
Toledo Crowd Compels Release of Socialist Speakers: Audience Aroused Because Denied Freedom of Speech Disarm Policeman and Marches on Police Station. [events of March 30, 1919]

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TOLEDO, O. — City authorities here learned Sunday [March 30, 1919] that the workers will no longer submit to arbitrary interference with the right of freedom of speech and freedom of assemblage. In a crisis they were obliged to ask the assistance of the workers' representatives to prevent a great mass of working people taking matters into their own hands and not only holding meetings as they pleased, but opening the prison doors for release of those who had been arrested.

The situation grew out of a meeting at which Toledo Socialists intended to pay their tribute to Eugene V. Debs. When they endeavored to secure Memorial Hall for this meeting they found it had been rented to the Metal Workers' Council. They went to the Metal Workers' Council and stated the case to them and the latter agreed to give up the hall in favor of the Socialists. When this was explained to the city authorities who control the hall, they refused to permit the transfer, stating that if the metal workers gave up the hall it would be turned over to some patriotic organization.

In order to meet this situation, the Metal Workers' Council agreed to have Debs speak under their auspices.

Arrangements had been made to meet Debs at the station when he arrived. A crowd of some

500 people assembled there, whom the police tried in vain to disperse. When the train arrived it was found that Debs had been taken ill in Cleveland and was unable to speak and that Charles Baker, state organizer of the Socialist Party, had come in his place.

Baker entered a waiting automobile and the crowd at the station formed in line behind, to march to the hall. In order to break up the demonstrators, police arrested the driver of the automobile, but another man quickly took his place and the procession proceeded.

When the procession arrived at Memorial Hall it was found that the city authorities had locked the doors and refused the metal workers, to whom the hall had been rented, the use of the hall for a Debs meeting. A crowd of 10,000 people was assembled in the streets in the neighborhood of the building.

M.H. Toohey, Secretary of the Toledo Socialist local, mounted the top of an automobile and began to speak and was immediately arrested. Seventeen other Socialists followed him, each being arrested as soon as he began to talk.

By this time the crowd was beginning to get beyond the control of the police, although the whole Toledo police force was present. One policeman was stripped of his badge, club, and revolver and <illeg.> out of the neighborhood. While

this was going on an appeal to members of the Socialist Party was made to immediately adjourn to the party headquarters, while the audience was asked to remain where they were.

At the headquarters 200 party members were organized to follow each other as speakers and they then returned to the scene of the meeting. In a half hour's time another 50 who attempted to speak were arrested, one after the other, among them Organizer Baker, and were taken to the police station.

Meanwhile the attitude of the crowd toward the police grew more threatening and it looked as if they were in for a rough time.

Evidently the city authorities realized that things were beyond their control, for no sooner had the last batch of prisoners arrived at the station, when the police chief appeared to beg M.H. Toohey, Thomas Devine, Charles Baker, and others to go back to the scene of the meeting and try to disperse the crowd.

After some negotiations, during which it was agreed that every man arrested should be freed at once and it was impressed upon the police chief

that never again must he interfere with a Socialist meeting, it was agreed that the Socialists would endeavor to restore order.

Hardly had they left the station when they met the vast crowd coming toward the station. Filling the street from building to building, the mass of people swept everything before them and advanced toward the station, intent upon freeing the arrested men.

An automobile was hastily placed in position from which Toohey and Baker addressed the crowd, explaining that all the arrested men and women had been freed and the agreement that had been reached.

After a half hour of speech-making, the crowd was calmed and after a number of other brief speeches the audience was dispersed.

Socialists believe that the city authorities have learned what a mass movement means from their experience Sunday and that they will hesitate a long time before they again expose themselves to the wrath of a great mass of working men, as they did Sunday.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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