RLA - General Purposes:
1. To avoid any interruption to commerce or to the operation of any carrier engaged therein;
2. To forbid any limitations upon freedom of association among employees or any denial, as a condition of employment or otherwise, of the right of employees to join a labor organization;
3. To provide for the complete independence of carriers and of employees in the matter of self-organization to carry out the purposes of this Act;
4. To provide for the prompt and orderly settlement of all disputes concerning rates of pay, rules, or working conditions;
5. To provide for the prompt and orderly settlement of all disputes growing out of grievances or out of the interpretation or application of agreements covering rates of pay, rules, or working conditions.

Understanding the Railway Labor Act of 1926

The RLA governs how we form Unions in the railroad industry, how we engage in collective bargaining, how we ensure our contracts are honored, and how we can resolve disputes.

- General Purposes
- Key Concepts
- How the RLA affects our Union
- Where to Learn More

Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employes Division

education@bmwe.org

bmwe.org
facebook.com/bmwedibt

Understanding the Railway Labor Act of 1926

Revised April 2023
Key Concepts

- The RLA guarantees the legal right of railroad workers to form Unions. The processes for organizing a railroad Union are provided by the RLA and administered by the National Mediation Board (NMB).
- Under the RLA, railroad contracts do not expire! They can be amended. The railroads and rail Unions use the processes outlined under Section 6 of the RLA to periodically engage in negotiations to amend contracts. This begins with the exchange of Section 6 Notices, unless prevented by an agreed-upon Moratorium Period, to begin Direct Negotiations.
- Many of the US Class I railroads bargain as a single group called the National Carriers Conference Committee (NCCC).
- If Direct Negotiations break down, the NMB can enter into Mediation to mediate.
- There is no time limit to Mediation under the RLA. While in Negotiations or Mediation, Status Quo must be maintained by all sides.

- If NMB decides Mediation won’t resolve the dispute, it will make a binding Proffer of Arbitration, which either party can reject. Rejection starts a 30-day Cooling Off Period, which maintains Status Quo.
- The NMB notifies the US President if a dispute threatens interstate commerce. The President may then create a Presidential Emergency Board (PEB) to recommend a resolution. Calling a PEB starts a 2nd 30-day Cooling Off Period.
- When the PEB submits its recommendations, a 3rd 30-day Cooling Off Period is imposed to review, approve, or reject their recommendations.
- If the PEB’s recommendations are rejected and no voluntary settlement is reached, after the 3rd Cooling Off Period either party may initiate Self-Help to resolve the dispute. This can mean unilaterally imposing work conditions, a Lockout by the railroads, or a Union Strike.
- The RLA was designed to prevent Self-Help and maintain rail operations as part of interstate commerce.

- The NMB, through the National Railroad Adjustment Board (NRAB) or other processes, also administers the resolution of Minor Disputes regarding the interpretation or application of RLA agreements if the parties cannot resolve the issue between themselves through their Agreement’s Claims & Grievance rules.

Learn More

BMWED website  
https://www.bmwe.org
Find training materials, additional readings, contact BMWED officers & staff, or access further resources on bargaining, claims & grievances, organizing, and more!

NMB website  
https://nmb.gov
Find documents and information on how the NMB works, who is on the NMB, and what the NMB does regarding Representation, Mediation, and Arbitration under the RLA.