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**Open Letter to the  
State Convention of the  
People's Party of Texas  
from Eugene V. Debs  
in Woodstock Jail,  
July 17, 1895**

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McHenry County Jail, Woodstock, Ill.,  
July 15, 1895.

L. Calhoun, Chairman,  
[etc.]  
Fort Worth, Tex.

My Dear Sir:—

I am in receipt of your esteemed favor of July 1 [1895], requesting me to write a letter to be read on the occasion of the Populist state rally, to be held at Fort Worth on the 5th, 6th, and 7th of August.

You say: "Knowing that you cannot come, I am requested to write you and urge you to write a letter to the people, laboring men especially, of Texas, to be read on one of the days of the meeting."

You speak a gloomy truth when you say "Knowing that you cannot come." All the people of the entire state of Texas — farmers, mechanics, professional, business, railroad, and laboring men should know why I and my associates cannot be present at the grand rally of Populists at Fort Worth.

I am profoundly in sympathy with the policy and principles of the Populist Party of the United States,<sup>1</sup> and it would be a source of great satisfaction to meet and hold converse with the courageous and patriotic people of Texas, who are marching to certain victory under the banners of populism.

My heart is in the emancipating cause championed by the Populist Party, and as [neither] the Supreme Court nor any of its subordinates has, as yet, enjoined its pulsations, it beats in approval of every measure advocated by the Populist Party, and until the sentence of imprisonment inflicted by a petty autocrat expires, I must be content to send my greetings, as I do now, to my political friends in council.

While I am committed unequivocally to “free silver,” I regard the political shibboleth of little consequence, as compared with that other battle cry, “Free men,” and I am persuaded that the Populist Party of Texas, and of the country, includes both as fundamental essentials to American independence and progress.

It becomes eminently vital at this juncture of our national affairs that a third political party should be organized, since any dispassionate survey of the past and every honest analysis of the present conditions emphasizes the haggard truth that the two old parties, the Democratic and Republican parties, have brought the country to the verge of ruin.

In calling a special session of the 53rd Congress, Mr. Cleveland declared that the wreck and ruin which has come upon the country was “owing chiefly to congressional legislation,” and this arraignment being true, any expectation of relief from further congressional legislation by either of these old parties will result in disappointment and added disaster.

The Republican Party was arraigned before the bar of public opinion for its plutocratic policy. It was charged with high crimes and misdemeanors against the great body of the American people, and the people, with united voice, rendered a verdict of “guilty,” and wrested from it the scepter of power, and the Democratic Party, with banners blazoned with declarations of reform, with Grover Cleveland at its head, came into power.

It would be a gross falsification of history to suppress the fact that the people generally placed great confidence in the Democratic Party. It had won distinction as the party of the people, and as uncompro-

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<sup>1</sup> Actually, the People's Party — “Populists” being a nickname for its members. Debs consistently misnames the party throughout this letter.

misgivingly hostile to plutocrats and all tribes and gangs that prey upon the substance of the people. It was widely remarked by those who watch the every varying moods of the people in political affairs that their rebuke of the Republican Party in 1892 was irrefutable proof that the people had determined to have honest government, that legislation in the interest of trusts and banks, whose policy of plunder constituted a colossal sham, should no longer hold the country in its grasp.

This popular upheaval was justly regarded as a demonstration of the people's capability for seeing the trend of national politics, and of their power to apply the needed remedies. But when it was found that the Democratic Party had become as thoroughly debauched as was the Republican Party, that it, too, was dominated by the money power, that it was no longer worthy of trust and confidence, what was the humiliating spectacle presented for the nation's contemplation? The Republican Party, expelled from power in 1892, with all the odium of its treason to the people still clinging to it, unwashed and unrepentant, is placed in power in 1894.

It was under such conditions that the Populist Party developed its great strength, and upon its success depends the welfare of the country.

The Populist Party fully comprehends the fact that in the coming battle for honest government, it is to fight the money power of the country — a power which will brook no restraint. Without a soul to be saved or damned, it plays the role of priest and pirate with equal duplicity, and always with the same end in view. It debauches the press to secure its designs, and compels the pulpit to offer prayers and invoke heaven's benediction upon its piracies.

It sets up its idols in congressional and legislative halls, and bribes its spineless vassals to worship them.

It enters what was once the most august judicial tribunal the world has ever known, accomplishes its nefarious purposes, and retires, leaving the temple of justice reeking with more stench than Coleridge discovered in the city of Cologne, while the people wonder by what power, human or divine, it can be deodorized.

The money power enters the White House by the front door and compels the President of the United States to issue gold bonds, that the Rothschilds and Shylocks, foreign and native, may riot upon wealth wrung from American toilers — and when these toilers seek to resist oppression, degradation, starvation, and slavery in a way that

has been the glory of the American name, the money power, like a Russian autocrat, orders out the standing armies of state and nation in all the pomp and circumstance of war. Workingmen are quieted by the persuasive power of bullets, powder, and bayonets, and blood drained from their veins stains the earth, which but for them would be a desert. And this is done under the folds of our starry banner, triumphantly waving over the land of the plutocrat and the home of the slave.

This is the power that the Populist Party has got to fight in coming campaigns and all hope of success centers in the ceaseless bombardment of its strongholds, its banks, its trusts, its corporations and its combines, its press, and every other covert from behind which it seeks to perpetuate its existence.

The farmers of the country are profoundly interested in the contest. The money power in unnumbered ways filches from the profits of their toil and controlling market and transportation, compels them to part with their products at a loss, and this done, it stands ready with a mortgage which ultimately transfers home, land, forest and field, and every movable thing to its engulfing maw.

The millions of men and women engaged in gainful occupation, from the sweatshops of the great centers of population to the plowman turning the furrow, all, regardless of name or occupation, can not prosper while vicious legislation permits the money power to levy tribute upon them to an extent which barely permits them to live, while it drives millions into the ranks of the idle, to be fed by charity or to subsist by crime.

When you invited me to write a letter to be read at the great Populist rally, because "knowing I can not come," you condense into five words a state of affairs in the United States, in the presence of which exaggeration becomes an unimaginable term.<sup>2</sup> I will not be present because a petty United States judge, in defiance of every constitutional guarantee of the liberty of the people, has thrust myself and [my] associates in prison, a despotic exercise of power as infamous as ever sent a liberty-loving Russian to Siberian mines to prison, to torture or death. This act of despotism, extending as it does far beyond myself, tells the people the gloomy truth, that an autocratic centralized power has been established, and that under its sway the constitutional guarantees of the liberties of the people have been struck down. Believing that the mission of the Populist Party is to restore the

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<sup>2</sup> The last few words of this sentence is barely legible on the microfilm.

lost liberties and reestablish a government by the people, by the all-pervading power of the ballot, my voice goes forth from my prison to cheer on the Populist hosts of Texas and the country, and with an unflinching faith in the ultimate triumph of the party, I bid all who march beneath its banners, godspeed.

Yours faithfully,

*Eugene V. Debs.*

*Edited by Tim Davenport*

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