



# Railroad Workers United

Special supplement to *The Highball*

## Single Employee Crews

### We Say Hell No!

That's right folks, *Hell No!* We're fired up and we ain't gonna take it no more!

We are not interested in hearing about how the telegraph went away, together with the steam engine and the caboose. We are tired of hearing how "you can't stop progress" and we're sick of being told that the single employee crew (or even the *no employee crew*) is inevitable, that the forces of industry and technology are inexorable. Bullshit!

First of all, what is there that is so "progressive" about workers working all alone, by themselves, day in and day out, year after year, with no companionship or assistance whatsoever? Is this really the kind of world that we want to live in?

And what about the inherent dangers for train crews -- for any and all workers -- that are forced to work alone? The railroad preaches "safety" and continually comes up with bad ideas that in fact threaten the safety of both the rail workforce and the general public.

In the coming months and years ahead, railroaders will be facing the specter of single employee train crews, and for many it is going to be the fight of our lives. Railroad Workers United feels there is no time like the present, so

let's get started now and be one step ahead of the game when it all comes down the pike.

We have included this special supplement to the Fall 2012 issue of our newsletter *The Highball* to get you, the rank & file railroader, fired up like we are. In these few pages we make the case that the threat of single employee crews is very real and is imminent. We ask some questions and have a few answers. And we lay out a strategy and tactics with which we can fight back and win. If you like what you read here, please make copies or order a bundle from us and we'll mail them to you. We also have flyers, stickers and bumper stickers, all available at cost to you.

If you are a trainman, join in this fight for your job. And if you are engineer, join in this fight to save your quality of work life. And if you are a railroader of any craft, join this fight too, out of solidarity with your brothers and sisters of the T&E craft and to help keep Railroad Retirement solvent. Go to your union meeting, demand your leadership take action. Go to work and spread the word, and prepare for the looming battle ahead. Let's not wait until the storm is upon us to start the fight. And in the words of the martyred union organizer Joe Hill, "Don't waste time mourning, Organize!"

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# No Single Employee Train Crews

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## ***A Brief History of the Attack on the Two-Employee Crew***

**Ron Kaminkow, RWU General Secretary, BLET #51 Amtrak, Reno,**

After achieving the near universal two employee train crew in the 1990s, the carriers did not waste a whole lot of time before they set their sights on eliminating that second worker and achieving the single employee crew. And while they have yet to achieve their goal, make no mistake, this is indeed their objective.

The first shot in the war on the two employee crew was fired when in 2003, the carriers reached agreement with the UTU to implement RCO with a UTU represented conductor at the controls of the box. This agreement has decimated the ranks of yard engineers all across the country. By the end of the decade, the carriers had implemented single employee RCO crews in the yard and on certain roads, they appear to be expanding their use ever more.

Meantime, the attack on the road conductor has proceeded apace. The ongoing hostility between the two unions of the operating crafts has facilitated this attack, as the carriers play each union and each craft against the other. The UTU has long maintained that it is not especially worried since it has a "crew consist agreement" which it is counting on to preserve a UTU-represented employee on the locomotive of every train. While the BLET appears to not be especially worried as it believes that all trains must have an engineer, and the BLET holds the contract representing that craft.

As a result of this narrow parochial approach to the issue, the unions did not utter a word when in November of 2004, the National Carriers Conference Committee (NCCC) dropped this bombshell in the form of a Section 6 Notice: *"All train and engine service positions should be consolidated ... the work formerly performed separately by the train and engine service positions be performed by 'qualified transportation employees' ... crew size shall be based on operational needs as determined by the railroad..."* But a group of rank and filers, engineers and conductors both, came together and formed Railroad Operating Crafts United (ROCU) and proceeded to educate the membership of both unions about the proposal and the need for rail labor unity of the unions of the operating crafts. Throughout 2005 ROCU lobbied the unions to unify, to stand together and to take action against this proposal for single employee operations.

Finally, in January, 2006, the presidents of the UTU and the BLET called a joint press conference and declared their opposition to any plan for single employee crews. But unfortunately just over a year later, the BLET's Dennis Pierce (at that time General Chairman on the BNSF property) cut a deal opening the door to RCO operations on the mainline. Under this plan, his union would be the one to represent the worker who dismounts and straps on the box. The UTU cried foul, the delicate truce was broken and the craft war would re-escalate with a vengeance.

Since that time, various rail carriers have run experimental trains with various technologies that appear to require just one -- or even no -- employees aboard the locomotive. And while none of this has yet to be regularly implemented, technology is being prepared for the crew reduction that the carriers fully anticipate. These technologies continue to be tested regularly while the unions seem to be oblivious to the threat they pose to their members' livelihoods.

Then in 2010 on the CSX property, it was the UTU's turn to cut a deal in the interest of "job security". Perhaps in a moment of weakness, losing faith in their beloved "crew consist" agreement that every train must have a UTU conductor aboard, the union agreed to language that provides for the use of "utility conductors" out on the road. Similar to utility brakemen that were implemented in the 1990s to work in the yard, these utility men would similarly service one or more trains, attaching themselves to the crew as necessary and then moving on. Like the BNSF -- BLET agreement of 2007, there is of course no mention of single employee operations, but come on, why else would you need a utility man out on the road? Likewise, why would an engineer need to strap on a belt pack if there was a conductor in the cab to do the job?

So here we are. On the one hand we have the BLET saying our guys can do the whole job, just let us be the ones to use the beltpack on the road. On the other hand we have the UTU saying, OK, we can see that single employee trains are in the works, let's save some jobs for our guys rather than have the BLET guys get all the work. And all the while the testing of new technology to grease the wheels of single employee operations goes merrily on, unfettered not one bit by union protest or interference..

This is a pretty grim scenario fellow workers. But single employee operations are not inevitable at all. Our unions do not have to be at each others' throats. The operating crafts are not predestined to stab each other in the back. We still have the option of solidarity. The leadership can still be pushed by the rank and file to stand together against single employee crews like they did briefly in 2006.

But it ain't gonna happen without you. Please read the editorial by former RWU Co-Chair and ROCU founder Ed Michael on Page S4 of this supplement to [The Highball](#) to see what we can do to create a whole different scenario, one that can stave off single employee operations and preserve the two employee crew.

**Ron Kaminkow is the General Secretary of RWU. A former employee of both Conrail and NS, he currently works for Amtrak in Reno, NV. In 2005, along with other midwestern rails, he co-founded Railroad Operating Crafts United.**



## Where Are the Rail Unions in this Fight?

*J.P. Wright, RWU Organizer, BLET#78, CSX, Louisville, KY*

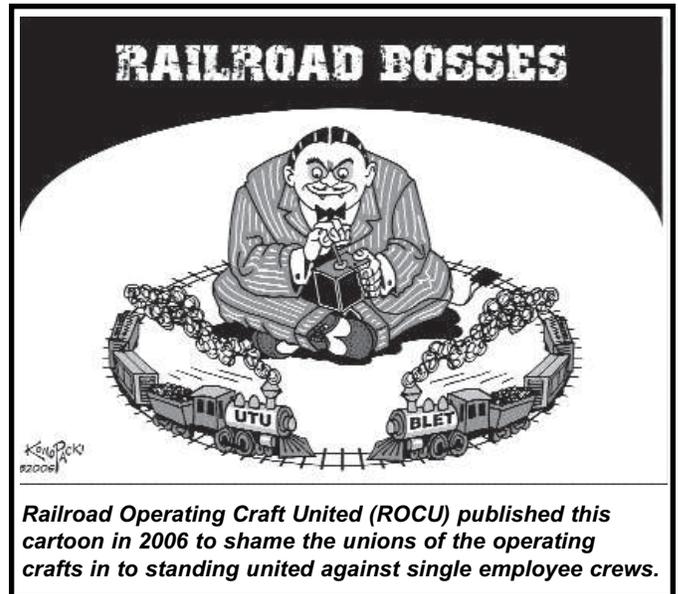
Is the job of the North American railroad conductor safe? Or do the railroads and government regulators have it in the crosshairs for elimination? This should be the number one question in the forefront of the minds of all railroad conductors' and engineers.

Along with this very important question comes a load of historical baggage. We must first understand where we have been to understand what might happen in the future. There are some things we know and there are some things we have heard. We know that all across America trains are no longer operated with cabooses. We have heard about the 1985 "Halloween Agreement" that sold out one craft and eliminated the caboose along with the jobs associated with it. We know that all over this land there are fewer and fewer jobs left that have a brakeman on the crew. We have heard of the language that is being added to our agreements that wish to combine engine service with train service to make another service craft called "Train Service Employee". We know that technological advances are making it easier for the railroad to track everything that an engineer does in the course of a trip. We have heard that there have been trains operated with no people at the controls whatsoever.

Unfortunately, the rail unions that represent engineers and conductors have yet to issue any statement that would commit them to the fight to preserve and protect the two-employee crew. A few years ago the presidents of the UTU and BLET, after several deaths in RCO operations, issued a joint statement that requested the FRA to halt the practice of single employee RCO operations. One president has since retired and the other was arrested and jailed for corruption. With the smoke settled and new union presidents in place in both organizations, RWU sent two rounds of certified mail to those new union presidents requesting that they both make a renewed commitment to oppose single employee operation of trains. Those letters were mailed on May 17th and again on August 2 of 2011. We know those letters were received, and we know that the union presidents chose not to respond.

We know the history whereby the carriers offer certain crafts another crafts' work. We know how the railroad pushes to combine many job responsibilities into a new position by pitting worker against worker. We now know that unsafe one-person operations of RCO are increasingly becoming the norm. We watched as the BLET and UTU were pitted against each other as the carriers implemented this new technology. We can only guess what is in the future for Road Conductor.

What are the important questions that must be asked? We know that Positive Train Control (PTC) will be implemented, but what will be done to keep the carriers from



using this technology to assist them in their goal of just one employee in the locomotive cab? We know that there are thirteen unions in the U.S. representing railroad workers; how do we build the solidarity with them to enlist their help in fighting single-employee trains? We know the dangers that our communities face if one fatigued worker is alone on a train; how will we educate the public to the danger?

With all of this said, it appears that if we rank and file rails don't take action NOW to oppose this possibility, then nothing will be done until it is too late to protect our jobs and our communities! The conductor craft is under attack from the greedy railroad bottom line, and no doubt the rail carriers will get the usual help from government regulators who will turn a blind eye and sanction the carriers' reckless actions. Railroad Workers United is in a position to lead the fight, by uniting all of us across craft and union boundaries and apply the pressure needed to make our unions work for us like they are supposed to. The past four years RWU has been working in our rank-and-file grassroots style to educate and inform the members of our unions about issues that unfortunately, the unions don't sometimes seem to want to address. We need your help. We are rank-and-file railroaders who are asking all rails to join us in our message of union solidarity. If we can't be one big union, we need to start acting like one. Join our campaign to oppose single employee operations of trains. If we don't fight this fight, who will?

**J.P. Wright is a member of the Railroad Workers United Steering Committee and the current RWU Organizer. J.P. works as an engineer for CSX in Louisville, KY, where he is the Secretary-Treasurer of BLET #78.**



## Winning the Fight Against One-Person Train Crews

Ed Michael, BLET#724 & UTU #979, UP, Salem, IL

We all know that rail carriers are looking down the road to using technology to reduce freight crew size to one person. Unfortunately many TE&Y people seem to be convinced that there is little we can do to stop this progression. But we believe it can be stopped with an organized campaign.

Will the BLET and UTU be able to mount an effective campaign to prevent one person train crews or will the carriers play them against each other in order to get one union to cave completely on the issue? Our assessment is that the two unions are not in any shape to mount a successful fight. Each union is affiliated with different parent unions, and they refused to cooperate in the last round of bargaining. And as it has been many years since the current officers have even worked T&E service, it is difficult to imagine that they have any real concept of what we are facing.

Railroad Workers United has begun this campaign against one person freight train crews. How do we propose the battle be won? What recent struggle can we use as a model for an effective campaign? In 1997, the Teamsters (IBT) fought United Parcel Service (UPS) and won one of the biggest labor victories in years. How did they do it?

IBT General President Ron Carey began preparing his campaign against UPS a year before the contract expired. The union circulated petitions among the members to gain support. They held rallies to motivate members and build communication networks among members in order to increase the mobilization effort. They established a website to maintain a flow of current information. They worked to ensure solidarity between part-time workers and full-time workers. They wanted no divisions in the ranks that UPS might capitalize on. Major resources were committed to this battle. UPS Teamsters were hired, pulled out of the shop for a year, to communicate face-to-face with members, and built networks in all barns across North America.

The Teamsters also worked to mount a public relations campaign in which they carefully crafted their message to the public. They made sure that everyone understood that they were striking for good full-time jobs. They used rank-and-file members in their public ads and statements so that the American public could empathize with strikers. It was a combination of these tactics and some political maneuvering which enabled the Teamsters to ultimately win their strike. Many Teamster members and local officers were skeptical that such a battle could be waged and won against such a powerful company. UPS fought hard, but union members worked hard to come together and stand with a collective, organized voice, and win. So using this example, RWU proposes the following tactics in order to fight single-employee train crews:

1. TE&Y employees, regardless of union membership, must help in the effort to educate ourselves and all our fellow

workers about the carriers' push for single person crews.

2. We have to make sure our elected union officials understand that we expect leadership and total commitment to winning this battle. They must understand that we expect them to commit substantial financial, public relation and political resources. *We expect and demand complete unity and solidarity between the UTU and the BLET on this issue.*

3. Single-employee crews are being negotiated on an on-property basis and not as a national contract issue. This means we must cast off our shackles of carrier, geographic, general committee and union boundaries and reach out

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to all of our co-workers to build the solidarity and strength we need to win. *Implementation of single employee crews anywhere is a threat to the two-person crew everywhere!*

4. We must each build a network of rank-and-file members who can effectively work to educate our friends, families and communities about the dangers of one person crews. These members must be able to present our message to the media and others in an effective and professional manner.

5. We must put the FRA and other regulators on notice that single employee crews are not safe and are not acceptable.

6. We must begin our efforts now and continue to build them until our union leaders, government regulators and the carriers understand that we will not relent.

As a dues paying, rank-and-file member, you are one of the true owners of your union. There is a lot you can do to help. Email us at [no1personcrews@gmail.com](mailto:no1personcrews@gmail.com) to get on board. We will ensure you have all the materials you need. We understand that this will not be easy, but we also realize that this battle is absolutely crucial to the future of our jobs, the safety of our families and communities, the health of our Railroad Retirement and the safety of each and every one of our brothers and sisters.

Ed Michael is on the RWU Steering Committee. Ed works as an engineer for UP in Salem, IL and is a member of both BLET #724 and UTU #979. In 2005, along with other midwestern rails, he co-founded Railroad Operating Crafts United (ROCU).

