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Six Years on from the Train Explosion in Lac-Mégantic **A Shocking Account of Criminal Negligence**



The report and interview in this issue of *Renewal Update* provide a shocking account of the criminal negligence of governments and the self-regulating railway companies.

The terrible memory of what happened in Lac-Mégantic is still fresh in people's minds, with local residents still reeling from the experience. Current developments are yet another indictment of the decision-making process controlled by interests over which the people exercise no control whatsoever. Now more derailments have taken place around Lac-Mégantic and the tracks are still not being maintained or overhauled as required and Transport Canada refuses to assume responsibility. This is what happens when the people and their concerns are sidelined as is being done in this federal election. It reveals why it is urgent for the workers and people living in communities on rail lines to be able to exercise their veto without repercussions when their lives are so directly threatened.

The condition of railway tracks is definitely a matter of national security. So is the matter of who controls the decision-making power. The situation of Lac-Mégantic reveals the need to provide the

conception of national security with a modern definition which does not serve nefarious ends while the security of the people is put at risk every day. This deserves discussion in the election as rail transportation has grown exponentially all over the country, along with the risks that come with it, especially where there are other factors like the grade that makes Lac-Mégantic so treacherous.

It is important to publicize the actions the people in the community of Lac-Mégantic are planning to take and call on everyone to support them. The justice of their cause is definitely an election issue.

Why Are Railway Conditions Not a Matter of National Concern?

- Pierre Chénier -

A train derailed in the village of Nantes, Quebec on August 24, just 12.9 kilometres from the town of Lac-Mégantic. Six years ago from the same village of Nantes, an unmanned train began rolling downhill into Lac-Mégantic, its 72 cars carrying 7.7 million litres of flammable liquids, eventually derailing in the heart of Lac-Mégantic. The resulting massive explosion and fire killed 47 people and destroyed more than 40 buildings. The destruction forced 2,000 people from their homes and closed numerous businesses. The loss to the town, beyond the human toll, has been estimated at \$1.5 billion.

According to the Mayor of Nantes, the August 24 train derailment is at least the third one in the area since the 2013 tragedy. Just ten days before the August 24 incident, the Lac-Mégantic Coalition of Citizens and Organizations Committed to Railway Safety had raised the alarm with the Transportation Safety Board of Canada that necessary repairs at the exact location of the derailment had not been done.

The coalition says the lack of maintenance is commonplace throughout the entire Estrie region of Quebec. It states that the company -- Central Maine and Quebec Railway -- does whatever it wants with impunity. Just one hour before the August 24 derailment, it points out, another train hauling 30 tank cars transporting sulfuric acid, gasoline, propane gas and bitumen passed over the same tracks where repairs are needed.

The Transportation Safety Board gave notice to the rail company last April of a total of 253 track anomalies to be repaired. Transport Canada issued a compliance order on May 7, yet the repairs had not been completed by the date of the August derailment.

For various reasons, the stretch of railway going through Lac-Mégantic is considered one of the most dangerous in Canada. At least one local mayor claims that the heart of the problem is not location or geography but a human one. Namely, that the human factor is negated and that governments have permitted railway companies to be self-regulating. Many decry a situation where



the railways act with utter disregard for the human toll within an atmosphere of anarchy, anti-consciousness and impunity.

An example of this impunity can be found in the attitude of the Transportation Safety Board regarding the latest derailment in Nantes. It refuses to inquire any further into the incident because no injuries were reported and no dangerous material was spilled. So the people must suffer in the manner of Lac-Mégantic for the authorities to even notice a problem with the condition of the railway! This is the anti-human factor/anti-social consciousness in control of people's lives and security, a dangerous contradiction between conditions and authority. The time is now for a new direction!

Pierre Chénier is Secretary of the Workers' Centre of the MLPC and its candidate in Châteauguay—Lacolle.

(With files from local sources and La Tribune)

Community Raises Alarm on Condition of Railway and Authorities' Lack of Concern

- Interview with Robert Bellefleur, Spokesperson, Coalition of Citizens and Organizations Committed to Railway Safety -



A Transport Canada inspector sent a Notice and Order to the Central Maine and Quebec Railway on May 7, regarding the alarming condition of the railway between Farnham and Lac-Mégantic in the Estrie region. On August 24, a train derailed in Nantes as it headed toward Lac-Mégantic. Although the incident did not cause any casualties or extensive damage to property, it was a stark reminder for the community of the dangers the railway poses. Everyone remembers with deep regret the 47 lives lost, the turmoil in the lives of thousands more, and damage to people's property from the July 6, 2013 horrific explosion and fire of a train carrying crude oil.

Renewal Update interviewed Robert Bellefleur, Spokesman for the Coalition of Citizens and Organizations Committed to Railway Safety about the conditions they face and recent events.

Renewal Update: What do you see as the significance of these two events: Transport Canada's Notice and Order, and the subsequent derailment at the entrance to Lac-Mégantic?

Robert Bellefleur: In our view, these recent events reveal the total bankruptcy of rail safety regulations in Canada. On May 7, a Transport Canada inspector issued a Notice and Order to the Central Maine and Quebec Railway stating that 253 faulty rails had been detected by ultrasound

between Farnham and Lac-Mégantic, a distance of around 225 kilometres. These rails have internal cracks and are at risk of breaking.

In addition, the inspector found over 30,000 feet of corrugated rails, which indicate maximum wear. Also noted were approximately 27,000 feet of mud-contaminated rails. With precipitation, the rails sink into the mud under the weight of the locomotives and cars, placing further stress on the rails and deforming them. Essentially, the entire structure of the railway line is in need of an overhaul.

The May 7 notice sent to the company by Transport Canada did not include any restriction on operations, or any obligation to carry out repairs. All that Transport Canada requested of the company was that it undertake more inspections and report on them.

Three months later, on August 12, we found out that a piece of track cited in the Transport Canada Notice and Order had not been repaired. We alerted journalists and on August 24, a train derailed at that same spot.

It is evident that the command structure is not working. Transport Canada issues a Notice and Order; however the company is not required to carry out any immediate repairs and can simply reduce the speed of the trains and make repairs whenever it wants. Until then, the risk of derailment is maximized.

RU: What is the community's response to these events?

RB: The coalition issued a press release stating that enough is enough. The population of Lac-Mégantic has suffered enough and has lived in fear long enough. We urgently requested that our Mayor, the Mayor of Nantes, the Mayor of Frontenac, the Prefect of Le Granit Regional County Municipality, our Member of the National Assembly and our Member of Parliament urgently exert pressure on Transport Minister Marc Garneau to immediately halt all transportation of dangerous goods on the railway traversing the Lac-Mégantic region. On September 3, we sent a formal notice to the Minister, urging him to cease the transport of hazardous materials.

Despite Transport Canada's May 7 Notice, the transportation of dangerous goods continues on those tracks unabated. It was stopped after Saturday's derailment [August 24], only to resume on Monday. The hazardous materials include automobile gasoline and sulfuric acid carried in DOT-111 rail cars. These cars are considered too dangerous for the transportation of crude oil, but are transporting sulfuric acid.

In our opinion, we have reached the stage where it is the people who must take charge. The population has no confidence in the authorities. They wonder when and where this is all going to end. We are organizing peaceful and legal actions during the election campaign, which we will be announcing soon. Rail Safety Week, which takes place from September 23 to 29, is also coming up, during which community actions will be organized. Again, we are calling for citizen action to defend the safety of our communities.



(Translated from original French by Renewal Update)

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