

Jesse Cox: An Appreciation (September 15, 1902)

Terre Haute, Ind., Sept. 15, 1902.

Jesse Cox was a commanding figure in the socialist movement in America.¹ When the Nationalist movement was organized in Boston by Bellamy and others, Jesse Cox was one of the first to catch the spirit of it in the West; and it was largely through his efforts that a local Collectivist Club at Chicago was converted into a branch of the national organization. From the time the philosophy of collectivism first appealed to him until his great heart ceased to beat, he was an earnest, active, and uncompromising advocate of the movement.

Jesse Cox was in the completest sense a socialist. He had read the literature and he understood the philosophy of socialism. But he wasted no time in quibbling or hair-splitting. He scorned the petty contentions that breed factions, and he had small patience with socialists who resort to the methods of capitalist politicians to gain their ends. Jesse Cox was clean-handed, open-minded, whole-hearted, and white-souled. There was nothing small and nothing mean about him. He was always frank and there was never any doubt as to what he thought or where he stood.

For himself he wanted nothing — his only thought was to serve. He was ever contributing and never receiving. With him socialism was the means and the end, and he stood upon the broad, open highway at the head of his column, pressing forward as he could — leaving the bypaths to others — his eye upon the goal and his heart throbbing for the march that kept his fellows in line.

For a long time Jesse Cox stood almost alone. He was eminently successful in his profession and people wondered that he turned to socialism and still more that he boldly avowed his belief in it. They did not know the man. With him courage and conviction held equal sway. What he thought he said and also acted. There was no taint of moral cowardice in his nature.

When the Social Democracy was organized Jesse Cox was one of the most active, energetic, and helpful workers. His advice and counsel was invaluable. He was cool, dispassionate, and farseeing, and had his counsel

always prevailed the socialist movement would be far more advanced in America than it is today.

While chairman of the National Executive Board he vindicated his fealty to the cause and his right to leadership. From first to last he was honest, unselfish, true. He was trusted, respected, and loved by every one of his colleagues.

He was hated only by those who were too mean and small to know him.

The telegram from Seymour Stedman announcing the death of Jesse Cox touched and shocked me.² It had not been long since we had clasped palms and the strains of his cheerful voice still lingered in my ears.

According to my reckoning he died too soon by many years. But who can tell? If life be measured by good deeds, Jesse Cox lived full a century. Faithfully he did all he could and his works will endure, as his heart will continue to beat, in the socialist movement he loved so well.

Goodbye, Jesse! We loved you truly. We will forget you never.

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¹ Jesse Cox (1843-1902) was a well-to-do attorney and former chair of the General Executive Board of the Social Democratic Party with headquarters in Chicago. Cox resigned this position in May 1900, bitterly opposed to what he foresaw as an inevitable drive towards unity with the Springfield SDP. He died on Sept. 10, 1902, of pneumonia following surgery for removal of his appendix.

² A telegram announcing the death datelined Chicago, Sept. 11, 1902, had been squeezed onto the front page of the previous issue of *Social Democratic Herald*.