

The Latest in Railroad Recklessness & Irresponsibility: The “Super Pool”

John Maynard Keynes once said, "Capitalism is the astounding belief that the most wickedest of men will do the most wickedest of things for the greatest good of everyone." When we go to the ridiculous extremes that Keynes foresaw, we end up where we are now, at an “extinction-level” capitalism that will not only eventually destroy those unfortunate enough to be targeted, but will eventually take down the very people that have decided to use this philosophy. There is no better example of this than the BNSF creating what they have called Super Pools. The Super Pool concept is nothing more than another way to use fewer employees to run trains so the carrier can make a bit more money, and safety be damned for the employees and the general public.

A Super Pool puts together different pools originating from the same terminal, but traversing different territories to create one giant pool. Everyone that previously worked one of these pools will be expected to work every other pool designated for that terminal. You will not know what pool you will work until you're called. An example of this is the Super Pool created in Galesburg, Illinois. It encompasses six different pools, traverses over 1600 miles, and takes in different modes of operations on each territory. These pools now operate with significantly fewer employees than were required prior to the consolidation of these pools. There are approximately one hundred and sixty engineer turns and the same number of conductor turns with extra boards also covering this Super Pool. So what you have is approximately four hundred workers not knowing when they are going to work, where they are going to work, and often times very little knowledge of the territory that they are going to be working on. As anyone that has worked any amount of time in train and engine service can tell you, this is a prescription for disaster. Local Chairmen are already reporting an uptick in discipline and rules violations. It's only a matter of time, according to those forced in to this pool and union officers affected by the creation of this monstrosity, before some tragedy occurs.

These pools have come about because of a provision known as Article 9. It is a BN agreement signed in 1985, that allows the carrier to combine working pools, with the objective being to use fewer employees to staff these pools. The problem is

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that conditions have changed dramatically. Where there were 4 or 5 people on a crew back then, there are now only 2 and those 2 work more trips and longer hours. Trains were shorter and lighter and there was far less traffic. In 1985 there were far fewer rules and regulations than there are now. Basically, 1985 was a whole different railroading universe than 2017.

The BNSF also uses the argument that they have created these Super Pools all over the system and nothing bad has happened. That interpretation is up for debate. Discipline and rules violations have increased where these pools have been created. It is just pure luck that these infractions have resulted in nothing worse than someone losing their job. And why wouldn't there be more rules violations? Every pool has



BNSF is leading the pack on the unsafe implementation of so-called “super pools” whereby trainmen and engineers are expected to be qualified on more than a thousand miles of territory, while given just a handful of qualifying trips on each segment.

its own set of rules and its specific interpretations. It is simply impossible to keep track of all the GCOR, the Federal Code of Regulations, General Manager Notices, Superintendent Notices, General Track Bulletins, etc. Besides, using the fact that you are doing something dangerously stupid and justifying it because nothing catastrophic has happened yet, is frighteningly immature behavior. It's like saying there is no danger in “Driving Under the Influence” because I'm 60 years old, I've done it at least once a week since I've been 16 and nothing bad has happened yet. We try to steer our children away from this type of behavior so they don't end up in a rehabilitation facility or a prison when they grow up. Yet, we let a corporation that is responsible for trains that run through populated areas that have the potential to kill hundreds, if not thousands of people in the event of a derailment, to use this type of justification for creating these pools.

To combat this dangerous creation of the BNSF it is essential to document, document, document. When there is an increase in discipline, make that fact known to everyone. No one in their right mind would believe that all infractions are because lazy employees don't care about their jobs, their safety, or the safety of those people who live along the right-of-way. Any correspondence sent in opposition to these Super Pools should be copied to local union officers, state and federal representatives, any safety agencies that are involved in railroad safety and anyone else you can think of that might have any influence. Spread the word to your brothers and sisters. If enough of us take the time to document and help collect evidence against these Super Pools, we have a chance to bring some sanity back in to our workplaces.

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