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# Real Patriotism:

## Letter to the Editor of the *Milwaukee Leader*, April 7, 1917

by James H. Dolsen

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Editor, *The Leader*:

A little while ago the streetcar men of Washington, DC, struck for recognition of their union. They saw that it was only through a closely knit



organization that they could bargain successfully with the corporation which controlled their jobs and owned the transportation system of the capital city.

At this time, however, the international situation was critical. Congress was in session, and in response to the appeals that they patriotically refrain from in any manner embarrassing the government, the strike was postponed. The men were applauded by the kept press of the capital for their sacrificing action and attempts were made to settle the dispute. These failed and just yesterday the strike was called. Immediately the patriotic company officials rushed inn several hundred strikebreakers and took every method of breaking the strike. I doubt but some wealthy “patriots” are financially interested in the traction company, and perhaps a list of the stockholders might even reveal some Congressmen.

Several years ago at a cost running over \$100,000, the industrial relations committee made an exhaustive report declaring the conflict between capital and labor the most pressing problem the country faces and suggesting various methods by which the conflicting factors might be reconciled. The right of organization and its recognition was assumed even by the capitalist members of the commission as a fundamental necessity. Characteristically, we allowed Congress to forget that report and ignore its recommendations.

The conflict between the industrial and financial oligarchy which controls the nation through a feudal system, strikingly similar to that of medieval Europe, and the working people and consuming public under the form of a political democracy, is irreconcilable. What Lincoln said of slavery, that the nation can not exist half slave and half free,” is equally true today. We can not exist as free men and women in a democracy where all the liberties guaranteed by our political institutions become a mockery under the tyranny of economic power concentrated in the hands of a small, irresponsible group.

Because this struggle results in the alignment of the vast producing masses, who are also the chief consuming public, on one side, and the comparatively few owners and controllers of industry and natural resources on the other, we have a tremendous group conflict which Socialists call the “class

conflict.”

Here in the United States this class conflict is reaching a very acute stage, emphasized by the tremendous profits of the great corporations and the swiftly increasing cost of living. It is characteristic that at such a time the ruling class uses every possible means to sidetrack the growing militancy of the workers. No method is more effective in directing this energy than the scarecrow of a foreign war and the consequent spasm of “patriotism” which sweeps the masses of people off their feet.

Let us beware of that “patriotism” rejoiced in by financiers, the intensity of which has a direct relation to its profitableness. With charity, we must judge that great multitude of our fellow citizens who fall victim to the specious pleas raised by the hirelings of the master class and who would not only pour out their own, but would require us also to give our lives for what they conceive as patriotism.

We workers do not despise the “patriotism” which finds the nation an organization worth preserving, but we raise above it the concept of patriotism which would secure to the humblest worker in our country the fullest possible opportunity of living a free, useful life; and because this is possible only by the solution of the class struggle through the triumph of the workers, so to us the highest patriotism is the dedication of our lives and abilities to the service of our fellow workers.

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