

They Want to Take Away Our Vote!

We have been hearing rumors that some BLET National Division officers have been working to enlist and assist someone to start an Initiative to take away our right to vote for National Division officers in 2010, but found it hard to believe they would be so arrogant as to believe we would be willing to give it up.

The upcoming election in 2010, if and when it is held, would be the first time for a rank-and-file vote for our top officers. Are our leaders so afraid of dues-paying members that they refuse to let us have the simple voting power to select our leaders? Do they have so little respect for our abilities to see through the smoke and past the mirrors?

Since the last election of National Division officers by delegates assembled at convention, we have stood by and watched as National Division officers have been removed from office for embezzlement, arrested for extortion, or simply resigned and quietly slipped away. Meanwhile, not one of the remaining officers have spoken out against the wrongdoing, demanded a full investigation into the misuse of OUR hard-earned dues money, or willingly introduced effective changes to stop any reoccurrence of the corruption. Instead they want to return to the system which put them in office. Why don't they want those of us in the rank-and-file to have a vote?

Now, Division 13 of La Crosse, WI, [Division 98](#) of Lincoln, NE, [Division 155](#) of Decatur, IL and [Division 236](#) of Portland, OR have begun circulating an [Initiative to take away the right to vote](#) for our National Division leaders. Who is behind this? Why? The process for a rank-and-file vote has already begun. The *Rules for the 2010 Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen National Division Officers Election* has already been published by the Advisory Board, an election schedule has been set, and an Election Officer has been appointed.

We have been looking forward to casting our vote, and are glad the old way of back-room dealing and the smoke and mirrors politics at convention are gone. Look at what the old system has brought us in the past four years – one discredited and corrupt BLET leader after another.

Nevertheless, there are apparently some in our union who prefer the old way. In his letter, Division 98 President, [Roy Helm](#), says:

- *“This method of electing our leadership has served our Brotherhood well from its founding in 1863 through our most recent election in 2006.”* - - - How well did the 2006 election serve us when the elected President was removed from office for embezzlement; his elected, elevated replacement was arrested and charged with extortion, and an elected Vice President was removed for embezzlement? How much longer must the BLET be the laughing-stock of rail labor? Let the rank-and-file vote and help set things right; we sure can't do any worse than the back room dealing at convention!
- *“...the majority of members are not involved in the day-to-day affairs of the union.”* - - - There is a lot of truth to what Brother Helm says, but we say that is the failing of our leaders and a system which – until now -- has historically excluded the members from full participation. We say a rank-and-file vote is the best way to motivate all of us to become involved. When we have the opportunity to cast our individual vote for a viable candidate who will speak out against the good-old-boy network, the corruption, and business and contracts as usual, Brother Helm might be surprised how much membership involvement there will be!
- *“When Division 316 circulated its Petition that resulted in the current election process in October of 2005, they intended to have the process completed prior to the 2006*

Convention. However, that Petition almost failed to meet the 25% threshold in the Bylaws, and only reached 25.22% with less than a month remaining in the time they had.” - - - What Brother Helm fails to mention is that this process would have been completed and been in place in time for the 2006 elections, had the vote count not been mysteriously dragged out for days until the election by delegates at convention could be finished, hence precluding a one-member-one-vote. Helm also fails to mention that the initiative to adopt a one-member-one-vote system passed by a nearly 2-to-1 margin.

- *“This consistent level of under-participation means that, contrary to what the supporters of the 2006 Initiative said in advocating their proposal, the future course of the Organization will not be decided by the majority of the membership.”* - - - We say BULL! We have much more faith in rank-and-file members than Brother Helm does. First, members will be motivated to vote in their very first one-member-one-vote election. Second, just as in any other democratic election it will be the majority of those voting who select our leaders.
- *“When the Election Rules for next year’s ND elections were published in July we were stunned with the level of complexity that is required in order to comply with the current Bylaws.”* - - - While Brother Helms may have a hard time understanding the need for these rules, we say this is good. The rules are designed to prevent cheating and illegalities. They are written to make sure that money from outsiders and/or the rail carriers is not used in an attempt to buy or influence the election of our leaders. They are written to make sure no officer uses our dues to get himself re-elected. These election rules are enforced to level the playing field and give us a fair chance to elect honest, hard-working members who will fully represent us. How can that be a bad thing? In addition, these rules are very similar to the rules which were used for election of BLET delegates to the Teamster convention in 2006 and are modeled after the IBT rules. So why wait until now to get “stunned”? Brother Helm, his Division, or anyone for that matter had the opportunity to file a protest of the rules. Why wait 90 days past the protest deadline, and then undertake a campaign to take away our right to vote? These rules are what every other local in the Teamsters and many in the country routinely meet. They are not so bad if one is willing to submit to an honest election process.
- *“Do we really want our ND Officers traveling all over the country doing fundraisers?”* - - - We do! We say it is high time for them to get out in the field and talk to us face-to-face. They have a lot of questions to answer. WE are the people who work 24/7/365 to pay their salaries, expense accounts and benefits. We are the people who actually work under the contracts they negotiate. It is long past time for them to stand up in front of us and ask for our vote!
- *“It will be determined by a small minority of the membership, the vast majority of whom will have no opportunity to learn about a candidate or the issues, outside of what is contained in campaign materials.”* - - - Once again, we beg to differ with Brother Helm. Members will have the opportunity to learn about candidates as they campaign. Under the rules, the National Division is required to provide a link to each candidates website on the BLET homepage, thus for the cost of a few dollars to create a web site each candidate can be heard from the bully pulpit at an extremely affordable rate. Also Division Delegates will play a vital role as they will be meeting with and hearing from the candidates at the 2010 convention. They will collect literature and opinions.

Then they can return to their Divisions to report on what they hear and see. Debate and discussion on the candidates and their respective platforms will take place at division meetings across the country.

Sure, campaigning is not easy. It is not supposed to be. We want leaders who can show us they are willing and able to stand up in front of us and justify our vote. For too long now we have seen just what we get from some leaders who are good at schmoozing and good-old-boy politics in the back rooms of conventions.

We will be attending our Division meetings and speaking out and voting against this Initiative. We are the dues-paying members of this union. **WE PAY THE FREIGHT!** One-member-one-vote elections in our union will make it stronger, more democratic, and more accountable to the membership. Just as we democratically elect our government leaders, we have a right to democratically elect our union leaders and we say no one can take that away from us!

Fraternally,

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Robert Hill – Division 758

Ron Kaminkow – Division 51

Ed Michael – Division 724

Hugh Sawyer – Division 316

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