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# Objectionable Bosses

by Eugene V. Debs

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The strike in the Brooks Locomotive Works, Dunkirk, NY,<sup>1</sup> has now become so serious that an appeal has been made to Buffalo for state troops in case they may be needed. The beginning of the strike was caused a month ago by the refusal of the riveters in the boiler factory to work under certain contractors. President Hinman<sup>2</sup> declined to yield to the demands of the strikers, although 28 men from Philadelphia refused work upon learning they had been brought to replace strikers, and the workmen from Philadelphia at present secured are not able to venture safely outside the works. The lack of riveters had necessitated suspending labor in other departments and now about 600 men are out of employment. Although the emergency may not arise, state troops at Jamestown and Buffalo are reported as being ready to move at a moment's notice.

The foregoing clipping from the *Railway Age* brings into prominence one of the causes which in numerous instances are productive of labor troubles.

It so happens that frequently proprietors of large industries select as overseers of their shops men who, though they may be in some regards competent are in many other respects totally disqualified for the positions they hold. Pigheaded, bigoted, and arrogant, they conceive it to be their duty to play the role of guards in penitentiaries or bosses of convict laborers. Their ideas of discipline are not specially dissimilar to those practiced by overseers of negroes in old "plantation times," and though the lash is not used, the attitude of the boss to-

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<sup>1</sup> The Brooks Locomotive Works was established in November 1868 and continued in continuous operation until its purchase by the American Locomotive Company in 1904. The final locomotive produced at the Dunkirk plant was produced in 1929.

<sup>2</sup> **Marshall Littlefield Hinman** (1842-1907) was named President of the Brooks Locomotive Works in February 1892.

wards the men is that of a petty tyrant, and who, dressed in a little brief authority, exercises it in such a way as to earn the contempt and loathing of the men he seeks to control. He is no more fit for the position than hell would be for a powder magazine, or a chestnut burr for an eye-stone.

Whenever such men are placed in control of great industries, troubles, more or less damaging to the business, are certain to occur, and though they may not lead to open rupture — to a strike — they are certain to create conditions flagrantly in antagonism to the welfare of those who have their money invested in the industry. To secure the best work, workingmen must be treated as men and not as menials, as slaves — and when the overbearing methods of the boss can no longer be endured, a strike is inevitable and is just and honorable. Indeed, it is the last resort of men who have a spark of self-respect to assert their manhood. The principle involved is a dear one, and for its recognition workingmen have the right to resort to extreme measures.

*Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport*

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