
A Question of Veracity

by Eugene V. Debs

Unsigned article published in *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*,
vol. 15, no. 2 (Feb. 1891), pp. 146-147.

The caption we have selected for what we may choose to write, might have been changed to, "A Question of Mendacity" — or, we could have captioned this article, "Veracity Questioned." Our purpose is to find the truth. The truth aways makes me free — a lie enslaves its author — and it is said that "a poor man is better than a liar," that is, a poor man who dares tell the truth, who won't equivocate, but whose words are equivalent to an oath, with the "so help me God" attachment, is better than one who does not hesitate to quibble, cavil, dodge, and evade the truth, though he be a thousand times a millionaire.

A truthful man is always a courageous man, while a liar is always and everywhere a coward — a spineless creature. And it might be said with equal force, if Satan's dominion was a paint pot and his forked tail a brush, he could not paint a picture as hideous as a lie. If he were to try it on, he would at last exclaim: "It beats the devil" — and for once at least, the head of the devil would be exceedingly level.

But to our task, "A question of veracity." What is the question?

A question of veracity is always an important question Admiral Porter said, "A pin is worth fighting for, if it involves a principle." A question of veracity always involves a principle and therefore becomes an important question.

It is well known that for more than two years the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers has been wrestling with the question of "federation." It is well known that the votes of the divisions of the order have been taken and that, within a few hundred votes, there were as many in favor of *general federation* as there were opposed to it. The *Engineers' Journal* has been invited to state that division vote in its columns, but it does not do it. It *lacks the courage*. To give that vote would knock the Journal higher than Gilroy's kite. True, the figures would not upset its arguments on federation, because it never had

any, but they would expose its jugglery, its double-dealing, and would show, as we have said, that of those who voted, the opposition to *general* federation in about 15,000 votes cast was but a small majority — both sides of the question having more than 7,000 votes, and neither side having 8,000 votes.

But the question of veracity does not hinge upon that statement, but upon other statements.

In the December [1890] number of this *Magazine* appeared an article captioned “270 vs. 168,” page 1116, from which we take the following:

At Richmond federation had few advocates in the convention; at Denver the number was largely increased, and now comes Pittsburgh — total number of delegates voting on Federation, 438; the number voting for federation, 270; the number voting against federation, 168; majority in favor of federation, 102. Two-thirds of 438 is 292. Those voting for federation, 270, or within 22 votes of a two-thirds majority.

This explains the caption of this article, “270 vs. 168.” It was a splendid victory for federation. It could only have been more resplendent by securing 22 more votes. In due time they will come. Come, because federation is right, because it meets the demand in the highest degree of the organizations of railway employees.

The statement made by this *Magazine* with regard to the vote is *delegate* information *absolutely* corroborated by a member of the B of LE, who was present when the vote was taken, and who avers that it was upon *General Federation*, 270 for and 168 against.

The *Switchmen's Journal* for December [1890] contained the following upon the subject:

The Pittsburgh Convention.

The committee on federation reported in favor of national federation. The vote upon the acceptance of the report was 270 in favor and 168 against. The majority of the delegates were in favor of applying for admission to the Federated Orders of Railway Employees, but it seems that the question required a two-thirds vote, which could not be obtained, as Mr. Arthur opposed

the proposition.¹ It was therefore laid on the table. During the last week of the convention another plan was reported by the committee and accepted by the convention. This was the same old “system federation,” and is the *first official recognition of anything in the way of federation*. The plan adopted has been shorn of many of the inequalities that characterized some of the other “system” plans, but is still cumbersome, costly, and entirely impracticable, being a shadow of a substance.

Now comes the question of veracity. The *Switchmen’s Journal* and the *Firemen’s Magazine* aver that upon the straight out proposition of “general federation” in the Pittsburgh convention of the B of LE, 270 votes were cast in favor of its adoption and only 168 votes against it. And this averment is based upon statements made by delegates who participated in the deliberations of the convention, and upon statements made by a member of the B of LE who was present and who was an eye and ear witness to the proceedings.

Such testimony is of the highest possible character; for has it not been written “that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.”² We have more than “two or three witnesses,” and all of them *are members of the B of LE*, and they say 270 votes were cast for *general federation* and only 168 votes were cast against it, giving a clear majority in favor of general federation of 102, lacking only 22 votes of a *clear* two-thirds majority.

Having written this much we are prepared to introduce the utterances of the B of LE *Journal* of December [1890] upon the subject, as follows:

The complexion of the Pittsburgh convention was one of general conservatism throughout the entire sitting. It was a noticeable fact and in direct contrast to the Richmond and Denver sittings. General Federation had but few advocates and was considered but three times during the sitting. It was seemingly a dead issue. *In the entire delegation of 406 members present not over 35 votes were in favor of general federation as proposed at the two previous conventions. Many delegates who favored and were extremists in their ideas as to general federation at the Richmond and Denver sittings were also representatives at the Pittsburgh convention. They were opposed to any form of federa-*

¹ **Peter M. Arthur** (1833-1903) was the Grand Chief Engineer [head] of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers.

² *Matthew*, King James version, chapter 18, verse 16.

tion of a general character. Neither did they hesitate to place themselves on record, whenever an opportunity presented itself, as advocates directly the opposite of that which they consistently thought their duty at the Richmond and Denver sittings.

The italics in the foregoing are introduced for the purpose of discussing intelligently the question of veracity.

Now, let it be understood, right here, that at least three delegates to the Pittsburgh Convention, and one member of the B of LE, who was present, aver that 270 votes were cast for *general* federation. The B of LE *Journal* says, "In the entire delegation of 406 members present, not over 35 of 406 were in favor of general federation.

In these declarations, there is a discrepancy of 235 votes. Four men aver that 270 votes were cast for general federation. They were on the ground. The B of LE *Journal* avers there were but "35" delegates who "were in favor of general federation" — a difference of 235.

The B of LE *Journal* from first to last had been blindly opposed to general federation, or, for that matter to any federation. What is the legitimate inference? This, that its overwhelming defeat upon the subject of federation completely demoralized it — upset its moral perceptions, rendered it so oblivious of the vivid line which separates veracity from mendacity, that, regardless of all proprieties, to use no harsher word, it sought by juggling to impose upon its readers a mendacious statement, the purpose of the imposition being, doubtless, to modify the stinging humiliation which truth would have brought upon it.

To still further juggle with the subject, it will be noticed that the B of LE *Journal* says: "It (general federation) was seemingly a dead issue." Indeed! More than 7,000 engineers voted for it when the question was submitted to a vote of the divisions. Is it not a shameful perversion of the truth to say general federation was "seemingly a dead issue," when 270 delegates, in convention, voted for it; a clear majority of 102 over those who voted against it?

Is it not an outrage upon the decencies which the truth always imposes, to intimate that general federation had become odious to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, when in convention 270 delegates voted to establish it, to 168 voting against it, a clear majority of 102?

Our purpose is accomplished. A deliberate falsehood has been published. The publications involved are the *Switchmen's Journal*, the *Firemen's Magazine*, and the B of LF *Journal*.

The *Switchmen's Journal* says its information in regard to the vote in the B of LE convention upon the subject of general federation was obtained from two delegates who were present. This *Magazine's* information is from sources equally reliable. The B of LE *Journal*, therefore, stands convicted of misrepresentation and falsehood unless it produces incontrovertible proof that our informants are falsifiers, and their statements vicious and misleading.

We suggest to our esteemed contemporary that by publishing the truth some modification of the sentence may be obtained. At any rate, the 50,000 members under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Council of the United Orders of Railway Employees (a "*dead issue*," if you please, according to the *Journal*) are getting there, and don't you forget it.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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