
Parties

by Eugene V. Debs

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The history of parties, factions, cabals, cliques, juntos, leagues, and alliances, would doubtless be exceedingly interesting. If the historian should begin at the beginning his researches, we conclude, would antedate the deluge. Indeed, there seems to be good reason for believing that in Heaven itself, at one period remote, a party under the leadership of satan existed, whose ambition it was to supplant God himself in controlling the affairs of the universe.

To set himself in glory 'bove his peers,
He trusted to have equall'd the Most High,
If he opposed : And with ambitious aim
Against the throne and monarchy of God
Raised impious war in Heav'n, and battle proud
With vain attempt—¹

We mention such things merely to emphasize the fact that the existence of parties, whether good or bad, is not a modern invention. Manifestly there was a party largely in the majority which took no stock in Noah's declaration that a deluge was coming. He preached it for a hundred years, and during the entire period was showing his faith by his works, for he was all the time getting his ark ready for the impending storm. And from the time that the tribes formed a sort of a cooperative association, and attempted to build a tower which would reach to Heaven, and as a result had their language so confounded that orders could no longer be given, there have been parties dividing the inhabitants of the earth.

We are of the opinion, whether a man gives the subject a casual thought or devotes to it years of investigation, he will find that parties are just now more numerous than ever before since history was res-

¹ From *Paradise Lost* (1667), by **John Milton** (1608-1674).

cued from fable. He will find that every nation, tribe, kingdom, and tongue is a distinct party — a primal condition which the centuries have neither changed nor modified. But the investigator will find that as civilization has subdued barbarism and savagery, parties have multiplied, and now, whether it be sunrise or noon, in civilization he will find more parties in existence than in any other period of the world's history. It may be interesting to inquire why? We think the answer easy enough. It is because the human mind has been in the process of emancipation, and when most enfranchised, when the semblance of a shackle no longer appears, when the disenthralment is complete, and man expands to the full stature of a free man, there will be found the greatest number of parties. It is said of creation and of the Creator, that while He bound all nature fast in fate, He left free the human will. That may have been the intention, but so far the human will has not been free, and of all the slavery that an inscrutable God ever permitted to curse the earth, that of the enslavement of the mind, the will, is the most abhorrent.

The immortal Irish orator, John Philpot Curran,² on one occasion while pleading for the liberty of his client, and speaking “in the spirit of British law,” which he said, “makes liberty commensurate and inseparable from British soil,” said,

“No matter in what language his doom may have been pronounced, no matter what complexion incompatible with freedom, an Indian or an African sun may have burnt upon him; no matter in what disastrous battle his liberty may have been cloven down; no matter with what solemnities he may have been devoted upon the altar of slavery; the first moment he touches the sacred soil of Britain the altar and the god sink together in the dust; his soul walks abroad in its own majesty; his body swells beyond the measure of his chains, that burst from around him, and he stands redeemed, regenerated, and disenthralled by the inevitable genius of universal emancipation.”

But an Irish (?) judge and an Irish (?) jury did not take Mr. Curran's view of the subject and his client, because he dared be free on Irish (British) soil, was sentenced to pay a fine of \$2,500 and to be imprisoned two years, and to give bond for good behavior in the sum

² **John Philpot Curran** (1750-1817), was a liberal Protestant barrister who defended a number of United Irish defendants in treason trials.

of \$10,000. Mr. Curran's client belonged to a party which advocated the liberty of the Irish people and that was his only crime.

It is one thing to break the fetters from the body, but a far different thing to emancipate the mind, the will, the soul, to establish free speech and a free press, a free Bible and a free religion, and when this mind deliverance is secured parties and sects will multiply.

There is a form of freedom which is illusive, the body, the physical man walks abroad, but the tongue is mute and the lips move not to give utterance to sentiments showing that the mind shares the freedom of the body. Poets have sung of the

Eternal spirit of the chainless mind.³

The figure is strong and captivating. It refers to what ought to be rather than to what is. In what land, blessed with even twilight rays of civilization, can be found a healthy intellect which does not realize this existence of penalties ready to be imposed upon opinions if men dare express them, give them to the world? In one land the penalty is dungeons, in another exile, in another death, and in others social, political and religious ostracism. Who are the world's heroes? Accepting standard theories, they are the Caesars and Bonapartes whose monuments are human bones and skulls, and whose bloody tracks, from battle fields to their palaces, are the records of their rise and fall. At their command the nations bled until

* * * Bloodier than the torrent flow
Of Iser, rolling rapidly,⁴

all of the rivers ran crimson to the sea. But the real heroes of the world are the men who have battled for the emancipation of the mind, who have warred for the sovereignty of the soul, who have given thought and opinion and speech the freedom of the universe. It is not required to build monuments of bronze or brass to perpetuate the name and fame of such men. We would as soon think of building a monument to bear testimony to the glories of the noonday sun. They are the pathfinders for men living and coming, who will strike down penalties for opinions and emancipate the mind—

³ Opening line from "The Prisoner of Chillon" (1816), by Lord **George Gordon Byron** (1788-1824).

⁴ From "Hohenlinden" (1803), by **Thomas Campbell** (1777-1844).

For Freedom's battles oft begun,
Bequeath'd from bleeding sire to son,
Tho' baffled oft, is ever won,⁵

and the multiplication of parties shall bear testimony that the "thorny stem of time" has at last budded, blossomed and borne the delicious fruit of mental emancipation.

In this connection we are led to inquire how it happens that within the past decade we have in this country what is known as a Labor party? Is it not the result of mind growth and mind emancipation? Does it not betoken the dawn of a new era? There is a Labor party. There is a distinct labor literature. It may be said, and it is doubtless true, that the Labor party as yet, is crude, somewhat discordant. To admit such things is to compliment the workingmen of the country, because it is proof positive that workingmen have minds of their own and that their differences of opinion relate to methods rather than purpose, and he is a very superficial observer who does not see in this success instead of defeat. If we were required to point out a sign of the times triumphantly indicative of the success of the Labor party in the United States, we should refer at once to the deliberations going forward in the ranks of labor. Propositions are exhaustively analyzed. Obstacles arise and are removed. Breaks occur, faction impedes progress, rivalry disconcerts plans, but in spite of embarrassments and barriers organization proceeds, the party grows and victory invites to effort.

There are those in labor organizations who occasionally evince distrustfulness in ultimate triumph, because of the large number of workingmen who do not come in and keep step to the music of organization. We do not share in their doubts, because we believe in the triumph of right, justice and truth over ignorance, prejudice and superstition. We believe that old ideas are to give place to the new. We believe in the final emancipation of mind. We believe that error and the idols of error are to go down, not immediately, but ultimately, as certain as that the sunshine will dispel fogs, or that draining a marsh will decrease malaria. It should be remembered that the idea of organizing a Labor party is recent. Its years can be counted on one's fingers. Everywhere is missionary ground. The press has but just begun its work. Old parties, barnacled and moss covered, stand in its way and

⁵ Lines from "The Giaour" (1813), by Lord Byron.

are jealous of its progress, but millions of men are reading today where but hundreds were reading yesterday and but tens the day before, and as they read and meditate the scales fall from their eyes and fetters from their minds. The work of emancipation goes grandly on. More drums are beating, more banners are flying, more men are coming into line. The Labor party grows. labor is organizing. Lodges are multiplying, workingmen are coming together, and now comes the battle shout of Federation. Men whose eyes first touched by the mighty oculist abroad in the land saw "men as trees walking" now see clearly that men are marching with stately strides towards the goal of triumph. Men who but yesterday complained that when the angel came down and troubled the waters they could not step in and be healed because no one was there to help them, are now standing erect, cured. All the pools of thought have been agitated and the commotion continues, nor is the angel to take his flight until the mind is completely unfettered and walks abroad knowing no master but reason, sanctified by conviction.

We care not how many parties exist, only those will remain which have a mission to accomplish. Labor has a mission. It is the mission of self-emancipation. For untold centuries it has appeared bare headed and bare footed on all the highways of progress and civilization. But it is going to wear hats and shoes in the future. In the past it has fed the world, in the future it will feed itself more abundantly. In the past it has built palaces for kings, aristocrats, monopolists and millionaires. In the future it will build pleasant homes for itself. In the past labor has woven broadcloths and silks for others and been content with rags. In the future it will wear good clothes, and will have its equitable share of the wealth it creates.

There's a good time coming, boys,
A good time coming.
The pen shall supersede the sword,
And Right, not Might, shall be the lord.
In the good time coming.
Worth, not Birth, shall rule mankind.
And be acknowledged stronger;
The proper impulse has been given;
Wait a little longer. ⁶

⁶ From "The Good Time Coming" (1846), by **Charles Mackay** (1814-1889).