
**Editor and Manager's Report
to the 16th Convention of the
Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen,
Sept. 12, 1892
[excerpt]**

by Eugene V. Debs

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Eugene V. Debs, Editor and Manager of the Magazine, submitted the following, his biennial report for the two fiscal years ending July 31, 1892:

To the Officers and Members of the Grand Lodge of the Brotherhood
of Locomotive
Firemen:

Sirs and Brothers : —

I have the honor to submit, herewith, my report of the publication of the *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, for the two fiscal years ending July 31st, 1892, as required in section 24, page 11 of the Constitution.

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The Policy of the *Magazine* Reviewed.

I deem it prudent, in discussing *Magazine* affairs, to review its policy during the past two years. Such a review is due the order and is equally just and becoming to myself, — and all the more appropriate,

because such references as are made to the policy of the *Magazine* are in the nature of a valedictory.

From the first, under my management, the *Magazine* has had a policy based upon the well defined purposes of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen. At the start, a few noble souls, some of whom still survive the wear and tear of toil, believed there was a necessity for the organization and a place for it; that there was an inviting field spread out before it which ought to be occupied and cultivated in the United States and Canada; in fact, for the firemen of the continent.

I do not suppose that in those, now far away days, the men who founded the order, grasped the full measure of the mission of the Brotherhood. Like "the men who rounded Peter's dome," they builded better than they knew. They put in operation forces which since that day have encircled a continent, and which, applied to problems of labor, have wrought results of a character which this convention cannot contemplate without feelings of honest pride. I confess to a reverence of these brave men akin to awe. They were the men who first lighted the lodge fires of the order, flung out the first signal lights, and with that faith which is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," pointed the way to the highland of victory and prosperity which the Brotherhood now enjoys. They had faith in education, in its conquering power over debasing ignorance, and therefore founded

The *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, the organ of the order which, for twelve years, has been, by the partiality and confidence of the Brotherhood, committed to my hands. I need not, nor shall I, in this report, attempt a recapitulation of the more commanding features of the *Magazine* since I assumed control of its pages — nor is it required, since all the facts are on record and are as unchangeable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. They speak for me. They are my witnesses. I could not if I would, and I would not if I could, silence their utterances. They will speak to the Brotherhood long after my retirement, and all through coming years they will speak to me and I shall be glad at all times to give them audience.

What has been the policy of the *Magazine*? Stated tersely, it has been first, to promote the welfare of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen. In no spirit of bravado, here and now, I challenge the records of its pages. It would be the sheerest folly to assume that no mistakes have been made, that infallibility has distinguished discussion. I make no such declarations, but this may be said, that like a

ship in mid-ocean when neither sun nor stars appeared to enable the navigators to determine latitude and longitude, the purpose was to reach the destined port. The *Magazine* has often been surrounded with embarrassments, when adverse tides and winds prevailed which only increased my solicitude for the good of the order, and so far as the *Magazine* is concerned the flag of the Brotherhood has never been lowered, has never been trailed in the dust, has never been dishonored, but, unfurled, it has floated defiantly, never as the symbol of discord and war, but rather as the ensign of independence, manhood and equal rights.

Need I remind this convention of a time when the great Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, guided by false lights subjected this Brotherhood to exasperating humiliations, which no diplomacy coupled with humiliating pleadings could remove ? Need I refer to the duplicity and double dealing to which this Brotherhood was subjected in the vain effort to have degrading laws of the B of LE so changed and modified as to remove stigma from the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen? Or need I refer to the policy of the *Magazine* which, after all prudent means had failed, created a sentiment which in spite of the hostility of the Grand Chief helped to place the two great Brotherhoods in harmonious relations upon a basis of equal rights? The pages of the *Magazine* are luminous with the facts in the notable contest, in which the sense of right in the great Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers overcame the petty prejudices and Jesuitical policy of its Grand Chief and created harmonious relations made conspicuous by the fact that at this Biennial Convention for the first time in its history the B of LE sends to this Convention a committee to confer with the representatives of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen.

The policy of the *Magazine* has been to permit no attacks from any quarter upon the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen without at once assuming not only the defensive, but the aggressive, demonstrating to all the ability of the Brotherhood to maintain its independence and to carry forward its enterprises without regard to opposing forces.

Faith to Labor Organizations.

The policy of the *Magazine* has been to sympathize with all labor organizations, and, as opportunities offered, to give them aid and comfort. In this policy there have been no exceptions. Comprehend-

ing, in some measure, the importance of labor organizations and knowing the sentiments of the rank and file of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, it has been the policy of the *Magazine* to give expression to that sentiment on all proper occasions. Having a lofty scorn for an aristocracy in labor, it has been the policy of the *Magazine* to excoriate those infirm creatures, who, because they hold office and are decorated with titles, put on more style than the nobility of Europe and assume that the simple incident of wages is quite sufficient to create an aristocracy in labor circles, and that a \$4.00 a day man, may of right contemplate with contempt a man who receives \$1.00 a day. The policy of the *Magazine* has been to expose such ardent nonsense and to denounce it with deserved severity. As an incident of this policy, I may refer to the position taken by the *Magazine* on the Homestead strike of the members of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers.

The articles which appeared in the *Magazine* upon that strike were so eagerly sought after that the general officers of the Association wrote for copies of the *Magazine*, and the articles were read in the lodges of the association eliciting rounds of applause. I refer to this incident because the Homestead strike assumed national importance, to a degree that the two houses of Congress at once created investigating committees, whose duty it was to analyze the facts and report, preliminary to Congressional action. What that may be is still undetermined, but it is certain, if workingmen are true to themselves the deliberations of Congress will be in the nature of the emancipation of labor from the degrading conditions which now crush it to the earth.

I do not propose, in this, my final report, to invite attention to every incident in which the policy of the *Magazine* is made conspicuous, but, I do myself simple justice by referring to the case of the Knights of Labor, in which certain villainous concerns at Rochester, N. Y., perpetrated an outrage, which the *Magazine* helped to expose and earned the approval of all organizations of workingmen.

In conducting the *Magazine*, I have assumed that the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen is an organization of workingmen. I have fired an engine. I have not forgotten what the term "fireman" means. I know what it is to break and shovel coal into a fire-box. I shall never forget my years of toil in front of the fire-box. Good luck to the boys who are still working for promotion! And it is because firemen are workingmen that I have sought to make the *Magazine* the exponent of their views upon labor subjects. Laboring men have a

fellow feeling for laboring men — and the policy of the *Magazine*, under my control, has been to keep to the front the conquering fact that the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen is not an organization of aristocrats, but of workingmen who sympathize with their fellow toilers in all departments of labor.

To give the largest power possible to organized labor the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen favored federation and the *Magazine*, in full accord with the sentiment, did all in its power to bring about the alliance, and success crowned its efforts. At one time four organizations were in line under the banner of federation. The outlook was cheering — notable victories were secured — all that was expected of federation had been accomplished, clouds were disappearing. At this supreme juncture there came a reaction. Like a clap of thunder from a clear sky, one of the orders in the alliance, by the action of its grand officials, blasted every hope and by conspiracy inaugurated disaster. The officials of the B of RT entered into a conspiracy with the officials of the Northwestern railroad system to slaughter every switchman in its employment who was a member of the Switchmen's Mutual Aid Association, an organization, at the time a member of the supreme council of the federated orders.

I am aware of all the duplicity and prevarication of the officials of the B of RT to exculpate themselves from their acts of treason, but the “damned spots” will not out, nor will the ghosts of the murdered switchmen down. It is shown by their own testimony, a part of the record of the order, taken in their own convention behind locked doors, secret and sacred, that the grievance committee, with the authority and by direction of the grand (?) officers of the order, entered into a conspiracy with the officials of the Northwestern railroad system to discharge all the switchmen in its service. In this infamous conspiracy it was stipulated that members of the B of RT should be sent east, as the agents of the order and the railroad, to employ men to take the places of the switchmen. The men were employed, they did take the places of Brotherhood switchmen, and the Northwestern Railroad Company paid the expenses incurred by the B of RT men to secure the services of these scabs.

This incident of conspiracy, treason, duplicity and infamy resulted in the overthrow of federation, disrupted the Supreme Council, which gave up the ghost and forever disappeared, on June 20, 1892. It was a child of promise and gave splendid indications of use-

fulness, but it fell a victim of conspiracy and was stabbed to death by traitors.

It has been the policy of the *Magazine* to award praise to worthy men who distinguished themselves by devotion to the interests of organized labor, and of this number William D. Robinson, the founder of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, stands forth more conspicuously than any other man on the continent. To him, more than to any other man, the organizations of railroad employees, engaged in the train service of railroads, owe a debt of gratitude they cannot pay. He was the pioneer of the new departure, the pathfinder, to whom was committed the herculean task of piloting the first organizations of railroad employes out of a wilderness of doubts and fears, and of giving it that direction which culminated in success. The grand old man is dead. I have sought to perpetuate his name and fame by advocating the erection of a monument to his memory.

At this date the Robinson monument fund in the custody of the grand lodge amounts to \$277.82.

Here, I ask, what more graceful and grateful thing could this convention do than by subscribing to the fund the sum \$500.00 and thus at once solve the monument problem. Most sincerely do I recommend the subscription of this amount by this convention. It will stand an enduring testimonial of gratitude to one who wrought wisely and well for the welfare of every Brotherhood fireman on the continent. Such a subscription, less than two cents per capita of our membership, would indicate a breadth, height and depth of gratitude and appreciation of noble deeds which would add to the splendid renown of the order and give it a claim to that nobility of soul which will be a crowing glory of the Brotherhood long after the delegates here assembled sleep the sleep that knows no waking.

Sectarian Wrangles.

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen knows no sect. Its doors are open to all manly men and they may worship according to the dictates of their consciences, with none to molest them nor make them afraid. The Brotherhood is not a nursery for bigots or fanatics. It cultivates no superstition. It advocates no sectarian creed or dogma, and it has been the policy of the *Magazine* to voice such sentiments of toleration as would prevent the introduction of the blighting effects of sectarianism. Notwithstanding this, sectarian prejudices in certain

localities have crept into our lodges and threatened their disruption. In this connection, I suggest that this convention, may with eminent propriety indicate, by resolution or otherwise, its abhorrence of bigotry and proclaim that the order will not tolerate men in its lodges who promote sectarian animosities.

Union Label.

The policy of the *Magazine*, as has been said, has been to promote the welfare of all organized labor. It has taken the broadest possible view of such subjects, because they are intimately interwoven with the welfare of the B of LF. Union labor is seeking to protect itself from scabism by the introduction of union labels upon goods, such as hats, clothes, boots and shoes, cigars, etc. The idea is for buyers to inquire, when making purchases, for the union label, and, unless it is shown, to withhold their patronage. The propriety of this movement is seen at a glance, and it enables all persons interested in the welfare of organized labor to aid its triumph. I shall hope that this convention, by resolution, will place itself upon record as uncompromisingly in favor of the use and observance of the union label.

The policy of the *Magazine* has been to advocate every proposition made by labor organizations to secure the enactment of laws calculated to mitigate any of the wrongs to which labor has been subjected, hence it has been in harmony with all legislative committees which have sought to bring to the attention of legislatures measures in any way calculated to remedy existing evils. While legislative committees are of unquestioned importance, and have accomplished much good, the one grand essential is to have certain bills prepared, calculated to benefit labor, and then interrogate candidates. If they pledge themselves to support the measures, vote for them; if they decline to give assurance of support, vote against them regardless of the party tag they wear.

It is to me, as it should be to every member of the order, a source of pride and satisfaction to have the testimonials of the foremost men in the movement of the popularity of the *Magazine*, and it is simply echoing the universal verdict to say that it occupies a commanding position in the field of economic discussion. The *Magazine* today is more widely and more extensively copied than any labor publication on the continent. Its articles are to be found in almost every issue of the scores of labor periodicals devoted to almost every industry

known to our civilization. Lawyers, doctors, divines, statesmen, statisticians, economists and students of social science are numbered among its readers. In a letter under date of September 1st received by me from the labor editor of the *Boston Globe* by one of the great metropolitan papers of the country, the *Magazine* is alluded to in the following language:

“During the seven years that I have been labor editor of the *Boston Globe*, I have seen many labor publications and am deprived by the hard experience of severe knocks of the luxury of being able to ‘enthuse’ easily. I cannot forbear, however, taking the time in the bustle and hurly-burly of getting up copy for Labor day, to say to you that you ought to feel proud of the *Magazine* you are producing, and the members of your Brotherhood should also experience a glow of satisfaction that they have one among their number who is capable of such a production. It is beautiful in appearance and typographical make-up, it is chock full of meat and it strikes good solid blows, every one a hundred pounds to the square inch, in the cause of labor’s final emancipation. If the last number is a sample of the way you get up every number you must feel perfectly satisfied when you look it over fresh from the bindery. I know it has been no small factor in making the B of LF the strong, compact and fearless organization it is today.”

—Cyrus F. Willard, *Boston Globe*.

The pathways we have traveled together for nine years have led through many pleasant places — by flowery fields and dewy meads, by winding streams and sparkling fountains. We have marched together where the landscapes were of enrapturing beauty — by cottage homes and palatial residences. We have bivouacked with comrades, have been cheered by their fraternal greetings, and have shared their generous hospitalities. But this is not all. We have tramped with our comrades over arid deserts and through dark defiles. We have clambered up mountain roads and walked beside yawning chasms. Nor does this tell the story. We have stood shoulder to shoulder with them in many a conflict, when the enemy, well equipped, was defiant and fierce, when many faltered, when some fled, and others turned traitors.

The Brotherhood has seen its *Magazine* on the war-path only when an enemy was to be hunted down; when lurking foes were to be driven from ambush and exposed ; when the right was assailed ; when justice and truth demanded that their professed votaries should come

to the rescue. On such occasions the *Magazine* has responded with alacrity. For these things the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen has not yet demanded an apology, nor will it until the Carnegies, the Fricks, the McLeods, the Depews and all enemies of organized labor, achieve a victory for corporate greed and corporate autocracy.

In surrendering to this Convention the offices I have held in the great Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, I confess to varied emotions. The 12 years I have held office, necessitating the most intimate, confidential and responsible relations, have created ties which cannot be sundered without regrets. Here and now I dismiss all but pleasant memories, and wherever I am and whatever fortune betides me, I shall hope for the continued prosperity of this my beloved order which has had so many years of my early manhood, and shall never be more happy than in knowing that its career develops constantly increasing power and usefulness.

Respectfully submitted,

Eugene Y. Debs,
Editor and Manager.

On motion, the foregoing report of the Editor and Manager of the *Magazine* was received and referred to the several committees for consideration.

The Convention then adjourned. Time of adjournment, 6:15 pm.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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