Open Letter to Freddie Simpson, Outgoing President of the BMWED

The following includes excerpts from Mr. Simpson’s farewell address, which was included in the Delegate Binder for the 2022 BMWED National Division Fifth Quadrennial Convention, held in May, 2022, and RWU’s response:

“From the beginning of my career on the railroad, I have always known, like Eugene Debs and the countless railroad workers before me, that railroad workers should recognize that brotherhood should reach beyond our narrow craft-mindedness. We cannot simply preach that railroad workers need to be in the same union, but we need to strategically think about how we can approach that ideal...As Brothers and Sisters within this union we should always ask ourselves before any decision we make, does this strengthen our ties as railroaders, and furthermore, as workers? Does the structure of our union support the further Brotherhood of railroaders and workers?”

“As members of this union, in the tradition of trade unionism that extends back to the Knights of Labor, the American Railway Union, and the early beginnings of our own organization, it is our duty to learn and understand this history. To those of you who have just begun your career as members of the Brotherhood, absorb as much information as possible and continuously remember that the battles for which you witness and take part in today have been had in the past. Learn from those that have come before you and never forget that the way forward lays in Brotherhood with your fellow workers... I have the utmost confidence in our membership to develop our trade union into an organization that the railroad robber barons cower in front of.”

“Understand what happened in the past, and have the courage to do what hasn’t been done. For future delegates to these conventions, if rail labor does not move towards a more centralized and solidified structure that puts the power into the workers’ hands, rather than into the hands of the numerous union officials, then we will be doomed to the rubbish heap of history. But if we are to extend our principles of Brotherhood beyond our craft and throughout our industry, the rights of labor can be secure for generations to come.”

Well said Brother Freddie. While other rail union leaders may occasionally pay token lip service to our history, none has ever posed the urgent challenge for our future as you have. To your credit the BMWED made a legit attempt to back up this vision of unity and solidarity with concrete action, organizing the All Rail Crafts Coalition (ARCC) several years ago. Unfortunately the leaders of the operating craft unions wanted nothing to do with this promising development. But now for the 1st time all of the rail unions are negotiating as one entity - better late than never.

It’s unfortunate you chose to not use your bully pulpit more forcefully to champion the solidarity, unity and democracy you stand for, as these are the foundational principles of RWU. It’s never too late to explore some kind of collaboration, since we obviously have a lot in common. Fight together on the common ground - agree to disagree as applicable. Over time discuss our differences with civility and mutual respect. Call us sometime.