

---

# Speech of Acceptance of the Presidential Nomination of the Socialist Party: Chicago — May 6, 1904.

by Eugene V. Debs

Published in Wm. Mailly (ed.), *National Convention of the Socialist Party held at Chicago, Illinois, May 1 to 6, 1904: Stenographic Report*. (Chicago: National Committee of the Socialist Party, [1904]), pp. 254-256.

\* \* \*

*THE CHAIRMAN [Seymour Stedman]:* I now understand that Delegate [George] Herron has a question of personal privilege. I think it is that we suspend the rules and ask the committee to present the candidate for President to the convention.

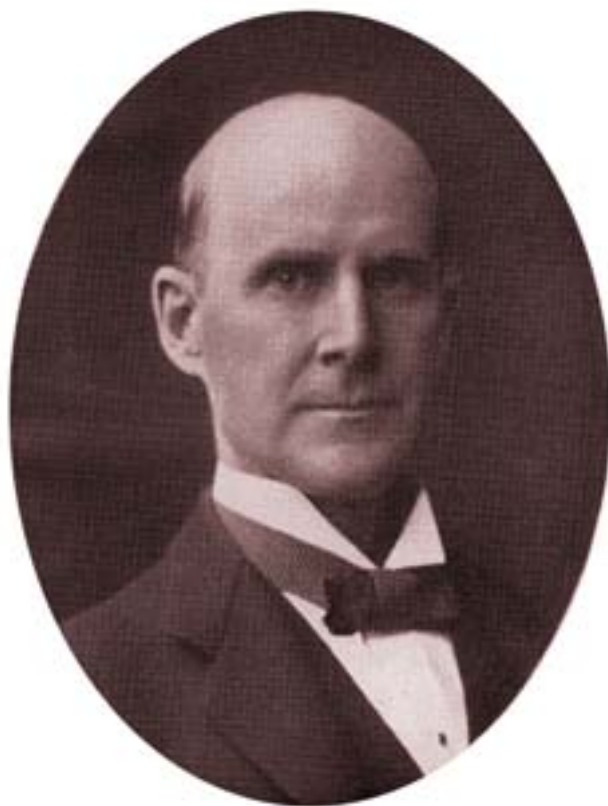
*DEL HERRON:* Yes.

*Comrade Debs, the nominee for President, was then escorted to the platform by the Committee of Notification.*

*THE CHAIRMAN [Stedman]:* Comrades, it is my pleasure to present to you the Ferdinand Lassalle of the 20th Century.

*Comrade Debs was greeted with prolonged applause, and after it had subsided sufficiently for him to be heard he addressed the convention as follows:*

*DEBS:* In the councils of the Socialist Party the collective will is supreme. (*Applause.*) Personally I could have wished to remain in the ranks, to make my record, humble though it might be, fighting unnamed and unhonored side by side with my comrades. I accept your nomination, not because of any honor it confers — for in the Socialist movement no comrade can be honored ex-



cept as he honors himself by his fidelity to the movement— (*Applause.*) I accept your nomination because of the confidence it implies, because of the duty it imposes. I cannot but wish that I may in a reasonable measure meet your expectations; that I may prove myself fit and worthy to bear aloft in the coming contest the banner of the working class; (*applause*) that by my utterances and by my acts, not as an individual, but as your representative, I may prove myself worthy to bear

the standard of the only party that proposes to emancipate my class from the thralldom of the ages. (*Applause.*)

It is my honor to stand in the presence of a historic convention, and I would that Karl Marx might be here today. (*Applause.*) I would that Lassalle and Engels, the men who long before the movement had its present standing wrought and sacrificed themselves to make it possible for me to stand in this magnificent presence. I wish it were possible for them to share in the glories of this occasion. We are on the eve of battle today. We are ready for the contest. (*Applause.*) We are eager for the fray. (*Applause.*) We depart from here with the endorsement of a convention that shall challenge the approval of the working class of the world. (*Applause.*) Hitherto we have repeated, we have reiterated, we have followed. For the first time in the history of the American movement we have realized the American expression of that movement. There is not a line, not a word in that platform which is not revolutionary, which is not clear, which does not state precisely and properly the position of the American movement. We leave this convention, standing on this platform, to throw down the gauntlet to the capitalist enemy, (*applause*) to challenge the capitalist oppressor who stands for the perpetuation of the system that keeps in chains the workers in whose name we meet today. (*Applause.*)

There is a Republican Party — the dominant capitalist party of this time; the party that has its representative in the White House; the party that rules in both branches of Congress; the party that controls the Supreme Court; the party that commands the press; the party that gives inspiration to the subsidized pulpit; the party that guides every force of government; the party that is in absolute power in every department of our public affairs. And as a necessary result we find that corruption is rampant; that the Congress of the United States dare not respond to the demands of the people to uncover the sources from which cor-

ruption flows like lava streams down mountain sides; that they adjourned long before the regular hour in order they might postpone the inevitable. (*Applause.*)

There is a Democratic Party (*A voice: "Where?"*); a party that has not stock enough left to proclaim its own bankruptcy; (*laughter and applause*) an expiring party that totters upon the crumbling foundations of a dying class; a party that is torn by dissension; a party that cannot unite; a party that is looking backward and hoping for the resurrection of the men who gave it inspiration a century ago; a party that is appealing to the cemeteries of the past; (*applause*) a party that is trying to vitalize itself by its ghosts, by its corpses, by those who cannot be heard in their own defense. (*Applause.*) Thomas Jefferson would scorn to enter a modern Democratic convention. He would have as little business there as Abraham Lincoln would have in a latter-day Republican convention. (*Applause.*) If they were living today they would be delegates to this convention. (*Tremendous applause.*)

The Socialist Party meets these two capitalist parties face to face, without apology, scorning to compromise; it throws down the gage of battle and declares that there is but one solution of what is called the labor question, and that is by the complete overthrow of the capitalist system. (*Applause.*)

You have honored me, in the magnitude of the task you have imposed upon me, far beyond the power of my weak words to express. I can simply say that obedient to your call, I respond. (*Applause.*) Responsive to your command I am here, to serve you to the limit of my capacity. My controlling ambition shall be to bear the standard aloft where the battle waxes thickest. (*Applause.*) I shall take advantage of every opportunity to proclaim the emancipating mission of the Socialist movement. I shall be heard in the coming campaign (*applause*) as often, as decidedly, as emphatically, as revolutionarily, (*applause*) and as uncompromisingly (*applause*) as my ability, my strength, and

my fealty to the party will allow.

I invoke no aid but that which springs from the misery of my class (*applause*) — no power that does not spring spontaneous from the oppression and exploitation of the workers of the world.

Above all things I realize that for the first time in the history of the ages there is a working class movement (*"Hear, hear" and applause*) — perfectly free from the patronizing cant of those who riot in the misery of the class who make up that movement.

On this occasion, above all others, my comrades, we are appealing to ourselves, we are bestirring ourselves, we are arousing the working class, the class that through all the ages has been oppressed, crushed, robbed, and debased, for the one reason that it has lacked the consciousness of its overmastering power that shall finally give it supreme control and make it the sovereign ruler of the world. (*Applause.*) This class is just beginning to awaken from the torpor of the centuries. (*Applause.*) The most hopeful sign of the time is that from the dull, dim eye of the proletaire there shoots forth the first gleam of intelligence, the first signal that he is waking up, and that he is becoming conscious of his power; and when through the vitalizing influence of the Socialist movement he shall become completely conscious of that power, he will overthrow the capitalist system and bring emancipation to his class and to all humanity. (*Great applause.*)

To consecrate myself to my part in this great work is my supreme ambition. (*Applause.*) I can only hope to do that part which is expected of me so well that my comrades, when the final verdict is rendered, will say, "He is not remembered be-

cause he was a candidate for President; he did not aspire to hold office; he did not try to associate his name with the passing glories, but he did prove himself a worthy member of the Socialist Party; (*applause*) he proved his right to a place in the International Socialist movement. (*Applause.*) If when the service to which you have called me shall have been completed this can be said of me, my acceptance of your nomination will have been far better made than I could hope to frame it in weak words, and so I close, with the wish and the hope and the ambition that when the fight has been fought, when the task you have imposed upon me has been performed, so far as it lies in the power of an individual to perform that task, my acceptance of the honor you have conferred upon me will have been worthily made, and that your judgment may then be vindicated by the membership of the party throughout the country.

From the depths of my heart I thank you. I thank you and each of you, and through you those you represent. I thank you not from my lips merely. I thank you from the depths of a heart that is responsive to your consideration. We shall meet again. We shall meet often. And when we meet finally we shall meet as a victorious host to ratify the triumph of the Socialist Republic. (*Great and prolonged applause.*)

*Prolonged cheers and applause followed the address of Comrade Debs, terminating with three rousing cheers and a tiger. When a semblance of order was finally restored the Chair said:*

\* \* \*

***Edited by Tim Davenport.***

***Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2006. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.***