
The Coming Election: An Address to Railway Employees

by Eugene V. Debs & the
Board of Directors of the ARU

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*To Members of the American Railway Union
and all railway employees in the United States:*

Greeting:—

The undersigned, constituting the Board of Directors of the American Railway Union, desire to address you upon a matter of momentous import in connection with the great political campaign now in progress. You have no doubt been struck with the unprecedented activity and astounding tactics of railway owners and managers in this campaign. High officials are going up and down the lines addressing employees and warning them against the frightful consequences of free silver coinage. Roundhouses, depots, and shops have been temporarily changed into political wigwams. "Sound money" clubs have been organized and employees intimidated to join them. Circulars and campaign documents are being delivered to employees with their wages, and in many instances employees are given plainly to understand that their continuance in service depends upon their supporting the gold standard candidates. In this proceeding, the money question only is permitted to be discussed, *and only one side of that.*

Now, what of all this? The railroad managers are overwhelming employees with predictions of frightful disaster which will follow in the wake of free coinage. Wages will be cut in two, they say, thousands will be thrown out of employment, and the country ruined. this one issue is forced upon employees to the exclusion of all others.

Their minds are not to be diverted from the free silver calamity a single instant. It is to command their united, ceaseless, and terrified gaze to the very election booth, so that by no possibility may the discovery be made that "sound money" is only a pretext for deceiving and hoodwinking employees, and that railroad managers have a totally different motive for transforming the corporations they represent into huge Republican machines in this campaign.

The money question has been in American politics in all its various forms since the foundation of the government. When have railroad corporations organized, drilled, and openly commanded their employees to vote the company's ticket? Never before to an extent that would even remotely compare with their brazen activity in this campaign. Employees have yielded up everything, and now they are to be stripped of their votes and deprived of their last means of protection against oppression and injustice.

And now, we ask, why this unheard of activity on the part of railroad managers for Bryan's defeat and McKinley's election? How is it to be accounted for? We appeal to railroad employees to *pause and think*. The like of the present situation has never been witnessed. The country stands amazed in the presence of such bold, bald, and shameless intimidation. Again, we ask, what does it mean? What can be its significance? Why such ceaseless, stupendous, and desperate efforts to control an election? Is it on account of free coinage? No! The absurdity of the proposition is evident upon the very face of it. That railroad companies have some interest in the money question is conceded, but that they would turn earth, heaven, and hell on that account, to prevent an injury to their "poor employees," is not only ridiculous, but an insult to every employee of common intelligence who is not wholly the property of the company.

They have been cutting the wages of their employees by all the means ingenuity could suggest and if they believed free silver would "cut in two" the wages they are now receiving, we know of nothing in their past record that would warrant the assumption that they would oppose free coinage.

Oh, no; it is not free silver that has unloosened and enraged this railroad Moloch. The, what is it? Here is the answer: **The attack in the Democratic platform on government by injunction.** Here is the milk in the coconut. We know whereof we speak. The authority upon which we make this avowal is from a source which can not be questioned. But such authority is scarcely required. Upon second

thought the proposition overwhelmingly confirms itself and becomes clear as the noonday sun. For years, railway managers have been wrestling with the problem of cutting wages and controlling their employees generally. But the employees were more or less organized. The managers found the opposition of these organizations extremely annoying. Committees greatly distressed them. Mr. Ingalls, President of the Big Four system,¹ in his annual report to the board of directors dilated upon the great and growing difficulties of handling employees and treated the question as one of paramount importance. The managers could not treat their employees as they pleased. There was more or less friction, and sometimes strikes occurred, and these were embarrassing and expensive. The dread of a strike restrained the managers and kept them within uncomfortable bounds. Something must be done to overcome these organizations and reduce employees to submission.

Experimenting began in various directions. Finally the right lead was struck. The federal court would solve the problem. The strike of the engineers and firemen on the Toledo, Ann Arbor & North Michigan was paralyzed by a federal court injunction. Other disturbances followed and were settled in like fashion, until Judge Jenkins actually restrained the employees of the Northern Pacific from quitting the service of the company, because of a reduction of wages, under penalty of being adjudged guilty of contempt of court and committed to jail.² The railway companies exclaimed in one voice, "*Eureka!*" The problem of problems was solved. Hereafter they might reduce wages, treat employees as they saw fit, and they would have to submit. *Government by injunction* was now established, and the managers were supreme, while the employees were helpless.

How perfectly the scheme worked, the great Pullman strike bore haggard testimony. The federal courts, the federal soldiers, the deputy marshals, in fact, all the tremendous powers of the government, were promptly brought into requisition to crush the employees, and it was all done by the application of government by injunction. There have been sweeping reductions of wages since, amounting to millions, but there has been no protest. There is not likely to be any protest while government by injunction continues. Unconditional submission is

¹ **Melville Ezra Ingalls** (1842-1914), was head of the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago & St. Louis Railroad, the so-called "Big Four."

² **James Graham Jenkins** (1834-1921) was a judge of the US District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin from 1888 to 1893.

the order of the day. Even arbitration is denied, and, in fact, has been made impossible. Railroad managers have things absolutely their own way. Should employees quit work in a body, injunctions would probably be issued and they would be sent to jail without trial. This is what has happened and what will happen again. Employees know this, and however galling the yoke, they submit. They can do nothing else.

Managers are no longer annoyed with committees. Agreements have been arbitrarily abrogated and men reduced to slavish conditions. No doubt some of these employees will deny these statements. Their jobs will depend on their doing so. Corporation hirelings will do likewise, but the facts are of Pike's Peak proportions and defy successful contradiction. Not long since the employees of the Plant System, at Savannah, Georgia, repudiated and denounced the American Railway Union. The company prepared the statement and compelled the employees to sign it, under pain of dismissal. We have the documents to prove the assertion. Can corporate despotism go farther, or the abasement of employees be sunk lower?

The election of McKinley means the perpetuation of government by injunction, the supremacy of corporations, and the helpless, hopeless subjection of employees. It will not be confined to railroad corporations in its enslaving operations. All other corporations, trusts, and combines will claim its beneficial protection, and therefore all workmen, especially those who are organized, are profoundly concerned in this issue. Ex-President Harrison and Bourke Cochran, both corporation attorneys, strenuously defended government by injunction in their New York speeches. It is worth millions of dollars to railroad companies, and all comes out of the pockets of employees.

American railroads consist largely of British gold and American labor. Government by injunction crowns the former king, and makes the latter subject. The platform upon which William J. Bryan stands is pledged to abolish this despotic usurpation of judicial power, and restore to railway employees their lawful right to resist reduction and injustice by the lawful means provided by their organizations. The railway corporations are united and have massed all their tremendous powers to crush him. This in itself is indisputable proof that he is the friend of workmen. In saying this, the genuine keynote of the railroad campaign has been struck. It startles like alarm bells at night. There is no mistaking the issue. Its gravity cannot be overestimated. It involves the very existence of organized labor, the bulwark and de-

fense of workingmen against corporate tyranny, which, if swept away, leaves them shorn of every vestige of power, and totally at the mercy of corporate capital.

The one federal judge who has proven himself to be immeasurably above the corrupting influences of corporations, who has earned the confidence and gratitude of all railway employees for his unyielding defense of their rights, upon whose fair name there is no scar or blemish, Henry C. Caldwell, has declared that the nomination of William J. Bryan is the greatest since Lincoln. We heartily concur in the declaration of this honest, fearless, and distinguished jurist.

In view of all these facts — facts of tremendous import which cannot be successfully controverted — we pledge our united and unwavering support to William J. Bryan for President, and appeal to railway employees and all workingmen to join with us in rebuking corporate tyranny which attempts to wrest the sacred right of suffrage from employees, in abolishing government by injunction, and in securing and maintaining every right of citizenship vouchsafed by the Constitution of our country.

*Eugene V. Debs,
James Hogan,
Sylvester Keliber,
R.M. Goodwin,
M.J. Elliott,
William E. Burns,*

Board of Directors, American Railway Union.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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