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# My Political Faith

by Eugene V. Debs

Published in *St. Louis Labor*, whole no. 760 (Aug. 28, 1915), pg. 4.

The first section of this article is a reprint of a piece written in the fall of 1913 and published in various trade union journals, entitled "Labor, the Life of the Race."

The emancipation of labor is essential to the freedom of humanity. The struggle for freedom is the history of the race; the fruit of the struggle, the development of man. The civilization of Egypt, Persia, Babylon, Greece, Assyria, and other ancient nations, and the royal robbers and privileged parasites that ruled over them, had their day and passed away with the wretched slaves who built the pyramids and obelisks along the tracks of the early centuries of the race. The feudal nations of medieval Europe, whose lords and nobles inherited all the vicious and heartless characteristics of the ancient ruling class, especially their parasitic disdain and brutal contempt for their outraged slaves, have followed in the wake of their predecessors, and nothing remains but the memory of their bloody reign — the midnight horrors of history.

The working class may be robbed, trampled upon, crushed, broken, sabered, imprisoned, shot full of jagged wounds, "poor dumb mouths" to bear witness to the crimes it has suffered, but its majestic march continues towards the sunrise. The master and slave, the lord and serf of past ages, are gone, and the capitalists and wage workers of our day must soon follow them.

It is the historic mission of labor to free the human race. To free itself is to free mankind. Labor is life. Society would perish without the working class. The degree of labor's servitude is the degree of society's tribulation, defeat, and shame. There can be no morals in any society based upon the exploitation and consequent misery of the class whose labor supports society. There can be no freedom while workers are in fetters. Wage servitude is fatal even to the true freedom of its most favored capitalist beneficiaries. They must be surfeited with gold and powers, but they are not free. They cannot sever the ties that bind them to their slaves and soar alone into the realms of freedom.

It is written in the moral law with “iron pen in the lead and rock forever,”<sup>1</sup> that whosoever enslaves his fellow-man forges fetters for himself. When labor is emancipated humanity will draw its first full and vitalizing breath of freedom. We are now in the transition period between individualism and collectivism; between brutality and brotherhood. Wealth will be for all; so easily obtained honestly that there will be no incentive to steal, and so abundant that poverty will disappear; and ignorance, disease, and crime will follow in their order. Profits and wages produce palaces for parasites and workhouses for workers. An awakening proletariat is pulsing with solidarity and turning its eyes towards the sunrise. Scarred and seamed are its rough and hardened features, and grim its determination, but no just man on earth need fear it. It has suffered a million crimes, but is animated by no spirit of revenge. Its mission of emancipation is darkened by no shadow of contemplated injury or injustice to its conquered enemy. It conquers that enemy but to free that enemy; and a victorious proletariat will celebrate the peace of the world.<sup>2</sup>

Mutualism instead of competition is life instead of death. The new-found faith is beginning to strike roots in the hearts of men. We are brothers and not enemies. In competition we have fought each other savagely and engendered the spirit of selfishness, jealousy, and hate. In cooperation we shall be taught to practice mutual kindness and mutual aid. Working together in harmonious cooperation we shall rise to a higher plane and become conscious of the inherent divinity of our nature.

Henry D. Lloyd said: “All the marvels, splendors, conveniences, and tendernesses we call progress are but a faint prophecy of the beauty and riches and love with which society will burst into bloom when its creator, man, begins to live his new-found faith.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is a permutation of the biblical book of *Job*, chapter 19, verses 23-24: “O that my words were now written! O that they were imprinted; that they were engraved with an iron pen in the lead in the rock for ever.”

<sup>2</sup> The original 1913 version of this article ends here. This was published, among other places in *The Conservator*, edited by Horace Traubel (April 1913); *Miners' Magazine*, organ of the Western Federation of Miners (May 22, 1913); *Machinists' Monthly Journal*, organ of the International Association of Machinists (Sept. 1913); *The Bridgemen's Magazine*, organ of the Bridge and Structural Iron Workers (Sept. 1913); *The American Flint*, organ of the American Flint Glass Workers' Union (Nov. 1913); and *Railway Carmen's Journal* (Feb. 1914).

<sup>3</sup> Henry Demarest Lloyd, *Man, the Social Creator*. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., March 1906; pg. 34.

When men and women cooperate with each other in the true spirit of Socialism, society will, indeed, “burst into bloom” and for the first time they will know the true joy of life.

The capitalists are in power; the workers are in servitude. The capitalists are few; the workers are many. Why are the capitalists strong and the workers weak? Why do the few capitalists rule the many workers? The answer is simple. The workers vote the capitalists instead of themselves into power. Why do they do this? Because they do not know better, and certainly the capitalists will never teach them better. When the workers realize the power that is inherent in themselves, when they cut loose from capitalist parties and build up their own, when they vote together against the capitalist instead of voting for the capitalist, there will be a change. The workers have to wake up and rub the age-long sleep out of their eyes. They and their fathers and fathers’ fathers before them have been in some form of servitude, exploited, poor, and ignorant. The time has come for them to put an end to this servitude.

A Roman patrician once said that it was fortunate for his class that the slaves did not have sense enough to count them and see how few there were. It is equally fortunate for the ruling class that the workers of today, like the slaves in ancient Rome, lack the intelligence to count their masters and see how little they actually amount to.

If a line were drawn across the continent, east and west, with all the capitalists on the south side and the workers on the north side, in a pitched battle how long would it take the workers to drive the capitalists into the Gulf of Mexico?

The capitalists are few indeed compared to the workers, but the capitalists are cunning, while the workers grow dull at their slavish tasks.

Wake up, you brawny-armed millions of workers! Get together in the union of your class and in the party of your class for emancipation!

*Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport*

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