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“The political parties don’t represent the people”: US workers furious after Biden signs bipartisan anti-strike legislation

The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee has announced an online rally this Tuesday at 7 pm Eastern/ 4 pm Pacific time to oppose Washington’s imposition of a contract that workers rejected to block a national strike. Register for the event here. All supporters of the railroaders are urged to attend.

Send in your statement of support for the railroaders! Email the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee at railwrfc@gmail.com or fill out the form below.



President Joe Biden signs legislation overriding the democratic right of railroaders to strike, in the Roosevelt Room at the White House, Friday, December 2, 2022, in Washington. Biden was joined by from left, Celeste Drake, from the Office of Management and Budget, National Economic Council director Brian Deese, formerly of Blackrock (the largest asset manager on the planet) Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack,

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Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh. [AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta]

On Friday morning, self-declared “pro-labor” President Joe Biden signed into law a dictatorial bill passed by Congress to impose a national rail contract which tens of thousands of railroaders voted to reject.

After the resolution passed the Senate on Thursday, Biden boasted that he “negotiated a contract no else could negotiate.” Biden falsely claimed that the contract was “so much better” than “anything” railroaders have “ever had.”

In justifying imposing the carrier-friendly contract against the will of workers, Biden repeated carrier and union talking points portraying the 24 percent wage increase as “historic.” In fact, spread out over five years, and after workers have gone three years without any pay raises, this amounts to a cut in real wages after inflation is factored in.

Biden acknowledged that the bill did not include a single day of paid sick leave. Democrats, led by Bernie Sanders and the four House Democrats who are members of the Democratic Socialists of America, used a sham proposal to add seven days sick leave to save face and posture as friends of workers even as they voted in favor of imposing the contract. They knew it had no chance of passing the Senate and crafted it in a way to ensure it would not hold up passage of the anti-strike law.

Biden, after signing a law imposing a contract without sick days, lied through his teeth that he would “continue the fight” to get paid sick leave, something he said he as been at, “a long time.”

Asked by a reporter when railroaders could expect to see paid sick days Biden replied with a wry smile, “when Republicans see the light.” In other words, never. However, Democrats would continue to try to pin blame for this on Republicans alone.

But in an editorial published Thursday, the Editorial Board of the pro-Republican *Wall Street Journal*, praised Biden for “keep[ing] the trains running,” in a paraphrase of an infamous quote praising Italian dictator Mussolini.

The rapid move by both parties to impose the contract and block a strike has shocked and angered workers across the country. The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee has received many statements of support over the last 48 hours from workers in other industries.

“I’m not a railroad worker, but a non-union machinist,” one wrote. “And I still support your fight.” He added that he would support a wildcat strike against the contract if one were to break out. “Congress f*cked around. It’s time they f*cking found out.”

Another wrote: “No matter the hardship a shut down of the distribution network may impose on me, I support you guys. The only way the working class is going to get their fair share of the pie is to shut down the government.

“The political parties have been corrupted and no longer represent the people. You guys do what you need to do.”

Mary, a retired General Motors worker from Flint, Michigan said: “Railroad workers and all rank and file workers deserve justice, pleasures, peace, and perks for themselves and their families just like those at the top. Where will the world be without the rank-and-file, the ones who are abandoned, used and abused? Sounds like slavery to me!

“It sounds like the officials of the rail unions are the same. They refer to the rank-and-file as ‘brother’ or ‘sister,’ but don't mean it at all. They reek of favoritism and nepotism, with their six-figure wages, with cushy air-conditioned offices. They feel and are treated like they are better than the ‘real’ workers, the manual laborers, with the huge gap between their wages.”

A young GM Flint worker said that “railroad workers standing up for themselves will send a ripple effect throughout the working class. It sends a message to all workers who wish to stand up against the government. Enough is enough! The working class is the majority and must unite with their brothers and sisters if we wish to live a sustainable and fruitful life.”

He said that the “railroad workers’ fight is not only for themselves, but will set an example for all working class people to not allow the government to walk all over us. Enough is enough. History is being reversed. Situations and rights that have been fought for and put in place are being stripped away. But we are the power and the ones who can change it! They are nothing without us and we must unite with our brothers and sisters to demand a comfortable life.”

Railroad workers that spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* were furious.

Asked to comment on Biden’s signing of the anti-strike legislation, Tony, a signalman, told the WSWS that Biden was “full of sh*t” and that the agreement was “not a great deal for railroaders.”

“It is not ‘pro-labor’ denying us our right to strike,” Tony said adding that it was “very very disappointing.”

“The unions, Congress and whoever else, pushed it to Christmas,” he said. “I don’t think [Biden] is a friend of labor, I think he is in it for the money....I think the whole thing is very, very, corrupt.”

Tony said a co-worker he spoke to following the Senate vote yesterday was “extremely angry.” While his coworker feels that while many railroaders will continue to do their job, the “quality of work” would suffer given that the contract does nothing to alleviate inhuman schedules or add paid sick days.

As for himself, Tony said, “The retirement is the only thing keeping me in at this point. I have given my life to this company, a call comes in, whether I am at a basketball game, birthday. I was even called out once on Christmas while my son was unwrapping gifts. It’s like ‘sorry son, I gotta go.’”

Derek, a veteran carman from California, said, “The way everything went down. ... It was all planned out and staged by every party involved!” He added that the fact the sick day amendment failed in the Senate was “proof that these senators are bought and paid for.”

Asked if he agreed with Biden’s statement that the contract was “so much better” than “anything” he’s “ever had,” Derek replied, “F*ck no! Because I am a yard employee, we are affected the most.”

Derek explained that the tentative agreement includes the imposition of the Automatic Bid Scheduling system. The system will eliminate “bumps” for yard workers, which was one of the few ways workers could add flexibility and a modicum of planning to their schedule.

One worker told the WSWS that forcing the contract through Congress, “is complete and utter horsesh*t. ‘Pro Labor’ is not all it's cracked up to be.” The worker said the experience “basically just proved the farce of the [Railroad Labor Act] and collective bargaining in general.”

John, a railroader from Nebraska, told the WSWS that the signing of the anti-strike legislation was proof that “they are taking power from the workers.” He said it was “unjust, not giving us an ability to get a fair deal.”

“Why even have a union if they just settle for anything that puts money in their pockets?” he correctly asked.

As to the role of Biden and the Democrats, John said they cared “nothing for the workers. It’s all just a magic show along with smoke and mirrors.” The “unfair” and “unjust” contract left railroaders with “scraps,” he added.

Another railroader told a WSWS reporter: “As I stated multiple times. This isn't about what is best or even good for the employees. This is clearly about profit. Profit over safety and investing back into your company. Pure corporate greed at its greatest. Class I railroads spend millions and millions of dollars in campaign funds so they will get what they want.”

“I will guarantee you that all of them [shareholders and CEO’s] have had a raise in the past three years,” they added. “Not to mention their bonuses. It is pure greed and the purpose is to bust unions. If you think it’s going to stop with railroads, then you better think again. We work tirelessly on call 24 hours a day, every week, every month. Never knowing when we will be home to try and be a positive role model for our children. Through pandemics and all weather conditions.

“And this is a president that says he supports unions and blue collar workers. Not to mention he stated about a month ago he got the contracts all settled. But today [he] signs an anti-strike [bill].”

Another railroad worker said the “the pro-union president” and the “pro-Democratic union” are “all take and no give.”

Another worker wrote: “There are 120 thousand [railroad workers] keeping 300 million of us alive. Get what you deserve. We’re behind you. The line must be drawn here. This far. No farther.”

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