
A Workingman's Congress

by Eugene V. Debs

Published in *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, vol. 17, no. 4 (April 1893), pp. 262-264.

The *Magazine* propounds the question: Would a workingman's congress be a move in the right direction? If not, why not? What can be said in favor of such a movement? Is the time ripe for it? What could it do if convened?

Just now, what would be a move in the right direction for workingmen to make? We refer to organized workingmen, for they are the workingmen who think, who want to accomplish something for their own benefit and for the toilers who shall inherit their tasks.

We do not now discuss the federation of organizations, but, rather, the unification of the mind forces of organization; deliberation, rather than federation.

True, all organizations have their annual or biennial conventions for deliberation and for the enactment of laws for their government, and it occurs in these conventions that those whose expressions are made public are taking ever broader views of labor problems, and it would be difficult to chronicle a fact more creditable to the heads and hearts of men who have advanced to the responsible position of leaders.

It is worthy of remark, that in all the labor organizations of the country are to be found men of broad and liberal views, students of industrial affairs, profoundly interested in the welfare of workingmen, but forever confined to their particular organization, they are handicapped; they never advance to their full measure; in a sense, fenced in. They discuss measures which relate to their particular organization, when in fact, labor questions in their legitimate scope, touch the wage workers of the nation, and in a labor congress there would be opportunities to bring into commanding and merited prominence, labor questions in which all are vitally interested.

We are profoundly impressed with the idea that the country cannot know the wealth of mind forces which labor possesses, until a la-

bor congress is convened, and we are quite as much persuaded that such a congress would prove a revelation to those who regard labor organizations with a species of contempt and lofty disdain, as composed of men who are small intellectually and whose minds are chiefly occupied in accomplishing small things, men chiefly desirous of promoting organized jealousies, of feathering their own nests, to be wiped out of existence whenever organized capital deems it prudent to squelch them.

We do not state the position of affairs too narrowly. It is only required to read the monopolistic press to verify our declarations. In it you will find no complimentary declarations relating to organized labor, and the question arises, is organized labor doing those things which ought to be done and which can be done, to change the estimate which a subsidized press ceaselessly puts forth?

We are not opposed to what organized labor is doing. On the contrary, we have only words of commendation for what we see and hear. Labor Day gives opportunities for parades, for many and valuable recreations, splendid addresses, etc., but we advocate something different, better, higher, more important. We should like to see a stately parade of labor's mind forces, free from badges, gewgaws, brass bands, and all things spectacular; a labor congress of labor's intellectual men debating questions which, day by day, are becoming the vital questions of the times in which we live; questions that are up for debate in the parliaments of the world, and in which labor, more than any other interest, is concerned. Such a congress, composed of labor's representative men, would arouse continental interest. The press would not and could not ignore it. The plutocratic class would stand amazed in its presence. It would be a proclamation that workingmen know their rights and are not ready to be enslaved. What says the labor press of the country? The labor congress proposition is up for debate. May we hope to have the views of others?

Edited by Tim Davenport

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · June 2017 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.
First Edition