

Statement Of The Vermont AFL-CIO

4/02/2023

In 2022, when the capitalist owners of the railroads refused to agree to paid sick leave for Union rail workers, and in December of that year when both the Democratic & Republican Parties again betrayed rail workers by eliminating their legal right to strike for this contract cycle and imposed pay and working conditions which did not include sick leave or adequate safety provisions, the continuity of interests and collusion of oppression between the two major political parties and the capitalist class was again laid bare. Further, in February of 2023 when the train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, released massive levels of dangerous chemicals into the environment putting the health and lives of tens of thousands of Americans in grave jeopardy, it was again made plain that the privately owned railroads in the United States, driven only by lust for profit, do not and cannot serve the interests of workers or the public. Further, it has been the rail owners who have resisted any meaningful reform to diminish derailments, the expansion of passenger rail, and more humane working conditions for Union rail workers. This is the reality of rail today in America.

Whenever a privately owned capitalist industry shows itself incapable of acting in the public interest, and in truth shows by its actions that it is aggressively opposed to the common good, it is the right and duty of workers and the people in general to demand and take such steps as may be necessary to see through the nationalization of that industry in order to compel a reorientation of priorities and governing principles, through public ownership and control, so as to guarantee the advancement of popular objectives. Thus the rank & file Rail Workers United caucus was motivated by good cause and reason in their February 16, 2023 statement calling for the nationalization of rail infrastructure in the U.S. in order to get the railroads back on track and moving in the right direction.

This call to nationalize the railroads is not new. Over 100 years ago a similar call was made by the Eugene Debs & the Unions, making nationalization of the railroads, although rejected by the Democrats & Republicans, a major plank of the Socialist Party platform in the 1920 Presidential Election (an election where they received nearly one million votes). Capitalists and their apologists then and now will say that public ownership is not needed, but rather reasonable reform within the confines of the current paradigm should alone address any perceived shortcomings within the industry. But when viewed in relation to how history has objectively unfolded over the course of the last fifteen decades, such reform has again and again proved itself to be hollow. Thus when the great Union organizer of rail workers, Eugene Debs states "privately owned industry and production for individual profit are no longer compatible with social progress and have ceased to work out to humane and civilized ends," we can say without hesitation that his words were as right 100 years ago as they are today.

Therefore the Vermont AFL-CIO stands in solidarity with Rail Workers United when they stand up to say enough is enough and that the time has come for a reckoning within rail, and that the railroads must now be forced to serve our collective interests and not just serve as a vehicle for the accumulation of wealth for the few. And when the International Unions representing rail workers too come to realize and articulate the need for the nationalization of the railroads, we, the Vermont AFL-CIO will stand by them and do whatever it takes, together, to see this through.

-Vermont AFL-CIO