



# Editorial

## The Two Person Crew Fight - The Showdown is Close at Hand

We knew this day was coming. We have known it for 17 years now, ever since the Class One rail carriers made it clear on November 1, 2004, that they intended to run trains in North America with a single crew member. On July 28<sup>th</sup>, a "Neutral" appointed by the National Mediation Board (NMB) ruled that SMART-TD, successor union to the UTU, must bargain the question of crew size with the Class One rail carriers, on certain - and eventually all - General Committees of Adjustment (GCAs) - across the U.S. (see front page article).

Railroad Workers United (RWU) - and our predecessor group, Rail Operating Crafts United (ROCU) - has warned since our early days that the carriers will be relentless in their drive for single person crews. And we have warned that - while state/federal legislation, legal maneuvers, and political posturing may serve us as delay tactics - ultimately, the rank and file must prepare for a showdown with the carriers at contract time (Please see our most recent article to this effect in the Spring 2021 issue of *The Highball*, "To Win the Fight for Two Person Crews, Rail Workers Need a "Plan B. "

We were proven correct in 2014 when BNSF reached a tentative agreement (TA) with SMART-TD GO 001 to run trains with a single crew member. RWU moved into action providing logistical support (open-to-all conference calls, brochures, fact sheets, buttons, stickers etc.), encouragement, and optimism to an already outraged rank & file. RWU members working on the BN, in alliance with their co-workers, aided by RWU members on other lines and supporters across North America, mounted an aggressive, determined "Vote NO!" campaign on that property.

The result:

Every craft in every terminal systemwide cast a majority ballot in opposition to the sell-out TA. Overall, the TA failed by a 5-to-1 margin, shocking both the rail carriers and union officials alike, while encouraging and invigorating the rank & file. The victory was so lopsided, so decisive, that no Class One carrier since has been able to approach the subject of crew size. And in the last round of national handling, the carriers did not even attempt to bargain the issue.

But that was the past, and we now face a more aggressive, even more determined opponent. The carriers are leaner and meaner. They are richer and more powerful than ever. Their Wall Street masters' quest for an even lower "Operating Ratio" and short-term mega-profits propels them to cut labor costs even further. PTC is now fully implemented and operational on all Class One-carriers. Many of the "old heads" who fought valiantly in 2014 to preserve their jobs and their craft are now retired and will not be around for this battle. The carriers have been granted the gift that they have been anticipating for 7 years: a ruling that the

union MUST bargain the question. And after the recent years of PSR and super profits, they are licking their chops at the prospect of more of the same through crew reductions and further savings on labor costs.

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**"It 'aint over 'till it's over."**

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But in the immortal words of Yankee's catcher Yogi Berra, "It 'aint over 'till it's over." And fellow workers, it 'aint over until WE say it is. Remember, we have held them off since 11/1/04! And we sent the BNSF and the Class One's away with their tails between their legs in 2014, in the one and only showdown that they dared to have with us. And on the Wheeling and Lake Erie (W&LE) - the regional railroad that clashed for years with the union on this issue - the rank & file stood 100% solid and unwavering, rejecting time and time again any and all proposals that allowed for single crew operations, ultimately winning a decent wage increase while forcing the crew size issue from the table in 2018. Workers 2; Carriers 0. We are winning this fight brothers and sisters!

And despite the universal dejection and demoralization, the cynicism and despair that so many of us have felt over the course of these last few challenging years, we can - and we must - rise to the occasion. In the words of RWU co-founder Ed Michael, "The first step in solving any problem is optimism." Well, fellow workers, there certainly is reason for optimism. We have a winning track record. We have unity of the operating crafts, and we have the strength in knowing that every engineer and conductor in this great land are all unequivocally supportive of the two-person crew. When RWU has the opportunity to state our case in various public arenas, the vast majority are convinced, share our concerns and express a willingness to assist if/when posed.

So let all of this serve as a warning to any potentially rogue General Committee out there, one that might be considering cutting a single person crew agreement, like the SMART GO 001 did on the BNSF back in 2014. In the face of universal opposition to the idea from engineers and trainmen across North America, and with a court ruling that allows the states' crew consist laws to now stand, combined with a new FRA administration that once again stands poised to commence a new rulemaking on the question of crew size, to reach such an agreement at this juncture would be an unconscionable sell-out of - not only your own members - but all rail workers across the continent!

**All railroad workers owe a tremendous debt to the rank&file on the old BN property, who decisively defeated a single-employee crew TA by 5-1, and the workers on the W&LE (at right) who held out for several years without any raise, while already underpaid compared to standard Class One wages. Their resolve is an example for all of us to emulate. Resistance may not always guarantee victory, but failure to resist does guarantee defeat.**



We agree that the carriers' irresponsible greed-driven proposal is a grave threat to safety and efficient rail operations. The future of our industry, our jobs, and our unions is on the line. Stand strong, stand united, don't fall for the lies and deceit of the carriers, and we can and will win this fight! Failure is not an option.