

# Eugene V. Debs

## The Voice of Labor

Extracts From His Address To the Jury At His Trial in  
Cleveland, Ohio

**T**WENTY centuries ago One appeared upon earth whom we know as the Prince of Peace. He issued a command in which I believe He said, 'Love one another.' He did not say, 'Kill one another,' but 'Love one another.' He espoused the cause of the suffering poor and the poor heard him gladly. It was not long before he aroused the ill-will and the hatred of the usurers, the money changers, the profiteers, the high priests, the lawyers, the judges, the merchants, the bankers—in a word, the ruling class. They said of him just what the ruling class says of the Socialist today—'He is preaching dangerous doctrine. He is inciting the common rabble. He is a menace to peace and order.' And they had him arraigned, tried, convicted, condemned.

"This has been the tragic history of the race. In the ancient world Socrates sought to teach some new truths to the people and they made him drink the fatal hemlock. It has been true all along the track of the ages. The men and women who have been in advance, who have had new ideals, who have had the courage to attack the established order of things, have all had to pay the same penalty.

"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 any standard historian you will find that a great majority of the colonists actually believed the king 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 loyally to 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. But they had the moral courage to stand erect and defy all the storms of de-traction; 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. All 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. He 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 know Wendell Phillips personally. I heard the story of his persecution, in part at least, from his own eloquent lips just a little while before they were silenced in death.

"William Lloyd Garrison, Garret 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, 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.

"We hear a great deal about human brotherhood—a beautiful and inspiring theme. It is preached from a countless number of pulpits. It is vain for us to preach of human brotherhood while we tolerate this social system in which we are a mass of warring units, in which millions of workers have to fight one another for jobs, and millions of business men and professional men have to fight one another for trade, for practice—in which we have individual interests and each is striving to care for himself alone without reference to his fellow men. Human brotherhood is yet to be realized in this world. It never can be under the capitalist-competitive system in which we live.

"I have stated to this court that I am opposed to the form of our present Government; that I am opposed to the social system in which we live; that I believed in the change of both—but by perfectly peaceable and orderly means.

"Let me direct your attention to the fact that in this system five per cent of our people own and control two-thirds of our wealth, sixty-five per cent of the people, embracing the working class who produce all wealth, have but five per cent to show for it.

"The five per cent of the people that I have made reference to, constitute that element that 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.

"The five per cent of our people who own and control all 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 destiny. And so long as this is true, we can make no just claim of being a democratic government—a self-governing people.

"I believe, in common with all Socialists, that this nation ought to own and control its industries. I believe, as all Socialists do, that all things that are jointly needed and used ought to be jointly owned—that industry, the basis of life, instead of being the property of the few and operated for their enrichment, ought to be the common property of all, democratically administered in the interest of all.

"John D. Rockefeller has today an income of sixty million dollars a year, five million dollars a month, two hundred thousand dollars a day. He does not produce a penny of it. I make no attack upon Mr. Rockefeller personally. I do not in the least dislike him. If he were in need, and it were in my power to serve him, I would serve him as gladly as I would any other human being. I am simply opposing a social order in which it is possible for one man who does absolutely nothing that is useful, to amass a fortune of hundreds of millions of dollars, while millions of men and women who work all the days of their lives secure barely enough for existence.

"This order of things cannot always endure. I have registered my protest against it. I recognize the febleness 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 re-organize society upon a mutual and co-operative basis; and to this end we have organized a great economic 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 co-opera-

tion of every nation with every other nation on earth. In that day, war will curse this earth no more.

"I ask no mercy. I plead no immunity. I realize that finally the 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 to 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 tossing 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 makes 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."

---

Issued by the

**NATIONAL OFFICE OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY**  
**220 South Ashland Boulevard**  
**CHICAGO**

40 cents per hundred, \$3.00 per thousand;  
\$2.50 per thousand in lots of 5,000 or over.

---

A copy of the National Platform of the Socialist Party will be sent free upon request.

---

**BOOKS YOU SHOULD READ**

**A NATION DIVIDED, by Prof. Scott Nearing.....10 cents**  
**HOW THINGS HAPPEN TO HAPPEN, by John M. Work.....15 cents**  
**OUTLAWING SOCIALISM, by Moses Openheimer.....15 cents**  
**LABOR IN POLITICS, by Robert Hunter.....25 cents**  
**CONSTITUTION OF SOVIET RUSSIA.....10 cents**

**Order From The Address Above.**