

Railroad Workers Unite in a Cross-Craft Rally Nationwide

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Railroad workers united and came together in cross-craft rallies across the U.S. on Wednesday, May 3rd in support of a fair contract and to send a message to the Class I rail carriers: "Leave our healthcare alone!" With the ongoing national contract bargaining at a stalemate, the carriers are simply refusing to negotiate. They are demanding substantial increases in workers' healthcare premiums, deductibles, co-pays, and prescription costs. There has been a national push for direct action coming from the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division (BMWED) of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), one of thirteen unions on the U.S. railroads. As well as extreme healthcare concessions, the railroads are also demanding that the BMWED take lousy raises and receive no back pay. Negotiating has gone nowhere for over two years now, as the railroads continue to go backwards in each bargaining session despite the attempt of BMWED - and other rail unions - to reach a just and fair contract for their members. The members have demanded that their healthcare be preserved, and being that the railroads remain adamant, the rank & file decided that it is high time for the rail unions to take action.

For direct action to be viable we need a united rail labor to fight off railroad concessions. After numerous failed attempts to ask the other rail union bosses for unity, the BMWED decided - with the help of its Communication Action Team (CAT) - to organize cross-craft "Healthcare, Not Wealthcare" rallies. The BMWED targeted strategic locations in Chicago - CN Home-wood Yard, NS Calumet Yard, and UP Proviso Yard - as well as CSX Radnor Yard (Nashville, TN) and UP Roseville Yard (Roseville, CA). The union injected their fulltime internal organizers to build a cross-craft rally at each location. In addition, the union mobilized more than 1,000 CAT "Frontline Communicators" - on-the-job organizers who keep members informed of national bargaining and union information - to organize high profile rallies in their respective terminals across the country.

The BMWED teamed up with local communities and allied organizations such as *Jobs with Justice* and the *Illinois Single*

Payer Coalition to get the message out. Dozens of rallies coast-to-coast depicted all rail crafts standing together in unity. While it may seem small compared to the roughly 150,000 working railroad workers in the U.S. this action is just the start of a movement of rail workers who are fed up with concessions and fed up with railroad fear tactics and mistreatment. Rail workers across all crafts are tired of being spit upon by the rail corporations that were built with their blood, sweat and tears, and

sometimes with their brothers' and sisters' lives. The railroads received the message loud and clear. Norfolk Southern in Chicago tried to silence the workers at the Calumet Yard, blocking part of the yard entrance with intermodal trailers, thinking that it might keep the workers from attending the rally there. Throughout the event, NS had the railroad police stalking attendees, and later called the Chicago Police in an attempt to further intimidate the workers.

"Rail workers across all crafts are tired of being spit upon by the rail corporations"

While they plead poverty, Class 1 railroads in the U.S. made \$14 billion in profit last year. They simply want to increase their profits off the backs of their employees. The BMWED put together a Committee to evaluate the national healthcare plan of all the unions combined. Their findings proved that by restructuring, more than \$100 million in administration costs would ensue. The union claims those savings would amount to enough that no railroader under the plan would incur any rise in healthcare costs, while maintaining the coverage that is already there. These findings were presented to the carriers early in bargaining, and the railroads agreed that indeed, there was at least \$70 million in savings there. However, the railroads then did an about face and claimed they still wished to raise workers' costs. That, fellow workers, is called greed. We cannot and will not accept that. We are here to tell the railroads that they will not sacrifice rail workers and their families at the altar of profit. We deserve a piece of the wealth that we have created!

We call upon all of rail labor and all union leaders to set aside union politics and sectarian divisions and join in solidarity. The combined power of the railroad carriers is far too great for any one union to defeat on its own. The track maintainers and the BMWED have pointed the way. It is time for other railroad workers to join in the fight and claim what is rightfully ours, together arm in arm. "An Injury to One is An Injury to All!"



Railroad workers and allies rally at the big Union Pacific yard in Roseville, CA on May 3rd, one of three major terminals that the union sought to target around the U.S. in the effort to win a good contract.