

# THE LABOR HERALD

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## Railroad Workers, Amalgamate!

By Wm. Z. Foster

SINCE the last issue of THE LABOR HERALD many events have transpired in the railroad industry to emphasize the necessity for complete amalgamation of all railroad unions. The first and most significant of these events was the failure of the Jewell settlement to materialize. So far only about 85 roads, and most of these of a very minor character, have agreed to it. On the rest of the systems the battle still goes on. Confronted with terrific odds, the worst of which is incompetent leadership, the shopmen are struggling valiantly on. They are paying the bitterest of penalties for the absolute refusal of our national officialdom to allow the unions to come together so that they could put up a real fight against the solidly united companies. Undoubtedly many of the large systems are lost to the unions because of this reactionary attitude of the leadership.

### Downfall of Grable

A clear and significant indication that the rank and file are through with allowing their leaders to betray them and to keep them divided was given by the dramatic events of the Maintenance of Way Workers in Detroit. The action of Grable in deserting the shopmen in the crisis of their strike was a great crime against the whole working class. For such a betrayal the severest punishment was merited. No doubt, however, Grable, seeing so many of our labor leaders getting away with such treason as a matter of settled policy, thought that he could make it stick also. But he came to grief when he met the representatives of the membership. He found them boiling over with indignation and revolt. The delegates to his convention were not the disorganized, planless, spiritless mob that so many of our conventions are. On the contrary, they had become infected with the ideas and programs of the Trade Union Educational League; they knew what they wanted and how to get it. Consequently they fired Mr. Grable and all his gang so hard and so quick that it made their heads swim. Then they endorsed and reendorsed the Minnesota Plan of Amalgamation half a dozen times to show that they fully realized that the

only hope of the workers lies in complete solidarity. The convention of the Maintenance of Way workers was historic. It was at once a menacing warning and a glowing promise; a warning to the labor fakers of America that their days of labor betrayal are almost at an end, and a promise to the working class that at last the dawn is breaking and our labor movement is about to free itself from Gompersism and to become a real fighting organization. Reactionary trade union officials will do well to heed the warning of the Detroit convention; it is the handwriting on the wall.

### Lee Shatters Big Four Alliance

In every railroad labor crisis for many years past, when the workers were either confronted with a splendid opportunity for achievement or menaced by a grave danger, W. G. Lee, President of the Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen, has never failed to make his reactionary influence felt with disastrous consequences. He has always been a disease spot in railroad unionism, a prime cause of defeat and despair. Movement after movement, full of hope and promise, he has shattered and broken up. It was he personally who was responsible for the "outlaw" strike of 1920 and its tragic consequences, it was he who blocked the splendid movement of all the railroad unions in 1921, which, had it gone through, would have put an end to the "open shop" drive on the railroads and laid the basis for a firm alliance between all the railroad unions; it was he also who dealt the shopmen's strike a mortal blow when he peremptorily ordered back to work those of his men who, following the lead of the Engineers and Firemen, had struck legitimately in protest against the tyranny of armed guards and the operation of defective equipment by the companies. He has ever been a loyal protector of the employers' interests.

Characteristically, therefore, just now, when considerable demoralization has entered the ranks of railroad workers as a result of the bitterly fought shopmen's strike, he is at hand to still further weaken the organizations. His latest betrayal is the breaking up of the national alli-

ance between the Big Four, the Engineers, Firemen, Conductors, and Trainmen. Although the four brotherhoods, allied together, have never displayed any real solidarity towards the other trades in the railroad industry, nevertheless their alliance was a most valuable development. It showed that the several organizations, breaking away from their historic policy of individual action, were finally coming to realize the necessity for concerted movements by all railroad workers. It represented a long step forward to the eventual industrial union. Indeed, the famous struggle of the Big Four for the eight hour day just before the war was one of the most inspiring movements in all our labor history.

But now Lee has broken this alliance. In a statement which drips with shame for Labor he has announced through the capitalist press that henceforth the Trainmen and Conductors will go it alone. He declares that, "So far as strikes, wages, and working rules negotiations are concerned, the 'Big Four' no longer exists." He demands a return to "normalcy," with each organization fighting its own battles regardless of the fate of its fellow unions. It is a great crime consummated. Mr. Lee, never a supporter of the Big Four alliance and dragged into it against his will, has knifed it in this hour of difficulty for railroad unionism. It is fitting indeed that the railroad owners and employers generally are pouring forth a flood of praises upon him for his "wise and statesmanlike" action. They know him for a tried and true defender of their interests as against the railroad workers.

Although at first blush one boils with indignation at this latest treason by Lee, yet it will probably turn out in the end a great blessing in disguise. Unless the writer is sadly misinformed as to the temper of the rank and file it will prove the straw that broke the camel's back, the final means to the elimination of Mr. Lee. All over the country, in all the railroad unions the sentiment for industrial unionism through a general amalgamation is running like wildfire. Thousands of local unions have gone on record for it, not to mention great numbers of system federations, etc., and the two conventions of the Railway Clerks and Maintenance of Way. And in the face of this raging sentiment for solidarity Mr. Lee dares to destroy even the faint bonds of unity that exist between the train service unions. The trainmen will not stand for it. Depend upon it they will find a way to repudiate Lee's leadership, to rid themselves of this incubus who has been pressing the life out of them for so long. They will do to him what the trackmen did to Grable, dump him into oblivion. For many years Lee has ruled with an iron hand,

crushing out every progressive movement among railroad workers. But he has overstepped himself by breaking up the Big Four. Watch him hit the toboggan. Every loyal unionist in the railroad industry will consider it his first duty to help cleanse railroad unionism of the labor traitor, Bill Lee.

### **The Shopmen's Settlement**

While accounts are being squared with Bill Lee and others of the leaders who have failed in this crisis, the rank and file will want some explanations from Mr. Bert Jewell also. He has never been whole-heartedly behind the national strike. He was opposed to it from the beginning. At the recent convention of the Railway Employees' Department, where the strike decision was taken, he proposed that only those roads be struck upon which the worst grievances existed, and he pleaded that a proposition to this effect be adopted. This would have been absolutely disastrous, and the delegates had the good sense to vote it down and to determine upon a general battle in which the organizations would have at least a fighting chance. But Jewell, notwithstanding the convention action for a determined struggle all along the line, has succeeded, nevertheless, through his settlement, in getting the strike upon the basis of a series of battles against individual roads. And that will take a lot of explanation, particularly with regard to the ugly statement afloat that many chairmen were misled into voting for the settlement by whispered assurances, never made good, that their roads were included in it. Moreover, Jewell will have to explain to the rank and file how it was that a movement so highly developed as the shop unions was unable to work out any organized system of relief for the strikers. This was inexcusable. In the steel strike, for example, although the unions were newly-born in the face of violent opposition of the steel companies and consisted almost entirely of inexperienced foreign-born workers, nevertheless, before the strike was three weeks old, they had set up in every steel center an elaborate commissary system which functioned successfully to the end of the strike. Why, then, could not the shop unions, disciplined by years of experience and composed principally of skilled mechanics, have done at least as well? Why were the various local organizations thrown practically upon their own resources and no definite national relief system outlined for them?

But far more important than answering questions about the strike management and its "settlement," Mr. Jewell will have to explain why, after this utter breakdown of craft unionism, the many railroad unions should not be amalgamated into one body. His platitudes about industrial union-

ism being a beautiful but impractical dream will no longer suffice. The rank and file of the railroad men of America are distinctly in favor of the Minnesota Plan of amalgamation and are determined to have it. If Mr. Jewell cannot see the light, if he persists in clinging to an outworn craft unionism, he will have to give way to men who do understand the necessity of the workers and are willing to help meet it. The shopmen's strike has sounded the death knell of craft unionism on the railroads. Despite the reactionaries of the Jewell type the organizations must and will be combined into one real fighting body.

### **Spread of Amalgamation Sentiment**

The one hopeful sign in the situation is the rapid spread of amalgamation sentiment among the railroad workers in general. With a suddenness almost startling, the rank and file have become aware that craft division, in the face of a united foe, is fatal. Wherever one goes among railroad men the opinion is practically unanimous that all the unions must be fused together into one gigantic organization. And the best part of it is that we are not dealing with a mere unorganized spread of vague sentiment. The movement is taking on definite, concrete form which is bound to lead to practical results. A long step in the right direction was the organization of the National Committee to Amalgamate the Sixteen Standard Railroad Organizations. Publishing its own paper and carrying on an intense educational campaign, this organization, which originated the famous Minnesota Plan, has the backing of enormous sections of the rank and file of all the railroad unions. Its work, the effectiveness of which was strikingly illustrated in the Maintenance of Way convention, is bound to crystallize soon in constructive results. Every militant railroader in the country will give it his active co-operation.

Two dangers now stand before the amalgamation movement; (1) the effort, ever increasing in volume, of the reactionaries to substitute the idea of a general railroad federation for that of a general amalgamation, (2) attempts to sidetrack the amalgamation sentiment into secession movements. Both of these tendencies must be combatted. As for the first, the railroad workers do not want federation, they want amalgamation. Time and again we have seen federation fail in a crisis; the attitude of Lee in breaking up the Big Four federation is typical of all such alliances. So long as unity of action depends upon agreement between autonomous unions, each of them dominated by a practical autocrat, that unity of action can never be achieved. What must be done is to lock the organizations so strongly together that no traitors or incompetents in office

have the power to separate them. That can be accomplished only by amalgamation. Federation has served its purpose, amalgamation is now the order of the day.

As for the second hostile factor, the tendency to run into secession movements, that, too, must be defeated. Regardless of the glowing plans and good faith of the advocates of dual unionism, the application of their program can only result in splitting us up even worse than is now the case. Instead of our sixteen craft unions, we would then have the sixteen craft unions plus four or five dual unions; for it is idle to suppose that any one of the several dual unions now in existence could absorb all the workers, or that the old craft unions would die out. A growth of dual unionism at this time on the railroads would result in endless confusion and division of our ranks. What we must do is not to try to tear our organizations to pieces and start all over again, for that is impossible, but to fuse them all together into one body. This is the method that industrial unions have been built by all over the world. It is the way we railroad men will have to construct ours. Any attempted shortcuts will only lead to disaster.

For the first time in our history the creation of a great industrial union of railroad workers looms as a practical possibility. The rank and file are overwhelmingly in favor of it. All that is needed now for its realization is to go ahead determinedly with our amalgamation program. Every tendency and every individual that attempts to defeat or divert that program is an enemy to the railroad workers. Amalgamation is the supreme need of the hour. The railroad unions of America stand on the very threshold of consolidation. Two great immediate tasks confront us, (1) to win the shopmen's strike, (2) to bring about amalgamation. Let's go at both with vigor, enthusiasm and determination.

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### **MILITANTS, ATTENTION!**

**In the past four months eleven State Federations and two International Unions have gone on record for amalgamation.**

**That is progress.**

**During the past month one comrade in a Middle Western city disposed of 800 copies of THE LABOR HERALD.**

**That is what makes progress.**

**What are you doing to help the T. U. E. L. extend its influence?**

**Increase your bundle order and watch the movement go forward.**