

Daniel Willard, President of the Baltimore & Ohio on the Strike Negotiations

Mr. Daniel Willard, President of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Company, when asked what further steps would be made looking to a settlement of the strike, stated that he knew of no further steps to be taken and that he personally could not say what further could or would be done. That no more effective or earnest mediators could be found than the chiefs of the five engine and trainmen's brotherhoods had proved to be and he believed that the railroad executives of the minority group in their efforts to reach an agreement had made an absolutely equitable proposal and had made every concession possible under the circumstances without result, and it would seem there remained nothing to do but proceed to build up forces from those who were desirous of performing service. That on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad there was at work more than 60 per cent of a normal force, that more than 1,600 men were employed at the Mt. Clare shops where something over 50 per cent of normal heavy repairs were turned out during the month of August. That, of course, the situation was not satisfactory and now that efforts at conciliation have failed the company was naturally redoubling its efforts to recruit forces and resume normal operations.

Concerning the conference between the chiefs of the five engine and trainmen's brotherhoods acting as mediators and the group of 52 railroads for which it was understood he acted as chairman and spokesman. He said he was glad to discuss the matter because it seemed to him that in some instances the public had failed to properly interpret the statements given out in New York following the meeting. He said he wished to explain, first of all, that the fifty-two railroads referred to, which continued the negotiations, had agreed fully with the other lines in rejecting the proposition which had been submitted to the larger meeting of the Association of Railway Executives, because, while in different language, the proposition was the same as that which had previously been presented requesting the reinstatement of the men on strike with seniority and other rights unimpaired.

A considerable number of the executives, however, while unwilling to accept the proposition that had been presented, were hopeful, nevertheless, that some other proposition could be developed which would lead to a settlement and which they could in good conscience accept. This resulted in the smaller committee being formed and further conferences with the mediators.

As a result of the renewed conferences which continued the greater part of two nights and a day, the minority group of

the railroads, so called, agreed to take back into the service all of the shop craft employes who had not been guilty of proven acts of violence, and to assign them in positions of the class they originally held on June 30th at the same terminal point where they were then employed, and at the rate of wages fixed by the Labor Board. It was pointed out, however, that owing to the large number of new men employed who would continue in service, some time would be required to bring about this arrangement in an orderly manner. The railway presidents agreed that they would either carry out in its entirety the proposition stated above by the first of October, or on that date they would put on pay such men as had not then been assigned to regular work.

The minority group of which I am now speaking also agreed to let the men who had been on strike retain all of their pension, pass and other privileges of that character which had been gained by their term of service with the company. In other words, the railroad companies did not seek to avail themselves of the situation to curtail privileges of any character gained by years of service.

Having in mind the normal requirements of the carriers for men of the shop crafts at this season of the year, together with increased requirements resulting from a reduced working force for nearly two months, these companies were willing to pledge themselves to find employment for all of the striking employes not guilty of proven acts of violence, believing that the requirements of the situation would afford ample work for all for many months to come. It should be clearly understood, however, that at no time did any of the railroad presidents agree, nor would they agree, to make any settlement that would in any sense adversely affect the rights or the privileges of the old men who did not go on strike, or the new men who had been hired since the strike began.

It was further proposed that a committee of ten should be appointed, made up of the five brotherhood chiefs who were acting as mediators, and the five railroad presidents who were meeting with them, and that this committee should have power to hear and make final determination concerning any matters of misunderstanding growing out of the strike and which might arise up to but not beyond the date of May 1, 1923. It was believed by the railroad executives that few matters would be referred to this committee providing both parties to the controversy were willing to approach the subject in a spirit of genuine conciliation, and this the railroad executives pledged themselves to do.

A memorandum setting forth the above terms was submitted to the fifty-two railroad executives of the minority group and they accepted it. It was also submitted by the mediators to Mr. Jewell and his associates and they rejected it. It should be evident to any one that the railroad executives in accepting the proposed basis of adjustment had in effect granted the substance of all that the striking shop crafts asked for, as it would have put all the men to work at once at the same class of work as of June 30th, and at the same terminals, with all pass, pension and other similar privileges unimpaired. The leaders were unwilling to have the men return to work even on such conditions unless the companies would agree that on the very day of their return they would be put back on the roster as of June 30th and ahead, where necessary, of men who had remained in the service.

The railway managers felt that the seniority rights which had been gained by the employes who remained in the service under well established rules were as much a part of their compensation as the money which they had received in wages, and they were not willing, under any circumstances, nor did they feel they had a right, morally or legally, to take from the men who had remained at work any part of their compensation, whether represented in money earned or privileges acquired. I think it must be admitted that the railroad executives of the minority group in their efforts to reach an agreement made every reasonable concession possible in order to accomplish that result. They were not willing, however, to look upon their promise to the men already in the service, whether the promise was verbal or in writing, as a scrap of paper to be thrown aside at will. Short of that one thing, they were willing to grant every other concession which the men requested. It must be apparent, therefore, that no compromise settlement of the situation is possible unless the railroad executives are willing to accept the policy that a promise or contract is something to be broken and not something to be kept.

The railroads must keep their obligations to the men who are in their employ, and there is clearly now but one course left, namely, to continue to build up their force as rapidly and effectively as possible, and this the Baltimore & Ohio, like others, is proceeding to do.

Mr. Willard was chairman of the committee that represented 52 Class I roads that failed in their negotiations for separate agreements between them and the leaders of the striking shopmen on August 25th, on the issues as stated.