
Debs Does Not Know

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They hope that Debs will save the rotten hull. this is what the so-called “Left” in the Socialist Party hopes and prays for. The “Rights” in the Socialist Party never wanted Debs at any time. These SP leaders, who were in the saddle in 1908 and who still control that party’s machinery, fought Debs’ nomination as candidate for President in the 1908 convention most bitterly and unscrupulously. They dare not say so while the Debs “wave” is on, but we are sure that many of them are opposed to Debs’ candidacy and several of them look forward for this plum for themselves.

However, it is reported that Debs has agreed to be the Socialist Party candidate for President this year. The Socialist Party has not officially tendered him the nomination as yet, nor has its National Executive Committee spoken frankly in the matter. At the SP convention last fall Debs’ nomination for this political office was discouraged and defeated by [Seymour] Stedman, who argued that it would interfere with Debs’ chances for liberation from Atlanta.

Our guess is that this scoop by [David] Karsner¹ (it was he who visited Atlanta some days ago to get Debs’ agreement to stand as the SP candidate for President) is an attempt by the “Left” politicians in that party to save the party from utter ruin. Debs is to be used as a rallying point for “radicals.” Will the reactionaries in the party agree to this program? Or will the coming national convention of this party end in another split, the Debs supporters leading one faction and Stedman the other?

The lamentable fact is that Debs does not know what is going on in the international movement nor does he know what is transpiring in the Socialist Party. Debs stated to Karsner (so Karsner reports) that he feels himself out of touch with things and with the Socialist Party

¹ David Karsner (1889-1941) was the editor of the weekend magazine section of the *New York Call* and was the author of two books written in close connection with the Socialist leader and published in 1919, *Debs Goes to Prison* and *Debs: His Authorized Life and Letters*.

in particular. Only those who have spent time behind prison bars can understand how completely such incarceration separates one from revolutionary activities. Revolutionary papers are forbidden. His mail is diverted to his brother in Terre Haute, who answers it. Only by personal visits can information of the progress of the revolutionary world situation be conveyed to him. The lesson of Albany has not reached him in its full significance. He still judges the SP by the St. Louis Resolution [of 1917]. That the Socialist Party, should it ever gain sufficient strength, would give us an Ebert-Noske "revolution." Debs does not realize, for the facts which definitely point that way have not reached him.

There is another matter we are deeply interested in. Karsner tells us (in part, we might add) what Debs said upon the occasions of Karsner's interview with him. WHAT DID KARSNER SAY TO DEBS? Will Karsner please report this also? The only reliable information Debs receives from the outside world is through those who visit him. Again, what did Karsner say to Debs about the Communist movement in this country? What did he tell Debs about the Socialist Party? What authentic information did he give Debs about the Third International?

Debs has declared himself for the Third International? Karsner may have told Debs that the Socialist Party had, by referendum vote, applied for admission to the Third International. But did he also tell Debs that the SP does not endorse the principles of the Third International? And did Karsner also tell Debs that the Third International does not admit parties which do not adopt its principles? what did Karsner tell Debs which induced Debes to accept the Presidential nomination from a party which, in the now historic Albany trial, wrapped itself in the American flag and told us all that the Socialists here would support the bourgeois state in a war against invasion by the forces of Soviet Russia.

Yet, Debs is a peculiar type. He rather breathes the soul and spirit of revolution. He is not a theoretician. He is not a factionalist. He has always shunned party controversy and several times, instead of taking sides with the Left, with whom he sympathized, he spoke for "harmony" and "comradeship." He does not seem able to apply the principle of birth, life, and death to an organism like the Socialist Party. He does apply it to the labor union movement, but his party loyalty has seemingly induced him to overlook its application in party growth.

The decision of Debs to be the Presidential candidate for the Socialist Party will come as a shock to thousands of workers who left the dying SP and who are now taking part in the only real revolutionary movement, the Communist movement. These workers had counted upon him as a leader of communists in the United States. They had hoped he would lend his talents to the building of the new party in the United States, the party which advocates sovietism and the proletarian dictatorship as its cardinal principles; the party which understands that the capitalist state must be abolished because it is a tool fashioned to do capitalism's dirty work; that in its stead must be placed a workers' toll fashioned to obey the workers' dictates.

Debs' acceptance of the Presidential nomination on the Socialist Party ticket comes to us about the same hour as the dispatches informing us of the growing Spartacan movement in Germany. The Ebert government is on the run. Ebert, the parliamentarian, found it necessary to call for a general strike — Ebert, who used martial law to defeat mass action and who is, as this is written, having his soldiers murder those whom he asked to strike to save him from Von Kapp. However, even Ebert for the moment understood that there is only one force which is all powerful — the revolutionary mass action of the workers.

And we ask — will Debs eventually be found with the American Scheidemanns, who appeal to the workers in time of personal distress, in times when these Scheidemanns are attacked by the more reactionary bourgeoisie? Will Debs eventually be found with the Scheidemanns who subdue the workers with shot and shell when the Scheidemanns are in the saddle?

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

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