
President Debs' Appeal to Railway Employees

by Eugene V. Debs

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To the Railway Employees of America:—

The struggle with the Pullman Company has developed into a contest between the producing classes and the money power of the country. This is what Lincoln predicted at the close of the Civil War and it was this reflection that gave the great emancipator his gloomiest forebodings. We stand upon the ground that the workingmen are entitled to a just proportion of the proceeds of their labor. This the Pullman Company denied them. Reductions had been made from time to time until the employees earned barely sufficient wages to live, not enough to prevent them from sinking deeper and deeper into Pullman's debt, thereby mortgaging their bodies and souls, as well as their children's, to that heartless corporation.

Up to this point the fight was between the American Railway Union and the Pullman Company. The American Railway Union resolved that its members would refuse to handle Pullman cars and equipment. Then the railway corporations, through the General Managers' Association, came to the rescue, and in a series of whereases declared to the world that they would go into partnership with Pullman, so to speak, and stand by him in his devilish work of starving his employees to death. The American Railway Union accepted the gage of war, and thus the contest is now on between the railway corporations united solidly upon the one hand and the labor forces upon the other. Every railroad employee of the country should take his stand against the corporations in this fight, for if it should be lost corporations will have despotic sway and all employees will be reduced to a condition scarcely removed above chattel slavery; but the

fight will not be lost. The great principle of American manhood and independence is involved. Corporate power, drunk with its own excesses, has presumed too far upon the forbearance of the American people, and notwithstanding a subsidized press (to which there are many notable and noble exceptions), public sympathy is with the striking employees, who are merely contending for the right of their fellow-toilers to receive living wages for their work.

I appeal to strikers everywhere to refrain from any act of violence. Let there be no interference with the affairs of the companies involved, and, above all, let there be no act of depredation. A man who will destroy property or violate law is an enemy and not a friend to the cause of labor. The great public is with us and we need only to maintain a dignified, honest, straightforward policy to achieve victory. Let it be understood that this strike is not ordered by myself or any other individual; nor is the strike inaugurated anywhere except by consent and authority from a majority of employees themselves.

Neither is this a fight simply of the American Railway Union. the question of organization ought not to be raised, but every man who believes in organized railroad labor and its battles for his rights and those of his fellowmen. I have faith in the great body of railway employees of the country and am confident they will maintain an unbroken front in spite of any opposition that may be brought to bear against them. I am perfectly confident of success. We cannot fail.

E. V. Debs.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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