
An Odious Comparison

by Eugene V. Debs

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In the discussion of labor topics we are everlastingly told that the condition of the American workingman is vastly superior to the European workingman, and it is urged upon the attention of the American toiler that since he is better off than his European colleague, he should be content and quiet, and cease agitation. The idea being that he should accept what was offered him in the way of wages, and make the best of it, because, as a general proposition, that is the way things work in Europe. Wage workers in the United States have a right to complain of this ceaseless effort to reconcile them to a policy of flagrant injustice, by references to the downtrodden workers of Europe. It will be found by perusing any of the laborious arguments of the pampered statisticians of monopolists and stock watering corporations that the tables are prepared and paraded before the public for the purpose of demonstrating that in the various trades, American receive higher wages than European workers, and as figures are supposed to always tell the truth (when in fact they can be made to lie like the devil), the conclusion is at once arrived at that any unrest on the part of workingmen is proof positive that they are the enemies of capital, of progress, of law and order, and should be suppressed.

The idea upon which the argument is based is vicious to the last degree. It is conspicuously un-American. In the United States the workingman is a citizen. He may be poor and obscure, born at the very bottom round of the social ladder, ragged, without influential friends; born in a hut or in a wayside cabin in the wilderness, but a sovereign born, nevertheless, with rights, prerogatives, and responsibilities unknown to the unfortunate poverty-born child of Europe. We do not overstate the condition. It is only required to write the name of Abraham Lincoln, and history corroborates the statement. To eternally parallel the American workingman with the European

laborer is to debase American citizenship. Its purpose is to degrade labor and exalt wealth. It is tabulated degradation, and the outrage is perpetrated only by those who favor the establishment in the United States of class and caste, in which the few shall be able to levy and collect tribute from the great army of American toilers in the future as is being done at the present time.

In carrying out the purpose, writers in the interest of corporations and monopolists, trusts and syndicates, are constantly parading before the public what these capitalists are doing for workingmen. We are told with what great solicitude certain rich men look after the interests of their employees and their families. These philanthropic magnates profess to feel profoundly the great responsibility Divine Providence has thrust upon them, in watching the moral, religious, financial, and physical welfare of men who work for them — American sovereigns, men whose votes make Presidents; men who are born the peers of kings, sovereigns in their own right. They talk of their employees after the style of the southern planter, when labor was a commodity as much as rice, cotton, tobacco, or sugar, and if by chance they pay the American citizen as much wages as are paid in Europe they insist that the American sovereign citizen workingman shall be satisfied and silent. Such is the drift, and if workingmen do not protest and declare their independence of such a humiliating, patronizing policy the work will continue to go forward. American workingmen are in the majority, are eminently able to take care of themselves without the interference of a patronizing government or dictation from employers. A robust manhood, permeated with American ideas of government and conditions, self-reliant, asserting its right to do what it pleases with money earned, demanding its rights and asking no favors, is the supreme demand — anything less is accepted degradation.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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