
The Farmers' Alliance

by Eugene V. Debs

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We have not studied critically the motives that have prompted the farmers of the country to organize what is called the "Farmers' Alliance." In a general way, we understand that they demand some legislation which, as they "feed all," shall, if possible, save themselves from starvation.

The farmers would, if they could, do away with national banks. That is to say, they would do away with national bank bills or currency, whereby the banks can, and do, expand or contract the circulating medium of the country at will, thereby giving them power to inflict untold evils upon the country.

The farmers, doubtless, believe it to be a stupendous wrong, to use no harsher term, for corporations to have the power to levy tribute upon the American people to pay dividends on water, and we assume that the farmers believe if railroads were content to pay dividends on honest investments they could reduce their rates and make as much or more money than at present. But the *Railway Age* takes a different view of the subject, and in a recent issue says:

The organized war against the railways of this country which has evidently been determined upon by the Farmers' Alliance in state and national gatherings, for the avowed purpose of compelling further reductions in the already low rates of transportation on farm products and merchandise, is a matter of most serious importance to railway employees, as well as to the owners of railway securities and to the manufacturers of railway supplies.

We do not suppose that the farmers ever dreamed of doing anything to injure "railway employees," nor do we see in what way the free coinage of silver or the issue of government "promises to pay" to take the place of national bank bills would result in the injury of men who operate the railroads of the country, and it is to be presumed that

“railway employees” will in the future, as in the past, vote pretty much as they please, unless their employers shall find ways and means to intimidate them and squeeze their manhood out of them. The *Railway Age*, in pursuing the subject, injects into its article the following remarkable utterances:

Hitherto railway men, as such, have taken very little part in political campaigns. *Left free by their employing companies to vote at they please*, they have followed their personal preferences and selected their candidates, often, without any regard to the attitude of the latter toward railway interests: not infrequently, strange to say, they have voted for legislators and other officers on avowedly anti-railway tickets.

“Hitherto,” says the *Age*, “railway men” have been ***“left free by their employing companies to vote as they please,”*** and having been “left free to vote as they please,” have voted ***“anti-railway tickets.”*** The intimation is that in future railway employees will not be “left free to vote as they please.” “Their employing companies” are to discipline them and keep them from perpetrating what the *Age* deems it proper to stigmatize as “supreme folly.” We do not remember to have seen anything in print of recent date more repulsive, more insulting to the intelligence and independence of railway employees than the intimation that since *hitherto their employing companies have left them free to vote as they please*, a change of program in this regard may be adopted when the railroad employees will *not* be left free to vote as they please. This form of intimidation has been carried quite far enough in the United States, and the *Railway Age* has only to brush away the coverts behind which it now writes and formulate its platform in honest words to learn that railway employees will vote as they please quite independent of “their employing companies.”

The *Age’s* form of intimidation has had its day. Railway employees are neither the livestock nor the rolling stock of railway corporations, but citizens who know their rights, and are quite as capable of casting an intelligent vote as the editor of the *Railway Age*.

The fact that a railway employee (?) writes in the interest of railway corporations is not remarkable. Such letters could be multiplied indefinitely. The old dodge of wreck and ruin has been played until it no longer frightens. This thing of tying railway employees, body and soul, to the corporation has been done, may be done again, but not to

the extent the *Railway Age* evidently anticipates, or to the extent the "Railway Employee in Dakota" outlines.

The Dakota man's scheme is simply immense. Indeed, that term scarcely defines its sweep. It would be highly interesting to know in what department of railroad service the Dakota correspondent of the *Railway Age* is employed. He talks like a President, or a Vice President, or a General Manager; and still he may be merely a switchman or a hostler; since in these, as in other departments of the railroad service, there are men who are eminently capable, when occasion requires it, to take either side of an important question and discuss it intelligently.

This Dakota employee wants to organize what "might be called 'The National Railway Employees' Protective Association,' to which should be eligible every person employed on railroads, every stock and bondholder, all interested bankers, car, locomotive or other railway supply manufacturers, and their employees; in fact there are few, if any, who are engaged in the manufacturing or mining industries who should not be eligible to become members of this organization if they are the least interested in the success and prosperity of the railways of the country." This railroad employee of Dakota is "convinced, after a careful study of the subject, that in order to protect the capital invested in the railways of the United States and in all those industries intimately connected therewith; to prevent the further reduction of the wages of the men employed in these industries; to give capital confidence enough to push forward the development of the country; to stimulate the manufactures which have declined since the decline of railroad construction; to enable the railways to employ a sufficient force for each department; to prevent hostile or unjust legislation against the railroads, and to preserve all the railway properties at a proper standard of excellence, the most effectual remedy at the present and for all time to come would be a thorough organization of all the employees and others interested." The Dakota employee, who writes like a stockholder or a bondholder, says that "the object of such an association would be to cause its members to vote at every election only for such Representatives or Senatorial candidates, state or national, as would be pledged to do all in their power to promote the welfare of all concerned, and at all times to oppose with their vote and influence any legislation which proposed to reduce the income of the capitalist below a just and reasonable profit on his investment, or which would have a tendency to reduce the wages of employees below

what could be considered a liberal allowance for their services.” Here we have outlined a great railroad party, all to be members of “The National Railway Employees’ Protective Association,” and all to *vote* straight railroad tickets at every election — vote for men opposed to the reduction of the income of capitalists. It would be sad, indeed, if the income of Mr. Jay Gould should be reduced a few millions, or if the Vanderbilts should be so cramped that they could not pay more than \$5,000 a year for a *chef*. The Rothchilds would doubtless weep over such destitution; and the point is made that all railway employees should join in with stockholders and bondholders to maintain rates, so that wages may not be reduced, which suggests the inquiry, when did the corporation come forward and say to their employees, Our road is now making money “hand over fist,” and your wages are to be advanced?

We are inclined to the opinion that the Dakota employee's scheme won't work. His plea for the capitalist is too top heavy. It is not built on the plan of the pyramids. His great solicitude for the capitalist is by far too pronounced, and the “employee” dodge is “too thin.” He is a master of verbal legerdemain. His word jugglery may be as the Yankees say, “smart.” Never did spider sing more sweetly to the fly; never were pussy's paws more velvety. Some flies may go into the “parlor,” some mice may be caught, but the great body of railway employees won't “tumble” to the Dakota idea immediately. A great many railway employees are giving all subjects relating to work and wages, earnings and dividends, careful study, and the conclusion is that a very large per cent, of their earnings go to enrich capitalists, and they want a fair deal. They may not get it. They have been defeated in the past, and the future may have grievous disappointments in store for them, but to ask them to join with stockholders and bondholders and stock waterers, and bankers and millionaires to increase the incomes of the rich that the crumbs which fall from their tables may not decrease in size nor quantity, is really carrying the joke too far by half. Old things are passing away. There are hopes of a new regime, and workingmen are not going to vote against its coming.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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