
About Eugene V. Debs: Socialist Leader's Family Ask that Comrades and Friends Use Patience and Leave Him Rest

by Theodore Debs

Published in *The New Age* [Buffalo, NY], vol. 10, whole no. 493 (Feb. 2, 1922), pp. 1, 4.

To begin with, I wish to say that the state of Gene's health will not permit him to take any active part in the work of the movement for some time to come, and for this there is good reason.

For two years before he went to prison, he was followed by detectives, hounded and threatened, and then he went to prison, where his peculiar position was an extremely difficult one and where he remained nearly three years. While none of this experience touched his spirit, it did take toll of his body and he feels the effects of it more now than when he left prison.

The long confinement, the prison food, the unceasing demands upon him of one kind and another by the prisoners, the misery and suffering that constantly surrounded him, all these drew heavily upon him in a physical way and as a result his body is tired, starved, and worn, in consequence of which his heart action has been affected. If he is not allowed time to rest and recuperated, he can never hope to actively enter the field again. This has been made plain and emphatic by his attending physician. At this writing he is in bed, being particularly advised that he must keep quiet and free from excitement, while one caller and one committee after another are at his door all day and half the night, some of them very insistent that he must make a speech for them at once. The comrades and other callers are here in the kindest spirit and with the best of intentions, but they simply do not understand.

Gene has been away almost continuously in the service of the working class under great difficulties during the last five years. His personal affairs and his office here are in a sadly disorganized state

from sheer neglect. There are piles of accumulations, including letters without number, manuscripts, pamphlets, books, etc., etc., which alone would require a month at least to get in order.

In the meantime and since the day of his return, letters, telegrams, etc., have been pouring in by the thousands, and with our scant means and limited facilities, it is simply impossible to handle this enormous mail. If the comrades receive no acknowledgment such as they expect, they will know the reason why. In addition to this there have been visitors and committees each day and the long distance telephone calls have been coming all hours of the night and from all directions. Under these circumstances you will see how impossible it is for Gene to collect himself in his weary and exhausted state, clear away the accumulations, reorganize his affairs, and prepare for further service in the movement.

There is another thing I wish to say that he would not say if he were making the statement, and that I would not say under any other circumstances. He has gone through five presidential campaigns, speaking day and night for months at a time, and as a result of sheer overwork, he succumbed to nervous exhaustion three different times. On each occasion it was doubtful if he would recover his strength, but his constitution and his will pulled him through. At 66 he must not break down again and we shall not permit him to if we can help it. Nor would he be helping the cause in the least by so doing. He has no organic trouble; he is simply at the point of nervous and physical exhaustion from years of overstrain, excitement, persecution, and hardship, which he will overcome if he has time — and this he must have. He will not be idle, you may rest assured. He will find ways while in retirement of serving the cause.

How long it will require for him to recuperate, we do not know. That will depend not a little on circumstances. Rest and quiet are most needed and if these are allowed a sufficient length of time, recuperation is certain to follow. If the comrades will understand that at present Gene cannot engage himself to make a speech or to respond to their many calls and demands, it will be along decidedly and I know how gladly they will agree to this when they understand the situation. As soon as he is physically rehabilitated and ready to fill speaking engagements he will announce himself without unnecessary delay. As soon as he can do so he will arrange to see all those of the various groups who have expressed a desire to be heard, and it is only fair that he should do so as nearly all of them have been his comrades

and closely associated with him in the past in the work of the movement.

Having been cut off so long from practically all sources of information and from active connection with affairs during a period of great change, he cannot at once, especially in his weakened physical condition, adjust himself to the situation.

Gene has but one purpose when his strength is restored and that is to take the place it is his duty to take, and where he can render the most effective service in organizing the workers, industrially and politically, along the lines of their class interests, and fighting side by side with them the battles for their emancipation. And when he is ready for work he will take his stand and that will be the proper time to take it. To announce prematurely what he intends doing two or three months hence, when the situation may have still further changed and be entirely different from what it is now, would simply complicate matters so far as he is concerned and certainly do no good. He will be heard from directly in various ways as soon as the clogged up state of affairs here is relieved and strength will permit.

Meanwhile, I can only ask the indulgence of our comrades, and this I do with entire confidence that they will understand and make allowance accordingly.

Yours fraternally,

Theodore Debs.

Edited by Tim Davenport

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · February 2012 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.