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# Kate O'Hare Visits Debs in Atlanta

by Frank P. O'Hare

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Unsigned article, tentatively attributed to Frank P. O'Hare.

In a visit full of dramatic incidents, Kate Richards O'Hare visited Eugene V. Debs in the Federal Penitentiary in Atlanta on July 2nd [1920], to carry to him the love of Socialists everywhere.

In a special message to his comrades, Debs said that while he deplored the recent differences between Socialist leaders, the rank and file is solidly with the Socialist Party. "The Socialist Party," he said in effect, "is the organization through which they will win their freedom."

Kate O'Hare was ushered into the prison; the two comrades met and embraced; Kate Richards O'Hare recently freed from the Federal Prison and Eugene V. Debs in prison garb with 9 years of prison life before him, said, "How happy I am to see you free, Kate." And—

And then smilingly he added, "Have you gotten used to being out yet?"

They then sat down facing each other across the table. It was a sun-baked afternoon and the rays of the sun filtered through the steel bars of the visitors' room of the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary and illuminated the features of Debs. He smiled a smile of joy to see his old friend free once again.

"Your coming here is like a new sunlight to me. Tell me about your prison experiences."

She answered, "Gene, I am not thinking of myself, but of little Mollie Steimer, who now occupies my cell at Jefferson city and of her appalling sentence of 15 years. She is a 19-year old little girl, smaller in stature than my Kathleen, whose

sole crime is her love for the oppressed."

As Debs listened to Kate relate the dramatic tale of this little child, his classes became tear-stained and his face showed the emotion of his heart. When Kate asked him, "How long can you stand this imprisonment, Gene?" He replied, "I could stay here indefinitely; forever if necessary — as long as the cause needs me."

Then Gene told her of how a few copies of her prison letters had drifted into the Atlanta Penitentiary. "You know, I think that tale of Dick playing the coronet for your outside the prison wells was one of the most dramatic tales I ever read in all literature."

The moment was tense, and for a second silence reigned; and then Kate O'Hare, recalling her son's prison serenade, could hardly control her mother emotions.

Then Kate opened her leather card-case and showed Debs her family group picture which she had carried with her during the 14 months of prison life. The sight of that picture had afforded her much consolation through the hours of dreaded prison silence and monotony.

"Gene, I shall present this to you with my autograph."

"This is very beautiful of you," said Debs, "and I shall treasure this photo all of my days," and smilingly he added, "I shall hand it down as an heirloom."

Then they discussed the things closest to their hearts, the work of freeing the hundreds of



**Kate Richards O'Hare and her four children**

From a photograph taken immediately after she was cited to place herself in the custody of a United States officer to be taken to the Jefferson City penitentiary to begin her five year sentence.

political prisoners and the Socialist movement.

Kate said, "In my lecture tour across the country, I find a greater crystallized Socialist sentiment than ever before. Great changes are imminent, and we are about to reap what we have sown, and although I find differences of opinion among the so-called leaders of the movement, I find the rank and file united.

Then Debs added what was really his message to his comrades: "This is no time for division. The rank and file will speak as they have

never spoken before. Although some of my most dear friends, who are in the different factions and parties, who I know to be absolutely sincere, will someday realize that they are mistaken in their tactics, and they will discover that the Socialist Party is best adapted for emancipating the American working class."

Kate O'Hare was accompanied on this visit by Frank P. O'Hare, her husband, and Attorney S.M. Castleton of Atlanta.

The visit was about to come to an end, and Debs said: "Tell the comrades that I am well and my spirit is finer than before."

"Any special message, Gene?" asked Kate O'Hare.

"You know what is in my heart, Kate," he replied. "Yours is the voice of the voiceless, and with you out of prison we know that the message will be carried on."

The guard rose and twirled his club and said, "Time's up."

With affectionate but sad farewell they parted, and as Kate O'Hare and the other comrades and visitors left, the tall, bent figure of Eugene V. Debs was lost in the file of prisoners going to their mess.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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