

Debs and Moyer—A Page of American Labor History

THE following open letter of Eugene V. Debs is a flash into American labor history and the character of the A. F. of L.

Terre Haute, Ind., November 16th, 1918.
Chas. H. Moyer,
President Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers,
Denver, Colo.

Dear Sir:

In the press dispatch in this morning's papers reporting the proceedings of the Pan-American Labor Conference now being held at Laredo, you are reported as having said that the A. F. of L. saved your life and the lives of Haywood and Pettibone twelve years ago, that you are now endeavoring to repay that organization for having saved your life and that Pettibone on his death-bed acknowledged his gratitude to said organization.

Upon reading this statement by you which contains other matter along the same line, I at once sent the following telegram to Laredo:

"Louis N. Morones,
Vice-Chairman Pan-American Labor Conference,
Laredo, Texas.

Be not deceived by Moyer's statement. He is now training with the Federation fakirs that wanted him hung twelve years ago and maligning the men who saved his life. If you want the truth I can furnish it and dare Gompers to face me and deny it. Eugene V. Debs."

I now write to you direct to ask you if you made this statement and if you did I want to brand it for what you know it to be, as an absolute falsehood. But before passing final judgment I wish to give you full opportunity to say what you have to say in your defense. If you have been misrepresented I shall be glad to know it, but if you have been truthfully reported I want you known for what you are in the labor movement.

Time was when I had full confidence in you and held you in respect, but I confess to have some doubt as to your integrity after hearing reports concerning you and your performances as a union leader from apparently trustworthy sources. Still, I would give you the benefit of every doubt and it would afford me far greater satisfaction to have you clear yourself and stand forth as the man I have believed you to be than to see you, like so many others with whom you are now in close affiliation, corrupted and dishonored for the sake of hanging on to an official job and selling your very soul for a mess of pottage.

If you stood before that conference at Laredo and made the statement above quoted you know that you uttered a deliberate untruth, an untruth so flagrant that it should have stuck in your

throat and made you blush scarlet with shame.

You know as well as I do what influences saved your life and you know it was not the A. F. of L. You know that Gompers and his gang wanted you and Haywood and Pettibone hung twelve years ago just as the same gang wants Haywood to be kept in the penitentiary today. You know that this gang, this Gompers gang that you are now cheek by jowl with, never lifted a finger to help you, but, on the contrary, did everything they could in a sneaking and underhanded way to send you to the gallows until the Socialists and the loyal men in the labor movement had stirred up the country and made your acquittal practically certain and then only did they allow themselves to drift with the current and reluctantly concede—and it strained them not a little to make the concession—that you were really entitled to a fair trial.

You know this to be the fact as well as I do. John M. O'Neil, your official associate and editor of your magazine, fiercely denounced Gompers and his crowd for their perfidy and cowardice. You know this, too, and you also know that at your official headquarters there was not a day that passed that Gompers and his pals, whom you are now currying favor with, were not roundly denounced as corporation tools and traitors to union labor for their cowardly and contemptible attitude in the Moyer, Haywood and Pettibone affair at the time the Socialists stood almost alone in fighting their battle and the general belief was that they would be hanged as murderers.

And now, if this report is true, you have the hardihood to stand before a body of labor delegates and tell them that it was the A. F. of L. that saved your life and to take the message back to their constituents and spread the lie in the Mexican labor movement so that it might be misled and betrayed into believing that the A. F. of L. is the only tried and trusted champion of the working class, while the I. W. W. is the traitorous conspiracy against labor which should be wiped from the earth.

I have had very positive differences with Haywood, as you well know, but if you made this statement to deceive the Mexican delegates, then I would rather a thousand times be Haywood in a penitentiary for the rest of my days than to be Moyer with a life tenure of the presidency of the western miners, or even the presidency of the United States.

You are quoted in your statement as having used the following language:

"Pettibone died, and on his death-bed he gave thanks to the American Federation of Labor for the help it had given him."

Who was present at his death-bed scene? Who was it that heard him express these thanks? I want to know and insist on your telling me. I know exactly how Pettibone felt toward Gompers and his crew in the A. F. of L. and I would be willing to stake my life that he never expressed his thanks to them for anything unless it might be for having earned his profound contempt.

Gompers and his A. F. of L. bunch helped to save your life and the lives of Haywood and Pettibone just as the same gentry helped to win the A. R. U. strike in 1891. They did not raise a finger in support of the strike, but in their characteristically cowardly and underhanded way they did all they could to discourage and defeat it and not until they were virtually dragged to Chicago by the angry and threatening rank and file of their organization did they make a move and then only in the nature of a pretense of sympathy which they were compelled to make and which but masked their perfidy.

And that is precisely the kind of help they rendered Moyer, Haywood and Pettibone when their lives were at stake and the bones of the three of you would long since have been consumed in quick-lime had you depended upon them to save you from the gallows.

It is quite true that some of the rank and file of the A. F. of L. joined in the movement to save you from being hanged, but they were mostly Socialists and they, above all others, denounced Gompers and the high officials for their cowardly and disgraceful attitude. You do not give these Socialists any credit however, to whom you actually owe your life, and you know that most of those who led in the movement in your behalf, especially at the beginning when you were branded by the capitalist press as murderers and assassins, did not belong to the A. F. of L. at all. You owe all your gratitude, according to yourself, to the Gompers administration, which in its heart wanted you hanged as high as Haman, and well do you remember it, from your own mouth have I heard your honest opinion of Gompers and his official associates.

But I have stood up for you, Charlie Moyer, in Butte and other places when you were attacked, charged with being a weakling, a fakir and a corporation tool. On my last trip out there I was warned at Butte not to attempt to defend you, but I did it, nevertheless, in a packed meeting I addressed, and I told your accusers to their faces that their charges against you could not go unchallenged while I was there.

And am I now to have to confess to these men that they knew you better than I did and apologize to them for the wrong I did them and the cause of labor in defending you? This will depend entirely upon yourself.

In your statement to the Laredo conference a deliberate and damning falsehood was put into the labor record and it shall not remain there if I can help it, and I think I can.

Awaiting your reply, I am,

Respectfully Yours,

EUGENE V. DEBS.

Socialism and Reaction in Austria

Continued from page eight

archistic. I was not so childish as to believe that my deed would abolish absolutism in Austria, or that it would bring peace. I have not become an anarchist. Anarchism attributes such possibilities to individual action. I have never believed it. I stand, as I have always stood, for mass action carried out with all effective means that are in accord with the feeling of right of the masses—in times of peace by parliamentary means, but when absolutism has destroyed all parliamentary means, also by force—to be conducted by the masses. To-day, as ever, I maintain that mass action must be, and is, decisive, and that my act has been nothing but a modest individual act, not to take the place of mass action, not even to call forth mass action, as some of my friends, who believe that I hoped for a concerted uprising of the people in answer to my deed, have said. What I wanted was to establish the psychological premise for future mass action, in Austria. I did not hope, by my deed, to call forth a revolution, but I wished to force the party to consider its attitude to a revolution. I have never, I should like to call the attention of the public prosecutor to this fact—during the course of the whole war, said a word in favor of forcible uprising because I

knew that, in the atmosphere in which I was condemned to live, in the milieu of this Executive Committee and this party, such words cannot be spoken. They have lost all understanding for the fact that force can only be created by action. They, in their cynicism, would have laughed at me. It was necessary, therefore, to present an avowal of the use of force, an avowal that would force the comrades to say, "This man is serious. He sacrifices his life in order to affirm his convictions." I wanted to force them to take a stand, and they have taken a stand. To-day no Renner, no Seitz will dare to say to the workers of Austria that forcible measures must not and cannot be used. That was what I desired to accomplish, what seemed to me worth the sacrifice of my life, to force these people to change their attitude.

I will add here that I have never over-estimated my deed, either before or after the first police hearing; I do not wish that my deed be over-estimated, either in its object, or in its effect. I simply wished once more to give the revolutionary spirit a place in our movement.

It was an open avowal of the policy of force, but it was a symbolic act, a parable as well. By it I wished

to show to the masses what could be accomplished on a large scale, that each and every one must be willing to sacrifice his life, that sacrifice should not be invited, but that one must be ready to sacrifice. You object that I have committed this deed against the principles of the social democracy. This also is not true. The International has admitted parties which, before the war, stood, in their programs, for individual action: the Social Revolutionists of Russia. I was one of their opponents, and have always carried on a sharp theoretical fight against them. *Mass actions must be supreme.*

I do not know whether a speedy death will release me, or whether fate will condemn me to an endless living death. But, when I stand face to face with my end, I have but one hope, that my nerves and my senses may serve me well to the last moment.

In taking leave of all whom I have loved, and whose love has been my happiness, from all my friends and comrades in all parts of the world, I will remind you, in parting, as a word of comfort, of the depth and purity of that Easter greeting:

Not all are dead that are buried, for they cannot kill the spirit, oh, brothers!