



Speak Out Now

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Rail Companies Sacrifice Lives for Profit

On February 3, in East Palestine, Ohio, a 150-car freight train derailed and sent toxic chemicals into the air, ground and water, poisoning hundreds of residents who now suffer from rashes, sore throats, headaches and nausea. And since that derailment, there have been several other train crashes across the country, which easily could have been just as bad as East Palestine. In a recent West Virginia train crash, 22 freight cars derailed, and three workers were injured as the front car caught fire, and a tanker spilled diesel into a nearby river. In a Florida train crash, tankers carrying thousands of gallons of liquid propane tipped over, and it was only a matter of luck that a massive explosion was avoided and no one was killed. The other crashes also came very close to catastrophe.

The risk of dangerous crashes like these is exactly what railroad workers warned everyone about. Last year during negotiations with rail companies, rail workers demanded increases in staffing and paid sick days. Over the last six years, railway companies have cut their workforce by 29%, firing 45,000 workers. And the remaining railway workers are now stretched to the breaking point, with no regular schedules, working on-call at all times, with much smaller crews for ever-longer trains, some over two miles long.

While rail companies were busy imposing staffing cuts, delayed maintenance, and ongoing safety cuts, rail workers warned that company profits were putting the safety of workers and communities at risk. Rail companies have seen billions of dollars in record profits, and since 2010 they have paid \$169 billion to shareholders in dividends and stock buybacks. They are dripping with profits while endangering our communities and the lives of rail workers.

And despite all of the supposed division between Democrats and Republicans, they have been in lockstep agreement in their efforts to protect rail

companies and their profits. Trump's administration gutted environmental and safety regulations in rail, lowering the number of rail workers required per train, allowing for weaker brakes on trains with dangerous chemicals, and approving other serious cuts to safety and maintenance. And in December, Biden and the Democrats, along with Republicans, used Congress to impose a contract on rail workers that ignored their staffing and safety concerns. Had workers' warnings been listened to, crashes like the one in Ohio and others could have been avoided.

These train crashes expose the backwards priorities that are rampant throughout this whole system, not just in the railroads. Workers know all too well the many ways companies risk our lives and the safety of our communities for profit. Companies regularly get away with toxic disasters like this, and in the rare times they are caught and charged in court, they choose to just pay the fines and continue doing exactly as before. In every industry, companies try to cut staffing to the bone, dangerously delay maintenance, and do anything to cut costs to make a buck. Safety doesn't matter to them because workers are expendable.

And none of the politicians have workers' backs. It doesn't matter how many photo-ops they take at these disaster sites, at the end of the day, they work tirelessly to protect the profits of corporations, always at the expense of the lives of working people.

But they won't be able to get away with this forever. They may have been able to use their government to block rail workers from striking, but they can't block all workers. Most workers confront similar problems today. But to stop the bosses' ongoing attacks, we'll need to organize ourselves and unite all of our forces in order to demand what we need and deserve.