
The Expulsion of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen

by Eugene V. Debs

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We have on our table the Railway Service Gazette of July 9th, in which reference in numerous ways is made to the action of the Supreme Council expelling the B of RT

The Gazette is an ardent advocate of federation, and it commends and applauds the expulsion of the B of RT

We do not question in the least the Gazette's loyalty to federation or to the welfare of railroad employees nor are we disposed to enter upon any lengthy criticism of the *Gazette's* position relating to the justice of the penalty visited upon the B of RT In one place the *Gazette* says:

Every reader of the *Gazette* should bear In mind that while the Supreme Council could, under Its present laws take no other action than that which was taken in passing sentence upon those who participated in the Chicago & Northwestern conspiracy, *it is not intended to intimate that the Trainmen's Association did anything deserving censure, those who participated in the conspiracy alone being responsible.*

The italics are ours, and are introduced to emphasize the position the *Magazine* has taken in the matter. The great body of the trainmen were absolutely *innocent* but by the penalty are made to suffer with the guilty. This could have been avoided and ought to have been avoided.

As we view the case, the *Gazette* is unfortunate in its illustrations and conclusions, as for instance, it says:

But we are told that In expelling the grand officers of the Trainmen's Association, all the members of the association are punished. This is absurd. Everyone at all acquainted with the laws which govern the federation knows that no other action could have been taken. As well say that when the United States Senate expels the two Senators of a certain state, who have been guilty of treason, that the people of the whole state are punished, because they are left without representation in the Senate. And so, too, they are in a certain measure, for it was their misfortune to be represented by traitors, but no one for a moment intimates that the whole people of the state are tainted by the treason of their Senators.

Here we have the declaration repeated that the B of RT was innocent, and also the declaration that is "*absurd*" to say the "members of the association are punished." And, again, the admission is made that "in a certain measure" they are punished. But let such things pass; the misfortune of the *Gazette's* illustration and conclusion lies in the fact that the action of the Supreme Council in expelling the B of RT is as unlike the action of the Senate of the United States in the two Senators of the State, as it is possible to conceive.

By the action of the Senate two members are expelled — not the State they represented. By the action of the Supreme Council, assuming the B of RT to represent the state, representatives and State go out together. The B of RT is absolutely out of the federation, and can be represented in that body only by readmission. Does the *Gazette* see the point?

It is not required to pursue the subject, as the *Gazette* has supplied an illustration which upsets its conclusion.

Still, we are inclined to introduce one more of the *Gazette's* illustrations. It says:

Benedict Arnold, previous to his treason, was a general of the Continental army, and enjoyed confidential relations with George Washington. As well say after a court martial found him guilty, that he should continue to hold his commission, and still share the secrets of the commander-in-chief, until such time as Arnold's state had taken action In the matter.

Benedict Arnold, at the time of his treason, commanded West Point. He had troops under him. His treason was discovered, but his

troops were not punished by Washington. They were not dismissed from the army.

In the case of the penalty inflicted by the Supreme Council upon the grand officers of the B of RT, the order was also expelled. The penalty fell with equal force upon officers and men. The officers, not alone were expelled, but the men who made up the rank and file of the brotherhood.

A different course could have been pursued. The verdict could have been transmitted to the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, giving that organization an opportunity to seek out the guilty, those who had betrayed their trust, and impose upon them, wherever found, the penalty their treachery merited. If the Brotherhood of Trainmen declined to receive the verdict, or adequately punish the offenders, such action or non-action would be equivalent to an approval of the conspiracy and the organization *as a whole* would be inculpated and it would then be time enough to arraign and punish the entire organization.

We must not be understood as entering a plea for the traitors who plotted to secure the dismissal of the switchmen on the Northwestern. From the first we stated that expulsion from the ranks of organized labor was what they deserved, nor have we modified our opinion, so far as they are concerned, in the slightest degree. It is to be hoped that the members of the B of RT will thoroughly investigate the matter, punish the conspirators and again join the federated forces.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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