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# The Canadian Pacific Railway and the Supreme Council

by Eugene V. Debs

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On Wednesday, February 4th [1891], the Supreme Council was convened at Montreal, Quebec, in response to the official call of Grand Master S.E. Wilkinson, of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen. For some weeks the conductors and brakemen on the eastern divisions of the system had been making ineffectual efforts to have their wages increased, which, in many cases, were barely above the living point; while the general average was not much better. The committee were patient to the utmost limit of endurance; they sought by every honorable means to obtain what was universally conceded to be their due, but they were doomed to disappointment. The management, while ostensibly willing to receive the committee and discuss their grievances, turned a deaf ear to every appeal for justice and finally refused point blank to make any concession that would even remotely touch the grievances involved.

At this juncture the members of the B of RT sent for their Grand Master and the members of the ORC appealed to their Grand Chief, both of whom responded promptly and made renewed efforts to have the differences between the employees and the company amicably adjusted. Failing in their efforts the Supreme Council was convened and each organization was fully represented. At the opening session the grievances were discussed and every mooted point was carefully investigated. The result of the meeting was that the grievances were approved as a whole and a committee was directed to call on the officials and request an interview in behalf of the council. This request resulted in the committee being sent for by the officials, and after a brief conference an amicable adjustment was effected, which was perfectly satisfactory to the committee and the men they represented. The concessions made by the company were such as will materially

increase the pay of the employees in the train service and all hands were pleased with the outcome of the meeting.

The potent and effective influence of federation was never demonstrated to better advantage. It filled the bill, it met every requirement, it was equal to the emergency. Without federation it is safe to say that no concessions would have been made by the company. Indeed, we doubt if the employees would have had the temerity to even approach their autocratic officials on the subject of grievances.

It is proper that we should give credit to the Order of Railway Conductors and its grand officers, E.E. Clark, Grand Chief, and C.H. Wilkins, Assistant Grand Chief, who cooperated with the council in all things necessary to effect a settlement. The grand officers, committees and members of the order were in hearty accord with the spirit of the occasion and gave unquestionable evidence of their "stickability," whatever the outcome of the negotiations might be.

We had the pleasure of meeting Grand Chief Clark personally for the first time, and much to our satisfaction we found him to be a gentleman of liberal and advanced views, wide comprehension, and in all regards fully abreast of the progressive spirit of the times. We believe Grand Chief Clark to be a man of principle and honor, officially as well as personally, just such a man as will by unfaltering rectitude, courageous defense of the right and unswerving fealty to obligations, inspire confidence and achieve success.

*Edited by Tim Davenport*

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