

Letters from Our Readers

Furloughed Thanksgiving: A Thank You to UTU #1374 and Railroaders Everywhere

The following letter was penned by a new-hire trainman in 2015 who was furloughed together with hundreds of others coast-to-coast last year. It is reprinted here as a fine example of solidarity and brotherhood, and a reminder that the new hire is the future of the union. We must all remember to always take care of each other, both new and old alike.

Being furloughed is no fun. None at all. I think most everyone here has been cutoff at some point in their career; some for longer and some for shorter. I for one have been furloughed for about 6 months and counting. I have about 1/8 a teaspoon of seniority so I can't hold anywhere in my two-hour call radius and no money to move myself, let alone my expecting wife and our son. The best guess I can get from my union brothers and management for a call back is sometime this spring unless the bulk of the other 18 guys in front of me in line have since quit. This isn't why I'm writing all this, but do allow me to pontificate and lament for a moment so that the impetus of my true message may be understood.

I joined up at CSX as a conductor trainee in January. The family business owned by my parents had been doing poorly and was about to be sold. With the new owner making it clear he would be replacing my management position with himself, I needed a new career. So I decided I'd give the career that three generations of my mother's side had: railroading with the B&O. I loved it! I had never had a job that was so unique in its challenges to mind and body. On top of that, trainee pay was a bit of a raise for me! I couldn't wait to mark up and start making that big money. Even with a family, I didn't mind the time away that much. I'd eat and pass out when we got to the away terminal, and wake up when I got called to take the return trip, usually with the same crew I had been training with on my way out. The guys and girls I worked with were great by and large, the conversations lively, and the trips usually went quick even when we were racing the clock's law. As my mark-up date loomed, the hammer dropped. "We'll finish your training and mark you up, but you'll be going straight to furlough status." At least they let me get certified first. Many out there haven't been so lucky.

Right now I'm working as a rail loader for a company in Ohio, as a temp, where we load the newly produced Chevy Cruze into auto racks for shipping. The plant is set to shut down for a couple months early in December while they retool to produce a new body style, so I'll be laid off *AGAIN!* Minimum wage in Ohio is \$8.10 an hour, and I make \$8.90. Some weeks I work 55 hours a week, some I work 12. We're on food stamps, heat and electric assistance, and we almost got our only car repossessed when our final payment went to 90 days past due. If it wasn't for family helping us, we would be truly done. Perhaps homeless. I am the only one working as we can't afford child-care if my wife worked as well. Family isn't available to help watch him.

True, I have precisely zero intention of not returning to the railroad but in the meantime people won't even look at my resume. Most people out there know what we get paid and know they can't pay that. They also know I won't hang around long because of that. I have applied to Class II's and III's, applied

for more non-railroad jobs than I can count; come nothing. I either hear back from places saying I am over qualified (I DO have a college degree with management experience) or I hear nothing at all. Needless to say, I wasn't feeling very thankful this past Thanksgiving. When I left for work yesterday I watched the moon set and was climbing all over tri-deck auto racks by the time dawn approached. Dusk came and went while I was finishing my last few tracks and the moon had risen for my commute home. All for around \$90 gross.

Today I woke to a text message from a number I knew was associated with the UTU, asking if my house was the red one. I said, why yes it is. The reply said to check my back porch as he didn't want to wake anyone by knocking on the front door. I went downstairs to find two crew pack boxes of food and a small box of treats for my 3 year-old son. Tons of food! It wasn't just a pallet of green beans; it was name brand sauce, stuffing mix, canned pumpkin, mac and cheese, pasta, hot chocolate; all the basics and then some. I have enough name brand canned tuna for a week's worth of lunches at work and enough food to eat for a week, especially when you figure in the gift card to a local grocery store to get fresh meat. I'm the lowest I have been ever in my life at a time when we are supposed to be celebrating a plentiful harvest, yet my black Thanksgiving had been turned into a mini Christmas. This is what unions are in their spirit.

During my famine, the local has checked up on me multiple times to see if I'm holding up and to keep me up to date on things, even if the news isn't good. When they call and ask for me they ask for Brother Maynard. Today they brought me food for my family's table. I have been furloughed longer than I was in service, yet I have not been forgotten.

So gripe as we may about our national leadership, management getting their way, or any number of other things, today I give thanks. I give thanks for and to my local, and I give my thanks for you, my fellow railroaders. For all who watch each other's backs to keep our brothers and sisters safe; to be a helping hand even when that brother or sister brings it upon themselves, or when they have been barely admitted to the club when the uppers hand us our hats and tell us to wait by the phone. Happy Thanksgiving to all of you out there whether you're working or with your family. You are in my thoughts and prayers; and this will surely be a holiday that I will never forget for the rest of my life.

Thank you.

Your Brother
in service,

Ian Maynard

