
The Labor View of the Election

by Eugene V. Debs

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The *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine* is not a politically partisan publication, only to the extent that when a citizen who is an enemy of labor aspires to office, the Magazine would have that aspirant defeated, regardless of party platform, banner or shibboleth.

The country has passed through a presidential election, in which labor was as conspicuously identified as any other interest that was or could have been named, and the question arises, wherefore this interest and solicitude?

In this discussion the *Magazine* discards all reference to the personnel of tickets, except in so far as such allusions refer to the welfare of organized labor.

Whitelaw Reid,¹ all of the years that he had been in a position to employ men, was distinguished as an inveterate enemy of organized labor. As an owner and publisher of a great newspaper, he had evinced a hostility to organized labor so relentless as to become a public scandal. This the *Magazine* deemed it its duty to expose in the light of established and notorious facts. Let this suffice.

The Democratic Party succeeds the Republican Party in the national government and in a number of states hitherto Republican in politics. In this sweeping change are there any comforting lessons to labor? If so, what are the lessons?

The discussions of the campaign were largely economic. Such questions are abstruse and easily mystified. Hence, labor has sought industriously for a few fundamental facts and principles to which it was easy to refer and were impregnable to the attacks of sophistry, calculated to mislead the mind and culminating in erroneous conclu-

¹ **Whitelaw Reid** (1837-1912) was the successor to Horace Greeley as chief of the *New York Tribune*, one of America's leading Republican dailies.

sions. Manifestly, the pivotal question of the campaign was that of the tariff, and we doubt, if, within the entire realm of economic questions, there is one upon which there is such a wide and honest disagreement; and yet, in this, as in every other question of national importance, there is a principle involved which, found and embraced, emancipates the mind from the thralldoms of error.

Admitting that the principle of protection is right, the next question is, should it be so warped and distorted as to protect a favored few to the neglect of the many? If a tariff does that, then justice is discarded and wrong triumphs. In a nutshell, should Carnegie and Frick be protected, whereby millions accrue to them, while their workingmen have their wages reduced and are made to realize that though employed in carrying forward a tariff-protected industry, the same tariff affords them no protection, but even makes their condition worse? Nor is this all. Labor has asked the question, why should certain industries be protected, while others are left to succeed, if they can, without such protection? Various reasons were assigned for this admitted injustice, but it is evident that labor was not satisfied with the arguments adduced; such protection was not, in the first place, fair play. It did not afford all industries the same advantages. It taxed one to support another, and was, therefore, in direct conflict with the genius of American institutions.

Again, it was held, during the campaign, if a high protective tariff protected certain industries against the importation of what is termed "foreign pauper labor products," it furnished labor no protection against the importation of "foreign pauper laborers;" they came by thousands and by tens of thousands, and offered their services for "pauper wages," and as a result, while the hue and cry in favor of protective tariff was loudest, organized labor, as in the case of Homestead, found it impossible to maintain wages, and thousands of workingmen are suffering because they had the independence to resist, not only a reduction in wages, but the murderous policy of a protected industry to introduce scabs, and thus compel unprotected labor to submit to conditions fruitful of poverty and degradation. In all of this, in so far as labor was concerned, strictly speaking, there was no partisanism. It was an economic question; and as a high protective tariff, as we have shown in the case of Homestead, did not protect organized labor, it was pronounced a failure, and the edict has gone forth for the modification of existing tariff laws.

There were other economic questions involved in which labor has a vital interest, as for instance, the free coinage of silver. Here again, comes into view a question in which labor has a right to be heard. First, because mining silver is a great American industry and gives employment to thousands of workingmen. Second, because free coinage affords a market for the product of the mines, and third, because silver coin is honest money, and no man ever failed whose silver dollars were equal to his debts.

Again, free coinage is in direct opposition to the policy of plutocratic millionaires, styled "gold bugs," whose policy has been and now is, by virtue of the single gold standard, to control the financial affairs of the nation, and control values. Labor takes no stock in such a policy, and on a direct vote, would overwhelmingly declare for the free coinage of silver, and the fact that when silver certificates are issued there is a silver dollar behind every certificate, emphasizes the fact that whether a man has the coin or the certificate, he has honest dollars.

We could extend illustrations showing that in the political campaign just closed, labor was everywhere an issue and that all political parties sought to give it prominence. It remains to be seen what the victorious party will do in legislatures and in congress to redeem the pledges made to labor. Much is required to modify present laws, and to enact others which shall give to labor a standing in the courts of the country, equal, in all respects, to that occupied by those who command money, and who, hitherto, when they have wanted a court went out and bought it. As the fruits of the election are gathered into law making bodies, the *Magazine* will endeavor to outline special requirements.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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