
Evolution

by Eugene V. Debs

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In writing of evolution there is no purpose to investigate or criticize Darwinism relating to "man's place in nature." We take man's place in nature as it stands today regardless of his creation. His remote ancestors may have been apes or tadpoles, or, he may have been created as the Bible proclaims. In any case there has been going forward in processes of evolution a steady unfolding of mental powers, whatever may be said of man's early physical endowments. It is quite possible that in the processes of evolution, man has lost in physical strength and gained in mental vigor. Indeed, investigation, we think, would lead to such a conclusion. This mental energy, it is noticed, exhibits greater development in some men than is found in others and, as a result, the men of the largest brain or mind power manage to rule those of inferior intellectual grasp. To state a general proposition, the evolution of intellectual power is consequent upon education, which is the great unfolding force. Hence, it follows, that those who command the largest educational advantages control those of inferior opportunities. To equalize these opportunities is the great purpose of the American free school system, to secure to all mind evolution, the unfolding of its powers, so that the humblest citizen may become a thinker and be prepared to maintain his independence in all conflicts that may arise between contending classes.

If a man is qualified so much as to read correctly, he, to a certain and to a very large extent, becomes responsible for the progress he makes in mental evolution. Being able to read, he can, if he will, avail himself of the advantages which books confer upon those who read. In that case the processes of evolution go forward with an ever accelerating rapidity. As he reads, his mind expands, unfolds, grasps and solves, and instead of being ruled by others he becomes a force and a factor in government, and in all affairs pertaining to his welfare.

In commerce, in finance, in industries, and in labor the processes of evolution are challenging the attention of men of thought. Intelligent workingmen are profoundly interested in these wonderful exhibitions. They behold new forces in operation and are studying with intense concern to ascertain in what regard they contribute to their well being. In the evolution of business affairs, they behold the concentration of wealth and the power which wealth confers in the hands of the few. They behold the machine everywhere taking the place of men. Unable to counteract such processes of evolution, even if they were desirous of doing so, they inquire with ever increasing solicitude, what must the end be? What, if anything, is evolution contributing to the welfare of those who toil?

If the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, if trusts, syndicates, corporations, and monopolies are the results of evolution on the one hand, it may be affirmed that labor organizations are also the fruits of evolution, and it is just here that comes into view the theory of survival. In evolution as it relates to animals and plants, the strongest survive, the weak go to the wall — disappear — sometimes styled “the survival of the fittest” but always the strongest. It must be granted that when large mind forces are in alliance with wealth, immense strength is developed, and as against ignorance and poverty, the latter must succumb, except incidentally and spasmodically, as in the early days of the French Revolution.

But when the eye surveys the field of organized labor, the fact comes into view that evolution has already accomplished wonders for those who toil. The labor mind as a whole has unfolded to an extent productive of amazement. Grasping every problem that relates to its welfare it is accomplishing results along the line of its active forces, that bear the stamp of practical wisdom, and in the discussion of the fittest, or, the strongest, labor is developing staying qualities which are creating anxiety in the ranks of those who have believed themselves to be the favorites of evolution. They have claimed that their education and their wealth conferred upon them not only the power to rule, but the right to rule, while labor, on the other hand, points to the fact that its mind forces challenge scrutiny; that its skill is more to the world than money. And then, when labor calls the roll of its membership and the men step forth to be counted, the army, the standing army of labor, appalls those who surmise that labor is simply a machine to be operated for their benefit.

We unhesitatingly declare that such are some of the advantages that have come to labor by virtue of evolution, and quite as unhesitatingly do we aver that up to this day labor fails to comprehend, scarcely in any measure whatever, what emancipating blessings evolution has conferred upon it. It not only does not put forth its hand to grasp and utilize its inheritance of power, but wedded to jealousies and selfishness, courts defeat and prefers degeneracy to independence.

If this debasement were universal, we should say that evolution, going forward during all the centuries, had accomplished nothing whatever for labor — and if we wanted an illustration of the fact, we would point to the condition of labor on the Reading Railroad, where men yield up their independence, and like so many peons or helots, wear the badge of servitude placed upon them by McLeod¹ — men who dare not light a lodge fire and proclaim their emancipation from a slavish condition. For such men, neither evolution nor revolution could lift them in a thousand centuries, one inch above the dead line of their degradation.

But, fortunately, such soul inferiority is not universal, nor yet a distinguishing feature in labor affairs of the period. Evolution has not simply unfolded the intellectual powers of the plutocratic class. It has laid its redeeming hand upon millions who toil and now, by rights divine they are organizing — a movement preceded by thought and carried forward by thought, to be crushed out only when Gabriel or some other commissioned herald proclaims that the pendulum of time has made its last vibration.²

But there is a demand for still further evolution in the world of labor. While the armies of labor are divided, and are under the leadership of men who from any base ambition hold their positions to promote selfish ends and aims, plutocrats and their wealth will rule. With such men, evolution has no significance beyond the boundary line of their own mercenary meanness. But they cannot resist the silent, ceaseless operation of evolution. They will die not too soon for labor's emancipation from the thralldom of prejudices they promote. The labor world, if evolution proceeds — and go forward it must, for such is the law — will unify upon all questions where rights are involved. Labor organizations, separate as waves but one as the sea, will

¹ **Archibald Angus McLeod** (1844-1902) was President of the Reading Railroad from 1890 until 1893.

² **Gabriel** is one of three named angels in the Bible, appearing in *Luke*, chapter 1 and *Daniel*, chapter 8.

mass their tremendous power for self-preservation. It is the law — the trend, we shall hope to see its sublime exhibitions of power. We should like to see it come as comes the dawn, with pencilings of light and rising orb, advancing in a cloudless sky to noontide glory. We should like to see it come, as comes the vernal season, with its sunshine and shower, buds and flowers and fruits, while all the feathered songsters make the woodlands vocal with their melodies — but, come it must either gently or with exhibitions of wrath and terror. Labor is the subject of evolution and its forward strides arouse the nation. Too great to be intimidated, too resourceful to take a backward step, its future is destined to be the climax in the process of evolution, since man started on his upward march towards the elysian fields of independence.

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