
Employer and Employed

by Eugene V. Debs

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When rightly considered, the interests of employer and employed are identical. In the first place both make their living out of the same business or undertaking. The railway company furnishes the track, road bed, engine, cars, machine shops, etc., the employees furnish the labor by which this system or business is operated. All are interested in the profits. The employee gets his wages from this source and the employer, or the railway company, gets the balance.

In fact any business is a partnership to a certain extent. The employer puts in the capital, the employee furnishes the labor. Out of the result of this combination both are paid. From this reasoning it necessarily follows that any harm done to capital injures labor, and any harm done to labor injures capital.

As society is now constituted, capital is largely in the hands of one class and labor in the hands of another. In some instances these classes may disagree, or the one may attempt to coerce the other to certain obnoxious measures, but in either case injury results to both.

Take a strike for an instance. Capital and labor cannot agree upon the amount of wages to be paid for certain work. Capital offers so much, labor wants more. Production ceases. Whose loss is this? It is the loss of both capital and labor. Capital loses its profits, interest on its investment, and the useless deterioration of its machinery. Labor loses its wages. Nay, more than all this, the whole world loses because there is less wealth produced.

One of the great objects of our organization is to prevent unnecessary clashes between employer and employed. One of our fundamental doctrines is that labor and capital are brothers. With hand in hand they march along the highway of progress, and it is wrong and suicidal to put them at enmity. Demagogues, who expect to ride into political power on the waves of disturbance, are continually attempting to make a breach between labor and capital. These men are

not the friends of those who toil. Their motives are entirely selfish. They should be ignored.

With our intricate system of civilization it is next to impossible to prevent some differences to creep in between labor and capital; if, however, these differences are honest, they should be adjusted peaceably and honorably. Both sides ought to give and take. Capital should extend its hand to labor and labor should grasp it in a friendly manner. There should be no insulting demand on one side nor insulting difference on the other. This truth should be bound upon the foreheads of all men. Capital depends upon labor, labor depends upon capital.

Very few people stop to think about the real relations of employer and employed. Many have the conception that employers ought to pay as little as possible for labor, and labor perform as little as possible for its wages. This is all wrong. The successful outcome of the business engaged in, is the interest of all.

Some have gone so far as to say that there is a natural, a necessary conflict between labor and capital. These are very shallow thinkers, or else very great demagogues. Argument is of no use against these people, either they cannot or will not see the falsity of their statement.

To see the proper relation between labor and capital and to teach that relation is one of our objects. The fact that this is our object has given as much of our influence as a brotherhood and added much to the respect in which we are held in railway circles. We desire our employers to fully understand that we are organized for no purpose harmful to their interests, but on the contrary we seek to make the relations between us and them pleasant, profitable, and mutually beneficial in all respects.

Railway officials should second our efforts and show to their employers that their welfare and that of the men who labor for them are identical. A harsh, unsympathetic employer obtains only half-hearted service. An employer with a heart gets good service with respect thrown in. If differences arise, as they often will, both sides should be above all other things manly. No cringing on the one side, nor arrogance on the other. In the first place the difference should be real or cease to exist; in the next place both sides ought to be willing to compromise. An employer should bear in mind that to make arbitrary rules or to cut down wages without cause is as much of a "strike" as one indulged in by laborers who "strike" for higher wages. To "strike" is simply to demand something that is not given willingly. When, as

an organization, we say to our members "do not strike," we say at the same time to our employers, "treat us fairly." If the difference is great let us confer about the matter, let us both understand the situation fully. All are men and should be treated as such. If this feeling is carried out faithfully no great disturbances need arise. Wisdom is our best counsel always and to compromise is wisdom.

Again, we repeat, capital and labor should not antagonize each other. There is no natural conflict between them. Together they make a noble combination, capable of subduing the world to the full use of man. All the enginery, all the cities, all the great highways, all the inventions of this century have their life and progress as the result of combined capital and labor. From the tiny toy manufactured for the baby to the Corliss engine that drives a thousand wheels, all things result from the combined effort of labor and capital. Why then should these brothers quarrel? False friends and bitter foes may cause differences, but they should be forever united.

One of the great drawbacks to a complete understanding of the true relations between capital and labor, springs from ignorance. Men will not or cannot think. They are led astray by the designing or the equally ignorant. It is our duty, as an organization, to educate our members to a correct understanding of their relations to their employers. This duty we are striving to perform. This ignorance of the proper relations between capital and labor is not confined to the ranks of the employed. Some of our employers are woefully ignorant on the subject. They have learned to look only at immediate results and have failed to see the situation from a high point of view. An employer who has many men under him and who has great results to obtain should be a man of great grasp of mind. Not a little, narrow fellow who sees in every demand for higher wages an attempt to coerce capital, but a broad-gauged man who tries to remedy the evil that makes the wages too low. The little fellow, as soon as a laborer approaches him with a demand for higher pay, cries "socialist," "communist," "revolutionist," and wants the military called out to suppress these dangerous laboring men. The man of brains, the man who understands the relation of employer and employed, listens with respect to the demand and affords relief if he can or a reason why if he cannot.

We are in the midst of great financial and commercial disturbances, and we know not what a day may bring forth, but we desire it to be known that we deprecate violent differences between employer

and employed; that we encourage honorable settlement in all cases, and if our employers will meet us half way they will always find us ready to agree to anything that is fair and honorable. We believe in capital *and* labor, not in capital *against* labor.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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