

Revolution:
Written for May Day 1907
(April 27, 1907)

This is the first and only International Labor Day. It belongs to the working class and is dedicated to the Revolution.

Today the slaves of all the world are taking a fresh breath in the long and weary march; pausing a moment to clear their lungs and shout for joy; celebrating in festal fellowship their coming freedom.

All hail the Labor Day of May!

The day of the proletarian protest;

The day of stern resolve;

The day of noble aspiration.

Raise high this day the blood-red standard of the Revolution!

The banner of the workingman;

The flag, the only flag, of Freedom.

< insert ornament here >

Slavery, even the most abject — dumb and despairing as it may seem — has yet its inspiration. Crushed it may be, but extinguished never. Chain the slave as you will, O Masters, brutalize him as you may, yet in his soul, though dead, he yearns for freedom still.

< insert ornament here >

The great discovery the modern slaves have made is that they themselves their freedom must achieve. This is the secret of their solidarity; the heart of their hope; the inspiration that nerves them all with sinews of steel.

They are still in bondage, but no longer cower;

No longer grovel in the dust,

But stand erect like men.

Conscious of their growing power the future holds out to them her outstretched hands.

< insert ornament here >

As the slavery of the working class is international, so the movement for its emancipation.

The salutation of slave to slave this day is repeated in every human tongue as it goes ringing round the world.

The many millions are at last awakening. For countless ages they have suffered; drained to the dregs the bitter cup of misery and woe.

At last, at last the historic limitation has been reached, and soon a new sun will light the world.

< insert ornament here >

Red is the life-tide of our common humanity and red our symbol of universal kinship.

Tyrants deny it; fear it; tremble with rage and terror when they behold it.

We reaffirm it and on this day pledge anew our fidelity — come life or death — to the blood-red banner of the Revolution.

< insert ornament here >

Socialist greetings this day to all our fellow workers! To the god-like souls in Russia marching grimly, sublimely into the jaws of hell with the song of the revolution in their death-rattle; to the Orient, the Occident, and all the Isles of the Sea!

Vive la Revolution!

< insert ornament here >

The most heroic word in all languages is *revolution*.

It thrills and vibrates; cheers and inspires. Tyrants and time-servers fear it, but the oppressed hail it with joy.

The throne trembles when this throbbing word is lisped, but to the hovel it is food for the famishing and hope for the victims of despair.

Let us glorify today the revolutions of the past and hail the greater revolution yet to come before Emancipation shall make all the days of the year May Days of peace and plenty for the sons and daughters of toil.

It was with revolution as his theme that Mark Twain's soul drank deep from the fount of inspiration. His immortality will rest at last upon this royal tribute to the French Revolution:

...the ever-memorable and blessed revolution, which swept a thousand years of such villainy away in one swift tidal-wave of blood — one: a settlement of that hoary debt in the proportion of half a drop of blood for each hogshead of it that had been pressed by slow tortures out of that people in the weary stretch of ten centuries of wrong and shame and misery the like of which was not to be mated but in hell. There were two “Reigns of Terror,” if we would but remember it and consider it; the one wrought murder in hot passion, the other in heartless cold blood; the one lasted mere months, the other lasted a thousand years; the one inflicted death on ten thousand persons, the other upon a hundred millions; but our shudders are all for the horrors of the minor Terror, the momentary Terror, so to speak; whereas, what is the horror of swift death by the axe, compared with life-long death from hunger, cold, insult, cruelty, and heart-break? What is swift death by lightning compared with death by slow fire at the stake? A city cemetery could contain the coffins filled by that brief Terror, which we have all been so diligently taught to shiver at and mourn over; but all France could hardly contain the coffins filled by that older and real Terror — that unspeakably bitter and awful Terror which none of us has been taught to see in its vastness or pity as it deserves.¹

Published as “Revolution” in *The Worker*, vol. 17, no. 4 (April 27, 1907), p. 4. Reprinted in two parts as “Revolution” and “Vive la Revolution!” in *Debs: His Life, Writings, and Speeches*. Girard, KS: Appeal to Reason, 1908; pp. 305-307.

¹ Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1889; p. 157.