SIDELIGHTS

Incidents in the Life of Eugene V. Debs

By Theodore Debs

Theodore (left) answering campaign letters with Eugene between stops while aboard the Red Special in 1908.

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In studying the life of Eugene V. Debs, noted labor and Socialist Party spokesman, it soon becomes obvious that his brother, Theodore Debs, played an important and integral part in all of his activities. Historians assessing the role of Eugene Debs would do well to recognize the influence and contribution that Theodore made to the success of numerous Debs’ projects. Eugene Debs would appreciate this recognition because he repeatedly stated in his lifetime that he would not have been able to do all the speeches, articles, letter writing, and countless other activities without the help of his brother, Theodore. This brief essay will discuss the working relationship and efforts that Theodore Debs made on Eugene’s behalf. First, some family background.

Theodore, born nine years after Eugene, in 1864, was the tenth and last child born to Jean Daniel and Marguerite Debs. Only six of these children lived beyond birth. These two brothers grew up in a home dominated by a stern, yet just father. He insisted that all of his children get the best education possible and sacrificed to pay for private school tuition because the Terre Haute, Indiana, public schools lacked rigor and quality at that time. Although the family had little money, they worked together in their grocery store and enjoyed a close family unity.

Every Sunday, Mr. Debs took his boys hunting while Mrs. Debs and the four daughters prepared a festive meal. In the afternoons and evenings, the family read and listened to music. Mr. Debs insisted upon their oral reading of the works of Schiller, Goethe, Hugo, etc., in their original languages. Shakespeare, Whitman, Lowell, Hawthorne and other important writers were also shared. These literary sessions certainly had an influence upon the prose style of both Eugene and Theodore. Mrs. Debs, quieter and more subdued than the father, radiated much charm in keeping this animated large family together.

Since Theodore was nine years younger than Eugene, he grew up at the time Eugene emerged as a successful union organizer. He followed closely the experiences of Eugene first as a railroad fireman, later as a union organizer and writer for labor journals. No records indicate exactly when Theodore began to work for his brother. He began by helping Eugene answer his mail from time to time.

Theodore pursued his own career for awhile and decided in the late 1890’s to come to Chicago. Here he became involved in the operation of a pickle and mustard processing factory. If Theodore had chosen to stay in this business, he could have become quite prosperous because the business thrived under his direction. Instead, he decided to become his brother’s secretary. Theodore and his wife, Gertrude, and their daughter, Marguerite, decided to move from their apartment at 519 E. 66th Street in Chicago back to Terre Haute where Eugene Debs had established an office at 11th and Wabash.

Eugene Debs emerged as an important national figure after the Pullman Strike. Even though Theodore had not yet decided to work full-time for his brother, he definitely aided his brother during this critical strike. They consulted frequently during the strike. After Debs served the six months’ jail sentence, it was Theodore who coordinated and planned at the insistence of Chicago labor leaders the massive celebration in Battery D held the day of his release from the Woodstock Jail. This behind the scenes activity would characterize the devotion and efforts of Theodore during the next twenty-five years on behalf of his brother. Theodore never sought the limelight, but notice the newspaper pictures of Debs and observe how frequently Theodore appeared in the background.
In the office in Terre Haute, Theodore and Eugene early established a routine and delineation of duties that they essentially followed for years. Theodore would arrive early in the office—sometimes by 6:00 a.m. and open the mail and begin to fill orders for the countless booklets and flyers they mailed out. Eugene advocated sending out a piece of literature with every letter. His cabinet which is now on display in the restored Debs home contained numerous pigeon holes for keeping a supply of pamphlets handy for mailing. With Theodore's help in 1900, he set up the Standard Publishing Company to print materials advocating industrial unionism, socialism, better working conditions, abolishing child labor, women's rights, etc. Although the actual printing was contracted to Moore-Langen, the editing and detail work fell to Theodore. Many of the 5 & 10c pamphlets were copies of speeches or articles Eugene had prepared.

The brothers arranged their office so that they could easily communicate and chat while they worked. By placing their desks side by side, they could easily pass items back and forth. Eugene would take the letters received and make notes on them indicating what he thought should be included in the replies. Sometimes Eugene wrote longhand detailed comments but more often the job of composition fell to Theodore. They bounced ideas back and forth and used one another as a sounding board for what each wrote. Sometimes they would take a break and go for a long walk into the prairies surrounding Terre Haute in order to escape the office routine and to continue their discussion of matters important to them.

The typewriter sat on a separate typewriter desk and Theodore "manned" the machine while Gene paced about the room dictating his thoughts. Theodore had the task of typing up what his brother said—no simple assignment when one considers that Debs spoke rapidly and for long periods of time. In this way, Debs kept up with the monumental demands placed upon him for articles and copies of his speeches, plus endless requests for information and support of various causes. This meant that office hours often extended until the late evening and then each brother took work home for completion.

After the Pullman Strike, Debs had more invitations to speak than he could ever fill. To better plan his trips and to organize them with a minimum of lost travel time and mileage, Theodore set up and managed from 1900 to 1908 a labor lecture bureau and coordinated to the last detail of train time Debs' speaking tours. On long trips, he always accompanied Debs and handled arrangements. When Debs lectured (often his speeches lasted 2 to 2 1/2 hours), he energetically infused his rhetoric with dynamic gesturing and sweated profusely. Theodore waited in the wings and after the speech would rub his brother with a towel and give him a dry shirt before going out into the night air. It was this kind of consistent, attentive devotion that enabled Gene to maintain such a hectic pace and survive.

The press of certain strikes and some of the presidential campaigns was so great that Theodore sometimes had to remain behind in Terre Haute, manage the office, and attempt to keep ahead of the mail. The continual shortage of funds for the five presidential campaigns forced extra burdens upon Theodore because items or speeches by Gene served as the best fund raisers.

Because the two men worked together so closely over a long period of time, Theodore could accurately predict what Eugene would want said or done in meetings when he could not attend. Theodore did substitute for Eugene in the delivering of a few speeches during the long campaigns. At night, when Eugene was exhausted, Theodore could stand on the back platform of the campaign train to speak with the same fire and fervor as his brother. He would wave his arms and lean forward over the crowd just like he had seen his brother do thousands of times. When he did this Theodore wore a hat because Gene's baldness in later years would have given him away.
Although alike in some respects, the personalities of the brothers differed. When disgusted or frustrated, Theodore could become quite excited and insist upon the correction of whatever bothered him. Gene maintained an easy outgoing disposition, but then he had Theodore to run part of the interference course for him. When apart, the brothers corresponded almost daily. These hastily scrawled notes reflect a genuine admiration for one another and include much joking banter. Each threatened to get the hide of the other if such and such a task wasn’t finished.

Theodore attended far more state and national conventions of the Socialist Party than Eugene. He often served as a delegate from Indiana and although some party leaders chided Gene for his non-attendance, he had an able representative in his brother. The liaison role between the national executive committee of the party and Eugene was also handled by Theodore. Since Eugene travelled continuously and Theodore made the schedules, officers of the party realized that to reach Eugene and get an answer contacting Theodore saved time. They also learned that Theodore wrote intelligent replies and gradually many of the leading Socialists wrote Theodore on matters and asked that he inform Eugene of their ideas. In the last ten years of Eugene’s life this practice prevailed. Perhaps more importantly, Theodore scanned the mail and answered for Gene countless letters from little known followers. Debs succeeded as a party leader because he had the rank and file support of the faithful dues-paying “Jimmy Higgenses” in the movement. Theodore did a great deal to keep these supporters informed and recognized.

The articles by Theodore that follow give further insight into the relationship of these two brothers. They also provide additional information about Eugene Debs as a charismatic reform leader. In the last few years of Eugene’s life more and more articles appeared with Theodore’s name as author. Editors of Socialist publications sought his opinions because they recognized his skills and importance to the movement and realized that Eugene could no longer meet all of the demands placed upon him. Articles by Theodore as “The War and the Workers,” [Debs Magazine, June 1922, p.3] differed little in content from Eugene’s thoughts on the subject except Theodore stated his views with even greater emotion. He continued to write articles and answer hundreds of inquiries after Eugene’s death and several of these articles appeared in The New York Call. The publication of these essays by Theodore’s daughter, Marguerite, preserves these valuable documents for our study and enlightenment. Theodore wrote them several years after Eugene’s death.
SIDELIGHTS: INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF DEBS

By Theodore Debs

CHAPTER I

Debs was filling the office of City Clerk of Terre Haute, drawing the princely salary of $1,500 per year, when apprised of his appointment to fill an unexpired term as National Secretary of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, as well as edit and manage its official publication, a monthly magazine.

That was in 1880. His remuneration as City Clerk was not large as compared to present day salaries, but quite sufficient to meet his simple and modest needs.

Debs' predecessor in the Brotherhood was a defaulter and had been removed from office. When Debs took possession of his new duties, all that was left was an antiquated iron safe, in the cash drawer of which reposed three pennies, probably overlooked, some office records, all in hopeless confusion, - and a staggering indebtedness of $10,000.

This was Debs' inheritance on becoming officially connected with the Brotherhood, other than having bestowed upon him the euphonious title of "Grand Secretary and Treasurer and Editor of the Locomotive Firemens Magazine".

It must be admitted this was considerable of a title in the light of the organization having the munificent sum of three cents in its treasury with which to meet its numerous and pressing obligations. The title may have been intended as an amolument for the honor it conferred, or, perhaps, to bolster the courage of the incumbent in facing irate creditors.

Anyway, Debs assumed the responsibility, - title, liabilities, and the guardianship of the three pennies carefully stowed away in the iron safe.

Each morning found Debs at his desk in the City Building; each night, until the early hours of morning, found him hard at work in the office of the Brotherhood, located, for the sake of economy in a room of his home.

The Brotherhood had always been weak; now it was in the throes of defeat and bankruptcy. However, by stupendous efforts and an unconquerable determination not only to rehabilitate, but make the organization a power in the labor world, the tide was finally turned. In time debts were liquidated; new lodges organized; and many new names added to the roll of membership. Now that the organization was taking on new life, doubt was dispelled, success was assured, and the future loomed bright with promise.

At this time Debs summoned the Grand Master of the Brotherhood, living in an adjoining state, to come to Terre Haute for a conference. Putting out money for railroad fare and travelling expenses was not in vogue, at least, not with the Brotherhood in those days. Officials, in their travels were expected to "beat" their way over the road - and did- riding in cabooses or engine cabs, as circumstances dictated.

The Grand Master was no exception to the prevailing custom. In contemplating his visit to Terre Haute, however, the thought occurred to him, now that the Brotherhood was looking up instead of down, assuming something of an air of importance; having had slight recognition in some quarters, that the officials of the line extending into a dozen states over which he must travel, might show its respect for the Brotherhood and grant him a trip pass to Terre Haute and return.

The company had been noted for its hostility to organized labor, but nevertheless he would make the attempt.

The Grand Master was a man timid by nature, but the thought of "beating" his way over the long distance in the heat of summer, riding dirty
and dusty cabooses, or perhaps, worse still, greasy engine cabs, fortified his courage. He would make a personal call upon the Vice President of the road, whose office was in his home town, and ask for transportation in the name of the Brotherhood.

In this particular case it was a serious undertaking, especially for one timid and weak at heart, as the Grand Master soon learned to his dismay. Scarcely had he made his desire known to the Vice President, than that gentleman directed a volume of vituperation, eloquently punctuated with a profanity against the Brotherhood in particular and organized labor in general, that would have done justice to an inebriated lumber-jack in town for the first time after a long winter in the woods.

The large force of white-collared clerks, bending over their desks, chuckled gleefully at the chagrin and discomfiture of the Grand Master, who, by the way, made his exit at the first opportunity, no doubt congratulating himself that he escaped through the doorway rather than having been pitched out of an open window.

It was an inglorious retreat; a most humiliating experience; an ignominious rout without a redeeming feature. Once outside the Vice President's office the Grand Master was more than content to make his way to Terre Haute on the hard cushions of a caboose.

On arriving in Terre Haute, the Grand Master, covered with the dust and dirt of travel, related his brief but tragic experience with the Vice President. Debs, indignant and disgusted, reproached his fellow-official for allowing anyone - whatever his station in life - to so outrageously insult the Brotherhood without bitterly resenting the outrage.

"No man could do that in my presence, no matter who he might be, or how high his official position, and get by with it", said Debs.

"You don't know the man or perhaps you would not say that", returned the Grand Master.

"Well", said Debs, "I will know him before the sun falls beneath the horizon tomorrow evening. Tonight you and I leave for C........

The Vice President was of the type Knut Hamson would pronounce "a barge of a man", standing full six feet in height, straight as the proverbial arrow, weighing more than two hundred, wiry hair, cold piercing eyes that seemed to discern one's innermost thoughts, short-cropped beard, square of jaw - in fact, the man possessed those attributes most sought by owners of large corporations to manage and direct their financial interests. In choosing this man they made no mistake.

The next afternoon Debs presented himself at the office of the Vice President, followed hesitatingly by the Grand Master. Their appearance was the signal for quiet tittering on the part of the employes, who at once recognized the victim of the Vice President's wrath, and great was their anticipation of a similar exhibition.

They had not long to wait. Preliminaries between the Vice President and Debs were brief and to the point. The state of the weather, business conditions, and topics of a like character, common on such an occasion, were somehow overlooked.

Debs had but briefly entered upon the purpose of his visit when the Vice President, throwing some papers he held in his hand on his desk, his eyes snapping, and with a fierceness of expression calculated to strike terror to the heart of the timid, and in a voice resembling that of an enraged animal, halted Debs abruptly, as if greatly irritated and wished the interview to end.

"I want you to understand, Mr. Debs", he bellowed, "that the ------ Railroad don't care a God Damn about the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen."

Drawing his chair nearer to that of the Vice President, leaning forward,
right arm extended, his long index finger at the very nose of the Vice President, Debs, in a voice equally rancorous, retorted:

"And I want you to distinctly understand, Mr. Vice President, that the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen don't care a God damn about the ----- railroad, but it does demand and insists in the name of the employees it represents in your service that it be given civil and courteous treatment by its officials."

For twenty minutes thereafter the exchange was fast and furious. There was no mincing of words or sparing of feelings. It was a battle of fast thinking, cutting satire, quick wit, in which neither participant asked for or gave quarter. Sparks flew as if from the mouth of a smith's bellows. The very air seemed charged with profanity. As the controversy progressed it became more heated until it seemed to the listening employes as if blows would be exchanged.

The Vice President thundered abuse upon organized labor, while Debs, equally vehement, lashed corporate greed and rapacity in sucking out the very life-blood of the men who enriched its coffers, that the owners and idlers might revel and riot in luxury, while glorying in the sale of their pampered and petted daughters in exchange for the worthless title of a foreign degenerate rake.

"How did you get here?" suddenly shouted the Vice President in the midst of the fiery exchange.

"It's none of your damned business," retorted Debs. "Nothing would more delight you than to know the names of the train crew that carried us into the city that you might discharge them for violating the company's rules. The suffering of their wives and children on that account would give you precious little concern."

Verbal combats, like storms at sea lashing the waves into froth, spend their fury, pass on, and the water again becomes placid.

And so it was on this occasion. The pent-up anger and indignation of the combatants expended, the men gradually assumed a more civil, courteous and dignified attitude, though neither had yielded the smallest fraction of an inch to the other.

When something like calmness prevailed, after each had had his say (-and said it aplenty), Debs broached the subject of issuing trip passes in favor of the Grand Master and Grand Organizer of the Brotherhood over the lines represented by the Vice President, as they had occasion to travel over his road.

As before stated, the road had always been hostile to organized labor, having never recognized or issued passes to the officials of the older railway organizations.

However, the Vice President, in strange contrast to his first greeting, now gave Debs courteous hearing. When Debs had finished, the Vice President reached over to his desk, touched a button, which almost instantly brought a clerk to his side. Addressing the clerk, he said, "Issue three annual passes on account of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen good over the main line and all branches of the road."

The clerk was amazed. For a moment he did not move, seeming undecided as to whether he heard aright. It seemed impossible in view of the well-known attitude of the Vice President and the policy of the company; and yet the words, "make out three annual passes" were ringing in his ears.

Here Debs interposed an objection, explaining to the Vice President that his work was in the office at home; that at present he travelled but little and, therefore, had no need of annual transportation.

"You are returning to Terre Haute?"

"Yes, sir" said Debs.

"Then we will compromise by issuing you a trip pass", said the Vice President, smiling audibly, having in mind no doubt the impertinent inquiry as to how Debs had gotten into town.
While the clerk was making out the passes, the Vice President, among other things inquired of Debs if he was a lawyer. Informed in the negative, he said, "You ought to take up the law, corporation law. You would be a great success as a lawyer, make a lot of money, and get somewhere in the world."

The clerk returned with the passes. The interview was at an end. The men arose from their seats, shook hands in a manner indicating mutual personal regard despite their opposite viewpoint, and parted.

Not until years later, immediately following the Pullman strike, when Debs was still under indictment for conspiracy to obstruct the United States mails, discredited and pronounced down and out by the press of the country, did he again see the Vice President; and then only by accident.

Called to Chicago on business, Debs registered at one of the downtown hotels. Entering the dining room on the evening of his arrival, just off to the left of the main aisle, sat the Vice President. By chance their eyes met. Neither showed the least evidence of recognition. They seemed to vision each other as they did other guests seated about the place with whom they were without acquaintance.

Strange anomaly! These two men, by virtue of their stormy introduction, had every reason for remembrance, yet, on this occasion neither so much as moved the lash of an eye in recognition of the other. Their first meeting was memorable for its turbulence; the second its silence and dignity.

The Vice President finished his meal. Leaving, on his way out, he halted at the desk for a bit of conversation with the steward, whom he well knew, and who, by the way, was also a friend of Debs, lighted his cigar and went his way.

Debs, too, having been served, was making his way out when intercepted by the steward.
“Did you recognize the gentlemen seated off to the left as you came in?” inquired the steward.

“Yes, it was Mr. M------, Vice President of the ------ Lines.”

“So it was,” returned the steward. “He certainly paid you a very handsome compliment.”

“That scarcely seems plausible in the light of his road having been so seriously hampered during the recent strike,” said Debs with a grin.

“However that may be”, continued the steward, “Mr. M-----, on leaving, remarked, that you were the only labor leader for whom he had respect; that you had convictions and the courage to fight for them regardless of consequence to yourself; that you could not be bluffed or intimidated; and that you were one man that could not be bought.”

“That certainly was a most generous compliment, coming from Mr. M----,” Debs smilingly replied. Expressing his appreciation to the steward, patting him gently on the shoulder as an expression of his friendship and regard, Debs, perhaps meditating whether such a compliment would have come to him had he chosen to become a “corporation lawyer”, continued his way to the street and was soon lost in the multitude that throngs Chicago walks at that hour of the evening.
Debs was booked to speak in a middle-west town. It was not one of the larger cities of that section of the country, though its Boosters Club rejoiced and boasted of a population of some 25,000 inhabitants. How much of the cemetery had been included in making up the sum total we do not know. Anyway, it was a thriving little manufacturing center in a growing community.

The Socialist Local was not large in numbers, but its members were animated with a splendid enthusiasm and imbued with the unconquerable spirit that presages success. They were of the crusader type, pioneers in a righteous but unpopular cause, trail-blazers with magnificent courage and conviction. Workingmen all, but their leisure hours were occupied in seeking greater knowledge, enlarging their mental capacity for clearer thinking. What more splendid than this? History, economics, the class-struggle, the social revolution were among the themes regarded by these young workers as a most essential part of their education. To fail in attendance when any of these topics was to be up for discussion was almost unthinkable.

Such was their eagerness and desire for working class education.

The coming of Debs was to mark an epoch in the history of the Local. Arrangements for the meeting were all but completed. The theatre had been engaged, advertising arranged, the sale of tickets, due to the hustling propensities of the membership, was more than satisfactory. So far as their part in the affair was concerned, the meeting was already an assured success.

The chairman, chosen to preside and introduce Debs, a young working man, enthusiastic, ambitious, calloused hands, inspired with the hope that he, too, might some day be on the platform teaching the lesson of solidarity to his fellow-workers, was elated that he of all the rest had been so highly favored, in
what he termed, the “greatest privilege and honor of his life” - the introducing
of Debs to an audience in his home town.

This was to be his maiden effort in public. Already was he burning the
midnight oil in preparing his introductory address; committing his speech to
memory, which was to mean so much to him. What an opportunity to acquaint
the people with the fact that the workers were no longer required to call in the
professionals - lawyers, preachers, hack politicians to introduce their speakers;
that they, the workers, had sufficient intelligence and were quite capable of
performing these functions in a manner creditable to themselves and the cause
they represented! How glorious it all was! The very thought of it thrilled every
fiber of his being and sent the blood coursing through his veins.

The day of the meeting finally arrived. Everything was in readiness. The
house had been “sold out”; the comrades were happy. Debs had come.

At the appointed hour, the young chairman, a trifle pale and slightly ner-
vous, moved to the front of the platform. For a few moments, until there was
perfect silence, he calmly surveyed the splendid audience. The introductory
was begun. His voice was clear, his enunciation excellent, his splendid English quite
in evidence. He had been speaking for, perhaps, five or six minutes and getting
on famously, leading up to one of the high spots of his address, pointing out the
fact that the condition, at times, in the lives of the workers became so serious
that resistance to further oppression and degradation was imperative. To
elaborate his point he quoted from a writer who called attention to a like fact
in the animal kingdom, when servility and patience had been exhausted. Con-
tinuing he said: “A cat will scratch; a dog bite; a cow horn; a goat will butt;
look at the jackass” . . . At this point there was pronounced hesitation. “See .
. . the . . . jackass,” he repeated. The young chairman’s face had suddenly taken
on color deep as the crimson of a socialist banner. He was hopelessly stuck. It
was pitiable to behold the embarrassment and chagrin plainly written in every
line and feature of his countenance. Suddenly he blurted out, “See the jackass’.
. . allow me to present to you Eugene V. Debs.”

It was too much. The audience burst into a roar of laughter that shook the
building. The humiliation of the young chairman was beyond the description of
words.

Debs walked to the front of the platform with a suppressed smile on his
face. The humor of it all was irresistible. It was some little time before the
audience quieted and Debs allowed to make his address.

No one laughed more heartily over the incident than Debs himself. Over
and again he related the story to comrades and friends, and each time he shook
with merry exuberance.
CHAPTER III

On a Sunday afternoon, late in the fall, - so late in fact that autumn was comfortably nestling in the lap of early winter, the ground being frozen, and the hillsides, recently aglow with brilliant colorings, now drab and drear - found Debs in a day coach in the Union Station, at St. Louis, congratulating himself upon having been so fortunate as to make a close train connection that would enable him to fill a lecture engagement down in Missouri that night.

His destination was off the main line, on a branch, what theatrical folks would dub a "hick" town. According to the train schedule, Debs would arrive at six o'clock that evening. Ample time to get settled in his room, "brush up" a bit, and have supper without being rushed.

However, local trains on branch lines, equipped with motive power and old coaches, no longer deemed safe or serviceable on through fast trains, have a manner of deporting themselves all their own. The train bearing Debs was doing fairly well, all things considered, when suddenly there was a jerking, scrunching and screeching of brakes. The engineer had applied the air; the train came to a stop.

Conjecture as to the cause of the trouble was the topic of conversation among the passengers. Inquiry brought forth the cheering (?) word that the engine had "broken down", disquieting news to Debs, who had had some practical experience in his younger years when he himself had been a locomotive fireman. Comforting, however, was the assurance that the damage was not great and there was no occasion for alarm.

An hour and more passed in wearisome waiting. Finally, and to the relief of the passengers anxious to be on their way, the engine bell rang, there was a sharp toot of the whistle calling in the flagman, who had been all this time out in the cold guarding the rear end, an imperative rule of the company, and the train moved on. Its speed, if it may be so termed, was aggravatingly slow. Laboriously it dragged itself around curves and somehow managed to "climb" hills, though the latter seemed a miracle.

With every turn of the wheels more time was added to that already lost. Debs was getting conspicuously nervous. Again and again he consulted his watch; station stops were interminably long. He became possessed of the thought that perhaps the officials of the road had become aware of his presence on the train and had issued a "slow" order so that he would arrive at his destination too late to fill his speaking engagement, an experience he had suffered on more than one occasion. This thought was soon dispelled. The engine had "broken down" and the old pile of junk was coughing and limping over the road as best it could in its dilapidated state.

At last, the conductor called Debs' station. His watch registered at 8:15. In the meantime, the waiting audience had grown restless; the committee in charge of the meeting, dismayed. The station agent, called over the phone, reported the train more than two hours late. This word was promptly relayed to the impatient audience, many of whom, no doubt, came out of curiosity to see for themselves if it was really true that Debs had horns and blew flames from his nostrils, as depicted in press cartoons they had seen.

Debs was the first passenger off the train. The committee was in waiting at the station. Sending his grips to the hotel, Debs was escorted direct to the theatre, only a short distance from the depot.

The stage entrance was through the alley - a passage-way dark as the interior of an Ozark mountain cave. All possible haste was being made. Debs felt a tug at his trouser-leg, just beneath the knee, and felt something give. Great
was his consternation on entering the theatre. The tug which he noted was now only too apparent. A piece of barbed wire, one end firmly imbedded in the frozen ground, the other protruding straight up, had caused the mischief - a great rent in his trousers, right in front, the flap of which hung down like the ear of a Missouri houn' pup, the damage plainly visible even to a man with a glass eye.

Dunder and blitzen! Here was a dilemma. What was to be done? The audience was growing more impatient and clamorous. It was Sunday; the stores closed; and, besides, this was no time for shopping. Immediate action was imperative. There was a hasty collection of pins. The footlights, shielded by an old-fashioned reflector, were promptly extinguished; the cloth covering the speaker's stand was lowered to the last fraction of an inch. Nothing was neglected in the way of concealing the speaker's pedal extremities, even to lowering the valance of the stage lights.

When all was in readiness, Debs, uttering a silent prayer that the pins would hold, moved rapidly to the speaker's stand, from which he did not emerge until his address was finished.

The fates had been kind; the pins held securely. But Debs' discomfiture was by no means at an end. Another booking for the next evening was on his schedule, a long jump, with a change of cars, and the only train out of town due to leave at 9:45 the next morning.

He had gotten through safely that evening, but would fortune continue her benign smiles through all the trip? Probably not. And then, the thought of speaking under such a lamentable handicap was unthinkable.

"Was there anything like a tailor-shop in the little town?" There was. A gentleman, of Hebrew origin, conducted a repair and cleaning business in a small room, on a side street, close by the hotel. This was encouraging.

Before eight o'clock, the next morning, Debs entered the establishment. The proprietor had just kindled the fire and was making ready for the day's business. Debs was recognized on sight. The little tailor and his wife had attended the lecture the night before.

"Dese is Mesta Deps!" excitedly, exclaimed the little tailor scarcely before Debs could close the door. "Vell! Vell! and dese is Mr. Deps, vat vas a candidate for president!"

Assuring his new-found friend that he had made no mistake, that he was the person, Debs attempted to state the purpose of his early visit. It was no use. The delight and enthusiasm of the little tailor was not to be silenced for any reason or pretext whatsoever.

Never, since first he put his foot on American soil, had he dreamed of having a presidential candidate in his place of business. To make certain there was no mistake, that his eyes did not deceive him, that it was no hallucination, he brushed a seeming speck from the lapel of Debs' coat. His conversation grew more excited. He would have hugged the man but his sense of propriety forbade such intimacy. He would bring his wife to the shop that she, too, might talk with "Mesta Deps", but Debs protested, happy as he would be to meet the good wife, that he had but a few moments as he had some appointments at the hotel, and, besides, his train was leaving shortly.

With much difficulty the little tailor's enthusiasm was in a measure restrained and Debs permitted to make known the occasion of his visit. A careful examination of the damaged trousers by the tailor revealed the fact that the tear was "clean", and with careful stitching could be mended in a manner visible only to the most scrutinizing eye - but it would be necessary for "Mesta Deps" to remove his trousers.

This could easily be arranged. From a secluded nook in the rear of the little shop a folding screen was forthcoming, set up, behind which "Mesta Deps" could sit until the damaged trousers were repaired.
Debs removed his outer garments. To further protect his customer from curious eyes, as also from the draft, a copy of a St. Louis Sunday paper was enfolded about the elongated limbs of his patron.

The tailor, once engaged in his task, for the first time since Debs had entered, ceased his excited conversation and gave himself wholly to the work in hand. However, he had but fairly begun the difficult stitching, when the door opened and a neatly dressed young woman entered, evidently a regular customer.

"Good morning Mr. S------." That was as far as she ever got with her conversation. The little tailor hastily removed his glasses, threw the trousers to one side, skiddled off the shop bench with alacrity, grasped the woman by the hand, all excited, rushed her to the rear of the screen, and -- introduced her to "Mesta Deps".

Imagine, if you can, the consternation of the young woman on seeing Debs, - and of Debs, enfolded in a St. Louis paper, not daring to move, lest this slight protection fail him. Picture in your mind, if you can, this indescribable scene of embarrassment, bewilderment and mortification; a scene sufficient to make the stoutest of angels weep and cry out in despair.

And yet, the little tailor, in his delirium of enthusiasm, did not observe the shock and nervous discomfiture of his guests, despite their flushed features, nor the awkwardness of the situation. To him there was no sense of impropriety. On the contrary, his delight was unbounded and he felt flattered and honored for the privilege of introducing his latest patron to a presidential candidate. No happier incident had ever come into his life.

The abashed young woman, suffering unforgettable mortification, made her acknowledgment of the introduction, and, to the great relief of Debs, now perspiring at every pore despite his lack of clothing, beat a hasty retreat. Nor did she linger to explain the nature of her coming, stammering, as she made her exit that she would call again, when the tailor was less occupied.

Debs drew a long breath when the door closed. Never, in all his life, had he been so confounded, or subjected to such insufferable mortification; and all done with such guileless innocence.

To Debs such a situation was unthinkable, yet here he found himself the helpless victim of its reality. Nor were his fears pacified now that the young woman had departed. Might there not be other feminine patrons! The rattling of a window, the slightest noise on the street, pierced the heart of Debs like an electric shock. No experience, - and he had many in his tumultuous career, had so confused or unnerved him.

The little tailor was again at work, but as Debs sat there waiting, waiting, the moments were interminable. On a shelf a dollar clock ticked merrily, but the hands seemed stationary, paralyzed. To Debs it was an age before the little tailor clattered from his bench and proudly brought the trousers for inspection. It was a work of art that could only have been accomplished by the most skilled and capable hand. The damage was visible only at very close range and even then by careful observation.

It was a happy, comforting moment for Debs as he mopped the nervous perspiration from his still flushed face, and hastily slipped into his garments. Getting out his purse he wished to pay his bill. The little tailor excitedly shook his head and put up both hands. There was no charge. It was an honor and a rare privilege to render such a trivial service; and, besides, "Mesta Deps", had already paid the bill a thousand times over. Had he not read in his Jewish paper, the Forward, how frequently "Mesta Deps" had spoken for the needle-workers on the East Side in New York, Chicago, Baltimore and other cities in times of strike among his craft? It would be next to sacrilege. No, no, it could not be; nor would his wife ever forgive him.

Debs persisted there was rent to pay, the needs of the family to be con-
sidered, and that he would leave better satisfied if his benefactor accepted remuneration for an invaluable service rendered in a great emergency. But it was all to no purpose. Only when the little tailor, looking up, with moistened eyes, pleaded with Debs not to hurt his feelings by offering him money for a service that had given him such infinite pleasure, such unspeakable joy, did Debs desist in the settlement of his bill. With his arm about the tailor, Debs tendered his warmest thanks and most grateful appreciation as they walked to the door.

Returning to the hotel, Debs found his friends in waiting, got his grips, and the little party made for the station. His little friend, the tailor, was already there, having closed his shop.

They had not long to wait. Debs, on the rear platform of the train, was waving an affectionate farewell. A little in advance of the group that had come to see him off, was the little tailor, uncovered, arm extended, shaking his handkerchief; and there he remained until the train swung around a curve obscuring his view. When he turned about, it was observed that a tear was coursing down his cheek.

Such was the tender heart and fine soul of this humble Jewish tailor, regarded, no doubt, by many, as a mere convenience in the community.

Debs never forgot the nobility of character possessed by this man and he held him in grateful and affectionate remembrance to the last of his days.

Speaking from the Red Special in 1908 at Waterbury, Conn.
Incidents: Sidelights in the Life of Debs
By Theodore Debs

Chapter IV

During the early days of the labor movement in this country, Debs made periodical organizing trips through the South; a section most in need of organization, yet most backward and difficult of organization. Wages were considerably lower on the average than in Northern states and working conditions execrable, due mainly to the competition existing between white and black labor. Negroes, because of their color, were not eligible to membership under the constitution of any of the white unions, a fact deeply deplored by Debs, realizing, as he did, that it pitted one set of workers against another, to the undoing of both and to the detriment of the labor movement at large.

Only in the larger cities of the South was there any semblance of organization, and even here, but few crafts were organized, and these generally thrown loosely together in a "Central Labor Union"; the latter all too frequently feeding-grounds for small bore politicians, of Democratic faith, ambitious to hold such exalted public office as that of constable, squire, or the still greater honor of becoming a justice of the peace.

On one of these organizing tours Debs was to address a body of railway employes in one of the principal and most thriving cities of that section. No sooner had he arrived in the city and been assigned a room at the hotel, than a committee called to pay its respects, as also to solicit his presence at a little dinner to be given in honor of, and at the home of the President of the Central Labor Union. It was to be a "surprise", and therefore those in on the "know" were enjoined to secrecy. Only a few choice friends were to be present - all members of organized labor.

There was also to be the presentation of a gold-headed cane to the President of the Central Labor Union, and it was the urgent desire of the committee that the presentation address be made by "Brother Debs".

The hour had been especially set for five-thirty, so that Debs could attend the dinner and yet have ample time to make his own meeting later in the evening. The President of the Central Labor Union was wholly unknown to Debs, as were the members of the committee.

Debs begged to be excused as he had a number of appointments for the day, made by correspondence, and would be unusually busy. The committee was persistent. The affair had been planned for an earlier day, but when it was learned that Debs was to come the plans had been changed to fit the time of his presence in the city, and he must not now disappoint those having the "surprise" in hand.

Debs still hesitated. But, then, the committee represented the organized labor movement of the city, and he finally reluctantly yielded to the earnest and impassioned appeal that had been made.

It might incidentally be mentioned that the reporters of all the daily papers of the city had been invited to the dinner; and it is not of record that a reporter was ever known to pass up a "feed". It is perhaps needless to add there were no letters of regret from this group. The press was fully represented.

Before the committee left Debs at the hotel he was again reminded that the dinner was a "surprise" affair and that no mention be made of his early evening engagement during the day.

No detail had been overlooked in perfecting the arrangements. The host was purposely detained down town until everything was in perfect readiness; curtains drawn; dining-room brightly illuminated; the long table around which the guests were assembled, was decorated with the most beautiful of flowers. It was an inviting scene.
Well may you imagine the expression of surprise and delight which illuminated the features of the President of the Central Labor Union on being ushered into the dining-room of his home, already in complete possession of his friends and admirers. How “surprised” he was! How could it ever have been arranged without his ever getting so much as an inkling of it all! Never had he been so taken by surprise! And what an honor it was to have “Brother Debs” as a guest on such an occasion!

The dinner was sumptuous, topped, as it was, with fried chicken, Southern style. Nothing was lacking in the way of delicacies that the market afforded; and all in the greatest abundance, prepared by a hand well versed in the art of cookery.

When the last course had been served, a delicious brand of Havana’s was passed about the festive board. Here Debs arose and in a neat address for and in behalf of the organized workers of the city presented the gold-headed cane to the host.

The President of the Central Labor Union, evidently a man of poise, not easily bewildered, with a fluent command of language, perfectly rounded sentences, made acknowledgment with an address replete with eloquence that bordered on the classic.

It was really a most delightful event and greatly enjoyed by all in attendance.

Soon thereafter Debs consulted his watch. The time had sped on wings of light. The hour of his meeting was drawing near and with apologies to the host and his friends he bade them a happy good evening. Two or three of the other guests were likewise obliged to leave on account of other engagements.

The topic of conversation on returning to the business district was the most excellent dinner and, especially, the happy and brilliant response of the host. After the conversation had continued for some little time, the gentleman sitting next to Debs in the street car, in low and confidential tone remarked: “Mr. Debs I don’t like to see you imposed upon, but the fact is that the President of the Central Labor Union got the kind of a cane he wanted - he made the selection himself - and the address he delivered this evening was prepared by an attorney with the reputation of being one of the most learned and polished after-dinner speakers in the South.”

Next day the newspapers carried an extended account of the event, printing in full the spontaneous (?) response of the President of the Central Labor Union, and a week later, it was afterwards learned, that gentleman announced himself as a candidate for Justice of the Peace.

The event was indeed an overwhelming “surprise.”
SIDELIGHTS: INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF DEBS

By Theodore Debs

CHAPTER V

It was in what was generally known as the Pullman strike that Debs was first brought prominently before the public and became a national figure in the world of labor.

This strike completely paralyzed railway transportation from Ohio to the Pacific coast, and was broken only, by and with the aid and support of the United States militia, United States marshals, - thousands in number - state troops, and federal courts, all co-operating to defeat the strike, under direct orders and supervision of the attorney general and president of the United States. All these powerful influences were at the disposal of, and freely used by the General Managers’ Association, an organization of managing railway officials.

It is true that Debs attracted some attention a short time before, when the American Railway Union, of which he was president, completely won a strike on the Great Northern Railway, - the J. J. Hill lines - but this was more sectional than national in scope.

The bitterness with which the Pullman strike was fought, and later, the sentence of six months in jail pronounced upon Debs by a federal judge for “contempt of court,” made him an unusual figure in the labor movement of that day. Invitations to address labor unions, liberal clubs, and radical bodies came to him by every mail; everywhere was he in demand. The East Side of New York was not lacking in its application for a public meeting in that section of the city. The request met with favor and a date was assigned.

It was the occasion of Debs’ first visit to that section of New York. At other times, as National Secretary of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, he had addressed railway employees in other parts of the city. It is the writer’s recollection that a sweatshop strike in the needle industry was in progress at the time.

The meeting on the East Side was a tremendous success, if attendance and enthusiasm are to be counted. Every inch of room in the large hall was occupied; the applause at times rocked the structure.

When Debs had concluded his address there was a great demonstration; a riot of hand-shaking and good fellowship, and it was some time before he was able to leave the hall and return to his hotel.

It must have been a year or more before he again addressed a meeting on the East Side. Again the hall was taxed to its capacity; the enthusiasm great as at his first appearance. Among those in attendance were many who had been present at the first meeting; and again at the close of his address there were enthusiastic greetings and hand-clasps innumerable. During the general rejoicing that followed the address, one enthusiastic admirer remarked to another, “Debs surely has a remarkable memory - he met us only on one previous occasion and yet he remembered us all by name.”

It was some time before Debs finally reached the hotel. When he had taken his bath, an imperative need - his garments having become literally soaked with perspiration - and he was again in dry linen, we lighted our pipe for a little smoke before retiring. When comfortably seated, feet at a satisfactory angle, and the blue smoke from our pipes falling in shapeless clouds about us, I said: “Did you really remember the names of all those people whose hands you grasped in such a cordial manner?”

A roguish smile illuminated his countenance; his eyes twinkled merrily as he blew a cloud of smoke to the ceiling. For an instant he said nothing, and then he replied:

“No. . . . . . no, - not all of them. You see there many Russian Jews among
those I greeted. By mumbling the first syllable of their names and emphasizing
the last, with a rising inflection of the voice, there was not much danger of
going wrong; their names all end with s-k-y." There followed a hearty laugh.

After this honest "confession of memory", still chuckling, we turned off the
light and retired for the night.

Thereafter when Debs related a story about which I had a right to be a bit
skeptical, with a half concealed smile, I always made inquiry as to whether this
was a "s-k-y" tale. It became one of our standing jokes.

Eugene V. Debs at his desk at Girard, Kan. at the Appeal To Reason of
which he was an associate editor from 1907 until 1912. Photo was taken
in August 1908.
Few men in public life, if any, were the recipients of a larger number of anonymous letters containing threats of assassination than Debs; and certainly none upon whom they fell more lightly, gave less concern, nor regarded with such utter indifference. Sometimes Debs opened his mail, but more frequently it received the attention of his secretary. Such letters read were cast into the waste basket and -- forgotten.

For years, letters of this nature came in greater or lesser number with ceaseless regularity. Not infrequently these epistles were written in red ink, bore crude drawings of daggers, pistols, fuse-sputtering bombs, presumably to add even greater terror to the heart of the recipient than the written message.

It mattered little whether he participated in a political campaign, strike, expressed an opinion upon some question before the public, or what not, the anonymous letter writer, with his threat of assassination, was ever in evidence.

The serious attempt of some of the poor boobs to appear as really bad, red-blooded, he-men, right out of the brush, that "eats 'em alive" was often amusing. Shortly before the death of Debs the following communication was received:

"Debs! You want to hear the truth. Well here it is. You are a liar, thief, bandit, traitor and murderer. You're not fit for American Citizenship and ought to be deported and if you don't shut up, you will be or you'll wake up in Hell. Beware! You are playing with fire when you provoke the American Eagle"

This choice bit of frothing was signed "An American."

One other:

"A friend of humanity and the law. Debs as you are a grate enemy of the welfare of business of this country I propose to put a stop to your lawless acts by Sending a bullet through your miserable heart at the very first Opertunity. The Corts has saved men for Shooting law a biding and good men. You are nothing but a law braker and I am going to take my chances. I am after you."

The foregoing, in red ink, was unsigned.

These are fair samples of what came in the way of threats in Debs' mail. For the authors of these epistles he had nothing but pity, looking upon them in the light of having been dealt with unkindly, even cruelly, by nature, bing born narrow between the eyes, weak in the head, lacking all the attributes of courage, moral and physical, and perfectly harmless.

It may be regarded as strange that the fewest number of anonymous letters and threats of assassination during his public life, came during the period of the world war. Thousands of letters were received by him from all parts of the country during that time, but only an insignificant number could possibly be construed as unfriendly, insulting, or threatening.

The Pullman strike brought a deluge of threats of assassination, but he heeded them not, addressing meetings in all parts of Chicago, at all hours, nor did he carry a weapon in those exciting and tumultuous days.
On one other occasion, a political campaign in Colorado, threats of assassination poured in upon him thick as snowflakes. This was the election held in that state at the time the metalliferous miners were on strike. The Independence railway station had been blown up; “Big Bill” Haywood, then national secretary of the Western Federation of Miners, had been kidnapped by the authorities, secretly transported to Idaho, and thrown into jail charged with the murder of ex-governor Stuennenberg; the arrest by gunmen in the employ of the Mine Owners’ Association of every union miner and sympathizer of the strikers in and about Victor, all of whom were loaded into cattle cars and dumped on the prairies of western Kansas.

The answer of organized labor of Colorado to these proceedings was the nomination of Haywood for governor on the Socialist ticket. His nomination was the signal for a campaign of malicious abuse and vilification unequaled before or since in an election. The press, unanimous in its bitterness, raked Haywood fore and aft; the organized workers, equally vehement, stood staunchly by and for him. Feeling was indescribably tense. In the mining districts no man ventured on the streets without a pair of six-shooters in his belt. The strike, deportations, the control of Victor by gunmen, the nomination of Haywood, were the only topics of conversation on the street, and seemingly all that the people were interested in. The press contained little other news in its columns.

The closing weeks of the campaign were marked with a frenzy that amounted almost to madness. Everyone was on edge wondering what next would happen.

In the midst of this unusual excitement the campaign committee wired the Appeal to Reason, under whose auspices Debs was lecturing at the time, asking if he (Debs) would come to Colorado and take part in the campaign. He would. The campaign committee was given a free hand in the making of all Colorado dates. Bookings interfering with the Colorado campaign were immediately cancelled by wire, and a new routing made in which Debs was to deliver some addresses before entering the state.

Before leaving on the trip, a friend, knowing the situation out there, offered him the loan of an automatic.

“What for?” asked Debs in surprise. “I certainly have no intention of committing suicide and I have no desire to shoot anyone. Never in my life have I owned or carried a weapon and have no use for one now.”

The Appeal published the schedule of bookings. Other advertising was unnecessary. No sooner had it been made known that Debs was to participate in the campaign than the press, solidly on the side of the mine owners’ candidate, denounced Debs fiercely for coming into the state. And it was this bitter denunciation that furnished additional inspiration to the horde of anonymous letter writers.

At the first point he made on the Colorado routing, he found in his mail a half-dozen threats of assassination if he came into the state. This number was augmented by leaps and bounds at each succeeding place. The more considerate of these writers cautioned him not to come unless accompanied by such useful personages as the coroner and undertaker; and by no means to neglect bringing a box in which to send back the remains - if there be sufficient left for shipment.

When the last point was reached before crossing the Colorado border Debs picked up a peck of letters. Daily denunciation of the press had added fresh courage to the horde of morons. By this time Debs was satiated with threats of assassination. One can even weary of hearing of one’s own early and sudden demise. Running through the mail, Debs sorted out letters bearing a Colorado postmark and cast them into the waste basket, unopened.

The schedule, as formulated by the committee, called for a meeting at Vic-
tor, the very heart of disturbance and the headquarters of the Mine Owners' Association, from which point, as already stated, every union miner and sympathizer had been deported. Gunmen had beaten up many citizens and there had been some killing.

Just why he was booked at a place where he no longer had a friend, and in a community altogether hostile, was never explained. Victor headed the list of engagements. On arriving Debs looked about, thinking there might be some one at the station to meet him. There was none - not even a would-be assassin was in evidence. Picking up his grips he made for the hotel, in doubt as to whether he would be allowed to register. On his way up street he was hailed by a man he knew. "I was just on my way to the station to meet you, was delayed, and a little late," explained the individual. "I was afraid you would not come after what has happened here."

"What about the meeting", inquired Debs.
"Well, Gene, I'm the only one left in town. I don't know whether the Mine Owners' Association don't know I am here, or whether they regard me as too insignificant to deport. Anyway, I'm here. I engaged the Opera House for the meeting. Mr. N----, an attorney, was to preside, but I learned this morning he had been unexpectedly called out of the city, and I don't know of anyone else who would be willing to be in the capacity in the present state of things."

The attorney, a friend of the miners, had likewise been kidnapped, deported, and unloaded in Kansas with the scores of other citizens, but he made his way back to Denver, armed himself with two six-shooters, returned to Victor, walked right into the headquarters of the Mine Owners Association, notified them of his return; that he was back to stay, and that the first man that put foot on his property would do so at the peril of his life.

"Who is to pay the rent of the Opera House" further inquired Debs.
"I thought, Gene, after you finished your speech you could make an appeal for voluntary contributions to meet that expense while I passed through the audience with a hat. The meeting is free. There will be a big crowd. Everybody will be there and I think, maybe, we can raise the price in that way. That is all there is of expense. The papers have been knocking the meeting and other advertising was unnecessary."

Debs was not favorably impressed with this arrangement, but as the meeting had been announced, he would, if need be, meet any deficiency out of his own pocket.

In view of the fact that no chairman was available, no one seeming willing to assume such responsibility in such a situation, the chairman would be dispensed with.

The prophecy of his friend as to the audience was more than verified. There was not a vacant seat in the house, aisles were packed, even the orchestra pit was jammed to the last inch of standing room. A crowd at the theatre entrance milled about determined to get in, all expectant that something would be "pulled off" and none seemingly willing to admit to his neighbor the next morning that he had not been an actual eye witness to the affair.

Beachy, the aviator, was quoted as saying: "People do not come to see me fly but to get killed."

So it was here, everyone sensed trouble, and there were many in the audience that actually believed Debs would never leave town alive.

When he walked out on the platform there was instant quiet, an ominous silence that might mean anything. The short breathing of the crowd was quite noticeable, suppressed excitement intense, the air seemed charged with expectation. Debs had been speaking for perhaps twenty minutes, during which time no sound, other than the breathing of the audience, could have been heard by the most acute listener, when an individual in the orchestra pit, a miner by
appearance, interrupted him. The man was unshaven, tousled hair, shirt unbuttoned at the collar, exposing a red flannel under-garment, and slightly intoxicated.

Debs stopped speaking. Leaning over the footlights he said, “What did you say, my friend?”

“I said, by God that youse was alright.”

There was a spontaneous outburst of laughter and applause. Debs smiled. The strain, so evident on all sides, was broken, the high nervous tension of the audience dispelled, the complex instantly changed and the crowd, as if by magic, transformed from one of hostility to at least passing friendliness.

In his speech Debs lashed the mine-owners for their sordidness and brutal treatment of the miners and their sympathizers. He was never more radical in his utterances. When his speech was concluded he made an appeal for funds to meet the rent. The response was quite generous.

As Debs was making his way through the crowd, now quite friendly, he was halted by a mine-owner. “Mr. Debs”, said he, “you are right, this is a class fight between the owners of these mines and the miners for a division of the wealth that comes from the mines; and we own the mines and are in control. Your point was new and novel to me and I have benefitted by your speech”. Grasping Debs by the hand he pressed a $20 gold piece therein. “I thank you” said Debs pleasantly, as he returned the coin. “You owe me nothing. There is nothing you have that I personally crave, not even your mines, but if you feel you have gotten something out of the address this evening for which you wish to make recompense, there is the gentleman passing the hat,” pointing to that individual. The coin went into the hat.

Next morning, just before the hour of leaving town, Debs was standing in front of the hotel. “See that man down the walk to the left”, said his one faithful friend, who had come to see him away. Locking in the direction indicated, Debs noted an individual gazing dreamily at the surrounding hills. “You don’t know the man, probably never saw him, but he knows you, and is your friend; and when he is the friend of a man he is his friend clean through. You have not been out of his sight, though you were not aware of it, since you left the train, except when in your room in the hotel. He is a two-handed man, quickest on the trigger in these hills. Never has much to say, bashful like, not given to boasting, but said if you were molested while in this man’s town some one wouldn’t be bothered hereafter by the state of the weather.”

Although lawlessness was rampant in the district, civil authority abrogated, and courts no longer functioning, no attempt was made by the would-be assassins to execute their threats upon the life of Debs, nor was he apprehensive of danger to himself at any time whatsoever.

If the writers of these anonymous letters, who so persistently plied their low and cowardly practice so many years, really imagined they were intimidating Debs, or that their epistles struck terror to his heart, they may now be disillusioned. Their efforts were entirely vain and wholly without effect. His course in life was unaltered by denunciation, however bitter it might be, by attempted intimidation, threats of bodily violence, or assassination.

During the many years of his activity in the labor movement, he took part in innumerable strikes in the congested centers of population, where assaults were common, not infrequently interspersed with riot and bloodshed, visited the unorganized mining camps of West Virginia during time of strife in the face of most urgent warnings and protests on the part of comrades and friends - where the life of an organizer of labor was ever in jeopardy -- but never in all this time did he strike a human being, nor was he ever assaulted by one.

The man was absolutely immune to fear. He passed through the world and on to the next adventure without really knowing what the word meant.
Among those intimately acquainted with Gene Debs his unusual memory was frequently a topic of conversation. That he was highly gifted in this respect there is not the shadow of doubt. Whether this precious gift, so valuable, especially to men in public life, was natural or acquired, no opinion is ventured. However, among his close associates it was well known that he possessed an uncanny faculty for remembering individuals, incidents - often of minor significance - conversations of years' standing, to say nothing of remembering matters of major import. It was not an unusual thing for him to meet a man or woman he had met a decade of years - or more - previously, call the person by name, recall the place and city where they had met, and often recite some trivial incident of their former meeting.

This was a notable feat to which many of his acquaintances could readily testify. He experienced little difficulty in committing to memory prose or poetry of considerable length; and once committed, it rarely escaped him.

In the city of New Orleans, not many years prior to the world war, Debs filled a speaking engagement. The next morning, while seated at the breakfast table, a gentleman gently tapped him on the shoulder. As Debs turned about, the man, his eyes sparkling and his face all aglow, said - "Gene do you know me?"

"Surely", remarked Debs. "You are Bob ------; you and I served together on an Illinois Central grievance committee for the locomotive firemen on that road; that was almost forty years ago. You represented Lodge No. 40 of the Brotherhood, and I the Grand Lodge. We were in session several days, and after a hard fight with the officials, we succeeded in gaining some substantial concessions from the company in the way of increased pay and better working conditions for the men. At that time you were firing a locomotive on the Central out of Bloomington, Illinois, and living in that city. We were then boys, in the morning of life, facing the sunrise. I haven't seen you from that time until now."

While Debs was speaking the man's countenance changed to that of wild-eyed amazement at this instant remembrance and flow of detail. Could it be possible that after all these years, and having met only on one previous occasion, that he was so quickly identified? The surprise of the man was such that for an instant he just stared at Debs, as if in a trance, and then in a burst of excited enthusiasm exclaimed: "Well, by God! I never would have dreamed that you would remember me. I followed you right along, as best I could through the papers, and it makes my heart glad to again take you by the hand, and to see you looking so well."

There followed a hurried exchange of events relating to the early days of the Brotherhood and the changes that had since taken place. Debs was leaving the city on an early train and time was pressing.

Again these two men, their faces now seamed by the years since last they had met, struck hands once more in affectionate fellowship, and, by a decree of fate, cruel and relentless, --- never met again.
When Debs was in his usual health, a blessing he enjoyed in rich abundance until the last few years of his life when physical and nervous exhaustion made themselves manifest, five o'clock in the morning rarely found him under the "kivers". When the clock struck the hour he was already up and doing, shaving, reading the morning papers, which he scanned closely, attending to little duties about the house, or doing some writing before breakfast.

It was not an unusual thing for him to turn the key in his office door before seven, after already having taken a walk of several miles as an appetizer for the day's work; and there was no time when there was not work in abundance. Tenants in the building in which his office was located referred to him as "the early bird" and "the man that never sleeps."

The changing seasons in no way interfered with his daily program; whether it was the prostrating heat of an Indiana summer, or the bitter cold of winter, it was always the same. The days were always too short.

For many years, by tongue and pen, he advocated and fought for the "eight hour" day, and yet, in his own affairs, the short work day was as unknown to him as the inhabitants of another planet. Never an idle moment, or one that he permitted himself for leisure; rarely one for a bit of diversion. It was only at long intervals, notwithstanding the many hours he gave unremittingly to his work, that his desk was free of accumulation. It was ever thus through the entire period of his fifty years' activity in the socialist and labor movement, and no man ever gave himself more freely to his task.

The Cause was his very life and it had precedence over all else. The demands were many and he was ever trying to crowd two hours of work into one. When he had matters in the business district of the city requiring personal attention, he frequently chose the alleys, going and returning to his office rather than the main thoroughfare, to avoid being halted by friends and acquaintances, who would take up more or less of his times, of which there was never any to spare, not even half enough to go around.

For thirty years he maintained an office in his home town, meeting all the expense, including help, rent, printing, postage, in itself not a small item, out of his own purse. It was not an elaborately furnished office; quite the contrary. It was very simple in its appointments, in conformity with his own personal habits, but well served its every purpose.

On the walls were large pictures of Victor Hugo, Colonel Ingersoll, Rodin's "The Thinker", a red Socialist pennant, a colored plaster emblem of the Socialist party, and a map of the United States. The shelvings and supply apartments were always well stocked with socialist and labor literature, including leaflets, pamphlets, books, papers, all for free distribution, and all in scrupulous order. There was never a time that Debs could not enter his office at night, and in the dark, put his hands on any book or piece of printed matter, or anything else therein. Everything had its place, the broom, duster, twine, desk equipment, works of reference or whatnot. An orderly office meant to him a huge saving of time and trouble. There were no floor coverings.

Debs did what few men in public life ever attempt, -- he answered in person, or had his secretary make acknowledgement of the unceasing flow of letters that came with each mail. He somehow harbored the feeling that if anyone, however humble, took the pains and trouble of writing him they were at least entitled to the courtesy of a reply. The mail was always interesting because of its variety. It is safe to say that at least half of the letters contained requests for
favors of one kind or another, to which he responded to the full extent of his strength and ability.

A hard taskmaster to himself he was ever indulgent of others. Following a full and nerve-taxing day at the office, he bundled up the papers and other printed matter that had come in, and this was taken home. After supper, even in the stifling heat of summer, when the neighbors were out on their porches gasping for a full breath of air, he would retire to his little work-room, upstairs, read the papers carefully, marking with a colored pencil articles of special interest. Next morning these papers, with a socialist leaflet enclosed, were mailed to non-socialists.

Debs received and subscribed for many socialist and labor publications; not one of these ever found its way to his waste basket. All were mailed where it was believed they would do the cause most good. Something in the way of propaganda must go into the mails each day. Nor was this program varied while on his speaking tours. At each point where he addressed a meeting he invariably took the names and addresses of non-socialists with whom he came in contact, who seemed interested in the Cause. These names were forwarded to his home office with instructions as to what particular leaflets, pamphlets or papers were to be sent each address. It took much time to do these things, but he always insisted that if the feet of but one working-man out of fifty were turned into the right path, it was time and money well spent.

What a tremendous work of propaganda could be carried on if each reader of socialist publications marked the more interesting articles in the periodicals to which he subscribed and mailed them to workers still groping in darkness!

Vacations played little part in the life of Debs. There was too much nervous energy in his nature seeking useful activity, to lounge about a camp or summer resort. There was neither time or inclination for self-indulgence. The writer remembers but three or four occasions when he actually "went on a vacation". One of these in early life, the others in his latter years. He had time only for the Cause to which he had consecrated his life. This had a perpetual first mortgage upon every atom of his strength, every drop in his veins, and he freely, gladly, gave all, and the best he had to give without stint or reserve. His power of physical endurance and nervous energy bordered on the supernatural. It mattered little how long the day, how exacting the demands, three or four hours of rest was quite sufficient for relaxation and recuperation, and he was again ready for whatever the day following had in store, however strenuous it might be. This can be better understood when one recalls the famous "Red Special" in the presidential campaign of 1908, when at the age of fifty-three, when most men are "slowing up", or getting ready to retire from active affairs, Debs, as the candidate of the Socialist party, campaigned for sixty-eight consecutive days, speaking five hundred and fifty times, of from ten minutes to two hours duration, to enormous crowds, mostly out-of-doors, often from trucks adjoining railroad yards, amidst the noise of chugging locomotives, a record never equalled by any man of the public platform, not even approached by such seasoned campaigners as Roosevelt and Bryan.

On this historical tour Debs lived in a small state room in the car in which the campaign party travelled, and this was also occupied by his secretary and another comrade. The state room was likewise used for his office. Three occupants, with luggage required for such an extended journey, would more than crowd such a small compartment, but with a typewriter, writing material, literature of all kinds, letter files etc., etc., the discomfiture of Debs and his two companions in that state room can well be imagined. They were actually so cramped for room that when one of the party wished to retire the other two had to actually get out or climb into their berths with their clothes on, that the third member might have room to disrobe.

In was in such circumstances and under such trying conditions that Debs
made this memorable campaign of sixty-eight days.

Not only did he fill his speaking engagements each day, but between train stops he dictated replies to the hundreds of letters that came to him, besides writing for the Socialist press, submitting to interviews, the shaking of hands by the thousand, and meeting all the many other demands that fall to the lot of a presidential candidate.

The record set by Debs on that occasion will live long and it is doubtful whether it will ever be equalled.

The man was a human dynamo, geared to the highest speed, endowed with a physique of iron and nerves of steel. Always an optimist; never a pessimist. Disgusted at times with the indifference and crassness of the working class in hugging the shackles which held it in the bondage of wage-slavery, he never lost faith in its final awakening and ultimate emancipation.

Never discouraged, never disappointed, often defeated but never conquered, asking only for the privilege of serving the Cause, he passed on to the next adventure, firm in the belief that the future would witness the enthronement of the ideals for which he had labored.
You are Invited to Visit  
The Eugene V. Debs Home  
 at 451 N. 8th Terre Haute, Ind.

Eugene Victor Debs, born in Terre Haute, Nov. 5, 1855, was first, a labor leader (Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen national leader) five times the Socialist Party's nominee for the presidency of the United States (1900, 1904, 1908, 1912 and 1920) and a pacifist.

Terre Haute is located on Interstate 70 and U.S. 40, running east and west and U.S. 41 running north and south. The House is located 5 blocks north of business route U.S. 40 on N. 8th St. and five blocks east of U.S. 41 and three miles from Interstate 70.

Hours: 1 to 5 p.m. on Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Closed Saturday and Monday. Can be seen on these days and in mornings by Special appointment. Telephone No: 812 (Area Code) 232-2163.

Admission: Free
The 1908 campaign—Theodore (left) and Eugene leaving the auditorium in Lincoln Park, Chicago, after a rally.

Sidelights: Incidents in the life of Eugene V. Debs by his brother Theodore Debs contains eight hitherto unpublished happenings in the life of the great union leader, presidential candidate and humanitarian. Copies of this book singly or in orders of ten or more for resale, may be obtained by writing to:

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