A Call to All Rail Unions: Support MLK Day as a Holiday for All Railroaders!

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The International Steering Committee of Railroad Workers United (RWU) has decided to launch a major campaign to honor and celebrate the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The RWU leading body proposes making what is already a Federal Holiday observed in all 50 States, also a paid holiday for all railroaders, from every craft, across the United States. RWU is proposing that this demand be included – and fought for uncompromisingly! – in all collective bargaining agreements from this day on until MLK Day is observed with honor, celebration, and contemplation by all working railroaders, of all skin colors.

This is a just and appropriate demand on the face of it. But, the RWU elected leadership also feels strongly that such a campaign is necessary on the part of the rail industry as a whole, and rail labor in particular. Because of our history!

Our railroad unions today, which also need to unite and overcome anachronistic divisions by craft, need to honestly address and finally overcome the nothing less than shameful, disgraceful, anti-labor history of the railroad industry, including the racist practices over many decades, of the so-called rail labor “brotherhoods.” These craft unions were, for decades, “white job trusts” that excluded African-American railroaders, until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act forced an end to such obscene, unforgivable anti-working class practices.

We urge RWU members and supporters to campaign with this Resolution. Get it passed at your local union meetings. Urge that it be included at the top of our demands for the next rounds of collective bargaining in freight, passenger, and all contracts.

There are new winds blowing in the labor movement today, after decades of retreat by our unions which resulted in a cumulative assault on workers rights and our standard of living. We need to rebuild the labor movement in the United States as a fighting movement for all working people. This RWU initiative promotes a more profound unity for all railroaders as we move united for the battles ahead to defend our jobs, our rights, our safety, our benefits, and our standard of living in the years ahead.

See the full Resolution on the RWU website RESOLUTIONS Page.

Martin Luther King, Jr. (left) and A Phillip Randolph (center) are prominent in this collage of prominent citizens - both Black and White - at the time of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs & Freedom.