
To the People

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by Eugene V. Debs

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Memory is not dead. We recall the heroic deeds of our forefathers who pledged life, honor, and property to secure liberty for themselves and for future generations. In recalling their heroism, their sacrifices, and their sufferings Americans must be as dead as Egypt's embalmed mummies if their hearts do not beat responsive to the holiest and sternest passions that ever burned and glowed in a freeman's heart.

Those immortal patriots founded a government of equal rights. They abhorred kings. They trampled upon crowns. They broke scepters and forever exiled a titled nobility and aristocracy from the land, and accepting the revelation that "God is no respecter of persons" they proclaimed the eternal truth that all men are "created equal," and to give their fiat enduring force they, "the people," crowned themselves by divine right sovereign citizens and took the ballot as a symbol of their sovereignty.

Since that august period more than 100 years have come and gone, and what is the legacy they have left for the present generation? On the one hand we are invited to survey the material progress of the nation,, and the facts challenge the imagination to paint a more glowing picture of triumphs over all opposing forces. The march of the nation westward, following the star of empire, has all the glamor of fiction. The carving of the vast domains into separate territories and their transformation into states and bringing them into the federal union under one flag is the wonder of the world.

I should like to dwell upon such evidences of national prosperity. An American born, to eulogize the greatness, the power and prosperity of my country would be in strict accord with every high and ennobling aspiration of my mental being. But 200,000 miles of railroads, mines, factories, forges, great cities, forests and farms, standing

armies, navies, gold and silver, banks, trusts, syndicates, plutocrats, do not, all combined, constitute a state — only men who know their rights, and, knowing, dare to maintain them, however great the sacrifice.

Our nation's physical greatness nor its fabulous wealth constitutes its glory, nor yet its schoolhouses nor its churches. If amid splendid triumphs of what the world calls progress the wage-workers of the country are oppressed, robbed, degraded, shot down like vagabond dogs and imprisoned like felons, driven from decent habitations and forced into dens which wild beasts would not inhabit, then our civilization is savagery. Fair it may be to contemplate from certain points of observation, but it is nevertheless a whited sepulcher, under whose captivating exterior exist abominations of which, if heaven takes cognizance, the eternal God must again repent that he made man at all.

Here, with the ballot; here, with constitutions framed for the protection of all, are daily perpetrated acts of despotism of unparalleled enormity, except perhaps in lands where the lives and liberties and the property of the people are in the hands of a tsar, a sultan, or a shah. And it is also true that in the United States acts of tyranny are perpetrated which demonstrate that appeals to courts and legislatures for justice are as unheeded as when a storm-beaten wayfarer appeals to a blizzard for protection.

Fellow working men, the outlook is appalling. Never since the minions of King George shot down the minutemen at Concord has liberty been in as great danger as now. Indeed the liberty we enjoy is a hollow mockery. Workingmen have no liberty. The plutocratic corporation, the autocratic judge, who enacts law by injunction and enforces it by deputy marshals armed with pistols and clubs and supported by troops with shotted guns, have banished liberty from the land. Workingmen are simply tolerated if they remain silent and do the bidding of their masters. If, under the tortures of hunger and nakedness, despair provokes protest, the injunction, the club, bayonet, and bullet enforce submission, and this work of enslavement goes steadily on.

I speak as a victim, from a dungeon tomb, as one who loved his fellow man and dared raise his voice to mitigate the pangs of famine in a suburb of Hell, known as Pullman, and all over this once favored land men are imprisoned or are driven into idleness and vagabondage, blacklisted and exiled because they had the courage to teach trampled hearts to feel the curses that their plutocratic masters were heaping

upon them. If, as it is said, the darkest hour of night is just before the dawn, then, fellow workingmen, the dawn ought to be near at hand, or do the enemies of labor contemplate a still darker hour before the first ray of light heralds relief and bids us hope? To what further increase of the armies of wretchedness do the corporations demand? To what deeper degradation are workingmen to descend to gratify the greed of the venal corporations and those who aid them in their piracies? To what greater depths do those who rob labor desire to plunge their barbed iron into the quivering souls of workingmen, that they may coin the tortures of their victims into dividends on watered stocks and bonds? Will workingmen cease to protest? Will the injunction and the prison, the blacklist and hunger, robbery and degradation, teach them submission? Will the bayonet and the bullet, the club and the blood that follows the blow, teach American workingmen how to starve and die that plutocrats may fare sumptuously every day? It has been done. The crime has been committed under the stars and stripes and is being repeated every day of the year. History repeats itself. How often shall such history be repeated in this land? How long shall the United States of America stand before the nations of the earth with the boastful lie of liberty in its throat, while corporation, court, and armies have multiplied thousands of men in the dust beneath their despotic hoofs?

The answer is not difficult. While workingmen use their ballots to enthrone men in power who are their enemies, the work of degradation will proceed. When workingmen conclude to use their ballots to elect to office neither plutocrats nor the fawning parasites of plutocrats, then, and not till then, will emancipation day dawn. There are dangers ahead. To aver them I appeal to the workingmen of America to abandon, at once and forever, the old political parties, to unify and cast their votes for a party whose every battle cry is "justice to labor," a party that is pledged to righteous laws and a righteous administration of justice.

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