

DEBS AT HOME

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An Appreciation of
Eugene V. Debs

=BY=

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Terre Haute, Indiana

DEBS AT HOME.

Here, in Terre Haute, where "Gene" Debs lives, everybody admires him. All who know him personally, love him. He has no personal enemies; he has enemies, but they do not know him. He has none in Terre Haute. Many here would like to hang his ideas, but the man, the strong personality, the gentleness and cordiality of his greeting when he meets his neighbors and fellow-citizens, disarm all prejudice. Politicians here, as elsewhere, fear him, for they know that his intrepid soul knows and permits no intellectual fears, stoops to no intellectual prostitution. He is as open and fearless when called upon for an opinion upon any matters of local

interest as he is when he assails the capitalist system.

I remember first seeing him in the editorial office of the Locomotive Firemen's Magazine. I was struck by his alertness and the unhesitating speed of his work, whether engaged in writing or arranging the details of printing, mailing or distributing the great magazine among the thousands of workers who read and had profitable enjoyment from its pages. I next remember his home-coming after the A. R. U. had won the Great Northern Strike. An immense throng met him at the depot with the Ringgold Band, drum-corps and torchlights. They had a carriage for him, but he protested and took his place in the ranks with the men,—only a look of joy shone on his face, nothing of exultation; he was as unconscious of himself then as he

seems ever to be and is. The shouts of "Welcome Home" seemed only to elate and inspire his soul to do more for the Cause of Labor. Then I remember (I was a Republican at the time) reading of the awful strike begun in Chicago in 1894. I shared with others in my ignorance in condemnation of the things reported from Chicago. I commiserated his confinement in jail at Woodstock, but believed, as millions equally as ignorant as I was then believed, that the laws had been upheld. I know now the details of the wrongs that in the name of Law and Order were heaped upon the cause of labor then, and understand the superb courage and patience of Labor's greatest and most far-seeing leader,—DEBS.

When he came from Woodstock jail to

Terre Haute, there were no welcoming shouts, no band, no drums, no carriages; he walked alone with his wife to their home near the Union Station, and from that day his mental and spiritual growth has been constant and glorious.

I do not know much of those long fallow years when he went deep into the movement of things. I became a Socialist in 1899, entirely uninfluenced and alone. I emerged and found myself and a new life, a new outlook, and stand now serenely, knowing that the end of capitalism is in sight and the day of better things is certain.

I feel yet the throb of his heart in his great strong hand when I told him I had taken my place on the side of the Barricades, where the cause of Labor must soon entrench itself. From that time I have seen him intimately at

all hours of the day, under all circumstances, and found him always sure in knowledge of the future, with unlimited faith in humanity, and never once faltering. I know unnumbered things he has done for the "A. R. U. Boys," know how he has gone to their personal assistance, not only with inspiring sympathy, but with substantial help. His mail often brings him words of courage and good cheer from those who have come into the light with him, and these are the things that go deepest to his heart. He keenly suffers with the workers in all their industrial battles, but sees now only the greater lesson to them he himself learned in the A. R. U. Strike. In that strike he learned that Labor was powerless with the courts, the laws, police, the military and every power of government in the hands of Capital, and always

ready to weaken, if not destroy, Unions, Unionism and Union Leaders. He often speaks of Woodstock jail as the greatest school where he learned to study and understand the value of the only weapon by which Labor can ever come to its own, "The Ballot."

He loves to tell the stories of his childhood experiences, and the experiences of his early manhood as Town Clerk and as a Member of the Indiana Legislature one term, his five years experience in Hulman's Wholesale Grocery House, of his joy in firing a locomotive on the Vandalia Railroad, and of his grief because his aged mother could not sleep when he started out with the engine, fearing something might befall him, and how to make her happy he quit the job.

I find him very often, even in these days of pressing work, reading all alone to his old

father, who is eighty-three years of age and almost blind. It is good to see this man who is known in more countries, and to more human beings than any other living man, surrendering himself completely to his friends when they call upon him. Three weeks ago, he and his comrade wife, Katherine Debs (he calls her "Kate"), came to spend the evening with my family. We had many neighbors with us and at the precise hour agreed upon "Gene" came down the street on his bicycle and went to the kitchen and without assistance prepared the supper. You, comrades, who have seen this man of heart and soul, poised like a panther when he steps upon the platform and hurls the words that scorch and flash like fire, should have seen the gleam of domestic pleasure and joyous comradeship when he stood in a long

apron and enthusiastically cooked a good supper in the kitchen of the "Old Red House" on Sixth street, where so many "Soapbox Travelers and Apostles of Truth" have found shelter and food and repaired their raiment. And then after supper, until after midnight, we saw his soul aflame upon his face as he recited the wrongs of Labor in Colorado and told of the heroism of the outraged comrades and workers in accursed Telluride.

Again, he loves best, I am sure, to go out into the country. We often go together. The last time we drove ten miles under the trees along the Wabash, and when his quick eye saw a Kentucky cardinal in the woods, he stopped the horse and sat listening to the clear falling notes of this sweet whistler, and when we heard a mocking bird, like a child, he clasped his hands together and was lost as

long as the song lasted in worshipful adoration of the wondrous music that stirred the still atmosphere into responsive vibration. After our dinner at a farm house we sat on a fallen "naked sycamore" on the "Banks of the Wabash," and there I saw deeper into the soul of this great comrade and brother. The universality of his vision was revealed and he poured forth, as though inspired, an analysis of world conditions, a forecast of things certain to occur, that made almost the waters in the river stop, listen and applaud. He described with great particularity the Chicago Republican Convention (it was before it occurred, sometime in early May), its certainty to be a dull, apathetic, heartless proceeding, and the St. Louis Convention marking the disintegration of a great political party, Bryan's dying struggle to save the Democ-

racy and the utter impossibility of preventing the coming together of Capitalists, Powers and Influences, the effect upon the minds of the workers, the revelation of the true position of Capital vs. Labor, and the tremendous and resistless growth of the Socialist movement. If he had had ten thousand workers before him, he could not have uttered more polished sentences, more words of deep significance, more prophetic epigrams, than I heard alone, sitting on the fallen sycamore. But such things are not lost; he has uttered as great things to men who seemed as trees, but some day these same men will move as though a tornadic wind was upon them, and then they will remember when and where they heard the first great words that inspired them.

It was near six o'clock when we came

home, and the toil-stained workers were going in all directions to their cottages, huts, hovels, bathhouses and tents. I shall never forget the look of compassionate understanding that came into his face as he reiterated some of the things he had so eloquently uttered in their behalf to the Wabash sycamore that afternoon, but now his words find open ears and go clear and welcome to hungry hearts. The words of this great comrade are finding lodgment and bearing fruitage, and the time of emancipation is not far off.

You comrades do not mistake the significance of events.

I know a million men and women are alive in America today and millions more will soon be ready to help create the Co-operative Commonwealth, where men and women, great in soul and mind and strong in bodies and sure

in life, shall be industrially free and realize the beneficence and uplifting power of Industrial Democracy. In that day we can know more of and better understand "Debs at Home," for now he is tireless and literally a wandering agitator, an apostle of truth, an awakener of the dead in spirit.

What would humanity be without such men, produced from their longings and aspirations? When you see him, give him the best love of your heart; inspire and encourage him for yet better efforts in your behalf. His life is of yours, ye toilers; his heart, his brain, his body, his soul, are aflame with truth in your cause. Go the journey with him for your own sake. He is not your leader, he is your comrade. He is bone and marrow, flesh and blood of and for you. You will not soon see his like again.

There are everywhere now, in all countries of the world, other great comrades, but nature will not soon conspire again to produce another Debs.

===== BUREAU OF =====

AMERICAN
LABOR
LYCEUM

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THEODORE DEBS, *Manager*

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TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA

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