
Getting Together.

by Eugene V. Debs

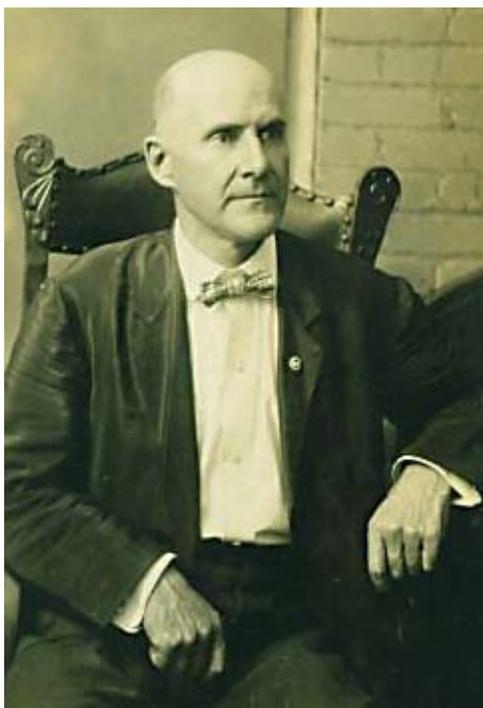
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The urgent, imperative need of thoroughgoing working-class unity was never so glaringly manifested as it is today. Recent lessons growing out of the defeated steel strike, the defeated mine strike, and the defeated railroad strike, are tragically in evidence in the appeal they make to the workers of the nation. Each of these strikes that resulted in such disastrous failure could and should have achieved a clean-cut victory. The grievances in each instance were sufficiently flagrant to arouse the attention of the entire nation, and the conditions were as favorable for the successful outcome of the battles as they could possibly be. The only reason that the brave soldiers who fought these heroic battles against starvation went down to ignominious defeat, thousands of them having been rewarded with the blacklist in addition to their lost jobs, is that they fought under a craft union instead of an industrial union standard, and consequently became the prey either of their misleaders, or of the designs of their masters and exploiters.

The steel strike was ably and honestly led, and if the workers had been industrially organized and backed up their leaders with an invincible host of industrial unionists, the story of the outcome would have been differently written.

The leadership of the mine and railroad strikes was as cowardly, weak, and inefficient as could possibly be imagined, and under such circumstances these strikes were almost inevitably doomed to defeat.

Craft unionism today is not only an obsolete form of organization, but characterizing it bluntly, it is a crime against the working class. Its sole purpose in the present industrial development is to keep the workers divided, arrayed against each other for the benefit of their masters and misleaders, and to their own detriment and undoing. There can be no possible excuse for it, in the light of its recent tragic failure to achieve anything for the members save only the most ignominious defeat and disastrous results.



The craft union was built upon handicraft, and the individual tool. Its purpose was to protect and advance as best it could in its limited sphere the interests of the workers employed in the small shop of that time. The individual tool has long since become socialized, and is now a mass of machinery, in which scores of trades are merged and industrialized. The evolution here indicated is so clear and so conclusive that

only the stone-blind can fail to see it and profit by its lessons.

Of course the trade union of a generation ago should have followed the evolution of industry, and should now be an industrial union, just as the tool has become a machine, and the trade an industry; and it certainly would have followed, but for the stubborn persistence with which craft union leaders have resisted the change and have done everything in their power to keep the labor movement in its inefficient, helpless, and outgrown state.

The capitalist employer has very wisely adapted himself and his interests to the changed conditions resulting from this industrial development. He is not only thoroughly equipped with all of the latest means of production, but he is organized in an ironclad corporation, which furnishes a magnificent illustration of capitalist solidarity. There are no craft union divisions and weaknesses in his armor when it comes to facing his hereditary enemy, the exploited worker. He is thoroughly united, class-conscious, and his battery consists of the latest 16-inch guns; whereas the tattered and half-starved workers that confront him under craft union leadership still use the flintlock and blunderbuss of their ancestors, in waging their warfare against starvation and slavery.

To come directly to the point, the workers of this nation need to be industrially organized without any further delay. It is the crying need, the urgent demand of the working class. That does not mean that dual unions should be organized. Not at all! I should be the first to oppose any such program. The lessons of past experience warn against any such further attempt. The rank and file must insist upon getting together and must furnish the impetus for such concentration and combination as are necessary to unite all the workers of a given industry within one compact and militant body.

A majority of craft leaders will fight this advance, every inch of the way, and in order to know the reason why, it is only necessary to inspect their salary account and realize that they are drawing millions of dollars for almost the exclusive purpose of keeping the workers pitted against each other in numberless craft unions, and thus at the mercy of their exploiting masters.

The hour the workers get together in an industrial organization, the service of thousands of craft

union leaders will be dispensed with, to the benefit of all concerned — even of themselves.

The Trade Union Educational League, under the direction and inspiration of William Z. Foster, is in my opinion the one rightly directed movement for the industrial unification of the American workers. I thoroughly believe in its plan and its methods and I feel very confident of its steady progress and the ultimate achievement of its ends.

Of course, I also believe in political unity, and the necessity of the working class building up to independent political organization of its own, for the development of the political power necessary to conquer the political power of capitalism and place the workers of the country in control of the machinery of government, as one of the means whereby they may secure possession of the industrial and productive machinery of the nation.

Defective, inefficient unionism, although it represents organization in a sense, may not only be of little benefit on account of its weakness, but may become positively hurtful by misleading and misdirecting the workers, blinding their eyes to their true class interests, and forging their fetters more securely while they are under the delusion that they are battling for emancipation and movement toward the sunlight.

Education, the sound education, of the workers alone can fit and prepare them for the herculean task before them. It is only through the education of the workers that they can come to clearly understand the necessity of not only organizing, but for the kind of organization required to give them the power to carry on their struggle, to fight their everyday battles, and finally to conquer capitalism and come into possession of their own.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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