
Debs Appeals for Prisoners: Leader Requests that All Trade Unions and Societies Work for Release of War Prisoners

by Eugene V. Debs

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To All Labor Unions
and Organized Workers.

Dear Brothers and Comrades:

I am making this appeal to you in behalf of the political prisoners. These men are held simply because of their activities in the labor movement and for no other reason. Any other pretense is simply a lie. All other countries have long since released their political prisoners. The United States government, to its lasting shame, is the one exception that keeps men caged as felons for the expression of their opinions. These men, brothers of ours, committed no overt act, no crime of any kind. The court records will prove this. The infamous Espionage Law, under which these men were convicted, has long since been repealed, and there is not the slightest excuse to longer hold them in prison.

The simple fact is that the treason for which these men were convicted was their loyalty to the working class. Such loyalty, especially in a time of war when the workers are turned into butchers and set to slaughtering one another for the profit and power and glory of their masters, is always treason in the eyes of such masters.

If these men with union principles and union hearts beating in their breasts, had been scabs or gunmen or strikebreakers, they would have been cracked up as 100% American patriots, given hero medals, and assigned to posts of honor carrying high salaries and eminent re-

spectability. But instead they refused to bow to the will of the brutal and impudent profiteers and stood up loyally for their own class and gave expression to the truth that was in their hearts, as it was not only their lawful right but their moral duty to do, and for this and this alone they are marked as dangerous and held and treated as criminals to the shame of the American labor movement and the infamy of the United States government, the most plutocratic government on the face of the earth.

Senator [William] Borah of Idaho, be it said to his credit, introduced a resolution in the United States Senate on January 25th [1922], directing the Attorney General to submit to the Senate all available information relative to the cases of persons convicted under the notorious Espionage Act. This resolution is most timely and the organized workers of the nation must bring all possible power to bear to force its passage. The plutocrats, profiteers, and pirates of Wall Street and their degenerate henchmen in all their servile capacities, who had the monstrous Espionage Law enacted to gag the truth and strangle free speech while they were putting over their criminal war conspiracy, will bring all their power to bear to defeat the Borah resolution. Well do these knaves in high places know that if this resolution passes the Senate and the Attorney General is forced to reveal the court records of the political prisoners it will show that they are guilty of absolutely no crime whatever save only that of saying during war time, when the nation had been lashed into fury of blind hate, what the 100% Wall Street profiteers and their lackeys in and out of office did not want to hear. The Constitution, of which they had been in the habit of prating on every occasion, was summarily suspended, truth was exiled, and manhood and self-respect put in prison stripes.

Think of these innocent union men, these working class brethren of ours, being suffered to remain buried alive in the steel vaults of American prison hells, and then talk about being "the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave!" The very thought brings the deep blush of shame to the cheek of every decent American.

These men must be gotten out of prison to the last one of them. As long as one remains we are all in disgrace, and our country stands impeached before the civilized world.

There must be no discrimination among the class war prisoners, for that is what they are and nothing else. All spies and enemy agents, some of whom were convicted of the gravest charges, including the placing of fire bombs in ships and the destruction of life and prop-

erty, were released years ago. Not one remains in prison. Not one of these belonged to a labor union. They were all readily forgiven as soon as the war was over.

But how different with the men who did belong to labor unions and who did not commit any crime or take any life or destroy any property, but who only stood up like men exercising their constitutional rights and telling the truth about the capitalist slaughter of the working class "to make the world safe for democracy!" It is for their benefit that the atrocious Espionage Law was enacted, and for the benefit of the Wall Street profiteers who coined the blood of the slaughtered workers into billions for themselves, that they are still festering in the hell-holes capitalism charitably provides for its victims.

Let it be borne in mind that every solitary profiteer and every politician and other stool-pigeon of the profiteer, whose loot and swag are wring from high prices and low wages, every solitary 100% specimen who wants to keep the political prisoners where they are, is also in favor of the open shop, and do not forget that the open shop of the capitalist class means the closed mouth of labor and the dead union of the working class!

To each and every local union and to every organized body of workers I appeal most earnestly for the adoption of the resolution herewith attached, demanding of your Senators and Representatives in Congress that they give their support to the Borah resolution and insist upon its immediate passage. I beg of you to take this action as I would in your behalf if you were in prison and your family without food, clothing, and shoes in mid-winter because you had loyally stood up for your class.

I entreat you to take this action at once as a matter of duty to yourselves and to vindicate your own self-respect. It is a part and a very vital part of the struggle now being waged by Wall Street special interests, the trusts and combines of capital, to crush union labor and destroy the labor movement.

Have your secretary send a certified copy of the resolutions to your Senators and Representatives at Washington and insist upon an answer to your demand. They will soon be wanting your votes and telling you that they are your servants. Put them to the test at once and if they are not deceiving you they will comply with your demand and the Borah resolution will pass and the conspiracy to keep innocent men in prison upon the pretense that they are criminals will be

uncovered and exposed, and the capitalist black-holes will be compelled to give up their victims.

Eugene V. Debs.

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**A Resolution That Should Be Read and Passed at Lodges,
Trade Union Meetings, and Other Gatherings of Citizens**

Honorable Warren G. Harding,
President of the United States,
Washington, DC.

Whereas, On January 25th, 1922, a resolution was introduced in the United States Senate, by Senator Borah of Idaho, directing the Attorney General of the United States to submit to the Senate all available information relative to the cases of persons convicted under the Espionage Act, and

Whereas, Every country involved in the late war, with exception of the United States, has long ago released all political prisoners convicted under war-time measures, and

Whereas, There yet remain in Federal prisons in the United States over 100 men, 65 of whom are sentenced to serve from 10 to 20 years solely for the expression of an opinion which was held to be in violation of the Espionage Act, now repealed, and

Whereas, These persons have now been confined in jails and penitentiaries for a period exceeding 5 years,

Therefore Be It Resolved, that we _____
endorse the efforts of Senator Borah to ascertain the status of these cases and hereby go on record as being unalterably opposed to the continued imprisonment of war-time political prisoners, and we hereby call upon our representatives in the National Congress and the Senate of the United States to do all within their power to secure the early release of these political prisoners, and

Be It Further Resolved, That we send certified copies of this resolution to the above mentioned representatives, to Honorable H.M. Daugherty, Attorney General of the United States, and to Warren G. Harding, President of the United States, and

Be It Further Resolved, That we recommend to our affiliated unions to adopt similar resolutions and forward them to Washington.

(seal)

President.

Secretary.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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