MOBILIZE THE ENTIRE WORKING CLASS AGAINST THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S ASSAULT ON RAIL WORKERS!



BY WILL LEHMAN
Mack Trucks worker and rank-and-file candidate for UAW president

I call on all workers in the UAW to support the struggle of rail workers against the rail companies and the Biden administration.

On Tuesday, Biden's Presidential Emergency Board (PEB) issued recommendations for a settlement in the railroad industry, where 116,000 workers have not had a national contract or a raise for nearly three years.

The presidential board came down on the side of the railroads on virtually every issue, proposing raises that are below the rate of inflation and sanctioning the railroads' punitive attendance policies, which have been used to drive thousands of workers out of the industry.

Over the last six years, the carriers have cut their workforces by 29 percent. They have used "precision scheduled railroading" (a variant of our "alternative work schedules") to squeeze more productivity out of fewer workers. Earlier this year, billionaire Warren Buffett's BNSF railroad unilaterally imposed its "Hi-Viz" attendance policy, which forces workers to stay on call 24/7, making it impossible to schedule family events or even doctor appointments.

Under the PEB's recommendation, railroad workers would get a 22 percent pay increase over five years, retroactive to 2020. This amounts to an average of 4.4 percent a year, little more than half of the current 8.5 percent rate of inflation.

Most provocatively, the board declared that workers had no to right to stop management from imposing its brutal attendance and disciplinary policies.

Earlier this year, 17,000 BNSF workers were prepared to walk out to stop the Hi-Viz policy, but a federal judge in Texas issued a strikebreaking injunction to stop them. Biden has done essentially the same thing, relying on the anti-worker Railway Labor Act to prevent a strike at all the major railroads.

Biden appointed the board last month to block a strike by workers who voted 99.5 percent to approve a walkout. Now that it has issued its recommendations, workers are banned from striking for the next 30 days while an agreement is worked out. Even if they reject a deal, they are not allowed to strike during another 30-day "cooling off" period. By that time, Congress is expected to intervene to block a strike and impose a settlement.

The politicians and media never fail to tell us that the US wages wars to bring "freedom" and "democracy" to the rest of the world. But in America, the workers who move the nation's goods have no right to strike and are basically industrial slaves. Biden has also intervened to prevent strikes in the oil industry and on the West Coast docks.

Just as we confront in the UAW, the struggle of rail workers is being blocked by a trade union apparatus that works against their interests.

The Teamsters-aligned Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLET) and the SMART-TD union called on Biden to appoint the PEB even before the railroad bosses did. That is, the unions called on the president to prevent a strike. They lied to workers,

telling them the president would be “neutral” even though they knew his board would side with the railroads.

The intervention of the White House demonstrates a lesson that all workers must learn. When it comes to defending the interests of the corporations against the workers, the Democrats and the Republicans are united. Whenever workers take action that threatens the rich, we can expect a battle against all the government, no matter what party is in power.

I am running for president of the United Auto Workers to spearhead a rank-and-file rebellion against the UAW apparatus as the precondition for a struggle against corporate exploitation and inequality. But this must be connected to a movement of the entire working class, through the building of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

I call on all workers in the UAW to send messages of support to the rail workers. I urge rail workers to establish rank-and-file committees to begin organizing a struggle independently of the union apparatus.

Just as we need the support of all workers in our struggles, rail workers need our support! An injury to one is an injury to all! Only through united action, in the US and throughout the world, can we win what we and our families need and deserve.

To send your message of support, or for assistance in establishing a rank-and-file committee, write to my campaign at willforuawpresident@gmail.com or text or call (267) 225-6633.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS’ POWER!

Get involved with the rank-and-file campaign in the UAW elections.

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved