
Promiscuous Striking

by Eugene V. Debs

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Tersely stated, a strike is not only a declaration of war, but is war. Here let it be understood that the various orders of railroad employees engaged in the train service of the country deprecate strikes. They hold that strikes should be the last resort. They believe, that as a general proposition, they can be avoided; that justice can be secured in a vast majority of cases without war — and, be it said to the credit of the organizations, that their laws do not contemplate strikes except as a last resort, when every means known to diplomacy has failed, and then only when rights, sharply defined and unquestionable, have been denied.

We desire to make such propositions clear, not only to the members of the various organizations, but to railroad corporations as well. It may seem to some paradoxical, but it is true, nevertheless, that while the organizations are organized to strike, as a last resort, they are also organized to exhaust every resource at their command to prevent strikes.

We are led to such reflections by an article in the *Switchmen's Journal* for August, in which an account of the "Illinois Central Strike" is given. The *Journal* points out the matter in controversy, which was the "removal of Superintendent Russell and the reinstatement of Trainmasters Berry and Pushie." In this case, the *Journal* says, "the management naturally asked for reasons which had led the men to demand the removal of Mr. Russell, and these the committee were utterly unable to furnish, and, that, too, after a delay of 24 hours." This is the case in a nut shell), and the *Journal* says, "This strike was a monstrous wrong, entered into blindly by some, recklessly by others and without regard for the laws of the organization," and, it should be added, without regard to the rights and

interests of the Illinois Central, in fact, the "monstrous wrong," as the *Switchmen's Journal* justly characterizes the strike, relates, not only

to the wrong done the railroad, but to the wrong done the organizations scandalously represented by some of the men engaged in the outrage.

The brotherhood men, with weak protests, deliberately violated the laws of their respective organizations, and that they did make such protests only the more clearly defines their guilt. They knew they were doing wrong, and therefore, with their eyes wide open, they permitted themselves to cast odium upon their organizations.

The organizations of which they were members have well-defined laws relating to grievances. These laws were all shamefully ignored, and the men proceeded to formulate demands which they could not substantiate, and because they were not granted proceeded to "tie up the road" and inflict incalculable losses, and the odium of such transactions falls upon the organizations, notwithstanding the wrong perpetrated is in defiance of the laws of such organizations.

We desire, in what we have to say in this matter, to be severely frank. There should be no subterfuges. We stand squarely by the law — its letter and spirit — and we would have every member of our organization do the same. If there are grievances to be adjusted, the laws of the order point out the way to have them redressed. To violate the law, is itself a grievance, and should be punished with marked severity. Wrongs are not corrected by perpetrating wrongs, and we are greatly mistaken if the brotherhood will much longer condone flagrant departures from its laws in such matters.

It frequently occurs that men who are not members of any organization, approach men who are members, with their grievances. They say in substance: "Here is a grievance — thus and so— if you will give us your help we can succeed," etc. Now, then, what is the simple duty of the brotherhood man? Manifestly, it is to say, "If you want to discuss grievances with me, if you want to have the influence of the brotherhood, join the order; otherwise, paddle your own canoe. The order of which I am a member has laws relating to grievances, and methods of procedure, and I am bound to recognize the binding force of such laws, and therefore cannot discuss grievances and strikes with you." Instead of this, the brotherhood man ignores his order, its laws, and the obligations it imposes, and permits himself to say to the non-brotherhood man, "Go ahead, we will stand by you." As a result such disgraceful strikes as that on the Illinois Central frequently occur, in which, while the organization is disgraced, the

road suffers loss, all of which could have been avoided by a faithful adherence to the laws of the order.

This *Magazine* is the advocate of justice — justice to the membership and justice to the corporation. The railroad company has rights, and the right is sacred wherever found. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen has no law that is not based upon principles of right and justice; no law that countenances wrong doing. Its entire machinery is constructed to find the right and to eliminate the wrong. It makes no war upon railroad officials until it is demonstrated beyond all cavil that they will not concede righteous demands, and up to that point the Brotherhood proceeds in a way which challenges criticism.

It is easy to see if the various brotherhoods permit the membership to join in with non-brotherhood men to inaugurate strikes or to engage in strikes not sanctioned by the laws of the order, confusion, disaster, and humiliation are inevitable. The order at once, and deservedly, loses caste, forfeits confidence, and may be justly regarded as a public enemy, whereas, by an unwavering adherence to the laws its movements win approval, and it is accounted a public blessing.

As we have intimated, we do not believe the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen will much longer condone illegal methods of presenting grievances or helping men to engage in such strikes as that on the Illinois Central and many others now occurring all too frequently for anybody's good. Nor should we be surprised if the laws are so changed as to visit upon those who thus engage in unlawful strikes, the penalty of expulsion. The question is becoming a serious one, and demands robust treatment.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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