
Auguries for the New Year: Notes from the 1902 Lecture Circuit

by Eugene V. Debs

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The late Congressional elections have truly been an eye-opener to the American people. Many a sneer of derision has been turned into a patronizing smile, while the politicians of all shades of the “old school” realize that of a sudden there is a pestiferous fly in their ointment and are wondering how it got there and by what means to get rid of it.

John Pierpont Morgan is quoted by the *Springfield Republican* as saying in substance that he and his coadjutors are simply organizing industry as a necessary part of our industrial and commercial development — which must eventuate in collective ownership of the competition-destroying modern agencies of wealth production and distribution.

If John is correctly quoted he is not only clear-eyed in seeing the handwriting on the wall, but wise and sagacious in reading it aloud for the benefit of the class for whom he serves a prophet and guide. Comrade Morgan thus couples up with the revolution and fixes himself with and for the inevitable.

The *Chicago Chronicle*, Democratic organ, foe of monopoly, friend of the people, champion of freedom, etc., shows all its teeth and most of its interior anatomy in an editorial on the appalling “Despotism of Socialism,” in which the startling discovery is proclaimed that in Socialism free thought as we now enjoy it will be suppressed, for there is a conspiracy in the Socialist movement that when the people get in power they will not allow themselves to think at all, and then despotism will strip off its mask, roll up its sleeves, and get in its deadly work on the people for a thousand years!



At Cheney, Wash., in the state normal school, on December 20 [1901] I gave my last lecture in the Northwest and am now speeding toward St. Paul on the Northern Pacific.

Since my engagement with the American Lyceum Union I have been in Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, Missouri, Colorado, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. On the trip just close I was obliged to cancel Eaton, Col., and Boise City, Idaho, on account of not being able to reach them in consequence of delayed trains — then entire service on the Union Pacific and Oregon Short Line being demoralized and trains running from 8 to 20 hours late, owing to dilapidated motive power and machinery resulting from the machinists' strike, which has been in progress almost a year and is bound to win in the end.

Since the beginning of the lecture season I have spoken in colleges, high schools, and churches, though in most places the lecture is given at the opera house, under a variety of auspices, including Women's clubs, YMCAs, college courses, school societies, church associations, debating clubs, etc.

But twice have I spoken under Socialist auspices during this time and but 3 or 4 times to less than a full house. As the lecture is given in the season course at almost every point and the ticket for the season is sold in advance, a full house, rain or shine, is the rule.

The people everywhere are not only ready for the gospel of Socialism, but receive it with every mark of enthusiasm, and the telling points in a speaker's argument are applauded just as heartily in a church or school room as they are in a Socialist propaganda meeting.

The trip in the Northwest was particularly gratifying in its evidences of substantial progress of the Socialist movement since my previous visit to that section. At almost every place I was received by "leading" citizens and called on by the "representative" men of the community, most of whom, a few years ago, would have joined in a tar and feather bee without a second invitation and then solemnly resolved that it was "the duty of all patriotic citizens to unite in

stamping the curse of Socialism and anarchy out of this great American republic.”

At La Grande, Ore., the school trustees called and invited me to the high school to address the pupils while the school was in session. The newspapers were uniformly fair and generally kind and even flattering. Oh, what a change!

In Oregon J. Stitt Wilson and Carl Thompson have done splendid work. Their agitation has prepared that field for a great harvest. I heard their names spoken often by men and women who had been reached, brain and heart, by the social crusaders and are now at work spreading the light among their neighbors. Wilson and Thompson may congratulate themselves upon the results of their campaign in that state. Socialism is the all-absorbing theme; the average man has a good grip on the philosophy of it and the movement is therefore free from maudlin sentiment and is bound to make steady and substantial progress in the right direction.

The one thing, however, that pleased me most of all was the great change in the railroad men of the Northwest. I was fairly “stumped” to find so many of them thorough Socialists. At La Grande and Pendleton, Ore., where the hotels were filled with engineers, conductors, firemen, brakemen, switchmen, telegraphers, car inspectors, shopmen, trackmen, etc., who came to pay their respects, nearly all were old ARU men and practically all were avowed Socialists. At La Grande it seemed like a reunion of the ARU. The old spirit was fanned into flame by the battle cry of Socialism and now burns with more intensity than ever before.

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The *Butte Miner* of December 22 [1902] contains a brief statement of the work of the Butte miners’ union during the past year. Among other things the report states that more than \$10,000 was contributed by this local to strikes in various parts of the country, that it has \$104,000 in its treasury, and that its property and assets aggregate almost \$500,000. This is the work of the Butte union and of the Western Federation of Miners, the wealthiest, most resourceful, liberal, and progressive local labor union in the world.



My hearty good wishes to *The Social Democratic Herald* for a bright and prosperous New Year. As the stalwart exponent of Social Democracy and international Socialism you are doing valiant service and merit loyal and generous support.

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