

My First Speaking Tour of 1910 (February 24, 1910)

Terre Haute, Ind., February 24th [1910].¹

The speaking tour of six weeks, which closed in Philadelphia last night [February 23], was in all regards the most successful in my experience. Beginning at Chicago January 23rd, the entire tour was in the nature of a vast demonstration. The country was covered between Nebraska and Pennsylvania. The attendance, without a single exception, was large, and the real fire was everywhere in evidence. In some cases large numbers were turned away for want of room.

The beginning of the wonderful trip, at Chicago, was most unfortunate for me. A magnificent audience, exceptionally keen, had gathered in the teeth of a fierce and blinding snow storm, and everything had been arranged for a masterly address. But the principle speaker, unfortunately myself, had the grippe,² and fell down flatly, to his inexpressible chagrin and mortification. The only plea I have is that, with all the strength I had to sand on my feet I did my best, and nothing outside of a socialist meeting would have been sufficient to induce me to leave my bed that day.³ Fortunately, the never failing Jim Brower⁴ officiated as chairman and so stirred and swayed the audience that he saved the day, for which I shall always remember him with gratitude.

So keenly did I feel this failure on my part that by sheer force of will, I determined to throw off the sickness, and from that time till the close of the tour the grippe let me severely alone.

Fifty thousand subscribers were added to the *Appeal* list during the six weeks we were out by our meetings alone, an average of over a thousand a day.⁵ Enough literature was disposed of to stock a good-sized establishment. At each point we left the comrades full of enthusiasm and resolved to work with renewed energy for the movement. At several places where there was local dissension we succeeded in restoring harmony, giving the local a fresh start and a clear field.

The Warren case, the exposure of the federal judiciary, and the *Appeal's* fight for a free press, free speech, and free assemblage are among the livest issues now before the American people. The keen interest of the

masses in these issues accounts largely for the tremendous gatherings which greeted us all over the country. Every mention of Warren was cheered to the echo, and every reference to the *Appeal* evoked a significant demonstration.

We are indebted to comrades along the line for kindnesses too numerous to mention. The glad greetings everywhere revive and refresh a weary comrade, and send him on his way, rejoicing that he has lived long enough to know the meaning of socialism and the comradeship it inspires.

It is merely justice to Comrade [George D.] Brewer⁶ to say that he has made himself indispensable. He cannot be beaten. He knows just what to do and always does it. He is never caught napping. His fifteen minute introductory speeches never fail to put the audience in the happiest mood, making it easy for the speaker who follows him. The people everywhere were impressed by Brewer's earnestness, his clearness, and his frankness, relieved by flashes of wit. Whenever he has occasion to address the people at length, as he doubtless will have in the future, he will be greeted by large and appreciative audiences. Brewer is one of the rising young comrades, and high honors await him on the platform of the socialist movement.

We are not going to rest until the *Appeal* has a half a million subscribers and until every corrupt federal judge has packed his grip for Egypt or some other clime.

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¹ Sent by telegram to the *Appeal to Reason* on February 25, 1910.

² An archaic term for influenza.

³ A postscript by Fred Warren notes that Debs was "really too ill to speak" in Chicago but that reports had been received that Debs had made a "magnificent effort" which had "thrilled" the audience and fueled a mass demonstration at what was actually a successful event.

⁴ James H. Brower was the Socialist candidate for lieutenant-governor of Illinois in 1904 and for governor in 1908.

⁵ The January-February 1910 tour was sponsored by the *Appeal to Reason*, for whom Debs worked as a paid contributor.

⁶ George D. Brewer (1877-1967) worked on the family farm near Marion, Kansas until leaving to become a railroad brakeman in 1894. He left the railroad service in 1899 to enlist in the Spanish-American war, but contracted typhus during training and never saw action. He returned to work as a brakeman after the war but suffered an incapacitating injury on the

job, from which he suffered a permanent limp. He became active in the populist movement during the second half of the 1890s and turned to socialism in 1900 after reading a socialist newspaper in a public library. He attended Ruskin College from 1901 until accepting a job with the *Appeal to Reason* in 1903. He was elected as a Socialist to one term in the Kansas legislature in 1914. Following World War I he relocated to the Upper Midwest and became involved in the activities of the Non-Partisan League.