

Secretary-Treasurer's Report

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BMWED Journal - July/August 2012

GOP Platform – Eliminate Amtrak; Ryan Budget Still Looms

BMWED members and all of Rail Labor are under attack, and the upcoming presidential election is the battle front of the war on rail workers. Make no mistake about it; your way of life, your livelihood, and your railroad retirement are all targets. The only thing that can stop this wholesale attack on your livelihood is your vote and the votes of your family and friends in the upcoming presidential election.

I know this sounds harsh, but it is the truth. Whether you are Republican, Democratic, or Independent is irrelevant. What's relevant is that you are a railroad employee and the benefits you have earned are squarely in the crosshairs of the Romney/Ryan team.

Several months ago, you received a postcard from BMWED/Teamsters Rail Conference concerning the Ryan budget and its threat to Railroad Retirement. The Ryan budget now casts an even more ominous shadow over your retirement benefits because its author, Congressman Paul Ryan, has been picked to be Mitt Romney's vice presidential running mate.

As you were advised back in May, the Ryan budget plan would "conform" your Tier I Railroad Retirement benefits so that they would equal (i.e., be reduced to) the benefits of Social Security. "Conforming" your Tier I benefits to Social Security would eliminate the provision for full retirement at 60 years of age and 30 years of service, eliminate RRB occupational disability benefits if you can no longer perform your railroad duties, and increase the minimum age for spousal annuities with a reduction in benefits.

"Conformity" would have a significant effect on our younger members too, because the retirement age under Social Security for those born on or after 1960 is currently 67 years old and may be pushed to 70 or beyond under various reform proposals under consideration.

Why the attack on Railroad Retirement? Well, there is approximately \$25 billion in the fund. If you were trying to reduce the deficit without raising taxes on the rich, wouldn't you find this pot an irresistible target? Remember, Railroad Retirement was established by an act of Congress in 1935. Another act of Congress can amend or eliminate the Railroad Retirement System in the absence of a presidential veto. This is not a hypothetical concern. The pensions of firefighters, police, teachers and others are being stripped away by right wing politicians. Can Railroad Retirement be next? Damn right it can!

If that is not enough to keep you awake at night, here comes the second salvo against rail workers. On the first full day of the Republican convention in Tampa, the GOP platform was adopted. Among the regressive provisions for rail workers nationwide is the elimination of Amtrak. The platform states, in part, “It is long past time for the federal government to get out of the way and allow private ventures to provide passenger service to the northeast corridor. The same holds true with regard to high-speed rail and intercity rail across the country.”

Amtrak and its employees make up nearly 10 percent of rail industry contributions into the Railroad Retirement System. So the elimination of Amtrak would have a devastating effect on your Railroad Retirement, regardless if you are employed by Amtrak or any other railroad. And the GOP’s platform to “allow private ventures” to provide passenger service in the northeast corridor and elsewhere is right up Mitt Romney’s ally. Wasn’t that his job at Bain Capital? Stripping hard working American workers of their jobs and benefits, transferring work to low wage contractors, and making millions of dollars for himself and his investors as a venture capitalist!

It should be clear to every railroad worker where your economic interests lie in this presidential election. Of course, there are things I don’t particularly like about either political party. There is no perfect platform, and there is no perfect candidate. However, like many of you, I have worked in this industry for almost my entire working life. Like you, I have made money for my family and for my railroad. Like you, I have earned my pay and benefits by the sweat of my brow in one of the harshest and most unforgiving work environments in America. And like you, I’ll be damned if I let it all be taken away by pulling the wrong lever on Election Day!

