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# Consolidation

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The spirit of the times, the signs of the times, and the trend of affairs in finance, commerce, manufactures, transportation, and industry are in the line of consolidation, solidification, combination, or union, as contradistinguished from individual effort.

However much we may sigh for the "good old times," they will return no more. A new era has dawned. Old things have passed and are still rapidly passing away. An epoch confronts the business of the country that dates new departures, and an ironclad necessity, which will admit of no modification, demands that men fall into line and conform to new conditions.

Men, generally, have exceedingly crude conceptions of the extent to which the work of consolidating great industrial enterprises has gone forward. Since 1880 the movement, gathering impetus constantly, is attracting and demanding more and more attention.

A census bulletin relating to the manufacturing interests of the country names a number of industries which show a large increase of capital invested. To secure such results consolidation was the means resorted to, the organization of trusts by capitalists by virtue of which they control capital, product, and wages.

What is true of manufacturing establishments is true to a still greater extent in the management of the railroads of the country, and the fact is authoritatively stated in the reports of the Interstate Commerce Commission. In the year 1891, when the total mileage of all the railroad tracks of the country was given at 216,140 miles, 42 corporations controlled nearly one-half of the total mileage, and now a much larger percentage of the mileage is in the hands of a still less number of corporations.

It is needless to discuss the reasons for this work of consolidation. We simply know it is going forward, and that as it proceeds the consolidated roads acquire greater power to dictate terms to their em-

ployees; and the fact, known and read of all railway employees, forces upon them for consideration the question as to what measures ought to be adopted whereby fair wages and just treatment may be secured and maintained. It is the old question, and however assiduously and conscientiously men may consider it, there seems to be no escape from the use of means, long in vogue, whereby the right may achieve victories for those who demand it and are willing to defend it.

I do not doubt that there may be large improvements in methods on the part of railroad employees to meet the new emergencies created by the consolidation of railroad corporations, and the first and most vital requirement is for them to consolidate.

Let it be understood that federation is not consolidation. The consolidation of railroad corporations is not the confederation of railroad corporations. It is not a dozen, more or less, of corporations, each with its retinue of officials, meeting at stated times for consultation and to define a policy. On the contrary, the consolidated corporations have one head, one controlling power, which decides and acts. The various roads become a "system," with one president, whose acts are not dependent upon the views of some other president, and whether the system has 1,000 miles of road and 3,000 employees, or 10,000 miles of road and 30,000 employees, the decrees of the consolidated concern are equally potential and effective.

It is supreme folly to disguise the purpose which the railroad corporations have in view by consolidation. It is not to promote the moral, intellectual, and social condition of any man or body of men. Neither philanthropy, charity, nor benevolence is considered. The one purpose is to make money and enlarge profits. Such is the supreme demand, and consolidation is found to be a trump card in every game the system plays with the public or with its employees. In dealing with the public, the system emulates the independence of William Vanderbilt and declares, "The public be damned," and in dealing with employees the same laconic expletive is employed.

It is not required to dwell upon the subject or berate the corporations for adopting consolidation as a means of promoting their financial well being. On the contrary, it is entirely natural that they should consolidate. They are wise in their day and generation. To say that corporations are unscrupulous is to repeat an old "chestnut" which makes the average reader weary. To say they have no soul, care nothing for decalogues and theological maledictions, is to repeat ad nauseam the stalest of criticisms. Denunciatory harangues do not alter

the fact. Railroad corporations exist for the purpose of accumulating a surplus of cash for their owners, and they are not particular about methods; the testimony in courts and in Congress is overwhelming.

In view of such facts the question arises, what should be the policy of employees of railroads? In one direction we hear it said they should federate; again we are told they should arbitrate, and from others we hear it said that if they "can't get what they ask for they should accept what they can get and be quiet." Federation, arbitration, and submission have all been tried. Results are before the country. There is one other means for railroad employees to try to escape squalor and degradation, and that is unification, consolidation — to meet consolidation by consolidation — to resist the power enthroned in corporate consolidation by the power enthroned in unification of employees to secure and maintain justice, to make honest toil produce such dividends as will secure decent American conditions for the home, the family, wife, and children.

Consolidation in railroad employment is the climax, the chief good, the Ultima Thule of organization. It takes in all. It constitutes a fraternity which redeems the saying "the brotherhood of man" from derision and contempt. It banishes the pestiferous dogma of a labor aristocracy, a loathsome disorder nursed by mental infirmities until labor, weakened by its growth and repulsiveness, finds that health and vigor can be regained only by asserting and maintaining the truth that the welfare of all railroad employees, regardless of classes and wages, demands equal consideration and protection.

The various classes and occupations in the railway service could still be maintained intact, and in all matters affecting any particular class or occupation exclusively the employers engaged in the class so affected would have entire jurisdiction. But in matters affecting the common interests of all, or in the adjustment of a righteous complaint, the whole body of employees are at all times prepared for prompt and united action. This fact in itself would guarantee employee immunity from many wrongs of which they now complain.

Everything else has been tried, and as everything else has practically failed to secure the benefits sought to be obtained, all should be not only willing but earnest advocates of consolidation as the last resort of railroad employees to enthrone the principle of "each for all and all for each."

*Eugene V. Debs.*