



### We Were There Then; We Are There Now

By Becky Schneider

Spouses and families have played an important role throughout the years in contributing to the labor protections in place today. The adversities that sparked the Great Labor Uprising of 1877 are not that different from those our members face today.

Thousands of Americans were out of work during the depression of the early 1870s, and for those who did have jobs, wages were on a downward spiral. When railroad and mine workers finally said "enough," they had sympathetic, strong support from a majority of citizens and from foresighted businessmen in their town, but not from the government. The owners of the railroads and the mines would not budge from their positions, forcing workers to use the only means available to them to ward off starvation - withholding their labor by means of a strike.

Using excerpts from *The Great Labor Uprising of 1877*, by Philip S. Foner, comparisons between events leading up to the uprising can be translated to today's corporate climate. While we are not near starvation, the situations bear uncanny resemblances. The following excerpts were taken from the uprisings in Pennsylvania, but the same type of events occurred through the Midwest and Eastern states.

**THEN:** "... as the railroads expanded, so too did their economic power. In some states they were in complete control of the political machinery, and they were notorious for their rapport with high federal officials. Railroad promoters and lobbyists swarmed into the state houses and the halls of Congress in search of charters, franchises, subsidiaries, and land grants, while fighting to prevent investigations, regulation, and new taxes."

**NOW:** Sound familiar? The Federal Railroad Administration has been working with the railroads in a "partnership" atmosphere rather in the regulatory role for which it was formed. The railroads were successful in getting the fuel tax repealed and are in line to receive subsidies to improve infrastructure and security, all with the backing of the administration and the majority in Congress.

**THEN:** "There was hardly any recognition of unions by the railroad companies for purposes of collective bargaining.

Sometimes... companies negotiated wages and work rules for the sake of convenience, ... but never as a matter of right, and always with the thought in mind of abrogating the agreements when it suited their purposes."

**NOW:** The Carriers often violate agreements before the ink is dry, refuse to negotiate in good faith when contracts are renewed, and continue to violate the guidelines issued by the FRA governing RCOs.

**THEN:** "It was not unusual for a railroad worker to be unemployed, and therefore unpaid, for as many as four days of the week, while the company expected him to be prepared to work at all times. When the men were able to work, they were often required to 'lay over' at high-priced company hotels...until they could find a job that took them back home."

**NOW:** Because of the work of labor predecessors, railroaders today make a living wage but are still on call 24/7. On regular pool turns, the carrier provides lodging. However, only recently has the carrier agreed to help with lodging for those who could only hold jobs hundreds of miles from their homes, but could not afford to support two households, many sleeping in their cars and showering at yard facilities.

**THEN:** "Railroading was a far more hazardous occupation than it is today. It was still the era of the clumsy handbrake, which threw so many railroaders to their death, and of the treacherous link-and-pin coupling, which maimed so many more. Crews were constantly being reduced...this meant added dangers. And the railroad executives seldom offered their maimed employees more than sympathy. Nor did the courts, which began to view labor as a commodity whose value was determined in the marketplace."

**NOW:** While progress has been made in the area of employee safety, railroading is still a dangerous occupation. By reducing crews through misguided agreements and remote-controlled operations, the Carriers are again striving to save money, creating a more hazardous workplace. At least for the time being, we have FELA to protect workers injured due to railroad negligence, but the practice of treating labor as a commodity could again be our fate if we become too complacent.

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## *From the President's Pen*



My, how can time pass so fast? It seems it was just yesterday we were planning Christmas and now it is Spring with its beautiful flowers.

Tony and I would like to express our sincere appreciation to all for their prayers, calls and e-mails concerning our daughter, Brenda. In January of this year, we learned that Brenda has had a recurrence of breast cancer. She is receiving chemotherapy and is scheduled for surgery this summer. She is doing well and the chemo treatments have not made her sick, for which we are thankful.

Please remember International Vice President Mabel Grotzinger and her husband Mike. There is a serious health problem in the family and they need our prayers so much.

Tony and I were very privileged to attend Division 326's meeting in Bossier City, Louisiana, in October. Bud Pickett, Local Chairman, of Benton, LA, was the presiding officer. Rathmann & O'Brien, BLET Designated Legal Counsel from St. Louis, Missouri, sponsored the affair, and gave a presentation on how members and their spouses can best protect themselves in case of an accident. Deborah Rine, Disability Specialist for the law firm, also gave a very informative talk.

How many of our members read the BLET Journal? In the Fall/Winter 2004 edition of the Journal, International 3<sup>rd</sup> Vice President Sereena Hogan wrote an informative article about the history of the GIA and our purpose. We appreciate the broad exposure through the GIA Dialogue in the BLET Journal, along with our website and newsletter. Various International officers take turns writing for the GIA Dialogue, giving the BLET and our members the chance to experience the dynamic personalities we have working with us. Look for an article by our International 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President Becky Schneider in the next issue of the BLET Journal giving even more detail about our programs and our continuing mission to support our BLET members.

Also in the Fall/Winter 2004 edition of the BLET Journal, Mr. Tom Galloway, Legislative Representative for Division 4 in Toledo, Ohio, wrote a very nice letter to the editor about International 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President and National Legislative Representative Becky Schneider's article, "Confessions of a Former Republican," that appeared in the Summer edition of the BLET Journal. Thank you, Brother Galloway, for the very thoughtful letter.

I pose a challenge to all GIA members to ask your spouses to bring up the GIA at their local Division meetings, and to remind those in attendance that our organization has expanded its role from a social/support organization to one that also provides information and education of members and spouses. One important function of our organization is educating the spouses of new hires. At each convention, we offer programs to inform these spouses about the railroad. A spouse of a new hire is often naive enough to actually trust the railroad and believe that they have their best interest at heart. With few exceptions, we know better.

I encourage each of you to take the time to read the BLET Journal and the BLET Newsletter. Both contain import information that affects our spouses and families.

And please, I urge you all to continue to support the BLET and spread the word about the GIA.

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Division 326 Meeting, with spouses, in October 2004, Bossier City, LA, sponsored by Designated Legal Counsel Rathmann and O'Brien

## Officers of newly formed Auxiliary 446 of Belen, New Mexico, were installed at the 2004 International Western Convention in Albuquerque, New Mexico

On August 22, 2004, in a brief ceremony immediately following the banquet at the 2004 IWC in Albuquerque, NM, officers of Auxiliary 446 were installed by International President Onita Wayland.



*Pictured from left to right*

**First Row:** Trudy Yates, Legislative Rep; Brenda Butkovich, Vice President; Lori Porch, Chaplain; Tammie Fuller, Secretary/Treasurer, all from Auxiliary 446.

**Back Row:** Anita Caruso, International Secretary; Sereena Hogan, International 3rd VP; Kim Linkletter, International 1st Canadian VP/Canadian Legislative Rep; Barbie Lynch, President, Aux. 446; Onita Wayland, International President; Brenda Hayes, Canadian VP and Director; Becky Schneider, International 1st VP and National Legislative Rep.

### Table Talk

By Pat Murphy

I have childhood memories of sitting around the kitchen table listening to the grown-ups converse, laugh, and share experiences. Even after the holiday dinner dishes were cleared, we lingered at the table because we knew that was when the “real” visiting would begin.

I don't know if was the same in places other than the area I grew up in, but in our neighborhood everyone gathered around the kitchen table to do the their talking. The living room was used for the newly acquainted who came to “visit.”

Perhaps it was the fact most houses in our neighborhood were Cape Cod style - no large front porch to rock on, no formal dining room. Our living room had a TV and a Hi-Fi, so it was mostly used for non-interactive repose.

The kitchen table and chairs were nothing fancy. but they provided a communication center that NASA could envy. When neighbors stopped by to see my

mom, I would be asked to take their coats, etc., and given instructions to hang them up “on my way out.” I knew that meant I was to keep going because this was going to be a grown-ups visit with conversation I would not be privy to. Feeling deprived, I would console myself with the thought that someday I'd be a grown-up with my own kitchen for my friends to come and visit.

The point of my story is to offer the idea of adding a “table-talk” segment to our regional meetings. Maybe from this forum we can add a “Table Talk Report” column to the newsletter. It could contain a single report or snippets from what the spouses share as to how they manage the problems that crop up from time to time as railroad spouses - you know, offering what one “can do” about a situation instead of just focusing on the “complaint.”

This is just an idea, but I believe it's one that has merit. If others agree and time permits, let's see if we can incorporate it into our regional meetings

## MetLife/\$2000 Death Benefit

**E-mail from Tom Dwyer, National Legislative Director  
National Association of Retired and  
Veteran Railway Employees (NARVRE)  
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From time to time we get inquiries from NARVRE members and retirees as to what benefits are provided under the Certificate of Life Insurance (\$2000 Death Benefit) offered by Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (MetLife) under various Group policy numbers. Depending on which labor organization you were a member of, they may have different policy numbers. When you call MetLife, make sure you indicate what union you belonged to while working. If you were an employee of a rail labor organization, you would be under a separate policy number as well.

Many railroad workers were originally insured by the Travelers Insurance Company, but effective January 1, 1996, these benefits were taken over by MetLife. Oftentimes callers are told by MetLife that there is no record of their

being an employee because they are not in their computer network. This does not mean you don't have a claim. They don't necessarily have you in their computer's records prior to January 1, 1996.

In writing, send a letter to Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, MetLife Record Keeping Center, P. O. Box 6129, Utica, NY 13504-6129. Telephone: 1-800-310-7770. List the following information in your letter: Name, Social Security Number, Railroad Employer, Date of Birth, Railroad Union, Seniority Date, and Occupation. MetLife will also check with the Railroad Retirement Board if further information is needed. Remember, by writing, you have a written document as to your status and MetLife will respond.

Please share this information with others on your e-mail lists. You might be surprised as to how many have the wrong beneficiary on file. Keep in mind that many of these beneficiary forms were filled out years ago when the employees hired out on the railroad.

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## International Brotherhood of Teamsters Women's Conference

**By Becky Schneider**

The Fifth Annual Teamsters Women's Conference took place March 31 – April 3, in Niagara Falls, Canada. Thanks to the foresightedness of our International President, Onita Wayland, I was asked to attend on behalf of the GIA. I also thank BLET Vice-President Raymond Holmes for allocating funds to assist with my travel costs. GIA International 1st Canadian VP/Legislative Rep Kim Linkletter was also in attendance, thanks to the support of Teamsters Canada Rail Conference VP George Hucker.

I found the diverse nature of Teamster women pretty amazing. Our organization has been sheltered from the mainstream union movement because we only deal with the issues of one industry. Union membership is pretty much a given on the railroads, but the Teamsters, as with most other unions, must fight for their right to win unionization and protect workers' rights.

The daily general sessions included at least one panel discussion on various topics, including "Organizing Together," "Women with Non-Traditional Jobs," and "Educating Teamster Women." Three of the five-member panel for "Women with Non-Traditional Jobs" were from the rail industry, including two Canadians, one from rail traffic control, and one from Maintenance of Way. The other was a BLET engineer out of Boston. While their presentations were no news to me, they were enlightening for other attendees who were not aware of the myriad of problems associated with the rail industry—not just the non-traditional positions, but other factors such as grade crossing accidents.

Robert Bouvier, President Teamsters Canada, gave an inspiring presentation on the importance of women in union

leadership, advising that being a woman is no excuse for allowing injustices to continue. He also underscored that the women who are spouses of union members are the first ones affected by cutbacks as they are usually the ones who manage the household budget. Mr. Bouvier believes that women are an important asset to today's unions.

Mr. Hoffa's equally inspiring speech included his recognition of the need for women's conferences on a regular basis, not just intermittently as occurred in the 1980s. He reported on the progress of the Teamsters over the last five years, and covered the organizing needs, legislative concerns, and the need to maintain the strength of the PAC fund because money talks... and you know the rest.

General Secretary Thomas Keegle gave a rousing speech on the need to promote legislation to cure the ills of multi-



**Teamster Women's Conference, Niagara Falls, Canada:** Kelly Cassidy, *BLET Engineer and Secretary, NY State Legislative Board*; Robert Bouvier, *President, Teamsters Canada*; Kim Linkletter, *Intl. 1st Canadian VP/Legislative Rep*; James P. Hoffa, *IBT General President*; Becky Schneider, *Intl. 1st VP/Natl. Legislative Rep.*

## Then and Now — Tracking Down Old Friends

By Mary Whitson, Secretary, Auxiliary 409

First I would like to say how proud I am of the GIA NEWS. I think the International Officers—Anita Caruso, Sereena Hogan, Becky Schneider, Mabel Grotzinger, and Onita Wayland—and any other contributors, have done an excellent job. The articles are well researched and well written, and are very informative to all members. Thanks ladies for a job well done.

I joined the GIA in 1975 when it was much different. We followed the ritual exactly at every meeting. We practiced for hours and sometimes days to get it perfect. Then we had an officer from another division come and inspect our work. We had so much pride in our divisions and in our GIA sisters. We were just like family. Then, every five years at the Grand Meeting, the representatives would practice and practice and present the perfect meeting. The love and respect and fellowship among the sisters was very strong. We took the Obligation very seriously. We promised to stand by a member in adversity as well as prosperity, and to visit the sick and distressed of our Order and render any assistance we could. And we did. We also worked very hard on Our Object to promote fraternal love, sociability, and higher education within the families of our members. We had get-togethers with all the GIA/BLE members, as well as homecomings, Christmas parties, visits to the shut-ins and needy with gifts and goodies, and visits to the sick with meals and much more. I even walked the picket line once and was ready to walk it again.

It seems as though those days are gone. I miss them and wish we had not changed so much. I have met the most wonderful people all over the U.S.A. and Canada by being a GIA member. I have missed keeping in contact with them and would like for the GIA NEWS to have a page that keeps

up with those who may not be as active as they once were—people like Mabel Green. I was in awe of her and her knowledge of the GIA at the first Grand Convention I attended. I would like to hear about Jean Chugg from Canada, Lilly Mae Parker, Maureen Faulkerson, and all the ladies from Savannah. There are too many to mention. If we had addresses, maybe we could stand by them with cards or phone calls or e-mails.

I would also like to see a memorial column of those who have passed on. Each auxiliary is required to send that information to the International Secretary as it happens, and again in the yearly report. Maybe our International Secretary, Anita Caruso, could list these once a year.

Let's encourage each auxiliary to submit a bio on at least one person each publication and let's really keep up with our sisters and support each other.

I will start with myself. I currently serve as Secretary to the "French Broad" Auxiliary 409 in Asheville, North Carolina. I have served as International Chaplain and International Alternate Secretary. My husband, Michael, retired from Norfolk-Southern in 2001. We had lived in the small town of Weaverville, North Carolina, for 32 years. We sold that place and now live in the country. Our home sits on a hill that overlooks a valley surrounded by high mountains on all sides. These are the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. We have a small farm and my husband loves keeping busy. We are in good health. We have five grandchildren and really are enjoying being retired. I would love to hear from all of you. My address is 8 Spice Cove Drive, Barnardsville, N.C. 28709. I can also be contacted by phone at 828-626-4123, or e-mail at patrain1@aol.com.

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### IBT Women's Conference, continued . . .

employer pension plans such as the Teamsters Pension plan. He also stressed that the Congressional leadership's labeling of the legislation as a "bail out" was false. He reported on the financial condition of the Teamsters relative to five years ago, and the continuing progress and health of the strike fund and organizing fund. Lastly, he reiterated the statements of President Hoffa, that unions are the only thing standing between the haves and have nots. Without unions, the middle class created by them, would disappear.

At one session I learned about the Teamster's D.R.I.V.E. (Democrat, Republican, Independent, Voter Education) PAC which was founded in 1959 and run by Jo Hoffa, wife of then-Teamster President Jimmy Hoffa. During the 1960s, annual visits were made to the Capitol by Teamster women decked out in linen dresses, pill box hats, and pocket books. The women were not only well-dressed, they were very well versed on the issues of the day. These women would fan out on the Hill to discuss issues important to labor and America. They were so effective and knowledgeable that

elected representatives either prepared themselves for the D.R.I.V.E. Week visits, or scheduled their vacations during that week so as to avoid them. This initiative held politicians accountable for their promises and had a strong effect on the Hill. I think it's time we instituted this type of program again. As I have said before, when lobbying on the Hill, I have noticed the difference it makes when you are representing spouses and families. We are seen as extended voting blocks, not just union members. I truly believe that the example set by Mr. Hoffa's mother is the reason he is very aware of the power women have in the organization.

On a final note, I think our organization would have been proud of me in the "Working to Build a Strong Negotiating Committee" workshop. Apparently, I have been paying attention even though I have never actually had negotiating experience. All in all, this conference was well worth the time, and I would encourage any woman with ties to labor to attend, especially if the conference is held your area. I will keep my eye on next year's conference and let you know the dates and place when it becomes available.



# Legislative Report

By Becky Schneider, Legislative Representative



*Good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgment.*

Will Rogers

Spring has sprung, Easter came very early this year, the income taxes are filed, and the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress has convened. The 2004 Election widened the gap between

the two parties, giving the leadership a renewed sense of purpose, thereby making our efforts to promote safety and better working conditions that much harder.

I have forwarded a 2005 Legislative Issues Report to each Auxiliary and to all Members at Large. If you have not seen it, please ask your Auxiliary Legislative Representative or President for a copy or briefing. If you are a MAL and did not receive a copy, please let me know and I will be happy to forward the packet. Because of its length, we were unable to include it in this issue, and because of technical difficulties caused by Comcast, we are currently unable to update our website. You can, however, download the Report at BLET Division 194's website, <http://trax.to/194>. Scroll down to the bottom to access the drop-down menu and click on GIA News.

My husband, Larry, recently reminded me of something we need to keep in mind. I think we tend to get discouraged because it seems like we are always "tilting at windmills." He said, "We cannot give up beating the bushes for our issues; even the legislators know how hard it is to fight for our causes. But if we let up, those who oppose us will sneak up and defeat us." So remember, no matter how many times you have called your representative, or how hopeless you think our chances of success are, we must remain determined to make our voices heard.

## Amtrak

We are very close to serious crunch time for Amtrak for Fiscal Year 2006. Amtrak has operated at the whim of Congress since its inception, never receiving the investment dollars needed to maintain a viable form of public transportation. It has been, in effect, on a starvation diet since the railroads turned over passenger rail operations 34 years ago. The underfunding has brought Amtrak where it is today, sorely in need of extensive repair and rebuilding of infrastructure. The President's 2006 budget called for "zero" funding for Amtrak for the purpose of forcing it into bankruptcy, which according to them would likely lead to the elimination of inefficient operations and the

reorganization of the railroad through bankruptcy procedures." The theory may sound like it could lead to more efficient operations, but it simply will not work, and is not in our national best interest. The Administration's budget did provide for \$360 million to the Surface Transportation Board (STB) to continue commuter and freight operations in the northeast corridor once Amtrak is bankrupt. The problem with that plan is that the STB has no experience managing passenger rail operations, and has informed Congress that it cannot envision any realistic scenario that would allow it to direct commuter operations for more than 60 days. Then what?

In the Budget Resolutions before both Houses a few weeks ago, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee included \$1.2 million in unspecified funding, which according to ongoing correspondence between Rep. Allyson Schwartz (D-PA), and Budget Committee Chairman Jim Nussel (R-IA), has been dedicated for Amtrak. The Senate, however, was unable to mount a successful campaign to fund Amtrak. During their session, Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) introduced an amendment to provide \$1.4 billion in the 2006 budget. The amendment was defeated 52-46, with four Republicans crossing party lines. The vote would have been closer if those who have previously come out in support of passenger rail, like Rick Santorum (R-PA) and Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX), had actually voted for Amtrak rather than the party line. Of course, they may have been threatened by their leadership if they had chosen to represent their constituents instead of the party. In 2003, 21 Republicans in the House, known as the Amtrak 21, signed a letter urging Chairman Istook of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, to fully fund Amtrak. Chairman Istook's response was to threaten these representatives, noting that "any request for Amtrak funding . . . must and will be weighed against your other requests, and I will consider it as project requests for your district." When they again supported Amtrak in 2004, he made good on his threat and deleted their highway projects from the appropriations bill.

Next month, the Administration is scheduled to introduce the Passenger Rail Investment Reform Act which advocates say will dismantle Amtrak and imperil service by putting maintenance in the hands of state agencies that are not equipped to handle it. According to Jim RePass, President of the National Corridors Initiative, "Connecticut has (maintained) its right-of-way for many years and it is the single worst section in the Northeast." Interstate passenger rail should ultimately remain a federal responsibility. There are 106 cities with current passenger rail service that have no air service. With the announcement by Greyhound Lines to eliminate certain routes and locations in the South and on the West Coast, the options will shrink even more. When

the airlines were deregulated, they dropped their less profitable routes. The same thing will happen if Amtrak is bankrupted – only profitable routes will remain, depriving many of their only mode of transportation during inclement weather, and their only alternative to air or highway travel.

In a one-hour debate on the House floor in early March, Congressman Oberstar stated that “America is a third world country when it comes to passenger rail service.” It was also pointed out that the United States ranks 25<sup>th</sup> on the list of countries that provide commuter rail funding, behind countries like Estonia, Belgium, and Slovenia. To give some perspective, since Amtrak’s inception in 1971, to 2003, subsidies for air and highway modes of transportation totaled \$1.89 Trillion, while Amtrak’s total is just over \$30 billion. Considering that it costs approximately \$1 million just to lay one mile of track, this amount would not go very far to cover equipment, maintenance, or labor cost over 34 years. The fact is that Amtrak covered 65% of their costs last year, and full funding could decrease the need for subsidies. The government should make an investment in the mode of transportation that services 25 million passengers every year.

Amazingly, even lobbyists for concrete manufacturers are among the list of Amtrak foes. They are afraid that the

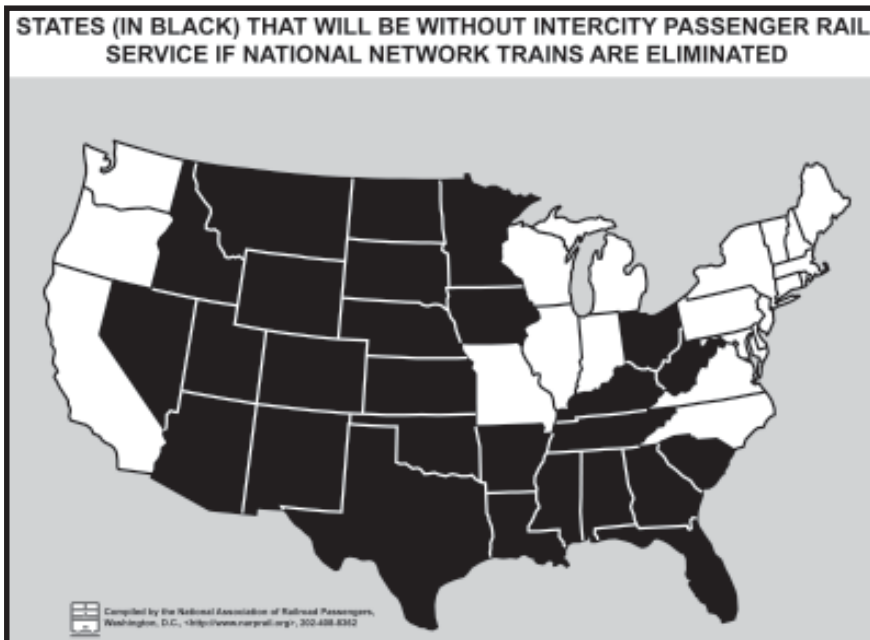
rates, and operating priority, according to the Association of American Railroad’s “Principles.” Of course, there are ulterior motives in their reason for only wanting to deal with Amtrak. When trackage rights were first negotiated with Amtrak (three Amtrak board members were railroad executives), the railroads demanded that Amtrak be responsible for any claims arising from accidents involving passenger trains, even if those accidents were caused by equipment or track failures for which upkeep was the responsibility of the owner freight railroad. The recent accident involving the Autotrain on the CSX in Florida is a prime example. It was determined that track failure caused the accident, but Amtrak paid all of the passenger claims amounting to millions of dollars. CSX received the maximum fine of \$20,000. Amtrak paid freight railroads \$100 million last year, about 9% of their FY 2004 budget, for access to tracks, yet the railroad’s position that Amtrak should bear the responsibility for accident claims for which the freight carriers are at fault is the “price for carrying passengers on our railroad,” according to Union Pacific’s CEO Dick Davidson. The *New York Times* reported that since 1984, Amtrak has paid more than \$186 million for accidents blamed entirely or mostly on others. Maybe if we close the indemnity loophole, and force the carriers to abide by the Rail Passenger Service Act that states “Amtrak trains have dispatching preference over freight trains,” then their

on-time record would improve, thereby increasing ridership, which in turn would decrease the need for subsidies.

Lastly, I have mentioned on numerous occasions, the 20,000 employees who would be out of a job if Amtrak goes bankrupt. There are a number of them who would not be able to transfer back to their seniority or even secure employment in the railroad industry. In addition to the job loss, in a “Dear Colleague” letter from Congressman Oberstar (D-MN) and Congresswoman Corrine Brown (D-FL), actual numbers pertaining to the effect on Railroad Retirement and Unemployment programs were cited. “The Railroad Retirement and Unemployment programs, which cover employees of all railroads . . . would be depleted. According to the Railroad Retirement Board, without the participation of Amtrak, employer and employee payroll

taxes would need to be increased from the current 16% to 27% in 2027. Those tax increases, however, would ultimately be insufficient and serious cash flow problems for Railroad Retirement would begin in 2031.” That’s before Social Security is supposedly going bankrupt, and if the current trend continues, no one will be able to afford Medicare. The letter goes on to state, “Cash reserves for the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Account would be exhausted by 2006, and nearly \$297 million would have to be borrowed from the Railroad Retirement account to make up for losses.”

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government might actually take seriously expanding rail service, thereby reducing the need for additional highways, causing them to lose their sweet deals for supplying contractors. Another argument for increasing passenger rail is that trains are more environmentally friendly. They give off less harmful exhausts than cars, there is no additional damage to the landscape with the laying of more concrete, and utilizing mass transit trains instead of cars would decrease our dependence on foreign oil.

Even the freight railroads are opposed to any transfer or franchising of Amtrak’s right of access, preferential access

## Legislative Report *continued from Page 7*

I have tried to paint a diverse picture of some of the different aspects in our fight to save passenger rail. There are still many other important factors. I ask that you contact your Congressional Representatives and both of your U.S. Senators urging full funding of Amtrak according to its Board's 5-year Strategic Plan that calls for \$1.8 billion per fiscal year. If America makes the investment needed, then more can be done to shore up and increase Amtrak's profitability. In addition, I ask that each of you request family and friends to call in support of Amtrak funding. The alternative in allowing the "zero" funding is not only short-sighted and ill-conceived, it will be a disaster.

### Cross-Border Train Inspection Waiver Denied

In a victory for rail safety, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) denied Union Pacific's waiver request which, if granted, would have allowed the Pre-Departure Inspection, the Locomotive Daily Inspection, the End-of-Train Device Testing and Inspection, and the Initial Terminal Class I Air Brake Test to be performed by employees of a Mexican Railroad prior to entering the United States. These trains could then proceed from Laredo, Texas, on to their designated inspection stations, 1000 miles into the interior of the United States, without any inspection on the U.S. side of the border. Several factors for the denial included the determination that inspection and testing regulations were not compatible with North American standards, a lack of agreements between the U.S. and Mexican governments for enforcement of such standards, concerns as to maintenance records and worker training, and security of trains entering the U.S. from Mexico. In addition, when the Spanish translation of the Code of Federal Regulations was examined, there were found to be differences in the translation, including missing sections.

### Social Security Debate **How it Affects Railroad Retirement**

With guns blazing, the Administration has been running around the country alleging that social security's "sky is falling." First of all, Social Security is not in crisis. Medicare is, but not social security. The future insolvency of the safety net counted on by millions of retirees to supplement their income needs to be addressed. That issue has nothing to do with private accounts. The cost estimates to institute the President's plan for private accounts range from \$1 Trillion to \$2 Trillion, and still would do nothing to address the real issue of solvency.

Actions taken in overhauling social security need to be carefully watched. Other than its devastating effect on the deficit, it will also affect Railroad Retirement Tier I benefits, which are calculated in the same manner as social security benefits aside from the differences in eligibility and early retirement provisions. Recently circulated was a document

authored by W. D. Pickett, Chairman of the Rail Labor Retirement Committee and International President of the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen. He briefly outlined the three proposals developed by the President's 2001 Commission to Strengthen Social Security, all of which contained some form of private account. If you would like to see an actuarial analysis of all three models, you can visit the Social Security website at [www.ssa.gov/OACT/solvency/PresComm\\_2002131.html](http://www.ssa.gov/OACT/solvency/PresComm_2002131.html). Other methods involve reducing benefits by changing the way they are calculated, reducing Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) increases, and limiting benefits. Some of the methods include:

- Reducing social security COLAs by revising the way the Consumer Price Index is figured.
- Reducing benefits by increasing the number of years used in calculating social security benefits from 35 to 38 years.
- Reducing benefits by modifying the benefit formula used in initially calculating benefits by lowering the percentage of earnings it replaces.
- Speeding up the increase in full retirement age under current law, or increasing full retirement age beyond the current 67.
- Reducing or eliminating benefits for higher income workers using a "means" test for beneficiaries.
- Raising social security payroll tax rates.
- Increasing the portion of social security benefits subject to Federal income tax.
- Raising (or removing) the cap on earnings subject to social security payroll tax.
- Extending social security coverage to all new employees of state and local government.
- Investing social security reserves in the stock market.

Rather than screwing around with benefits, which will undoubtedly leave some workers wanting when they retire, removing the cap could, in and of itself, make the system solvent. Private accounts, if they are approved, will only generate enormous fees for the brokers and money houses who service those accounts. More likely, the benefits to those retiring in the future will be reduced because they are offset by projected returns on private accounts. The guessing game is that those reduced benefits, together with income from the private accounts, would be less than if the current system was maintained. A great number of employers now offer 401(k)s through payroll deduction, and IRAs are still around. These accounts can and should be used for "private accounts" instead of drawing money away from the current

system, leaving it in greater need of an overhaul. Using employer sponsored retirement accounts would also alleviate the need for another layer of bureaucracy to administer the new program.

Keep your eye on this ball. The shell game is about to be played, and we need to make sure they do not undermine our retirement system, or the system that provides income, now or in the future, for ourselves and so many of our friends and relatives.

## Medicare Reform

With all of the press being given to Social Security reform, as stated above, the real crisis lies with Medicare. The projected shortfall of Social Security is \$3.7 trillion over the next 10 years; while Medicare's shortfall is \$27.8 trillion – seven times that of Social Security. A recent Associated Press article cites, “by 2018, Social Security is on track to start paying more annually to its recipients than it collects, an ominous tipping point that Medicare reached last year. While Social Security is expected to exhaust its reserves in 2042, Medicare should deplete the trust fund financing its hospital benefits in 2019, the latest forecast shows.”

In addition, the drug benefit, set to take effect in January of 2006, has been projected to cost between \$724 billion (estimate from the Administration) and \$1.2 trillion (estimate from the bipartisan Congressional Budget Office) over the next 10 years. The Administration's own current estimate is almost double what they promised when the bill passed by a very narrow margin in 2003. Minority leaders have been joined by Republicans in requesting hearings on the prescription drug benefit to re-examine the law and see if drug costs can be brought down.

States are also feeling the brunt of the new law in which Medicare will take over state-run prescription drug programs for Medicaid (low income) recipients who are also eligible for Medicare, requiring them to pay billions of dollars per year back to the Federal government. The states were promised significant savings, but instead will be required to spend more than they would have in the absence of the law, in part due to their own state's prudent measures to hold down drug costs.

But wait, that's not all. An Associated Press article at the end of March advised that Medicare premiums will rise again by at least 12 percent for doctor's visits, and could rise even higher if physician reimbursement rates are not reduced. Medicare Part B rates are estimated to rise from \$78.20 per month to \$89.20 per month, and the deductible is scheduled to increase from \$110 per year to \$123 per year. Reimbursement rates to physicians are scheduled to be reduced by 5 percent on January 1, 2006. If Congress intervenes and does not allow the reduction, then beneficiaries could see premiums go even higher, to between 14 and 15 percent. Many of these increases are due, in part, to the skyrocketing cost of the Prescription Drug Program, which will not be put into place until January 1 of next year.

Everyone, whether on Medicare now or not, should contact their Congressmen and Senators to request hearings to re-examine the law, revising it to accomplish its intended purpose – providing affordable health care and real prescription benefits for those who qualify, without breaking the bank or our pocketbooks.

## Railroads Lie to the Government

I realize this is not a big surprise to railroaders or to our members, but it seems to be a surprise to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), our Congressional Representatives, and other governmental entities. The rash of recent remote control accidents involving release of hazardous materials, and in some cases even death, continue to confirm the need for regulations. Of course, the FRA stands on its audit report that accidents and injuries have decreased with the use of RCLs (remote controlled locomotives). Their report, based on information obtained from the Carriers, touted the increased safety reported with RCL operations. They are becoming increasingly aware because the BLET is reporting RCL involvement in accidents to them, not because the Carriers volunteer the information. The Carriers may report the accident, but are failing to mention that an RCL is involved. Two specific incidents of failure to report involve a major accident in July in Pine Bluff, AR, and another on September 21 in East St. Louis that also involved hazardous materials.

A tragic example of failure to report to governmental agencies made headlines in the *New York Times* regarding the railroad's failure to promptly report to the Department of Homeland Security's National Response Center and the Federal Railroad Administration, resulting in the death of a young woman at a crossing that had several previously unreported accidents. It is the railroad's responsibility to ensure grade-crossing incidents are thoroughly documented and investigated in a timely manner, as well as reported. Out of the 3000 grade-crossing accidents in 2003, only four were investigated by Federal authorities. In addition, Federal oversight is sorely lacking in their inspections to ensure grade crossings remain safe, or to preserve evidence in the event of an accident. Subsequent to these revelations in the *New York Times*, Representatives Oberstar (D-MN), Brown (D-FL), and Hollings (D-SC) forwarded a letter to the Inspector General asking for a review of the safety issues raised in the articles. Representative Brady (D-PA) also sent a similar letter requesting a review of grade-crossing accident practices.

As we have said on numerous occasions, the fox cannot be allowed to guard the henhouse, and Federal regulatory agencies must do the job they are required to do in order to keep the railroads honest. I included this section so that you can remind your representatives that when the railroad gives them information, chances are they are lying. You can tell because their lips are moving.

- continued on Page 10

## Way to Go UP!

In typical Union Pacific fashion, the railroad giant is going after model train enthusiasts by requiring a licensing plan calling for a three percent royalty from companies such as Lionel Trains that use the UP logo. UP says they are not doing this to make a profit, but so they will know who is using it and how. Not only are they trying to control and make money off their own logo, but those they gobbled up, such as Southern Pacific, Katy, Cotton Belt, Denver & Rio Grande, and Chicago and North Western. UP has filed a federal trademark-infringement suit against Lionel and another major scale-model manufacturer, Athearn, Inc. What a bunch of greedy so and sos.

## Last Minute Updates

By the time you read this newsletter, Congress will have returned from their two-week Easter recess. The controversy over the Terry Schiavo case—not whether she had a right to live, but because a large majority of Americans felt that Tom Delay (R-TX) and the President overstepped their bounds in a family matter over which the courts had jurisdiction—has been unsettling for many in Congress. DeLay has threatened to impeach the judges involved, even though some are Republican appointees. It has been reported that a few top Republicans feel their party is at a precarious juncture over the handling of end-of-life issues by a House leader already battling ethics charges.

There is some apparent good news pertaining to the Senate's invoking a "nuclear option" to end the ability to filibuster Federal judge confirmations for those deemed too conservative (over 200 of Bush's nominees have been approved; only 10 were not). Senator Bill Frist (R-TN) may have had second thoughts, and it is reported that he will soon offer Democrats a compromise on the long-standing impasse. The threat by Senate leadership to change a 200-year-old Senate rule that prevents **either** party from total control must not be allowed to happen. This issue needs our attention, and I encourage you to contact your Senators as soon as possible.

The regional conventions will be here before you know it. If you have the chance to attend one, please make the effort. With as many conventions as I have been to, I find that I continue to learn something new at each one. Take advantage of the opportunity if a convention occurs in your area. Besides, they are also fun.

Anyone wishing to receive e-mail updates, please forward your e-mail address to me at [BeckyGIA1@earthlink.net](mailto:BeckyGIA1@earthlink.net).

*Becky Schneider can be reached by telephone at (915) 581-1373; by mail at 515 W. Redd Road, El Paso, TX, 79932, or by e-mail at [BeckyGIA1@earthlink.net](mailto:BeckyGIA1@earthlink.net). If you wish to have your name added to Becky's e-mail list, please send your e-mail address to her. You will be kept up to date on all legislative matters that are of concern to BLET and GIA members.*

## We Were There Then; We Are There Now, continued from front cover

**THEN:** "These and other railroad companies (NY Central, PRR, and B&O) did not hesitate to pass the burden of their financial losses on to their employees instead of to their stockholders. In the four years leading up to the Great Labor Uprising, railroad workers suffered reductions in their wages ranging on the average between 21 and 37 percent, while food prices dropped only 5 percent. John Garrett, President of the B&O, lowered the wages of his men to 50 percent of what they had formerly been; yet not once did he either lower a dividend payment or fail to make one.

**NOW:** History is repeating itself. CEOs are paid exorbitant salaries, record profits are being made, stockholder dividends continue to be paid, and millions are given to political campaigns, yet the railroads claim they cannot afford decent raises, or continue to pay health and welfare benefits, or, as on the Union Pacific, provide a scholarship program for their employees' children as it costs too much.

**THEN:** The *Baltimore Sun* issued a report on July 15, 1877, that Garrett, President of the B&O, "took occasion to congratulate the board of directors on the substantial nature of the business.... He went on to point out that the road's earnings showed the usual balance over and above expenses; in short, affairs were 'entirely satisfactory.' The directors voted the usual dividend of 10 percent to the stockholders." "...the following day, the *Sun* published the news that a 10 percent reduction in wages had been ordered

to take effect immediately, and that President Garrett was confident that everyone, both workers and townspeople along the line, would "cheerfully recognize" that the reduction was a necessity.

**NOW:** This could be taken out of the pages of today's news. Even though railroads are running at record levels, the railroad workers who make those earnings possible are told there is not enough money to keep providing the level of benefits for active employees and retirees.

The final 10 percent decrease in wages was the beginning of the end of railroad workers' tolerance of the double speak of the robber barons of the time. They lawfully and peacefully stopped freight train traffic while still allowing passenger and mail trains to pass unmolested. Their main grievance was the most recent reduction in wages (which followed two previous reductions, some amounting to as much as 50 percent), forcing them below the poverty level, which, during a depression, was almost worse than not working at all.

The *Baltimore Sun* supported the rail workers in their strike, and noted: "The singular part of the disturbance is the very active part taken by the women, who are the wives or mothers of the firemen. They looked famished and wild, and declare for starvation rather than have their people work for the reduced wages. Better to starve outright, they say, than to die by slow starvation."

## Greetings from the Editor Pro-Tem Becky Schneider...

I am filling in for this issue for our International Vice President, Mabel Grotzinger. I ask that all of our sisters keep her family in their prayers. Her husband has been diagnosed with a serious medical condition, so she must see to the needs of her family right now. She will still be working on GIA issues because we just cannot do without her, but her duties will be limited for the time being. We all hope for the best and will keep them close to our hearts.

Thank you, Pat Murphy and Mary Whitson, for the articles you submitted for this issue and for your ideas for adding new feature columns to the GIA News. With the help of our members, we will do our best to incorporate these suggestions.

## We Were There..., continued

The railroads refused to even consider negotiations with any labor organizations, despite support of the communities and other workers. They flexed their political muscle, calling upon the Governor of Pennsylvania to stop the "riots" and "insurrection" of railroad employees with militia troops. Because the militia in Pittsburgh, one of the first bloody skirmishes, was sympathetic to the workers, the militia from Philadelphia was brought in. With no warning and no provocation, the Philadelphia militia first stormed with bayonets the some 900 citizens and workers gathered in support to block freight trains from leaving the station. The troops opened fire on the crowd, killing women and children who were there in support of their husbands and fathers.

The GIA was originally formed in 1887, ten years after the Great Labor Uprising. Its founders recognized the need to support their spouses in their quest to secure fair labor practices within the rail industry. In that era, women did not enjoy the freedom we have today to step into the limelight and make our voices heard. For many years, the GIA was looked upon as more of a social/support organization. The mission of today's GIA is not only to provide support, but also to offer information and education for the spouses and families of railroad workers. While our efforts address and support BLET and railroad safety issues, we also support the efforts of workers across America. Hopefully, the sacrifices that have gone before will renew in us the spirit of solidarity.

## 2005 Member-at-Large Dues

Notice of Dues forms were mailed to all Members-at-Large on January 1. If you have not paid dues for 2005, please send \$20.00 to me at the address below. My books will be audited on March 31, 2005 and dues are delinquent if received after this date. Also, please keep me updated of any address changes. Thank you!

Anita J. Caruso, International Secretary  
3341 S. 112th Street  
Omaha, NE 68144-4709

## In Memorium

**Kenneth A. Leonard, Los Angeles, CA  
December 10, 2004**

**Christopher G. Seeling, Columbia, SC  
January 6, 2005**

## Remembering Charlie Clary By Anita Caruso, International Secretary

The GIA is sad to announce the passing of Brother Charlie Clary, husband of Past International Secretary Betty Clary, on November 28, 2004. Brother Clary worked 42 years on several railroads, ending his career in November of 1985 on the CSX. Brother Clary held several BLE Offices including President, Secretary/Treasurer, Local Chairman, and Legislative Representative of Division #779.

Brother Clary and Sister Betty were married 61½ years. They have three children, four grandchildren and seven great grandchildren. Sister Betty asked me to convey the following message: "Thanks for all the prayers and cards sent to us during our time of bereavement."

Friends who wish to contact Sister Clary can write her at 2424 Judson Bullock Road, Manchester, GA 31816.

Your submissions for this publication are encouraged. Please send articles, stories, poems, photos, etc., to:

*Mabel Grotzinger, Editor, GIA News  
1120 Cocklin St., Mechanicsburg, PA 17055  
Phone/Fax: 717-766-1204 (call first to send fax)  
e-mail: mmgrotzinger@comcast.net*

If you have access to the internet, please e-mail your submission to Mabel, and also to Publisher Sereena Hogan at vp3sereena@aol.com.

Please have submissions for the next edition to Mabel by August 1, 2005

## **Southeastern Meeting Association**

**June 12-16, 2005**

Location: Montgomery, AL

Hotel: Embassy Suites, 300 Tallapoosa Street,  
Montgomery, Ala. 36104 (334-269-5055) Rate:  
\$114

Chairman: David Bowen, Division 332 / 2835  
County Road 59 Deatsville, Alabama 36033 /  
Home: 334-361-4181 / Cell: 334-201-2200 / E-  
mail: [dab332@aol.com](mailto:dab332@aol.com)

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## **International Western Convention**

**July 3 - 8, 2005**

Location: Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Hotel: The Fairmont Palliser, 133 – 9th Avenue  
SW, Calgary, AB T2P 2M3 Canada (403-260-1220)  
Rate: \$144 - Canadian

Chairman: Mike Linkletter, Division 355 / 208-915  
44 Street SE, Calgary Alberta T2T 5K7 Canada /  
Home: 403-207-0265 / E-mail: [minkletter@  
teamstersrail.ca](mailto:minkletter@teamstersrail.ca)

## **Eastern Union Meeting Association**

**June 26-30, 2005**

Location: Saratoga Springs, NY

Hotel: Prime Hotel Saratoga Springs, 534 Broad-  
way, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866 (888-999-4741)  
Rate: \$129

Chairman: Bill Kearsing, Division 46 / 107 Vaughn  
Drive Albany, New York 12203 / Home: 518-869-  
2297 / Cell: 518-281-0738 / E-mail:  
[BKearsing@aol.com](mailto:BKearsing@aol.com)

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## **Southwestern Convention Meeting**

**October 2 – 6, 2005**

Location: Oklahoma City, OK

Hotel: Renaissance Oklahoma City Convention  
Center Hotel, 10 North Broadway, Oklahoma City,  
OK 73102 (405-228-8000) Rate: \$109

Chairman: John Salisbury, Division 141 / 13100 St.  
Andrews Dr, Oklahoma City, OK 73120 / Home:  
405-755-4596 / Cell: 405-210-4101 / E-mail:  
[madandjohn@aol.com](mailto:madandjohn@aol.com)

**For tentative agendas and registration forms for the above regional meetings, go to [www.ble-t.org](http://www.ble-t.org).**

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