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# Unmasking Hypocrisy

by Eugene V. Debs

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Dishonesty takes on many forms, among which hypocrisy is probably the most common. It is always the guise chosen by the cunning knave. The hypocrite is a conscienceless creature. He is the Pharisee, who to be seen of men, and for a pretense, makes long prayers while engaged in “devouring widows’ houses.”<sup>1</sup> Like “the devil, he can cite scripture for his purpose.”<sup>2</sup> He appears like “a goodly apple,” but is “rotten at the core.”<sup>3</sup> His forte is dissimulation; in false professions he is always loud. The modern hypocrite, the better to make duplicity serviceable, is very apt to put on pious airs. He gracefully wears the cloak of religion, and in his private intercourse and public addresses, takes great interest in the souls of men, and quite likely at such times he is pondering in what way he can make his deceit most profitable in the way of gaining some one’s confidence and of improving his financial condition. But abandoning such reflections for the nonce, we turn our attention to one E. H. Belknap, who, in February 1888, was a conductor on the CB&Q. Paul Morton,<sup>4</sup> who won imperishable notoriety as a champion of mendacity, was just the sort of a fellow to appreciate the talents of E. H. Belknap. The CB&Q, when it concluded to resist every demand for fair, honorable treatment of its engineers and firemen, had a pressing necessity for scabs, and E.H. Belknap, a member of the ORC, filled the bill. Be

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<sup>1</sup> Reference to *Matthew*, chapter 23, verse 14, which reads: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.”

<sup>2</sup> From *The Merchant of Venice* (c. 1598), act 1, scene 3, by **William Shakespeare** (1564-1616).

<sup>3</sup> *The Merchant of Venice* (c. 1598), act 1, scene 3.

<sup>4</sup> **Paul Morton** (1857-1911) was the General Passenger Agent of the Burlington system in 1888 and the company’s point man during the great Burlington strike. He briefly served as Secretary of the Navy under Theodore Roosevelt in 1904.

this as it may, E.H. Belknap, in association with one W.C. Cross, signed a circular, dated Burlington, Iowa, March 10, 1888, captioned, "Position of the ORC's" and addressed "To all members of the Order of Railway Conductors." Mr. Belknap, in addressing "all members of the Order of Railway Conductors," says:

We can assure you that the ORC has made a great record for faithfulness and loyalty to principle by its members among railway officials.

Manifestly, Belknap, like Wheaton, don't care a continental for grammar, his purpose is accomplished if he can make "all the members of the Order of Railway Conductors" understand that the conductors on the CB&Q scabbed, as if they had been under a solemn obligation to crawl in the dirt like worms, rather than hold up their heads and walk erect like men. But not being content with his own degradation, he exhorts "all railway conductors" to emulate his own abject selfishness, and says:

Now, Brothers, In conclusion, let me say to you as conductors, as employees, as members of the ORC that, in case this strike spreads and your road becomes involved, "Go thou and do likewise.

The circular from which we have quoted has the following endorsement:

I have given permission to Brothers Belknap and Cross to issue the above circular.

(signed) **C.S. Wheaton**, GCC<sup>5</sup>

Now then, we submit that the quotation we have given from E.H. Belknap's circular has the ring of honest convictions — the robust utterances of a man who entertains the highest possible respect for railway officials. We submit that 999 men out of every thousand would conclude, Belknap is a man who intimates that he never saw even one fly on any railway official, and that members of the ORC never had and never expect to have anything approximating a complaint or a "grievance" against their employers. Belknap's circular, apparently, affords the most positive assurance. Belknap's circular was

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<sup>5</sup> Grand Chief Conductor — head of the brotherhood.

evidently intended for the eyes of railway officials. His purpose was to ingratiate himself in their favor. He understood that in these degenerate times thrift often follows fawning. He was playing the game of Machiavellianism. Is this true? Was his policy one of duplicity? Did his anxiety to retain his position obscure all sense of manliness? In a word, while glorifying the members of the ORC on the CB&Q for scabbing was he honest? And when he exhorted "all members of the Order of Railway Conductors" to scab did he not indulge in dissimulation? Such questions E.H. Belknap may answer before the tribunal of the public.

For some reason, which we shall not attempt to divine, E.H. Belknap was called upon to deliver the annual address before the representatives of the Railway Passenger and Freight Conductor's Mutual Aid Association, held in Chicago in November last. *The Railway Conductors' Monthly*, of which Calvin S. Wheaton, GCC, is editor, in referring to Belknap's address on the occasion, says: "The address of Bro. E. H. Belknap, delivered on the above occasion, is, we think, one of the very best ever delivered before that body." Here we have an unqualified endorsement of Belknap's address by the highest authority of the order.

Let it be understood that whether it be Belknap or Wheaton, or the *Conductor's Monthly*, or any other person authorized to speak for the order, their public utterances are always designed to impress railway officials and the public generally with the idea that railway conductors, members of the order, have no grievances against railway officials, but in private, hypocrisy lays aside its mask, then Belknap ceases to crawl and stands up. Belknap issuing a circular "To all members of the Order of Railway Conductors," and Belknap making an address before the delegates to the Mutual Aid and Benefit Association of the order, judged by utterances, are as unlike as a spaniel and a royal Bengal tiger. In his circular Belknap whines, in his address he growls and roars. In his circular he is as destitute of spine as a tape worm — in his address he has the backbone of a grizzly bear. In his circular he is as meek as a muley cow.<sup>6</sup> In his address he is an untamed bull, with horns ready for attack, and with tail erect he spurns the earth and bellows like a thunderstorm.

We have before us the full text of his address, delivered on the 21st of November, 1888, before the Mutual Aid and Benefit Association. It is official. It appears in the proceedings of the convention of

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<sup>6</sup> Archaic term for a hornless cow.

that association, on pages 15 and 23, inclusive. For the information of the public, for the delectation of the readers of the *Magazine*, and for the purpose of unmasking hypocrisy, we give a few extracts from the address, which the *Conductor's Monthly* for February 1888, page 55, pronounced "one of the very best ever delivered before that body." Belknap, in his address, deplors the fact that conductors are "made the scapegoats of every passengers' fancied wrongs," and then asks "wherein lies the remedy and the cure?" And he answers, "Cast your frown and stamp with the seal of infamy everything, yes everything that is false and unworthy; show by you life and your character, to all mankind, that you stand at the top of the ladder." In this strain Belknap soars and corruscates; he is a pyrotechnic display all the way from a shooting cracker to a ten-pound rocket. After pointing out how conductors can mount up the ladder of fame and "reach the top," he says: "And you ask again, will this ever be?" He answers, "it must be," and adds, "I have looked far enough in the future to tell you what most is needed for your welfare, for your permanent success." Steadily Belknap approaches the climax. He has been looking into "the future." He has seen the ladder; the conductors climbing steadily. He urges them to climb faster and get higher. He wants them to "reach the standard which all business men must reach to be considered first in the list of honorable businessmen." Belknap sees conductors skulking, biding, obscuring their light, and he goes for them as follows: "Let me say to you in all kindness, that the sooner you emerge from this hiding place and believe the opposite to be the truth, the better it will be for you."

At this juncture, Belknap inquires of the conductors, "Have you gained one step each day of your life?" — that is to say, have you gone up one round in the ladder every day of your life? Have you scabbed when ordered to scab? Have you exhorted, in a circular or otherwise, your fellow conductors to scab when ordered to do so by a railway official? Have you learned the arts of duplicity? Can you play the rote of lickspittle, that you may be blessed with a smile from your boss, while in your heart of hearts you loathe yourselves for your degeneracy? Such interrogatories would seem to be in the line of Belknap's public expression. But we are now dealing with him as a spokesman in war paint, feathers, and eagle claws — in the council chamber of braves. The great medicine man of the tribe, the man with two faces and a double tongue, and we want to quote him verba-

tim. He is the man the *Conductors' Monthly* delights to honor, but dares not quote in full. Belknap says in his address:

Have you gained one step each day of your life? Others have, have you? If not, then sit no longer idle and repining, but rather awake, as awaken you must, if you too would be successful.

"Ah," but says one, "we do *not receive pay enough* to do all this for any company on earth." Nothing more true than this have you ever uttered and no one more *to blame than the one who utters* it. None to blame but the conductors of America that this is, alas, so true; some isolated cases have been known where here and there one has gone and asked for more pay; **as well breathe his breath on the frosted pane of your window in hopes to warm the world; as well that General Grant had approached, alone, the battlements of Lee and Johnson, and said, "Kind sirs, please lay down your arms and surrender."** Would they have done so? Ah, no; but when he approached them with 60,000 Union soldiers, the bands playing "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," and the shot, shells, and **bullets singing**, "Down with the Traitor, Up with the Stars," they **sang another tune** and learned the greatest lesson of their life, that right is might.

Then act as men; *go to them 60 thousand strong*. Not with dynamite, nor bearing the red flag of anarchy (thank God, it is not a native of America), but *en masse* and *state your grievances* as becometh men. Show to them in a *solid phalanx* what *some-one has tried to do unaided and alone*, and then come to me and tell me the result. And finally, *what you owe your employer is only the same which is expected and exacted from the servants* of all practical, substantial, and prosperous business firms in the world.

In the foregoing the italics and [bolding] are ours (the grammar is Belknap's), our desire being to aid our readers in their analysis of Belknap. We have quoted the *Conductor's Monthly* as saying Belknap's address was "one of the very best ever delivered" before the Mutual Aid and Benefit Association. The Monthly reproduces portions of the address, but it is careful to omit the paragraph we have reproduced. Why? It dared not. They are an overwhelming exposé of the perfidy, the hypocrisy, of the policy of the men who have controlled the affairs of the ORC. Never in the history of any labor organization have declarations of hostility to corporate injustice been more emphatic than those made by Belknap. They sting like a scorpion's lash, like whips of

fire. Belknap, in the presence of railway officials, tells his fellow conductors that railway officials are so heartless, so mercenary, so unjust, that a conductor going to them alone, asking for the redress of a grievance, might as well “breathe his breath on a frosted window pane in hopes of warming the world.” That is to say, railway officials are never generous, never just, never honest, never noble, but always venal, always arrogant, always contemptible. There never was a more terrible arraignment. Belknap makes no exceptions; he bandies all railway officials together, including the CB&Q, and flays them. But to still further impress upon his hearers the stolid, soulless indifference of railway officials to any honest appeal of conductors for justice. Belknap exerts himself to exhaust metaphor and says Grant might as well have approached the battlements of Lee and Johnson and said, “Kind sirs, please surrender,” as for a conductor to approach a railway official alone and ask for simple justice. What does Belknap recommend? He tells conductors to emulate Grant — never to go to railway officials alone pleading for justice, but to go “60 thousand strong,” “en masse,” “in a solid phalanx,” in a word, to strike for their rights. The language admits of no other construction, and this conjecture is the reason why the *Conductor’s Monthly* declined to publish Belknap’s utterances.<sup>7</sup> It hadn’t the courage of conviction.

It is this cowardice, this vulgar duplicity that has made it necessary to organize the Brotherhood of Railway Conductors. Hypocrisy is not popular. Honest men will not tolerate it. The time has come for workingmen to be manly, to have the courage of conviction — to demand their rights with dignified independence, and this Belknap advocates in private, but when he issues a circular with the permission of Wheaton, his utterances are hypocritical and deceptive. Such duplicity, endorsed by the Grand Chief of the ORC, when known, must of necessity lead to disintegration. No order can live long that so outrages the decencies and proprieties of life. The conclusion must be, from what Belknap says, that railway officials have a supreme contempt for the ORC. They pay no attention whatever to the grievances of its members. When they want a member of the order to scab, or to perform any menial duty, the member obeys, and when the member has a grievance he might as well expect to “warm the world” by

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<sup>7</sup> Excerpts of Belknap’s November 21, 1888, speech, including copious quotations but omitting inflammatory passages, appeared as the lead article in the February 1889 issue of *The Railway Conductors’ Monthly*, pp. 55-59.

breathing on a “frosted” windowpane, as to expect that a railway official will grant his request.

The circular and address illustrate the disgusting methods to which a certain class of men will resort to win approval, and the address points to the circular with merited scorn, and to compare the two documents extorts the verdict that such tactics merit universal contempt.

*Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport*

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