
The Common Laborer

by Eugene V. Debs

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Contempt has always been the portion of the “common laborer” and this notwithstanding the fact that he is the chief prop in the social fabric and the main support of all civilization. With-



out the common laborer there would be universal collapse and chaos.

Yet even among workers themselves, where it might be expected that all honest labor might be held in

respect, the “common laborer” is made to feel that he is tolerated rather than entitled to equal consideration with others of his class. Indeed, some of the most vulgar and offensive aristocracy I have known has been among the skilled and semi-skilled trades in the working class. They have shut themselves up in little 2-by-4 unions, adopted prohibitive admission fees and dues, and hedged themselves about with exclusiveness as insolent and snobbish as ever provoked the disgust of sensible men.

To these shoddy aristocrats the common laborer appears if possible even lower and more ser-

vile and contemptible than he does in the eyes of the ruling class. But happily this is largely of the past. The machine has brought most of these would-be aristocratic unions and the individuals who compose them down to the common level and the rest will follow in due time.

The common laborer today is no longer ignored or treated with scant decency by the labor movement. He may still be ostracized in certain select craft union circles but he is taking his rightful place in the great industrial movement that is spreading over the world.

The common laborer is the chief sufferer and the most aggrieved victim of the capitalist system. He it is who was denied the chance to learn a trade and perhaps never saw the inside of a schoolroom. He it is who was seized in his childhood and flung headlong into the struggle of life with no chance to prepare or equip for it. From his earliest boyhood he has done the world’s dirtiest and most necessary and useful work and receive only kicks and contempt for his pay.

The common laborer in the past has been the legitimate spoil of every element of society, including his own class. He has been the sport and prey of all. Lower than his level the lowest

could not sink.

And yet the real heart of the working class has always been in common labor and here among these who have been despised we find the truest and noblest specimens of the class.

The common laborer is really the only one who feels the whole crushing burden of capitalist oppression and knows the full and awful meaning of capitalism to the working class. He is at the bottom and he bears the whole load and suffers the deprivations and misery as none others can.

The fate and destiny of not only the whole working class but the whole of humanity are irrevocably bound up in the common laborer and his emancipation is the condition of the emancipation of the race.

Capitalism in reducing the workers to a

common level of wage-slavery, is stripping them only of the qualities that interfere with their solidarity and to compensate for these it is permeating the entire mass with the spirit of proletarian revolt.

Common labor is today the foundation upon which the labor movement is organizing and the revolution is marshalling its forces for the overthrow of wage-slavery.

If the word king were not in such disrepute I should say that the common laborer is king among the workers. He is the unvanquished host and nothing can be done without him.

All hail the common laborer wherever he may be found! He is the stuff of which the revolution is made, the revolution which will lift common labor out of common slavery and make it the common glory of mankind.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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