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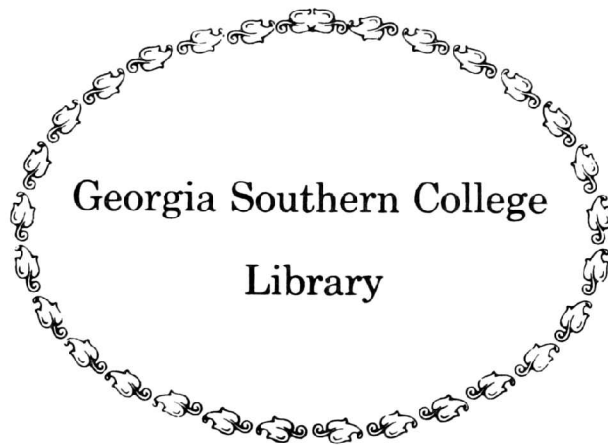
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**THE PRICE OF PROGRESS
THE GEORGIA RAILROAD
STRIKE OF 1909**

Mark V. Wetherington



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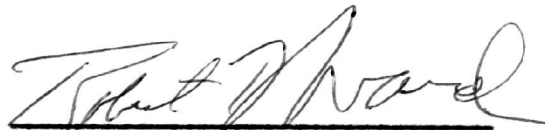
THE PRICE OF PROGRESS
THE GEORGIA RAILROAD STRIKE OF 1909

Mark V. Wetherington

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the History Department
of Georgia Southern College in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts in History

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Approved by:


Major Professor


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PREFACE

The Georgia Railroad strike of 1909 found its participants in a period of unsettled values and directions. It was fought out against an agricultural backdrop in which many Georgians still remembered the sacrifice of the war years, bitter Reconstruction, and the glorification of the Lost Cause. Nevertheless, the strike possessed all the animosities of twentieth century industrial strife. The struggle during the spring of 1909 warned Southerners that the future years of industrial growth necessary for the development of a New South might not be the smooth, progressive, uplifting transition envisioned by some Southern leaders. The union's attempt to use race as a rallying cry for its cause was a desperate move to capitalize on political and social segregation for its own interests. The failure of the brotherhood to win a clear victory in 1909 was an indication that Southern business interests, while openly endorsing racial disfranchisement and social inferiority for blacks, would not allow white unions to use race as a weapon to break their hold on the region's unorganized and unskilled workers.

Unfortunately, the story of the Georgia Railroad strike of 1909 remains incomplete; in that sense it is not unlike all written history. Few records are extant which reflect the black fireman's reaction to the walkout. An inquiry into the availability and extent of railroad records remains unanswered. The testimony of railroad officials and their public statements, however, adequately reflects the railroad's attitude toward its laborers, black and white. The staff of the Labor-Management Documentation Center, Martin P. Gatherwood Library, Cornell University,

provided valuable assistance in obtaining brotherhood records. I would also like to thank Mrs. Mildred B. Sanders and the staff of Georgia Southern College Library for their helpfulness.

Many individuals have aided in this study. Foremost among these is my major professor, Dr. Robert D. Ward, whose own interest in Southern labor and economic history encouraged this work. His scholarly advice and guidance greatly aided the completion of this study. I would also like to thank Dr. J. Perry Cochran and Dr. C. Charlton Moseley, members of the reading committee, for their helpful suggestions concerning the manuscript.

Finally, I owe special thanks to my wife, Mary Ann, who aided in the preparation of the manuscript and was a constant source of encouragement.

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CHAPTER I

THE NATION AND THE STATE

Only two and one-half months remained in the first administration of Georgia's Governor Hoke Smith when a frugal superintendent at the Atlanta Joint Terminal Company replaced ten white union yardworkers with ten black non-union men. Few Georgians could predict that the act, meant to bolster the sagging economy of the company, would trigger a walkout of union firemen on a connecting railroad, fan the fires of race hatred, disrupt train and mail service to a large section of the state's piedmont, and initiate cabinet level discussions in the newly formed Taft administration. Although an economic struggle, the "Georgia Race Strike" was interpreted as a racial fight and was severely criticized by the nation's press. The embroilment raised the fundamental economic question of the status of the black industrial worker in the New South and its outcome severely hindered the organizational efforts of the firemen's brotherhood. To understand how a walkout of forty-three union firemen on a small Georgia railroad could provoke racial conflict and necessitate federal intervention requires a brief look at the underlying forces which would combine to form an economic and political melee known as the Georgia Railroad strike of 1909.

By 1900 the United States had experienced a fundamental transformation as a result of the industrial revolution. Through technological advancements the nation had, by 1880, doubled its capacity for the production of steel and extended its lead over Great Britain. Much of this

steel was marked for railroad construction, which was considered "fundamental to the industrial growth of the nation."¹ Between 1877 and 1890 railroad mileage more than doubled as railroad companies consumed fifteen million tons of rails. The railroad was, in the words of Charles Francis Adams Jr., "the most developing force and largest field of the day."² Although there were over 1,000 railroads in the United States by 1890, integration and absorption placed the control of those roads into the hands of three large sectional trunk systems. The Southern trunk was formed by the Richmond and West Point Terminal Company, the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, and the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad.³ As railroads combined to form systems, railway employees found it increasingly difficult to wrest satisfactory working agreements from the "larger employer," or system which had leased or purchased the smaller road upon which they labored. As a result, railroad workers began to organize on a system-wide basis and eventually on a national scale in order to reach absentee managers and increase their economic clout. By 1873 both locomotive engineers and firemen had formed national organizations. They were among the first workers confronted by the effects of the industrial revolution. Engineers and firemen on Southern railroads saw the elimination of the woodpasser as railroads converted from woodburning locomotives to engines fired by coal. Symbolically the turn of the twentieth century witnessed the gradual disappearance of decorative painting on driving wheels; ornamental brass and wood vanished as engines became heavier and

¹ John A. Garraty, The New Commonwealth 1877-1890 (New York, Harper and Row, 1968), 85.

² Ibid., 31.

³ Ibid., 86-88.

more utilitarian. The Baldwin locomotives used on many Georgia railroads weighed seventy tons, carried six thousand gallons of water, and consumed "enough coal to last a family through a severe winter." The "new monsters" represented the crowning achievement of locomotive engineering and reflected the basic changes wrought by industrialization.⁴

Atlanta was the railroading capital of the Southeast. By 1910 the bustling city exhibited the trappings of a progressive community: electric lights, electric streetcars, and telephones. But the ceiling of electric wires and cables above Atlanta's streets abruptly ended at the edge of town. Only an occasional autoist pushing the "good roads movement" ventured into a countryside which, in contrast to the city, was still heavily agricultural. Most rural dwellers saw such portents of a new era fleetingly or not at all. By the turn of the century over eighty per cent of black Southerners were still bound to a system of commercial farming along with a majority of white farmers. Caught in an economic backwater, impoverished sharecroppers and tenant farmers were little affected by the inventions of an Edison, Ford, or Bell.

The blacks who did manage to escape the drudgery and isolation of sharecropping during the first migrations to Southern cities found menial and domestic jobs along with Jim Crow elevators and racial violence. In 1906 Atlanta exploded into race war after Hoke Smith's intense gubernatorial campaign based, in part, on black disfranchisement as a basis for the maintenance of white supremacy. Despite the urgings of national politicians and black leaders progress seemed elusive for blacks. In January of 1909 William H. Taft, in an address to Augusta's black Young Men's

⁴ John R. Commons, ed., History of Labour in the United States (New York: MacMillan Company, 1936), II.

Christian Association, advised young black Southerners to make themselves economically indispensable and thereby eliminate prejudice. The president-elect's advice, however, seemed hollow and empty to blacks who possessed neither economic nor political clout. Social justice seemed incompatible as the nation embarked upon a course of Anglo-Saxonism, writers turned out books entitled The Negro, A Menace to America, and newspapers sensationalized racial conflict.⁵ Yet some black leaders believed that there was reason for optimism. Booker T. Washington, in a speech delivered at Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute four months before the Georgia strike, predicted that the "wisest" Southerners now realized that the future of the South depended upon blacks as "common and skilled" workers. Washington, in words that proved untimely, ventured: "Everything that can happen to disrupt the relations between the races has already happened. We have reached,..., the extreme of racial friction...." The black leader hoped that "a sanity of self control, a liberality on the part of the...white race in the South" would characterize future race relations.⁶ Liberality and self control, however, were conspicuously absent during the spring of 1909; blacks who tried to follow the advice expounded in the Atlanta Compromise found the path to economic independence stubbornly blocked. For many white Georgians, perpetually fearful of an agricultural labor shortage, had social as well as economic reasons for keeping blacks on the farm. When a bill calling for a \$25,000 appropriation for a black agricultural and mechanical college came before the Georgia state legislature in 1909, one

⁵New York Times, January 18, 1909; C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 352.

⁶New York Times, February 1, 1909.

senator voiced the racial sentiments of more than a few Georgians when he thundered:

It is not right to appropriate to them all of this money to be used in that way. Why, they even have tennis courts out there. Why not make them plow these courts up and plant something in them? It's called an agricultural school, not a military college. Let's make them wear homespun shirts, jean breeches and get in the fields and plow....

...Patent leather shoes, red neckties, brass buttons and chevrons are breeding in the breast of every negro out there the ambition to be a Booker T. Washington and eat at some white man's table.⁷

In fact, when two blacks were served in the cafeteria of the House Office Building in Washington D.C., five Southern congressmen "stalked from the room." Outraged Southern representatives subsequently threatened to "boycott the restaurant."⁸ Two days after the Washington cafeteria incident the Georgia Railroad's white firemen walked out.

The "Great Strike Down South," as one journal labeled the walkout, was fought out under vastly different attitudes. To Southern blacks and their supporters the strike threatened the black's right to work and challenged the old Southern shibboleth that, although excluded socially and politically, blacks were free to seek industrial positions in the South. For Southern conservatives with an eye on industrial development the strike threatened the utilization of a cheap, tractable labor force which had long been the boast of the New South. Southern railroad management, directly threatened by the walkout, saw the strike as union encroachment into a traditionally anti-union South; the brotherhood's organizational efforts posed a system-wide threat to the open shop.

⁷"New Phases of Old Perplexities," Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine, III (July 1909), 524-525.

⁸New York Times, May 15, 1909.

Brotherhood members viewed the strike as a defensive struggle against a railroad which used cheap black labor to beat down the union scale and erode the bargaining position of the local. Finally, many Georgians, influenced by union propaganda, viewed the strike as a battle for the maintenance of white supremacy; it was then an easy step for state and local politicians to exploit the racial overtones of the fight and win new converts. The strike also exposed a fundamental rift in the ranks of Southern whites. On one hand the graying colonels of the old order, who sat on the railroad boards as directors and ran the law offices, still viewed black Southerners paternalistically and held on to the old ideals of noblesse oblige. White firemen who struck to protest the hiring of blacks, said the gentlemen, were "misguided" by "foreign" elements. But young brotherhood men, who were born long after the old order had died and who had reaped none of the benefits of black toil, either slave or free, viewed blacks from a different, although not entirely new, perspective. Raised during the tumultuous eighties and nineties and weaned on a rising, virulent racism, young union men considered the black worker as an economic enemy, an omnipresent competitor in the hands of unrelenting management. The racial animosity carried in the breasts of brotherhood men was not unlike the animosity exhibited by the economically disadvantaged sandhillers and small yeoman farmers of the old order; but that animosity was now cloaked in a conservative, fraternalistic brotherhood.

CHAPTER II

FROM SLAVE LABOR TO UNIONIZATION

The Georgia Railroad was the state's first. In 1833 Augustans, startled by the completion of the Charleston to Hamburg railroad, organized the company to tap the Piedmont and retain their hold on the Georgia cotton market. By the mid-1830's the horse drawn cars of the road had pushed westward along the developing Piedmont, stopping at stations which bore the names of early company presidents, Camak and Dearing. In 1837 the railroad placed its first steam engine on line; nine years later the road's grading and track reached the small, interior town of Terminus, later renamed Marthasville and finally dubbed Atlanta. As the Piedmont developed, the railroad, practically free from state taxation, profited and extended branch lines to the growing communities of Washington, Macon, Athens, and Monroe. In one year, 1846-1847, cotton bales hauled by the road increased from 38,000 to 94,000. Alone on the Piedmont and without serious competition, the Georgia Railroad "dominated railway traffic in the easter part of Georgia."¹

Both black and white firemen stoked the woodburning locomotives on the Georgia Railroad during the ante-bellum period and competition between the races was almost as old as the railroad itself. Locomotives heading

¹Joseph B. Cumming, A History of Georgia Railroad and Banking Company and its Corporate Affiliates 1833-1958 (Georgia Railroad Company, 1959), 3-9; John Michael Mathews, "The Georgia 'Race Strike' of 1909," The Journal of Southern History, XL (November 1974), 614.

west over the road's "lower" division, between Augusta and Union Point, were fired by company owned slaves or blacks leased from planters along the fertile eastern section of the railroad. Here, in planter dominated counties, few white laborers were available to fire locomotives. When the railroad's locomotives reached Union Point the black firemen stepped out of the cab and white firemen continued to stoke the engine over the road's "upper" division into the foothills around Atlanta. The juxtaposition of white and black firemen on the Georgia Railroad reflected the traditional break between upcountry and low-country. The use of blacks on the railroad, however, ended abruptly in 1865. During the weeks immediately following the war emancipated slaves left the railroad and, as one railroad worker put it, "struck out for something different."²

Jobless veterans and dispossessed farmers quickly filled the labor void left by blacks. As a result, white firemen dominated the engines of the Georgia Railroad for the next four decades. They were tumultuous decades, characterized by organizational efforts and depression. As early as 1874 white employees of the Georgia Railroad, hard pressed by the panic of the previous year, met at Augusta's City Hall to discuss the formation of a beneficial association. Two years later, as wages plummeted nationwide, the engineers of the road were forced to act. During the past eighteen months they had witnessed a reduction in wages from \$4.25 a day plus board to \$2.50 per day without board. When the local was unable to reach a satisfactory agreement with the railroad the engineers struck.

²"Arbitration Proceedings, Georgia Railroad and Its Employees" (typescript in Georgia Collection, University of Georgia Library, Athens, Georgia), 479-483, 492-494; Seventh Census of the United States, 1860: Population, 72-73.

The walkout was broken when the railroad brought in twenty non-union engineers as strikebreakers; the engineers, humiliated by the defeat, were forced to sign an agreement which barred brotherhood members from participation in "strikes prejudicial to the company's interest."³

The engineer's counterpart in the cab, the fireman, was also the object of organizational efforts in the South. The conservative Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, organized in 1873, had active agents in the region, forming lodges for the "uplifting and betterment" of the men; collective bargaining did not become a permanent feature of the brotherhood until 1885. Under the banner of "protection, charity, sobriety, and industry," the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen (B. of L. F.) offered insurance policies which, due to the dangerous nature of railroading, were unavailable elsewhere. As one observer of the American labor movement noted, the "large membership...is unquestionably due to the insurance features..., rather than to collective bargaining." But the insurance plan was also responsible, in part, for the brotherhood's "unfailing conservatism." A brotherhood fireman who had "invested in a policy and...carried that policy for several years and is counting on its protection is wary of strikes or other experiments involving risk."⁴ One organizer, on a recruiting campaign through south Georgia and north Florida in 1887, hinted that the B. of L. F.'s conservative strike policy still stood: "Our brotherhood," he stated, "is independent of all labor organizations, we never had a strike, and I hope we never will. We arbitrate all of our differences." Indeed, the avoidance of strikes was a "business principle"

³Augusta Chronicle, January 6, 1874, November 16, 1876.

⁴Helen Marot, American Labor Unions (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1914), 29-35.

of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen.⁵

The B. of L. F. shunned the American Federation of Labor and remained outside the mainstream of the American labor movement. In many respects the brotherhood resembled a fraternal organization rather than a labor union. The purpose of the brotherhood, according to one organizer, was to "effect a unity of locomotive firemen..., and to elevate them to a higher social, moral and intellectual standard, and for the protection of their families." In addition to the brotherhood's insurance features, social outings were organized for members and their families. "Benevolence," the Savannah Morning News declared, "is the principal object of the union."⁶

The B. of L. F.'s benevolence, however, stopped at the color line; the firemen's union, as well as organizations governing engineers, trainmen, and conductors, barred black railway workers from membership. To admit blacks into such fraternal organizations would be an admission of social equality, "something that will never be tolerated in the South," one fireman wrote. Another brotherhood member emphatically stated: "I hope and pray that I may never live to see the grand old B. of L. F. so disgraced as to take into its protecting folds this class of God's creation."⁷ As early as 1887 one Georgia newspaper noted that the "order views with satisfaction the tendency on the Southern roads to employ white firemen in place of colored men..., because they do not consider it either political or safe to put colored men in charge of trains."⁸ Indeed, the brotherhood practiced its own peculiar version of "pure and simple" unionism.

⁵Savannah Morning News, February 16, 1887.

⁶Marot, Labor Unions, 29; Savannah Morning News, December 11, 1884.

⁷Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 288.

⁸Savannah Morning News, February 16, 1887.

"We are," as one union officer proudly testified, "a white man's institution, pure and simple."⁹

Although a national policy of black exclusion insured the survival of a segregated fraternal organization, it left Southern locals hopelessly open to attack. Southern railroad superintendents, "hostile to trade unionism," relentlessly employed blacks "to weaken the organizations which barred [them] from membership." The railroad's use of unorganized blacks to impede the growth of unionization in the South reaffirmed the white fireman's belief that blacks were incorrigible competitors. When Southern firemen demanded an increase in wages they were told that the railroad could "get a Negro...for one dollar, while I am paying you \$1.50 per day."¹⁰ In 1899 an article in the Locomotive Firemen's Magazine ironically noted that the firemen of the North and West "had thrown off the yoke of slavery. But why does not the Brotherhood accomplish similar results in the South? The answer is: 'The Negro.'"¹¹ When The Nation addressed the question of black competition in 1903 the magazine wrote that the basic issue was whether the unions would control the black worker, "or whether [he] shall come into conflict with unionism and take sides with the employer. When this issue becomes a serious one, it is hardly doubtful that race prejudice will yield to pecuniary interest."¹² But race prejudice was unyielding among Southern brotherhood firemen, who had no intention of allowing a "burr-bear" into their "grand organization."¹³

⁹"Arbitration Proceedings," 167.

¹⁰Spero and Harris, Black Worker, 286-287.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²"The Negro and the Trade Unions," The Nation, LXXVI (1903), 187-188.

¹³Spero and Harris, Black Worker, 288.

By 1881 the Georgia Railroad had been surrounded by three Southeastern railroad giants: the Central of Georgia, the Richmond and Danville, and the Louisville and Nashville. The Georgia's directors, aware that their own road could not compete successfully with the larger systems, leased the line to the Central of Georgia and the Louisville and Nashville. Although the ninety-nine year joint lease was beneficial for the Georgia Railroad's stockholders, it severely hampered the firemen's struggle on the line.¹⁴ Throughout the 1890's the fate of the firemen's weak Georgia locals was inextricably bound to a more powerful organization, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (B. of L. E.). Locals of the B. of L. F. and the B. of L. E. jointly negotiated for wage agreements with railroad management. Traditionally, wages paid to brotherhood firemen were fixed at fifty per cent of those paid to engineers. Now the engineers and firemen's fight on the Georgia Railroad was no longer with a single superintendent in Augusta, but with two distant systems. The president of the Louisville and Nashville, an avowed anti-union man, had declared that the brotherhoods were secret organizations which demanded "increases in their compensation and...changes in the rules and regulations so as to give them less work and more pay." The Louisville and Nashville, one Southern organizer bitterly complained, "so strongly opposes our organization that instant dismissal is the penalty of membership when it becomes known...."¹⁵

¹⁴Maurry Klein, History of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad (New York: MacMillan Company, 1972), 179-180.

¹⁵Ibid., 260; Proceedings of the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen (St. Paul, Minn.: n.p., 1910), 478.

Under the guidance of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, the Georgia Railroad began a strict program of economic retrenchment. General Manager Thomas K. Scott, who assumed control of the Georgia Railroad in 1893, initiated "an economical administration of affairs" and saved the railroad "considerable money...letting go every man whose services were found not to be absolutely necessary."¹⁶ The general manager quickly froze the wages of the railroad's employees. In 1893 P.M. Arthur, Grand Master of the B. of L. E., and a grievance committee formed by Georgia Railroad engineers met with Scott and demanded a new contract which called for pay by the mile rather than per diem. Scott refused their demands, pointing out that the panic of that year prevented an increase in wages. The general manager subsequently fired some obdurate members of the engineer's committee. In 1894 Grand Master Arthur and the engineers were again turned away by Scott. The conservative Georgia local, after three days of caucus and ballot, followed their traditional no-strike policy.¹⁷ The great strike of the American Railway Union during the summer of 1894 had little effect in Augusta. Cured meat prices temporarily soared as Chicago was seized by the walkout. Railroad officials at the road's home office were more concerned with the interruption of coal trains from Alabama than by a walkout of their operatives.¹⁸ The Louisville and Nashville, however, was not as fortunate as the Georgia road and was determined to purge the system of brotherhood men who had supposedly violated their contracts by joining the American Railway Union. It was a convenient time to retract any recognition of the firemen's brotherhood. Nationally, the firemen's partici-

¹⁶ Augusta Chronicle, July 6, 1894.

¹⁷ "Arbitration Proceedings," 758-762.

¹⁸ Augusta Chronicle, July 8, 9, 1894.

pation in the American Railway Union strike and the part played by Eugene V. Debs, editor of the Locomotive Firemen's Magazine, had "virtually wrecked" the B. of L. F.¹⁹

The Louisville and Nashville had sound economic reasons for crushing the firemen's union on the Georgia Railroad. The lease of the road cost the Louisville and Nashville and the Central of Georgia \$600,000 per year. Expense cutting measures were the order of the day, particularly since, according to the Louisville and Nashville's president, Milton H. Smith, "no return [was] ever...received" on the Georgia Railroad.²⁰ When the Central of Georgia went into receivership during the late 1880's the entire burden of the joint lease fell upon the Louisville and Nashville. An embittered Smith blamed the Central of Georgia's failure, in part, on the moribund Georgia Railroad. In 1898 the Louisville and Nashville paid the Central of Georgia's share of the lease and during the following year sold half interest in the Georgia Railroad lease "to the more reliable Atlantic Coast Line."²¹ The last year of the century found brotherhood firemen on the Georgia Railroad confronted by two Southern trunk system kingpins: the anti-brotherhood Louisville and Nashville and the Atlantic Coast Line, a railroad which, according to the Savannah Morning News, had traditionally side-stepped the problem of unionization among firemen in Georgia by hiring only black coal shovelers.²²

¹⁹"Arbitration Proceedings," 529-542; Lloyd G. Reynolds and Charles G. Killingsworth, Trade Union Publications: The Official Journals, Convention Proceedings, and Constitutions of International Unions and Federations, 1850-1941 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1944) 59-63.

²⁰Klein, Louisville and Nashville, 179-180; U.S. Congress, Senate Documents, 64th Cong., 1st sess., No. 461, Hearings Relative to the Financial Relations, Rates, and Practices of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad Co., The Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railway, and Other Carriers, 360.

²¹Klein, Louisville and Nashville, 307-308.

²²Savannah Morning News, February 16, 1887.

Discontent among the Georgia Railroad's employees continued into the new century. In October 1902 the railroad's engineers again demanded payment by the mile rather than by the day. Apparently they believed that the amount paid for a day's work was too low considering the mileage traveled. Scott again refused to negotiate with the engineers and dismissed several of their leaders.²³ The railroad's refusal to reinstate the dismissed engineers sparked a month long fight which eventually involved the brotherhood firemen on the railroad. J.J. Hannahan, Grand Master of the B. of L. F., told one Augusta reporter that the firemen were "ready to give to the engineers their fullest measure of support, morally and financially."²⁴ A favorable press and threats that the fight might spread throughout the system forced the railroad to concede. On the surface the victory seemed significant. The engineers received a ten per cent increase in wages and seven men who had been fired were reinstated. Brotherhood firemen, under the same contract, received "an increase in wages proportionate with the increase given the engineers."²⁵

Although the 1902 contract clearly called for a sixty day notice before the agreement could be altered or broken, General Manager Scott began to undermine the firemen's wage increase within days of the contract's signing. The tenacity of the two brotherhoods had handed Scott his first union directed defeat since his occupancy of the general manager's office in 1893; that defeat raised Scott's ire. A brotherhood victory set a dangerous precedent: "If the example of the engineers was followed in

²³ Augusta Chronicle, October 3, 4, 1902.

²⁴ Ibid., October 3, 14, 1902.

²⁵ Ibid., October 3, 11, 14, 26, 1902.

other departments," Scott later commented, "we would...be practically at the mercy of our employees."²⁶ The engineers, however, were highly skilled, difficult to train, and practically unassailable. But the engineer's staunch ally in the 1902 struggle, the firemen, were semi-skilled, vulnerable, and members of a brotherhood which was particularly weak in the South. The Georgia Railroad's general manager was determined to enfeeble the firemen's local on the railroad before it was strong enough to bargain alone. Scott must act soon, for the general manager noticed that the firemen's loyalty to the company had waned and that the brotherhood's fresh victory had bolstered the spirit of brotherhood members. Scott outlined the railroad's problem and openly discussed his plan of attack:

...It became perfectly manifest..., that the firemen could not be expected to treat as reasonably and as fairly and as considerately with the Road as they had formerly done. They had manifested evidences of a determination to rest their case more upon the strength of their organization, and their power to enforce their demands, than they did upon reason and fairness and consideration for the condition surrounding their employment, and it was then, in order to have some defense against the evident intention in the future to make and to enforce their demands, that I authorized the enlarged employment of negroes,..."²⁷

The use of black firemen on the Georgia Railroad was, of course, not unique to the road's history. But the "enlarged employment" of blacks in 1902 was undisguisable, since "Old Bill" Irwin, a relic of the wood-burning days, was the only black fireman on the railroad. Nevertheless, Scott quickly began to replace union firemen with blacks, rather than pay them an increase in wages. By 1903 the number of black firemen on engines

²⁶ Augusta Chronicle, October 26, 1902; "Arbitration Proceedings," 764.

²⁷ "Arbitration Proceedings," 764.

and on the extra list had increased to twenty-one while the number of white firemen was fixed at seventy-seven. In 1905 the number of whites dropped to sixty-six while the number of black firemen increased to forty. By the spring of 1909 blacks would account for forty-two per cent of the railroad's firemen. Scott attributed the increase in black firemen to technological change. Since 1893, he would later testify, the railroad had slowly replaced its lightweight iron rails with steel rails. By 1903 the transition was complete and heavier locomotives were placed on line to deal with an increase in freight. According to Scott, "the white firemen...were found incompetent to satisfactorily fire those heavier machines, and I authorized the employment of negroes in their places, to secure men of greater muscle and greater endurance." Black firemen, the railroad's master mechanic testified, "could stand the heat from the fire door." The Georgia Railroad did not explain how white brotherhood firemen in the North and West managed the muscle to fire the same type locomotive. The old generalization that the fireman's task was traditionally "nigger work," later claimed by white workers of the New South, underwent a strange reversal on the Georgia Railroad.²⁸

The railroad's "radically" altered hiring policy enraged brotherhood firemen, who saw their bargaining power jeopardized. One brotherhood sympathizer wrote that Scott and the road had given jobs to the "weakest, cheapest laboring class on the face of the globe...in order to save a few measly dollars...."²⁹ But the savings garnered by the use of blacks on the

²⁸"Arbitration Proceedings," 483, 485, 760; One recent treatment of the strike noted: "By tradition blacks continued to work alongside white engineers during the postwar years. Owing to technological advances that made the job less back-breaking, large numbers of whites began to move into the occupation." That generalization, while perhaps true elsewhere, does not accurately describe events on the Georgia Railroad. See Hugh B. Hammett, "Labor and Race: The Georgia Railroad Strike of 1909," Labor History, XVI (Fall 1975), 471-472.

²⁹Atlanta Constitution, May 29, 1909.

railroad amounted to more than a few dollars. Since the railroad paid "the darkey by the day and the white man...per mile" the disparity was signal. Black firemen were paid \$3.50 for a three hundred and forty mile round-trip from Augusta's Union Station to Atlanta's Joint Terminal Company. White brotherhood firemen received \$7.50 for the same trip.³⁰ Scott paternalistically explained away the differential by claiming that black firemen received less pay because their "scale of living is low. We give the white man more because we do not wish to bring his scale down to the level of the negro."³¹ Embittered brotherhood men, however, charged that the hiring of blacks was like "taking bread out of a white man's mouth to put it into a negro's."³² The rank and file of union firemen now feared irreparable erosion of brotherhood strength on the Georgia Railroad.

Public attacks aimed at the "Old Reliable" revealed that the road's economy minded management had tried to reduce operating expenses in other areas as well. In 1907 Bowdre Phinizy, an Augusta newspaper editor and frequent critic of the Georgia Railroad lease, charged that the road had been neglected to the point that it was now physically unsafe for passenger trains. Phinizy alleged that the railroad's heavy locomotives ran over the "cheapest sort of track." When the price of crossties increased, Phinizy continued, the railroad reduced the number of crossties from 180,000 to 104,000 in order to keep "the annual expenditure...about the same." A railroad hired "expert" from Atlanta pronounced the road

³⁰"Arbitration Proceedings," 190.

³¹"The Georgia Railroad Strike," Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen's Magazine, XLVII (August 1909), 257-258.

³²Augusta Chronicle, May 16, 1909.

safe for travel, although affidavits from one community on the railroad told a story of unreliable schedules, decayed crossties, and derailments. When Phinizy walked a section of the track between Atlanta and Augusta he reportedly arrived at the capital with "a handgrip full of spikes, said to have been pulled by hand out of Georgia railroad crossties." Louisville and Nashville officials dismissed Phinizy's charges as "vague, loose, fallacious and demagogic [sic]." ³³

The panic which gripped the nation in October of 1907 found Southeastern railroad managers scrambling to reduce their operating expenses. Georgia's general managers were even harder pressed after the state's railroad commission reduced passenger rates. In December 1907 and January 1908 the region's major railroads, including the Louisville and Nashville and the Georgia railroad, "served notice on the engineers and other organizations of a desire to reopen the contracts.... It was, of course, understood that this meant a reduction in wages." ³⁴ The brotherhoods predictably refused to sit down with the railroads and reopen the agreements. When the Louisville and Nashville threatened to reduce wages after March 1, 1909, the engineers stubbornly resisted and, after threatening a system-wide walkout, invoked federal mediation under the provisions of the Erdman Act. In Washington, before a board of mediation composed of Chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission Martin A. Knapp and Commissioner of Labor Charles P. Neill, the engineers convincingly argued their position. The brotherhood's wage scale was hard won and the engineers would witness no reduction until it was clear that the present panic was

³³ Augusta Chronicle, March 14, 21, 1907.

³⁴ Charles P. Neill, "Mediation and Arbitration of Railway Labor Disputes in the United States," U.S. Bureau of Labor, Bulletin No. 98 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1912), XXIV, 22; Mathews, "Race Strike," 614.

a long one. Knapp and Neill agreed. The Louisville and Nashville must extend the present wage scale for three more months. If the lull in railroad traffic continued and reductions in wages were warranted at the end of the ninety day period, the board would resume hearings. After three, three month extensions the effects of the panic had worn off. Neill noted that "conditions of traffic had so improved that no notice of a desire to reopen negotiations was served, and the existing wage scales were allowed to stand unchanged."³⁵

For brotherhood firemen on the Georgia Railroad the Panic of 1907 and the mediation of 1908 eventually meant the loss of an important ally. The engineers emerged from the panic unscathed and, in fact, gained a wage increase of six to ten per cent by late 1908. But the firemen, denied their traditional proportionate increase, found themselves defenseless. When they confronted Scott and demanded an increase in wages the general manager replied that he did not consider it in their contract to grant an increase. It was clear that the railroad's practice of hiring black firemen had served its purpose well. There was no "necessity" to raise the wages of white firemen, Scott stated in cold economic terms, because "there was a more abundant supply" of labor.³⁶ Brotherhood firemen could

³⁵Neill, "Mediation and Arbitration," 22-25, 46; Passed in 1898 because of the lack of any efficient mediation or arbitration of the Pullman strike, "An Act Concerning Carriers Engaged in Interstate Commerce and Their Employees," 30 Stat. L., 424 was commonly called the Erdman Act. Under its provisions, railroad employers or employees could invoke mediation and, if that failed, arbitration "whenever a controversy concerning wages, hours of labor, or conditions of employment..., seriously interrupts or threatens to interrupt...business." The mediators were the Chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission and the Commissioner of Labor. If mediation failed, arbitrators, one chosen by each side and a third, chosen as "umpire," made a ruling which was considered binding for one year. See George A. King and W. B. King, Supplement to the Revised Statutes of the United States, Legislation of the Fifty Second to the Fifty Sixth Congresses 1892-1901 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), II: 769-773.

³⁶"Arbitration Proceedings," 792.

no longer expect support from the B. of L. E. The engineers had watched their wage scale hang precariously in the balance for nine months and had no intention of jeopardizing their 1908 wage increase for members of an organization which they now viewed as a competitor. As early as 1885 the B. of L. E. and the B. of L. F. were at odds. During that year the B. of L. E. ruled that all new members must carry engineer's cards only and denounce membership in previous organizations. Since most engineers worked their way up from the ranks of firemen, the B. of L. F. lost membership. To curb this drain and increase its strength the B. of L. F. reorganized in 1906, becoming the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen (B. of L. F. and E.). Since "enginemen" meant anyone in the cab to railroad men, both firemen and engineers could join the new organization. The period of 1906-1909 was one of bitter competition and poor relations between the two brotherhoods. Firemen charged that engineers in the South were "opposing our organization" despite directions from the engineer's Grand Chief, who urged that the region's B. of L. E. lodges assist white firemen "in displacing the negro firemen in the South." White firemen claimed that the local engineer's reasons for opposition were twofold. First, the use of black firemen decreased the number of white firemen who could eventually rise to compete with engineers. Second, white firemen scornfully charged, some engineers preferred black firemen for egotistical reasons. The black fireman is "a servant to him, [will] wait on him, black their boots, and they can order him around." Hard times, black competition, and organizational infighting on a national

scale ended any hopes for an alliance between firemen and engineers on the Georgia Railroad.³⁷

During the summer of 1908 the hapless firemen's local on the Georgia Railroad received another setback. Scott and the wage conscious Augusta home office decided to attack the sacred railroading institution of seniority. Among white brotherhood firemen seniority determined which man would receive the best run and, therefore, the most pay. Passenger runs were particularly desirable; they were faster and, according to one fireman, they were "where the money comes in." Passenger runs invariably went to senior white brotherhood firemen. Georgia Railroad officials, however, were not remiss in realizing that the placement of blacks on passenger runs could reduce the cost of a coal shoveler by fifty per cent. The railroad's decision to tamper with the seniority system was made easier by the knowledge that, should the forty-eight brotherhood firemen bolt, there were now forty-six black firemen to replace them. During August railroad officials informed brotherhood firemen that less expensive non-union blacks would be granted seniority as a reward for "their efficiency and faithfulness." The brotherhood's local angrily protested when two senior white firemen were removed from passenger runs and replaced by blacks. The railroad, white firemen argued, would soon place blacks on all the best runs and leave whites to "scramble around for the odds and ends." Union men

³⁷"The Georgia Railroad Strike," Firemen's Magazine, 260; Reynolds and Fillingsworth, Union Publications, 55, 59, 60-62; "There has been inevitable friction between two organizations representing men so closely related as the firemen and the engineers,... A fireman from the day he starts firing is in the process of becoming an engineer, for without his experience of firing he may not qualify for engineering. When he does qualify he may have to continue as fireman until a position of engineer is opened to him. In consequence, many engineers are members of the B. of L. F. . See Marot, Labor Unions, 43; Also Lorenzo J. Greene and Carter G. Woodson, The Negro Wage Earner (New York: Van Rees Press, 1930), 104; "Arbitration Proceedings," 26.

feared that, once installed on passenger runs, blacks would perpetually block young brotherhood firemen from qualifying as engineers. As The World's Work noted, the railroad could "erect a barrier of Negro employees over which the white men in inferior positions find it difficult to pass." The use of black firemen on passenger trains, the brotherhood claimed, endangered the traveling public; passenger train engineers were forced to "drive locomotives over routes on which they have never 'fired' and with which,..., they are unfamiliar." Finally, the brotherhood charged that the practice of hiring black firemen tended to create an engineer labor pool from which the railroad could draw; as the Atlanta Constitution pointed out, white firemen were allowed to "work as firemen until they are competent to become engineers, and then [were shunted] into the list of 'extras' until they are needed."³⁸

The close of the year 1908 found brotherhood firemen on the Georgia Railroad embittered, angry, and apprehensive. During the past year they had witnessed the fall of their wages to forty-seven per cent of that received by the engineers, they had seen the number of blacks proportionately increased, and they had lost contract surety and control of seniority. The railroad's refusal to meet brotherhood demands, one union officer declared, was "brought about by the employment of negroes for firemen...and ...by allowing...negroes to have...seniority over...white firemen." The wages paid to white brotherhood firemen on the Georgia Railroad were "down

³⁸"Arbitration Proceedings," 23-24, 485-486; "Negro Firemen," The World's Work, XVIII (July 1909), 11754-11755; Atlanta Constitution, May 30, 1909.

to..., the lowest percentage paid" in "Negro territory." Faced with the prospect of seeing brotherhood firemen removed "and...their places filled with negroes," the Eleventh Biennial Convention of the B. of L. F. and E. declared that black firemen should be "eliminated from the railroad service in the South." Although many Southern firemen, no doubt, viewed the resolution as a banner worthy of a crusade, it was more solice to Southern lodges than a threat to Southern railroads. The firemen's national officers apparently had no desire to engage Southeastern railroad managers in a pitched, regional struggle where the brotherhood's base was weakest and the outcome predictable.³⁹

³⁹Report of the President to the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen (St. Paul, Minn.: n.p., 1910), 293; "The Georgia Railroad Strike," Firemen's Magazine, 256; Mathews, "Race Strike," 614; "Arbitration Proceedings," 210.

CHAPTER III

AN UNYIELDING ENEMY, WHITE SUPREMACY, AND NEW FRIENDS

In Georgia the Eleventh Biennial's resolution was viewed with skepticism, particularly by brotherhood old-timers who remembered similar declarations at the B. of L. F.'s Atlanta convention in 1888. White firemen on the Georgia Railroad now viewed themselves as an isolated enclave and on the defensive. In 1909 the B. of L. F. and E. had only one small local on the Georgia Railroad, formed by twenty white firemen in Augusta who called themselves Stone Mountain Lodge No. 332. Their efforts to co-operate with other Georgia locals had been consistently thwarted by the railroad. Brotherhood firemen employed in the roundhouses and yards of the Atlanta Joint Terminal Company, a concern operated jointly by the Louisville and Nashville and the Georgia Railroad, were organized into Kennesaw Lodge No. 247. Twenty-three in number, the Kennesaw lodgemen were engaged as hostlers and hostlers' helpers and performed the dirty tasks of wiping and cleaning locomotives in the yards. Although General Manager Scott sat on the board of control of both the Georgia Railroad and the Joint Terminal Company, the Louisville and Nashville refused to allow the two weak locals to join hands. Such a concession would be a dangerous step toward the recognition of system-wide collective bargaining. In fact, brotherhood men charged that the Atlanta Joint Terminal Company, which now controlled terminal facilities formerly under the auspices of the Georgia Railroad, had been formed in order to "separate the employees and cause them to work under two separate companies." The brotherhood men, one fireman

later recalled, were not taken in by the company's ploy, since union workers employed by the Georgia Railroad and the Atlanta Terminal received "their wages in...one pay car, from...one paymaster, and payable on the Georgia Railroad and Banking Company."¹ Unable to unite and stripped of seniority rights, the firemen reacted.

During January 1909 the B. of L. F. and E.'s national office at Peoria, Illinois received notice that the Kennesaw and Stone Mountain lodges had formed a joint grievance committee and would propose a revision of wage scales and complain about working conditions. A wage increase, the Georgia lodges informed their president, would be "of secondary consideration, but...the rules governing employment, and seniority rights,...would be of great importance to the men." The national office turned a sympathetic ear to their Georgia locals but warned that the "time was very inopportune for making...demands,...on account of industrial conditions throughout the country." Management, the brotherhood's president cautioned the Georgia Railroad firemen, might use the re-opening of contracts to reduce rather than raise wages. The national's hesitancy was understandable; walkouts during an economic slump seldom succeeded. Furthermore, dualism, the aftermath of the American Railway Union's strike, and black competition had reduced the number of brotherhood firemen in Georgia from three hundred and twenty in 1890 to two hundred and seventy-five in 1900. After almost a decade of conservatism and hard organizational work the brotherhood had increased its strength within the state and could claim a membership of almost four hundred in Georgia by 1909. To engage in a futile struggle

¹ Augusta Chronicle, September 8, 1888; Report of the President to the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen (St. Paul, Minn.: n.p., 1910), 292, 293, 295; Quarterly Report of the International Officers of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen (N.P.: n.p., 1911), 88-89.

now would only thin out the ranks of the union in Georgia once more. When the brotherhood's national headquarters received word in March 1909 that the Georgia Railroad grievance committee had failed to reach a settlement with General Manager Scott and now called for the assistance of a Grand Lodge Officer, the union's president dispatched Eugene A. Ball, second vice-president of the B. of L. F. and B., to Georgia.²

On April 6, 1909 Ball stepped off a passenger train at Augusta's Union Station. A Canadian with an impressive railroad record, Ball had started out as a wiper in a roundhouse on the Grand Trunk Railroad in 1878 and had worked himself up through the ranks of yard fireman and locomotive fireman to engineer in 1888. In 1903 he accepted a position with the brotherhood's national office. On this first trip South, Ball met with the Joint Protective Board of the two lodges in Augusta on April 8; he found himself in a difficult position. Charged with the task of settling the Georgia Railroad dispute by a distant national office, Ball quickly learned that the problem close at hand was complex and, for the two lodges, perhaps fatal. Brotherhood firemen informed the vice-president that attempts during the previous winter to regain lost wages and to win a contract separate from the engineers had proven fruitless. The railroad and the terminal company, both firmly committed to economic retrenchment, remained intransigent and refused to recognize the bargaining powers of the Joint Protective Board. Ball echoed his president's opinion; to reopen contracts during an economic slump was unwise. As an alternative,

²Report of the President, 290; F. Ray Marshall, Labor in the South (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 57-59.

Ball urged that the existing contract be amended, thereby avoiding the hazards of reopening the contract. The Georgia brothers quickly agreed, pointing out that a clause guarantying the seniority of white firemen "over the negro" must take precedence over any other amendment.³

The upshot of the April 8 meeting was a memorandum drafted by Ball and members of the Joint Protective Board. It contained seventeen articles of amendment, most of which covered rules for deadheading, construction work, and computation of the work day. Amendments dealing with overtime and rules regarding engineer promotion, probably aimed at the railroad's use of machinist-engineers, were also covered. But the heart of the firemen's complaints was buried in articles four and six. Article four declared that vacancies "on all runs and engines...be advertised..., and the senior white fireman,..., be given the run or engine...." Article six demanded that new firemen "be placed in freight and yard service, and the oldest white fireman...stand first for passenger engines or runs." The adoption of those two articles would have eliminated the use of black firemen on the Georgia Railroad.⁴

Thomas A. Campbell and C.W. Veasy, representing Lodge No. 332, were sent with the memorandum to meet with Georgia Railroad Superintendent Brand at the Augusta home office. Brand stated that he "would do nothing," since the amendments meant an increase in operating expenses. General Manager Scott

³Report of the President, 290; "The Georgia Railroad Strike," Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen's Magazine, XLVII (August 1909), 257-258, 261.

⁴"The Georgia Railroad Strike," Firemen's Magazine, 261-262; Augusta Chronicle, June 1, 1909; Brotherhood men demanded that engineers have three years service on a run before taking over an engine. This would have eliminated the road's use of machinist-engineers, who were unfamiliar with the run and who were not members of the B. of L. F. and E.

claimed that Campbell and Veasy "walked right in and immediately began to talk to me about this proposed new agreement." Scott stated that the men wanted a separate contract, something "entirely novel." The general manager quickly pointed out that the main feature of the memorandum called for the elimination of black firemen and then piously declared that white firemen should "not...be parties to such a gross injustice...." In a gesture of generosity, the company agreed to place water coolers on engines during the sweltering months of April through November and pay for the ice. When the firemen "had a bona fide grievance," Scott said in parting, "come to me with it."⁵

Events at the opposite end of the Georgia Railroad quickly pushed the brotherhood men to a course of desperation. While Campbell and Veasy were busy at the Augusta home office, Garnett Ball and C. K. Norwood, representing the Kennesaw lodge, carried the same amendments by rail to Atlanta for a confrontation with Atlanta Joint Terminal Company officials. When the two men arrived in Atlanta on the afternoon of April 10 they were met by angry and excited brotherhood firemen. John D. Patterson, superintendent of the terminal company, had replaced ten white union hostlers and hostlers' helpers with ten blacks. It was a bold move, for the yard had previously employed white firemen only; in one stroke one-half of the Kennesaw lodge was placed on the extra list. Powerless, Garnett Ball and Norwood urgently called vice-president Eugene A. Ball to Atlanta on April 11.⁶

⁵Report of the President, 292-293; "Arbitration Proceedings, Georgia Railroad and Its Employees" (typescript in Georgia Collection, University of Georgia Library, Athens, Georgia), 777-780.

⁶Report of the President, 293.

While Patterson's move provoked vice-president Ball and the two Georgia lodges, few could argue with his economic reasoning. The Panic of 1907 had thrown the terminal company into an economic tailspin. By the summer of 1909 the company's embarrassed officials reported that the concern was \$70,510.73 in debt; the Louisville and Nashville, ever-mindful that the Georgia Railroad and the terminal company were severe economic burdens, ordered expenses cut at the terminal by "at least \$1,000.00 a month." The replacement of white firemen, who worked for \$1.75 per day, with ten blacks, who worked for \$1.25 per day, was only one more way to tighten up the terminal's sagging economy.⁷

When Eugene A. Ball arrived in Atlanta the blacks were already at work in the yards. Incensed, Ball argued, in a tone soon familiar to Georgians, that Patterson's act meant that ten brotherhood firemen's families were "deprived of a livelihood" by the company and their "living" handed over to "ten negroes and their families, because the negro would... work for fifty cents a day less...." Such a defiant challenge to the brotherhood's strength could not go unanswered.⁸

Although newspapers later pointed to the April 10 dismissal of brotherhood men as the spark which ignited the Georgia Railroad strike, the fuse was slow burning; the walkout was still over one month away. Throughout April and early May, Ball and the grievance committees met with the railroad and the terminal company's representatives. Patterson refused to reinstate the white firemen, commenting that the terminal "had to make a cut in pay roll." When asked if "he intended to put the

⁷Report of the President, 293; Thirty-Seventh Report of the Railroad Commission of Georgia (Atlanta: Foote and Davies Co., 1909), 568.

⁸"The Georgia Railroad Strike," Firemen's Magazine, 263.

negroes to firing," the superintendent coolly replied that "it was going further than that," and refused to look at the amendments. At a final unproductive meeting between brotherhood men and General Manager Scott on May 8, the firemen demanded an end to "the destruction of their seniority rights as firemen." The discussion ended when Scott told the firemen that it was their "right" to quit work if they desired. After the union delegation left, Scott decided to scrutinize their subsequent "movements and operations."⁹

The brotherhood firemen, Ball later wrote, were now "in a very peculiar position. We had been turned down on all sides. The men were very poorly paid, and the negroes had their seniority, and in a short time would fill the position of firemen on all the best paid runs." Confronted with future dismissals, the vice-president reduced the issue to "a question of...whether we would lay down, and...allow our Organization to go out of existence, or whether we would put up a good stiff fight, and show the people of Georgia whether our Organization was a live one or a dead one."¹⁰

Ball realized that forty-three union firemen could not stand alone against the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. He quickly discovered, however, that a "very strong feeling against the Georgia Railroad and the Yards in employing so many negroes" existed among the brakemen and trainmen in Atlanta. In addition, the rank and file of engineers, Ball noticed, "were with us to the end." Many engineers had grown up along the Georgia Railroad "and were so intermingled" with the firemen's families

⁹"Arbitration Proceedings," 752, 782-784; Report of the President, 293.

¹⁰Report of the President, 294.

"as to be in many instances related,..." It "hurt" the engineers, "as well as the firemen, to have their friends and relatives superseded by negroes." Ball realized that the brotherhood firemen could gain a powerful ally if the race issue, always politically explosive, was now exploited by the union in an economic struggle. It was an easy step from protests against black seniority to cries of railroad induced black supremacy. The black worker, traditionally a tool in the hands of management, now became an awesome weapon in the hands of labor. As Ball put it:

... I concluded that the only successful way that we could win a strike at the present time was to confine our request to the supremacy of the white man over the negro, and that if we put our fight on anything else but the race question, and some rules to govern our employment, that we had no possible show to gain our point.¹¹

The strength of racism convinced Ball that an economic struggle with the Louisville and Nashville could be won.

The plan to use race-baiting and the "bugaboo of negro domination" to win the strike for the brotherhood was made more promising by recent developments within Georgia. Politicians fought and won elections by stirring up the emotions of their constituents with anti-railroad harangues and blistering speeches dealing with white supremacy and black disfranchisement. The Atlanta Race Riot of 1906 was still fresh in the mind of Georgians, and those who needed mental prodding were constantly barraged by a "sensational press that played up...stories of Negro crime, charges of rape and attempted rape, and alleged instances of arrogance, impertinence, surly manners, or lack of prompt and proper servility in conduct."¹²

¹¹Report of the President, 294-295.

¹²G. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow (2nd rev. ed., New York, 1966), 66.

It was believed that a strike which included the "race problem" as the "force behind it" would win the white firemen overwhelming public support.¹³

Eugene Ball, a veteran campaigner, was not one to begin a struggle unprepared; during early May he canvassed Atlanta, drumming up support for the firemen's cause. The brotherhood's coterie of support was impressive. At the top of the roster was the state's governor, Hoke Smith. Elected in 1906 on a platform considered "anti-nigger and anti-railroad" by the conservative Macon Telegraph, Smith was now sitting out the last two months of his term.¹⁴ The governor was openly "favorable" to the fireman's plan. Smith assured Ball that "if his term...had not been drawing to a close...he would guarantee in a short time that there would be no negroes employed as Engineers, Firemen, Conductors, or Brakemen on any of the Georgia railroads."¹⁵ Smith warned, however, that his political enemy and successor, Joseph M. Brown, had "been elected by the railroad interests" and would assume office in June. As a result, the governor could not give the firemen ironclad assurance of black elimination; Ball must act quickly. Atlanta's mayor was considered "non-committal" and the city's Chamber of Commerce only offered to investigate the dispute. A Trades and Labor Executive meeting, which represented about four thousand members of Atlanta's Federation of Trade, assured Ball the the firemen's "request was reasonable," and promised "help and assistance." John Lee, president of the state Farmer's Union, was more enthusiastic in his support. Lee pledged "all the help...that lay in his power to secure a white man on every engine

¹³Savannah Morning News, May 26, 1909.

¹⁴Report of the President, 294; Dewey W. Grantham Jr., Hoke Smith and the Politics of the New South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 145, 148-149.

¹⁵Report of the President, 294.

in the State of Georgia." Railroads which employed black firemen, he charged, drained the countryside of agricultural laborers. As a result, it was "hard to get hold of a good stout negro qualified for farm work." Georgia congressman Lon F. Livingston, former president of the state Farmer's Alliance and labeled by Ball as "one of the strongest politicians" in Georgia, hinted that he had "saved" the Georgia Railroad \$50,000.00 in 1908 and would now collect on the favor by pressuring the road "to give the white man the rights and seniority over the negro." The brotherhood vice-president's thorough canvass even included Atlanta's police commissioner. He was "very favorable to us," Ball later wrote, and declared that "Pinkerton men and thugs" brought in by the Georgia Railroad "would be dealt with." Businessmen in Atlanta and Augusta also reacted favorably to Ball's overtures. By mid-May he could report that the "good will of every right thinking man [is] on our side."¹⁶

¹⁶Report of the President, 294-295. Ball's vague reference to Livingston's action probably involved a political favor. According to Ball, Livingston did confront the Georgia Railroad, "and hot words ensued, which no doubt in time will react upon the Georgia Railroad."; C. Vann Woodward, Tom Watson Agrarian Rebel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 179-181.

CHAPTER IV
A STIFF FIGHT

At the end of the second week in May the two disgruntled lodges on the Georgia Railroad were joined by fourteen non-union white firemen in a unanimous vote to "fight against the railroads." Ball wasted no time in bringing the racial features of the brotherhood's plan into clear focus. The strike vote was described as a "last resort." The firemen voted to walkout rather than "continue to work under such conditions in a white man's country."¹ On Saturday evening, May 15, General Manager Scott received a widely circulated strike notice. Brotherhood men, in protest of the railroad's policy of black seniority and discrimination against whites, would walkout on Monday evening, May 17, "until...a white man is respected as much, if not more, than a negro" on the Georgia Railroad. The strike notice was only a hint of the verbal melee which followed.²

Sunday morning's issue of the Atlanta Constitution carried Scott's response. A settlement between the union firemen and the road was impossible, Scott wrote, because the brotherhood made insurmountable requests. The demands of union firemen, the general manager continued, "would have utterly and completely [destroyed] the reasonable rights of seniority acquired by negro firemen...by reason of their efficiency and faithfulness."³ Scott, quick to protect the rights of his less costly, non-union workers, aimed his attack directly at Eugene Ball. The white

¹Atlanta Constitution, May 16, 1909; Augusta Chronicle, May 16, 1909. The brotherhood claimed unanimity in the strike vote, while the Chronicle reported one abstention.

²Ibid.

³Atlanta Constitution, May 16, 1909; Macon Daily Telegraph, May 18, 1909.

firemen were "being used by a party unacquainted with and alien to our industrial situation." Scott, not unaware of the powers of sectional prejudices, declared that union "agitation" would impede the industrial progress of the South. Scott left it up to the public "to judge whether or not the movement to stir up industrial race strife for which I hold Mr. Ball...to be chiefly responsible,....will not mean an end of industrial freedom for the negro,..."⁴ The general manager did more than talk. On Saturday he dismissed T.A. Campbell, chairman of lodge No. 332's grievance committee, and any other firemen who refused to declare their position."⁵

Eugene Ball did not spend the weekend in idleness. Aware that brotherhood men were "as good as dismissed" from the railroad by the strike vote, he used the weekend to prepare a slanted statement which explained the firemen's cause. The letter, calculated to malign black firemen, the railroad, and to swing the public into line with white firemen, was heavy with the theme of white supremacy. Addressed to the "People of Georgia," the volatile tirade appeared in the state's leading newspapers:

The people of this section demand white supremacy. This is not a question of white supremacy.

The people of this section refuse to accept negro equality. This is even worse than that. The white firemen on the Georgia Railroad are demanding only equality, and that is refused. Why do we say this? A fireman on the Georgia Railroad when promoted is promoted to the position of an engineer. The man first entitled to promotion in any subordinate position is,...., the senior man in that position....

As even the Georgia Railroad has not yet sought to make negro engineers the senior white fireman in the service is the next man to become an engineer and is,...., the senior fireman on the road,...., he is entitled to be treated as a senior fireman and have the best run.

⁴ Macon Daily Telegraph, May 18, 1909; "Strike on the Georgia Railroad," Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen's Magazine, XLVII (July 1909), 98-99.

⁵ "Strike on the Georgia Railroad," Firemen's Magazine, 99.

Instead of this, negroes who cannot be promoted to the position of an engineer and who are, therefore, junior to white firemen, are treated as their seniors and given all the choicest runs.⁶

In addition, Ball charged that the railroad disciplined white firemen for the slightest offense, while overlooking the shortcomings of less expensive black workers. The railroad, Ball continued, had dismissed white firemen at will and forced an uncommon closeness between white and black firemen which would have been considered repugnant elsewhere.

...A few days ago a white man was dismissed from...the company for swearing at a negro who had no business on the engine.... It seems generally understood in Augusta on Saturday night or pay days that the negroes are slow to respond for duty; if they do not respond then the white firemen at the risk of being punished, must fill that negro's place, sit on the same seat, put his clothes in the same box and use the same utensils as the negro had he responded when called.⁷

On Monday Ball, in a letter to the editor of the Atlanta Constitution, issued a final rousing call for brotherhood support before the walkout began. It would have done credit to the prattle of any demagogue: "This is not a matter of sentiment or bluff, but a business proposition for the people of Georgia to determine, whether a white fireman is to be superseded by a negro to enrich the treasury of any railroad, or granted the privileges of a free country."⁸ General Manager Scott, in turn, charged that Ball was an outsider who had confused the traditional Southern distinction between political exclusion and economic freedom for some blacks. The brotherhood leader, Scott wrote, "proclaims...to be so thoroughly acquainted with the industrial conditions affecting the races in Georgia as to

⁶"Strike on the Georgia Railroad," Firemen's Magazine, 96-97; Macon Daily Telegraph, May 18, 1909.

⁷"Strike on the Georgia Railroad," Firemen's Magazine, 97.

⁸Atlanta Constitution, May 17, 1909.

confuse the constitutional [black disfranchisement] amendment adopted last fall with an antagonism between the races in the ordinary pursuits of life...." Apparently Scott did not consider the right to vote an ordinary pursuit of life. The fulminations of both leaders were avidly followed by readers in every small town and whistle stop between Atlanta and Augusta. At nine o'clock on Monday evening the brotherhood firemen who had not been dismissed stepped down off railroad engines and the hostlers walked out of the terminal's yards.⁹

Initial public response to the walkout was sluggish. Scott reported that there was little "along the line to indicate the existence of a strike." In the yards, according to the New York Times, the Georgia Railroad was discharging brotherhood men "as fast as they came in from their runs." Although the railroad denied it, the Times reported that some blacks had taken the place of white union men. Observers of the strike believed that the brotherhood's efforts would remain ineffective unless they were joined by engineers. A joint effort by the two brotherhoods would immediately cripple the railroad. Without a sympathetic strike by the engineers, the Macon Daily Telegraph predicted, the firemen's fight would be an "up-hill" affair.¹⁰ Ball's efforts to win over the engineer's leadership, however, were unsuccessful. While he believed that the rank and file of engineers were ready to "step down and out with our boys," a private meeting with Fred A. Burgess, Assistant Grand Chief of the B. of L. E., revealed that the grand chief had little sympathy for the firemen's

⁹"Strike on the Georgia Railroad," Firemen's Magazine, 98; Atlanta Constitution, May 18, 1909.

¹⁰New York Times, May 18, 1909; Macon Daily Telegraph, May 19, 1909

cause. Burgess, Ball bitterly wrote, convinced the Georgia Railroad engineers that their "contracts were sacred." It was also apparent that the old interorganizational rivalry for control of Southern engine-men had once again surfaced. Burgess wanted to end the dispute, but under the aegis of the B. of L. E. Ball refused to participate in such an unholy alliance. "I gave him no excuse whatsoever," the firemen's leader later wrote, "to circulate over this country that the firemen got into a fight and had to beg for the assistance and protection of the B. of L. E. to keep them from losing their employment and our organization from going out of existence in the South."¹¹ The news broke on Tuesday morning, when the conservative Burgess informed the press that the engineers would not "fight another's battle." By late Tuesday afternoon the two Georgia lodges "stood absolutely alone."

But not entirely alone. On Tuesday evening Ball was joined in Atlanta by A.P. Kelly, third vice-president of the B. of L. F. and E. Ordered to Georgia from brotherhood business in Connecticut by a worried national office, Kelly was a hard-nosed organizer who once contemptuously remarked that the black's place in railroading should be limited to "cleaning out...urinals and sweeping out...cars."¹² While impressed with the determination of the two lodges, Kelly was troubled that the effects of the strike were still negligible. Train schedules were uninterrupted and blacks continued to fire engines. Kelly quickly realized that if "negroes were permitted to work, the strike would be a failure." No stranger to the South, Kelly pointed out to Ball that the public must be prodded into

¹¹Report of the President to the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen (St. Paul, Minn: n.p., 1910), 296.

¹²Macon Daily Telegraph, May 19, 1909; Report of the President, 302-303; "Arbitration Proceedings, Georgia Railroad and Its Employees" (typescript in Georgia Collection, University of Georgia Library, Athens, Georgia), 139.

action. Another rousing cry must be issued. Ironically, railroad officials gave Ball and Kelly an opportunity to seize the advantage. General Manager Scott's public statement, which labeled Ball an outsider, was an obvious appeal to Southern contempt for Northern unionism. The road's appeal would fail because the brotherhood leaders, in response, would appeal to the stronger Southern tradition of white supremacy.¹³

The two union officers quickly warmed to the task. By Wednesday their vituperative reply, printed above Ball's name, was before the citizens of Georgia. It primed the population's prejudices against the twin evils of black equality and railroad monopoly. Scott and the railroad had placed blacks "over and above" white firemen. "What more than this," the letter asked, "is necessary to damn him in the eyes of the people of the State?" The brotherhood's statement continued with words tailored for Southerners.

He [Scott] seeks to divert attention by harping on the fact that I am from Canada and charges me with responsibility for raising this white man's issue. Had I raised the issue, I would be proud of it, but it is an honor I cannot claim; the men inherited the issue from their white forefathers....

These Georgia boys did not have to go to Canada to be told they were better than a negro; they knew it, and Mr. Scott seems to be the only one to doubt it....¹⁴

Ball then replied to Scott's charge that he was unfamiliar with Southern traditions and industrial conditions. The brotherhood vice-president admitted that this was his first trip South, but he would prefer to leave it "to the southern people,...to judge whether my conduct or that of Mr. Scott shows a better appreciation of southern conditions. I stand for

¹³Report of the President, 303.

¹⁴"Strike on the Georgia Railroad," Firemen's Magazine, 100-101; Macon Daily Telegraph, May 19, 1909.

white superiority; he stands for negro superiority. Let the people of the south judge between us." The two union officers close the clamorous harangue with a rallying question: "Will the people of Georgia back their own men or will they back the Georgia Railroad in trying to ram negro supremacy down the throats of its white firemen?"¹⁵

Although Wednesday morning's trains moved along the Piedmont without incident and railroad officials remained confident, the strike neared a new and violent stage. As the public absorbed the brotherhood's emotional appeal, Kelly met privately with brotherhood men in Atlanta and "outlined a plan of campaign which was expected to successfully put a stop to the operation of the road." At the heart of the plan was the forced removal of black firemen from engines along the railroad. While violence was, by no means, limited to certain towns, three communities were union strongholds. Lithonia controlled the western end of the railroad, Union Point held the center and was the junction town for the Athens branch, and control of Thomson, which dominated the eastern section, sufficiently isolated the Macon branch from Augusta. Operating through sympathetic citizens directed by key, low profile strikers, Kelly found himself in control of a potent union "picket force" between Atlanta and Augusta. Dusk on Wednesday settled among small town crowds who, urged on by volatile newsprint and union pickets, had gathered at rural railroad stops determined to secure "a fair deal for the white man against the negro." Rhetorical race-baiting, so effective in local political struggles, had worked for the brotherhood as well.¹⁶

¹⁵"Strike on the Georgia Railroad," Firemen's Magazine, 101.

¹⁶Report of the President, 303; Thomas K. Scott to Hoke Smith, May 24, 1909, Box 3, Hoke Smith Collection, Special Collections Division, University of Georgia Library, Athens, Georgia. Scott identified Thomson as the "controlling point."

At six o'clock on Wednesday evening a through freight fired by John Wesley, black, stopped at Thomson, thirty-five miles west of Augusta. The atmosphere at the station was ugly. When the engineer stepped from the cab and walked into the telegraph office an offensive crowd quickly surrounded the engine. After threats of violence, the black fireman agreed to abandon the engine. At Dearing, eight miles east, William Parker, another black fireman, was called off an engine by "five or six white men...taken behind [a] store and badly beaten." On the Macon and Athens branch, mail trains were delayed by crowds of protesters. As a result of intimidation and violence, black firemen abandoned their locomotives and entire trains were stranded. On Thursday morning the Macon Daily Telegraph reported a dozen idle freight trains on sidings along the Georgia Railroad.¹⁷

The railroad was quick to respond to violence. A \$500.00 reward was offered for information leading to the arrest of Parker's assailants and, on Thursday, the railroad "lodged a formal complaint" with U.S. District Attorney F. Carter Tate in Atlanta. Delayed mails were accumulating at Atlanta and at other stations.¹⁸ Brotherhood lawyers quickly informed Tate that union men were "in no way responsible" for violence and were "ready to join with you in bringing to justice the guilty parties." Privately, brotherhood leaders followed a different course. Kelly left Atlanta on Thursday morning and traveled over the Central of Georgia railroad to Augusta. Upon arrival late that evening he assumed control of the union's campaign along the eastern section of the railroad. The brotherhood men

¹⁷ Augusta Chronicle, May 20, 1909; Atlanta Constitution, May 20, 1909; Macon Daily Telegraph, May 20, 1909.

¹⁸ Augusta Chronicle, May 21, 1909.

in Augusta were in good spirits. Wednesday night's violence had "pretty well demoralized" the Georgia Railroad and strikebreakers were proving unreliable. In addition, vice-president Ball had issued another infectious statement, a rousing vindication of mob action, from the Kimball House in Atlanta. The violence along the Georgia Railroad, Ball wrote, was "deprecated by every member" of the B. of L. F. and E. Union firemen were innocent of any wrongdoing. But the violence which had accompanied the Georgia Railroad strike was "a thing which must be expected." Ball continued:

....Never in the history of civilization has the white man submitted to negro domination, and when the Georgia Railroad seeks to put negroes over these Georgia boys, who have worked for them so faithfully, they must expect trouble. Of these firemen who have lost their jobs, many live up and down the railroad, and when their friends and relatives see trains going by and a negro occupying his place, putting his negro clothes in the white man's locker, and practically occupying the business home of the young white man, trouble will ensue.¹⁹

Along the eastern end of the railroad Kelly met with sympathetic citizens and, as he later recalled, "brought them into my confidence...." The union leader wisely preferred to "operate" through friends and relatives of the strikers, "not wishing [them] to be identified with any move" against the railroad. The small town crowds, Kelly wrote, "worked faithfully in our behalf." Faithfully and violently.²⁰

Shortly after six o'clock on Thursday evening an Atlanta bound freight train rolled into Thomson, home of the Populist turned racist, Tom Watson. The freight's locomotive was fired by Nathan Thomas, a "humble...polite

¹⁹"Strike on the Georgia Railroad," Firemen's Magazine, 101-102.

²⁰Report of the President, 303.

negro," who had joined the railroad in 1897, later becoming a fireman. When the train stopped a large and troublous crowd was waiting at the depot. Thomas heard "an angry exclamation" and, looking toward the engineer's side of the cab, was "seized from his own side, thrown heavily to the ground, cuffed, kicked, hit with bricks and struck with sticks." The angry crowd of whites quickly did their work on one side of the engine while the county's obliging sheriff stood on the depot platform. Thomas, although badly beaten and bruised, flagged a train back to Augusta. The black fireman, the Augusta Chronicle reported, was also "robbed of \$28 in currency and his watch." Thomsonians, charged with both assault and robbery, bitterly denied the latter only. Under the banner of "Union Wars on Negroes," the New York Times quoted General Manager Scott: "...this strike is the skirmish of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Engineers in their plan to drive the negro out of employment on railroads altogether."²¹ Incidents of intimidation were reported at Lithonia, Union Point, and Covington. One observer noted that freight trains were "held up at nearly every junction point." At Union Point, where a band of young toughs harrassed black firemen from the depot, railroad officials demanded that the town's mayor remove intimidators from railroad property. When confronted, the defiant youths bought ten-cent tickets to the next stop, became "patrons of the road," and continued to wait for the next train.²² Union Point's mayor, Scott wired Governor Smith, was "unable to preserve the peace and maintain order."²³

²¹ Augusta Chronicle, May 21, 22, 1909; Macon Daily Telegraph, May 21, 1909; Scott to Smith, May 21, 1909, Hoke Smith Collection.

²² Macon Daily Telegraph, May 21, 1909.

²³ Scott to Smith, May 21, 1909, Hoke Smith Collection.

Thursday night's violence prompted a volley of telegrams from General Manager Scott to Governor Smith. Scott demanded protection for railroad property and, if necessary, the dispatchment of state troops to trouble spots. Railroad officers were well aware, however, that favorable action from Governor Smith might be slow in coming. As a result, the railroad hired guards and private detectives. According to the Augusta Chronicle, a "train load" of white strikebreakers was brought in from St. Louis; most proved unreliable. The Atlanta Constitution reported that eighteen strikebreakers in Augusta offered to sell out to the brotherhood for a total of \$450.00. Guards hired by the railroad from local counties were not much more reliable; one admitted that he would accept the twenty dollars in expense money and draw \$3.50 per day "till [sic] things began to get warm." Scott, in a statement released to the press, warned Georgians that interstate freight was "subject to the national law." The strike, he hinted, could be submitted to "officials of the government" for peaceful arbitration. "This being true," he continued, "not even the most ignorant has any excuse for violence." But the general manager's appeals to Georgia representatives in Washington were coolly received. Senator A.O. Bacon, aware that any aid to the railroad from his quarter might not be viewed kindly by voters in Georgia, wired that "the power to protect persons and property and to preserve order in the State belongs to the state government." Bacon refused to notify the Interstate Commerce Commission or postal authorities.²⁴ Watson's

²⁴ Augusta Chronicle, May 21, 22, 1909; "Strike on the Georgia Railroad," Firemen's Magazine, 105.

Jeffersonian Magazine viewed the railroad's frantic appeals to state and federal authorities for help with characteristic causticity.

It is a very queer thing to observe the dear railroad companies,... When everything is going their way; when they are violating the rights of the public; when they are refusing to bear their share of the general taxation;..., how they do howl if government ownership is suggested! How they get black in the face over the socialism and populism that would try...to control them! But how quick are they to send telegrams demanding troops and insisting that the government come to their aid and take charge of their affairs whenever outraged employees or public make other than a verbal protest!²⁵

It was obvious to Ball and Kelly that the railroad hoped for quick and decisive intervention before a complete tie-up was achieved. They also realized that the possibilities of state intervention were remote. Smith's private conversations had clearly indicated the governor's sentiments and, as Senator Bacon hinted, federal troops could be sent in only at the behest of the governor or legislature. By late Thursday evening Smith fulfilled their expectations. The governor claimed, probably with justification, that state troops would "increase rather than lessen excitement," and refused to order out the militia.²⁶ Finally, it was not politic for Governor Smith to order out troops to protect the very "railroad ring crowd" and blacks whose denunciation had carried him into the Capitol in 1906. The governor, seeking a politically safe solution, wired Scott on May 20 and suggested that the answer might lie in the "arbitration of the differences between your road and the firemen."²⁷

While the governor advocated a form of state arbitration, Scott and railroad lawyers were groping for active federal intervention. Their cause was greatly aided by the actions of the strikers. Although fearful of federal interference, the union now intensified its campaign, pushing for a com-

²⁵"The Georgia Strike," Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine, III (July 1909), 526-527.

²⁶Smith to Scott, undated, Hoke Smith Collection.

²⁷Ibid.; "Strike on the Georgia Railroad," Firemen's Magazine, 102.

plete tie-up along the railroad. Throughout the week sympathetic citizens had limited their assaults to freights, fearing federal intervention if passenger-mail trains were stopped altogether. On Friday Kelly notified his lieutenants, through a system of messengers, that the firemen's cause no longer made the "distinction between passenger and freight service, as it all looked alike in a strike."²⁸ The labor leader's order to intensify the campaign brought quick and violent results. When the Buckhead train stopped at Thomson a company guard, after pushing one member of a citizen's boarding party off the engine, was jerked from the cab, disarmed, and pistol whipped. "The people in Thomson," the guard later commented, "seems to have gotten it into their heads that I am in favor of running a negro over the white man. Nothing could be further from the truth. I am . . . in favor of the supremacy of the law."²⁹ But many civil authorities were either powerless to enforce the law or, fearing political reprisals during the next election, actively co-operated in its obstruction. McDuffie County's sheriff admitted his helplessness when he wired the Capitol: "unable to control situation am doing what I can to preserve order." According to one Lithonian, Dekalb County's sheriff seemed indifferent: "You need not call on the sheriff...here to protect the Georgia Railroad," he wrote Governor Smith, Sheriff "Morris was her[e] to day [sic] ...and seet [sic] on his ass."³⁰ Indeed, an Augusta bound fast freight with eleven cars of perishables was sidetracked at Lithonia

²⁸ Report of the President, 303.

²⁹ Augusta Chronicle, May 22, 1909.

³⁰ E.W. Howe to Smith, May 21, 1909 and John T. Brand to Smith, May 29, 1909. Hoke Smith Collection.

after its fireman abandoned the engine. The railroad, fearful of a spoilage suit, sent a replacement with two guards to rescue the train. When the crew arrived at Lithonia the black fireman "refused to go to work" and the railroad guards were arrested and "charged with carrying deadly weapons." A third attempt to remove the train also failed. It was at Thomson, a hot-bed of anti-railroad sentiment, that the union's final push for a complete tie-up reached its crest. On Friday afternoon a white strikebreaker on passenger-mail train No. 91 was "forcibly removed from the engine...and carried off...by a mob." Friday's confrontation at Thomson convinced Kelly that the union's supporters had erased any distinction between freight and mail trains. Thomson's citizens had also allayed Kelly's fear that the use of white strikebreakers would destroy "the race question." It was "pleasing to note," he later wrote, "that a white scab looked the same as a black one to those good people along the Georgia Railroad."³¹

Friday's sharp increase in violence and the delay of passenger-mail train No. 91 prompted another flurry of telegrams from railroad officials to Washington. U.S. Attorney G.W. Wickersham and postal authorities were informed that trains "could not proceed." Early Friday evening Scott acted upon the previous night's warning and wired Charles P. Neill, Commissioner of Labor, and Martin A. Knapp, Chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission. "Strikers or their sympathizers," Scott complained, had engaged in "assault and battery and other personal maltreatment of railroad...employees..." The Georgia Railroad demanded "prompt

³¹ Augusta Chronicle, May 22, 1909; Report of the President, 303

action" under the provisions of the Erdman Act. Brotherhood men countered with a response similar to that of the American Railway Union during the Pullman Strike. Ball quickly wired postal authorities that the union would "allow the mail trains to run and furnish white firemen, if necessary, at our own expense." Railroad management, as in the Pullman Strike, turned down the offer.³²

At the Capitol Governor Smith, hurriedly preparing for a weekend trip to the south Georgia town of Fitzgerald, was informed of federal invocation in a wire from General Manager Scott. The sheriffs and mayors were powerless to enforce the law or preferred to do otherwise. "Assaults and intimidation of our employees continue," Scott wired. Governor Smith fired a wire to the sheriffs of DeKalb, Warren, Greene, Morgan, and McDuffie counties, urging them to "take all steps necessary to preserve order and to prevent any interference with the trains or employees upon the Georgia Railroad."³³ The governor then left Atlanta for the weekend.

Violence continued throughout the night despite the governor's mild urgings. By Saturday afternoon the "lawless mobs" were swollen by idlers on Saturday's half-holiday and by curious farmers on weekend trips to town. One Augusta newspaper recorded that "jeering crowds" surrounded outbound trains despite guards and police. White strikebreakers were "going over to the strikers and leaving town[.]" Ball painted a romantic picture of a popular uprising when he wrote his president: "old...and

³²Augusta Chronicle, May 22, 1909; Thomas K. Scott to Charles P. Neill, May 21, 1909. Erdman Act Case File 20, "Georgia Railroad vs. Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen," Record Group 13, Washington National Records Center.

³³Scott to Smith, May 21, 1909 and Smith to sheriffs of DeKalb, Warren, Greene, Morgan, and McDuffie counties, May 21, 1909. Hoke Smith Collection.

young men left their farms or employment...to assist in securing for the white firemen what justly belonged to them."³⁴ Saturday also witnessed the introduction of a new union tactic. If the engineers would not abandon the engines voluntarily and in sympathy with the firemen, then they must be forced off locomotives in the brotherhood's final attack: the stoning of engines.³⁵

The fury of the "outlaws" and other trackside rabble along the Georgia Railroad had been directed toward defined targets throughout the week. First toward black firemen and strikebreakers, and then toward white strikebreakers, guards, and passenger-mail trains. Now the engineers would become the targets of rocks and bricks. The new twist was based on the assumption that all the rank and file engineers needed was an excuse to abandon their cabs. Only Grand Chief Burgess had held them in line. In fact, a few engineers had already aided the firemen's cause by refusing to break in strikebreakers or convincing them to leave the cab and crossover to the firemen. "An excuse of any description," Kelly believed, "...would give them the opportunity of refusing to go out on their engines." A complete tie-up of the Georgia Railroad would then become inevitable.³⁶

But the excuse provided by the crowds on Saturday was a very real and dangerous one. One engineer, Burgess frantically wired General Manager Scott, had been hit by a rock at Conyers and another at Lithonia, where a worried citizen wrote that "ther [e] is going to be some killing." The mood was so vicious at Camak that seven engineers, huddled inside the depot, wired that it was "not safe to go out." Burgess wired Scott and

³⁴Report of the President, 297; "Strike on the Georgia Railroad," Firemen's Magazine, 103.

³⁵Report of the President, 303

³⁶Ibid., 296, 303-304.

declared: "I decline to carry the responsibility of the engineers' lives any longer." The union "picket force," Kelly gloated, "was beginning to have the desired effect. The engineers complained greatly of the danger of attempting to run the engines." Citizens along the Georgia Railroad had followed Kelly's instructions closely; they were no longer "particular which side of the engine they... [took] the man off of."³⁷

At Thomson, an inexhaustable source of animosity and violence, obdurate citizens issued an ultimatum which warned off trains carrying black firemen or white strikebreakers. The decree was no idle threat. When a westbound passenger-mail train stopped at Dearing, eight miles east of Thomson, the station's telegrapher wired the Augusta home office that the train would be stopped and boarded at Thomson "if there were armed guards or a negro fireman on the engine." After lengthy negotiations between the railroad's agent in Thomson, "prominent men," and leaders of Thomson's brotherhood picket force, the train was allowed to proceed. Thomsonians, however, dictated special conditions; the black fireman and company guards were seated in a coach and a white passenger, pressed temporarily into the company's employ, fired the engine through town.³⁸ Twelve "dead engines" sat on sidings at Union Point, while sixteen freight trains were tied-up at other stations along the line. One diligent conductor delivered mail by handcar. The engineers, Scott wired the Capitol on Saturday, "are complaining their lives are endangered by rocks thrown at engines...they cannot be expected to man their engines."³⁹

³⁷Macon Daily Telegraph, May 21, 1909; "Strike on the Georgia Railroad," Firemen's Magazine, 103; John T. Brand to Smith, May 22, 1909. Hoke Smith Collection; Report of the President, 303-304.

³⁸Macon Daily Telegraph, May 23, 1909.

³⁹Ibid.; Scott to Smith, May 22, 1909. Hoke Smith Collection

Governor Smith remained in touch with Atlanta by long distance telephone. On Saturday morning he sent his attorney general, John C. Hart, on "a trip over the Georgia Railroad for observation." Hart had hardly reached Union Point, a salient of brotherhood support, when he was convinced that the "situation... [was] of great gravity." At several points along the railroad the attorney general was, according to the New York Times, "abused as a 'nigger lover' [and] kept busy explaining that he was simply investigating and not taking the part of the negroes."⁴⁰ Although Hart made it through Thomson, the tumultuous center of anti-railroad sentiment, citizens at the tiny settlement of Boneville "mistook... [him] for a strike breaker...and orally denounced" the attorney general. The trip down the line was so unnerving that Hart decided to return to Atlanta on the Central of Georgia railroad.⁴¹

National figures were also watching the strike closely. On Saturday Charles P. Neill and Martin A. Knapp, at the Department of Commerce and Labor, wired brotherhood and railroad officials, asking "the nature of the controversy and the precise question at issue." Eugene Ball, cautioned by Kelly to "acknowledge receipt...but not to commit himself," replied that the railroad had been paralyzed "by reason of the fact that the public heartily disapprove of the course pursued by the Georgia Railroad, you know best whether you can be of any assistance." Ball hinted at the strike's racial implications when he wired: "The issue is a local one [and] cannot be understood unless you are here."⁴² Ball's annoyance

⁴⁰ New York Times, May 25, 1909; Hart to Smith, letter quoted in "Strike on the Georgia Railroad," Firemen's Magazine, 105; Smith to Scott, May 24, 1909. Hoke Smith Collection.

⁴¹ Ibid.; John C. Hart to Josiah Carter, May 22, 1909. Hoke Smith Collection; Macon Daily Telegraph, May 23, 1909.

⁴² Martin A. Knapp and Charles P. Neill to Ball and Scott, May 22, 1909 and Ball to Knapp and Neill, May 22, 1909. Erdman Act Case File 20.

with federal meddling was less subdued in an exchange carried by the Macon Daily Telegraph. When asked if the union men would agree to arbitration, Ball gave the classic management response, "what is there to arbitrate?" and quipped: "As I see it there is nothing connected with the race question subject to arbitration."⁴³ Shortly after four o'clock on Saturday afternoon Scott wired a lengthy reply to Knapp and Neill. The general manager reviewed the fruitless meeting on May 8 and described the brotherhood's demand for black elimination. Since the walkout, he concluded, crowds had "forcibly assaulted and removed" black and white strikebreakers.⁴⁴

The brotherhood's campaign of violence, however, would soon achieve its goal. By eight o'clock on Saturday evening the stoning of engines had driven most engineers from their cabs and persuaded others to remain at home. At Augusta a crowded passenger train was stranded when its engineer and crew walked out of the yards. In Athens a mob of six hundred to a thousand "men and boys" rocked an engine carrying white strikebreakers and railroad detectives. The salvo was so vicious that one detective was knocked off his feet and a policeman wounded.⁴⁵ Late Saturday night Burgess declared that the "menacing attitude of the people... along the road has increased until engines had been rocked, engineers struck, guards dragged from the cabs, and...it has become suicidal for engineers to continue on duty." The grand chief then placed the blame

⁴³Macon Daily Telegraph, May 23, 1909.

⁴⁴Thomas K. Scott to Knapp and Neill, May 22, 1909. Erdman Act Case File 20.

⁴⁵Macon Daily Telegraph, May 23, 1909.

on the Georgia Railroad as the engineers abandoned their engines. "We do not propose to take any part in the strike," he commented to the press, "but the men must be afforded protection. When it is found that the railroad cannot give this, they will not go out on runs until it can be given."⁴⁶ Railroad officials quickly shifted the blame to Governor Smith. Scott upbraided Smith by wire on Saturday evening: "The whole responsibility of this condition rests upon you...for failing to exert your power to the fullest extent in maintaining order on the line.... Please wire me what remedial action you will now take."⁴⁷ Kelly, however, was exuberant. "It is useless for me to state," the organizer later wrote, "that this condition was pleasing, for my greatest desires were never more gratified than at this sight, for it was one of the most perfect trimmings that labor ever gave to an employer that has come under my observation, and I saw some hot ones in my days. Nothing moved between Atlanta and Augusta."⁴⁸ Old Reliable was paralyzed.

On Sunday morning Atlanta's eastbound passenger-mail train stood "like a monument to a dead railroad." Along the line Georgians grumbled when their Sunday papers failed to arrive; preachers and travelling shows, the Atlanta Constitution noted, were stranded at quiet depots between the capital and Augusta. Sunday morning strollers in Atlanta formed "great crowds of curious people...about the depot; rumors were "abundant, varied, exaggerated,...,but not verified." Although Saturday

⁴⁶ Atlanta Constitution, May 24, 1909; Macon Daily Telegraph, May 23, 1909.

⁴⁷ Scott to Smith, May 23, 1909. Hoke Smith Collection.

⁴⁸ Report of the President, 304.

night's violence vanished with the early morning hours, anti-railroad sentiment was still apparent. An Atlanta newspaper reporter wrote that more "bad things were said about the road's management by people who knew nothing of railroad work" than by striking firemen. Some Populist minded Georgians called for state seizure of the railroad on the grounds that the line had not fulfilled one of its charter requirements, which demanded train service unless "Providential interference" prohibited. Despite Sunday's lull, it was apparent to insiders that both sides were shoring up for a long seige. The Atlanta Constitution revealed that the railroad had imported twenty-five strikebreakers from New York and St. Louis through the services of a "local detective agency." The strikebreakers were housed, under guard, on the top floor of the Empire Hotel. Strikers and their partisans tried to talk the strikebreakers down and notes tossed by the newcomers claimed that they were "under the impression that they were to 'white-man' a railroad to take the places of negroes."⁴⁹ One old engineer on the Georgia Railroad, angered by the arrival of outsiders, openly sided with the striking firemen:

...We came off those engines, because our chief thought the run dangerous,... Now, since the road wants to substitute imported men, strikebreakers--hang 'em [sic], I can't see that the danger is diminished. In fact, I think it has been augmented materially. The people along the road have a kinder feeling for the negro, who has grown up here; than they have for a white man who comes among us to take our jobs.⁵⁰

Despite the old-timer's prediction of increased violence, less apparent forces were already shaping the course of the strike. The coming week would be characterized by a flurry of telegrams, closed-door confer-

⁴⁹Atlanta Constitution, May 24, 1909.

⁵⁰Ibid.

ences, mute participants, and newspaper speculation. On Sunday afternoon Georgia Attorney General Hart met with Scott in Augusta and with Eugene Ball at the Kimball House in Atlanta. Both meetings led to much speculation but little firm newsprint. It was clear by Monday, however, that Hart had proposed a plan--the result of his "peaceful mission" over the Georgia Railroad during the weekend--which he hoped would settle the strike. Hart wired Governor Smith that he had been "impressed with the fact that Mr. Scott and Mr. Ball realize the seriousness of the situation." The attorney general recommended that the governor prompt the formation of a Georgia board of arbitration, composed of six of the state's sons. Each side would choose three representatives. The governor agreed. The solution was politically safe, it prevented federal intervention, and it cast Smith as a peacemaker. Besides, the governor was already under considerable pressure from the state's business leaders, who were losing money while goods remained on sidings and in Atlanta's wholesale warehouses.⁵¹ Union firemen, aware that their case was safer in the hands of six Georgians in Atlanta than in the hands of federal arbitrators in Washington, readily endorsed Hart's plan.⁵²

The brotherhood's choice of arbiters left little doubt in General Manager Scott's mind as to which way they would vote. Union men chose John Lee, the opinionated president of the state's Farmers' Union, Thomas E. Hardwick, Georgia congressman, political ally of Smith's, and a prime mover behind the black disfranchisement movement, and Horace Holden, a

⁵¹ Atlanta Constitution, May 25, 1909; Hart to Smith, May 24, 1909. Hoke Smith Collection.

⁵² Ball to Smith, May 24, 1909. Hoke Smith Collection.

member of the Georgia Supreme Court. Scott wisely refused to have any part of a state arbitration which could be influenced by public sentiment and anti-railroad politicians. Only the federal "Board of mediation at Washington," Scott wired the governor, has the power to settle the dispute.⁵³

Scott's refusal to participate in state arbitration proceedings brought criticism and pressure from both predictable and unexpected quarters. Governor Smith met with two Atlanta directors of the Georgia Railroad, John W. Grant and Dr. A.W. Calhoun, on Monday. As a result of the meeting, they both agreed to urge Scott toward state arbitration. The directors may well have realized that stalled trains brought few dividends. The pro-Smith Atlanta Journal noticed that all parties to the dispute had agreed to sit down and arbitrate except General Manager Scott, but discounted charges that the railroad was holding out for vindictive reasons.

...It has been intimated in some quarters that the authorities are not unwilling for the people along the line of the railroad to suffer on account of their alleged sympathy with the striking firemen. We should be loath to believe such an accusation,...

...President Scott has admitted the possibility of arbitration, has admitted that there is something to arbitrate, in making his appeal to the board of mediation. The form of arbitration is unimportant.... The governor of the state has made a suggestion. The Atlanta directors of the Georgia Railroad consider it a wise one. Vice President Ball has accepted it. The responsibility for any further delay in the settlement of the difficulty...is..., easily fixed, at the present moment.⁵⁴

The pressure and responsibility of Scott's delay was lessened considerably on Monday afternoon when the general manager received a wire from Martin A. Knapp, Chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission.

⁵³Ball to Smith, May 24, 1909 and Scott to Smith, May 24, 1909. Hoke Smith Collection.

⁵⁴Clipping from the Atlanta Journal in Erdman Act Case File 20.

Labor Commissioner Neill, Knapp informed Scott, would "leave for [the] South to-night." A similar wire to Eugene Ball at the Kimball House notified the brotherhood leader that Neill was coming to Georgia to "endeavor to secure an amicable agreement...in accordance with the provisions of the Erdman Act." It was Ball's first notice that federal intervention, so long a rumor, was now fact. He quickly wired Washington and pointed out that plans for state arbitration were already afoot. It was too late. Scott's dilatory tactics and his refusal to participate in local arbitration had effectively sabotaged the brotherhood's hope for a state, and most probably favorable, adjudication.⁵⁵

The decision to send Labor Commissioner Neill to Georgia in response to the railroad's appeal for help was the least offensive decision that the young Taft administration could have reached, short of complete passivity. The President of two months had seriously courted the South during the campaign of 1908, much to the disappointment of black leaders. Taft had continued Roosevelt's Southern policy of attracting conservative Democrats into Republican ranks with some success. The Republican vote in Georgia increased by 17,000 in 1908.⁵⁶ Taft's campaign of "The Winning of the South," however, would suffer if he assumed the old role of "injunction judge" and interfered with a Southern strike against a railroad which employed blacks at the expense of whites.⁵⁷ As a result, the President was more interested in the "race feature" of the conflict than in interstate freight disruptions or mail delays. While the threat of dis-

⁵⁵Martin A. Knapp to Ball and Scott, May 24, 1909, Ball to Knapp and Scott to Knapp, May 24, 1909. Erdman Act Case File 20.

⁵⁶C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 466-469.

⁵⁷Harold C. Livesay, Samuel Gompers and Organized Labor in America (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), 165-166.

patching "regular troops to Georgia to insure the uninterrupted transmission of the mails" was hinted at by individuals in "administrative circles," Taft hoped for a settlement free from strong federal intervention. The use of troops would only dredge up the ugly memories of Reconstruction and alienate Southern voters. Although the New York Times reported that the U.S. District Attorney in Atlanta had been ordered "to proceed in the courts when the occasion demands such action," there was little chance that an injunction would be forthcoming unless it was decided upon at the cabinet level. If Georgians ignored a restraining order, and there was every indication that they would, Taft could only up the stakes with the introduction of U.S. Deputy Marshals. Such action could precipitate another Georgia race riot.⁵⁸ The administration had made a ~~wise~~ decision in sending the capable and energetic Neill to Atlanta.

The possibility of continued violence and the necessity for calm, rational action was demonstrated on Monday night; many Georgians, despite the lull, were still in an ugly mood. In Augusta a nervous railroad guard mistook a group of foundry workers for an anti-railroad mob, "lost his head," and discharged a load of buckshot at the men. The workers responded with a fusillade of bricks and stones, chasing the guard into the railroad detectives' camp. Scott quickly wired Governor Smith an ominous sounding note from Augusta, warning that strikers' sympathizers were aware of the presence of white strikebreakers "on our shop premises and have planned to attack...to get at these men...it will result in bloodshed and arson."

⁵⁸New York Times, May 26, 1909.

The clash between the foundry workers and the railroad guard fanned the tempers of Augustans. The situation was so volatile that the city's mayor warned vaudevillians to avoid "the injection of strike hits into... skits." Black community leaders published a card in the Augusta Chronicle which advised blacks to remain away from railroad stations. "The best policy for us," the notice concluded, "is to maintain a strict silence."⁵⁹

At the opposite end of the railroad a "mass meeting" was held at the Atlanta Baptist Tabernacle in support of the striking firemen; among those present were civic leaders and the city's "best known labor men." The tabernacle, crowded with "several thousand" brotherhood supporters, was the scene of many "fiery" speeches which dealt largely with "white supremacy, and the [black] menace to the southern working man." All participants, the Atlanta Constitution reported, were "loud in their condemnation of...the attempts of the Georgia road to enforce economic equality between the races."⁶⁰ Eugene Ball, speaking for the firemen, outlined their grievances and denied charges carried by the Atlanta Journal:

...Certain...reports...seem to indicate that it is my intention to 'call out' firemen on other roads that have been accepting freight diverted from the Georgia. That's all a mistake. I'm no czar over the firemen or over this situation. The most I could do..., would be to call a meeting of the chairmen of the boards interested, lay the matter before them, let them decide what is best to be done, after which they would take the question up with their own men. I can't go ahead and order strikes indiscriminately,... it is preposterous.⁶¹

The firemen's fight, Ball declared, was "eminently fair and just;" the brotherhood was willing to compromise, there was no "hard and fast settlement" which must be reached. Ball was soon followed by a representative

⁵⁹Augusta Chronicle, May 23, 1909; Atlanta Constitution, May 28, 25, 1909; Scott to Smith, May 24, 1909. Hoke Smith Collection.

⁶⁰Atlanta Constitution, May 25, 1909; Macon Daily Telegraph, May 25, 1909; Clipping from the Atlanta Georgian, Erdman Act Case File 20.

⁶¹Clipping from the Atlanta Georgian, Erdman Act Case File 20.

of the city's trainmen, whose rousing speech brought "down the house" when he declared his hope that the "Georgia road would be tied up so tight that a car couldn't be moved with a crowbar." The parade of laborites continued. A speaker for the Atlanta Federation of Trades waved a bloody shirt for the strikers when he likened their struggle to that of "other southerners during the civil war." H.L. Dickson, general counsel for the B. of L. F. and E., claimed that the railroad had been forced to hire black firemen because it had watered its stock to three times its value. The road, Dickson charged, was so desperate to cut expenses that it would hire "chimpanzees" as firemen "to throw coal and ring a bell for 30 cents a year" if it could find them. Union supporters then called forth one of six strikebreakers seated on the front pew. The man, F.A. Pigeon, claimed that he and other strikebreakers had read, in the New York World, "that firemen were wanted in the South and...were informed that they were to take the place of negroes." Pigeon claimed that they had been deceived by the railroad and had escaped from the Empire Hotel. The labor rally continued. When one man in the audience shouted "what will be the result in the Southland if the negro should win in this fight?" Atlanta's assistant city attorney thundered: "If the negro won in this fight and it meant that negroes were gradually to take the place of white men in industry, then the South would disappear and there would be nothing left but the black belt." The meeting was closed with a standing rendition of "Praise God From Whom All Blessing [s] Flow."⁶²

⁶² Atlanta Constitution, May 25, 1909; Macon Daily Telegraph, May 25, 1909; Clipping from the Atlanta Georgian, Erdman Act Case File 20.

While some Atlantans were eager to participate in the almost carnival atmosphere of the strike, many Georgians in rural counties were beginning to suffer serious deprivations. As the strike entered its second week mounting isolation and food shortages began to take a toll. Although the New York Times headline "Famine Grips Towns on Tied-up Railroad" was a sensational exaggeration for its readers, fresh meat and flour shortages were felt along the line. Crawfordville merchants wired Governor Smith: "For God's sake do something...." Indeed, the "strike district" was with little or no rail transportation and some towns were running short on "groceries and food stuffs." At Lithonia it was reported that citizens looked with "hungry gazes" upon side-tracked cars carrying perishables. The town's mayor suggested a solution which would have been pleasing to his constituents. "If supplies should run short and it becomes necessary," the mayor declared, "I shall simply condemn the train...and tell the citizens to help themselves."⁶³ Greensboro's mayor wired Smith that "food supply with merchants exhausted situation brewing serious." Citizens quickly turned to new and old methods of transportation. Individuals who owned automobiles, newspaper accounts noted with a hint of profiteering, stood to make sizeable gains. A round trip fare from Thomson to Augusta, for example, was \$7.00 per passenger by auto and \$3.50 per passenger by carriage, "depending on which class the passenger wished to travel." Coffins bound for the home place were stranded at depots. Augusta's streets were crowded with wagon trains laden with provisions for small towns as distant as

⁶³New York Times, May 25, 1909; Savannah Morning News, May 27, 1909.

fifty miles. In Athens, one hundred and twenty-five wagons left for communities between that town and Union Point. The Atlanta Constitution reported that a traction engine, "drawing a string of wagons for supplies," was proceeding at the glacial pace of a little over one mile per hour. The transportation of "such necessities of life as food," one newspaper observed, had "dropped back to the methods of a former degree of civilization,... to wagons and even pack animals."⁶⁴ The World's Work used the transportation breakdown to push a point national in scope. The Georgia Railroad strike

...afforded an almost startling illustration of the public character of our railways. By the stoppage of trains on this one line, a considerable portion of the state...was threatened with destitution.... An incident of this sort illustrates...how impossible it is to treat railroads as private enterprises. They are as truly public highways as are navigable rivers or as were in the old days the wagon roads.⁶⁵

Newspaper editors and readers alike now reflected upon the first week of the strike. The New York Times wrote that the strike was "the first general labor disturbance of racial origin in the history of the South." Under the headline of "Race Prejudices Mixed With Economics," the paper accurately pointed to the economic issues involved in the strike. The black's only fault, the Times noted, was that he worked "more cheaply than white men." The "serious element" of the walkout was that it refuted the South's claim that the region had "never denied the negro the right to earn his living...[now] the state of Georgia declares that [when] negroes rise...to compete with white laborers they shall be thrust back

⁶⁴J.H. Glessing to Smith, May 25, 1909. Hoke Smith Collection; Savannah Morning News, May 27, 28, 1909; Atlanta Constitution, May 27, 28, 1909.

⁶⁵"Negro Firemen," The World's Work, XVIII (June 1909), 11754-11755.

to their former conditions of sloth and degeneracy--a continuing menace instead of a means of prosperous uplift."⁶⁶ One Georgia judge agreed. In a letter to the editor of the Atlanta Constitution W.R. Hammond wrote that an "organized effort" to deny blacks "the right to shovel coal on a locomotive engine" would reduce them "to a hopeless state of serfdom." The black's protection, Hammond noted, "lies in the fair-mindedness of the southern white man." The editor of the anti-Smith Macon Daily Telegraph pronounced himself bi-partisan but chided the governor for his failure to use the "strong arm of the state" to protect "society against anarchy." The Macon paper expressed the opinion of many conservative Georgians when it placed the blame for violence squarely on the shoulders of an "idle, loafing, lawless class...who have, unsolicited, fastened themselves to this contention like flies to a raw spot scarified by a surgeons knife.... Throw a flatiron at them in the name of peace and good order."⁶⁷ National and sectional opinion agreed that an abundance of cheap black labor was essential for a prosperous and orderly South.

⁶⁶New York Times, May 25, 26, 1909.

⁶⁷W.R. Hammond to the editor, Atlanta Constitution, May 28, 1909; Macon Daily Telegraph, May 25, 1909.

CHAPTER V

WASHINGTON SENDS A PEACEMAKER TO GEORGIA.

Labor Commissioner Charles P. Neill's arrival in Atlanta on Monday evening, May 25, shifted the focal point of Georgians from Augusta, and a dozen violent communities along the line, to the state's Capitol. The next five days were appropriately labeled as the "conference stage" by local newspapers. General Manager Scott and the railroad's leading lawyer, Major Joseph Cumming, departed Augusta earlier in the day among jeering crowds and were awaiting Neill's arrival. During Tuesday evening the labor commissioner met with Scott and Cumming on one floor of the Piedmont Hotel and with Eugene Ball, Kelly, and union lawyers on another. Both sides reportedly presented "arguments of unusual gravity" but few concrete concessions were made. Publicly, Neill's arrival gave hope in uninformed quarters of a quick and easy settlement. If such a settlement was not forthcoming, state and national papers predicted, the U.S. Attorney General would issue a restraining order backed up by marshals and "the services of United States troops" if necessary. But President Taft and his cabinet, while publicly keeping an injunction open as a possible tool, had no intention of reaching a final decision until they had heard from Neill.¹

Word reached Washington from Neill within twenty-four hours of his

¹Savannah Morning News, May 26, 1909; Atlanta Constitution, May 26, 1909; Charles P. Neill to Bureau of Labor, plain and cipher text, May 26, 1909. Erdman Act Case File 20, Georgia Railroad vs. Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen, Record Group 13, Washington National Records Center.

arrival in Atlanta. The labor commissioner was immediately confronted with three issues: the race problem, the wish for a Georgia solution, and the restoration of mail and freight service to citizens along the railroad. The upshot of his exhausting, late night meetings with union and railroad representatives was a short ciphered wire which summarized the explosiveness of the situation and which urged restraint on the part of the administration. The "situation," Neill wired early Wednesday morning, is "delicate and full of serious menace. Matter has developed into bitter race issue. Extreme caution needed. Any decisive Federal action at this moment likely to frustrate chance of amicable settlement and precipitate race riot."² The deciphered text, which Martin A. Knapp and Secretary of Commerce and Labor Charles Nagel found on their desks on Wednesday morning, clearly pointed out that an injunction was no solution.

For the remainder of the week, Neill pushed and probed for any sign of compromise and any avenue which might break the stalemate. In Washington the strike received "unusual attention," basically because "the race issue involved" made good news copy. Eastern newspapers pointed with "special interest" to Grover Cleveland's intervention in the Pullman strike as a possible solution. But Taft, forewarned by Neill, would not blunder into the certain racial and political repercussions of an injunction.³ During commencement exercises at Howard University on Wednesday, the President sought to sooth the violent tempers engendered by racial extremism:

²Charles P. Neill to Bureau of Labor, May 26, 1909. Erdman Act Case File 20.

³Atlanta Constitution, May 27, 1909; The New York Times, for example, covered the strike on May 23 under the banner of "Mob Negro Firemen on Georgia Railroad."

I am delighted to think, because I have been in the South a great deal of late and have studied some of the conditions there, that they are getting better...for the negro race in certain aspects.... The truth is that the greatest hope that the negro has...., is the friendship and sympathetic interest of the white man with whom he lives.... I know it is not the habit to think so, but it is growing and one of the things that misleads us most is the desperate, the extreme statements of white men from the South on the subject, but really they do not mean what they say.⁴

The black Washington Bee, a newspaper which supported Taft, found the President's commencement speech "particularly interesting because of the...trouble on the Georgia railroad," but was quick to point out that a "wide difference of opinion may and does prevail in the South as to the proper means of developing and realizing" black potential. How wide that "difference of opinion" could become was illustrated when a black was lynched at Lincolnton, Georgia, twenty miles north of Thomson. The Atlanta Constitution complained that it was the first "deliberate lynching in Georgia for nearly two years" and hinted that the racial animosities stirred by the Georgia Railroad strike were, in part, to blame. The same paper feared "that racial enmity and reprisals on negroes will be stirred up in regions remote from the railroad tracks." In addition to the Lincolnton lynching the Constitution noted, for example, that wild rumors of another Atlanta race riot were heard among blacks near Thomson.⁵

At the Piedmont Hotel, Neill was making slow progress. Deliberations which included all parties involved in the dispute, he complained, were impossible because General Manager Scott refused to represent the Atlanta Joint Terminal Company. While awaiting a Louisville and Nashville officer

⁴Savannah Morning News, May 27, 1909.

⁵Washington Bee, June 26, 1909; Atlanta Constitution, May 27, 29, 1909.

who would negotiate for the terminal, Neill pushed stubbornly ahead. Mail delays, now in their fifth day, were embarrassing to the administration. Neill contacted Grand Chief Burgess of the engineers, assured him that no harm would come to engineers on engines "hauling cars loaded with...mail, and nothing else," and implored Burgess to allow engineers on cabs pulling mail cars. Burgess replied that the engineers would return to work "when given protection." Neill then cornered Scott; considerable pressure was necessary because the resumption of mail service would remove a plank in the road's argument for federal intervention. Scott finally agreed to run twelve mail trains, beginning on Thursday morning. "We consider this quite a concession," the general manager told one reporter, "as we are in no way obligated to do this by our contract with the government for moving the mail." Ball vainly offered the services of brotherhood firemen.⁶

In Washington Taft's administration and members of the Georgia delegation nervously awaited the departure of the mail trains. Their safe passage was a crucial test of the policy of non-interference by the President. On Friday morning the President received Georgia Senator A.O. Bacon at the White House and indirectly delivered a word of caution to brotherhood firemen and their sympathizers. Bacon, who wanted to see the white firemen "relieved of negro competition," urged a continuance of the administration's hands-off policy, warning that violence was certain if an injunction was issued. Taft would not be swayed. Although what

⁶Neill to Charles Nagel, May 28, 1909. William Howard Taft Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress; Atlanta Constitution, May 28, 1909.

passed between Bacon and Taft is uncertain, the President apparently made it clear that the administration's patience was exhausted and that direct action would follow any interference with mail trains.

The senator was impressed and quickly wired Ball in Atlanta:

In my judgment locomotive engines on southern railroads should be manned exclusively by white men, just as locomotive engines are manned exclusively by white men on northern railroads. Nevertheless, having in mind the conference with the president, I most strongly urge that there be no interference by anyone with the running of mail cars, and thus avoid giving any possible excuse for intervention by the government to protect the mails.... I most strongly urge scrupulous compliance by everyone with the course suggested above.⁷

At least Bacon was convinced that the President was not bluffing. Ball and Kelly quickly cautioned brotherhood pickets that mail trains must proceed unhindered.

But it was the Georgia Railroad that needed a warning. When Taft met with his cabinet shortly after Senator Bacon departed, Secretary of Commerce and Labor Charles Nagel handed the President a troubling, four-page telegram from Neill. The labor commissioner had made every effort to insure an incident free mail run. Offensive, gun-wielding Pinkertons, who often discharged their rifles unnecessarily, had been replaced by inconspicuous postal authorities. In addition, white brotherhood firemen had volunteered to go out on the engines. But the Georgia Railroad, Neill angrily cabled, would unnecessarily provoke union sympathizers by sending out "negro firemen on these trains." While Neill did not believe that the mail trains would be "molested," he did point out that "the

⁷Atlanta Constitution, May 28, 1909.

resentment and race prejudice have grown.... All other features of the controversy have sunk into insignificance and the race issue is now paramount, conservative men here without exception are deeply concerned." Brotherhood men, as well as Neill, saw through the railroad's attempt to provoke violence and necessitate direct federal action. Eugene Ball later wrote that General Manager Scott had deliberately placed blacks on mail trains "with the hope and the expectation that those mail trains would be interfered with, and the Government would then send in their troops,..." Neill, already irritated by Scott's unyielding attitude during negotiations, found his patience exhausted by the railroad's irresponsible and dangerous attempt to force federal intervention with the use of black firemen. "I have notified [the] road," Neill wired Washington, "that unless an assurance of settlement is in sight tomorrow [Saturday] I shall abandon effort and leave during afternoon."⁸ After discussing the strike with his cabinet, Taft directed Nagel to wire Neill that the Chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission, Martin A. Knapp, would leave that night for Atlanta. "We have decided," Nagel telegraphed, "that you ought to remain and continue your efforts."⁹

The mail trains moved peacefully across the Piedmont despite the road's use of black firemen. Ball and Kelly's instructions of non-interference "were carried out to the letter." Although the use of black firemen did not provoke the response hoped for by the railroad, it did harden the resolve of strikers' sympathizers. An Associated Press reporter no-

⁸ Neill to Charles Nagel, May 28, 1909. Taft Papers. Neill wired that the "road asserts its rights to employ negroes..., and demands that it be protected.... The road is entirely within its legal rights, but the insistence upon them to the letter involves desperate possibilities."; Report of the President to the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen (St. Paul, Minn: npp., 1910), 297.

⁹ Nagel to Neill, May 28, 1909. Erdman Act Case File 20.

ticed "a firm, unmistakable determination that no trains save those carrying mails...will be allowed to pass" Thomson and Union Point. The Atlanta Constitution indicated that something stronger "even than racial feeling binds together the community of whites...backing the striking firemen, and this is blood ties..., many a blood relative is standing by his kinsman in standing by the strike."¹⁰ Citizens at Crawfordville, Georgia preferred to "do without mail than have it brought by negro firemen."¹¹

Against this hostile, resentful backdrop the railroad provoked the firemen's sympathizers again on Friday afternoon. Threatened with legal action, the road attempted to rescue meat valued at \$5,000 on sidings at Lithonia. Despite assurances of protection from county officers, who had never been able to control the crowds, Lithonia remained one of the most volatile spots on the line. The railroad guaranteed a violent reception for its engine at Lithonia when it placed a black fireman in the cab. At four-thirty engine No. 37 pulled out of Atlanta under the supervision of John D. Patterson, Superintendent of the Atlanta Joint Terminal Company. At five-thirty the engine arrived at Lithonia, where one hundred people waited. Amid "hoots and shouts," Patterson and the engine's crew hurriedly coupled twenty-five cars to the engine. As the train began to move off the siding the crowd demanded that the black fireman step off the engine. "We don't want your nigger but we won't let him run on the road," one partisan shouted. As the train moved onto the mainline the engine was rocked, the engineer hit, and members

¹⁰ Report of the President, 297; Atlanta Constitution, May 29, 1909.

¹¹ Atlanta Constitution, May 29, 1909.

of the crowd boarded "the...train..., set the brakes and broke it into three sections." The engineer and fireman ran the engine back to Atlanta, while Patterson had to walk to Redan station to await the arrival of the next train.¹²

The Lithonia fiasco was costly. As a result of the railroad's irresponsible and, as some felt, calculated action, the fruits of three days of negotiation were lost. Grand Chief Burgess recalled the engineers after the injury of one of their brothers at Lithonia and, even if the engineers were willing to go out, a freight train of perishables blocked the mainline which must be used for Saturday morning's mail runs. The mob at Lithonia was "stirred" to a "pitch." Burgess received a threatening letter, signed by the leader of "the bush whack gang" and postmarked Conyers, Georgia:

Dont [sic] let any of your Men go out on any train on the Ga Rail Road with a negro fireman if they do they are likely to get hurt for we dont [sic] expect to let any negro pass Conyers...if we can get a chance at Him with a winchester rifle. We cant [sic] throw a rock true bu [t] we can throw a winchester rifle BALL to the spot and will do it. And while we are doing this we may hurt some of you Engin Men [sic]....¹³

The Lithonia incident, one newspaper noted, brought the threat of violence into focus "...more sharply than ever...." If speedy federal intervention was what the railroad wanted, it almost succeeded.¹⁴

Governor Hoke Smith was in a political quandary. The use of state or federal troops might ignite a race riot and spell political disaster.

¹²Atlanta Constitution, May 29, 1909. It is interesting to note that Scott, having refused to accept the task of representing the terminal company, allowed Patterson, superintendent of the terminal, to take charge of an engine sent to rescue goods in railroad cars. There was undoubtedly cooperation between the terminal and the railroad. With proper preparation, Lithonians would have allowed the removal of perishables by a white crew. See J.B. McLaughlin to Scott, May 29, 1909. Erdman Act Case File 20.

¹³Typewritten letter to Burgess, May 28, 1909. Erdman Act Case File 20.

¹⁴Atlanta Constitution. May 29, 1909.

Tom Thomson, where it was "impossible to get deputies who are not strike sympathizers," a political ally of Smith's wrote that Tom Watson, estranged from the Smith camp, might be maneuvering the governor into a deadly political position. Watson, it was reported, felt that he had made Smith governor and could just as easily break him.¹⁵

Our friend on the hill has kept close indoors, but judging from the fact that the leading man in attempting violence is supposed to be his [Watson's] right-hand man in all matters... he [Watson] is approving, if not advising, that course, and I do not think it would be at all a matter of regret with him that the situation should become so grave that you would feel called upon to bring out the State troops. He knows that would be an unpopular move for you.¹⁶

Yet the governor must act. Many Democratic conservatives, while feeling little or no sympathy for black firemen, were feeling the damaging economic effects of the rail tie-up. Washington, Georgia business leaders wired the governor: "It is not mail that we need but freight trains with provisions for man and beast...."¹⁷ Macon's Chamber of Commerce adopted a resolution which stated that the "Macon people and merchants...are... seriously affected,... we,...earnestly condemn the prolongation of the strike.... We demand it in the name of the people."¹⁸ Another embittered citizen from Macon, piqued by the governor's inactivity, charged that Smith was following the politically expedient course. "If you are afraid to... [act] you ought to step aside and give the man next to you the honor of doing it. The way to stop big trouble is to stop it in time[. T]his is no time to stop for politics or allow [sic] men to tell

¹⁵Atlanta Constitution, May 29, 1909; C. Vann Woodward, Tom Watson Agrarian Rebel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 386-389.

¹⁶John T. West to Smith, May 28, 1909. Box 3, Hoke Smith Collection, Special Collections Division, University of Georgia Library, Athens, Georgia

¹⁷Ibid., Oliver Smith to Smith, May 28, 1909.

¹⁸H. Burns, Secretary of the Macon Chamber of Commerce, to Neill, May 29, 1909. Erdman Act Case File 20.

you remember who put you there."¹⁹

Hoke Smith's course of inaction and sympathy with the strikers, however, had won him new political laurels. Bowdry Phinizy, editor of the Augusta Herald, wired that the state "cannot afford to jeopardize rights and lives of citizens by continuance of railroad's disregard of Southern Civilization and Sentiment...Attitude of...railroad seriously threatens race riots."²⁰ One racial extremist from Columbus, Georgia congratulated Governor Smith for his handling of "the nigger problem" and pledged "to vote for you for anything you want. I know you or [sic] write [sic] own [sic] the white fire strik[e] trouble and you will do all in your power to keep the nigger in the feld [sic] the only place on e[a]rth for him."²¹ One Richmond County admirer wired that seventy-five per cent of the county's voters approved of the governor's stand.²² An Augustan praised Smith and hinted that the old anti-railroad lawyer might be using the strike to settle a political grudge with an antagonist from the gubernatorial campaign of 1908: "The wheels of the Gods grind slowly. But surely. You certainly have got an inning on the Ga. RR^d officials for their active part they taken against you last summer."²³ Another of Richmond County's sons wrote that the "auto [club] boys from Savannah" were pleased with Smith's actions. The governor's lieutenant concluded: "My friends talk in the highest terms of you. Many recruits to next years race for me. We hope to put down the opposition."²⁴

¹⁹T.J. Anderson to Smith, May 29, 1909. Hoke Smith Collection.

²⁰Phinizy to Smith, May 29, 1909. Hoke Smith Collection.

²¹Ibid., J.M. Arkin (Askew?) to Smith, May 29, 1909.

²²Ibid., A.P. Padgett to Smith, May 21, 1909.

²³Ibid., John Holmes to Smith, May 28, 1909.

²⁴Ibid., J.W. Clark to Smith, June 2, 1909.

Smith's move must not alienate such devoted followers.

But Hoke Smith, a man who had served in a hard money cabinet in Washington while successfully defending the administration's policy before a state of debtors, a man who had based his gubernatorial campaign on a progressive platform of railroad regulation while calling for black disfranchisement and, in doing so, won the support of Tom Watson and most Georgia voters, found a politically acceptable, if not applaudable, solution. State seizure of the railroad "on the ground of public welfare and necessity" would abrogate calling out the militia and relieve economic pressure. Although the governor was evasive on the subject of state takeover of the railroad, and may well have been bluffing, the Atlanta Constitution noted that Attorney General Hart was, in fact, investigating the legality of such a move. If a settlement was not quickly reached, the paper predicted that Smith would direct Hart to "file a bill in the state courts either for receivership or...some other process to compel the... road to resume...the operation of trains."²⁵ Apparently such newsprint was not so much wasted space. On Friday morning Neill wired the Department of Commerce and Labor that Smith "was prepared...to take some form of drastic action against the road." Such a move could foul Neill's own attempt to settle the strike. Annoyed that local politicians were riding the wave of racial sentiment engendered by the strike and complicating the settlement of an explosive situation, Neill wired in cipher on Friday afternoon that the "situation here has been complicated from [the] outset

²⁵Atlanta Constitution, May 29, 1909.

by politicians."²⁶ The labor commissioner not only had to deal with a racially charged struggle between the brotherhood and the railroad, but with the repercussions of political infighting between the Smith and Weston factions of the local democracy.

On Saturday Martin A. Knapp joined Neill in Atlanta and jumped into the economic, racial, and political morass. Time was short. Neill realized that the Lithonia incident had fanned the fires of race hatred to a dangerous intensity. At Augusta on Saturday morning a black fireman was badly beaten by a mob. Weekend crowds, inflamed by the railroad's use of black firemen on "neutral" mail trains, watched and waited for the next locomotive. The administration's worst fears of a race riot, which would demand immediate and direct action, seemed perilously close to reality.

At the Piedmont Hotel Knapp and Neill brought pressure on both brotherhood and railroad representatives. The firemen found themselves in an unusual position. The railroad was paralyzed, public opinion was solidly behind the firemen, and the strikers were unified. All of the ingredients for a successful strike were in the brotherhood's hands. Knapp and Neill, however, privately threatened to throw "the matter...into the federal courts" unless an agreement was reached by Saturday afternoon. Although Ball had ignored the threat of an injunction before, he appeared unwilling to up the stakes on Saturday morning. As he, Ball, was later to write: "From private information I was...aware that as soon as the State or Federal Court [issued an injunction and] put Deputy Sheriffs on the

²⁶ Neill to Nagel, May 28, 1909. Taft Papers; Neill to Bureau of Labor, May 28, 1909. Erdman Act Case File 20.

engines or trains there might be serious damage to bridges, tracks and buildings along the line. Up to this time there was no reflection whatever against our Organization or any member of it, so far as accidents and damage to property was concerned."²⁷ While the hardened union campaigner might be willing to utilize such regionally acceptable tactics as the beating of blacks, he apparently had no desire to nationally taint the conservative brotherhood with images of sabotage and arson. Such acts might drive the public into the arms of the railroad and throw their case into a less favorable forum. The brotherhood's future organizational efforts in the Deep South needed no brand of labor radicalism.

The governor's plan to seize the railroad, while solving his own political dilemma, was no lasting solution for the firemen. Ball realized that, once the courts returned the road to Scott after state seizure, the brotherhood firemen would be forced to go before the general manager and argue for a new contract. That dismal prospect meant that all the brotherhood had fought for during the spring of 1909 would be lost. Federal mediation and, if necessary, arbitration, was the only feasible solution for brotherhood men. Ball later recalled the confusing situation: "...we were threatened with the State Court stepping in and taking possession of the road at any moment, and the Federal Courts also stepping in to take possession of the road, unless it had been already taken over by the State Court, when the Federal Court would have issued an injunction against the State and taken possession of the road."²⁸

²⁷Report of the President, 297-298.

²⁸Ibid.

Georgia Railroad officials found themselves in a distasteful position also. Seizure of the railroad by Hoke Smith was even less palatable than a Georgia six-man board of arbitration. The road's demand for federal help had brought a bi-partisan labor commissioner to Georgia rather than a swift solution, Pullman style. The railroad's subsequent attempts to provoke a confrontation and force federal intervention had failed. Now Neill warned the road that he would leave unless the railroad submitted to mediation by Saturday afternoon. If Neill departed, the railroad's fate would be left in the hands of an anti-railroad governor, who would be free to pursue his own course against an old political enemy. At least federal mediation would hopefully remove local politics and negate the effects of public opinion. For railroad officials who would rather "give the firemen everything they asked for than allow the dispute to go before any six Georgians," federal mediation was a pleasant alternative. Toward the end of the week the Louisville and Nashville, in sending its fourth vice-president, G.E. Evans, to Atlanta, removed the last major railroad impediment.²⁹

Throughout Saturday morning messengers at the Piedmont Hotel hurried between the rooms of Scott and railroad attorneys on one floor and Ball, Kelly, and brotherhood attorneys five floors below. As the conferences wore on Ball made one last effort at the six-man Georgia board of arbitration. Neill would not be moved, calling the plan "a farce pure and simple." The Georgia Railroad, the labor commissioner told Ball, "could not get a square deal through a measure of [that] kind."³⁰

²⁹ Report of the President, 297; Atlanta Constitution, May 29, 1909.

³⁰ Report of the President, 304.

Ball and Kelly finally admitted that they were afraid of federal arbitration for one major reason, the third arbitrator. Under the provisions of the Erdman Act each side in the dispute picked an arbitrator as a representative. A third arbitrator, or "umpire," was then mutually selected by the two. If the two arbitrators could not agree on an "umpire," as was usually the case, Neill and Knapp chose the third man, who delivered the swing vote. "We had but very little hopes," Kelly pointed out, "of the third appointment being made by...ourselves and...by the railroad company.... We feared the appointment of the third man by the Mediation Board." The two brotherhood leaders gave in to mediation, they later claimed, only when Neill had promised to "make a selection of six names who would be agreeable to both sides, and guarantee to appoint one of those six as the third man." How Ball and Kelly expected Neill to find six mutually agreeable men when they doubted that the railroad and the union could agree on one man was not explained.³¹

With Saturday's deadline uncomfortably near, Georgia Railroad officials agreed to submit the dispute to mediation under the provisions of the Erdman Act. Operation of the railroad would resume immediately. The Articles of Agreement which, according to General Manager Scott, "called off the dogs of war," were signed at two o'clock on Saturday afternoon, May 29. Operating conditions on the road were returned to a status quo prior to the strike. Striking brotherhood firemen were allowed to return to work and the ten white hostlers dismissed by the terminal were

³¹Report of the President, 304. A.P. Kelly later claimed that a determined Neill brought every "pressure to bear upon us, even going to the extent of using the sweating degree," in order to convince the union men to submit to mediation and, if necessary, arbitration.

re-instated.³² The question of black rights, the salient point of the Brotherhood's attack, was left to mediation, along with five other questions:

First: That the Georgia Railroad Company and its terminals at Atlanta will not use negroes as locomotive firemen, on the road or in the yards, nor as hostlers nor assistant hostlers.

Second: That firemen shall have three years experience before being promoted to the position of engineer....

Third: That all firemen when hired shall be placed in freight, yard or hostling service, and the senior white fireman shall have preference of engines and runs.

Fourth: That hostlers shall receive their present rate of pay; assistant hostlers shall be considered as yard firemen and paid yard firemen's rates; extra firemen, when used as hostlers, shall receive the rate paid to hostlers.

Fifth: That passenger, through, local freight and yard engines will not be blocked by non-promotable [black] men.

Sixth: That firemen will not be required to throw switches, flag street crossings or trains, except in case of emergency....

The first clause would have eliminated black firemen altogether, while the third and fifth clauses would have destroyed black seniority. The Articles of Agreement contained a final qualifying paragraph, which pointed out that if the first clause was not granted, "the Board of Arbitration may award whether or not there shall be a fixed percentage beyond which the [railroad] shall not employ negroes as firemen...."³³

Shortly after two o'clock Scott and Ball announced the settlement in the rotunda of the Piedmont Hotel and a telegram, ordering the firemen back to work, was signed and wired to every station between Atlanta and

³²"Arbitration Proceedings, Georgia Railroad and Its Employees" (typescript in Georgia Collection, University of Georgia Library, Athens, Georgia), 785.

³³"Agreement to Arbitrate," Erdman Act Case File 20.

Augusta. "The broken link," one Atlanta newspaper declared, "was welded." Knapp and Neill immediately wired President Taft that the "strike will be immediately declared off and train service resumed."³⁴ The President received the wire while attending a baseball game at Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. When his Secretary of State, Philander C. Knox, informed the rotund President that the Georgia strike was over Taft replied: "That's fine; Knox; splendid."³⁵ Georgians along the moribund railroad received the news with similar exultation. At Washington, Georgia, where the isolated countryside had been exhausted of feed stock and its citizens had "reached the danger limit," the news of the settlement "was flashed over the wires, and from mouth to mouth...business...soon reached normal conditions."³⁶

The first train out of Atlanta was stoked by a black fireman. It soon rolled past sidetracked freights and silent engines on the outskirts of Lithonia, the scene of mob violence less than twenty-four hours before. But the train met a mob of a different type on Saturday afternoon. The town's citizenry had experienced a quick conversion. "United States flags were in the hands of all that could get them," one observer commented. "As the train came to a standstill, flags were frantically waved, yells were heard and every one [sic] was excited,... the train was greeted with cheers." The first train out of Augusta was fired by a brotherhood man and met with similar enthusiasm. Its engineer recalled: "We had an ovation from Augusta to Atlanta,... we were greeted with cheers and smiles all the way."³⁷

³⁴Atlanta Constitution, May 30, 1909; Knapp and Neill to Taft, May 29, 1909. Taft Papers.

³⁵Atlanta Constitution, May 30, 1909.

³⁶Washington (Georgia) Recorder, June 3, 1909.

³⁷Atlanta Constitution, May 30, 1909.

Tensions along the Georgia Railroad were visibly eased on Sunday; brotherhood, railroad, and government conferees spent the day "recuperating from the exertions" of the past week. Monday, however, found the participants back at the Piedmont Hotel, undergoing the rigors of mediation. The major "stumbling block" was, predictably, the question of the "retention of...negro firemen in any capacity." "Eliminate that one point," the Atlanta Constitution wrote, "and there is no controversy." But both parties were exhausted from five day of intensive bargaining; by late Monday afternoon it was clear that any spirit of compromise that may have existed during the past week was gone. One Atlanta paper noted that the only reason union and railroad leaders had agreed to submit to mediation was "to prevent federal intervention, which would have been disastrous to both sides, and probably stirred up still greater trouble in the south...." Yet neither the railroad nor the brotherhood was willing to admit defeat after a bitter, twelve day struggle. An impasse existed; mediation had failed. The tribunal which would decide the fate of the blackfiremen and the success or failure of the union's fight, although unknown to the participants, would not sit down for three more weeks. Federally supervised arbitration would deliver the final verdict.³⁸

State and national newspapers and magazines, however, did not withhold their judgment. The editor of the anti-Smith Augusta Chronicle, largely silent during the strike, now rendered his own decision in a lengthy, scathing attack on the Governor and organized labor in the South. The strike, the Chronicle argued on Sunday morning under the banner of "The End of a Week of Anarchy in Georgia," had been forced "DELIBERATELY AND WANTONLY...upon a peaceful and industrious people" by the "professional

³⁸ Atlanta Constitution, May 31, 1909.

labor agitator and race-prejudice politician." Governor Smith was a "political marplot," who had used the walkout to win "new plaudits and votes for himself." He had encouraged "RACE-HATRED AND RIOTING" and had "HUMILIATED and DISGRACED" the state and the office he held. In a final jab at the governor the Chronicle found encouragement that "A STRONGER AND HONESTER HAND [Joseph M. Brown] IS SO SOON TO BE AT THE HELM." Had not the "railroad and race-baiting" governor been in his final days "impeachment proceedings would mark his end." The paper's editor then turned on state politicians and public servants in general. Most had preferred "to pander to the mob...rather than stand for law and order." Afraid of the "race issue" and, as strange as it sounded in Georgia, afraid of the influence of "organized labor," state and county officials had remained meekly submissive; their passivity had made it "possible for MOBS TO TAKE POSSESSION OF AN ENTIRE SECTION OF THE STATE." In the economic vein, the paper warned that the losers were the "people of the South," who would soon see their "hold on the great body of black laborers weaken, and the grip of organized labor tighten on every calling...." The Chronicle failed to specify which Southern people had a firm hold on blacks to lose. Although the black man had been denied the ballot and social equality, "self interest," the paper prudently placed first, "as well as justice..., demanded that the negro be left free to labor...the pursuance of any other policy on the part of the South--where the negro makes up the bulk of our laboring population--would be nothing short of suicidal. In saying this there is, of course, no suggestion of social equality, or equality of any sort."³⁹

³⁹Augusta Chronicle, May 30, 1909.

The Nation, like many papers covering the strike, echoed the Chronicle's economic conclusions and attacked Smith. "There is an anti-negro demagogue in the Governor's chair at Atlanta.... His political ambitions have not been quenched by his failure to secure re-election." The Nation's article, however, failed to point out that the Georgia Railroad "manfully stood by its negro employees" for economic, rather than altruistic, reasons. It was a race issue, "pure and simple" the magazine declared. Black labor must be left free for exploitation. The "triumph of the union's policy spells economic disaster" in a region" which continually complains that it cannot get trained workers from the negroes in sufficient numbers for its mines, mills, and shops." The New York Sun, in an editorial which must have made liberals shudder, compared Smith to Illinois' former governor, John P. Altgeld.

It is plain that association with GROVER CLEVELAND in 1894 instilled into HOKE SMITH none of that man's spirit and determination. Indeed, it seems...that SMITH looked past his chieftain and puffed his soul with admiration for another figure of that troubled summer,... John P. Altgeld,... Else, how could SMITH assume to-day the attitude he has taken toward the law breakers of his State?

It was CLEVELAND, with whom HOKE SMITH was in daily association, who upheld the law and crushed disorder. It was ALTGELD who encouraged rioting, defended incendiarism, assault and murder....

CLEVELAND AND ALTGELD are dead, but of the men who struggled for mastery in Chicago in 1894 there remains one who was then and is now conspicuous. Has EUGENE V. DEBS sent to GOVERNOR HOKE SMITH a message of approval and applause?⁴⁰

Throughout the first week in June the nation's editors continued to praise and condemn. Harper's Weekly, while critical of Smith's failure to protect railroad property, was restrained in its judgment. The magazine concluded that the dismissal of ten union whites and their subse-

⁴⁰"The Week," The Nation, LXXXVIII (May 1909), 523; Clipping from the New York Sun. Erdman Act Case File 20.

quent replacement with blacks was the act of a "stupid official," an assessment which Ball and Kelly, no doubt, agreed with. "We do not turn to this Southern labor trouble with any holier-than thou objurgation. Discrimination against the negro is, we are sorry to say, a national and not a merely sectional habit."⁴¹

The reflections of newspapers and magazines are interesting for their mistakes and accuracies. Perhaps the most balanced of early interpretations of the Georgia Railroad strike was delivered by The Outlook on June 5. In addition to a perceptive overview the editor wrote:

This is the first time that an industrial contest has followed the lines of racial struggle to a serious degree. Heretofore the two problems in acute form have been kept distinct. In the North, where strife between organized labor and capital has been frequent, the comparative smallness of the negro population has kept it free from racial complications. In the South,..., where racial strife has been frequent, the comparatively unorganized conditions of white labor and the comparatively unadvanced condition of negro labor have kept it free from finding expression in strikes or lockouts. Now, however, with the progress of organized labor in the South and the progress of the negro in industrial efficiency, there has arisen an occasion on which the labor problem and the race problem, each a spring of passion, have mingled.⁴²

The Outlook conveniently overlooked the racial animosity stirred by the use of black strikebreakers in the industrial North. Many papers seized old shibboleths as readily as Ball, Kelly, and Scott. The Independent preferred to blame the trouble on "lower class...poor whites," the traditional ante-bellum enemy of the black, and followed a double standard when it excused Taft's hesitancy, predicting that the President would have eventually followed in Cleveland's footsteps and intervened. It could not, however, "exculpate Governor Hoke Smith.... He got his election on the

⁴¹"The Georgia Race Strike," Harper's Weekly, LIII (June 1909), 5.

⁴²"The Georgia Railroad Strike," The Outlook, XCII (June 1909), 310-312.

cry of danger of negro supremacy, and had to carry out his infamous policy of injustice." The magazine also made the common error in assuming that the strike stemmed from an attempt on the part of the brotherhood to claim black firemen's jobs as their own, rather than a fight for survival by the lodges. The Independent preferred to generalize: "Negroes have been employed from the beginning as firemen, but without the privilege of promotion as engineers. It is a laborers job, requiring simple, faithful manual labor. Now the white men want it all..."⁴³

The New York Times, among Northern papers, found it encouraging that "even the Southern press [is] contending that some things can not and should not be arbitrated, even in a dispute regarding negro labor."⁴⁴ The Evening Post, of the same city, declared that the strike, despite its obvious failings, would prove beneficial in two ways; "it has not only brought about a split among Southerners on a race issue, but it must be bringing home to...intelligent men...a clear understanding of how far unrestrained race prejudice may carry their section of the country." The Hartford (Connecticut) Courant was pleased that "Southern journals of light and leading have shown up this war upon the black coal-shovelers for the wicked and stupid thing it is." Another Connecticut paper, the Bridgeport Post, echoed an opinion of the Augusta Chronicle in condemning near-anarchy in Georgia. The "most unfortunate feature..." of the strike, the Post printed, "was the utter failure of the authorities to even attempt to suppress riotous and illegal actions."⁴⁵

⁴³"Compromise by Submission," The Independent, LXVI (June 1909), 1249-1250.

⁴⁴New York Times, June 3, 1909.

⁴⁵Augusta Chronicle, June 7, 1909; "The Great Strike Down South," Current Literature, XLVII (July 1909), 11-17. Both carried an excellent survey of national press reaction.

The New Orleans Times-Democrat, among Southern papers, viewed the strike as basically an economic, rather than racial, dispute. The Jacksonville (Florida) Times-Union hinted at outside agitation when it asked a question and left the answer open to speculation. "What has come to the South," the Times-Union wrote, "that there should be such intestine troubles in Kentucky, Tennessee and Georgia; is there a common cause behind these outbreaks?" The Richmond Times, along with many other newspapers, feared that the South was reneging on an often declared principle: "The South has repressed the negro socially, and it was right to do so. It has repressed the negro politically, and it was right to do so. But it has always declared that it gave the negro a square deal and even an even chance industrially,... To oust negroes from positions which they are filling efficiently...is to repudiate this wise policy." Apparently such a policy was "wise" so long as it provided cheap and unorganized labor. When an attorney for the Georgia Railroad, admitting that the company hired blacks to erode union strength and cut expenses, asked "Is it a crime, a wrong to practice economy? If we can get what we want cheap, is it a crime to take it?" Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine sarcastically retorted: "It would be a crime to economize by reducing the salaries of high officials, expert legal counsel or cutting down dividends upon watered stock." So wrote the old Populist. Watson the racist, however, assailed Northern, Southern, and "Socialist organs" alike for raising a "great hue and cry over the 'negro's right to work' which is not involved in the case at all. The negro," according to Watson, "does not

want the right to work where he is effective and where his presence occasions no racial troubles or danger to human life. He is the eternal Butinski where neither efficient nor desired."⁴⁶ Another partisan magazine, the brotherhood firemen's journal, noted that eastern newspapers quickly defended the black's economic rights while socially casting him in the same inferior role assigned him by the racist. Piqued that editorialists eagerly upheld the black's right to work only when it meant profits for corporations and competition for unions, the journal abrasively attacked:

...When...., 'Mr. Nigger,' as a class, becomes the antagonist of union labor, ye gods! how the editorial columns of plutocracy's organs open the floodgates of their eulogy in proclaiming his constitutional rights, his privileges as a citizen, and defending his 'industrial' interests....⁴⁷

The nation's black community was not silent. The rabble along the Georgia Railroad had hardly dispersed when, on May 31, the National Conference on the Status of the American Negro gathered in New York City. The conference, called by socialist writer William English Walling, called for "civil and political equality" for black Americans. It was well attended by over three hundred men and women, including two "young radicals," Jane Addams and W.E.B. Du Bois. Booker T. Washington, whose policies were labeled as too conservative by some members of the conference, was conspicuously absent. The conference branded Taft's failure to appoint more blacks to high office as the "rankest heresy and a shameful surrender to Southern arrogance." Resolutions which attacked the rise of lynchings, disfranchisement, and the improper enforcement of the Fourteenth and Fif-

⁴⁶"The Great Strike Down South," Current Literature, XLVII (June 1909), 11-17; "The Georgia Railroad Strike," Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen's Magazine, XLVII (August 1909), 257; "Georgia Railroad Strike Award," Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine, III (August 1909), 610.

⁴⁷Quoted in Hugh B. Hammett, "Labor and Race: The Georgia Railroad Strike of 1909," Labor History, XVI (Fall 1975), 474.

teenth Amendments. The civil rights activists specifically condemned the Georgia Railroad strike by declaration.

...We regard with grave concern the attempt manifest South and North to deny to black men the right to work and to enforce this demand by violence and bloodshed. Such a question is too fundamental and clear even to be submitted to arbitration. The late strike in Georgia is not simply a demand that negroes be displaced, but that proven and efficient men be made to surrender their long followed means of livelihood to white competition.⁴⁸

The black New York Age declared that General Manager Scott had done the "manly thing" by refusing to participate in a Georgia arbitration. The Age wrote that "there is neither right nor reason on the part of the 'cracker' firemen, with neither honor nor a knowledge of conditions attaching to the demagogue leader of the strikers." Georgia arbitration "was simply a ploy to the gallery hoax of the Governor." The state's only black newspaper, the Savannah Tribune, praised the Southern press for its "admirable spirit" and, under the banner of "The Negro's Right to Work," warned that ousting blacks from industrial occupations was a mistake. "The idle Negro," the Tribune wrote, "is likely to be the criminal Negro. The working Negro is learning lessons of personal responsibility, of self-respect and self improvement."⁴⁹ The region's prosperity, black leaders argued, must include all Southerners.

⁴⁸"The Great Strike Down South," Current Literature, XLVII (June 1909), 11-17; New York Times, June 1, 2, 1909.

⁴⁹New York Age, May 27, 1909; Savannah Tribune, June 1, 2, 1909.

CHAPTER VI

ARBITRATION AND REACTION

The hopes of a successful mediation of the dispute had no sooner vanished when it became clear that both sides were less than eager to enter the unfamiliar grounds of arbitration. On Monday night, May 31, General Manager Scott called on Eugene Ball at the Kimball House. An outside settlement, Scott convinced Ball, was sincerely desired by the railroad. Scott then urged Ball to delay the naming of his choice of arbitrator until all efforts at "mutual concession" had been exhausted. The general manager's motives are unclear. He was, no doubt, aware that any delay would put precious time between the hot public response to the brotherhood's campaign and the opening day of arbitration proceedings. Perhaps stalling would weaken the brotherhood's principal weapon, public sentiment. Scott was also aware that the brotherhood lodges considered the signing of the Agreement to Arbitrate as a partial victory. The railroad, coerced by state and national pressure, had sat down with the firemen and, by signing the articles, recognized the union's right to bargain. So much the better if the Agreement to Arbitrate was torn up after an outside solution was reached. More striking than Scott's proposal of delay on Monday night was Eugene Ball's acceptance of the proposition. Apparently, Ball innocently believed that a delay would not be harmful to the brotherhood's cause. Perhaps the union leader felt that an outside agreement, free from the whims of an umpire, might be more beneficial than the uncertainties of federal arbitration. Although Ball had

hand picked his arbitrator on Monday he agreed to delay.¹

The upshot of the Monday night meeting between Scott and Ball was that the beginning of an irreversible timetable was postponed for more than a week. Under the provisions of the Erdman Act, the naming of arbitrators must be followed within five days by the mutual selection of the umpire. If no decision was reached at the end of five days, Knapp and Neill named the umpire. Every day that Scott stalled in naming his choice for arbitrator meant another day won for the railroad, plus an additional four or five days spent wrangling over the umpire. On Thursday, June 3, Scott wired Ball from Augusta that he would be unable to meet with his directors and discuss their choice of arbitrator until Monday, June 7. Ball, still hopeful of an outside settlement, replied: "While I am now prepared to name my Arbitrators....I respect your wishes and will meet you as requested with the sincere hope that results will follow agreeable to both parties." The union leader naively agreed to delay a second time.²

A.P. Kelly, however, was not taken in by the railroad's appeal for another delay. Each day that passed could only lessen public support for the strikers' fight. Appeals to racism had galvanized the striker's supporters; delay might dampen their spirits. Kelly realized that there was "only a faint hope of the Company conceding our points" and only an "even chance" that the board of arbitrators would decide for the union. The brotherhood's cause was being "left in the hands of outside parties," Kelly later wrote "...the odds were against us."³ Distrustful of the

¹Report of the President to the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen (St. Paul, Minn.: n.p., 1910), 298, 304

²Ibid., 298.

³Ibid., 305.

railroad's motives and a decision rendered by "outside parties," Kelly was determined to clinch a victory for the brotherhood regardless of the outcome of arbitration. The union leader "decided to attempt to reach the public and...interest them" in legislating black firemen from the cab "on every...road in the State of Georgia." While the nation's newspapers and magazines scrutinized the strike during the first week in June, Kelly canvassed the countryside, stopping at the same familiar towns and whistle stops which had been the scene of the previous week's violent campaign. Stumping at Camak, Thomson, and Augusta brought pledges of unyielding support for the brotherhood. The tour ended at Union Point, where Kelly appealed to "a mass meeting of some 500 people," who unanimously declared themselves "in favor of any movement we desired to inaugurate."⁴

It is important to point out that suspicious union men and stalling railroad officials were joined by Knapp and Neill in their hesitancy to enter arbitration. On their return trip to Washington Knapp and Neill discussed the strike. A dispute which involved antagonism between labor and management was difficult enough to settle. But the Georgia strike added the dimensions of race hatred and state politics. If federal arbitration was held in Georgia violent mobs might surround the court house and influence the outcome. Politicians might even be appointed as arbitrators. Upon arrival at Washington Knapp and Neill drafted a wire and sent it to Ball and Scott:

...the more we reflect upon the matter the more we are impressed with the importance of avoiding...arbitration by bringing about an amicable adjustment. It seems to us plainly undesirable at this time to have...formal adjudication....

⁴Report of the President, 305.

Arbitrators chosen by the railroad and the brotherhood, Knapp and Neill continued, "should be men who are qualified to act as peacemakers and who will use their efforts and influence to promote a settlement."⁵ The wire's specific appeal for "peacemakers" would hopefully eliminate the appointment of state politicians, who could feed upon race hatred. Knapp and Neill realized that it was important to keep the economics of the issue free from racial rhetoric. Eugene Ball replied for the brotherhood on Friday, June 4. The two Georgia lodges, he complained, had already conceded more points than the railroad; both sides must give a little. With Monday's meeting with Scott in mind, Ball expressed a "reasonable hope" that an outside solution could be reached. The brotherhood leader did not reveal the name of his choice as arbitrator.⁶

In addition to fears of racial and political overtones, Knapp and Neill apparently had other reasons for avoiding the final dictates of the Erdman Act. During the first eight and one-half years after the act's creation in 1898 it was invoked only once, and then attempts at an arbitrated settlement proved "entirely fruitless." Although labor arbitration cases increased after 1906, Neill still regarded the workings of the act in the "experimental stage." Indeed, mediation settled more disputes than arbitration. If the Georgia Railroad strike reached arbitration in 1909 it would only be the third of twenty cases to do so. Under mediation the Labor Bureau could offer its "friendly offices" to settle the fight but impose no legal ruling. Under arbitration, "a quasi-judicial method adopted for the speedy settlement of industrial controver-

⁵Knapp and Neill to Ball and Scott, June 2, 1909. Erdman Act Case File 20, Georgia Railroad vs. Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen, Record Group 13, Washington National Records Center.

⁶Ibid., Ball to Knapp and Neill, June 4, 1909.

sies," the board's ruling was binding for one year. Yet even Neill admitted that there had been "different interpretations...and...subsequent friction" regarding decisions reached under arbitration. Neill, in a moment of candor, echoed the worst fears of the brotherhood. "The selection of the third arbitrator by the mediators [Knapp and Neill] has been a difficult and embarrassing duty...." In twelve cases of arbitration between 1907 and 1911, for example, Knapp and Neill were forced to select the umpire eleven times, and the Commerce Court and Neill had a hand in the selection of the twelfth. Since the umpire was supposedly selected for his impartiality, he was seldom familiar with railroading. As a result, Neill pointed out with finality, "...dissatisfaction with an award and consequent criticism of the appointment of the third arbitrator is to be expected." It was a strange system of justice where the least informed member of the board cast the most important vote.⁷

Arbitration was assured on Monday when the last hopes of an outside settlement vanished. The Kimball House conference between Ball and Scott was brief and to the point. Scott sparred with Ball, attempting to discover the brotherhood's choice of arbitrator. Finally, Scott brought the discussion down to one question. What would the firemen demand and concede in order to settle without arbitration? Ball replied that black seniority must end on July 1, 1909 and that the Georgia Railroad must limit the number of black firemen to twenty-five per cent of the work force. The railroad would not give in. Arbitration was the only solution.⁸

⁷Charles P. Neill, "Mediation and Arbitration of Railway Labor Disputes in the United States," U.S. Bureau of Labor, Bulletin No. 98 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1912), XXIV, 1-20, 56-57.

⁸Report of the President, 298-299.

Monday's brief and fruitless conference at the Kimball House convinced Ball that further delay was unwise. Perhaps the brotherhood leader suspected that Scott had deceived him; the railroad's appeals for delay had cost the union one valuable week. It would take at least one additional week to find an umpire. At noon on Tuesday Ball released a press statement which reviewed the causes of the strike, claimed that the union had made every effort to settle the controversy, and called upon "the good people of the state...and the arbitrators to give us the white man's supremacy in the white man's country..., even if it does affect the financial interest of the railroad corporations,..." Having appealed to anti-railroad and racist sentiments, Ball closed with another emotional exclamation: "We shall not allow this to be a lost cause."⁹ Ball now publicly declared that Thomas K. Hardwick, congressman from the state's tenth district, would represent the brotherhood during arbitration proceedings.¹⁰

The brotherhood's choice of arbitrator fulfilled the worst fears of Knapp and Neill. A partisan politician would now sit at the table. Hardwick was an astute politico who had managed to survive the Watson-Smith dispute. His home district, the tenth, encompassed much of the strike district, including Thomson. Fighting for the firemen's "rights" would be a fight for white supremacy, the small man against the corporation, his country district against the railroad ring in Augusta and Atlanta. Such a fight could only win Hardwick new political converts; it was tailor-made and required no switch on the major political issue, white supremacy. The

⁹Atlanta Constitution, June 9, 1909.

¹⁰Ibid.

congressman's stand on the race issue was well known. Hardwick had engineered the disfranchisement plank in Hoke Smith's gubernatorial platform in 1905-1906. The congressman represented a growing band of Southern politicians who had little concern for the ideology of noblesse oblige. As racism reached a new crescendo, an anti-black plank was often the only plank necessary. "If there is an avowed enemy of the negro in this State it is [Hardwick]" the Commerce News declared. The straight conservative Macon Daily Telegraph agreed. Hardwick was a poor choice as arbiter because he was an active politician "who...made his way in politics on the single item of negro disfranchisement." Arbitration, the paper's editor wrote, should not be influenced by the "militant politics" of Hardwick. If the black worker's place in the South was to be redefined, it should "be done by the wisdom of our best men and not by the torturous rule of politics."¹¹ Apparently the Daily Telegraph's editor did not consider Hardwick among the South's best men.

To many Southern conservatives the Georgia Railroad's choice of Hilary Abner Herbert as arbitrator fulfilled the Daily Telegraph's call for the region's "best men." Colonel Herbert was a veteran Alabama Redeemer who had served in Congress from 1877-1893, successfully defending his seat against the Alliance movement. In 1890 the empty-sleeved ex-Confederate wrote Why the Solid South? or, Reconstruction and Its Results, "the most elaborate and influential apology for

¹¹Dewey W. Grantham Jr., Hoke Smith and the Politics of the New South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 138-139, 147-150; Clipping from the Macon Daily Telegraph, Erdman Act Case File 20.

the Redeemers and their regime...." Ironically, Herbert had served as Secretary of the Navy in Cleveland's second cabinet along with Hoke Smith, then Secretary of the Interior.¹² In contrast to Hardwick, Herbert's "attitude toward the negro race was paternalistic, but while his principles led him to be kindly disposed toward the black man, they in no wise altered his conviction that the Negro was inferior."¹³ Herbert was a firm believer in the black disfranchisement movement, declaring that the North was with the South, and that Washington would not intervene unless the South embarked upon a course of harsh treatment for blacks. Although Herbert's law firm represented the Seaboard Airline Railway, Harper's Weekly believed that the old Colonel would be "free from passion and low prejudice." Of the old school, Herbert had successfully made the transition from old South to new, maintaining law offices in Montgomery, Alabama and Washington. In defending the railroad from the "labor agitator...and...political demagogues," Herbert would also be defending the varied economic, social, and political philosophies of the Redeemers and Bourbons.¹⁴

On Tuesday evening Ball and Scott sent a joint wire to Hilary Herbert and Thomas Hardwick, both at their Washington offices. The wire requested that their first meeting for the selection of an umpire be held no later than June 11. The deadline for a mutually acceptable umpire would then fall on Saturday, June 18. In Atlanta brotherhood men

¹² Albert B. Moore, History of Alabama (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1934), 615; Introduction to the Hilary Abner Herbert Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 489.

¹³ Hugh B. Hammett, "Labor and Race: The Georgia Railroad Strike of 1909," Labor History, XVI (Fall 1975), 478.

¹⁴ "The Georgia Strike Arbitration," Harper's Weekly, LIII (July, 1909), 4; Atlanta Constitution, July 11, 1909.

successfully thwarted an attempt by the railroad's management to have arbitration proceedings held in the more hospitable surroundings of Washington D.C. That move, if successful, would have eliminated the strong force of public pressure. In the same vein, the firemen managed to receive assurances that the proceedings would be open to the public.¹⁵

The remainder of the week found the "colony of firemen" in constant contact with Hardwick and other brotherhood sympathizers in Washington. Herbert, union partisans grumbled, would only name "some official of the railroad or those closely allied with them" as his choice for umpire. Hardwick rejected name after name. Finally, Kelly demanded that Neill produce the list of six mutually acceptable names. Neill denied that he had ever promised to compile such a list. The talks were now hopelessly stalemated as the June 18 deadline drew nearer. Kelly angrily commented that the labor commissioner had "played us false and deceived us to the extent of stealing our victory under a false promise."¹⁶ As the week slipped away Hardwick and Herbert continued to wrangle over the appointment of an umpire at the Interstate Commerce Commission's office. As the deadline approached the search was narrowed to two Georgians, Bishop Warren Candler of the Methodist Church of Atlanta and David Crenshaw Barrow Jr., Chancellor of the University of Georgia. Brotherhood men loudly objected to both, but Hardwick convinced them that Candler, an old friend of Smith's, was the lesser of two evils. The congressman also pointed out that it would be impossible to compromise on anyone else before the June 18 deadline. The firemen finally agreed to accept Candler

¹⁵ Apparently the weekend days of June 12-13 were not considered as working days: Report of the President, 299.

¹⁶ Ibid., 305.

but the brotherhood received another setback when the Methodist bishop hesitated and, at the last moment, refused to serve as umpire.¹⁷ Candler's declination on June 18 now threw the choice of umpire into the hands of Anapp and Neill. On Saturday, June 19, they notified Chancellor Barrow that he had been "appointed" as umpire and urged that he arrive in Atlanta on Monday. Both parties were "ready and waiting and anxious to proceed." On Saturday night Hardwick and Herbert packed their bags and left Washington.¹⁸ In Atlanta, Kelly complained that the umpire was now a man "whom we protested against." The brotherhood's fear of the third arbitrator proved well founded. As the firemen's magazine gloomily noted, "a majority of the board consisted of men whose appointment the railroad company desired...."¹⁹

David Crenshaw Barrow Jr. was born in 1852 in the middle Georgia county of Oglethorpe. His brother, Pope Barrow, was a Savannah lawyer, U.S. Senator, and conservative Cleveland supporter. David Barrow dabbled in civil engineering, taught engineering and math at the university, and was described as a "practical farmer." The chancellor was noted for his "progressive policies" and "wise and conservative counsels." One admirer described the "public-spirited man" as possessing a "fine set mouth indicative of will power and persistence." Barrow would need both qualities during the coming week.²⁰

¹⁷Id., 300, 305; Candler wired Hardwick and Herbert on June 18: "I am not inclined to accept such a task unless it is perfectly clear that it is my duty to do so on behalf of the parties at issue, and in the interest of the general public. No consideration could move me to undertake it short of a sense of duty." See Atlanta Constitution, June 19, 1909.

¹⁸Knapp and Neill to Barrow, June 19, 1909. David Crenshaw Barrow Papers. Special Collections Division, University of Georgia Library, Athens, Georgia.

¹⁹Report of the President, 305-306; "The Georgia Railroad Strike," Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen's Magazine, XVII (August 1909), 255.

²⁰Grantham, Hoke Smith, 50, 63; William J. Northern, ed., Men of Mark

Brotherhood firemen had reason for optimism when Monday morning's hearings began despite the presence of Barrow and Herbert, who were described by Harper's Weekly as representing "the better sort of public opinion in the South."²¹ Arbitration would take place in Atlanta, a city which had visibly displayed its ardent support for the strikers, and the proceedings would be open to the public. In transferring their fight from the countryside to the courtroom the union men placed their case in capable hands. The B. of L. F. and E.'s national headquarters at Peoria, Illinois sent in H.L. Dickson, the union's national counsel. Dickson, a veteran defender of the organization, was familiar with railroading throughout the nation and was considered by many as an "orator of unusual ability." That Dickson was also a native of Mississippi and a former fireman who had lost both hands in a railroading accident would stand in his favor. But the union hired the services of Reuben Arnold, a local favorite considered by many to be the state's best known lawyer, to deliver the brunt of the union's argument. "Rube," the local papers called him, was a lieutenant of Hoke Smith's and no novice to litigation with the Georgia Railroad. His defense of Leo Frank in 1913, however, would stand in stark contrast to his defense of the white firemen's fight in 1909, characterized by vitriolic attacks upon the dependability and efficiency of black firemen, as well as apologies for mob action.²²

in Georgia (Atlanta: Caldwell Publishers, 1910), V: 1-4.

²¹"A Hope Fulfilled," Harper's Weekly, LIII (July 1909), 5.

²²Ibid.,; Atlanta Constitution, June 21, 1909.

The Georgia Railroad's fight against "Rube" Arnold and the firemen was directed by the road's venerable leading counsel, Major Joseph B. Cumming. The major had been in the service of the railroad for almost a third of a century and was aided by attorney Sanders McDaniel. The railroad's lawyers faced a brotherhood strategy which hinged on two salient arguments. First, that blacks were too "stupid" and "incompetent" to fire engines safely or efficiently. Inextricably bound into that point were rhetorical arguments of white supremacy and innate black inferiority. Second, the union's lawyers hoped to show that the state of public opinion was so volatile that the continued use of black firemen on the Georgia Railroad would ignite further racial conflict along the line. Brotherhood men had no problem finding scores of brooding citizens who would testify to the inferiority of blacks and to the ugly mood which existed in towns down the track.

At eleven o'clock on Monday morning Barrow, Hardwick, and Herbert entered the assembly room of the Piedmont Hotel and, seated behind a massive table, began six days of arbitration. The opening hours of the first day were spent debating the legal and parliamentary procedures of the board. Was there a precedent? The board decided to grope along and formulate rules as questions arose. It was quickly apparent that the railroad's and firemen's ideas of what the board would hear as evidence differed vastly. Arnold immediately declared that the hearing was not a staid, inflexible court of law bound by "technical rules." The firemen, Arnold maintained, would subpoena and introduce the testimony of dozens of witnesses from along the road to buttress their case. Cumming

countered that the whole purpose of the hearing was to take the matter out of the hands of the mob. Testimony which amounted to "a mere statement of public opinion" was irrelevant and more appropriately expressed by the ballot. Arnold shot back: "If we cut out all evidence that is hearsay, or that is public opinion, there wont [sic] be much left in any arbitration of this sort." The brotherhood's lawyers warned that public opinion must be demonstrated, "not because public opinion ought to control the arbitrators, but because public opinion might make it safe or dangerous to other employees at points along the line." The arbitrators decided to tackle the question of the relevancy of testimony upon the first objection by either side.²³

During the afternoon session Arnold presented an opening statement which traced the history of the strike and layed the groundwork for the firemen's fight. According to Arnold, "public policy,...safety," and justice demanded a decision favorable to the brotherhood. State laws governing all walks of life, Arnold pointed out, demanded the separation of the races: in schools, on passenger trains, and in hotels. Why, he asked, should the white firemen be singled out by a curious double standard and forced to mix with blacks. Progressive public policy, he hinted, demanded the elimination of blacks from the cab. Few blacks were hired by railroads in other sections of the nation, Arnold continued, noting that the South might be lagging behind the North and West in progressive reforms. "There is not a negro in train service in any of those enlightened and up to date states" he added. The practice of

²³"Arbitration Proceedings, Georgia Railroad and Its Employees" (typescript in Georgia Collection, University of Georgia Library, Athens, Georgia), 15-16; Atlanta Constitution, June 23, 1909.

using black and white firemen on "joint tenure" runs was degrading for brotherhood men and sure "to arouse...friction between the two." White firemen, Arnold alleged, must climb into the cab and "clean up the engine after the negro firemen; and we expect to prove and contest that it is about the same thing as making a white man and a negro man room together and each keep his clothes in the same trunk or bureau."²⁴ Uneducated blacks, he pleaded, should not block positions which could be held by educated whites, who were subject to brotherhood safety rules and union examinations for promotions. The job was too "progressive" for black men, they were clearly not the "stuff" a competent railroad man was made of. Arnold pulled out a typical stereotype when he declared that blacks were fine for "menial capacities" when supervised by whites. They were too "dull" to handle "intricate" locomotives and their presence in the cab endangered the traveling public. Finally, Arnold charged that a very real danger existed if blacks were put on Georgia Railroad engines. "We expect to show..., that the state of the public mind is such in the country, and in the towns and villages on that railroad track, that it would not be safe...to operate these trains with darkies." Arnold pulled out the ugly memory of Reconstruction when he cautioned that the Georgia Railroad's persistence in placing blacks on locomotives was as big a mistake as the "Federal Government [putting]...colored folks in office in the Southern States." In short, mob rule would demand a decision favorable to the brotherhood.

²⁴"Arbitration Proceedings," 15-16; Atlanta Constitution, June 23, 1909.

On Monday night deputy marshals were busy serving over one hundred subpoenas to citizens along the railroad line. That action caused the editor of the New York Times to bitterly ask how "lynchers could be made a party to the arbitration."²⁵

On Tuesday morning vice-president Ball took the stand for the brotherhood and testified that blacks were unsafe and incompetent railroad men. When Major Cumming objected that Ball's testimony was hearsay the vice-president retorted that the Georgia Railroad had ignored public safety when it hired cheaper black workers. "They have less respect for their passengers and freight than they have for financial affairs of their company," Ball continued, suggesting that an appropriate company motto might be "dividends first, public last." When Major Cumming again objected to Ball's partisan statements and asked that they be stricken from the record, Arnold declared that the hearing was "a liberal tribunal, I know we are not going to be hidebound." On Tuesday afternoon that liberal attitude was displayed when the union's lawyers introduced a parade of partisan engineers and firemen from southeastern railroads who were ready to testify to black inefficiency and irresponsibility. Their testimony would consume roughly one-half of over eight hundred pages of typescript.²⁶

"Rube" Arnold immediately sought to uphold the charge that blacks were inefficient and incompetent firemen. Locomotive firemen testified that blacks fired "for smoke, don't fire for steam at all." The follow-

²⁵"Arbitration Proceedings," 19, 31; New York Times, June 23, 1909.

²⁶"Arbitration Proceedings," 53-57, 101.

ing exchange between Arnold and an engineer on the Central of Georgia Railroad sought to discredit blacks as unsafe firemen and lookouts. The sweeping generalization closed the ludicrous testimony of the second day.

Arnold: Is the fireman required to remain awake at night, on night runs?

Witness: Yes....

Arnold: Is the negro liable--as a class, I mean, as a rule--to keep awake, and attend his business?

Witness: Well, they are the next thing to a possum [sic] about sleeping.

The brotherhood, charged with the burden of proof, marched witness after witness before the board. Blacks who were sent out to flag crossings, one witness testified, "mighty nigh always go to sleep if they stay long, especially at night, always getting a nap." The same witness charged that blacks curled up near the fire door during winter months and fell asleep.²⁷

While much of Tuesday's testimony was little short of racial rhetoric, the firemen did manage to place some real grievances before the board. Charges that union firemen were disciplined and discharged for infractions while less expensive black firemen, who committed the same offenses, went unpunished were apparently true. The railroad could afford to overlook the shortcomings of its black workers while using any excuse to discharge more expensive brotherhood men. But when one brotherhood officer tried to lay the responsibility for the South's appalling railroad accident rate at the feet of "dull" black firemen, Major Cumming quickly asked for proof and noted that the answer

²⁷"Arbitration Proceedings," 122, 208.

might lie in the North's use of a predominately double track system while the South still used single tracks. Railroad officials, however, were not entirely innocent of generalization. When officials of the Louisville and Nashville and the Georgia Railroad justified the use of blacks by testifying that white firemen lacked the "endurance" to fire heavier Baldwin locomotives, Arnold successfully cut off that line of attack with one question: "Have you got bigger engines than the Pennsylvania Railroad?"²⁸

By mid-week the patience on both sides had worn thin. Prominent Southern railroad managers lingered in the halls of the Piedmont Hotel, aware that the outcome of the arbitration might create economic problems for their own rail systems. A few managers might have found some solice in the editorial column of Wednesday's New York Times, which pointed out that Joseph M. Brown, "elected upon the issue of maintaining the lawful rights of the railways against the malevolent attacks of Gov. Smith," would occupy the governor's mansion on Saturday morning. "The fact is not on the record of the arbitration," the Times editor wrote, "but it is likely to have an important bearing upon the question raised by the strikers."²⁹

Inside the Piedmont's assembly hall the queue of union witnesses filed before the board. When Arnold asked how black firemen compared with white firemen the witnesses dutifully replied: the white is better "in everything," or "naturally a white man's superior to a negro" or the black is "deficient in certain moral qualifications." Such exchanges often

²⁸"Arbitration Proceedings," 160-164, 494-496.

²⁹New York Times, June 23, 1909.

revealed more about social attitudes than black competence. When Arnold asked the Georgia Railroad's master mechanic if black firemen would make safe and competent engineers the witness replied in the negative.

Arnold: Why not if he is a competent fireman?

Witness: I would have to draw the line somewhere.

It was also clear that the participants were sparring in a legal void, somewhere between a courtroom and a country store. The railroad corporation were fair game. The much advertised, New South calling card of employee loyalty was gone.

Arnold: State whether the black fireman...will overlook the most essential things unless you are constantly reminding him of them.

Cumming: I think that Brother Arnold ought not to be putting leading questions in the mouth of the witness as he is doing.

Arnold: I think I have the right to ask a leading question of these employees,...

Cumming:My Brother Arnold admits that he is asking leading questions.

Arnold: I admit that the last one was.

Cumming: And he claims the right because these witnesses are in the employ of the Georgia Railroad....

They are far more in the employ of the Brotherhood that is here as Plaintiff in this case. They recognize its authority more than they do that of the Georgia railroad, and the reason does not exist that he should be excused in violating the rule which prohibits asking leading questions.

Arnold: I insist on my right to ask leading questions.... I am going to change the form of that question to relieve the Commission of any ruling on it. To what extent, if any, are engineers compelled to keep constant vigilant lookout over his negro firemen as compared with his white firemen?

Witness: Well a little more so than he would with white men--a great deal more so than he would with white men.³⁰

The brotherhood's counsel began its second salient argument on Tuesday afternoon. The mood of the public, Arnold warned, would prevent the safe

³⁰"Arbitration Proceedings," 517, 304.

operation of the railroad if black firemen were used on engines. The union's lawyer then introduced the mayor of Lithonia as a star witness. The mayor, prepared to testify that hot tempers were many in his own town, began his statement with a few sentences on the competency of black workers in general. As a foreman in his father's quarry, the mayor testified that he was "never able to do anything with blacks except to learn them to drill a hole." Major Cumming immediately objected. The mayor's testimony had nothing to do with railroading; he was a partisan witness who would only drag the mood of the mob into the assembly hall. The question of relevant or irrelevant testimony was now clearly before the board. Cumming quickly called for a brief recess and returned to the hall with a well prepared, lengthy discourse which laid the base of the railroad's objections. Cumming's widely publicized, "masterly" speech effectively blunted the union's attack. To allow partisan witnesses, some active participants in late May's lawlessness, before the board was the "grossest contempt..., an assault upon the very citadel of...liberty." The brotherhood, he continued, demanded that the board of arbitration find its verdict among Georgia's "excited population--excited and stimulated by false issues and false cries of negro supremacy...." To admit such testimony, Cumming argued, would return the dispute to the rabble along the railroad and defeat the purpose of arbitration. But the union's course, he gloated, was one of desperation. It underlined the fragility of their "broken down...feeble" case. The brotherhood, out of weakness, was now attempting to browbeat the arbitrators into submission, to make the verdict

subject to "the pressure of public opinion. I won't use any harsher expression.... There is a word in my mind that would fit..., a word of three letters...."³¹ In closing Cumming shrewdly charged that the union had wrongly maligned the good character of the people of Georgia by hinting that the populace would not abide by a decision considered favorable to the railroad.

Now..., when this Board lays down the law..., if the people of Georgia are dissatisfied--it is charged...by the other side thtt they are going to become rioters, law-breakers, assassins and murderers, I don't believe that--but if this law is displeasing to them they will go in the regular way and have an election ...the public opinion will show itself in the action or non-action of the members of the next legislature.³²

Major Cumming, confident that the railroad lobby at the Statehouse was stronger than the brotherhood's, had openly challenged Kelly's campaign to legislate blacks from locomotive cabs.

Arnold's earthy, rousing response declared the board a "peace board" formed to promote "good feelings...if it can be done.... We all know strikes produce irritation and friction and frequently rioting and bloodshed...." Railroad's, Arnold continued, were quasi-public corporations and any dispute between the railroad and its employees must, by necessity, include the citizens served by the railroad. Arnold defended Georgians and the institution of white supremacy.

I think the people of Georgia are the best people in the land. I was born and raised here and expect to die here. People do get excited at times; people do have prejudices; I would not give the snap of my finger for people who don't have prejudices, and one of

³¹"Arbitration Proceedings," 324-328; Arbitration Between Georgia Railroad and its White Firemen Under the "Erdman Act," June 21st-26th, 1909. Interlocutory and Final Arguments of Jos. B. Cumming, Counsel for the Georgia Railroad. (Augusta: Chronicle Job Print, 1909), 1-5. This pamphlet was probably printed and distributed at railroad expense.

³²Ibid., 5.

the prejudices of which we boast is white supremacy. I don't care what you say about it; how much you criticise it, the white man is here to stay and here to rule.³³

Despite Arnold's impassioned appeal to prejudice, the arbitration board unanimously ruled against the admittance of testimony by partisan citizens such as Lithonia's mayor. Apparently Hardwick voted with Herbert and Barrow because he agreed that such testimony was irrelevant and time-consuming, or because his association with the two men during the week convinced him that the outcome of arbitration was predictable regardless of the testimony. Although the board would hear partisan railroad employees for two more days, the crest of the union's attack had passed.

It seemed more than appropriate to railroad officials that, even as "Rube" Arnold resolutely argued the brotherhood's case at the Piedmont Hotel, Hoke Smith delivered his farewell address before a joint session of the state legislature. While recounting the achievements of his "reform" administration the governor could not restrain himself from branding General Manager Scott's demands for militia protection as a "reckless willingness" to endanger life and property. Smith justified his own course and pointed out that measures had been taken to place the Georgia Railroad in the hands of a receiver due to "the failure of the railroad authorities to operate the road." Hoke Smith clearly had no sympathy for the Georgia Railroad. In parting the governor advocated one more reform measure, the enactment of a Georgia law providing for state arbitration of labor disputes.³⁴

³³"Arbitration Proceedings," 320-324.

³⁴Atlanta Constitution, June 24, 1909.

As Hoke Smith's term as governor came to an end Northern newspapers praised the railroad's liberal and spirited defense of its black firemen. Major Cumming, however, found himself in the awkward position of defending an employee which he did not consider a social equal, but merely another factor which reduced operating expenses. What liberalism the railroad displayed was based on sound economics and not social justice. In fact, Cumming's own brand of racism was often thinly veiled. The brotherhood's case hinged on one important question, Cumming declared, and that was "whether the negro is so deficient as a fireman that he must be excluded..." from railroad work. The question of whether or not "the negro is as good as the white man," the Major quickly pointed out, was not involved at all, despite the rantings of union leaders. Cumming, in a statement colored by Spencerian Darwinism and supply and demand, clearly delineated the railroad company's economic and social philosophies:

...Who has ever claimed that he the black fireman was equal? That isn't our case. We are not here to establish the impossible proposition that the negro is as high in the scale of humanity..., as the white man. We are here to contend...that he is high enough in that scale to make a good fireman.

Isn't it a merit..., to be as economical as you can? And right here, we say that the negro gets less because the market price of the negro is naturally less.... If the Georgia Railroad is trying to establish social equality between the white man and the negro, it is an idiot and ought to be put in the hands of a receiver....³⁵

In addition to the racist attitudes of both parties, arbitration also reflected a fundamental anti-union sentiment among Southern railroad managers. One Louisville and Nashville official testified that a "principal qualification" of a fireman on his road was non-affiliation with

³⁵Final Arguments of Jos. B. Cumming, 9-10, 14.

the brotherhood and admitted that the system hoped to retain only enough white firemen to supply the road with engineers. General Manager Scott testified that the brotherhood's push for educational standards and safety measures among Southern firemen was only an attempt by them to "magnify their usefulness." The brotherhood had no business in the South. Unions were alien and feared:

Arnold: You said you knew the source from which [educational and safety rules] came.

Scott: I said that...to indicate that these rules had been formulated and urged by these orders, which were far more practicable where those rules are operated than down where I have been operating.

Arnold: More feasible in the east than here?

Scott: Yes sir.

Arnold: And you don't want it to spread?

Scott: No sir, I do not. That is the reason you hold your union convention in September of these evangelists,...

Arnold: You don't want this educational wave to spread.

Scott: I don't care whether it spreads or not..., I don't care to be at the behest of men who want to be magnified by me. I will let the evangelist attend to his own [affairs].

Arnold: You don't want to pat him on the back and help him along?

Scott: No sir, He don't need my help, I need his mercy.³⁶

On Saturday morning Major Cumming closed the railroad's case. The leading counsel, in an emotional speech, appealed to a sentiment which might even overcome the union's race-baiting tactics, the Lost Cause. Cumming declared himself "a Southern man, born in the South..., spending four of the best years of my life...trying to uphold the rights of the South--need I say that I would not be here advocating negro supremacy, or negro equality?" But blacks, the old Confederate continued, were brought here by force, educated in the "hard school of slavery," and after years of toil in the field "made...acceptable to us as laborers,..."

³⁶"Arbitration Proceedings," 790-791.

Young Southern men must not "forget that in the last stages..., blacks had reached such a degree of humanity...and let it never be forgotten by that noble old South which some of us remember...that, during the last years of the War, the women and children of the South were in their keeping."³⁷ Brotherhood complaints of unsafe blacks and repugnant contact were all subterfuge. There was only one question, Cumming thundered, and that was:

...shall the negro be excluded from industrial life in the South? I rejoice to think that no such movement has ever started with Southern white men. Where did it come from?... It is the second conquest by the North and West....

Cumming declared that the union "schemes" would not "stop at the railroad." They would "sweep over every other industrial pursuit in which the negro is performing.... When that is done, we shall have not merely a check, but an absolute paralysis...." The old major warned that the elimination of blacks from industrial positions would require "some foreign element... to take their place. It will be a long time doing it, and it will be retarded in doing it by the presence of this very [black] population." If blacks were barred from industrial work the "flood gates" would be thrown open. Cumming demanded that the board "stem,...that flood of revolution" by deciding against the brotherhood.³⁸

Cumming's references to the Lost Cause and a radical, Northern inspired revolution among Southern workers was followed by a scathing attack on the union movement in the South. Reconstruction had failed, the major declared, but now a "radical movement" would attempt to erode the region's supply of cheap laborers in a second emancipation. Cumming

³⁷Final Arguments of Jos. B. Cumming, 16-20.

³⁸Ibid., 18, 20.

now waved a bloody shirt of a different sort.

How we do need reformation. How we need it, from New Haven, and Chicago, and from Peoria. We need another conquest. We have been conquered once, a conquest which attempted..., to put the negro on top. There is where the cry of negro supremacy started when the North came down and tried to put the bottom rail on top, and tried to reverse the edicts of God Almighty. They now come down and say: "We will undo that work, and having attempted to establish negro supremacy and failed, we will reverse our work entirely, and these poor people, whom we put in a position where they had to compete for their living, and whom we led to believe were as good as the white man, and in some instances better..., we come now to say that they shall not make a living." There is the second conquest that is proposed to us here of the South.³⁹

With the end of Major Cumming's final speech, Southern railroad managers, brotherhood officers, and curious citizens filed into the hotel's lobby and settled down to await the board's decision. A.P. Kelly and H.L. Dickson, certain that Hilary Herbert and Chancellor Barrow would support the Georgia Railroad on every issue, left Atlanta by train before the board went into executive session on Saturday night. Ironically, Atlanta's afternoon papers featured the inauguration of Joseph M. Brown. In a short, metaphorically embellished inaugural address, Brown hinted that industrial strife had passed and that the state could now return to more progressive pursuits.

It is true that clouds of discord have for a time obscured the sky of our peace, that paralysis has stagnated the warm blood of manly endeavor; but, emerging from the shadows into the radiance of the rising sun, we know today as we have ever believed that the heart of Georgia still beats true to the music of progress (cheers),...⁴⁰

³⁹Final Arguments of Jos. B. Cumming, 18, 19.

⁴⁰Atlanta Constitution, June 27, 1909.

The decision of the board, reached after four hours of deliberation on Saturday evening, was announced to Georgians along the railroad by Sunday's newspapers. Bold headlines announced that: "GEORGIA RAILROAD WINS BATTLE FOR RETENTION OF NEGRO FIREMEN: EMPLOYEES GAIN MANY DEMANDS." Barrow and Herbert quickly established a pattern which held on each successive vote. They jointly demanded that blacks be retained as firemen. Thomas K. Hardwick predictably demanded the elimination of blacks because they constituted "a menace to the safety of the traveling public." Since Barrow and Herbert declared that blacks must be retained by the Georgia Railroad, Hardwick agreed that they should receive equal pay, but only on the grounds that his vote would aid in "removing the principal incentive for [black] employment, [and] result in the speedy elimination of this cheaper labor and a consequent improvement of service."⁴¹ All arbiters agreed that firemen must have three years experience before promotion to engineer. In a split decision, with Hardwick again dissenting, Barrow and Herbert upheld black seniority. In addition, the board unanimously approved the firemen's demand that assistant hostlers receive yard firemen's wages. On the key grievance that black firemen should not block passenger, local freight, or yard engines the arbiters returned a unanimous decision so vaguely worded that it left the railroad complete freedom.

In assigning vacancies to firemen, seniority alone shall not control, though it may be considered in connection with the efficiency and with the necessity, where it exists, of giving

⁴¹"The Georgia Railroad Strike," Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen's Magazine, XXVII (August 1909), 266; Atlanta Constitution, June 27, 1909.

experience to candidates for promotion to the position of engineer.⁴²

After an intense, violent campaign along the Georgia Railroad and weeks of anticipation, the decision, calmly announced by men in stylish suits and starched shirts, was anticlimactic. The state's leading conservative organs turned from the strike and busied themselves with front page columns portending the actions of the new Brown administration. Their editorial space was devoted to blistering attacks on one of Hoke Smith's last acts in office, the dismissal of S. Guyton McLendon, chairman of the state's railroad commission. Southern railroad managers, who could now breathe easier, maintained a low profile and departed Atlanta by rail. Vice-president Eugene Ball, one of the last brotherhood leaders to leave the city, wrote a farewell address to the people of Georgia. The letter, quoted in part by the New York Times, thanked the state's citizens for their support and claimed that the brotherhood had never demanded complete elimination of black firemen. "When the board ruled that both races should receive the same pay for the same work," Ball wrote his partisans, "I am inclined to think they gave us all we asked,... When you place the white man and the negro on the same pay basis, it is certain that the employer will secure the most competent laborer, not the cheapest."⁴³ The board's decision was only a temporary "set back...time..., will in the end vindicate us." The vocal Kelly, however, bitterly flailed the board's decision and the Erdman Act.

The deal we got...appealed to me as a travesty on justice..., it was clear that our case was proven beyond a doubt. But it is only "poor old labor" that was to suffer at the hands of capital

⁴²Report of the President, 310.

⁴³New York Times, June 29, 1909.

and I presume that this majority of Arbitrators felt that the shock would be too great if it rendered justice in its favor,... I desire to go on record as being absolutely opposed to this method of arbitration,... Labor's cause is one of representing humanity in its most humble, homely and honest form, and it has ever been the desire of the employer to crush it out of existence, and I know of no law that will accomplish it sooner than the Erdman law as it was used in the Georgia Railroad strike.⁴⁴

Hilary Herbert, Kelly complained, was more of a "prosecuter than...judge."

Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine saw the decision as another defeat of Southern white working men at the hands of New South moguls. Watson ironically noted that the only bright spot in the decision was equal pay for both races. But even that victory, he pointed out, might prove transient, "since the employer, not the employee, fixes the rate of wages." The Georgia Railroad, the magazine continued, now had

...just as much opportunity to lower the wage of the white firemen to the level of that heretofore paid to the negroes, as to raise the negroes' pay to the level of the white. So long as negroes are to be continued in undiminished numbers as employees of the road, they will be used to beat down the price of labor and the self-respecting claims of the white man.

Some Georgia labor organizations used the strike to bring their grievances before the public. A Georgia Federation of Labor meeting at Columbus adopted a resolution "protesting against the licensing of detective agencies by the Atlanta police commission." The resolution, according to the Atlanta Constitution, was "inspired by the recent issuance of such licenses during the Georgia railroad strike, enabling Pinkerton detectives to enter the city and do work in behalf of the railroad company."⁴⁵

⁴⁴"The Georgia Railroad Strike," Firemen's Magazine, 267; Report of the President, 306.

⁴⁵Ibid.; "Georgia Railroad Strike Award," Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine, III (August 1909), 610; Atlanta Constitution, June 18, 1909.

The nation's press praised the decision. The editor of the New York Times wrote that the ruling gave blacks the "right to live, for the right to work is the right to subsistence." Harper's Weekly printed that the votes of Barrow and Herbert had firmly declared that "mob law must not be presumed to be stronger than the laws of the State of Georgia." The board's decision was particularly significant for the black community, which tended to view the struggle as a fight by Southern whites for black jobs. The black New York Age wrote that "nothing short of the Negro's right to work and his employment on Southern railroads are at stake." The Boston Guardian feared that equal pay for both black and white firemen would remove the "reason for [railroads] to hire colored" firemen. The Age did not agree, pointing out that equal pay was "the only road to industrial security for the white labor of the South. On this issue the Negro's cause is the white man's cause." Another black paper wrote that an unfavorable decision would have relegated the black worker to "half a slave in spite of the war and notwithstanding the [Thirteenth] Amendment."⁴⁶ For blacks bound to the sharecropping system, the job of locomotive fireman on the Georgia Railroad was not closed during the summer of 1909. Booker T. Washington, in a laudatory letter to Hilary Herbert, wrote that black leaders believed "that this decision rendered by Southern men will be as far-reaching in effect as any single thing in helping forward the progress of the Negro people."⁴⁷ One North Georgian praised

⁴⁶ New York Times, June 29, 1909; "A Hope Fulfilled," Harper's Weekly, LIII (July 1909), 5; New York Age, June 3, July 1, 1909; Boston Guardian, July 3, 1909; Savannah Tribune, June 19, 1909.

⁴⁷ Booker T. Washington to Herbert, August 12, 1909. Hilary Abner Herbert Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Barrow for the "verdict" rendered by the board and wrote that the black community "...owes a duty of respect to the Barrows,...Thomasses, and Gobbs,...who have been most generous towards them along all lines in trying to elevate them and make good citizens of them." The president of Georgia State Industrial College in Savannah thanked Barrow for his support and penned: "I told my friends that the colored man's interests were perfectly safe in your hands."⁴⁸ The Colored American Magazine described the arbitration award as "one of the most commendable and courageous decisions ever given by a Southern board." The state's black newspaper commended Barrow and Herbert for their stand, while declaring Major Cumming "sincere in his advocacy of the rights of the colored firemen."⁴⁹

Hilary A. Herbert, in a letter to the editor of the Atlanta Constitution on July 11, probably spoke for Chancellor Barrow and most Georgia conservatives when he hinted that a progressive and regulated South must include industrial work for blacks. Any other policy meant a great social dilemma. "If the negro is not competent to do the duties of fireman....," Herbert asked, "what is he fit for. What are we to do with the 10,000,000 negroes in the South?" Herbert declared himself in step with the South on the issue of race but could not agree that the only place for the black was in the field. "Is the white farmer the only white man in the south with whom the negro is to be allowed to compete?" Unions were fine in their "proper sphere," but the ~~brotherhood~~

⁴⁸ J.T. Heard to Barrow, June 29, 1909 and R.R. Wright to Barrow, July 3, 1909. David Crenshaw Barrow Papers, Special Collections Division, University of Georgia Library, Athens, Georgia.

⁴⁹ Colored American Magazine quoted in Lorenzo J. Greene and Carter G. Woodson, The Negro Wage Earner (New York: Van Rees Press, 1930), 107; Savannah Tribune, July 3, 1909.

had encouraged "strife between the races." Herbert echoed an often voiced fear that unionization would become rampant in the South. "We will not be doing justice to the negro," he remarked, "if we allow one labor union to come down from the north and exclude him successively from carpentering and blacksmithing and sawmilling and mining..., until finally we shall have organizations interfering with even domestic service." "Justice to the negro" was available so long as it was economically expedient.⁵⁰

The participants in the Atlanta hearings had hardly dispersed when the union firemen carried their fight into the Statehouse. The brotherhood's lobby worked feverishly for discriminatory legislation. One Georgia representative introduced a resolution which called for white firemen on all Georgia railroads "as an additional safeguard to public travel." On June 30 the New York Times reported that a bill had been introduced into the lower house which called for an "educational test for negro firemen." Although the black Savannah Tribune calmly downplayed the importance of the bill and expressed the opinion that black firemen could "hold their own" if the bill passed, The Nation was enraged. White firemen, the periodical charged, would have considered arbitration "a very beautiful thing" if the board had decided in their favor. But now, having lost the fight, the brotherhood was trying to force the state legislature "to dance to the tune of the Dominant Race." The educational test bill, the magazine declared, was the "latest shame-

⁵⁰ Hilary A. Herbert to the editor, Atlanta Constitution, July 11, 1909.

ful attempt [to keep] the negro in the dirt" and off the locomotive. Social and political Jim Crow tactics must not be extended into economic realms. "Are we to see the day," The Nation asked, "when a man shall not be allowed to stoke an engine or turn a brake-wheel unless his grandfather was a fireman before 1867?" Despite racial overtones, the fireman's lobby failed to push the measure through the legislature. The Georgia Railroad's black firemen, caught up in a violent and emotional struggle between white management and labor, continued to fire engines. The outcome of the Georgia Railroad strike, the New York Age pointed out, was a clear indication that Southern moneyed interests would not allow the "race cry" to become an economic bludgeon wielded by the brotherhoods. Southern businessmen could now rest easy. The "radical" second emancipation had been turned back along the Georgia Railroad. New South leaders were assured that cheap, unorganized labor would remain in abundance.⁵¹

⁵¹New York Times, June 30, 1909; Atlanta Constitution, June 30, 1909; Savannah Tribune, July 3, 1909; "The Week," The Nation, LXXXIX (July 1909), 23; New York Age, July 1, 1909.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The Georgia Railroad strike of 1909, the New York World reminded its readers, was "an industrial war...fought out on the lines of race and color." It was a point worthy of emphasis. For all too often the economic origins of the strike were lost in racial rhetoric. The brotherhood's utilization of racial propaganda, of course, did not help in clearing up a complicated picture of economic infighting between the railroad and its organized white laborers. The railroad's exploitation of traditional anti-unionism among Southerners and its cries that the strike's success would eliminate Southern blacks from all industrial pursuits were no less extremist. That there was no "flood" of unionism to fear is evinced, in part, by the status of unionism in the South today. As is usually the case, a close approximation of what the Georgia Railroad strike was lies with neither extreme despite the banners of partisan newspapers and the rantings of brotherhood hardliners, politicians, and railroad lawyers. The strike was an intense struggle for survival by two lodges of a national railroad brotherhood, which found their organizational efforts under attack in a hostile region, and an economy minded railroad management determined to eliminate the union threat with unorganized black labor. The hapless black firemen were caught in the cross fire. Finally, the strike reflected the frustrations, fears, and hopes of Southerners in a traditional, yet

unsettled and changing South.¹

Unfortunately, there is little to indicate how the rank and file of black firemen reacted to the strike. As is often the case, their spokesmen were community leaders or newspaper editors. Caught as an unwilling pawn between the efforts of the railroad to decrease operating expenses and the brotherhood's attempts at successful collective bargaining, the black's role in the strike surfaced only when he was the object of sensationalized mob violence. Newspapers described his bruises and cuts rather than probing into his views on unionization and railroading. His true status and, as Hilary Herbert indicated, the "completeness" of white supremacy was illustrated by his absence at the tribunal which determined his fate.²

The black firemen, one local newspaper pointed out, were highly pleased with their wage increase. Indeed, one recent interpretation of the strike declared that the "real winners" were "the black firemen.... The victims of the episode, they remained virtually invisible as the railroad and the union fought it out."³ Victims they were, but invisible they were not. Constantly taunted, intimidated, and frequently beaten, some left their engines. Others were determined to stick it out. One veteran black fireman stepped from a locomotive at Lithonia with a double barreled shotgun, determined to defend himself and his job.⁴

¹ New York World quoted by Savannah Tribune, June 19, 1909.

² Atlanta Constitution, July 11, 1909.

³ Hugh B. Hannett, "Labor and Race: The Georgia Railroad Strike of 1909," Labor History, XVI (Fall 1975), 482.

⁴ Macon Daily Telegraph, May 23, 1909; Atlanta Constitution, May 24, 1909.

The decision reached during June of 1909 certainly encouraged black leaders and temporarily insured that blacks would continue to fire engines on the Georgia Railroad. But the board's award must not be viewed as the great turning point in a massive, coordinated assault by the union. Nor should it be viewed as a watershed in the nation's treatment of blacks. Although the New York Age declared that the color line had been "wiped out" by the award, black Americans did not have to look far for a reminder that little had changed. Hard upon the heels of the Georgia award the Interstate Commerce Commission exonerated a number of Southern railroads from charges of discrimination against black passengers. The complaints, filed by five African Methodist Episcopal church bishops, charged that the roads furnished inferior cars for blacks and denied them sleeping car accommodations. The commission declared the roads innocent of "discrimination" or "prejudice," despite testimony that blacks were served only on the third call to dinner. The Boston Guardian branded the ruling a "foul lie" and a "slap in the face" to ten million black Americans. If "The 'Jim Crow' Car Decision" had been handed down by a Southern board, the editor of the Macon Daily Telegraph wrote, it would have been bitterly attacked by the nation's press.⁵ While the Atlanta decision gave the black the "right to live," the Interstate Commerce Commission reminded him that the "place" in which he lived would remain clearly defined.

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen continued its fight against black firemen on the Georgia Railroad after the strike of

⁵New York Age, July 1, 1909; Boston Guardian, July 3, 1909; Macon Daily Telegraph, July 3, 1909; The Seaboard Airline, the Southern, and the Central of Georgia were among Southern railroads charged with discrimination.

1909. That campaign was more akin to attrition than onslaught and factors far beyond the control of the union, railroad management, and politicians eventually came into play. In 1911 brotherhood firemen on the Southern Railroad threatened to walkout in protest against black seniority. In order to avoid a fight the railroad agreed to a wage increase and the elimination of blacks along certain sections of the road. The brotherhood's sentiments were well voiced by the Locomotive Firemen and Enginements Magazine in 1911 and reflected a rising American, and not merely Southern, brand of racism.

The question of doing away with the Negro fireman has been mooted for several years and like Banquo's ghost, it will not down. Therefore it is hoped that the various roads will begin now to prepare for accepting the inevitable, for Americans have determined that neither the Negro, the Chinaman or the Japanese will "run" either this country or its railroads.⁶

When the United States Railroad Administration assumed control of the nation's railroads during World War I it was forced to grant concessions to the brotherhoods in order to guarantee uninterrupted and trouble free operation of the railroads. When wartime contracts were coupled with the movement of Southern blacks to Northern based war industries, some Southern railroads began to feel a serious labor shortage. Despite the stronger brotherhoods, Georgia led the nation in the employment of blacks in train service with 10,865 workers in 1923.⁷

But the firemen's union doggedly held on. Equal pay gained by blacks during the war removed some of the "incentive to employ Negro workers." The economic slumps of 1919 and 1921 reduced the number of

⁶ Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 291-292.

⁷ C.H. Wesley, Negro Labor in the United States 1850 to 1925 (New York: Russell and Russell, 1927), 301.

firemen necessary, making the brotherhood "all the more anxious to displace Negroes." Declining business during the 1930's and technological change further reduced, albeit slowly, the number of black firemen in Georgia. In 1930 one observer wrote that the new contracts "between the roads and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen negotiated during the last few years have prevented the Negro from regaining the old place which they held on the Southern roads" prior to the war.⁸ A stronger union, economic depression, and a decrease in railroad traffic slowly took their toll. In 1910 there were 1,719 locomotive firemen in Georgia; 1,007 were black. By 1940 the number of firemen within the state had been reduced to 1,000. White brotherhood firemen saw their ranks decrease only slightly, from 548 in 1910 to 452 in 1940. Blacks, however, lost 555 locomotive firemen during the thirty year period, with only 452 on engines in 1940.⁹ In 1941 the fate of black firemen was sealed in the "Southeastern Carriers Agreement" between twenty-one railroads and the B. of L. F. and E. Blacks were barred from fifty per cent of the diesel positions and from new runs and vacancies. In the long run, black firemen were allowed to slowly expire.¹⁰

The black firemen's short term gains on the Georgia Railroad were vulnerable as well. As Tom Watson, a fiery supporter of white firemen, pointed out there was little to prevent the railroad from lowering the

⁸Howard W. Risher Jr., The Negro in the Railroad Industry. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 35-42; Spero and Harris, Black Worker, 306-307.

⁹Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Population, Occupation Statistics, 450; Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Population, The Labor Force, 729.

¹⁰Risher, Negro in the Railroad Industry, 41-42.

white firemen's wages rather than raising black wages. Without contract surety the black's newly won increase proved illusive. The Outlook recommended that "a possible solution is the employment of trustworthy engineers." That course, while certainly admirable and just, was not an attainable solution in 1909. It would have thrown some black firemen into direct competition with the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, a conservative organization which was stronger and more elitist in philosophy than the B. of L. F. and E. The engineers were well entrenched and, with all probability, could have mustered a successful defense of their locals where the firemen failed. That only eleven of the state's 1,874 engineers were black in 1910, however, must not be attributed solely to the power of the B. of L. E. Southern railroad management had to "draw the line somewhere." It was not considered "politic" to employ blacks as engineers. A public which voted to take the ballot from blacks and, in the case of the Georgia Railroad strike, refused to provide them protection under the law could hardly be expected to accept blacks as engineers. If the firemen's job was considered too "progressive" for blacks, then the engineer's side of the cab must be preserved for skilled whites only.¹¹

Both the brotherhood and the railroad cast black firemen in typical stereotypes. The union was all too eager to depict black firemen as incompetent and obsequious laborers, unorganizable and unalterably loyal to their employer. The railroad projected itself as a beneficent employer,

¹¹"The Georgia Railroad Strike," The Outlook, XCII (June 1909), 312; Thirteenth Census, 450.

commanding complete loyalty from its faithful and content black firemen. Both pictures were inaccurate. Shunned by the white B. of L. F. and E., black firemen on Georgia railroads organized their own union, the Colored Locomotive Firemen's Association. Dissatisfied with their working conditions, black firemen on the Georgia Railroad struck in 1906. Labor militancy among the road's employees was not peculiar to white workers.¹²

The strike in Georgia, as the national office feared, disrupted the brotherhood's organizational efforts in the Southeast. W.W. Slaby, a "special organizer" sent South by the B. of L. F. and E. reported that officials of the Louisville and Nashville "have become more bitter than ever in their...determination to prevent the organization of... firemen...on that line and other lines within its control. Since the Georgia Railway strike few roads in the extreme Southeast have employed any white firemen...." Slaby's tour of the deep South was "very discouraging." Firemen, he wrote, were "very timid" during the Georgia strike. The Louisville and Nashville "so strongly opposes our organization that instant dismissal is the penalty of membership when it becomes known...." Legislation, Slaby continued, was the only "remedy..., as the South is becoming aware that something must be done for the protection of its sons." The brotherhood's president agreed. A "diplomat," he declared, is usually more successful than a "warrior." A no strike policy was the best policy for the Southeast.¹³

¹²Spero and Harris, Black Worker, 311; "Arbitration Proceedings, Georgia Railroad and Its Employees" (typescript in Georgia Collection, University of Georgia Library, Athens, Georgia), 170.

¹³Proceedings of the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen (St. Paul, Minn: n.p., 1910) 135, 471-479.

The year following the arbitration award was one of discouragement for brotherhood firemen on the Georgia Railroad. Despite the stipulation that brotherhood firemen must be retained by the railroad during the year after the agreement, one fireman was confronted with a yellow-dog contract within days of the award. A grievance committee member wrote his national office: "scarcely was the ink dry on the signatures of the signers...until...the company began a campaign of extermination of the white firemen." Lodge membership declined as brotherhood men were dismissed. By September, 1910 there was "less than twenty-five per cent white firemen on the road. "In no instance since the strike was a white man employed."¹⁴ The brotherhood's future in the South looked bleak.

Past treatment of the 1909 firemen's strike on the Georgia Railroad in labor monographs, and in two recent articles, tend to end the story of the strike at this point. The black's right to work was upheld, his seniority was maintained, and an "important area of economic opportunity remained open" to him.¹⁵ But the two Georgia lodges continued to fight, and not without results. During the fall of 1910 the Georgia Railroad firemen recalled A.P. Kelly, a tenacious negotiator who could deal with General Manager Scott. The scenarios was similar to that of 1909. For weeks Kelly wrangled with Scott through conferences, wires, and letters. The union demanded recogni-

¹⁴ Quarterly Report of the International Officers of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Engineers (St. Paul, Minn?: n.p., 1911), 92.

¹⁵ Hammett, "Labor and Race," 483.

tion, higher wages, shorter hours, and "the white man's right to all things over the negro." When the railroad remained obstinate, Kelly threatened another strike. Although both brotherhood and railroad officers denied the possibility of a strike when questioned by the press, another racially charged walkout confronted the railroad. At a conference on October 12, Kelly, in the form of a final ultimatum, tossed out a proposition which he felt certain would be rejected. The railroad must reverse the proportion of black firemen, then fixed at fifty, and white firemen, fixed at twenty. "To my surprise," Kelly later wrote, "he agreed to consider this offer...." At a meeting on the following day Scott stalled, calling the clash between black labor and white unionism "one of the greatest problems...that confronted man in the South." The hardnosed Kelly was unrelenting and set October 15 as a deadline. On that day Scott agreed to employ forty white firemen on a monthly basis rather than on a per diem basis. A confident Kelly refused the offer, noting that "it would be possible to run our men an unlimited number of miles for less compensation...." Scott finally gave in and the railroad agreed, "if the business...permits it, to maintain forty...white firemen in their employment, who shall be given preference to all work." If the company could not use the men they were to receive "a minimum day for every day not used at passenger rates."¹⁶

It is important to point out that the 1910 contract did not eliminate black seniority; but it did give white firemen preference to work

¹⁶ Quarterly Report, 95-100.

where senior firemen, black and white, were not engaged. As A.P. Kelly put it, passenger and local freight firemen were "not...affected, as their ages give them preference anyhow, but all other is on the rounds, and it is here where our men..., can run it so there won't be room for 'nig' to remain." The increase in wages was considerable and the Atlanta terminal agreed to hire ten whites, which left only one position open for a black fireman in the yards. Perhaps the most important clause in the contract was the shortest: "No fireman shall be discriminated against on account of membership in or affiliation with any labor organization or serving on any committee." The two Georgia lodges had won a major victory.¹⁷

Given the Georgia Railroad's harsh anti-unionism during the spring of 1909 and its refusal to compromise on black employment, the contract of 1910 adds another strange twist to a complicated strike. The railroad's reversal on union recognition and its complete turnabout on black-white employment ratios muddies the neat, traditional view of the strike as a victory for black firemen. Apparently the railroad, while unwilling publicly to give up the principle of black seniority and set a dangerous precedent, was willing to privately sacrifice a number of its unorganized employees in order to maintain the peace. The railroad, having confronted one ugly racial conflict, must not provoke another. For black firemen who waited for the next round, only to be bumped by whites, the 1909 victory proved ephemeral. Kelly was convinced that the 1910 contract was

¹⁷ Quarterly Report, 95-99.

"the first real step...taken towards the removal of the negro from the engines of the South...." For that reason the Georgia Railroad strike should not be viewed as a landmark decision which redefined the black's "place" within the region's slowly emerging industrialization. Of much greater significance was the 1909 strike's final chapter: the contract of 1910. In a region characterized by hostile anti-unionism, management and white workers on the Georgia Railroad privately came to grips with each other. The economic color line had not been "wiped out" on the Georgia Railroad. It had been redrawn by both the railroad's "best men" and by its white "cracker firemen."¹⁸

The ideological lines drawn during the strike were often crooked and frequently overlapped. Both sides scrambled to beat the most acceptable drum and often found that they were loudly playing the same tune to the "Dominant Race." The traditional labels tossed back and forth during the strike by both participants and the press were completely inadequate. They did not fit the oddities of the Georgia struggle and their meanings became hopelessly blurred. Governor Hoke Smith, in seeking a solution to his political dilemma, seized a liberal Populist plank, state seizure of the railroad. By aligning himself with a conservative brotherhood, the governor was branded by a conservative press as a liberal defender of organized labor in the South, Georgia's John P. Altgeld. The mockery of political disfranchisement as a reform was carried to its extreme along the tracks of the Georgia Railroad. There mayors, aldermen, and county sheriffs quickly demonstrated their political savvy; the mobs could vote.

¹⁸Quarterly Report, 95-100.

in the fall, their black victims could not. On a national level, Georgia's senators and congressmen turned a deaf ear to the cries of the railroad, preferring to leave the politically explosive issue in the hands of their constituents. Even the President was hesitant to alienate Southern votes wooed in the fall by sending in federal marshals and troops into the region during the following spring. "Interference by the Federal government," the black New York Age declared, "would have meant the opening of the old sectional wound to a degree not approached since the days of Reconstruction."¹⁹

The Georgia Railroad strike was peculiar. Unlike many disputes, the very success of the walkout depended upon the introduction and maintenance of racial animosity. Unlike many labor unions, the brotherhood was as conservative in its economic and social philosophy as management. But the race question made it possible for both the railroad and the union to seek their own economic priorities. To railroad management the black represented a source of cheap and unorganized labor. He "naturally" received less and for that reason he must be protected. For brotherhood men the black was an old antagonist. He must be removed from the field before the union could successfully deal with the railroad. Perhaps the greatest irony was that the brotherhood turned the railroad's use of black labor into a powerful weapon through cries of railroad induced black supremacy. That tactic illustrated what could be done by union's confronted with minority competition, and it is surprising that it did not occur with greater frequency.

¹⁹New York Age, June 3, 1909.

In short, union officers out-demagogued the demagogues. In doing so they won over the powerful ally of public support. That support was so strong that the railroad had no desire to confront it again. While the brotherhood can certainly be condemned for exploiting the explosive issue of race relations to carry its fight, the railroad must be held equally accountable for economically exploiting blacks and willingly endangering the lives of black firemen by placing them on mail trains. Actually, neither the railroad nor the brotherhood was seriously dedicated to the maintenance of black principles. Both were dedicated to their own economic goals and, in that respect, both were conservative business organizations.

Conservative Old South stalwarts such as Colonel Scott and Major Cumming fought to protect the railroad from the "demagogues" and "labor agitators." They were praised by the press for their stand on black employment. Yet the arguments which the railroad mustered to meet the brotherhood's racially charged attacks revealed a strange brand of liberalism. The railroad's use of the Lost Cause as representative of the first Southern conquest and unionism as the vehicle of the second conquest was as much demagoguery as the brotherhood's use of race. Those "best" Southerners, who cried loudest against unionism during the spring of 1909, were more often than not those who controlled the region's railroads, mines, and mills.

Brotherhood leaders found themselves leveling the liberal label at the railroad's management which, for the sake of profits, pushed

black supremacy upon unwilling "Georgia boys." The press branded the union reactionary and anarchistic; the union labeled the press plutocracy's mouthpiece. Union lawyers were quick to point out that the railroad and Southern leaders demanded a strange double standard. On one hand, social and political dictates demanded that all whites join hands in relegating blacks to the status of second class citizens. On the other hand, for the benefit of an economically "progressive" South, white workers must labor alongside black workers even if it meant lower wages. If the New South demanded sacrifice, the laborers must pay.

The persistence of the two Georgia locals, however, indicated that some white laborers were not sure that the "best" Southerner's version of the New South included a fair share of economic progress for themselves, if any. Indeed, from the laborer's viewpoint, they were at the opposite ends of an economic tug of war in which the railroad's management threw every obstacle in their path, including the employment of blacks. For protection of their own interests they turned, economically, to the brotherhood. Politically, they turned to the demagogue. By revealing a split among Southerners on a race issue, the strike also underlined a rift among Southerners on economic issues.

The Georgia Railroad strike's origins were economic and its momentum was carried by racial issues. The strike's final solution, however, becomes an inseparable blend of the two, "pure" economic history aside. Despite the cries of outside agitation, the problem was an indigenous one. The contract of 1910 indicated that the railroad, while unwilling

to publicly bow to the brotherhood, realized that another conflict was inevitable unless their differences were patched up. To placate its white firemen the railroad tossed out a system of Jim Crow rules and regulations. Unfortunately, the uneasy peace between the Georgia Railroad and its white union firemen, not unlike the region's fragile political solution, was maintained at the expense of black workers.

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