

Working Class Unity: A Labor Day Message (September 9, 1905)

The burning question of the hour is that of unity and by this I mean the unity of all workers for the overthrow of capitalism. The country is full of object lessons demonstrating its imperative necessity.

The attempts to unite the working class in the past have all failed, in the main, and at the same time it must be admitted that all have succeeded to some extent.

The philosophical insight of Karl Marx enabled him to foresee the absolute necessity of the unification of all workers of all countries, and the evolution of industry has made it so clear that only the mentally blind now fail to see it. The interests of the working class are so self-evidently identical that their unity would seem to follow as a matter of course, but it is just here that the ingenuity and satanic cruelty of capitalism is taxed to prevent the workers from uniting and acting together to throw off the yoke of wage-slavery, which keeps them in a state of brutal servility and submissiveness scarce a degree above the beasts of the field.

The trade union movement is filled with spies, spotters,¹ and sneaks, whose craven natures fit them for their damnable treachery in secretly betraying their brethren while wearing the union badge and pretending to be loyal to its principles.

The Socialist Party has not yet developed sufficient power to be an actual menace to the capitalist system, but even now there are those in its ranks who will bear watching, and when the point is reached where the party becomes a contesting factor in the political field the same spies and traitors will infest its councils and attempt to thwart the honest efforts of the loyal comrades to unite the workers and keep them united in the struggle for emancipation.

But despite these dangers and difficulties through which the labor movement will be required to pass, and which are in fact necessary to its development, working class unity will be achieved, for only by this means can the impending revolution be accomplished and when the time comes all obstacles to unity that may be thrown in the way by the hirelings of the

capitalist class will be swept aside by the resistless march of the workers to the goal of freedom.

The central theme for Labor Day should be the unity, industrial and political, of the working class. Without this, failure is a foregone conclusion; with it, success is inevitable.

The last two years are replete with valuable experience for workers, organized and unorganized. Practically every strike of consequence has been defeated; scores of unions have been disrupted; courts have encroached steadily upon labor unions until they are so hedged about that even if they had the power for successful resistance they would be helpless to exercise it in any way that would benefit the rank and file.

Besides this, the capitalists, manufacturers, and employers generally have organized for economic and political action in the interest of their class and they are so conscious of their class interests and so responsive to them in every hour of trial that when there is a battle on they move with the precision of a well-drilled army and not the slightest friction prevents complete unity of action; and this is why they are uniformly successful in sweeping the field and leaving their adversaries, the poorly organized and class-unconscious workers, a routed and demoralized mob, with their best fighters stark and dead where they fell in their tracks.

There can be no true and lasting working class unity that is not based upon sound principles and that does not express sound working class economics.

The American Federation of Labor and its affiliated unions, denying the class struggle and attempting to anchor the exploited workers to their exploiting masters on a mutually satisfactory basis of exploitation, will never effectually unite the workingmen of the United States. Its daily record bears testimony to its increasing impotency. It has numbers enough, but lacks solidarity. Numbers alone count for little and not even that little long.

Ten thousand class-conscious workers have far greater dynamic power than a hundred thousand whose only conception of unionism is to fawn at the feet of their masters and boast loudly of a great victory when the miserable wage pittance has been increased 15 cents a week, or the defeated members allowed to wear their union buttons on the patched seat of their trousers.

There are certain so-called labor leaders who court the smiles and wiles of the capitalist class in the vain hope of effecting permanently

harmonious relations between them and their fleeced and miserable victims. The working class will never be united on that basis or under that leadership.

In the first place, true working class unity must be of the working class itself. It must be class-conscious and if it is this it will also be self-reliant, self-disciplined, determined, and in the end victorious. A thousand defeats may fall to its lot and each of them will but leave it stronger than before.

Next, there can be no perfect unity no real solidarity, except that which has both economic and political foundations. The class-conscious trade union is absolutely essential to the class-conscious political party and both are indispensable to the labor movement if that movement is to mean unity and unity is to mean unconquerable determination to abolish wage-slavery and emancipate the working class.

Next, the form of the union must express the state of industry. The pure and simple union of 25 years ago is as completely out of date as are the tools that were in use at that time. That form of unionism is based upon tools that have long since been discarded and, upon consideration, that no longer exist. The concentration of industry and the combination of capitalists necessitates concentration in unionism unless unionism is to become as obsolete and useless as the trades from which it sprang. The hundreds of old unions, more or less in conflict with each other and striving vainly to maintain their independent jurisdictions to the benefit only of the staff of salaried officers they support, and such walking delegates² and agents as traffic in unionism to line their own pockets, bear sufficient testimony to their inefficiency and it is but a question of time until they must entirely disappear in that capacity.

The Industrial Workers recently organized at Chicago expresses clearly and logically the industrial demands of the working class up to date. This new industrial organization declares in favor of political action in waging the class struggle. It actually unites all workers so that any given industry is under the sole jurisdiction of a single union and the workers in any given department are assured of the united support of all their coworkers in the event of a strike or other exigency that requires the united action of all.

This is the only kind of unionism that will prevail against the capitalistic combinations of the present day. The working class must be organized as never before, must be united as never before, and above all, must be class-conscious, economically and politically, as never before.

A single union on the industrial field and a single party on the political field, each the counterpart of the other and supplementing and strengthening the other; each supreme in its respective sphere, the union recognizing the need for political action and the party recognizing the need for industrial action, and both in harmonious cooperation with each other, is the great and imperative demand of this time and to bring this about every worker should bend all his energies and put forth all the ability at his command.

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¹ A spotter was an undercover company employee, generally in the railroad industry, who pretended to be an ordinary passenger so as to covertly observe acts of corruption or violations of company rules.

² A walking delegate is a union employee who travels from workplace to workplace making sure that contractual agreements were being observed.