

RLA - General Purposes:

1. To avoid any interruption to commerce or to the operation of any carrier engaged therein;
2. To forbid any limitations upon freedom of association among employees or any denial, as a condition of employment or otherwise, of the right of employees to join a labor organization;
3. To provide for the complete independence of carriers and of employees in the matter of self-organization to carry out the purposes of this Act;
4. To provide for the prompt and orderly settlement of all disputes concerning rates of pay, rules, or working conditions;
5. To provide for the prompt and orderly settlement of all disputes growing out of grievances or out of the interpretation or application of agreements covering rates of pay, rules, or working conditions.



Brotherhood of Maintenance
of Way Employees Division
—
Burlington System Division



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Understanding the Railway Labor Act of 1926

The RLA governs how we form Unions in the railroad industry, how we engage in collective bargaining, how we ensure our contracts are honored, and how we can resolve disputes.

- **General Purposes**
- **Key Concepts**
- **How the RLA affects our Union**
- **Where to Learn More**

**Understanding the Railway
Labor Act of 1926**

Revised January 2023

Key Concepts

- The RLA guarantees the legal right of railroad workers to form Unions. The processes for organizing a railroad Union are provided by the RLA and administered by the **National Mediation Board (NMB)**.
- Under the RLA, railroad contracts **do not expire!** They can be amended. The railroads and rail Unions use the processes outlined under Section 6 of the RLA to periodically engage in negotiations to amend contracts. This begins with the exchange of **Section 6 Notices**, unless prevented by an agreed-upon **Moratorium Period**, to begin **Direct Negotiations**.
- Many of the US Class I railroads bargain as a single group called the **National Carriers Conference Committee (NCCC)**.
- If Direct Negotiations break down, the NMB can enter into bargaining to mediate.
- There is no time limit to **Mediation** under the RLA. While in Negotiations or Mediation, **Status Quo** must be maintained by all sides.
- If NMB decides Mediation won't resolve the dispute, it will make a binding **Proffer of Arbitration**, which either party can reject. Rejection starts a 30-day **Cooling Off Period**, which maintains Status Quo.
- The NMB notifies the US President if a dispute threatens interstate commerce. The President may then create a **Presidential Emergency Board (PEB)** to recommend a resolution. Calling a PEB starts a 2nd 30-day Cooling Off Period.
- When the PEB submits its recommendations, a 3rd 30-day Cooling Off Period is imposed to review, approve, or reject their recommendations.
- If the PEB's recommendations are rejected and no voluntary settlement is reached, after the 3rd Cooling Off Period either party may initiate **Self-Help** to resolve the dispute. This can mean unilaterally imposing work conditions, a **Lockout** by the railroads, or a Union **Strike**. **The RLA was designed to prevent Self-Help** and maintain rail operations as part of interstate commerce.
- The NMB, through the **National Railroad Arbitration Board (NRAB)** or other processes, also administers the resolution of **Minor Disputes** regarding the interpretation or application of RLA agreements if the parties cannot resolve the issue between themselves through their Agreement's **Claims & Grievance** rules.

Learn More

BMWED website

<https://www.bmwe.org>

Find training materials, additional readings, contact BMWED officers & staff, or access further resources on bargaining, claims & grievances, organizing, and more!

NMB website

<https://nmb.gov>

Find documents and information on how the NMB works, who is on the NMB, and what the NMB does regarding Representation, Mediation, and Arbitration under the RLA.