
Boycotting

by Eugene V. Debs

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In writing of "boycotting," it is required that the readers of this *Magazine* should be somewhat informed of its history. The public, generally comprehend its meaning — particularly where it has been practiced.

In common parlance, "boycotting," is an "importation." It is not an outgrowth of American institutions. It could not have been born in the United States, simply because the conditions which made it a necessity in a foreign land never existed in this heaven favored and freedom favored republic.

We do not say that "boycotting" is to be condemned, because it is an importation, or because it had its origin in a foreign land — such a position could not be logically sustained. It would be as unwise as to contend, that because a working man, in any foreign land, is required to work for 25 cents a day, therefore, American laborers should be content with such degrading wages.

Boycotting had its origin in Ireland, and was the product of conditions of the most harrowing infernalism, such as cannot be inaugurated in America while its rivers flow to the sea.

As we write, a native-born Irishman, of large information and culture, gives us the following brief resume of the origin of "boycotting." He says:

During the famine period in Ireland eight or nine years ago, just after the formation of the Irish National Land League, a Captain Boycott, a retired military officer and an Englishman, who had, some years previously become the owner of a landed estate in one of the interior counties, Kings, I believe, made himself very obnoxious to the people in his vicinity by his arbitrary methods of dealing with his tenants, and others, over whom he had any power. He was a "resident magistrate" besides, and this gave him additional facilities for exercising his "sweet will" over the people. They resolved to put him and his belongings in "coventry,"

an old term long in use in Ireland, to which country it had come from England, and which meant to let Captain Boycott and all his belongings, his interests, severely alone — to neither buy of him, sell to him, work for him nor in any way, directly or indirectly, have anything to do with him.

Our informant further says:

The plan worked successfully, notwithstanding that Captain Boycott resorted to every means the law afforded to break the resolve of the people. Finally he left the country, partly in disgust and partly for fear of violence.

This Capt. Boycott was a heartless despot who had for his victims men, women and children, who by the failure of crops were reduced to the direst conditions, and who were unable, therefore, to pay their “rack-rents.” Subsequently, other landlords who pursued Capt. Boycott’s methods of cruelty and oppression were treated in the same way, and hence the term “boycotting.”

It will be readily observed, that the “boycott” is a terrible weapon, to be used only when a terrible wrong exists.

Unfortunately, we think, boycotting has been introduced into the United States — Unfortunate, because no such conditions and no such flagrant wrongs as existed in Ireland, in the days of Captain Boycott, and still exist in that unfortunate and oppressed country, exist in the United States, and hence, the weapon which Irish tenants wielded so effectively against Capt. Boycott and others of his type, cannot be justly used against people in the United States, unless it should so happen that men or corporations, should adopt Captain Boycott’s methods of cruelty and oppression towards those who might be in some measure under their control.

Just here we inquire, what has been the history of boycotting in the United States? We shall not assert that in no instance it has been justifiable, because we do not pretend to a knowledge of every instance where it has been employed, but, as a general proposition, we contend that boycotting in the United State has been from the first, and continuously, a mistake, a stupid error, a total misapprehension of conditions, situations, institutions, and rights. In this connection we do not hesitate to say that there exist circumstances of a palliative character. We are familiar with instances of hardships endured by workingmen which were well calculated to test their patience to the

uttermost limits. In such cases, rashness finds reasons of an extenuating character. But we are not commenting upon isolated incidents. We are discussing a principle in human affairs as they exist around us, and of which we are required to take cognizance, and our conclusion is, that boycotting is a wrong of such magnitude, of such wide spreading and far reaching injustice, that it never can have popular approval, and in fact, never ought to have such approval.

Furthermore, we are of the opinion that the average man — we like the term average, because it does not include cranks, visionaries, Utopians, but takes in men of common sense, which is, after all, the best sense the world possesses — such men oppose boycotting, if for no other reason, than that it does more harm than good, often striking with disastrous force the very men it assumes to benefit.

There must be no misunderstanding in regard to the position which the *Firemen's Magazine* occupies in the discussion of labor problems. It is first, last, and all the time the champion of the wage men of America.

Is it the question of organizing Brotherhoods, trade unions, or Knights of Labor? We do not stop to discuss names — we are in favor of all organizations of working men. It is their right, their inalienable right, and we bid them Godspeed. It means elevation, dignity, better comprehension of rights and duties.

Is it a question of wages? Then by every agency known to honesty, fair dealing, justice, and equity, we would have the scale of wages elevated everywhere, upon the broad principle that where labor is well paid prosperity and peace prevail.

Is it a question of a less number of hours for toil, and more time for rest and mental culture? Then we are the ceaseless advocates of such a modification of existing rules and regulations, as shall conduce to the moral, intellectual and physical improvement of workingmen throughout the country. With these declarations we proceed to point out that boycotting, whatever may be the purpose of those who employ it, ought to be dismissed as a regulating force or weapon in the industrial affairs of this country. It must be admitted by all working men, as a fundamental right, that they may or may not, just as they may elect, join a labor union, by whatever name it may be called. Strike down that right, and the idea of personal liberty disappears, and exists no more in the United States of America than it does in Russia or Turkey, or in any other despot cursed land. Admitting this fact, it follows that a man who does not belong to a labor union, has

as much right to work as the man who is a member of such an organization — upon the principle, that a man exercising one right cannot by any conception of justice, surrender any other right — hence a man exercising the right to stand aloof from a labor organization, does not surrender his right to seek employment and accept employment, when and where he pleases, and at such prices as he chooses to take, being, in this respect, independent, and any interference is a law aimed at independence, at fundamental and inalienable rights, which cannot and will not be tolerated. Reasoning further. If a man has a right to seek employment where he pleases and accept employment at such prices as he pleases, then it follows, that the man, at whose hands he seeks employment, may employ him if he pleases, and at such prices as the two independent men may agree upon.

These principles, in our conception, are bedrock, fundamental, primal, and to attack them is to attack the superstructure of liberty, freedom, personal rights and all that American citizens hold dear.

The question arises, does boycotting as it is practiced in the United States, attack these principles? In our opinion it does, and is therefore a grievous error and ought to be everywhere discouraged and discontinued. Manifestly, we have placed ourselves under obligations to our readers, to state such reasons as we can command, to justify our conclusions. We have not the space to multiply illustrations, and a few must suffice, our purpose being to exhibit the injustice of boycotting to working men and totally innocent parties.

We will take a cigar factory, which employs, we will say, 100 men. The proprietor, as we have shown, has the right to employ men without reference to membership in the Cigarmakers' Union, hence, the employees may or may not be members of that organization, as is their right. The men demand various prices for their labor, as they have a right to do, and the proprietor pays such prices as he and his employees agree upon. In all of this, personal rights have been exercised — every one of which to a free man is as dear as life itself, and cannot be surrendered without humiliation. The union at this juncture, we suppose, demands that all the non-union men shall be discharged. This is a blow aimed, not only at personal rights, but at laboring men who have committed no offense under heaven. Exercising their rights, they declined to join the union, exercising their rights they accepted such wages as their employer agreed to pay and were at work peaceably. At this juncture, how stands the case? One class of working men exercising a right, which no one questions, joined the

union. Another class exercising the same right, decline to join the union, and for exercising this right the union working men make war upon them, and demand their discharge. This is despotism, a wrong of such proportions, that when its inherent injustice is exposed, honorable men cry out — shame. But if the employer concludes to continue the employment of the non-union men, what is the next step? If there are union men employed, they leave the factory, and if that does not sufficiently cripple the business of the establishment, then a boycott is ordered. When the boycott is established no union man is to purchase cigars made at the boycotted factory. Again, if any customer of the factory continues his purchases, he too is boycotted — as for instance, all stores, no matter what may be their line of business, if the boycotted cigars are found on their shelves, they too are boycotted, drug stores and grocery stores, etc., and the order is that this boycotting business is to continue until the non-union men are discharged, or until they join the union. Then the boycott, to use a phrase, is lifted, and the embargo is revoked.

And just here appears another phase of the boycotting business, which cannot be discussed without feelings akin to anger. The men out of work, because they were at work, now find themselves idle, without means to support themselves and those dependent upon them, they become mendicants and drift into crime, and when it is asked who drove them from employment to idleness? The answer must be not employers, not monopolists, but workingmen, members of the union. It is said that the way out of their difficulties, is to join the union, but there can be no certainty of success when voting is conducted with black and white balls, and in case of failure, a poor fellow finds that he is the victim of a double calamity — the loss of his rights, his personal liberty, and of opportunities to work. Again we will suppose the case of a newspaper, the proprietor of which employs printers without regard to membership in the printers' union. He simply exercises his right as an American citizen, And every man in his employ does but maintain the same inestimable prerogative. For doing this, a boycott is ordered, and the decree is that to take the paper, to buy it, or to advertise in its columns, is to be visited with the penalty of boycotting. A merchant has a stock of goods, he desires to reach the public by advertising, but if he does advertise his wares in the boycotted paper, he too is boycotted, and thus the wrong proceeds and spreads, involving in its crushing influence men, women and children, who have committed no wrong against any one. It may

be supposed that a contractor wants to employ a dozen men, but should he seek to acquaint the public with his necessities, he becomes a victim of the boycott, though the advertisement was clearly in the interest of labor. We have no purpose, other than to illustrate the operations of the boycott, in selecting a cigar factory and a newspaper establishment, they simply stand for any and for every other case of boycotting in the country, and those who feel inclined may at their leisure select any other case and with certain modifications, one boycott answers for the entire list.

The American motto is “fair play.” Boycotting is not fair play — it is not in consonance with American ideas of justice, it is fruitful of injustice, it does not recognize personal liberty and personal rights. It is violent, and if ever resorted to, should only be adopted when all else has failed and the wrongs complained of touch the very marrow of existence. It originated to punish a man who was cold and heartless, a petty tyrant who took advantage of misfortune to multiply the sorrows of his victims, and not because he hired Irishmen to work at such prices as were fixed by mutual agreement. We write with the hope that the time will never come when boycotting in the United States will be justifiable.

We write with a certain conviction that that direful period has not yet arrived, and we write in the hope that throughout the country, working men will discountenance boycotting as a means of redress for any troubles which may environ them.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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