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Struggle La Lucha PDF - December 5, 2022

written by Struggle - La Lucha

December 5, 2022

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Vol. 5, No. 22 • Dec. 5, 2022
Suggested donation: \$1
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As railroad workers fight for dignity and sick leave: Stop government strikebreaking!

By Stephen Millies

Every worker has the right to withhold their labor. Concerted action and collective bargaining by workers are supposed to be protected by law.

That hasn't stopped President Biden from demanding on Nov. 28 that Congress stop over 100,000 railroad workers from striking.

The man in the White House said he was "reluctant to override the ratification procedures and the views of those who voted against the agreement." Yet Biden insisted that Congress enforce a tentative deal "without any modifications or delay."

The House of Representatives promptly voted on Nov. 30 to impose an agreement by a vote of 290 to 137. The Senate agreed and Biden signed the bill forcing the contract on railroad workers without their consent on Dec. 2. So much for the democratic right of railroad workers to vote on their contracts.

This is the thanks the labor movement gets for helping to stop the expected Republican landslide in



A rally in support of railroad workers was organized by International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10 at the Port of Oakland, California, on Oct. 27.

Photo: Indybay.org

the midterm elections. Forgotten were the volunteers dispatched from Black churches and union halls.

Railroad workers have been under attack for decades. Employment has fallen from 1.5 million workers in 1947 to just 147,000 today.

This 90% drop in employment was the reason that Warren Buffett told Bloomberg Businessweek that he had his Berkshire Hathaway conglomerate gobble up the BNSF railway.

BNSF has 32,000 miles of track in 28 states as well as British Columbia and Manitoba, Canada. Yet there are only 35,000 workers that make the system's trains operate from Chicago, Alabama and Texas to California and the Pacific Northwest.

It was the BNSF that imposed a harsh new attendance policy earlier this year. Workers will be punished for being absent no matter what the reason, including going to a doctor.

Railroad management imposed these rules during the COVID-19 pandemic that killed so many trans-



Railroad workers and supporters protest BNSF CEO Kathryn Farmer outside Alliance, Nebraska, on Nov. 2.

Photo: Indybay.org

portation workers. At least 156 New York City area transit workers died of the coronavirus.

As noted in a statement from the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division-International Brotherhood of Teamsters, "the railroad is not a place to work while you're sick. It's dangerous. It requires full concentration, situational awareness, and decision-making."

BNSF employees can be fired for taking off just five holidays during their entire decades-long career. People get sick on holidays, too.

Most transportation workers don't have Monday through Friday work weeks. Neither do millions of workers in hospitals, restaurants and other 24/7 workplaces.

Job cuts kill

Railroad tycoon Warren Buffett doesn't have to worry about sick days. His fortune has ballooned to \$109.2 billion while over a million

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Fidel Castro Square, Moscow, Nov. 22.
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Photo: Lenni Cervantes Party

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