

The People.

VOL. IV, NO. 39.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1894.

PRICE 3 CENTS.

FIRST EDITORIAL

DEBS' CONVICTION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

EUGENE V. Debs has been declared in contempt of court at Chicago, and sentenced to six month's imprisonment. The labor movement of America should extend its heartfelt congratulations to the brother. To be in contempt of a capitalist court is the only attitude becoming to decent men. The court speaks the opinion not of sense or justice, but of the robber class of capitalism that it represents. Its utterances and verdicts are so many passages from {a} buccaneer's logbook. Rather to be in contempt of such a gang than in their esteem. The sentence of the court is a badge of honor that Debs should prize, and that at no distant date will, like the gallows on which John Brown was murdered, cast a dark shadow across the paths of the class of malefactors.

* * *

But there is in connection with this occurrence a source of no slight danger. The labor papers will teem with execrations of the culprits, who, abusing the power they are bound soon to lose, presumed to convict an innocent man; but we fear us the true lesson may be lost in the popular indignation.

The court that sentenced Debs committed a heinous deed, true enough, but let us be clear upon this: The deed was no more heinous than is the killing of a child in his mother's arms by a thunderbolt, or the drowning of a woman by a sudden freshet, or the crushing to death of him on whom a landslide rolls. The being in the path of the lightning, of a freshet or of a landslide cannot escape. These are all natural results of given causes. So likewise is the sentencing of a workman by a capitalist court a natural thing. Any other result in this respect would be as accidentally fortunate as the escape of the child, the woman or the man in the above

illustrations.

In the social system under which the things needed to earn a living by are private property society falls into two hostile camps—the camp of the class that owns the requisites to life and the class that does not. Under such a social system the property-holding class is bound to keep the other down; class laws, class justice, i.e., injustice, follow as sure as night follows day. The conduct of the Chicago court should, therefore, serve, not so much to draw upon the miscreant judges the execration they have earned, but to draw attention to the inherent wickedness of a social system under which such wretches spring up and functionate as a matter of course.

Hatred against the judges can only draw attention away from the cause of the evil. Let their conduct serve to illustrate the necessity, not of putting other judges there, but of overthrowing the capitalist system, thus wiping out class distinctions and making, not injustice, but justice the natural emanation of courts of law.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded November 2002