The Green New Deal: What is it and Why Rail Workers Should Support it

In January, a Resolution was introduced into the U.S. House and Senate that calls for a “Green New Deal.” Patterned on the New Deal of the 1930s, the idea brings that concept into the 21st century, where “climate change” has become a household word. In a nutshell, the Green New Deal is a plan to transition America to 100% renewable energy, a “just transition” for all communities and workers who have been impacted by climate change or depended on fossil fuels, and a job guarantee with a family-sustaining wage for everyone in our society.

A key component of the Green New Deal is the so-called “Climate Jobs Guarantee” (CJG). The CJG appears to have popular support. Polling firm Civis Analytics says a jobs guarantee is one of the most popular issues they’ve ever polled: 52% in support and 29% opposed. Polling by the Sunrise Movement, which has championed the idea since Day One, indicates that support for a jobs guarantee focused on climate protection is in fact even more popular.

Millions of workers stand to lose their jobs, their livelihoods and their communities when the economy re-tools to a clean energy future. Workers in basic extraction, processing and refining, along with some railroad workers, probably stand to lose the most. Therefore it is imperative the these workers and their unions study the Green New Deal and help to push it forward, especially the protections for workers who are dislocated by such a transition.

The Green New Deal has the potential to assist the labor movement to achieve many of its long-term goals and objectives, including, but not limited to, the following: providing good jobs for all workers; the abolition of poverty; rebuilding the Labor Movement; winning wide support for a labor friendly program of action; building a powerful labor-friendly coalition among U.S. citizens; unifying those fighting for a better environment with those of us fighting for better wages, benefits and working conditions; ending corporate dominance of the U.S. political process by creating a coalition of the vast majority of Americans on one side and corporate America on the other; strengthening workers bargaining power by maintaining full employment at a living wage for all; Strengthening workers bargaining power by eliminating unemployment and taking wages out of competition; and expanding union apprenticeship and training to do the new jobs required by the conversion.

Railroad workers in particular would benefit greatly under a Green New Deal. The key to transformation to a clean economy is modern, efficient, safe and fast transportation. There is no other form of transportation that is as environmentally friendly, nor as safe as the railroad, when operated properly. It leaves less of a mark upon the landscape than highways, is far less damaging to the upper atmosphere than plane traffic, and as we know, can “move one ton of freight 450 miles on one gallon of fuel.”

RWU urges all rails to become familiar with this innovative and bold concept capturing the imagination of millions, from all sectors of society. See the RWU Resolution in Support of the Green New Deal at http://railroadworkersunited.org/rwu-resolutions.