Speech to the Great Anti-Northwestern Conspiracy Meeting at Chicago:
Held at Battery D — Jan. 16, 1892

by Eugene V. Debs

Stenographic report first published in *Age of Labor.* Reprinted in *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine,* vol. 16, no. 2 (Feb. 1892), pp. 150, 154-162.

Brothers:—

Most of you know me, and some of you like me, and a good many of you don't, and I am much obliged to you both. I like every man who hates me because I don't endorse the Northwestern conspiracy. [*Applause.*] I am sorry you can't all be seated, because I propose to detain you a long time, and I don't intend that one of you shall get away before I get through. [*Applause.*]

In the matter of the Northwestern conspiracy there is a principle involved that neither you nor I nor any of us can afford to ignore. If it is right for an organization to go into partnership — and do it deliberately — with a railroad corporation, to break down an associate body of workingmen, if it is right to do that on the 14th day of May, it is right to do it on the 16th of January, and it is right to do it forever!

On the 14th of May, 1891, after marching side by side and shoulder to shoulder with the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen for a period of seven years, we parted company with each other, and from that day to this we have been marching in opposite directions. [*Applause.*] I stand today where I stood then, where I have always stood — on the side of the men who move the railroad trains of the country and who have organized the several brotherhoods for the purpose of securing those rights they are daily earning in the sweat of their honest faces. I am not one of those who believe there is an irrepressible

conflict between capital and labor. I believe it is possible for one man to work for another, and the two to be friendly with each other. I believe it is possible for a railroad manager to respect a railroad brakeman. [*Laughter.*] Now, isn't that a strange proposition? [*Laughter.*] And I believe it is possible for a railroad brakeman to respect a general manager. [*Continued laughter.*] I do not believe, though, that it is possible for a general manager to respect a brakeman who will enter into a conspiracy to deprive his fellow-man of employment. [*Cheers.*]

In this matter of the trouble on the Northwestern road, there is a principle involved that I would have understood. There was a switchman in the employ of the company, previous to the 14th day of May, of the name of Crowe. Now just recollect the fact, will you, because Crowe, as I will show, destroyed the equanimity of the whole Northwestern system. Crowe worked for that company up to the 14th or shortly previous to the 14th day of May, when he was discharged. On the same day, and by the same decree, every switchman in the service of the company was discharged. Not a single man escaped. The company, to punish Crowe and a few other alleged offenders, found it necessary to cut adrift nearly 400 innocent men. Did you ever hear of a Crowe raising such a row as that? [*Laughter.*]

I will take up this matter from the time that Crowe and McNerney had their trouble. The fact is that the whole affair is the outgrowth of a purely personal quarrel between those two men — one a yardmaster, the other a switchman, one a member of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, the other a member of the Switchmen's Mutual Aid Association. And if you will examine the evidence you will find that the enmity for each other grew out of the fact that they belonged to different organizations. Now then, McNerney gets discharged, and a committee of trainmen come to his rescue. They conclude that Crowe is a bad man, that McNerney has been grossly wronged. They further conclude that McNerney must be reinstated and that Crowe must be discharged. And up to this point I don't blame them, for they doubtless thought there was a principle involved and that it was their duty to fight for it. After exhausting the remedies provided for by the laws of their own organization they had the Supreme Council convened. The deliberations of that body occupied three days, but the outcome was evidently not satisfactory to the trainmen. The committee then said, "We are going to put this matter into the hands of three men, deputize them to act for us, with in-

structions that they shall reinstate McNerney at any cost." Here is where the conspiracy begins.

These three men called on the officials of the company, and they were confronted with the proposition that if McNerney was reinstated the switchmen would strike. If, on the other hand, the company refused to reinstate him, the trainmen would strike.

The press has given out the information that for two years the switchmen had virtually controlled the Northwestern road; that the officials didn't dare to discharge one of them — if they did there would be a strike. Now it seems strange to me, in view of the fact that railway managers are men of brains and decision, that the officials of the Northwestern Railway could not control their own property — that they permitted a condition of affairs to develop that necessitated the discharge of nearly 400 faithful employees, for the alleged reason that a mere handful of them were guilty of insubordination. The committee, finding themselves unable to accomplish their purposes, telegraphed to their Grand Master, and Bro. Wilkinson comes to Chicago and they meet the Northwestern officials at the Tremont House, according to the statement of Bro. Wilkinson himself. The officials say: "Now, Mr. Wilkinson, suppose we discharge every switchman we have got — will you take their places?" "No, sir." That was such a revolting proposition that all of his blood boiled with indignation. "But suppose we find it necessary to reorganize our switching service, and we create some vacancies, and we call on you to help us out. How about that?" "Ah, that is a different proposition." [*Laughter and applause.*]

Well, the two propositions represent the difference there is between Tweedle-dee and Tweedle-dum. [*Applause.*] In the first instance they say, "We have got 400 switchmen doing our work. These 400 men are all in their places. Now, if they strike, won't you take their places?" — "Oh, no, we are not scabs." "But suppose we fire them bodily?" — "Ah, that is a different thing." [*Applause.*] Now, what do you think of that? Do you think it is possible for the leader of a labor organization to commit himself to that sort of a policy?

I am now going to open the proceedings of the Galesburg Convention and introduce some of the evidence offered there. I will begin with that of Bro. Wheat. I don' know that he is here, but I hope he is. I would like to have him hear what I am going to say about his testimony. Brother Wheat was a member of the committee of three that had the matter of McNerney's grievance in charge. In his testimony

he makes some very startling revelations. His statement alone is sufficient to condemn the whole conspiracy. In his statement there is a question by a delegate from Lodge No. 74. He asks: "In the circular they sent over the country it was said you went over to Philadelphia and employed Brotherhood men to go to Chicago and take the places of these men. Is that a fact?" That is a direct question. Now here is the answer of Bro. Wheat, one of the committee of three: "I will explain that. Bro. A.E. Brown was sitting in the general grievance committee rooms all the time in Chicago previous to the convening of the council, and afterwards went to Philadelphia or east to some of the lodges and reported the circumstances to these lodges. He went on the 13th; he got east about the 15th. In regard to the 17 men, they volunteered to come. A great many more wanted to come, and were told that they had no room and didn't want them. *The 17 who came here were put to work."*

Here is an admission that the committee in charge of the Northwestern grievance sent a man east on the 13th day of May (that was one day before all the switchmen were discharged), for the purpose of hiring men to take the places of the discharged switchmen. Here is an admission by Bro. Wheat himself that they sent a man east to hire men to make sure that they had enough to fill all the places of the switchmen who were cut adrift. Now, I propose to show not only that the committee did conspire with the officials of the Northwestern system, but that they had the sanction and approval of their grand officers; and more than that, before I get through I will show by their own testimony that the Northwestern Company paid their expenses for going east to hire men to take the places of the discharged switchmen. [*Applause.*]

Note particularly this question. Here is a question in the investigation at Galesburg by a delegate from Lodge No. 205. He asked, "Who paid Bro. Quinn's expenses for going east, the grievance committee or the Northwestern road?" Here is the answer of Bro. Ogden, the chairman of the trainmen's committee: "Bro Quinn's expenses on the eastern trip were a part of the expenses of the general grievance committee."

Question by same delegate: "You say they were a part of it?" Answer by Brother Ogden: "Yes, I will tell about that. There is one account for lost time, and there is another expense account — incidental. That was a portion of his expenses as a representative on that committee. I will state further that I presented the case to the general

superintendent of the Northwestern road after the entire business was over, and presented the claim that *owing to the mismanagement of the Northwestern road* — mark that, will you? — *through the division superintendent and the general superintendent,* we were compelled to come to Chicago to adjust grievances on the Northwestern road, as they *were entirely responsible for our presence in Chicago,* it was no more than just for this organization that they would lose the time that we lost *by attending to their business."* [*Laughter.*]

Just listen to the rest of this: "On the claim for our time it was argued at length, and they allowed for the time of the general grievance committee while sitting at Chicago, and the lodges paid the incidental expenses."

Here we have the admission that the Northwestern Company paid the greater part of the expenses incurred by the trainmen's committee, who agreed to supply, and did supply, so far as it was necessary, the places of the discharged switchmen. That is the testimony given by the chairman of the committee. I declare that in the annals of labor there is no parallel to this infamy. I declare that no organization of workingmen ever commissioned a man to go abroad to hunt up men to take the place of union men, members of a sister organization. [*Great applause.*]

On the 13th day of May, one day before the switchmen were all discharged, Grand Master Wilkinson, of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, met Bro. F.P. Sargent, Grand Master of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and President of the Supreme Council in the the city of St. Louis, and said to him in a conversation: "Tomorrow you will hear something drop."

Here is the evidence of Brother Sargent himself, page 10 of the evidence taken in the investigation. The chairman says: "Mr. Sargent you may state what you know about this conspiracy?" Answer: "I had no knowledge of it. My first knowledge of any trouble on the Northwestern so far as the Brotherhood of Trainmen and Switchmen were concerned, was communicated to me by Grand Master Wilkinson himself, in the city of St. Louis, when he said that before tomorrow I would hear something 'drop.'" And yet, Brother Wilkinson maintains he didn't know anything about a conspiracy; never heard of a conspiracy. Still, it appears that when he left here, after meeting the officials of the Northwestern in the Tremont Hotel, he was perfectly advised that 'something was going to drop.' [*Applause.*] What was it that was going to 'drop?' It would seem to me that if he ever thought about

what was going to drop it would have disturbed his equanimity to the extent at least of an occasional regret for the fate of those poor switchmen who, unoffending, innocent, without having done the first thing to merit punishment, were sent out in the world in search of employment with the brand of insubordination upon them — sufficient cause to bar them from employment by any other railway company. [*Applause.*]

True to Bro. Wilkinson's prediction, something did "drop," and it dropped on the 14th day of May, when the switchmen reported for duty and were told that they were no longer wanted. That information must have come to those men as a clap of thunder would come from a clear sky, and more especially to those who had never given their employers the slightest cause to be dissatisfied with them. I want you gentlemen to ponder this phase of the conspiracy well. I want you to think of the lot of a switchman. Most of you know that a switchman has to go to work early, that he must work until late, and that he is subject to almost everybody's abuse. For every crust of bread that a switchman eats he has got to take the risk of losing life or limb. You can imagine the feelings that must have taken possession of these men when they were deprived of work, men who never gave the company the slightest reason to be dissatisfied with them. "You are all discharged, from the city of Chicago to the city of Omaha, and all through the Northwest. There are some of you we are going to take back, but we will pick them. And there are some of you we will not take back. We will take you back, John Brown and George Jones; but we will not take you back, Sam Smith, nor you, Joe Green." These men had all been working together, you understand, side by side; had shared each other's privations and dangers and liked each other. George says: "I cannot go back and leave Joe out in the cold. I have been working with him for a long, long time. I would feel kind of guilty to go back into the service of the company and leave him out." [*Applause.*]

The Northwestern Company said: "We would have taken 80 percent of them back." Yes, but there was someone there to decide who should go back. And do you know, I have a good deal of respect for the switchmen who wouldn't go back and leave their comrades out in the cold? [*Loud applause.*]

What is more natural than for a switchman to stand by a switchman? Gentlemen, you all know something about railroads, and you all know something about switchmen; and when some of you hear

the word "switchmen," there is something in the very term that seems obnoxious. Do you know that the switchman, the average switchman, although he does not wear the best clothes, nor mark a very high degree on the social thermometer, carries as much pressure of manhood to the square inch as any man in the railroad service from the car greaser to the railroad president? [*Loud applause.*] Did you ever year — and you have heard of almost everything against the switchmen — in fact, I think the vocabulary has been strained to do the switchmen justice — have you ever heard of a switchman scabbing? [*Shouts of "Never!" Great applause.*]

One of the great troubles with the switchmen is their extreme zeal in the cause of union labor — their hearts are too big, they have done our fighting when we didn't have the nerve to do it ourselves. [*Great applause.*] I remember, in the CB&Q trouble,[1] when the engineers and firemen, with all their boasted strength had gone down, when the verdict had been recorded that the corporation had triumphed, that those brave men had gone down in defeat, the switchmen threw themselves into the breach as the old guard did at Waterloo, and went down with the engineers and firemen in irretrievable disaster. [*Tremendous applause.*]

When it was asked of the Northwestern committee and Brother Wilkinson if they would fill the places of the switchmen if the company discharged them, the record shows that the committee said to the officials: "While we will not fill their places, we will keep the business of the company moving until you get things in shape." Mark that well. I want to read that from the record, so there will be no mistake about it. Here is Brother Wheat, I will confine myself to his testimony for a while. He is good authority. [*Laughter.*] He was one of the three that did the business with the sanction of the grand officers. Brother Wheat says, in answer to a question by the delegate of Lodge No. 298: "I told them (the officials) that we should see to it that the business of the company was done — that the business of the company did not stop." How's that? Analyzed, that simply means this: The officials asked the trainmen if they would take the switchmen's places. They said no. "Then if we discharge them will you help us

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[1] The strike of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad, which began late in February 1888, was conducted by the organized locomotive engineers and firemen over a revised set of wage rates unilaterally implemented by the company. For more on this strike from the labor point of view, see: John A. Hall, *The Great Strike on the Q*. Chicago: Elliott and Beezley, 1889 and C.H. Salmons, *The Burlington Strike: Its Motives and Methods...* Aurora, IL: Bunnell and Ward, 1889.

out?" "Yes; we won't take their places but we will keep your business moving until you get a new set of switchmen."

What does that mean? Let us be plain and honest. It means simply this: That they would take their places and do their work, whether it was for one day or forever.

Let me ask you a question: Did Henry B. Stone,[2] in 1888, ask the scabs that came to his rescue to do anything more than to keep the business of the company moving until he got permanent fixtures to take the places of his engineers and firemen? [*Applause.*] That is the politest excuse for scabbing I ever heard. [*Laughter and applause.*] I will not take your place, I will not scab on you, but I will not neglect the company's interests. Let us suppose a case: I come along, having struck, and I meet a man that I always thought was my friend, and I see that he is doing my work. I say: "Hello, Bill, you are not at work switching these cars, taking my place?" "Oh, my, no; I am simply keeping the company's business moving. [*Laughter and loud applause.*] I would not scab for the world, but the business of the company must be kept moving." [*Laughter.*]

Let us define another term so that it will be properly understood. I just found out the other day for the first time, although I had been a close student of this question, I just found out that the Chicago & Northwestern officials did not discharge their switchmen at all; that is all a mistake — they simply reorganized the service. [*Laughter.*] The matter of pay doesn't cut any figure. I am all right, you know, except that I am not in the reorganization. [*Laughter.*]

In 1888, in February, the engineers and firemen on the CB&Q road struck because they could not get their rights. they could not get the pay they were entitled to. They could not get the protection that was due them. When they stepped down and out their places were taken by scabs. Had Henry B. Stone, the General Manager, been equal to the emergency, he could have escaped the maledictions that were heaped upon him by simply explaining to the public that he was only "reorganizing the service." [*Laughter.*]

The fact is that the Northwestern affair, probed to the bottom, analyzed honestly with due reference to the rights of the officials of the company, is without question the greatest outrage ever perpetrated upon any body of workingmen anywhere under the bending skies. [*Applause.*] The officials said, as I stated a while ago, that there were a few switchmen that ran the road for about two years. Now, if

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[2] General Manager of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad.

that were true, isn't it strange that the officials did not at once send for Sweeney, for Hall, for Simsrott, for Downey, the officials of that organization? Isn't it strange they didn't call for those men and say: "You are at the head of these switchmen. some of them are making themselves so offensive that we cannot control our own property." Why didn't they do that? Do you suppose for an instant that the grand officers of the switchmen would not have said to the officials: "Discharge every one of them who deserve to be discharged; you will have no trouble, for as long as you are right we will stand by you."

Let it be understood that men are not made general managers of railways upon their good looks — that is one of the professions in which brains is the chief essential. Now it is strange, or seems strange to me, that with all their fertility of resources the officials of the Northwestern company could not devise ways and means to subdue a half dozen refractory switchmen. There is not a policeman in the city of Chicago that could not have done that in a minute and a half. [*Laughter.*] But for two years, it is alleged, the switchmen were permitted to run things with a high hand. No power could control them. Now, if that is true, it is a burning disgrace to every organization of railroad employees, without exception. If it is not true, it reveals a design to allow them to run matters up to a certain point that the officials might put in a wedge between the organizations of their employees that would destroy their effectiveness, array workingman against workingman, thereby insuring the triumph of the corporation over them all. The plea that the Northwestern officials could not control a few switchmen, without discharging them all, does not satisfy me.

We have thus seen that in order to punish a single switchman — they say there were more, but no one ever named them, there is not a name in the entire testimony but that of Crowe — in order, I say to punish a single switchmen, it becomes necessary to discharge 400. Let me entreat you to think of that, and think of it seriously. And think if you have ever heard of a parallel to such an atrocious act in the annals of railroad labor? Think of a businessman in the city of Chicago having to discharge 50 faithful clerks and bookkeepers in order to punish a single one of them. I am not objecting, understand, to the discharge of a single man who has made himself unduly offensive. If I were a division superintendent, or a general manager, or a president, I would be that and nothing less. I would have discipline. I would not allow any man in my service to run my business, nor all of them combined.

And I would be ashamed to confess, as the Northwestern officials have done, that they tamely submitted to having a few switchmen usurp and exercise their official authority for a period of two years. These officials will pardon me if I give them credit for more courage and self-respect and better sense. They know all about the weaknesses of organized labor. They understand the weak points of labor organizations. That is one of the requisites of their position. They know how to keep their employees friendly enough with each other — not to like each other. So I say they will pardon me if I do not believe they were incapable of subduing a few refractory switchmen.

They said to the trainmen: "We cannot reinstate your man without having a strike," and they said the same thing to the switchmen. Here are two bodies of men, both believing they are right, trying to get a brother reinstated; the corporation is in what you would call a dilemma, not knowing what to do, conscientiously trying to serve both, and not being able to do that, saying to one of them: "If I please you, I displease the other; if I please the other, I displease you," and worrying about that until finally the happy idea comes to them — after two years, mind you — if they go into partnership with one of them they can knock out the other. Isn't it strange it took two years to evolves such a profound idea? The trainmen made the first bid. The officials would have waited two years, yes, 2,000 years before the switchmen would have said: "We will go into partnership with you and knock out all your trainmen." [*Applause.*]

When the 400 switchmen were exiled I took my stand. I made up my mind that their cause was my cause and, without reference to consequences, I enlisted in the uneven struggle between the persecuted innocence and triumphant conspiracy.

One feature of this affair deserves special notice. The press of the United States teemed with execration of the Northwestern switchmen. The capitalistic papers said: "Here is a road that found it necessary to discharge all its switchmen because they defied discipline, because they would not even allow the board of directors to declare a dividend." One of the victims of this plot, a switchman who had always faithfully performed his duty, goes out and applies for work, "Where did you come from?" "I worked for the Northwestern road as a switchman." "You can't work here." He goes a little farther and again applies for work; they put the same question and he meets with the same answer; and, gentlemen, some of these switchmen are looking for work yet.

The other day I went to St. Louis. I stopped at the Laclede Hotel.[3] After I got through with my business, I was driven to the depot. When I got out of the carriage, I had about five minutes before my train left. A poor wretched-looking fellow came up to me and said: "I beg your pardon, but isn't your name Debs? I heard you speak once." I said: "Who are you?" "Why, I was discharged from the Northwestern yards on the 14th of last May," he said, "I had a wife and three children. I was getting along pretty well. I bought a little piece of property. In my whole life I never had any trouble with anybody. On the 14th day of May I was discharged. I looked for work all over Chicago. I could not find a job even on the streets. I came away from there; I would not scab; I came over here, and I am promised a job of driving a hack. Maybe I will get it; if I do, I will get on my feet again. My wife got sick and I had some bills that came due, and as I could not pay them, my little property had to go. And, of course, I have got to do the best I can for my wife and children."

That is just one of them I happened to meet. I don't know how many more there are, and I don't know where they are, and I hope I will not know, because one of them is as many as I care to see. When I saw that poor fellow, when I realized his exile and sufferings, for no reason except that he was a union man, and true to his fellow-men, I said that those who were responsible for his woe were destitute of every redeeming trait of human nature. [*Tremendous applause.*]

Is there any justice in a policy that plots the downfall of four hundred innocent men? That is the policy of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen is committed to. They met in convention in October and investigated (?) the Northwestern conspiracy, and they rendered a verdict. Now, let us see who their witnesses were. I want you to listen carefully while I call their names. The first witness is McNerney, the second is J.D. Cuttridge, a member of their committee, the third is Ed A. Ogden, chairman of their committee, the fourth is S.E. Wilkinson, Grand Master, the next is P.H. Morrissey, First Vice Grandmaster, the next is William A. Shahan, Grand Secretary and Treasurer, the next is James Fowler, another member of the committee, the next is Brother Wheat, also a member of the committee. I have named them all. [*Laughter and applause.*]

The Galesburg papers reported that the convention had made a thorough and impartial investigation of the entire affair, and yet they

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[3] Landmark 6-story hotel located in downtown St. Louis that was constructed in 1872 and demolished in 1961.

never had a single witness who was not charged with being a conspirator, or an avowed defender of the conspiracy. Did you ever hear of such a trial in all your life? These men were charged with entering into a conspiracy with the Northwestern officials to defeat the switchmen. I have named all their witnesses, and every one of them was under charges. [*Laughter.*] Why didn't they call one switchman — just one? Why didn't they call Sweeney, or Simsrott, or Hall, for a single one of them? They never called any one of them, because they didn't want a single ray of truth to reach the delegation. And hence the endorsement of the conspiracy. After they had investigated the matter, upon testimony given by the conspirators and the avowed friends of the conspirators, they endorsed the conspiracy with a whoop and a hurrah. Here is an extract from the Galesburg Republican Register, of the 12th of October.

Listen:

> "Saturday evening's session, when a decision was reached regarding the whole matter, was one of the momentous occasions in the history of any labor organization in the country. Some of the scenes were worthy the skill of an artist or of the genius of a word painter. The first part of the session was taken up in answering questions. The prolonged and frequent cheering, heard far beyond the courthouse, showed that the replies to the interrogatories were acceptable to the delegates and that the greatest enthusiasm prevailed. The sentiment was evidently very nearly unanimous. The desire for the calling of the roll seems to have been practically unanimous. The delegates wanted to be put on record. Probably an hour was consumed in the roll call, for it was interrupted by remarks, by cheering, by explanation. At length it was completed. the convention, as it were drew its breath prior to one grand explosion. The secretary announced that the motion was carried by a vote of 302 to 14. The explosion resulted. Had there been a strange spectator in the gallery, he would have thought, methinks, that the inmates of a lunatic asylum were having a jubilee, or that the delegates were members of a board of trade, at the instant of great excitement in the market. McNerney, the yardmaster of the Chicago yards of the Northwestern, was picked up bodily, hoisted by scores of hands high in the air, and borne around the room in triumph. Hats were tossed aloft. Coats were hastily doffed and thrown into the air. Some of the more excitable climbed the columns of the courthouse room [just think of the courtroom festooned with brakemen — how was that for a ghost dance?] [*Laughter*], and from their

elevated positions waved their hats and handkerchiefs. The uproar was terrific. Every strong pair of lungs was exerted to its utmost; and it was moments before the hardworking Vice Grand could restrain this expression of pent-up feelings."

Let me read something in connection with this scene. I will leave Bro. McNerney on the tips of the hands of his enthusiastic supporters while I rad. In the August [1891] issue of the *Switchmen's Journal,* I find this article:

Criminal Libel.

The Chicago Press has published an interview with Frank McNerney, the now notorious Northwestern scab. In this interview McNerney says he proposes immediately to enter suit against the editor of the *Journal* for criminal libel. The ground upon which he will base his suit is that the *Journal* has referred to him as a scab. The statement is *correct.* The *Journal* not only accused McNerney of being a scab, but stated positively that he is that thing. No warrant has yet been served upon the editor, but the *Journal stands ready to prove,* to the satisfaction of any judge and jury that can be found, *all that has been charged,* and more. *We court investigation.* If McNerney desires to clear himself in the courts, we will afford him ample opportunity. We fully appreciate the gravity of the case. If the charge can not be sustained, it means a trip over the road for the editor. If the charge is substantiated, another and graver one can be also, and it means that the Northwestern company will lose the services of McNerney. The *Journal* is waiting for McNerney to take hold. If he don't pray the Almighty for help to let go, we will welcome seclusion and retirement. [*Loud applause.*]

The law of Illinois provides that a "libel is a malicious defamation, expressed either by printing, or by signs or pictures, or the like, tending to blacken the memory of one who is dead, or to impeach the honesty, integrity, virtue, or reputation of one who is alive, and thereby to expose him to public hatred, contempt, ridicule, or financial injury." "Every person, whether writer or publisher, convicted of libel, shall be fined not exceeding $500, or confined in the county jail not exceeding *one year."*

Now if McNerney, who is being tossed, you understand, on the tips of the fingers of these enthusiastic delegates, if he is not a scab — I do not say he is, mark you — if he is not a scab, I suggest that he

sue John Hall, the publisher of *Switchmen's Journal,* for libel, and let those poor fellows down easy — down easy — the hard-working friends who are making an electrical fan of him. [*Laughter.*]

I don't want Bro. McNerney to do that for the purpose of getting even with John Hall, but I do want him to do it to relieve the delegates who are keeping him tossing, for the sake of the men who carried him on their shoulders in Galesburg. Just after they got through doing that the same enthusiastic delegates — and I have not a word to say in any unkind spirit of what they did — but just after they got through doing that they marched down to Bro. Wilkinson's house and serenaded him, and Bro. Wilkinson, having been endorsed, I suppose, and feeling pretty good, made them a little speech, and he said: "Well, we have got the Supreme Council up a tree, and the tree is being chopped down." I suppose that Bro. Wilkinson had his ears attuned, waiting for a dull, sickening thud, or, in other words, he waited for the Supreme Council to drop. He is still waiting. It may be that the Supreme Council will fall, stabbed to death in the household of its friends. That may be its fate — I don't know and cannot tell. But if it goes down there will be more vitality and honor in its corpse, dead and cold in its winding sheet, than there will be in ten thousand organizations and federations whose foundations are laid in broken pledges and whose cornerstone is treason to organized labor. [*Great applause.*]

I have a word for the members of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen. The other day a Vice Grand Master of that order held a meeting not very far from here, and he was asked how it was that Debs, of the Firemen, was against them in the Northwestern matter, and he responded by making a personal attack on me. I suppose the poor fellow didn't know better. He didn't know what reply to make, so he thought if he could attack me that would satisfy the men, and he did. I know precisely what answer he made to the question that was put to him. I have a transcript of his answer from at least one friend I had in that audience who was a member of his own organization. If that Vice Grand Master, in answer to the question put to him had said the reason that Debs was against the Trainmen in the Northwestern matter was that he did not have red whiskers, there would have been just as much sense and a good deal less malice in the answer. [*Laughter and applause.*]

Just after the trouble was over there were two circulars issued in their order by the grand officers of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen. In the second one appears this:

> "Mr. Debs has in the past been regarded as a true friend to the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen. It is true that when the organization was an infant he nourished it, and no doubt gave it life, but that life found a too fertile soil and outgrew the organization that at first encouraged it, and then, though jealousy, no doubt, Eugene V. Debs, after doing a good thing, attempts to destroy it; and, like the cow that upset the bucket of her own milk, he moves the adoption of a resolution, the purport of which was to reduce the membership of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen about one-half, and every move of the Supreme Council since our last convention was to break up our organization."

It will thus be observed that the circular of the grand officers of the Trainmen accounts for my not endorsing their conspiracy, upon the ground that I had grown jealous of the growth of their organization. I want to put on record a few facts that have never found their way in print, that may interest some of the members of that order. I should not be charged with egotism, when I say that I organized the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen. They speak of George Washington as being the Father of his Country. I am the father of the Railroad Trainmen. I organized the first lodge they ever had, and it bears my name to this day. I guaranteed their bills from the time they first organized. I guaranteed the payment of their bills until they were able to pay them themselves. Their first organizer came to the city of Terre Haute, stopped with me as my guest, and I taught him all the duties of his position. I gave his organization commercial credit. I put into the Secretary's hands a letter introducing him to our engraver, men who did the work for the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, a letter to our banker, a letter to every-man with whom we did business. I didn't ask whether they were a solvent institution. They had no credit; they had no standing, because they had no organization. I not only did that, but I wrote for them. I wrote a letter to every friend I had in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, and I said: "I want you to do me a personal favor; I want you to find a brakeman, I want you to hand him this letter, and ask him to get a few brakemen together and encourage them to organize a lodge of the Brotherhood of Railroad Brakemen, because if there is any class of men in this country who need organization, it is the brakemen." [*Applause.*] I divided my time

between the organization that paid me and the one that needed my services. I sat up many and many a night, after I had eaten my supper, until the sunshine looked into my room, working to lay a foundation for the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, and if that is not true, I hope my good right arm may fall palsied at my side. [*Great applause.*]

I stood by the organization as faithfully as I stood by the Firemen. I was proud of that organization. I never had an ambition that that organization and its officers did not share. I got jealous according to this charge. Let me show you what I said as far back as 1887. I delivered an address before that organization. You will find it published on page 498 of the *Brakemen's Journal* for the month of November of that year. And here is a part of what I said:

> "I have been interested in your work from the beginning; and while I have reviewed the work done by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, the Order of Railway Conductors, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, the Switchmen's Mutual Aid Association, while I have the fullest appreciation of their work, I say to them frankly that the Brotherhood of Railroad Brakemen has accomplished more in less time than all of them combined."

Is there any element of jealousy in that statement?

Now you will understand that if a man is jealous of another's prosperity, that feeling does not develop in an instant. If a man is jealous today he is jealous forever, and in this sense jealousy means a certain narrow, contemptible hatred for another, because he is prosperous. In this sense, jealousy means dishonesty. If I am jealous of a brakeman because he is doing well, what do you think of me? If I had been of that disposition I would never have helped the brakemen to organize, because I had sense enough to know then that properly organized they would become a power. And I have done everything from the inception of their organization to this day to augment their power. If I was ever jealous of that organization I must have been jealous from the beginning, and be jealous now. I want to show the utter falsity of that charge. I want to show that as late as last December, a year ago, just previous to the Northwestern conspiracy, what I said in the official organ of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, of which I am the editor. This same Brotherhood of Trainmen had met in convention at Los Angeles. I devoted nearly three pages of the *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine* to giving a report of their proceedings, and I wrote this editorial:

> "The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen's convention has been one of the most harmonious and successful ever held. This Magazine adds its hearty congratulation. The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen is on the high road to still greater achievements. It comprehends conditions and is equal to the most exacting demands. The grand officers of the order are the right men to put on guard, to see that no interest of the order suffers from inattention. The Magazine wishes the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen uninterrupted prosperity."

Would such an utterance as that have been made if there had been any feeling of jealousy on account of the growth and prosperity of that organization?

In his annual speech at Columbus, Ohio, in 1889, Grand Master Wilkinson, pointing to me — and you will excuse me for introducing this, because I have got to show to you I was not animated by any spirit of jealousy when I took a position against the grand officers — said: "On my left sits the founder of our brotherhood. Everyone has learned to love him for his many manly qualities. (They seem to have deserted me.) He was our friend when we most needed a friend, and you and I in all our life will never be able to repay him for what he has done for us and for the benefit of our brotherhood." [*Loud applause.*]

Now, my friends, I am unalterably committed to the proposition that there is strength in unity. That if we would secure for the men who work upon the railroads of the continent the largest benefits that organization is capable of bestowing, we must be united. We must stand together, side by side, and shoulder to shoulder, and in every hour of conflict we must be as one man. [*Applause.*] I do not believe that it is necessary for the railroad employees of this country, every now and then, to indulge in the extremely expensive experiment of a strike in order to demonstrate to the public that they have certain rights, or that they have an organization with which to maintain these rights. I believe, as we all have believed, that a strike is disastrous to the employee, disastrous to the corporation, and disastrous to the public at large. A strike is in the nature of a calamity. On the one hand, it cuts off wages; on another it stops earnings; and on another it embarrasses and inconveniences the public. Nobody is helped by a strike. How are we going to avert a strike? By simply harmonizing all along the line. By eliminating all friction; by destroying this thing of caste that is creeping into labor organizations, and making an engi-

neer feel that because he gets four dollars a day he is four times as big as a man who gets one dollar a day; the same feeling that makes a conductor expand to the proportions of a Jumbo in comparison with the brakeman he used to associate with. Destroy caste; destroy this thing of grading men by the pay they get.

I would classify men if I could in just one way. I would make men superior to each other, and I would decorate them with badges in proportion as they were better men, not according to their pay. [*Applause.*] If an engineer or a conductor will consider this proposition a moment he will see how foolish it is to think that he is better than a car-greaser. If that is the correct standard, where does the engineer stand compared with Jay Gould? If an engineer who gets big pay is a big man compared to a poor fellow who gets small pay, how big is he that gets 400 times as much a day as he does?

If a labor organization has an mission in this world it is to help a man who is getting a dollar a day to get a dollar and twenty-five cents. [*Applause.*] If they have any mission, it is to help the section man and the car man. The others can, to a great extent, take care of themselves. You don't have to have an organization to see that the general manager has a turkey on his table on Thanksgiving day. He looks out for that himself. And that is why he is a general manager. The man who cannot provide himself with a turkey on Thanksgiving day will never be a general manager. If organized any mission in this world, it is to help those who cannot help themselves. But what is organized labor in a great many cases trying to do? To cater to the power that oppresses them, and resist the power that is trying to relieve them. Let me illustrate: Take some yardmaster, and I have seen some of them and know some of them. A switchman comes along and says to the yardmaster: "Good morning, Mr. Brown." The yardmaster looks disdainfully. In about five minutes the division superintendent comes along, and he is all politeness. Mr. Brown is on his knees instantly. The division superintendent scarcely looks at the yardmaster, and the yardmaster is all smiles, glad to have the recognition of the division superintendent. The division superintendent goes along the line until he meets the general superintendent, and he pays him the same courtesies that the yardmaster paid him. He kicks the yardmaster, but he smiles at the general superintendent, and the general superintendent struts all along the line until the general manager comes along, and he shows him the same courtesies. [*Laughter.*]

Don't you know, it is an unfortunate thing in human nature, that we are everlastingly ready to crook the knee when we meet somebody that can wear better clothes than we can; and our social standing is measured by that standard absolutely, and by no other. I respect always the man who knows more than I do, I pay tribute to him, but i am not willing to pay tribute to a man simply because he has a larger bank account than I have. [*Loud applause.*] I am not willing to admit that because a man happens to have in his possession more money than I have, money that perhaps he never earned, that there is due from me a recognition that I would not be willing to bestow on any man I meet, as far as the social force of dollars and cents is concerned. If we can get rid of that idea of caste in labor organizations, if we are capable of appreciating men according to their necessities, according to their honesty, we can establish an organization that will not only be a protection to the employees, but will be a guarantee to the officials that as long as they mete out justice they will never have a strike.

I believe that time is coming. I believe that gradually as we grow older in experience we will become capable of mastering these questions, and that after a while we will so fully understand this matter of organization that we can meet together in the true spirit of brotherhood; that, whether we be carmen or telegraphers, or what not, we can all of us who earn our bread in honest work stand together to the end of the ordeal. I have faith in the future. I have faith in the intelligence of workingmen, notwithstanding the fact that temporarily they are arrayed against each other. I believe that as a body they are trying to find the right road to travel, and I believe it is only a question of time until we will so fully understand each other that such a thing as a conspiracy will be an impossibility. [*Great applause.*]

Now, my friends, I am going to speak to you on behalf of a man who was locked out of a position for the sake of principle. If ever there was a man in this world who deserved the sympathy and support of workingmen, without reference to their occupations, that man is L.W. Rogers. [*Loud applause.*] The man who, for the sake of principle, sacrificed a position; who, for the sake of his convictions, abandoned the Grand Lodge of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen. Brother L.W. Rogers is as true a man as ever stood in the ranks of labor. He is a man who will fight for the right. He is a man who will do right He is a man you can trust. He is a man who has been tried and not found wanting. If I have a friend here tonight, I ask him to do what he can to assist Rogers in the building up of the *Age of Labor.*

[*Great applause.*] It is well enough to say, "I will help," but it is better to put your hands in your pockets and pull out a dollar and say: "Rogers, you stood by what you believed was right — you stood by me, you stood by my fellows, you defended a principle. I propose to subscribe for your paper. I propose to show there are few men in this country who appreciate your splendid courage in behalf of organized labor." [*Applause.*] L.W. Rogers showed by his course and by his policy that a position glittering with all the emoluments and glory that might attach to it could not for a moment deflect him from his purpose. He stood for principle. He stood for right. He stood for you. He stood for organized labor, and it is the duty of organized labor to stand by him. [*Loud applause.*]

And now, my friends, in the bonds of fellowship, without reference to the organization you belong to, but believing as you believe, that the time is coming when "truth, crushed to earth, shall rise again,"[4] when virtue will no longer be cloven down, when hypocrisy and crime will no longer be rewarded, when the everlasting truth will prevail, when right will be king, we will meet and stand together once and for aye. [*Loud and prolonged applause.*]

Edited by Tim Davenport
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First Edition.

[4] Line from "The Battle-Field," by William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878).