



Railroad Workers United

Solidarity • Unity • Democracy

The Rank & File in Action!

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Rail Rank & File Must Reject Craft Union Officials' War of Words

Rank & file railroaders need to take a strategic approach to bargaining, and remain focused on our long-term goals and objectives. As such, the current war of words among the rail craft union "leadership" is a diversion. RWU encourages all railroad workers to avoid the provocations and hence temptation to be drawn into the divisive finger pointing, name calling, and blaming.

Railroad workers – especially younger rails who have ten, twenty or thirty more years to work - must remember that we are in this for the long-haul. Regardless of whether one supports or opposes the TA negotiated by the National Carriers Conference Committee (NCCC) and the Coordinated Bargaining Group (CBG), this will not be the last contract we ever negotiate. In fact, this contract is partially retroactive, and in a few short years, we are back at the table once more to negotiate the next national agreement. Do we want to go into those upcoming negotiations divided? Will all the accusatory vitriol of today assist us in building the necessary unity and solidarity we need to win a good contract next time? And it is not just national handling that we need concern ourselves with. Many subjects of bargaining - in fact most - are now handled within "on property" agreements. Many of these negotiations are on the horizon. Will we be united going into these efforts if we buy into this kind of fratricidal rhetoric that is being served up by these irresponsible union leaders?

RWU has maintained since our founding a decade ago that the disparate rail unions must come together as one if we expect to win at the bargaining table. One of three original campaigns, the *RWU Campaign for Coordinated Bargaining* takes the position that "United we bargain, divided we beg"; and that "An injury to one is an injury to all", and finally that "No one settles until all settle". This is not a radical strategy or some pie-in-the sky notion. Rather, this is basic, fundamental trade unionism. But we are perennially faced with a glaring obstacle, the fact that we are divided into more than a dozen unions and as a result, cannot act as a union should naturally act. There is unfortunately, no "railroad workers union". As a direct result of this glaring failure on the part of craft unionism, we are perennially divided, severely handicapped, always fighting a battle with one hand tied behind our backs. The quagmire we are now in is not new. The myriad craft unions each take their turn, this or that one settling first, leaving the others hung out to dry, while the name-calling and accusations run amok.

The basic tenants of solidarity teach us that it is unacceptable to have White railroaders in one organization, Blacks in another, women in another, Hispanics in another, Catholics in yet another, and so forth. We understand and appreciate the fact that railroad workers of different background, genders, race and creed must ALL stand together as one. That is what a union is. Why then is it acceptable that we be divided by craft and group into these absurd craft unions, which then form illogical and ineffectual "coalitions", only to break down and proceed to fight viciously with one another? As Eugene V. Debs – founder of the American Railway Union - stated more than a hundred years ago: "*Why should the railroad employees be parceled out among a score of different organizations? They are all employed in the same service. Their interests are mutual. They ought to be able to act together as one...*"

Regardless of the disgraceful way that so-called union "leaders" choose to address one another, it is imperative that rank & file railroaders be civil, courteous, and respectful of one another and each other's views on this contract. If you believe it is a good contract, vote *for* it and explain why. If you think it is fundamentally lacking, but is the best that we can get given the context at this time, vote *for* it with that caveat. And if you think it is a terrible contract, explain why, and vote *against* it. But for rank & file working railroaders, it is unacceptable to slander and degrade one another.

Union officials in positions of leadership in the various craft unions tend to be older, in many cases approaching or even past retirement age. Some will not be around for the next round of bargaining. And most all will be gone within a decade. Practically none of them will ever perform service under this or any other future agreement. As such, we rank & filers have differing interests from them. So, we must not take our cues from them when they refuse to even pay lip service to the obvious need for a single unified bargaining coalition, and instead irresponsibly whip up craft animosity and inter-union strife. We will be here for many years to come. We will continue to work alongside each other. And we will live and work under the contracts that are negotiated. Therefore, we must not be drawn into the union officials' war of words, but rather, continue to forge solidarity and unity with one another across craft and union lines if we hope to succeed in the long run.

Solidarity Forever!

Ron Kaminkow
RWU General Secretary