

*Eugene V. Debs*

by Jorden Brown, West Vigo High School

From the article “A Plea for Solidarity” Eugene V. Debs stated, “The future of labor, the destiny of the working class, depends wholly upon its own solidarity.” In this article, he describes the ups and downs of forming unions to fight for the working class people. He believed that the people had to be unified and work together to make changes. In the early 1900’s and late 1800’s the working conditions for the working class were horrible. They worked long hours without benefits and were at the mercy of their employer. The owner of the companies got wealthier and could afford the nice things in life. However, the working class could barely afford food and shelter.

Eugene V. Debs worked for the working class to make legislative changes by forming unions and giving a voice to the workers. He believed that child labor needed to be restricted; women should have the right to vote, improving the safety of the workplace, and protecting the workers’ rights to join unions. That is why “A Plea for Solidarity’s” words are so prevalent for today. In Wisconsin, Indiana, and nine other states are trying to get rid of the unions. They want the teachers’ union to be disbanded and are giving the government the right to decide the working conditions and the right of evaluating teachers.

I feel as if history is repeating itself. Democrat senators are leaving the state to protect the workers and teachers. They are trying to prevent Governor Daniels and Superintendent Tony Bennett from doing this very thing. Superintendent Bennett wants to be the one in charge, changing the hours people work, making them longer without extra pay, cutting salaries because the Governor of Indiana feels teachers make too much money. But think of other professions that require equal amounts of education and constant retraining to maintain their license; are the

teachers really over paid? They also want to change and reduce their retirement. The teachers are standing in solidarity fighting for rights. My question is why? Legislators are saying it is for educational reform, but how is this reform. What are they getting out of it? Are they planning on lining their own pockets as leaders in the past? Educational reform should be about the students and what will make our country better. If they accomplish their task the history of unions will soon repeat itself. I don't understand how our legislatures can blindly agree to this. If they would take the time to look at history this would not be an issue. What happened to compromise and working together for the betterment of all.

I believe Eugene V Debs, if he were alive, would be standing in the state capitols in all eleven states fighting for the rights of teachers' unions, and all other unions. Unions are what have made this country a successful place to reach our dreams for every race whether male or female. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream that everyone could live in harmony without fear. Eugene V Debs also had a dream that everyone would be treated with dignity in the work place, with safety a top priority, and protecting the rights of everyone.

The future of Labor and Education, the destiny of the working class, depends wholly on the solidarity of the people. "A Plea of Solidarity" by Eugene V. Debs shows what he believed in and stood for in the early 1900's. If he were still alive today he would be standing up and fighting for what he believed in, and as the people we need to follow in his footsteps.