
The Fred D. Warren Case:

Speech at Orchestra Hall — Chicago, IL, January 14, 1910

[excerpt]

by Eugene V. Debs

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Had Moyer, Haywood, and Pettibone been three capitalists instead of three working men the Supreme Court of the United States would have promptly come to the rescue — would have sought out and summarily punished the criminal.

It occurred to Fred D. Warren to test the consistency of this high tribunal, and so he published a reward, offering a thousand dollars for the apprehension and return of ex-Governor [William S.] Taylor, who was under indictment for murder and who was a fugitive from Kentucky.¹

Condemned Before Trial.

Because of this Warren was fore-condemned to conviction. The trial was a farce. When the time came Judge [John C.] Pollock, who was placed upon the bench through the influence of railroad corporations, pronounced sentence. The case was appealed. It is now up for hearing before the Circuit Court of Appeals. What the decision will be it is not difficult to imagine.

We are quite sure that Fred D. Warren will go to jail, but if he goes there it will not be with his head bowed in shame and humiliation; he will go there with the accusation of no wrong festering in his conscience, but with his head erect, his soul unfettered. And I would a thousand

¹ Fred D. Warren was the editor of the mass circulation socialist weekly published in Girard, Kansas, the *Appeal to Reason*.

times rather be Fred Warren in jail than to be the infamous and corrupt judge who sent him there. (*Continued applause.*)

Will Live in History.

Here let me say that Fred D. Warren will live in history, and his memory will be honored long after Judge Pollock has been dumped into the alley of oblivion. (*Laughter and applause.*)

I remember that while I was serving a sentence of six months at Woodstock [Cook County jailhouse] I was brought to the city of Chicago daily in charge of two officers of the law, because I was regarded as a very dangerous character, and returned there in the evening, and the people of Woodstock even protested against having such a disreputable character in their jail. (*Laughter and applause.*) One of the judges who tried me was Peter S. Grosscup. (*Hisses.*) If justice were done him, instead of wearing the judicial ermine, he himself would be in stripes. (*Long continued applause.*) And yet he has all of the qualifications essential to a federal judgeship. As a tried and trusted friend of the corporations he is eminently qualified to kiss the Bible and swear to serve the people.

The trial began, and we would have been convicted had it not been for an incident that proved to be of great significance. We discovered that the [association of railroad] general managers held a secret meeting with the managers of the Pullman Corporation; that they had jointly conspired to crush the employees in the Pullman service and to destroy the American Railway Union. Now the crime we were really guilty of was sympathizing with the wage slaves at Pullman.

Conspiracy Was Exposed.

During the course of the trial, when the discovery was made that this joint meeting had taken place, we called for the official proceedings of this meeting. It developed that each manager and member of the association had a single copy in his strong box. This demand could not be refused by the court, because a similar demand had been made upon the American Railway Union, and we had been compelled to introduce in court all of the proceedings of our meetings.

That noon court adjourned. Judge Grosscup was very sorely troubled. After the lunch hour had passed and court was reconvened, the judge gravely announced that a juryman had been suddenly taken ill; that the

trial could not continue. (*Laughter.*) I have never learned the price of the illness. (*Laughter and applause.*)

Stricken from Docket.

And so the case was postponed from day to day and from week to week until the interest in the case gradually died out, and at last, after months had passed, a very small, obscure press dispatch announced that the case had been stricken from the docket.

Had the trial proceeded to its close, a verdict of not guilty would have been rendered, and we would have been vindicated, and this would not do, since we were already serving time in jail on a charge involving practically the same offense.

But a working man has no fair chance before a federal court. All of the 131 members of the federal court are appointed through the influence and power of corporate wealth. All nine members of the United States Supreme Court are all corporation attorneys — every one of them; there isn't an exception to the rule. They are not elected by the people — they are not responsible to the people. They are not in touch with the people.

Have Served the Trusts.

All of their official lives they have served the trusts and the corporations, and when there is an issue that arises between the corporations and the people they universally decide in the interests of the corporation. The Supreme Court has virtually sanctioned the kidnapping of working men. It has outlawed the boycott and practically the strike, so that it has stripped organized labor of practically all of its power and left it helpless at the feet of corporate power.

The working men are just beginning to understand the issue that is involved in this great struggle. They are beginning to think, and they will soon begin to act. Many of them are beginning to ask why it is that they must press their rags still closer lest they jostle against the silken garments that their finders have finished.

Weary and Shelterless.

Why is it that they must offend their hunger by the odor of banquets they have spread but may not touch; why is it that they must walk, weary and shelterless in the shadow of palaces they have erected but may not

enter? They are beginning to think; they will soon act. They will not much longer beg for their rights, but they will take them. (*Applause.*)

Here in Chicago we have a fully developed capitalist metropolis. Upon one hand the fortunes mount skyward and upon the other there is unspeakable misery and want and woe. Is it possible for any human being with a good heart in his breast to be satisfied with conditions as they are? Go up any of these crowded thoroughfares and no matter how violently you may be opposed to Socialism, you will see multiplied thousands in whose pink faces there is traced an indictment of capitalism and our much vaunted christian civilization.

The Flower Dies.

Man to a very large extent is a product of his environment. Under the influence of sunshine the flower bursts into bloom, in all its beauty. It does so only because soil and climate is adapted to its growth. Transfer this flower from the sunlight to a cellar filled with noxious gasses and it withers and it dies. The same law applies to physical human beings. All life has a physical basis. The industrial soil and the social climate must be adapted to the development of men and women, and then we will cease producing the many thousands whose very appearance is a rebuke to this system.

No, it is not possible for anyone whose heart throbs with sympathy for his fellow men to be satisfied with conditions as they are. The workers are united for the purpose of overthrowing this system, and taking possession of the tools of industry and to have industry for the purpose of producing wealth that all may have who are willing to do their share of useful social work. In this system the wealth of the country is gradually gravitating into the hands of a few. A billionaire has been produced, and from my point of view he serves us as a warning, not as an example. (*Laughter.*)

John D. a Pauper.

It is said that a man is poor who has no money, but is much poorer if he has only money. (*Laughter.*) From my point of view John D. Rockefeller, the chief product of capitalism, is an abject pauper. He has a billion dollars and not a single friend. (*Laughter and applause.*) If there is a human being who loves him for his own sake, I have not heard of him.

And now just a word to the working class. I appeal to you in closing to unite — unite your forces upon the economic field. Disregard the advice of those leaders who may be keeping you separated; unite upon the principles of industrial unionism. (*Applause.*)

You are in control of industry now, if you just knew it, and you can build up the Socialist commonwealth within capitalism itself. Join the same organization, acting together all along the line.

Vote Together.

Vote together upon election day. You have had to learn to do a great many things together in this system; to work together, to be locked out together, to look for work together, to be enjoined together. (*Laughter.*) And to go to jail together. (*Laughter and applause.*)

You still have to learn to do a very important thing together, and that is to vote together on election day. And in due course of time the change will come, for the triumph is certain.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

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