

CN is provoking its workers to launch a strike *"The most important issue in these talks is the health and safety of the workers and of people living near railroads."*

OTTAWA, Aug. 29 /CNW Telbec/ - After only a few days of bargaining, it seems that the Canadian National Railway Company (CN) is bent on provoking its workers to launch a strike, regardless of the insistence of the union to pursue discussions. Negotiations broke down last Friday and the company refuses to offer its formal proposal to the workers' Negotiations Committee. Moreover, no further dates of discussions are scheduled and the company refused an extension of the conciliator's mandate.

In fact, CN wants to use the Labour Code to impose a settlement on the parties rather than bargain by mutual agreement with the union of some 2700 conductors, yardmen and traffic coordinators. CN workers are represented by the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference (TCRC).

The union believes that Canadian National wants the Government to quickly assign an arbitrator to the case, thus disabling the normal bargaining process. These discussions started last May, as the collective agreement ended in July. There were only six days of actual bargaining before CN requested conciliation "We have hardly begun discussions before the employer wants to end them," explains Bryan Boechler, spokesperson for the TCRC Negotiations Committee. "And we all know that it takes two to tango."

The health and safety of the workers and of the population are at stake The rail company is proposing modifications to eliminate all provisions pertaining to the rest period by arguing that they are outdated. The workers could therefore be forced to work 24 of 32 hours, and then restart this cycle 8 hours later. The union believes that this proposal will increase the risk of accidents. "Let us be clear: the most important issue in these talks is the health and safety of the workers and of people living near railroads, explains Bryan Boechler, spokesperson for the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference. "My worries are based on my experience on the field, not on a bogus theory put forth by some managers of the company." The conflict looming on the horizon therefore strangely resembles the prevailing situation between the locomotive engineers and the company in December of 2009. CN had wanted to unilaterally change the working conditions of the locomotive engineers, which brought about a strike. The health and safety of the workers and of the public were also at the core of the dispute.

Strike vote The union had no other choice but to send a strike vote by mail to its members. The results are expected sometime between now and the end of September. A walkout or a lockout could therefore take place in the Fall.

"We feel that they will lock us out or force a strike in order to have the Government order arbitration, adds Boechler. We invite the company to return to the bargaining table with an open attitude instead."

In closing, CN reports profits of \$1.26 billion in 2009. This company operates a transcontinental network of 28,200 km that serves several Canadian provinces and American states. It crosses all of Canada from East to West between Nova-Scotia and British Columbia; from North-South, it crosses the United States between the region of the Great Lakes and the Gulf of Mexico

Mike Piche

Staff Representative
United Steelworkers USW - Metallos
Canadian National Office

