
Declaration of Principles of the American Railway Union

[Adopted June 6, 1893]

Published in Constitution of the American Railway Union: Adopted June 5th, 1893. n.c. [Chicago]: n.p. [American Railway Union], n.d. [1893]. This version based upon a Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen reprint, undated.

In the creation of a new organization of railway employees, certain reasons prompting the movement are demanded and should be set forth with becoming candor.

The number of employees now in the service of the railroads in America has been variously estimated from 800,000 to 1,000,000. It is safe to assume that this vast army of employees is, at the present time, not less than 1,000,000.

Accepting the highest claims of the various railway organizations as a basis of calculation, less than 150,000 of these employees are members of such organizations, leaving more than 850,000 who are not enrolled in the ranks of organized labor.

To state the proposition concisely, organization is union. It is a self-evident truth that "in union there is strength, 9 and conversely, without union weakness prevails; therefore, the central benefit to be derived from organization is strength — power to accomplish that which defies individual effort.

Experience, the great teacher, whose lessons, sooner or later, must be heeded, points out with unerring certainty the defects, and demonstrates the inefficiency of the organizations as they now exist:

First. They do not provide for all classes of employees, it being shown that 850,000 of them, or eighty-five per cent, of the whole number, remain unorganized. These may be divided into three general classes: (1) those who are eligible but decline to join; (2) those who have been expelled because of their inability or refusal to bear the financial burdens which membership imposes, and (3) the multiplied thousands in various departments of the service who are totally ineligible, there being no provision for their admission.

These facts, in the light of thirty years of organization, establish, beyond all controversy, the truth of the declarations herein set forth, and emphasize the demand for an order in which there shall be room and protection for all whose hearts throb responsive to union sentiments, and whose desire it is to march under union banners in the great struggle for the triumph of union principles.

Second. The existing organizations, designed to promote and preserve harmonious relations between employer and employee, have met with only limited success, if, indeed, it can be shown that any progress in that direction has been made. Never has there existed that mutual Confidence, without which, it were misleading to assume that peace, amity and good-will prevail. At best, therefore, this relation between employer and employee, has been little better than an enforced compliance with conditions rarely satisfactory to either party.

Third. What must be said of organizations which have failed to establish friendship and good-will even among themselves? From the first there have existed antagonisms and jealousies, culminating in warring factions instead of a harmonious whole. Organization has been pitted against organization, bringing upon themselves not only disaster but lasting reproach.

Fourth. Protection is the cardinal principle of the present organizations; but they do not protect. Since "an injury to one is the concern of all," a failure to protect all is an exhibition of a purpose without the power to enforce it, and this fact emphasizes the necessity of the federation of organizations, but which, under existing conditions is impracticable, if not impossible.

Fifth. It is universally conceded that one of the most serious objections to the existing organizations is their excessive cost to the membership, the sum totals of which, were the facts known, would amaze the labor world. So enormous have they become, that tens of thousands, unable to bear the burden, have been forced back into the ranks of the unorganized.

Sixth. Another defect in existing organizations is their secrecy, as for instance, the secret ballot, by virtue of which thousands of worthy applicants have been excluded. The air of mystery surrounding their proceedings is not calculated to inspire confidence. On the contrary, in the relations between employer and employee, in carrying forward great enterprises in which the people at large are profoundly interested, mystery is not required, and is productive of suspicion and dis-

trust. Open, fearless and above-board work is far more in consonance with the spirit of independence and free institutions.

Seventh. The tremendous power conferred upon chief officers has been a source of wide-spread dissatisfaction. The mere dictum of an individual determines whether a strike, involving thousands of employees and millions of dollars, shall or shall not occur. He is, in this sense, an absolute monarch. From his decision there is no appeal. The unanimous vote of the organization cannot prevail against it. Such autocratic power vested in a single person is not only dangerous to a degree that defies exaggeration, but is at war with the American idea of government, in which the one-man rule has no place. The responsibility often involved in a final decision is too great and too grave to rest upon any one man, however sturdy his integrity or unerring his judgment.

Eighth. The subject of grievances and grievance committees has itself become a grievance that cries aloud for correction. The petty complaints that ceaselessly arise among employees and keep them in a state of agitation and unrest, have brought odium upon organizations and weakened their power for good in directions where real grievances demand adjustment. The very term "grievance committee" has become a reproach and a by-word. This brood of evils is in a large measure due to the personal jealousies and enmities flowing out of the inharmonious relations existing between organizations, each of which seeks supremacy without regard to the welfare of the other.

The complex grievance machinery entailing prolonged delays, the vast number of local, general and joint committees, an army in themselves are well calculated to increase rather than diminish grievances. For every complaint that is remedied another takes its place, and thus they multiply, until railway officials lose patience and seek refuge in refusal to make further concessions. Such petty grievances as are herein indicated ought not to exist at all, and once correct methods of organization are inaugurated, will entirely disappear. Righteous complaints and just demands are always in order, and should receive prompt attention and be pressed to a speedy and satisfactory adjustment.

Ninth. Organizations have become so numerous and their annual and biennial conventions occur so frequently, that the question of furnishing free transportation for delegates, their families and friends, is being seriously considered by railway officials as an abuse of privileges without a redeeming feature. This incessant demand for special

trains, special cars, the recognition of credentials, and passes without limit is compromising the character and dignity of organizations and placing their officers and % members under obligations which must, sooner or later, in view of the constant agitation for increased pay and other concessions, prove a source of embarrassment and humiliation.

Tenth. The extraordinary feet cannot be overlooked, that while present organizations are provided with expensive striking and boycotting machinery, and while millions of dollars, wrung from their members, have been expended in support of strikes, they have with scarcely an exception been overwhelmed with defeat. The history of railroad strikes, as conducted by railroad organizations, is a recital of brave but hopeless struggle, of strikers defeated, impoverished, black-listed, pursued and driven to the extremity of scabbing or starvation. Under present conditions this result is inevitable, and a century of organization on present lines will not change it. Railway employees have contributed from their earnings untold millions in support of organizations, and are, therefore, entitled to protection instead of promises that can never be fulfilled.

It cannot be denied that the policy of present organizations has filled the land with scabs who swarm in the highways and byways awaiting anxiously, eagerly, the opportunity to gratify their revenge by taking positions vacated by strikers. Thoughtful men have no difficulty in accounting for the failure of railroad strikes. Neither are they at a loss to suggest a remedy. Organized upon correct principles, governed by just laws and animated by unselfish purposes, the necessity for strikes and boycotts among railway employees will disappear.

Experience teaches that defective organization leads to strikes and defeat as certainly as perfect organization will insure peace and success.

Eleventh. The ever increasing body of idle engineers, conductors, etc., seeking in vain for employment, is the legitimate fruit of promotion on the seniority basis. The pernicious effects of this system can Scarcely be overestimated. A lifetime of faithful service counts for nothing. When dismissal comes, oftentimes for trivial offense, the victim finds the doors of his calling everywhere barred against him. He is compelled to go to the very bottom and serve again his entire apprenticeship. The natural tendency is to weaken organized labor by creating a surplus of experienced men whose necessities make them available to corporations in recruiting their service in times of trouble.

It is not strange that the Victims of the seniority iniquity renounce organization and take their places with the unorganized.

What is required is a system of promotion that recognizes and rewards merit rather than seniority. Other things being equal, seniority should, of course, have preference. In filling vacancies selection should be made from the line of promotion and from the unemployed in a ratio evincing due regard to the rights of both.

The American Railway Union will include all classes of railway employees, separately organized, yet all in harmonious alliance within one great brotherhood.

There will be one supreme law for the order with provisions for all classes, one roof to shelter all; each separate and yet all united when unity of action is required; In this is seen the federation of classes which is feasible, instead of the federation of organizations, which has proved to be utterly impracticable. The reforms sought to be inaugurated and the benefits to be derived therefrom, briefly stated, areas follows:

First. The protection of members in all matters relating to wages and their rights as employees is the principal purpose of the organization. Railway employees are entitled to a voice in fixing wages and determining conditions of employment. Fair wages and proper treatment must be the return for efficient service, faithfully performed.

Such a policy insures harmonious relations and satisfactory results. The new order, while pledged to conservative methods, will protect the humblest of its members in every right he can justly claim. But while the rights of members will be sacredly guarded, no intemperate demand or unreasonable proposition will be entertained.

Corporations will not be permitted to treat the organization better than the organization will treat them. A high sense of honor must be the animating spirit, and even-handed justice the end sought to be attained.

Thoroughly organized in every department, with a due regard for the right wherever found, it is confidently believed that all differences may be satisfactorily adjusted, that harmonious relations may be established and maintained, that the service may be incalculably improved, and that the necessity for strike and lockout, boycott and blacklist, alike disastrous to employer and employee, and a perpetual menace to the welfare of the public, will forever disappear.

Second. In every department of labor, the question of economy is forced to the front by the logic of necessity. The importance of or-

ganization is conceded, but if it costs more than a working man is able to pay, the benefits to accrue, however great, are barred. Therefore, to bring the expenses of organization within the reach of all, is the one thing required, a primary question which must be settled before those who stand most in need, can participate in the benefits to be derived.

The expenditures required to maintain subordinate and grand lodges, every dollar which is a tax upon labor, operate disastrously in two ways, first by repelling men who believe in organization, and second by expelling members because of inability to meet the exactions, and in both of which the much vaunted fraternity feature, it is seen, is based entirely upon the ability to pay dues. In this it is noted that the organization, as now conducted, are for men, as a general proposition, who have steady work at fair pay, while others less fortunate in these regards, are forced to remain outside to be the victims of uncharitable criticism.

Hence, to reduce the cost to the lowest practicable point is a demand strictly in accord with the fundamental principles of economy, and any movement which makes it possible for all to participate in the benefits ought to meet with popular favor.

This reduction of cost, the new organization proposes to accomplish in a way that, while preserving every feature of efficiency that can be claimed by existing organizations, will so minimize expenses that members will not be forced to seek relief, as is now the case, in the abandonment of organization. To accomplish this reduction a number of burdens such as grand and subordinate lodges, annual and biennial conventions, innumerable grievance committees, etc., will be eliminated. As these unnecessary features will not exist, the entire brood of taxes necessary to maintain them will be unknown.

Third. The new organization will have a number of departments, each of which will be designed to promote the welfare of the membership in a practical way and by practical methods. The best thought of workmen has long sought to solve the problem of making labor organizations protective, not only against sickness, disability and death, but against the ills consequent upon idleness, and those which follow in its train: hence there will be established an employment department in which it is proposed to register the name of every member out of employment. The department will also be fully informed where work may be obtained. It is doubtful if a more important fea-

ture could be suggested. It evidences fraternal regard without a fee, benevolence without alloy.

Fourth. In the establishment of a department of education, a number of important features are contemplated, as, for instance, lectures upon subjects relating to economics, such as wages, expenses, the relations of employer and employee, strikes, their moral and financial aspects, etc. In this connection a daily paper will be established whose mission it will be to advocate measures and policies in which labor had vital interests, and also the publication of a standard monthly magazine, which will occupy a still broader field in the discussion of questions which engage the attention of the best writers and thinkers of the times.

Fifth. There will be a department designed to promote legislation in the interest of labor, that is to say, the enactment of laws by legislatures and by congress, having in view well defined obligations of employer and employees, such as safety appliances for trains, hours of labor, the payment of wages, the rights of employees to be heard in courts where they have claims to be adjudicated, and numerous others in which partisan politics will play no part, the common good being the animating purpose.

Sixth. In the department of insurance sound business principles will be introduced, something that has not hitherto engaged the serious attention its importance merits. At present insurance entails grievous burdens without corresponding benefits; to lessen the cost while maintaining every security and every benefit, will be the problem the department will solve. It is the purpose to have a life as well as an accident department, both to be optional with the membership.

With this declaration of its purposes and with boundless faith in its conquering mission, the American Railway Union consecrates itself to the great cause of industrial emancipation. It comes with a message of greeting and good cheer to all organizations and all men who stand pledged to the sacred work of lightening the burden and lifting up the bowed form of labor.

It hails with a glow of satisfaction the signs of the times, indicating with unerring certainty the coming of the new and better era, when heart, brain and conscience, in holy alliance, shall be the controlling power in human affairs.

In this spirit it enters upon its chosen field and will labor with all the zeal, devotion and ability at its command to attain the cherished objects of its high ambition.