

The RWU Store

The RWU Store continues to offer a full line of items. All proceeds from the Store benefit RWU. This past year we added a full-color embroidered RWU Patch that can be sewn and/or ironed-on to shirts, hats, jackets, grips, etc.

We continue to be very satisfied with our "Store Envy" platform, which is very user-friendly and can accept Pay Pal or credit/debit card payments online, and offers numerous advantages over the previous "We Pay" system that we had been using for the RWU Store over the previous couple of years.

Orders from the Store slowed once the BNSF single employee crew fight was over. But rails continued to order shirts, hats, stickers, bumper stickers, pins and more throughout 2015. In addition, members of the public, organizations, attorneys and others are free to make purchases from the Store, and often do so, providing RWU with much needed funding, publicity, and good public relations.

Railroad Workers Memorial Day

For the 7th straight year, RWU observed *Railroad Workers Memorial Day* on the Friday prior to Father's Day, June 19th, 2015. We asked that all railroad employees wear black to work in remembrance of our fallen fellow railroaders, killed in the line of duty.

Each year since 2009, RWU focuses on a specific incident, issue, or rail property. In 2015 we focused on the surprisingly high number of contract and adjunct railroad workers who were being killed on the job. These workers are employees of firms that contract with the railroads to provide such services as locomotive maintenance, rail car cleaning, maintenance-of-way projects and just about every other aspect of railroading. These workers sometimes are poorly trained, work for smaller companies, usually have no union representation, and are not subject to the scrutiny and oversight that the Class I railroads are subject to. When they get hurt or killed, their hardship goes relatively unnoticed. Mistakenly, we may not consider them rails because they do not work *directly* for the railroad. But they work right alongside of us on railroad property performing essential tasks that make the railroad run.

Official Website

The RWU Website continues to be a major source of information for our members. This Winter we have plans for a total overhaul as we move to a new server that is more attractive and user friendly. Every leaflet, flyer, Resolution, issue of the newsletter and other RWU materials are available and are archived on the website together with separate articles from each issue of *The Highball*. We are currently looking for a new co-webmaster. If you have the skills and time to assist, please email: info@railroadworkersunited.org.

Facebook Page

The RWU Facebook Page continued to grow and expand in 2015. The Page had 4008 followers in January and ballooned to over 7000 by Fall. This growth did not come without controversy, as different members and non-members alike had differing expectations and desires for what the Page could and should be. The Facebook Committee and the Steering Committee continue to grapple with the complexities of providing the best possible Facebook Page to serve the organization and railroad workers in general.

Check out the RWU Facebook Page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Railroadworkersunited/>. If you have comments or concerns about the Facebook Page, please contact J.P. Wright at railroadmusic333@gmail.com.

RAILROAD WORKERS MEMORIAL DAY

"Black Shirt Friday"



- Fathers Day Weekend -

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

For more information, call 206-984-3051; see the website: www.railroadworkersunited.org

Steering Committee

The RWU International Steering Committee (ISC) continues to meet monthly, usually on the first Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. The Steering Committee members do not get paid, nor do they have rights to mark off "union business", so meetings are scheduled when most members can attend, in order that we are able to achieve a quorum. In addition, other RWU members have attended the meetings in 2015. Some have become regular participants. All RWU members in good standing are welcome to attend, listen and/or participate. Also, we invite guests to attend the meetings throughout the year - friends from other unions, worker, citizens and environmental groups - as needed.

The current Steering Committee (elected in April 2014) is largely drawn from the operating crafts - represented by the Sheet Metal, Air, Rail & Transportation union (SMART) and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen (BLET). But we also have representation from members of the National Conference of Firemen & Oilers (NCFE), Transportation Communication Union (TCU), and the Teamster Canada Rail Conference (TCRC).

In 2015, one ISC Member and one Alternate resigned for personal reasons (they remain members in good standing) and were replaced by others, one a SMART member and the other a BLET member.

The current RWU Steering Committee:

Mark Burrows, UTU #1433, CP, Chicago, IL
Ron Kaminkow, BLET #51, Amtrak, Reno, NV
Paul Matchett, WSOR, Janesville, WI
Dreadsen Owen IWW #520, MRS, Chicago, IL
Hugh Sawyer, BLET #316, NS, Atlanta, GA
Daniel Scudder, TCU/BRC #6354, NS, Atlanta, GA
John Vitaska, NCFE #395, CP, Chicago, IL
James Wallace, UTU #305, BNSF, Lincoln, NE
Jen Wallis, BLET #239, BNSF, Seattle, WA
Andrew Weir, TCRC-CTY #240, CN, Sarnia, ON
John Wright, BLET #78, CSX, Louisville, KY

Alternates

Robert Hill, BLET #239, BNSF Tacoma, WA.
Ryan Cornia, UTU #1554, UP SLC, UT
Ross Grooters, BLET #778, UP, Des Moines, IA

You can reach any Steering Committee member individually or the entire ISC by emailing info@railroadworkersunited.org.



Annual Report of Railroad Workers United

2015

RWU Matures and Develops in 2015

Railroad Workers United continued to progress throughout 2015. The challenges of single employee train crews, improper maintenance of infrastructure, chronic crew fatigue, inward facing cameras, draconian attendance policies and harsh discipline, long and heavy trains, blame-the-worker safety programs and more has certainly kept us busy this past year. In addition, we have attempted to go on the offensive. All too often workers' organizations adopt a defensive posture where we lay in wait for the employer to attack us ... and then react. Therefore, RWU has decided to bring our issues of safety to the public. From these efforts, we hope to not only educate the public about railroad worker issues, but to forge an alliance with community and environmental organizations around rail safety that will have the power to assist railroad workers in our efforts to win better conditions

In the workplace (see the Conference Report below).

All the while throughout the course of 2015 we continued to fight on our traditional fronts listed in the previous paragraph. The organization continues to grow and diversify, as workers from all crafts continue to join. The effort for the coming year is to now get these new members *active*.

We have built a sister organization to handle our education and legal efforts that has obtained tax-exempt non-profit status under the IRS 501c3 code. Now, railroad workers, our friends and families can receive a tax deduction when helping to fund our efforts (see inside for more details).

Please read over this little Annual Report for a better idea of just what your organization has been up to in Calendar Year 2015.

Conference - "Railroad Safety: Workers, Community and the Environment"

When RWU took on the fight to stop single employee operations of BNSF trains in 2014, we pledged that once the TA with SMART-TD was defeated, RWU would now go on the offensive and bring this question - together with the whole issue of railroad safety - to the general public. Together with numerous labor, community and environmental organizations RWU sponsored three conferences in 2015, two on the west coast and one in Chicago, "*Railroads Safety: Workers, Community & the Environment*." In all, more than 300 railroad workers, union activists, environmentalists and concerned citizens - many of them movers & shakers in their communities - attended these conferences.

The non-railroaders came away with a better understanding of the conditions that railroad workers face everyday on the job, while the railroad workers gained insight into the concerns of community and environmental activists. Everyone who participated learned a series of valuable lessons: 1 - that we can have "jobs and the environment"; 2 - that in the face of the enormous

power wielded over us by big business, workers and citizens are natural allies; 3 - that we have fertile common ground on which to build an alliance; and 4 - that we are now ready, willing and able to support each other in the struggles ahead.

Dozens of organizations in the three locales where the conferences were held - Richmond, CA; Olympia, WA; and Chicago, IL - endorsed and otherwise assisted to make these conference happen. There is huge support for us railroaders out there. With our assistance, members of the public can easily understand and acknowledge our issues, and can appreciate that these issues are of deep concern to them too.

RWU made some valuable contacts with seasoned community activists, and for the first time, railroad workers and our issues are now on their radar. Rail-



road workers no longer have to fight our battles with the rail carriers alone. We have allies - in labor unions (longshore, oil, and electrical among others); environmental organizations (Forest Ethics, Sierra Club, Greenpeace and dozens more); and community groups across the country. We plan to nurture our relationship with these organizations in the coming years in the hope that we will be able to count on our new found friends in future battles.

Future conferences - including possible locations of Baltimore, New York (Albany), the Gulf Coast, Twin Cities, Texas and Lac Megantic, Quebec - are some of the locales under consideration

For more information on the conferences, a complete listing of endorsing organizations, an explanation of workshops and discussions, and plans for future conferences and actions, please see the website that RWU set up especially for these conferences

www.railroadconference.org

Newsletter

RWU's quarterly newsletter *The Highball*, continues to grow and improve. Our network of distributors continues to expand slowly. Some members (and supporters) elect to receive a bundle of the newsletter (generally 25 to 50 copies) each issue, while others make their own copies at home, work, or the copy shop. Thousands of copies get distributed each issue now. In addition, the newsletter is available on-line as a pdf on the website, Facebook and through the list serve as well for our on-line readers. All members are encouraged to help distribute *The Highball*. If you are interested, please email secretary@railroadworkersunited.org.

We try to keep the newsletter topical and focused on issues that matter to railroad workers today. In addition, the newsletter covers RWU efforts and functions as a mouthpiece for the organization. We covered national bargaining and the efforts to build union bargaining coalitions; various aspects of railroad safety; the looming threat of inward facing cameras; the wreck of Amtrak #188; the ongoing struggle against single employee crews on W&LE; organizing efforts of crew van drivers coast-to-coast; and the RWU sponsored safety conferences and the effort to build a labor-community alliance around rail safety. RWU Organizer Mark Burrows continued his series of commentaries on the state of rail labor, and we continued to run a regular Editorial in each issue. And we began experimenting with two features - reports from railroaders in other countries; and a "Railroad Art & Culture Page" for rails to publish their photos, poems, tags, etc.

By focusing on the current issues that are important to the working railroader, and by refraining from frivolous "feel-good" topics (e.g., golf tournaments, scholarship funds, officer re-elections, etc.), RWU is well on the way to making our newsletter *The Highball* the most relevant and best read newsletter among railroad workers of North America.



Railroad Workers Education & Legal Defense Foundation (RWF)

The Railroad Workers Education & Legal Defense Foundation (RWF) was originally set up in 2013 as a "sister" organization to serve as the education and legal arm of RWU. The Foundation has now been recognized by the U.S. federal government as a tax-exempt, not-for-profit charitable foundation. According to the Department of the Treasury, "We have determined that you are exempt from Federal income tax under section 501c(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions to you are tax deductible under Section 170 of the Code. You are also qualified to receive tax deductible bequests, devises, transfers or gifts under section 2055, 2106, or 2522 of the code."

RWF's mission is to provide grassroots education and leadership development programs that help railroad workers understand the issues they face, to build unity and solidarity among railroaders, and ensure democracy and transparency in our unions. To date, RWF has been called upon to fund a number

of efforts, including the September Chicago rail safety conference and registration fees for an RWU member to attend a "Just Transition" conference of union members in Washington, DC.

RWF's work is made possible by the generous donations from railroad workers, family members and retirees, as well as from supporters who share our vision of a labor movement that uses rank-and-file power to fight for all working people. In the coming years, we hope to gain the support of progressive, pro-labor community/social change foundations. RWF does not and never will solicit or accept funding from any employer-related or anti-labor sources.

For more information about tax-exempt organizations, including Railroad Workers Education & Legal Defense Foundation, go to www.guidestar.org. Our Federal I.D. is 37-1711643.

Speakers

RWU had official representatives speak at a number of events throughout the course of 2015. In addition to our presentations at the three safety conferences that RWU sponsored, we presented at the Oil Train Summit in Pittsburg, PA. and also in Spokane, WA. RWU members addressed rallies in both Chicago and Lac Megantic in October, as well as a Labor Day gathering in Woodstock, IL, where Eugene V Debs had spent time in jail following the Pullman Strike in 1894. In addition we conducted numerous on-air interviews (see *Using the Media* below).

RWU Trademark

In 2015, RWU took up the question of a "trademark". The Steering Committee decided to allocate the necessary funds and apply for an officially recognized Trademark for our name, slogans and logo. Former RWU Co-Chair Ed Michael did the research and applied for trademark status. Sometimes in 2016, RWU should have its official trademark status.

Translation

In the Fall, the RWU Steering Committee agreed to translate our website and official documents into both Spanish and French. In addition, we will produce stickers (in limited numbers) in both languages. We want to get our message of solidarity, unity, democracy and action across to *all* railroaders in North America - and that includes Mexico and French speaking Canada.

New Resolutions Adopted in 2015

During the course of 2015, the RWU Steering Committee adopted six new Resolutions on a variety of topics. The first three Resolutions were newly updated versions of resolutions that RWU had adopted in previous years: Crew Fatigue; Single Employee Train Crews; and Inward Facing Cameras. Ongoing developments necessitated that the Steering Committee revisit the previous resolutions and to clarify, modify and make additions to them as necessary.

Three other resolutions were adopted that were brand new this year. The first was adopted in June and focused on the need

for Improved Track Maintenance. Two others were adopted in the fall. The Resolution in Defense of Charged Railroad Workers supports the Canadian railroaders in their efforts to defend themselves against the trumped up charges they face in the wake of the Lac Megantic disaster. The Resolution on RWU Autonomy & Independence reiterates and expands upon RWU's insistence that it remain independent of any and all unions, political parties or other organizations, as stated in our Bylaws.

These and all previous RWU resolutions can be found on the RWU website.

Using the Media

Throughout 2015, RWU has issued press releases on numerous issues and actions, and our leadership and members have spoken out and been heard by the public.

The media took great interest in our three safety conferences and did stories on-line, in the newspaper, on radio and TV. When Amtrak #188 wrecked in May, the mainstream media including AP, NPR, CNN and CBS eagerly contacted RWU to solicit a railroad worker perspective. Every time the media takes interest in our activities and opinions, we gain invaluable contacts with reporters that we can call on to cover our issues in the future.

Our database of news media outlets and specific reporters greatly expanded in 2015. It serves as an invaluable resource and has assisted us to get the voice of the rank & file worker heard. It is available to the RWU Steering Committee and members alike, a great benefit of RWU membership.



Finances

At the January 2015 meeting of the Steering Committee, RWU reported a total of \$11,738.93 in the bank. By the December meeting it was reported that we had \$12,381.49. This does not tell the whole story however. When RWF achieved non-profit status, RWU used the surplus funds rendered from the west coast safety conferences as "seed" money for our sister organization (see Railroad Workers Education & Legal Defense Foundation this page). As a result, RWF reported a year-end total of \$3662.89 on hand.

Throughout much of 2015, our combined assets totaled around \$18,000. The vast majority of this came in the form of membership dues from new members along with membership renewals. Sales of merchandise from the RWU Store, along with donations account for the rest. While both of these sources are a valuable addition to our funds, membership dues continues to be our major source of income.

The rail safety conferences on the west coast concluded with a surplus. We sponsored raffles at both events and also did a "hat pass" at both, resulting in over \$3000 that has been deposited into the RWF account for future conferences, seminars, and educational events.

RWU established a petty cash fund to be used by the Treasurer and/or the General Secretary not to exceed \$50 to be used as needed between meetings of the Steering Committee.

Organizing

The first four months of Calendar year 2015 saw a continued growth in RWU membership on par with that in 2015. By Spring the number of new members joining had dropped off significantly, but once again rebounded in the Fall. As in the past, the majority of the new members are drawn from the operating crafts, but we also saw new members join RWU from the ranks of the "non-ops" as well. In addition, a number of workers from related industries joined as "Solidarity Members".

Most new members continue to join RWU on-line and this method of joining, renewing and paying dues is expected to grow in the coming years. This has simplified the way new members can join and has greatly assisted the General Secretary's job.

In addition to new members, RWU developed scores of new "contacts" with railroad workers and others, who - while they have not yet decided to join - support RWU and are interested in our efforts. Many of them signed up for the Google Groups list serve and are active on the RWU Facebook Page. Our hope is that many of them will become members in the coming years.

Finally, a new policy was adopted whereby RWU members get three notices to renew, once every six months. Failure to renew membership after the third notice results in being dropped from the "good standing" membership roles and forfeiting the many benefits of membership in RWU.

Solidarity Actions and Efforts

RWU continued our efforts at building solidarity with other workers and groups related directly and indirectly to the rail industry within North America as well as overseas.

We continued our practice of adopting resolutions of support for various unions and workers in struggle including: the postal workers and the "Grand Alliance", striking oil refinery workers, and the Doro Chiba Japanese motive power union, among others.

We continue to build our relationship with the United Electrical (UE), supporting the efforts of the Renzenberger crew van drivers to organize and assisting the locomotive builders in their fights with GE.

RWU made token contributions to a number of organizations when approached (usually \$50.00 or so) including Workers Independent News (WIN) who report on our issues; Labor Beat (who produced a

video of our Chicago conference); and United Electrical (UE) who allowed us the use of their union hall for our Chicago conference.

We tested the waters with a quick on-line fundraiser when it appeared that the W&LE trainmen and engineers might renew their strike against the carrier. That effort raised \$780.00 for them in a matter of days.

Finally, we adopted resolutions of support for the struggle of the residents of Lac Megantic, Quebec; sent representatives to both the Canadian and Chicago rallies; and adopted a resolution of support for the railroad workers facing trumped up criminal charges on the MM&A.

Among railroad workers throughout North America, we continue to preach the gospel of universal solidarity of *all* railroad workers without regard to craft or workgroup, union affiliation, date of hire, carrier or nationality. "An injury to one is an injury to all!"