
The Policy of the Magazine

[A Polemic]

by Eugene V. Debs

Published in *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, vol. 15, no. 2 (February 1891), pp. 134-138.

The receipt of the following communication serves a purpose, of how much consequence may be developed further along:

Elm City Lodge, No. 284, B of LF,
New Haven, Conn., December 21, 1890.

To the Editor and Manager of the Magazine [Eugene V. Debs]:
Dear Sir and Bro.:—

Your official circular No. 3, in regard to the *Magazine*, was read before this lodge at our regular meeting today, and we wish to reply and state that as members of the B of LF we do not approve of the scurrilous articles that have for the last year appeared in the columns of the *Magazine*, *attacking everybody in one way or another* that has *incurred the displeasure of the Editor*, and perhaps a few hot heads of the order. It may afford some members of the order vast pleasure to read articles about *Russianized Serfs*, and *Czar Corbin*, and *Mephistopheles Depew*, and other such articles that have appeared in the *Magazine* for some time, but the members of *this lodge* are not in favor of this kind of talk and *do not care to read it, much less* to ask for subscriptions from outsiders who know nothing of our affairs. We also believe that it is injurious to the order, and if it is continued, that it will work far more injury to the *order's fair name* that it has taken years to establish, than can be repaired in years. And *we say* that when *you say* that the *Magazine* has *voiced the sentiments* of the order, that you have not voiced the sentiments of Lodge No. 284, and we will not solicit subscriptions for the *Magazine* under the present circumstances.

Yours fraternally,

Edward A. Ferrill, Sec'y.

Per order of lodge.

In the first place the foregoing communication affords us an opportunity to speak of the policy pursued by the *Magazine* under our management, which we embrace without hesitation.

This being true, Elm City Lodge, No. 284, has done us a favor, however foreign such a purpose was on the part of the lodge, which we appreciate.

The *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine* has been under our control for more than ten years. When we say that, we mean to be understood as saying that we have been from the first, all the time, in every issue, absolutely responsible for every utterance to be found in its pages — responsibilities having never been divided with anyone.

To say that we are proud of the record the *Magazine* has made under our management ought not to prompt anyone to bring against us the charge of egotism, self-conceit, vanity, any purpose of self-laudation. We are not built that way.

The *Magazine* under our *management* has steadily increased in circulation. Its articles have found favor with men of large intellect, of culture, and of varied attainments. They have subscribed and paid for the *Magazine*, and are with us today. They include men of the various learned professions — lawyers, physicians, clergymen, educators, scientists — men who consult the *Magazine* to note the trend of public sentiment upon labor topics, and who, were they members of Elm City Lodge, No. 284, would regard it as a duty and a pleasure to solicit subscribers for the *Magazine*.

It will be noticed that Bro. Ferrill, Secretary of Elm City Lodge, No. 284, B of LF, refers to a circular “in regard to the *Magazine*.” The circular in question was sent to all the lodges of the order. It set forth the claims of the *Magazine* upon the membership of the order, but the members of Elm City Lodge are so exasperated by the policy the *Magazine* has adopted and pursued, that it indignantly declines to do anything in the interest of the organ of the brotherhood, and for its refusal to either “cut bait or fish,” “fight or hold the candle,” says:

“We write to reply and state that as members of the B of LF we do not approve of the scurrilous articles that have for the last year appeared in the columns of the *Magazine*, attacking everybody in one way or another that has incurred the displeasure of the Editor, and perhaps a few hot heads of the order. It may afford some members of the order vast pleasure to read articles

about *Russianized Serfs*, and *Czar Corbin*, and *Mephistopheles Depew*, and other *such articles* that have appeared in the *Magazine* for some time, but the members of *this lodge* are *not in favor of this kind of talk* and *do not care to read it, much less to ask for subscriptions from outsiders who know nothing of our affairs.*”

Elm City Loge, No. 284, labored after the fashion of the fabled mountain, and the foregoing is the mouse it brought forth. It is rather small for a mouse, but it probably a fair average for the Connecticut article. Connecticut is a small state, noted, we believe, for long-neck clams and wooden nutmegs. But still Elm City Lodge, No. 284, existing, we will suppose, under the shadow of old Yale, ought to have brought forth a letter more complimentary to the independence and self-respect of its members, more creditable to its brotherhood intelligence and fealty to principle, and less obnoxious to the charge of stupidity and a willingness to be very degenerate corporation parasites.

However deplorable it may be, it is nevertheless true that the profoundest ignorance is usually found in close proximity to a university; the most sickening exhibitions of mendicancy are most numerous near charity hospitals, and to the everlasting disgrace of the country, serfdom thrives best near old Independence Hall, in Philadelphia, where the Declaration of Independence was first read and a Nation of Freemen was born.

It is not a matter of surprise that Elm City Lodge has not been profited by being under the eaves of Yale College. It is not to be presumed that any of the professors in that world famed university could expand the intellectual vision of Brother Ferrill or the brothers for whom he writes. The trouble is, doubtless, that they have not been students of the *Magazine*, or if they have read it, their purpose has been to sneer rather than to cheer.

Such a conclusion is warranted by the extract we have made from their communication. We have italicized a few sentences because we desire the reader to fix his *gaze* upon them, and if his vision is defective we want him to use spectacles. Boiled down the charge is that the editor of the *Magazine* has assailed scurrilously everybody who has incurred his displeasure. That charge comes under the seal of Elm City Lodge, No. 284, B of LF. The particular scurrilous *attacks* are not specified. They have, it is charged, appeared sometime during the “last year” — 1890. Why not name one of them? When a charge is made under the seal of the lodge, there should be specific allegations. If we have attacked scurrilously, not “everybody,” but anybody, be-

cause he or they have incurred our displeasure, why not specify the article? Why make a charge at random as the old farmer sowed oats?

A word just here, parenthetically: At San Francisco in September last, the delegates of the B of LF, in convention assembled, without one word of solicitation on our party, elected us unanimously for the sixth time Editor and Manager of the *Magazine*. The convention was eminently representative of the brains, of the character, of the honor, integrity, and high ambitions of the order. Not a word was uttered, not an intimation that the editor had scurrilously attacked *anybody* because *anybody* had incurred his displeasure, or for any other reason whatever. There were 275 delegates present — among them were men of courage and capacity, of high sense of honor, men of convictions, and the courage of convictions, and these men selected the editor to succeed himself without a dissenting vote or voice, a complete, comprehensive, and absolute endorsement of our management of the *Magazine*. Now, then, we place this triumphant vindication of our course as Editor and Manager of the *Magazine* in juxtaposition with the communication of Elm City Lodge, No. 284, B of LF. We have a right to do this very thing. Elm City Lodge, No. 284, makes a deliberately false and scandalous charge, writes a libelous accusation, without cause or provocation, becomes a calumniator, a traducer, a malingerer of one, who never, in any way, directly or indirectly sought to do aught, but to promote its interests — and then with such impudence, perversity, and stupidity as defies characterization, debauches the seal of the lodge to give currency and character to its defamation. But Brother Ferrill and Elm City Lodge, No. 284, disclose their sore toes. They tell where their pain is located. They diagnose their own case. They tell what is the matter with them. Hear them: We quote again:

“It may afford some members of the order vast pleasure to read articles about Russianized Serfs, and Czar Corbin, and Mephistopheles Depew, and other such articles that have appeared in the *Magazine* for some time, *but the members of this lodge are not in favor of this kind of talk.*”

There you have it, dear reader — on the half shell, raw — served with all the salt and pepper Elm City Lodge could command. Permit us to premise somewhat: Messrs. Corbin, Depew, H. Walter Webb, Pinkerton, et al, never by any act personal to the Editor of the *Magazine*, incurred his displeasure. We write of them in their official rela-

tions to labor — to workingmen. Mark Anthony did not hesitate to say of Brutus and his gang of assassins who stabbed Caesar to death that they were “all honorable men,” but he did not fail to exhibit Caesar’s mantle, and show “Caesar’s wounds, poor, poor dumb mouths, and bid them speak.”¹ We make no boast, but this we say: As best we could, we have shown to the world, not Caesar’s mantle, but the workingman’s blouse and pointed out the stab holes in it, made by such assassins as Corbin, H. Walter Webb, and men of their ilk, who, by methods and practices that horrify humanity, have, in many localities, stabbed workingmen, if not to death, to conditions that ought to make hell and heaven blush. Take Austin Corbin’s rule on the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad, and you have an assassin who stabbed labor into a condition that a Congressional committee proclaimed to the world had “Russianized” that portion of Pennsylvania where his rule extended — that is to say, he had reduced workingmen to the condition of “serfs.” He had wronged them in their wages. He had inaugurated poverty, destitution, and starvation. He had ruled with such an iron hand that white men, free men, American workingmen, were prostrate beneath his steel clad hooves, and he had trampled them into the dust and mud, until Pennsylvania became, in the opinion of a Congressional committee, a Russia, and the *Firemen’s Magazine* did what it could, little it may have been, to “put a tongue in every wound” that Corbin had inflicted, that would, were it possible “move the stones” of the old Keystone state “to rise in mutiny” against such infernalism. But the members of Elm City Lodge, No. 284, B of LF, are so pleased with Corbin’s rule, with his Russianizing policy, that because the *Magazine* denounced it, they refuse to solicit subscriptions for it. They don’t like “this kind of talk.” The Russianizing policy of Corbin, among other things, took the form of an *ukase* against all labor organizations. No man who belonged to a labor organization could have work in Corbin’s Russianized dominion. To obtain a job, the workingman must first renounce all obligations to his order, to his lodge; must give up, surrender his rights, privileges, and prerogatives as a freeman, and swear fealty to Corbin before he would be permitted to earn an honest living in Corbin’s realm. The *Magazine*, as best it could, branded both as infamous, held czar and decree up to the unutterable scorn of every self-respecting workingman. But Elm City Lodge, No. 284, B of LF, don’t like “this kind of

¹ William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act 3, Scene 2.

talk,” so distasteful is it to the members of the lodge that they indignantly decline to secure subscriptions to the *Magazine*.

Truth, it is said, is sometimes “stranger than fiction,” and Elm City Lodge, No. 284, B of LF, furnishes an illustration of the truth of the aphorism. The members of the lodge seem to be infatuated with Corbin and his policy. True, if a member of the lodge were to ask for a job on the P&R, he would have to renounce the B of LF, would be required to repudiate every obligation the order imposes, would have to forswear all allegiance to the order, and since they don't like to see Corbin arraigned, and are opposed to any criticism of Russianizing infernalism, it is to be presumed that, if circumstances were to force them into the dominion of the P&R, they would at the first crack of the reigning Tsar's whip, go down upon their knees, disrobe themselves of their Brotherhood badges, and take upon themselves the insignia of degradation, as the reigning autocrat of the P&R might direct.

Such are the men who decline to solicit subscriptions for the *Magazine*, because it has denounced Corbin and his policy — by all the gods known to heathen mythology, the brothers of Elm City Lodge, No. 284, B of LF, have paid the *Magazine* a high compliment. But we are not done with the communication. It affords us an opportunity to rewrite history. We champion the *Magazine*.

They refer to “Mephistopheles Depew,” and they don't like our “talk” about this horny-handed child of labor. In many regards we were an admirer of Chauncey, the new labor agitator, the “walking delegate” to the Pittsburgh Convention. Chauncey is the President of the New York Central Railroad corporation, and we believe is director of the NY, NH & H. His salary is \$50,000 a year. If, as Mr. P.M. Arthur says, “a \$4.00 a day man and a \$1.00 a day man have no interests in common,” in the name of all the Vanderbilts, what interest “in common” has a \$136.00 a day man and men who get from \$1.00 to \$4.00 a day? But such questions aside, we refer to Mephistopheles Depew as President of the NYC. We care nothing for his salary, nor his elegant surroundings. That he can dress in purple and fine linen and have terrapin and frog legs every day, does not concern us. The policy of the NYC is what we discuss. President Depew is responsible for that policy. He shapes it. At any rate, he must approve of it. There are but two courses for him to pursue. He must endorse the policy of the corporation, or like an honorable man, protest against it — and, if his protest is unheeded, he must step down.

He does not step down and out, and hence the conclusion, he endorses the policy of the NYC. And here we ask what is the policy of the New York Central Railroad corporation?

Before answering the question, it is proper to say that in August 1890 there was a strike on the NYC. The B of LF was not directly involved. It was a strike of the great order of Knights of Labor, for rights — dear to every workingman — and because it was a strike involving the interests of workingmen, the Supreme Council of the Federated Orders of Railway Employees investigated the causes which led to the strike, and on August 25th, 1890, after mature deliberation, gave to the country their deliberate judgment of the matter, and arraigned the policy of the New York Central Railroad, for which Mr. Chauncey M. Depew is responsible; his position as President making him responsible.

The Supreme Council, in its address “to all labor organizations,” said:

That the policy of H. Walter Webb is despotic to an extent that outrages every principle of American citizenship, and if generally adopted would, if successful, reduce American workingmen to the degraded condition of serfs.

That H. Walter Webb, by the employment of Pinkerton thieves, thugs, and murderers, vile wretches from the slums and brothels of New York and other cities, to kill workingmen because they dared to protest against his rule and strike for their rights, is a crime of such enormity as will associate the name of H. Walter Webb forever with those who, dressed in a little brief authority, have used their money to secure power to degrade their fellow men.

That the efforts now being put forth by H. Walter Webb to destroy the Knights of Labor would, were circumstances changed, in a like manner be made to destroy the organizations of engineers, firemen, conductors, trainmen, and switchmen, and if successful, it is only a question of time when a similar effort will be made to seal the fate of other labor organizations.

That H. Walter Webb, by the course he has pursued toward the Knights of Labor and the representatives of labor organizations, has shown a total disregard of those principles of citizen sovereignty dear to every American worth of the name, and, considering only his money power and the corporate power of the company he represents, his acts, which speak louder than words, say, in the language of W. H. Vanderbilt, once the autocrat of the New York Central, “the public be damned.”

H. Walter Webb seeks to support his arrogant attitude towards workingmen and labor organizations by assuming that the New York Central & Hudson River Railroad is private property, and that his acts in the treatment of his employees are in no sense a matter of public concern; that he can with impunity discharge men and remand them to idleness and poverty and render them homeless wanderers without giving them any reason or explanation whatever for his conduct, disregarding the fact that the corporation for which he plays autocrat is a thing created by laws, in the making of which, once unified, will bring his corporation of the bar of justice where his millions and the other millions he represents will cease to be potential in deciding questions of right.

In the foregoing the name of H. Walter Webb is made conspicuous because he happened to be the tool of the corporation to carry out the policy of his superiors. And who, we ask, were his superiors. Webb was Third Vice President, Chauncey M. Depew was *President*. Every word said in arraigning Webb, in thunder tones arraigned Chauncey M. Depew. There is no escape from the conclusion. Chauncey M. Depew, the elegant gentleman, the renowned after dinner orator, the man of culture and refinement, one of New York's 400 upper crust, endorsed the course pursued by H. Walter Webb, which the Supreme Council said, "if generally adopted *would, if successful, reduce American workingmen to serfs.*"

Chauncey M. Depew endorsed the course pursued by H. Walter Webb.

The Supreme Council said that "the employment of Pinkerton thieves, thugs, and murderers to kill workingmen was a crime of infamous enormity."

Chauncey M. Depew, as President of the New York Central, endorsed the employment of Pinkerton murderers.

Has Chauncey M. Depew ever uttered a word of protest against the employment of Pinkerton thieves, thugs, and murderers by the New York Central to kill workingmen? When? Where? He has command of burning words. he wields a whip of flame. When did Chauncey M. Depew, President of the NYC, protest against the employment of Pinkerton murderers to kill workingmen?

The labor world waited, held its breath, to hear Chauncey M. Depew utter his maledictions of the crime, listened for execrations of the Pinkerton horror. They believed that he could formulate anathemas that would be keynotes of a new dispensation. But Depew was

silent — and has remained silent. Had he protested, had he denounced the Pinkerton outrage perpetrated on the road of which he is President, workingmen would have built him a monument broad based as Cheops and enduring as adamant.

The *Magazine*, as well as the Supreme Council, has denounced the policy of the New York Central, the policy of its President, directors, and all the lesser lights in its management, and for this Elm City Lodge, No. 284, B of LF, will not solicit subscriptions. The members of the lodge don't like that sort of "talk." Was ever a labor publication so highly honored? With the exception of Elm City Lodge, No. 284, B of LF, is there one organization of workingmen in the world which directly or by implication would endorse the policy of Chauncey M. Depew, President of the NYC? We do not believe there is another organization so utterly debauched. Certainly, we never heard of one.

But we are not quite done with the policy of the NYC, of which Chauncey Mephistopheles Depew is President. We desire, for the benefit of Elm City Lodge, to reproduce a little more history in which the B of LF is specially interested, and in which Brother F.P. Sargent, Grand Master of the Brotherhood and President of the Supreme Council, talks. On page 805 of the September [1890] *Magazine*, will be found the following:

While in the city of New York, F.P. Sargent, Grand Master of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, in the course of an interview with H. Walter Webb, third Vice President of the New York Central, said to that official: "Suppose a locomotive fireman, a member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, was discharged by Mr. Buchanan, the Superintendent of Motive Power, and suppose the discharged fireman should endeavor to secure reinstatement, and not succeeding, a committee should take up his case in accordance with the laws of the Brotherhood, and the committee should also fail to secure the man's reinstatement, after which I, as the Grand Master of the Brotherhood, should be called upon to adjust the difficulty with Mr. Buchanan, and should also fail, do I understand you to say that if I called upon you you would not treat with me as the Chief Executive Officer of the Brotherhood?" To this pointed and important question, Mr. Webb replied: "These cases are all investigated by subordinate officers of the company, and no man is discharged without just cause."

The declaration of Grand Master Sargent is that "Mr. Webb evaded the question and left the impression upon my mind that he would not recognize nor treat with me as the Chief Executive Officer of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen."

As a matter of course, the *Magazine* first, last, and all the time, with such ability as it could command, has denounced such a policy, and while we have control of its pages will undeviatingly continue to castigate corporation officials high and low, who seek to degrade workingmen or to treat organizations of workingmen with supercilious insolence.

The editor of the *Magazine* has no personal quarrel with any corporation official. Not one of them ever "incurred" his "displeasure." We have written of some of them because of their injustice to employees. Of many of them we have written in complimentary terms because they sought to do justice by their employees, and recognized the rights and prerogatives of labor organizations.

Because this has been the policy of the *Magazine*, Elm City Lodge, No. 284, assaults the *Magazine* and its editor. Wanting in capabilities it does not originate its charges, but reproduces some *ancient chestnuts* which, though decayed and worm-eaten, answer its purpose.

These charges place Elm City Lodge in the odious position of being the friend and champion of a policy which all honorable, independent, and self-respecting workingmen abominate, and of being the enemy of the *Magazine* because it has defended the rights of workingmen and labor organizations.

There are, no doubt, a great many firemen under the autocratic rule of McLeod, the successor of Corbin, and Bonzano, his Dago lickspittle, who, like Elm City Lodge, No. 284, would not assist in circulating the *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*. They would doubtless be told if they even read it they would be discharged. Who has ordered Elm City Lodge to play the role of the serfs on the P&R? We understand Chauncey Mephistopheles Depew's influence extends to New Haven. Has Elm City Lodge been Corbinized, Russianized? Do they bark at the *Magazine* because ordered to do so? We neither know nor care. We simply state that the communication we publish has served us a purpose. It has afforded us an opportunity to indicate the policy of the *Magazine*, a policy which combined with other influences, has given the Brotherhood whose interests it represents and defends, power and influence never so patent as today.

The hope of organized labor, like the star of empire, is in the West. At any rate, the hope of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen does not center in Elm City Lodge any more than the intellec-

tual growth of mankind centers in the institutions where the feeble minded are taught to go under shelter when it rains.

In closing, let us say that Elm City Lodge, No. 284, has not incurred our displeasure, but rather, has awakened our commiseration. It lacks spine. May its backbone be strengthened.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

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