The Profit System's Complete and Total Moral Bankruptcy

Summertime 2018 seems to be as good a time as any for an updated reality check. Where to begin? Let’s see, the carriers' relentless drive to increase productivity (and by logical extension - profits), by any means possible, continues to put workers and the public at risk. Check. The carriers continue to get more creative in their interpretation and application of existing contractual verbiage. That’s a nice way of asserting that their increased brazen arrogance knows no boundaries as they flagrantly violate existing agreements, which were already relatively carrier-friendly to begin with. Check. The existing union leadership makes public proclamations expressing their righteous indignation, but the mutually accepted terms of engagement ultimately render them incapable of any meaningful opposition and/or resistance. Check. Railroad workers’ discontent continues to deepen and fester. Check. Unfortunately, the vast majority of these discontented rails remain tethered to the indisputable limitations of being divided into 13 different craft unions. Check. The Federal Railway Administration (FRA), after barely offering token, obligatory lip service and feebly going through the motions to validate their supposed mission to safeguard workers and the public, then proceeds to rubber-stamp the carriers' regulatory wish-list. Public comments on autonomous trains anyone? Check. Beyond our immediate reality in the rail industry, various corporations pollute our air, water, soil, food, etc. with not only impunity, but overtly sanctioned by the very regulatory entities whose stated mission is to protect us from these hazards to our collective health and well-being, with the same chutzpah the FRA does us. Check. In this country and around the world, workers are abused and exploited, forced to work harder and longer hours for less and less pay. Check. Contrary to the delusional lies of a few science and fact denying politicians and corporate executives, environmentally and ecologically speaking, our planet is going to hell in a hand basket. Check. The world economy is not exactly inspiring working people to dance in the streets, though more and more are taking up marching. Check. Every day, dozens of civilians, working-class folks just like you, me, your friends and family, who simply have the misfortune to live in a part of the world with vast energy and mineral resources, are slaughtered in cold blood, virtually ignored by the world’s collective conscience as unfortunate collateral damage in an ever expanding geo-political gangland turf war over those resources. Check. While certainly not a new development, it now feels like it is a semi-regular occurrence for working class folks, predominantly people of color, to be pumped full of lead, often in the back, by local, state and federal entities whose stated mission is to “serve and protect”, for reasons that defy moral justification, regardless of what the “official” investigations conclude. Check. Trump’s sadistic cruelty towards working-class families seeking refuge from economic, political and/or social oppression south of the border is repulsive, as is the sanctimonious hypocrisy of liberal politicians and pundits who conveniently forget Obama’s sordid record on this. Check.

“Make America Great Again!” Really? Again?! Maybe I’m missing something but I’m just not feeling any warm and fuzzy nostalgia for a society whose history begins with the mass murder of the continent’s original inhabitants because they were inconveniently in the way, and with the violent kidnapping of a half a million Africans, because our original quest for greatness required slave labor to do the dirty work. Steel magnate Andrew Carnegie can hire thugs to murder striking steelworkers in Homestead, PA in 1892, then go on to build Carnegie Hall in New York City, and be worshipped as one of society’s elites. We need not hurry to return to that level of greatness.

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Though I’m just starting to get on a roll, space limitations compel me to wrap up this raging rant. So what the hell does this have to do with railroad workers in the Summer of 2018, some of you may ask? As rail workers, our lineage goes back to the brave, courageous workers who fought for their dignity and sometimes gave their lives in countless battles - the Great Rail Strike of 1887, the Pullman Strike, the Great Shopmen’s strike of 1922 - to name but a few chapters from our as-yet-unfinished struggle for dignity in the workplace and in society at large. Likewise, the ideological lineage of today’s breed of bosses can be traced back to the original “robber barons” who reaped such unimaginable horrors on our forefathers. To the naked eye they may not appear to be as overtly ruthless and violent towards us today. I would argue the main reason for that is simply that we are not yet challenging them as past generations of workers did. While today’s bosses may appear to be oh so much more sophisticated and cultured, I submit that their forefathers’ vile, bloodthirsty lust for profits-at-any-cost, with the prerequisite bankruptcy of morals and values, were handed down from generation to generation.

After the rail bosses tried to literally crucify rail workers Tom Harding and Richard LaBré to deflect attention from their own criminal culpability and responsibility for the horrific tragedy in Lac-Mégantic, it’s not surprising that the bosses at Norfolk Southern are apparently so drunk on their home-brew Kool-Aid that they feel emboldened to sue their workers to recoup some financial losses from a recent accident those workers are alleged to be responsible for. The carriers’ relentless assault on our safety, well-being and dignity - all to increase their profits - is evil and immoral, as is their disregard for the public in general. The citizens of Lac-Mégantic can vouch for that. It is the same evil and immorality that is behind the atrocities committed against people like us here and around the world by rogue corporations and governments.

The strong, militant rail unions we strive for will need to drive a revitalized labor movement as part of the universal struggle for social, economic, political and environmental justice. For you discontented rails, joining RWU is a good place to start.

Mark Burrows has served as Organizer and Co-Chair for Railroad Workers United. He recently retired after hiring out in 1974, working as an engineer for a combined total of 37 years for Chicago North Western and the Soo Line/Canadian Pacific in Chicago, Illinois. He continues to be an active member of RWU.