
“A Happy, Bright Spot in Civilization” :
Interview with the Chicago Chronicle
(June 14, 1897)

Bright and happy at the prospects of this his crowning ambition, Eugene V. Debs stepped from a train at the Dearborn Station at 6 o'clock last night and warmly greeted a group of waiting friends. With him from Terre Haute came his brother Theodore, Sylvester Keliher, and George P. Keeney. Showing little of the fatigue of recent work and travel the President of the American Railway Union talked earnestly and animatedly of his project.

Never were the masses in America so badly off as at present. Menacing the happiness of the country and the continued freedom of its people from turbulence is an army of not less than 5 million persons out of employment. Every passing hour adds to their ranks. Introduction of new machinery, improvements on old appliances, the concentration of wealth, and other conditions are throwing people out of employment all the time. Millions are looking into a future that has no light, no hope. We propose to take them where they can, at the worst, find means of existence and may discover prosperity and have congenial occupation.

Trade unionism furnishes no adequate remedy for the terrible evils which confront the toilers. Organized labor, simply by the fact of its union, cannot hope to cope with organized capital. If all the workers in the country were organized at the present time and engaged in a concerted warfare with capital they would be beaten. The people who have the money also hold all the means of production, of distribution, and of purchase. They could starve out their antagonists, who possess nothing. We offer a different solution of the labor problem and one which does not contemplate a battle with capital. Our ideas are endorsed by men of many classes and opposed by none.

Capitalists Approve It.

Surely the capitalist who abhors socialism, the man who has money and whose secure interests are threatened by the imminence of an uprising of the starving millions will not object to the removal of this menacing multitude to a district thousands of miles away, where they will be industrious and contribute to the welfare of the country. He need not be philanthropic in order to endorse the movement; he need only consult his own interest. I have deep faith that our project will be successful and will exert a beneficial influence on all mankind. Even if it should fail it may be the means of opening up avenue that may yield the desired result.

[In this way,] revolution may be averted. It *<illeg.>*, but it is near enough [to be] threatening. The unrest and discontent of the idle, whom the ordinary citizen does not see, is like the seething of a giant subterranean cauldron. We seek to remove this condition, which is the result of want and inaction, by substituting for them occupation and opportunity of subsistence. I explain these circumstances to demonstrate that there are many sources, not apparent to one who does not reflect, from which will proceed abundant aid for the consummation of our scheme.

The plans which will be adopted by the convention have for their foundation the exodus of the cooperators to a Western state. First of all, there are numerous places we can go. We have had invitations to settle in dozens of states. Governor Rogers¹ of Washington urges selection of that state and places which have thus far been considered with most favor are Washington, Utah, Idaho, and Texas. Immense tracts of fertile land are there which can soon be irrigated and upon which can be built homes and stores and factories which will produce not only enough for the consumption of the community, but a surplus which can be sold to the outside world. For we do not contemplate isolating ourselves, but will keep in touch with the country and widen our propaganda until cooperation becomes the system of America.

The Advance Guard.

A few thousand men will proceed within a few weeks to the location selected by the convention and will prepare abiding places for the great armies that will follow. Our only difficulty will be in transporting the advance guard. they may have to walk — orderly and peaceably, of course. But we are confident that as our ideas become understood we will have ample funds to start, given up not only by our friends and sympathizers in

trade unions and schools of economic thought all over the country, but also from the capitalists, who will be glad to see the idle millions — the “tramps,” as they are called — melt away from the cities and the byways like snow. Out of the small membership fee and per capita tax that are charged there will soon be a revenue of \$25,000 a month. This will buy lands, procure agricultural implements, tools for building, machinery for factories, and such other articles as are needed at once.

Women will go. It will be a community of families and homes. The people will be educated. They will have newspapers and literature of the right kind and they will represent organized intelligence and knowledge. They will develop the resources of the state, organize industrial enterprises, build roads, canals, schoolhouses, and public buildings.

We will have short hours of labor. Six hours a day for each man will be sufficient to produce enough for the community. The man who toils the hardest will work the fewest hours. The common store will supply all. The kitchen in the home will be abolished and food will be distributed from a common kitchen. The general conduct of the colony will be such as the federal statutes will countenance and it will be a happy, bright spot in civilization, where men will be brothers.

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¹ John Rogers (1838-1901) was elected Governor of Washington in 1896 on the ticket of the People’s Party, becoming the third chief executive of the new state. Rogers jumped to the Democratic Party in 1900.