



RAIL LABOR BARGAINING COALITION

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News Release

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Rail Carriers' Outright Rejection of Rail Labor's Proposed "Ground Rules" Derails Negotiations

(Washington, DC) - The second bargaining session over changes in wages and work rules of the national rail carriers concluded prematurely yesterday when the National Carriers Conference Committee (NCCC), representing the Class One carriers, refused to entertain or even discuss ground rules for negotiations proposed by the Rail Labor Bargaining Coalition (RLBC), representing seven rail unions comprised of 85,000 rail workers. The RLBC proposed the ground rules after questions regarding the bargaining process were raised at the first negotiating session, held 1/24/2005. At yesterday's meeting, the rail carriers' chief negotiator, Robert Allen, said, "There will be no ground rules for these negotiations."

"By refusing to even discuss the Rail Labor Coalition's proposed ground rules, the rail carriers have gotten these negotiations off on the wrong track," said George Francisco, coordinator of the Coalition and President of the National Conference of Firemen & Oilers (SEIU). "These ground rules are an attempt to clarify the process in which seven rail unions are bargaining in concert."

The proposed Ground Rules simply covered the following eight issues:

- Who each side represented;
- Who would participate in negotiations;
- The advance notification of presentations by experts;
- The scheduling of negotiations;
- The alignment of common and craft-specific issues so the suitable representatives would be available;
- Mutually agreeing upon negotiation locations and provisions for bargaining and caucus rooms and the sharing of expenses;
- Provisions for information sharing and confidentiality agreements;
- The finalization of contract language and the process for the ratification of the contract by the members of the coalition.

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“Since the 1930s, the NCCC has assumed master contract bargaining on behalf of the majority of the carriers. For the first time in decades, rail unions are joining together in a coalition to make sure our members get a fair contract,” said Francisco. “For that reason, we felt a clear set of ground rules would help streamline the process. It is outrageous that the Rail Carriers dismissed our proposal out of hand.”

Robert Allen, chief negotiator for the National Carriers Conference Committee (NCCC), representing the Class One carriers, refused to discuss the issue and refused carte blanc to point out what objections the NCCC had to the proposed ground rules.

For the first time in two decades, seven major railroad unions joined together in the creation of the "Rail Labor Bargaining Coalition" to coordinate contract negotiations with the rail carriers. The seven unions of the coalition represent nearly 85,000 rail workers from American railroad corporations. The Coalition has developed a coordinated contract negotiating strategy and each individual union will not sign off on any tentative agreements with the rail carriers until all the coalition members concur.

The Coalition is comprised of the following railroad unions:

Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division (BMWED-IBT)
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET-IBT)
National Conference of Firemen and Oilers (SEIU)
Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS)
Sheet Metal Workers International Association (SMWIA)
International Brotherhood of Boilermakers (IBB)
American Train Dispatchers Association (ATDA)

By presenting a unified front at the bargaining table, members of the Rail Coalition have taken an important step in combating rail management's divide and conquer bargaining strategy. That strategy features the coercion of individual labor organizations into divisive contract settlements, which then are said to form a 'pattern' of substandard agreements that are, in turn, forced on other labor organizations through over-long mediation, Emergency Board proceedings or legislation. A united union movement will restore balance to contract negotiations.