
The Debate in the Council:

Some of the Members in Favor of a General Tie-Up

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The session of the council began at 9 am and did not adjourn until 5:15 pm [Aug. 25, 1894], and during those eight hours a good deal of eloquence was uttered on both side. It is impossible to say who voted for or against the strike, but it is stated that the vote was 8 to 4. It is also believed that the representatives of the switchmen were dead against a strike, and they could have defeated such action alone, as it requires a unanimous vote to order a strike. An attempt to change the constitution so that a two-third vote could order a strike was also defeated by a vote of 8 to 4.

Not Organized to Strike.

The fact is that the Federation is not organized to promote strikes, but to avert them. The constitution is very plain on this point, and in refusing to order a general strike to aid Powderly, the council has simply obeyed the law to which it owes its existence. Down here the remark is that the Knights of Labor asked the Federation for bread and has been given a stone not even the balm of pecuniary support being offered. Whatever may be the opinion, however, of the effect of the action on the strike of the Knights, there can be no doubt that the council has at the first opportunity given it to show its colors, chosen those of conservatism, prudence, and obedience to its own laws.

Status of Federation.

In discussing the action of the council last night E.V. Debs, Grand Secretary, said,

“The question of rendering financial support to the striking Knights of Labor was not considered in any form. That is something with which we have nothing to do. We have given them our moral support and we can go no farther. If any of the separate orders composing the Federation want to assist the Knights financially they are at liberty to do it. As a matter of fact the Knights have not asked for anything of the kind, and I believe that Mr. Powderly will be satisfied with our decision and I certainly do not believe that he expected us to order a strike in behalf of his men.

“The position of the strikers who are members of the Federation and also of the Knights of Labor is just this. By striking they have acknowledged their allegiances to the Knights and to that body they must look for support. Not having acted under our constitution or by our orders, we can not help them. They violated our laws in striking, although we coincide that, having subsequently obtained the sanction of the Executive Board of the Knights, their actions were legalized by that body.”

A Question for the Future.

“Does today’s action close the connection of the Federation with the [New York] Central [Railroad] strike?” Mr. Debs was asked.

“That,” he replied, “is a question that cannot be answered at this time. The council has adjourned subject to the call of the chair. New developments, complications, or entanglements are likely to arise at any time. Some of our firemen, for instance, may be asked to take the places of the strikers. Should they refuse, then they may be discharged. In such an event the services of the supreme body would again be called into play.”

Paralyzed the Local Knights.

Local Knights of Labor are paralyzed at the result of the appeal of their chiefs. They had confidently expected that the Federation would rush to Powderly’s assistance and through the medium of a general tie-up endeavor to bring Webb to terms. The cause of the men on the Central, they say, is a lost one and with the defeat goes the union, the prestige, and the strength of the order.

A Telegram to Powderly.

At 6 pm Sargent sent the following telegram to Powderly:

“The Supreme Council adjourned this afternoon after carefully considering the strike in all its details. You will notice the result of our deliberations in tonight’s dispatches, which it is hoped will meet with your approval. The committee was unanimous in endorsing your proposition and the proposition of the Grand Executive Board, and most earnestly hope that the right of which you are the champion is the great conflict on the New York Central may finally and powerfully prevail.”

Edited by Tim Davenport

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