
The Attempted Blacklist Degradation of Employees

by Eugene V. Debs

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In a recent debate in the United States Senate, on Inter-State Commerce, Senator Vance, of North Carolina, said: "Now, our laws forbid absolutely the tyranny of one man over another, or of any kind of restraint whatever by one man over the personal freedom of another." The proposition is so self-evident that discussion would obscure, rather than add luster to the truth it embodies. It may be said, indeed, the proclamation cannot be too frequently or too emphatically made, that when one seizes an opportunity to tyrannize over another, he becomes a monster of such hideous mien, is so corrupted by vile propensities, and so hardened by the cultivation of detestable purposes, that whatever may be his position or surroundings, he has only to be known to be at once consigned, by all honorable men, to a class of miscreants whose existence can be accounted for upon no rational hypothesis. He is a human reptile, and only an inscrutable creator could tell why he exists. To this class belong those railway superintendents who have evolved, what is widely known as "blacklisting" methods, whereby employees, who from any cause, may be discharged, are blacklisted, that is to say, branded as unworthy of employment and confidence, and followed up in their search for work and made to realize that these sleuth hounds of persecution, as relentless as death, are following them through every lane and avenue of life, ready and prepared to deprive them of employment and make their lives an intolerable burden. This movement, the gods be praised, is said to be confined to about thirty "down east" superintendents, and manifestly has for its object the degradation of employees, freemen, men robed in the sovereignty of American citizenship, to the

condition of serfs, creatures who belong to certain railways, and wear the collar of certain superintendents. Honestly analyzed, the blacklisting infamy is designed to bring about that condition among American laborers. To illustrate: A is in the employment of B, an eastern railway superintendent, with whom he disagrees, as he has a perfect right to do, receives his discharge and is therefore required to seek employment elsewhere and under some other "boss." What is the result?

Simply this: B enters his name upon the blacklist, and forthwith it is sent to every other blacklisting superintendent. A goes forth with a blacklisting mark upon him. He goes the rounds, everywhere B has preceded him. If he finds work at all it must be outside of his chosen vocation. He must apply elsewhere and for employment in which he has little or no experience. The blacklisting curse may even follow him there. He is doomed to idleness and to all the ills which idleness entails — poverty, tramping, ostracism, degradation, and possibly crime. These blacklisting scoundrels doubtless reason among themselves "our men know the penalty of a discharge, of abandoning our employment, and rather than take its risks, will submit to our degrading demands, and be silent and submissive to our rules." By such processes, it is understood, that about 30 Eastern railway superintendents anticipate lordly control over their employes. We learn from *The Railroader*, published at Toledo, Ohio, that there is a widespread protest throughout the west against this blacklisting program. It cannot be too extended, too unanimous nor too emphatic. Blacklisting is a move in the wrong direction. It will not be tolerated. It is opposed to law, justice and common decency. The superintendents who practice the execrable outrage upon working men should be everywhere held up to public scorn and contempt. They are enemies of public order. They dethrone law. They invite anarchy. They are the assassins of character. They inaugurate deep seated enmities, and are the deadly foes of free institutions. We hear much, nowadays, about the murderous designs of dynamiters, of the vagaries of socialists of "red handed" communists, to the end of the chapter, but here we have it stated that some 30 railway superintendents have organized a blacklisting Ku Klux Klan, whose mission it is to follow up certain blacklisted mechanics and working men for the purpose of robbing them of the

means of subsistence, dogging their steps for the purpose of keeping them in idleness till gaunt hunger gnaws at their vitals, until rags bespeak their degradation and blank despair shrouds their lives. This is certainly a new departure in railroading. It demands the widest possible notoriety. It means mischief. It cannot survive light. It is dirty in its very conception and damnable in every feature. It is anti-American. It is an exhibition of arrogance and turpitude deserving crushing resentment. American working men are not serfs — they will not wear the collar of railway superintendents, east or west. They are not cringing, fawning, lickspittles, to approach railway superintendents on their bellies in the dust. The blacklisting gang, by the fiat of justice, will be required to change their policy. This should be the motto, not only of all the railway papers in the land, but the press generally should demand that the blacklisting railway superintendents should at once change their program.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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