

President's Perspective

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Excerpts from the President's keynote address to the Delegates-Second Regular BMWED Convention, June 21, 2010.

Brothers and Sisters, honored spouses and distinguished guests:

Welcome to the Second Regular Convention of the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division of the Teamster Rail Conference.

It has been 123 years since the founding of our Brotherhood on a warm spring day in 1887. On that fateful Sunday morning a small group of brave men, fully exposed to the threat of severe retribution for their actions, gathered under the shade of a large oak tree along a river bank near Demopolis, Alabama to discuss their mutual problems of low wages, the hazards of their work, and the financial insecurity of their families.

This group, lead by a young track foreman named John T. Wilson, formed a benevolent society under the laws of the State of Alabama for the purpose of assisting families widowed and orphaned by the brutal realities of maintenance of way work. This society, first chartered as the Order of Railroad Trackmen, grew and evolved from this humble beginning to what it has become today, one of the largest and most progressive railroad Brotherhoods in North America.

Today we are gathered here together, 123 years after that fateful beginning in Alabama; strong, united and prepared to build upon the progress made by our predecessors in countless gatherings just like this. It is now your time to set the future course of this union and leave your own legacy for the next generation to come.

Rapid advances in new technology continue to change the tools and methods used for performing maintenance of way work. What once took hundreds of workers to accomplish, now takes just a scant few. Today, our members are better educated, more technically advanced, and more productive than at any time in history. However, maintenance of way work is still dangerous and unforgiving. Railroad management continues to be ruthless and unrelenting. And the challenges of the future will be formidable and never ending.

That is why your National Division Officers have aggressively embraced the responsibility of assuring that our union leaders are educated and trained in the ways of union leadership, union administration, and union ideals. Transition to the future is not just a theme; it is a goal that is taken seriously by your National Division Officers.

Shortly after the 2006 National Division Convention, a committee of officers and staff was appointed to compile a summary report projecting the staffing needs and challenges facing the

Brotherhood over the next 10 years. That Report was presented to the National Division Officers in Lexington, KY in October 2007.

As part of our 10-year plan, the Department of Safety and Education was split into separate departments in order to provide a full-time Department of Education. Over the past three years, the National Division has been conducting Local Chairman and Local Lodge Secretary-Treasurer seminars around the country. National Division, with the approval of the National Division Officers, has been providing substantial financial assistance to Local Lodges to help offset the cost of sending Lodge Officers to these training programs. Additionally, we have recently developed a new discipline program, in cooperation with our Arbitration Department, to train Local Lodge and System Officers in handling discipline cases and representing members in disciplinary hearings.

No matter how well we plan, however, we know our future will be influenced by what happens in Washington, DC. So I have expanded our Legislative Department in Washington, D.C. by appointing full time Regional Coordinators to assist the Legislative Department in achieving its goals. This has been particularly helpful in promoting work opportunities for BMWED members in the developing area of high-speed rail and in securing long-term funding for Amtrak, commuter rail and high-speed rail corridors. Additionally, our Department of Safety has been working with FRA and the Rail Safety Advisory Committee to improve Roadway Worker Protection and strengthen the Federal Track Safety Standards and Passenger Equipment Regulations to assure the safety of high-speed rail. And, our Arbitration Department has been working with your National Division and System Officers to protect our work through an aggressive strategy to curb contracting out and protect BMWED collective bargaining agreements.

Looking back over the past four years, you ratified a national contract that provided some of the best wage increases seen in decades. Of course the contract was not perfect, but I think it's safe to say that we are thankful for our union-negotiated contracts that delivered retroactive pay and wage increases to BMWED members during one of the most difficult economic downturns this country has experienced since the great depression.

We bargained the last national contract as part of the Rail Labor Bargaining Coalition. We duplicated this success on Amtrak when we formed the Passenger Rail Labor Bargaining Coalition with several other unions. Against significant odds, and under one of the most anti-union administrations on record, the Passenger Rail Coalition delivered eight years of back pay and wage increases to our Amtrak members.

I am pleased to stand here today and tell you the Rail Labor Bargaining Coalition has been reconstituted for this round of national bargaining, and a passenger coalition has been established on Amtrak. The BMWED, BLET, Boilermakers, Firemen & Oilers, Signalmen, and Sheet Metal Workers are signatory to the RLBC agreement and we intend to build upon the success of the last round.

Your National Division and System Officers are committed to addressing those issues important to you that were not resolved in the last round of bargaining. We have made it clear to the other

unions and the railroads that these issues will be resolved. We intend to use every resource and tactic to achieve our bargaining goals.

I want to thank General President Hoffa, General Secretary-Treasurer Keegel, and Rail Conference Director Murphy for their endless support of our collective bargaining goals and strategies. Standing together united and in solidarity, we intend to deliver the kind of collective bargaining agreement you deserve. Our coalition is united and strong. Add Teamster power and we will not be denied!

Of course, our work is not done and we will continue the fight to make gains for the membership. We will continue to fight contracting out, and we will continue to fight Camp Cars. We will continue efforts to grow our union through organizing and the expansion of passenger service. We will continue our efforts at the bargaining table, in the halls of Congress, at the ballot box, and before every federal agency and tribunal affecting the welfare of our membership. And, while these battles rage on, we will continue with our efforts to transition this Brotherhood into the future.

In closing, I wish to thank the officers and staff of BMWED and Teamsters for their efforts on behalf of the membership over the past four years. I want to thank the members for the hard work they perform each and every day to keep our country on track, keep our communities safe, and keep our rail infrastructure a vital lifeline of our nation's economy. And finally, I want to thank you, the delegates to this Second BMWED Convention, for your dedication to this Brotherhood, for the views and opinions you bring to this National Division Convention, and for the honor, dignity and passion with which you represent our membership.

God Bless you all, God Bless our Brotherhood, God Bless our troops, and God Bless America. Thank you.

