

Wage Earners & Free Silver

Why Free Silver Will Help the Employees of Railroads and Others Who Work for Wages or Salaries.

A Conversation on a Train Between a Railroad Engineer and a United States Senator.

I have never seen a copy of your paper, but I have heard of it, and know the side that you are on in this campaign. I send this letter to you because I know that you will publish it, and your paper has probably a larger circulation than any other paper that would publish it. My name is withheld for reasons that are obvious. I am a conductor on a Western railroad. A few weeks ago a certain official of this railroad company, handed me a small pamphlet of several leaves, entitled, "The Wage Earner and Free Silver." I was asked to take it home with me, read carefully and return it. I did so. In fact, I read it three times. It worried me very much. I have been in the railroad service for about fifteen years, and have never given any special attention to political questions, and know probably more about the tariff than any other question, and don't know much about that. In a general way I have felt from observation that money was too scarce; I have seen all businesses and enterprises getting dull; I have seen land sell under the hammer for half what it sold for a few years ago; I have heard complaints from relatives and friends who live on farms to the effect that prices were so low that it was difficult to meet expenses and have enough money left to pay taxes; I have heard merchants complain that they could not sell half the goods that they had been selling. I had no doubt railroads would do much more business in carrying out and bringing back freights if produce brought a better price and new enterprises were started up; so I had made up my mind to vote for the side that favored more money in this fight.

But now for the circular: It started out with calling our attention to the fact, that we were receiving wages of so much per day, or salaries of so much per month, and that it was to our interest that everything we had to buy should be cheap so that our wages would buy more of other things. Then it stated that free coinage of silver would cause the prices of farm products and all other things that we had to buy to go up about double, which would have about the same effect as if the company were to reduce our salaries one-half.

The circular also went on to say that the railroads all owed bonds payable in gold, and that free coinage would not only drive all gold out of the country, but that it would also send it to a premium; therefore that the railroad companies would have to pay a premium to get the gold to meet their bonds, and that this would so embarrass the roads that they would have to either raise their freight and passenger rates or reduce the wages of their employees. That freight and passenger rates were now as high as the people would stand; therefore, the only thing left would be to reduce the wages of those who work for the roads. That this would be a double blow to the men employed, and appealing to them (to us) not to vote to bring this calamity upon ourselves. The circular also went on to say that free silver would drive foreign capital out of this country; would cause railroad securities which are held abroad to be returned and thrown upon the market, and much more along the same line.

As I have said, this circular gave me a great deal of trouble, and had about brought me to the conclusion that my duty to my

wife and children would force me to vote against free silver. The day before I returned the circular I had on my train a United States Senator. While I did not know him well I knew that he was a strong free silver man, and that he had also on all occasions taken sides with the laboring man. So I handed him the circular and asked him to read it and hand it back to me, saying to him that if what was in that circular was so, why then was it not my duty to myself and my family to vote against free silver. When next I passed through the car he asked me to sit down a moment in the seat with him. He handed me back the circular and asked me if they were being distributed generally among the employees of the railroad. I told him that I thought they were. Then, smiling, he said: "The advice of these companies to the effect that your wages will be reduced if you vote for free silver reminds me of what once occurred between a banker and his carriage driver. The banker asked his driver, as they were about starting for the polls on voting day, how he was going to vote. Upon receiving the driver's answer the banker replied: 'Don't you know that if you vote that way you cannot get as good wages as you get now?' The driver promptly replied: 'Sir, if that were so, me thinks you would vote that yourself.'"

I admitted the force of the illustration, but I told the Senator that I wanted him to explain to me whether or not this circular was correct when it said that free silver would raise the prices of farm products and many other things which I would be forced to buy out of my salary each month. I give you below as best I can from memory his answers and my questions:

Senator. Yes, free coinage of silver will undoubtedly raise the prices of all farm products. But you must remember that

Conductor. If that is so, then I want you to show me, if you can, how it would be to my interest to vote for free silver. But first let me state to you my case. My sympathies are all on the side of farmers and those who create wealth. I even feel that generally the country would be more prosperous if there were more money, and for that reason I had about made up my mind to vote for free silver. I have a wife and a growing family. My only income is my salary, which is \$75 a month. It is all I can do now with this salary to make both ends meet. My oldest daughter will soon be grown. My wife and I feel that we must send her off to school this fall, if we ever intend to do anything more for her than give her a common school education. This circular says that if I have to pay double prices for what I have to buy that it will amount to the same as cutting my salary in half.

Now it would be simply impossible for me to live on \$37.50 per month. Therefore, even admitting that free silver would be the best thing for the country generally, is not my first duty to my wife and family? therefore, should I not vote against free silver, situated as I am?

Senator. You have stated the case probably as strongly from the gold standpoint as it is possible for anyone to make it.

But the circular tells only a half truth, and tells that to mislead you. To tell half the truth when the whole truth should be told is often the most dangerous and vicious kind of falsehood, because it is so deceptive.

In the first place it would not cost you double as much to live, and in fact very little more, if any, with free silver than it would under the gold standard.

Free silver simply means increasing the amount of legal tender dollars, and will effect

you no more than increasing the number of gold dollars would.

Every one admits that there is not enough gold for money.

No one would object to the single gold standard if there was enough gold to make a sufficient quantity of legal tender money to meet the needs of increasing of population and business. Yes, some one would object, but it would not be the free silver people. It would be the bondholders, the monopolists, and money gamblers. They want money scarce. It is their only way to make fortunes without working. If there was enough gold, then they would want to demonetize gold and use something that was scarce for money. Of course, you remember that when gold was discovered in California and Australia in large quantities, that the bankers and money lenders held several conferences in London and New York with a view to trying to demonetize gold and to use silver alone if gold got more plentiful than silver. In fact, under the advice of these bankers and bondholders Germany, Holland, and other countries actually demonetized gold in order to make legal tender money scarce.

With free silver the farmer will get more for his cotton, which the manufacturer will pay, but the cotton goods will not cost you any more, for the manufacturer is now charging all that competition will allow him to charge under the tariff laws; and the manufacturer (though he would pay more for cotton), would himself be benefited, for he would sell twice as much of the manufactured product, and his employees would be benefited for the factory would run full time; for if the farmer gets a fair price for his products he would buy at least twice as much cotton goods as he does now.

The same applies to wheat and other farm products. And, besides, it would be the same way with every other manufactured product. While the manufacturer would have to pay more to the farmer and laborer for the raw material, and would pay out more money to labor employed in his factory for full time as well as an increase in his wages, yet you would not pay any more for the goods than now. There would simply be a better distribution of profits. The manufacturer then would not become a millionaire, but the farmer and the men who work in factories would prosper as much as the manufacturer.

Besides, there are a number of fixed charges which you are now forced to meet out of your salary each month, which would be the same with free coinage or more money. As I have said, it would cost you very little, only a few dollars more per month to live than now, provided you paid the same for manufactured products and a little more for what you got from the farmer; but you must remember that the prices of a large number of manufactured products which you now buy have been forced up by the combinations and trusts. With free silver every trust and combination would disappear. It is possible for trusts to be formed and to thrive only when the amount of money in circulation is decreasing. With an increased volume of money, or with a volume of money increasing as business and population increase new enterprises, manufacturing just what the trusts now control would spring up so rapidly that every trust would be destroyed by their competition. This would bring down at once the price of everything which you have to buy that is now controlled by combinations, trusts and monopolists. This would reduce your expenses for living because the saving here would be greater than the increased price which you would pay for farm products. For in-

stance, a beefsteak, which now sells in the cities for 20 cents a pound, would, if the Armour trust was broken, sell for 6 to 8 a pound.

But, for argument's sake, let us admit that it would cost a great deal more to live with free silver. That is, let us admit that all that is said in that circular is true, then still there is another side to this matter which you must not overlook, in as much as you love your wife and children. The fact is that you have as much and probably more to fear from the gold standard than the farmer, even though you are drawing a salary. Did it ever occur to you that if the gold standard is permanently fixed upon this country that your salary is sure to be reduced, and not only reduced once, but continuously and successively, until there is no telling upon how little you may be forced to live per month; and, besides, did it ever occur to you that you are liable any time to lose your position?

Conductor. I don't understand that. Why should I lose my position as long as I do my duty to the company or have my salary reduced, either?

Senator. Do you know any man to-day who is out of a job who is as competent to serve as conductor on this road as your self?

Conductor. Yes I know several.

Senator. Several? If you will think for a moment you will think of more than several. The fact is, that if you take the country over, for every man who has a job that pays as much as yours, there are at least ten men, equally as competent to fill it who are either out of a job or trying to make a living in some other way, who would be ready and anxious to take your job and every other job like it, and even to take it at a lower figure than you are getting, if necessary. There are political reasons why the railroads do not just now force down your salaries or dismiss you and take some other man who will work for less; but let me ask you: Is it human nature for any man or corporation to pay more to you for certain services that they can get other men, equally as competent, to perform the same services? Let the gold standard once be permanently fastened on this country, when the corporations and the gold men feel safe, and as sure as fate every man who is now in their employment will have to accept a big cut in his wages or be dismissed to give place to some other man equally as competent, who will do the work for less.

Does not the history of England, and in fact of the whole world, show and prove that this has been the case in every country where and when the amount of legal tender money in circulation was contracted. It is one of the inexorable laws of supply and demand which apply with equal force to money as to everything else.

Let me ask you, What would you do today if you were dismissed as conductor? Which way would you turn to make a living?

Conductor. God only knows. I would try to find some other job, but my family would suffer if I were to lose one month's wages.

Senator. You would try to find another job? But would you not find at least ten men as competent as you are applying for the same job? Then, how could your chances be any better than one in ten to get the job? If every other man was as competent to fill the place as you, and you had no special pull, then the only way that you could get it would be by doing the work for less than the others.

How destructive this competition is to labor, and, on the other hand, how greatly to the advantage of corporations! As

money gets scarcer this competition between labor grows greater, and the conditions of labor will get worse and more helpless.

Therefore, the scarcer money gets the better it is for corporations and the worse it is for labor. The number who are employed would not today be getting even as much as they are were it not for the force and power of the labor organizations. Do not the corporations always fight these organizations? Who has always been the friend of labor when it wanted legislation? Has not every farmer in Congress always stood up for labor when it wanted legislation? On the other hand, has not every corporation attorney in Congress or in our state legislatures fought such legislation demanded by labor?

To-day there are millions of men willing to work who are idle, and even those who have jobs do not get as much as they deserve.

The fact is there are so many people not employed that if you were to average the wages paid to those now employed with those unemployed, the average pay which labor now receives would not be more than half of what employed labor actually received before silver was demonetized. When a man whose only capital is his labor is forced to be idle a day that much of his capital is forever lost; it is confiscated; it can never be gotten back for him or for society; it is as much lost as when a building is burned. Conditions that would require a certain number of houses to be burned each day would not be any more unjust or destructive to the owners of the houses than present conditions are to the laborer when forced to be idle, when willing and anxious to work, while his wife and children suffer for bread.

The fact is that labor employed is to-day forced to support labor that is idle. Capital contributes one cent to the support of idle labor. Those not employed must be supported by you and those who are employed, or they will suffer and starve.

Let me ask you: Have you any sons who are not employed?

Conductor. Yes I have two sons—one nineteen and the other fifteen. I have been trying to get them a job, but I can only get them temporary work here and there.

Senator. Then you have to support those two sons in idleness out of your seventy-five dollars salary. If those two sons were employed at good wages, or were in business, you not only would not be burdened to support them, but they could help you to send your daughter to school, and also give their mother more comfort and help at home than you can now out of your present salary. But why is it that you think of nothing but getting a job for yourself? Or if you were to loose your job why would you not go into some business enterprise with them where you could be with your family more, and have more time that was your own?

Conductor. I know of no business that I could go into in which I could make a living. I would perish to death at farming, though I was raised on a farm. The mercantile business is run in the ground, and men with more capital and experience than I have got, are failing each day. I hear all the drummers complain of dull trade, and I see a great many others who have been dismissed by their firms on account of falling off in sales.

Senator. Then you admit frankly that the condition of the country is very bad, and even alarming. Now, are you safe even as a man drawing a salary when your sons are idle and cannot get a job, or go into business, and where you are liable to have your salary reduced, in fact, certain to have it reduced if the number of unemployed men increase, and where if you lost your job you would be at sea, and would soon face want?

Only the other day a certain class of men who work for this

road who are paid by the hour for eight hours' labor each day were notified that they would be paid hereafter for only six hours a day. This is twenty-five per cent reduction in the wages of these men. If this order should be applied to you it would mean a loss of \$18.75 per month at one blow. Those men are submitting to this reduction, and if it be applied to you, would you not submit also? You would be forced to submit or be without a job entirely. You and these other men are as helpless and as much compelled to submit to whatever terms are put upon you, without being consulted, as were the slaves of the South before the war. There are plenty of idle men ready to take your job at this reduction, or even at a greater reduction, which is sure to come.

Do you prefer this situation of things? Or would you prefer to have your sons employed and to see all of these unemployed men who are standing around waiting for your job, engaged in profitable business—some of them farming and making money, some of them merchandising and making money, some of them going into manufacturing enterprises and making money, some of them going on to new railroads that would be built, until there was a demand for more labor than there were men to supply the demand? Then the combined salaries of you and your sons would be at least \$200 a month. This is what would happen with a sufficient supply of money. Then you, instead of being in danger of losing your job, would have another railroad bidding for your services and offering you a greater salary. They would also be bidding for the services of your sons. There would be no danger of losing your job. The only question would be, which job would you take? And the chances are that you would not serve as conductor on any railroad, for the opportunity of going into some business more congenial to your taste and more agreeable to your family would open up. Here are the two pictures. One is as sure as fate under the single gold standard; the other is as sure as fate with free coinage and an honest financial system, where the amount of money will be increased each year in exact proportion to the increase of population and business. Under the gold standard, what hope have you for the future of your children? Unless you could make a contract for your sons to hold a job at a given salary you would lie on your death bed with your greatest concern as to whether or not they would be able to live even as you had, or whether they would go down in poverty and want and rags. In short, your own future and that of your children is safe, and the future of every man is safe who is willing to work for an honest living provided we have a change in our laws and an honest financial system.

The Senator was about to advance another point, to show why the railroads themselves would be for free silver if they were not owned by foreign capitalists and the gold trust, but we were nearing the junction, where he changed cars. But he said enough to show me clearly that I was about to damage my family and to finally enslave my children. I see the whole thing now clearly. The gold standard cannot help anyone except the hoarders of aggregated capital, the gold trust, the bondholders, and those who through trusts and monopolies can levy a fixed tribute like a tax upon every man and upon every industry, and who can cut our wages at will and leave us helpless to accept what they offer or lose our jobs and suffer. My mind is fixed. I will vote for Bryan and free silver.

A FREE SILVER CONDUCTOR.

An Answer Awaited

At the republican meeting held in the tabernacle on last Saturday, when Mr. Elliot was speaking, one Henry Fisher, a venerable and respected citizen, who is a radical free silver man, found it necessary from a physical infirmity to withdraw temporarily from the audience, whereupon he was unmercifully cheered and gayed by the leading republicans, led by the mayor of the city, who is the district chairman of the tenth district. Mr. Fisher and other parties would like to know if they are to expect such treatment in the future.

Lots in the Leopold addition in proximity to the court house are very much sought for at present by local real estate buyers.

The Silver Daily, 25 cts. for campaign