

Opinion & Commentary

Unity - Solidarity - Democracy: Needed Now More Than Ever!

In conjunction with the urgent need to conquer unity and solidarity amongst ourselves, as well as democratize our union, we need to go on a long, overdue counter-offensive to fight for a UNIFORM, NATIONAL standard of wages and working conditions throughout the ENTIRE rail industry. As the carriers take their divide and conquer game to a higher level, the stakes for us multiply exponentially.

It requires more effort to take candy from a baby than for the carriers to shamelessly manipulate and take advantage of us being divided into 13+ different craft unions. This then makes it easier for them to secure their sweetheart, individual customized on-property agreements; slicing us up from carrier to carrier, terminal to terminal, with the brutal precision of a surgeon eviscerating a soft stick of butter with a dull chain saw.

Last summer when the BNSF blindsided our brothers and sisters in GO-001 with the infamous "engineer-only" tentative agreement (TA) bombshell, the vast majority of rail workers around the country instantly grasped the magnitude of the stakes involved. While we applauded and saluted the "troops" on the front line for their 5-1 thrashing of the TA, we warned of inevitable future attacks; anywhere and at anytime.

We are all under attack in some way, shape or form, from the day to day skirmish on the "playing field" to the next treacherous backroom deal being hatched right now as you're reading this. Just as we all had a stake in last year's battle at the BNSF, all rails should be concerned with what's going down at the Canadian Pacific (CP) in the U.S.

Last December, the SMART-TD conductors on CP Rail (US) decisively rejected CEO Hunter Harrison's "blood-money for anything-goes" vision of modern railroading (i.e. the CN model) by a 30-1 margin. For a summary of the worst sordid details, see the Fall 2014 edition of *The Highball*: "Don't be Fooled by Candy-Coated Promises; Fight Back!!!"

A few months ago, while the SMART-TD and BLET General Chairmen were working overtime in the backroom, desperately trying to find enough lipstick to slather on that "pig" of an agreement for Round Two, CP viciously ambushed us from behind with a Section 4 notice, pre-approved by the Surface Transportation Board. If implemented in its totality, this would result in approximately an \$8.00 per hour wage cut, as well as further deterioration of our working conditions. To fully appreciate just how insidious THIS attack is, a little background history is in order. (Sorry). A few years after our 47 day strike in 1994, the Soo Line (subsidiary of CP), short-lined its main line to Kansas City, along with the "corn-lines" throughout Iowa and Minnesota. The streamlined Soo Line was now Bensenville Yard, the main line from Chicago - St. Paul - North Dakota - Canada, along with a few auxiliary branch lines. With the CP "motherhood" maintaining 33% ownership in the "new" railroad, wages and working conditions were gutted, legitimized by a BLET contract, for those who chose not to permanently relo-

Stay with me here it gets even *better*. Citing their need for ... decreasing congestion and promoting more efficient movement of rail traffic in the Greater Chicago Terminal...", the plan now is to merge us all into one big, happy seniority district from Sabula Jct., IA, Milwaukee, WI to Hammond, IN (Indiana Harbor Belt - Gibson Yard).

OK, here's the main punchline. Item #3 states: "Train crew positions headquartered within the consolidated territory will be established pursuant to the terms of the Agreement between the DM&E and the BLET, effective October 01, 2010. So in essence, the short line once "cast adrift", (with a 33% lifeline), now reemerges to replace the comparatively tolerable Soo Line wages and working conditions, with a BLET-sanctioned hellhole. A secondary punch line is that the DM&E South is predominantly engineer and asst. engineer. The fate of conductors who are not qualified engineers could be a problem. A third punch-line is the DM&E agreement doesn't provide health insurance for retirees, as the Soo Line and some other Class 1 agreements do. Soo Line employees crossing off the days on their "jail-cell" calendar could be SOL, myself included. This will all be decided by an arbitrator in the near future. There is something very wrong when this scenario can even be posed!

Needless to say, this doomsday scenario was utilized as a gun-to-the-head threat to frighten the SMART-TD conductors into ratifying Round 2 of the CN model TA (must've been one hell of a sale on lipstick). In spite of this serious threat and some loud cheerleading by a few LC's along the system, we once again rejected the opportunity to sell ourselves into "railroad-slavery" by a 2-1 margin. Now the BLET engineers are getting their first opportunity to sell out *their* souls, dignity, quality of life, as well as their co-workers and ultimately

rail workers around the country. If the BLET ratifies this, an arbitrator would no doubt say, "Well, if it's good enough for the engineers, then it should be good enough for the conductors". My opinion is that this logic would then ultimately spread like cancer throughout the entire industry. Even if the majority of engineers do the right thing and reject it, an arbitrator could *still* ram the DM&E contract down our throats.

I know things are tough all over, but I feel this saga at CP Rail makes a convincing case that #1: All of us rail workers, regardless of craft, need to be in ONE industrial union, (or until such time, at least *function* as one), and #2: We need to fight for one master national agreement governing wages and working conditions for ALL! If we don't fight to improve the

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