
The Unity of Labor

by Eugene V. Debs

Unsigned article published in *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*,
vol. 15, no. 8 (Aug. 1891), pp. 679-680.

The *Farmers' Voice* in a recent issue says:

Philosophic thinkers now recognize the essential unity of "the labor movement" in all civilized nations. Its pleas and manifestations may have diverse local peculiarities but all draw their force and receive their impulse from the same deep reservoir of power, which lies far below the surface in the great substratum of humanity.

All labor is independent. If, for the sake of illustration, grades of labor are introduced, it will at once be seen that the highest is absolutely dependent upon the lowest grade — that the vital nerve extends from the foot to the head — from the lowest depths to the most exalted heights, and that this nerve, subjected to injury anywhere throughout its length, will be productive of disaster more or less serious.

Do such propositions require proof? Are they not self-evident? In the very nature of things is there not a law of union, an irrevocable law, a law as eternal as that of gravitation, binding all classes, all grades of labor into one interdependent whole? A brotherhood which — discarding signs, grips, and passwords — voices, trumpet-toned, a truth yet to be recognized, that labor in all of its labyrinthian ramifications, high and low, whether it is bestowed at 25 cents a day or \$10.00 a day — whether rendered by slave or freeman — is united, having the same end in view, to produce, to build, to preserve, to carry forward all enterprises and to bless the world?

There is not, we surmise, in the world of the mind, a broader, deeper, or a more commanding truth in all the sciences and philosophies than the one we have suggested, that labor, in all of its divisions and subdivisions, in all of its branches and classifications, constitutes

a oneness, a unity, which no power in earth or heaven can change. If so, it follows logically that any attempt to change the irrevocable law must be productive of confusion and injustice.

The aristocracy, not of labor, but in labor, or more properly, in labor circles, is an exhibition of mental deformity and infirmity, explainable only upon the hypothesis that labor has copied the most repulsive characteristics of the men who debase labor — the men who rob workingmen and grow rich by the tribute money they extort.

If labor could see and comprehend the eternal truths of its mission in the world, the \$4.00 or the \$10.00 a day man would take the profoundest interest in the \$1.00 a day man, or his more unfortunate brother who toils for a less sum than \$1.00 a day.

In this highly favored (?) land we talk much of the “sovereignty of the people,” we shout in lofty periods about the “power of the majority.” Occasionally, to embellish a stump speech, some demagogue injects into his “flapdoodle” the Latin phrases, “vox populi, vox Dei” — “the voice of the people is the voice of God,” while at the same time the majority, the working people of the country, because they will not unite, are the victims of the minority, and the few who are united bead down the many, and make them hewers of wood and drawers of water — that is to say, divide them into castes, set them to wrangling, and thus crush and rob them, silence them in courts and in Congress, and impose upon them degradations and humiliations not one remove from serfdom.

If workingmen were united in sympathetic bonds; if the skilled laborer was broadened rather than dwarfed as he advanced in knowledge until he, if a bricklayer, could comprehend the fact that he is dependent upon the hod carrier; if the locomotive engineer could grasp the fact that he is dependent upon the locomotive fireman, descending to or ascending from the humblest laborer the aristocratic idea in labor circles would disappear, the interdependence of labor would at once constitute a bond of union, a chain whose links, forged and fashioned to hold workingmen in harmonious alliance, would girt them about as a defense in every time of trouble and resist invasion, through assailed by all the plutocrats that ever cursed the earth.

This desideratum, this one thing needful, has not been secured, and because it has not been obtained, the plutocrats are treating millions of workingmen as “dumb driven cattle.”

Will this sort of thing go on forever? Men will answer just as they have confidence in the intelligence of the people, as they have confidence in the intelligence of workingmen.

The plutocrats have confidence in the people, based upon Jay Gould's theory of their integrity. When he wants a judge or a legislature, he ascertains the price and pays it. The plutocrats pursue the same policy, though there may be less directness in their methods of subjugating workingmen, and in every instance money or its equivalent — employment — is made to talk. It can coo like a dove, or utter decrees with the fierceness of a Nero. In either case workingmen cower and tremble. Will it be thus forever?

Divided, estranged, quarreling, forever conducting a guerrilla warfare upon each other, building up little aristocracies based upon wages, discarding fundamental principles, they will be in the future as in the past, animals to be slaughtered. But should the time come when workingmen fraternize and, recognizing the interdependence of all, rally to the standard of right and justice, determined to be heard, then the millennium of labor will dawn. The plutocratic Satan will be chained for at least a thousand years, and the unity of labor being recognized there will be peace in the earth.

It is a question of faith in man, or faith in money. The world is taking sides. Let the debate go forward.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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