On the Anniversary of Deadly Runaway Train, Accusation of a CP Cover-up

On February 4th, 2019, Canadian Pacific Train #301 rolled away down “Field Hill” in the Rocky Mountains of British Columbia, Canada. The train's lead locomotive, mid-train DPU and 99 cars of grain derailed, killing all three crew members aboard. As the anniversary of that tragic wreck approached this past winter, family members, co-workers and the general public were demanding answers. The Canadian news media has been awash with the news of the wreck, and evidence seems to point to a cover-up by the railroad. Charges of negligence on the part of Canadian Pacific (CP) are coming forward.

Following six months of investigative reporting, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) released its finding on nationwide television Sunday evening, January 26th, when the award-winning news program "The Fifth Estate" aired the 22-minute episode. Watched by Canadians coast-to-coast, the segment suggested that the rail carrier might possibly be attempting to prevent additional information about the nature of the wreck from being disclosed.

Following allegations of a cover-up on the part of the Canadian Pacific Police Service (CPPS) in relation to the derailment, the Teamster Canada Rail Conference (TCRC) union has begun calling for an independent investigation into the deadly disaster. The union is also reiterating its call for the federal government to abolish corporate police forces such as CPPS. The union believes that this is a blatant case of the “fox guarding the hen house.”

The lead safety investigator looking into the fatal runaway crash of the freight train says the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) should step in to investigate potential negligence by the railway company. "I was ordered to stop investigating," claimed Mark Tataryn of the CP Police Service, saying his superiors prevented him from obtaining key witness accounts. "I would say it was some type of cover-up." Tataryn went on to state, "I believe it's an injustice. I do believe that there was corporate influence to sway the aspect of the investigation in some capacity."

Meantime, unanswered questions of what exactly led to the crash of CP Rail Train #301 remain, leaving the victims' family members angry, frustrated and suspicious of Canadian Pacific. "I hold CPR responsible. They killed those guys," says Pam Fraser, mother of Dylan Paradis, the 33-year-old conductor killed in the crash. "Their practices, their safety standards, their bottom line, to keep the trains rolling no matter what, killed my son and his crew mates. I want to hold them responsible."

During the course of the investigation, the CBC would discover that in the past 25 years, there have been 25 runaway trains on Field Hill. Ironically, the latest runaway came within a few days of the anniversary of the 2019 wreck, when a single carload ran away from the yard, travelling five miles or so down the main. Together with the devastating runaway at Lac-Mégantic, Quebec in 2013, which levelled the downtown in a devastating explosion that killed 47 people, Canada has been experiencing a dramatic increase in such runaway trains in recent years.

As RWU has reported, such common sense means of train security on steep grades — including the application of the automatic brake and the use of handbrakes - have not been mandatory by law or rule. Had they been, it is likely that most, if not all, of these wrecks could have easily been avoided. It is interesting to note that within weeks of the Field runaway, Transport Canada did issue an emergency order mandating that all trains stopped on steep slopes must have handbrakes tied on a sufficient number of cars to hold the train, in order to prevent such a reoccurrence. In a dramatic display of arrogance and disregard for human life and safe train operations, both CP and CN appealed the agency's ruling within weeks.

It remains to be seen just what the outcome will be. But no matter what is unearthed by any further investigation, one thing remains clear: multiple devastating train wrecks in Canada in recent years could very easily have been avoided with the simple application of basic railroading safety procedures, but the rail carriers have stubbornly refused to implement them.

Another River Rescue in KY

Two CSX crew members were briefly trapped in the cab of the lead locomotive after an ethanol train derailed in Kentucky on February 13th, plunging into the Big Sandy River and exploding. Firefighters were able to rescue them by boat. They were taken to the hospital and treated for minor injuries. This wreck comes on the heels of a New Year's Eve wreck six weeks earlier in Idaho, when a BNSF train derailed and careened into the Kootenai River, where the crew was miraculously unhurt and rescued in a similar fashion. Both crashes were the result of rock and mudslides that went undetected.