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# The Record of the CB&Q Strike

by Eugene V. Debs

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History must be made before it is written. In this age of lightning and steam, it is about all the daily press can do to record incidents as they occur. From the *Firemen's Magazine*, published monthly, all that can be expected is that important events having a bearing upon the interests of the brotherhood it represents, shall be recorded as a matter of history, and especially is it required that every important feature of the CB&Q strike shall have due prominence. So far, the *Magazine* bears testimony to the fact that nothing important has been overlooked, and at this writing our purpose is to show that while the engineers and firemen have not won the battle, they have not sustained a defeat, and that if the soulless corporation has gained any advantage over them, it has been at such a fearful cost of money, such a loss of business, as to amount to a notable defeat, and as nearly as we can approximate the facts, we propose to demonstrate the absolute truth of our propositions.

It goes without the saying that on the 27th of February, 1888, the CB&Q system was rich, powerful, and prospering. True it was mercenary and unjust towards its employees, and managed by a system of classification and other adroit schemes, in the concocting of which its officials are experts, to rob its engineers and firemen \$200,000 annually, money they had honestly earned.

On the 27th of February, when the strike was inaugurated, the fortunes of the system began to wane — nor have they ceased to decline from that day to the present. Demoralization, disaster, wreck, and ruin are everywhere observable throughout the entire system. The latest authoritative advices show a fearful wreckage of engines, and in but one locality is the road doing 50 percent of the business it had previous to the strike, and elsewhere 30 percent is the highest esti-

mate made. The traveling public, as far as practicable, avoid its trains, and shippers seek other channels of transportation, and in the open market its stock has been hammered down until the decline represents millions. Those in a position to know, aggregate the losses of the CB&Q system since the strike at \$5 million, and this amount, it is contended, is below rather than above the amount the strike, so far, has cost the road. If it be accepted, as approximately true, that to have acceded to the demands of the engineers and firemen, it would have cost the corporation \$200,000 a year more than it was paying them, then it follows that the losses already sustained by the corporation would have sufficient to pay the additional wages demanded for 25 years. That we do not exaggerate the situation it is only required to consult any prudent railroad manager in the country and the reply will be heard, that upon any system of the magnitude of the CB&Q, a bonus of \$5 million would be no temptation to pass through such an ordeal.

Not only has the CB&Q lost money and lost business, but it has lost character, lost standing, lost prestige. The traveling public is aware that its engineers and firemen are characterless and incompetent — men raked up from the slums, and people will not, when they can avoid it, take the unusual risks of traveling on its trains; and as shippers have no guarantee that their goods will reach their destination, shipments, when it is possible, are made by other routes. Everywhere on the system engines are smashed and dead; roundhouses are full of wrecks; passengers are few and freight is scarce, and as a consequence trains are discontinued, even when “scabs ” stand ready to run them. Under such circumstances, losses already sustained, though alarming to every stockholder, are not all they will be required to face, for it is true that when a railroad has earned a reputation as infamous as that which the CB&Q has secured, it requires years to regain its standing, and it is to be doubted if the CB&Q, under the management that has wrecked it, can ever be reinstated in public confidence.

The investigation conducted by the Warehouse and Railway Commission of Illinois found its engineers and firemen incompetent, and now the Interstate Commerce Commissioners propose to unearth some of its shameful methods and expose the mismanagement of its officials.

In grouping all these facts, what is the conclusion? It is this: the two great brotherhoods of engineers and firemen have established beyond controversy the justice and righteousness of their demands, and

the word has gone forth that they are men who have the courage of conviction and who are willing to make sacrifices to maintain their cause before the world.

As we write, the strike is still on — the men are firm. What the final result will be we do not know, but this, whatever may ensue, we can say, every page of the record is luminous with the facts that engineers and firemen who were the victims of the unequal struggle, have no cause for blushing. Their honor is unstained. Their manhood, their fealty to obligations and to every demand of citizenship redeems them from obloquy, and their brethren who have stood by them have added dignity and imperishable glory to the principles of brotherhood. The word may not have a new meaning, but it means more than ever before in the history of the two brotherhoods.

It has a wider sweep, a loftier significance. They are not vanquished, nor jostled, nor deflected from their upward and onward course, and whatever may be the result of the strike the brotherhood banners are not trailing in the dust.

*Edited by Tim Davenport*

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