

---

# Facts About Federation

by Eugene V. Debs

Published in *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, vol. 15, no. 9 (Sept. 1891), pp. 812-813.

The *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine* has from the first, with such ability as it could command, championed federation.

The principle is axiomatic. The mere statement that in "unity there is strength," is one so self-evident, that argument would, were it possible, weaken the proposition.

In all of the labor organizations there is not a man so demented as to deny the central truth that in organization, united effort, there is conquering power.

Federation is simply carry ing the power of organization to its ut-  
termost limit. It is organization's *Ultima Thule*.

There is no longer debatable ground relating to the proposition.

The difficulties in the way are entirely separate and apart from the question of the power of federation.

In federation there must be coordination. The federated bodies must be co-equal.

If this supreme requisite is not recognized, then the federation becomes a farce, which, instead of conferring power, breeds confusion and calamities.

But to constitute federation a success instead of failure, to give it power instead of weakness, there must be an honest recognition, on the part of each constituent body, of the co-equality of every other constituent body, just as in Colonial federation, Rhode Island and Delaware were the co-equals of Virginia and Massachusetts.

Again, in federation there must be the recognition of mutual interests to be guarded, protected and promoted. If this is not done, then *ab initio*, federation is a failure, more, it is a calamity.

Moreover federation is democratic, it is not autocratic, aristocratic, nor plutocratic.

It recognizes absolute equality, based upon mutual interests, and not upon numerical nor financial strength; as for instance, in Colo-

nial federation, a colony with 50,000 population was equal in the federation to a colony with 500,000 population.

It must be assumed, in federation, that there is an equality of intelligence, integrity, and honor, self-respect, loyalty to obligation, and of all things of good report among men. Manifestly, this must be taken for granted, since no power can determine anything to the contrary until the facts develop the lack of such essential virtues.

Coming to the federation of railway employees, such an organization is a failure if one organization assumes that it is, from any cause whatever, superior to any other organization in the federated body. Such an assumption is necessarily fatal, since it totally ignores the prime essential of federation—the protection of mutual interests.

If, therefore, one organization assumes superiority because of its larger membership, or larger wages *per diem*, or of its greater importance to the railway service, it can never federate with other orders of railway employees which it regards as inferior; or if it were to consent to federation and should demand a controlling influence, proportionate to its assumed superiority, thus discarding co-equality and mutual interests to be protected, it would be a death blow to federation.

Federation, then, to be a success must recognize the co-equality of the federated bodies. Federation to be a success must have a congress or a council with delegated powers by which and through which its power may be exerted, and this congress or council must be constituted by the representatives of the federated orders, and these representatives must be equal and clothed with power to enact rules for their government.

In the Supreme Council of the Federated Orders of Railway Employees the principles we have outlined were carried into effect.

Co-equality was established and maintained. No power was assumed not clearly delegated by the orders represented, and in the exercise of these powers great good resulted.

But, says some one, the Supreme Council got into trouble and serious calamities have befallen it. That is true. But we assume that no eye but that of omnipotence could have foreseen the trouble, no hand but that of omnipotence could have guarded against the calamity.

To censure the Supreme Council, to intimate that it could have known of the treason that invaded its ranks is to assume that fallible man can penetrate the future and foretell coming events; more, that one man may read the thoughts and know the purposes of another

man. Had this Godlike power been conferred upon George Washington, Benedict Arnold had not committed treason.

Now then, with every fact before them, we challenge the most astute foe of federation to point out wherein federation, as established under the Supreme Council, has committed an error in the organization of that body of representatives indicative of a want of caution and an honest purpose to do right.

The trouble that has come upon the Supreme Council is as foreign to federation as was the treason of Arnold. It in no regard involves federation.

The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen stood as high for intelligence and integrity as any order of railway employees on the continent, and only God himself, who reads the thoughts of men, could have been aware that conspiracy lurked in the hearts and minds of any of its chosen representatives.

The poor driveling comments made by feeble minded scribblers, relating to the Supreme Council, are totally unworthy of consideration, and will so be regarded by men who have the capacity to comprehend honest endeavor, to map out a highway for the relief of men when wronged and oppressed.

*Edited by Tim Davenport*

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · May 2017 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.  
First Edition.