

## ***You Railroad Workers! Don't Waste Time Mourning - Organize!***

RWU conventions are always a great opportunity to step back and collectively assess where we are at in organizing resistance to the bosses' relentless attacks on our dignity, quality of life, safety and by logical extension, their threats to our very lives. Interacting with rails from around the country, as well as international guests, sharing our respective horror stories fuels my anger and class hatred, while the camaraderie shared amongst so many dedicated fighters fuels my inspiration. Meeting several new RWU members attending their first convention and celebrating our ten year anniversary as an organization validates that we must be doing something right. How we can improve on that is an obvious question posed.

It's fair to say our jobs on the railroad are unique compared to the average industrial jobs. With the division of labor, compounded by extreme manpower cuts, we are virtually isolated from each other. This exacerbates our challenge to organize the unity and solidarity we need within our respective crafts, much less amongst the other various crafts. The barbaric schedules many of us work can add to our isolation from the rest of the working class. As the attacks on rail labor intensified in the early 1980's, a virtual no-brainer consensus began to develop that we would be in a much stronger position to defend ourselves if we were united into one industrial rail union, or at least function as one united entity vs. being fragmented into a dozen plus different unions. Unfortunately that widespread sentiment has not been able to generate much traction.

That's why the formation of All Rail Craft Coalitions (ARCC) in several major rail terminals around the country is an important development. This is a direct response to the grotesque, pathetic debacle this most recent round of so-called "national" bargaining degenerated into. As always, one union, or in this case, one of the three bargaining coalitions settles, thereby automatically setting the bar and precedent for the other unions. Usually it's been one of the operating craft unions, the UTU or the BLET, taking turns to see who can settle first. In my personal opinion, for this reason alone, the leaders of the operating craft unions, past and present, merit nomination into the "Rail Labor Hall of Shame". This time though, the UTU and BLET outdid themselves, actually negotiating and settling together in unison.

While this tissue-thin veneer of "unity" might have pleasant optics to the operating crafts, it was a vicious knife-in-the-back to the non-operating crafts who opposed the tentative agreement. Scandalously indifferent to these sentiments, the UTU and BLET leadership sold this to their members with, "There's no major work rule changes here so hurry up and ratify this before the bosses change their minds." This thought process is seriously flawed. Why would the bosses confront a major component of the work force in "national" bargaining when they're still licking their wounds from the hurt BNSF workers put on them with their attempted engineer-only agreement in 2014, and with the exception of the Wheeling & Lake Erie RR workers, they've had little to no opposition getting their coveted rule changes one terminal, property and/or carrier at a time (i.e. CN & CP)? Rather than risk another humiliating defeat, much less a possible uprising, they seem to be content with their piece-meal, path-of-less-resistance strategy for now.



**The railroad union Organizer and founder of the American Railway Union, the father of industrial unionism in the USA, Eugene V. Debs urges a crowd of workers to organize along industry lines more than a 100 years ago.**

The end result of "pattern bargaining" amongst a dozen plus different unions boils down to this: Heads = the carriers win; tails = the workers lose. If we're lucky we at least get to call it in the air so we can pick our poison. In the past, after this meticulously choreographed scenario plays out to its predetermined conclusion, the inevitable knee-jerk discontent gradually dissipates and fades away back to business-as-usual. This time feels different. In the 40 plus years since I started railroading, I have never witnessed or experienced anything resembling this phenomenon of these ARCC's. Is it possible that a significant number of railroad workers are getting close to the proverbial "breaking point"? If so, Glory Hallelujah, misery loves company, let's get this party started. I wholeheartedly encourage any and all disgruntled rail workers (you know who you are) to get involved in a local ARCC. The BMWED leadership merits credit for this initiative.

In 1893 Eugene Debs founded the American Railway Union (ARU) to organize all rail workers into one industrial union. At its peak the ARU had more members than all of the other rail "brotherhoods" combined. Though the 1894 Pullman strike was being won on the ground, the ARU was ultimately defeated by the federal militia, at the behest of the bosses, aided by the shameless treachery of the "brotherhoods" leadership. From a speech Debs gave in Chicago Nov. 24, 1905, motivating for the Industrial Workers of the World: "As long as this great army of workers is scattered among so many craft unions, it will be impossible for them to unite and act in harmony together. Craft unionism is the negation of class solidarity. The more unions you have, the less unity; and here, in fact, you have no unity at all. In this state you can do nothing to improve your working condition. You are substantially at the mercy of the corporations".

As this issue goes to press, school teachers and their allies are in the streets all over the country it seems. It is in our interests as workers to support them, and rails can learn something from their and the French rails' determined defiance.

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