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# The Strength of All for the Good of All

by Eugene V. Debs

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We have no hesitancy in declaring that the stability of American institutions depends upon the enactment of such laws and in the adoption of such a policy as will secure justice to labor.

The affirmation that labor creates all the wealth, and that from labor all the revenues of nations are derived, requires neither qualification nor apology.

To withhold any rights which in the nature of things belong to labor, is a wrong for which there is no palliation. It is in itself a crime. It is more prolific of ills than the fabled box presented to Pandora by Jupiter. It is a crime in whose infernal womb there are forever quickening into life ills, compared with which, nature's forces, whether above or below the crust of the earth, in their most destructive displays, become almost meaningless. Nor do we exaggerate, if to these are added all the scourges, which from time to time create woe and lamentation, and fill the mind with horror.

It is a fact, disguise it as we may, that "an injury to one is the concern of all." It is made so by the "brotherhood of man" and the "fatherhood of God." Treat it as fable or fact, it matters not, Cain's crime has concerned all people, tongues, tribes, and kindred, since the date of that fratricide. It stands for an example — nor has the blood of Abel ceased crying from the ground.<sup>1</sup> It is so ordered. It is the law. No mortal stab of man was ever feloniously made which did not open a "poor, poor dumb mouth" into which fate put a tongue, that it might harangue the world forever against the crime of murder. But there are crimes, compared with which, murder is a benediction and deserving all the wealth of rhetoric. Take an eviction in Ireland, made by the

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<sup>1</sup> The story of Cain and Abel is found in *Genesis*, chapter 4, verses 1-15.

sanction of law, and executed by creatures of the law — old men and old women, bending beneath the weight of years, innocent youth, and helpless infancy, mothers in the pangs of parturition, thrust into the road to suffer and to perish. (Such crimes are worse than murder, and are the concern of all, though all may not feel concerned, but when such infamies are perpetrated humanity receives a shock; they touch the nerve centers of nations. The human family is one. There is a bond of sympathy between all nations. The man who steals a man and sells him into slavery, commits a crime against all men. If a wrong is done to the humblest American citizen by any foreign power, it becomes the concern of every other American citizen, and the resources of the Republic are pledged to redress the wrong.

In discussing federation, we presuppose the independence of the federating parties — but, which, nevertheless, have certain interests in common, and that the supreme purpose of federation is to protect such common interests. The original thirteen American colonies were absolutely independent of each other. They existed by virtue of distinct charters, but they had certain interests in common, and when these interests were menaced and attacked, they federated for mutual protection, and with federation they won a victory, and secured blessings, in the presence of which hyperbole sits dumb— and yet, every colony retained in its autonomy, its power and rights of self-government.

Labor organizations — we refer specially to those connected with the railway service — have found in the past, find now, and are likely to find in the future, certain interests, alike common to all, in jeopardy. The menace is perpetual, and attacks upon their rights, frequent and often exasperating. In the maintenance of their rights, labor organizations have found that separate action was, as a general thing, a delusion and fruitful only of disaster. The lessons of experience have convinced those capable of analyzing the situation that security lies in federation.

But the fact need not be disguised, that there are obstacles in the way of immediate success, and it is in the line of prudence, to name them and estimate their obstructive, their hindering power. In this discussion, it will be well to inquire what motive prompted railway employees to organize? Or, rather, was the obtaining and the maintaining of just wages, one of the inciting purposes? If it is found that any of the organizations of railway employees ignores the question of wages, or, is content with such wages as employers may see proper to

pay, such an organization cannot be expected to federate with another organization which makes honest wages and just treatment bedrock propositions. If there is an organization of railway employees, whose members, at the behest of corporation officials, will “scab” — divest themselves of manliness, of self-respect, of independence, and voluntarily become the cringing, fawning tools of the enemies of workingmen, in their honorable efforts to secure and to maintain their rights — we say, if there is such an organization of railway employees, it is not expected that it will federate with any other organization for any honorable purpose whatever. It will be found wanting in brains, in spine, in *sand*. Its predominating characteristic is that which distinguishes the serf — it is serfdom. It permits others to create conditions to which it yields as uncomplainingly as an ass to its burdens and blows. Only such organizations will federate, as will not “scab,” as will not abdicate any right, human or divine — unalienable, constitutional or statutory — whose members know they are sovereign citizens, and feel ennobling, vitalizing thrills of independence, who organize, federate and work, not only for their own good but for the welfare of others. Such organizations of railway employees, as favor federation, take an eminently wise view of situations and surroundings. They have self-respect without vanity, courage without false pretense, and in advocating federation, make no surrender of allegiance to the parent organization. They do not arrogate to themselves any superiority over other organizations; they recognize the fact that as employees in the railway service, while engaged in promoting their own welfare, have certain interests in common with other organizations, which can be fully protected only by federation, a fact, so clearly demonstrated by experience, as to render argument unnecessary.

The ultimate triumph of federation hinges upon the final result of the conflict between truth and error, right and wrong, education and ignorance. So far, no valid objections have been brought forward. The wrongs which environ railway employees are numerous, often flagrant and degrading. Insufficient wages when earnings are large confront employees in every direction. None are overpaid, while thousands are underpaid. Men are discharged to gratify the malice of some official, whose arrogance can be placated only by a serf-like submission and degradation — and the blacklist has been introduced to compel men to choose between humiliation and idleness. To correct, or at least, to mitigate such evils railway employees organize. That good has re-

sulted in many instances is not to be questioned. But the evils have not disappeared. The right has not triumphed. Labor has not utilized all its resources. Peace has not been declared, and the battle is still on. There is hope in federation — in combining the strength of all for the good of all. It is rational. The more it is discussed, the more the facts are brought out, the more convincing becomes the argument. Time and truth are in alliance. Only the right was born to live. Let the work of agitation and education go forward. Nothing is so fatal as stagnation. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen stands pledged for federation and this *Magazine*, as its organ, will not misrepresent its noble purpose. The truth is iconoclastic. Neither idols nor images, nor shams of any class or character can expect exemption from its eternal hostility.

The sun of labor is rising grandly to the zenith. The boys of today have advantages which their fathers did not possess. The educating forces have multiplied in a ratio that defies exaggeration. Organization is progressing, and federation is coming, and it is coming to stay. It will establish arbitration and enthrone justice, and finally relegate strikes to the limbo of extinct measures of redress.

*Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport*

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