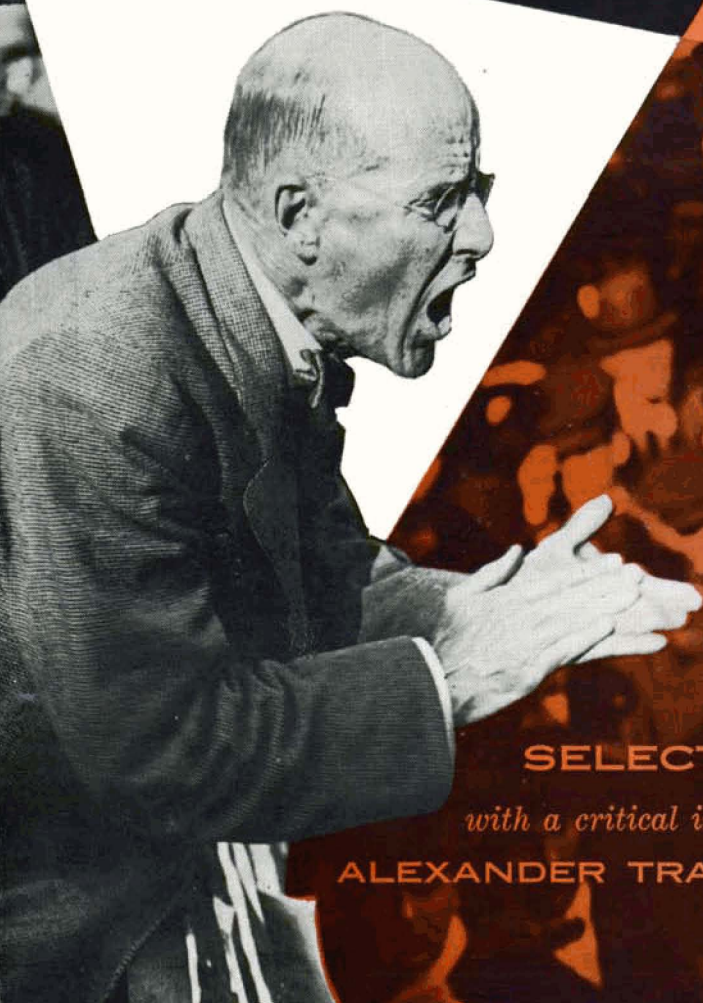


THE HERITAGE OF **GENE DEBS**



SELECTIONS

with a critical introduction by

ALEXANDER TRACHTENBERG

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GENE
DEBS

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: The Heritage of Gene Debs, by *Alexander Trachtenberg*

5

Biographical Sketch, 5; Years of Struggle and Organization, 6; Debs Becomes a Socialist, 7; The Trade Unions, 10; The Socialist Party, 14; The First World War, 19; The Russian Revolution, 21; The Orator, 22; Fearless Fighter for Socialism, 24

SELECTIONS FROM SPEECHES AND WRITINGS

How I Became a Socialist	31
Politics—A Reflex of Economics	33
Political and Industrial Action Are Complementary	33
Political Action and the Unions	34
Industrial Vs. Craft Unionism	35
The Class Struggle and Craft Unionism	36
No Neutrality on the Union Question	37
A Word for the I. W. W.	38
The First Martyrs of the American Class Struggle	38
The Martyred Heroes of Labor	39
Sacco and Vanzetti Must Not Die!	41
Organization and Emancipation	42

Danger Ahead	43
The Socialist Party and Immigration	44
Differences With the Socialist Party	46
Militarism and the Class Struggle	48
The War in Europe	49
In Whose War I Will Fight	51
The Bolsheviki	51
Greetings to Our Russian Comrades	52
Greetings on the Third Anniversary of the Russian Revolution	54
The Right of Free Speech	55
The Supreme Court—A Tribunal of the Ruling Class	56
International Solidarity	57
Our Revolutionary Traditions	58
The Present Industrial System	60
The Present Order Cannot Endure	61
The Future Is Ours	63

THE HERITAGE OF GENE DEBS

By Alexander Trachtenberg

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Eugene Victor Debs was born on November 5, 1855, in Terre Haute, Indiana, originally a French settlement on the left bank of the Wabash. His parents were poor Alsatian immigrants. From them he had an acquaintance with two European languages and a taste for literature which his father particularly cultivated in him. He was named after Victor Hugo, the great democratic and liberty-loving writer.

In his childhood he heard the din of the Civil War—the second American Revolution. His youth was spent in the very midst of the industrial expansion that followed it. Terre Haute at that time had many of the aspects of the pioneer West; but it was already a railway center and of rising importance in the meat industry.

The Debs family was large and when Eugene was fourteen years of age, tall and sturdy, he went into the local railway-repair shop as a laborer. Two years later, he was firing a freight locomotive and was a member of the Brotherhood of Firemen and Enginemen—one of the railroad labor organizations that was growing up in this period of expansion. He showed here keen interest and ability; and within a few years was national secretary of the Brotherhood and editor of its official journal. The building of labor unions on a national scale was then growing apace. Debs contributed much of his energy to promoting the organization of the workers employed on the railways. Besides his own union, he helped to build other unions of railroadmen: Trainmen, Carmen, Switchmen and Telegraphers.

Years of Struggle and Organization

But this period of unprecedented expansion was interrupted by a deep economic crisis in 1873. Lasting for several years, it was perhaps the severest crisis in the history of the country up to that time. Over three million workers—a vast proportion of the working population then—lost their jobs. Entire families perished daily of starvation. The unionization movement of the seventies faced a terrific offensive from the bosses. The struggle lasted until the end of the decade. In the railway strike of 1877, Federal troops were for the first time called into a labor struggle, and the courts gave expression to their conception of a union as a “malicious conspiracy.” In 1874-75, the struggle in the Pennsylvania anthracite fields for the right to organize came to a climax with the execution of ten and the imprisonment of fourteen Irish miners (“Molly Maguires”) in 1877. It was in this struggle that the professional informers and hired provocateurs were employed by the coal companies.

On January 13, 1874, police charged into a Tompkins Square unemployment demonstration in New York and made of it a bloody holocaust.

Many of the national unions were destroyed. Yet labor came out of the period with an increased solidarity and strengthened class consciousness. The movement for an eight-hour day and the struggles in its behalf in the middle eighties, which are responsible for the origin of May First as an international labor holiday, showed the revival of organization and the will to struggle on the part of the workers. Debs took part in this great revival, which continued through the nineties.

In 1893, Debs led in the organization of the American Railway Union, pioneer industrial union of workers of all crafts employed on railroads. He left the high post of the craft organization of the Firemen and Enginemen and became the leader of the new industrial organization. In the year of its formation, the A.R.U. became involved in a

successful struggle against buccaneer Jim Hill's Great Northern operating from Chicago, and in the following year it joined in a sympathetic strike in defense of the Pullman workers who had struck against a wage cut and intolerable conditions in the company-owned "model town" of Pullman, Illinois. The struggle was a bitter one. Contrary to the expressed wishes of State and local authorities, Federal troops were sent by President Cleveland to help the railroads break the strike which was paralyzing them. The strike was lost. Debs was sent to jail for six months on charges of "contempt of court," for continuing to struggle in the face of a sweeping injunction issued by the court against him and other leaders. The original "conspiracy" charge which Debs welcomed was shelved.

It was during his imprisonment in the Woodstock, Illinois, jail that Debs began to see gleams of the political implications of the A.R.U. and Pullman struggles and defeats. He was not new to politics. In 1878, at the age of 23, the year in which he became editor of the *Firemen's Journal*, he had been offered a congressional nomination by the Democrats of Terre Haute. Under the prevailing array of political forces such a nomination was equivalent to election. Debs had declined the nomination because of his absorption in the building of the union. However, in 1885 he was elected by the Democratic Party to the Indiana State Legislature, and he served only one term.

Debs Becomes a Socialist

Debs came out of the Woodstock jail in 1895 shaken, but not completely detached from his capitalist moorings. The next year he followed William Jennings Bryan who, as Democratic presidential candidate had enlisted the support of the People's Party, farmers, groups of middle class elements, and many trade unions. Bryan's famous oratorical *tour de force*, the "Cross of Gold" speech which got him the Democratic nomination in 1896, brought him the support

of many workers, including Socialists. But the lessons learned from the defeated A.R.U. strike were crystallizing in Debs' mind; and in 1897, he addressed to the members of the A.R.U. a political letter in which he declared that "the issue is Socialism versus capitalism," and "I am for Socialism because I am for humanity." He himself made it clear that he was brought to Socialism through the Pullman strike and imprisonment when he later wrote: "I was baptized in Socialism in the roar of conflict."

In 1897, together with his followers in the A.R.U., whose numbers had greatly declined after the Pullman strike, and representatives of Middle Western Socialist groups, Debs organized the Social Democracy of America. This organization considered as one of its aims the establishment of socialist colonies—a Utopian scheme which had already met with failure in America some fifty years before when the United States was a gathering place for adherents of Owenite and Fourierist panaceas. A year later, in 1898, Debs, with Victor Berger, a leading Wisconsin Socialist, helped to organize a split at the convention of the Social Democracy and formed the Social Democratic Party of America. This party was to be built on the pattern of the European Socialist political parties. In 1900-01, the Social Democratic Party joined forces with numerous elements which had broken away from the sectarian Socialist Labor Party, originally founded in 1877, to form the Socialist Party.

Debs was the presidential nominee of the united party in 1900; as such he polled about 100,000 votes. He was again a candidate in 1904, 1908, and 1912, when the vote was still restricted to men, polling first 402,000, then 420,000 and finally almost 900,000 votes. The later vote was obtained in spite of the candidacy of former President Theodore Roosevelt who ran on a program of "social justice" buttressed by planks pilfered from the Socialist platform. Debs declined to be a candidate in 1916. That year, with Allen Benson, a journalist, as presidential nominee, the Socialist Party vote dropped to 585,000. In 1918 Debs made his fa-

mous speech against the war at the Ohio State Convention of the S.P. at Canton, for which he was tried and convicted. In 1920, while serving a prison sentence, Debs was again a presidential candidate and received 920,000 votes.

Besides participating in the national elections as a standard bearer of the party, Debs traveled extensively throughout the country on agitation tours for the party and subscription drives for the various publications with which he was connected, such as the *Appeal to Reason*, the *National Rip Saw*, and numerous other dailies and weeklies as well as the monthly *International Socialist Revue*. Debs was always in demand as a speaker at various political demonstrations, strikes, free-speech fights, defense cases and similar struggles.

In the following pages the editor attempts to give a critical estimate of Debs' place in the American Socialist movement. It is based on personal observation of his activities during a period of twenty years. The attitude of Debs specifically on the role of trade unions, the Socialist Party, the World War (1914-18) and the Russian Socialist Revolution, are the major questions selected for consideration. Several other pertinent matters are briefly commented upon. The editor believes that the true character of Debs is mirrored in his writings and speeches which are reproduced at some length in this booklet (pages 31-64).

These excerpts were taken from an early collection published nearly fifty years ago and from numerous pamphlets and issues of publications to which he regularly contributed. The editor is responsible for the selection and organization of these excerpts and for their titles. Debs' brother Theodore, a lifelong co-worker of Gene, graciously aided the editor in supplying material which he had in his possession.

This booklet is brought out to celebrate the One-Hundredth Anniversary of the birth of Debs. It is a revised and shortened edition of a collection first published in 1928. The editor saw no reason to revise the basic estimate of

Debs' role and the contribution made by him during a half-century of activity with and in behalf of the American working class.

THE TRADE UNIONS

Debs viewed trade unionism as a Socialist. His whole experience in the labor movement had taught him that only a trade union based on a militant program can cope with the offensive of the employers and serve the workers properly in their everyday struggles. His conception of the role of the trade unions in the class struggle, as well as his experience with craft unions, led him to adopt the idea of industrial unionism.

As a Socialist, Debs did not believe in the neutrality policy advocated by most of the leadership of the Socialist Party. According to this policy, the American Federation of Labor and its component unions were to tackle the everyday economic demands of the workers, while the Socialist Party would busy itself with the political problems of the nation and of the labor movement. This meant, of course, leaving the unions to the complete control of the conservative leaders. Unlike the "pure and simple" trade unionist, Debs knew that there could be no absolute separation between the political and economic phases of the labor movement. In 1912, when the Socialist Party was at the height of its strength in membership and influence (120,000), he wrote: "The S.P. cannot be neutral on the union question. It is compelled to declare itself by the logic of evolution, and as a revolutionary party it cannot commit itself to the principles of reactionary trade unionism."

Debs stood for Socialist and other progressive workers joining the existing conservative trade unions, advocating the policy of "boring from within," as the term was then used. As a matter of fact, this policy was enunciated at the very inception of the Socialist Party as against the practice of deserting the existing unions and leaving them to the re-

actionary leaders. The reason for the split from the S.L.P. was primarily based on the differences on the question of dual unionism. Debs never failed to emphasize also the need for the organization of the unorganized, which the craft unions utterly neglected. Neither did Debs recoil from the idea of organizing the unorganized into new unions in view of the failure of the official labor movement to pay any attention to the hosts of workers left outside the labor organizations. He wrote in 1912: "I would encourage industrial independent organization, especially among the millions who have not been organized at all, and I would also encourage the 'boring from within' for all that can be accomplished by the industrial unionists in the craft unions." Even prior to that, in 1910, in a letter to Tom Mann, the English militant trade union leader, he wrote: "We must bore from within and without."

Debs hated class collaboration with all his being and he frequently castigated Samuel Gompers, who for two-score years was the head of the A. F. of L. and who more than any one else personified the policy of "pure and simple" trade unionism. Gompers' connections with the National Civic Federation—an organization of trust magnates (headed by August Belmont, Andrew Carnegie) and capitalist politicians (Marcus Hanna)—always came in for scathing criticism from Debs. "For the very reason Gompers was glorified by Wall Street, Bill Haywood is despised by Wall Street," he declared, thus comparing the then two outstanding figures who represented the opposite poles in the trade union movement.

When Moyer, Haywood and Pettibone, officials of the militant Western Federation of Miners, were on trial for their lives in 1906-07, President Theodore Roosevelt, in an attempt to influence public opinion and the jury, publicly called the three labor leaders "undesirable citizens." Roosevelt then added also Debs' name, for good measure. For many years after that Debs gloried in this appellation and used to quote in his speeches. During the railroad struggles

in 1894, the *New York Times* spoke of Debs as "an enemy of the human race." The *Times* still does not approve of strike leaders.

Although many prominent Socialists were active in various unions, the A. F. of L. leadership was always considered by Debs as the bulwark of reaction, and its affiliation with the National Civic Federation was for Debs a sufficient indication of its class collaborationist policy. Gompers and John Mitchell of the Miners, were for many years vice-presidents of the National Civic Federation, but Mitchell was forced to resign by a United Mine Workers convention on the threat of dropping him as president of the union.

From the very beginning of his acceptance of Socialism as his guiding philosophy, Debs understood that the only real, progressive labor union is the class-struggle union. He never failed to drive home this lesson. The old union—by which he meant the union which Gompers helped to develop and which was founded on the policy of a "fair day's work for a fair day's wage"—he considered as entirely opposed to the interests of the workers. He maintained that this union is "organized on the basis of identity of interests between the capitalists and the wage earners, and spends its time and devotes its energies to harmonizing these two classes."

Debs became a convinced industrial unionist as a result of his experience in building several unions on the railroads. This is why he helped to form the American Railway Union in 1894 as an industrial union of the workers employed on the railroads. He witnessed the jurisdictional disputes which were sapping the vitality of the craft unions from the inside, and he saw that the employers' ability to defeat the workers was increased by craft divisions. The reactionary character of the craft union, according to Debs, lay also in the fact that as a form of trade unionism it was outmoded, unable to cope with the development of large-scale industry, being concerned only with the aristocracy of labor, while leaving millions of workers in basic and

trustified industries unorganized, with no union support.

During the 1919 Steel Strike, under the leadership of William Z. Foster, Debs saw the possibility of the organization of that industry in one union; but he said: "Foster has the right idea of labor organization, but the pity of it is that he will not be able to make any headway with industrial unionism as long as Gompers and his crowd hold labor by the throat."

Debs often castigated craft unionists when he really meant to chastise their leaders to whom the idea of industrial unionism was anathema. A year before his death in 1925, as a guest speaker at the Indiana State A. F. of L. Convention, he shouted his old battle cries: "This is the age of organization. Everything depends on solidarity. . . . Power comes through unity. . . . The labor movement must either go forward or backward. . . . Merge your craft unions."

Syndicalist and DeLeonist overtones can be observed in some of Debs' early writings on economic struggles and industrial unionism.

Debs understood the nature of the class struggle. He saw the array of class forces in every fight the workers waged. This can be observed in all his utterances. He also knew the power and the role of the state in class conflicts. He himself experienced it many times during the struggles in which he was engaged. He fought Gompers' policy of "no politics in the unions" as robbing the unions of their natural and complementary weapon in the struggle against the power of the trusts. He saw the A.R.U. strike broken by military force and when he later described it, he wrote that "in the gleam of every bayonet and the flash of every rifle the class struggle was revealed." He also wrote: "Political power is essential to the workers in their struggle and they can never emancipate themselves without developing and exercising that power in the interest of their class."

Following the sectarian policy of the S.P. against any political alliances (reformist parties can also be sectarian), Debs called upon the trade unionists to follow and vote

only for the Socialist Party. He thereby restricted the possibility of political action of the unions which could have developed organs of political activity of their own, or as they did previously, by joining with the People's Party in the nineties.

THE SOCIALIST PARTY

On many occasions Debs was in open conflict with the S.P. leadership. Although considered as such, Debs was never the real political leader of the party. He represented perhaps the greatest peculiarity in the American Socialist movement. Considered by the rank and file as the personification of the fighting spirit of Socialism, and looked upon by the outside world as the outstanding personality in the American Socialist and labor movement, Debs never sat on the executive committee of the party, except for the last two or three years of his life, when, desperately ill, he was nominally brought in for window dressing. He was never sent as a delegate to a national convention or an international congress, and he never participated in the councils of the party to formulate policies and work out tactics. The leadership of the S.P. studiously avoided bringing Debs into the center of the organization. He was kept on the platform where his eloquence was capitalized, or relegated to writing mainly in fugitive and privately or cooperatively-owned Socialist journals, rather than in the official organs of the party.

The S.P. leadership feared Debs' militant attitude on the burning questions which agitated the membership of the party. They knew his uncompromising stand on many questions and they preferred not to have any quarrels with him. He spoke his mind from time to time either through the press or through letters addressed to close friends, but being organizationally removed from the membership, he could not directly exercise the full political influence over them which otherwise would have been his.

Debs should never have permitted himself to be placed

in such a position by the S.P. leaders. His place was among the broad membership, guarding the party against the reformist leaders and guiding the membership in his own spirit of militancy. He should have been the political leader of the party instead of letting that leadership, in the main, fall into the hands of revisionists and reformists.

During the years 1910-12, the S.P. grew in membership, reaching the highest number in its history. Debs saw the entrance of elements into the party who were joining it not as a truly Socialist party. While in other countries there were parties in which persons, disillusioned with conservative parties, could join, the S.P. was the only available political home for all those who favored reforms which the two capitalist parties opposed. Advocates of woman's suffrage, direct election of U.S. Senators, abolition of child labor, protective labor legislation, municipal ownership and agrarian reforms, joined the Socialist Party through which they hoped to promote these reforms, without bothering about the ultimate aims which were written into the program of the party. In this manner, the militant sections in the party were permeated by altogether alien, though well-wishing elements.

With his workingclass instincts, Debs felt the danger to the Socialist Party lurking in the admission of such elements. These were the years of "trust busting" campaigns, of muckraking and the offering of all sorts of panaceas against the encroachments of corporate wealth. The middle classes were beginning to feel the solidification of American capital and it was looking to reforms to help it out of the difficulties. These elements were finding their way into the Socialist Party, and the well-known among them, particularly the writers and journalists, were immediately acclaimed as leaders. Charles Edward Russel, Allen Benson, and their like became overnight spokesmen of the party. They were elected to executive committees and designated as standard bearers in elections.

Writing in 1911 under the title "Danger Ahead," Debs

warned the party against the degeneration which was sure to set in as a result of the admixture of elements entirely foreign to its program and its aims. He wrote: "It [the S.P.] may become permeated and corrupted with the spirit of bourgeois reform to an extent that will practically destroy its virility and efficiency as a revolutionary organization. . . . The working class and the revolutionary character of the S.P. are of first importance. All the votes of the people would do us no good if we cease to be a revolutionary party."

Lincoln Steffens, the eminent journalist, once interviewed Debs during his presidential campaign of 1908 in the home of Victor Berger, then one of the influential leaders of the S.P. He was asking many questions and Debs was replying to them much to the discomfort of Berger, who claimed to have been the ideological father of Debs. Steffens wanted to know how Debs proposed to deal with the trusts. "Would you pay for or just take them," asked Steffens. "Take them," came the quick and sure reply of Debs. "No, you wouldn't," cried Berger, "not if I was there, and I answer that we would offer to pay."

To many in the Socialist Party, the essence of Socialism was public ownership of public utilities. To these advocates Debs addressed himself in his characteristic manner: "Government ownership of public utilities means nothing for labor under capitalist ownership of government." Debs knew of the breaking of strikes in government-owned industries and the ban on unions in these industries.

Debs crossed swords with the S.P. leaders when they advocated the A. F. of L. policy of excluding immigrants, especially East and South Europeans and Asians. In a letter to a delegate to the 1910 convention, which adopted a resolution dealing with immigration, he wrote: "I have just read the majority report of the committee on immigration. It is utterly unsocialistic, reactionary and in truth outrageous, and I hope you will oppose it with all your power. The idea that certain races are to be excluded because of

tactical expediency would be entirely consistent in a bourgeois convention of self-seekers, but should have no place in a proletarian gathering under the auspices of an international movement that is calling on the oppressed and exploited workers of all the world to unite for their emancipation."

To Debs such a stand favoring the exclusion of workers from other countries meant forsaking the principle of international solidarity and he called upon the members "to stand squarely on our revolutionary working-class principles and make our fight openly and uncompromisingly against all our enemies, adopting no cowardly tactics and holding out no false hopes."

At the time of the left-wing split from the S.P. in 1919, Debs was in prison. Only partial information could reach him regarding the political controversy in the party which preceded this split. While Debs was bound by many ties to the Socialist Party, he did not fully agree with its leadership. During the 1919 convention the remaining left-wing elements succeeded under pressure of the split, in forcing a resolution which would insure Debs the nomination for the presidency at the 1920 convention, where the question of candidates was to be dealt with. The leaders did not wish to have Debs, who was then in prison, nominated as a candidate. They claimed that the size of the vote would be affected and did not want to flaunt before the country a presidential candidate who was in prison. When, in spite of their importunities, he was finally nominated in 1920, and a committee was sent to visit him in the penitentiary to notify him officially of the nomination, he surprised the committee with a devastating criticism of the party and especially the stewardship of the leaders.

Regarding the platform adopted at the convention which nominated him, he said: "I wish I might say that it had my unqualified approval." He went on to say that platforms are not so important, as "we can breathe the breath of revo-

lution into any platform." He emphasized, however, that "Socialist platforms are not made to catch votes" and that "we are in politics not to get votes but to develop power to emancipate the working class." It was also significant that on that occasion he expressed regret "that the convention did not see its way clear to affiliate with the Third International without qualifications." Debs, therefore, allied himself with that third of the delegates of the 1920 Convention which favored the acceptance of the rules of admission to the Communist International, and was opposed to Hillquit's proposal for affiliation with reservations. To the S.P. leaders who were present he addressed himself point blank with the following rebuke: "There is a tendency in the party to become a party of politicians [read: opportunists.—A. T.], instead of a party of the workers."

Removed from the outside world by his incarceration, Debs, perhaps, could not see sufficiently that this was no longer *a tendency*, but a *fact*. The process of degeneration, beginning with the struggle against the left wing, was fast becoming completed and Debs, having recognized that the S.P. was becoming "a party of politicians instead of a party of workers," should have definitely broken with the politicians and joined with the militant workers who left, or were leaving, the S.P. in large numbers, Debs knew enough about the party to realize that it no longer was the party he had visioned in 1908—a "class-conscious, revolutionary, Socialist party which is pledged to abolish the capitalist system, class rule and wage slavery."

Debs made the mistake which many others have made. At the beginning of the Third International, some Socialist leaders emphasized the *principle of unity* more than the *unity of principle*. "About the time we get in shape to do something," Debs wrote then, "we have to split up and waste our energy in factional strife. We preach unity everlastingly, but we ourselves keep splitting apart."

Debs failed to realize that what was then generally taking place was the separation of the wheat from the chaff,

the freeing of the militant elements of the party from the very opportunists which he himself saw in the party leadership. The "factional strife" which he deprecated was nothing but the hammering out of a clear-cut policy based on Marxism, which the party had polluted with all sorts of reformist nostrums. The class struggle was carried from the shops right into the party, and the division which followed, admitting sectarian excesses, was based on class lines. Later history proved that to the hilt.

Unlike Lenin, on an international scale, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg in Germany, and Charles Ruthenberg in this country, who not only criticized the reformist leaders but fought them and organized against them, Debs remained only the critic. When he was released from prison, he allowed the same leaders whom he held responsible for ruining the party, to use him as a shield to cover their alliances with the trade-union bureaucracy and capitalist politicians.

In 1905, Debs wrote on the place of the class struggle in the program of the labor movement, to say nothing, of a Socialist party: "We insist that there is a class struggle; that the working class must recognize it; that they must organize economically and politically upon the basis of that struggle; and that when they do so organize they will then have the power to free themselves and put an end to that struggle forever."

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Debs was an uncompromising opponent of imperialist wars and as such he was convicted in 1918. He was guided in his anti-war stand by his understanding of the economic causes of wars and by his loyalty to the principle of international solidarity of Socialism. He denounced the European Socialists who turned war supporters soon after the outbreak of the war in the summer of 1914. In 1915, when America began to prepare to join the war in Europe, he

wrote an article for an anti-Preparedness issue of the *Appeal to Reason*, in which he derided those who supported the war. There were many expressions in that article which did not harmonize with his known convictions. In letters to the paper he was even accused of harboring pacifist illusions. In a reply in another issue of the paper, Debs came back with the following declaration of his position: "No, I am not opposed to all wars, nor am I opposed to fighting under all circumstances, and any declaration to the contrary would disqualify me as a revolutionist."

Debs reiterated that he was "only opposed to ruling class war," and that he refused "to obey any command to fight for the ruling class, but will not wait to be commanded to fight for the working class."

Lenin praised the stand of Debs on the war. In the famous *Letter to American Workers* he later wrote (1918): "... I also recall the words of one of the most beloved leaders of the American proletariat, Eugene Debs, who wrote in the *Appeal to Reason*, I believe towards the end of 1915 [September 11], in the article 'In Whose War Will I Fight,' (I quoted that article at the beginning of 1916, at a public meeting of workers in Berne, Switzerland) ... that he, Debs, knows of only one holy and, from the standpoint of the proletariat, legal war, namely: the war against the capitalists, the war for the liberation of mankind from wage slavery!"

Debs took seriously the anti-War resolution adopted at the S.P. Emergency Convention at St. Louis immediately upon the declaration of war by the United States, in April, 1917. Although adopted by the referendum vote of an overwhelming majority of the members, the resolution soon became a mere scrap of paper. The leaders who voted for it at the convention because of the pressure of the rank and file members, sabotaged its execution and completely nullified the provisions calling for militant action, which were contained in it.

At the Ohio state convention of the party at Canton, June 16, 1918, Debs again expressed what he had said be-

fore America's entrance into the imperialist war. Charles Ruthenberg, the leader of the Socialist Party in Ohio, and two others were already in prison and Debs took the cause of their imprisonment as the text for his address to the convention. The Government convicted Debs for this anti-war speech and tried to make his conviction and imprisonment an example, which was intended to serve as a warning to militant workers. Because of the nationwide protests, especially by thousands of trade unions, which were concerned about his imprisonment, Debs was later offered his freedom by President Harding. But he would not leave prison except on his own terms. On Christmas Day, December 25, 1921, after almost three years of incarceration, the 68-year-old true patriot and militant Socialist walked out of the prison door amidst the cheers of the inmates, broken in health, which he never regained till his death five years later, October 20, 1926.

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

In Debs the Russian Revolution found an immediate and sympathetic response. He considered the Socialist Revolution "the greatest in point of historic significance and far-reaching influence in the annals of the race," and sensed the difference between the compromising Mensheviks and the indomitable Bolsheviks, who, under the leadership of Lenin, forged ahead toward the proletarian revolution. In addressing himself to the Russian Revolution on the First Anniversary of the Revolution he wrote: "The achieved glory of your revolutionary triumph is that you have preserved inviolate the fundamental principles of international Socialism and refused to compromise." When the name Bolshevik was spoken with derision among his party friends, Debs declared publicly: "I am a Bolshevik from the crown of my head to the tips of my toes." To the jury at his trial, he defiantly declared: "I have been accused of expressing sym-

pathy with the Bolsheviks of Russia. I plead guilty to the charge."

When the Socialist Party delegation visited Debs at Atlanta in connection with his nomination for the presidency, the question of "dictatorship" came up in the discussion about the Russian Revolution. Debs spoke about the "unfortunate phrase" and stated that "dictatorship is autocracy." But he immediately explained that "there is no autocracy in the rule of the masses." The political organizer in him led him also to the conclusion that "during the transition period the revolution must protect itself." To the Socialist leaders who stated that they were "for" the Russian Revolution, but "did not like certain features of it," Debs openly declared, in speaking in response to the notification committee: "I heartily support the Russian Revolution without reservations."

THE ORATOR

The fact that Debs was the most eloquent speaker the American labor movement has produced, contributed a great deal to his being kept on the platform. American history abounds with names of great orators who flourished in legislative halls and pulpits. Daniel Webster and Wendell Phillips are probably the most illustrious representatives of these types of American oratory. Debs was much impressed with the published orations which he read, and in his youth trained himself in the art of public speaking. The atheistic exhortations of Robert Ingersoll and the eloquent, but empty denunciations of "the interests" by William Jennings Bryan in his early election campaigns, had probably a direct influence on Debs' flair for public speaking.

There was not in Debs' speaking that intellectual force that was behind the oratory of the Socialist leader, Jean Jaures, the professor and parliamentarian, who became the public tribune in France. Debs on the platform was more

the evangelist. He appealed to his audience rather than reasoned with it. He always tried to convert, and his speaking pose betrayed his deep earnestness. His figures of speech were apt and poetic. He often grew lyrical and his rhythmic body responded to the rhythm of his utterances. He kept his audience in raptures and he often appeared to those near him as though he was in ecstasy.

His writings were of the same pattern as his speeches. He probably dictated most of his published articles. They read like impassioned orations. They particularly suited a paper like the *Appeal to Reason*, which was perhaps the best agitational medium the American labor movement ever produced. Its regular editions ran into hundreds of thousands and its special campaign issues reached millions.

With his eloquent voice and trenchant pen, Debs stirred the imagination of large sections of the American working class. His appearance in a struggle was sure to result in the revival of militancy, for he knew how to describe to the workers and their families their life under capitalism and to inspire them with hope for ultimate victory.

John Swinton, the famous labor journalist and formerly managing editor of *The Sun*, heard Debs speak in New York in 1894 from the same platform Lincoln spoke in 1860. He then wrote of his impression of Debs: "Debs in Cooper Union reminded me of Lincoln there. As Lincoln, of Illinois, became an efficient agent for freedom, so, perchance might Debs, of Indiana, become in the impending conflict for the liberation of labor. Let us never forget Lincoln's great words, 'Liberty before property; the man before the dollar.'"

Swinton saw in Debs the future fighting leader of American labor. John Whitcomb Riley, the Hoosier poet, gave us a closeup of the human side of Debs in the tender lines of a poem he wrote about Terre Haute:

*Go search the earth from end to end
And where's a better all-around friend
Than Eugene Debs?—a man that stands*

*And just holds out in his two hands
As warm a heart as ever beat
Betwixt here and the Judgment Seat!*

Victor Berger once said about him: "Debs with the soft heart—Debs is the orator." What he meant by it was that Debs was only to be considered the platform speaker and was not to be given the opportunity to participate in the real political work of the party. His "soft heart," meaning, of course, that his proletarian instinct, which led him to react militantly to problems arising out of the class struggle, might interfere with the work of the hard-headed and hard-hearted opportunist politicians—the Bergers and the Hill-quits.

FEARLESS FIGHTER FOR SOCIALISM

In the two outstanding events in Debs' life in which his class integrity was tested, in the early career, the A.R.U. strike and, in the evening of his life, the World War, he revealed himself a fearless revolutionist. "I would rather be a thousand times a free soul in jail than a sycophant or coward on the streets."

Throughout the trial for his Canton speech which began September 9, 1918, Debs conducted himself as a true representative of the American working class. He spoke, himself, to the jury from notes assembled the night before. He declined to have witnesses for the defense and pleaded guilty to the anti-war charge made against him by the Government. He used the court as a tribune to speak to the people of the country. He refused to recant anything he had said in opposition to, or regarding the imperialist character of the war. In his speech to the jury, he repeated the substance of his Canton speech and, in fact, made it stronger. The anti-war resolution of the St. Louis convention, which was fast becoming a nullity, was revived by him. Flesh and blood was put on it when Debs spoke for two hours to the

jury on that memorable September 12, 1918, in the Federal Court in Cleveland.

The jury, having found Debs guilty "as charged" under the Espionage Law, he was brought for sentence on September 14. Availing himself of the customary right to make a statement before sentence is imposed, he spoke extemporaneously, without a scrap of paper in his hands, yet militantly and brilliantly. He prefaced his remarks to the court as follows: "Years ago I recognized my kinship with all living things, and I made up by mind that I was not one bit better than the meanest of the earth. I said then, I say now, that while there is a lower class, I am in it; while there is a criminal element, I am of it; while there is a soul in prison, I am not free."

In his last remarks as a free man, Debs spoke to the people through the court about the rulers of America:

"Your Honor, the five per cent of the people that I have made reference to, constitute that element that absolutely rules our country. They privately own all our public necessities. They wear no crowns; they wield no scepters, they sit upon no thrones; and yet they are our economic masters and our political rulers. They control this Government and all its institutions. They control the courts. . . . And so long as this is true, we can make no just claim to being a democratic government—a self-governing people."

He spoke about the exploited in the mines, mills, and factories:

"In the struggle—the unceasing struggle—between the toilers and producers and their exploiters, I have tried, as best I might, to serve those among whom I was born, with whom I expect to share my lot until the end of my days.

"I am thinking this morning of the men in the mills and factories; I am thinking of the women who, for a paltry wage, are compelled to work out their lives; of the little children who, in this system, are robbed of their childhood, and in their early, tender years, are seized in the remorseless grasp of Mammon, and forced into the industrial

dungeons, there to feed the machines while they themselves are being starved body and soul. . . ."

He spoke of what is to be done and about the rising hosts of liberation:

"This order of things cannot always endure. I have registered my protest against it. I recognize the feebleness of my effort, but fortunately I am not alone. There are multiplied thousands of others who, like myself, have come to realize that before we may truly enjoy the blessings of civilized life, we must reorganize society upon a mutual and cooperative basis; and to this end we have organized a great economic and political movement that is spread over the face of all the earth.

"There are today upwards of sixty million Socialists, loyal, devoted, adherents to this cause, regardless of nationality, race, creed, color or sex. They are all making common cause. They are all spreading the propaganda of the new social order. They are waiting, watching and working through all the weary hours of the day and night. They are still in the minority. They have learned how to be patient and abide their time. They feel—they know, indeed—that the time is coming in spite of all opposition, all persecution, when this emancipating gospel will spread among all the peoples, and when this minority will become the triumphant majority and, sweeping into power, inaugurate the greatest change in history. . . ."

In conclusion, Debs spoke of the inevitable future, translating his simple but cogent declaration to the jury "that the sun of capitalism was setting, while the sun of Socialism was rising" into this poetic image:

"When the mariner, sailing over tropic seas, looks for relief from his weary watch, he turns his eyes toward the Southern Cross, burning luridly above the tempest-vexed ocean. As the midnight approaches, the Southern Cross begins to bend, and the whirling worlds change their places, and with starry finger-points the Almighty marks the passage of time upon the dial of the universe, and though no

bell may beat the glad tidings, the look-out knows that the midnight is passing—that relief and rest are close at hand.

“Let the people take heart and hope everywhere, for the cross is bending, the midnight is passing, and joy cometh with the morning. . . .”

It took only *one week* to try, convict, and sentence Debs. He took his conviction of ten years' imprisonment as a consistent and militant Socialist. When the U.S. Supreme Court, including the well-known liberal Justices, Holmes and Brandeis, and with Holmes writing the opinion, unanimously affirmed the conviction in April, 1919, he declared: “The decision is perfectly consistent with the character of the Supreme Court as a ruling class tribunal.”

On April 19, 1919, though the war was over a half-year, Debs, at the age of 65 and in delicate health, entered Moundsville (West Virginia) prison to serve his sentence. (The Federal prisons were still overcrowded, housing many political prisoners. Later, Debs was removed to the Federal penitentiary at Atlanta where he stayed until he was released. It was rumored that the Government feared that the West Virginia miners might attempt to free Debs from the insufficiently protected county jail and, therefore, had removed him to the security of the Atlanta Penitentiary). To the workers and others in America, whose minds and hearts were turned to him, Debs declared through the press, in the spirit of Henley's “Invictus”: “I enter the prison doors a flaming revolutionist—my head erect, my spirit untamed and my soul unconquerable.”

Debs began his career in the ranks of the trade union movement. He reached a high position in his union and led several historic battles. When he came to the Socialist movement he was already a national figure with a prison term and a record of heroic labor struggles behind him.

We have already had occasion to refer to the policy which the S.P. leadership employed to exploit Debs to recruit members, to gather subscriptions for various publications, and especially to obtain votes in national elections.

These public activities were important and enabled Debs to bring the message of Socialism to large masses in the land. But he could do more. He could give direct political leadership to the party and inspire the workers in their day-to-day struggles. He exhibited, however, a lack of theoretical training. For instance, he accepted the position of the S.P. that there was no special Negro question in the United States, and therefore no need for any special demands for the Negro people on the ground that Socialism would bring full freedom to the Negro people as to other minorities. The national question as such was not discussed then in the party nor was it to be found in current party literature.

In keeping with the party's "neutrality" policy with regard to the trade unions, Debs, though he was opposed to this policy, was nevertheless in later years won away from the broad field of labor struggles almost exclusively to the restricted parliamentary election campaigns and agitational fields of activity. The result was that Debs, who in earlier years could organize labor unions and, through his great eloquence and inspiring appeal, move large masses into action, became mainly a platform speaker and a presidential candidate. If it were not for the fact that Debs frequently rebelled against the position in which he was placed by the S.P. leaders and on his own initiative threw himself into struggles which flared up from time to time, thereby keeping his militant spirit alive, we might have witnessed the transformation of a mountain eagle into a bird of paradise.

The theoretical level of the S.P. was low. Little original Marxist literature was produced and whatever educational work was done among the members was in the main on the elementary level—mostly through the vast distribution of mass literature and the press. There was no grounding in Marxist theory in the mass of membership and, in building a party mainly for election purposes, there was little opportunity for experience in the mass struggles of the workers. The milieu in which Debs worked was not conducive to the development of his native abilities and talents for real

political leadership. Although the reverse is usually the case, the S.P. received from Debs more than it gave him. He lived and drew sustenance from his earlier attainments and from general struggles and developing national and international events.

By not participating at the center of political discussion and decisions in the party, and functioning as it were on his own, he was not always able to pass judgment upon a situation engendered in a new period of struggle. That he was always attuned to the manifestations of the class struggle, that he was a militant fighter for the immediate needs of the workers as well as for the ultimate aim of Socialism—the material culled from his speeches and writings which follow, will bear witness. Even when he was in disagreement with persons or organizations in the broad labor movement, his voice and pen were always placed at the disposal of all who were engaged in struggles. Thus we see him rushing to aid the I.W.W. when it was attacked, although he had broken politically with it soon after its foundation; joining the Friends of Soviet Russia and the International Labor Defense, and writing for their publications as well as the *Liberator* and the T.U.E.L.'s *Labor Herald*, though these organizations and journals were on the S.P. blacklist because there were Communists among their leaders and editors. Forgotten and unsung by the official labor movement or the S.P., the martyrdom of the "Molly Maguires" and the Chicago militant labor leaders who fought for the 8-hour day, were to him golden pages in the history of the American labor movement, and the campaign to save the framed Sacco and Vanzetti, was always close to his heart.

While on a speaking tour during the Amalgamation campaign conducted by the Trade Union Educational League, in 1922, William Z. Foster, the leader of the campaign, on a tour through the country, was arrested in a Denver hotel just before leaving for the meeting hall. He was put in a car, taken to Wyoming and ordered to stay out of Colorado.

Debs heard of Foster's arrest and immediately wrote him a letter on August 26, 1922: "If I were not confined in a sanitarium under treatment, I would be at once with you and tender my services in any way in my power. You are to be congratulated, after all, upon the infamous outrage perpetrated upon you in the name of capitalist law and justice, for in these outrages . . . is revealed the fear of their thieving and brutal masters, and this is the highest compliment they could possibly pay you. All I have to say is that when I have recovered my strength sufficiently to take up my work again I shall be with you shoulder to shoulder in your stand for the working class and industrial freedom."

Anarcho-Liberal and reformist writers of all hues used Debs for copy, particularly during the war and during his confinement in prison. They never spoke of Debs the Marxist, the revolutionary Socialist, the militant fighter and beloved spokesman of the American working class. They went out of their way to advertise Debs only as the "good man," the "humanitarian," taking advantage of his good nature and friendliness to the people. These appellations could not express the meaning of the whole man Debs, who always wanted to be known as an unalloyed revolutionist and fighter for full freedom and democracy and Socialism.

Debs eschewed any other but the path of struggle, both on the economic and political fields. As such, he remembered

Debs eschewed any other but the path of struggle both on the economic and political fields. As such, he is remembered by the present generation of true American fighters for democracy and Socialism, who keep his memory green so that it may be passed on to future generations. Eugene Victor Debs, better known to all those who worked with or followed him, as Gene Debs, belongs to the revolutionary traditions of the American people and its working class.

HOW I BECAME A SOCIALIST

(From the New York Comrade, April, 1902)

It all seems very strange to me now, taking a backward look, that my vision was so focalized on a single objective point that I utterly failed to see what now appears as clear as the noonday sun, so clear that I marvel that any working-man, however dull, uncomprehending, can resist it.

But perhaps it was better so. I was to be baptized in Socialism in the roar of conflict and I thank the gods for reserving to this fitful occasion the fiat, "Let there be light!"—the light that streams in steady radiance upon the broad-way of the Socialist republic.

The skirmish lines of the American Railway Union were well advanced. A series of small battles were fought and won without the loss of a man. A number of concessions were made by the corporations rather than risk an encounter. Then came the fight on the Great Northern, short, sharp and decisive. The victory was complete—the only railroad strike of magnitude ever won by an organization in America. . . .

Next followed the final shock—the Pullman strike—and the American Railway Union again won, clear and complete. The combined corporations were paralyzed and helpless. At this juncture there were delivered from wholly unexpected quarters, a swift succession of blows that blinded me for an instant and then opened wide my eyes—and in the gleam of every bayonet and the flash of every rifle the class struggle was revealed. This was my first practical lesson in Socialism, though wholly unaware that it was called by that name.

An army of detectives, thugs and murderers were equipped with badge and bludgeon and turned loose; old

hulks of cars were fired; the alarm bells tolled; the people were terrified; the most startling rumors were set afloat; the press volleyed and thundered, and over all the wires sped the news that Chicago's white throat was in the clutch of a red mob; injunctions flew thick and fast, arrests followed, and our office and headquarters, the heart of the strike, was sacked, torn out and nailed up by the "lawful" authorities of the federal government; and then in company with my loyal comrades I found myself in Cook County jail at Chicago with the whole press screaming conspiracy, treason and murder. . . .

The Chicago jail sentences were followed by six months at Woodstock and it was here that Socialism gradually laid hold of me in its own irresistible fashion. Books and pamphlets and letters from Socialists came by every mail and I began to read and think and dissect the anatomy of the system in which workingmen, however organized, could be shattered and battered and splintered at a single stroke. The writings of Edward Bellamy and Robert Blatchford early appealed to me. The *Cooperative Commonwealth* of [Lawrence] Gronlund also impressed me, but the writings of [Karl] Kautsky were so clear and conclusive that I readily grasped, not merely his argument, but also caught the spirit of his Socialist utterance—and I thank him and all who helped me out of darkness into light.

It was at this time, when the first glimmerings of Socialism were beginning to penetrate, that Victor L. Berger—and I have loved him ever since—came to Woodstock, as if a providential instrument, and delivered the first impassioned message of Socialism I had ever heard—the very first to set "the wires humming in my system." As a souvenir of that visit there is in my library a volume of *Capital*, by Karl Marx, inscribed with the compliments of Victor L. Berger, which I cherish as a token of priceless value.

The American Railway Union was defeated but not conquered—overwhelmed but not destroyed. It lives and pulsates in the Socialist movement, and its defeat but blazed the

way to economic freedom and hastened the dawn of human brotherhood.

POLITICS — A REFLEX OF ECONOMICS

(Delivered at Girard, Kansas, where the Appeal to Reason was published, May 23, 1908, on the occasion of nomination as presidential candidate by the Socialist Party.)

It is a fact that politics is simply the reflex of economics. The material foundation of society determines the character of all social institutions—political, educational, ethical and spiritual. In exact proportion as the economic foundation of society changes, the character of all social institutions changes to correspond to that basis. Half of this country was in favor of chattel slavery, and half was opposed to it, geographically speaking. Why was the church of the south in favor of chattel slavery? Why was the church of the north opposed to chattel slavery? The northern capitalist wasn't a bit more opposed to chattel slavery from any moral sense than was the southern plantation owner. The south produced cotton for the market by the hand labor of Negro slaves. On the other hand, the north was not dependent upon cotton, could raise no cotton. In the north it was the small capitalist at the beginning of capitalism, who had begun to manufacture with the machine, and who wanted cheap labor; and the sharper the competition the cheaper he could buy his labor. To the southern plantation owner, chattel slavery was the source of his wealth.

POLITICAL AND INDUSTRIAL ACTION ARE COMPLEMENTARY

(Delivered at Canton at the Ohio State Convention of the Socialist Party, June 16, 1918.)

Political action and industrial action must supplement and sustain each other. You will never vote the Socialist

republic into existence. You will have to lay its foundations in industrial organization. The industrial union is the forerunner of industrial democracy. In the shop where the workers are associated is where industrial democracy has its beginning. Organize according to your industries! Get together in every department of industrial service! United and acting together for the common good your power is invincible.

When you organize industrially you will soon learn that you can manage as well as operate industry. You will soon realize that you do not need the idle masters and exploiters. They are simply parasites. They do not employ you as you imagine but you employ them to take from you what you produce, and that is how they function in industry. You can certainly dispense with them in that capacity. You do not need them to depend upon for your jobs. You can never be free while you work and live by their sufferance. You must own your own tools and then you will control your own jobs, enjoy the products of your own labor and be free men instead of industrial slaves.

POLITICAL ACTION AND THE UNIONS

(From Debs: His Life, Writings and Speeches, 1908, pp. 91, 136, 142.)

Socialism is first of all a political movement of the working class, clearly defined and uncompromising, which aims at the overthrow of the prevailing capitalist system by securing control of the national government and by the exercise of the public powers, supplanting the existing capitalist class government with Socialist administration—that is to say, changing a republic in name into a republic in fact.

Socialism also means a coming phase of civilization, next in order to the present one, in which the collective people will own and operate the sources and means of wealth production, in which all will have equal right to work and all will cooperate together in producing wealth and all will

enjoy all the fruit of their collective labor. . . .

The cry, "no politics in the union," "dragging the union into politics," or, "making the union the tail of some political kite," is born of ignorance or dishonesty, or a combination of both. It is echoed by every ward-heeling politician in the country. The plain purpose is to deceive and mislead the workers.

The fully developed labor unionist uses both his economic and political power in the interest of his class. He understands that the struggle between labor and capital is a class struggle; that the working class are in a great majority, but divided, some in trade unions and some out of them, some in one political party and some in another; that because they are divided they are helpless and must submit to being robbed of what their labor produces, and treated with contempt; that they must unite their class in the trade union on the one hand and in the Socialist Party on the other hand; that industrially and politically they must act together as a class, and that any workingman who deserts his union on strike and goes to the other side is a scab, and any workingman who deserts his party on Election Day and goes over to the enemy is a betrayer of his class and an enemy of his fellow-men.

INDUSTRIAL VS. CRAFT UNIONISM

(From article on "Unionism and Socialism," reprinted in Debs: His Life, Writings and Speeches, 1908, p. 133.)

The "pure and simple" trade union of the past does not answer the requirements of today, and they who insist that it does are blind to the changes going on about them, and out of harmony with the progressive forces of the age.

The attempt to preserve the "autonomy" of each trade and segregate it within its own independent jurisdiction, while the lines which once separated them are being obliterated, and the trades are being interwoven and interlocked

in the process of industrial evolution, is as futile as to declare and attempt to enforce the independence of the waves of the sea.

A modern industrial plant has a hundred trades and parts of trades represented in its working force. To have these workers parceled out to a hundred unions is to divide and not to organize them, to give them over to factions and petty leadership and leave them an easy prey to the machinations of the enemy. The dominant craft should control the plant or, rather, the union, and it should embrace the entire working force. This is the industrial plan, the modern method applied to modern conditions, and it will in time prevail.

The attempt of each trade to maintain its own independence separately and apart from others results in increasing jurisdiction entanglements, and is fruitful of dissension, strife and ultimate disruption.

THE CLASS STRUGGLE AND CRAFT UNIONISM

(From Speech on "Craft Unionism," delivered at Chicago, November 23, 1905, at the inaugural convention of the Industrial Workers of the World.)

The working class are in an overwhelming majority. They have the numbers. They ought to have the power. And they would have the power if only they were conscious of their interests *as a class*. . . .

Every effort is put forth by the exploiting capitalist to prevent workingmen from seeing the class struggle. The capitalist insists that there is no such struggle. . . .

We insist that there *is* a class struggle; that the working class must recognize it; that they must organize economically and politically upon the basis of that struggle; and that when they do so organize they will then have the power to free themselves and put an end to that struggle forever.

Now, have not the workers, especially here in Chicago, had sufficient experience during the last few years? Have they not been defeated often enough to demonstrate the inherent

weakness of the old trade union movement? Have they not been clubbed by the police and flung into jail often enough? Haven't they had experience of this kind enough to open their eyes to the fact that there is a mighty class struggle in progress, and that there will never be any material change in their condition until they unite their class in every department of industrial activity?

Speaking for myself, I was made to realize long ago that the old trade union was utterly incompetent to deal successfully with the exploiting corporations in this struggle. I was made to see that in craft unionism the capitalist class have it in their power to keep the workers divided, to use one part of them with which to conquer and crush another part of them. Indeed, I was made to see that the old form of unionism separates the workers and keeps them helpless at the mercy of their masters.

NO NEUTRALITY ON THE UNION QUESTION

(From article, "Sound Socialist Tactics," in International Socialist Review, February, 1912.)

The Socialist Party cannot be neutral on the union question. It is compelled to declare itself by the logic of evolution, and as a revolutionary party it cannot commit itself to the principles of reactionary unionism. Not only must the Socialist Party declare itself in favor of economic unionism, but the kind of unionism which alone can complement the revolutionary action of the workers on the political field. . . .

Political power is essential to the workers in their struggle, and they can never emancipate themselves without developing and exercising that power in the interests of their class.

I believe in making every effort within our power to promote industrial unionism among the workers and to have them all united in one economic organization. To accomplish this I would encourage industrial independent or-

ganization, especially among the millions who have not yet been organized at all, and I would also encourage the "boring from within" for all that can be accomplished by the industrial unionists in the craft unions.

A WORD FOR THE I. W. W.

(Delivered at Canton, June 16, 1918.)

Few men have the courage to say a decent word in favor of the I.W.W. I have.

After long investigation by two men who are not Socialists: John Graham Brooks, Harvard University; Mr. Bruere, Government investigator, a pamphlet has been issued called *The Truth About the I.W.W.*

These men investigated the I.W.W. They have examined its doings, beginning at Bisbee, Arizona, where the officers deported five hundred. It is only necessary to label a man, "I.W.W." to lynch him. Just think of the state of mind for which the capitalist press is responsible. . . .

The I.W.W. in its career has never committed as much violence against the ruling class as the ruling class has committed against the people. The trial at Chicago is now on and they have not proven violence in a single solitary case, and yet, one hundred and twelve have been on trial for months and months without a shade of evidence. And this is all in its favor. And for this and many other reasons, the I.W.W. is fighting the fight of the bottom dog. For the very reason that Gompers is glorified by Wall Street, Bill Haywood is despised by Wall Street.

THE FIRST MARTYRS OF THE AMERICAN CLASS STRUGGLE

(From the Appeal to Reason, November 23, 1907. In the following lines Debs pays tribute to the members of the militant miners of Pennsylvania, members of the "Molly Maguires," ten of whom were executed and fourteen imprisoned in 1877 for

their activities in behalf of the workers in the anthracite region during the great strike of 1874-5, and the bitter struggle which followed the defeat of the strike.)

They all protested their innocence and all died game. Not one of them betrayed the slightest evidence of fear or weakening. All were ignorant, rough and uncouth, born of poverty, and buffeted by the merciless tides of fate and chance.

To resist the wrongs of which they and their fellow workers were victims and to protect themselves against the brutality of their bosses, according to their own crude notions, was the prime object of the organization of the "Molly Maguires." Nothing could have been farther from their intention than murder or crime. It is true that their methods were drastic, but it must be remembered that their lot was hard and brutalizing; that they were the neglected children of poverty, the products of a wretched environment. . . .

June 21, 1877, the curtain fell upon the last mournful act in this tragedy of toil. The executioner did his bidding and the gallows-tree claimed its victims. On that day history turned harlot and the fair face of truth was covered with the hideous mask of falsehood. The men who perished upon the scaffold as felons were labor leaders, the first martyrs to the class struggle in the United States.

THE MARTYRED HEROES OF LABOR

(From article in New Time, February, 1898, quoted in Debs: His Life, Writings and Speeches, 1908, p. 265. Debs pays tribute to the executed "Chicago Haymarket" militant leaders of the Eight-Hour movement of 1886. Governor Altgelt of Illinois later proved it was a frame-up and freed the leaders who were sentenced to imprisonment.)

The men who were judicially murdered in Chicago in 1887, in the name of the great State of Illinois, were the *avant couriers* of a better day. They were called anarch-

ists, but at their trial it was not proven that they had committed any crime or violated any law. They had protested against unjust laws and their brutal administration. They stood between oppressor and oppressed, and they dared, in a free (?) country, to exercise the divine right of free speech; and the records of their trial, as if written with an "iron pen and lead in the rock forever," proclaim the truth of the declaration.

I would rescue their names from slander. The slanderers of the dead are the oppressors of the living. I would, if I could, restore them to their rightful positions as evangelists; the proclaimers of good news to their fellow men—crusaders; to rescue the sacred shrines of justice from the profanations of the capitalistic defilers who have made them more repulsive than Augean stables. Aye, I would take them, if I could, from peaceful slumber in their martyr graves—I would place joint to joint in their dislocated necks—I would make the halter the symbol of redemption; I would restore the flesh to their skeleton bones, their eyes should again flash defiance to the enemies of humanity, and their tongues, again, more eloquent than all the heroes of oratory, should speak the truth to a gainsaying world. Alas, this cannot be done, but something can be done. The stigma fixed upon their names by an outrageous trial can be forever obliterated and their fame be made to shine with resplendent glory on the pages of history.

Until the time shall come, as come it will, when the parks of Chicago shall be adorned with their statues, and men, women and children, pointing to these monuments as testimonials of gratitude, shall honor with holy acclaim, the men who dared to be true to humanity and who paid the penalty of their heroism with their lives, the preliminary work of setting forth their virtues devolves upon those who are capable of gratitude to men who suffered death that they might live.

SACCO AND VANZETTI MUST NOT DIE!

(From an "Appeal to American Labor," written by Debs six months before his death for the International Labor Defense, May, 1926. Sacco and Vanzetti were executed on August 23, 1927.)

The Supreme Court of Massachusetts has spoken at last and Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco, two of the bravest and best scouts that ever served the labor movement, must go to the electric chair.

The decision of this capitalist judicial tribunal is not surprising. It accords perfectly with the tragical farce and the farcical tragedy of the entire trial of these two absolutely innocent and shamefully persecuted working men. . . .

It would have been merciful to the last degree in comparison had they been boiled in oil, burned at the stake, or had every joint been torn from their bodies on the wheel when they were first seized as prey to glut the vengeance of slave drivers, who wax fat and savage on child labor, and who never forgive an "agitator" who is too rigidly honest to be bribed, too courageous to be intimidated, and too defiant to be suppressed.

And that is precisely why the mill-owning, labor-sweating malefactors of Massachusetts had Sacco and Vanzetti framed, pounced upon, thrown into a dungeon, and sentenced to be murdered by their judicial and other official underlings.

I appeal to the working men and women of America to think of these two loyal comrades, these two honest, clean-hearted brothers of ours, in this fateful hour in which they stand face to face with their bitter and ignominious doom.

The capitalist courts of Massachusetts have had them on the rack day and night, devouring the flesh of their bodies and torturing their souls for six long years to finally deal the last vicious, heartless blow, aimed to send them to their graves as red-handed felons and murderers. . . .

There is another voice yet to be heard and that is the voice of an outraged working class. It is for labor now to speak and for the labor movement to announce its decision, and that decision is and must be, Sacco and Vanzetti are innocent and shall not die!

To allow these two intrepid proletarian leaders to perish as red-handed criminals would forever disgrace the cause of labor in the United States. The countless children of generations yet to come would blush for their sires and grand-sires and never forgive their cowardice and poltroonery.

It cannot be possible, and I shall not think it possible, that the American workers will desert, betray and deliver to their executioner two men who have stood as staunchly true, as unflinchingly loyal in the cause of labor as have Sacco and Vanzetti, whose doom has been pronounced by the implacable enemies of the working class.

Now is the time for all labor to be aroused and to rally as one vast host to vindicate its assailed honor, to assert its self-respect, and to issue its demand that in spite of the capitalist-controlled courts of Massachusetts honest and innocent workingmen whose only crime is their innocence of crime and their loyalty to labor, shall not be murdered by the official hirelings of the corporate powers that rule and tyrannize over the state.

ORGANIZATION AND EMANCIPATION

(From the Southern Worker, April, 1914.)

The problem confronting us today is preeminently one of organization. To organize the working class is to achieve emancipation.

But there is organization and organization. There is the kind the master class do not object to, in fact, encourage, patronize and support, thus showing themselves to be friends of the working class, but the kind of organization which has the approval of the exploiter is not apt to do anything for his victim except to bind him more securely in bondage.

There is another kind of organization that the master class do not approve and commend, but on the contrary denounce and fight tooth and nail, and that is the kind which has for its purpose the overthrow of wage-slavery, the abolition of the master class, and the emancipation of the wage-slave.

This kind of organization is rightly called revolutionary; it is both economic and political in character, does not trim or trade or compromise, but pursues the straight road to its goal, and this kind of organization is positively the only kind that holds out any hope to the working class.

The absolute necessity for sound, revolutionary organization is becoming more apparent every day. Without such organization the struggle is vain and the future without hope. The industrial democracy and the Socialist republic of which we hear so much and in which we all believe cannot be voted into existence. They have got to be organized and the foundation of such organization must be laid and its superstructure reared within the old system so that when the old system crumbles away the new will be already molded to take its place, and thus prevent lapsing into chaos and disaster from which it would require years and years to recover.

Hand in hand with industrial unity must go the political unity of the workers. They must develop and assert their political power as well as their economic power and make both count for all they are worth in the struggle for industrial freedom. The Socialist Party, organized by the workers, is the political expression of their hopes and aspirations and this is the party the workers must build up and support staunchly every step of the way and every hour of the struggle until victory is achieved.

DANGER AHEAD

(From the International Socialist Review, January, 1911.)

The danger I see ahead is that the Socialist Party at this stage, and under existing conditions, is apt to attract ele-

ments which it cannot assimilate, and that it may be either weighted down or torn asunder with internal strife, or that it may become permeated and corrupted with the spirit of bourgeois reform to an extent that will practically destroy its virility and efficiency as a revolutionary organization.

To my mind the working class character and the revolutionary integrity of the Socialist Party are of first importance. All the votes of the people would do us no good if we ceased to be a revolutionary party, or only incidentally so, while yielding more and more to the pressure to modify the principles and program of the party for the sake of swelling the vote and hastening the day of its expected triumph.

THE SOCIALIST PARTY AND IMMIGRATION

(Letter to George D. Brewer, July, 1910. Brewer was an active Socialist working on the Appeal to Reason. He was a delegate to the 1910 Congress of the Socialist Party at which the subject of immigration was discussed. Unwilling to come out unequivocally for unrestricted immigration which the rank and file of the members demanded, the S.P. leadership, desirous to placate the A. F. of L., adopted a compromise resolution which favored the restriction of "artificially stimulated immigration.")

I have just read the majority report of the Committee on Immigration. It is utterly unsocialistic, reactionary and in truth outrageous, and I hope you will oppose it with all your power. The plea that certain races are to be excluded because of tactical expediency would be entirely consistent in a bourgeois convention of self-seekers, but should have no place in a proletarian gathering under the auspices of an international movement that is calling on the oppressed and exploited workers of all the world to unite for their emancipation. . . .

Away with the "tactics" which require the exclusion of the oppressed and suffering slaves who seek these shores with the hope of bettering their wretched condition and are

driven back under the cruel lash of expediency by those who call themselves Socialists in the name of a movement whose proud boast it is that it stands uncompromisingly for the oppressed and downtrodden of all the earth. These poor slaves have just as good a right to enter here as even the authors of this report who now seek to exclude them. The only difference is that the latter had the advantage of a little education and had not been so cruelly ground and oppressed, but in point of principle there is no difference, the motive of all being precisely the same, and if the convention which meets in the name of Socialism should discriminate at all it should be in favor of the miserable races who have borne the heaviest burdens and are most nearly crushed to the earth.

Upon this vital proposition I would take my stand against the world and no specious argument of the subtle and the sophistical of the National Civic Federation unionism, who do not hesitate to sacrifice principle for numbers and jeopardize ultimate success for immediate gain, could move me to turn my back upon the oppressed, brutalized and despairing victims of the old world, who are lured to these shores by some faint glimmer of hope that here their crushing burdens may be lightened, and some star of promise rise in their darkened skies.

The alleged advantages that would come to the Socialist movement because of such heartless exclusion would all be swept away a thousand times by the sacrifice of a cardinal principle of the international Socialist movement, for well might the good faith of such a movement be questioned by intelligent workers if it placed itself upon record as barring its doors against the very races most in need of relief, and extinguishing the hopes, at the very time their ears were first attuned to the international call and their hearts were beginning to throb responsive to the solidarity of the oppressed of all lands and all climes beneath the skies.

In this attitude there is nothing of maudlin sentimentality, but simply a rigid adherence to the fundamental

principles of the international proletarian movement. If Socialism, international revolutionary Socialism, does not stand staunchly, unflinchingly, and uncompromisingly for the working class and for the exploited and oppressed masses of all lands, then it stands for none and its claim is a false pretense and its profession a delusion and a snare.

Let those desert us who will because we refuse to shut the international door in the faces of their own brethren; we will be none the weaker, but all the stronger for their going, for they evidently have no clear conception of international solidarity, are wholly lacking in the revolutionary spirit, and have no proper place in the Socialist movement while they entertain such aristocratic notions of their own assumed superiority.

Let us stand squarely on our revolutionary, working class principles and make our fight openly and uncompromisingly against all our enemies, adopting no cowardly tactics and holding out no false hopes, and our movement will then inspire the faith, arouse the spirit, and develop the fiber that will prevail against the world.

DIFFERENCES WITH THE SOCIALIST PARTY

(From the acceptance speech delivered to the members of the committee of the Socialist Party at the Federal Penitentiary, Atlanta, May 29, 1920, notifying Debs of his nomination for president of the United States.)

. . . I have read the platform adopted by the convention and I wish I might say it had my unqualified approval. It is a masterly piece of writing, and it states the essential principles of the Socialist movement.

But I believe it could have been made much more effective if it had stressed the class struggle more prominently and if more emphasis had been laid on industrial organization. I do not believe in captious criticism, but I wanted to be frank with you and state my position. I must do this if

I am to prove worthy of the high confidence reposed in me.

However, a platform is not so important after all. We can breathe the breath of revolution into any platform. . . .

I have always been a radical, never more so than now. I have never feared becoming too radical. I do fear becoming too conservative. We must guard against any policy or attitude of fear to state our position clearly.

Socialist platforms are not made to catch votes. Our purpose should be to state the principles of the party clearly to the people. There is a tendency in the party to become a party of politicians instead of a party of the workers. That policy must be checked, not encouraged.

We are in politics not to get votes but to develop power to emancipate the working class. I would not do or say anything to catch a vote for the sake of that vote. Our duty is to tell exactly what we seek to accomplish, so that those who come to us do so with no misunderstanding.

Some members of the party have been admitted in the past to make us respectable. They were unfortunate incidents. We want what we are rightly entitled to and, if we can get that, we can use it properly for our purposes.

Before serving time I made a series of addresses supporting the Russian Revolution, which I consider the greatest single achievement in all history. I said at that time that I was a Bolshevik. I still am a Bolshevik, but I am not a Russian Bolshevik in America.

I regret that the convention did not see its way clear to affiliate with the Third International without qualifications. There is some difficulty about that unfortunate phrase about the dictatorship of the proletariat.

A dictatorship does not imply what we mean. It is a misnomer. Dictatorship is autocracy. There is no autocracy in the rule of the masses. During the transition period the revolution must protect itself.

It is an unfortunate term and leads to misrepresentation. I am sorry it is used. I am opposed to dictatorship in every form. We are for freedom and equal rights. When

we say dictatorship, we give the capitalist press opportunity to attack us. Phrases do not make a revolution.

I heartily support the Russian Revolution without reservation.

We should withhold criticism of those who have left us. I was sorry to read a speech of Berger's the other day attacking the Communists. I have known many comrades in all these parties. I have high regard for them. They are as honest as we are.

MILITARISM AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE

(Delivered before the jury at the Federal Court, Cleveland, September 12, 1918.)

Where there is exploitation there must be some form of militarism to support it. Wherever you find exploitation you find some form of military force. In a smaller way you find it in this country. It was there long before war was declared. For instance, when the miners out in Colorado entered upon a strike about four years ago, the state militia, which is under the control of the Standard Oil Company, marched upon a camp, where the miners and their wives and children were in tents. When the soldiers approached the camp at Ludlow, where these miners, with their wives and children, were, the miners, to prove that they were patriotic placed flags above their tents, and when the state militia which is controlled by Rockefeller, swooped down upon the camp, the first thing they did was to shoot those United States flags to tatters. Not one of them was indicted or tried because he was a traitor to his country. Pregnant women were killed, and a number of innocent children slain. This in the United States of America—the fruit of exploitation. The miners wanted a little more of what they had been producing. But the Standard Oil Company wasn't rich enough. It insisted that all they were entitled to was just enough to keep them in working order. There is slavery for you. And when at last they protested, when they were tormented by hunger, when they saw their children in tatters,

they were shot down as if they had been so many vagabond dogs.

THE WAR IN EUROPE

(From the National Rip-Saw, October, 1914.)

In the present crisis the need of an educated and organized working class is being daily, hourly urged upon us as never before in this struggle. Capitalism may be on its last legs and on the verge of collapse, but that only makes our condition more distressing if we are too weak and impotent as an organized body to deliver to the brutal and outworn old system its *coup de grace* and install the new order of society.

The crisis is upon us but are we prepared for it? Preparation in this case means education and organization and their resultant industrial and political solidarity.

The Revolution may be at our door but like the revolutions of the past it will be next to fruitless to the working class, unless they are prepared to take advantage of the opportunity it presents to install themselves into power and inaugurate the new order of society based upon their industrial freedom.

The war in Europe and the conditions resulting from it have served to make this an unusually propitious time to educate and organize the workers along the lines of the social revolution, and to this task every Socialist and industrial revolutionist should now bend all his energies.

Industrial unity should be the watchword of the workers and in every industry the rank and file should get together and make common cause in one and the same industrial union and one and the same political party.

The downfall of capitalism and the triumph of Socialism will follow inevitably when the workers have achieved their economic and political solidarity.

WAR: ITS CAUSE AND ITS MAKERS

(From the speeches delivered at Canton, June 16, 1918, and before the jury at the Federal Court, Cleveland, September, 1918.)

War does not come by chance. War is not the result of accident. There is a definite cause for war, especially a modern war. The war that began in Europe can readily be accounted for. For the last forty years, under this international capitalist system, this exploiting system, these various nations of Europe have been preparing for the inevitable. And why? In all these nations the great industries are owned by a relatively small class. They are operated for the profit of that class. And great abundance is produced by the workers, but their wages will only buy back a small part of their product. What is the result? They have a vast surplus on hand; they have got to export it; they have got to find a foreign market for it. As a result of this, these nations are pitted against each other. They begin to arm themselves to open, to maintain the market and quickly dispose of their surplus. There is but the one market. All these nations are competitors for it, and sooner or later every war of trade becomes a war of blood.

Wars have been waged for conquests, for plunder, and since the feudal ages, the feudal lords along the Rhine made war upon each other. They wanted to enlarge their domains, to increase their power and their wealth and so they declared war upon each other. But they did not go to war any more than the Wall Street Junkers go to war.. Their predecessors declared the wars, but their miserable serfs fought the wars. The serfs believed that it was their patriotic duty to fall upon one another, to wage war upon one another. And that is war in a nutshell. The master class has always brought a war and the subject class has fought the battle. The master class has had all to gain and nothing to lose, and the subject class has had all to lose and nothing to gain. They have always taught you that it is your pa-

triotic duty to go to war and slaughter yourselves at their command. You have never had a voice in the war. The working class who make the sacrifices, who shed the blood, have never yet had a voice in declaring war. The ruling class has always made the war and made the peace.

IN WHOSE WAR I WILL FIGHT

(*From the Appeal to Reason, September 11, 1915.*)

Since my characterization of the soldier in the Jingo edition I have been asked if I was opposed to all war and if I would refuse to be a soldier and to fight under any circumstances, and to make my answer through the *Appeal to Reason*. No, I am not opposed to all war, nor am I opposed to fighting under all circumstances, and any declaration to the contrary would disqualify me as a revolutionist. When I say I am opposed to war I mean ruling class war, for the ruling class is the only class that makes war. It matters not to me whether this war be offensive or defensive, or what other lying excuse may be invented for it, I am opposed to it, and I would be shot for treason before I would enter such a war. . . .

But while I have not a drop of blood to shed for the oppressors of the working class and the robbers of the poor, the thieves and looters, the brigands and murderers whose debauched misrule is the crime of the ages, I have a heart-full to shed for their victims when it shall be needed in the war for their liberation. . . .

There is where I stand and where I believe the Socialist Party stands, or ought to stand, on the question of war.

THE BOLSHEVIKS

(*Delivered before the jury at the Federal Court, Cleveland, September 12, 1918.*)

I have been accused of expressing sympathy for the Bolsheviks of Russia. I plead guilty to the charge. I have read

a great deal about the Bolsheviks of Russia that is not true. I happen to know of my own knowledge that they have been grossly misrepresented by the press of this country. Who are these much-maligned revolutionists of Russia? For years they had been the victims of a brutal Czar. They and their antecedents were sent to Siberia, lashed with a knout, if they even dreamed of freedom. At last the hour struck for a great change. The Revolution came. The Czar was overthrown and his infamous regime ended. What followed? The common people of Russia came into power, the peasants, the toilers, the soldiers, and they proceeded as best they could to establish a government of the people.

It may be that the much-despised Bolsheviks may fail at last, but let me say to you that they have written a chapter of glorious history. It will stand to their eternal credit. Their leaders are now denounced as criminals and outlaws. Let me remind you that there was a time when George Washington, who is now revered as the father of his country, was denounced as a disloyalist, when Sam Adams, who is known to us as the father of the American Revolution, was condemned as an incendiary, and Patrick Henry, who delivered that inspired and inspiring oration that aroused the colonists, was condemned as a traitor.

They were misunderstood at the time. They stood true to themselves, and they won an immortality of gratitude and glory.

GREETINGS TO OUR RUSSIAN COMRADES!

(From an article in a symposium, One Year of Revolution, issued November 7, 1918.)

Comrades of the Russian Soviet and the Bolshevik Republic: We salute and honor you on this first anniversary of your great revolutionary triumph, the greatest in point of historic significance and far-reaching influence in the annals of the race. You have set the star of hope for all the world in the eastern skies. You have suffered untold perse-

cution, exile and misery and you have shed your blood freely all these years in the great struggle for emancipation, not only of your own oppressed people, but the oppressed of all the earth. On this historic anniversary we extend our proletarian hand to you from all directions and across the spaces and assure you of our loyalty and our love.

The chief glory of your revolutionary triumph is that you have preserved inviolate the fundamental principles of international Socialism and refused to compromise. It will be to your everlasting honor that you would rather have seen the Revolution perish and the Soviet with it than to prostitute either one by betraying the workers to alleged progressive reforms which would mean to them an extension of their servitude under a fresh aggregaiton of exploiters and parasites.

You, Russian Comrades of the Soviet and of the Bolsheviks you represent, are resolved that for once in history the working class, which fights the battles, sheds its blood and makes all other sacrifices to achieve a revolution, shall itself receive and enjoy the full fruitage of such a revolution; that it shall not allow itself to be used, as dumb driven cattle, to install some intermediate class into power and perpetuate its own slavery and degradation.

On this anniversary-day we pledge you, brave and unflinching comrades of the Soviet Republic, not only to protest against our government meddling with your affairs and interfering with your plans, but to summon to your aid all the progressive forces of our proletariat and render you freely all assistance in our power.

We pledge you, moreover, as we grasp your hands in comradely congratulations, on this eventful day, to strive with all our energy to emulate your inspiring example by abolishing our imperialistic capitalism, driving our plutocratic exploiters and oppressors from power and establishing the working class republic, the Commonwealth of Comrades.

GREETINGS ON THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

(Written in the Federal Penitentiary, Atlanta, and published in the Socialist New York Call, November 7, 1920.)

Greetings, comrades, in our glorious celebration of the third anniversary of the Russian Revolution. The proletarian world and lovers of liberty everywhere thrilled with joy at the news of the great victory of the Russian people. The triumph of the workers' cause in Russia is an historic milestone in the progress of the world and its influence for good has circled the earth and will direct the course of the future.

The emancipation of Russia and the establishment of the Workers' Republic is an inspiration to the workers of the world, and this people's government is a bright star in the political heavens and will light the way of the world; it is the great hope of the human race and its example will lead to the emancipation of the workers of the world; all hail to those noble comrades who have carved out a people's government on an impregnable foundation of granite that shall stand for all time.

Comrades, you have weathered the storm; the faithful cooperation of comrades has been able to defeat the world-wide alliance of capitalism. I am sure that the same spirit that conquered capitalism will develop the geniuses that will conquer the devastating diseases you inherited from capitalism in Russia and combat the present mad methods of alien capitalistic governments who seek to destroy the newly emancipated people of Soviet Russia.

Have faith, comrades, your triumph is complete. Other nations will become liberated and together shall form a brotherhood of the world.

THE RIGHT OF FREE SPEECH

(Opening remarks of the historic speech at the Ohio State Convention of the Socialist Party, delivered at Canton, June 16, 1918.)

I have just returned from a visit from yonder (pointing to workhouse), where three of our most loyal comrades* are paying the penalty for their devotion to the cause of the working class. They have come to realize, as many of us have, that it is extremely dangerous to exercise the constitutional right of free speech in a country fighting to make democracy safe for the world. I realize in speaking to you this afternoon that there are certain limitations placed upon the right of free speech. I must be extremely careful, prudent, as to how I say it. I may not be able to say all I think, but I am not going to say anything I do not think. And I would rather a thousand times be a free soul in jail than a sycophant or coward on the streets. They may put those boys in jail and some of the rest of us in jail, but they cannot put the Socialist movement in jail. Those prison bars separate their bodies from ours, but their souls are here this afternoon. They are simply paying the penalty that all men have paid in all of the ages of history for standing erect and seeking to pave the way for better conditions for mankind.

If it had not been for the men and women who, in the past, have had the moral courage to go to jail, we would still be in the jungles.

Why should a Socialist be discouraged on the eve of the greatest triumph of all the history of the Socialist movement? It is true that these are anxious, trying days for us all, testing those who are upholding the banner of the working class in the greatest struggle the world has ever known against the exploiters of the world—a time in which the weak, the

* Reference is made to three Socialist leaders of Ohio who were imprisoned for their opposition to the war—Charles E. Ruthenberg (died March 2, 1927, while General Secretary of the Communist Party), Alfred Wagenknecht and Charles Baker.

cowardly, will falter and fail and desert. They lack the fiber to endure the revolutionary test. They fall away. They disappear as if they had never been.

On the other hand, they who are animated with the unconquerable spirit of the Social Revolution, they who have the moral courage to stand erect, to assert their convictions, to stand by them, to go to jail or to hell for them—they are writing their names in this crucial hour, they are writing their names in fadeless letters in the history of mankind. Those boys over yonder, those comrades of ours—and how I love them—aye, they are our younger brothers, their names are seared in our souls.

I am proud of them. They are there for us and we are here for them. Their lips, though temporarily mute, are more eloquent than ever before, and their voices, though silent, are heard around the world.

THE SUPREME COURT—A TRIBUNAL OF THE RULING CLASS

(Statement issued March 10, 1919, when the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously upheld the conviction and sentence of Debs, quoted in David Karsner, Debs: His Authorized Life and Speeches, p. 56.)

The decision is perfectly consistent with the character of the Supreme Court as a ruling class tribunal. It could not have been otherwise. So far as I am personally concerned, the decision is of small consequence. But there is an issue at stake of vital interest to the American people. It involves the fundamental right of free speech. With this our boasted freedom is a delusion and a farce. . . .

Great issues are not decided by the courts, but by the people. I have no concern in what the coterie of begowned corporation lawyers in Washington may decide in my case. The court of final resort is the people, and that court will be heard from in due time. . . .

I stand by every word of the Canton speech. The Supreme Court to the contrary, notwithstanding, the Espionage Law is perfectly infamous and a disgrace as well to the capitalist despotism at whose behest it was enacted.

Sixty years ago the Supreme Court affirmed the validity of the Fugitive Slave Law to save chattel slavery. Five years later that infamous institution was swept from the land in a torrent of blood. I despise the Espionage Law with every drop of blood in my veins, and I defy the Supreme Court and all the powers of capitalism to do their worst.

All hail to the workers of America and the world!

The day of emancipation is dawning.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

(Delivered at Canton, June 16, 1918.)

Every Socialist on the face of the earth is animated by the same principles. Everywhere they have the same noble idea, everywhere they are calling one another "comrade," the noblest word that springs from the heart and soul of unity. The word "comrade" is getting us into closer touch all along the battle line. They are waging the war of the working class against the ruling class of the world. They conquer difficulties; they grow stronger through them all.

The heart of the international Socialist never beats a retreat. They are pressing forward here, there, everywhere, in all the zones that girdle this globe. These workers, these class-conscious workers, these children of honest toil are wiping out the boundary lines everywhere. They are proclaiming the glad tidings of the coming emancipation. Everywhere they are having their hearts attuned to the sacred cause; everywhere they are moving toward democracy, moving toward the sunrise, their faces aglow with the light of coming day. These are the men who must guide us in the greatest crisis the world has ever known. They are making

history. They are bound upon the emancipation of the human race.

OUR REVOLUTIONARY TRADITIONS

(Delivered before the jury at the Federal Court, Cleveland, September 12, 1918.)

A century and a half ago, when the American colonists were still foreign subjects, and when there were a few men who had faith in the common people and believed that they could rule themselves without a king, in that day to speak against the king was treason. If you read Bancroft or any other standard historian, you will find that a great majority of the colonists believed in the king and actually believed that he had a divine right to rule over them. They had been taught to believe that to say a word against the king, to question his so-called divine right, was sinful. There were ministers who opened their Bibles to prove that it was the patriotic duty of the people to loyally serve and support the king. But there were a few men in that day who said, "We don't need a king. We can govern ourselves." And they began an agitation that has been immortalized in history.

Washington, Adams, Paine—these were the rebels of their day. At first they were opposed by the people and denounced by the press. You can remember that it was Franklin who said to his compeers, "We have now to hang together or we'll hang separately by and by." And if the Revolution had failed, the revolutionary fathers would have been executed as felons. But it did not fail. Revolutions have a habit of succeeding, when the time comes for them. The revolutionary forefathers were opposed to the form of government in their day. They were denounced, they were condemned. But they had the moral courage to stand erect and defy all the storms of detraction; and that is why they

are in history, and that is why the great respectable majority of their day sleep in forgotten graves. The world does not know they ever lived.

At a later time there began another mighty agitation in this country. It was against an institution that was deemed a very respectable one in its time, the institution of chattel slavery, that became all-powerful, that controlled the president, both branches of congress, the supreme court, the press, to a very large extent the pulpit. All of the organized forces of society, all the powers of government, upheld chattel slavery in that day. And again a few appeared. One of them was Elijah Lovejoy. Elijah Lovejoy was as much despised in his day as are the leaders of the I.W.W. in our day. Elijah Lovejoy was murdered in cold blood in Alton, Illinois, in 1837, simply because he was opposed to chattel slavery—just as I am opposed to wage slavery. When you go down the Mississippi River and look up at Alton, you see a magnificent white shaft erected there in memory of a man who was true to himself and his convictions of right and duty unto death.

It was my good fortune to personally know Wendell Phillips. I heard the story of his persecution, in part at least, from his own eloquent lips just a little while before they were silenced by death.

William Lloyd Garrison, Gerrit Smith, Thaddeus Stevens—these leaders of the Abolition movement, who were regarded as monsters of depravity, were true to the faith and stood their ground. They are all in history. You are teaching your children to revere their memories, while all of their detractors are in oblivion.

Chattel slavery disappeared. We are not yet free. We are engaged in another mighty agitation today. It is as wide as the world. It is the rise of the toiling and producing masses who are gradually becoming conscious of their interest, their power, as a class, who are organizing industrially and politically, who are slowly but surely developing the economic and political power that is to set them free. They

are still in the minority, but they have learned how to wait, and to bide their time.

It is because I happen to be in this minority that I stand in your presence today, charged with crime. It is because I believe as the revolutionary fathers believed in their day, that a change was due in the interests of the people, that the time had come for a better form of government, an improved system, a higher social order, a nobler humanity and a grander civilization. This minority that is so much misunderstood and so bitterly maligned, is in alliance with the forces of evolution, and as certain as I stand before you this afternoon, it is but a question of time until this minority will become the conquering majority and inaugurate the greatest change in all of the history of the world. You may hasten the change; you may retard it; you can no more prevent it than you can prevent the coming of the sunrise on the morrow.

THE PRESENT INDUSTRIAL SYSTEM

(Delivered before receiving ten-year sentence from the Judge of the Federal Court, Cleveland, September 14, 1918.)

In the struggle—the unceasing struggle—between the toilers and producers and their exploiters, I have tried, as best I might, to serve those among whom I was born, with whom I expect to share my lot until the end of my days.

I am thinking this morning of the men in the mills and factories; I am thinking of the women who, for a paltry wage, are compelled to work out their lives; of the children who, in this system, are robbed of their childhood, and in their early, tender years, are seized in the remorseless grasp of Mammon, and forced into the industrial dungeons, there to feed the machines while they themselves are being starved body and soul. . . .

I think of these little children—the girls that are in the

textile mills of all description in the East, in the cotton factories of the South—I think of them at work in a vitiated atmosphere. I think of them at work when they ought to be at play or at school; I think that when they do grow up, if they live long enough to approach the marriage state, they are unfit for it. Their nerves are worn out, their tissue is exhausted, their vitality is spent. They have been fed to industry. Their lives have been coined into gold. Their offspring are born tired. That is why there are so many failures in our modern life.

Your Honor, the five per cent of the people that I have made reference to, constitute that element that absolutely rules our country. They privately own all our public necessities. They wear no crowns; they wield no scepters, they sit upon no thrones; and yet they are our economic masters and our political rulers. They control this Government and all of its institutions. They control the courts.

The five per cent of our people who own and control all of the sources of wealth, all of the nation's industries, all of the means of our common life—it is they who declare war; it is they who make peace; it is they who control our industry. And so long as this is true, we can make no just claim to being a democratic government—a self-governing people.

THE PRESENT ORDER CANNOT ENDURE

(Delivered before receiving sentence from the Judge at the Federal Court, Cleveland, September 14, 1918.)

This order of things cannot always endure. I have registered my protest against it. I recognize the feebleness of my effort, but fortunately I am not alone. There are multiplied thousands of others who, like myself, have come to realize that before we may truly enjoy the blessings of civilized life, we must reorganize society upon a mutual and cooperative

basis; and to this end we have organized a great economic and political movement that is spread over the face of all the earth.

There are today upwards of sixty million Socialists, loyal, devoted, adherents to this cause, regardless of nationality, race, creed, color or sex. They are all making common cause. They are all spreading the propaganda of the new social order. They are waiting, watching and working through all the weary hours of the day and night. They are still in the minority. They have learned how to be patient and abide their time. They feel—they know, indeed—that the time is coming in spite of all opposition, all persecution, when this emancipating gospel will spread among all the peoples, and when this minority will become the triumphant majority and, sweeping into power, inaugurate the greatest change in history.

In that day we will have the universal commonwealth—not the destruction of the nation, but, on the contrary, the harmonious cooperation of every nation with every other nation on earth. In that day war will curse this earth no more.

Your Honor, I ask no mercy. I plead for no immunity. I realize that finally right must prevail. I never more clearly comprehended than now the great struggle between the powers of greed on the one hand and upon the other the rising hosts of freedom.

I can see the dawn of a better day of humanity. The people are awakening. In due course of time they will come into their own.

When the mariner, sailing over tropic seas, looks for relief from his weary watch, he turns his eyes toward the Southern Cross, burning luridly above the tempest-vexed ocean. As the midnight approaches the Southern Cross begins to bend, and the whirling worlds change their places, and with starry fingerpoints the Almighty marks the passage of time upon the dial of the universe, and though no bell may beat the glad tidings, the look-out knows that the mid-

night is passing—that relief and rest are close at hand.

Let the people take heart and hope everywhere, for the cross is bending, the midnight is passing, and joy cometh with the morning.

THE FUTURE IS OURS

(Delivered at Canton, June 16, 1918.)

When we unite and act together on the industrial field and when we vote together on Election Day we shall develop the supreme power of the one class that can and will bring permanent peace to the world. We shall then have the intelligence, the courage and the power of our great task. In due time industry will be organized on a cooperative basis. We shall conquer the public power. We shall then transfer the title deeds of the railroads, the telegraph lines, the mines, mills and great industries to the people in their collective capacity; we shall take possession of all these social utilities in the name of the people. We shall then have industrial democracy. We shall be a free nation whose government is of and by and for the people.

And now for all of us to do our duty! The clarion call is ringing in our ears and we cannot falter without being convicted of treason to ourselves and to our great cause.

Do not worry over the charge of treason to your masters, but be concerned about the treason that involves yourselves. Be true to yourself and you cannot be a traitor to any good cause on earth.

Yes, in good time we are going to sweep into power in this nation and throughout the world. We are going to destroy all enslaving and degrading capitalist institutions and recreate them as free and humanizing institutions. The world is daily changing before our eyes. The sun of capitalism is setting; the sun of Socialism is rising. It is our duty to build the new nation and the free republic. We need in-

dustrial and social builders. We Socialists are the builders of the beautiful world that is to be. We are all pledged to do our part. We are inviting—aye, challenging you this afternoon in the name of your own manhood and womanhood to join us and do your part.

In due time the hour will strike and this great cause triumphant—the greatest in history—will proclaim the emancipation of the working class and the brotherhood of all mankind.



Gene Debs in prison garb conferring in Atlanta Penitentiary with the late Seymour Stedman, his running mate in the presidential elections of 1920. Stedman was Debs' chief defense counsel during his trial. He left the Socialist Party and joined the Communist Party several years later.

For a fuller biography

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