
Homecoming Speech in Terre Haute, Indiana,

Nov. 23, 1895

[excerpt]

by Eugene V. Debs

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Papers of Eugene V. Debs microfilm collection, reel 14.

Terre Haute, Ind., Nov. 23 [1895].— * * *

There could not have been a worse night for the reception to "Gene" Debs at his home. It rained all day and when his train arrived at 7 o'clock this evening it was still raining with a cold, strong wind to chill the pedestrians who "came to town" to see the parade. * * *

After Debs had entered the armory the doors were opened to the crowd that had been waiting in the rain and that had followed him. In a few minutes 1,500 persons were crowded into the hall, filling it to the doors. Debs was very hoarse from his experience in the storm in Chicago last night, but otherwise he was in perfect health. * * *

Mr. Debs Speaks.

As Mr. Debs came forward the cheering began in greater volume and continued for several minutes. He said:

Ladies and Gentlemen, Neighbors and Friends:—

How much I appreciate your kindness, your sympathy, your devotion, no language of mine, however fittingly chosen, can express. In coming back to your midst, it is with the proud consciousness that you who know me best know that I did only what I believed to be right and my duty. Manifestly the spirit of '76 still survives; the fires of liberty have not yet been totally extinguished. I comprehend the significance of this magnificent dem-

onstratation, and appreciate fully the honor that makes it possible for me to stand here tonight. I greet you as lovers of liberty. I greet you as despisers of despotism. (*Cheers.*) Injunction rule means the sway of the money power. It is the flagrant violation of the constitution to which I enter my protest. When has a federal court interfered to help half-starved workingmen? When and where have the federal troops been called out except in the interests of corporations? (*Cries of "Never! Never!"*)

If Judge Woods is correctly reported in an interview printed today, he says I was mistaken when I said the courts restrained men from striking. I maintain now that the moment they strike injunctions are issued against them and the next day the men are dragged into the presence of this same judge and are sent to jail, not for crime, but for alleged contempt of court. When he says the courts do not in effect restrain men from striking I charge that he utters knowingly and willingly a falsehood. (*Great Cheering.*)

If this be contempt to his contemptible court, let him make the most of it. I propose to assert my rights, to speak the truth, and arraign iniquity in high places if I end my career in a hangman's noose. (*Repeated cheering and cries of "They'll never hang you!"*) The federal court may be dominated as simply a conspiracy against the common people. A man cannot become a federal judge unless he is a corporation tool. (*Cheers.*) It is an all-around shell game. In the first place, the corporations make the judges and then the judges make the corporations. There are judges who are fleas on the corporate dog.

Debs quoted the Judge Trumbull letter and the opinions of Justices Brown, Harlan, and White on the income tax, in which they criticized the decision of the majority of the court, and remarked that what they said was worse than anything he has said about the court, whereupon an auditor's query why these justices were not sent to jail caused general laughter.

The remainder of Debs' address, which occupied an hour and ten minutes in all, was confined to the manuscript of the address he prepared for the Battery D meeting [Nov. 22, 1895]. He closed sooner than he had expected because of his throat trouble.

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Edited by Tim Davenport

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