Dennis Pierce, president of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen and John Previsich, president of SMART Transportation Division, issued the following statement on June 16, 2016, reflecting their joint submission of comments responding to the Federal Railroad Administration’s Notice of Proposed Rulemaking establishing a minimum size for train crews.

“Operating freight trains with one-person train crews is unsafe and must be prohibited. That is the message we delivered on June 15 in comments filed with federal rail safety regulators.

“Our comments provide a clear rationale for the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to finalize a rule this year and to close loopholes included in the agency’s initial proposed rule that could permit the limited use of one-person crew freight operations.

“We have waged an aggressive campaign shining a spotlight on the dangers associated with the use of one-person freight train crews. Regulators must ensure that a certified engineer and a certified conductor are working on every freight train. These two safety professionals — our members — work together to minimize the effects of fatigue, deal with emergency situations including hazardous materials accidents and incidents, operate advanced technologies and comply with myriad federal rail safety requirements. They also provide critical backup to one another as decisions are made that often save lives. A single crew member cannot perform these tasks and still maintain the highest safety standards.

“A two-person minimum crew size rule is needed in light of public statements by the freight rail carriers that they want to implement one-person operations and will continue to pursue this dangerous course in collective bargaining. We are also deeply concerned with rail industry claims that implementation of Positive Train Control (PTC) technology will somehow lessen the need for a second crew member. These erroneous claims should be dismissed given the clear evidence that PTC will actually increase the demands on operating crews and distract them from carrying out their already complex duties. What is obvious to our members is that the railroads want to slash operating crews and use those savings to pay for deployment of PTC. Our government must reject these smoke-screen tactics and never permit the multi-billion dollar rail industry to water down safety standards through negotiations.

“We thank the Administration for its leadership and urge completion of a final rule this year. The regulations must put to rest the absurd notion that massive freight trains — more often than not filled with hazardous materials — can safely traverse our communities with a single crew member.”

“We have waged an aggressive campaign shining a spotlight on the dangers associated with the use of one-person freight train crews. Regulators must ensure that a certified engineer and a certified conductor are working on every freight train.”
President Pierce (center) with a recent BLET Education & Training Department class for local Chairmen.

Editor's Note: this is the second of three articles on this subject.

A s with so many other things, the railroad industry was a trail blazer in the field of employee pensions. The first industrial pension in North America was established by a railroad in 1874, and by the mid-1920s more than 80% of all railroad workers were covered by pension plans. However, these pension plans were unregulated and chronically underfunded. A combination of a vast reduction in railroad employment during the 1920s and the Great Depression that began with the stock market crash of 1929 led Rail Labor to struggle to establish a national pension plan.

The first Railroad Retirement Act was enacted in 1934, providing for defined benefit annuities based on railroad earnings and length of service. Benefits were awarded to retirees upon reaching age 65, and workers with 30 years of service could retire at age 60 with a reduction in the annuity. In these ways, Railroad Retirement served as a model for the Social Security system that would be adopted in the late-1930s.

The 1934 Act was challenged by 134 Class I railroads, two express companies, and the Pullman Company. In a 1938, the Supreme Court found the Act to be unconstitutional on the basis that it deprived the railroads of their property without due process. The second Railroad Retirement Act became law later that year, and another legal challenge to this law by the industry failed. Let that sink in for a moment: Rail management fought all the way to the Supreme Court to prevent rail workers from having the ability to retire with dignity.

Since that time the Railroad Retirement Act has been amended many times. These amendments liberalized benefits, provided annuities for spouses and dependents, and ensured the financial stability of the system. They also provided “occupational disability” annuities for workers having physical or medical conditions that prevent them from performing their regular railroad occupation. Parallel to these retirement benefits, the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act of 1938 (“RUIA”) provides benefits to railroad workers idled due to unemployment, including most strikes, or illness.

All Railroad Retirement benefits — both age and service annuities, and occupational disability annuities — are paid by taxes imposed on both railroad employers, including railroad labor organizations, and railroad employees, including employees of railroad labor organizations. RUIA benefits are funded by a tax paid by railroad employers only. During the month of March over 265,000 retired and disabled railroad workers received Railroad Retirement annuities. Counting spouses, dependents and supplemental annuities, nearly 341,000 annuities — totaling over $1 billion — were paid during the month. Another 12,400 railroad workers received RUIA benefits totaling almost $131 million in March.

Railroad Retirement benefits are significantly higher than Social Security benefits. The Railroad Retirement age annuity paid to the average worker and his or her spouse in March was $3,632, or nearly 80% higher than the corresponding annuity of $2,019 being paid to the average Social Security recipient and spouse. For new annuities awarded in March, the Railroad Retirement total was $4,854, almost 85% higher than the $2,638 awarded by Social Security. Occupational disability annuities — both paid and awarded during the month — were, on average, more than double the disability annuities paid under Social Security.

Over the past 80+ years the struggle waged by the Brotherhood and all of Rail Labor to maintain and improve Railroad Retirement has produced the most generous defined benefit pension system in the nation. For this reason, it is a primary target for Corporate America's War on Workers. In 1979 defined benefit plans covered 62% of private-sector participants and defined contribution plans like 401(k) plans covered only 16%, according to the Employee Benefit Research Institute. However, by 2011 those figures had been completely reversed, with only 7% of such participants in defined benefit plans, while 69% were in defined contribution plans. Railroad Retirement annuities make up a significant portion of that 7%, which is why the system has been under attack. You may recall that, in 2012, Congressman Paul Ryan (R-WI) — who was the Republican Party’s candidate for Vice President of the United States that year, and who today is Speaker of the House of Representatives — proposed a budget that was a direct attack on Railroad Retirement.

The Ryan Budget proposed eliminating the Railroad Retirement Occupational Disability program, as well as the “60/30” provision allowing for early retirement by railroad workers at age 60 if they have 30 years of service. It also proposed to gut the formula for cost-of-living increases in annuities, and to raise the eligibility age for Medicare from 65 to 67, along with turning that defined medical benefit into a defined contribution voucher to be used for purchasing coverage from private insurance companies. The rationale for these proposals was that it would save the taxpayers money. This claim was blatantly false, as I said at the time, because the entire Railroad Retirement system is funded by taxes paid by railroad employers and railroad workers. There was and is no taxpayer savings from this outrageous proposal.

In this presidential election cycle, Ryan is again rumored to be among those under consideration for the #2 slot on the Republican ticket. He also was approached by those who are concerned by the Trump candidacy as a possible replacement for the front-runner. As I noted in the first installment of this series, the current race to the bottom in the War on Workers is being funded by nothing more sophisticated than the old “divide and conquer” tactic. Workers having good benefits — like Railroad Retirement — are demoted by politicians, who then attempt to turn workers who have lesser benefits on their working class brothers and sisters.

You can expect to hear these corporate owned politicians say if social security is good enough for the rest of the country, it should be good enough for you. I think that you will all agree with me that railroad workers deserve the Railroad Retirement System that we have all paid into, but we know all too well that if the corporate owned Republican politicians get their way, Railroad Retirement is at risk. I for one am not willing to take that risk when I cast my vote this fall. Corporate America’s ultimate plan is to turn the clock back 100 years or more on wages and benefits. When you consider the issues and the candidates this fall, be sure to remember that the security of your retirement hangs in the balance.

Dennis R. Pierce
BLET National President

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Editor's Note: this is the second of three articles on this subject.


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The volume of e-mails received makes it impossible for the National President to answer all unofficial communications. Therefore, it is the policy of the BLET that e-mails addressed to the National President will be reviewed and forwarded to the appropriate officer or staff for a time-ly response; however, an e-mail message is not considered an official communication. Moreover, anonymous e-mails and e-mails that do not provide sufficient infor-mation concerning the sender to en-able National Division staff to confirm the sender’s membership status will not receive any reply or acknowledgement. This policy is intended to allow the National President to be aware of the opinions and suggestions of the membership, while at the same time providing a timely response to the member’s unofficial communication, if a response is necessary, without need-lessly expending limited BLET resources.

Adopted at Cleveland, Ohio on July 22, 2010. ©

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Adopted at Cleveland, Ohio on July 22, 2010. ©
Rollback of Workers Rights at Stake In November

Teamsters members and other workers are facing a significant political challenge in this election year. Big business and corporate apologists are continuing their push to strip unions of their ability to collectively bargain by pushing so-called right-to-work (RTW) legislation. And if they are successful, more workers could lose their rights on the job.

Such efforts have already been successful in West Virginia, where earlier this year the Legislature overrode the veto of the governor to implement RTW and roll back the state's prevailing wage law. While supporters there promised more jobs will result from the move, history shows that lower pay for residents will be the likely result. And that's not something West Virginians, or anyone else, needs.

But what happens if this country's voters decide to elect candidates in November who don't represent workers' values? Given the current makeup of Congress and many state legislatures, it is definitely possible that RTW could become a reality in more states or even nationwide.

And that would be devastating for millions of families. Those living in RTW states have a higher poverty rate than those in ones that support collective bargaining.

In fact, nine of the 10 highest poverty states are RTW. That, in part, is attributable to lower salaries and benefits. Those with no rights at work make almost $1,500 a year less. They are also less likely to receive employer-based health insurance or pensions.

Teamsters must help lead the charge to defeat efforts to spread anti-worker legislation. RTW is a ruse. Now pro-worker forces need to spread that message so everyday Americans understand what is at stake.

Fraternally,
JAMES P. HOFFA
Teamsters General President

The GCA’s quadrennial meeting in Asheville, N.C., May 23–26, 2016. Forty-four delegates represented 45 BLET Divisions in attendance. The Norfolk Southern-Southern Lines GCA represents nearly 3,200 active locomotive engineers and trainmen.
Cray E. Craddock was reelected by acclamation to his second term as Chairman of the Canadian National-Illinois Central (CN-IC) General Committee of Adjustment (GCA) at the GCA’s quadrennial meeting in Tunica, Miss., June 6-8, 2016.

A member of BLET Division 762 (Memphis, Tenn.), he was elected to his first term as General Chairman in 2012, and prior that was elected Second Vice General Chairman in 2008. He has served his Division in various positions over the past 36 years.

Brother Craddock has more than 40 years of engine service, earning promotion to locomotive engineer for the Illinois Central in Jackson, Tenn., on April 22, 1976.

Also elected were: 1st Vice Chairman W. D. (Billy) Evans, Division 203 (Jackson, Miss.); 2nd Vice Chairman Lanie M. Keith, Division 593 (Meridian, Miss.); 3rd Vice Chairman Tom P. Bloom, Division 315 (Clinton, Ill.); 2nd Alternate Vice Chairman T. R. (Tiger) Mobeley, Division 914 (Baton Rouge, La.); 3rd Alternate Vice Chairman Roger D. Carlson, Division 508 (Fulton, Ky.); 4th Alternate Vice Chairman Alan L. Douglas, Division 762 (Memphis, Tenn.); and Alternate Secretary-Treasurer Steve E. Lott, Division 326 (Bossier City, La.).

Three Trustees were elected to serve the GCA: W. P. (Patrick) Randolph, Division 512 (Belleville, Ill.); T. D. (Ted) Williams, Division 602 (Champaign, Ill.); and Lanie M. Keith, Division 503 (Meridian, Miss.).

Representing the BLET National Division at the meeting were: First Vice President E. Lee Pratt; National Vice President Marcus J. Ruef; and National Secretary-Treasurer Steve E. Lott.

Delegates, officers and guests attending the quadrennial meeting of the BLET’s Canadian National-Illinois Central General Committee of Adjustment at Tunica, Miss., June 6-8, 2016.

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David Spradlin elected KCS General Chairman

Kenny A. Hansen was elected Chairman of the Iowa State Legislative Board at the Board’s quadrennial meeting in Altoona, Iowa, June 13-14, 2016.

“Congratulations and thank you to Brother Hansen and all officers of the Iowa State Legislative Board,” BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce said. “They will have their work cut out for them with the national election just a few months away, but I have every confidence that they are up to the task of educating legislators and candidates about our issues. I also wish to thank Brother Orlando Penrod for his service as Chairman and for his continued dedication to our Brotherhood.”

The delegates heard from Iowa’s former Lieutenant Governor Patti Judge, who addressed them via conference call. She is currently campaigning to represent the State of Iowa in the U.S. Senate. Outside of election of officers, the delegates spent the majority of their time conducting a significant re-write of their Bylaws.

Brother Hansen hired out as a welder in 1993 for the Chicago & NorthWestern Railroad at Clinton, Iowa. He transferred to engine service three months later and earned promotion to locomotive engineer in March of 1994. Brother Hansen and his wife Jody have been married the entire time he has worked for the railroad and they have three adult children.

Hansen elected Chairman of Iowa State Legislative Board
Each year, the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) prepares a “Certificate of Service Months and Compensation” (Form BA-6) for every railroad employee who had creditable railroad compensation in the previous calendar year. The RRB typically mails these forms to employees during the first half of June each year. While every effort has been made to maintain current addresses for all active railroad employees, anyone with compensation reported in 2015 who has not received Form BA-6 by July 1, 2016, or needs a replacement, should contact the nearest RRB field office by calling the agency’s toll-free number, (877) 772-5772.

Form BA-6 provides employees with a record of their railroad retirement service and compensation, and the information shown is used to determine whether an employee qualifies for benefits and the amount of those benefits. It is important that employees review their Form BA-6 to see whether their own records of service months and creditable compensation agree with the figures shown on the form.

In checking the 2015 compensation total, employees should be aware that only annual earnings up to $118,500 were creditable for railroad retirement purposes in that year, and that $118,500 is the maximum amount shown on the form. To assist employees in reviewing their service credits, the form also shows service credited on a month-by-month basis for 2014, 2013, and 2012, when the creditable compensation maximum was $117,000 for 2014, $113,700 for 2013 and $110,100 for 2012.

The form also identifies the employer(s) reporting the employee’s 2015 service and compensation.

Besides the months of service report- ed by employers, Form BA-6 shows the number of any additional service months deemed by the RRB. Deemed service months may be credited under certain conditions for an employee who did not work in all 12 months of the year, but had creditable tier II earnings exceeding monthly prorations of the creditable tier II earnings maximum for the year. However, the total of reported and deemed service months may never exceed 12 in a calendar year, and no service months, reported or deemed, can be credited after retirement, severance, resignation, discharge, or death.

Form BA-6 shows the number of months of verified military service creditable as service under the Railroad Retirement Act, if the service was previously reported to the RRB. Employees are encouraged to submit proofs of age and/or military service in advance of their actual retirement. Filing these proofs with the RRB in advance will streamline the benefit application process and prevent payment delays.

For employees who received separation or severance payments, the section of the form designated “Taxable Amount” shows the amounts reported by employers of any separation allowance or severance payments that were subject to railroad retirement tier II taxes. This information is shown on the form because a lump sum, approximating part or all of the tier II taxes deducted from such payments made after 1984 which did not provide additional tier II credits, may be payable by the RRB upon retirement to qualified employees or to survivors if the employee dies before retirement. The amount of an allowance included in an employee’s regular compensation is shown under “Compensation Amount.”

Form BA-6 also shows, in the section designated “Employee Contributions,” the cumulative amount of tier II railroad retirement payroll taxes paid by the employee over and above tier I social security equivalent payroll taxes. While the RRB does not collect or maintain payroll tax information, the agency computes this amount from its compensation records in order to advise retired employees of their payroll tax contributions for Federal income tax purposes.

Employees should check their name, address, birth date and sex shown at the top of the form. If the form shows the birth date as 99-9999 and the gender code is “U” (for unknown), it means the RRB is verifying his or her social security number with the Social Security Administration. Otherwise, if the personal identifying information is incorrect or incomplete (generally a case where the employee’s surname has more than 10 letters and the form shows only the first 10 letters) or the address is not correct, the employee should contact an RRB field office. The field office can then correct the RRB’s records. This is important in order to prevent identity or security-related problems that could arise if the employee wants to use certain Internet services available on the RRB’s website at www.rrb.gov.

Employees may view their railroad retirement service and compensation records; get annuity estimates; apply for or claim railroad unemployment benefits; claim sickness benefits; and access their railroad unemployment insurance account statements through the RRB’s website. To use these online services, an employee must set up an RRB Internet Services account. Instructions for establishing an online account can be found in the “Benefit Online Services Login” section on the home page. For identity verification purposes, first-time users must enter a Password Request Code (PRC). The agency mails a PRC to any employee who files a paper application for unemployment or sickness benefits. If an individual has not received a PRC, they can request one by clicking the appropriate box on the home page. They will then receive the PRC by mail at their home address in about 10 days.

Employees can also request that print-outs of their individual railroad retirement records of service months and compensation be mailed to them. A PIN Password is not required to use this service. It can be accessed by visiting www.rrb.gov, moving the cursor over the “Benefits & RR Employees” category and then clicking on “Request Service & Compensation History.”

If the employee’s name was incomplete on Form BA-6, and he or she has not yet contacted an RRB field office to correct it, the employee should enter his or her first and middle initials and his or her surname just as it appears on the Form BA-6 or a previously furnished printout of service and compensation, along with the other requested information, in order to submit an online request.

Any other discrepancies in Form BA-6 should be reported promptly in writing to:

Protest Unit - CESC
Road Retirement Board
844 North Rush Street
Chicago, IL 60611-1275

The employee must include his or her social security number in the letter. Form BA-6 also explains what other documentation and information should be provided.

The law limits to four years the period during which corrections to service and compensation amounts can be made.

For most employees, the address of the RRB office serving their area is provided on the form along with the RRB’s nationwide toll-free number, (877) 772-5772. RRB field offices are open to the public from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, and from 9:00 a.m. to noon on Wednes- day (beginning June 1, 2016), except on Federal holidays.
Educational loans from the BLET’s Greene Fund available to children of members in good standing

All BLET members with adolescent children going on to higher education, whether it be for trade school, associate, bachelor or graduate degrees, please take notice. The Franklin P. Greene Fund, established in 1956, is an educational loan fund set up to assist the children of living or deceased BLET members by providing educational assistance with low-interest loans.

The necessary requirements are: the BLET member/parent living is in good standing, or if deceased was in good standing at the time of his/her death, that an application be filled out, signed, and returned along with at least one letter of recommendation; an official copy of the student’s high school or college transcript; and an acceptance letter from the educational institution the applicant will be attending. These documents must be sent to Ms. Nicole Schonhut, Staff Accountant, BLET Accounting Department, 7061 East Pleasant Valley Road, Independence, Ohio 44131.

Brother Franklin P. Greene was a member of BLET Division 266 (Gladsden, Mich.) and a locomotive engineer on the Soo Line from 1895 to 1940. Before his death at the age of 86, Brother Greene wrote to then-Grand Chief Engineer Guy L. Brown stating, “… everything I have I owe to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers.” In appreciation for what the Organization did for him, Brother Greene established the loan fund in his Will.

The National Division understands school begins this August and September. We ask that interested persons submit applications as soon as time permits. Should you have any questions regarding the loan, please direct them to Ms. Schonhut at: 216-241-2630, ext. 211 or you may email her at: schonhut@ble-t.org.

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The U.S. Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) has announced a schedule of dates for the agency’s fall and winter 2016 informational conferences. The conferences will be held in 10 locations across the country from September 16 through December 9.

Started approximately 60 years ago by the RRB’s Office of the Labor Member, the conferences provide rail union officers with a comprehensive overview of the provisions and financing of the railroad retirement and unemployment insurance systems. These officials, in turn, pass on to their fellow rail labor membership the information acquired at the conferences.

Informational Conferences are open to union officials and their spouses by invitation only. Labor representatives who do not receive an invitation to a conference in their area should contact the RRB toll-free at (877) 772-5772 and request that they be added to the agency’s invitation database. Registration for each informational conference begins at 8:00 a.m., with the programs beginning promptly at 8:30 a.m. and ending at 12:15 p.m.

### SEPTEMBER 2016

**SEPTEMBER 16**
- Decatur, Ill.
  - Decatur Conference Center
  - 4191 US Hwy. 36

**SEPTEMBER 16**
- Roanoke, Va.
  - Holiday Inn Roanoke
  - 3315 Oldway Drive

**SEPTEMBER 23**
- Fort Worth, Texas
  - Courtyard Fort Worth South University
  - 3550 Riverfront Drive

**SEPTEMBER 23**
- Albany, N.Y.
  - Albany Ramada Inn
  - 3 Waterfall Extension

### OCTOBER 2016

**OCTOBER 21**
- Bellevue, Wash.
  - Red Lion Hotel
  - 11211 Main Street

**OCTOBER 21**
- Pittsburgh, Pa.
  - Greater PA Regional Council of Carpenters Union Hall
  - 650 Ridge Road

**OCTOBER 28**
  - Sheet Metal Workers #19 Union Hall
  - 1301 S. Columbus Blvd.

### NOVEMBER 2016

**NOVEMBER 18**
- Charlotte, N.C.
  - Fairfield Inn and Suites
  - 8540 East Independence Blvd.

### DECEMBER 2016

**DECEMBER 9**
- Metairie, La.
  - Wyndham Garden New Orleans Airport
  - 6401 Veterans Memorial Blvd.

**DECEMBER 9**
- Jacksonville, Fla.
  - Embassy Suites by Hilton
  - Jacksonville Baymeadows
  - 9300 Baymeadows Road

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BLET to conduct LR class in September

The BLET Education & Training Department, in conjunction with the National Legislative Office, will conduct a class for BLET Division Legislative Representatives in Washington, D.C., from September 25-29, 2016.

The class will take place at the Intercontinental Brotherhood of Teamsters headquarters. Classroom training begins at 5:00 p.m. on Sunday, September 25, with an orientation and discussion about expectations for the week ahead. All-day classroom training will start Monday, September 26 and run through Wednesday, September 28, 2016.

During this class, Congress will be in session for the last time prior to their recess and the national elections. This will be a good time to come to Washington and assist the BLET in relaying the issues and concerns affecting our organization. The curriculum will cover:

- Computer skills (principles of using the Internet and database management);
- Regulatory affairs (reporting and documenting important issues);
- Political affairs (the anatomy of elections, how a bill becomes law, communications skills and correspondence with politicians);
- Understanding individual State Legislative Board bylaws; and
- Trustee responsibilities.

Upon completion of the classroom training, attendees will participate in a full day of lobbying on Capitol Hill on Thursday, September 29, with a wrap-up day scheduled for Friday, September 30.

Participation in this class is limited to the 20 attendees who will be guaranteed to attend BLET Legislative Division representatives and new State Legislative Board Chairmen.

Those who successfully complete the September 25-28 classroom portion will be eligible for a $140 per diem, for classroom days only, from the North American Railway Foundation (www.narfoundation.org). NARF does not pay stipends for the day of lobbying.

Attendees must register for the LR Class through the BLET website at: www.blet.org/ir.

After registering through the BLET website, please send an email containing hotel reservation information. For more information, please contact Jason Wright, Special Representative of the BLET Director and Education and Training Department: office, (216) 241-2630, ext. 247, cell, (216) 296-4447, or email weight@blet.org.

Are you a photographer? The National Division’s Public Affairs Department, which has received numerous inquiries lately from BLET members volunteering to contribute their images to the “Photo of the Month” section of the Newsletter. The Division would like to submit photos for consideration, you may call Editor John Bentley at (216) 241-2630, ext. 248, or you can email jעל@dulh@sble@le.org