
Triumph Through Federation

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The *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine* has in the past advocated the federation of locomotive engineers, locomotive firemen, railroad brakemen, and switchmen, nor have we been disinclined to include railroad conductors. We have discussed the subject entirely free from passion. We have assumed throughout in the discussion of wages, the improvement of the condition of workingmen, that society at large, as certainly as the individual workingman, would derive large benefits by the enthronement of a policy which would insure to workingmen, fair, honest, living wages.

This *Magazine*, while it is the recognized organ of a great brotherhood, and on all occasions champions the interests of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, has done what it could to arrest the growth of the pernicious idea, that there is an aristocracy in labor — the India-pagan idea of caste, than which nothing could be introduced into the discussion of topics designed for the welfare of the workingmen of the country, more detrimental to their well being.

Let us say just here and now, that the aristocratic, the caste idea is not only repugnant to American institutions, but is rebuked by God Himself. The apostle Peter, and a braver man never drew a sword or offered up a prayer, declared that he had learned that "God is no respecter of persons"¹ — and our own immortal Declaration of Independence, declares, that "all men are created equal." It were blind, impudent folly, after quoting such authorities, to favor aristocracy, or caste in society, and it is an insult of colossal proportions for one wage worker to assume a haughty, disdainful and overbearing air towards another wage-worker, because, forsooth, his pay is more remunerative. In pursuing such a course, he does what God Almighty never

¹ Acts, chapter 10, verses 34-35, which read: "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

did, since He created Adam, and he does that which the genius of American institutions condemns. In the discussion of federation of railroad brotherhoods we dismiss sentiment, though we fully recognize a sentimental side to the subject. We favor federation because we believe it capable of producing beneficial results, financially. If this is admitted, if this is true, other benefits relating to moral, social and educational conditions, are certain to follow.

Those who favor federation are, we conceive, in duty bound to state their reasons for the position they have taken. To win, their reasons must be cogent and convincing. They must be free from sophistry. Every proposition should be sharply stated. Conclusions should be based upon facts. In such discussions the tricks and arts of the demagogue should have neither place nor consideration. This done, men will be able to determine the course of action which ought to be pursued.

In the first place take the four orders of railroad employees, engineers, firemen, brakemen, and switchmen. They are especially identified in running railroad trains, they are absolute necessities. Without them trains could not move. In the very nature of things, as employees, these men must cooperate, they are interdependent, the one cannot operate without the other. In their employment for one to assume any superiority over the other is sheer nonsense. There can be no rivalry. These different classes of railroad employees organized brotherhoods. Why? It may be said in reply, to improve their condition, morally and socially. But this is not all, the fundamental, bedrock fact, in forming the organizations was the bettering of conditions financially. Wages was the supreme question. There is not an organization of workingmen in the country which was not prompted by the belief that it would be the means, directly and indirectly, immediately and remotely, of advancing wages, or at any rate, preventing a decline in wages.

It is scarcely required to say in this connection, that labor creates the wealth of nations. Workingmen after many years of education grasped the fact, and the conclusion followed that they were not receiving their equitable share of this wealth. They saw distinctly that their environments were such as were calculated to keep them forever in a condition of subjection, to prevent their advancement — to blast their hopes and defeat their aspirations. They created the wealth and remained poor. They tilled all the fields and harvested all the crops, but were hungry. They manufactured all the clothing, the hats and

the shoes, but had to be content with scanty raiment. They built all the houses for the people and the barns for the cattle and were compelled to inhabit shelters unfit for human beings. Their country conferred upon them sovereignty and they had the ballot, but the laws were so framed that their rights and interests were ignored. In a word, labor was degraded.

Under such circumstances, workingmen concluded to organize themselves into unions and brotherhoods. Nothing could be more natural. The causes were numerous, of long standing, deep-rooted and powerful. They created a necessity for organization — compact, determined, and persevering organization. It is only needed to look around to comprehend to what extent labor has organized during the last 25 years. Almost every trade that can be named has an organization, and the purpose of which primarily is, to secure fair and honest wages.

We are not unmindful of the fact that many of these organizations have what are termed benevolent features, that the sick and afflicted are cared for, and that certain pecuniary benefits accrue to relatives in case of death, but at the bottom of this benevolent policy lies the question of wages — fair pay for fair work. With this question settled all others are easily managed. With fair wages we have the bright and cheerful home, good food, good clothes, books and papers and refinement such as should adorn the American home.

It will be admitted, we think without controversy, that organization has accomplished vast good for the American workingman. It has taught him his power in the body politic, social, and commercial. He has found that organization educates and elevates, that it gives power and consequence, and exerts an influence which statesmen recognize as potent. But the workingmen have learned that while they have been organized for bettering their condition by advancing and maintaining wages, the employers have been busy in devising ways and means whereby they might hope to maintain their ascendancy, nor have they been disappointed.

We readily comprehend how that in this connection we could devote some space to the discussion of certain facts upon which employers rely for ultimate success in defeating labor organizations — chiefly, that what is termed the “labor market,” is oversupplied with men, and that if one man quits work, no matter what the cause may be, two men stand ready to take the place at the wages offered. It is this fact that brings into the boldest possible prominence the benefits

of federation — the inauguration of an alliance between organizations whose members are identified with carrying forward an industrial enterprise, in which each one is absolutely necessary to the other.

And here, coming down to business, we take for an illustration a railroad. Necessarily, it employs engineers, firemen, switchmen, and brakemen. In case of a grievance on the part of one class of these employees, the road might be slightly embarrassed by a strike, but if the other three classes remain loyal to the corporation, the places of those who had quit work could be readily supplied, and things would move forward without serious embarrassment. In this case it is readily seen that the purpose of organization would be defeated. This sort of a victory has often been achieved by railroad corporations. It matters not how serious and exasperating may have been the grievances of the employees, the more indefensible the wrongs, the greater the triumph of the corporation, and emboldened by success, it gives other employees to understand that the same, fate awaits them for any similar assertion of manly independence.

What is the logic of such a case as we have cited? It is this, that the corporation is stronger than any one organization of its employees, and can defeat it in any contest without regard to justice, or the rights of the employees. This has been done in the past, and will be done in the future more frequently if occasion requires, because corporations are combining for defense. Quick to comprehend situations, watchful of the signs of the times, they see the day of battle approaching. American workingmen, at least the more intelligent and progressive of them, have determined to enjoy their rightful share of the wealth they create. They have organized for the struggle. In the contests that have taken place, organized labor, though “baffled oft,” has compelled corporations to show their hand. Their purposes, strategy and policy, are understood and the knowledge gained is not, like the talent we read about, to be hid away in a napkin. With railroad employees it is to be used for their benefit. It may be that the corporation can defeat one or even two labor organizations, but it will find it difficult to strike down three or four when federated to secure justice and acting as a unit. Organized labor has accomplished much — how much can never be told. It has been an educating force of transcendent power. It has brought into play the mind forces of millions which before were dormant. It has aroused energies and ambitions, in consonance with American rights and privileges, that cannot be lulled to repose. The maxim, that “in union there is strength,” trite but true,

has been clothed with new significance. Organization has prepared the way for federation. Organization is federation's *avant courier*. It is as one crying in the wilderness of doubt, in the wake of defeat, prepare the way for federation and the triumph of labor.

Are there those who doubt? Probably. Are there those who hesitate? Certainly. When, we ask, in the history of the world's advancement was there ever a movement made to emancipate men from oppression, that there were not men who doubted and hesitated? When was there an army organized that did not have its cowards. Where in the world's history has truth confronted error that there was not to be found a Judas Iscariot to betray with a kiss for a consideration?² Men who take counsel of their fears stand still or recede. It is not required to particularize. History supplies multiplied instances. Workingmen who organize are courageous. Men who stand by their colors in the storm of battle, in the hours of darkness, men whom defeat cannot dishearten, clear-visioned, clear-headed, and trustful, are now, as in the past, the hope of the world. Workingmen see distinctly that final triumph is to be secured by federation.

Locomotive firemen, railroad brakemen, and switchmen have declared for federation. These organizations are pledged to an alliance that cooperation, however liberally construed, does not create. Federation is a compact, a treaty. It has a significance, a power and influence that cooperation does not and cannot possess.

It is not our purpose at this writing to discuss fine distinctions in the meaning of words. That may come later. Our chief purpose now is to say that this *Magazine* is unalterably committed to the federation of the organizations of railroad employees, engaged in moving trains. As we have said three of these organizations have voted in favor of federation, and they will federate.

The important preliminary steps have been taken. There are no insuperable obstacles in the way, and final results are no longer matters of discouragement or special anxiety. The question may be asked, will other organizations come into line under the federation banner? We might answer by asking, why not? What have they to gain by remaining isolated? The men who federate are the peers of those who may decline to fly the federation banner — their equals in moral ex-

² Allusion to *Luke*, chapter 22, verses 47-48, which read: "And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?"

cellence, in mental grasp, in the comprehension of the problems to be solved, in manly independence and in all things that go to make up good citizenship, and since trains cannot move without their assistance, the necessity of discussing any phase of the subject which does not directly relate to the settlement of such grievances as are common to railroad employees does not appear.

In closing this article we desire to say that we have undiminished faith in the conquering power of education. It levels up, and it levels down. Aristocratic ignorance and superstitions are certain to disappear. The brotherhood idea is sweeping along with resistless power, and the time is not distant, as we read the signs of the times, when the throttle, the pick, the brake, and the switch, arrayed in artistic style will symbolize the federation of the men who wield them, not only in their own interests but for the interests of society, and we do not hesitate to believe that the festive punch sooner or later will have its allotted place on the shield of the federated brotherhoods.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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