
Final Annual Meeting of the Supreme Council

by Eugene V. Debs

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On June 20, 1892, the fourth and last annual meeting of the Supreme Council of the United Orders of Railway Employees was held in the city of Chicago.

The meeting was eminently harmonious. It was called according to law, called to order according to law, the deliberations were according to law, and the Supreme Council was disbanded according to law. Possibly, some facetious gentlemen may suggest, "according to the law of necessity."

The Supreme Council, during its existence, transacted business according to law. It tried members for treason according to law and inflicted the penalty according to law. It was law-abiding first, last, and all the time. It shirked no responsibility. Its courage was equal to its conviction and though it disbanded, it is not disgraced. There is no stain upon its escutcheon. Its flag was never trailed in the dirt. It never surrendered to a foe, only to the inevitable.

The Supreme Council was the outgrowth of an idea as vital as ever announced to workingmen, practical and potential, and though the Supreme Council no longer exists, the principle upon which it was founded survives.

A principle never dies. It is more enduring than the stars. A principle like Truth may be "crushed to earth," but like Truth it will "rise again," because the "eternal years" are pledged to its survival.

Federation is not dead, nor can it be said that it "sleepeth."

On every hand is heard the demand for Federation. The unification of labor organizations for the purpose of protection is now the motto of the armies of labor, and railroad employees are not indifferent to the call. The demand for an organization of organizations is the

desideratum, the one thing wanted. That it will come is as certain as that morning follows the night.

Those who helped to organize the Supreme Council were the avant-couriers in a new departure of labor efforts. They were the pathfinders through a wilderness of doubt and anxiety to highlands of vision and to positions of power.

No words they said require modification nor need they be solicitous about the effect their courageous words produced. They were winged words and are even now fulfilling their splendid mission.

A truth set forth on its mission to battle for supremacy may be embarrassed by a lie. It may be put to the torture, but it never surrenders. The world is full of lies. Treachery, duplicity, and treason to truth sometimes come forth so splendidly equipped as to appear invincible. But the day of reckoning comes, the mills of the gods grind on, and finally the truth triumphs.

We look forward to the time when a Supreme Council will be established that will accomplish the work the disbanded Supreme Council was organized to perform, and which it did perform up to a time when emergencies arose which only infinite wisdom could have foreseen, and even then the Supreme Council met the crisis, and though the penalty was disbandment, its honor and integrity survive the dispersion.

The *Firemen's Magazine* has printed many pages since it began the advocacy of federation and urged the organization of the Supreme Council, but of them all not one glows with words more fraught with devotion to the welfare of men engaged in the train service of railroads and the welfare of labor, than those where we used such arguments as we could command in favor of federation.

It would not be difficult to tell in a few words why the Supreme Council has ceased to exist. But we do not care to play Mark Anthony and exhibit the mantle of the Supreme Council to show where treason got in its work.

The Supreme Council was a creation of Federation. Federation lives and will flourish long after those who rendered the disbandment of the Supreme Council necessary are dead and forgotten, or, if they are remembered, it will be only for their ignorance and treason to labor.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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