

Opinion & Commentary

Operating Craft Unions Are Helpless as HH Divides and Conquers at CP

To get started, I'll update some developments that were left hanging as the Fall 2015 issue of *The Highball* went to press. (see "Unity - Solidarity - Democracy: Needed Now More Than Ever") Despite the SMART-TD conductors on the Soo Line portion of the Canadian Pacific (CP) "mothership" decisively rejecting CEO Hunter Harrison's offer of "blood money for anything goes" twice in the past year, in a stunning setback for unity and solidarity, the BLET engineers ratified the agreement 152-130 with 25 not voting.

So as the Soo Line conductors emphatically, defiantly told the CP's CEO in no uncertain terms, "HELL NO!!", Hunter Harrison (H.H.) apparently consulted his "Divide & Conquer Manual for Dummies" for some step-by-step guidance on how to overcome this obstinacy on the part of the unappreciative, ungrateful conductors. This manual is only available exclusively to CEO's, their chain of command, politicians, and government run institutions, such as prisons. (Any perceived connection between the railroad and prison is purely coincidental). I can only offer my personal opinion/educated speculation as to some of the "enlightenment" that H.H. may have gotten from this manual and his subsequent thought process. Perhaps in Hunter's head, it went something like this:

"Back in the day, my heroes (the railroad robber barons of yesteryear), aided and abetted by the violent, lethal repression of the federal militia, crushed the Pullman strike and the American Railway Union (ARU) in 1894. The rail bosses were no doubt concerned as that commie rat bastard Eugene Debs was attempting to organize ALL rail workers into ONE big industrial union through the ARU. To this day, all of us rail bosses remain the beneficiaries of the compliant workforce that continues to this day to be divided into over a dozen different craft unions. It's a bit unnerving to fathom that before we smashed the ARU, half of rail labor had been quickly won over to this concept. Then I calm myself down by getting back to the present, where all the leaders of the established rail unions have this "divide & conquer" thing firmly under control. It is impressive how these union officials all maintain an iron grip over their respective "fiefdoms", while having to fend off the growing chorus of, 'Boo hoo hoo, the company's so mean to us, boo hoo hoo, the union's not doing anything', by these low life scum crybaby workers. Then there is this ragtag bunch of misfits called Railroad Workers United, who aspire to emulate Debs' efforts to build cross-craft unity, solidarity and militancy amongst rail workers. That's OK since enough rail workers are content to just "piss and moan", then remain comfortably numb. That's one of the extra benefits of this CN model hourly rate agreement. When I get my way, almost everyone will be working 12 hour shifts with most of them on-call. They won't have the physical and/or mental energy, much less the time to organize resistance to the status quo. That's RIGHT! The beatings will continue until morale improves! HA HA HA...etc (sounding here like an over-served hyena with an evil sinister tone). Life is good except for those SMART-TD conductors who refuse to sell their souls, dignity, safety, co-workers, structural and physical integrity of their bodies as well as their quality of life. Not to worry, I'll just turn to the engineers. Over the years, management - together with the union leadership - have cleverly nurtured an elitist, aristocracy of labor mindset even though most of them have no clue as to what that even means. Since they attend separate union meetings, even though they still work side by side in many situations, most engineers don't get to hear the conductors

eloquenty explain how working 12 hour shifts on these labor intensive, undermanned flat switching jobs day-in-and-day-out will simply grind their respective bodies to a pulp. May the next underpaid or unemployed 20 year-old, come on down! Most engineers could care less that their big money raise will come from a small percentage of the benefits I will not have to pay for the laid off conductors. HA HA HA, am I good or WHAT?! Once the engineers sign on the dotted line, I'll be able to force this on the conductors by hook or crook if they don't surrender in disgust. This is like taking candy from a baby, HA HA HA!"

At a special BLET contract meeting with an International VP and Soo Line/DM&E General Chairman (GC) there to sell this agreement, at least one engineer attempted to raise the concept of solidarity with the conductors. It was reported that the GC's response was, "You don't need to concern yourself with what the conductors are doing." Hunter Harrison would have been proud. As long as we continue to settle for and accept union "leadership" like this, one that brazenly instructs the membership to "F&@# your fellow workers", H.H. and his ilk can rest assured they have nothing to fear.

But we at RWU stand and advocate for the 180 degree opposite; UNITY, SOLIDARITY & DEMOCRACY. We strive for the day when the rail bosses tremble in fear at the prospect of an educated, organized, mobilized, and militant rank & file that stands up and refuses to be divided and conquered!

I hope you have enjoyed my streams of consciousness, rantings and "ragings" in these last 14 issues of *The Highball*. If sharing my 40 plus years of perspective in the rail industry has helped to inspire feelings of entitlement and empowerment amongst you, my brothers and sisters, then I must have been doing something right. The rant you just read will be the last and final in this series. By the time this issue of the newsletter goes to press in January, I will be free from industrial wage slavery (i.e., retired). While I look forward to taking back some of the life that's been robbed from me by the rail carrier, I plan to stay active in RWU in various capacities, and continue to pay homage to the legacy, vision and ideals of Eugene V. Debs.

I'm going to close with a few of shout-outs: 1) Ike, thanks for mentoring me when I was just a hot-headed rebel 36 years ago. 2) DJ, I'm counting on you to rock the house in 19. And 3) Thanks to all you rails for reading my column the last few years, and I look forward to continuing the discussion this spring at the RWU convention in Chicago! Solidarity Forever!!

Mark Burrows currently serves as the Organizer for Railroad Workers United. He has been a longtime member of UTU Local #1433. Until January 1st when he retired, Brother Mark worked as an engineer for CP Rail in Chicago. He first hired out in 1974 with the C&NW. This is the 14th and final installment in this series. Mark will continue his activism with RWU into his retirement and will continue to contribute articles and commentaries to *The Highball*.



For those wishing to see the entire series of all 14 of Mark's commentaries dating back to 2012, they are archived online at the RWU website on the Newsletter Page.