



Railroad Workers United

Solidarity • Unity • Democracy

The Rank & File in Action!

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RWU Resolution in Support of Public Ownership of the Railroads

Whereas rail infrastructure the world over is held publicly, as are the roads, bridges, canals, harbors, airports, and other transportation infrastructure; and

Whereas numerous examples of rail infrastructure held publicly have operated successfully across North America for decades, usually in the form of local/regional commuter operations and state-owned freight trackage; and

Whereas, due to their inability to effectively move the nation's freight and passengers during WWI, the U.S. government effectively nationalized the private rail infrastructure in the U.S. for 26 months; and

Whereas, at that time it was agreed by shippers, passengers, and rail workers that the railroads were operated far more effectively and efficiently during that time span; and

Whereas every rail union at that time supported continued public ownership (the "Plumb Plan") once the war had ended; and

Whereas, specifically, when the rank & file rail workers were polled by their unions in December 1918, the combined totals were 306,720 in favor of continued nationalization with just 1,466 in favor of a return to private ownership; and

Whereas the entire labor movement at that time was in favor of basic industry being removed from private hands, with the delegates to the 1920 AFL Convention voting 29,159 to 8,349 in favor, overruling the officialdom of the AFL and its conservative position; and

Whereas, in the face of today's crumbling infrastructure, crowded and clogged highways and city streets, poor air quality, lack of transportation alternatives and deepening climate crisis, expanded rail transportation – for both freight and passenger - presents a solution to these social ills and problems; and

Whereas the rail industry today however is contracting – rather than expanding – at a time when we need more trains, trackage, rail workers, and carloads, not fewer; and

Whereas the private rail industry is moving 5 to 10% less freight than it did 16 years ago, and in recent years has shuttered diesel shops and classification yards, and has drastically reduced the number of employees; and

Whereas the private rail freight industry is generally hostile to proposals to run any additional passenger trains on their tracks – despite having legal common carrier obligations to do so - making it difficult if not impossible to expand the nations' passenger rail network; and

Whereas the rail industry has come to focus solely on the “Operating Ratio” as a measure of their success, and in doing so have engaged in massive stock buybacks and other measures that deliver short-term gains for stockholders but at the expense of the long-term health and vitality of the industry; and

Whereas the Class One carriers’ failures to move freight effectively have contributed greatly to the ongoing supply chain crisis, resulting in some of the highest inflation rates in many years; and

Whereas, these “Fortune 500” corporations have raked in record profits, in both “good” years and “bad”, right through the “Great Recession,” the pandemic, and otherwise, right up to the most recent Quarterly financial announcements; and

Whereas, during these years of record profits, these same Class One carries have:

- Failed to solicit nor accept new but “less profitable” freight traffic.
- Forwarded less freight than 16 years ago.
- Stonewalled practically every attempt by Amtrak and other agencies to add passenger service.
- Failed to run Amtrak passenger trains on time, despite regulation and law to do so.
- Downsized the infrastructure, physical plant, and capacity.
- Eliminated nearly a third of the workforce.
- Outraged shippers and their associations by jacking up prices, providing poor service, and assessing new demurrage charges.
- Thumbed their nose at state and federal governments.
- Blocked road crossing and increased derailments by the implementation of extremely long trains.
- Threatened and attempted at every turn to run trains with a single crew member.
- Opposed proposed safety measures, from Positive Train Control (PTC) to switch point indicators; the End-of-Train Device (EOT) to Electronically Controlled Pneumatic Brakes (ECP).
- Taken a hostile stance towards the myriad unions, refused the bargain in good faith, consistently demanding concessions, all the while expecting these “essential workers” to labor through the pandemic without a wage increase.

Therefore, be it Resolved that RWU supports the public ownership of the rail infrastructure of the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, to be operated henceforth in the public interest, placed at the service of the people of all three nations; and

Be it Further resolved that RWU urge all rail workers to voice their support for this proposal; and

Be it Further Resolved that RWU urges the rail union leadership of North America to take a similar stand, thereby providing the leadership necessary to see such a proposal through to fruition; and

Be it finally Resolved that RWU urges all labor unions, environmental and community groups, social justice organizations, rail advocacy groups and others to push for a modern publicly owned rail system, one that serves the nation’s passengers, shippers, communities, and citizens.

Adopted by the RWU Steering Committee 10/5/2022