
**The New Commonwealth:
Letter to the Editor of the *New York Journal*
(April 16, 1897)**

Terre Haute, Ind., April 16 [1897].

Editor, the *New York Journal*:

The approaching special convention of the American Railway Union, to be held at Chicago beginning the third Tuesday in June [June 15, 1897], promises to be one of the most interesting and important convocations of labor representatives held in recent years. There is no doubt that radical changes will be made, that the order will be vastly broadened in its scope, and that a progressive and up-to-date policy will be adopted. The members have long since realized that the old methods have been outgrown and that nothing more can be accomplished on present lines; and they have simply been waiting for the full effects of the great strike of 1894 to make themselves felt upon railroad employees, confident that it would result in ripening them for the great change which is now contemplated.

To Adopt New Tactics.

To organize for another strike were worse than folly. At present railroad corporations have things their own way so far as employees are concerned, and the latter might as well have no organization. If organizations are recognized or considered at all it is only when they fully and unqualifiedly subscribe to the terms made by the corporations. Under such arrangements "harmony prevails and the best of feelings exist between the companies and their employees." In the meantime the capacity of all machinery is being increased and more and more business is handled with less and less men. An army of idle employees, the federal and state soldiers, and a subservient federal judiciary would perpetuate this state of affairs indefinitely. Fortunately, however, such object lessons are not wholly in vain. Thousands of railway employees and all other kinds of workingmen who have been the victims of corporate supremacy have been using their brains, and as a result they propose to adopt new tactics, and by the application of common sense methods overcome the

selfish, sordid gang who have monopolized the country and the fullness thereof and place the people in possession of their own.

How is this to be done? By uniting the workers of the country in a grand cooperative scheme in which they shall work together in harmony in every branch of industry, virtually being their own employers and receiving the whole product of their labor. The country is ripe for such a movement, and I believe the coming convention of the American Railway Union will launch it. It is to be confined to no particular class of labor, but all who toil are to be admitted without regard to nationality, sex, color, or previous condition of servitude. The primary work will be largely educational. Every problem relating to our social, economic, political, and industrial life will be examined. Lecturers and organizers will take the field and enter upon a thorough canvass of every state of the Union. Some of the foremost men in the reform movement will head the crusade, and it is a foregone conclusion that it will grow more rapidly than any organization that has ever preceded it, and being founded on the intelligence of its membership, the growth will be healthy and substantial, and it will not be long until the movement will be one of the determining factors in shaping the policy and destiny of the Republic.

Industrial Cooperation the Basis of the Project.

Industrial cooperation as the basis of a higher type of civilization will be the principal object. It is impossible to enter into details so far in advance, but these will doubtless adjust themselves at the proper time. Upon fundamental, bedrock principles a round million of us are agreed. We shall unite all our energies to destroy the present capitalistic system and establish the cooperative commonwealth. Under the former, which is now in the last stages of "consumption," the country has been brought to the verge of ruin, and humanity has been degraded beyond the power of language to describe. To one whose sensibilities are not wholly dead a mere contemplation of the horror of our social life is sickening and shocking.

The time has come for social regeneration, and this is only possible through a new and worldwide change of system, and to inaugurate that change will be the purpose of the new movement to be launched soon in the great metropolis of the West. Soon after the work is underway it is proposed to begin active operations in some western state. The state will be colonized by our people, the leaders will converge there, a full ticket will be nominated, and we will undoubtedly have votes enough to secure

complete possession and control of the state government. We will then establish the cooperative commonwealth and the state government will be in harmony with it. The [jobless] thousands of the country will be invited to the state, and will be given equal opportunities with all others to develop its resources and enjoy “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

There are several western states in any one of which all the unemployed of the country could, under sane conditions, not only provide for themselves, but attain a type of civilization compared with which the present would appear like cannibalism. From one state the new life would rapidly overleap boundary lines and permeate others, and thus the tide will sweep in all directions until the old barbaric system has been destroyed and the Republic is redeemed and disenthralled, and is in fact the land of a free and happy people.

Eugene V. Debs,
President of the American Railway Union.

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