



The Highball

Official Publication of
Railroad Workers United

Analysis

Two Years After East Palestine Tragedy - Critique of the NTSB Report

By Jeff Kurtz

We are approaching the second anniversary of the derailment in East Palestine, OH, where a 150 car, 18,000 ton train derailed, polluting a massive area with dangerous chemicals. As of this time, we can't say for certain how many people have been adversely affected because of the derailment and subsequent unnecessary detonation of some of the derailed tank cars, but we do know that many people have suffered illnesses that can only be explained by exposure to toxic chemicals that were released by the unwise detonation of some of the tank cars that had derailed. The long term outcome for people that have been exposed is uncertain, but given the information that we have concerning the contents of the tank cars, the prognosis is not good.

In cases of major accidents like East Palestine, a fact finding report is done by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) that is supposed to utilize experts in all modes of transportation. Using evidence from all the sources available to the Board, they should be able to come up with the most likely cause or causes of accidents like East Palestine and make recommendations to the affected parties and to legislators that would reduce or eliminate the possibilities of accidents like this from happening again. These investigations typically take about a year and will include input from interested parties. You can find the report for East Palestine at [:https://www.nts.gov/investigations/AccidentReports/Reports/RIR2405%20CORRECTED.pdf](https://www.nts.gov/investigations/AccidentReports/Reports/RIR2405%20CORRECTED.pdf), and you can find the full docket at <https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=106679>.

As a union officer with the BLET before my retirement 10 years ago, I would read reports from the NTSB and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) because it has been my experience that both of these safety agencies tend to come to some conclusions that can only charitably be classified as curious, and they tend to either minimize or completely disregard comments made by the unions.

This report is no exception. I hope in this series of articles to point out some of the inconsistencies I've found in this report. I would encourage everyone to take the time to go over the report and look at some of the other information in the full docket because it has also been my experience that the best experts are the people that actually work on the railroad for a living. The more people that are experienced in working on the railroad that we have critiquing this report, the better our analysis will be.

The first and probably most important point I would like to raise is the NTSB's total disregard of the train length as being a factor in the accident. The length and weight is mentioned once in their report and then never again. The submissions by the BLET and

SMART-TD cite as one of their most important safety recommendations that trains in this era should see a significant reduction in size to ensure safer operations. To quote a section of the SMART-TD submission: "The size of train 32N and its makeup, while lacking the scientific ability and insight to prove it, was, in our opinion (given our professional experience), very much a contributing factor to the scale of the derailment, the hazardous materials release, and the subsequent resulting fire."

There are some things that are just self-evident. If I run full speed into a wall face first, I shouldn't need a peer reviewed, scientific study to prove that I'm probably going to hurt myself, and at my age probably hurt myself pretty badly. I'm sure that if I wanted, I could take the time and do that study, but in the meantime I'm not going to be running into any walls just because I can't provide scientific evidence in a timely fashion. I'm just not going to run into any walls.

Long, heavy trains are kind of the same thing. You can do the math and science to prove that they are more dangerous, are harder to control, and will at the very least make derailments much more severe - if not cause more derailments outright - but why not trust the judgement of the people that actually do the job and use your own common sense? Legislation is needed now to restrict the size of these trains.

In the next few issues we'll look at other issues that should have been taken on by the NTSB. Please take the time to look at the docket. The more eyes we have on this document, the more we can do a professional critique on things that should have been looked at and make our own recommendations.

In addition to the serious health issues, many East Palestine residents are uncertain if they can remain in their homes. Veteran rail workers like myself know this was preventable. The Justice for East Palestine Residents & Workers Coalition is demanding that the government enact the Stafford Act, which would guarantee necessary health care and relocation assistance as needed/applicable, with no strings attached. Please contact your representatives to express your support for this necessary, just demand.

Jeff Kurtz hired out on the Santa Fe Railroad as a Fireman in April, 1974. A BLET union officer most of his career, he was President of Division 391, Fort Madison, IA, for 8 years and Iowa State Legislative Board Chairman for 10 years. He retired from BNSF in Dec., 2014. He's been a Trustee for the Lee County Labor Chapter and was elected to State Representative from Lee County, IA, in 2018. Currently, he's a member of the Justice for East Palestine Residents and Workers Coalition.





RWU News

Building Momentum for Public Rail Ownership

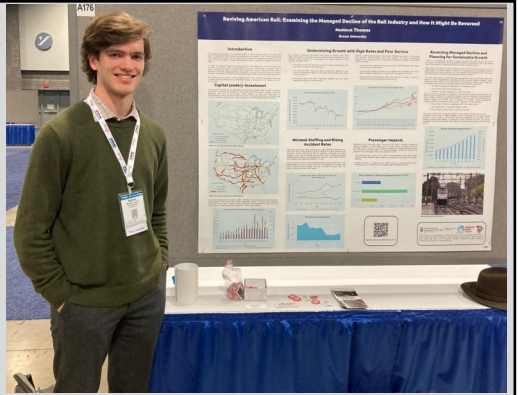
The close of 2024 was a period of tremendous activity and growth for Public Rail Now (PRN), marked by significant outreach, coalition-building, and educational initiatives. Across North America, PRN engaged railroad workers and connected with new activists and organizations, strengthening the campaign for public rail ownership.

Adam Barrington's efforts have been instrumental in amplifying our message. Over the past few months, he delivered two compelling lectures at the Harry Bridges School of Labor, advocating for public rail ownership. He also reached a broader audience through an interview on Eco-Logic, 99.5 FM, and his appearance at the December meeting of the Dorothy Day Labor Forum. These engagements helped Public Rail Now secure endorsements from influential organizations such as Women for Racial and Economic Equality (WREE) and the Sustainable Earth Council (SEC), further expanding our coalition. With these new allies, we are well-positioned to make significant strides in 2025.

In January, Maddock Thomas represented PRN at the prestigious Transportation Research Board (TRB) meeting, part of the National Academy of Sciences. Despite logistical challenges caused by a snowstorm, Maddock's presentation, "Reviving the American Rail: Examining the Managed Decline of the Rail Industry and How It Might Be Reversed," was a resounding success. His poster session attracted a large audience, sparking engaging discussions over an hour and a half. Maddock also participated in several committee meetings, covering topics from freight rail to urban transit, where he exchanged ideas and gained valuable insights to inform PRN's ongoing work.

Capping off this period of activity, Public Rail Now hosted a thought-provoking webinar on January 15. The event explored the economic, environmental, and social benefits of public rail ownership, featuring a panel of distinguished experts, workers, and advocates. Moderated by journalist Kari Lydersen, the discussion drew on findings from a recent peer-reviewed study that

In January RWU member Maddock Thomas gave a presentation on Public Rail Now at the prestigious Transportation Research Board meeting, part of the National Academy of Sciences. He was well received and a lively discussion followed.



highlighted public rail's potential to save U.S. consumers up to \$140 billion annually while mitigating \$190 billion in health, environmental, and fiscal costs. Panelists, including Kira McDonald, Maddock Thomas, Sean Jeans-Gail, Thomas Hanna, Billy Randel, and RWU General Secretary Nick Wurst, emphasized the transformative potential of public rail for both the working class and the environment.

Attendees left the webinar inspired by the vision of a sustainable and equitable transportation system. As Public Rail Now moves into 2025, the momentum generated by these events fuels our optimism and commitment to reshaping America's rail infrastructure for the better.

For more information visit publicrailnow.org

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Railroad Workers United
THANK YOU to all Our Donors,
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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**

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International Rail Labor News

Railroad Work Around the World: This Stop, France

Ending the private ruin and dismantling of railroads is in the news in France as well as Britain. In Britain, the unions are pressuring the Prime Minister Keir Starmer to keep his promise to renationalize English railroads, operated by private firms for the last 30 years. In France, the unions are on strike against French President Emanuel Macron's plan to privatize freight operations on the national rail.

In November, the French unions warned that they would not accept the privatization of freight service or cuts in privatized passenger rail service. The unions also warned that private firms would replace train service with trucks and worsen air pollution and that privatizing railroads and other transport, including ports and utilities, would lead to white-collar job cuts as well as cuts as for longshoremen and power plant workers. Even railroad police would lose jobs. The unions were defending riders, cops, secretaries, bosses, and every Frenchman's breath of fresh air.

Two months later, they still are. They began with a one-day, November strike that halted one out of every four trains in France. The unions promised to strike again in mid-December and on December 7th the French national railroad, the SNCF, made concessions to railroad freight workers. Most important, Macron's new, private freight service would not lay off workers for the next three years.

The four big French railroad unions conferred and the biggest, the CGT, called for more strikes. Two of the other three unions disagreed. They wanted open-ended negotiations leading to more concessions on disability pay and pensions. The CGT issued an ultimatum to the government: no privatization or no railroad service as of December 13.

The French business press hailed the "minor effect" of the walk-out that day. Riders knew better. Some high-speed express trains ran late and slow. Delays in regional train service were common, especially in and around Paris, the hub of the French rail network. Strikers in railroad towns like Trappes, outside Paris, felt confident.

On the 15th, all four French railroad unions struck against a regional line in Picardy and Flanders, just northeast of Paris. Privatization of that road was to begin the same day. Only 2/5 of scheduled trains ran and some of them did not reach Paris. The SNCF agreed to delay privatization, the unions conferred, and two of the four agreed to stay on strike until the railroaders won more. The other two agreed to strike until New Year's Day. Strikes in some cities halted most service.

This New Year's Day, passenger service was spotty, freight was often blocked, and the unions were confident but split. Tactics are one point of disagreement. Another is politics. To the Left is the CGT, which might be translated as the General Confederation of Travail (like the English word, "travail," or "hard labor"). In the center is the second biggest union, the Catholic-inspired CFTD, or *Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail*.

The unions agree about nationalizing railroads. In 1920, the CGT went on strike demanding their own version of the American Plumb Plan to nationalize U.S. roads. Troops and scabs broke the strike, but in 1937 the CGT and the other unions won nationalization. The government-owned *Syndicat National des Chemins de Fer*, the SNCF, took charge of all passenger and freight service. When France fell to Hitler in 1940, the SNCF asked the Nazis and the French police to make mass arrests of *cheminots*. The company warned that the workers were already



RWU member Fritz Edler (back 3rd from left) with CGT leader Axel Persson (to his right) and the Executive Committee of the CGT des Cheminots in Trappes, a regional rail center outside Paris in early Nov., 2024. This branch of the CGT represents all crafts locally. They were meeting to prepare for a series of strike actions around both contractual issues and the Macron government's plans to further dismantle parts of the national rail system and privatize freight. There was lots of discussion about rail conditions in North America, their own situation and other international and political issues.

organizing sabotage. The French police tried and executed 900 railroad workers and the Nazis killed 9,000—only a fraction of the tens of thousands who committed sabotage until D-Day.

National ownership and good contracts continued until 2018, when French President Macron announced a multi-year plan to dismantle the national system. Macron began by splitting the SNCF, not selling it. The five new companies are mostly renamed railroad departments, such as the Operating Network and Passenger Services. They lengthened hours, dropped safety rules, and cut disability pay. Regional privatization, as in Picardy, came this year. Macron planned to privatize freight service in 2025.

The most obnoxious change will come last. In 2028 private firms will operate French high-speed trains, the world's fastest, but let the government pay the cost of maintaining the right of way. More workers will lose their jobs as Macron declares that he has saved a part of the French transport infrastructure that ranks as high as the Golden Gate Bridge or Route 66.

Thanks to this summer's French election results, Macron, a neo-liberal centrist, faces a hostile Parliament. His backers are a minority and the Left, organized as "France Insoumise," or "France Will not Submit," is the second largest party. Concessions to politically organized worker organizations may be unavoidable and abandoning privatization may be one of them. The fight against privatization is becoming central to French politics and as of New Years the *cheminots* could win it. In the words of Alex Persson, CGT leader in Trappes, "France is full of surprises. We shall see."

Fred Naiden is a former motorman and locomotive engineer, TWU Local 100, RWU member and also a former 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 Debs and Why Now?

By Fritz Edler

There isn't much of a contest. Despite the one hundred sixty or so years that railroad workers have organized to defend themselves collectively, there aren't many really standout leaders across the crafts whose contributions really stand the test of time.

Though he died nearly one hundred years ago, Eugene Victor Debs was one of those few who do stand out. Unfortunately, today, he is not well known in our ranks. The young folks of today in society have almost certainly not been taught about his legacy which endures today in many ways. That is a shame, because, as William Shakespeare said, "What's Past is Prologue." We could all do well to not reinvent the wheel every time a predictable conflict between Labor and Capital reoccurs.

Some things to consider about EV Debs, and why we in RWU honor him. Born in 1855, Debs in some ways personifies the pathway of discovery that is familiar to working people today. He held a seat in the Indiana General Assembly as a Democrat in 1884. The rest of his life was an evolution through the crucible of what working people then faced and how it turned out. He did his best to learn from it.

He started railroad work as a boy, not uncommon even into the mid 20th century. After working several crafts, he settled as a Fireman and was soon a rising leader of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen (BLF), one of the founding unions of what is today SMART-TD. Like many today, he preferred peace and cooperation with the managers and owners, but expected fairness in return. Like today, it was the instinctive drive of the owners that convinced him and many coworkers that "Labor Peace" would always come from surrender on increasingly crucial problems in the workplace.

After defeated strikes, Debs became increasingly clear that one of the most important weaknesses common to defeated strikes was the craft divisions between the rail unions. He left the BLF and joined with others to found the American Railway Union (ARU), the first and only real Industrial Union of railworkers.

Industrial unionism, like a united bargaining coalition advocated today, proved its worth with strike successes. But even the huge enthusiasm of rail workers for the united front made possible by the ARU, things came to a head with a national strike against the Pullman company. The US government broke the strike and Debs and his fellows served time in jail.

In short, it was experiences like this that taught all these men that a unified industrial union alone, without political campaigning, would still most often fail when confronting the owners. It was not long before Debs became clear that workers needed their own party separate from that of their bosses. He joined with others in a succession of organizational forms which ultimately resulted in the founding of the Socialist Party of the USA, for which he campaigned for the rest of his life. In that capacity, he became perhaps the foremost spokesperson for many social policies which we today take for granted.

Debs never stopped fighting for freedom, equality and a powerful self-aware, self-confident working class. He was more capable than many, then or today, in the ability to learn from experience what works and what doesn't. Once he understood, he never went back to servant-like behavior. When he came to understand the real meaning of WWI, he opposed the slaughter of



RWU member Fritz Edler with a bust of EV Debs in the Debs collection at the Cunningham Memorial Library on the campus of Indiana State University In Terra Haute, IN last September, 2024.

worker against worker for the sole benefit of the rich. Again he was willing to take a stand and went to prison for his clear call against the pointless carnage. He ran for president from his prison cell and received a million votes, reflecting not only how respected he was but how correctly he could connect the dots for people.

We fight with one arm tied behind our backs today in considering "political" questions as off limits for Unions. Debs and his comrades understood the role of war and its consequences at home and abroad. Instead of using our rail networks to contribute to safe robust economic activity, we transport death to civilians abroad in conflicts that have never been properly debated in public. That kind of cargo is not only bad for a broad prosperous economy, it also makes our own jobs more unsafe.

Today, we face the discouraging but predictable reality of the disintegrated "united bargaining coalition" we nearly had. The comfortable leaders of the divided rail unions posture fiercely while moonwalking backwards from any actual confrontation with the rail bosses. We'd all do well to go back and look at what Debs and his co-thinkers understood. Looking at the "pattern" we must all now eat, no one can realistically say our own defeat wasn't snatched from the jaws of victory.

Railroad Workers United honors what Debs and his coworkers accomplished and knew. The American Railway Union was an idea unfortunately before its time. But the reasons for its necessity are even stronger today. Everything that Debs understood about Capital and railroad barons is completely valid today. Nothing new has changed the judgement of history on that.

Editor's Note: The viewpoints expressed here are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the positions of RWU.

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.





Commentary

They Are Coming For Us And Their Weapon Is Automation

By Fritz Adler

They don't even try to hide it. The Managers keep telling us what they are going to do to us: cut jobs; squeeze all they can from those of us who are left; repeat.

Remote control (RCO) is a perfect example. For 40 years the employers push for remote-control of locomotives has split the crafts. In all that time, no one has ever been able to honestly argue that remote control of locomotives has been a good sustainable safe way to operate. It has always been 100% about "saving" money. It always winds up with fewer skilled, judgement capable, human workers.

Skilled experienced railroaders on both sides of the engine KNOW that RCO isn't safer or better. Yet the search for a superior Union argument, in favor of allowing industry to make those dangerous changes the norm, just goes on and on. The logic of accepting remote-control keeps taking us further and further, inevitably towards REAL remote-control: drone trains, with no human nearby, regardless of what Union, being available to help.



If the carriers get their way more railroad workers will be replaced by RCO's, increasing the risk to lives and limbs of crew members, and the well being of surrounding communities.

If you've been a Union organized rail worker for a while, you could be excused for thinking the problems we face with the private Class 1 employers are really complicated. It's the excuse for why we have no united bargaining coalition today, when we were so close as recently as the 2022 round of "national" bargaining. The gossip going around now is that the problem is personalities. This national president isn't friends with this or that one, or was it the other one?

It isn't about personalities. The problem is lack of will to take on the robotization of transportation when the employers and their government partners who are determined to implement it. We should never ignore real complications. But here's the simple truth: All of our unions have more than enough information right now to know the material problems and dangers ahead. The big question is when are they going to take that information and put it into action?

Once remote-control locomotives are a thing everywhere (now being pushed outside yard limits), it is inevitable there won't be ANY crewmembers on the ground. It is an indisputable fact that once any new work rules/changes to operating procedures are

established in one terminal, the precedent is established, and it NEVER stays local. We can't close our eyes and just hope it goes away.

Drones are supposed to be the future. Our kids know it. TV and movie producers know it. But do our organizations know it? Drones can be operated from anywhere, even from the other side of the world. The negotiations about remote-control are no longer about safety, accountability and local judgement capable humans. Raising these issues seems to have been abandoned in favor of just a "Save our jobs" argument. We will all lose if our Brotherhoods go down this road.

RCO locomotives aren't the whole story of automation in the rail industry. A version of it was the central cause of the East Palestine wreck. In that case, NS eliminated specialist maintainers and relegated the monitoring of "hot-box" detectors away from the train crews and loosened rules for when to stop and inspect a train following an alert to an overextended, unmonitored, and certainly not completely qualified "watcher", covering three divisions while working from home. The result of this "modern" way of protecting trains was the present and future ruin of a whole community.

All the evidence is in front of us.

Rail Unions have spoken out historically about the deskilling of the work we do that comes with the relentless push to use new and often untested technologies. Systems like Trip Optimizer and Positive train Control that are supposed to operate flawlessly (until they don't) are always implemented with the proviso that when they fail, the human crew member is supposed to instantly leap in to save the day, despite having been ordered to allow the machines to run the train all the rest of the time. You can't both deskill AND use the deskilled worker as the failsafe.

This isn't hard. All the evidence is in front of us. What's hard, but still necessary, is what we need to do to stop accepting automation as an inevitable, unopposable juggernaut. That accepts the boss's argument that our jobs aren't serious, or necessary.

We are not alone. Our brothers and sisters of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) are confronted with the issue of automation. They understand that automation is an existential threat. Rail workers and Port workers are connected. We hand off work to them, they hand off work to us. Our joint challenge is to stop the management drive to robotize the ports and operate them as militarized fortress machines with no human judgement capable employees, and to take the public completely out of the process, despite the risks that would be shifted onto the communities.

Port operations can be run remotely from any place in the world. That's the future for rail as well, if we let it be. The ILA has now negotiated an agreement that postpones the ultimate showdown on Automation, but we will all confront it either with power or submission in the future. Automation isn't even mainly about losing good Union jobs. It is about the dangerous and out of control world they want all of us to live in. It's past time for our Brotherhoods to say no to this dark, automated future.

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Commentary

Why Do We Put Up With This Sordid State of Affairs?!

By Mark Burrows

As this issue goes to press in mid-January, I don't even know where to begin. On a good day I have a lot swirling around in my tortured brain, but lately with all that's gone down this last year, it feels like my inner turmoil has been jacked up by the fierce Santa Ana winds that are fueling the raging inferno in Southern California at present. My heart goes out to the victims, many of whom have lost everything - much like the residents of Gaza.

Speaking of many who have lost everything, Feb. 3rd will mark the two year anniversary of the horrific East Palestine, OH, derailment and tragedy (See Page 1 article). While the front page article alludes to shortcomings in the official National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) report, I'm going to throw in a little bit of good old fashioned righteous indignation.

In previous issues of *The Highball* we've covered and made an ironclad case that this simply should not have happened - that this was 100% preventable. Even NTSB Chairwoman Jennifer Homendy concedes that much, to her credit. That's probably where any credit ends. I'll defer to Brother Jeff Kurtz, author of the front page article, for the sordid details of what the NTSB report failed to cover, in this and future issues.

I want to briefly address the human component that for the most part has been ignored by mainstream media. While the original derailment released toxic fumes and chemicals, much more damage was inflicted by the intentional release and burning of the leftover toxic chemicals in the derailed cars a few days later. It has since been firmly established that procedure was not necessary per the reasons cited.

The NS officials shrieked in blood curdling panic that the derailed cars were a ticking time bomb. If they didn't empty the cars immediately and burn the contents a horrific explosion sending shrapnel and more deadly chemicals everywhere was imminent. That theory has since been firmly debunked and it's pretty clear now that the only reason for intentionally poisoning the residents and the environment - significantly more than had already been done - was so that the NS could clear the wreckage, and patch up the tracks to get their trains rolling again. While there are far too many examples of arrogant, corporate greed vs. human lives and needs, this one is a serious contender for Capitalism's Hall of Shame.

To put a bow on this tragic debacle it has now been firmly established that when the EPA told the residents, who had been told to evacuate, that it was safe to return that simply was not true. To this day many residents continue to suffer respiratory ailments, skin rashes, bloody noses, brain fog etc. East Palestine resident Chris Albright eloquently explained in the Summer 2024 issue of *The Highball*, as well as other media outlets, how the \$600 million settlement from NS is scandalously inadequate. In addition to not coming close to residents' current and unforeseen future medical and logistical expenses, to accept or not accept becomes a real life game of "Let's Make a Deal."

Door #1 - Get some badly needed cash now but sign away future medical claims; Door #2 - Hold out for a more just settlement while medical and logistical bills pile up. This of course can take YEARS to play out. Since many can't work due to their health conditions they've lost their health insurance as well as steady income. Many railroad workers who've suffered a serious injury on the job can no doubt relate to this scenario.

Why should railroad workers care about the plight of East Palest-

ine? There are several reasons but a good one to start with would be just good old fashioned human solidarity, which in my opinion, this world could use a lot more of. But if that doesn't work for you then let's talk about our common enemy. The same people who have obliterated the quality of life for the residents of East Palestine are the same people who could care less about our quality of life as railroad workers. The unsafe working conditions responsible for this derailment, rammed through by the bosses and enabled by the government, are the same unsafe working conditions railroaders contend with every day.

The politicians were "shocked" and "concerned" to realize that railroad operations might be cutting corners and compromising safety. They apparently weren't reading *The Highball* for the last 15 plus years. What the Hell do we know? Why should anyone care what we have to say since we're just "dumb" workers?

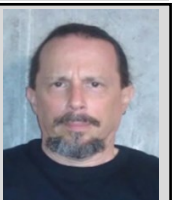
The ensuing proposed Rail Safety Bill, in spite of loopholes that you could drive a three mile train through, still couldn't get passed. So in essence, nothing has really changed and something like this could happen again, anywhere, any time. Our unions should be leading the fight for justice for East Palestine. Hell, they SHOULD be leading the fight for safe working conditions for the members they represent.

What's seldom gets discussed is just the immorality of it all. The Real News Network - which I highly recommend as an important resource for news and working class analysis - recently had a show about sacrifice zones. It was a round table of guests from various parts of the country, including East Palestine, all sharing their horror stories of various forms of industrial poisoning - all from a toxic combination of arrogant, corporate malfeasance and government neglect and indifference. There's an 85 mile stretch from Baton Rouge to New Orleans that's commonly known as "Cancer Alley." That says it all! Add to this all that's coming out about the profit driven health insurance industry. It's relentless! Why do we put up with this sordid state of affairs?! They're all playing us for chumps and rubbing our face in it.

My blood starts to boil whenever I think about all this and I've been told by reliable sources that I need to watch my blood pressure. So moving on to a less stressful subject: By the time this issue is in your hands "Trump - The Sequel" will be our new reality. Buckle up and strap yourself in. It's quite possible that we will all be embarking on a journey into uncharted territory - whether we asked for it or not. My personal opinion is that the statement by the UE on the adjacent page (See Page 7) hits the nail on the head, capturing the essence of what we most likely will be up against and why. IMPO it also charts the course that we need to collectively find our way towards if we're going to entertain any thoughts of defending ourselves from what's coming. I could not express this any better so I'm not even going to try. I encourage you all to please read it, process it, discuss and debate it with your peers and coworkers. Solidarity Forever!!

Editor's Note: The viewpoints expressed here are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the positions of RWU

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.





Post-Election Analysis

Labor Movement Must Unite Working Class to Resist Corporate Agenda, Fight for Real Solutions

Editor's note: The following statement from the Officers of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) was released on Nov. 6, 2024.

RWU is republishing this as an important contribution to a necessary discussion that rail labor needs to be a part of.

For over half of a century, working people in the U.S. have seen stagnating wages, worsening working conditions, the loss of good jobs, and constant increases in the cost of living. This is the result of corporations' never-ending thirst to squeeze as many profits out of workers as possible. Throughout this time, both major parties have been complicit in this corporate assault. They have maintained their power, and a corrupt two-party system, by dividing the working class along lines of race, gender, and education. Frustration with the Democrats and their unwillingness to confront corporate power or offer real solutions to working people's economic concerns led many working people to vote for Donald Trump on Tuesday, giving him the margin of victory.

While working people largely voted for Trump in the hope that he will improve the economy, Project 2025, the 900-page blueprint for a second Trump administration, will only worsen the economic problems working people face. One of the most dangerous political threats that the labor movement, and the working class, has faced in generations, Project 2025 proposes a variety of measures to weaken unions in the private sector, and bluntly states its objective to eliminate them completely in the public sector. It also seeks to weaken or eliminate virtually every law that protects workers, from OSHA to the minimum wage to laws against child labor.

Furthermore, we know from Trump's first term that a Trump NLRB will seek to remove National Labor Relations Board protections from hundreds of thousands of graduate workers by classifying them as simply students, not workers, despite all of the paid labor that they provide to their universities. We also know from Trump's history, and the rhetoric he has used throughout his campaign, that he will continue to demonize immigrants and encourage attacks on them — and we know that employers will take advantage of those attacks in order to silence immigrants who are union leaders.

Faced with these threats, the labor movement simply cannot afford to retreat into a defensive crouch as it did after the election of Republican presidents in 2001 and 2017. Our unions must be prepared not only to militantly defend workers, but also to lead a broad and militant social resistance to Trump and the Republican Congress. The policies that they will seek to enact, both legislatively and through executive branch action, will hurt everyone except the super-rich.

As the airport occupations in 2017, the mobilization to defend the Affordable Care Act in 2018, and the general strike threat in response to the federal government shutdown of 2018-19 all show, the anti-worker Republican agenda can be defeated, and the labor movement must step up to the plate and help lead such struggles.

The strike, labor's ultimate weapon, will be a key part of working-class resistance to a second Trump administration. In the higher education industry, where UE is the leading union of private-sector graduate workers covered by the National Labor Relations Act, university administrators will be faced with a choice of whether or not to side with Trump's attacks on graduate workers



RWU BLET and BMWED members along with other BMWED members at the recent Teamsters for a Democratic Union convention in Nov., 2024. Sara Nelson, President of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA (center) supporting some BMWED members' call for One Member-One Vote. The BLET and IAM are the only rail unions to conquer this essential foundation of union democracy so far. We will need more democracy in our unions to prepare for the challenges ahead.

and immigrant students. Those administrators who take advantage of Trump's policies to attack workers must be met with fierce resistance and militant action, including large strikes by majorities of workers. UE is prepared to engage in aggressive struggle to ensure that universities respect labor rights and that international graduate workers are not targeted. We call upon the entire labor movement to close ranks with this sector of the working class and any others that come under special attack.

Trump won because the Democrats have largely failed to clearly take the side of the working class, either while in office or on the campaign trail. While Harris claimed to be fighting for the "middle class," she offered few concrete policy proposals beyond a vague claim that she would cut taxes. Had Harris campaigned vigorously on a platform of reining in corporate power, investing in green jobs, and providing universal healthcare, she would have given working people a more compelling reason to vote for her than simply opposing Trump.

Harris was also hurt by her unwillingness to condemn Israel's year-long military assault on the people of Gaza, with a significant number of potential Democratic voters feeling that they could not vote to "endorse genocide."

This election has demonstrated, once again, that the current two-party system is incapable of uniting working people around a vision for progress. We reiterate the position taken by UE's General Executive Board in September: "Working people need an independent political organization to fight for our interests against the corrupt two-party system, and we call upon our locals and members, the rest of the labor movement, and our allies in other social movements to get serious about building a true political alternative, a labor party that can unite and speak for the working class."

In the immediate future, the labor movement faces an existential threat. The most anti-union elements of our society will have the full power of the federal government at their disposal, and have made clear their intentions to destroy us. We must respond by uniting our membership and uniting our class; engaging in militant struggles, including strikes, to defend our rights and our unions; and leading a fight for a future that puts people over profits.

Editor's Note: The viewpoints expressed here are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect the positions of RWU.

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RWU has lots of stuff to assist you in the fight to campaign for a real United Bargaining Coalition and to save the two-person train crew. T-shirts, buttons, stickers, bumper stickers, flyers, yard signs and more. Get yours today!

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“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963

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When you join RWU, you unite with a growing network of railroaders who strive to build unity, democracy and solidarity among the railroad workers of North America. Specifically, when you join here's some of what you get:

- Your personal RWU membership card.
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- The RWU newsletter mailed to you each issue.
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- Most importantly, you will become part of a network of like-minded railroaders who are working to make a difference. For advice, encouragement, ideas, and support to assist you in your day-to-day struggles on the railroad, there is no finer network today to be a part of than Railroad Workers United!

Never Forget the Field Hill Wreck, Feb. 4, 2019

Feb 4, is the six year anniversary of the Field Hill Wreck in British Columbia, where three brothers tragically had their lives cut short in a preventable derailment. Railroad workers continue to be killed and maimed on the job at an unacceptable rate. Most, if not all, of these tragedies can be traced directly and/or indirectly to the carriers insatiable quest for profits.

The job is dangerous enough on a good day, under the best of conditions. When you factor in the logistical hazards from longer and heavier trains, speed-up for operations and maintenance, fatigue from being overworked, insufficient training etc., working for the railroad can feel like Russian Roulette - especially with a loaded unit train, barreling down a mountain grade, with the air brake system compromised by sub-arctic temperatures.

The reason we highlight an incident like the Field Hill Wreck is that the circumstances are so egregious, both before the incident, as well as after. The Field Hill Wreck stands out as a bold example of what's wrong, dangerous and unaddressed in North American railroading. Every railroader needs to educate themselves about why these problems are not isolated events. Systemic dangers require systemic fixes. We all accept the current state of affairs at our peril.



L-R: Engineer Andrew Dockrell; Conductor Dylan Paradis; Trainee Daniel Waldenberger-Bulmer. Their last moments alive were horrifying as the air brakes failed, the train ultimately careening off the mountain, resulting in mangled, blood soaked steel and flesh in the frozen snow. In the immortal words of Labor leader Mother Jones, “Pray for the dead and fight like hell for the living.”