

Revolt Against the AF of L is Bound to Come:
Letter to Frederic Heath
(April 22, 1905)

Terre Haute, Ind., April 22nd, 1905.

My dear Heath:—

Yours of the 18th came in my absence.¹ You think that if I were to come out against the new movement Gompers would “gnash his teeth.” You are exactly opposite the fact. He is “gnashing” now, and he will have occasion to do considerable more. In 1894 he did all in his official and personal power in opposition to the ARU and to defeat the Pullman strike. You know that as well as I, and notwithstanding this fact and a hundred others of equal import, reinforced by the fact that he is the incarnation of the false doctrine that the interests of labor and capital are identical, he flourishes like a green bay tree, and all efforts to dislodge him along the lines indicated by you will be as fruitless as they were in the case of P. M. Arthur. Nothing less than revolt will do this and the outraged workers are ripe for that revolt and whether the new movement had been announced or not, that revolt is on the schedule of history and bound to come. In fact, it has already come. The western workers broke away long ago and thousands and thousands of others are getting ready to follow out of the Civic Federation-cursed movement that has betrayed labor and led the workers into the shambles to be slaughtered by their capitalist keepers.

The charge of splitting the movement comes with devilish poor grace from those who have betrayed it. They are in fact the splitters and not those who have manhood enough to break away and loyally stand by working class principles. A united worker class will never come out of the AF of L. Mark that!

It does not matter to me that DeLeon sees an opening for himself in the new movement. He will not capture it, nor control it. Mark that!

When you tell me about the splendid progress that is being made within, I can hardly keep from concluding that you are joking. The San Francisco convention was a pitiable exhibition of the farce. The few socialists that were there were made the laughingstock of the country — the footballs of fakirs. The really progressive rank and file understand, as a

rule, that there is not hope and if the new movement starts right, as I believe it will, your eyes will be opened wide by the tremendous breaking away that will follow, and if you will take a word of friendly personal advice, you will let the new movement alone, for every word you say against it will one day come back to inspire vain regrets that it had been uttered. You need not worry unduly about DeLeon or Gompers or any other individual. The working class are going to unite and the AF of L, nor its leaders, nor any other person, influence, or element can prevail against this consummation.

Allow me to suggest that the personal journalism now running rampant in the *Herald* will do no good. It is in my opinion bad policy. Berger and Hagerty,² if they must fight, should attack each other's position and principles and let each other's persons alone. The charge of the *Herald*, in effect, that Hagerty is a grafter, is a great injustice to him. Whatever he may be, or not be, he is not that.

I have not forgotten that I promised you an article, but I have not yet had a chance to write it. Every day is full of exactions, but I shall get around to it soon.

I may be up your way in the not distant future and we will then have a chance to talk it over. I very much regret the Berger position in the judgeship matter. I think it is a great mistake to endorse a capitalist candidate, even by intimation, under any possible circumstances. It is a bad precedent and a dangerous tendency and I do not believe it can be successfully defended from any sound socialist point of view. Of course, I do not for a moment question Victor's integrity, nor his good intentions, nor do I allow these to be questioned in my hearing unchallenged, but I am bound to appeal from his judgment. These differences between us are natural enough, but as we know each other, even to the heart's core, these differences, however widely they may separate us for the time, will never affect our mutual confidence or mar our personal relations. I am wishing you and all of you well in all things and all places and all the time.

Yours always,

E. V. Debs.

[Handwritten PS:] Enclosed clipping is a little old, but is apropos and you may care to reproduce and comment.³

Typed letter-signed on personal letterhead in *Victor L. Berger Papers, 1862-1980*, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, microfilm edition, reel 14, frames 40-41. Not published in Constantine (ed.), *Letters of Eugene V. Debs: Volume 1, 1874-1912*.

¹ The April 18, 1905 letter from Heath to Debs has not survived.

² Victor Berger and Thomas Hagerty represented polar opposites on the question of political action, with the first fixated upon building an electoral organization and the latter dismissing political action as an ineffectual shadow of the labor movement.

³ The clipping has not been preserved. Heath was editor of the *Social Democratic Herald*.