
Debs Goes to Prison.

by David Karsner

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Chapter One. **In Terre Haute.**

Unguarded and unescorted, save for the company of a few friends, Eugene Victor Debs, four times candidate for President of the United States on the Socialist Party ticket, on Saturday, April 12, 1919, left his home in Terre Haute, Indiana, on the ten o'clock train over the Big Four Route for Cleveland, Ohio, to surrender himself to the federal authorities who would take him to prison for ten years for having exercised his constitutional right of free speech, thereby violating the Espionage Law, a wartime statute, enacted June 15th, 1917.

Debs had made a speech under the auspices of the Ohio State Socialist Convention at Canton, Ohio, June 16th, 1918, in which he reiterated the Socialist Party's opposition to the war, denounced the profiteers, paid tribute to the Bolsheviki of Russia and all the struggling forces in the world that were making for the emancipation of the workers. For this speech Debs was tried on September 9, 1918, in the Federal Court at Cleveland before Judge D.C. Westenhaver, and was found guilty by a jury on September 12th. On Friday, September 14th, 1918, he was sentenced to serve ten years at the Moundville, West Virginia, State Penitentiary, which has a contract with the government to receive 250 federal prisoners a year.

It was about 11 o'clock Saturday morning, April 12, 1919, when the telephone in Debs' home rang. Debs himself answered. It was District Attorney Wertz on the other end of the line. "Yes," said Gene. "Good morning. What can I do for you?"

Wertz told Debs that he would not send a deputy marshal to Terre Haute to escort him to Cleveland, but that Debs should leave at the earliest possible moment of his own accord.

"Thank you, Mr. Wertz; I'll be right along. Good-bye."

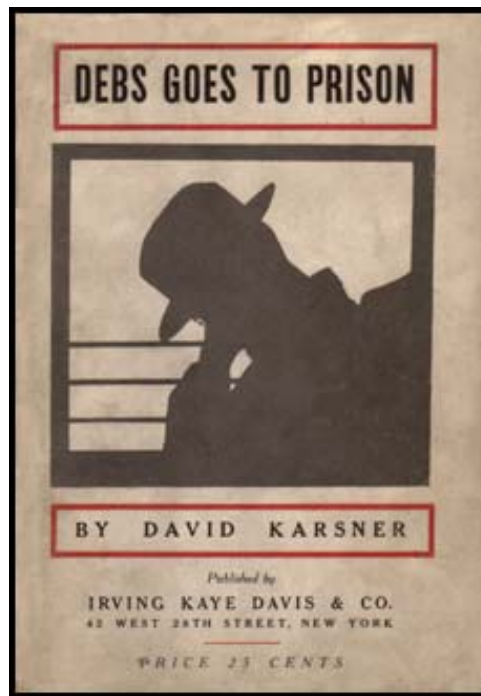
From that moment until 9:30 o'clock in the evening Debs was busying himself at home packing up a few of his things for the journey to the penitentiary. Mrs. Kate Debs, his wife, helped him with this and that, reminding him to write that little note before he went away, and

"Don't you think you should attend to this?"

All day long telegrams and special delivery letters poured into his home on 8th Street. They were from his friends in all corners of the continent.

"What a wonderful demonstration of love," said Gene as he opened another telegram that arrived while he and I were seated in his parlor. He signed for the message, patted the little messenger boy on the head and called a loving "Good-bye" as the astonished youngster tripped down the porch and off the wooden steps.

It was just before 2 o'clock that I arrived in Terre Haute. There were crowds at the station and I thought surely that Debs must have gotten away. A newsboy



thrust a local paper in my hand, and I read it eagerly for the first word of Debs' movement.

On the first page was a little item to the effect that District Attorney Wertz had told Debs to come to Cleveland.

I hailed a taxi. "Take me to Debs' home," I urged. A moment later it occurred to me that maybe the driver did not know where Debs lived. I told him. The chauffeur smiled. "I wish I had a dollar for every man I've driven to Debs' house. Why, more people in Terre Haute know where Gene Debs lives than they know the location of City Hall." In a few minutes we were at Debs' home.

Some moments elapsed before the door was opened. A tall, matronly woman, with gentle face and stately mien, opened the door. There was a slight hesitancy in her manner. I sensed the situation at once. Persons coming into that home that day were nothing less than intruders, interlopers, and embarrassment overwhelmed me. Yes, Debs was at home, she said, but very busy. "He is upstairs writing some letters now." Then the door opened wider and she bade me come in. I stepped into the parlor. Footsteps were heard on the steps above and Gene was coming down.

Debs appeared to be in much better health than when he was on trial in Cleveland last September. His shoulders are less stooped. His eye is clear and his voice is firm, sweet, and resonant. We sat a few moments in his parlor. It was a wonderful spring day down there in southern Indiana. Everywhere one sensed the budding and bursting of new life. Debs felt it.

"What a splendid day, and did you notice out there on the lawn the leaves are coming out?" he said.

The bell rang. It was another telegram from someone far away sending last greetings of love and good will.

"I am going away at 10 o'clock tonight," Debs said. Then he told me of the conversation with District Attorney Wertz. "Well, I am all ready. Yes, I am ready to go to prison. I am ready to pay the ultimate penalty for speaking what to me was the truth. I said in court at Cleveland that I had not one word to retract. I have not anything to retract now."

I asked Debs if he would tell me his own feelings in connection with his going to prison. He smiled. I knew at once that I had asked a foolish question, for the answer to it flashed to me in his smile, his wonder-

ful, confident smile. We chatted about this and that. Names bobbed up in the conversation frequently. To every name mentioned, Debs would say, "Give him my love when you get back to New York," or "Tell the dear Comrade that it is all right; everything works out for ultimate good."

"What about a pardon? I don't know anything about one. I have asked for none. Nor shall I.

"I stand on the threshold of going to prison with malice toward none, and with perfect faith in the rectitude of my course and an absolute confidence in the justice and ultimate triumph of the cause to which I have gladly given my life. To ask a pardon would be to confess guilt."

Debs' eyes were flashing fire, and a steely glint came into them. He told of the wonderful meetings he had been having in northern Ohio.

"The other night at Lima," he said, "we had a great meeting in the street. The Chamber of Commerce had shut up all the halls to us. Well, we didn't need their halls. The streets hold more people than halls. Then the fire department came, evidently with the intention of squirting the hose on us. I told those crowds the firemen would not dare to turn the hose on them. Why, had they done so, that crowd would have turned their carts upside down."

Gene slapped his leg a whack, as the thought flashed across his mind of this attempted petty denial of free speech.

Debs said that he thought the dark forces of reaction, as epitomized in District Attorney Wertz, truly thought that Bolshevism was rapidly spreading throughout the United States, and that, if they could cut out its tongue, they would then have killed it.

"There is not doubt," he said, "but that they want to put me in jail."

He thought it not altogether unlikely that President Wilson might intervene. "Wilson has a vision," said Debs. "There is some light on his social horizon, however much it may be obscured by the clouds that hover over and around him. He sees that the liberties of the people cannot be crushed by repressive measures. But there are tremendous forces behind the President, or before him, I don't know which, that won't let him be free." Debs made it very clear to me that, so far as he was concerned, he was willing to go to prison, if prison be the price of truth, conscience, and one's

respect for the integrity of one's own soul.

As we talked those few moments, not more than half an hour together, Mrs. Debs reminded him that there were many little duties he had yet to perform before he began his journey to prison. "Yes, dear; I'll be right along." I knew I was intruding on these sacred premises.

"Well, I have got many little things to do this afternoon. I have to write a note or two, then there are some relatives I must see here in town before I go away. And there is an old man and his wife I must go to see; they are both sick and neither is able to leave the house. They have been my neighbors for many years. I must see them."

Only a few persons in Terre Haute, the town in which Debs has made his home for these many years, and which has become famous through its connection with his name, knew that he was leaving them that night for the last time. Perhaps Debs wouldn't come back any more. Maybe he would have to serve his full 10 years after all. Maybe the capitalists would exact from him the full pound of flesh. At the station there was only a little group to see him off, some of those upon whom Gene had called to bid a last farewell that afternoon.

These town folk, who love him and know him for what he is and for what he has done for humanity, were arranging a huge demonstration for him. Debs requested them to call it off. He did not want it. "I just want to slip out quietly now. When I come back, I told them, that will be the time."

A little way down the street from his two-story frame dwelling two children, about 10 years old, were playing with a kitten. I had just left Debs' home, but as an experiment, I asked one bright-eyed youngster where Gene Debs lived.

"Right in that second house from the corner there, two doors below Sycamore Street. You can't miss him; he's the man with the kind face." Then the little girl chirped up:

"Yes, the other day he patted me on my head and told me not to hurt my kitten, and I have not squeezed it since." The little one pressed the kitten close to her body.

I had no special way in which to occupy my time during the remainder of the afternoon so I decided to talk about Gene Debs to whomever I chanced to meet.

Down on the railroad tracks near the station where I had just come in was a watchman's shanty. I looked in and there was a watchman, an old man, looking to be about 60 years. His face was red and weather beaten. His eyes were red, too, from the wind and cinders. He was reaching his arm through the little window to dip a cup into a pail of water that was placed on an upturned box.

"Do you happen to know where Debs lives?" I asked.

"Well, I guess I oughta," replied the railroad watchman in an all-knowing manner. He directed me to the house which I had just left.

"I guess you know they're taking him away today to prison," I ventured.

"Yes, I know it." A fierce glint tempered with sadness stole into the eyes of the old railroader who hastily gulped down the water he had dipped from the pail.

"I suppose you are going up to say good-bye to him before he goes."

"Oh, Gene Debs never goes out of Terry Hut but what he comes by this shanty and yells in, 'So long, Bob, see you soon again.' He'll come by here tonight before he goes away. He won't be gone long, I'll bet." That night, just before train time, Gene Debs, his brother, Theodore, and I were walking slowly to the station from Debs' home.

"Just a minute, boys," said Debs, "I want to stop at that shanty over there and say 'so long' to Bob."

Strolling down Seventh Street towards the center of the city's heart (Wabash Avenue), an elderly man hove into sight. He looked to me as though he might be a retired wage worker, too old now, maybe, to work at whatever had been his trade. A butt of a cigar was gripped between his brown teeth, and a battered light felt hat dipped over one eye. His clothes hung upon his slender frame in a manner resembling nothing so much as a scarecrow's. I put the same questions to him. With some show of city pride after the manner of an elder citizen who has a speaking acquaintance with all the local celebrities, my friend owned that he knew Gene Debs very well.

"I once worked for him," he vouchsafed, swelling up just a little. I asked what he had done for Debs.

"Oh, I tinkered round his porch and painted her up. Well, so Gene is leaving Terry Hut tonight for

prison! Well, I'll be damned. That's tough, ain't it? Well, now, there was Don Roberts! Don laid these bricks in this street. Yes, sir, he paved all this street you see here, and what did he get for it? Why, he got six years, that's what he got for it. Six years. Times ain't changed none; the more you do for people the more they soak you. Ain't it so? Yes, sir, Don Roberts 'done' six years at the 'pen.' That's what he got for paving these streets."

I now remembered that Don Roberts had been the mayor of the city some while back and was involved in, or said to be, in a graft scandal. He had served his term.

"What does Mr. Roberts think of Gene Debs?" I inquired.

"Fingers and toes with him," replied the old fellow. "You'll find Don down there standing 'round the Terry Hut House, they all stand 'round there Saturday afternoons. Now I'll just bet you anything that when Gene Debs comes out of prison he and Don'll be thicker than ever."

"Do you know," I said, "someday Terre Haute will honor itself by erecting a huge monument to the memory of Debs?"

"Well, I don't know. Now we ain't much on monuments in Terry Hut. Did you see that Soldiers and Sailors monument down there in the park on your way up? Ain't that a hell of a looking thing? No, we don't go in much for monuments here in Terry Hut. This is a frontier town. We used to be wide open here, everything in full blast. By the way, mister, where do you come from?" I told him I had just arrived from New York. His eyes opened wider and he took a little gasp.

"Well, that must be a great city, eh? Wide open, I guess. What kind of politics have you got down there now?" I told him Tammany controlled the city.

"Oh! Wide open town, eh?" No, I said, the politicians were trying to make some show of respectability.

"Just like here in Terry Hut," he said with disgust.

"Well, you'll see Don down there hanging 'round the Terry Hut House. He'll tell you all you want to know about Gene Debs. I'll just go 'round and say good-bye to Gene before he goes." The old wage worker slowly ambled off toward Debs' home to take his parting farewell.

Down at the Terre Haute House some leading citizens and politicians were standing in groups out on the pavement. Several iron rods that were holding up the awning that extended to the curb were bent in just about up to a man's shoulder, and several leading citizens were settled snugly against them. I went into the bar. It was crowded.

The man next to me was drinking slowly from a glass of beer. He wore striped trousers that were frayed at the heels, and a black coat that was green and shiny in the back and elbows. A greenish black braid ran all around it and on the cuffs. A high piccadilly collar with soiled flaps pinched his neck. He had a professional air about him.

We struck up a conversation about Gene Debs.

"Well, I should say I do know him! For twenty years, sir."

"What does Terre Haute think about Debs going to prison?" I ventured.

"Well, now, speaking for myself," he began, "I have known Debs for many years. I like him personally, but he's certainly got some cranky notions in his head." He gulped down the rest of his beer and ordered another.

"I'll tell you, I hope Debs goes to prison, and I hope he s-e-r-v-e-s — twenty-four hours." I was surprised.

"But why the twenty-four hours?"

"Just to prove to him and his followers that the law is bigger than he is." Someone nudged the doctor's arm and they strolled away to a stall in the barroom.

At the Terre Haute *Tribune* office I interviewed Mr. House, the city editor.

"Everybody in Terre Haute loves Debs," he said with feeling, "but many think he was mighty foolish to make that speech when he did. He had no right to do that. I guess the feeling in Terre Haute about Debs is something like this. Ninety-five percent of the people here don't like his ideas, but they worship the man. They all love him. But there probably is not one man or woman in that ninety-five percent but who would go to jail for Gene Debs if they could."

Further down on Wabash Avenue where Gene and Theodore have their office I came up to the janitor of the building.

"Gene Debs ain't been here today," he said. "He's going to prison today. Didn't you see it in the papers?"

He'll be back soon, though, I guess." The last expression rang true with sincerity and hope for the future of Debs.

"I am not going to prison, but to victory," said Debs to me just before I left him in the afternoon.

In spite of the fact that on Saturday afternoon a committee representing the Terre Haute Central Labor Union called on him to get his permission to hold a demonstration that night, which Debs would not permit, there were at the Big Four railroad station more than 200 of the old guard, the faithful Comrades who would not let their Gene go away from them without a farewell and a last handshake.

Shortly after 8 o'clock Saturday night I went to the Debs home on 8th Street, near Sycamore. Lights were shining through the side windows of his sitting room. For some minutes I sat on the porch, not wishing to intrude before the moment Debs had requested me to come. Persons coming from the movies passed his home, and each said something in inaudible tones. Frequently I heard people say, "There is Gene Debs' home. They are taking him away tonight."

In the sitting room, furnished like any ordinary American home, sat Debs in an ample rocking chair, smoking a cigar. He might have just returned from a campaign trip. There was good nature everywhere, and Debs seemed to be the one least affected by the ordeal through which he was to pass in the few hours and days to come. Around him sat his brother, Theodore, Mrs. Debs, Arthur Bauer and Mrs. Bauer and daughter, Mrs. Debs' mother, and one or two neighbors. On a table was placed a huge bunch of American Beauty roses. Mrs. Flynn, an old washer-woman, had bought them out of the hard-earned money received from washing clothes of the neighborhood.

Debs saw me looking at the flowers. He told me something about Mrs. Flynn.

"She is a Catholic," said Debs, "and every morning for many years she has prayed for me." The great and simple man blew a ring of smoke and smiled rather sadly.

"The back of the house resembles a horticultural hall," said Mrs. Debs, as she showed me the myriad flowers that had been brought to the house all day and evening. They were the gifts of Debs' neighbors, many of whom do not share his ideas, but who worshiped the man.

"Right up the street," said Debs, "lives a rich overall manufacturer. He has a big factory. Of course, he doesn't like the things I say about capitalism, and does not sympathize in any way with our views, but he is a splendid neighbor and was here today to say good-bye."

"Over in that corner house," Debs moved from his chair and, going to the window, pointed across the street, "live the two Douglass girls, with their mother. Those girls have wept all day because I am going to prison." All the while Debs spoke impersonally. He might have been speaking of Bill Haywood or Emma Goldman, or any other individual in hard luck, yet loved by his fellow man.

"Well, Eugene, we had better start," said Mrs. Debs, rising to go.

"Yes, we don't want to miss our train," replied Debs, rising.

Theodore, who has been closer than a brother to Eugene, like Jonathan to David, went to the hat rack and helped Gene with his coat. Mrs. Debs' aged mother was weeping softly. Gene went over to her and patted her cheek. "It is all right, mother," he said with infinite tenderness, "it will come out all right in the end."

In front of the house there was an automobile to take the party to the station. Debs said he would rather walk, so Theodore and myself escorted him. It was five minutes' walk. Gathered on the sidewalk in front of the depot was the faithful old guard. They were miners, factory workers, some well dressed businessmen, all together there on the street, scarcely lighted, all talking and feeling in their hearts a sorrow which they could not fully express. Gene strolled right into the crowd. Instantly he was surrounded by a large group. Those who could not edge their way right up to Debs reached over the heads of the more fortunate ones and clutched at the coat sleeves.

Debs went from one to the other, speaking words of love and cheer. They represented, typically so, the great American labor movement. They were the ones who would gladly have gone to prison to serve Debs' sentence for him.

One big raw-boned miner worked through the crowd. He thrust his gnarled hand into that of Debs' and tears flowed freely from his eyes. "We're with you, Gene," he sobbed, "by God, we're with you to the last

man.”

“I know it,” said Debs, patting his cheek; “until the last drop we’ll stand together, all of us. You know only by standing together that we can win. You boys take care of the outside and I’ll take care of the inside.”

Debs passed into the station and bought his ticket. The crowd followed. For five minutes there was a buzz of voices, then a great hurrah that echoed through the station.

“Three cheers for our Gene!” shouted a little Scotchman in greasy overalls and a jumper. Two hundred voices echoed the sentiment. Out on the platform they followed, first one running up to Debs, then another, all eager to get the last handshake or the last word. Two businessmen could not possibly be more competitive for the good things in life than were these men competing, vying with each other just to touch the hem of Gene Debs’ garment.

Debs mounted the steps. A Pullman porter doffed his hat as he stepped up. Instantly Debs removed his broad felt hat. In this manner the crowd stood for some minutes.

Right up front in the crowd was a soldier in uniform. On one sleeve he wore two gold stripes, and on the other was one gold stripe. The soldier boy stood first on one foot, then on the other.

He could restrain himself no longer. He climbed up on the platform, grasped Debs by the hand, and fairly shouted:

“Mr. Debs, I went through hell over there for them, and now I’m ready to go through hell over here for you.”

The crowd let out a war whoop.

“And there are a million more like me,” shouted the soldier back to the crowd.

Just before the train pulled out Phil Reinbold, former president of the Terre Haute Central Labor Union, stepped up. He and Gene embraced.

“We won’t forget you, Gene,” said the labor man.

“We have stood side by side for many years, Phil,” said Debs, affectionately, “and we’ll stick until the last drop of blood — until the last tap of the bell.”

Mrs. Debs took off her hat when the crowd uncovered as the train pulled out of Terre Haute to take this man to the penitentiary for 10 years. Debs threw a kiss to his good wife and Comrade, and yelled a

cheery good-bye to all the rest. A little way down the platform a young girl pulled a red flower from her bosom and threw it at Debs, who was still standing on the platform.

We went right into the smoker until the porter made up Debs’ bed. Thus began the journey to the prison.

Earlier that day Debs gave me this statement:

“During my incarceration my Comrades will be true and my enemies will be satisfied, and therefore, as far as I am concerned, all will be well with the world.”

I asked Debs how Mrs. Debs was bearing up under the great strain.

“She has stood shoulder to shoulder with me through every storm that has beat upon me, and she is standing firm now.”

Debs said that it was the regret of Mrs. Debs that she could not go with him. “But she cannot do that, so she will remain here to keep the home fires burning.”

All about the Debs home there was every indication that the world’s great humanist would remain undisturbed for the rest of his life. A man was working in the little garden in back of the house, laying out new flower beds for Mrs. Debs and pruning the trees on the lawn in front.

Mrs. Debs took keen delight in opening the hundreds of telegrams that came to the house all day Saturday and Sunday, and which are probably still pouring into the home. Quietly standing by his side throughout all of his trials and tribulations, throughout all of the homage and glory that have been lavished with loving hands upon her celebrated husband, Mrs. Debs refused to give out any statement concerning the plight in which Debs now finds himself. No word of antagonism has escaped her lips for those tremendous forces that conspired to silence the eloquent tongue of Eugene Victor Debs.

Her hair may be just a wee bit whiter; her cheek may have lost just a little of its accustomed rosiness; she may even be somewhat thinner, but withal she is quite as erect and carries her head in the same queenly manner, resembling nothing so much as a great tree in some forest over which has swept many a strong wind, yet which remains steadfast, braced to weather any

storm that may again arise.

Saturday morning Debs had received in the main copies of a photograph of the bust which is being made of him by Mayer, of New York, the sculptor who made the now famous "People's Lincoln," which is to be placed in every school and college in the land. The photograph of the Debs bust is a tribute to the artist. Every tiny vein, every line of suffering and trial, the valleys and crevices in Debs' face are revealed in the picture. When this heroic work is completed it will be placed in the Rand School of New York. Perhaps some day replicas of Debs' bust will find their way to every school and college in America, beside that of Lincoln.

Chapter Two. **Bound For Cleveland.**

On the train from Terre Haute Debs was accompanied by his brother-in-law, Arthur Bauer, Terre Haute druggist, and myself.

Debs smoked two or three cigars as we sat in the club car. He talked lively and was in excellent spirits. Soon after 12 o'clock I persuaded him to retire.

During the three-cornered conversation I said to Debs: "Your imprisonment will certainly tend to accelerate whatever boom that would otherwise have been started for you for President. If the Socialists in convention again nominate you, would you consent to make a run?"

"There is better timber in the woods than I," replied Debs. "Let me see. The presidential campaign is two years away. Why, in two years I'll be the best swabber of floors or the best prison clerk in Moundsville."

I told Debs that not a single Socialist in America would agree with him in his opinion that there is better timber in the woods than he. Not a man or woman but who would defer that honor in favor of Debs.

If Debs is still in prison when the presidential campaign rolls around, what worthier honor could the Socialist Party confer upon its membership and its constituency than by honoring Debs in naming him as its choice for the Presidency?

I reminded Debs that he had already been nominated, so far as New York was concerned. He wanted to know how that came about, and I told him that

several weeks ago, when Scott Nearing was given a reception following his trial, someone, in paying a tribute to the Socialist educator, mentioned him as the party's candidate for President. Whereupon Nearing instantly put the quietus on that spontaneous boom by declaring that Gene Debs was the logical leader of the party in the presidential race.

"That is so characteristic of Nearing," said Debs.

Debs did not say positively to me that he would refuse to run for President. Neither did he give me any authority for assuming that he would accept the nomination.

This conversation led Debs to speak of "leaders."

"Very often," said Debs, "a leader is, in fact, a misleader. It is the workers, the men and women who do the hard work in building up their branches and their locals, to whom all the credit, homage, honor, and glory is due. They are the salt of the earth, the gold in the rainbow.

"These simple people, the Jimmie Higginses who work early and late for the cause, who arrange the meetings, who wash the dishes after the festive dinners — O my soul! How much we owe to the workers in our movement. They expect no pay, they receive no honors. If you were to approach them with your thanks for the good they have done, they would blush to the roots of their hair.

"I have had a regret all of my days that I shall not live long enough to repay these dear and beloved Comrades of mine for the wonderful love and honors they have showered upon me with their loving hands — their seamed and scarred hands, worn and shriveled from the toil that has been their lot.

"Their joy is to serve, and yet none serve them."

Debs was thinking more than he said. His face, at moments, was sad and grave. While he was speaking of the service of the workers to the cause dearest to their hearts his face was radiant and a moisture came to his eyes.

"All that I am in this world," he was saying, softly, "is what my Comrades have made me. They are the fruit of the choicest tree that ever grew."

Across from us, sitting in the brightly lighted smoking car of the Big Four Line, sat several smooth and soft gentlemen, clothed in immaculate linen. They were going somewhere to make a trade, or to strike a

bargain. They knew Debs sat within a few feet of them. Each man had either a newspaper or a magazine before his eyes, pretending to be reading it. But I saw each man look over his book or paper, and steal a glance again and again at Debs on the sly. A little while before they had run out on the platform of the Pullman at Terre Haute to see what all the racket was about.

People asleep in their berths in several cars ahead and below the one in which Debs was assigned came out in their pajamas and nighties under their coats.

One tall fellow, with a fine face, and clothed in his pajamas, shook Debs by the hand and said: "Mr. Debs, I am going to Canton. Have you ever been there?"

"Oh, yes," replied Debs, appreciating the humor, "I made a speech there once." The old guard standing down on the dimly lighted platform of the station laughed heartily.

It was at Canton that Debs made the speech on June 16, 1918, that resulted in his indictment, conviction, and imprisonment.

Shortly before five, the porter came to my berth at the opposite end of the car. I was sleeping soundly.

"Are you with Mr. Debs?" the porter inquired. He seemed to regard me as a deputy. "Mr. Debs has just gotten up."

A few moments later, Debs was in the washroom writing a note. He said he had slept only an hour, "but," he added, "I was resting with my thoughts." If one could only write what those thoughts were.

We again went to the club car, and in a moment Bauer joined us. A stranger was sitting opposite. He approached Debs and I was alert, thinking the stranger might be a deputy to place Debs under arrest. He was just a man who wanted to shake Gene's hand and give him his love. Debs said he did not know the person.

In the early morning while the train was creeping slowly into the Cleveland yards Debs leaned over to me and asked me to take his statement for his comrades throughout the United States. I fished about for some paper in my coat, and not finding any, took a book that I had in my grip. Although I was unaware of it at that moment, I had picked out the book *Debs: His Life, Writings and Speeches* by Stephen Marion Reynolds. When I had written that statement in the back of the book Debs remarked, "That makes a nice addendum, doesn't it?" I asked him if he would sign

his last statement for me. This is the statement:

"As I am about to enter the prison doors, I wish to send the Socialists of America who have so loyally stood by me since my first arrest this little message of love and cheer. These are pregnant days and promising ones.

"We are all on the threshold of tremendous changes. The workers of the world are awakening and bestirring themselves as never before. All the forces that are playing upon the modern world are making for the overthrow of despotism in all its forms and for the emancipation of the masses of mankind.

"I shall be in prison in the days to come, but my revolutionary spirit will be abroad and I shall not be inactive. Let us all in this supreme hour measure up to our full stature and work together as one for the great cause that means emancipation for us all.

"Love to all my Comrades and all hail to the revolution.

"Eugene V. Debs."

Earlier in the night I asked Debs what would be his attitude toward a possible pardon.

"Suppose," I asked him, "President Wilson should cable a pardon for you without any strings attached to it, an unconditional pardon, what would you do, what would be your attitude?"

Debs took another draw on his cigar. As the smoke curled from his lips his answer was ready:

"I shall refuse to accept it, unless that same pardon is extended to every man and woman in prison under the Espionage Law. They must let them all out — IWWs and all — or I won't come out. I do not want any special dispensation of justice in my case. It is perfectly clear. I always have taken that position, and I cannot too strongly reassert it now."

I understood. Every one of his followers will understand.

All during the trip to Cleveland Debs talked gayly enough. He told us stories of how back in 1896 he had campaigned for Bryan for President. "Even during that campaign," Debs said, "I was getting along fast toward Socialism. I was talking straight industrial unionism, and some of Bryan's lieutenants did not like it. They said I was directing more attention to myself

through my speeches delivered direct to the workers than was Bryan with his free silver panacea." Debs chuckled merrily as he recalled the incident.

"Many years ago," he went on, "during the great Cripple Creek strike in Colorado I was asked to go out there and help to organize the miners. I would not go into a situation like the one I found out there again for anything in the world — not for anything except for Socialism.

"The towns were flooded with armed thugs and they were all ordered to shoot any labor agitators that arrived on the scene. The businessmen and the mine owners had determined they would not allow a union in that district. I went out there. At the station I was met by a large group of armed thugs. They had made up their minds that I should not make a speech that night." Debs said he told the leader of the gang that "this would either be the beginning of organized labor in Colorado or the end of me."

"They held conference together while I went to a hotel. That night I made my speech and held one of the most successful meetings that it has ever been my privilege to hold.

"The next morning I was standing on the curb near my hotel, talking with several of the union men. One of the men drew my attention to a big, hulking fellow not ten feet away. He was the biggest man I ever saw. He had a deadly eye. I could see that the fellow had guns in his pocket.

"See that fellow over there, Mr. Debs?" one of my friends said to me. 'Well, he is a sure shot. He was never known to miss the man he went after. Last night that man stood not ten feet away from your stand all the time you were speaking. He has never left you since then. He has been following you every step, and he will be the last man to see you out of this town.'

"Is that so?" I said to my friend. I walked over to the strong man on the curb and extended my hand to him.

"My friends have been telling me that you were at my meeting last night, and that you have been watching my movements ever since,' I told him.

"Yes, Mr. Debs, I have. I knew that they were out to get you in this burg. I come from Vincennes, Indiana, and I know you're on the level with the workmen. I made up my mind that any — — — who laid his dirty hands on you would be carted out of this

here region a corpse.'

"The man blushed to the roots of his hair," said Debs, "when I thanked him for the personal service he had rendered to me. I have found so many times that it is almost impossible to accurately declare who are our friends and who are our enemies."

Chapter Three.

Spirited Away to Prison.

In this story I want to tell about the extralegal methods through which Debs was spirited out of Cleveland, where he arrived at 6:30 o'clock Sunday morning. Nothing like it ever has been known in the American labor movement.

At 10 o'clock Saturday morning Debs, at Terre Haute, received a telephone call from District Attorney Wertz at Cleveland. Wertz was the man who prosecuted Debs last September. Debs was told to come at once to Cleveland. He might come alone, the prosecutor said.

In spite of the fact that Debs had been at his home only a few days to convalesce from a serious attack of lumbago, with which he was afflicted at Akron, Ohio, at the home of Mrs. Marguerite Prevey, one of his bondsmen. Debs told the prosecutor he would proceed to Cleveland on the 10 o'clock train Saturday night.

When the Cleveland Saturday evening newspapers carried the news that Debs was leaving Terre Haute for that city, Cleveland Socialists hastily organized a monster mass meeting for Sunday afternoon. Dodgers printed in scarlet ink announced the meeting for 2:30 o'clock as a protest against the imprisonment of Gene Debs. He was announced as the speaker for the occasion. The streets in the business part were littered with the red circulars. As Debs strolled from the restaurant where he had just had breakfast with his party to the Gilsey Hotel he tread upon these thousands of red printed papers. Despite the fact that Debs was hustled out of the city in the morning the meeting was held in the "Free Speech Park," dedicated to the city in memory of the late Mayor Tom L. Johnson. That afternoon 15,000 workers marched to the city park singing the "Marsellaise."

At Cleveland there was no one to meet Debs except Mrs. Prevey, her sister, Mrs. May Deibel, and John Deibel. They had all motored from Akron, leaving that town before 5 o'clock.

Debs, Bauer, the Prevey party of three, and myself took an auto to a restaurant for breakfast. Mrs. Prevey went to a telephone to get Attorney Morris Wolff, one of Debs' lawyers at his trial. He told her he would come down at once. Mrs. Prevey said she had not been notified by the District Attorney to surrender Debs. Mrs. Prevey, with Henry Moscovitz, a Cleveland tailor, were Debs' bondsmen. The regular legal procedure would have been for the District Attorney to have notified Debs' bondsmen to surrender Debs at the marshal's office. Neither Mrs. Prevey nor Moscovitz knew Debs would be taken to prison so soon until they read of it in the Saturday newspapers.

After breakfast, Debs with his party went to the Gilsey House. He wrote a letter while Mrs. Prevey again tried to get Attorney Wolff. Shortly before 8 o'clock, Deputy Marshal Thomas E. Walsh and Deputy Gauchorte, both of Cleveland, learned, probably through the reporter who met Debs at the depot, that their man was in the city.

Mrs. Prevey, who was at that moment in Debs' room with J. Louis Engdahl and Alfred Wagenknecht, both of whom had just arrived from the national office of the Socialist Party in Chicago, protested that she had not been notified as a Debs bondsman to surrender him, and that the proceeding was irregular. There was a half-hour's controversy, during which Deputy Walsh telephoned to Marshal Charles W. Lapp at the Federal Building for instructions.

"I have a mandate from the United States Supreme Court to take you to the United States Marshal and from there to prison," said Walsh to Debs.

"All right," replied Debs, somewhat weary of the wrangle. "I am your man, and am ready to go with you."

Wolff had not appeared, and did not appear.

While I was talking with Debs in his home at Terre Haute Saturday afternoon, a telegram arrived from Seymour Stedman in Chicago, Debs' chief counsel. Stedman said he was coming to Terre Haute. Theodore Debs immediately wired to Stedman that Gene was leaving for Cleveland.

Debs' other Chicago lawyer was William A.

Cunnea. Debs' fourth attorney was Joseph W. Sharts, of Dayton.

In the moment of the greatest single incident in the history of the American labor movement, the greatest figure in that movement was being kidnapped by deputies through extralegal proceedings, and with no one to interpose objection, save a woman, Mrs. Prevey, one of Debs' bondsmen.

Debs was placed in an auto and driven to the Federal Building, a few blocks away. Half an hour later, or about 9 o'clock, he came out of a side entrance between United States Marshal Charles Lapp and Deputy Walsh. Their pictures were snapped, and Debs, carrying his heavy grip, stepped into an auto between his bodyguards.

It is said, but I have no proof of it, that the car in which Debs was placed belonged to "a Cleveland newspaper." A reporter for that paper sat with the chauffeur. In a few seconds Bauer, Wagenknecht, Mrs. Deibel, Engdahl, and myself threw our baggage into an auto owned by Morris Fried, a Cleveland Socialist. It was a huge touring car capable of great speed. The Debs' car was a smaller affair. Yet the Debs' car tore through the streets, rounding corners sharply, and ignoring all traffic regulations. Up one street and down another it raced, tore, and careened.

Our car kept up all the way, sometimes scratching the paint off moving trolley cars and brushing other speeding automobiles. For an hour this race continued.

Traffic policemen waved their arms after both cars in frantic, yet futile attempt to stop the mad race. Along Euclid Avenue, where John D. Rockefeller has his palatial Cleveland residence, the Debs car slowed up. The marshal was showing Debs the house in which Tom Johnson had lived when he was Mayor and getting in bad with the big business interests because of his 3-cent streetcar fight.

We ran up to a little railroad station on the Erie near the outskirts of Cleveland, and all bought tickets for Youngstown, Ohio. The marshal was surprisedly angry when Bauer, Engdahl, Wagenknecht, and myself bought tickets for the same place.

He then knew we were going to stick to the end. He denied he had tried to lose us, but that was one of his aims. They wanted to take Debs away alone. They didn't want anybody to see.

On the Erie train we were placed in a private compartment. The marshal then spoke as if he was sorry that we had to take three-quarters of the trip on trolley cars. That was purely for effect. It had all been planned. They knew well enough that if they took Debs to Moundsville by a regular route, on either the Pennsylvania or the Baltimore & Ohio, we would telegraph ahead and organize speedy demonstrations at every city and town on the road. We had our timetables marked ready to carry this plan into effect. We meant to give Debs a rousing farewell along the line.

It was not to be.

The trip was uneventful. Debs told stories of his life, the ARU strike, the time when he told the then Governor Knute Nelson to take a trip on the "B" line and go to hell, and the case of John R. Walsh, the Chicago banker who died in the prison at Joliet. Every now and then Debs would turn round to Marshal Lapp, slap him on the knee, and ask him how he felt.

At the station in Cleveland I happened to mention to Marshal Lapp that his name would go down in history for the part he was playing in this great drama. The marshal blushed. It was apparent from his manner that he did not relish that sort of fame.

Just before we reached Youngstown Debs remarked that it might take us some time to get to Moundsville.

"Well, we can make an all day job of it," smiled Lapp. "We have lots of time."

"Oh, yes," rejoined Debs, "we have 10 years to get there."

At the little station of the interurban Debs strolled about and conversed with first one of his party and then another. He seemed to be in the best of spirits.

"I never felt better in my life. This is the beginning of a great event for us all."

We reached Youngstown at 12:30, and not a soul, save one little boy, knew that Debs was in the city.

In half an hour we were again on a trolley bound for Leetonia. From there to East Liverpool, from there to Steubenville, from there to Wellsburg, from there to Wheeling, from there to Moundsville. We hopped off and on interurban cars all day long Sunday, sometimes in the sunshine, sometimes through mists and threatening clouds.

No one in the party had eaten a mouthful since

early morning. At Youngstown the marshals alternated their watch over Debs, so they could get a sandwich. No thought was taken of Debs. He could wait until the end of his journey. He was just a convict; to jail with him.

In East Liverpool I asked Marshal Lapp if we could stop long enough to give Debs some dinner. The veteran chieftain of the militant movement of the working class showed exhaustion. His face was drawn and his shoulders a little more bent. There was not a word of complaint from him. When we bellowed about the kidnapping, Debs would only smile and say: "It's all right; let them have their inning now; we'll have ours soon." Like Christ toting his cross to Calvary, saying: "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do," Gene Debs was toting his cross to Moundsville, and forgave them who knew not what they were doing.

We slid across trestles, jolted and jostled along the foothills of the Alleghenies, with every now and then happy couples getting on and off the various cars on which we travelled. They were making merry on a Sunday frolic. Debs, on the same car, was going to prison.

Just before we got to East Liverpool, about 4 o'clock, Debs was so weary he could hold his head up no longer. He was sitting with his brother-in-law. Presently, Gene's head slowly bent toward his breast, and in this posture he slept as the car rocked his head from side to side.

Life's grayest shadows hold no sadder picture than this. In all the days of our lives, we who went with Debs to prison shall never forget the sad and sleeping figure of him with head bent on his bosom, his great frame cramped in a straw trolley seat, moving along the Ohio Valley, with the river flowing at our right, with great earth swells rising and falling on either side like huge brown waves.

"It is just another stop," said Marshal Lapp, when we reached Steubenville.

Debs was now awake and alert. He remarked about the dull and drab life of the workers in the small Ohio mining villages. Once, pointing to a low, squatty cabin on a hillside — the habitat of a miner — Gene remarked, "That place is a palace to what they have down in the Paint Creek region of West Virginia."

When the marshal said, "It is just one more stop,"

we knew he was lying. It was three more stops. We had made five so far. We got into Wheeling about 7 o'clock. It was twilight.

The marshal steered us into a cheap dairy lunchroom, seven hungry men. Debs ordered pork chops, brown potatoes, coffee, and bread. It was to be his last meal in the world he knew and loved, for all of its sorrow and sordidness. I sat next to him and bolted my own liver and onions so I might rush a wire dispatch to *The New York Call*. Debs finished half of my meal. When I came back, he said: "Now you are liverless. What are you going to do?"

The marshal took Debs' check and paid it. Gene hastily gathered up one or two checks of his friends and paid them himself.

As he ate in peace and quiet, the two marshals walked restlessly to and fro. They wanted to hurry along to the prison with their charge. They confessed they were tired and weary. How much more so must have been Debs, 64 years old, just out of a sick bed, and with a million years of service to the world and its workers crowded into his span of life. Shortly before 10 o'clock we alighted at Moundsville. The great turrets of the prison arose before us like ancient towers. As we passed we could hear voices. They were those of the prisoners. Lights shot through the steel bars like a sieve held over a candle.

Debs was still toting his heavy grip. He would let none carry it for him. And 30 seconds from the time that Eugene Victor Debs crossed the threshold of the prison, he had been shot through the automatic turntable enclosed in a double set of circular bars. He had begun to serve his term of 10 years.

Debs was merely told by Warden Terrell that he would be expected to obey all prison rules, which do not permit Socialist speeches or writing. Debs promised to try to obey every rule, saying, "If I transgress, it will not be intentional, and I want you to call my attention to my error so I will not repeat it."

We were riding between East Liverpool and Steubenville in mid-afternoon. Now and then the creaking trolley car would come to a full stop to let on or off passengers. Debs looked weary. He gazed out of the window at the rolling hills. He was sitting in the little smoking compartment with Bauer. Both Lapp and Walsh were nodding their heads. Bauer left his

seat beside Debs and came back to where Engdahl, Wagenknecht, and myself were sitting. I left the group and went into the seat alongside of Debs. We remarked about the scenery and then discussed the outrageous methods of the officials in spiriting Debs away to prison. Gene pressed my hand very tenderly, saying: "It is all right, Davy, they knew they had to do it this way."

He then asked me if I had some paper.

"I want you to take a statement for me. It will be my last.

These are the words of the great humanist that I wrote on the back of an envelope at his slow and deliberate dictation:

"I enter the prison doors a flaming revolutionist — my head erect, my spirit untamed and my soul unconquerable."

Chapter Four.

Debs: Convict No. 2253.

Eugene Victor Debs awoke shortly before 6 o'clock Monday morning in Cell 51 in the south wing of the penitentiary at Moundsville, where he may spend 10 years of his closing life. Debs said he slept well. If he did so, it was because he was physically exhausted after the outrageous trip of the day before from Cleveland to Moundsville, about 150 miles, on trolley cars.

Sunday night, about 11 o'clock, Warden Joseph Z. Terrell permitted J. Louis Engdahl, Alfred Wagenknecht, and myself to say good night to Debs in his prison cell. We walked the entire length of the south wing of the prison and up one flight of whitewashed iron steps to the second tier. The warden and the prison physician were with us. Debs had been preparing for bed. He was partly undressed. With one hand gripping the steel bars of his cage, he extended the other through the grating and bid us each good night.

"It is all right, boys; it is all right. I am going to sleep the sleep of the just tonight. Don't worry for me; don't worry about me. We know what we are about. Good night, Comrades; good night. I shall be comfortable here."

We slipped away from Cell 51. Throughout the

prison arose the customary chorus of coughing. At that hour in prison, coughing is usual. The men are just going to sleep, their lungs are rotting, and they must cough. The tickling sensation in their throats won't let them sleep for several hours after they retire on their steel bunks. That is tuberculosis. Sometimes in the incipient stage, sometimes well advanced. But tuberculosis in a prison is as usual as the steel bars.

Debs really did seem to be in fairly good health and excellent spirits. Not for one moment did he waver, not for one second. It was just 9:45 o'clock Sunday night when he passed through the great iron doors to the prison.

A few moments before he was walking slowly down the sidewalk with United States Marshal Charles W. Lapp, who brought him to the prison from Cleveland.

Debs was talking softly, but I heard what he said to the Marshal.

"It is all right, Marshal," Gene was saying, "you have treated me like a gentleman all the way through. I am glad to have met you, and I should not wish you to ever feel that you have done me a wrong by bringing me here. I understand just why I am going to prison. My Comrades, they all know and understand; it is all right; everything is all right."

Debs' long arm slowly stretched across the broad shoulders of the man who was taking him to prison. Those Christians who talk of the second coming of Christ might have been pleased to have witnessed this little scene in Moundsville. They would have seen a real, a living, a breathing, a human Christ, going to his crucifixion between two bodyguards. An hour later they would have seen him in Gethsemane, smiling and serene, awaiting the worst; maybe looking for the best; expecting nothing.

Debs is in prison today, actually behind bars, despite the hue and cry that went up over America among radicals when he was convicted on September 12 last at Cleveland. They said then: "They'll never send Debs to prison. They're afraid to lock up Our Gene. They won't dare to do it."

Idle twaddle, mere words, and mostly meaningless, save for the wells of sympathy and compassion and camaraderie they expressed. But words won't unlock prison doors.

There is an automatic turntable that Debs passed

through, taking him from the "outside" and placing him on the "inside." That turntable works by organized power. Mere words won't budge it, and if the Socialists of America want Gene Debs to rot and die in prison, if they want his flesh to curl up on his bones, let them go talking, talking. Let them decide whether it would be best to withhold recognition from the Bavarian Soviet, or let them decide to send greetings to Hungary. In the meanwhile, Debs will be in prison and all the other class war prisoners will still be in prison in America. If they are to get out, there must be behind them organized power.

During the sixth lap of the journey from Cleveland, Debs turned around for a moment. He was smiling sweetly. "If I were to engage in satire, I would say how strange it is that I have been organizing labor for 40 years and now am being taken to prison by union men."

It was a crushing blow. It had not occurred to any of us in just that way; but it was literally true. The conductors, and brakemen, and firemen, and engineers, and motormen — all union men — helped take Debs to prison last night.

Immediately after we had entered the prison, the Marshal "presented the body of Eugene V. Debs to the state prison at Moundsville."

Marshal Lapp introduced his celebrated prisoner to the Warden.

Gene extended his hand and, in that half-stooping manner of his that is so characteristic of him, he grasped the Warden's hand. "I am so glad to meet you, Warden," said Debs. The Warden stiffened up a little. Maybe he did not like that manifestation of friendliness. He had been used to meet skulking men who don't shake hands when they enter prisons. Maybe he thought Debs was trying to "get in right" from the start.

Debs was not trying to do or be anything but a decent, simple, human being. It seemed unusual only because we are totally unaccustomed to meeting loveliness and beauty of the kind that Debs radiates.

"Well, you are a tall man, Mr. Debs."

"Yes," replied Debs. "Six feet."

The Warden's manner toward his prisoner was a stern friendliness. You meet it often in reformist circles,

and frequently in churches. It is the sort of kindness that says to you: "You are a lovely fellow. You have brought much happiness to this wicked old planet, but for your pains I shall send you to the stake for your own good." That is just the way the Warden impressed me.

There were hasty handshakes between the Marshal and Debs. A deputy who accompanied the Marshal was anxious to get the job done and return home. It was all a day's work with him.

"Step this way, Mr. Debs," commanded the Warden. The little group that accompanied him to the prison — Arthur Bauer of Terre Haute; Louis Engdahl of Chicago; and Alfred Wagenknecht, and myself, were standing between the Warden's office and the turntable through which Debs must soon pass.

Smiling, "with head erect, with spirit untamed and with soul unconquerable — a flaming revolutionist," Eugene Victor Debs, "Our Gene," kissed each of us. There was just a moment's turning back of his head, a smile was on his face — his lean, tired face — as he stepped into the turntable, which is enclosed in steel grating. A trusty turned a lever and wheels began to grind. The turntable swung Debs this way and that for a few seconds, until it swung itself around automatically to the entrance to the "inside world."

The Warden called some guard or trusty, by name. In a moment the Warden returned.

He was cordial and bade us come into his office and smoke his cigars. Bauer was pretty well shaken by the experience. He did not linger, but went back to Terre Haute. As he passed through the iron gates there was an oath on his lips. I knew what it said, and I knew what it meant.

"You gentlemen are all friends of Mr. Debs, I suppose," queried the Warden, whose head is bald, like Debs'. He seems to be a young man, maybe 45, clean cut, like a self-respecting politician who wants to do something for the "worthy poor." You know the type. We all admitted our friendship and our interest.

"Mr. Debs will be well taken care of here. Of course, we are not going to have Debs on exhibition. We've got no monkey house here, but Debs and I will get along all right. I know he is a man of great character and force and intelligence, and I mean to respect him as such. You may say to his friends that Debs will be well taken care of."

We asked the Warden about what he proposed to do with Gene, to what kind of work he would assign him. "Oh, Debs is too old to work here. There isn't anything he could do, and, besides, we have enough men here to do all the work that is required." The Warden has said before that Debs was the 896th prisoner at the present time. His number would be Convict No. 2253.

"How many letters can he write?" I asked.

"Well, the rules call for two letters a month, but I shall allow Mr. Debs to write as many letters as he pleases, subject always, of course, to the prison censorship. I understand that Mr. Debs has thousands of people who want to know how he is faring, and I shall let Mr. Debs tell them — in reason." We inquired if Debs might receive newspapers, magazines, and books of the radical type.

"Well, now, that would be all right, gentlemen, if Mr. Debs only received them. Of course, they could do him no harm, but there is some danger of those kind of papers getting into the hands of other prisoners, and that would not do, for we have some very ignorant men here."

We all laughed.

"Well, Warden, here's a chance to reduce prison ignorance," we said.

"Yes, but you know how it is—" The Warden's voice trailed off.

"Well, let the papers and books come for a little while and we will see how it goes," said the Warden. Finally, he seated himself at his desk and asked us to be seated.

"How old is Debs now?" I told him Debs was 64 years old. "Well his age alone would be sufficient reason for an early pardon for him." So with this tip from the Warden, Debs' keeper, we might take some heart, knowing that if we do not get Debs out of prison his age will get him out sooner or later.

"Of course, gentlemen," said Joseph Z. Terrell, the Warden, "the regulation visiting days come once a month, but in Debs' case I shall make no rule. Those who have a right to see him may do so at any time. I mean his family and very personal friends. But I am not going to let hundreds of people in here every day to see Debs. That would never do. In reason, Debs may see his friends, and his friends will be friendly to Debs by not abusing the privilege I am trying to ex-

tend to him.”

In a few minutes a reporter for a Wheeling paper appeared. The words exchanged between the Warden and the reporter indicated that they might be political cronies. Perhaps the reporter was merely trying to show off to us how well he stood with the officials.

The reporter, of course, wanted a story. The Warden would not let him see Debs, because the great Liberator had just gone to bed for the night. I ventured to tell the Wheeling journalist some of the incidents of the trip through the entire state of Ohio.

Then I gave him the last statement that Debs made to me on the way down in the trolley car. It began this way:

“I enter the prison door a flaming revolutionist, my head erect, my spirit untamed, my soul unconquerable.”

The reporter wrote fast. The Warden whistled a tune.

“So, we have a flaming revolutionist in our midst, Doctor,” the Warden said to the prison physician. “Well, Mr. Debs may be a flaming revolutionist as long as he likes, so long as he doesn’t inflame my boys.”

It was amusing to hear this politician, who has been Warden only since last October, refer to nearly 900 prisoners as “my boys.” I do not know what was wrong, but it did not smack of sincerity.

I told the Warden that tens of thousands of Debs’ friends and followers on the outside would be watching Moundsville.

Moundsville has now won immortal fame, or infamy, which shall I say? The state of West Virginia will also be linked with Debs’ name in the days to come, when children shall read in the schoolbooks about this great human liberator, this lover of mankind. And in that day to come they will wonder — they will just wonder what a lovely time we must have had back in 1919, when society confessed its inherent weakness and wickedness by placing Gene Debs in prison.

Chapter Five.

Convict No. 2253 is Clerk in Prison Hospital.

Who is United States Convict No. 2253 at the Moundsville State Penitentiary? He is Eugene Victor Debs, four times candidate for President of the United States on the Socialist Party ticket, and one of the world’s great liberators. What is he in prison for? Until the workers of the United States assert their economic and political power, and force the capitalist class to unlock the doors that bar him to freedom.

On the prison records, Debs’ occupation is given as writer and lecturer, but he is the only convict in the state prison at Moundsville who will not be allowed to practice his trade or profession. Warden Terrell has had several conversations with Debs in which he said rather sternly to the 64-year-old humanist that he must not under any circumstances attempt to “organize” his fellow convicts. The Warden explained to me later that Soviets might be all right in Russia, but in Moundsville he was the supreme dictator.

Convict No. 2253 gave the Warden his solemn pledge that he would not violate the rules of the prison, and when Convict No. 2253 gives his word to any man, nothing on earth or in heaven could persuade him to break it.

Debs slept Monday night, not in a cage like a wild beast, as he slept Sunday night, his first in the West Virginia state prison, but in a little room in the hospital of the prison, for Our Gene has been appointed a hospital attendant, and he has a separate room to himself, with a white iron bed, newly clothed, a table and a chair.

Shortly after 11 o’clock Monday morning, April 14, Debs was taken from his cell, No. 51, in the second tier of the south wing, to the prison baths. He was examined by the prison physician, and then donned prison underclothing and the prison uniform. But when I saw Debs late Monday afternoon the prison garb was not unbecoming on him. It was well fitting, and contained the tiniest check. It is the kind of suit that anybody might purchase at a cheap clothing store.

Warden Terrell explained that he had at first thought of placing Debs in the prison library because of his knowledge of books and literature, but he did not do this because he thought Debs might be too much subjected to curiosity. As hospital attendant,

Debs will have a room entirely to himself. The room is of a good size, larger than most rooms of the Bronx tenements. It is on the ground floor. There are two ample windows, one facing the south and one the east. There are no bars at his windows. The door is open at all times, and Debs has full privilege to come and go as he pleases. He has full and complete access to the prison yard and lawns.

When Engdahl, Wagenknecht, and myself went to the prison Monday we were led by Warden Terrell through the turntable. He took us through long, winding corridors to the hospital section. As we passed, the prison druggist was making little pellets. He was a convict "in" for murder. He looked at us as we passed with a furtive look, then went on filling the capsules.

We walked up one flight of stairs. The Warden opened the door of a freshly painted room, and there was old Gene quietly sitting in a low rocking chair, smoking his pipe and reading a book. At first he did not look up.

"Mr. Debs, here are your friends back again to see you," said the Warden. Gene put his book aside on the bed and disturbed the big gray cat that was sleeping by his side.

Greetings were over, and the Warden then told Debs that he had free access to the prison library.

"We have a rule here, Debs, that prisoners must be checked up on books they take from the library, but we will waive that rule for you. I know you appreciate the value of good books."

"Indeed, I do," said Debs, thanking the Warden.

We talked a few minutes, and Debs told us that he slept "like a log last night," and now felt "as chipper as a young goat on a tin roof."

He laughed good-naturedly as he looked at his prison garb and asked us how we liked his new suit. Debs had come to the penitentiary in a new blue serge. He was still wearing the vest of it. He wore his own collar and tie.

"I have met many fine men here," said Gene to us. "In the cell right next to mine last night there was a man whom I met at McKees Rocks, Pa., many years ago. He was telling me his story."

We walked down the hall with Debs, and he assured us that he had three good meals, and "that everything was all right," his usual expression in cases of

extreme adversity. The Warden made it plain to use that he did not wish our visit to be of length. We tarried a moment while Debs said that he had received a number of telegrams from his Comrades in all parts of the country.

All day Monday two Negro convicts were at work in Debs' little room, scrubbing the floors, washing the windows, and fumigating it so as to put it in order to receive the most celebrated prisoner this country has ever known.

As we passed the door of the room that Debs will occupy during his stay, Debs looked in at the Negro convicts at work.

"The Warden won't let me help you," said Gene, "but I shan't forget your kind favors."

"Das all right, Mr. Debs," replied the shorter of the two Negroes, "we mighta had a worse job dan dis."

The Moundsville prison had just recovered from an epidemic of Spanish influenza. One hundred convicts were ill and there were two deaths. The Warden seemed particularly concerned about Gene's health, and admonished him to take it easy and rest.

Remember that I am responsible for your health, Debs," said the Warden, "and I want you to leave here in as good shape as you came."

"I will leave here in better shape than when I arrived," said Debs. He smiled and joked a little and told us that he had been treated "excellently."

Debs would say the same thing were he bound to the stake and burned. He would kiss the hand of the man who would light the pyre under his feet.

Just before we entered the prison we met three messenger boys, and all of them owned they had just delivered messages for Debs. The Warden insisted that Engdahl, Wagenknecht, and myself take dinner with him. We did so. The Warden was interested to learn something of Debs' history.

Warden Terrell told us that 25 years ago he was a telegraph operator on the B&O Railroad when Debs was organizing the railroad men in the American Railway Union. "I remember when Debs went to prison at that time," he said. The Warden admitted that he had never seen Debs before, but added: "He has a wonderful mind, a fine brain and bubbles over with kindness."

As we talked with the keeper of the great liberator in his private apartments on the top floor of the

prison overlooking the Ohio Valley and the river that flows at its feet, Terrell's little girl romped and played on the floor.

The name of Debs was mentioned frequently, and finally the little brown-eyed baby looked up in her father's eyes and asked: "Daddy, who is Debs?"

The Warden blushed. "Ask the gentlemen here, my dear. They seem to know better than I!"

The little girl, her name was Barbalee I think, ran over to me and climbed up on my lap. I had just been playing "Patty-cake, patty-cake baker's man" with her.

"Who is Debs?" lisped Barbalee.

"Debs is a good man, kind man," I told her, "who loves all little boys and girls. And all little boys and girls love him, too. If he were up here now he would get right down on the floor there and play with you." The little girl danced off my lap and ran over to the Warden, clapping her hands with glee.

"Oh, Daddy, Mr. Debs is a kind man who loves little children and he plays with them, too; d you think he will ever come upstairs and play with me?" There was anxious hope in the sweet voice of the Warden's daughter as she put her question.

The Warden was nonplussed. He did not know how to answer this innocent question of his little girl whose imagination had been gripped by the simple description I had given her of Debs.

"No, my dear," replied the Warden, "I don't think Mr. Debs will ever have time to come up and play with you, but you shall see him some day." Barbalee ran back to me as though I could rescue her possible playmate.

"Some day," I told her, "some day, Barbalee, when you have grown to be a big girl you will be glad and proud that you lived in the same house with Gene Debs. Lots of his friends would wish they might say they had lived in the same house with Debs." She looked at me wonderingly. Her big, brown eyes were sad and I felt that I had given Barbalee just a little pain.

"I don't know what you gentlemen may think," said the Warden at one point, "but I want you all to know that i have had no instructions from anyone — not from the Governor nor from Washington — to show Debs any special favors or consideration. What I am doing is purely my own affair."

The Warden seemed to want to impress us with that view of the matter. We all had hazarded the guess that in the case of Debs unusual consideration would be the policy, and that this consideration very likely came from high authority. The Warden denied it. The reader may judge for himself. The fact is, however, that Gene Debs was being shown every consideration. His breakfast and his dinner had been brought to him Monday morning and he ate them in his cell. The Warden said he wanted to save Debs the first humiliation of walking in the lockstep to and from the mess hall. Debs would have felt no humiliation in that regard. He felt a little bit peeved that all the other 895 convicts were not receiving the same treatment.

While we were all talking in Debs' room the Warden spoke about Gene's new job as hospital attendant.

"I am going to do whatever you think is best," said Debs. "I want to earn my board here, at any rate," he added, and the tall classic frame of the great Socialist humanist bent almost double with silvery laughter.

The book that Debs had been reading was John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*. I had presented Debs with my own copy of that book.

* * *

Tuesday afternoon we journeyed to Moundsville, taking the Warden at his word that we would be permitted to see Debs whenever we came. The Warden seemed stiffer than usual. We asked for pictures of the prison, which were given to us. The Warden's manner indicated that he would refuse to let us again see Debs, so we did not press the matter. He merely said: "The matter is a closed book now, gentlemen," evidently meaning that Debs was Convict No. 2253. Debs is the quietest prisoner at Moundsville. He is spending his days learning his work under the direction of the prison physician, and in a little while he will have full charge of all the hospital records. Debs has asked Warden Terrell that he be permitted to do some manual labor.

Before we left the Warden permitted us to leave with Debs a box of cigars, a cake of chocolate, and a bag of apples and oranges. In the corridor we passed several convicts painting the bannisters. Debs patted each on the back. It was a spontaneous outburst of

affection which he could not refrain from. The Warden smiled.

In spite of this kindness, in spite of this manifestation of official consideration for Our Gene, let the workers not relax one iota in their efforts to get Debs out of prison. He is a prisoner behind bars. He cannot come out of jail for 10 years, unless the organized power of the working class forces the capitalist class to swing the lever of the automatic turntable through which Debs passed Sunday night, April 13, 1919.

Debs knows this as much as any. It is liberty that Debs wants, and in securing liberty for himself he demands it for every breathing being. As I write this I am reminded of Debs' classic statement, printed and stated so many hundreds of times. Shall we write it again?

“While there is a lower class I am in it. While there is a criminal class I am of it. While there is a soul in prison I am not free.”

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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