

President's Perspective

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Saddled with a disappointing report, and recommendations from Presidential Emergency Board 243 (PEB), we have been mobilizing and working very hard to overcome those recommendations. As if imposing on us the UTU insurance give-backs weren't bad enough, the PEB, in their infinite wisdom, referred "away-from-home expenses" back to "local handling". In other words, they did nothing to correct the inequity of the current expense allowances and rolled over for the freight railroads.

I have said since the end of the last bargaining round that BMWED would not leave the bargaining table without having advanced the away-from-home expense issue. Fifteen years is too long to go without an increase in expenses. Everyone, including the railroads, knows that travel and meal expenses have gone up dramatically since the last increase, and allowances should be increased accordingly. Otherwise, our members required to work away from home end up subsidizing the railroads. Our members are the backbone of this industry, and the industry is reaping record profits while our members struggle to keep up with a rising and unstable economy.

This issue affects thousands of our members, many of whom have no other alternative other than to work away from home.

With the situation moving forward with a strike or lock-out pending, and the real threat that Congress would simply impose the Presidential Emergency Board's unreasonable recommendations, I had advised the carriers of my intent to extend the cooling off period until February 10, 2012. This commitment was made with the prospect of accomplishing two things; provide an opportunity for hard bargaining over away-from-home expenses without the issue going on into perpetuity, and given the fragile state of the economy, spare the nation a rail strike during the busy holiday season while still retaining our right to self-help. The carriers responded with an offer of agreement to extend the cooling off period until February 8, 2012, with a mutual understanding that we would make a good faith effort to resolve our bargaining dispute on a voluntary and expeditious basis, provided that all three remaining crafts (BMWED, BLET and ATDA) agree to the extension. I was notified on November 29 by the Presidents of both the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, and the American Train Dispatchers Association, that they would not agree to the extension of the cooling off period.

On December 1, 2011, both the BLET and the ATDA reached a deal with the carriers that they are attempting to ratify, prompting the National Carriers' Conference Committee to agree to an extension with the BMWED. Accordingly, we will continue to press for a voluntary resolution to our issue of away-from-home expenses, but have not relinquished any legal right to self-help should that become necessary.

Extending the cooling off period for 60 days will allow our members to enjoy the Christmas and New Year holidays as a time of peace at home with their families, without being concerned about a pending strike or some other action interfering with time that should be spent with friends and family.

This issue was not resolved in the last round of bargaining and our members cannot wait 5 more years. The railroads can avoid any future disruption to service by coming to the table prepared to bargain fairly. Not to resolve this issue would only mean a discordant and strained relationship going forward. As it has been all along, my hope is that we can reach a peaceful resolution to this issue.

The hard work put into this effort by the BMWED Bargaining Committee and staff, coupled with the support of the membership, has brought us to this point. I have no doubt that, with your support, we will reach a fair resolution of this issue.

We can win this battle. We must continue to show unity, not only within our craft, but also with our brothers and sisters within the other rail crafts. We are on the right side, and the honorable side of this issue. No one should have to pay their employer for the privilege of coming to work.

Bargaining will continue, and membership support and input is very important to the process. Stay in tune to how things are progressing and attend your local union meetings, watch our website at www.bmwe.org, and while visiting our website sign up for "BMWED News Alerts".

Frederick Douglas once said, "If there is no struggle, there can be no progress." The BMWED has struggled forward for the past 125 years and the progress is evident. We will continue to move forward.

Stay safe and enjoy your holidays. I wish every BMWED member and family my sincerest wish for a very happy Christmas, and a healthy and prosperous New Year.

