

Don't be Fooled by Candy-Coated Promises: Fight Back!

In the last several months, the carriers' have intensified their attacks on our jobs, our very livelihoods, with contract proposals, that if implemented, would result in massive reductions of the workforce. Those of us fortunate enough to remain gainfully employed in the industry would face an intensified assault on our dignity, quality of life on and off the job, and the safety of us as workers, as well as the general public.

So far, this assault has been waged on two separate fronts: #1 – The well known attempt by the BNSF to negotiate the infamous single employee train crew agreement, and #2 – The NOT so well known attempt by the Canadian Pacific (CP) Railway to ram through an agreement identical to the “blood money in exchange for anything goes” working conditions that have been in place on Canadian National (CN) properties for over a decade.

The vast majority of rail labor instantly understood the implications of, and the high stakes posed for all of us by the tentative agreement proposed to the members of SMART- Transportation Division (TD) GO-001. Our brothers and sisters at the BNSF on the “front lines” of this battle scored a decisive victory, not only for themselves, but for all of us.

While we rightfully salute them and celebrate OUR victory over the BNSF management and the treacherous elements of the SMART-TD leadership, rail labor needs to become concerned about the tentative agreement in play at the CP, as this issue of *The Highball* goes to press.

Truth be told, rail labor needed to be concerned when these devastating changes to our work environment and culture were first introduced on the Illinois Central before the CN acquired it. Just as we rightfully feared the BNSF single crew agreement could spread like wildfire throughout the industry if implemented, the danger of the CN model gaining a stronger foothold in the industry is a threat that all of rail labor will need to take seriously.

The sordid details of the CN model merit a separate column. In lieu of that, the short version of the story goes something like this: In exchange for a substantial raise in the hourly rate (Conductors are being offered \$42.50 per hour for a basic ten hour day) we will give up virtually all agreements governing work rules and conditions that our forefathers fought for and secured for us in decades past.

A ten hour basic day? Space does not allow for a history of the fight for an *eight* hour day, courageously waged by our forefathers in the labor movement over one hundred years ago. The lives of dozens of workers, their families and supporters, were sacrificed in these historic battles. All of them, especially the Haymarket Massacre martyrs, executed by the city of Chicago, have to be spinning in their graves.

Any union official who signs his name to a ten hour basic day is guilty of ignorance of labor history at best, and treachery and betrayal of the working class at worst. (Sorry, I had to vent). In the



terminal I work in, the carrier has already eliminated approximately 75% of the regular jobs that we had as recently as three years ago, adding a proportionate amount of the workforce to the extra-board. Without yard bracket start times that protect regular jobs on each shift, they can simply call for work around the clock on an ‘as-needed’ basis.

They've already implemented this practice, in lieu of any new agreement, flagrantly violating our current one. Being able to say, “Do as you're told, file your grievance later,” is a good gig if you can get it, compliments of the Railway Labor Act. There will be no distinctions between the work that road crews or yard crews can perform. A road crew will flat switch if they get into the terminal with time left to work. A yard crew can make up an outbound train, then take it as far as they can. Have a road grip packed at all times as you'll never know if you're going to end up in a hotel or be home for dinner.

Conductors are working and inspecting their trains if a carman is not available. Carmen are rolling by outbound trains because all utility jobs have been eliminated. With only a few regular assignments, seniority becomes less of a factor, especially if system seniority is trashed with the proposed agreement. This is a sneak preview of the future of modern railroading: The maximum amount of production by the least amount of employees (whose benefits are such a costly nuisance).

We can all be very afraid OR we can emulate the example of the workers at BNSF. An educated, organized, mobilized rank & file determined to fight for our safety and dignity by any means necessary CAN prevail over the carriers, treacherous union officials, and the government.

Mark Burrows currently serves as the Organizer for Railroad Workers United. He is a member of UTU Local #1433 and works as an engineer for CP Rail in Chicago, IL. This is the 9th installment in this series.

