
Labor in Politics

by Eugene V. Debs

Unsigned editorial in *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*,
vol. 16, no. 6 (June 1892), pp. 532-533.

The *Age of Labor* favors independent political action on the part of the workmen of the country and in an article captioned "Political Independence," says:

What the laboring men of every state ought to do is to form an independent political organization for the purpose of securing and enforcing legislation necessary to their welfare. We have in our hands the weapon of the ballot but we carelessly neglect to use it. Probably the cause of the indifference of the laboring men on political subjects arises from the fact that the question has not been agitated as it ought to be, and their attention directed to the very desirable things that may be accomplished by political unity. Whoever doubts the practicability of such a movement has only to look back upon the wonderful progress made by the force of united effort in the various labor organizations. There is no good reason why as much cannot be done by united action to secure better legal condition as has already been done to secure financial benefits.

But would it be as easy to hold a political club together as to preserve the unity of a labor union? Probably not. But because it is more difficult is no evidence that it is impossible. Very few things are impossible when directed with earnestness, energy, and determination. The *Age of Labor* believes the laboring people of the United States are sufficiently broadminded to lay aside all political prejudice and maintain a strict independent position in order that their general welfare may be advanced. It cannot be done in any other way. Just as long as a man is a slave to some party, just as long as he is willing to admit that the interests of that party are more important than his own; just so long as he will vote a ticket because "Republican" or "Democratic" is printed at the top of it, he is a hopeless case. When he becomes a free man and is able to say to every party in the field, "You have no mortgage on my vote; I own myself," then he is a fit subject for

independent political action. Why should a man bind himself to any political party? A party is simply the advocate of a principle, and whenever it deserts the principle it should be deserted by the voters. What has any party now in existence done for labor? Nothing. The few laws on our statute books that better the condition of the toilers have been secured by the agitation of labor itself entirely independent of political parties. In the history of the country parties have done nothing more for labor than to draw up a platform full of promises that are never fulfilled. It is time for us to do a little thinking for ourselves. We have allowed parties to do it for us long enough.

To intimate that workingmen can be induced to organize a labor party, ought to be something more and better than dreaming, but it is scarcely more than a whim, a pleasing hallucination. Why expect working men to organize and maintain a political party, when you can't persuade them to federate for the purpose of obtaining their rights, wrested from them by employers? Why expect men to solve difficult problems in algebra when they are unable to do a sum in the Rule of Three? The time may come when there will be in this country a workingmen's party, with its county, city, state, and national candidates; so the time may come when the lion and the ox will eat straw together. But for the present, the only thing to be done is to agitate and educate, and hope for the good time coming, when labor, redeemed from groveling prejudices and jealousies, and vulgar ambitions to down somebody, will see the importance of unification to secure and maintain the right.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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