
A Message from Convict No. 9653

[August 21, 1919]

by Joseph W. Sharts

Unsigned article in the *Miami Valley Socialist* [Dayton, OH], v. 7, whole no. 390 (Aug. 29, 1919), pg. 1.
Attributed to Joseph W. Sharts, Dayton Socialist who attended the meeting.

Eugene V. Debs was seen in the federal penitentiary at Atlanta, Georgia, Wednesday, August 20, 1919, by Marguerite Prevey of Akron, Ohio, and Joseph W. Sharts of Dayton, Ohio, sent on a special mission by Alfred Wagenknecht, State Secretary of the Socialist Party of Ohio, acting for the party; and Samuel M. Castleton, the Socialist attorney at Atlanta, Georgia, made the third member of this committee.

The purpose of the interview was to obtain Debs' signature to an application for a writ of habeas corpus. The ground of the application was to have been the illegality of Debs' sudden removal on orders from Washington from the Moundsville [WV] penitentiary to which he had been sentenced by the court, and his present imprisonment at Atlanta. The theory of the application was that the removal and his present detention were unconstitutional, in that they were a second sentence arbitrarily imposed at Washington, increasing his punishment, without a hearing and without due process of law; and that he was entitled to be released.

Debs asked for the night to think it over, saying it was not himself it so much concerned as the entire body of political prisoners, and he did not want to make any move that might delay a general amnesty for all.

On Thursday morning, August 21 [1919], the same committee saw him again; whereupon he stated he wanted this matter to lie in abeyance

for 30 days for reasons which the committee is not free to reveal at present.

The position he took was equivalent to his deliberately deciding to remain in prison voluntarily, as there was every probability he would be released at least temporarily pending a hearing. The working class may never realize the tremendous sacrifice which this implies.

At this last interview Debs referred very earnestly to the present party controversy, and said he had implicit faith in the intelligence of the rank and file of the movement and their ability to come to a common understanding without any compromise of revolutionary principles; and that their present differences can be reconciled.

He said the psychology of the American workingmen is different from that of the workers of other countries; they will not respond to any appeal which has a suggestion of violence. They are steeped in traditions of political liberty.

The Socialist movement in America in the past has conformed too much to the reactionary craft unionism of the AF of L. It has conceded too much to that conservatism. We need to take a clean-cut stand on the side of revolutionary industrial unionism.

On the other hand we must not subordinate, or leave a suggestion of subordinating, political action to industrial action. One side in the present controversy has overemphasized industrial action at the expense of political action. But the other

side has overemphasized political action to the exclusion of industrial action and has temporized too much with craft unionism.

The problem of immediate demands, he said, could be settled by state autonomy. If a state wanted immediate demands in addition to its revolutionary program, circumstances there might justify it. Other states ought not to dictate.

He urged in conclusion that the comrades be assured that he was as firm and unshaken in his position as ever, and if they would cast their eyes towards Atlanta, over the dome of the prison, they would see his torch flaming in the sky.

In testimony of the accuracy of this report the committee have hereunto set their names this 21st day of August, 1919.

*Marguerite Prevey,
Samuel M. Castleton,
Joseph W. Sharts.*

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