
Cooperation and Arbitration

by Eugene V. Debs

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This *Magazine* has on many occasions pointed out the many advantages that must necessarily result to each, if the two great Brotherhoods — Locomotive Engineers and Locomotive Firemen — cooperated in all matters involving mutual interests. It might be well to inquire what are the mutual interests of locomotive firemen and locomotive engineers? And yet it seems scarcely necessary to propound such an inquiry, since the most casual thinker in either of the brotherhoods, must see that these interests are many and of special importance.

Of all the locomotive engineers on the continent, it is safe to say that 90 percent of them have been locomotive firemen. The men of the “scoop” today, are the men of the “throttle” tomorrow. There is a ceaseless going from the “left” to the “right-hand side” of the “cab.” The fireman worthy of the position on a locomotive aspires to be an engineer. It is in all regards an honorable ambition, and it has been ten thousand times demonstrated that the *best* engineers were in their day the *best* firemen. The *best* fireman is a student of the locomotive, he will know all about the machine. He understands its construction. If he can't make a locomotive, he knows how and wherefore it was made, and he becomes at once and necessarily to the engineer what the first mate of a ship is to the captain, he is an engineer in the process of development, and hence we assume that these mutual interests, which are irrevocable, binding together locomotive engineers and firemen, exist between no other two brotherhoods engaged in any kind of employment.

If our conclusion is correct, and we regard it invulnerable, then it follows that in all matters involving mutual interests, cooperation is not only wise and prudent but absolutely natural, normal, in order,

and that any other course is an antagonism utterly indefensible upon any rational theory whatever.

In this connection we desire to point out to the readers of the *Magazine* some recent good results arising from co-operation between locomotive firemen and locomotive engineers. We refer to conferences with J.T. Harahan, Esq., General Manager of the Louisville & Nashville system, and John Echols, Esq., Third Vice President of the Newport News & Mississippi Valley system, gentlemen who control many thousand miles of railroads.

On both of these systems of railroads misunderstandings existed between the railroad officials and the engineers and firemen, and it became necessary for the grand officers of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and of Locomotive Firemen to confer with the officers of the railroads whose names we have mentioned. In this there was cooperation between the brotherhoods, there were mutual interests involved. There was no proposition to strike, the demand was conference and arbitration. It was for a meeting with railroad officials, and a free and frank discussion of all matters relating to a harmonious adjudication and settlement of grievances or misunderstandings, and results were in the highest degree satisfactory.

On July 23 [1887], the Grand Master of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen [Frank P. Sargent] was called to Louisville, Kentucky and on the 25th, a conference was held with J.T. Harahan, General Manager of the Louisville & Nashville system. This conference, with necessary intervals, continued to July 28, when a satisfactory agreement was reached, and throughout, the representatives of the brotherhoods were treated with the most pronounced courtesy by the General Manager and his entire corps of officers. There was on the part of Mr. Harahan, from the first, a dignified and appreciative recognition of the importance of conference and arbitration — in a word, it was business, freed from a semblance of arrogance, a willingness to listen and a desire to reach amicable conclusions — at once conclusive that the Louisville & Nashville system has a general manager at the head of affairs who, while keeping in full view the interests of the great enterprise he represents, is capable of comprehending the rights, interests and welfare of men who are vitally identified with the success of the enterprise, and this is said with no intention of writing taffy, but in robust justice to a man, who, having great power at his command, is disposed to use it with a clear apprehension and com-

prehension of the best consequences to himself and to those who work for him.

On July 29, the Grand Master of the Brotherhood called upon John Echols, Esq., Third Vice President of the Newport News & Mississippi Valley Railroad system. Here again, as in the case of Mr. Harahan, the conference was characterized by every courtesy and business propriety the occasion required. There was a free interchange of opinions, every point was discussed with an earnest desire to reach a satisfactory settlement of differences, and if all was not granted that was demanded by the men in each case, a good work was accomplished by establishing "seniority" and the abolishment of "classification," and throughout the best of feeling prevailed on the part of engineers, firemen and railroad officials. In both instances Grand Chief P. M. Arthur was present and represented the engineers, and from the beginning there was perfect cooperation between the grand officers and committees of the respective organizations.

The readers of the *Magazine* will not fail to notice the towering difference between Messrs. Harahan and Echols, men in charge of great railroad systems, and the mongrel Martin, the General Manager of the Brooklyn Elevated Railroad, the little puffed up autocrat who would neither confer nor arbitrate, but who, like a five inch chief of lilliputians, put on the airs of a tsar and outraged all decency by his profane blackguardism.

The incidents we have related are of commanding significance. They demonstrate beyond cavil that as between locomotive firemen and engineers cooperation is essential and wise, that railroad officials are willing to arbitrate, that strikes are to disappear and that the era of justice is dawning, which the two great Brotherhoods, by their united influence, will push forward to an early full orb'd noon.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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