
Supreme Council Declines Aid to NY Central Strike

Published as "The Question of Financial Aid"
in *Chicago Inter Ocean*, whole no. 6878 (Aug. 27, 1890), pg. 6.

Terre Haute, Ind., Aug. 26 [1890].— *Special Telegram*. — The attention of Eugene V. Debs, of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, and the reputed writer of the manifesto emanating yesterday from the Supreme Council of the United Order of Railway Employees refusing to declare a federation strike upon the New York Central system on the appeal of Mr. [Terence] Powderly, was called this evening to two paragraphs that appeared in today's newspapers as press dispatches. One was from Albany, NY, and represented Mr. Devlin, of the General Executive Board of the Knights of Labor, as making the following statement: "The Supreme Council have extended to us not only moral support, but financial assistance, the latter being more than we expected, and they have, in fact, determined to support the fight as their own."

The other dispatch was also from Albany, and General Secretary Hayes, of the Knights, was quoted as saying last night: "If the dispatch is true, about no strike being ordered, it means a single-handed fight, with the Knights doing the fighting and the other organizations aiding financially."

Mr. Debs said: "I have seen statements published since the council adjourned to the effect that the federation would vote financial assistance to the strikers. I suppose these originated because there was a great deal of talk about the council taking such an action when it became known that a strike had not been ordered by the federation, and also perhaps because of the very strong stand the council took in endorsing the cause of the striking Knights. But, as in the case of a strike on the Central system by the federation, there is also something in the way in the matter of financial aid. Under the rules of the federation there can be no appropriation for a strike unless the federation directly engages in the strike and that does not exist in the present case. To call upon our emergency fund, or to levy assessments for a

strike, it would be necessary first that one or more of the orders represented in the federation should be engaged in a strike, and second, that the Supreme Council should sustain the strike by the holding of just such a meeting as you have just seen held here. So you will see that it is impossible for the federation as a body to vote financial aid as the case stands. This does not prohibit the members of the different orders from giving as individuals if they so desire, and no doubt many of them will. I understand the Knights of Labor are well equipped in a financial way for the present struggle with the New York Central. We are thoroughly in sympathy with Mr. Powderly and his men and think they have justice on their side in the fight. We have given them as strong an endorsement as lay in our power, and have gone as far in every particular as the laws of our federation permit.”

“What is the aggregate of the protecting fund of the locomotive firemen at the present time?” asked the correspondent.

“Something over \$100,000,” replied Mr. Debs. “This sum lies in the hands of subordinate lodges subject to the order of the Grand Lodge, and is only used in such an emergency as a strike. I do not now recall the protection funds of the other orders in the federation, but there is one thing certain, and that is that not a cent could be appropriated for a strike that has not been endorsed by the Supreme Council.”

Mr. Debs stated further, in response to inquires, that it was true that the Supreme Council was not of one mind upon meeting regarding the advisability of a federated strike on the New York Central road in support of Powderly. Mr. Debs said there were a few members who favored the changing of the rules so as to admit of the strike, but the matter was thoroughly canvassed in the conference and the manifesto that emanated from the council was the unanimous expression of all the members. Nothing has been heard officially from Mr. Powderly since the report of the council, but Mr. Debs was satisfied that the Grand Master Workman understood the position of the federation thoroughly and was satisfied with it.

Edited by Tim Davenport

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · April 2017 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.
First Edition.