

Milwaukee Road muzzles workers

BOZEMAN (AP) — The Milwaukee Railroad has ordered its employees not to discuss the company's affairs with outsiders, a step that Rick Applegate of the Center for Transportation labels "ridiculous."

The muzzling apparently is the latest step in the fight between officials of the bankrupt railroad and employees who want to save their jobs and the rail service in Montana.

G.Y. Neu, acting division manager at Deer Lodge, posted a notice six days ago in depots, yards and roundhouses that said, "We must have adherence to Rule 704, and any violation will not be tolerated."

Rule 704 is part of a set of consolidated rules for the industry.

The rule states: "Employees must not disclose information regarding the affairs of the railroad except to authorized officers or to persons authorized by law to receive it. They must not permit access to books, correspondence, waybills or statistics in their charge."

"It's a ridiculous rule that ought to be dropped, or at least modified, and is an infringement on their rights of citizenship," Applegate said.

"They should be able to speak of their work and conditions of it as well as anyone else. No rule should be able to

take that away from them."

Neu's notice, a letter, said he had noted several instances of Milwaukee employees "furnishing the press with comments concerning the cause of accidents and, in some cases, what they think is the extent of the damage."

He said there have been instances of employees giving erroneous information because they did not have all the facts.

"That is why we want all inquiries for information funneled through my office," Neu said.

Applegate said the consolidated code is poorly written and so vague that it invites selective enforcement. One rule, he said, forbids employees to say anything that might subject the railroad to criticism.

"If the company wants to get rid of an employee — virtually any employee — it does it with the rule book," he said.