
Statement about Reestablishing the American Railway Union (circa November 17, 1899)

When I arrived home from the Pacific coast this week I found a bushel of letters from railway men asking me to take up the work [of reorganizing the ARU].¹ There is no doubt that the reorganization will be effected. It will reorganize itself. The railroad men are beginning to feel that they want to be part of the movement — to affiliate with their brothers in other occupations.

The present brotherhoods hold aloof from one another and from other crafts. This is just the policy the railroad managers desire the brotherhoods to pursue. The railroad managers know that just so long as their employees are organized in isolated bodies they have nothing to fear.

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¹ During Debs’s Northwestern and Pacific tour that ran from approximately Oct. 10 to Nov. 12, 1899, a rumor spontaneously emerged in the press that numerous railwaymen were intent on relaunching the American Railway Union and that Debs would probably be spearheading such an effort in the near future. This unsubstantiated rumor, amplified through wire reports in dozens of newspapers, appears to have generated real life momentum. This statement was made by Debs just prior to his Northeast tour that began on Nov. 18.