
The Mission of Our Brotherhood

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Since the organization of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen the question has been often asked, What is its mission? Questions are more easily asked than answered, and yet we propose to answer this interrogatory with becoming frankness.

The reader will at once perceive the necessity for prefatory remarks. We shall approach the main question with considerate caution. Locomotive firemen are preeminently practical. They are not distinguished as devotees of panegyric or pyrotechnic displays of impractical theories. Locomotive firemen are remarkable for common sense. They are bronze-browed, hard-fisted, noble-natured men. They are forever dealing with problems which demand and command serious thought. A locomotive fireman cannot, in the nature of things, be a dude. He is forever facing danger. Every faculty is on the alert. There is not a bit of the ideal or of fiction in his chosen calling. He deals with fire, steam, speed, danger — responsibilities which, when on duty, demand ceaseless vigilance. In all the avocations known to modern civilization the locomotive fireman has chosen the most perilous. When he mounts his engine he takes his life in his hand. His partings with his loved ones are always in the nature of adieus. He has no assurance that he will see them again until the day when the “sea shall give up its dead.” Say what we will, there is a mournful grandeur in the calling of a locomotive fireman. He lives a year sometimes in an hour, in a minute. His iron horse, fed on fire, dashes on over bridges, around curves, through tunnels and cuts 25, 40, or 60 miles an hour, in the light, in the twilight, in the darkness. Behind him a train with precious lives, his own life at stake; home, wife, children are in his thoughts; wakeful, watchful, he plunges on. Hopefully he peer into the darkness, and when the route is run and the steed stands

still, we opine — indeed, we know — the locomotive fireman thanks God.

There are at least *twenty-two thousand* of these men in the United States and the Canadas — ten thousand of whom are enrolled as members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen. All hail comrades! Let us reason together. The Magazine is your friend. It speaks for you. Its high ambition is to promote your welfare. What is the mission of our Order? Let us be in earnest. Locomotive firemen are not fanatics. They are not vagarists, utopians. They seek the attainable. It is within reach. It is not a myth, a fantasy, an illusion, a hallucination, a phantom, or a dream. We state the case boldly. The best for locomotive firemen is not to be found within the domain of *strikes*.

A strike means war. the shibboleth motto of locomotive firemen is peace. But, for the nonce, dismissing these propositions we repeat, What is the mission of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen? As we write, the glory of our Order is unfolded to our vision. We see its citadel lodges embracing the continent from rock-ribbed Main, from the Thousand Islands of the St. Lawrence, to the Golden Gate, to where the Oregon pours its mighty flood, a continental Brotherhood. We indulge our fancy and surmise that every scream of the locomotive whistle tells us that a locomotive fireman is on duty and ding his duty. We survey the map of our country. We note the intermingling of railroad systems, embracing cities, towns, districts, and including a continent, and then we say, on all these highways of travel are scores of locomotive firemen. We fancy the day is near at hand when every locomotive fireman will be a member of our beneficent Brotherhood. Why? Because it is organized to promote the welfare of men of his calling. Still, the question recurs, What is the mission of our Brotherhood? Is it understood? Is it fully comprehended? Do we individually and collectively appreciate the majesty of our mission? The Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen has certain high ambitions in view certain purposes, certain aims. What are they? Its ambition is that every locomotive fireman shall be in the highest and best sense of the term a gentleman, self-poised, self-assured, true to every trust, every obligation, a *chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*, a man who knows his duty and performs it with unwavering fidelity; sober, industrious, self-respectful, the peer of any man who walks God's green earth. The purpose of the Order is to have such men, and only such men, within its charmed circle — en who pay their dues, who are ambitious to

maintain the morale of the Order, who appreciate the obligations of membership, and who recognized the sacredness of their responsibilities. Ours is a benevolent organization. We propose to *stand* by the living — that we may *stand* by the dead. It is more than benevolent. It is an organization designed to build character, perfect and adorn it, give it symmetrical and substantial proportions, the foundation stones of which are sobriety, industry, and fidelity. What more can we say in regard to the mission of our Brotherhood? Much. It is designed to make a home a type of heaven — a snug harbor for “poor wanderers of a stormy day” — where wooing wives and prattling childhood give every cloud a silver lining, and attune every chord of the human heart to melody. We could pursue these felicitous thoughts indefinitely, for our faith of the future of our Order knows no boundaries.

But negatively, rather than affirmatively, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen was not, we are bold to say, organized to inaugurate strikes nor to favor strikes. We assume, and do not hesitate, to proclaim our convictions that labor strikes are not, and in the nature of things cannot be, in the interest of labor. We assume that labor is capital. We ignore technical distinctions. Capital to be profitable must be employed. We are not unmindful that we are upon the threshold of controverted propositions. We enter the arena of debate with confidence. We invite criticism. We have the courage of our convictions. The mission of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen is not to antagonize capital. Strikes do that; hence, we oppose strikes as a remedy for the ills of which labor complains. Our purpose is to do away with misapprehensions. We cannot afford to be misunderstood. Locomotive firemen are employees — their employers are the owners and managers of railroads. In the very nature of things we should understand each other. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen was not organized to dictate prices. It is no part of its mission. It will not deviate one hair's breadth from its course.

Our Brotherhood proposes to offer to railroad officials sober, industrious, moral, competent men, tried and true. We propose that the time shall come when a Brotherhood fireman shall be preferred to an outsider. It is the purpose of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen to banish from the Order every unfaithful man. Deadbeats, men of crooked ways, are to be ostracized, banished. Ours is to be a Brotherhood of gentlemen — honest, faithful, sober men. Railroad officials want that class of men. They cannot do without them. Their character, their reputation, their money, their profits all combine to make

honest, sober, industrious, faithful firemen a desideratum. We take it for granted that when such men are employed, railroad officials will pay them all they can afford. There may be exceptions. We are discussing the rule. Be this as it may, if locomotive firemen engage in strikes they do it outside of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen. The Order has no striking machinery. It was not founded for strikes. We have a better theory for disagreements between employer and employee. Strikes never settled any labor question. Strikes have invariably inflicted incalculable evils upon the strikers.

We desire to make ourselves distinctly understood. Let us introduce a few illustrations: A mat at \$2 per day, \$60 per month, earns \$720 a year, which is equal to an investment of \$18,000 in government bonds bearing 4 percent interest. The proposition illustrates the idea of labor capital. It is a trite saying that "capital is sensitive" — timid. Approach a money capitalist, propose to him an investment, and his first inquiry will be: Will it pay? In discussing the subject with him, in answering his inquiries, there will be no time to introduce poetry or sentiment. He wants facts and figures. He balance probabilities. If the favorable predominate he will invest, otherwise he will withhold his money. The proposition is of universal application. There is absolutely no exception. We hold that labor capital is as sensitive as money capital, and there are many and cogent reasons why it should be the more sensitive and cautious. Money capitalists seldom invest their all in any enterprise, but the labor capitalist, the workingman, the wage earner does, for the time being, invest his all — his time, his skill, his health, his life; hence, we assume that labor capital is more vitally involved than money capital in all matters pertaining to strikes.

We have said we are opposed to strikes as a means of settling controverted labor questions. We are opposed to strikes primarily because we are satisfied they do not promote the welfare of laboring men. We are persuaded from our readings, observation, and experience that there is a better way out of labor disagreements with employers than to "*strike*" out. If there is anything in fact and logic, if there is anything worth considering in figures and common sense, we are persuaded that our proposition can be satisfactorily demonstrated, and we invite the attention of the Brotherhood to an honest solution of the problem. It is stated by the highest authority that the average cost of 100 miles of railroad is \$3,074,474; for our purpose we take the rounds sum \$3,000,000. The average number of locomotives on each

100 miles of railroad is given at *twenty*. We will assume that these 20 locomotives require 30 locomotive firemen. Here, then, we have the situation clearly defined. The road is built and equipped. The locomotives are on the track. The train is made up and ready to start. But there is no locomotive fireman on the engine. Now comes into bold prominence a fact which must forever be recognized, that money capital is useless without the assistance of labor capital, skill capital, muscle capital, and this fact ought to, and must eventually, bring money capital and labor capital into harmonious existence. They are necessary to each other. It is an indissoluble connection and cannot be revoked, and we plead guilty to the charge of a desire to make this association profitable and agreeable to both parties. We believe we see the dawning of a new era, and every word of ours shall be a harbinger note of peace and good will.

Again: We have said the 100 miles of railroad cost \$3,000,000, and that the train was on the track ready to move, awaiting only the presence of the locomotive fireman. At this juncture we are told that the locomotive firemen have *struck* and that the train cannot move. We have the picture fully outlined — vivid as lightning. We are in a position to contemplate it in its immediate and remote consequences. We shall endeavor to be frank. We have no sinister ambitions to subserve. Invested money to the amount of \$3,000,000 stands still. It is doomed to inertness. Authorities say tht for the year 1882 there were in operation 107,158 miles of railroads; that the capital and funded debt of these roads amounted to \$3,456,078,196, and that the total dividends paid amounted to \$102,031,434, or about 3 percent. Our authority for these figures is Poor's Manual — hence, we assume that the 100 miles of road which we have introduced to illustrate our argument, if there had been no strike, would have earned dividends for its owners during the year amounting to \$90,000, but which, owing to the strike, earned nothing.

We have shown in this article that a locomotive fireman, earning \$720 a year, is equal to the man who has \$18,000 invested in government securities bearing 4 percent interest. We have assumed that every 100 miles of railroad require 30 locomotive firemen. If we are correct (and whether exact or not, the figures illustrate our argument), then the 100 miles of railroad represent an investment of firemen capital of \$540,000 at 4 percent, yielding dividends amounting to \$21,600 a year. Now, be it remembered, the strike not only compels \$3,000,000 money capital to earn no dividends, but it also

compels \$540,000 of locomotive firemen capital to earn no dividends. The money capital and the labor capital stand still — do nothing and earn nothing. We protest that such a state of affairs is not founded in wisdom.

But this is not all, nor the worst of the situation. We have assumed, for the sake of the argument, that the strike continues one year. Even numbers are better than fractions for our purpose, while ratios remain the same. At the end of the year, we will assume, the strike is ended. There is always a limit to human endurance. How stands the account? The owners of the \$3,000,000 invested in the road have lost \$90,000, and the locomotive firemen, who represented \$540,000 labor capital, have lost \$21,600. The aggregate loss has been \$111,600. The \$3,000,000 money capital has lost what it failed to earn — \$90,000. How about the firemen? They have not only lost what they failed to earn, \$21,600, but, assuming that it has cost them the same to live while idle as it cost when employed, they are out of pocket at the end of the year \$43,200. We here discuss the money problem. We omit the demoralizing consequences of idleness — tramping, abandonment of family, and home topics of admitted seriousness. With such facts in full view, we are bold to assert that strikes have no compensations equal to the losses they entail.

We believe there is a better way out of such disagreements as occasionally arise between locomotive firemen and railroad officials, between money capital and labor capital, and it is the purpose of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen to find that way and the high ambition of the *Firemen's Magazine* to place the facts relating to such subjects in such a light as to bring about a perfect understanding between railroad managers and our Brotherhood. The mission of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen is to build — not tear down. It is to enthrone confidence rather than distrust. We detest sycophancy. We abhor arrogance. We admire manhood. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen has for its foundation principles which dignify and glorify human nature. It champions the cause of labor not by antagonizing money, but rather by showing that between money and labor capital there is and must forever remain an intimate alliance, which, when the terms of the federation are honestly and honorably adjusted, will be productive of untold benefits. But, again, referring to our Order: Its growth and prosperity are in all regards phenomenal. There is nothing to parallel its progress. There are now in operation 210 Lodges. Our membership exceeds 10,000. We have stated that in

1882 there were in operation in the United States 107,158 miles of railroad, and the entire North American system in 1882 amounted to 127,830 miles. If there are 20 locomotives to every 100 miles of road, then, we assume, there are in the country 22,560 locomotive firemen. Of these more than 10,000 keep step to the music of our Brotherhood. It is a music which glorifies benevolence. Every wheel, and every wheel within a wheel of our Order is set in motion by the inspiring, heaven-born spirit of benevolence

Edited by Tim Davenport

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