



The Highball

Official Publication of
Railroad Workers United

Analysis

Rail Unions Abandon National Bargaining

Separate on-property agreements set destructive precedent for future negotiations.

As this issue of *The Highball* goes to press in mid-October several of the rail unions in both the operating and non-operating crafts have tentative agreements (TA) in play and a few of them have already been ratified. It is unprecedented to be at this stage of negotiations before the Section 6 notices from the carriers and the unions are exchanged, which generally happens in November prior to the commencement of national bargaining. More often than not negotiations tend to drag out for several months, if not years, beyond the contract "expiration" date.

So what's different this time? Why the rush to settle so quickly? Where's the fire? Why are both sides working overtime to make this happen now? Ultimately who benefits from this radical departure from established contract negotiation protocol?

What's in it for the carriers?

It's quite plausible that the carriers might prefer to stay out of the public eye at this point in time. They certainly got a lot of bad publicity back in 2022 as the possibility of a national rail strike on four of the six major Class 1 railroads was seriously posed.

Could it be that the carriers may also just be biding their time, kicking the can down the road hoping that Trump gets reelected? There's a 99.99999...% probability that the FRA's recent 2-person crew mandate would be reversed as part of the instant transition to "self-regulation" on steroids.

What's in it for the unions?

It's quite plausible that the unions are also hedging their bets, taking the quick, easy way out now as opposed to trying to make a stand under a potential Trump administration. While Biden clearly established that he was no "friend" of rail labor - in spite of his self-proclamations to the contrary - Trump would not even feel the need to navigate around such false pretenses.

While the rail union leadership was essentially going through the motions back in 2022 - any seasoned rail veteran knew how that would all ultimately play out - they faced a raging firestorm of discontent and raised expectations from the rank & file. One could expect that the union officialdom might prefer to keep the door slammed shut on that type of worker mobilization.

Who stands to gain?

Fundamental safety issues flowing from the relentless speedup in the industry were never on the table in the last round of negotiations and are only getting worse, while wages and benefits are all that's really being discussed in the current round. Even if these agreements are semi-respectable, they come at the cost

of completely obliterating what was left of the Master Freight Rail Contract with the Class Ones.

This process actually goes back at least to the late 1990's when the Illinois Central Gulf (ICG) - run by soon-to-be rising star Hunter Harrison (HH) - sold the infamous 10-hour-day agreement to the operating crafts. When the Canadian National (CN) acquired the ICG, HH was promoted and proceeded to work his "magic" on the entire CN-US system in the early 2000's.

When the Bill Ackman-led hedge fund investors took over at Canadian Pacific (now CPKC), they paid HH big bucks to come out of retirement for an encore. He waged a ruthless attack on the workforce and gave his business model a shiny new name, albeit an oxymoron - "Precision Scheduled Railroading." Aided by the BLET undercutting the SMART-TD resistance, HH was able to implement the 10-hour-day agreement there in 2015.

When the carriers introduced remote control operations (RCO), the operating craft unions - to their credit - made some noise about safety concerns. But soon they would be outdoing each other, competing for last-man-standing agreements. The rest, as they say, is history. We've seen flashes of that with the single person crew TA on the BNSF in 2014, and today the crew-consist TA in play on the BNSF former Santa Fe Coast Lines.

The moral of these and other similarly sordid stories is that without ironclad unity among the disparate unions and without a national standard of wages and working conditions, we are like sitting ducks, prey to being divided and conquered. Once a bad precedent is established with one union, terminal and/or property it's difficult to keep it from spreading.

If all the major Class 1 RR's have individual agreements, they could provoke a confrontation on one of the properties. The other carriers, in alliance with numerous strategically placed short-lines, could unite to pick up the slack and keep any economic disruption from a strike or lockout to an acceptable minimum, compared to a "national" strike. With what could be at stake in the future, the carriers have set themselves up quite nicely. In contrast, RWU has long called for One Single United Bargaining Coalition, along with Unity, Solidarity and Democracy. More than ever we need to fight for these basic fundamentals of unionism.





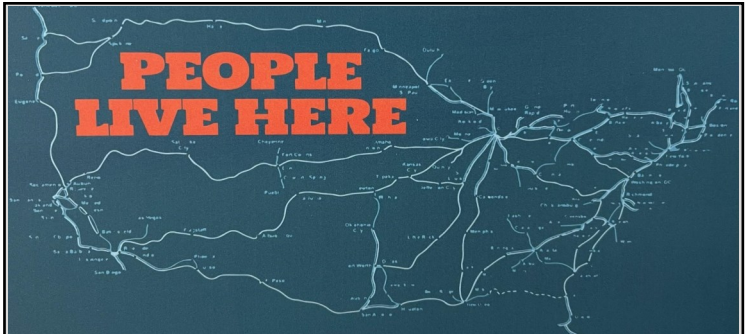
The Public Rail Ownership Campaign Gains Momentum Over the Summer

The Public Rail Ownership (PRO) campaign released its second research report, "Putting America Back on Track: The Case for a 21st Century Public Rail System," in July. Maddock Thomas' report examines the failures of private Class I railroads in America and suggests a public rail system to rectify these intrinsic failures. It explores the history of publicly owned railroads in North America and examines global rail systems to evaluate the best structure for a public rail system in the US.

The economic study "From Margins to Growth, the Economic Case for a Public Rail System" by Kira McDonald reveals that public rail ownership could save up to \$140 billion annually for US consumers, create 180,000 new jobs, and reduce public health, environmental, and fiscal costs by \$190 billion. It also helps meet climate goals by avoiding 180 metric tons of carbon emissions. The 109-page report provides a wealth of information in support of public ownership and its benefits to the working class. We've also provided a short executive summary and a "By the Numbers section" for easy-to-grab information at your fingertips. All railroad workers are encouraged to look it over!

We have spiral bound, union stamped, hard copies for sale of both McDonald's economic study and Thomas' white paper. We also have merchandise available on the PRO website. Visit: www.publicrailnow.org for more details. (Go to RESEARCH and the drop-down menu for both of the studies.)

Adam Barrington, our National PRO Organizer, attended an Institute for Policy Studies event in Washington, DC, commemorating the 1984 Union Carbide gas leak in Bhopal, India. Panelists included activist survivors Rachna Dingra, Bati Bai Rajak, and Farhat Jahan, and Jami Wallace, the Unity Council for the East Palestine Train Derailment's Founder and Executive Board President. Maddock Thomas, our Campaign Researcher and Organizer, attended Unifor's Canada Council from September 26-29. As Canada's largest private sector union, he learned about Cana-



Pacific Northwest Rail Summit brought together passenger rail advocates, labor, industry and government officials to pave the way for collaborations for the future for high performance rail that would serve people, goods and economy in the Pacific Northwest region.

da's railroads and labor movement, spoke with railroaders from across the country, and expressed interest in further cooperation among rail workers across North America.

PRO Campaign Director Tabitha Tripp attended the Pacific Northwest Rail Summit in October, where numerous organizations from five Pacific Northwest discussed building coalitions and cooperation between local, state, and federal entities for expanding passenger and freight rail in their region.

For more information about the PRO Campaign, please visit: www.publicrailnow.org

**From all of us at
Railroad Workers United
THANK YOU to all Our Donors,
Our Monthly Sustainers and Our Members
We appreciate YOU!**

Railroad Workers United

Railroad Workers United was organized in April 2008 at a Founding Convention in Dearborn, MI. RWU grew out of decades of struggle within the craft unions for unity, solidarity, and democracy. We are carrying on a tradition of rank & file activity which dates back to the 1890s and the time of Eugene V. Debs.

RWU is a cross-craft inter-union caucus of rail labor activists across North America. All rail workers of all crafts from all carriers who support our Statement of Principles are welcome to join in our efforts. Please write, call, or email. See the contact information below.

Statement of Principles

- Unity of All Rail Crafts**
- An End to Inter-Union Conflict**
- Rank-and-File Democracy**
- Membership Participation & Action**
- Solidarity Among All Railroaders**
- No to Concessionary Bargaining**

International Steering Committee

Cory Aaron	BMWED #745	BNSF	St. Louis, MO
Chuck Abbate	SMART-TD #898b	KEOLIS	Boston, MA
Gabe Christenson	SMART-TD #1043	UP	Sparks, NV
Pete Crudo	SMART-TD #1043	UP	Sparks, NV
Jason Doering	BLET #667	UP	Las Vegas, NV
Ross Grooters	BLET #778	UP	Des Moines, IA
Hugh Sawyer	BLET #316	NS	Atlanta, GA
Cameron Slick	SMART-TD #1614	UP	Minneapolis, MN
Stu Wallenberg	SMART-TD #1433	CPKC	Chicago, IL
Matt Weaver	BMWED #2624	CSX	Toledo, OH
Nick Wurst	SMART-TD #1473	CSX	Framingham, MA

Alternates

Eric Basir	ATU #208	CTA	Chicago, IL
Ryan Black	SMART-TD #1433	CPKC	Chicago, IL
Alex Nantell	BRS #14	UP	Portland, OR
Tom Nelson	SMART-TD #1732	AMTK	Grand Rapids, MI
Tim Sloper	SMART-TD #768	NS	Decatur, IL

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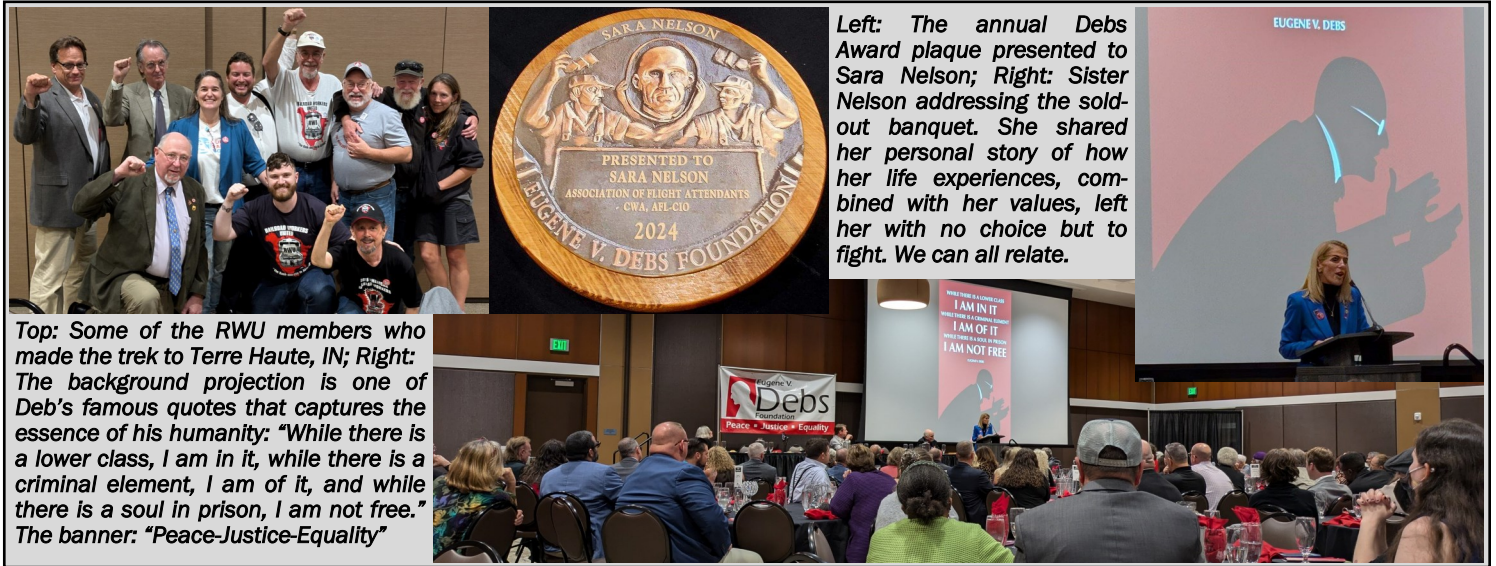
Fritz Edler	BLET #482	AMTK	Washington, DC
Ron Kaminkow	BLET #51	AMTK	Reno, NV
Andy Weir	TCRC #240	CN	Sarnia, ON

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Labor News

RWU Attends Ceremony for Debs Award Presentation to Sara Nelson



Left: The annual Debs Award plaque presented to Sara Nelson; Right: Sister Nelson addressing the sold-out banquet. She shared her personal story of how her life experiences, combined with her values, left her with no choice but to fight. We can all relate.

Top: Some of the RWU members who made the trek to Terre Haute, IN; Right: The background projection is one of Deb's famous quotes that captures the essence of his humanity: "While there is a lower class, I am in it, while there is a criminal element, I am of it, and while there is a soul in prison, I am not free." The banner: "Peace-Justice-Equality"

From the Eugene V. Debs foundation website:

"The officers and directors of the Eugene V. Debs Foundation are pleased to announce that on Saturday, September 28, 2024, the Debs Award will be presented to Sara Nelson, International President of the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA). AFA represents 50,000 of aviation's first responders at 19 airlines. She has been a union Flight Attendant since 1996 when she started flying at United Airlines.

Sara often says corporations have money and control but workers have power, and the Labor Movement is for all working people. She encourages women everywhere to join unions and run unions. She believes Flight Attendants can play a pivotal role in building worker power with more public contact than almost any other job and connectivity around the world. Currently, AFA is aggressively organizing thousands of non-union flight attendants including a major drive at Delta Airlines."

Over September 27-29th, more than a dozen RWU members - from Baltimore to Reno, Atlanta to Minneapolis - gathered in Terre Haute, IN, the birthplace and lifelong home of rail union organizer and activist Eugene V. Debs to congratulate and express solidarity with Sara Nelson, International President of the AFA. Debs former home is now an outstanding museum of trade union/working class resistance and socialist memorabilia.

RWU has long appreciated and respected Sister Nelson for her uncompromising solidarity with - and dedication to - advancing the struggle of the working class, as part of her militant, fighting spirit in championing the just demands of flight attendants across the industry, both union and those yet-to-be organized.

Along with leaders like United Electrical Workers Union President Carl Rosen and United Auto Workers President Sean Fain, she represents a glimpse into the future of what the leadership of the organized labor movement can and NEEDS to look like if we are going to be serious about advancing our historical struggle for dignity in the workplace, along with economic and social justice for society as a whole.

The annual Eugene V. Debs award has long been a noble tradition dating back to 1965. Ms. Nelson joins an impressive list of various labor leaders (A. Philip Randolph the only rail union leader), social justice activists and institutions, academics, artists,

politicians, etc. who have all made significant contributions to the fight for social justice.

The day began with an open house at the Eugene V. Debs Historic Home and Museum, followed by a tour. Under the expert guidance of museum director Allison Duerk, we explored the life and legacy of this influential labor leader. Allison's deep knowledge and enthusiasm made the history come alive, as she shared compelling stories about Debs' activism, his role in the labor movement, along with insight into his personal relationships with friends, family, and other activists.

One of the highlights was the stunning mural on the third floor, which beautifully captures key moments from Debs' life. This amazing visual narrative not only adds an artistic touch but also serves as a powerful storytelling element, illustrating his enduring impact on American society.

Some of us then went to the Highland Lawn Cemetery for a graveside ceremony to honor Eugene and Kate Debs. In the mid-afternoon Sister Nelson gave a presentation at the Cunningham Memorial Library, which is on the Indiana State University campus titled, "Does Unchecked Capitalism Pose a Serious Threat to Society?" Following an enlightening discussion we adjourned to a large room upstairs that is dedicated to Deb's archives, writings, newspaper articles etc.

The main event was a sold out banquet that evening at the Terre Haute Convention Center. David Rathke, acting Director of the Debs Foundation and Master of Ceremonies, eloquently connected the dots from Deb's history and what he stood for to the present. From there Sister Nelson hit it out of the park with an inspiring acceptance speech and call to action.

For those of us who made the trip it was our first visit to the Debs Museum. We highly recommend that labor and social justice activists visit the museum as it's a wonderful way to connect with our history and the ongoing journey for workers' rights. RWU has long sought to develop a relationship with the Debs Foundation, since our basic mission is inspired by his rail labor organizing in that chapter of his life. As individuals, many of us are also inspired by the subsequent chapters of his life, that he dedicated to the universal fight for peace, justice and equality - more urgently needed than ever today - until the day he died.



Public Rail News

Riding the Rails Through the Alps Drives Home the Message of Public Ownership.

By Kari Lyderson

The terrain outside the window was spectacular, and harsh: the surrealistically rugged spires of the Dolomites rising straight up on one side, a rushing turquoise river in a deep gorge on the other. The weather was equally dramatic: frigid temperatures, snow and sleet, wind - uncharacteristically wintery weather arriving in late summer thanks to Storm Boris, which had wreaked death and destruction in Eastern Europe.

My parents and I had been biking through this landscape, but found our hands frozen, making it hard to brake descending the slick winding mountain roads, our anxiety only growing as we watched ominous storm clouds massing above.

We turned to the savior that rescued us many times during this weeks-long journey: the dependable trains that traversed the Alps and surrounding valleys, bright shiny vessels emerging from tunnels and coursing along canyons throughout the wild country. They were powered by electricity, with catenary wires strung above the tracks, providing a seemingly impossibly smooth and quiet ride. Bicycle and stroller signs on the outside of the cars let us know where to stow our bikes, and take refuge in comfortable seats with large, clear windows offering gorgeous views.

At a small town tucked in the mountains, a crowd of laughing and joking teens piled on with their backpacks, getting off a few stops later at an even smaller town, just another day of commuting home from school. In small and large cities that we rode through - like Brunico, Venice, Bern, St. Moritz, Lienz - the crowds were bigger and more diverse, the service equally organized and effective.

The passenger trains we rode in Italy, Switzerland and Austria were clearly a staple of civic life, crucial for everyday activities, commerce, tourism, and preventing private vehicles from clogging narrow roads and small towns that could not handle such traffic, especially in extreme weather that will only get more common with climate change. We marveled at the feats of engineering, the tunnels cut through sheer mountains, the tracks skirting cliffs above rivers, all with their reliable electric supply.

It was inspiring and impressive, and it was publicly owned. Italy has long faced stereotypes - some unfair and some perhaps based in fact - of disorganized, underfunded and failing infrastructure and public systems.

Fascist Mussolini famously promised to make trains run on time, an obsession that has been referenced and examined in more recent decades, both by the modern extreme right in Italy and by liberal pundits probing Mussolini's record on transportation.

As David Dudley noted in CityLab, Italy's state-owned railroads were already being rebuilt after World War I devastation when Mussolini took over. He did invest in railroads, especially in the wealthier north, and made significant improvements but didn't actually make the trains run consistently on time. In the ensuing decades, Italy has been run by a turbulent succession of center-left and right-wing governments, and Trenitalia - a wholly-owned subsidiary of the government - has grown into a powerful public company running the trains in Italy and acquiring private rail companies in other countries.

It boasts regional and long-distance trains, including the Frecciarossa high-speed trains with sleek red bodies and long snouts, and also runs freight (with both electric and diesel engines). According to a blog by Frédéric de Kemmeter, European Union rail



Left: An electric passenger train traverses the Sudtiroal area in northern Italy, including craggy mountains and lush valleys filled with apple orchards. Right: A passenger train climbs out of San Candido in northern Italy at dawn. Both rail systems are publicly owned.

deregulation opened the way for competition in the railroad, but the entry of a private competitor actually ended up increasing Trenitalia's ridership.

The takeaway being, you don't need a dictatorship or even copious state wealth to grow and run an efficient, enjoyable, effective publicly-owned railroad.

Italy has managed it even with a long-struggling economy that sees many young people fleeing for better opportunities in other European countries or the U.S., without oil wealth or other overflowing resources to pour into public infrastructure. The railroad clearly helps the economy in multiple ways, including by creating tens of thousands of public and union jobs. There was a transportation workers strike during our trip, September 8-9, leading to a few disruptions, though apparently such strikes are coordinated and announced ahead of time to minimize impact on citizens while demanding improvements from the government.

I haven't ridden the trains in Southern Italy since a backpacking trip decades ago; my recent experience was confined to the wealthier northern part of the country. The situation may be different in the South, though given the denser population and wealth differential, the trains I imagine play an even more crucial role in everyday life.

During our trip, we also relied on Swiss and Austrian trains, run by the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) and Austrian Federal Railways (ÖBB), respectively.

Austria's railroad has been publicly owned since the late 1800s under the Austro-Hungarian empire, and was largely destroyed during World War II, when it was taken over by the Third Reich. Electrification increased immediately after World War II as the railroad was rebuilt. Today, ÖBB employs almost 40,000 people, covers almost 5,000 kilometers - three-quarters electrified, and is known as the most punctual and popular passenger rail in Europe, according to an impressive Wikipedia page. While the system is open to market competition, ÖBB remains a wholly-government owned company, with the shares managed by the Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology.

Switzerland's population is 8.7 million, and according to another good Wikipedia page, 0.88 million rides are taken on SBB trains each day, reaching their destination with less than 3 minutes delay 92% of the time. More than 400 kilometers of tunnels cut through the nation's famous Alps, and 100% of the trains are

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Public Rail News

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electrified.

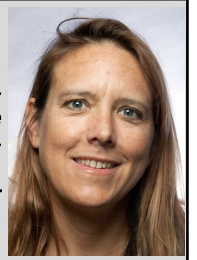
There are various other charming details: Being Switzerland, the clocks in the stations are synchronized each minute with a master clock. And as Wikipedia notes, "Since 2002, SBB has used music in train announcements. The notes in the music correspond to the acronyms SBB CFF FFS, transposed by means of the German notes "Es - B - B" (Eb, Bb, Bb), "C - F - F" (C, F, F) and "F - F - Es" (F, F, Eb)."

In short, the publicly-owned trains I traveled in Europe were a delight, showing that it is possible to run railroads through some of the world's most rugged (and spectacular) country and power them with electricity that is increasingly generated from renewable sources. Governments can run these trains in the name of the people, and people flock to them, from commuting workers

to families to tourists, including countless bicyclists like us. Among all the other benefits, the trains become a public square where people from different walks of life mingle and move together.

As the U.S. debates its energy, transportation and political futures, I hope we can be inspired and instructed by the example.

Kari Lydersen is a Chicago-based journalist, author, assistant professor of Journalism at Northwestern University and a Solidarity member of RWU. She has covered labor, environment and energy for publications including In These Times magazine – where she recently published an in depth piece about public ownership of railroads – and The Washington Post, New York Times, Chicago Reader, and other outlets. She is a reporting fellow for Energy News Network, covering the clean energy transition.



The UK Forges Ahead with Re-Nationalization of the Rail Industry

The nationalization of railroads in Britain is moving forward—running late but heading for the destination. The Labour government has just moved the nationalization bill through the House of Commons. Britain's weak version of the Senate, the House of Lords, will approve it sometime in October. They can't amend it much.

They'd like to. The Conservatives in the Lords include some of the owners of Britain's ten private passenger railways. These lines have franchises to operate trains but don't own the cars or tracks and will lose their franchises over the next five years. The government will run these lines, as it did before privatization occurred in 1993. That's good news for the workers at Network Rail, the government agency that maintains the right-of-way. They will no longer be dealing with operating companies that cheat on safety. These workers belong to the biggest railway union, the National Union of Rail, Maritime, and Transport Workers (RMT), a federation of railroad and maritime workers. They fought for nationalization for years. So did the other big railway union, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF), which represents the Engineers. The head of ASLEF, Mick Whelan, is also the President of Britain's version of the AFL-CIO, the Trade Union Congress (TUC). He led the drive to win federation support for nationalization and persuade the Labour Party to put nationalization in their platform in this Spring's national election.

In the past, Labour nationalized other parts of the British economy, especially medical care, run by the National Health Service (NHS). British workers feel about the NHS the way American workers do about Social Security - it had better be there and it still is. This year, the railroad bill is the only act of nationalization proposed by the new Labour government. The Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, has said more about saving money than about nationalization and the British tabloids joined investors in hoping Starmer would abandon his pledge to nationalize railroads.

They were wrong partly because the government of Scotland, which has some say about railroads, was setting an example for Labour. The Scots nationalized their railroads in April of this year. Network Rail is helping the Scots run their lines. This is Britain's version of the complications American workers and riders face in places where Amtrak, a state-run commuter line, and a private freight line share facilities. In North America delays and accidents result. In Britain, the Scots, Network Rail, and the Labour government are cooperating. The Prime Minister has quietly told them to, even though he can't yet take over English lines.

He surely will. The government is already operating several lines that went bankrupt several years ago. One of these is a major line running north and east of London. Traffic here surpasses that of the Northeast Corridor in the U.S.

The investors and the Tories have one dodge left - letting private companies operate railroads without being given a franchise. Instead, they would pay the government a fee to operate. The government would provide access to the tracks and stations the company wants. A few of these "open access" companies have been operating during the last 20 years, offering lower prices than the competition but worse service and worse working conditions for workers. ASLEF, the RMT, and rider groups condemn "open access," which is a Tory idea, but Starmer has not yet agreed to put a halt to it.

Railroad nationalization does not make the whole industry government-run. The government has agreed that the three companies that build Britain's rolling stock will keep their private monopolies. These companies will go on leasing cars rather than selling them, a scheme that lets them earn interest. All three companies run unionized plants located in Britain. All three are also foreign - one Japanese and two German. A German company also operates most of the freight service in Britain, even though Network Rail provides maintenance.

The news from Britain raises questions for the Public Rail Campaign in the US. Should train operations and maintenance both be government-run? Consider Amtrak. Are workers and riders satisfied with the service it provides on lines maintained by the Big Five? Would these groups want Amtrak to lease cars from private firms and pass along the cost of interest payments by raising fares and cutting wages? Who should own the right-of-way? All right-of-way in the U.S. stems from a grant by a state legislature or by Congress. These grants turned the railroads into the American House of Lords. The Big Five freight companies still act that way.

The British reformed their House of Lords in 1999. We can learn from their mistakes and make the world's largest rail network one that serves all the people who live here into the future.

Fred Naiden is an ex-motorman and locomotive engineer, TWU Local 100, RWU member and also an ex-history professor. His book about the subway, "Railroaded—A Motorman's Story of the Subway from Horse Cars to Covid," is forthcoming from the Rutgers University Press.





Commentary

Why the Working Class Needs a Foreign Policy That is in Our Interests

By Mark Burrows

RWU does not have an official position on this. So, to be clear, I am expressing my personal opinions here which I hope will serve as a contribution to a long overdue, urgently needed discussion. What does this have to do with railroad workers?

That's a fair question, so I'll attempt to address this with a hypothetical scenario, albeit a tad oversimplified. Let's go back to the Fall of 2022 when the possibility of a national railroad worker strike was seriously posed, the inevitable government intervention per the Railway Labor Act (RLA) notwithstanding. Contrast that scene to the present, where the rail union leaders and the carriers are tripping over each other as they race to conquer temporary labor peace.

So while the prospect of a similar showdown may not be on the immediate horizon, it would be irresponsible, if not suicidal, to be lulled into the trap that this current status quo will last indefinitely. We know what the carriers' ultimate wish list is, and we know that railroad workers are not going to voluntarily surrender to it. It is only a matter of time before another showdown between the unions and the carriers is posed.

There should be no doubt anymore as to how future conflicts will be resolved. Either railroad workers voluntarily surrender, or the government (or an arbitrator) will ram another unpopular contract down our throats, after the unions have jumped through the required hoops of the RLA like trained seals. Are railroad workers destined to be disgruntled but obedient sheep forever, or do we find that there are limits to playing by the boss's rules?

When we were kids most of us at some point experienced a playmate or sibling who would throw the game board and everything off the table if she/he wasn't getting their way and go off in a huff. At some point we would probably stop playing with her/him until they learned some basic rules of civility. Unfortunately, unless we want to go look for another job, we have no choice but to remain at the table with the spoiled brat boss who goes crying to the government whenever she/he feels the unions aren't letting her/him win. Or does another choice exist?

Throughout the history of the struggle for social justice there are numerous instances where organized masses literally trampled over the unjust laws and injunctions intended to prevent them from gathering, protesting, and/or striking. I like to refer to that as voting with one's feet.

There is historical precedent for a scenario where railroad workers collectively, in masse, get to a point where we say, "We're mad as Hell and we're not gonna take it anymore!" - then act decisively on that! I can't advocate for defying a presidential back-to-work order but unless/until railroad workers are prepared to challenge the morally and ethically unjust provisions of the RLA, the degradation of our jobs, working conditions and the industry itself will continue unabated.

Let's take a fantastical projection for a moment into the future where this scenario might be posed. Knowing for a long time that this scenario was inevitable, railroad workers have successfully prepared for this bold but necessary action. We have taken our case to the public, earning the support and solidarity of the vast majority of the working class. It's clearly established that any "economic disruption" will be the responsibility of the greedy hedge fund investors who run the railroads and the slimy, scumbag, servile-to-the-bosses politicians that aid and abet them.

The government and media have overplayed the "economic disruption" card like the boy who cried wolf and railroad workers are on the precipice of a historic conquest, but the government and media have one more trick card up their sleeve. They shriek in blood curdling panic, "You can't go on strike because you'll disrupt the war effort!"

Now as this issue goes to press in mid-October we are not currently in a hot shooting war, but it's fair to say that we might not be much more than a hair trigger away from World War III breaking out in the Middle East. Regardless of whether all Hell breaks loose in the next few minutes, hours, days, weeks, months or years to come, I find it hard to believe that the question of war will not ultimately become a factor in future rail labor conflicts.

So going with the above hypothetical scenario, which I consider to be well within the realm of possibilities, there's basically two possible responses:

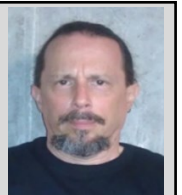
- 1) "Damn, I didn't think about that. I guess we gotta call off the strike, go back to work and take whatever they give us per our patriotic duty and servile loyalty to our morally righteous government that can do no wrong." Or...
- 2) "Well truth be told, we're really not big fans of your foreign policy. We feel that you gaslight us, that you've cynically abused our patriotism and loyalty and have misused our military to protect the investments and profits of corporations at the expense of our fellow workers, brothers and sisters around the world."

For the sake of this commentary, I'm not motivating for either response, but I submit that it's more urgent than ever for the working class to engage in a civilized discussion/debate about what's in OUR best interests - and ultimately to act on that wherever that takes us. It's bad enough that we allow Democratic and Republican politicians to shamelessly gaslight us with a straight face on the fundamental issues of the day, such as the economy, immigration, the environment, support for labor (a token photo-op at a picket line isn't enough) etc., to name but a few. They long ago forfeited the right to our unquestioned loyalty as it pertains to the stakes involved with potentially endless war.

If Biden feels that Hamas's savagery morally justifies and that it's in our best interests to obliterate Gaza to the point of mass starvation and the reemergence of polio, then he has an obligation to make that case to the American people. But don't insult our intelligence with the pathetic whining about being concerned and wanting a ceasefire - which he said was a few days away during his ice cream social with Seth Meyers back in February - when the whole world knows that he has the power and authority to stop the carnage yesterday. Sorry, I had to vent.

For the sake of full disclosure and transparency, I feel that the "Canton Speech" by Eugene V Debs, founder of the American Railway Union, is a great place to start for an alternative perspective on the complexities of the world we live in. Though he gave that in 1918 and was sentenced to 10 years in jail for doing so, it unfortunately stands the test of time. Please Google it, read it for yourself, and arrive at your own conclusions.

Mark Burrows has served as Organizer and Co-Chair for RWU. He retired at the end of 2015, after hiring out in 1974, working as an engineer for a combined total of 37 years for the C&NW and the Soo Line/CP Rail in Chicago, Illinois. He was SMART-TD 1433's Delegate for the 2011 & 2014 International Conventions and continues to be an active member of RWU.





Commentary

Connect The Dots: Mask Off Maersk

By Fritz Edler

Connect the dots. If you ask me what *The Highball* does, my short answer is **Connect the Dots**. That's what our unions could do a whole lot more of. One day there's a train crash in Ohio. Then you hear about two railroaders who lost their lives inside a train yard a thousand miles away. What about having to be on call just about 24/7 no matter how it messes up your family life and your health?

How should we look at these events? Are they just examples of "sh#t happens?" Or can we connect the dots and get a handle on why this sh#t keeps happening? Who's behind it all? Most importantly, what can we do about it?

Connecting the dots shows us that as long as the hedge fund vultures and profiteers are running - or more accurately ruining - North America's railroads, things will be bad for those of us who work on the railroads, bad for the communities the trains run through, bad for the economy, and bad for the environment. Every issue of *The Highball* connects the dots about the sad state of our railroads. Connecting the dots to the solution: strong unions that unite all railroaders.

We recently learned about a campaign that connects the dots about another part of the transportation system - not trains, but ships. I think railroaders will see that we're in the same boat as all the workers in commercial shipping.

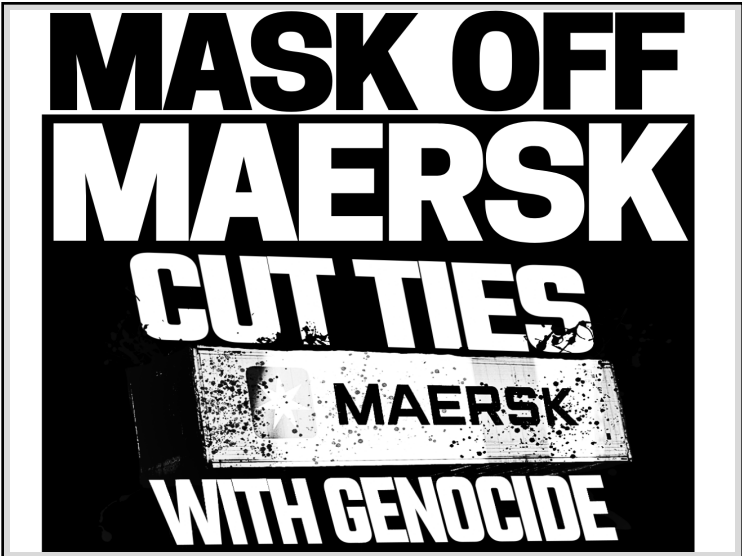
The campaign is called **Mask Off Maersk**. Maersk is one of the biggest commercial shippers in the world. It's based in Denmark, but the problems are just as big in the shipping companies in Singapore or South Korea or anywhere else. Maersk, like all of them, is run by profiteers. Maersk, like all of them, cuts corners to "save" money. They find crews from poor countries so they can keep wages down. They try to avoid any regulations from any of the countries where they operate. They work to keep unions off their ships and if that fails, they pit workers against each other. Sound familiar?

Most rail workers know this outfit. We see their containers. Maersk also does supply chain management, port operation and warehousing. They have subsidiaries and offices across 130 countries. They are one of the worst actors in the biz, using our rail networks to advance anti-worker agendas, environmental disaster and war.

The collapse of the Key Bridge in Baltimore this year was caused by an intentionally, poorly maintained ship under contract to Maersk, whose policy has been to discipline or fire workers who report safety issues to regulators. Maersk spends millions of dollars lobbying the US government on everything from Workmen's Compensation to infrastructure and job elimination schemes.

Maersk corporate policy is familiar to rail workers. Their efforts to suppress whistleblowing and use illegal and unethical means are the subject of sanctions. Rail workers will also recognize the dangers represented by Maersk's efforts to ram forward automation in ports like Alabama that destroy jobs and quality of work life but also put nearby communities and economies at risk.

This is all too familiar in our own industry where the drive for ever more short-term profits makes the employers blind to common sense requirements for trained, skilled, judgment capable humans instead of remote-controlled machinery. In August of



last year, a division of Maersk went after the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) in the port of Alabama for defense of their members who were suspended for raising safety concerns. There are multiple reports of sexual abuse up to including rape aboard Maersk vessels, which is an egregious example of the broader unsafe workplace culture.

Organizations around the world have launched an international campaign to unmask the bad role of Maersk. The specific trigger came from Maersk's logistical role in supplying weapon components and support for the ongoing, brutal, one-sided war in Gaza. But **Mask Off Maersk** uncovers not only a corporate contributor to a brutal conflict. Everywhere you look, Maersk is up to no good. Again, sound familiar? Everywhere we look, the giant conglomerates that call themselves railroads are up to no good. That's what happens when companies only chase the money, on land or sea.

We know we can't leave it to the rail owners to decide how to use the world's largest rail network. The same goes for every part of the global supply chain/transportation system. If the profiteers are in charge, everybody else suffers. If we understand how to take the lead on supply chain questions, we get power that impacts up and down the chain.

Connect the dots. If **Mask Off Maersk** succeeds, that's good for everybody who works on a ship or relies on an efficient global supply chain. That's all of us, but especially railroaders. One thing we can all do now is to support the **Mask Off Maersk** campaign to show how the wrong way to run railroads, or shipping companies, has far reaching and dangerous consequences. Maersk is not the only company we have to rip the mask off. But it is a great place to connect those dots.

Fritz Edler was a long time officer of BLET Division 482 in Washington DC, and an officer of the BLET DC State Legislative Board. He is an RWU Delegate to the Labor Network for Sustainability (LNS) and the Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED). He was Chair of the Harding/LaBrie Defense Committee, that organized international support for the railroaders scapegoated for the tragic Lac-Mégantic oil train wreck.





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"I'd rather vote for something I want and not get it, than vote for something I don't want, and get it."

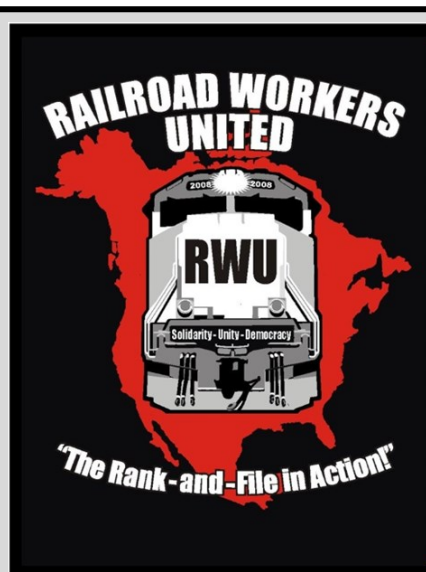
Eugene V. Debs, Founder of The American Railway Union

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- Various lapel and bumper stickers (see below).
- The RWU newsletter mailed to you each issue.
- Discounts up to 25% on most RWU merchandise.
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- Meeting Minutes from each Steering Committee meeting.
- The right to attend the RWU Biennial Convention.
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