
A Letter from Debs: Gene Sends Greetings to All the Comrades: Full Report of His First Speech by Otto Branstetter

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I saw Gene Debs this afternoon, the second time since his return home. As I entered the house I met a group of friends just departing. In the short time I was there, the telephone and doorbell were ringing constantly. In each case it was either friends calling to see Debs or telephoning for an appointment. In the living room on the first floor there was an immense sheaf of telegrams — over 400 in number which had been received during the last few days. On a table were hundreds and hundreds of letters from all sections of the country. Everyone was represented in that pile of letters. Letters from radicals and liberals of every type; business and professional men, college professors, editors and artists, mingled with letters from labor organizations, from old comrades in the struggle of the ARU [American Railway Union]; from young wives and gray-haired mothers; from coal miners, farmers, mechanics, and factory hands; from little children and from veterans of all our wars since 1860.

I saw Gene in the library on the second floor. There the same accumulation of correspondence met the eye. The mantel shelf was piled high with telegrams and letters. The writing table was covered with them, On top of the pyramid was a great bundle left by the postman on his last round, which had not yet been opened. I estimated that there could not be less than 2,000 to 3,000 letters in addition to the telegrams and postcards; and they are still arriving by every mail.

It has been Debs' lifelong practice to acknowledge the receipt of every letter he received. He has always been sufficiently interested in his friends to want to personally acknowledge and reply to every communication received from them. The present deluge, however, has overwhelmed him. It is physically impossible for him to undertake to reply to the thousands of messages he received. It would require all of his time and that of a staff of stenographers for a month to dictate personal replies to his friends and well-wishers. It is under these circumstances that he has dictated a general acknowledgment with the request that it be sent out in the National Office Press Serv-

ice and published in all the Socialist and Labor press. The friends and comrades everywhere will understand that this message is sent to each of them personally; that it is Debs' personal acknowledgement and reply to their communication. It is what Gene would write each and every one of them individually if it were physically possible for him to do so. This is the message which he sends:

To My Beloved Friends and Comrades:

I realize how vain it is for me to attempt to express what my heart is so full of, after the last few days of thrilling and dramatic experience, such as I have never before known.

The tireless, unceasing efforts, the unwavering loyalty, the unflinching kindness and devotion of our many, many comrades and friends can never be expressed in words. With my heart upon my lips and thrilling with deepest and tenderest emotions, I say — Thanks to all my beautiful and devoted comrades and friends!

Who would not go to prison for such loyal devotion as I have known, and which makes life run richer for me than I could ever have dreamed!

I can only answer in a completer consecration to the Cause, and in a higher resolve to serve it with every atom of my strength to the last hour of my life. I can say no more. I can only express myself in silence and tears.

Devotedly,

Eugene V. Debs.

As it is impossible for Gene to answer the messages of cheer and congratulation received, so it is equally impossible for him to express his appreciation to the many groups and organizations and to the thousands of individuals who have worked so unceasingly for the release of himself and other political prisoners. To all these friends and comrades he sends greetings and his heartfelt appreciation.

To My Friends of Amnesty:

It is with great pleasure that I avail myself of the earliest moment to express my appreciation to members of the Socialist Party and all other groups and organizations of whatever name or title, who have worked to secure Amnesty for Political Prisoners. I have never before known such loyalty, coupled with such energy as was demonstrated in the campaign made by these many comrades and friends to secure our liberation. I wish it were possible for me to give a true transcript of my heart's feelings as I contemplate the magnificent work done by these devoted adherents to the cause of FREE SPEECH and CIVIL RIGHTS.

This splendid work has in part been rewarded, but it has yet to be completed, and I entreat the same comrades and friends to continue their agitation and make it more and more effective in every possible way until the last of our imprisoned comrades has been liberated.

I am sure that all who have been so devotedly interested in our behalf will understand how deeply I have been touched, and how fully I appreciate every

effort put forth by every friend and comrade in their splendid Amnesty Campaigns.

The following is a correct report of Comrade Debs' homecoming speech:

Mr. Debs Spoke From the Porch of His House.

Mr. Mayor and Friends — and Neighbors — and Comrades!

HOME AGAIN! And what a wonderful, beautiful demonstration! What a picture to greet the eye and the heart and the soul on my return! How vain words are! How meaningless all language in the presence of such a marvelous, touching, and inspiring scene! From the very depths of my heart I thank you for your kind welcome. I thank every man, woman, and child who have been the cheer and support of my dear wife and family during my absence. And I thank you over and over again for your devotion. What a beautiful homecoming! I felt in leaving here that you were with me in spirit and I was sustained by your faithfulness and devotion. I thank every one of you for the efforts you have been putting forth so long in my behalf. You have succeeded at last.

But I am not free as long as any are in prison. I have a heart for my fellow man. I shall devote my life to the liberation of those who are imprisoned. And I shall know no rest until they are restored to their families. I was saddened because I was compelled to leave behind in Atlanta my fellow men in prison.

In my heart there is no bitterness, only a resolution not to yield, but to remain true to my honest convictions and to my ideals. I could not do otherwise. I have no regrets.

You and I may differ from time to time, and yet may grasp each other's hands in fellowship. On this touching occasion how little of the emotions struggling within me can be expressed in words! I see your glowing faces tonight. I hear your sympathetic heartbeats. I would it were possible for me to put arms around you and express the love I bear you.

I cannot make a speech tonight, but I can again thank you from the bottom of my heart. This wondrous picture will remain forever on my memory's walls. It can never be forgotten.

With a heart overflowing with grateful thanks I now bid you beloved friends and comrades — Goodnight and God-speed.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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