

Leaders of the nation's major freight railroads and the United Transportation Union entered into an agreement to operate locomotives by remote control late last year, and began the implementation of 'pilot projects' using the new technology in the Spring of 2002.

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, which represents the craft of employees federally licensed to move and operate locomotives in the United States, protested the agreement as a violation of its collective bargaining agreements and long-standing established practices. The BLE also threatened to strike over this issue.

<http://www.ble.org/remotecomtrol/>

## **Pierce circulates remote control response**

CLEVELAND, May 13 -- BNSF Northlines/MRL General Chairman Dennis Pierce is circulating information that clarifies his committee's position on the issue of remote control technology and rebuts misleading statements by the UTU.

The packet of information that General Chairman Pierce sent to his local chairmen contains several items which provide an overview of recent events on BNSF and Montana Rail Link regarding the implementation of remote control technology.

In a letter, General Chairman Pierce rebuts misleading statements made by UTU International First Vice-President Paul Thompson. In correspondence, Thompson attempted to draw parallels between the BLE's remote control agreement on the MRL and the UTU's actions on all the major railroads. However, the results are not similar at all, according to Pierce.

"UTU would have you believe BLE's actions somehow justify the fact that (UTU) is assisting the carrier in the wholesale slaughter of the locomotive engineer's position in yard service on BNSF, but the aforementioned MRL agreement hardly compares to the process in place on the BNSF properties," writes Pierce.

Pierce goes on to describe the process by which jobs were actually gained through the BLE's agreement with MRL. He contrasts this with the prospective job losses on BNSF in Galesburg, Ill., where 19 locomotive engineers' positions will be lost and locomotive engineer and conductor training classes will be discontinued. Some of the jobs lost will be those of trainmen which the UTU represents.

"UTU has publicly stated that all will be protected, but there is no signed agreement stating that. In fact, the Carrier has denied our requests for New York Dock protection for our affected engineer members at Mandan (N.D.) whose jobs were abolished. In addition, several trainmen were furloughed when remote service was implemented there and none of these employees were given protective benefits," Pierce writes. "UTU has not secured an agreement protecting either the earnings potential or jobs of the existing employees through attrition as we did on MRL. To the contrary, they have proudly agreed to a product that eliminates the locomotive engineer's position, plunging head long into what can only be described as a true race to the bottom. All of this just to secure the jurisdictional rights, and dues receipts, for the surviving operating employees in yard service."

Pierce also confronts Thompson's assertion that a merger between the BLE and UTU

would solve all of these problems.

"I do not believe that we should have to merge with the UTU for them to be willing to work together with us for the betterment of all operating employees. The employees that BLE and UTU represent deserve much better than that. Unfortunately, the UTU International would rather work against BLE than work together even when it is in the best interest of all."

<http://www.ble.org/pr/news/newsflash.asp?id=3570>