
President's Keynote Address to the 1st National Convention of the American Railway Union: Ulrich's Hall, Chicago — June 12, 1894

by Eugene V. Debs

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Ladies and Gentlemen,—

I appreciate the honor conferred by the position I occupy on this occasion, because it affords me the great satisfaction of welcoming you as delegates representing the American Railway Union, in this, the first convention of the order — an organization of railway employees, called into existence by conditions vindicating its necessity, the rapid growth and power of which is phenomenal to an extent that has no parallel in the history of labor organizations anywhere, at any time, or on any continent; facts which, while well calculated to arouse honest exultation, impose upon us the gravest responsibilities.

Growth of the American Railway Union.

This organization was launched upon the troubled seas of labor June 20, 1893, one year ago. If on that day there were doubts and misgiving, there were also stout hearts, hope, and a faith which was the “substance of things hoped for.” There were a number of organizations in the field, but it was believed that there was room for one more, and hence the flag of the American Railway Union was unfurled to the breeze and the order began its first voyage of discovery and conquest.

On August 17, 1893, the first local union of our order was organized, and now, after a lapse of 9 months and 28 days, we number 425 local unions and more than 100,000 members. Such growth in numbers, power, and prosperity was never before recorded of any other

labor organization, and while we have a right to felicitate each other upon this wonderful development, it will be the part of wisdom to remember that our responsibilities have kept pace with our progress, and that as delegates and officers of this young but gigantic organization, we are charged with the duty of enacting organic laws, bearing the impress of wisdom and patient investigation, for its government.

A New Departure.

The American Railway Union is not only a new organization of railway employees, but it is a new departure in the organization of this class of wage earners. We begin our career as an order with new formulas, new policies, new purposes, and new shibboleths. We start out with the declaration, for the truth of which there is overwhelming proof, that in the towering, pivotal, and essential feature, that of *protection* against corporate power, all the organizations of railway employees hitherto known have been dismal failures.

Personal.

In saying this, I must not be charged with being the enemy of the old organizations, nor must my utterances here be regarded as discourteous, for all railroad employees whose knowledge of the facts gives weight to their opinions, know that the strength of my young and my mature manhood has been freely given to one of these organizations,¹ and that I speak from a knowledge of facts obtained from years of study and familiarity with the workings of these organizations. To assume that because I discovered defects, because I point them out and bring them to the attention of my fellow workingmen, that I am, therefore, the enemy of the rank and file of these organizations, is a resort to questionable methods to obscure imperfections and to perpetuate inefficiency.

The Field.

The American Railway Union found, on the day of its organization, a broad and inviting field for the display of its philanthropic

¹ That is, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, of which Debs served as Grand Secretary and Treasurer and editor of its monthly magazine for more than a decade.

energies. This field was entered and cultivated, and here today we are permitted to contemplate the abundant harvest that comes to us as a reward for work well done, and thousands of railway employees, hitherto unsheltered by any organization, but who were left out in the cold to endure the pitiless storms of corporate power, vie with each other in repeating the plaudit, "Well done, good and faithful servants. You were faithful to your trust when local union No. 1 was born, and we now place in your charge 425 unions, and awaiting the deliberations of our representatives in the first convention of our order, we stand pledged to multiply our unions, until every neglected railway employee has a home beneath the sheltering flag of the American Railway Union." In all this magnificent work, in all the splendid triumphs that have fallen to the lot of the American Railway Union, it has simply minded its own business, neither directly nor remotely interfering with the business of other organizations.

Building the Organization.

Appreciating the fact that in building an organization of railway employees it must, like a modern battleship, be built for war, we have determined to build upon that plan. If peace prevails, from a sense of prudence or fear, the ship may display her bunting, ride safely at anchor in port, exercise her crew or make trial trips to test sailing qualities, the ideal always prevailing that if war is declared the ship is ready for action. The American Railway Union is built upon this plan. It enjoys peace and prosperity. It indulges in no bravado, but at all times, and in all seasons, it is prepared to assert the rights of its members and to exhaust its resources in their defense.

It has been found that of all the organizations of railway employees hitherto constructed not one was constructed for battle — not one had perfect armor plates. In every instance [these organizations were undermined by what]² experts in naval architecture call "blow holes," cracks and imperfections to the extent that, when a corporation battleship or a fleet of these monsters delivered a broadside at labor's crafts when a battle was on, labor's navy went down with all of the grand commanders, crew, and petty officials on board.

Taught in the school of experience, the American Railway Union accepts no armor plates (especially those manufactured by Carnegie,

² Chipping of page with loss in source document, best guess at gist of missing material provided in square brackets.

Frick & Co.) with blow holes, open or “plugged.” It has already demonstrated in its youth that it can win victories against powerful odds; that it can see the right and that it has the courage to defend the right, when others, looking through spectacles with “dollars of the daddies” for eyeglasses, could not see the right — when the grandest exhibition of their courage took the shape of orders from their boots, the headquarters of their hearts and courage, directing their members to submit to the wrong for the glory of the corporation and the good will of the watered stock and bondholders.

There is one thing far more deplorable than strikes and war. It is when men accept degrading conditions and wear collars and fetters without resistance. When a man surrenders his honest convictions, his loyalty to principle, he ceases to be a man. Decorate him with the insignia of office, robe him in purple and fine linen, give him a palace and let him feast his full on the choicest luxuries, and still he is a poltroon. Lazarus, as the gate of Dives, attended by vagabond dogs, expands to proportions as far above such a coward and sneak as Pike’s Peak towers above the burrow of a prairie dog.

Wisdom, Work, and Peril.

But, as I have intimated, this convention means serious work for the American Railway Union. Let it be remembered that the order is now on trial with a future of work and peril. The first great demand upon the delegates is conservative propositions for organic laws and unbroken harmony in deliberations.. There is danger in extremes, and defeat lurks in discord, nor is this all; however paradoxical it may seem, there is, nevertheless, an element of danger in prosperity, and against this we will find it the part of wisdom to guard with sedulous care. Present conditions are fruitful of manifold defects and deficiencies, which are annoying and constitute grievances, which, while productive of injury and vexation, are far below the plane of gravity which demands any resort to extreme measures for redress or adjustment, and which, were this order to take cognizance, would be productive of continuous embroilment, and which would result in the discredit of the order. Industrial conditions are at present of a character which demands a constant exercise of the virtue of patience and forbearance when difficulties are encountered, which under other and more favorable conditions would demand the interposition of the order.

Industrial Conditions.

We meet in convention at a time when the business and industrial conditions of the country are most deplorable. Such prostration, paralysis, and widespread demoralization in financial, commercial, and industrial affairs were never before known in American history. It would be surprising if such conditions did not enter into the deliberations of this convention, and cool heads will be required to formulate declarations, which while giving expression to honest convictions at the same time steer clear of rocks and shoals and reefs, among which the ship of state is now sailing, or feeling its way.

In the first place, the country is full of men forced into idleness, which, as a general proposition, they did not create and cannot control. Banks break by the hundred, commercial establishments suspend operations, and railroads, representing more than a billion [dollars] of investments, are forced into the hands of receivers. These cyclonic disturbances fall with crushing force upon labor, which is powerless to resist their force to an extent which will lessen the burdens it is compelled to bear.

The Coal Miners' Strike.

In the case of the strike of the coal miners, it may be said that they voluntarily abandoned their work, but it should be remembered that the purpose of the miners was as patriotic as ever prompted men to battle for a principle or to take up arms in defense of home, wife, and children. I do not doubt that this convention will devote time and consideration to the condition of the coal miners of the country. They have been despoiled and degraded. Toiling and starving, these men consolidated and struck for wages that would have the effect, in some measure, at least, to emancipate them from burdens that no American citizen should bear, and from the horrors of oppression which defy exaggeration. And yet, the wages these miners demand are so meager that the country is astounded at the exhibition of piratical greed which refuses the moderate demands of men, who, having exhausted patience and endurance, concluded to strike.

The representatives of the American Railway Union, in convention assembled, will, I am sure, voice only sentiments of profound sympathy for the overtasked and underpaid coal miners of the United

States, and give utterance only to words of unmitigated scorn and contempt for those who have oppressed them, and those who oppose their efforts to secure just pay for their exhausting and perilous work, regardless of the source from which opposition emanates. And this sympathy on the part of the American Railway Union is all the more natural and becoming because the ordeal which it passed on the Great Northern Railway was in many regards similar to that which now confronts the union coal mine workers of the country.

Gratitude is a most precious jewel in union labor's diadem, and the American Railway Union cannot afford to forget that in its struggle [with the]³ Great Northern the miners of that section of the country came to its rescue, not only with words of sympathy and cheer, but with even more substantial evidences that our demands were just, and I do not hesitate to believe that the time will come in the history of the American Railway Union — if, indeed, it has not already come — when coal miners strike for honest wages, no ARU man, in any capacity, will contribute to their defeat by hauling a pound of coal an inch mined by non-union labor.

The coal mine workers of the United States are confronted with a host of enemies and multiplied obstacles. There are convicts and scabs by the thousands; there are mine owners and operators, always and forever scheming to reduce wages and who would reduce our civilization to the plane of Hottentots if thereby they could increase the size of their fortunes; there is railroad cash, court injunctions, marshals and deputy marshals with Winchester rifles, and in addition, soldiers — federal and state — with shotted rifles and Gatling guns. Can they win against such odds? Three hundred thousand union mine workers may be compelled to dig coal, and at the same time, dig their graves, and here, speaking for the American Railway Union, I bespeak for the coal miners your profoundest sympathy and your most serious consideration.

The men who resist tyranny in labor affairs are fighting the battles of workingmen now and in all future time. Humble, obscure, and unlettered they may be, but in their valor and sacrifices they are bearing testimony of divinity in human nature. Such battles are not less glorious than those of Thermopylæ and Marathon, though the orator and poet may not embellish them in eloquence and song.

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Commonwealers.

Another phase of the deplorable conditions in which workingmen find themselves involved is the organization of what is known as the "Coxey, or Commonweal armies," of which General Coxey of Ohio is commander-in-chief. There never was such a continental display of hopeless poverty since time began. Out of work, out of money and without food, ragged, hungry, friendless and homeless, these commonwealers began their march to the capital city of the nation while Congress was in session. It would require the genius of a Milton or a Dante to describe these Coxey armies. These wretched men heard to cry, "On to Washington!" and they responded, as did the Highland clans of Scotland when the sound of the pibroch called them to battle. The proposition was to go to Washington and permit the lawmakers of the nation to see what congressional legislation had accomplished for workingmen, and to the call they

"Came as the winds come, when
Forests are rended;
Came as the waves come, when
Navies are stranded."⁴

Faster and still faster they rallied as the bugle call echoed through the land. They walk, they ride, they float; the storms beat upon them, their tent the skies, their couch their mother earth, their pillows stones. Some fall by the way and are buried by their comrades, unknelt and unsung, to sleep their last sleep in unknown and forgotten graves. But the survivors press forward to Washington, and as they march, recruits start up from almost every center of population in all of the land, from mountain and valley, from hill and dale, from abandoned mine and silent factory, shop and forge — they come and tramp to the muffled drum — funeral march of their throbbing hearts. The cry is, "On to Washington," where on the marbled steps of the nation's capitol, in their rags and barefooted, they would petition Congress to enact laws whereby they might perpetuate their wretched existence by toil — laws that would rekindle the last remaining spark of hope, that their future would be relieved of some of the horrors of hunger and nakedness.

⁴ From the song "Pibroch of Donuil Dhu" by Sir Walter Scott (1816).

It is written that “hope springs eternal in the human breast,”⁵ and it is also written that “hope deferred maketh the heart sick.”⁶ The hopes of the commonwealers have been deferred, aye, crushed, and lie dead at their feet, and the commonwealers are walking upon their graves. Congress has ears, but it will not listen to the tale of their woes; Congress has eyes, but it will not look upon rags and wretchedness; Congress has tongues, but they do not move when human woes demand words of sympathy and condolence.

The capital city of the nation has a patch of ground where the sun and rain produce grass, now known as “sacred grass,” and Coxe and his fellow leaders are now languishing in prison because their unsanctified feet pressed the nation’s “sacred grass,” and over this “sacred grass” patch floats the nation’s starry emblem of liberty and independence. Oh, my fellow representatives of the American Railway Union, were it possible for our

“Flag of the free heart’s only home,
By angel hands to valor given,”⁷

to realize the deep degradation to which it has been subjected in the nation’s capital, every star upon its blue field would be a *shooting star*, and every stripe upon its folds a whip of flame to scourge the miserable men who make the nation’s ensign symbolize oppression instead of liberty. It would be strange, indeed, if this convention, composed of workingmen, should terminate its deliberations without making special reference to the commonweal armies whose foremost men are suffering imprisonment because their *sovereign* feet stepped upon the nation’s “sacred grass.”

Oh, my fellow workingmen, there must be no slavery in this land of “the star spangled banner.” There must be no cry go heavenward to make angels weep, nor hellward to make devils blush, from famishing men, women, and children, victims of a greedy and heartless capitalism that coins the life and soul of honest toil into dollars to swell its unholy possessions.

⁵ From “An Essay on Man,” by Alexander Pope (1734).

⁶ *Proverbs* chapter 13, verse 12, King James version.

⁷ From “The American Flag” by Joseph Rodman Drake (1795-1820).

Cause of Labor Distress.

This convention, I do not doubt, will deem it within its province to investigate, somewhat, the cause of labor demoralization throughout the country, and fortunately for the convention it has the right to adopt the language of President [Grover] Cleveland and declare that it is "principally owing to congressional legislation." I do not doubt the absolute correctness of the President's affirmation, and accepting it as true, the proposition would seem to be prudent that if legislation has brought upon the country the unparalleled curses which now afflict it, legislation ought to be sufficiently potential to remove the curses complained of, one of the rules, which, like the machinery of a locomotive, ought to work both ways. But unfortunately for labor and for the country, the legislation now going forward at Washington, instead of affording relief, instead of lifting the burdens from the bent forms of laboring men and women, instead of dispersing clouds and dispelling gloom, it is adding indefinitely to the woes congressional legislation has inflicted.

Doubts and uncertainties are intensifying the unrest of the people. Instead of workingmen finding employment, the armies of the idle day by day are increasing. there are more rags fluttering on the bodies of Americans than can be seen elsewhere from the Congo forests to the home of the Laplanders, and that, too, in a land where decent clothing is a drug on the market. There is more hunger in the United States of America, where food is fabulously abundant, than can be found in any zone that belts the earth from the poles to the equator. There are more Lazaruses begging crumbs that fall from rich men's tables than angels ever beheld since the morning stars sang together, and there are more rich men like Dives, rolling in luxury and dressing in purple and fine linen, than statisticians have numbered.

I am not here to formulate plans of a partisan character to relieve the distress that has fallen to the lot of labor. I care nothing for parties, as such, but as an American citizen, and assuming that President Cleveland told the truth when he charged that the business depression and demoralization and the brood of ills this legislation has spawned upon the country was principally owing to congressional legislation, I am free to assert that congressional legislation, radically different from what we have had, from what we are now having and are likely to have, must be had, and that speedily, if as a nation we are to have peace and prosperity.

This convention, representing as it does more than 100,000 workingmen, I do not doubt, will deem it wise to give expression to its views upon matters of such commanding import.

I entertain an American regard for the ballot. I do not underestimate its power. I do not doubt that the time is at hand when wage-workers will combine and consolidate for the purpose of righting the wrongs legislators have brought upon the country by vicious legislation, and that this they will do under some banner, on some platform, and the declaration of some policy, which will, like a tide taken at the flood, lead to victory. To do this is to enter politics, and partisan politics.

Congressional legislation, which the President of the United States declares is principally responsible for our present national afflictions, was partisan legislation, enacted by political parties which, in dividing the spoils of success, have always given the turkey to the rich, and the turkey buzzard to the poor — to the workingman. If this policy is to be changed, it must be done by the ballots of workingmen emancipated from the parties, which, regardless of names and professions, are equally capable. Taking this view of the subject, I fail to discover any valid reason why this convention may not consider the propriety of an alliance on the part of workingmen of a party whose leaders, and whose platform and policy is to have congressional and state legislation which will lift workingmen to a higher plane of prosperity rather than continue to contribute their support to the political parties which have shorn them as if they were sheep, and degraded them as if they were chattels.

Men Ambitious to Regain Their Former Standing.

I take pleasure in calling the attention of this convention to a large body of men who have been members of some of the organizations of railway employees, but who, under the pressure of adverse circumstances, lost their standing and have been found in the ranks of non-union men. It is not required that I should catalog all the misadventures of these unfortunate men, or content that in all regards they are blameless, though investigation would doubtless disclose the fact that in a vast majority of cases they were the victims of adverse circumstances which they were utterly powerless to overcome, such as sickness, loss of employment, and hence inability to pay dues and “stand square on the books.” The loss of their standing in the respec-

tive organizations has been, in numerous instances, the loss of friends and the loss of hope. Despondency took the place of courage, and as disappointments multiplied and wants pressed heavily upon them, it is doubtless true that in numerous instances they were induced, indeed compelled, by their necessities to accept wages which fixed upon them the insufferable stigma of *scabs* when, in fact, their better natures rebelled at such a classification.

I know that there are thousands of these men anxious to regain their position and honorable standing in the ranks of organized labor; and here the question arises: "What can the American Railway Union do to redeem such men from the ranks of non-union workingmen?" Thousands of these victims of misfortune are honest men and anxious of showing themselves such, and the American Railway Union may, with eminent propriety, [heed] the splendid maxim that "While it is human to err, it is divine to forgive" and [extend to] such men an opportunity to make good [their expressions] of [fealty] to organized labor.⁸

An Eight-Hour Day.

Among advanced thinkers in the ranks of labor, the 8-hour day is regarded as the most important means of solving the labor problem. It is one of the propositions, the wisdom of which can be demonstrated with mathematical accuracy. The cry is that there are more men than there is work — and the affirmation is absolutely true, if men continue to work 10 hours a day. There is just so much work to be done; hence if you reduce the number of hours constituting a day's work, you add to the number of men required to do the work; hence also, if 100 men work 10 hours a day, it is equal to 1,000 hours; if the hours are reduced to 8, the number of men required to perform the job in one day would be 125, because 125 men working 8 hours equals 1,000 hours. Therefore, if 5 million men working 10 hours a day were to work only 8 hours a day, the result would be that 1,250,000 idle men would find employment. It is a mathematical demonstration of an economic and philanthropic proposition, which, could it be adopted throughout the country, would result in a harvest of untold peace, prosperity, and contentment.

⁸ Chipping of page with loss in source document, gist and possible content provided in square brackets.

There are numerous other blessings which would come to workingmen, and to society at large, were the 8-hour day universally adopted. Workingmen would have more hours for rest, more hours for study, more hours in their homes and with their families — in every instance a change of condition for the better, for the good of workingmen, for the good of society, and which could not fail of adding indefinitely to the power of our civilization to bless mankind.

The American Railway Union, I am persuaded, is in favor of the 8-hour day, and I suggest that it would be both wise and opportune for this convention to call a conference of all labor organizations to urge legislation to establish an 8-hour day in every department of labor and to keep alive the agitation upon the subject by voice, pen, and ballot until victory is achieved.

The Pullman Strike.

The Pullman strike in the town of Pullman and against the millionaire Pullman, began under the auspices of the American Railway Union on the 11th day of May [1894]. Pullman, the town, like Pullman, the proprietor, has a national reputation not specially unlike that which Carnegie, Frick, and Homestead enjoy.⁹ Whether Carnegie, Frick, or Pullman is the more intimate friend of his satanic majesty, he of the forked tail and cloven foot, it is needless to inquire. All of them go back to him on Sundays, but on working days, when the business is to rob and degrade working men and women, Pullman and the devil pull together at Pullman as merrily as “Buck and Bright,” hitched to a harrow.¹⁰ So devoutly has Pullman robbed the Pullman employees, so religiously has he cut down wages, so piously has he made his retainers economize so as to prolong starvation, so happily are the principles of Pullman blended with the policy of the proprietor of the lake of fire and brimstone, that the biography of the one would do for the history of the other, and not a change of a letter or a punctuation mark would be required by the severest critic.¹¹

Pullman, as greedy as a horse leech, saw his employees losing strength, saw them emaciated, but he kept on sucking their life cur-

⁹ Reference is to the 1892 Homestead Steel Strike.

¹⁰ Reference is to the left (buck) and right (bright) oxen in a yoke, who were frequently given these as common names.

¹¹ The allusion to Satan is meant to mock George Pullman's popular reputation as a generous patron of church construction.

rents. It was work and poverty in Pullmantown, or Pullemdown, until, patience ceasing to be a virtue, and further forbearance becoming treason to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness, the employees determined to strike to better their condition. Pullman was very rich; his employees were very poor; but they concluded that the town of Pauperdom was better than Pullmandom, and in a moment of righteous energy, quit work, which simply gave Pullman, the plutocrat with a soul so small that a million of them could dance on the little end of a hornet's stinger, an opportunity, by refusing them fair wages, to suck their blood to the last drop and coin it for the gratification of his pride and the enlargement of his pomp.

The Pullman strike, as an object lesson, will, I doubt not, engage the attention of this convention. It is a terrible illustration of corporate greed, and heartlessness, and pharisaical fraud which for years has prevailed in this county, and which has created conditions in the presence of which the stoutest hearts take alarm.

National Ownership of Railroads.

There are thousands of American citizens profoundly verse in economics who do not hesitate to affirm that the time is approaching when the government will be required *to own* the railroads, to prevent the railroads from *owning* the government. Accepting the figures of the census bureau at Washington that the wealth of the country is \$65 billion, and accepting current valuation of the railroads of the country at \$10 billion, it is sure that the railroads already own 15.38% of the entire wealth of the country — enough to dominate legislation by debauching legislatures and sending their tools to the United States Senate, where the olfactory organs of honest men are saluted by more stenches than Coleridge discovered when he visited Cologne.¹²

The question, "How shall we pay the railroads?" is one that need not trouble the people until the ballots of the people demand that the government ought, for the general welfare, to own them; and the day

¹² Allusion is to the poem "Cologne" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), which includes the following lines:

*And rags, and hags, and hideous wenches;
I counted two and seventy stenches,
All well defined, and several stinks!
Ye Nymphs that reign o'er sewers and sinks...*

the people decide the question the way to buy the railroads will be made exceedingly luminous. Other countries have demonstrated the feasibility of national ownership of railroads, and the problem need not and ought not to deter those who believe in the practicability of the undertaking in the United States from giving the fullest and truest expression to their convictions. That it would be a great undertaking need not be questioned, but the American people are familiar with great undertakings, and when once resolved upon bugbears and scarecrows will disappear. Some legislation might be required to squeeze out the water that constitutes about two-fifths of the estimated value of the railroads of the United States, upon which the owners are extorting dividends from a patient and despoiled people, and by cutting down the wages of employees. With government ownership, instead of schemes to enrich plutocrats, the policy would be to give dividends to the public in cheaper transportation, and honest wages to those who really operate the roads. The princely salaries of presidents, vice-presidents, general managers, et al., would disappear, and employees, who now have their wages cut to make good losses in Wall Street, would be honestly and regularly paid, and this equitable distribution of receipts would work a revolution in the condition of railroad employees.

We are becoming familiar with the subject and the more it is discussed the more practical and patriotic the scheme appears. The members of the American Railway Union have had abundant opportunities for knowing that the change of ownership of the railroads of the country, from corporations to the government, could by no possibility make their condition worse, but that, discussed from [this] and from every point of view, the change would be of incalculable benefit to them.

Membership of Women.

The American Railway Union admits women to membership. There are thousands of women in the employment of the railroads of the country, doing work necessary to carry forward the great enterprise in which the railroads are engaged. That these women should be protected goes without saying, and the American Railway Union throws wide open its doors to receive them, and will demonstrate its loyalty to them by maintaining that when a woman performs a man's work, she ought, in all justice, to have a man's pay.

The Strike on the Great Northern.

The strike inaugurated on the Great Northern Railway began on April 13, 1894, and ended on the first day of May 1894, counting 18 days. The strike was an [exertion] of resolute men who refused the degradation incident to a reduction of wages below a decent living standard. The resistance of these men to the imposition of degrading wages was in all regards chivalric. They saw and clearly comprehended the importance of unity of opinion, purpose, and action, and took the necessary steps to secure all the benefits such unity could confer. They were in the right and realized that “Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just.”¹³ They did not underestimate the power of their foes, but sized them up, number and weight, in a way which demonstrated from first to last that the American Railway Union was the master of the situation. The battleground extended from St. Paul to the coast, involving the rights and wages of thousands of men. In [every] engagement the American Railway Union [holds] decisive advantages. The ranks of the [strikers] were never broken, never dismayed, [never] faltered, and as an exhibition of fealty to [truth?] and justice, every day and continuously [added?] records of labor’s struggle [...].¹⁴

I would be unpardonably faithless to [them] were I to fail to mention in this connection the valuable services rendered by employees of the Great Northern who, though members of other organizations, clearly saw that the American Railway Union was right, and with that splendid courage which dares to be [shown] with conviction, contributed their full quota to secure victory, and this was done in defiance of orders designed to make them the friends of the enemies of labor.

Taken all together, a more notable victory has never been achieved in a railway affair in the United States or elsewhere. The success of the American Railway Union was complete — wages were restored, and all the men who engaged in the strike have been restored to their employment, a feature of the victory which can be said of no other extended railroad strike.

¹³ From *Henry the 6th, Part 2*, Act 3, Scene 2 by William Shakespeare.

¹⁴ Chipping of page with loss in source document, gist of some words in square brackets, content of rest of line impossible to guess with certainty.

Conclusion.

Delegates to the first convention of the American Railway Union, I welcome you most cordially, and salute you as brothers and co-workers of a great cause, the banding together of employees of every class on American railways.

The work of organization has been exceptionally arduous — a wide area of country[sic] has been traversed. The task has been heroically [begun] but results are of a character which [atomizes?] all the labor that has been bestowed. The fires of local unions are burning on mountains, in valleys, and on plains. A phenomenal success, so far, has attended [these] efforts. The strides of the American Railway Union have been gigantic. It is rapidly encompassing the great republic from ocean to ocean...¹⁵

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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¹⁵ Chipping of page with loss in source document, gist of some words in square brackets. The content of the final 250 or so words of the document are impossible to guess with certainty, although Debs seems to call for unity, the correction of mistakes as they arise, and the need to set aside “jealous leaders” if they split or delay the united movement.