
American Railway Union: Its President Defeats the Attempt to Expel Him from the Brotherhood of Firemen

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Terre Haute, Ind., April 27 [1893].— Eugene Debs, the President of the new railway labor organization, the American Railway Union, won the first contest with those who believe his project means opposition to the brotherhoods by defeating the movement to expel him from the local lodge of the Brotherhood of Firemen.

When the lodge met last night [April 26, 1893] the charge was preferred that he had violated his obligation that required him to further the interest of the order and a resolution was offered for his expulsion. Debs spoke one or two hours, reviewing the history of the Brotherhood and his part in it from the time, 13 years ago, when it was bankrupt. He showed that he had been elected Grand Secretary for 13 years without a vote against him, that at times he has given out of his personal means to tide the Brotherhood over, and that repeatedly a larger salary had been voted him than he had drawn. The remarkable personal magnetism of the man carried the meeting by storm, and the expulsion resolution was withdrawn.

The purpose of the opposition, Mr. Debs said, was to expel him, that thereby the new organization might be discredited. He and his friends declare that had he been expelled it would have caused the death of the Brotherhood in short order. When asked pointedly whether the new organization did not mean disruption for the others, he replied that it was a question of the survival of the fittest, and he believed that the new idea would succeed over the old just as the locomotive had succeeded the stage coach. He did not intend to make war on the brotherhoods, but thought all might exist, at least for a time, with harmonious relations.

Speaking of the American Railway Union, he said that on the day of the formal organization, June 20 [1893], there would be a mem-

bership of 12,000 from minor orders, such as the Carmen, which had formally decided to enter the new union as a body. There were now 72 applications for local unions. There are 1,500 men at Cleveland waiting to join. At Boston there is an enthusiastic interest in it. There are 1 million railway employees in North America, and he was confident of getting one-tenth of them into the union inside of three months. He illustrates his opinion that the old brotherhoods have reached their *ultima thule*¹ by citing the loss of membership because of the onerous financial assessments. The firemen lost 7,000 members because of the Burlington strike, which took more than \$500,000 of the men's wages. He says the compulsory insurance feature is faulty in many respects, and denounces that of the Brotherhood of Engineers as being worthless. There is no insurance fund, and if the Brotherhood should go to pieces in a big strike, as it would be liable to do, the insurance would be lost. In the new order insurance will not be compulsory, and he hopes to make an arrangement with some good accident and life company to carry all of it on strictly insurance business principles. There will be no secrecy nor oath obligation.

Mr. Debs says that the men who are opposing the new union are the ones that are drawing salaries of \$4,000 or \$5,000 a year, which they would lose if the brotherhoods went by the board.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

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¹ Highest point attainable.