February 5, 2015 Newsletter

**It’s Time To Prepare For March 13 Strike**

Where Talks Stand

Negotiations were held February 3. No progress was made.

The Rail Labor Coalition continued to propose what Presidential Emergency Board 249 recommended:

* 18.4% in compounded wage increases over six and a half years.
* Health insurance contributions increasing to 2.5% of an employee’s weekly straight time earnings.

New Jersey Transit refused to change its unacceptable proposal in any way, even though it had been rejected by two Presidential Emergency Boards:

* 10.9% in compounded wage increases over seven years.
* Radically higher employee health insurance contributions, that would rise to an average cost of $460 per month, with families paying as much as $642 a month.

Why A Strike Is Likely

Negotiations will continue. But we cannot accept anything close to the draconian increases in health insurance payments that NJT is demanding, which would effectively wipe out the paltry wage increases the company is offering. And NJT shows no signs of improving its offer.

What You Can Do

Prepare yourself economically. At 12:01 am on Sunday, March 13, every union on New Jersey Transit will strike if no agreement is reached. The company is likely to simultaneously announce a lock-out. Once a strike begins, no one knows how long it will last. If you do not want to be paying the extreme insurance contributions that NJT is demanding, you must be prepared to strike for as long as it takes for NJT to come to its senses.

Don’t listen to rumors. Already there have been erroneous reports of President Obama ending a strike after one day. That will not happen. Only Congress has the power to end the strike through legislation, and it is highly unlikely to do so. Get your information from your union representatives. Attend all meetings.

When the time comes, sign up for picket duty. Picket captains are being designated now. Every location will be picketed.

Railroad Retirement Unemployment Benefits

Because the unions’ final offer was selected as the “most reasonable” by PEB 249, strikers will be eligible for Railroad Retirement unemployment benefits. However, there is a fourteen day waiting period. If the strike should continue past two weeks, benefits will be $671.04 every subsequent two week period. You can apply on-line at www.rrb.gov. But you must first have an RRB online account. Apply for one now at the same RRB web site.

As Long As We Stay United, We Will Prevail

New Jersey Transit is solely responsible for this mess. Every previous round we have reached fair contracts without strikes – contracts that each union’s membership has ratified. But this time is different. Five years ago NJT laid down the gauntlet when it demanded five-fold increases in employee health contributions. They have not changed their position yet, despite rulings in our favor by two neutral Presidential Emergency Boards. If there is a strike, it will be entirely NJT’s fault.

You deserve a fair contract – a contract similar to those achieved by our brothers and sisters on our neighbor commuter lines, Metro North and Long Island Rail Road. That’s all we are asking. That is why, for the first time ever, every union on NJT has come together in a bargaining coalition.

We will remain united until we achieve a contract that you deserve.

**SOLIDARITY --- UNITY --- ECONOMIC JUSTICE**