

RWU Conducts Rail Safety Workshop for Community Activists in Chicago

On July 6, RWU hosted a forum titled: “No More Lac Megantics! - Citizens, Railroad Workers & the Fight for Rail Safety.” This was one of 60 events across North America to mark the third anniversary of the Lac Megantic oil train disaster, when a runaway oil train derailed and exploded, leveling several buildings, killing 47 people. Among the approximately 35 attendees at the United Electrical workers union hall were environmental and community activists who have been organizing around a range of issues, together with a few railroad workers. The program was broken into four different segments: 1) The Need for a Labor–Community Alliance - 2) Factors Leading to Lac Megantic Tragedy; Drop the charges against Tom Harding and Richard Labrie. - 3) Existing and Potential Hazards on the Railroads; What communities need to know. - 4) The Struggle on the Wheeling & Lake Erie –workers on the front line in the fight against single-employee crews. Former RWU Co-Chair Mark Burrows gave each presentation with a Q + A discussion following each segment.

For railroad workers fighting for a safer, dignified work environment, building and forging alliances with the general public is critical. The degeneration of our working conditions since the 1980’s indisputably prove that our unions’ “fightback” strategy of lobbying and “getting-out-the-vote-for-our-”friends” is worse than useless. Only when we successfully galvanize the potentially massive support from the general public, who have a vested interest in safe railroading operations, will we be able to decisively resist the carriers’ relentless assault on us. There are numerous fronts in the fight for social, economic, political, and environmental justice. We all face the same enemy - corporations, their investors and local, state and federal governments that enable and run interference for them.

The second segment focused on the facts, circumstances and



policies that were responsible for this horrific tragedy in Lac Megantic. In essence, we turned the tables, and the now defunct Montreal, Maine & Atlantic (MM&A) Railway was put on trial, “charged” with the ultimate responsibility and culpability. In addition, Transport Canada and the FRA, the applicable government regulatory agencies, were “charged” as accomplices for their rubber stamping of the dangerous policies, practices and culture at M&MA. See www.hardingdefense.org and the article on Page 1 for more analysis of this important case.

The third segment explained the most critical safety issues railroad workers are confronted with: ridiculously longer and heavier trains; the threat of engineer-only trains; the existing hazards of chronically fatigued workers due to barbaric work schedules and deferred/neglected maintenance of rolling stock and infrastructure. The final segment explained the stakes involved at the W&LE and made a preemptive appeal for support and solidarity, should the workers there get forced out on another strike. The entire forum was later broadcast on the local cable access network and can be found on You Tube under “Railroad Workers and the Fight for Rail Safety.”