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# Federation, the Lesson of the Great Strike

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A railroad strike creates in tense and widespread excitement and alarm. It is not surprising. The railroads of the country, now estimated at 148,000 miles of track, and costing \$8 billion (or are capitalized at that amount — practically the same thing), constitute the highways of traffic and transportation, and any serious disturbance in their operation produces at once incalculable calamities. It dwarfs the subject to discuss the various systems, since all roads, by their connection, constitute one great system, and any serious disturbance anywhere is more or less disastrous everywhere. Governor [John] Martin of Kansas, is credited with saying

All the commercial and industrial pursuits of the people have been adjusted to the carrying trade of the railways. Block the wheels of the Kansas railways for one week and nine-tenths of all the mills and factories of the state would lie compelled to close. Block them for three weeks, and every commercial and agricultural pursuit in Kansas would be paralyzed.

What is true of Kansas is equally true of every other state in the Union. Such self-evident truths do not demand discussion. As a consequence, the first lesson taught by the great strike is that the whole people are profoundly interested in all that pertains to its inception and progress as they will be in the final results of the disturbance.

It may be assumed, we think, that the great body of the people, being aroused by the great strike, will insist upon knowing definitely the causes which led up to it, and, since their interests are jeopardized, will, as they have a right to do, discuss remedies that shall in the future act as guarantees against disagreements which in their effect are fatal to the prosperity of the country. And we do not hesitate to assert

our belief that the people will favor such remedies only as will do full justice to the parties immediately involved in the controversy, *viz.*: employer and employee. But the faith of the people must, of necessity, be largely dependent upon the information which the people have relating to matters in dispute. Hence, the great strike emphasizes the importance of furnishing the people with the facts, clearcut and bedrock. But the great strike has taught the strikers the lesson that the press cannot be relied upon to furnish such information. It is always found in alliance with corporate interests and opposed to strikers. We speak of the rule, and not of the exceptions, and this fact brings into bold prominence another lesson taught by the great strike. It is this: If corporations and the press confederate to overwhelm workingmen when they demand redress for grievances, they too must federate to enforce their rights which corporations deny them when demands are made in a becoming manner.

It goes without saying, that there exists a strong bond of union between railroad corporations when the demands of their employees are for an equitable share of the wealth they create, the theory being that in the matter of wages corporations shall always determine the rate, regardless of the rights and interests of the wage-worker, and instances are rare in which, as a right, employees have been consulted. And if a case can be found in which wages are even approximately fair, it will be discovered upon investigation to be the result, if not of a stoke, of latent forces which could have been called into operation if the demand had been ignored.

Another lesson taught by the great strike, and one which should be profoundly studied by railroad employees, is, that since railroad corporations federate, coalesce, when any effort is made to advance wages on the part of any one of the brotherhoods of railroad workers, a similar federation is indispensable on the part of all the brotherhoods when, as a last resort, a strike is ordered. As, in the one case, it is found that the corporations federate against the workers, it becomes supreme folly to expect success if one brotherhood is left to fight the battle single handed. And the contest invites federation from the fact that the question of fair equitable pay is alike vital to all. It is the question of labor vs. corporate power and injustice, and in this every worker is equally interested. It is a question in which the interest of one is the interest of all. If wage men doubt the proposition, so far as they are concerned, they have only to contemplate the fact that corporations act upon that principle, which has been given special

emphasis since the CB&Q strike, which we denominate the great strike, was inaugurated.

If strength is found in unity, it needs no argument to prove that weakness is in alliance with division, and this fact being fully comprehended by corporations, it will be well for all the brotherhoods of railroad workers to give it due consideration, and if, upon reflection, it is found, as it surely will be found, that success lies in federation, no time should be lost in forming an alliance, offensive and defensive, by virtue of which justice would be secured and strikes would at once and forever disappear.

We deem it prudent to suggest that preliminary to such a federation of brotherhood railroad workers there must be a recognition of mutual interest — all brotherhoods must stand on the same plane. The idea of superiority and inferiority must be dismissed. The motto must be “United we stand; divided we fall.” For purposes of protection the throttle and the scoop, the switch, and the brake must be in close alliance and equally firm and defiant, and when corporations see this federation accomplished no strike will occur, because a strike under such circumstances would mean an immediate cessation of railroad transportation on the line or system where it occurred. Instead of a strike there would be arbitration, a patient consideration of grievances when presented, and a prompt application of remedies when found.

Of all the lessons taught by the great strike, not one, as we view the situation, is of more importance than the one which emphasizes the wisdom of a compact federation of engineers, firemen, switchmen, and brakemen for mutual protection w'hen their rights and interests are involved, because the question of honest pay for honest work is a supreme question in which all are involved, and here we repeat that the wisdom of such a federation cannot be questioned by railroad corporations, since they federate for mutual protection against labor when it complains of unjust treatment at their hands.

We are not unmindful of the fact that strikes of railroad employees are disastrous. We need not to be reminded of their cost in sum totals of dollars, nor the sufferings they entail upon those who, to secure justice at the hands of corporations, accept the sacrifice with heroic devotion to right. We would have a settlement of every dispute without a resort to extreme measures. We would have employer and employee meet amicably and in a spirit of fairness adjust every grievance. We would have employers recognize their employees as men

upon whom vast and exacting responsibilities devolve, and without whose services railroad operations would cease as certainly as if by a decree of Jehovah. Nor would we have employees demand more than their rights, tested by any standard which might be accepted as embodying approximate justice, but we would have employees consulted in all such matters and their consent obtained, because, while recognizing to the fullest extent the power and value of capital in carrying forward the enterprises of the day, we know that it is inert and powerless until vitalized and set in motion by labor.

Viewing the subject from such standpoints, we venture the prediction that the day is near at hand when the brotherhoods of railroad employees will federate for mutual protection, and we further predict that when such a federation is perfected, railroad strikes will be numbered among things of the past. It will not be a federation against capital, but, on the contrary, a federation seeking a closer alliance with capital — an alliance which will be just to all parties concerned, an alliance in which arbitration, mutual concessions, shall take the place of strikes, a federation for the purpose of investigating for justice, of enthroning the right, which may be found if the seekers are in earnest, and which when found and established exiles jealousy and distrust and inaugurates peace, contentment and prosperity. Federation meads victory for the right, and the great strike on the CB&Q has brought its necessity into such bold relief that its advocacy becomes a duty and its consummation will be fraught with incalculable blessings, not only to employees, but to employers, to society and to the whole country.

*Edited by Tim Davenport*

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