

Kansas City All Rail Crafts Coalition Meets on Workers Memorial Day

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The Kansas City All Rail Crafts Coalition (ARCC) conducted a public forum on April 28th – Workers Memorial Day – at the local Teamsters union hall that drew 29 union activists from five different unions - track workers (BMWED), machinists (IAM), electricians (IBEW), firemen & oilers (NCFO) and truckers (IBT), to discuss both rail and highway safety, and how we build an effective alliance to promote both. Brother Aaron Dixon, local rail machinist and member of both RWU and ARCC, introduced the event by linking the single employee crew issue to the Lac-Mégantic disaster, and the absolute necessity for rail workers - and all workers - to build solidarity between crafts and industries, and to overcome any false divisions that hold back working people from achieving both safe workplaces and our rightful prosperity.

Brother Dan Bonowitz, SMART-TD #1409 Legislative Rep. gave a thorough report on the FRA's current request for comment on autonomous processes in the rail industry, and the public opposition to its implementation (see article on Page 1). The rail carriers want to expand the use of automation to the ends of enhancing profits, reducing workers on the payroll, and increasing harassment of employees, such as employing drones to ensure rules compliance, and using PTC as a justification for the downsizing of train crews.

He was followed by Jerry Woods, President of Teamsters #955. Brother Woods spoke to the issue of the recent influx of autonomous highway vehicles and the many challenges
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this presents to Teamster drivers today, including the concept of "platooning" in which a lead tractor/trailer is followed by one or more within 20-30 feet behind, all controlled by blue-tooth. Legislation in favor of "platooning" has been introduced in the Missouri legislature. Meanwhile, the state of Kansas has introduced legislation to increase gross vehicle weight from 80 to 90,000 lbs. All in all, Woods painted a dim picture of highway safety as a result of politicians being firmly in the pocket of corporations.

Judy Ancel, retired Director of Labor History at University of Missouri Kansas City, concluded with a brief history of the local labor movement, including the actions of the Knights of Labor in the 1880's and the "Great Southwest Strike" of 1885. She pointed out that rail unions' isolation from the mainstream organized labor movements must be overcome if we are to succeed. Ms. Ancel hosts a weekly radio show "Heartland Labor Forum" on the local community radio station KKFI, and is an active organizer in "Jobs with Justice" which recently collected over 180,000 petition signatures calling for political finance reform in Missouri.

I left this forum with a feeling of growth, of building networks, and gaining vital new allies. What we hope to build with ARCC is not a new idea by any means. Jilting the apathetic is not easy, but brothers and sisters, getting involved in "the greater good" *really is* easy. And with every friend and ally we make "the greater good" becomes more and more achievable.