
Railroad Unions General Strike: Debs Says Concerted Action of Rail Unions Can Bring Victory to All Strikers

by Eugene V. Debs

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Mr. Union Man, whoever you are and wherever you are, I have something to say to you after reading this morning's papers.

The strike of the railroad shop employees is a week old. There has been some slight disorder and a few scabs have been hurt. This has been the extent of the violence, but it has been sufficient to bring to the strikers what they fought for in the late world war. The Federal government announces through the Department of Justice that it will stand no trifling on the part of the strikers and that if necessary armed forces will be employed at once for their suppression.

The governors of seven states have simultaneously announced that they have the National Guard in their respective states mobilized and ready to move at command when the exigencies of the situation demand action.

Now, Mr. Union Man, you will have no trouble in guessing what kind of action is thus meant on the part of the national and state governments which you shouted for, voted for, invested your last dollar for, and crossed the Atlantic to fight and be gassed and die for in the war to make the world in general and America in particular safe for democracy and liberty.

A carpenter, belonging to a local union and now on strike with the rest of the shop employees of the railroads, has just been in to see me to talk over the situation. He asked me what had best be done by union men in the face of the menacing situation that now confronts them. I might have answered him by saying: "Buy Liberty Bonds; buy till it hurts, and then buy some more." that was his slogan and the slogan of his union during the war. He and his union brethren were ardently patriotic. they were strong for Liberty Bonds and Thrift

Stamps; they raised Liberty poles and danced about them like Indians preparing for the warpath, and they were ready at a moment's notice to tie the halter about the neck of one of their own number who had intelligence and self-respect enough to refuse to glorify the slaughter of his class for the benefit of the profiteering masters.

I did not answer him in that way. I did call his attention to a few cold facts and pointed a moral from his own experience. He left with his eyes open and his mind clear as to what the world war was fought for in the light of the present industrial conflict and chaos in the United States. The same soldiers he fought with to destroy imperialism, achieve liberty, now stand ready at the command of the President and of the state governors to turn the same guns against him and his class and mow them down like ragweeds for having the nerve to protest against starvation wages and inhuman conditions.

And this, Mr. Union Man, is exactly the thing you and your union fought for in the world war. You fought not to destroy imperialism and militarism in Germany, as your lying Wall Street masters, the gamblers of your lives, persuaded you to believe through their prostitute press and pulpit, but to establish and secure the supremacy of imperialism and militarism in every capitalist country on the face of the globe.

This is what the world war was fought for by the slaves of capitalism at the behest of the profiteering rulers.

But please note, Mr. Union Man, that the imperial rulers under the capitalist system, the capitalist class, the bankers, bondholders, brokers, profiteers, grafting contractors, thieves and looters without number, dollar-a-year patriots, greasy politicians, Chamber of Commerce plotters, servile editors, craven preachers, in short, the capitalist ruling class and all its retainers and mercenaries, all of whom frantically waved the flag and howled for war, did not go to war. They remained safely at home to look after the coin of the realm. You will look in vain for a one-legged patriot on that side of the house.

Now, strange as it may seem to a man not absolutely feeble-minded, that is the crowd you cast your lot with and made common cause with in the world war to the betrayal and slaughter of your own class.

And now that the war is over and Kaiserism is dead and democracy and liberty are on top this same crowd to a man, to whom you rallied in such a frenzy of enthusiasm at the command of your leaders, this same gang, to compensate you for your noble patriotism, is

now lined up against you in battle array and ready to shoot you down like dogs in return for your having slaughtered one another at their behest and for their glory and enrichment.

That is the crowd, Mr. Union Man, that owns about all there is of the United States and absolutely controls every department of its government, thanks to the workingmen who would rather have a capitalist master to fleece them than to be free to work for themselves, rule themselves, and enjoy the fruit of their labor as the despised Socialists whom they spurn with contempt would have them be.

It is true, Mr. Union Man, that your craft union leaders with scarcely an exception stood with the Wall Street profiteers in howling for war and rushing you, the common herd, into the trenches to be gassed, mutilated, and murdered while they remained in the rear to receive the plaudits of the plutocratic press for their patriotism. But that does not excuse you, for you chose these leaders and were responsible for them, and after all, the leaders are about as fit or otherwise as the rank and file who elect them deserve.

But the applause of the plutocratic press has subsided since the war, and the Wall Street patriots with whom the labor leaders were cheek by jowl now despise them, figuratively spit upon them, and treat them with open contempt. They do not need them now. The war is over. By the time the next war is due the common herd can again be fed up on patriotic bunk and steered into the trenches for slaughter.

It is a simple game and the capitalist class play it to perfection. They are convinced beyond a doubt that wage-slaves are brainless and incapable of learning by experience. If today, jobless and hungry as millions of them are, they had a chance to vote for socialism and freedom instead of capitalism and slavery, an overwhelming number of the 100% American patriots would vote for their masters instead of themselves and crucify anyone who stood in the way of their tragic self-betrayal.

The capitalist ruler, Mr. Union Man, holds you in utter contempt save only when he gets into a row with some other capitalist looter and needs to have you to shoulder a gun and ship to the front to have yourself killed for his benefit. Then you are a patriot. While it lasts. During that brief period his daughter will cheer you as a hero, feed you dainties, and flatter you out of your brogans with her kisses.

Now observe, Mr. Union man, that it is the very capitalists you fought for and many of you died for who have slashed your wages to

the bone, launched the Open Shop drive to smash your unions, handed down crushing decisions against you through their highest courts, and are now commanding their government through its President and state governors to turn the machine guns against your ranks and wipe all your power and reserves out of commission.

Mr. Union Man, in order to accomplish lasting results and to protect even what you gained in the industrial fields, that is to say in the shop, the factory, the mill, and the mine, you and your brothers in the union must learn to appreciate the value of your vote. You must learn to stop voting for men because you like them or heard of them as good fellows.

You must learn to break with the old past, the old ways of voting, and organize or join a political party of labor that stands squarely for you and your unions and all you wish to see accomplished. A party that stands for the working class all the year round, in office and out of office, is what you, Mr. Union Man, want and must have before you can be a serious power in this country.

By intelligent political action as a class in your union and on election day you will get control of the machine guns and the injunctions of the plutocrats and, indeed, of all the state and governmental power now used against you in the strikes all over the country.

Learn to strike right and learn to vote right. One is essential for your success as the other and both are absolutely necessary to you before you can get anywhere.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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