

“The Working Class Republic”, Chapter 8 of Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1982)

Comrades across the country anticipated magnificent results in November 1908. In the midst of a period of tremendous excitement and growth Socialists applauded the unrest and challenges to traditional capitalist authority that pervaded the country. Within the labor movement the IWW (RF: the IWW was an organization that inherited some of the anarchist and Knights of Labor legacy; committed to organizing all workers, not just skilled, and using direct action, with ultimate goal of bringing about a general strike) attracted great attention, but radical sentiment also grew in the more established unions as well. In popular culture Upton Sinclair's sharply drawn novel, *The Jungle* - an expose of the meat-packing industry and of the inherent oppression of workers under capitalism-won a vast audience, as did the novels and stories of Jack London, the fervent California Socialist. During these years two Socialist periodicals, the *Appeal to Reason* and *Wilshire's Magazine*, each averaged circulations of 250,000 and repeatedly hammered at the basic contradictions of American capitalism. Throughout the country a vigorous Socialist press emerged, not only in New York and Milwaukee, but also in such communities as Benton, Missouri, Myton, Utah, and Charleroi, Pennsylvania.' The activities of such progressive muckrakers as Ida Tarbel and Lincoln Steffens further increased this excitement. While most Socialists would distinguish between their movement and the progressive impulse-and particularly noted the limited critique of capitalism that most reformers offered-they nonetheless welcomed the agitation. "Socialism is either an evolutionary science or it is no science at all," one sympathizer wrote in 1905, and many saw in the progressive yeast future Socialists waiting to rise above the inadequate reformist movement.'

The condition of both the party and the movement fired Socialist hopes, too, especially as it suggested the ability of Socialists to contain the conflicting tendencies already evident. From a base of less than 10,000 in 1901, the party doubled that figure by 1904, increased it 1906, and in 1908 had over 41,000 dues-paying members The social composition of the members was also encouraging. While middle-class professionals tended to dominate the party's governing councils, a party canvass of members in 1908 indicated a different orientation for the rank and file. Two-thirds of those who responded-approximately one-sixth of all members-listed themselves as workers; and over 60 percent of these workers were skilled members of the various trades. Although still small, the party had a solid and vital working-class core.'

The Socialist movement-those who sympathized with the Socialist critique and, where eligible, voted for Socialist candidates, but who failed to take out a party card-also grew during these years, although less evenly than the party itself. After doubling the votes over past elections in both the 1902 congressional campaign and the 1904 presidential contest, the Socialist total declined by nearly 30 percent-from over 400,000 to under 300,000-in the 1906 state and local elections.' While some argued that the losses reflected the factional antagonisms of recent years, most party members took a more sanguine view. Various reform movements temporarily attracted the voters, they argued, and thus drained Socialist strength. William R. Hearst's

municipal ownership party undercut the Socialist ticket in New York, and other Progressives distracted voters in Toledo, Cleveland, and Chicago. But they felt that as reformism ran its course and the limitations of its analysis became more apparent, the Socialist movement could only grow in strength. In the meantime, Socialists could take comfort that amid all the reform excitement they retained a solid committed group of voters.' The sharp attacks of such capitalist politicians as Theodore Roosevelt encouraged this optimism. Estimating their strength from their opponents' fears, many Socialists found in Roosevelt's attention to the movement further proof of their own imminent success.

In this mood the delegates to the Socialist convention gathered in May 1908 to nominate their presidential ticket. Although a majority of party members favored drafting Eugene Debs for the third consecutive time, it was not clear that he would accept. Citing his health and his desire for a fresh choice as standard-bearer, Debs wrote in March that he had "discouraged the use of my name and am still hoping that it will not be presented to the convention." Artfully, however, Debs left the door ajar, noting that "there is nothing in the line of duty that I would not do for the party.'" The status of Bill Haywood (leader of the IWW) complicated the pre-convention jockeying. Recently released from prison and acquitted on charges of murdering the former governor of Idaho, Haywood had immense popularity, and many wanted him as their candidate, especially if Debs chose not to run. Party leaders, however, opposed Haywood and his brand of Socialism, and the feeling intensified after Haywood completed an eastern speaking tour that spring. Debs attempted to soften the criticism and explained that if Haywood gave some poor speeches, no one could always be at his best., But he reassured the comrades on one point. Haywood did not want the nomination and would, like Debs, accept it only from a "sheer sense of duty to the party. He himself told me this and I am sure in all sincerity for Haywood does not dissemble.'" But by the opening of the convention the opposition eliminated Haywood as a serious candidate.

In a certain sense, then, the process of nominating the Socialist candidate was open for the first time in party history. Quickly, those who disagreed with Debs on industrial unionism sought to fill the breach. Morris Hillquit (RF: Hillquit was leader of NY delegation, supported working with Gompers, was the SP's most racist and anti-immigrant official) worked for James Carey's candidacy; Seymour Steadman nominated Algie M. Simons, who had recently resigned as editor of the *International Socialist Review*. When Victor Berger rose to nominate Carl D. Thompson, a Socialist minister and Berger ally, tension filled the hall and Berger acknowledged it: "It is my fate to do unpopular things," he began. Presenting himself as the power behind Debs, Berger told the delegates that "I did an unpopular thing fifteen years ago when I succeeded in getting Comrade Debs into the Socialist movement. I did an unpopular thing twelve years ago when I did my very best to start the old Social Democracy together with Comrade Debs. I again did a very un-popular thing by splitting that party at the time they stood for colonization.'" Berger's speech angered Debs and had little effect on the delegates.

Elected to the Indiana delegation, Debs was in Chicago but not on the floor of the convention, which caused Hillquit to comment "that may perhaps be a political move, and not a bad one."

From the floor, however, Debs's supporters conducted a well-organized campaign. Nominated by P. H. Callery of Missouri, his seconds quickly met their opponents' objections. They declared that Debs's health was fine and the political opposition from certain comrades unfounded. "Eugene V. Debs is the embodiment of the American proletarian movement," Frank P. O'Hare of Oklahoma proclaimed, and even John Spargo of New York defended him, noting that his "mistakes ... have done him more credit than the right things that many other people have done." But the invisible hand of Debs decided the debate. As in the past, he remained apart from the center of controversy but followed the proceedings carefully and influenced the outcome through others-in this case, by releasing a private letter to Ben Hanford for a public reading to the delegates. His health, Debs averred, was robust, and, although he had "no desire to run for office and maintained his "positive prejudice against the very thought of holding office," his final paragraph threw wide open the door to his candidacy. "To obey the commands of the Socialist party," Debs reminded the delegates, "I violated a vow made years ago that I would never again be a candidate for political office. My whole ambition-and I have a good stock of it-is to make myself as big and as useful as I can, as much opposed to the enemy and as much loved by our comrades as any other private in the ranks. You need have no fear that I shall shirk my part in the coming campaign. I shall be in condition, and I hope there will be no good ground for complaint when the fight is over."

Against the power of Debs's still invisible presence-against the imagery of this acknowledged leader offering himself as but a private-Berger, Hillquit, and their allies had little chance. While Berger held his Wisconsin delegation for Thompson, Hillquit lost complete control of his New York comrades. In the ensuing stampede, Debs received 159 votes to 14 for Thompson and 9 for Simons."

Despite the attempt to block Debs's nomination, Socialists enthusiastically united behind the Debs-Hanford ticket. Max Hayes, the Cleveland Socialist and trade unionist, predicted a minimum of one million votes, and some thought he was too conservative. For his part, Debs saw in the reception tendered him on his return to Girard, Kansas, after the convention a providential omen. Greeted and feted by "the people of Girard, regardless of party, creed or color," Debs thought he "caught a glimpse of the fine, sweet, beautiful, *human society that is to be.*" Intending to capitalize on the widespread anticipation, J. Mahlon Barnes, the campaign manager, raised funds for a three-car railroad train to enable Debs to tour more extensively than ever before. Dubbed the "Red Special," between late August and 2 November, election day, it carried Debs and his entourage-including a brass band and a baggage car filled with literature-to more than three hundred communities in thirty-three states. Haywood was but one of numerous nationally known Socialists who joined for part of the tour, and all along the way local comrades would board for a stop or two, or even overnight."

At almost every stop a powerful excitement animated the crowds. In downstate Illinois two working-class Irish women listened from the edge of the crowd while Simons spoke. Reportedly, one asked the other, " 'An is that Debs?' The other replied, 'Oh no, that ain't Debs-when Debs comes out you'll think it's Jesus Christ .. .... In Glenwood Springs, Colorado, a recent bride of sixteen attended Debs's lecture from the caboose of the "Red Special" with her husband and

mother. Twelve years later she recalled the importance of that event for her in a letter to Debs: "I had never heard of the class struggle," Mae Bishop remembered, "and I did not know that there was such a thing as the Socialist party in the world. I listened to your lecture . . . and after the meeting I lingered and asked you questions." That experience began her radicalization, and that of her husband and mother as well. Still in the movement, she thanked Debs for helping her "to start out in the right direction at such an early age."

In small towns as in the large mass meetings in New York, Chicago, and Milwaukee, Debs's speeches crystallized opposition to corporate capitalism and legitimized for untold numbers of Americans their individual anger that grew out of their daily work experiences. At the height of his powers, Debs aided others to understand the connection between their personal circumstances and the larger social reality.

Given these efforts, the final result, an increase of only 18,000 votes over the 1904 total, was discouraging. In their post-election explanations some Socialists pointed to the influence of Samuel Gompers who, after twenty-two years of political neutrality, had publicly supported the Democratic candidate, William Jennings Bryan. Others suggested that the current depression had forced many workers to "tramp" to find work, and these men failed to meet the residency requirements for voting. But the most accepted Socialist interpretation stressed the changing nature of American politics. Both traditional parties had drafted reform platforms in 1908, it was argued, in an attempt to undercut recent Socialist gains. This, comrades suggested, was proof of Socialism's potency, and they found a silver lining in the dismal results: the party now knew the extent of the committed Socialist support among Americans. As they had before, Socialists claimed that the various reform movements would yet run their course—perhaps more slowly than they had hoped—and encouraged each other to rededicate themselves in the next local and state campaigns."

Yet the gap remained. The final results confused Debs. He took pleasure in the growing strength in the West and Southwest (states that accounted for almost 30 percent of the national Socialist vote in 1908 but the larger picture was discouraging. If, as he had often stated, "what 'the people' want they take," it was now less clear what exactly it was they wanted. Nonetheless, as he recovered his health from the exhausting campaign, Debs determined to return to the podium with his forceful presentation of Socialism.

Debs's appeal as a Socialist agitator had many sources. He remained the "hero of Woodstock," whose advocacy of American democratic values reverberated widely in the consciousness of his audience. But the Socialist Debs then merged a class analysis of American society with his keen understanding of citizenship. His sharp critique of corporate capitalism transcended reformism, as it did the mere desire to return to a less complicated past, for at root he demanded the transfer of power from the corporate elite to those who produced society's wealth. It was this Debs, the Socialist citizen who helped evolve an indigenous democratic Socialism, that drew the crowds and the attention throughout a long career.

As a speaker, Debs was a compelling and commanding force. In an era to long orations, his speeches often lasted two or more hours—but rarely did he bore an audience. His long, thin body

pulsated with energy; his outstretched arms, extensions of that inner force, implored, emphasized, and above all embraced; the veins in his head bulged with concentration, and his eyes, piercing yet loving, seemed to acknowledge each individual in the audience. His voice ran a gamut of tones: mock whisper to normal conversation to full stentorian power. Yet from all accounts it was rarely forced or theatrical. His appeal, most frequently described by contemporaries as evangelical, transcended at that moment factional disagreements and led each in the audience to glimpse a different social order.

Heywood Broun, the sensitive cynic of 1920s journalism, sensed Debs's magnetism. "I'm told," Broun reported, "that even those speeches of his which seem to any reader indifferent stuff, took on vitality from his presence." One "hard-bitten Socialist" confessed to Broun his confusion about this power. Deeply opposed to "sentimental flummery"-to calling others comrades, to rhetorical excesses and imprecise theory-as he considered it "a lot of bunk," the man was confounded in Debs's presence: " But the funny part of it is that when Debs says 'comrade' it is all right. He means it. That old man with the burning eyes actually believes that there can be such a thing as the brotherhood of man. And that's not the funniest part of it. As long as he's around I believe it myself."

Debs did not simply confirm his audiences' preconceptions but rather, as on the question of racial prejudice, frequently challenged their basic assumptions. While not free of contradictions himself, Debs called upon both party comrades and workers to reaffirm and strengthen their dedication to liberty for all. Among American Socialists, as throughout the society, racial equality was not strongly defended. By 1913 there were few blacks in the party and little energy devoted to organizing them. The party's state secretary for South Carolina explained why: "It would not be wise to permit negroes to join white locals. The race prejudice is so strong here that such a practice would endanger the entire movement." At their best, American Socialists held that black oppression was but a part of the larger class question and deserved no special attention. This position they consistently reaffirmed at party conventions between 1901 and 1919. Girding that formal analysis, however, was a different set of assumptions. "As a race," Charles Dobbs publicly asserted in 1904, "the negro worker of the South lacks the brain and backbone necessary to make a Socialist. Party secretary William Mailly urged the Georgia Socialist Eliza Frances Andrews to exploit the Democratic party's claim to protect white workers from black rule but quickly assured Andrews that he did not intend to imply "that the black or yellow races are not inferior to the white race." A decade later, a Texas comrade wrote Carl D. Thompson, director of the party's Bureau of Information, for statistics on miscegenation, especially in the 'Democratic' strongholds." The fear of racial equality "kept me out of the party for a long while after I became class conscious," Arch Lingan explained, "and I am anxious for data along the line mentioned for some of my old 'Democratic' friends." Incredibly, Thompson replied that he had no figures but desired them and asked Lingan to forward any information he possessed."

While there were important examples of biracial unity among Socialist dock workers in New Orleans and Philadelphia, timber workers in Louisiana, and numerous miners in locals in the coal regions, Victor Berger reflected the pervasive party attitude. "There can be no doubt that negroes

and mulattoes constitute a lower race," Berger told his comrades in 1902. Arguing that the "Caucasian and indeed even the Mongolian" were more civilized "by many thousands of years," Berger appealed to the crudest racial stereotypes to clinch his argument: "The many cases of rape which occur whenever negroes are settled in large numbers prove, moreover, that the free contact with the white has led to further degeneration of the negroes, as of other inferior races. Along with most Socialists, Debs shared a class analysis of racial prejudice but had shorn it of much of the violent racism that motivated other comrades. Somewhat blindly, he argued in 1903 that "there is no 'Negro problem' apart from the general labor problem" and expressed the hope that even in the South racial prejudice would soon evaporate." In another article that same year Debs insisted that the party had "nothing specific to offer the negro, and we cannot make special appeals to all the races. The Socialist party is the party of the working class, regardless of color-the whole working class of the whole world.

To a certain degree, this one-dimensional analysis covered Debs's own racial prejudice, formed in the anti-black atmosphere of south-central Indiana. Even into his sixties, Debs relished dialect jokes and praised the humorist Eugene Field for his large repertoire of racial and ethnic stereotypic stories. Equally important, as an early Socialist leader Debs continued to accept a form of white supremacy in his political thought. In 1898 he opposed the American annexation of the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico-while welcoming the absorption of Hawaii-on essentially racial grounds. Mimicking the worst of the American tradition, Debs explained to a Midwest newspaper: "I think that was entirely proper and in perfect keeping with the constitution of the United States. In the first place it was the desire of the natives of Hawaii to become citizens of the United States through annexation. They are composed in a degree of Caucasians, and they already have a government established. Then Honolulu is a coaling station for the United States, and this government must need protect itself in this regard.""

But this racial jingoism does not completely represent Debs's attitudes. As the leader of the American Railway Union, he forcefully and publicly insisted in 1894 that the union abolish the color line. Defeated by the rank and file, Debs often reminded his audiences in later years that the exclusion of black workers "was one of the factors in our defeat."" During his career Debs also addressed the larger cultural issues at the core of white-black tension. Accused of encouraging the closer proximity of "debased" black males and "pure" white women by advocating the organization of blacks into the party, Debs addressed the myth of the black male rapist directly: "Whence came he? Not by chance. He can be accounted for. Trace him to his source and you will find an Anglo-Saxon at the other end. There are no rape-maniacs in Africa. They are the spawn of a civilized lust." That same year, 1904, he attacked Thomas Dixon's popular racist novel, *The Leopard's Spots*, for its assumptions that "one race was created to be the bondsmen of another race"; twelve years later he condemned D. W. Griffith's painfully ugly racist movie *Birth of a Nation*.

By the 1920s Debs's understanding of American race relations led him to a fundamental critique of white American culture itself. He castigated the double standard that allowed white men to abuse black women with near impunity while black men, merely suspected of such

activity, often were lynched without trial. Racism created in America "a false and pernicious civilisation," Debs told his audience, and were Christ to return, "the Galilean Carpenter would scorn and lash the pharisees who profess to be his followers while ... they exercise their despotic and damnable [racial] dominion."

Although never free of elements of racial feeling, Debs's attitudes clearly changed over the course of his career. But even earlier, when his understanding was more attuned with the Indiana of his youth, Debs's actions frequently confronted trade unionists and Socialist comrades with direct challenges to their practice of racial exclusion. During his tours of the South Debs often refused to speak before segregated audiences. In Montgomery, Alabama, in 1900 Debs forced the manager of the hall to permit Afro-Americans to attend. In appearances that same year at Columbus, Macon, Savannah, and Atlanta, Georgia, as in Birmingham, Alabama, Debs either demanded that Afro-Americans be allowed in or insisted on an end to segregated seating *within* the hall. In all these speeches Debs directly criticized the white trade unionists who organized the meetings for excluding blacks from the union." With a basically inadequate analysis--how could Afro-Americans simply be part of the larger labor question when most white workers refused to work or organize with them?--Debs's actions nonetheless frequently confronted comrades with a stark demand that they reconsider their position. A true native son, Debs offered in himself an example of possible change within basic areas of American culture. Debs's witness was instructive, even if some in the Socialist movement failed to notice.

Important as it was, the question of equality did not occupy the greater part of Debs's attention. His central message focused on expanding and strengthening the self-perception of America's white workingmen and women. In a fashion inconceivable only sixty years after his death, Debs hectored these men and women in speech after speech and urged them to realize the profound potential each possessed. "I would have you understand," Debs insisted, "that within yourselves there is all that is necessary to develop a real man. So much of what there is within you is latent, undeveloped." While corporate capitalism clearly encouraged this condition through its degrading work discipline and corruption of the political process, Debs told workers that they also were at fault. Their passive compliance to authority actively aided their own enslavement."

At the core of Debs's appeal lay a spirited defense of the dignity of each individual. Traditional, in that it stemmed from his earlier understanding of manhood, this message also reflected his more acute realization of the nature of class relations in mature capitalist society. Debs encouraged his audiences to discover the dual nature of such terms as manhood and dignity, much as he himself had two decades earlier. Referring to the fliers for factory employment that advertised for "hands," Debs urged working people to resist such insulting definitions. "Think of a hand with a soul in it," Debs told one audience, and prodded them to consider the relationship between individual self-respect and a new collective identity: "A thousand heads have grown for every thousand pairs of hands, a thousand hearts throb in testimony of the unity of heads and hands, and a thousand souls, though crushed and mangled, burn in protest and are pledged to redeem a thousand men. The worker, Debs told a Kansas trade union audience in 1908, has under capitalism nothing but his labor. Capital owns the means of production, and the worker, more

dependent than ever, must find a buyer for his labor. But can you boast of being a man among men" in this context? Of course not: "No man can rightly claim to be a man unless he is free. There is something godlike about manhood. Manhood doesn't admit of owner- ship. Manhood scorns to be regarded as private property. "

This emphasis on manhood, the central theme in Debs's personal and public life, had at least two important consequences. First, his consistent use of the term excluded women from attention in his analysis of capitalism. It was not that he did not know that women worked but rather that he perceived the impact of industrial society on American culture from a traditional male vantage point. While effective before audiences that included women, Debs saw women as subsidiary to his main concerns, in orbit around and tangential to the leading actors in this drama, their fathers. Their place was really in the home, one can almost hear Debs say, and his continuous use of manhood as the linchpin of his analysis reveals his basic understanding of the women's question." Far more than he could publicly admit, Debs hinged his analysis on a reassertion of traditional paternal authority, despite the fact that neither his parents nor his own marital relations followed this pattern.

But within these limits, Debs's appeal was quite powerful. His emphasis on manhood and the potential for a more holistic self-image, presented in his insistence on the harmony of the head and the hand, structured his analysis of class in capitalist society. For the American workingman reared in a culture that emphasized their primacy within the family, the dignity and responsibility of their common citizenship, and the self-esteem derivative from their craft, Debs's use of manhood held great cultural and political meaning in the face of capitalism's attack in all three spheres. Through a complex evolution, Debs had discovered the essential dual aspect in his cultures' tradition: the American Revolution was not a static event, embossed in marble and praised each July. Its essential meaning demanded a prophetic call to each succeeding generation to renew and reinterpret that heritage. Debs did successfully combine this tradition with a pointed class analysis. The vastness of the country's resources meant that America, perhaps alone among all nations, "should be free from the scourge of poverty and the blight of ignorance." That it was not, Debs noted some years later, was in part but not solely the responsibility of capital: "The kingdom of heaven so long prayed for, has been set up here on earth," Debs argued. The millennium lacked but the active realization by its citizens."

The Debs who preached at his full powers during these years rarely romanticized working people or his Socialist comrades. On occasion overly rhetorical, he persistently confronted his audiences with their own responsibility for the erosion of liberty and exhorted them to struggle to recapture their heritage. "He begged his hearers not to accept his conclusions," one Georgia paper commented in 1900. "But he implores you to study as he has studied." The relation between this individual responsibility and an engaged collective identity remained an important theme. A decade later, before a Utah audience, he gave that understanding classic expression:

I am not a Labor Leader; I do not want you to follow me or anyone else; if you are looking for a Moses to lead you out of this capitalist wilderness, you will stay right where you are. I

would not lead you into the promised land if I could, because if I could lead you in, some one else would lead you out. **YOU MUST USE YOUR HEADS AS WELL AS YOUR HANDS**, and get yourself out of your present condition."

Debs understood more clearly than most Socialists the particular ambivalence of American working people. Increasingly treated as "hands," these men and women did come to occupy a distinct class in American society. Yet they resisted a conscious identification of themselves as a working class. Ethnic and religious differences played a part in this, but even more important was the tradition of political equality with its over-riding individualistic emphasis. Debs knew this, in large part from his own experience, but he directly and at times brutally demanded that his audience confront the aggressive collective implications of these traditions.

At the sight of a "two-by-four boss," Debs told a strike rally in Philadelphia in 1908, many working people "tremble and take off your hat. You are looking for some one to make an excuse to for being on earth." The workingman, he prodded, "is so easily satisfied. He is strongly inclined to be content. Give him a miserable job; a two-by-four boss to wield the hunger whip over him; and a place to sleep and enough to eat to circulate his blood and keep him in working order, and his ambition is satisfied." From his understanding of manhood, Debs attempted to offer these workers, who were then bickering over whether to call a sympathy strike in support of the striking streetcar men, a vision beyond their isolation: "This world only respects as it is compelled to respect, and if you working men want to be respected you have got to begin by respecting yourselves. Get out of the capitalist parties. You do not belong there. You are in an environment that taints you, corrupts you, reduces you. All these affiliations are calculated to strip you of your manhood, reduce you to a condition where you are ashamed of yourself."

Following the speech, Debs and some comrades drove to New Jersey. Along the way, Debs gave an extemporaneous speech, "fit," he said, "for Walt Whitman." For at least one in this small audience, the speech was a revelation. As Joseph Cohen remarked many years later, it "was entirely different from the Socialist propaganda speech which he had just delivered in Philadelphia. [it was] an apostrophe to Democracy, a superlative prose poem." But in an important fashion Cohen misunderstood Debs and his "Socialist propaganda." Debs's belief in democracy, in a specific American tradition which stressed the dignity of each individual citizen, never wavered even as he advocated a collective class analysis. For without that understanding of the individual citizen, the class struggle became a forced theory, disembodied from and in tension with the deepest currents in the culture and in himself.

Rooted in this analysis, Debs resisted any temptation to find a short cut to the Socialist assumption of power. In 1910, for example, he argued that if Socialists could "have the power to govern now, we would say 'no.'" Such a development would "precipitate a catastrophe," he stated, for "the people are not yet ready. They must be further educated. They would not know what to do with their freedom if they had it." What was true of the people was also true of his comrades, for "even the socialists are not ready." Patterning himself after generations of Protestant preachers, Debs emphasized the centrality of individual conversion in constructing a collective identity. At times as pessimistic as any Calvinist divine in his prognosis, Debs

remained essentially optimistic. His faith and his despair met in the individual before him in the audience. In that person lay another opportunity to touch the soul, to point to the unity of heart and hand, and thereby to insist again that active engagement and willingness to struggle formed the center of the democratic tradition itself.

For many Americans, Debs's political message and personal qualities were attractive. Debs was able, in the words of J. A. Wayland, to reach "the deep-hidden good that is in every creature." For "Mother" Ella Bloor and Alexander Trachtenberg, both important members of the Communist movement after World War 1, Debs was the evangelist possessed of a "wonderful personal magnetism" who "always tried to convert" his audience." To James P. Cannon, the Kansas-born leader of the American Trotskyist movement, Debs was "an ever-present influence" who drew from his audience a response quite unlike any other public figure. As Robert Hunter, the conservative Socialist from Terre Haute, attempted to explain to Lincoln Steffens, Debs was "a preacher, a Luther or a Calvin, rather than a political leader. He [was] a man who has dedicated his life to a cause, and put aside many years ago all questions of expediency, of policy, and of compromise." This power was evident. Once, while addressing Chicago's Polish Federation, Debs held the large crowd captive, moving them to tears and wild applause during the course of his two-hour speech. Perplexed, as the majority of the audience understood little or no English, Debs asked a bilingual comrade to inquire how this was possible. One Polish Socialist responded quite simply: "Debs talks to us with his *hands*, out of his *heart*, and we all understood everything he said."

Yet the familiar disparity remained. Despite his personal and political appeal, Debs's ability to attract audiences always exceeded the political support he and the movement received. To some this suggested that his political analysis had less meaning than his personal appeal. As one sensitive if critical New Orleans reporter commented after Debs spoke in that city, he was "an ill-balanced man, a dreamer," with "the gift not of wisdom but of epigram." Yet the audience reaction was perplexing. Working people had packed the hall: the "old grizzled man with a long white beard, and the venerable air of a prophet, with face and hands seamed and seared with toil"; the "young mechanic, evidently dressed out in Sunday best"; the "day laborer, with inevitable heavy forward droop of shoulder." All listened with intensity and applauded with passion, but the reporter did not think that they had just become Socialists: "One left the building with the feeling that it was not what the man had said but what he was that carried away his hearers." Stumbling toward an explanation, he suggested that "it was not so much that they cared for what he said, but that they cared that he cared for them-if this does not confuse the point."

At times Debs echoed this analysis. When a new acquaintance commented after a speech that the audience "all seemed to love you," Debs responded: "They love me because they know I love them." On occasion blinded by his own power with audiences, Debs never lost, as did the New Orleans reporter, an appreciation of the basic political symbolism that gave his wide appeal its basis. From Woodstock to a later jail term at Atlanta Federal Penitentiary during and after World War 1, Debs remained the most visible and dynamic opponent of the new corporate order, and the

large audiences he drew indicated the extent of the unrest among working people. But the task of transferring that response into more concrete channels was difficult. As Debs frequently noted, a worker too often insisted on remaining in the old parties because "his father ... and his grandfather belonged to that party." Sensitive to the continuing importance of that politico-cultural force in working people's lives, Debs's own brand of Socialism pointed to the continuity in the changed allegiance he advocated.

Unlike any other Socialist of his era, Debs transcended the ethnic and geographical differences that separated working people. In the Southwest, for example, he elicited dramatic responses from poor tenant farmers and coal miners. He had lived among them and knew their hopes and expectations; and his Protestant temperament and revivalistic fervor poignantly addressed their anger and frustration as those hopes went unfulfilled." Immigrants, and perhaps especially Jews, enthusiastically received him. "Deps, Deps, they called him," a Yiddish-speaking comrade remembered. He embodied "the hopes and the zeal of the foreign-born for social and economic change" in this new alien society. "His words made men cry, even when they were not fully understood, and working class women would present him with bouquets-my mother would do that when she went to his meetings-and worry about his health." Charney Vladeck, general manager of *The Forward*, New York's Socialist Yiddish daily, caught the essence of Debs's appeal. Explaining why pictures of Debs plastered the walls of Jewish immigrant homes alongside such traditional Jewish figures as Sir Moses Montefiore and the Rabbi of Lubawich, "Debs was the liberator, the first who had come from the ranks workers, holding out his hand and saying, 'I am your brother.'" They had respect and admiration for radicals of their own race. But they worshipped Debs."

Even among non-Socialists Debs held a unique power. As a young teenager in Worcester, Massachusetts, the playwright S. N. Behrman remembered wandering into a Debs meeting. Sitting almost under the podium, Behrman watched, entranced, as as the "tall and angular" speaker "leaned far over the edge of the platform, as if to get close to each of his listeners. His arms reached out, as if to touch them." Although he remembered none of the specifics of Debs's speech, decades later Behrman asserted that the experience gave to all my later life an orientation it would not otherwise have had." It was less Debs's specific argument than "the overwhelming impression that Debs' personality made on me. Most of all, I remember his intensity and what seemed to me to be his quivering sensitiveness to pain." As he grew older, Debs became for Behrman his "standard of reference" for all politicians who sought his allegiance: others "fulminated against gold and tariffs and refractory Cabinet members . . . [but] they were not stripped, as was Debs, of everything but the spirit of humanity."

But Debs's success as a Socialist agitator had other sources than his powerful personal appeal. Debs was no Socialist Midas, turning into comrades all whom he touched. Rather, his effective agitation crystallized for many the meaning of Socialism because the analysis Debs presented echoed their own daily experience. A rampant industrial capitalism, aggressively in search of ever greater profits, was ultimately responsible for the growth of the Socialist movement.

Between the Civil War and World War I America matured as an industrial society and became the leading industrial nation in the world. This expansion spurred the emergence of a new understanding of the relationship between the federal government and American citizens. The Civil War had greatly broadened Washington's power in such areas as taxation and military draft. Further, during the Civil War the partnership between this new, more centralized government and the business community first assumed its modern form." But for Americans without access to board rooms or Washington agencies, the ultimate effects of this alliance were less desirable. In the factory and on small individual farms throughout the land, the crux of this relationship involved the question of class control. Industrial capitalism would replace the power and dignity of the idea of citizenship with the concept of the "hand"-hundreds and thousands of them to fill the slots created by the expanding economy.

This question of class affected Americans nationwide, but in different ways. The Milwaukee Socialists in the skilled trades had adjusted more thoroughly to the structure of the new order and now sought out its pressure points; miners to the west and south of Milwaukee were engaged in a battle for physical survival. Immigrants presented yet another experience. In large part unskilled and unfamiliar with American society, they possessed neither citizenship nor the vote and thus sought other ways to protest and alleviate their conditions. In the southwestern states yet another variant of Socialism grew during these pre-World War I years. Conventional Socialist wisdom held that as farmers owned land and employed hired help, they held different and antagonistic interests from wage workers. But, Debs proclaimed in 1914, these southwestern Socialists exhibited a firm "class conscious enthusiasm" that granted them full status in "the revolutionary movement of the working class."

As early as 1901 Wayland noted in the *Appeal to Reason* that while "the farmer is often held up as an example of manly independence," in reality "he has no say so as to what he is to get for his labor any more than the veriest wage slave that lives.," Natural disasters might wipe out his investment but a more consistent threat was the economic system in which the farmer sold his produce: "Should he have a good crop, he must take what others are willing to give him for it." Although the national party did not recognize farmers' demands until after 1910, salesmen for *Appeal to Reason* and Socialist organizers throughout the Southwest organized an effective agitation. By 1912 the Southwest had the fastest growing regional Socialist movement. Despite the relatively low population density, it accounted for 12 percent of the national Socialist vote for Debs. Two years later the Oklahoma Socialists, then second only to New York state in official party membership, captured 21 percent of the gubernatorial vote and elected Socialists to several municipal offices." Clearly a new wind blew across the southwestern plains.

Two major reasons account for the transformation of these pre-dominantly rural and small-town citizens. First, the changing pattern of land ownership after 1900 dramatically altered the consciousness of these men and women. In 1890, a year after the last great land sale in the territory, less than 1 percent of all farmers in Oklahoma were tenants working for another man. A decade later over 43 percent leased their land, and by 1910 54 percent-over 100,000 farm families-worked the Oklahoma land for someone else." In Texas and Kansas a similar pattern

occurred. To farmers reared in a culture of "manly independence," these figures were ominous. The severe disadvantage they faced when competing with local land speculators or the large "bonanza farms" owned by industrial corporations resulted in a growing number of bankruptcies. There was no innate "shame" to tenant farming but, by 1910, the belief of these farmers in mobility was seriously shaken as tenancy increased, and fewer and fewer farmers made the transition to owners."

Political realities in tenant farm country followed this economic pattern. The large landowners, or the managers who represented them, dominated local and state politics, influenced the press, and frequently had substantial economic investments in regional industry, commerce, and banking. This power they did not hesitate to use. When the tenants on absentee owner Tom Padgitt's farm in Coleman County, Texas, struck for better conditions in 1908, Padgitt and his resident manager immediately mobilized merchants and artisans in the neighboring town of Leadlay to cut off credit to the tenants and had the local sheriff evict the tenants identified as Socialists. When Padgitt and his wife arrived at their 12,000-acre farm from their home in New Mexico, he praised his manager and declared that the battle in Coleman County was but a part of the nation-wide struggle against "red agitation." Many tenants, however, as they experienced this tightened class structure, formed organizations to channel their protest. Combining a radical democratic anger with an indigenous adaptation of popular Marxist thought, these men and women were attracted to the Socialist movement .

If the prospect of building a regional movement of farmers disturbed the more orthodox Socialists, the second major source of southwestern Socialism was more familiar. At the center of the agricultural wrapper that encased this movement lay a core of blue-collar workers. Strongest among the UMWA locals in Kansas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma, this Socialist influence grew with the region's urban development and industrial concentration. A blue-collar belt existed across the agricultural heartland with strong ties to the radicalized farmers.

The creation of this proletariat occurred over a thirty-year period. With the development of the railroad repair yards and freight depots, a working class emerged that was organized during the 1880s by the Knights of Labor. During the dramatic strikes of 1885-86 these workers challenged their employers' power and actively sought alliances with small farmers and local businessmen. By 1900 the lumber industry as well was contributing to this development. National corporations dominated the industry and sought to impose a factory-style work discipline in the rural areas of Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana. But it was the coal mines that gave the greatest impetus to the creation of this working class. Mines were from the first a corporate venture requiring a large capital investment, and mine operators employed a multi-ethnic and racial work force in the hope of undermining worker unity. But throughout the Southwest, however, the miners organized into the UMWA and embraced its militant industrial unionism that included men of all races and nationalities. In Pittsburgh County, Oklahoma, Sebastian County, Arkansas, and Crawford County, Kansas, strong UMWA locals united the miners, conducted successful job actions, and voted Socialist. British, Italian, and Slavic miners joined with other Americans to elect Socialist union and municipal officials in mining

communities throughout the region.

Despite its rural image, the Southwest contained an important working-class element that possessed a strong class awareness. Kansas miners in 1902, for example, supported a strike by union motormen on the interurban trolleys; a few years later Oklahoma miners aided the streetcar men's strike in Oklahoma City." Fighting the transformation of the region, these workers discovered shared grievances with tenant farmers, and together they presented a formidable force that challenged the bid for control of the region by the large landowners, bankers, and industrialists.

Into this changing reality came the effective agitation of the Socialist party itself. The party grew because its leaders sensitively understood and articulated the concerns and the culture of the region's mining and farm families. National leaders--Debs, Mother Jones, Kate Richards O'Hare--drew tremendous responses. But even more important were the *Appeal to Reason* salesmen, local ministers, union organizers, and rural farmers who lived in the Southwest and built the party and the movement."

The most successful approach used by these local organizers in this region was the Socialist encampment." First introduced in Grand Saline, Texas, in August 1904, these week-long meetings put the historic form of the religious revival to new but not so different purposes. Drawing farmers from miles around, encampments gathered thousands and thousands of farmers to hear Socialist talks, to enjoy Socialist dramatic skits, and to visit among themselves. They gave these men and women, as one Socialist noted, "the greatest opportunity of their lives for a good time." The encampment, he suggested, was also a tremendous opportunity for Socialist agitation: "it is the drawing power of the socialist message, combined with the amusement features, that makes these mid-summer gatherings universally popular. The encampment is the greatest single agency at our command for reaching the great mass of political sinners in the South." The encampments, like the revivals, were held in summer when the crops were "laid by" but also "when the shadow of the drought becomes darkest." This perennial sense of urgency surrounding nature and its power reinforced the concern many felt about their own economic condition. "When there is almost a total failure of crops," a former resident of Colorado City, Texas, wrote in 1913, the families of migrant workers and tenant farmers were forced to "lead a gypsy life, much like 'tramps.'" This combination of conditions made the encampment a brilliant and effective innovation for Socialist organizing.

The encampment was not just a technique borrowed from local culture and put to a different purpose. The center of Socialist strength in the Southwest lay in the small towns and adjoining rural areas, and it shared its appeal with fundamentalist religious sects. In 1906 over 86 percent of all Baptists, Methodists, Disciples of Christ, and United Brethren in the Southwest lived outside the principal cities." To a surprising extent, conservative religion and native Socialism meshed rather than clashed, their commingling eased by a pervasive sense of urgency over the fundamental evil people experienced in their society and in their daily lives. The encampments' biblical images--the basic linguistic symbol of the culture--challenged economic oppression, and southwestern Socialists boasted of one comrade who had "scarcely a peer in Texas as an authority

on the Biblical viewpoint" of Socialism." Ministers and lay people alike joined the movement and found that Socialist doctrines "link fine with the teachings of Christ.""

The religious tone that permeated this Socialist movement did not negate the growing class awareness-but it did interpret that consciousness in a particular cultural context. The crisis in people's lives, as in their society, was no mere intellectual problem. Rather, as H. Richard Niebuhr has suggested, it fostered "a revolutionary temper" and a belief that "life is a critical affair" and forced each to confront "the necessity of facing the ultimate realities of life." This religious force, never confined to Sunday sermons but rather the primary cultural expression of daily experience, emphasized revival and rebirth from the suffering of human existence. In this fashion "newness of life" gave renewed urgency "to the idea of the Kingdom of God on earth." This convergence of religious and secular millennialism generated a powerful social critique. A common religious impulse provided moral principles-the "notion of right"-to denounce capitalism; the democratic tradition provided the context through which class anger found expression; and deteriorating social conditions supplied the impetus for anger and action. As one Milton, Oklahoma, Socialist wrote the U.S. attorney general in 1912, protesting the arrest of the editorial board of the *Appeal to Reason*: "Christ was crucified by the same class of men . . . and for no other reason than the teaching of truth to the 'mob' that it might be better prepared to protect it- self from the arrogant servants and the commercial pirates of the world. . . . O, no," A. P. Folsom concluded, explaining his social philosophy, "I am not an anarchist, neither was Christ, Luther, Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln.""

In the Southwest this powerful combination of religious impulse and prophetic Socialism generated a popular, broad-based critique of capitalism. Far different in expression and social origin than the Milwaukee Socialist movement, these southwestern Socialists countered the distrust of their movement by eastern comrades with the words of their national hero, Eugene Debs: "I have met many of the farmers down your way," Debs wrote the Oklahoma and Indian Territory Socialist organizer in 1906. They "were revolutionary to the heart's core, and furnished the very best material for the party movement. "" Self-conscious of their cultural traditions and painfully aware of their current circum- stances, these Socialists forged from their roots a basic attack on capitalism that expressed their new, sharp class awareness.

The Southwest was not the only region where the results of industrial development and effective local organizing built a strong Socialist movement. In many of the towns and smaller cities in the Midwest major changes in regional agricultural and industrial production precipitated new social relations among former neighbors. Class lines became clearer as conflicting interests emerged and altered the texture of people's daily lives. Like Terre Haute decades earlier, St. Marys, Ohio, experienced its introduction to industrial capitalism on a relatively small scale. But unlike Terre Haute, the citizens of St. Marys elected a strong Socialist administration to counter the power of regional capitalism.

Located in rural Auglaize County, eighty miles northwest of Columbus, St. Marys seemed an unlikely candidate for electoral success. As the sur- rounding county, this small city of under 6,000 in 1910 was inhabited by American-born citizens, the majority of whom lived in single

family dwellings and sent many of their children to local schools at least through age fourteen. Despite this appearance of stability, both the city and the county experienced an important transformation between 1890 and 1910 that laid the basis for Socialist agitation. In these years the rural population of Auglaize County declined as a changing social structure propelled individuals to the small cities. Between 1900 and 1910 the number of owner-operated farms decreased by almost 12 percent, and the tenant farm population grew by almost 20 percent. In the city even sharper contrasts appeared. Although St. Marys ranked seventy-third in the state in the value of its manufactured products, the sixty men who controlled local industry in 1900 formed a dominant elite whose emergence generated class divisions. Immediately underneath these manufacturers was a group of forty-four salaried officials and clerks-white-collar employees who managed the city's industry and whose average yearly salary approached \$900 per year. Beneath them were the wage workers. While the available records do not allow a careful analysis by skill and occupation, the less refined comparison that is possible is revealing. Of the 453 wage workers, all over age sixteen, who were employed in 1900, the 410 men averaged wages of \$447 per year, just about half that of the white-collar employees. The forty-three working-class women fared worse, with an average yearly pay of but \$209.

In this context the Socialist movement grew. With only seven members in 1910, these comrades published a newspaper-with the help of a Socialist cooperative printing plant in nearby Findlay, Ohio-and counted 112 members a year later. Entering a full slate of candidates in the November 1911 municipal elections, these Socialists ran an energetic campaign that included a speech by Haywood at an October rally. To everyone's surprise the Socialists swept the election, winning the mayoralty, most of the city's other executive offices, and the seven positions on the city council. The thirty-year-old mayor, Scott Wilkens, who had left the farm eight years before to work at the post office, received 48 percent of the vote in a three-way race."

Even before this startling victory, the strength of the movement in St. Marys and other Midwestern communities attracted national attention. Frank Bohn, a left-wing Socialist, applauded the comrades in June 1911 but remained somewhat uneasy as he felt their origins were less influenced by Socialist theory than by the recent social change in the community. In a long report following his organizing tour of the Midwest, Bohn perceptively caught the tone and substance of this transformation even as he bemoaned the absence of firm theoretical foundations. "The social distinctions in the small towns are now much more clearly marked than formerly," he noted. If in earlier years the "large degree of social equality" followed from the very structure of community values, from the citizens' "manner of living, their ideas and the education of their children, all this is now changed." In St. Marys the new high school caters to the "better people"; the new industrial leaders, riding through town in their automobiles, no longer stop to talk with other citizens; and the electric wires, gas pipes, and sewer lines are installed only in the better neighborhoods. In a fashion alien to past experience one man's poverty and another man's wealth are "known to the whole community." As a result, "the old time American workingman is very much embittered." He sees "men he has known from boyhood"-and knows "are 'no better than he is' "-reaping new benefits from his labor. In contrast, his own "condition is becoming steadily

worse."

Beyond this, though, Bohn had misgivings. At first, Bohn thought, this nascent comrade tended to blame himself for failing to grasp the opportunities he held were open to all. Contact with the Socialist movement expanded his understanding, but, in contrast with the worker in the larger urban centers, Bohn argued that "the necessity of revolutionary theory and practice" remained unclear:

The point of departure in the reasoning of the man in the small town is usually as regards his conception of government. . . . In the small town the worker is bred to be both religious and patriotic. When his living conditions have deteriorated, when he sees his children denied the opportunities that would make their life easier than his, and after he has seen several local politicians grow rich through town and county graft-then he is ready for a larger view of life. Its form is usually bitter enmity towards the wretches who have debased "his country" and its government.

For Bohn and other Socialists, this deficient grasp of Socialist theory explained "the tremendous hold" of the *Appeal to Reason*: "Its editors comprehend perfectly the psychology of the American-born worker and specifically the worker in the small town. The *Appeal to Reason* comes into the home of this man and he begins to sweat from anger." Inadequate by itself, Bohn hoped that this process initiated "the first act in the making of a revolutionist."

Bohn understood the effects of industrial capitalist development, but he and others remained condescending toward the new party members. Embarrassed by "religious and patriotic" sensibilities, Bohn was surprised by Mayor Wilkens's class-conscious administration. In one of his first official acts, Wilkens visited a machine shop where some workers had been laid off for refusing to work Saturdays. Urging the men to organize a union and offering them the city council chambers for a meeting, the Socialist mayor of St. Marys promised them that if they struck, the city would protect their rights and, in the event of violence by company-hired thugs, he would swear in strikers as deputies." Like other Socialists with a national audience, Bohn misunderstood the basic social foundation of his own movement's appeal. In the person of Debs, in the vibrant movement in the Southwest, and in communities such as St. Marys, religious belief and a deep-rooted patriotism did not inhibit the growth of a strong class awareness. That awareness developed within a specific political and cultural context that provided it with a most powerful ally: through these men and women and their specific traditions a class analysis-so at odds with the dominant ideology of individualism- entered American culture and its political discourse with a power and force otherwise unimaginable. Misunderstood by many, that mixture of biblical appeal, democratic ideology, and growing class awareness was the great strength of the Debsian Socialist movement and remains today its most potent legacy. Support for Debs's contention that class relations now structured American society was evident in urban industrial areas as well. In Reading, Pennsylvania, for example, a diversified industrial city with over 70 percent of its adults engaged in working-class occupations, Reading's workers were American-born, a high percentage were church members, and a substantial number owned their own homes. The city's population grew by 65 percent between 1890 and 1910, reflecting the in- flux of rural

people from surrounding Berks County; simultaneously its central industrial base shifted from the production of machines to textiles, especially hosiery. The opposition of employers to the union movement and the effective leadership of James Maurer, Andrew Bower, and J. Henry Stump proved the context in which the Socialist movement grew. A major force in the city, Socialists elected aldermen, mayors, and state 1930s."

A similar process occurred in Schenectady, New York, where in 1911 Socialists elected a mayor, eight of thirteen aldermen, and a state assemblyman. Between 1900 and 1910 that city's population increased by in large part due to the dramatic expansion of its two major employers: General Electric and American Locomotive. With a predominantly American-born constituency - although Schenectady Socialists had a high percentage of Irish men among their leaders-these semiskilled workers voted the Socialist ticket.

Despite important differences, a common theme united these two urban experiences. In each city Socialist electoral success relied on working-class support. In Schenectady the skilled machinists, organized Association of Machinists, backed the Socialists, and the party drew firm support throughout the working-class wards. While the middle-class minister, George R. Lunn, became that city's first Socialist mayor, half of all victorious Socialist candidates in 1911 were machinists and members of their union. In Reading, with a higher proportion of semi- and unskilled workers than other cities with Socialist electoral victories, the alliance between the Socialists and trade unionists was even stronger and of longer duration. From its founding in 1900, Reading's Federated Trades Council supported (if unofficially) the Socialist movement. An overwhelming majority of its delegates were members of the party, and through effective organizing in union halls, cultural associations, and even church socials-as well as through traditional Socialist meetings-they consistently recorded votes for the Socialist ticket far in excess of the party membership. Not only was the Socialist electoral strength drawn "consistently and with increasing intensity" from the working-class wards but so were its candidates for office. Between 1910 and 1935, 85 percent of all those nominated for office by Reading Socialists held working-class jobs. Although different in expression and experience from their Oklahoma comrades, as they were in important ways from the Milwaukee Socialists as well, workers in Reading, Schenectady, and other industrial communities created Socialist movements of varying strengths that depended upon working-class people for support and expressed in indigenous terms a class analysis of American society."

This critique of industrial capitalism, organized around a clear class awareness, had deep and powerful roots among Americans. Integrated in different fashion with democratic ideology, trade union practice, and earlier political and religious traditions in the specific locale, this American expression of class nonetheless created a vigorous response in opposition. The differences among the regional movements were obvious; they would continue to cause bitter conflict within the party; and they required a firm but sensitive national leader to bridge the disagreements. But this should not obscure the fact that the Socialist movement's appeal rested on a realistic assessment of American society and culture.

It was this foundation that supported the platform from which Debs spoke. As he had

decades earlier, a growing number, if still a minority, of Americans now questioned the revolution in their political traditions, cultural values, and daily work experience engineered by industrial capitalism. Hesitantly and at times awkwardly realigning their long-held individualism with a new collective identity, they provided the Socialist movement with its greatest local and national electoral successes in 1911 and 1912.

After the discouraging 1908 campaign, the growth of the Socialist party was impressive. Official party membership doubled between 1909 and 1911 and increased another 40 percent in 1912, when the party achieved its highest recorded membership, almost 118,000 activists. The off-year elections also pointed to the renewed health of the movement. In 1910 Socialist party candidates for state and local office attracted nearly 700,000 voters, and in 1911 seventy-four cities and towns elected at least one Socialist mayor or major city official. From Schenectady, New York, to St. Marys, Ohio, from Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, to Berkeley and Watts, California, Socialist officials assumed office and utilized what power they possessed in support of local working people. Nowhere, Bohn proclaimed, were the results "unworthy of our cause. Everywhere our fundamental position was emphasized." Looking forward to "1912-The Beginning of an Epoch," Bohn predicted that with the capitalist parties on the defensive the comrades would move "through this wilderness of crooked paths" and possibly capture more than two million votes in the presidential election."

Fermenting just beneath this surface unanimity, however, basic differences remained concerning the applicability of the Socialist class analysis and relations with the AFL and IWW. The struggle to control the party apparatus and thus the political direction of the Socialist movement in America intensified between 1908 and 1912. To a large extent, these tensions reflected the tremendously diverse nature of the American movement and the contrasting regional experiences with industrial capitalism. Although Haywood, Berger, and Wayland all appealed to the working class, each envisioned a vastly different movement. In important ways these leaders and others, such as Hiliquit in New York, Maurer in Pennsylvania, and Max Hayes in Ohio, could not rise above their specific contexts to reach the common ground at the core of their different Socialist commitments. In Debs, however, the party possessed a comrade of unparalleled national stature who, through his incessant travels, was intimately familiar with most of the regional movements. With friends in each faction and armed with a deep belief in the power of a democratic working-class Socialist movement, Debs's leadership qualities would undergo a critical test in these four years.

The opening round in the renewed factional strife began innocently enough in early 1909. Writing in the *International Socialist Review*, William English Walling criticized Keir Hardie's Independent Labour party of Britain for relying on the skilled workers, "the aristocracy of labor," for its electoral support. Walling argued that industrial development and worker consciousness were more advanced in America and that to limit the labor activity of the party to the skilled workers was in effect undemocratic. A month later, Robert Hunter responded and suggested that Walling misunderstood the British party. Arguing that the combination of Socialists and skilled trade unionists in Britain represented an alliance and not a fusion (and thus preserved independent

Socialist principles), Hunter characterized Walling's position as "contrary to socialist tactics." In the same issue the *Review* sided with Walling and argued that an American labor party would flounder on the conservative reefs of official trade union ideology. I" There the matter rested, an exchange reflecting basic tensions in the Socialist movement that remained more theoretical than immediate, until the following November.

On 19 November Algie M. Simons wrote Walling a letter from Toronto, where he was attending the annual convention of the AFL. Simons was impressed by the number of former Socialist party members present as delegates and depressed by their reasons for leaving the party. He argued that the party was divided between intellectuals and the "never works" (i.e., the IWW impossibilists) and that this condition kept "the actual wage-workers" from remaining in the party. To remedy this situation, Simons proposed the creation of an American labor party along British lines, closely aligned with Gompers and the AFL. He urged the simplification of Socialist party machinery in order to appeal "directly to the union men," ignored the unorganized majority of American working people, and demanded that his faction "drive from our own ranks" those "who are seeking to raise rebellion against every person whom they cannot use for their purposes." In a closing appeal Simons informed Walling that his party faction-and he specifically named Hillquit and John Spargo among them-already had "preparations under way to bring about an internal [party] revolution" and desired Walling's cooperation. Walling decided that political concerns outweighed the claim of friendship, and he privately circulated and then published Simons's letter in the *Review*. The battlelines of a major party dispute now formed with greater vigor than ever before. Petulantly and somewhat tardily, Spargo chastised Simons for his tactical blunder: "Surely," the national executive committee member wrote, "you ought to be careful as to whom you write, even intimating our plans!"

Reaction to the airing of Simons's letter was swift. Debs denounced the plan and argued that the party "has already CATERED FAR TOO MUCH to the American Federation of Labor." Rose Pastor Stokes, the immigrant Socialist married to a Connecticut Socialist millionaire, condemned the plan as "nothing but a desire to get into office.... Since we cannot win the entire A.F. of L. to the revolutionary position, these comrades think it would be an advantage to come down to the narrow position of the A. F. of L." Her husband, J. G. Phelps Stokes, also was critical, and Socialist locals in New York City and elsewhere denounced Simons, Berger, and Hillquit.

But those who shared Simons's views were also active. Hillquit argued that, while the "prime object" of the party was to organize the working class politically, "it has so far not succeeded in doing so." Therefore he would support a "bona-fide workingmen's party . . . organized ... on a true workingmen's platform" and insisted that the party would have to do so also. Berger was, as usual, both more vindictive and more pragmatic than Hillquit. Dismissing his opponents as "impossibilists" who, if successful in discrediting his faction, "would even try to paralyze us where we have worked successfully," Berger urged Hillquit and Spargo to concentrate on the coming election of a new national executive committee. He suggested a list of candidates "whom we want to see elected" and instructed Hillquit to use his influence in New York, as he would in Milwaukee, to direct the Socialist press accordingly.

The issues in this dispute were fundamental: who was to control the party and how would it respond to the continued resistance of many workers to Socialism. For Berger, Hillquit, and their allies, the answer to the first question was obvious. Their professed theoretical superiority and control of strong local Socialist movements based on skilled unionists meant *they* were the answer. The second point went to the heart of the matter. Like Berger and Hillquit, Simons actively resisted the growing "lumpen- proletarian" influence in the party, which he equated with the IWW and their supporters. Focusing solely on the organized skilled craft unionists, Simons argued that, although he had been quite critical of the AFL in the past, " I am forced to recognize that it comes much nearer to representing the working class than the S.P., and unless we are able to shape our policy and our organization so as to meet the demands and incarnate the position of the workers, we will have failed in our mission."''''

For Debs, such a course was despicable and stupid. Socialists who advocated a policy of accommodation with Gompers exchanged their principles for the "dirtiest Tammany tricks." Their reward, Debs wrote in anger, was "being puked on in return by" Gompers. "Berger's performances in this connection," Debs told Hunter, "have been disgraceful and contemptible beyond words." To Debs, the sight of Socialists, "alleged revolutionary leaders," joining forces with the AFL was "absolutely inexcusable" and the crassest form of class collaboration. Debs understood far more clearly than other party leaders the resistance to Socialism by American workers but stressed that these collaborative at- tempts merely compounded the problems facing Socialists: " It is this very thing that confounds and confuses the rank and file, muddles the situation and makes our already difficult task next to impossible." Demanding that the movement retain its fundamental principles even as it adapted to specific American conditions, Debs declared for "clear cut action and un- compromising principles. I do not propose to try to win the intimidated rank and file of the A.F. of L. by publicly pandering to their corrupt bosses."''''

The labor party dispute further solidified internal party divisions. As both Simons's and Debs's responses make clear, the question of Socialist labor policy remained the most critical issue before the members. Control of the party apparatus therefore assumed great importance, as each side jockeyed to influence the outcome on a related series of issues. Immigration policy, for example, was a source of major disagreement. At the 1910 party congress, a majority of the committee on immigration (Berger, Ernst Untermann, and John Wanhope) approved a resolution calling for the "unconditional exclusion" of all Oriental workers. Reflecting the AFL's position, this resolution argued that as America was already afflicted with its own racial problems the continued immigration of Asian workers would weaken labor. After long debate a substitute motion passed that favored exclusion but removed the overt racial reference. This resolution, introduced by Hillquit and approved by a slim margin (55-50), evoked an angry response from Debs. Speaking on behalf of those Socialists opposed to close relations with the AFL, Debs called the resolution "utterly unsocialistic, reactionary, and in truth outrageous." Drawing clearer the lines that divided the party, Debs termed the resolution's supporters "subtle and sophisticated defenders of the civic federation unionism" and proclaimed his refusal "to sacrifice principle for numbers and jeopardise ultimate success for immediat6 gain . . . [and] to turn my back upon the

oppressed."""

Debs was assuming a leadership role among the revolutionary democratic Socialists within the American movement. Although he had allowed his membership in the IWW to lapse, without comment, in 1908, Debs still proclaimed the necessity of industrial unionism. Such organizing efforts broke through the narrow confines of AFL policy and focused primary attention on the majority of American industrial workers who possessed neither skill nor craft. Attempts to replace the older craft unions were a waste of time, Debs argued, and instead he emphasized the unique possibilities inherent in the very structure of industrial unions. These unions, he now understood, were based upon the "mutual economic interests of all workers [in an industry) and the solidarity arising therefrom." Therefore industrial union organization presented a clear path to democratic Socialist political action. If the trade or craft union based its existence on "the prevailing industrial system," the industrial union, democratically controlled and rooted in a solidarity among workers, had for its goal both improved conditions and the "ultimate abolition of the existing productive system, and the total extinction of wage servitude." Advising comrades to "bore from within and without" the old unions, Debs saw the industrial union movement as "laying the foundation and erecting the superstructure of the new revolutionary economic organization, the embryonic industrial democracy."

Early in 1911 Debs went a step further and directly linked his advocacy of industrial unionism to internal party disputes, especially to the question of democratic governance of the party. In a perceptive and at times caustic article, " Danger Ahead, " Debs applauded the recent 19 1 0 electoral gains but cautioned against an infatuation with municipal Socialism. There were votes in 19 1 0 "obtained by methods not consistent with the principles of a revolutionary party," Debs wrote, and he warned that this "spirit of bourgeois reform" could "practically destroy [the party's] virility and ef- ficiency as a revolutionary organization." But there were those in the party, the unnamed "vote-getters," who encouraged this trend and used Socialist propaganda "as a bait for votes rather than as a means of education. " In an obvious reference to Berger's Milwaukee practices as well as to the recent labor party controversy, Debs condemned those who would "join hands with reactionary trade unionists in local emergencies and in certain temporary situations to effect some specific purpose." To elect local officials, "here and there, where the party is still in a crude state will inevitably bring trouble and set the party back," Debs argued, and he warned his Socialist adversaries: "Voting for socialism is not socialism any more than a menu is a meal."

"Of far greater importance," Debs insisted, "than increasing the vote of the Socialist party is the economic organization of the working class. ... Socialism must be organized, drilled, equipped and the place to begin is in the industries where the workers are employed." Without this effective economic base, working class "political power, even if it could be developed, would but react upon them, thwart their plans, blast their hopes, and all but destroy them." Integrating class analysis and democratic ideology with a newfound power, Debs again pointed to the democratic industrial union movement as the foundation of a meaningful Socialism. Such a movement would prepare "the workers, step by step, to assume entire control of the productive forces when the hour strikes for the impending organic change. . . . Organized industrially . . .

[workers] will just as naturally and inevitably express their economic solidarity in political terms and cast a united vote for the party of their class."

"Industrial unionism," Debs wrote a month later, "is the structural work of the cooperative commonwealth, the working class republic." In these articles Debs all but declared open public war on Berger, Hillquit, Spargo, and their allies. Spurning his knowledge of the important regional differences within the movement, Debs held that there was but one path to the Socialist revolution and strongly implied that it was no accident that the same party bosses who retarded the growth of a democratic Socialist movement were also most closely affiliated with the AFL. Buoyed by the dramatic IWW free-speech fights as well as by that union's first attempts to organize immigrant steel workers at McKees Rocks and New Castle, Pennsylvania, Debs somewhat impulsively sought to reduce the diverse movement to a single model. His critique of party bosses was discerning, and his understanding of the structural differences and contrasting orientations of craft and industrial unionism was perceptive. Yet his enthusiasm overwhelmed him, and he lost sight of the delicate balance that would allow him to press his critique while stopping short of dismissing his opponents.

In private Debs went further than even his sharp public attack. "if the socialist movement tolerates a boss, be it Berger or Jehovah," he wrote Carl Thompson late in 1910, "it is false to its professed principles and the lightning should strike and will strike it just as certain as we invite it." Debs vowed that he would soon "face Berger" on this issue "before the delegates of a convention, or better still, the rank and file," and in the process he revealed just how consistent were the concerns that motivated his own sense of self. "I discovered [Berger's] true nature long ago," he told Thompson, "but I was indulgent with him to the verge of cowardice. I have heard him talk to Fred Heath in a room full of people as I would not talk to the mangiest cur, and Heath took it all meekly and without protest, and Berger took it for granted that it was his right to exact such servile and debasing obeisance from comrades. He tried it on me," Debs remembered, "but there he struck a snag":

I yielded and submitted until self-respect moved me to call a halt, and I did. Berger was determined that I had no right to differ with him and insultingly commanded me to act the part of a lackey to him, and then our relations came to a very sudden end. I told him that I was a man and a socialist, that I would permit neither man nor god to boss or dictate to me in the vulgar spirit that moved him to turn purple as he tried to bulldoze me into docile subjection to him as he had done to so many other comrades.

In contrast, Debs offered his vision of a Socialist leader and, not insignificantly, his perception of his own role in the movement: "The true leader uses all his power, not to rule others, but to impart the power and intelligence to them to rule themselves."

Debs's opportunity to "face Berger" was not long in coming. At the party's national convention in May 1912, the delegates renominated Debs for the fourth time as their presidential candidate. But the selection of Debs was more fractious than ever before, as Berger and Hillquit organized 40 percent of the voting delegates for their candidates, Emil Seidel and Charles E. Russell, respectively." Publicly, at least, this opposition did not upset Debs, but Hillquit's actions toward

the close of the convention did. Implying that he spoke with the unanimous approval of both the National Executive Committee and the convention's Committee on Constitution, Hillquit moved that J. Mahlon Barnes, the former national secretary whose forced resignation in 1911 had caused many to look to Theodore Debs as a replacement, be appointed campaign manager. Given the seemingly impeccable recommendations (the national committee at this time included both Haywood and Kate Richards O'Hare as well as Hillquit) and the late hour, Barnes's appointment was approved.

As news of the appointment spread, furious reaction ensued from the rank and file. Although Barnes had been forced from office in 1911, for fathering a child by Jean Keep and then refusing to acknowledge his responsibility, many comrades remained angry at that conduct and at the actions of Hillquit, Berger, Spargo, Hunter, and Seymour Steadman who, in a vicious party trial, attempted to portray Keep as the guilty person. Debs shared this anger, but the internal struggle for democratic control of the party remained paramount for him and his allies. For, it was soon discovered, Hillquit had lied when he stated that Barnes had the unanimous approval of two major Socialist committees. Compounding the offense, Hillquit then enlisted Berger, Spargo, and others to pressure the official stenographer to doctor the convention proceedings to eliminate his reference to unanimous support. Unabashedly, Hillquit decided to weather the storm. He and Berger inhabited a world of predominantly professional, middle-class party leaders and possessed little patience for and less interest in the majority of their "untutored" comrades. As New York Socialist Bertha Howe wrote to a friend, Hillquit says 'Hillquitism' can only mean normal socialism, since anti-Hillquitism means something very like Anarchism, or words to that effect. , , , "

In a remarkable series of letters to Fred D. Warren, editor of *the Appeal to Reason*, Debs discussed the implications of the dispute over Barnes. "My mail," he wrote in June 1912, "is loaded with threats and protests about the Barnes affair." Some party locals resolved to stop paying dues to the national office; others refused to contribute to the coming campaign; "and numberless others declare that they will not vote the ticket unless Barnes is removed." Pointing to the "official machine" of the party bosses as the basic issue, Debs told Warren "that machine has got to be smashed if the party is not to be wrecked" and vowed to release a statement that would, by naming "those who are responsible," force the issue: "They think my lips are gagged on account of my position [as presidential candidate] but if I permitted the party to be utterly disrupted by my cowardly silence I would be a traitor indeed to the thousands of good comrades who trust me." Yet less than a week earlier, in a face-to-face meeting with both Berger and Hillquit, Debs contained his anger and issued no protest as the majority of national officials refused to remove Barnes from the campaign.

A month later, in another long letter to Warren, Debs recounted the insistent attacks by both Berger and Hillquit on the *Appeal* at the last convention. A week later, following an editorial in which Berger accused Debs of egotism, Debs exploded. "I will have something to say to that gentleman after the campaign is over," Debs wrote. "I have been silent under his insults a good many times for the sake of the party . . . but [I will] tell a few truths about Berger the Boss and

the bully that will put him right before the comrades." Although Debs had changed his mind and decided to wait until after the campaign, he proposed to Warren a united effort to "fight the machine that is now throttling the party." With his oratory combined with the *Appeal's* circulation, Debs argued that the rank and file would flock to "us in the fight against machine politicians, boss rule and [for] a truly democratic socialist party." "As Debs noted to another friend the same day, since the Berger-Hillquit alliance "could not defeat me ... it could and did," through the Barnes appointment, "get control of my campaign as it did four years ago, and it is not an accident that since the machine has been set upon destroying me, or at least my influence, my campaigns have been managed by those who did all in their power to defeat my nomination.

Debs's expressed willingness to conduct a major factional fight was a dramatic reversal for him-and an indication of the depth of his personal and political disgust over the direction of the party. But Warren saw the situation differently. On 8 August he wrote Debs that he would not put the *Appeal* at his disposal in the fight against Berger and Hillquit. In part the paper, already in deep financial difficulty," could lose needed subscribers if it engaged in such a fight. But Warren's reticence went deeper: "I am willing to follow you, dear Gene, to any lengths in fighting for a better system," but if Debs continued with his plans "then we will have to part company.... It is not necessary for me to tell you, Debs, that I love you as no other man on earth, " but "to see you dissipate your energy in the hopeless task of keeping the socialist party straight" pained Warren. "To me the socialist movement is everything and the socialist party but a means to the accomplishment of our ends." Reflecting the power and indigenous roots of the southwestern movement, Warren told Debs of a recent speech before a large Socialist audience, "all revolutionaries," where no one expressed to him after the talk "the slightest interest in the Barnes controversy or the other questions which agitate socialist party officialdom

Debs was stunned that his old friend refused to join him. Sadly, he acknowledged that Warren was right-Debs and the *Appeal* must part ways after the campaign-but Debs vowed to start his own paper to carry the fight. Debs agreed with Warren's analysis of the party and the Socialist movement but warned him not to "forget that the party is the necessary instrument and if it is corrupted the movement is betrayed and defeated. A series of letters followed, which altered neither man's position, and after the campaign the two had a pleasant time when Warren visited the recuperating Debs in Terre Haute. But the moment had passed.

Debs's handling of the Barnes controversy reveals the central weakness of his leadership. He knew this was no minor dispute, and he understood his critical role as a national leader of the opposition to dictatorial and anti-Socialist internal party policy. Yet, as he always had in the past, he found a reason to delay the fight: "This is a different statement," Debs noted when he announced he would not insist on Barnes's resignation, "than the one I had first intended." Now Debs simply supported a national referendum on the question, held that September during the campaign. Not surprisingly, Barnes was retained as manager, if only to insure campaign continuity."

The effects of a more vigorous struggle, had Debs decided to undertake it, are difficult to determine. While his fear of splitting the party was real, other options were available. Had

Theodore Debs agreed to run for Barnes's position in 1911, and had his brother publicly pressed a discussion of the relationship of Barnes's appointment in 1912, democratic socialism, and industrial unionism, the effect upon the party and the movement might have been immense. Taking control of the national party apparatus from those exclusively committed to a narrow, AFL-orientated policy, while striving to preserve a place for them within the party, could have greatly enhanced the effectiveness of the Socialist movement. Most important, such a course would have made possible friendlier relations with the IWW. This, in turn, might have checked the excesses of the IWW, especially concerning "direct action," and have prevented a final split between the IWW and the Socialist party. But the two brothers did not. As Eugene told Warren, "parting company with Theodore ... I cannot do." Neither would he publicly "face Berger." Inevitably, then, the movement splintered, and Debs found himself siding with his long-time party enemies. "

In January 1912 a strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, momentarily held the promise of binding together the various factions that were rending the Socialist party. Sparked by a group of Polish female textile workers who quit their looms when they received an unannounced wage cut, the strike broadened the following morning. On Friday, 12 January, a large contingent of Italian workers left their jobs at the American Woolen Company, damaged machinery on their way out, and went from mill to mill along the Merrimack River, urging workers in other factories to join their strike. By nightfall over 10,000 textile workers-of both sexes, all ages, and numerous nationalities-had quit work. Lawrence braced for its most dramatic labor conflict.

A spontaneous, angry response to the latest corporate insult, the Lawrence strike was nonetheless not without organization. The skilled workers had their union, the United Textile Workers of America, but it was generally ineffective and refused to organize the large numbers of unskilled immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. The Socialist party, too, had a small local in Lawrence, but its focus remained centered on the Lawrence Central Labor Union, and its organizers had made little inroads within the diverse immigrant community. Even before 1912, however, the local leaders of the IWW had organized these workers. Conscious of the way in which ethnicity divided working people, the Lawrence IWW recruited organizers from every major ethnic group, who brought its message of militant industrial unionism into church fairs, socials, and cultural activities. As most of these men and women could not vote-many knew very little English-this agitation spoke pragmatically and directly to their sharpest needs. These local organizers also did not dismiss the more conservative local unions. Louis Picavet, a French-Canadian textile worker and member of IWW Local 20, followed Debs's policy of working with the older unions even while building a strong IWW movement. Under such direction, the influence of the local, if not its formal membership, grew impressively, and in August 1911 its members conducted a series of slowdowns and wildcat strikes throughout the industry.

The 1912 strike lasted eight weeks. Despite the ethnic differences, the presence of the state militia, and a brutal police attack on striking families at the train depot on 24 February, the textile workers remained united. Contrary to their public image, in part the result of their own loose talk, national IWW leaders who came to Lawrence counseled against violence and supported specific

demands to be obtained through negotiation with the mill owners as the goal of the strike. As Haywood noted at the time, employers could not "weave cloth with the bayonets" of the soldiers. All the workers had to do was to withdraw their labor, keep their hands in their pockets, and wait out the bosses. By mid-March they won their four major demands, and the victory was hailed throughout the country.

Within the Socialist movement this triumph had a stunning effect. After years of growing tension and open, bitter hostility, it seemed as if the two major tendencies within the movement had finally discovered the path to cooperation. The IWW emphasis on "direct action"-which rejected both political work and often traditional organizing efforts-no longer appeared an issue, as both sides worked together effectively. Lawrence Socialists were active in the strike, and the national party gave over \$18,000 to the strike fund. Socialists throughout New England and from New York City and Philadelphia arrived to lead the exodus of strikers' children to other cities to avoid the hunger, lack of heat, and potential violence in strike-torn Lawrence. Even Berger, now a U.S. Congressman and for many years the bitterest opponent of the leftist Socialists, cooperated. He demanded and obtained a congressional investigation of the strike and, as the *International Socialist Review* stated proudly, "Congressman Berger worked hand in hand with Haywood and gave invaluable assistance in exposing . . . the hypocritical pretenses of the tariff-protected mill owners." The example of such an alliance between two enemies, and of the way in which the Socialist party fully supported the IWW-directed strike, led the *Review* to state that the Lawrence battle "is only a beginning. Its importance lies in the fact that winning tactics have been discovered and have already received the virtual endorsement of the Socialist party of America. Industrial Unionism is no longer an untried theory. Henceforth its progress will be swift and sure.

This enthusiasm marked the first days of the Socialist party's May convention as well. When the labor plank for the first time in party history called special attention to the needs of the unorganized, unskilled immigrant workers and urged all unions to abolish "artificial restrictions" on the membership, the left and the right in the Socialist movement appeared to clasp hands. Tom Hickey, the Texas-based organizer of tenant farmers, did just that as he hugged Job Harriman, a particularly bitter personal enemy for the past fifteen years. But it was Haywood who captured the importance of the moment. As both a national officer of the party and a leader of the IWW, Haywood symbolized the fundamental differences within the movement. But in 1912 he told the delegates with great enthusiasm that, with this new labor policy, "I can go to the working class, to the eight million women and children, to the four million black men, to the disfranchised white men ... and I can carry to them the message of Socialism." Haywood again endorsed political action but noted that, as many of his followers did not possess the vote, the party's approval of industrial unionism would allow Socialists to organize all workers "at the machine so that they could carry on production after capitalism has been overthrown. " With a great smile and his broad frame spread wide as if embracing the audience, Haywood stated that he could now "shake hands with every delegate in this convention and say that we are a united working class .....

But such was not the case. Those Socialists who favored industrial unionism and opposed the policy of unilateral support of the AFL misread the meaning of the new labor plank. The

recent experience at Lawrence notwithstanding, Berger, Hillquit, and their allies remained deeply antagonistic toward Haywood and the IWW. And Haywood himself fueled this anger. In the middle of the Lawrence strike, the *International Socialist Review* published a major speech that Haywood gave in New York in which he goaded his Socialist opponents, using all of the rhetorical weapons available, including personal insult. While formally approving political action, Haywood, in a pointed reference to Berger, stated that he would rather workers could elect a factory superintendent than a Congressman. Haywood dismissed Socialist lawyer Hillquit, claiming "for all the ages ago," lawyers "have been the mouthpieces of the capitalist class." The IWW leader then told his New York audience of the major lesson he took from his experience in the western mines: "I despise the law," he decried, "and am not a law-abiding citizen. And more than that, no Socialist can be a law-abiding citizen. When we come together ... to overthrow the capitalist system, we become conspirators then against the United States government." Finally, Haywood termed "coercion" as the best method of achieving the transition to industrial Socialism and specifically attacked all union workers who agree to a contract with capitalism: "The trade unionist who becomes party to a contract takes his organization out of the columns of fighting organizations," Haywood declaimed. "He removes it from the class struggle and he binds it up and makes it absolutely useless.""

Haywood's speech crystallized opposition to him and the IWW. Direct action, Haywood's talk made clear, would not only mean organizing at the point of production among unskilled immigrantworkers without the right to vote, but also it would demand, through its scorn of political action and praise of illegal activities, a frontal attack upon both the Socialist party and any labor union not affiliated with the IWW. Despite the recent cooperation at Lawrence, Haywood dismissed all who refused to follow his approach. He had come to believe too many of his own press clippings. The one-eyed hero of the wild west, more at home in the bordello than the drawing room, could not pass up the opportunity to taunt the effete Socialists" of the nation's major city.

But Debs also shared the blame for the final rupture. One effect of his inconsistent role as a party leader was to encourage Haywood in his irresponsible rhetoric. With the national party firmly controlled by bitter opponents, Haywood thought, wrongly but understandably, that the Socialist party would be of no help to him. Debs's failure to act had another consequence as well. Since Debs relinquished any attempt to influence the IWW, his inaction left him no choice but to side with Berger and Hillquit in their successful effort to expel Haywood and his supporters from the party.

Debs's disagreements with Haywood were severe and nearly total. In the same issue of the *Review* that carried Haywood's speech, Debs insisted on the necessity of developing tactics "adapted to the American people and to American conditions." Debs agreed that as capitalist laws were prejudicial to working people they should have little reverence for them, but he would not "make an individual lawbreaker of myself." Debs understood in Haywood's platform plastique-that stressed sabotage and "direct action" by workers at the point of production-"the tactics of anarchist individuals and not of Socialist collectivists." Terming these measures

"reactionary, not revolutionary," Debs concluded they played directly "into the hands of the enemy": secrecy and stealth "cannot make for solidarity," would open the movement to *agentsprovocateurs*, would totally sunder the Socialist movement, and leave those left "responsible for the deed of every spy or rnadman."

Most important, Debs insisted that Haywood's conception of workers was false. American workers "are law-abiding," Debs stated, "and no amount of sneering or derision will alter that fact. Direct action will never appeal to any considerable number of them while they have the ballot and the right of industrial and political organization." Had the topic not been so painful, Debs might have also asked Haywood to explain why the rank and file of the Western Federation of Miners, the very mythic origins of Haywood's presentation of self, had recently voted to re-affiliate with the AFL.

Toward the conclusion of his long article, Debs reaffirmed the intimate connection between industrial unionism and Socialism, proclaimed his "faith in proletarian political power and in the efficacy of political propaganda as an educational force in the Socialist movement," and made a fateful decision. Looking ahead to the May party convention, Debs hoped that that meeting would "place itself squarely on record . . . against sabotage and every other form of violence and destructiveness suggested by what is known as 'direct action.'" This statement remained Debs's sole pre-convention comment on the most explosive issue that gathering faced. "

At the convention Haywood's joy at the prospect of what he termed "a united working class" quickly turned to bitterness. On the day following the adoption of the labor plank, the delegates took up a proposed constitutional amendment that would expel "any member of the party who opposes political action or advocates sabotage or other methods of violence as a weapon of the working class." The final struggle had begun. E. H. Merrick of Pennsylvania immediately moved to strike the motion and noted that continued discussion of it would destroy the unity and harmony that prevailed but a day before. Marguerite Prevey of Ohio also opposed it, as did Tom Hickey. But they were in the minority. When Berger took the floor and equated the IWW by name with the anarchism of Johann Most, he could almost smell the victory over the "impossibilists" that he had long worked for. Merrick's motion was defeated, 191-90, and the battle was over. For the first time since 1901 the party was unable to contain its divergent elements. It would not, however, be the last time basic issues were resolved in that fashion.

Following the convention, Debs expressed second thoughts concerning the new section of the party constitution. Writing in the *Review* in July, Debs noted that he would have rather reduced "to the minimum the offenses punishable by expulsion from the party" and, while opposed "to anarchist tactics," he instead "would have the party so declare itself on moral ground." In a private letter a month later to Berger, Debs disagreed with the Milwaukee leader's assessment of the "immediate danger from the alleged anarchist element" but favored after the election "a thorough housecleaning ... and the expulsion from the party of any who prefer violence to the ballot." If Debs was beset by contradictions, others were far clearer. Adolph Germer, an official in both the party and the UMWA, stressed that the primary task facing the party was "to set Haywood out- side . . . so that we would not be required to bear the

responsibility of his idiotic tactics." Carl Thompson, replying to Helen Keller's appeal in support of Haywood, asked whether she would choose "the Paris Commune or Schenectady" as the model for the Socialist commonwealth. Even British trade unionist Keir Hardie chimed in, calling Haywood a "bounder" and expressing thanks that "all of his type on this side remain outside the Party.

Not surprisingly, the national referendum sponsored by the New York State Socialist party to recall Haywood from the National Executive Committee for his speech in New York won handily. Haywood received less than one-third of the votes cast and carried c)nly ten state organizations, all but Tennessee and West Virginia (which he won by three votes) in the far West or Southwest. Nor did the dispute stop there. Between 1912 and 1913 the party lost almost 23,000 members, the great majority as a result of this fight. <sup>1411</sup> Although many Haywood supporters were now outside the party, bitter antagonism remained. In March 1913 Debs referred to the IWW as "an anarchist organization in all except in name" and now firmly supported the party's "decided stand" against the group and its leader: " I think you know there is a very wide difference between the kind of political action Haywood advocates and the kind I advocate, even if we do happen to use identical words." A year later, Debs was venomous in his opposition. At Lawrence, Akron, and elsewhere, he argued, a simplistic emphasis on direct action coupled with bombastic rhetoric, careless organizing, and a desire to grandstand for the assembled reporters had resulted in devastating defeats for working people. These workers "were most basely betrayed, sold out and treacherously delivered to their enemies by the IWW Judases." Debs distinguished between industrial unionism and the sabotage and direct action the IWW encouraged and warned the labor movement to deal sharply with "this base and treacherous gang . . . when it projects itself into a local disturbance with professions of loyalty to labor upon its lying lips and treason to labor in its venal heart."

Despite an isolated attempt to heal the wounds incurred in this fight, Debs remained angry. The collapse of the IWW in Lawrence in 1913, and with it the rollback of the gains the strikers had won, fueled his anger. Debs blamed Haywood and other IWW leaders for eliciting and then misusing the deep commitment, sacrifices, and energies of these workers. But it was Debs's experience in the 1912-13 West Virginia miners' strike that confirmed all of his worst fears concerning the nature of IWW organizing drives. The local miners, with the belated support of their state and national officials, struck in May 1912 when the coal operators in Kanawha County refused to sign a contract. The operators raised a private army to suppress the miners and the sympathetic governor, William E. Glasscock, declared martial law and sent in the state militia that September. As the strikers armed to defend themselves, the appeal of the IWW grew, especially as the Socialist party offered little initial aid. Arrested under the provisions of the martial law in February 1913, Mother Jones wrote a friend of her many "brave boys" currently in jail and bitterly protested the attitude of the Socialist party: "if Victor Berger or Hilford [Hillquit] or any of those or of their Jesus's was in here what a howl would go up.... The dear well fed socialists . . . can tell us what they are doing in the Balkan war or something that kind," but they overlook the horrors at home."

At first, Debs echoed Mother Jones's feelings. Following his appointment to a special party committee (along with Germer and Berger) to investigate the strike in May 1913, Debs wrote Germer that the party's delay was unconscionable: "Had it been Berger and Spargo in the bullpen instead of Mother Jones and John Brown," the national office "would not have waited." When Debs arrived in West Virginia, however, the situation was even more complicated than he had thought. A newly elected governor, Henry Hatfield, had rescinded the martial law edict and promised the Socialist committee that UMWA and Socialist organizers would no longer be harassed by state troops. Under orders from the national party to attempt to repair relations with the UMWA, Debs was horrified at the antagonism that existed between the two groups. Socialists in the minefields scorned the UMWA and advocated immediate insurgency by armed groups of miners; many openly endorsed the IWW. As one state Socialist leader told a group of Holly Grove miners in 1912, he had "become in recent years almost what they call 'Haywoodite.' Some of my friends in the state say I must be removed from office because I believe in direct action." "Gentlemen," Harold Houston retorted, "I believe in action that gets results, and as Bill Haywood says, 'The more direct, the better.' " That this would stand in West Virginia and the nation as the primary contribution of the Socialist movement to the defense of one of the few unionized coal fields in the whole state incensed Debs. That these Socialists also undermined one of the few progressive industrial unions in the nation added to his fury.

When the committee's report appeared, a storm of protest arose from the West Virginia militants. They accused Debs especially of selling out their cause, of heeding more the governor's promises than his comrades' experience, and of ignoring their needs in order to curry favor with "corrupt " national UMWA officials. As descriptions of Debs's motivation or even of the unintended results of his report, these accusations are false. But for Debs they did mark the distance between his advocacy of industrial unionism and that of Haywood and those West Virginia Socialists who endorsed him. The attacks on the UMWA, the praise of direct action, and the loose talk of social revolution against the armed power of the state were at best infantile, destructive concepts to Debs. It was not that one should never attack an established union-Debs's record on that, even in relation to the UMWA, was quite clear. Rather, as he wrote to John Brown, it was "entirely a matter of tactics.... The way to keep reactionary trade union officials where they are is to attack them as Merrick has been doing and their followers adhere to them all the more closely." Directly blaming the Socialists for the angry responses from the UMWA leaders and even from the rank and file, Debs asked Brown "how could the U.M.W. men help but hate socialists if Merrick is a fair representative of the feeling of socialists toward their union? ... The tactics they are pursuing in their mad denunciation of everything U.M.W., good, bad, and indifferent, are utterly suicidal and destructive all around."

Arguing that many West Virginia Socialists were just enough for political action to cloak their anarchy," Debs feared that "the spirit of the Chicago I.W.W.ism" would destroy all organizations it touched, including the UMWA. "From my crown to my footsoles I am an industrial unionist," Debs reminded Brown, but "I am not an industrial anarchist." To attack the UMWA as Socialists did in West Virginia was "a suicidal, asinine and destructive act,"

performed "to the delight of the mine owners." Concluding his long letter, Debs etched the issue sharply: "You will find that sooner or later you will have to take your stand wholly with the Chicago I.W.W.ites or against them," for they will leave you with little choice.

Following the expulsion of the IWW, the best opportunity in Debs's career to unify the Socialist movement and to re-orient the labor movement along industrial lines passed. Although Debs would continue to urge the unification of the Western Federation of Miners and the UMWA, increasingly there was less and less response from either Socialists or miners." It would not be until a generation later, during the Great Depression, that a powerful industrial organization emerged.

The concerted efforts of employers nationwide helped to prevent this unity. From Terre Haute to Telluride and beyond, Citizens Protective Associations formed with the express intent of eliminating any union activity, even of the most moderate type. The judiciary, as in the late nineteenth century, was a most helpful ally. Injunctions appeared on corporate demand to break strikes and jail strikers, and the AFL reeled under the impact of two U.S. Supreme Court decisions that threatened its very existence." As was so evident during the Pullman strike in 1894, corporate managers had easy access to state and federal troops and in the aftermath of Lawrence in 1912, Leadville and Butte in 1914, and numerous other strikes, it was working people who gathered at the grave, buried their dead, and sifted the ashes of their torched union halls and offices.

But Socialists also bore responsibility for this disunity. Berger and Hillquit consistently clung to their narrow approach to labor, even in the face of opposition from their own supporters. In Milwaukee, for example, delegates and members of the unions affiliated with Berger's own Federated Trades Council refused in 1905 to support the position of the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor, which condemned the newly founded IWW. Sixty percent of the delegates to the council looked forward to the IWW's development, and during the debate they argued that many of their members did as well. But it was Berger and the leaders of the council, using the enormous local economic and political power they possessed, who forced these skilled workers to rescind their vote and support the resolution." Trailing after a bankrupt policy and following it with such severe blinders that they could not perceive important changes in the culture and attitudes of working people, Berger, Hillquit and their allies stringently limited Socialist options.

Debs's motivation differed from Berger's, but he, too, contributed to this condition. The power and force of his analysis after 1905 had its deepest roots in the call to fraternity among working people that in 1890 marked the turning point in his relations with the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen. Debs's fervent articulation of the mutual necessity of internal party democracy, unified industrial organization, and aggressive political agitation indicated the rich potential of a Socialist movement sensitive to American conditions. As Debs argued in 1911, "The union and the party must be managed and directed" by workers themselves-"*not from the top down, but from the bottom up.*" While not even Debs expected his speeches to effect an immediate change, he did intend them to mark the path to be taken and to redirect his party's efforts toward that goal. This he failed to accomplish, in large part due to his own deficiencies as

a national leader.

It would be tempting to suggest that Debs's commitment to a democratic process inhibited him from using his position of prominence to influence more directly the resolution of these issues. But this was not the case. As his correspondence suggests, he both understood the basic differences within the party and the need to air them publicly. This, despite repeated private declarations to the contrary, he refused to do. Yet it is these private declarations-especially to Warren and Thompson during 1910, 1911, and 1912-that contain the personal sources of Debs's persistent inability to confront such opponents as Berger. The tone of the letters over the years follows a consistent cyclical pattern: direct attacks on Berger, his dictatorial methods, and Socialist theory lead to a firm conviction to "face Berger" and confront him within the party. Invariably, some weeks or months later Debs backs off, claiming one or another party responsibility prevents him, at the moment, from entering the fray. Predictably, however, he points to another time in the near future when the circumstances will be right and the enemy engaged. But that time never comes as this cycle repeats itself. Beneath this maneuvering is Debs's anger at Berger. In part it is overtly political. In large part it is also personal and is at times indistinguishable from fear.

Throughout these letters Debs repeatedly-refers back to his early Socialist years when Berger demanded Debs accept his tutelage. From Woodstock in 1895 through the contradictory directions Debs took under Berger's prodding during the negotiations that led to Socialist unity, Debs followed Berger while he seethed internally. Finally, as he told both Warren and Thompson, he privately confronted Berger and claimed his own manhood. Not coincidentally, that confrontation marked the decline of their political relationship. As Debs aligned himself with labor movement militants, he created his own synthesis of Socialist theory and American values that differed in substance from Berger's.

Yet Berger retained a remarkable hold on Debs. More than a decade later, Debs recounted his "moment of manliness" vis-a-vis Berger with the immediacy of a far more recent event. While his continued anger had political roots, his letters also reveal that the basis of that anger remained a fear of Berger. As he had from their first association, Debs felt inadequate before Berger's formidable personality and seeming theoretical brilliance. Never one who relished conflict in personal terms, Debs feared that in a battle with Berger he would appear the fool. Worse yet, in such a battle, resolved perhaps through a national referendum, Debs might lose-the "machine" Debs decried was no mere figment of his imagination-and this possibility also checked Debs. As he had since his years with the Firemen, Debs avoided conflicts that would test his power with the rank and file. His own dependency on the recognition of his honored and special position cautioned him, if unconsciously, in such contexts.

Debs was more comfortable in the role of a national figure of importance, and his lack of leadership in serious disputes had important effects. By not helping to create more favorable relations between the party and the IWW, Debs inadvertently encouraged Haywood and his supporters to further excesses. The issue of direct action still separated Debs from the IWW, but the persistent hostility of Socialist leaders to any policy that deviated from their official

commitment to the AFL created an insurmountable barrier to a more fruitful discussion. More poignantly, this lack of leadership left Debs personally and politically in the embrace of Berger. "Furthermore," Debs wrote his old nemesis in August 1912 in reference to the Barnes affair, "I favor putting an end to Hillquitism, which has become synonymous with bossism. In addition to his desire to be a dictator extraordinary, Hillquit ... in many other ways has conclusively proved himself to be the proverbial bull in the china shop. When the term of the New York attorney, as a member of the Executive Committee, expires, I strongly favor his retirement to the ranks where he can do fully as much good and infinitely less harm than in his present capacity. " This latest sally of Debs's could only have caused Berger to chortle.

It was not as if Debs had no other options, but this attempt to enlist one longtime enemy to battle another, all the while suppressing his awareness of the close personal and political relationship between his two antagonists, seems pathetic. Debs might have insisted that the very diversity of the Socialist movement demanded, given a firm commitment to internal democracy, a multiplicity of tactical approaches. He might have followed his own advice and demanded room within the party to "bore from within and without" the established trade unions. This would have given the industrial unionists the opening they required while acknowledging the importance of Berger's own organizing efforts. Further, in any open, principled fight over internal party democracy, even Berger and Hillquit would have been hard pressed to defend their autocratic role. Moreover, what options did Berger and Hillquit have? Had Debs called Berger's bluff to bolt the party, he might have discovered just how shallow a bluff it was. Berger needed the national movement for his own sense of importance and as the arena to display his theoretical virtuosity. More important, as Berger had understood since 1896, the Milwaukee leader needed Debs—as did Hillquit and every other national leader. Debs was, in the public image, *the* national Socialist movement. An American-born radical with powerful appeal to Americans of different class and ethnic backgrounds, Debs could bridge regional differences and represent a unified and diversified Socialist movement.

But Debs refused. Fear of exposing his own prestige to possible criticism and woefully insecure before the vaunted intellectual pretensions of other party leaders, Debs desisted. It was with an almost audible sigh of relief that he took to the road to start the 1912 campaign and to assume the most comfortable mantle as the embodiment of the Socialist spirit. Above the fray, checkmated by his desire to remain there, Debs reveled in the tremendous reception he received on the campaign trail and in the voting booths that December.