
Labor Day

by Eugene V. Debs

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The workingmen of the United States are making preparations to appropriately celebrate "Labor Day." The purpose is to make Labor Day, the 1st of September of each year, a national holiday. The idea is in all regards praiseworthy.

Just why the 1st day of September is chosen for "Labor Day," we are not informed. It may be the anniversary of some notable event in labor affairs. Be this as it may, the fact that a day has been designated as a labor holiday answers the demand. It is a rallying day for the hosts of workingmen and women, who go forth from their homes and from their every day employment for recreation of mind and body. They, having left their toils behind them, say and sing:

"Begone dull cares, I prithee begone from me."¹

Labor Day dates a new departure. One of the inspired writers, enumerating times for certain things, says there is "a time to plant."² We have in the United States what is called "Arbor Day," when the people go forth and plant trees. There is something very beautiful and very practical in planting trees. The purpose is always commendable, whether the tree planted be for its wood, its fruit, its flowers, or its shade. On labor days, the people do not go forth to plant trees, but in the midst of their enjoyments, they may plant thoughts which, sending their roots down into their moral, intellectual, and spiritual being, will grow, as grow the trees "planted by the rivers of water," thoughts which in their maturity shall withstand the gales and shelter them when the storms of oppression and adversity come, thoughts that shall bear the fruit of knowledge and independ-

¹ First line from an anonymously penned 18th Century song, "Begone, Dull Care."

² *Ecclesiastes* 3:2.

ence, union, and strength, of which all may freely partake, which shall enable them to distinguish between good and evil and be wise in their day and generation.

We are in full accord with the “Labor Day” movement. It should be a day sacred to rational enjoyment, free from anxiety, a day when mind and body, relieved of the dull routine of everyday life, find health and pleasure in relaxation. On such occasions the toilers of the land have opportunities to exchange opinions. Labor Day is a time not only for *set* speech but for free speech, a day to “plant words, and reap actions; to plant actions, and reap habits; to plant habits, and reap principle; to plant principles, and reap character; to plant character, and reap a destiny.”³

We do not doubt that “Labor Days” are to yield splendid harvests of blessings to the workingmen of America. During all the hours of “Labor Day,” Labor’s emancipation day, no bell calls us to toil. The hands on the dial plate of the clock do not remind us when work begins, or when it ends. We go forth to the forests, to the green fields, to breathe the fresh air; or listen to the melody of brook and bird and bee; our minds and hearts are in harmony with nature, with the beautiful — the good, the true; it is labor’s holiday, labor’s jubilee; it is a benediction and a benefaction, and though unknown, we bless the man who first suggested Labor Day.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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³ An adaptation of an inspirational quotation of indefinite origin which emerged during the decade of the 1870s and is today frequently misattributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882): “Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.”