

Midwestern Marx Institute’s Endorsement of the Railroad Workers United Resolution in Support of Public Ownership

The catastrophic train wreck in East Palestine, Ohio has received national attention. However, the disastrous damage the toxicity of the vinyl chloride has already produced on local’s health, pets, and environment – damages which can extend well over a 100 miles radius – have been a suppressed part of the coverage. This disaster and its effects, undermined by the media, the government, and Norfolk Southern, could have been prevented if the voices and demands of rail workers were heard and acted on. For years the workers at Railroad Workers United (RWU) have warned about the unsafe practices Class One carriers have proliferated in hopes of cutting production costs and thereby increasing their rate of profit. By using longer and heavier trains, an operating model known as “Precision Scheduled Railroading” (PSR), and continuing to petition the Federal Railway Administration for relief from historically necessary inspections, these companies continuously put the lives of workers, customers, and trackside communities at risk.

While rail companies and their shareholders rake in record profits, worker’s jobs are continuously cut and contracted out, leading to grueling schedules and worsening working conditions. Since 2019, twelve unions representing over 100 thousand workers have been fighting for a new contract, one which increases the quality-of-life provisions and overcomes the difficulties the companies’ production cuts have created. After three years of failed negotiations, the Biden administration – which claims to be the most pro-union ever – imposed on workers a contract they democratically voted against, and illegalized their ability to strike.

Railroad workers, whose hands create the infrastructure through which 61 tons of goods are shipped across the country, whose labor is the precondition for modern American life, have seen the fruits of their labor line the pockets of company owners and shareholders with billions of dollars. Meanwhile, this parasitical class of beings prevents workers from having the time off necessary to live decent lives and lobbies the government to the tune of tens of millions a year to represent their interest by enforcing their suppression and exploitation of workers.

The private ownership of rail – an industry so indispensable for society – makes profit, not public good, the sole purpose of its existence. With profit in command, disasters like that which occurred in East Palestine, Ohio will be commonplace, and worker’s rightful and democratic demands will continue to go unheard. Under the existing property relations in rail, expansion and development have become impossible – companies’ profit-oriented management has reached a point where it has become an obstacle in the way of progress.

The solution to hazardous railroad practices, worsening working conditions, and stifled development can be obtained only insofar as the ownership of rail is taken out of private hands which operate for the sake of profits for a few wealthy individuals, and is placed under public ownership and control. The nationalization of rail will bring forth a much-needed rejuvenation in the industry and will allow – for the first time since its temporary nationalization during WWI – for railroads to serve the American people, not employers and shareholders. The Midwestern Marx Institute, therefore, wholeheartedly endorses RWU’s resolution in support of the public ownership and control of rail.

Editorial Board,

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