
The Ways of Justice

by Eugene V. Debs

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We hold these truths to be self-evident — that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

—Declaration of Independence.

It has been held that in the political institutions of the United States there are two fundamental facts recognized — the sovereignty of the people and the equality of conditions. It is held by eminent jurists that these facts are original, perfect and uncontrollable.

In the formation of the government under which we live certain rights of the individual are surrendered, but never an inalienable right, never the right of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

To invade such rights, to strike them down, is despotism pure and simple.

It does not matter by what method such rights are abridged or destroyed; it does not matter under what circumstances the rights are murdered or who the assassin may be; it does not matter whether whether a vandal court, a savage, or a sultan perpetrates the crime, nor by what juggling lies are clothed in robes of truth, nor does it matter what high officials surround the bier upon which a dead right is borne to its grave, or what Marc Anthony orations embellish the funeral, the occasion simply celebrates the death of rights essential to freedom, and when they

cease to exist, though drums may beat and banners wave and eloquent tongues glorify law, the three cardinal rights — life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness — lie dead in the presence of the people, and the “sovereignty of the people” and the “equality of conditions” go down together.

It is not to be expected that a despotism is to be proclaimed from the housetops and that the rights of the people are to disappear as when earthquakes swallow down cities. The approach of the calamity will be insidious. The subtle and treacherous enemies of liberty will inject into some law a provision to be vitalized at the proper time and made the weapon of those who espouse the cause of wealth against labor.

Such restrictions are largely within the boundaries of facts now in course of development, and provisions which are claimed to answer the demands of the friends of despotic power are said to exist in what are known as the interstate commerce law and the anti-trust law, which, as they are interpreted by the courts, uproot and scatter to the winds the right of railroad employees to decide for themselves whether they will continue or abandon work, as they may elect, because, forsooth, this work is of a “public” or “semi-public” character, and hence the public, more properly the government, under the laws which the government enacts, at once reduces the employee to a servitude that must inevitably, unless all sense of liberty and independence is crushed and dead, result in revolution.

One of the astounding phases of the controversy now going forward, involving the inalienable rights of citizens, is the autocratic power exercised by the courts. It is difficult to find words for the proper characterization of this power. In such discussions it becomes necessary to refer to the debasing methods by which certain mental and moral infirmities find their way to the bench and are permitted to don the robes of office. They are often the creatures of a corrupt appointing power and are selected because of their willingness to do the bidding of those who are able to pay

the price of their treason to justice. Having gained notoriety as corporation lawyers, their study and ambition having been to find law for the protection of the iniquitous practices of corporations, they go upon the bench to continue their corporation practice, until men who have the means are disposed to follow the example of Jay Gould, who said: "When I want a judge I buy him." This debauchery of courts has reached a pass that a majority of the people regard courts, their orders, and decisions, with profound suspicion and contempt; and this debauchery, this stupidity which distinguishes certain judges, creates in the public mind a continually intensified scorn, because the people behold in such things only the mockery of justice. They see a petty tyrant called a judge issuing dynamite orders designed for the destruction of the rights of workingmen and their organizations.

The practices of corporations to despoil workingmen are never so much as hinted at; only the rights of corporations to throttle, gag, crush, and degrade their employees receive attention. It was useless to attempt to obscure the facts. Sophisms and chicanery have had their day, and it is seen that an effort is being made by the courts to subject employees to conditions such as in former days aroused men to denounce the starry ensign of the nation as a "flaunting lie."

It is held in certain quarters that the courts are not deciding "that strikes are always and everywhere illegal, but only that striking must be done in such a way as not to perpetrate an arbitrary and grievous wrong upon the public." A strike of railroad employees engaged in the train service necessarily and always subjects the public to inconvenience, which is called "a wrong," hence the intimation of the courts and the conclusion of corporations that since quitting employment on the part of employees perpetrates this "wrong," this inconvenience to the public, they shall not abandon their employment. But the courts do not intimate that it would be a "public wrong" or a public inconven-

ience for corporations at their pleasure to discharge 1 or 100 employees, or to reduce them to starvation wages and degrade them to peonage, hence it will be observed that neither the courts nor the corporations care a straw for the fundamental fact of “equality of conditions,” which, once destroyed, no matter by whom, the ship of state, like a disabled ship at sea, drifts wherever the wind of chance and fate may drive it.

Are we to wait until every shackle is riveted? Are we to insist on crying “peace” when the shot orders of courts, deadly as bursting bombs, render men as speechless as if they were dead? I ring no alarm bells when there is no danger approaching. I simply invite workingmen to contemplate the shadows of events, as fraught with danger as when Patrick Henry proclaimed: “Give me liberty or give me death.”

Let it be understood that the old landmarks are being rapidly obscured, destroyed, forever obliterated. The autocracy of courts, defining by legal jugglery the rights of workingmen, the rights of corporations, and the rights of the people and the equality of conditions, and lobby-made law by debauched votes strike right and left and always at the rights of workingmen. They are shearing from Samson’s head his locks of power, they are seeking to make him blind to their purposes, they laugh at his calamity and mock at his fear, but it were better to desist, better to be just, else the labor Samson may some time grasp the pillars of the temple of despotism in America and re-establish the “sovereignty of the people” and the “equality of conditions” upon its ruins.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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