

# ■ William McKinley: Last Speech

**Date:** 1901

**Author:** William McKinley

**Genre:** speech

## Summary Overview

William McKinley was president of the United States during the period of overseas expansion that grew out of the war with Spain in 1898. A popular speaker as a campaigner, McKinley wrote presidential messages and delivered addresses that proved significant in persuading Americans to adopt this expanded world role at the end of the nineteenth century. At a time when radio did not yet exist, the president had to make his case through the prose that his constituents read in their newspapers or in pamphlet form. McKinley proved quite adept at framing arguments that would convince citizens of the wisdom of the course he was proposing. On the day before he was shot by an assassin, McKinley delivered his Last Speech in Buffalo, New York. In it, he encouraged reciprocal trade arrangements with foreign countries and emphasized the need to put aside attitudes of isolationism.

## Author Biography

William McKinley was born in Ohio in 1843. He fought in the Civil War and then was elected to the House of Representatives, where he served from 1876 to 1890. From 1892 to 1896 he was governor of Ohio. Nominated by the Republicans for the presidency in 1896, McKinley was elected and served from 1897 until he was assassinated in 1901. During his four and a half years in office, a dispute with Spain over the rebellion

of Cuba against the Spanish led to war in 1898. That conflict, in turn, resulted in an American victory and the negotiation of a peace treaty in Paris. The outcome of the war led to America's acquisition of Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. McKinley was reelected to the presidency in 1900. He was shot by an anarchist sympathizer on September 6, 1901, and died on September 14, 1901.

## Defining Moment

McKinley was the first modern president. Although he had been elected largely on domestic issues in the campaign of 1896, he became a significant chief executive in the area of foreign policy. During his administration the United States fought the Spanish-American War over the fate of the island of Cuba. McKinley used his power as commander in chief to direct the war effort, govern the possessions that were added from the peace treaty with Spain, and prosecute a war in the Philippines. The administration also sought to penetrate the Far East for American trade through the policy of the Open Door with China, a concept developed in the mid-nineteenth century and stating that all nations, in principle, should have equal trading rights in China. These developments accelerated the process by which the United States became a world power.

## HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

I am glad again to be in the city of Buffalo and exchange greetings with her people, to whose generous hospitality I am not a stranger, and with whose good will I have been repeatedly and signally honored. To-day I have additional satisfaction in meeting and giving welcome to the foreign representatives assembled here, whose presence and participation in this Exposition have contributed in so marked a

degree to its interest and success....

Expositions are the timekeepers of progress. They record the world's advancement. They stimulate the energy, enterprise and intellect of the people, and quicken human genius. They go into the home. They broaden and brighten the daily life of the people. They open mighty storehouses of information to the student. Every exposition, great or small, has

helped to some onward step.

Comparison of ideas is always educational and, as such, instructs the brain and hand of man. Friendly rivalry follows, which is the spur to industrial improvement, the inspiration to useful invention and to high endeavor in all departments of human activity. It exacts a study of the wants, comforts, and even the whims of the people, and recognizes the efficacy of high quality and low prices to win their favor. The quest for trade is an incentive to men of business to devise, invent, improve and economize in the cost of production. Business life, whether among ourselves, or with other peoples, is ever a sharp struggle for success. It will be none the less in the future.

Without competition we would be clinging to the clumsy and antiquated process of farming and manufacture and the methods of business of long ago, and the twentieth would be no further advanced than the eighteenth century. But though commercial competitors we are, commercial enemies we must not be. The Pan-American Exposition has done its work thoroughly, presenting in its exhibits evidences of the highest skill and illustrating the progress of the human family in the Western Hemisphere. This portion of the earth has no cause for humiliation for the part it has performed in the march of civilization. It has not accomplished everything; far from it. It has simply done its best, and without vanity or boastfulness, and recognizing the manifold achievements of others it invites the friendly rivalry of all the powers in the peaceful pursuits of trade and commerce, and will cooperate with all in advancing the highest and best interests of humanity. The wisdom and energy of all the nations are none too great for the world work. The success of art, science, industry and invention is an international asset and a common glory.

After all, how near one to the other is every part of the world. Modern inventions have brought into close relation widely separated peoples and make them better acquainted. Geographic and political divisions will continue to exist, but distances have been effaced. Swift ships and fast trains are becoming cosmopolitan. They invade fields which a few

years ago were impenetrable. The world's products are exchanged as never before and with increasing transportation facilities come increasing knowledge and larger trade. Prices are fixed with mathematical precision by supply and demand. The world's selling prices are regulated by market and crop reports. We travel greater distances in a shorter space of time and with more ease than was ever dreamed of by the fathers. Isolation is no longer possible or desirable. The same important news is read, though in different languages, the same day in all Christendom.

The telegraph keeps us advised of what is occurring everywhere, and the Press foreshadows, with more or less accuracy, the plans and purposes of the nations. Market prices of products and of securities are hourly known in every commercial mart, and the investments of the people extend beyond their own national boundaries into the remotest parts of the earth. Vast transactions are conducted and international exchanges are made by the tick of the cable. Every event of interest is immediately bulletined. The quick gathering and transmission of news, like rapid transit, are of recent origin, and are only made possible by the genius of the inventor and the courage of the investor. It took a special messenger of the government, with every facility known at the time for rapid travel, nineteen days to go from the City of Washington to New Orleans with a message to General Jackson that the war with England had ceased and a treaty of peace had been signed. How different now!...

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was not a mile of steam railroad on the globe; now there are enough miles to make its circuit many times. Then there was not a line of electric telegraph; now we have a vast mileage traversing all lands and seas. God and man have linked the nations together. No nation can longer be indifferent to any other. And as we are brought more and more in touch with each other, the less occasion is there for misunderstandings, and the stronger the disposition, when we have differences, to adjust them in the court of arbitration, which is the noblest forum for the settlement of international disputes....

We have a vast and intricate business, built up

through years of toil and struggle in which every part of the country has its stake, which will not permit of either neglect or of undue selfishness. No narrow, sordid policy will subserve it. The greatest skill and wisdom on the part of manufacturers and producers will be required to hold and increase it. Our industrial enterprises, which have grown to such great proportions, affect the homes and occupations of the people and the welfare of the country. Our capacity to produce has developed so enormously and our products have so multiplied that the problem of more markets requires our urgent and immediate attention. Only a broad and enlightened policy will keep what we have. No other policy will get more. In these times of marvelous business energy and gain we ought to be looking to the future, strengthening the weak places in our industrial and commercial systems, that we may be ready for any storm or strain.

By sensible trade arrangements which will not interrupt our home production we shall extend the outlets for our increasing surplus. A system which provides a mutual exchange of commodities is manifestly essential to the continued and healthful growth of our export trade. We must not repose in the fancied security that we can for ever sell everything and buy little or nothing. If such a thing were possible it would not be best for us or for those with whom we deal. We should take from our customers such of their products as we can use without harm to our industries and labor. Reciprocity is the natural

outgrowth of our wonderful industrial development under the domestic policy now firmly established.

What we produce beyond our domestic consumption must have a vent abroad. The excess must be relieved through a foreign outlet, and we should sell everywhere we can and buy wherever the buying will enlarge our sales and productions, and thereby make a greater demand for home labor.

The period of exclusiveness is past. The expansion of our trade and commerce is the pressing problem. Commercial wars are unprofitable. A policy of good will and friendly trade relations will prevent reprisals. Reciprocity treaties are in harmony with the spirit of the times; measures of retaliation are not...

Who can tell the new thoughts that have been awakened, the ambitions fired and the high achievements that will be wrought through this Exposition?

Gentlemen, let us ever remember that our interest is in concord, not conflict; and that our real eminence rests in the victories of peace, not those of war. We hope that all who are represented here may be moved to higher and nobler efforts for their own and the world's good, and that out of this city may come not only greater commerce and trade for us all, but, more essential than these, relations of mutual respect, confidence and friendship which will deepen and endure. Our earnest prayer is that God will graciously vouchsafe prosperity, happiness and peace to all our neighbors, and like blessings to all the peoples and powers of earth.

## GLOSSARY

**bulletined:** recorded in written form

**Christendom:** the entire Christianized world, comprising primarily Europe and nations founded elsewhere by descendants of Europeans

**Exposition:** a public exhibition, displaying technological and other achievements of a given place and time

**quicken:** encourage

**reciprocity treaties:** agreements beneficial to all participants

**tick of the cable:** the transmission of messages in Morse code over telegraph wires

**Document Analysis**

The last speech that McKinley ever delivered came on September 5, 1901, at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. For that reason, it has become known as “McKinley’s Last Speech” and copies of the address usually carry that title. Of course, McKinley did not know at that time that he would be shot the next day. His comments were part of a campaign he was launching as he began his second term. He had been reelected in November 1900 over William Jennings Bryan and believed that his policies had been endorsed as well. Although McKinley had been identified with the doctrine of the protective tariff from the start of his political career, he had come to think that it was time for the United States to liberalize its trade relations with other countries. His administration had negotiated reciprocal trade agreements with several countries, and the United States Senate was to take those up when Congress met for its regular session in December 1901.

The Republicans in the Senate did not share McKinley’s view of trade policy, and so the president intended to build public support for his new program through a series of speeches during the fall of 1901. After McKinley’s death, Theodore Roosevelt as his successor abandoned the trade treaties and pursued attacks on large corporations or “trusts” instead. McKinley’s speech at Buffalo thus represented not the start of a presidential campaign for his program but a punctuation point for McKinley’s life and presidency. Read in the context of what he hoped to accomplish during his second term, it is a document that says much about McKinley’s vision of the future for the United States. In his remarks, for example, he notes in the third paragraph that “isolation is no longer possible or desirable.” His comments in the third and fourth paragraphs describe a crude form of early-twentieth-century globalization and the changes that technology was making in people’s lives. For that reason, the president adds, “no nation can longer be indifferent to any other.” Having outlined these elements, McKinley then comes to the point of his address. “By sensible trade arrangements which will not interrupt our home production, we shall extend the outlets for our increasing surplus” of products.

The message of trade reciprocity then becomes clear: “We must not repose in fancied security that we can forever sell everything and buy little or nothing.” As a result, “reciprocity is the natural outgrowth of our wonderful industrial development under the domestic policy now firmly established.” McKinley argues that “reciprocity

treaties are in harmony with the spirit of the times; measures of retaliation are not.” He then lists the policies that the nation should follow—promotion of the merchant marine, the building of a canal across Central America, and telegraph cable service to the Pacific. Praise came in the newspaper accounts the next day (September 6) for what McKinley had said. That same afternoon, McKinley was shot; he died eight days later. People remembered his speech for a time. As the dynamic personality of Theodore Roosevelt took over the presidency, the import of McKinley’s words receded, however, and his themes became indistinct and eventually disappeared.

**Essential Themes**

McKinley’s importance stemmed from his impact on the office of the presidency itself. In forging closer relationships with the press, traveling extensively to promote his programs, and working closely with Congress, McKinley set precedents that subsequent executives emulated during the twentieth century. By the start of his second term, there were complaints in some quarters that McKinley had accumulated too much power and was stretching the authority of the presidency in directions the framers of the Constitution had not anticipated. Such criticisms attest to the significant impact McKinley’s policies and his public articulation of the goals of his administration had in reshaping the way Americans saw their presidents.

In domestic affairs, McKinley’s presidency witnessed an economic rebound from the depression of the 1890s. The enactment of the Dingley Act (1897) and the Gold Standard Act (1900) were key elements in the Republican program of a protective tariff and a sound, reliable currency, respectively. As businesses consolidated during the years of returning prosperity, the issue of “the trusts” (monopolies) became an important one in American politics. McKinley was assassinated before he could fully engage the issue, but there were indications as his second term began that he intended to regulate the trusts along the lines that Theodore Roosevelt later followed in his first term as president. Even though he had been an advocate of a protective tariff early in his career, McKinley endorsed liberalizing of American trade and planned to make that a hallmark of his second term. His last speech, delivered in September 1901 in Buffalo, New York, was a significant indication of the direction in which he, as president, wanted to take the country.

—Lewis L. Gould, *University of Texas at Austin*

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# ■ Eugene V. Debs: “How I Became a Socialist”

**Date:** 1902

**Author:** Eugene V. Debs

**Genre:** article

## Summary Overview

The American trade union leader, orator, and Socialist Party activist Eugene Debs was a master at making what might look today like radical political ideas seem as American as apple pie. A student of history as well as politics, Debs regularly invoked the memory of the Founding Fathers to make his policy suggestions seem more acceptable. Motivated by an unyielding sense of justice, he often tried to shame authorities to do what he thought was right. Whether addressing audiences at a labor rally or on the campaign trail, Debs invariably came back to a sharp critique of the American political system, touting the virtues of his brand of Socialism. His goal as a politician was not necessarily to win elections but instead to inspire listeners by his own example and to win converts to the Socialist cause. In a country with no Socialist legacy—unlike many European countries where Socialism was established—it is really quite remarkable that Debs had any success at all as a politician. That success was due in no small part to the power of Debs’s oratory and prose. In his 1902 article “How I Became a Socialist,” Debs traces his path toward growing class consciousness and final embrace of Socialism.

## Defining Moment

Debs’ greatest struggle throughout his life was trying to realign perceptions of Socialism in American society. In this article and others throughout his life, Debs tried to move people toward a political viewpoint that he believed was more in sync with their best interests. It was only through an embrace of Socialism, Debs believed, could American workers achieve the sort of equality and justice that they deserved. His target for these speeches were chiefly American industrial workers, the men and women toiling in factories, in mines, and, perhaps above all else, laboring on the railroads. Working under hazardous conditions, long hours, and for little pay, American workers were ripe for recruitment into Debs’ movement. By documenting his journey to Socialism, Debs hoped to inspire others in similar conditions, and in so doing call them to action.

## Author Biography

Eugene Victor Debs was a trade union leader, orator, and frequent Socialist Party candidate for the presidency of the United States. He was born in Terre Haute, Indiana, in 1855. While working his way up through the hierarchy of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, an important railroad union, he was elected city clerk in Terre Haute in 1879. He also served one term in the Indiana state legislature in 1885. In 1893 Debs cofounded the American Railway Union (ARU), an industrial union that, unlike most exclusive railroad brotherhoods of the era, admitted railroad workers of all skill levels. As the leader of that organization, Debs led the infamous Pullman strike of 1894.

The Pullman strike was an effort to organize workers at the Pullman Palace Car Company of Pullman, Illinois. As part of the strike, ARU members nationwide decided to boycott all trains that carried the company’s famous sleeping cars in an effort to force them to recognize the union. As a result, rail traffic stopped nationwide. In response, railroad companies deliberately placed mail cars on trains with Pullman Palace Cars in order to encourage government intervention in the dispute. The legal injunction issued by a federal judge in response to the boycott essentially shut down the strike and destroyed the union. In 1895 Debs was convicted of interfering with the mail as a result of his refusal to abide by that injunction. Debs’s political views were greatly affected by the Socialist literature he read during his short stay in jail. Indeed, this incarceration would prove to be the pivotal point of his entire life.

Upon his release Debs announced his conversion to Socialism. He also changed career paths from being a trade union leader to being a political leader. Debs would serve as a Socialist Party presidential candidate five times: 1900, 1904, 1908, 1912, and 1920. His best showing occurred in 1912 when he came close to garnering a million votes. That was 6 percent of the total votes cast in that election. In 1918 Debs was convicted of sedition for a speech he had given in Canton, Ohio, earlier that year. Debs had to run his final campaign

for president as a protest candidate from his jail cell. A famous campaign button from 1920 read "For President—Convict No. 9653." Between elections Debs toured the country giving speeches and writing articles that critiqued the American capitalist system and championed the cause of Socialism. Debs died in 1926 at the age of seventy.

Debs represented a vision of Socialism in America that got lost in the anti-Communist hysteria of the cold war era. His political beliefs, though Socialist, were grounded in American ideals like justice, equal rights, and Christianity. Debs's willingness to go to prison for

the causes he championed greatly increased his appeal and the popularity of his ideas. While many other figures in American Socialism were immigrants from European countries like Germany, where Socialism was more in the mainstream, Debs attracted native-born Americans to the Socialist cause. His success as a politician came as the result of hundreds of thousands of Americans entertaining the possibility of radical change in American life in an era when the adverse effects of industrialization had made them unhappy with the existing political system.

## HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

On the evening of February 27, 1875, the local lodge of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen was organized at Terre Haute, Ind., by Joshua A. Leach, then grand master, and I was admitted as a charter member and at once chosen secretary. "Old Josh Leach" as he was affectionately called, a typical locomotive fireman of his day, was the founder of the brotherhood, and I was instantly attracted by his rugged honesty, simple manner and homely speech. How well I remember feeling his large, rough hand on my shoulder, the kindly eye of an elder brother searching my own as he gently said, "My boy, you're a little young, but I believe you're in earnest and will make your mark in the brotherhood." Of course, I assured him that I would do my best...

My first step was thus taken in organized labor and a new influence fired my ambition and changed the whole current of my career. I was filled with enthusiasm and my blood fairly leaped in my veins. Day and night I worked for the brotherhood. To see its watchfires glow and observe the increase of its sturdy members were the sunshine and shower of my life. To attend the "meeting" was my supreme joy, and for ten years I was not once absent when the faithful assembled...

Through all these years I was nourished at Fountain Proletaire. I drank deeply of its waters and every particle of my tissue became saturated with the spirit of the working class. I had fired an engine and been stung by the exposure and hardship of the

rail. I was with the boys in their weary watches, at the broken engine's side and often helped to bear their bruised and bleeding bodies back to wife and child again. How could I but feel the burden of their wrongs? How the seed of agitation fail to take deep root in my heart?

And so I was spurred on in the work of organizing, not the firemen merely, but the brakemen, switchmen, telegraphers, shopmen, track-hands, all of them in fact, and as I had now become known as an organizer, the call came from all sides and there are but few trades I have not helped to organize and less still in whose strikes I have not at some time had a hand.

In 1894 the American Railway Union was organized and a braver body of men never fought the battle of the working class.

Up to this time I had heard but little of Socialism, knew practically nothing about the movement, and what little I did know was not calculated to impress me in its favor. I was bent on thorough and complete organization of the railroad men and ultimately the whole working class, and all my time and energy were given to that end. My supreme conviction was that if they were only organized in every branch of the service and all acted together in concert they could redress their wrongs and regulate the conditions of their employment. The stockholders of the corporation acted as one, why not the men? It was such a plain proposition—simply to follow the ex-

ample set before their eyes by their masters—surely they could not fail to see it, act as one, and solve the problem....

The skirmish lines of the A. R. U. were well advanced. A series of small battles were fought and won without the loss of a man. A number of concessions were made by the corporations rather than risk an encounter. Then came the fight on the Great Northern, short, sharp, and decisive. The victory was complete—the only railroad strike of magnitude ever won by an organization in America.

Next followed the final shock—the Pullman strike—and the American Railway Union again won, clear and complete. The combined corporations were paralyzed and helpless. At this juncture there were delivered, from wholly unexpected quarters, a swift succession of blows that blinded me for an instant and then opened wide my eyes—and in the gleam of every bayonet and the flash of every rifle *the class struggle was revealed*. This was my first practical lesson in Socialism, though wholly unaware that it was called by that name.

An army of detectives, thugs and murderers were equipped with badge and beer and bludgeon and turned loose; old hulks of cars were fired; the alarm bells tolled; the people were terrified; the most startling rumors were set afloat; the press volleyed and thundered, and over all the wires sped the news

that Chicago’s white throat was in the clutch of a red mob; injunctions flew thick and fast, arrests followed, and our office and headquarters, the heart of the strike, was sacked, torn out and nailed up by the “lawful” authorities of the federal government; and when in company with my loyal comrades I found myself in Cook County jail at Chicago with the... press screaming conspiracy, treason and murder, and by some fateful coincidence I was given the cell occupied just previous to his execution by the assassin of Mayor Carter Harrison, Sr., overlooking the spot, a few feet distant, where the anarchists were hanged a few years before, I had another exceedingly practical and impressive lesson in Socialism....

The Chicago jail sentences were followed by six months at Woodstock and it was here that Socialism gradually laid hold of me in its own irresistible fashion. Books and pamphlets and letters from socialists came by every mail and I began to read and think and dissect the anatomy of the system in which workingmen, however organized, could be shattered and battered and splintered at a single stroke....

The American Railway Union was defeated but not conquered—overwhelmed but not destroyed. It lives and pulsates in the Socialist movement, and its defeat but blazed the way to economic freedom and hastened the dawn of human brotherhood.

## GLOSSARY

**Chicago’s white throat was in the clutch of a red mob:** sarcastic comparison of the city to a woman (white, at that) in danger from “reds,” or Socialists

**class struggle:** fundamental conflict between the workers (proletariat) and business owners (capitalists)

**Fountain Proletaire:** an expression, apparently of Debs’s own coinage, that used the French adjectival format (noun followed by adjective) and presented the struggle of industrial workers as an opportunity to gain wisdom and grow

**grand master:** a master craftsman, a leading figure in many local union bodies

**Great Northern:** the Great Northern Railway

**homely:** down home

**watches:** shifts at work

**where the anarchists were hanged a few years before:** a reference to the place of execution of four men out of eight charged for their alleged roles in the Haymarket riot in Chicago on May 4, 1886

### Document Analysis

In his article "How I Became a Socialist" Debs does his best to convey that he had always been a kind of Socialist, even though he had explicitly rejected that label for his political ideas before his imprisonment in 1895. His goal in this piece is to suggest that people like him who saw aspects of class conflict all around them but did not understand Socialism would come to embrace the movement once Socialists like Debs taught them to understand the world. Here he describes his own education in the hope that others might follow along his same path.

In the early sections of the essay, Debs conveys his enthusiasm for organizing his fellow members of the working class as a sign of his growing class consciousness. At that point in his life, he thought organization alone was enough to redress the many wrongs that management inflicted upon labor. Debs explains that unlike other labor leaders of that era, he helped organize the ARU because he thought that all railroad men would do best standing together rather than separated into unions organized by skill. This is an implied contrast to the American Federation of Labor, an umbrella organization for unions that was just getting started around the time that Debs first gained prominence in the labor movement. Despite his comparatively broad view of organized labor's potential base, Debs's vision remained limited to what he could do in support of the trade union movement.

Then came the Pullman strike. "In the gleam of every bayonet and the flash of every rifle" Debs writes, "*the class struggle was revealed.*" This justifiably famous line not only supports the idea that the Pullman strike converted Debs to Socialism but also helps explain his reasons for supporting Socialism. Since the federal army kept the exploitation of Pullman workers going, ordinary people had to be able to control the state so that it could support their cause rather than the goals of giant corporations. To Debs, then, labor and politics were inseparable. He could not help the working class without entering politics.

This philosophy is in sharp contrast to the predominant labor union philosophy of that era. The American Federation of Labor, led by Samuel Gompers, believed in what Gompers called "pure and simple unionism." This meant that trade unions should worry about raising the wages and improving the working conditions of their members, and absolutely nothing else. Unions that followed this philosophy ignored politics because

politics took time and resources away from their core purpose—helping their members. This debate was sometimes referred to as the "political question" within union circles. However, by the time of his death in 1924, Gompers came around to Debs's point of view on this issue even if he never adopted Debs's radical positions.

### Essential Themes

The industrial revolution completely transformed not just how products were made but also the relationship between labor and capital. Whereas before products were handcrafted, requiring specialized skill, the industrial revolution allowed, and in fact demanded, large numbers of unskilled workers. To the men who owned the factories, labor became just another resource, on the same order as coal or oil. As need for labor increased, workers began to make demands on owners, including higher pay, shorter hours, and higher safety standards. When owners refused, the clashes often became violent. One industry especially fraught with conflict were the railroads, run with an iron fist by industrialists such as Jay Gould and Cornelius Vanderbilt. These robber barons continuously fought against the rise of unions and bettering conditions for their workers, even going so far as to employ private police to put down work stoppage and protest, violently, if need be. By the 1880s several unions had formed as a counter measure to the power of the industrialists, among them Eugene V. Debs' American Railway Union. Tensions erupted in 1893. When after a panic in the market, George Pullman began to lay off employees and cut wages. Pullman, owner of the Pullman Palace Car Company, required workers to live in a planned community he designed on the south side of Chicago, but despite firing workers and cutting wages, he did not cut the already steep rents he forced his employees to pay. The following year, the ARU organized a mass boycott, in which 125,000 Pullman employees walked off the job at over two dozen railroads. The boycott, along with sympathy strikes launched by other unions, halted railroad transportation across the country. When the railroads responded by hiring strikebreakers, the strikes became violent. In response President Grover Cleveland sent in the army, leading to clashes between armed troops and strikers, resulting in 30 deaths. Ultimately the boycott was a failure with much of the nation against the unions, the press blaming the action on immigrants. Although the government tried to extend an olive branch by making

Labor Day a federal holiday, the Pullman strikes had the effect of radicalizing much of the union movement and its leadership, much of whom, Debs among them, were jailed after the boycott. As tensions continued to grow, labor, heavily influenced by the ideas of German philosopher Karl Marx, began to organize around the idea of socialism. In fact, by 1901, following Debs' release from prison, the disparate far left groups came together as a unified Socialist Party of America, setting the stage for a multi-pronged conflict between capital and labor that would dominate industrial relations for the next century. The challenge for union leaders such as Debs was to drive up recruitment for what they saw as a full scale war between capital and labor, especially as an increasingly vocal segment of the population viewed socialism as a threat to the natural order, with the federal government even considering groups such as the Socialist Party as potentially treasonous.

The efforts of Eugene Debs to recruit people into socialism yielded mixed results. Despite his impassioned writing, speaking, and organizing, despite several failed presidential bids, one of them from prison, socialism generally, and the Socialist Party of America specifically, never gained much of a following. Some of this had to do with the rigidity of the far left, as the Socialist Party and its affiliate groups would not form coalitions with other parties or even allow members to vote for other candidates. Another factor was the fact that the United States at the turn of the century had already embarrassed left-leaning policy, with both major parties representing progressive ideas in their platforms, most prominently on display during the 1912 election between Howard Taft, Woodrow Wilson, and Theodore Roosevelt. Finally, the rise of Russian Communism in 1917, had the effect of turning much of public opinion against socialism, as average Americans equated the political ideas of Karl Marx with the authoritarianism of the Soviet Union. Red Scares became a common tactic of the political right to galvanize support against

the socialist agenda. However, Debs and his Socialist Party did have a profound effect on organized labor and the form of the liberal agenda in the mainstream parties. Debs won converts across organized labor who then helped shape and influence the political discourse across the nation. Debs' tireless advocacy for the workers and the poor helped normalize concepts such as socialized medical and retirement benefits, in fact, many of the ideas first espoused by Debs later became the basis for Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, which in turn became the structure on which the Democratic party is built upon today. Debs continues to be a major influence on liberals and progressives, with many prominent members of the left, including Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, claiming Debs as a personal hero. Although in life Eugene V. Debs never achieved the kind of social change he dreamed of, his ideas continue to resonate to this day, influencing public debate and the ongoing relationship between capital and labor.

—Jonathan Rees, PhD and KP Dawes, MA

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