
Campaign Speech at Spokane, Washington, September 16, 1908

[excerpts]

by Eugene V. Debs

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Class conscious socialism had its inning in Spokane last night [Sept. 16, 1908] when 3,000 people turned out at the Great Northern depot to greet Eugene V. Debs, Socialist candidate for President, upon the arrival here of his "Red Special," and later when 4,000 people paid 15 and 25 cents each admission and contributed \$203 additional in voluntary collection to hear him deliver an address at the armory.

Both gatherings were comprised largely of men of the laboring classes. In both gatherings starched shirts were the rare exception and at the depot assembly many men appeared in working clothes minus their coats. The train, which was due to arrive at 3:30 [pm], was three hours late and the greater portion of the crowd remained at the depot throughout the entire interval in the excess of their zeal or their curiosity to see the man who is making his third Socialist race for the Presidency.

Long Cheering Welcomes Train.

Even after their long wait they were disappointed in their desire to see the candidate. They caught sight of the train as it pulled into the depot yards and gave vent to a cheer which lasted two or three minutes, but Mr. Debs, who had already delivered six speeches yes-

terday, had retired for a little sleep and his companions were reluctant to permit him to be disturbed.¹

So as soon as the train came to a stop a member of the Spokane Socialist committee, which met the train at Harrington [WA], stepped out upon the platform and announced that the procession would form immediately and march in a body through the streets to the armory. The band accompanying the special train disembarked and formed in the yards and, led by the local committee, marched uptown, followed by the entire crowd of people, most of them under the impression that they were following their national party leader.

The crowd having departed, the Debs train was switched over to the O.R.&N. yards, where Mr. Debs continued his sleep until 8:30, when he rose and followed the crowd to the armory for the evening meeting.

Red Special on Long Tour.

The "Red Special," as the Debs train is called, which consists only of an ordinary Pullman sleeping car, a plain day coach, and a baggage car, was made up at Chicago, August 31 [1908], proceeding thence westward through Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Colorado, Utah, Nevada to California, thence northward across the state, Oregon, and Washington as far as Everett, where it turned eastward again last night and from there will proceed on eastward, arriving at Chicago September 25. This is as far as the schedule has been definitely made up, but if sufficient funds are contributed to defray the expenses it will go from Chicago eastward for a tour of the northern Atlantic states.

The expenses of the tour are being defrayed by a popular subscription contributed by members of the party and local organizations. The first call for subscriptions for the purpose was issued July 18 and members of the party with them printed statements showing all individual contributions to the fund up to July 21, at which time the fund had reached \$6,019.

¹ Debs went on at midnight and spoke until 1:15 am the previous night in the second of back-to-back hall meetings in Seattle and Everett. His sleep schedule was no doubt disrupted.

Contributions Are Liberal.

Up to 10 days ago the subscriptions had been coming in so slowly that the abandonment of the eastern trip was contemplated, when California comrades suggested the plan of taking up voluntary contributions at all meetings addressed by the candidate. This plan was inaugurated in California, and, in addition to the admission charged, demanded at all meetings in large cities, the voluntary contributions taken up at San Diego, Sacramento, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, and Spokane have in each instance exceeded \$200. The cost of the train and its transportation for the purpose is estimated by members of the party at \$20,000.

The members of the party, in addition to Mr. Debs, are Theodore Debs, brother of the candidate and his secretary; A.H. Floaten, a former merchant of Telluride, Col., who was driven out of that place for extending credit to string miners; W.W. Buchanan, who is in charge of the sale of socialist literature; Harry M. McKee of San Diego, socialist lecturer, who conducts the collections at Debs meetings; Charles Lapworth of London, representing British and continental newspapers, Otto McFeely [???], press representative for the party, Professor Christian Sorenson of Denmark, leader of the "Red Special" band of 15 pieces, with the members of the band; and George S. Boomer of Prosser, Wash., candidate of the Socialist Party for Governor of Washington, who joined the party at Kalama yesterday. Mr. Boomer left the party here, and goes from Spokane tomorrow to canvass Stevens County and the party was joined here by Ernest Untermann of Clearwater, Idaho, candidate for Governor of that state. The itinerary of the special train contemplates leaving Spokane at 9:00 am today over the O.R.&N. for Wallace and Wardner, thence eastward through Montana over the Northern Pacific.

Big Armory Jammed to Doors.

Fully an hour before the time set for the armory meeting the early arrivals began to press for admittance to the building, and when the meeting opened it was jammed to the doors, several hundred people being compelled to stand for lack of seating accommodations. Fred H. Moore presided and Mr. Boomer was introduced as the first speaker. At the conclusion of his address Mr. McKee took the floor to

tell of the trip of the "Red Special" and make the appeal for contributions to the fund to defray its expenses. The admission fee fund was taken in charge by the Spokane local, which had already contributed \$50 to the special train fund. The collection was taken by passing baskets through the immense audience, and brought nearly a peck of silver coins together with a few small bills, totaling \$203.40.

Mr. Debs was scheduled to arrive at the armory at 9:00 o'clock, and the earlier plans for the meeting were timed to a nicety to make way for him when he arrived, which he did almost on the second. When he entered the south door of the building he was immediately recognized by the vast audience, which rose to its feet almost as a man and greeted the candidate with a rousing cheer. Mr. Debs was introduced as the "Martin Luther of this new Protestant movement, the Abraham Lincoln of this new century of industrial progress."

Resembles Opper Cartoons.

Standing over six feet in height, loose-jointed and lanky, almost totally bald, long in the feet and wearing a loose-fitting suit of steel-gray clothes, Mr. Debs greatly resembles the cartoons that Frederick Opper used to draw of the late Bill Nye. While engaged in conversation he shows a greater expanse of teeth than does President Roosevelt, and when speaking to an audience his teeth snap with a force which carries sincerity in a manner which his serious though smiling face emphasizes.

Without the airs of the polished orator, he stands when in repose before his audience with his hands on his hips and arms akimbo, but when he rises to a climax to drive home his arguments he leans forward, places both hands on his knees, and lifts the weight of his body on his toes.

Throughout his address Mr. Debs was frequently interrupted by applause and remarks of approval and when he concluded, after taking an hour and fifteen minutes, there was a rush of his auditors to the platform which for a moment completely engulfed him, but from which he was soon rescued and hastened away to his private car.

Socialism to Free Workers: Capitalistic Course About Run, Says Debs.

Through all the ages of the past the few have ruled and the many have served; the few have worn the purple of luxury and the many have struggled in poverty. The Socialist Party is the political expression of the socialist movement in the emancipation of the working class from wage slavery.

The capitalist system in which we live has about run its historic course, and on every hand we see unerring signs of a change. It has just begun to write again of its record of bankruptcy and failure, of idleness and distress, of despair and death.

The last panic, so called, was in 1893 and was charged by the Republican Party to the incompetency and dishonesty of the Democratic Party. According to its own logic I convict the Republican Party of being responsible for the panic of 1908. In 1900 the slogan of the Republican Party was "Let well enough alone," in 1904 it was "Stand pat," in 1908 it is "God knows."

Both Old Parties Alike.

There is no difference between the Republican Party and the Democratic Party so far as the interests of the workingmen are concerned. Mr. Upham and Mr. Peabody control the great coal trust of Chicago. Mr. Upham is collecting funds for the Republican Party and Mr. Peabody is collecting funds for the Democratic Party and both campaign funds are being used for the same purpose, that of keeping the workingmen of the nation in ignorance.

About this time of the year the old party politicians become intensely interested in the welfare of the working class. Their orators come before you and tell you how deeply they are impressed with your intelligence. They insult your intelligence by flattering your ignorance while the Socialist orators arouse you to intelligence by telling you of your ignorance. The old party politician calls you "horny-handed workingmen" when what he really thinks of you is that you are "horny-headed" instead. Why, some of you unthinking workingmen have developed your hands and neglected your brains until you ought to be ashamed to look your hands in the face.

Through all the ages the badge of labor has been the badge of servitude, when it ought to be the badge of honor. Society has always been organized and is now organized for the exploitation of the many in the interests of a class. The coming of the ma-

chine and the ownership of the machine by a capitalist class which controls the government has separated the worker from the product of his labor until he is compelled to give four-fifths of the product of his labor to the owner of the machine for the privilege of being permitted to work. This has created the present condition of idle men needing work and idle mills needing men to work them. On the one hand we have a class of the capitalist owners of tools they do not use, and on the other hand the working class users of tools they do not own.

The capitalist politicians accuse us in one breath of endeavoring to stir up class animosities by attempting to array class against class, and in the next breath say there are no classes in this country. If there are no classes in this country how can we array class against class?

Workers Beginning to Think.

The workers are beginning to think and they will soon begin to act in their class-conscious capacity, and when they begin to act they will soon abolish wage slavery. There is a class struggle in this country because the workers are demanding a larger share of the product of their labor, while the capitalists are refusing to give it to them and are demanding a larger share for themselves. This struggle will never be ended until the capitalist class as a class is abolished and we establish the industrial commonwealth. The present system ought to be abolished not in the interests of the working class, not in the interests of any class, but in the interests of a better humanity.

President Roosevelt has denounced the class-conscious Socialist as an evil thing, but the class-conscious Socialist can see through President Roosevelt without the aid of a cathode ray. When he was Governor of New York and there was a strike on the work of constructing the Croton Dam because the contractor would not obey the 8-hour law he called out the state troops to protect the interests of the violator of the law.

Accuses Roosevelt of Duplicity.

President Roosevelt is a political purist with his hands stuck out behind him. While promising in his last campaign to regulate the trusts and make the big malefactors obey the law, he was writing to E.H. Harriman to come down to the White House in the dark of the moon and help him compose his message to Congress. Roosevelt poses as a friend of the working class, and he

has nominated for his successor another friend of the working class. God save he working class from its friends.

W.J. Bryan also pretends to be a friend of the working class, but two and a half years ago, when the officers of the Western Federation of Miners were kidnapped and taken into court on a trial which contemplated judicial murder, he had an opportunity to show whether he was or not, and he failed to take advantage of it. If he had shown then that he was a friend of the working class he would have offended the miners, and if he offended the miners he would have sacrificed what little chance he now has to ever become President.²

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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² This last sentence seems to be garbled in the transcription.