On Friday afternoon, July 6, U.S. District Court Judge Diana Saldaña blocked a strike by members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) employed by the Texas Mexican Railway (Tex Mex), which was scheduled to begin at 12:01 a.m. on July 9, by granting a Preliminary Injunction that had been requested by Tex Mex and its multi-national corporate parent, Kansas City Southern Railway (KCSR).

In dispute is the railroads’ plan to replace Tex Mex crews with Mexican train crews employed by a Mexican KCSR subsidiary (KCSM) over the 9 mile Tex Mex line that runs between the interchange point at the U.S./Mexican border on the International Bridge connecting the two nations, and the Tex Mex Laredo Yard. The strike had been approved by 98% of voting members, and the strike date had been set by BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce and BLET Tex Mex General Chairman Chris Heise to coincide with the day the crew replacements were scheduled to begin. Judge Saldaña held an emergency hearing in Laredo on Tuesday, July 3. The railroads argued the dispute involved interpretations of four collective bargaining agreements, and for that reason, was a “minor” dispute under the Railway Labor Act (RLA) and subject to mandatory arbitration, rather than self-help.

The Judge’s decision was in spite of the volume of evidence presented to the Court by BLET on a number of key issues. The Union definitively showed how the plan would diminish railroad safety, because it was contrary to the letter and the spirit of numerous Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) regulations. Among those were regulations governing subjects such as operating crew certification, radio
I’ve said this before and I’ll say it again: if the BLET goes away, then so will your union contract. And believe me, you do not want to work in this industry without a union contract to protect you. You would become an at-will employee. Things like a seniority roster, paid vacation and health care are all the whisks of the employer when there is no Union contract. Without a union and without a union contract, that work would be given away without a fight. Without a union and without a union contract, there wouldn’t be the fight to preserve two-person train crews at the W&LE. Elections have consequences, and although I know that not all members agree with my political views, I must agree that we have to elect politicians who will stand up for what we believe in and who will help us to protect our way of life, if we are to be successful.

Please join me this fall when we go to the polls in November. Help me to help you by electing candidates who are pro-labor and who will stand up for working Americans. Help yourself by voting for candidates who will work with the BLET and all of rail labor to make our workplace safer and who will make sure that you continue to have a voice on the job.

DENNIS R. PIERCE
BLET National President
The public believes in the power of unions

Some anti-worker advocates are trying to convince the public that the labor movement is unnecessary in today’s world. But a survey conducted earlier this month by the Pew Research Center shows that this is wishful thinking on their part.

The poll found that 55 percent of Americans have a positive impression of unions. Additionally, they have a negative view of unions’ reduced size in the workplace in the last two decades, with 51 percent saying it has been mostly bad for workers, compared to 35 percent who say it has been mostly good.

African Americans see unions’ declining numbers the most negatively at 65 percent, followed by those with postgraduate degrees at 61 percent. When broken down by age, younger millennials in the 18-to-29 age group view the change most negatively, at 56 percent. Even with the Supreme Court case decision in Janus v. AFSCME, these results show the majority of Americans see there is value in a union. Why is that? Well, for one, because unions pay more. The median union worker makes $11,000 more a year than the median non-union worker. And that doesn’t even begin to address issues such as health benefits, which are better for those with union jobs. Need proof? The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics last year unveiled numbers showing that 94 percent of private sector union workers have access of employer-provided health care benefits, compared to only 67 percent of non-union workers. Union members also take greater advantage of such benefits, with 76 percent of them participating, compared to 48 percent of non-union workers. That equals an up-take rate of 85 percent of union workers compared to 72 percent of non-union workers.

The labor movement takes a stand for increased wages, raising the standard of living for hard-working Americans, ensuring quality working conditions and better benefits for workers and their families. While the American workplace is changing, that cannot be used as an excuse to drop employees by the wayside all in the name of increased profits.

That’s why workers came together in June as part of the Poor People’s Campaign to stand up for their rights. Harnessing the power of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. 50 years after his tragic assassination, they know working Americans are going to get a raw deal if they don’t stand up for themselves.

Despite the Janus ruling, anti-union forces should know that workers aren’t quitting — not now and not ever.

Fraternally,

James P. Hoffa
Teamsters General President

BLET members ratify CN-IC contract

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The News Flash alerts are news articles from the BLET National Division website that are automatically emailed to you.

To register online, just go to www.ble-t.org/newsflash. On this page, you will find an area to enter your email address and click subscribe to begin receiving the most current news from the BLET National Division.

It is a great way to keep informed on the most recent issues impacting your job, your contract and your Brotherhood.
BLET concludes
Monterey regional meeting

On June 19, approximately 280 members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) and their families convened here for opening ceremonies of the BLET’s first regional meeting of 2018. BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce called the meeting to order. After presentation of the flags by members of the Salinas Police Department Honor Guard, Brother Gary R. Pedigo, Chairman of the BLET’s Texas State Legislative Board, delivered the invocation. Brother Pedigo is a member of BLET Division 177 (Denison, Texas).

President Pierce then welcomed all members, families and guests to Monterey. He introduced members of the BLET Advisory Board who were in attendance, and thanked National Vice President Jim Louis, Special Representative Matt Kronyk and Special Representative Jason Wright for their work in managing and organizing the regional meeting. President Pierce also recognized and thanked the regional meeting arrangements committee members who provided local support: J. C. Boatman, retired member of Division 553 (Calwa City, Calif.); Michael J. Brugno, member of Division 664 (San Luis Obispo, Calif.); Anthony O. Langel, member of Division 664 (San Luis Obispo, Calif.); and Edward A. Truello, retired member of BLET Division 383 (Fort Mohave, Ariz.).

President Pierce delivered remarks regarding the benefits that BLET members enjoy thanks to their union membership, such as work rules, a seniority system, Railroad Retirement, the Occupational Disability system, Health and Welfare, and the Federal Employers’ Liability Act (FELA). He also warned that such benefits are under attack due to the anti-worker, anti-union movement in Washington, D.C.

“We face a fight like none of us have ever experienced,” President Pierce warned. “And it won’t happen in a single, winner-take-all battle. Instead, years of attacks on labor, some hidden in seemingly harmless legislation, lie ahead. That means we need all hands on deck, and we need to educate our membership exactly how stark are the risks we face if we don’t mount an historic defense.”

He challenged all BLET members to do their part to help end these attacks on working class Americans.

“I need your help to spread the word, and the help of every BLET member who is willing to pitch in and do their part,” he said. “To stop the anti-worker movement in the legislative halls across the country, we must seek out and elect politicians who will work for working class Americans. To restore this nation, we must elect politicians who are not afraid to say the word UNION and support us in our efforts. We will have a chance this fall to do just that; we must not let this opportunity pass without an all-out effort to change government from one that only as good as you want it to be. We have to fight today or lose tomorrow. As coach Jim Valvano said, ‘Don’t give up. Don’t ever give up.’

After Vice President Davis’s speech, President Pierce led BLET members in a moment of silence for all BLET members who have been killed in the line of duty since 1989. All their names were shown in a solemn video presentation.

The morning’s keynote speaker was Rep. Grace F. Napolitano, who represents California’s 32nd District. Rep. Napolitano is a co-sponsor of the “Safe Freight Act” which mandates two-person train crews on freight trains—one certified locomotive engineer and one certified conductor.

Geri Clark, Assistant to U.S. Railroad Retirement Board Labor Member Walt Barrows, was the next guest speaker. She talked about the strength of the Railroad Retirement system, which is secure with an almost $27 billion Investment Trust Fund.

John Hermann, Assistant Director for Area 8 of the National Association of Retired and Veteran Railway Employees (NARVRE), was the next guest speaker. Hermann explained how NARVRE dedicates itself to protecting railroad workers’ pensions and the Railroad Retirement system.

The final guest speaker of the morning was BLET National Vice President Gil Gore, who also is retiring at the end of the year. He delivered a message of unity and stressed the importance of educating our members to help turn the tide of anti-union sentiments in the U.S.

The afternoon session included a closed meeting for BLET members and an open meeting hosted by the BLET Auxiliary. Members took advantage of educational opportunities throughout the remainder of the week. Workshops featured specialized training for BLET Legislative Representatives, Secretary-Treasurers and Locals Chairmen. The 2018 Monterey regional meeting concluded with a banquet on the evening of Thursday, June 21. The BLET’s second 2018 regional meeting will be held August 13-17 in Washington, D.C. More specific information about the Washington, D.C. regional is available at www.ble-t.org/regional.

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The BLET Education and Training Department will host a Local Chairman training class from November 11-15, 2018, at the BLET National Division headquarters and Training Center in Independence, Ohio. The class is designed to help Local Chairmen develop and hone the skills necessary to provide the best representation possible to our members. Due to the upcoming triennial elections and the convention, the November class will be the only class for Local Chairmen in 2018.

The week-long course will begin with an orientation and overview session at 4 p.m. on Sunday afternoon, November 11. Full-day classes will run from Monday through Thursday. The class will conclude with a casual banquet on Thursday evening, November 15, 2018. Hotel check-out and travel day is on Friday, November 16. Registration to attend must be submitted by October 22, 2018. Those wishing to attend must register online through the BLET website: www.blet.org/lc.

If you had applied for the April class, you will not need to re-register.

The Education and Training Department asks that you bring your portable computer to class with you on the day of orientation. Ideally, you should bring whatever portable technology you typically use to perform your duties, whether it be a laptop, Mac, tablet, iPad, or whatever your machine of choice. Before your arrival, find out if your machine has Wi-Fi capabilities. If your machine is not Wi-Fi compatible, then please contact Jason Wright, Director of the BLET Education and Training Department, to let him know in advance so he can make arrangements.

Class space is limited so delay in registering for your spot. The class is open to all Local Chairmen and Vice Local Chairmen with their Local Chairman’s consent. The Training Center is located at the BLET National Division headquarters (7061 East Pleasant Valley Road, Independence, Ohio 44132).

Among other topics, this class will cover BLET organizational structure and functions, representation of members at disciplinary and decertification hearings, union leadership skills, claim and grievance handling, and writing and editing skills.

Additional course topics include:

- Negotiating Skills;
- Railway Labor Act;
- Section 3 and 6 Notices;
- Arbitration;
- Basic understanding of the Railway Labor Act;
- Appeal and letter writing.

Those who successfully complete the course will qualify for a $93 per day stipend from the North American Railway Foundation (www.narfoundation.org). Depending on the class, the stipends will be paid directly to the Secretary-Treasurer of the Division, Division President, General Committee of Adjustment, or State Legislative Board.

The North American Railway Foundation (NARF) is a non-profit operating foundation formed by the Brotherhood's Relief and Compensation Fund (BRCF) to support rail history, education, safety and technology in the United States and Canada. With initial funding and continued Board of Directors stewardship coming from the BR&CF, NARF has supported many non-political projects throughout the United States and Canada. The primary focus of these efforts has been in support of organized rail labor — giving back to all of the men and women of the railroad community across North America.

BLET members who attend are responsible for their transportation costs to and from Independence as well as their room and board. The hotel provides transportation to and from the airport and the BLET will provide transportation between the headquarters and the hotel. Participants will be provided with instructions on how to make room reservations after registering for the class through the BLET website. When planning out the cost of your trip, please contact Jason Wright by email: jwright@blet.org to get an idea of what additional items are covered such as meals, etc.

Again, registration for the Local Chairman class is on a first-come, first-served basis and space is limited. For more information, please contact Jason Wright, Special Representative and Director of the BLET Education and Training Department, office, (216) 241-2630 ext. 247, cell, (216) 296-4447, or email jwright@blet.org.

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railroad retirement benefits are subject to reduction if an employee with less than 30 years of service retires before attaining full retirement age. While employees with less than 30 years of service may still retire at age 62, the age at which full retirement benefits are payable for those born before 1938 was increased due to the fact that they may remain age 66 for people born in the years 1955 through 1959. For people who were born in the years 1943 through 1944, the full retirement age will remain age 65 for people born in the years 1938 through 1942. The full retirement age will be age 67 for those born after 1960, and age 66 for those born between 1960 and 1961. The full retirement age for those who were born in the years 1962 through 1963 will be 62, and the employee's tier II benefit would be reduced by 26.67 percent, the maximum age reduction applicable in 2018. This would yield a tier I monthly benefit of $880; the employee's tier II benefit would also be reduced by 26.67 percent, providing a tier I amount of $586.66 and a total monthly rate of $1,466.66. However, if the employee had any railroad service before August 12, 1983, the tier II benefit would be subject to a maximum reduction of only 20 percent, providing a total monthly amount of $640, and a total monthly rate of $1,520. 

As a second example, take an employee born on June 2, 1960, and also eligible for Medicare at age 65. This employee retires at age 62 with no service before August 12, 1983. The tier II benefit would be reduced by 35 percent applicable in 2022, the net monthly benefit would be $683.33. 

Do these changes also affect survivor benefits? 
Yes. The eligibility age for a full widow(er)'s annuity is also gradually rising from age 65 for those born before 1940 to age 67 for those born in 1960 and later. A widow(er), surviving divorced spouse, or remarried widow(er) whose annuity begins at full retirement age or later will generally receive an annuity unreduced for early retirement. However, if the deceased employee received an annuity that was reduced for early retirement, a reduction would be applied to the tier I amount payable to the widow(er), surviving divorced spouse, or remarried widow(er). The maximum age reductions will range from 17.1 percent to 20.36 percent, depending on the widow(er)'s date of birth. These age reductions apply to both tier I and tier II. For a surviving divorced spouse, or remarried widow(er), the maximum age reduction is 28.5 percent. For a disabled widow(er), disabled surviving divorced spouse, or disabled remarried widow(er), the maximum reduction is also 28.5 percent, even if the annuity begins at age 55. 

How can individuals get more information about railroad retirement benefits and their eligibility? 
The RRB provides a variety of information, news releases, and other materials related to railroad retirement benefits under Ben- efits (Retirement) https://rrb.gov/Benef- its. Persons can also contact an RRB field office for more information. Field Office Locator https://www.rrb.gov/ Field-Office-Locator provides easy access to any field office web page where the street address and other service in- formation is posted, as well as the op- tion to contact the office directly by us- ing the feature labeled send a secure message. The agency's toll-free number (1-877-772-5772) is equipped with an au- tomated menu offering a variety of ser- vice options which include finding the street address for a local field office, hear- ing general information about bene- fits, or contacting an RRB office to speak with a representative or leave a message. Most RRB offices are open to the public on weekdays from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., except on Wednesdays when offices are open from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. All RRB offices are closed on Fed- eral holidays. 

Do the increases in full retirement age also apply to the earnings limitations and work deductions for railroad retirement tier I and II, and vested dual bene- fits paid to employees and spouses, and tier I, tier II, and vested dual benefits paid to survivors are subject to deduc- tions if an annuitant’s earnings exceed certain exempt amounts. These earn- ings limitations and work deductions apply only to all age and service annuitants and spouses under full retirement age regardless of the employee’s years of ser- vice. Although employees retiring at age 60 with 30 years of service have no age reduction, these earnings limitations and work deductions still apply until they reach their full retirement age. These earnings limitations also apply to survi- vor annuitants, with the exception of disabled widow(er)s under age 60 and disabled children. 

Likewise, while special earnings re- strictions apply to employees entitled to disability annuities, the disability earn- ings restrictions cease upon a disabled employee annuitant’s attainment of full retirement age. This transition is effec- tive no earlier than full retirement age even if the annuitant had 30 years of rail- road service. 

The additional deductions applied to the railroad retirement and social security-covered earn- ings are not subject to age reductions ex- cept for employees with less than 10 years of service, but who have 5 years of service after 1995. Such employees may qualify for a tier I benefit before retirement age based on total disability, but only if they have a disability insured status (also called a disability freeze) under Social Security Act rules, counting both railroad retire- ment and social security-covered earn- ings. Unlike with a 10-year employee, a tier II benefit is not payable in these dis- ability cases until the employee attains age 62. And, the employee’s tier II benefit will be reduced for early retirement in the same manner as the tier II benefit of an employee born on June 2, 1960, and also eligible for Medicare at age 65.
Amtrak Service Workers Council denounces
dining car service cuts

From a Transport Workers Union, 
UNITE-HERE, TCU-IAM press release.

The Amtrak Service Workers Council (ASWC) denounces Amtrak’s plan to cut dining car service from the Lake Shore Limited and Capitol Limited routes, beginning Friday June 1. We pledge to do everything in our pow-
er to preserve these jobs and the unique Amtrak dining experience. With as little as nine-day notice, seven chefs represent-
ed by the Transport Workers Union of America received furlough letters, giving 
them a little more than a week to make a major life decision. The move also threatens jobs and pensions from coast-to-coast.

Due to this sudden decision, our members will be forced out of work, and some will be faced with the diffi-
cult decision of whether to uproot their lives, to relocate and exercise their se-
nority to replace ASWC members working other routes. For example, there are ASWC members with 30 years of service living on the east coast who may be forced to move to Seattle or Chicago just to complete the career they started decades ago. Therefore, it is certain that closing dining cars on these routes will have immediate and ripple effects on Amtrak workers across the country, not only those employed on the Lake Shore Limited and Capi-
tol Limited lines.

Adding salt to the wound, Amtrak’s offer of “contemporary and fresh din-
ing choices” for sleeping car customers is nothing more than a cold snack in a cardboard box being delivered to pas-
sengers in their rooms. Riders are pay-
ing close to $1,000 a ticket, only to be fed yogurt and sandwiches? We have been told by our members that passen-
gers already are expressing their dissat-
sfaction with the upcoming service and meal plan changes.

Our members are on the frontlines, and they know that passengers view the current dining service as part of the ex-
perience of riding a train through the country along a long-distance route. Our members are proud to provide this service and care about its quality be-
cause they understand that it contrib-
utes to passengers’ experience. Main-
taining the current high-quality service is important to attracting passengers to Amtrak, and it’s central to our mem-
bers’ livelihoods.

We demand Amtrak President Rich-

ard Anderson reverse his decision and stops these cuts.®
Bill would make assaulting train crew members a federal offense

In the one-year anniversary of the shooting of an Amtrak conductor in Naper- ville, Democratic Sen. Tammy Duckworth of Illinois on May 46 introduced a bipartisan bill that would make assault or intimidation of passenger rail crew members a federal offense, which could lead to tougher penalties.

The bill, co-sponsored by Sen. John Hoeven, a North Dakota Republican, would provide the same federal protections to passenger rail engineers, conductors and other on-board service personnel as are provided to airline crew members, said a news release from Duck- Worth’s office. Currently, any assault against a rail crew member is handled under the laws of the local jurisdiction where the crime is committed.

The bill, called the Passenger Rail Crew Protection Act, is being introduced one year after the shooting of Michael Case at the Naperville train station. Case, who suffered extensive internal injuries and died at the hospital, was one of 73 victims of recorded assaults on Amtrak crew members since 2015, Duckworth’s office said.

The man who shot Case, Edward Klein, 80, formerly of West Allis, Wis., was charged with attempted murder but found to be unfit for trial after exhibiting signs of dementia and committed to a private facility in suburban Mil- waukee. Case, 46, has said that he and his family supported the way the inci- dent was resolved.

Having assaults adjudicated under federal law would be tougher and more consistent across county and state lines, according to Duckworth’s office. (From the Chicago Tribune) | 8