
Locomotive Engineers and Federation

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In a recent issue of the *National Car and Locomotive Builder* there appears an article captioned, "Locomotive Engineers and Federation."

The article in question was written in the interest of railroad companies. This crops out in the opening paragraph as follows:

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers will meet in convention at Pittsburgh this month, and the delegates assembled will be called upon to settle a matter that is of considerable importance to railroad companies.

Here we have it stated that federation is of "considerable importance to railroad companies."

The statement is true. But why is federation of "considerable importance to railroad companies?" In answer we should say that federation is of "considerable importance to railroads," just as in 1770 the federation of the colonies was of "considerable importance" to the British.

Now, it will be remembered, and we commend the historic fact to the *National Car and Locomotive Builder*, that in that dark period of the Nation's history, Tories and British emissaries tried to defeat federation. They favored kingly rule. They were in league with the English aristocracy. They said federation is of "considerable importance to England," and as they were trying to visit English oppression upon the colonies they sought to defeat federation. These Tories used arguments against the federation of the colonies in many regards similar to those put forth by the *National Car and Locomotive Builder*. In Virginia, Pennsylvania and New York the Tories said, "Why federate with such little, weak and unimportant colonies as Rhode Island, Delaware and Connecticut?" In the little colonies the Tories changed

their tactics and said, "If you federate with the great colonies they will destroy you; your influence will be so small as not to be recognized by them." These enemies of federation, were working for England, just as the *National Car and Locomotive Builder* is working for the railroad companies. Let us see if it is not so. The *National Car and Locomotive Builder* says:

The proposal to make the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers a part of a federated organization of railroad men has been for years urged upon the engineers by the weaker orders of railroad men. In the Eastern states the prevailing sentiment among engineers is to remain independent, but the federation idea is reported to have taken such firm hold of Western men that they are ready to fight the battle for change at the coming meeting. It is easy to understand the motives of the Brotherhoods of Firemen, Conductors, Brakemen, Switchmen, etc., in seeking for a coalition with the engineers, for it is the weak seeking the aid of the strong, but we entirely fail to understand what equivalent the weaker orders are prepared to give to the strong to pay for the sacrifice that would be made if the engineers undertook to make the cause of all railroad men their own.

There you have the old Tory argument to defeat the federation of the colonies when fighting the battles of liberty and independence. It is an appeal to the basest passions of human nature, an effort to array one class of workingmen, with identical interests involved, against other classes, because they are "weak." It is the argument, as we have said, of the Tories in favor of British rule, used now in favor of railroad companies and against the interests of railroad employees.

Quite likely "it is easy to understand the motives of the Brotherhoods of Firemen, Conductors, Brakemen, and Switchmen." What is the motive? Is it dishonorable? Is it a motive that should occasion a blush, or demand an apology? Admit as a fact, or for argument, what the *National Car and Locomotive Builder* asserts. What of it? Let it be said that the firemen, conductors, brakemen, and switchmen do appeal to the engineers to federate, because the engineers are strong. What of it? Did not the little colonies appeal to the great colonies to federate in 1770 because they were strong? Did the great colonies say to the little colonies, "We will not federate with you because you are small and weak?" No, never! Their interests were mutual and it required them all to achieve emancipation, and never in all of that eight years war, from the time he drew his sword at Cambridge, till he sheathed it at Yorktown, did George Washington tell the weak colo-

nies to “mind their own business,” intimating that he could achieve victory without them.

But as a matter of fact, while the Brotherhood of Engineers is great and strong and influential, it is not as great and strong and influential as the federated orders — the firemen, the conductors, the brakemen, and the switchmen. Nor can the Brotherhood of Engineers do more for the federated orders than the federated orders can do for it.

Let us prudently examine this phase of the subject.

The Brotherhood of Engineers claim a membership of 27,000. Admit it. The federated orders claim a membership of 50,000. Admit it, and the federated orders are stronger by 23,000 men.

These figures disclose the fact that the weak are not appealing to the strong.

Can it be said that the federated orders are appealing to the engineers at all?

Unfortunately for the argument of the *National Car and Locomotive Builder*, organ of railroad companies, it has put upon record the denials of its own assertion. It says the demand for federation comes from “Western men,” members of the B of LE, who “are ready to fight the battle for change.”

Here, we have it, that intelligent, wide awake, progressive members of the Engineers’ brotherhood, are demanding federation, and they know “what equivalent” the federated orders “are prepared to give” to them, in case of trouble.

The *National Car and Locomotive Builder* prates of the “skillful workman and the crude laborer,” for the purpose of establishing antagonisms between men who move railroad trains, and without whose assistance trains would not move at all. It is an argument in favor of caste, of aristocracy in labor. It is an exhibition of servility, totally unworthy of consideration.

Again, says the *National Car and Locomotive Builder*:

Transcendent moral sentiment calls for the strong to give their support to the weak on the abstract principle of common humanity; but individuals have not generally responded to the high requirements of sacrifice, even when they are united as a Brotherhood. When men’s interests cease to be identical discord is certain to ensue, and discord is the beginning of disruption.

It should he said, at the expense of repetition, that the “weak” are not asking support of the Engineers, upon any “moral sentiment,” or principle, abstract or concrete. It is held that the interests of all railroad employees, engaged in moving trains, are mutual, reciprocal, common, interchangeable. It is true. These mutual interests must of necessity exist and continue as long as trains require engineers, conductors, brakemen, firemen, and switchmen. They ought to be in the most harmonious relations. Anything less, is in the interest of the corporation, which profits by their dissensions, and to create such disagreements and strife, appears to be the ambition of the *National Car and Locomotive Builder*.

Again, says the *National Car and Locomotive Builder*:

Should a federated organization of railroad employees, by a consolidation with the locomotive engineers, be made sufficiently powerful to present unreasonable demands on railroad companies with the probability of success, the tendency would be to level pay upward. The engineer would be called upon to lift the condition of the brakeman, the switchman, and probably the trackman, to his own level, and take bis share In paying the expense in any fights necessary to bring about this elevating process.

In the foregoing, the objection is made to federation, that the engineers would be called upon “to help level pay upward; to lift the condition of the brakeman, the switchman, and probably trackman, to his own level,” etc.

In this, the basest instincts that degrade human nature are appealed to.

The Engineers, having reached success, in any given conflict with the corporation, by the united efforts of all employee engaged in the train service, are sought to be swerved front the pathway of honor because of the part that they might be asked to level up the pay of other men as necessary to the train service as themselves; the assumption being that in such eases, in fact, in all eases, the demands “on railroad companies” would be “unreasonable.”

The idea is that engineers are entirely independent of till other men engaged in the train service of the country; that no mutual interests exist, and that federation on the part of engineers with firemen, conductors, switchmen, and brakemen, would be a proceeding without one redeeming feature. “It seems natural,” says the *National Car and Locomotive Builder*, “for every man to magnify the importance of

his vocation. It would be difficult to find a conductor who did not consider that his duties were more important than those performed by an engineer, and that he ought to be paid accordingly. Switchmen and brakemen reflect that their occupation is more dangerous than that of an engineer and that their pay ought to be based on the extra hazard to life and limb. Those interested in leveling pay upwards find no difficulty in making arguments to support that view of the case." Such stuff can influence only those who are totally devoid of sympathy for workingmen, who antagonize "leveling pay upwards" and are helping those who level pay downwards, and seek to degrade labor.

To level pay upwards is to level up humanity, to level up home, women and children, to enable workingmen to obtain fair wages, and live as becomes citizens of a free country, and those who oppose such leveling up processes, as railroad employees have adopted, by whatever other names they may be known, are corporation parasites, fleas in the hair of the corporation dog.

In the case of the *National Car and Locomotive Builder* its purpose seems to be, is in fact, to array the engineers against other men with whom they must forever be in the closest association. To them it says: "The engineers are now the aristocrats among labor organizations, and their members have never failed in obtaining justice from railroad companies when their demands appealed to popular support," Here is an exhibition of flunkeyism rarely equalled, and fortunate it is that ten thousand engineers, members of the B of LF, treat such declarations with becoming disdain. They are men who cannot be cajoled and imposed upon by the paid sycophants of corporations, but who know the right, and dare defend it. They have faith in their fellow-workmen; they know the value of conductors, firemen, brakemen, and switchmen; they throw to the winds the aristocratic ideas of vocation, and regard honest, self-respecting men their equals. They know the future is full of perils to organized labor, and that the only hope is in federation.

Already ominous clouds are gathering along the horizon of labor, in railroad affairs stockholders want larger dividends, and bond holders want more interest. High officials level pay upwards for themselves, and downwards for employees. If the men who do the work are to receive fair pay and fair treatment, they must come into close, compact union — nothing else — nothing less will answer the demand. Federation is feasible, honest, just and right. To approach men, as does the *National Car and Locomotive Builder*, with despicable

propositions — appealing to low and vulgar prejudices, is an exhibition of sycophantic fealty to corporations which honest engineers will be quick to discover and rebuke.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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