

DEBS---And The Struggle Against Reaction

By unanimous vote the United States Supreme Court has upheld the ten year sentence imposed on Eugene Debs by the Federal Court of Cleveland some months ago. The decision has been hailed with unqualified delight by the bourgeois press, though a few, more voracious than the rest, have cavilled at the fact that the constitutionality of the Espionage Act, under which thousands of men and women are already lying in jail, was not definitely established. Here and there a word has been grudgingly inserted about Debs' personal courage and integrity but unfailingly the writers have answered the call of their class, or, to be more correct, the class that employs them. There is a faint pretense that the confirmation of the sentence was a matter of military necessity or national emergency, but even the most brazen editorials hastily leave this phase of the subject.

The class conscious worker is, however, not deceived by any twist that the cunning of newspaper practice or the trickery of legal phraseology may employ. He recognizes the verdict as an act of war on the working class, he knows that Debs is not sentenced for the protection of the country, in the sense that the term is generally used, but for the protection of the present system of exploitation and robbery. Few if any have had the temerity to hurl the slander of pro-Germanism against Debs. The case is clear cut, for half a century Debs has fearlessly championed the cause of the working class, the class to which he belongs and from which he scorned to rise. In every crisis his voice, his pen and his powerful personality have urged the workers on towards emancipation. Every state in the union has been the scene if his labors, all over the country the people have flocked to hear his voice and never since he first set his face toward the sunlight of the new day has he faltered in his allegiance to the cause of the world's oppressed. It is because of his adherence to this cause that the sentence was first imposed and its imposition is now confirmed.

It is true that in its broad aspect the Debs case differs but little from the thousands of others throughout the country. Every conviction against a Socialist, I.W.W. or other class conscious worker is backed by the same class tyranny, is an act of war by the capitalists against the workers. But in its more intimate phases the case stands alone. Debs, by his length of service, by his intellectual integrity, and above all by his limitless love, holds a unique position. He is the pulsing heart of the rebel wage slave. He voices the cry of the child worker for sleep, and play and sunshine—for childhood; he voices the dumb longings of the woman toiler for laughter, and love, and beauty—for womanhood; he voices the inarticulate demand of the slave man for leisure, and bread and home—for manhood; he voice the cry of humanity for economic freedom, for life. He is the soul if the American Socialist movement and the inspiration of every other conscious working class organization in the country, and his imprisonment is a gage flung at the feet of the workers.

The imprisonment of every member of our class is such a gage flung with patrician scorn in the path of the "rabble" but it is not to be expected that the workers have yet become sufficiently educated to view it in this light, a thousand incidents distort their at-

tention from the main issue, Debs' case, however, is clearer cut. There can be but one answer to this assault on the worker, we must pick up the gage on the point of the sword of our economic might and hurl it back.

Three score years and ten is man's allotted span, Debs has already passed through sixty-four years of strenuous life and the imposition of a ten year sentence means that he, who loves freedom as it is given to few to love it, shall spend his declining years in a convict's cell unless the workers intervene. A general strike is the only reply to this latest act of bourgeois tyranny. This sentence is a blow struck in the class struggle by the opposing side and it must be replied to by the blow that the workers can make effective—the withdrawal of their economic power. A one day strike, a half hour strike, even a five minute strike will be sufficient to show that the working class means business. The manifestation of class solidarity will be enough to ensure success. Debs will have secured his greatest triumph if he can inspire such solidarity and labor will have marched forward many steps.

It may be that behind this act of the Supreme Court there lurks executive pardon for Debs but Debs can take care of that. If the workers of America allow the prison gates to close for one day behind Debs then indeed they are sunk in lethargy. Monarchical England gave MacLean five years only to release him in nine months at the demand of the workers, Imperial Germany gave Liebknecht four years and the workers burst open the prison gates before the term was over, Democratic America decrees ten years to Debs, what do the workers say?

The constitutionality or the unconstitutionality of the law matters not, what does matter is that the application of the law is a class act, an act of aggression by the bourgeoisie class against the working class in the person of its best loved spokesman. Bourgeois democracy is a fiction for working class consumption. The law, the impartial law, the will of the people's representatives, is invoked to cover a bourgeois offensive in the class struggle. It was so in the case of Moiney, in the case of Haywood, in the case of a thousand nameless ones, but in this case it must be clear to even the dullest worker. Debs is punished for his love and loyalty to his class for his devotion to the highest ideals of his brothers.

Presidents and diplomats may speak of liberty in ever so idealistic phrases but so long as Debs is imprisoned even the most gullible must see that their words are a sham and a mockery. Bourgeois democracy and idealism is itself tearing away the scales from the eyes of the workers and this latest act is its greatest folly.

The workers must rely on themselves for their own salvation, the first step to the realization of their power lies open through this act. Not only can they free Debs and all his fellows throughout the country but in so acting they move to free themselves from industrial serfdom. The gage is thrown: Eugene V. Debs is to lie in jail for ten years. . . . Take up the challenge workers of America, let the general strike be your answer and let it be swift and sure!

Another Side To The Russian Atrocities

In the New York Times of Sunday, March 16, there is a long article from the pen of Carl W. Akerman which reveals the humane methods of the Russian bourgeoisie whom the Allies are arresting to free the Russian people. Were we not already in full sympathy with the Bolsheviks, the following extract would surely convert us:

"Two Cossack leaders, Generals Semenov and Kalmykoff, in Tehita and Khabarovsk, respectively, were carrying on obstructive work. They were terrorizing every Russian community through which their armies past. Under the guise of fighting the Bolsheviks they were robbing banks and murdering peaceful, respectable Russian citizens with impunity. Although Russian themselves, they were terrorizing their own country. Their activities, however, came to a head when they interfered with rights of foreigners.

"In Khabarovsk Kalmykoff arrested three agents of the Swedish Red Cross on the ground that they were German agents. When word reached Sweden the Stockholm Government protested to the Allies. The Allied Consuls in Vladivostok appointed a committee to investigate the charges and the conditions of the imprisonment of the three Swedes. Before the committee was organized a report reached Vladivostok from Khabarovsk to the effect that the Swedes had escaped from jail and 'disappeared'. The last word was significant. Whenever any one 'disappears' in Siberia he never reappears. Within a few days came other reports to the effect that the Cossacks had murdered the Swedes and destroyed their bodies."

The crime of these two bourgeois Russian generals is that they

interfered with the rights of foreigners." Had they limited their murderous activities to the slaughter of defenseless Russian peasants and workmen no objection would have been raised, even though the victims numbered into thousands, but three bourgeois officials—it is indeed an atrocity.

A correspondent of the New Statesman (1st February, 1919), discussing the respective terrors indulged in by the Bourgeois parties wherever they got the upper hand. He says:

"Various estimates have been current as to the number of workmen executed when the Whites occupied Rostov. A leading 'White' politician, whose name, if I might mention it, would be known to everyone who knows anything of Russia, puts the figure at 23,000. That may be an exaggeration or it may be an under-estimate, but it certainly represents roughly the standards of the 'White' as compared with those of the 'Red' Terror. It is safe to say that if the Whites capture a Red town there will be a hundred executions for every one which would occur if it were a White town captured by Reds. At Ekaterinoslav Denikin ordered every Great Russian found with Bolshevik literature on his person or in his dwelling to be shot forthwith. Elsewhere in the Don district at Bataisk every man who had a son in the Red Guard was hung. At one place every tenth workman was taken and shot as an example to the rest. Your correspondent says that 'the Whites have not put to death perfectly innocent people.' The statement is either grotesquely untrue or