

---

# The Coming Union

by Eugene V. Debs

First publication in *Miners' Magazine*, Oct. 26, 1905.

Reprinted in *The Daily People* [New York], v. 6, no. 123 (Oct. 31, 1905).

The opponents of the Industrial Workers, numerous, varied, and powerful though they be, will find themselves baffled in every attempt they make to stem the tide of new industrial organization.

These opponents, strange as it may seem, embrace, besides the capitalist class and their "labor lieutenants," Socialists who profess to favor industrial unionism and trade unionists who profess to be class conscious workingmen!

An anomalous situation, indeed!

The only national labor union that recognizes the class struggle, the Industrial Workers of the World, is opposed, and the American Federation of Labor, whose leaders deny the class struggle, is supported by men who call themselves Socialists and class conscious workingmen.

But in spite of all this the Industrial Workers is the coming labor union in the United States and all the powers of capitalism and all the resources of its emissaries cannot prevent it.

The conditions are mature for it and the working class will embrace it and stand by it as they learn to comprehend its meaning and grasp its mission.

Three years ago, when the Western Federation of Miners and the American Labor Union, in national convention assembled, in Denver, struck the new trail of class-consciousness and declared in favor of independent political action along working class lines, the very thing Socialists have been clamoring for, the press of the Socialist

Party, almost solidly, instead of cheering the new departure and encouraging and supporting the movement, treated the matter coldly, or damned it with faint praise.

These papers felt themselves committed to the American Federation of Labor and feared to offend the anti-Socialist organization. Upon no other ground is such opposition to Socialist action by Socialist papers conceivable.

When the Industrial Workers of the World was recently organized at Chicago the same Socialist papers fought the movement openly, or, what revealed the same antagonistic attitude, remained silent.

These Socialist papers, smiling patronizingly upon the American Federation of Labor which repudiates and despises them, and frowning scornfully upon the Industrial Workers of the World, a truly class-conscious organization, have committed a grave mistake and appearances indicate they are beginning to realize it. The open opposition has died out and silence has taken its place. They have evidently heard from the rank and file. In any event it may be well for them to know that DeLeon's *Weekly People* is getting a harvest of new subscribers, including many members of our party, because of his espousal of the Industrial Workers.

That Socialists can still find it consistent to remain in the American Federation of Labor in the light of its fixed pro-capitalist policy is, I confess, incomprehensible to me.

Why do they not apply their peculiar logic

to the political situation? The Republican and Democratic Parties both consist mainly of workmen. Why not turn them into working class parties? The workmen have a majority in both—why organize a Socialist Party?

The workman who reasons in that way and attends Republican and Democratic conventions as a delegate is by Socialists set down as ignoramus or fakir, and yet that is precisely the attitude of certain Socialists with reference to the old anti-labor federation and the new working class union.

The American Federation of Labor, which is simply an attempt to harmonize pure and simple trade unions, that were built up on tools long since discarded and on principles long out of date, is the enemy of working class solidarity. It is in control of the capitalist class. The Civic Federation and its personnel is sufficient proof of this fact.

It leers at the class struggle.

Professing to oppose independent political action by the working class and even forbidding the discussion of political questions, it connives with the political hucksters of capitalist parties in consideration of beggarly “hand-outs” for its henchmen.

This aggregation of one time labor organizations have veered about and are now thoroughly reactionary, and every inch of genuine working class progress from this time forward will have to be made in spite of them.

Would but Socialists remain away from the national convention of this alleged federation the jurisdictional lightnings would then have full play and soon strike and sever the flimsy bonds that hold the old antiquated unions together. The few Socialists serve the federation leaders in the valuable role of lightning rods to attract and divert the bolts of disintegration. These Socialist comrades are on a cold trail. Their misguided zeal is worthy of a better cause. There was a time when their efforts bore fruit, but that day is passed. They might as well spend their time, as Thomas Paine

put it, “administering medicine to a corpse.” The role they are now in at the federation convention is almost pathetic. Even the applause in the gallery is dying out. They are sadly out of place. They are in truth laughing stock — the footballs of two by four fakirs that serve the capitalist class for their stereotyped dispatch reporting the annual kicking out of Socialism by the American Federation of Labor.

When the moon turns into green cheese will these Socialists succeed in converting the American Federation of Labor, honeycombed with capitalistic influences, into a revolutionary working class organization.

But in the meantime they are extremely valuable to the federation leaders, who would undoubtedly seriously regret to be deprived of their services.

The opposition to the Industrial Workers, inspired by personal hatred for Daniel DeLeon and the Socialist Trade & Labor Alliance is puerile, to say the least. With all that has been said about the latter it has never been charged with being a capitalist annex and as for DeLeon personally he is not an issue to be considered when choosing between a bona-fide labor union organization for the benefit of the working class and a bogus labor organization defended by every capitalist paper and supported by every capitalist politician in the land.

DeLeon is sound on the question of trade unionism and to that extent, whether I like him or not personally, I am with him.

My personal likes and dislikes are secondary to my allegiance to the working class.

The choice is between the AF of L and capitalism on one side and the Industrial Workers of the World and Socialism on the other.

The AF of L is for the wages system; the Industrial Workers of the World for its abolition.

How can a Socialist hesitate in his choice an instant?

The AF of L keeps the working class divided

into trades which have ceased to exist; the Industrial Workers unites them into one compact militant body.

Which of these truly expresses the present industrial situation and which actually stands for working class solidarity?

As a member of both the Industrial Workers and the Socialist Party I want to see one class-conscious labor union on the industrial field and one class-conscious labor party on the political field, each the counterpart of the other, and both working together in harmonious cooperation to overthrow the capitalist system and emancipate the workers from wage slavery.

The Industrial Workers has made a sound beginning and at its convention the work will be rounded out and the organization fairly started on its mission of proletarian emancipation.

The time has come to strike out boldly and cut loose from all associations that are not with and for the revolutionary program of the working class. Any professed labor organization that does not recognize the class struggle and stand squarely

on the right side of it forfeits all claim to the respect of intelligent workingmen; and to remain with it is not to help the union get right, but to risk personal contamination.

The way to serve the working class through the AF of L is to get out of it and leave the capitalist class and their henchmen in undisputed control.

The paramount question is the labor movement and working class victory. All other things — parties and unions included — are secondary.

Therefore, organization, economic and political, along class lines. Any organization that attempts to obscure these lines damns itself.

The Industrial Workers is right. It has come at the right time and it will fight its way to the front! It is asking no favors of capitalism and granting none; it is pandering to no organization and no man or set of men to curry favors; it stands squarely on the class struggle, defiantly challenging the capitalist class, relying only upon the awakening working class to rally to its standard and carry it to victory.

*Transcription by John-Paul Catusco & David Walters for Marxists Internet Archive.*

*Minor additional editing by Tim Davenport.*

*Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2006. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.*