
On the Color Question

by Eugene V. Debs

Excerpt from an article in the *Indianapolis World*, June 20, 1903.

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The Indianapolis World of June 20 [1903], a newspaper for colored people, contains an article by Eugene V. Debs, written at the invitation of the editor, from which we quote the following passages:

There was a time when organized labor in the main was hostile to the Negro, and it must be admitted in all candor that certain unions, such as the railroad brotherhoods, still ignorantly guard the trades they represent, as well as their unions, against invasion by the colored man, and in this they have always had the active support of the corporation in whose interest it is to have workingmen at each others' throats, that they may keep them all, black and white, in subjection.

Indeed, it is a fact, that wherever labor unions, now or in the past, opposed the Negro, such opposition was inspired, or at least encouraged, by the employing class represented by Mr. Parry, who now seeks so assiduously to place the responsibility on the poor ignorant dupes of his capitalistic master.

The ignorant members of labor unions, and there are many such, thanks to the system of wage-slavery Mr. Parry so ably defends, who still oppose the Negro, unconsciously echo the interests of their industrial masters, while those who know better and fight the black man are spies and traitors in the service of the same masters.

But in spite of all such influence, the labor movement in general, in America and throughout the world, stands unequivocally committed to receive and treat the Negro upon terms of absolute equality with his white brother, and where this is not the case the genius of unionism is violated and investigation will disclose the fact that corporate power and its henchmen are at the back of it.

The Socialist Party, the political wing of the labor movement, is absolutely free from color prejudice, and the labor union, its economic wing, is rapidly becoming so, and in the next few years not a trace of it will remain even in the so-called black belt of Southern States.

The workers of the world, mainly through organized effort, are becoming conscious of their interests as a class, totally regardless of color, creed, or sex, and in time they will unite and act together upon a common basis of equality in spite of “the world, the flesh, and the devil” and the Manufacturers’ Association.

What the Negro wants is not charity but industrial freedom and then he will attend to his own education. There is no “Negro problem,” apart from the general labor problem. The Negro is no one whit worse off than thousands of white slaves who through the same labor market to sell their labor-power to the same industrial masters.

The workers, white and black, want land and mines and factories and machinery, and they are organizing to put themselves in possession of these means of production and then they will be their own employers, they will get all they produce and the problem will be solved.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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