
Verbal Authorization of David Karsner's Book¹

by Eugene V. Debs

Spoken work, recorded in David Karsner, *Debs: His Authorized Life and Letters*. (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919; pp. vii-ix.

I am exceedingly glad that you were commissioned to write this book which, I am sure, will come to be recognized as an important and imperishable contribution to American labor history. Although the rules of the prison do not permit me to write an introduction to your book, or to do any writing of any kind aside from my one letter a week to my family, in this spoken word I authorize you to write the story.

I give to you as the author, and to Boni and Liveright as publishers, not merely my word of approval and hearty endorsement of your book, but my warm appreciation of this manifest interest in the cause which I have been privileged to serve all of my life. You will right just the kind of a book that Time and History will require, and in every line, on every page you will be speaking for me with my authority, given to you without reservations or qualifications.

More than any other person you have been peculiarly identified with the whole story since it began with the trial in September 1918. Your daily report of the trial in Cleveland, your several accounts of the trip we took to Moundsville Penitentiary last April, and your several interviews with me at Moundsville, all printed in the *New York Call*, were rare specimens of newspaper accuracy and journalistic skill. I say this not as flattery, but as the personal conviction which I have expressed to you in writing before.

Honestly, I do not know of a man in America who is placed in so advantageous a position, from so many angles, to write this book, as yourself. I suppose that other books along similar lines and covering

¹ David Karsner was a lead reporter for the *New York Call*, a Socialist daily newspaper which covered the Debs case and aftermath exhaustively.

the same subject will be bound to follow, but already you are fortified with a thorough knowledge of the case and have an understanding and an appreciation of the significance to be able, more than any other, to write authoritatively. As you have so far been the newspaper historian of my trial, conviction, and imprisonment, you will now become the historian of the whole story in a much larger and more permanent sense.

And I endorse and shall stand by your book as being the real and true history of such facts, incidents, and data that you may deem necessary to write about, comment on, or interpret, and you therefore understand without further word from me that I place abundant faith in your moral and intellectual integrity. If I did not feel absolutely sure that you would discuss your subject frankly, fearlessly, justly, and accurately, and in the same intellectually honest spirit that I would write of it, I should of course be compelled to withhold my imprimatur from your book.

During this past year, crowded with these momentous months when we have been together under the most trying circumstances, you have measured beyond every test of loyalty and devotion as a friend and comrade, and have given me cause to regard you always as my younger spiritual brother.

I wish your book every success; which I am sure it will have; and you have my authority to sign my name to what I have told you in this interview, inasmuch as the rules of the United States Prison here do not permit me to give you my written word.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

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