
The Crisis on the Railroads

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At last the supreme test is coming for the railroad men. The employers are tearing into them right and left. Not content with taking away the



national agreement of the Shopmen, the 8-hour day from the Maintenance of Way, the Signalmen, the Clerks, Stationary Firemen, and others, reestablishing piece work in the shops, setting up company unions, farming out repair work to

all kinds of dummy companies so as to evade the Transportation Act, doing away with Sunday overtime rates, and otherwise reestablishing pre-war slave conditions, they are now cutting and slashing wages to the bone. In the past 10 days, both the Maintenance of Way workers and the Shopmen have had their wages reduced again. The companies have declared open war on the unions, and it is quite evidently a fight to the finish. Not only that, but the railroads show their contempt for the organizations by making these wage cuts right in the face of the AF of L Convention. They have no fear that the conservative labor leaders will do anything serious about it.

According to statistics submitted by Mr. Jewell, President of the Railway Employees Department in the hearings before the Railroad Labor Board on May 22nd [1922], the mechanics on the railroads are getting only 64 percent of the meats, fish, milk, and eggs, 77 percent of the cereal foods, 91 percent of the vegetables, and 71

percent of fats and oils necessary to maintain their actual families at the lowest level of safety. The family budget of the Department of Labor calls for an expenditure of \$2,303.99 per year, whereas the full-time wages of shop mechanics last year amounted to only \$1,884.90. This figure is based on assumption of steady work. It disregards the fact that unemployment amounted to 40 percent at least. Now comes the Railway Labor Board and cuts even these skinflint wages again more than 10 percent on average, bringing the Shopmen down to a condition of semi-starvation.

But bad off as the shop mechanics are, the unskilled laborers are inconceivably worse situated. Under the recent decision of the Railroad Labor Board for the Maintenance of Way, large groups of laborers will be paid but 23¢ per hour. This means that a man at this class of work working 8 hours per day, 300 days per year, will earn only \$552.00. Compare this disgraceful figure with the minimum, bare living estimate of the Department of Labor, calling for \$2,303.99, and you will get an idea of just about what the recent wage cuts mean to large sections of railroad workers.

In this terrific onslaught of the companies, which is being made through the lickspittle Labor Board, the railroad men are only harvesting the crop which they have been sowing for many years. It's because they do not practice the principles of solidarity. When the steel workers were on strike, the railroaders, not being attacked themselves, did nothing about it. They stood around and watched Gary and his minions demolish the

steel organizations and violate every law in the statute books in doing it. The railroad men could not see where they were interested. Likewise in the miners' strike, they not only lend no hand to help their brothers in the coal pits, but are actually busy hauling scab coal all over the country. This is aiding the operators directly to break the strike of the miners. And when the railroad men helped the steel magnates to break the steel workers' strike and the coal operators to break the coal miners' strike, they have been helping their own masters to lay shackles on them. Likewise, in their own struggles, they have refused to help each other. The various sections or groups of unions have stood aside and watched the others go before the executioners, which are the Railroad Labor Board; with the consequence that all of them have been defeated one after the other. Now they are paying the penalty for their shortsightedness. The chickens of the craft division are coming home to roost.

What must be done in this crisis? Strike, of course, if the Railroad Labor Board tries to make its recent infamous decision stand up. But not a strike of a few crafts. Make it a strike of every railroad man in the United States. Anything short of this would be a crime. The railroad employers of the country are united. They are determined to crush the unions and to wipe them off the railroads. The railroad men, therefore, must stand

together in one solid body. If in this critical time the Four Brotherhoods hold aloof from the rest of the trades, as sure as fate they will pay for their treason shortly afterwards. The companies have a rod in pickle [*sic.*] for them, awaiting a favorable opportunity to apply it.

But far more important than even the strike in showing that the railroad workers are determined not to allow themselves to be enslaved, would be a movement for the various organizations to join forces and merge together. If such a movement had been launched by the recent convention of the Railway Department, it is questionable indeed if the recent outrageous decisions regarding the Maintenance of Way and the Shopmen would have been handed down. But when the convention refused to adopt a single measure tending to develop the solidarity and strength of the organizations, it was that much encouragement for the employers to go on with their attacks. It showed that the railroad workers are not yet ready to take this fight seriously. But better late than never. As one reply to the open shop drive of the companies, the railroad men should and must combine all their forces into one gigantic army. The situation demands this heroic measure. To do less means to walk into the shambles. It is time for the railroad men of America to act, and to act unitedly.

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