
The Solidarity of Labor

by Eugene V. Debs

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In mere physical enterprises the age in which we live laughs at impossibilities. The ancient alchemists sought to transmute base metals into gold. In this they were not successful but their labors and discoveries laid the foundation of scientific chemistry, the value of which it is impossible to overestimate. Living today they would suffer all the odium that attaches to cranks, visionaries, vagarists. They were dreamers and with patience and sincerity sought to realize their visions. Did they work in vain? By no means. Chemistry is their monument and the old alchemists are immortal and all nations are their beneficiaries.

We talk of the fatherhood of God. Is that a vagary? A mere freak of fancy? If so, it is better to dismiss it. It is fashionable to refer eloquently to the brotherhood of men. Is that another hallucination unworthy of consideration by men of brains? If so, let it also be remanded to the limbo of forgotten myths. Galileo, several centuries ago, became satisfied that the earth moved. It was a fact, but the monks of the Inquisition said it was a lie and made the old mathematician and astronomer recant to save himself from torture. Thus it is seen that along the track of the centuries, verities and vagaries have intermingled until in their separation it is found that in a vagary there is an element of fact, and in a fact, an element of vagary, and about the best that can be done under the circumstances is to find whether truth or error preponderates.

In discussing the solidarity of labor I am not without certain data that serves as a foundation for those who believe that its consummation is within the boundaries of the possible. There is such a thing as human fellowship, and solidarity means fellowship, fraternity, mutual sympathy, interest in each other's welfare, and in seeking to bring about solidarity in the ranks of workingmen it must be apparent that only their highest good is sought.

Is solidarity practical? Every labor organization in the country demonstrates that it is not a mere theory, that it is not speculative, that it exists and is accomplishing good results. These organizations seek to cultivate fellowship and to establish fraternal obligations; to bring their members into active sympathy with each other, creating bonds of union promotive of their welfare; hence, solidarity is not a hallucination. We see it in operation in every hand. This being true, I make the point that it is possible to bring all organizations of workingmen into one household of faith. What obstacles are there in the way that may not be overcome by the enlightening influence of education? I know of none, not one. I see science and invention have encircled the earth with electric wires and made the orient and the occident neighbors; I have seen science and invention issue their mandates and in obedience to their command, rivers and chasms are spanned, mountains are tunneled to make straight the pathway of transportation upon which the iron horse of civilization travels, and I conjecture, however herculean the task may be, that it is possible for the divinities of education, common sense, and self-protection to so shape events that workingmen will ultimately see that their interests demand solidarity.

It should be understood that solidarity is the enemy of faction and the champion of unity. There is one supreme demand of labor and that is unification. Labor factionalized is labor impotent. The enemies of labor appreciate this imbecility and profit by it. They unify for victory and achieve it. Labor sails in a hundred small crafts in seas where plutocratic devil-fish abound and there is not an instance on record where one of these labor crafts challenged resistance that the plutocratic devil-fish with their prehensile arms have not dragged them down to defeat, and being equipped with the means of obscuring their motives if not their acts, have managed to make labor pay all the penalties and endure all the odium consequent upon defeat. I assume that common sense will ultimately overcome these prevailing errors and that labor, by the invincible power of solidarity, will be prepared to successfully resist plutocracy.

I have repeatedly declared that in the absence of solidarity it is folly for men to strike against the wrongs inflicted upon them by their employers, and if labor had the solidarity of its enemies, everything bearing the stamp of righteousness would be secured, because the exhibition of power would be so overmastering that resistance would be madness.

I am profoundly impressed with the conviction that solidarity is the last and only hope of labor. There must be, of necessity, an *Ultima Thule*, the farthest limit of labor's endurance of wrong. There must come a time when labor will make a final effort to resist encroachments upon its rights. My forte is not bombast. I formulate no rhetorical periods to captivate the populace, but I do evoke the genius of American citizenship to bear witness that the work of degradation now going forward will not be permitted to proceed forever nor until labor, deprived of its eyes and shorn of its Sampson locks, becomes the sport of its enemies.

What is it that today menaces the tranquility of society and the stability of the government? To name the contingency of a foreign war is an idiocy. The imprisonment of an ex-consul at Madagascar, the shots fired by a Spanish gunboat at an American ship in Cuban waters, or England's novel method of collecting debts of Central and South American republics, are simply contemptible. Indian wars are all of the past — what then? The one thing that affrights is the condition of labor. The corporation, trust, and capitalistic Shylocks, by processes more infamous than Shakespeare's Jew adopted to glut his vengeance,¹ pursue a policy of starvation, degradation and death. I speak by the card — neither sickness, starvation, nor death could curb the "cruel devil" that dominated George M. Pullman. Carnegie, the "blow hole" thief and hypocrite, who first robbed his employees and then to kill them, provided electricity, scalding water, and Pinkertons; and the General Managers' Association, pursuing workingmen with a blacklist as deadly as a cobra's fang, have brought about, with the aid of infamous legislation, a condition which is everywhere arousing alarm.

Lincoln said this government could not exist "half free and half slave." Can it exist half starved and half well fed? Can it exist half degraded and half exalted?

I propose the solidarity of labor; that by peaceful methods labor problems may be solved for the peace, glory, and perpetuity of the government as founded by the patriotic fathers. I would have labor vote one way to emancipate labor and save the Union, as Union sol-

¹ **Shylock**, a Jewish loan shark, was a fictional character in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1605), and is remembered for having guaranteed a loan made to a merchant with a pound of flesh from next to his heart, and for having gone to extreme lengths to attempt to collect his due when the loan was defaulted.

diers shot one way to save the Union and emancipate the slaves. And over all and above all, I would write, as old Job wanted to write, “with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever,”² this motto: With solidarity, the rights of labor can be secured.

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Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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² From *Job*, chapter 23, verses 23-24: “Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!”