
Review and Personal Statement.

by Eugene V. Debs

Probably the text of a speech delivered in Chicago, Monday, Oct. 2, 1922.
Reprinted here from the Oct. 5, 1922, press release of the National Office, Socialist Party.
Copy in the Socialist Party of America Papers, Duke University, microfilm reel 9.

The capitalist World War had long been over when I entered prison in April 1919 to serve a sentence of ten years for protesting against this country being dragooned by its plutocratic arch-enemies into that monstrous and disgraceful massacre of the human race. I gave my hearty approval and my loyal and outspoken adherence to the ringing manifesto issued by the St. Louis convention of the Socialist Party, which boldly challenged the bloodthirsty American plutocracy and declared the war a crime against humanity.

At the time I entered prison the Socialist Party, though shaken violently in the general upheaval and shattered by the fierce and relentless persecution its anti-war attitude had precipitated upon it, was still a united party. It is true that internal strife and dissension, added to the bitter persecution from without, had wrecked many of its locals and decimated its membership, but the party was still intact until the convention was held four months later at which the split occurred which rent the party asunder and divided its membership into several conflicting and hostile factions.

During the period that followed all socialist, radical, and liberal publications, of whatever kind, were withheld from the prisoners convicted under the so-called Espionage Act by the prison authorities under orders from Washington to destroy the same as fast as received, which orders were faithfully executed.

In these circumstances we were kept in the dark as to the conflicting claims of the various factions, save only as an occasional paper ran the gauntlet of the vigilant censorship and brought us a ray of light, or as information reached us through such letters received

from comrades as the censors did not consign to the waste basket. In these letters from comrades, once standing at elbow-touch in the Socialist Party, but now torn apart, dissevered, and pitted against each other in bitter fratricidal strife, all kinds of charges were made, the various writers each pleading the legitimacy of their own particular faction and urging an avowal of allegiance in its behalf.



At this point I wish to pause long enough to say that I have never had any heart for factional warfare. I simply cannot and will not engage in it. I can argue and reason with comrades, but I cannot and will not give way to anger and resort to vituperation over my differences with them. They are as honest as I am and if I cannot agree with them I can let them alone, and they cannot quarrel with me if I refuse to quarrel with them. All the time, strength and resources I have, limited enough at best, are needed to fight capitalism, the

common enemy, and there is not one moment to spare to abuse and vilify my own brothers, and I absolutely refuse to degrade myself by descending to that level.

Due to the conflicting reports and claims that were made to me at Atlanta and the meager information of a reliable nature that was allowed to reach me, I determined to remain noncommittal until I should be released and able to investigate for myself, hear all sides, and arrive at an intelligent conclusion, and I gave my pledge to various comrades to that effect. Shortly after my release, unfortunately, I fell ill from prison starvation, mental as well as physical, and from overstrain due to the brutal persecution preceding my prison sentence. From the time the war was declared our trouble began and it waxed fiercely after we were criminally pitched into the seething, bloody maelstrom. We were pursued by the sleuths of the profiteers and hated by their dupes as traitors, threatened with assault and assassination, and outraged in every manner the malignity and mendacity of capitalism could devise. We were, in short, the legitimate prey of the brutal patrioteers, their politicians, preachers, editors, not a few labor leaders (?), and their whole vast army of other mercenary hirelings. Following this nerve-testing ordeal came the prison sentence, covering in all nearly five years, and under such circumstances it is not strange that my health and strength were sadly impaired and that month after month, with all the power of will I could bring to bear, I was physically unable to resume my usual activities, and this must be my apology for this belated statement which otherwise would have been made long ago.

Let it not be supposed that I attach any importance to this statement as I am speaking for myself only and for no one else, and it is of consequence only in that it is in fulfillment of my pledge to many comrades that when I felt qualified to do so, I should state my position and give my reason for it, and this statement is issued to redeem that pledge.

After taking time enough to personally see and hear comrades representing the various sides to the factional controversy, giving them equally fair and impartial hearing, after reading carefully the literature of the several factions and weighing carefully their arguments for themselves and against each other, and after studying the complicated situation as best I have been able to do under the circumstances, I have ar-

rived at the definite conclusion that my place in the future as in the past is in the Socialist Party, and in its ranks and beneath its banner I shall continue to serve the working class and the social revolution as soon as my shattered strength is restored and I am able to resume my former activities.

Twenty-five years ago I stood at the cradle of what is now the Socialist Party, the child of the American Railway Union, and I have marched with its comrades in sunshine and tempest ever since. I have joyed in its advance and kept the faith in its retreat, but always has my heart been in the party born of the union in which I fought the battle that first sent me to a prison cell, and in the darkness there opened my eyes to the light of Socialism and its radiant ideals, which caught and held captive my imagination and have claimed my soul's allegiance and every red drop of my heart's blood ever since.

I see no reason why I should desert the Socialist Party now. I have spent the better part of my active life in its service and why should I now turn upon it and rend it; seek to tear down, destroy what I have devoted all these years of struggle and persecution helping to build up? I admit the party has made mistakes and that it is not today what I should like to see it, but the same would be true of any other party I might join. If the Socialist Party is not the revolutionary working class party it should be, it can be made so, but if it is held that this is impossible, then how is it possible to achieve that result with the same material, the same comrades, the same ultimate aims, merely adopting another name and marching under another banner?

We all admit that in the struggle of the working class for the overthrow of capitalism we must have a political party as well as an industrial organization, and if after twenty-five years of the best effort at our command we should confess that we have failed and that we cannot make the Socialist Party the true political expression of the class struggle, then I should have to conclude that the same melancholy failure would mark our efforts to build such a party under any other name.

The splitting up of the party and the splitting of the splits has reduced us all to weakness and impotency at the most crucial time when we should present a solid front, and the disastrous condition has invited the contempt of our capitalist masters expressed

through repressive legislation under which our lips are gagged and our bravest comrades are either in prison or under indictment and about to be sent there. Let us rejoice that the splitting era has ended and that there are now increasing signs of returning sanity and of an era of reaction that will drive us to unity from the sheer necessity of self-preservation.

Let me here add that if I were inclined to desert the Socialist Party, which I am not, I should not do so in the hour of its weakness, after being shot into shreds and tatters in the struggle. It is then I should prove my allegiance to its principles, whatever its mistakes and shortcomings, by standing staunchly by it as I do now and shall in its future struggles, with all the strength I can command.

It has not been an easy matter for me to arrive at this conclusion. There has been many a heartache in the ordeal that led to it. To see comrades I know to be equally loyal to the cause, equally faithful and efficient in its service, and whom I have been in the trenches with and love equally well — to see these comrades arrayed against each other in hostile camps seeking to discredit and destroy each other to their common undoing, has been to me a saddening spectacle and has given me pain and regret beyond expression.

I know many of the members of the Workers' Party and the Proletarian Party and I know that in taking the position they have they were actuated by the best of motives and that they are as honest as we are in the choice they made and in their efforts to build up a party to serve the working class in the revolutionary struggle. These comrades I respect as I do our own and I shall treat them accordingly, confident in the belief that in good time the differences that now separate us will be ironed out by the stern logic of events and that we shall be once again united and marching shoulder to shoulder into battle together for the overthrow of capitalism and the emancipation of the workers of the world.

The world of capitalism is today in a state of physical collapse and moral bankruptcy and only Socialism can save it from lapsing into the barbarism of the dark ages. How infinitely important, therefore, that we should muster all our forces and conserve all our energies for the herculean task that confronts us!

This year is of special historic importance in the United States. The supreme opportunity challenges our

fitness and capacity to profit by it. The twin political parties of capitalism are disintegrating from their own sheer rottenness and corruption. Thousands upon thousands of decent voters are deserting both in disgust and seeking another fit for their allegiance. That other is the Socialist Party and in the campaign now in progress that fact must be made manifest in every way in our power.

Think for a moment of the present condition of this country and what it might be if the working class but made intelligent use of its organized industrial strength and its political voting power!

Let us all realize the challenge to our loyalty, our courage, our capacity to think and act, and set to work to rebuild the party. The shattered ranks can be restored to their former strength if we but will it. The locals that have been destroyed can be reorganized and the thousands of members who have gone out from us can be brought back once more.

To work, comrades, in every state, and all along the line! We have a party to rebuild, a press to restore, a campaign of supreme account to wage, and in this great work in the service of the working class there is room and need for us all!

Let us at once provide the means to place every available speaker and organizer in the field!

Let us rally to the support of our press which has been all but strangled in the foul clutches of capitalism and renew our subscriptions and secure others who are ready now and waiting for our literature as never before!

Let us start our locals going again, attend meetings with eager enthusiasm as we used to do, and begin at once in every locality a thorough canvas for new members to add to our rolls. Thousands are now ripe and waiting for Socialist Party membership!

Let us pay our dues at once, local, state, and national, and put money enough in our treasuries to finance our propaganda activities and make our vicinity resound with the ringing battle-cry and the joyous shouts of advancing socialism!

Let us organize meetings everywhere, on the street corners, on the commons, in public halls, school-houses, churches, anywhere, and see that they are attended by the people who are sufficiently alive to wish to hear the only live message that will be heard in this campaign!

Let us plan a methodical and continuous campaign of literature. Leaflets, tracts, pamphlets, books galore are now available at small cost and tons and tons of them should be spread broadcast among the people!

Let us get into our local papers to the extent that we have access to their columns. Hundreds of these papers are open to us and will gladly give space to such articles as we send them if they are brief and to the point. The columns of all these papers should bear daily evidence that there are Socialists in the community and that Socialism is the issue of the day.

Let us resolve here and now that the fight is on in dead earnest and that we are going to win. Ours is the cause of the people and ours is the task of waking them up and lining them up for action in the worldwide struggle for their emancipation. Fifty thousand members on our rolls on election day and a hundred thousand soon after the New Year's sun blazes upon the world!

Let us as a party stand staunchly for the industrial organization of the workers and aid them in every way in our power, not only to achieve their industrial solidarity but by standing solidly behind them in every fight they have with their cruel bosses, in every struggle with their exploiting masters, giving them and their wives and children all the moral and material support at our command. We are their fellow-workers, their interest is our interest, our party is their party, and we are bound to fight with them in every battle they wage everywhere and every day in the year!

Let us above all things remember our class war prisoners and swear by the eternal that they shall go free. Let us renew and intensify our agitation in their behalf until the infamy of their imprisonment is blotted out. There must not be one exception. The last of them must be rescued from the cruel clutches of their capitalist keepers. As long as Tom Mooney, Warren Billings, Ralph Chaplin, and scores of others fester in the black-holes of capitalism, we are all in disgrace, and my share of it accuses me and keeps me awake at night. The working class prisoners in the penitentiaries of California and Texas since long before we entered the war must not be forgotten. We must prepare a list of them all, and wherever they may be and whatever their affiliation or non-affiliation, if they are in jail or prison for fighting for labor they are our com-

rades and we are false to ourselves as well as to them if we fail to put forth every effort in our power to secure their release. Nor must we ignore or betray cowardly indifference toward those under indictment in Michigan, California, and other states, and those out on bail who were either arrested, indicted, or tried under the infamous black-hand gag law against "criminal syndicalism," the miserable pretext of the thieving patrioteers to silence protest against their plunder of the people and their criminal abuses and murderous misrule. Each of these victims is our comrade whose persecution is his credential and claim and our obligation and duty!

The subject of international affiliation is of course an important one, but in my opinion need not and should not be decided at this time. The bitter contention between the several internationals is gradually dying out and in time will disappear at least to the extent of making possible a united front and a harmonious working agreement, and until that time is reached I believe we should hold aloof and give our time and energy to the reconstruction of our shattered party. That will occupy us fully for a time and once we have a party of power and standing there will be no trouble about affiliation.

It is my opinion that our party policy should favor harmonious relation with all other parties and organizations which stand for the working class as far as this may be possible, whether they are revolutionary in the full socialist sense or not, provided our party integrity is zealously safeguarded and is not compromised in any degree under the circumstances. There is a certain degree of common interest between all these parties and there are times and situations when unity of action is possible and may be fruitful of good results which can never be garnered by a policy of rigid and exclusive isolation.

I have reserved for the last the infinitely important question of the Russian Revolution to which I have given my enthusiastic allegiance from its inception and to which I now pledge my unqualified support until this stupendous historic event is triumphantly consummated. It matters not what its mistakes have been, nor what may be charged against it, the Russian Revolution, in what it expresses for the Russian people and in what it portends for the oppressed and exploited peoples of all nations, is the greatest, most luminous and far reaching achievement in

the entire sweep of human history. Considering the unimaginable opposition, the violent and implacable hostility, the endless plots and conspiracies, the malice, hatred, and brutal revenge of the whole capitalist world, including its armed invasions and assaults, that the revolution has encountered, it is the marvel of the ages that it has heroically withstood all attempts to undermine and destroy it and that it is today farther advanced and more certain of achieving its high destiny than at any time since it first shook the capitalist pirates of the world out of their dream of universal empire.

I have said that Lenin as the incarnation of the Russian Revolution is the greatest thing that came out of the World War and that is still my positive conviction.

The Russian Revolution under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky is the historic beginning of the international revolution that is destined to sweep capitalism and militarism from the face of the earth. The Russian comrades today are fighting heroically to free, and starving stoically to feed, the workers of the whole world. What they have suffered and endured in their sublime struggle for human liberty and for the progress of the age and the happiness of future generations, is beyond human speech and will be chronicled only in the ultimate liberation of mankind from the cruelty

and crime of all the centuries in the scroll of time.

The Soviet government is the beginning of the self-government of the people throughout the world. It has withstood the combined assaults of all its foes from without and from within and its red flag of freedom still floats in triumph in the face of all the black flags of capitalism and piracy that surround and threaten it.

The Soviet government, the lusty child of the revolution, baptized in its precious blood and consecrated to its high ideals, is invincible. It stands and will stand monumental of the revolutionary spirit in which it was born, of the cruel despotism it has conquered and destroyed, of the sacred blood so freely poured out by its valorous defenders, and of the peace, freedom, and happiness it is destined to achieve for the whole of mankind.

All hail then the Russian Revolution and the Soviet government, the crowing glory of the twentieth century!

Let us all unite, East and West, North and South, over all the earth, and pledge our loyal and unqualified support to our Russian comrades until the irresistible revolution they have inaugurated has run its triumphant course and achieved the peace and freedom of the world!

Edited by Tim Davenport.

*Photograph of Gene Debs and his brother Theodore, Dec. 1921, photographer unknown.
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