

To the Seattle *Socialist* and Its Readers (July 10, 1904)

Comrades and Friends:—

The appeal of the publishers in the last issue of the *Socialist* is a reproach to us all.¹ There is no excuse for such a state of affairs. Socialists and their friends, most of them, are poor, but they are not paupers. Nine-tenths of them can, if they will, send the *Socialist* 50 cents in the next 10 days and put the paper on a substantial foundation and the publishers on their feet.²

Socialists are not consistent, to put it mildly, when they talk continually about “education” while they let their own press starve to death. Socialists, who stand against exploitation, have no right to exploit those who serve them. *The Socialist* has served them not only at the expense of its publishers, but to their absolute impoverishment. The readers of the *Socialist*, outside of almshouses, should be ashamed to accept charity, and yet they complacently receive and read the paper on that basis. But perhaps the socialist press is itself largely to blame. It has cheapened itself in point of price until it has to cry out for alms like a beggar, and it has sought to cheapen everything else accordingly. The *Socialist* at 50 cents per year is down almost to a pauper basis. It cannot pay legitimate expenses. Those who get it out have to divide their time between their work and the wolf at the door. This would be all right if it were necessary, but it is unnecessary; worse than this, it is an imposition that amounts almost to an outrage. It is one of the results of everlastingly telling socialists that they are paupers and that everything ought to be done for them for next to nothing, and of organizing the whole propaganda on that wretched basis. It surely can not be charged to “high priced” lectures and others who object to the two-bit brand of propaganda.

Trade unionists, made up wholly of workers, manage to support their press, at least a large part of it, in decent order, so that the press can live comfortably and serve instead of starving and dying. I have always been opposed to a two-for-five press. I want to see a substantial paper, the best that can be produced, and a reasonable price paid for it, instead of a flimsy sheet on crutches that manages to limp from one issue to another, almost

a walking epitaph. This is no reflection on the publishers, but it is intended to hit those, and hit them hard, who expect a socialist paper for nothing and who expect everything else at the same price. They are lacking, not in means, but in common honesty.

For the poor and unfortunate who are unable to subscribe I have not only sympathy, but will contribute my share to provide the paper for all who are in that class. There are comparatively few of these among the members of the socialist movement. Most of them who are willing to get along without things that can be easily dispensed with can support the press.

My observation is that our papers and our propaganda in general are more liberally supported by those who cannot afford it than by those who can. When I was connected with railway unions I found that as a rule the section man who supported a family on a dollar a day had always something to give for the good of the cause, while the engineer and conductor who got five times that much always had an excuse instead of a contribution. This was excusable in the railway unions, but it is not excusable in the socialist movement. The many who have means ought to be ashamed to exploit the few who are willing to serve them and who even go hungry to do it.

The Socialist must be put upon its feet, and at once. Dr. Titus and his colleagues have done their whole duty and gone far beyond it, and now we have got to show some inclination to do ours. There are several ways to put the Socialist where it properly belongs, and this applies to every other socialist paper and periodical.

First, let every reader send to the *Socialist* the very hour this strikes the eye 50 cents, more or less, as a voluntary contribution to cancel the debt of the past.

Second, let every reader in the same hour go out and secure a new subscriber; or if he cannot do this, subscribe himself or herself for the paper to be sent to some worker who needs it.

Third, raise the subscription to \$1.00, beginning with the next issue, and keep it there until you have 25,000 subscribers, and then reduce it to 50 cents or increase the size or number of pages.

If you place no value on your own work, others surely will not. When you offer your paper at a Jim Crow price they will take you at your word and look upon your paper as a Jim Crow paper. Give it to them free, like

an almanac, and they will not have it at all, or they will expect a premium to take it home and use it to paper the kitchen or outhouse.

If the publishers and readers of the socialist press will do the things herein suggested, we will soon have a press that will have the ability, the capacity, and the resources to not only represent, but lead, the movement, develop its strength, fight its battles, educate and arouse the masses, and hasten the day of capitalist collapses and socialist freedom.

Eugene V. Debs.

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¹ *The Socialist* was launched in Seattle, Washington, on Aug. 12, 1900, as a self-described “little organizing sheet for the Debs campaign, with no expectation of permanence” (#147) by Hermon F. Titus (1852-1931), a Baptist minister turned medical doctor turned fiery socialist agitator. If Victor Berger’s *Social Democratic Herald* was the unofficial weekly organ of the SPA’s Midwestern “constructive socialist” right wing, Titus’s publication was the parallel publication of the party’s revolutionary socialist left, a loose faction concentrated in the hardscrabble West. For what it’s worth Debs contributed very frequently to the former, very rarely to the latter. *The Socialist* ran for a full decade, changing its name to *Next* and moving to Toledo, Ohio in 1904, before reversing course the following year. *The Socialist* briefly changed its name again, this time to *The Workingman’s Paper*, shortly before termination in the fall of 1910.

² This piece appeared in the *Socialist* beneath a facsimile of a supportive note written by Debs to Hermon Titus that read: “My dear Titus:— Please give space to the enclosed. Raise the price to \$1.00. If you were to make the subscription one cent or give it away nobody would want it. Hold the fort! Don’t fail to get out each issue if you have got to reduce to the size of a postage stamp. You will pull through and win out. Yours always, E.V. Debs.”