

# The Growth of Socialism

By

EUGENE V. DEBS

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# The Growth of Socialism.

By Eugene V. Debs.

(The following article was written for Success Magazine. On account of demand for space the editor reduced the length of the article, omitting many of the vital paragraphs. The entire article is here reproduced in full.)

Not many of those schooled in old-party politics have any adequate conception of the true import of the labor movement. They read of it in the papers, discuss it in their clubs, criticise labor unions, condemn walking delegates, and finally conclude that organized labor is a thing to be tolerated so long, only, as it keeps within "proper bounds," but to be put down summarily the moment its members, like the remnants of Indian tribes on the western plains, venture beyond the limits of their reservations. They utterly fail or refuse to see the connection between labor and politics, and are, therefore, woefully ignorant of the political significance of the labor movement of the present day.

It is true that in all the centuries of the past labor has been "put down" when it has sought some modicum of its own, or when it has even yearned for some slight amelioration

of its wretched condition, as witness the merciless massacre of the half-famished and despairing subjects of the Russian czar, a few months ago, for daring to hope that their humble petition for a few paltry concessions might be received and considered by his mailed and heartless majesty.

It is likewise true, that, in the present day, and in the United States, all the powers of government stand ready to "put down" the working class whenever it may be deemed necessary in the interest of its industrial masters.

All great strikes prove that the government is under the control of corporate capital and that the army of officeholders is as subservient to the capitalist masters as is the army of wage-workers that depends upon them for employment.

But, true as these things are, it is not true that labor is ignorant of them, nor is it true that such conditions will continue forever.

The labor movement has advanced with rapid strides, during the last few years, and is, today, the most formidable factor in quickening the social conscience and in regenerating the human race. It is not the millions that are enrolled as members of labor unions that give power and promise to this world movement, but the thousands, rather, that are not trade-unionists merely,

but working-class unionists as well; that is to say, working men and women who recognize the identity of the industrial and political interests of the whole working class; or in other words, are conscious of their class interests and are bending all the powers of their minds and bodies, spurred by the zeal that springs from comradeship in a common cause, to effect the economic and political solidarity of the whole mass of labor, irrespective of race, creed or sex.

These class-conscious workers—these Socialists—realize the fact that the labor question, in its full and vital sense, is a political question, and that the working class must be taught to extend the principle of unionism to the political field, and there organize on the basis of their economic class interests; and, although they are engaged in a herculean task, the forces of industrial evolution and social progress are back of them, and all the powers of reaction cannot prevail against them.

The labor movement has had to fight its way, inch by inch, from its inception to its present position, and to this very fact is due the revolutionary spirit, indomitable will, and unconquerable fiber it has developed, and which alone fit it for its mighty historic mission.

In the beginning the workers organized in

their respective trades simply to improve working conditions. They had no thought of united political action. The employing class at once combined to defeat every attempt at organization on the part of its employes; but, notwithstanding this opposition, the trade union, which had become an economic necessity, grew steadily until at last the employers were compelled to recognize and deal with it. Being unable to destroy it, they next proceeded to control its operations by confining it to its narrowest possible limits, thus reducing it to inefficiency—from a menace to a convenience.

The late Marcus A. Hanna crushed the trade union with an iron boot in the beginning of his career as a capitalist. In his maturer years he became its patron saint. He did not change in spirit, but in wisdom. What is true of Mr. Hanna is true of the principal members of the Civic Federation, that economic peace congress conceived by farsighted capitalists, sanctified by plutocratic prelates and presided over by a gentleman who, but a few months ago, engaged James Farley and his army of five thousand professional strike breakers to defeat the demands and destroy the unions of his New York subway employes.

A new unionism has struggled into existence, and the coming year will witness some

tremendous changes. The old forms cramp and fetter the new forces. As these new forces develop, the old forms must yield and finally give way to transformation.

The old unionism, under the inspiration of a Civic Federation banquet, exclaims jubilantly: "The interests of labor and capital are identical. Hallelujah!"

To this stimulating sentiment the whole body of exploiting capitalists gives hearty assent; all its politicians, parsons, and writers join in enthusiastic approval; and woe be to the few clear, calm, and candid protestants who deny it. Their very loyalty becomes treason, and the working class they seek to serve is warned against them, while the false leaders are loaded with fulsome adulation.

But nevertheless, the clear voice of the awakened and dauntless few cannot be silenced. The new unionism is being heard. In trumpet tones it rings out its revolutionary shibboleth to all the workers of the earth: "Our interests are identical—let us combine, industrially and politically, assert our united power, achieve our freedom, enjoy the fruit of our labor, rid society of parasitism, abolish poverty, and civilize the world."

The old unionism, living in the dead past, still affirms that the interests of labor and capital are identical.

The new unionism, vitalized and clarified by

the living present, exclaims: "We know better; capitalists and wage-workers have antagonistic economic interests; capitalists buy and workers sell labor power, the one as cheaply and the other as dearly as possible; they are locked in a life-and-death class-struggle; there can be no identity of interests between masters and slaves—between exploiters and exploited—and there can be no peace until the working class is triumphant in this struggle and the wage system is forever wiped from the earth."

The months immediately before us will witness a mighty mustering of the working class, on the basis of the class struggle, and the day is not far distant when they will be united in one vast economic organization in which all the trades will be represented, "separate as the waves, yet one as the sea," and one great political party that stands uncompromisingly for the working class and its program of human emancipation.

In the late national election, for the first time, the hand of the working class was clearly seen.

The Socialist party is distinctively the party, and its vote is distinctively the vote, of the working class.

More than four hundred thousand of these votes were counted; probably twice as many were cast. This was but the beginning. From



now on there is "a new Richmond in the field."

There is but one issue from the standpoint of labor, and that is: "Labor versus Capital." Upon that basis the political alignment of the future will have to be made. There is no escape from it.

For the present the ignorance of the workers stands in the way of their political solidarity, but this can and will be overcome. In the meantime, the small capitalists and the middle class are being ground to atoms in the mill of competition. Thousands are being driven from the field entirely, beaten in the struggle, bankrupt and hopeless, to be swallowed up in the surging sea of wage-slavery; while thousands of others cling to the outer edge, straining every nerve to stem the torrent that threatens to sweep them into the abyss, their condition so precarious that they anticipate the inevitable and make common issue with the wage-workers in the struggle to overthrow the capitalist system and reconstruct society upon a new foundation of co-operative industry and the social ownership of the means of life.

Of all the silly sayings of the self-satisfied of the present day, the oft-repeated falsehood that there are "no classes" in this country takes the lead, and is often made to serve as the prelude to the preposterous warning that

periodically peals from rich and sumptuous club banquets, at which the president and other patriots are guests, that "it is treason to array class against class in the United States."

If there are no classes, how can they be arrayed against each other?

The fact is that precisely the same classes and conditions that exist in the monarchies of the old world have also developed in our capitalist republic. The working-class sections, including the tenements and slums of New York and London, are strikingly similar; and the wealth-owning class of the United States represents as distinct an aristocracy as England can boast, while the laboring elements of both countries are distinctively in the "lower class" by themselves and practically on the same degraded level.

Deny it as may the retainers of the rich, the classes already exist; they are here, and no amount of sophistication can remove them, nor the chasm that divides them. The rare and exceptional wage-worker who escapes from wage-slavery simply proves the rule and emphasizes the doom of his class in capitalist society.

The existing classes and the struggle going on between them are not due to the mischievous influence of labor agitators, as certain politicians and priests, the emissaries of the "rich and respectable," would have it appear.

The long swell of the wave but expresses the agitation of the deep.

The agitator is the product of unrest—his is the voice of the social deep; and, though he may be reviled as a demagogue who preys upon the ignorance of his fellows, the unrest continues and the agitation increases until the cause of it is removed and justice is done.

Classes and class rule and their attendant progress and poverty, money and misery, turmoil and strife, are inherent in the capitalist system. Why? Simply because one set of men owns the tools with which wealth is produced, while another set uses them, and there is an irrepressible conflict over the division of the product.

The capitalist owns the tools he does not use; the worker uses the tools he does not own.

The principal tools of production and distribution in the United States—mammoth machines, complex social instruments, made and used co-operatively by millions of workmen, their very lives, their wives and babes being dependent upon them—are the private property of a few hundred capitalists, and are operated purely to make profits for these capitalists, regardless of the poverty and wretchedness that ensue to the masses.

In virtue of the individual ownership of the social instruments of production, one capi-

talist may exploit the labor of a million workingmen and become a billionaire, while the million workers struggle through life in penury and want, to a bleak and barren old age, to find rest at last in the pauper asylum, the morgue and the potter's field.

This vast and resourceful country should be free from the scourge of poverty and the blight of ignorance; but it never will be until the private ownership of the means of life is abolished and society is organized on the basis of social ownership of the social means of wealth production and the inalienable right of all to work and to produce freely to satisfy their physical needs and material wants. It is for this great organic change, this world-wide social revolution, that the Socialists of all countries are organizing, that it may be intelligently guided, and come, if possible, in peace and order when the people and conditions have been prepared for it.

The present order of society is developing all the symptoms of degeneracy and dissolution. Only the individualist self-seekers and their mercenaries—they who believe in making the animal struggle for existence perpetual, in climbing to the top over the corpses of their fellows—only they are satisfied, or would appear to be, and expatiate upon our marvelous prosperity, and the incomparable glory of our free institutions.

The man who can look upon New York or Chicago, today, and utter such sentiments should blush for his perverted sense of justice, to say nothing of his total lack of humanity.

Many thousands of men, women and children suffer for food and shiver in the cold in these typical capitalist cities, while the beef trust is crammed to bursting and the cotton kings of the South burn cotton to keep up prices.

Has the world ever heard of such monstrous iniquity—such unspeakable crime? In the name of all that has heart in it not yet turned to adamant, has human life any value, even that of the lowest grade of merchandise? And is it not high time to call a halt to the ravages of capitalism and give a little thought and consideration to humanity?

Let us briefly note some of the crying evils which infest the class-ruled society of the present day. First of all, millions are poverty-stricken, the result, mainly, of no work or low wages. The great book of Robert Hunter, on "Poverty," recently published, abounds in facts, supported by incontrovertible proofs, which silence all doubt upon this point.

In New York City, alone, fifty thousand children, when they go to school at all, go without sufficient and proper food, and one

corpse in every ten is dumped into the potter's field.

New York and Chicago are filled with unemployed and suffering, and in the country at large ten millions are in want. In the shoemaking industry, fifty-one per cent of the laborers receive less than three hundred dollars per year. In cotton spinning, the wages of thousands average from two hundred and twenty dollars to four hundred and sixty dollars per year. During the last year tens of thousands of coal miners were allowed to work but from one to three days per week. Fall River capitalists reduce wages three times in rapid succession, and lock out and starve their employes for six months, declaring that they cannot afford to pay the high prices for cotton, while the planters of the South burn up the cotton to keep up prices rather than clothe the naked whose labor produced it.

The state of Colorado seethes with military brutality and recks with political corruption because the mine owners are practically proprietors of the state and propose to do as they please with their own; and they who have the temerity to protest are branded outlaws and bull-penned, deported, or shot dead in their tracks.

The United States senate is dominated by the special representatives of the trust and

corporations, and several of its members are under indictment for playing the game of their masters in their own personal interests. Think of Senator Chauncey M. Depew reforming the abuses of the railroads, or Thomas C. Platt stopping the extortion of the express companies, in the interest of the people!

The Pennsylvania Railroad company dictated the recent election of the United States senators from Pennsylvania, and the most flagitious political debauchery attended the election of many others, such proceedings being regarded as so entirely in consonance with our capitalist-owned republic as to excite little more than passing notice.

Only a short time ago the late John H. Reagan, the venerable ex-senator of Texas, in discussing the federal courts, said that he expected no improvement in them "as long as railroad lawyers are allowed to go on the bench to interpret legislation affecting the management of the railroads." As long as the railroads are privately owned they will have their judges on the bench, and the government, that is to say, the capitalist politicians, will do their bidding.

Judge Reagan closed his sweeping arraignment of the courts as follows: "I have seen such gross perversions of the law by the courts that I have lost confidence in them and

regret I cannot feel the respect for them that I once felt."

These are ominous words and from a source that gives them the weight of high authority.

Census figures recently published show that "every fifth child between the ages of ten and fifteen in the United States is a breadwinner. One out of every three of these children workers is a girl. There are one million seven hundred and fifty thousand one hundred and seventy-eight children employed, an increase of thirty three and one-third per cent in ten years."

The land frauds, postal steals, and Indian graft all cry out in condemnation of private ownership of capital, the source and inspiration of all the political corruption that, like a pestilence, blights the land.

Charles F. Kelly, speaker of the house of delegates, at St. Louis, the convicted boodler, in making his confession, described in a few graphic words the methods and motives of office-holders and politicians in the grab-all regime of profitocracy. Said he: "Our combine was not along party lines. Both democrats and republicans belonged to it. My experience has been that boodlers line up according to their own interests, and not under party standards. In the majority of the wards of St. Louis both the democratic party and the republican usually nominate men to go to



the house of delegates for the money they can get out of it. Each party man votes for his own fellows, and either one that gets in serves those who rob the city of franchises."

Be it noted that the corrupters of courts, the bribers of legislators, and the debauchers of public morals are all capitalists in high standing, the gentry whose subservient and hypocritical underlings are forever preaching about "law and order" to the working class.

In the face of these frightful eruptions on the body-politic, President Roosevelt coolly informs us that we are passing through a period of "noteworthy prosperity," and that "we must raise still higher our standard of commercial ethics, and we must insist more and more upon those fundamental principles of our country—equality before the law and obedience to the law. **In no other way can the advance of Socialism, whether evolutionary or revolutionary, be checked.**"

The words "still higher" seem like sarcasm when applied to our so-called "standard of commercial ethics," that is mired in profit-mongering and can never rise above the sordid level of brutal self-interest in the declining stages of the competitive system.

The commercial pirates who rob the nation of its franchises and organize monopolies to exploit the people are not in the business of

raising the standards of ethics, commercial or otherwise. The only ethics they know is to "get there;" the end always justifying the means.

Just at present President Roosevelt, typical capitalist executive that he is, is after the railroads—so we are told. His organs assure us that he proposes to bring these great corporations to their knees, and make them obey the law and stop robbing the people. And yet, President Roosevelt has had one of these criminal offenders in his own cabinet.

It is known of all men that Paul Morton, late secretary of the navy, is a self-confessed lawbreaker who would now be serving a prison sentence if the law in his case had been enforced.

Then, again, can President Roosevelt consistently crack the whip above the heads of these corporations after sharing in the special privileges they enjoy at the expense of the people? In making his political campaigns, and on other occasions since he has become a commanding figure in national politics, the railroad corporations have provided Mr. Roosevelt with the most luxurious special trains, sumptuously furnished and abundantly stocked, **free of charge**. The thousands of dollars of expense thus incurred by the railroad corporations could not have been without some consideration, and, whatever that

may be, it is not calculated to inspire self-respecting and candid men who think for themselves with faith in the sincerity of the president when he vaults into the arena to do battle against the railroads as the champion of the people.

It is not to reform the evils of the day, but to abolish the social system that produces them, that the Socialist party is organized. It is the party, not of reform, but of revolution, knowing that the capitalist system has had its day and that a new social order, based upon a new system of industry, must soon supplant the fast decaying one we now have.

Every social system changes ceaselessly, and, ultimately, having fulfilled its mission, passes away.

Capitalism is the connecting link between feudalism and Socialism.

The industrial forces are now making for Socialism, preparing the way for it, and sooner or later it is sure to come.

On the one hand the capitalist class are combining their resources, centralizing their capital, co-operating instead of competing, organizing industry, and eliminating competition. This is the new and better way. It is good as far as it goes. It is the limited application of the economic principles of Socialism.

On the other hand, the working class are

organizing. They are beginning to spell solidarity and to pronounce Socialism. They are yearning for emancipation from the galling yoke of wage-slavery, and with all the power of their minds, all the strength of their bodies and all the passion of their souls they are crusading against the ignorance of their fellow-workers and the prejudice of the people.

Steadily the number of class-conscious toilers is increasing, and higher and higher rises the tide that is to sweep away the barriers to progress and civilization.

Let others talk about the tariff and finance—the enlightened workers demand the ownership of the tools of industry and they are building up the Socialist party as a means of getting them.

**The working class alone made the tools; the working class alone can use them, and the working class must, therefore, own them.**

This is the revolutionary demand of the Socialist movement. The propaganda is one of education and is perfectly orderly and peaceable. The workers must be taught to unite and vote together **as a class** in support of the Socialist party, the party that represents them as a class, and when they do this the government will pass into their hands and capitalism will fall to rise no more; private ownership will give way to social ownership,

and production for profit to production for use; the wage-system will disappear, and with it the ignorance and poverty, misery and crime that wage-slavery breeds; the working class will stand forth triumphant and free, and a new era will dawn in human progress and in the civilization of mankind.

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Volume I, already in its second edition, tells the economic conditions prevailing during the colonial period of the United States, and of the origin and development of the large land fortunes such as those of the Astor and Marshall Field families. Volume II, also in its second edition, and Volume III, just published, deal with the great railroad fortunes of Vanderbilt, Gould, Sage, Elkins, Hill, Morgan and others. It is in this volume that the author devotes a chapter to the Pacific quartet, composed of Huntington, Crocker, Stanford and Hopkins. Future volumes are to describe the acquisition of vast railroad

properties by Harriman and the Standard Oil Company, and will also deal with those great fortunes which have grown out of the control of public franchises, mines and various manufacturing industries.

The author arrives at no conclusions as a result of his investigations, but leaves the readers to do so in accordance with the facts which he has presented. In brief, there can be but one conclusion, and that is that thrift, temperance and hard work are not the recipe for getting rich, else many millions of people who have to work hard and who are thrifty and temperate would forthwith become so. Through all fortunes large and small there runs the same heavy streak of fraud and theft, of bribery, graft and corruption. The little trader with his misrepresentation and swindling is different from the "big fellow" in degree only.

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All his writings that he thinks worth preserving are included in this book, which also tells the story of his life and work.

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