Commentary

**It’s High Time for Disgruntled Rails to Stand Up and Be Counted!**

Belated Season’s Greetings to all of you in Highball land. So what kind of gifts and good tidings can rails expect from the carriers in 2019? Well, if the scenarios posed by the various articles in this issue are any indication, I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but it looks like we’re going to end up wishing it was only a lump of coal. So what are we going to do about it? The way I see it, we basically have two options: 1) Continue to take it, or 2) RESIST. I try to avoid being presumptuous, but I’m going to go out on a limb here and trust that for the vast majority of you reading this, your collective arrow tends to lean towards resistance.

How? What can we do NOW to turn the situation around? One doesn’t have to be a certified MD to grasp the common sense concept that, “If we don’t accurately diagnose the source of the ‘disease’, we’ll never be able to figure out the most effective ‘cure’”. Is the problem facing rail labor as simple as a few ineffective leaders of our respective unions? If that’s the case, then all we need to do is find a few visionary, militant fighters to replace them and next thing you know, we’ll all be singing, “Happy Days are Here Again”. Right? Or perhaps the source of our problems is a little more complicated and complex, therefore requiring a bit more thought, creativity, and initiative.

“Here we go, he’s going to bring up Debs again.” Damn right I’m going to bring up Debs - again! No serious discussion of how rails can effectively resist the carriers’ never-ending, ever-increasing assault on our safety, dignity and quality of life, can be the least bit credible without studying the legacy and history of Eugene V. Debs, so that we can learn, process and apply the immensely valuable lessons to our struggles today. I might add that the rest of the working class and all fighters for social justice could learn a lot from Debs, but that’s a deeper discussion for another day. Without researching a verbatim quote, one recurring theme in his speeches and writings went something like, “Don’t take my word for this. Take it upon yourselves to study, research and learn the facts. If you do, I’m confident that you will arrive at the same conclusions I have.” Truer words were never spoken.

Yes I stand accused of “preachin’ to the choir” and I plead partially guilty. How the hell does one plead “partially” guilty? To those of you who consider yourselves to be in this proverbial “choir”, I trust you understand this simply comes with the territory. Besides that, sometimes a few members of even the most bad-ass choir get a little tired, and could occasionally benefit from a little inspirational boost. If I can simultaneously inspire a few “young-uns” to join the “choir” for the first time, then that’s an added bonus to any therapeutic benefit for my tenuous sanity, that I may derive from my quarterly stream-of-consciousness rant & rage.

So please don’t stop me even if you’ve heard this before, but the bottom line is that the existing infrastructure, direction, tactics and strategies of our unions is broken and failed. It has been for over 125 years since Debs set out to organize ALL railroad workers into ONE industrial union, the American Railway Union. The pathetic futility of being divided into more than a dozen different craft unions has only been exacerbated since then. RWU would not need to exist if this were not the case. I could be experimenting with my new, magical guitar processor, instead of trying to coherently formulate my seething contempt for the bosses, and all their enablers and servile lackeys, in 900 words or less.

When Hunter Harrison (HH) first took over at CP Rail, I described in vivid, hi-def, technicolor detail - both in these pages and from the podium at the 2014 SMART-TD Convention - the horrifying manifestations of his reign of terror, as a desperate warning to all other rails: “If this ‘cancer’ is not stopped NOW, it will spread throughout the entire industry.”

The lead, front page article for this issue unfortunately validates those concerns. I don’t recall the exact day and time that this all began to go down at CP. Three years after getting out alive, I’m still trying to recover from HH induced PTSD, but here’s what I do recall: As HH implemented his attack on us with classic “shock-and-awe” brutality, not ONE leader of our unions made the slightest public protestation. Nor was there so much of a peep from any of the so-called “friends of labor” politicians, endorsed and supported by our union leaders, including their fave liberal, supposedly “progressive” savior - then president Obama. The over-the-top, death-defying speed-up, combined with flagrant contract violations by-the-hour at CP, flew under the radar at the time, compared to the feces storm that played out as HH took “Precision Railroading” one-step-beyond at CSX.

What is happening in the rail industry is nothing less than a vile abomination to the workers and the public. I could give a bazillion reasons why the union leaders’ broken-record mantra of, “Get out the vote for our ‘friends of labor’”, is one of the ultimate exercises in futility, but for now I’ll just refer to my experiences at CP as Exhibit A. Beyond the obvious futility, when rank & file workers blindly follow our union leaders, that they often complain about, as if they’re the Pied Piper leading us like lambs off the cliff, we’re only setting ourselves up for future defenseless slaughters. The time is long past overdue for ALL disgruntled rails to join RWU, contribute financially to our efforts, and get actively engaged in the resistance. There is really very little alternative.

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