
Debs Hails Socialism: Thinks It Is the Only Cure

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Terre Haute, Ind., Dec. 31 [1896].— Eugene V. Debs has come out for socialism and formally announces that he is no longer a member of the People's Party, for which he left the Democratic Party after the election of Cleveland in 1892.

It is his belief that if Bryan had not been the candidate of the Democrats and Populists this year the Socialists would have cast 1 million votes.

He says that Bryan at heart is a socialist, and that hundreds of thousands of voters who were ready to vote for an out-and-out socialist voted for Bryan because they looked upon him as one who would carry out their ideas so far as he could.

"I know," said Debs, "that I will be criticized and berated by the press and especially by those persons who do not understand the true and better meaning of the term 'socialist.' But there is coming to be a better understanding of what enlightened socialism means. Some of the ablest men, in the pulpit, too, are beginning to sound the alarm, and they will be heeded before there is a violent explosion."

Following is his letter in parts.

To Members of the American Railway Union
and Other Toilers:—

Since the recent Presidential election I have received a large number of letters making urgent inquiries as to future efforts to emancipate wage-workers from their thralldoms, all couched in language which, properly interpreted, is the substance of the interrogatory, "What shall we do to be saved?"

As there is not time at my command to answer these numerous letters, I take this method of replying to my friends who have

asked for my views upon present conditions and the outlook for the future.

The free silver issue gave us, not only a rallying cry, but afforded common ground upon which the common people could unite against the trusts, syndicates, corporations, monopolies — in a word, the money power — under whose sway the country has been well-nigh ruined, labor reduced to famine, and personal liberty banished; and, once united, could press forward in a solid phalanx in the crusade against social and industrial slavery, nor halt the advancing columns until the whole capitalistic system is abolished and the cooperative commonwealth has become an established fact.

But the election is over, and, after mature deliberation, I am persuaded that it may be regarded as both a defeat and a victory. This affirmation may appear paradoxical, but it is true, nevertheless. The result of the November election has convinced every intelligent wage-worker that in politics, per se, there is no hope of emancipation from the degrading curse of wage slavery.

In the late election they may read their doom as vividly outlined as if written in fire across the blue dome of the skies above them. The storm cloud of the campaign disappeared, bearing upon its frowning breast no bow of promise of better things. Cowering before the despotism of the money power — its injunctions, prisons, and standing armies — they were driven to the polls to vote for a system of wage piracy that they might hold their jobs, while sitting on the ragged edge of starvation, fearful that at any moment their famine wages might be withheld and they and their wives and children forced into an abyss of despair or death. It is, therefore, not surprising that they should ask: "What shall we do to be saved?"

The ballot, however much it has been eulogized, has been beaten to the earth by "boodle" wring from unrequited toil, and as a weapon cannot be relied upon to execute the will of the people while they are in industrial bondage. An industrial slave cannot be expected to cast an independent ballot. One John D. Rockefeller with his \$200 million; one Cornelius Vanderbilt with his \$150 million; one Andrew Carnegie with his \$100 million; one C.P. Huntington with his \$75 million; one J. Pierpont Morgan with his \$60 million; one George M. Pullman with his \$50 million; and one Mark Hanna with his \$40 million, alone or in alliance, can debauch the nation. Nine percent of our population having obtained possession of 71 percent, or \$50 billion, of the nation's wealth, can and do poison every stream of knowledge, of truth, of justice, of love, of mercy, and make it run bank full of every vile

contamination that human greed can devise and inflict upon suffering people.

It has passed into a proverb that the school of experience is a dear one, and it is as true as the aphorism that the wage-workers of America have an abundance of tuition in this school. They have worked and toiled down the declivities of poverty until they have reached the bottom, to find huts, rags, crusts, darkness, and despair.

I survey these frightful conditions, the ripened and rotting fruit of the capitalistic system, and I declare, with all the emphasis of which my words are capable, my implacable hostility to this system, and my determination to battle with all my power for its overthrow.

The issue is socialism vs. capitalism. I am aware that socialism is a term little understood by the world at large, and that it is everywhere a target for denunciation by the plutocratic press. When analyzed it means a more perfect and equitable distributions of the products of labor; cooperation instead of competition; collective ownership of land, capital, and all the means of production and distribution. It proclaims the coming of the cooperative commonwealth to take the place of wage slavery.

The present industrial system is not only a failure, but a colossal aggregation of crime. It robs, it degrades, it starves; it is a foul blot upon the face of our civilization, indicative of poisoned blood flowing through the veins and arteries of the body social, industrial, and politic; it promises only an increase of the horrors which the world deploras, and which is leading nations, as well as individuals, into a decline and fall from which, as history teaches, there is no resurrection.

I confess to no hope for the toiling masses of my countrymen except by the pathway mapped out by socialists, the advocates of the cooperative commonwealth.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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