
Letter to Arthur E. Elmgreen in Chicago from Eugene V. Debs in Terre Haute, Jan. 11, 1919

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“My Heart is with Mooney” in *Truth* [Duluth], Jan. 24, 1919, pg. 3.

Eugene V. Debs has been invited, by practically a unanimous vote, to address the Mooney Labor Conference now being held in this city. Whether his parole will allow him to come to Chicago to appear before the conference is not known. The Chicago Socialist has just received a letter, however, written by Debs to Arthur E. Elmgreen,¹ of the 23rd Ward Branch [Chicago] of the Socialist Party, in which he gives his views on the Mooney case as follows:

Terre Haute, Ind., Jan. 11, 1919.

Brother Elmgreen:—

There is nothing in my power that I would not gladly do to free Tom Mooney. He is absolutely innocent. There is not a question about it. He is the victim of the most infamous conspiracy in American history, and his conviction was and is a burning disgrace to our courts and a damning crime against justice.

I know Tom Mooney intimately. He is clean and true to the core of his big heart. There is not a blemish upon his manhood. And that is precisely the cause of his shameless persecution by the political highbinders of the plundering plutocracy of the Pacific coast, every one of whom, if justice were done, would be keeping the lockstep in penitentiary.

¹ The *Truth* article spells the surname of the letter's recipient once as “Elmgreen” and once as “Almgreen.” As the former seems to be a slightly more common surname, it is used here pending the discovery of additional information.

But fouler and more treacherous and degenerate than even these are the so-called labor leaders and trade unionists in California and elsewhere who for the paltry pelf there is in it for them, are in alliance, openly or otherwise, with the profiteering pirates and the political and judicial hirelings, to redden their hands and blacken their souls in the blood of a fellow unionist who is too rigidly honest to betray the working class and too courageous and conscientious to yield to threat and intimidation.

I shall not be able to attend the national labor congress to be held at Chicago in behalf of Tom Mooney and Warren Billings, beginning on January 14, but my heart will be there, and if the labor movement of the United States is true to itself and as true to Mooney and Billings as they have been to it, no effort will be spared to secure the unconditional freedom of these tried and trusted union men. The labor movement can afford to go to any length to accomplish this end. it cannot afford to stop short of it. The labor movement is itself on trial in this cause, and if it proves cowardly and craven in the presence of its supreme task it ought to perish, for it is not fit to live. If the American labor movement cannot or will not defend its bravest defenders, it brands itself with cowardice and infamy and cannot escape its self-imposed ignominious fate.

But I shall believe otherwise. I shall have faith that the delegates assembled at Chicago will rise to complete the stature of union men and demand and insist upon the unconditional release of the innocent victims of the California conspiracy of the silk-hatted would-be murderers, and if all entreaties are in vain and all measures fail, then as a last resort let a general strike be ordered and the industries of the nation paralyzed from end to end by an outraged working class determined upon rebuking crime and securing justice.

The cowardly Governor of California [William Dennison Stephens], tool of the corporations that he is, will do nothing. The courts of California, debauched to the last degree, will do nothing. Therefore the working class and the common people and all who sympathize with them must take this matter into their own hands and fearlessly meet the issue by stopping the wheels of industry long enough to compel the financial bandits and their mercenaries to realize that the honest workers have some rights they are bound to respect.

The life of tom Mooney and his equally innocent associates are more to us and to humanity than all the industrial profits of the ruling class.

At this convention let the capitalists of America be reminded in terms they will not misunderstand that the working people are not forgetting that the late war, from beginning to end, according to the capitalist themselves who shouted it from the housetops, was waged for the purpose of putting an end to barbarism and brutality, promoting the cause of humanity and a higher civilization, and making the world safe for democracy and justice.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

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