
Letter on Unity to David Karsner in New York City from Eugene V. Debs in Atlanta, April 30, 1920.

Published as "Here is Personal Statement on Unity from Debs" in
The Chicago Socialist, whole no. 392 (May 15, 1920), pg. 2.

NOTE:— Some of our readers have expressed doubts as to the authenticity of the interviews with Debs on the question of unity published in the *Chicago Socialist*. We feel that the following letter sent by Comrade Debs to David Karsner, who secured the interviews, should be given the same publicity as the original statement. The letter of Debs in full: [—].
Louis Engdahl, editor]

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Debs on Unity.

Atlanta, Ga.
April 30, 1920

David Karsner,
3 Beekman Place,
New York, NY.

My Dear Comrade David:

Your communication of the 27th inst. has been received and I lose no time in replying so that we may both be set right in regard to the interview you had with me and your report thereof.

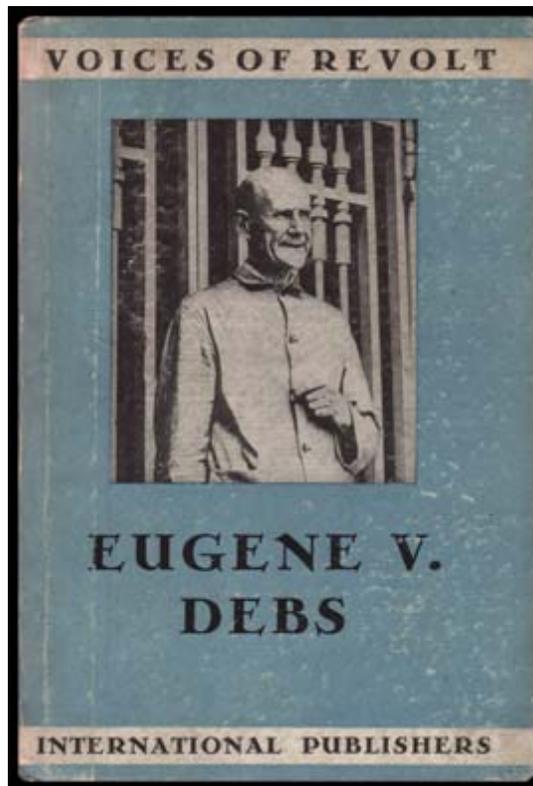
First of all let me say to you and through you to the comrades and others interested that in all essential particulars your report was correct and as a whole has my unqualified approval, and whatever is wrong with it must be charged wholly to me and not to you.

I admit that the statement is incomplete and no doubt lacking in other respects, but the fault is not with your report, for you caught accurately the spirit and purpose of what I had to say and transmitted it faithfully. Due allowance should be made, however, for the circumstances under which the interview was held and the obvious limitations upon a full and free expression of my views.

In the next place it should be understood that I spoke for myself only; I did not presume to speak for anyone else.

I expressed as well as I could under the circumstances my opinion of the situation that confronts us on the eve of the present national campaign, and the best course to pursue in the interest of our cause, and this I did simply as a private member, and what I said is entitled to that consideration and no more.

It may be added that if I had been looking for a nomination a simpler statement, and one subjecting me to less criticism, could have been made.



That my views have encountered opposition was of course expected. No one, not even the wisest among us, could venture to suggest a way of composing existing differences without provoking adverse criticism.

For myself, I attach no great importance to my views and opinions upon party matters. I am as apt to be wrong as anyone.

I may be entirely wrong now, as I have been many times in the past. It is my purpose only that I hold true and I have no fear of that being questioned.

I have said and I want to repeat that there is no fundamental difference, in my opinion, between the great majority of the rank and file of the three parties; no difference that will not yield to sound appeal in the right spirit.

Mistakes have been made on all sides, mistakes aggravated by the war hysteria, and with these candidly admitting an understanding is possible that will embrace a vast majority of all the factions that composed the party prior to its separation.

It is not too much to say that I personally know most of the members of all these factions, and I know them to be equally loyal and true, and equally eager to serve the cause.

That there are some obstacles in the way of unity, and serious ones, it was foolish to deny, but I believe they can be overcome, and if not, then at least there can be a truce on the eve of the battle so that we may enter the campaign with a united front and make the most of the greatest opportunity ever presented to us since the day we were organized.

If I understand it correctly the Socialist Party is the only one of the three that has not been outlawed, at least temporarily, and we either have to enter the campaign as the Socialist Party or not at all, and this being true, why not go into the fight with all our forces united and make the issues so clear and luminous that the enemy will have to face it and thus give us the opportunity for propaganda and action in behalf of our cause that we have never had before and may not have again for years to come? The conditions are ripe; the people are ready; the hour is here. It is up to us!

How big are we, or how small? Shall we unite and fight the great political battle before us in behalf of the working class, or shall we turn and rend one another, or seek advantage of one another in factional strife, or talk about our indifference, and thereby be-

tray the cause by allowing the supreme opportunity to pass us by unimproved?

Differences there will always be, especially among Socialists, and fortunately so, but wise men profit by their differences and do not permit themselves to be throttled by them.

For myself, I have no stomach for factional quarreling and I refuse to be consumed in it. If it has to be done others will have to do it. I can fight capitalists but not comrades.

It takes all I have in the way of time and strength to face the front and fight the foe.

I do not object to fighting among ourselves, if fighting there has to be, but I do insist that we shall be decent and fight clean, and not sink to the level and resort to the methods of ward-healing politicians.

One remark in my interview seems to be sadly misconstrued. I did say that it made no difference to us if the Socialist Party was outlawed in all the states, but what I had reference to was our spirit and attitude toward capitalism and the struggle for emancipation. I meant to be understood as saying that we would simply fight with greater energy, enthusiasm, and determination than ever before.

Some comrades were discouraged by the unseating of our comrades at Albany. Not I. Quite the contrary. That was our greatest political victory.

The ruling capitalists now recognize in our movement a menacing force to their corruption and misrule, and they have foolishly set about to sit down upon it. Now watch them — and us, if we are not as foolish as they.

Some other comrades were inclined to renounce political action after the Albany experience. Not I. The unseating of those 5 comrades has shaken the whole country. They are talking about it in Maine and California, and down here in Georgia, and it is all in our favor.

We have lost and won; and they have won and lost!

More than ever, if that be possible, do I believe in political action — not in vote chasing or office seeking, but in political propaganda and action, and there is a vast difference between them.

The Socialist Party is primarily a political party. It is more than that, but it is certainly all of that or it is nothing and should disband.

If I did not believe, and believe thoroughly, in political action as one of the essential means of waging the class struggle, I would not be in the Socialist Party, not a minute.

I can understand those who lay the entire emphasis on industrial action and I can cooperate with them in all harmony.

I see no necessity for friction or misunderstanding. What I object to is the pretense of political action to screen hostility or indifference to it. If all are either for or against it in real earnest we shall have no trouble in adjusting ourselves accordingly.

The political appeals, if rightly made and properly supported, can be made most potent and effective in the promotion of our cause and for obvious reasons, I think, this is especially true here in the United States.

To secure the maximum of results we should go into politics our whole length and with our full strength; we should have a sound platform and a complete ticket, and we should fight each battle along clean and uncompromising lines.

The coming convention in New York will be the most important yet held. The comrades here in Atlanta join in hearty greetings and good wishes. We have neither advice nor suggestion. We simply trust the delegates may be strong and stand firm, clear-sighted, and avoid compromise.

In this hour we need as never before faith of granite in our cause — the supreme cause of mankind. We need the sublime faith the cause inspires in us and in each other, and the enthusiasm that leaps from the soul of a warrior like a divine flame, and all we need to fear is that we may shirk some share of our duty and

responsibility.

There can be no doubt regarding the temper and attitude of the forward-looking American people toward our movement. All the powers of capitalism are exhausted in vain to misrepresent it. Hundreds of thousands are today sympathetic who but yesterday were hostile.

They know in spite of all the deceit and falsehood made to serve against our cause that we stand for real democracy and self-government and the essential rights and liberties of the people.

And this year, if we but give them the chance, they will rally to our standard, and I am fully persuaded that if we wall aside all differences of the past, as far as may be, buckle on our armor and plunge into the struggle with all our might, heedless of all else, touching shoulders all along the battle line, when the smoke has cleared away and we emerge from the conflict we shall be so welded together, so completely one in solidarity and sympathy and understanding that there will be little inclination to part company and reestablish a divided and discordant household.

In closing allow me to say that you are at liberty, of course, to publish this letter or to use it wholly or in part in any way you may see fit. For your great kindness in the recent past and for many loving favors these many years, I thank you with all my heart, and with love and greeting to you and Rose and your little darling, and all the comrades, I am,

Yours always,

Eugene V. Debs.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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