network of railroaders and confront the issues that are important to railroad workers. Through the newsletter, the list

serve, Facebook and other social media, RWU is getting its message across. Our Campaign Against Single Employee Train Crews has gained traction this year as has our Campaign for Union Based Safety. More and more railroad workers are coming to take the single crew threat seriously, and to understand just what a farce behavior based safety is.

We continued to build alliances with other workers in struggle, and to express our solidarity with other sectors of the working class throughout 2013. RWU looks forward to our Fourth Biennial Convention this coming year with optimism and the knowledge that our ideas and efforts are appreciated and supported by the rank and file.

## RAILROAD CARRIERS DEMAND CREW SIZE REDUCTIONS

1970s



1980s



1990s



2010s



## RWU Finances

RWU continues to fund its operations primarily from the dues of our members. Without membership dues, RWU would not exist. The dues income is augmented by financial contributions and sales of merchandise in our Store. Income is spent on stickers, copies, postage, etc. RWU continues to be run by railroad workers on their own time. We continue to work towards the day when the organization has the funds to pay a part-time staff person with the office skills necessary to handle the expanding workload required to keep the organization running. For further information, contact RWU Treasurer Chet Whyers at [treasurer@railroadworkersunited.org](mailto:treasurer@railroadworkersunited.org) or RWU General Secretary Ron Kaminkow at [secretary@railroadworkersunited.org](mailto:secretary@railroadworkersunited.org).

## RWU Membership

Membership continues to grow at about the same rate in 2013 as in previous years. While the majority of members continue to be drawn from the ranks and trainmen and engineers, a number of track workers, car knockers, clerks, dispatchers and others did join RWU over the course of 2013.

And while membership growth remains modest, a number of newer members have become more active in the organization. To join RWU, please see the website Home Page and click on *Join RWU* or contact RWU General Secretary Ron Kaminkow at [secretary@railroadworkersunited.org](mailto:secretary@railroadworkersunited.org)



## Steering Committee

The current Steering Committee, elected at the May, 2012 Convention, has served since then with a few minor changes. IAM member Jon Flanders retired in the spring of 2013 and is now an alternate. His slot was filled by Paul Jenvey, IBEW member from San Luis Obispo, CA. Steve Desavouret, TCU member from Chicago resigned and has been replaced by TCU member Daniel Scudder from Atlanta.

## The RWU Store

Our We Pay method of ordering and payment continues to be a success. We have a store for members (with most items discounted 25% or more) and a store for the general public. At either Store you can order and purchase a full line of RWU merchandise including hats, T-shirts (Including the new design depicted on this page), lapel pins, books, CDs, stickers and buttons. Members can now order their bundles of *The Highball* through their store. In addition, they can order flyers, make donations and pick up a T-shirt, all in one stop.

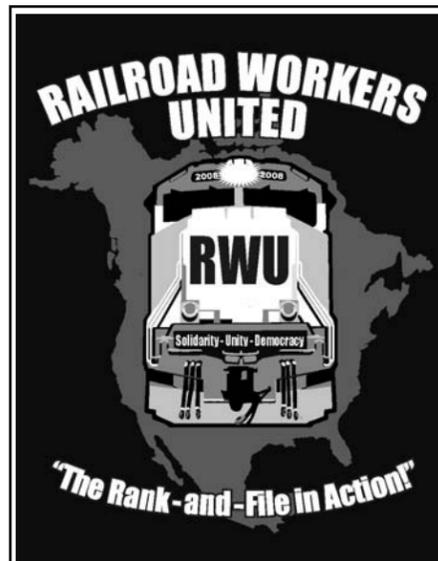
To place your order as a member, go to the RWU webpage *The RWU Store*. All proceeds from the sale of RWU merchandise goes to build RWU. Please contact the RWU Organizer J.P. Wright at [railroadmusic333@gmail.com](mailto:railroadmusic333@gmail.com).

## Ongoing Campaigns

Throughout 2013, RWU once again promoted three basic efforts. 1 - Coordinated Bargaining of All Rail Labor. Because rail industry bargaining was limited during 2013, our efforts were minimal. Nevertheless, this basic stand – that ALL rail unions must stand together and back one another up in contract bargaining – remains an RWU central tenet

2 - The Safety Campaign continues to win over more and more railroaders. Since its founding, RWU has taken the position that rail labor must break with the so-called "behavior-based safety" programs promoted by the carriers. Rather than focus on worker behavior, safety programs must focus on fixing the hazards that lead to injuries, accidents and fatalities. We must build union safety committees and positions that are independent of management. Nancy Lessin, a member of OSHA's Whistleblower Protection Advisory Committee and a life-long advocate of this perspective, continues to address UTU and BLET gatherings across the U.S.

3 - RWU is out front with the Campaign Against Single Employee Crews. The wreck at Lac Megantic, Quebec, together with the strike on the W&LE has propelled our campaign to the forefront. For more information including flyers, leaflets, resolutions and more, see the RWU webpage *RWU Campaigns*.



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In addition to these three major efforts, RWU has continued to vocalize our opposition to inward facing cameras. The ax finally fell when the KCS began installing the cameras this summer and a federal judge ruled against the unions' half-hearted attempt to stop them. UP followed suit and other major carriers are expected to install them as well. RWU still feels there is a fight worth fighting and that inward facing cameras are no solution to safety issues.

## Building the Rank & File Network

RWU continues to build a network of rank and file railroaders across North America. While some elect to join, others remain as "contacts" and "supporters". Inevitably, we hope to get the latter to become members, as full participation in all facets of the organization are essential. Our pinpoint map on the website displays graphically where our members and supporters reside and work. Most major terminals are represented. Through our list serve, website, newsletter and other media, we are hooking up rails from disparate regions who are ready, willing, and able to fight back. Putting various rails in contact with each other to assist one another in their efforts is one of the major activities of RWU. If you would like to be added to our list serve, see the RWU website Home Page *Receive RWU News Alerts* and fill out the webform.

## Railroad Workers Memorial Day

On Mother's Day, 2009, a young conductor, Jared Boehlke, was killed on the job in Selkirk, NY while working a single-employee RCO job in the hump yard. Like so many other railroad fatalities, Jared's death could so easily have been avoided had the carrier maintained a safe workplace. In response to this tragic accident, Railroad Workers United called for a national day of remembrance a few weeks later, on Father's Day Friday. Urging all railroaders to wear black shirts to work that day, we proclaimed the day "Railroad Workers Memorial Day", and have pledged the organization to observe this day every year in honor and remembrance of those railroad workers who have died on the job.

For the 5th year now, RWU members wore RWU T-shirts to work on the third Friday in June. We asked that all railroaders wear a black shirt and join with us in standing in solidarity with our fallen comrades. Help us to make a statement to the carriers that we will not go along with business-as-usual corporate sponsored safety programs that only look at our behaviors and fail to take an interest in alleviating the hazards that lead to accident, injury and death on the job. See the RWU website page **Remember Fallen Rails** for posters, flyers and more.



## The Upcoming 4th Biennial Convention

RWU will expand our Convention for 2014 to be a two-day affair. The date is set for April 3-4 in Chicago, Illinois. As the organization grows and matures, there is the need for more time to handle the business of the Convention while allowing time for needed discussion of strategy and tactics to build RWU over the next two years. Thursday will focus on workshops, discussions, strategy sessions and the like, while Friday will be devoted more to organizational business – resolutions, bylaws amendments, elections, etc. Guest speakers will be on hand both days.

## Fallen Rails Program

The fractured nature of rail labor has led RWU to initiate a program to honor each and every railroad worker killed on the job, regardless of what craft and what union the worker was a member of. When a brother or sister is killed in the line of duty, it should be the concern of all of us, whatever craft we happen to work or union we happen to pay dues to.

RWU has committed to do the following: Send cards and flowers to the family of all victims; Publicize each and every railroad fatality; Encourage our fellow railroaders to sign the register at the funeral home as an act of solidarity with the aggrieved family; Keep a running tally of all rails killed on the job and make this information available on the website and annually in the pages of the newsletter; Continue our annual Railroad Workers Memorial Day activities each year; Make future donations to both the National Workers Memorial and the National Railroad Memorial as funding allows. We have established a special memorial fund to fund these activities See the web Page **Remember Fallen Rails**. or contact RWU Steering Committee Member Rob Hull at [robhull9626@hotmail.com](mailto:robhull9626@hotmail.com).

## Labor Solidarity Efforts and Campaigns

On an individual level, a number of RWU members have become deeply involved in the greater labor movement: as delegates to central labor bodies; activists in their local Jobs with Justice and other labor groups, etc. RWU continued to adopt resolutions of solidarity with workers engaged in struggle such as the Mobile Rail Solutions Workers (IWW); locomotive builders (UE Local 506 in Erie, PA); and the Korean railroad workers. RWU encourages all railroad workers to never forget that they are part of the

greater labor movement and to support and participate in labor actions on behalf of any and all sections of the working class. In turn, a number of workers who are not railroad workers but are associated with the industry – locomotive builders, crew van drivers, seamen, longshore workers and others – have joined RWU as "Associate Members". If you would like to assist with our solidarity work, contact RWU Steering Committee member Paul Jenvey at: [paul.jenvey@gmail.com](mailto:paul.jenvey@gmail.com).



## RWU Resolutions for 2013

In 2013, RWU adopted a number of resolutions on various subjects. The majority of these resolutions focused on the rail industry: Support for a fired whistleblower from the RWU Steering Committee Steve Desavouret; support for the UP dispatchers efforts to organize a union; Backing the struggle of W&LE workers against single employee crews; Support for the efforts of workers at Mobile Rail Solutions to organize a union. Other resolutions focused on issues and struggles of concern to railroad workers: Support for locomotive builders at GE in Erie, PA.; Defense of medicare and social security; and resolutions of support for Pacific Northwest longshore workers and the workers in Greece.

These resolutions are all available on our website and have been mailed/mailed to the appropriate individuals/organizations concerned. While we will not achieve the change we need simply by adopting resolutions, they set the tone and outlook of our organization and let the world (and potential members) know just where we are coming from on issues of concern to railroaders and the working class in general. To view the resolutions from 2013, see the website link **RWU Resolutions**.

## Getting the Word Out There!

### RAILROAD WORKERS MEMORIAL DAY

"Black Shirt Friday"



A time for all railroad workers to mourn for the dead and fight like hell for the living.

### The Highball Newsletter

The RWU newsletter continues to be published each season in the standard 8 page 11X17 format. The newsletter continues to be mailed to all RWU members. In addition, The Highball is distributed by a network of rails (members and non-members alike) throughout North America. Some download and make copies on their own nickel, while others seek reimbursement from RWU.

We continue to mail bundles of the newsletter to members and supporters who place orders for bundles in increments of 25. We ask a nominal fee to help cover the costs of printing/mailling.

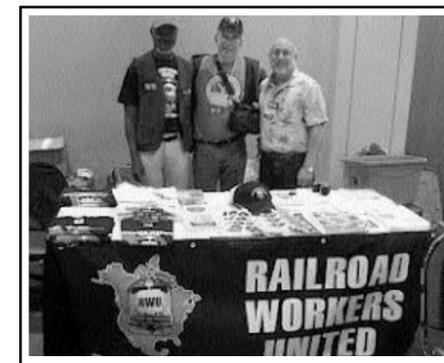
To assist with distribution or other aspects of The Highball, please email [info@railroadworkersunited.org](mailto:info@railroadworkersunited.org).

### Website

Our new Squarespace website is easier and quicker to navigate and utilize. It is more visually pleasing with the addition of photographs and graphics. It is easier than ever for folks to join and maintain their membership in RWU or to purchase items from our new Store. All back issues of The Highball are neatly cataloged along with all RWU Resolutions adopted by the Steering Committee since 2008. Campaign materials are available for download, and there is a wealth of information, making it one of the most comprehensive and informative websites available to the working railroader. Please take the time to look it over and let us know what you think. All feedback is appreciated. Please check us out at [www.railroadworkersunited.org](http://www.railroadworkersunited.org). And email your ideas to: [webmaster@railroadworkersunited.org](mailto:webmaster@railroadworkersunited.org).

### Facebook

The RWU Facebook page has grown to 700 members. This is a good place to get railroad related union info. The page is moderated by organizer JP Wright. Get involved in the discussions. The Facebook page is a great forum to ask questions or to get connected to like-minded union folks from all across the rail network.



### Mail Chimp

In an effort to upgrade the look of official RWU communiques, we have begun to make use of a new service called Mail Chimp. With it, RWU can now produce flashy on-line news updates, announcements and other communiques that are more visually appealing, using graphics, photos and links.

In this day and age, most people are overwhelmed by email. By dispatching attractive emails that are pleasing to the eye and easy to read, RWU stands a better chance of having our emails read by those who we want to reach – those that are looking for an alternative.

Plans are for a monthly bulletin summarizing each calendar month of activity to augment The Highball's quarterly publication schedule.

### List Serve

Members and non-members alike continue to sign up to receive "RWU News Alerts". We continue to use the google groups platform to post news of the rail industry, rail labor, and the labor movement in general to our members and supporters across North America.

Members and non-members alike can engage in discussion and debate on issues or simply opt to receive the posts of others on the list. The interactive list serve gives RWU, its Steering Committee members and all members the opportunity to make posts and respond if they like.

The list serve is often the way future members first learn of RWU and our activities and perspective.