
The Lessons Taught by Labor Day

by Eugene V. Debs

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September 7th was very generally celebrated throughout the country by wage workers as Labor Day. In several states the 7th of September is made, by statute, a holiday the same as the 4th of July, the 22nd of February, or Christmas.

The more thoughtful men of the country, regardless of membership in labor organizations, are inquiring the significance of Labor Day. What does it mean? What lessons does it teach? What great fact in the history of the times is made prominent by Labor Day celebrations? Is some truth long since "crushed to earth," rising again, proclaiming that "the eternal years of God" are pledged to its triumph over error?

All civilized nations have their holidays designed to commemorate something of great national importance.

This is true of the United States. We have our 4th of July, "Independence Day," when in various ways, by parades, orations, picnics, pyrotechnics, and by a thousand and one other methods, the people seek to commemorate the announcement made July 4th, 1776, that the American colonies had set up business for themselves, and no longer recognized the authority of a king.

We celebrate the 22nd of February, the birthday of George Washington, and as the years go by, the day grows in importance. As the nation grows in population and power, the people learn to appreciate the sublime character of the man who was "first in peace, first in war, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

Labor Day, so far, selects no one individual as illustrative of events which brought workingmen into prominence as a force and a factor in all things calculated to advance civilization and give prosperity to republican institutions.

It is well that such is the fact. Labor Day, above all things, voices a new departure in moral, social, economical, and political affairs.

Labor Day is a new Independence Day. The declaration is that “in the course of human events labor is to take commanding rank in controlling human affairs.”

It is an announcement that from this time forward, Labor, with form erect, comprehending its rights and prerogatives, its independence and high purposes, will walk abreast with all the armies of progress and pitch its tents on lofty elevations, and fortified by intelligence, integrity, and courage, will hold the fort against all who would seek to degrade it.

The *Chicago Post* referring to Labor Day in that city, said:

Those simple citizens who affect to fear the “dangerous masses” had a fine opportunity to observe the objet of their dread yesterday. Some 20,000 wage-workers paraded the streets for several hours. They were not all, but a very important part of the “masses.” Each belonged to that class of the community in which the fashion prevails to eat the bread that is earned by the sweat of the brow. It is a large branch — the larges by all odds — and, in the mercy of providence, it will never grow smaller. It includes, it *is*, “the masses.”

Very dangerous, too, those 20,000 intelligent, self-reliant, and cheerful philosophers of toil. Dangerous to corruption in high places; dangerous to political quackery; dangerous to sanctimonious humbug and to humbug of all kinds, especially when it masks in a thin veil of pretended sympathy, stupid distrust or blind hatred of the working “masses.”

Sympathy is not exactly the nostrum for these 20,000 specimens of robust manhood. They don’t ask it, don’t need it, and won’t have it. They want no “protection” of hypocritical men or silly women. They want room according to their strength. And, under the benign workings of “the laws of nature and of nature’s God,” they manage very comfortably to get what they want.

Else they might, indeed, be “dangerous” — to somebody.

Labor Day will eventually sound the death knell of plutocracy in the United States.

The era of robbery and of degradation is drawing to a close. It will at no distant day appear that the “dangerous masses” are not workingmen, but those who use their money power to filch from labor its just rewards.

Labor Day is to grow in importance and in significance. The number of workingmen who are to parade on Labor Days in the near future will startle the country. The time is near at hand when there will be millions in line, with music and banners. The time is not remote when workingmen will exact and receive their full share of the wealth they create, and then Labor Day will be Emancipation Day.

When that auspicious time shall come, workingmen will cease to be known by “numbers,” and names will be reinstated. The hut will give place to habitations such as are becoming American citizenship, and though the rich will grow richer, it will not be as now, and in the past, by a series of robberies, entailing poverty, degradation, and death upon the poor.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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