
Federation of Labor Organizations for Mutual Protection

by Eugene V. Debs

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In advocating the federation of labor organizations for mutual protection, we shall state as definitely as possible our reasons, and shall seek to state propositions, which we believe will stand the test of the severest scrutiny. The wealth of nations is created by work — without work there is no wealth. As all working men are engaged in producing this wealth, it follows logically that there is an identity of interest. There are many departments of work — workers have a diversity of tastes and ambitions. Their modes of living may be widely different, their habits dissimilar, their thoughts and education unlike, and yet upon one point there ought to be and ultimately and inevitably there must be perfect agreement, and that point is fair, equitable wages. Upon this proposition there is no room for debate. But when the question arises, “What are fair, equitable wages?” disputations begin and are endless. The employer insists that he shall be permitted to fix the rate — that the wage worker, the bread winner, the wealth creator shall have no voice in a matter of supreme importance to him, and equally important to the welfare of society. The long prevailing policy has been that the worker shall take what he can get and be content.

Of late years the workingmen of the United States, having grown in intelligence, comprehend more fully than ever before the injustice of which they have been the victims, and with an independence born of intelligence have organized themselves into unions bearing various names, for the purpose of securing fair wages, a more equitable share of the wealth they create. What is the significance of this movement? It means simply that workingmen shall live in better houses, shall

have better shelter, better homes, better clothing, better and more abundant food, all of which signifies better citizenship, more influence in human affairs, in all of which every working man has the same identical interest, and to secure which is the chief end of labor organizations. As a consequence, in the advocacy of the federation of labor organizations for mutual support, we are doing that which, if consummated, must result in securing for wage workers their rights, a just recognition of the value of work in carrying forward the great industrial enterprises of the times.

During the year 1888 the various labor organizations will hold their annual conventions. Labor questions are to be discussed with a zeal and an intelligence hitherto unknown. There are some special reasons for this growing out of the fact that important elections are pending. The interests of labor are to have a hearing on the rostrum, but as it is said "God helps those who help themselves," the question of federation for mutual support becomes more than ever before vital. It is not what can a party, or a politician do for them, but what can they do for themselves?

It must not be understood that in advocating federation we favor the abandonment of separate and distinct organizations. We do not favor amalgamation. We do not desire to blend, fuse the various labor organizations into one conglomerate whole, but regarding the supreme purpose of each to better the conditions of its members, we would have such an understanding, such a federation, that when one is driven to the necessity of making a stand for its rights, for justice, honest wages, it shall have the sympathy, and at least the moral support of all, that in no instance should the enemy of workingmen have the support of any labor organization, but on the contrary, all should, within prescribed limits, do all things proper to enable the organization in the struggle to win a victory. The plan is feasible, prudent and patriotic. It contemplates no wrong to any one or to any interest. It signifies unity in case of emergency, and victory for the right against oppression. The *Magazine* in its advocacy of federation for mutual protection includes all labor organizations. It is broad enough to take them all in. It is the organ of a brotherhood of workers whose high aim is to achieve better conditions and advanced positions, and in the spirit of fraternity we address all the labor organizations in the land, believing the emancipation of workingmen depends upon their working together when the rights of any organization are invaded and imperiled, and we earnestly invite all labor organizations to give the

matter we have briefly stated their consideration. United for mutual protection, workingmen of America would be invincible. Once federated in the interest of right and justice, they would exert a moral power which would bear down all opposition. In that event, strikes would disappear and peace and prosperity would reign supreme.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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