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**Open Letter to the  
*Evansville [IN] Tribune*  
from Eugene V. Debs  
in Woodstock Jail,  
Aug. 8, 1895**

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McHenry County Jail, Woodstock, Ill.,  
August 8, 1895.

Editor, *Evansville Tribune*:—

I write by request of Miss Blanche Johnson, special correspondent for the *Tribune*, who assured me on behalf of the obliging publisher that my friends in Southern Indiana will be pleased to hear how I am getting along and what my plans are for the future.

It is now 77 days since I and my seven colleagues began to serve our sentence for contempt of Judge Woods' court. Just why the distinguished judge singled me out for special favors by giving me 6 months while he deemed 3 months sufficient for the rest, can only be accounted for upon the hypothesis that my contempt for his judicial highness was twice as great as that of my good and faithful fellow prisoners and if they do not object, I am willing it should rest upon that ground. Candor compels me to admit, however, that the ameliorating influence of time has not diminished my scorn for the court of Indiana's far-famed "block" signal judge and if I had to serve a sentence measured by my contempt for that judicial satrap, the remaining years of my life would hardly make a good beginning. I haven't forgotten, and I'm not going to forget, that Judge Woods, at the behest of the railroad organizations, enjoined us from doing many things we never intended to do and never did do, and some things we

had a constitutional right to do, and then sentenced us to jail without a trial, in exact accordance with the program of his plutocratic masters. The injunctions were issued for that very purpose. WE have violated no law, we have committed no crime, we have never been charged with any offense, have never been tried, and yet we occupy felons' cells, and for this Judge William A. Woods is alone responsible. He did the bidding of the corporations even to the extent of abrogating the right of trial by jury and strangling to death civil and constitutional liberty — and without engaging in bravado I wish to serve notice on that ermined gentleman that the day will come when he will stand at the bar of the American people and answer for his crime.

My colleagues leave here on the 22nd instant, in time to institute the score or more unions that are waiting, and participate in the festivities of Labor Day, which, I am persuaded, will be celebrated with more than ordinary eclat this year.

On the first day of our incarceration we organized the "Cooperative Colony of Liberty Jail," and adopted a code of rules which have been rigidly observed through the whole period of our confinement and to this fact I attribute the excellent health we have enjoyed and the great amount of work we have been able to perform. We rise at 6 o'clock sharp each morning. At the ring of the alarm bell Inspector Elliott calls 6 o'clock at each door and in 15 minutes we are all required to be bathed and dressed and in the jail yard ready for exercise. We are then under command of Col. Hogan, who puts us through the military drill. WE have but two guns, one of which, an old army musket, the sheriff carried through the Civil War, and the other, a wooden one, made by Secretary Keliher, who is an experienced wood worker. After this we are put through a squad drill and then follows a turn at punching the bag, dumbbells, elastic exerciser, handball, etc., until 7:30 breakfast is announced. At 8 o'clock sharp we are in the jail corridor, which constitutes our study room and workshop, and from that hour until 12:15, noon, there is perfect silence and each member is at his study or correspondence. From 12:15 to 1 o'clock rest and exercise are taken and then dinner is announced. From that hour until 5 is devoted to reading, study, and correspondence. From 5 till 6:30 we are put through a rigorous course of exercising and then supper is announced. After supper and until 8 o'clock we enjoy a social chat at rest and then the debate of the evening begins on some subject announced the previous evening. The debating academy is under the tutelage of Prof. Rogers, who in years that are gone divided time be-

tween the pedagogue and the railroad brakeman. The debate lasts an hour and a half, or, until 9:30, when preparation is made for retiring and at 10 o'clock, by the stroke of the bell, every "contempt"-ible one of us is required to be in bed, and woe unto him who chirps or breaks the stillness of the sleeping hours. This is our program 16 hours a day and 7 days a week.

Of course our reading embraces the principal social and economic works, fiction, history, poetry, and other branches of research and study.

There is a ceaseless torrent of correspondence [which] pours in here from every quarter of the globe. Resolutions of sympathy by thousands have been sent in by all classes of people, including farmers, mechanics, miners, laborers, sewing girls, newsboys, bootblacks, etc. In addition to the work we do ourselves we have a stenographer and typewriter who is kept busy early and late with correspondence. We also have innumerable demands for interviews and articles from newspapers and magazines and have lately contributed to *The Arena*, the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *St. Louis Chronicle*, *Chicago Journal*, *St. Paul Globe*, *Minneapolis Tribune*, and many others.

The American Railway Union has renewed its youth. It is springing full fledged into the arena again. Judge Woods and the General Managers' Association made a monumental mistake in putting our officers in jail and blacklisting and exiling our members. There is something in the breast of a freeman that rebels against tyranny. Thousands of men have been made staunch members of the ARU by being driven to the verge of starvation for having belonged to it. The order is today growing at a rate that exceeds all expectations and the day is near when it will be infinitely more powerful than ever before.

I propose to remain with the American Railway Union until every obstacle has been overcome and it is rich and powerful in numbers and resources and then I propose to resign my office and give my attention to the unification of all working men and working women in one great organization whose purpose shall be their social and industrial regeneration by means of a united ballot. The scheme may seem chimerical but it is perfectly feasible and no power on earth can prevent it. There will be such subdivisions as may be necessary in the large variety of trades and conditions that will be represented and it will be under the supervision, not of a "chief" or "master" or other potentate, but of a labor congress, elected from the ranks by direct

vote of the members. Space forbids detail. It is enough to say that the working men and women will unify their forces and hew out their way to emancipation.

Workingmen have been the slaves of corporations and women have been the slaves of both. Under the “new order” the wife will walk the highlands of equality by the side of her husband, and they will together enjoy the enrapturing vision of a land redeemed from a form of slavery that has darkened all the ages since old father Adam played the roll of sneak when he said: “She gave me of the tree and I did eat.”

*Eugene V. Debs.*

*Edited by Tim Davenport*

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