
Let Labor Be Organized

by Eugene V. Debs

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Rev. Myron Reed, of Denver, Colorado, is one of the greatest ministers in America. As a divine he is immensely practical and has become justly celebrated for his epigrammatic style of preaching. He is a man of sturdy honesty and unquestioned courage. He tells the truth without fear or favor. He does not cater to wealth nor compromise with hypocrisy. Mr. Reed makes no pretensions to oratory in the ordinary acceptance of the term. In this regard he is as unlike Talmage as a grey eagle is unlike a lightning bug.¹ No matter what his subject may be, Mr. Reed handles it very much after the style that a blacksmith handles iron. He hammers it into usefulness, makes something out of it that the people want. As, for instance, in discussing labor questions, he is quoted as saying:

But let labor be organized. Let the hands and the feet and the whole body obey the head. Let there be no paralyzed hand. Why did the revolutionary war last for seven years? Because it was fought by 13 colonies, one jealous of the other, generals jealous one of the other. Gates plotted against Washington.² If you have a load that it requires 13 horses to pull, you will not pull it by putting on three and working them till they are discouraged, and then try 7 and then 5. You want the 13 at one time, heads looking one way, traces straightened, each horse well into his collar. Then gee a little and yell.

¹ Rev. **Thomas DeWitt Talmage** (1832-1902), a Presbyterian minister, lecturer, and writer, was one of the best-known American religious figures of the 19th Century.

² General **Horatio Gates** (1727-1806) is best known for commanding rebel troops to victory over the British at the Battle of Saratoga in 1777.

The foregoing remarks are eminently characteristic of Rev. Myron Reed. They embody real wisdom, the true philosophy of the labor question. Every word weighs a pound. With proper organization workingmen can solve the problem; without it they are powerless. It is the difference between strength and weakness, victory and defeat. To a certain extent workingmen comprehend the difference between organization and disorganization, between an army and a mob. But the organization of labor, so far, has not secured anticipated benefits. It seems difficult to get organizations in line to pull together. The reason of this is, I surmise, entirely in consonance with human nature though directly in conflict with human interests. Human nature seems to have had for its policy from the first, "Every man for himself and the devil catch the hindmost," while human interests would rescue, if possible, the hindmost from the grasp of the cloven-footed enemy. As soon as organization is so perfect that it secures all workingmen their rights, whether skilled or unskilled, seeking the welfare of the masses as certainly as the classes, the then 13 or 1300 organizations will pull together whatever load fate may impose, and the time will have arrived to "gee a little and yell." Till then organizations may "gee and haw," but the corporations will only pile on more burdens and chuckle as they see them, as at present, stuck in the mire listening to the advice of a certain labor leader who smilingly tells them, "If you can't get what you want, you must take what you can get."

The American Railway Union is unifying the railroad employees throughout the country. They realize that the railroad companies, in so far as labor is concerned, are solidly allied. No *class* organization exists among them.³ They comprehend the power of perfect unity. If railroad employees would secure the benefits of organization, fair wages, and such treatment as becomes *men*, they have got to follow the example of the corporations and *get together*. They can never do this by organizing and maintaining separately the various classes. These can be maintained within one organization, as in the case of the American Railway Union, but when separately organized, class jealousies are aroused which makes harmony impossible and reduce all to helplessness.

When the railroad men of the country and workingmen generally comprehend the necessity of closing up the ranks, getting together

³ That is, no set of formal craft-based subcategories effectively dividing railroad labor into hierarchical strata.

and pulling together, they will emancipate themselves from the thralldom of injustice.

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Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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