

# An Open Letter To Eugene V. Debs.

## Dear Comrade Debs:—

A year ago you were taken from our midst by the enemies of the working class and thrust into Atlanta Penitentiary — with head unbowed — hurling defiance at the Capitalist Government — the very incarnation of the proletarian revolution in America.

All through the war, while the leaders and officials of the Socialist Party were betraying the class struggle and making a hollow mockery of the St. Louis Resolution, you stood like a rock for International Socialism and against the capitalist-imperialist world war. Later, when the Bolsheviki conquered power in Russia and set up a dictatorship of the workers and peasants, you, Comrade Debs, came out for them in ringing words — while the officials and leaders of the Socialist Party were busy discrediting the idea of proletarian dictatorship as the means of overthrowing capitalism. You also came out openly for the Liebknecht-Luxemburg Spartacan revolt against the Ebert-Scheidemann bourgeois Government, while the official Socialist Party was, and is, defending those traitors and their government as "Socialist"

All your life you had championed the cause of the working class — all your life you had espoused the class struggle and the principles of International Socialism. Not without reason did the Communist Party of Russia (Bolsheviki) in issuing the call for the formation of a New International, invite "the left elements of the Socialist Party of America under the leadership of Eugene V. Debs" to send delegates to Moscow.

Before the prison gates closed upon you, you must have known of the long list of compromises and betrayals of which the leaders and officials of the Socialist Party had been guilty in the past. You must have known of the growing resentment of the rank and file within the party, which smoldered fiercely for two years and eventually burst forth into a conscious revolt against the official machine.

Your article in the February 1919 "Class Struggle", one of the organs of the Left Wing, of which you were one of the editors—"THE DAY OF THE PEOPLE"—was one of the factors aiding this revolt. We shall quote the last part of it in order to refresh your memory: "The reign of capitalism and militarism has made of all the peoples inflammable material. They are ripe and ready for the change, the great change which means the rise and triumph of the workers, the end of exploitation, of war and plunder, and the emancipation of the race. Let it come! Let us all help its coming and pave the way for it by organizing industrially and

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politically to conquer capitalism and usher in the day of the people. In Russia and Germany our valiant comrades are leading the proletarian revolution, which knows no race, no color, no sex, and no boundary lines. They are setting the heroic example for world-wide emulation. **Let us, like them, scorn and repudiate the cowardly compromisers within our own ranks, challenge and defy the robber-class power, and fight it out on that line to victory or death!** From the crown of my head to the soles of my feet I am Bolshevik, and proud of it. "The Day of the People has arrived!"

Thus spoke the man whom the capitalist class placed behind prison bars last year.

To-day, after a long tomb-like silence, comes the announcement of your acceptance as presidential candidate on the corrupt Socialist Party ticket.

We presume, Comrade Debs, that you are ignorant of the facts and unacquainted with all that transpired within the Socialist movement this last year, else you might not have accepted a nomination which can only lead to a parting of the ways between the class-conscious revolutionary workers and yourself, their one-time leader.

What made you accept the nomination we know not. We can only infer that the political charlatans, the "cowardly compromisers", who have not hesitated to lie to you in the past, have done so again.

We address this open letter to you because we desire to place the facts squarely before you. Your lifelong devotion in the cause of the working class, your attitude toward Bolshevism and the heroic Communist leaders, Lenine and Trotsky in Russia, and Liebknecht and Luxemburg in Germany, — your scorn and repudiation of the betrayers of Socialism and the class struggle, make it imperative that we acquaint you with the type of party and men you, in your ignorance of the facts, are aligning yourself with.

During this eventful year, while you have been kept behind prison bars, without chance of intercommunication, the Communist International has extended itself to every part of the world.

During this year, revolutionary Socialists of practically all countries have decisively cut themselves off from association with the old parties of the Second International and have formed new Communist parties. In this country the rank and file revolt led to the formation of a Left Wing movement within the Socialist Party, which culminated in September of last year at Chicago in the creation

of a Communist Party of America. Together with the Communist Labor Party, these two parties absorbed all the really revolutionary elements in the old party. Not more than one-fourth remained in the Socialist Party, notably the large Finnish Federation. The Finnish Communists have not yet split off from the Finnish Socialist Federation. The betrayers of Socialism, "the cowardly compromisers", as you called them, remained in the Socialist Party, and even now lead and shape its policies and tactics.

In the recent hearings on the ouster of the five Socialist Assemblymen at Albany, we have the last word of the highest Socialist Party spokesman on just what that party now stands for, and just how it intends to attain its aim. The entire defense of the Socialist Party at Albany was constitutional regularity as the limit of party purposes and actions. They accepted unreservedly the existing form of capitalist government, based upon the Constitution of the United States, as the form upon which to build the future society. They insisted that the Socialist Party did and always would conform to the State and National Constitutions and laws. Not the least mention was made of the class struggle. Instead, patriotism and loyalty was painfully and somewhat ludicrously stressed. The class character of American Government could hardly be mentioned since the Socialist Party boastfully proclaimed itself the arch-defender of "representative democracy" and of "constitutional integrity".

The St. Louis Platform, upon which you and others were convicted and sentenced to long prison terms, was brushed aside as "a scrap of paper" and as of no moment. Whatever was vital and revolutionary in it, even though moderately expressed, was twisted and distorted to rob it of its meaning and significance, and the witnesses all insisted upon their exemplary "loyalty" and "patriotism" during the war. In several other respects, in which the party declarations might seem to have offended bourgeois "respectability", the defense was that the party never did anything of the kind, no matter what it said. Control of legislative representatives by resignations, required by the party constitution, was declared a dead letter. The obligation not to vote for military appropriations was repudiated. Instead of insisting upon the propriety of alien membership in a working class political party, the Socialist Party introduced false figures to prove the "Americanism" of the party membership.

In spite of the achievements of the Russian Communists, in spite of the impending Communist revolutions in other European countries, the chief spokesman of the Socialist Party at Albany characterized the Communist