

Speech of Acceptance of Nomination
for President of the United States ¹
(March 9, 1900)

Mr. Chairman and Comrades:—

A few moments ago your committee advised me of the great honor conferred upon me by this convention in making me one of the standard-bearers of the party in the great campaign upon which we are now entering. Never in all of my life was I so profoundly impressed with the conviction that there is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will. Yesterday [March 8] I left this hall under the solemn belief that I could not, under any possible circumstances, accept the nomination tendered me with such enthusiastic unanimity. But with your united voices ringing in my ears, and your impassioned appeals burning and glowing in my breast, and your eyes searching the very depths of my soul, I was soon brought to realize that in your voice in behalf of socialism there was the supreme command of duty — that I could not disregard it and decline the nomination without proving myself wholly unworthy of the confidence which inspired it. I felt that I could not decline the nomination, tendered me under such circumstances, without being guilty of treason to the cause we all love so well; and so I come to you this afternoon, obedient to the call voice by your committee, to say that I accept your nomination, and with it all of the responsibilities that the great trust imposes; and with my heart trembling upon my lips, I thank the comrades, one and all, for the great honor you have conferred upon me.

I also thank you for having nominated as my associate and colleague so true a socialist, so manly a man, as Comrade Job Harriman, and let me assure you that we will stand together, side by side, in the true spirit of socialism, and joining hands, will bear aloft the conquering banner of the Social Democratic Party of America.

The ordeal through which we passed yesterday was indeed painful and trying to us, but perhaps it was necessary to completely consecrate us to our great task.² Standing in your presence this afternoon the standard-bearer of a united socialist party, so long a cherished hope and now practically a realized fact, all the skies of the future are bright, and I do not hesitate to believe that in the great campaign upon which we are now

entering that we are to achieve results that will mark the real beginning of socialism in America, as also the real end of capitalism. The line is to be sharply drawn. The issue is to be clearly understood. We are to move forward side by side, a united party, a solid indivisible phalanx. We are to move forward with steady step, our eyes on the goal. No backward step is taken. We are not to be deflected from our course the breadth of a hair; and in the first battle, whatever the outcome, a great victory will have to be achieved to be followed by others until at last socialism is triumphant in the United States, capitalism falls never to rise again, and the working class, bruised, degraded, and plundered through all the centuries of the past, for the first time in the history of all the ages will stand forth redeemed and disenthralled, the coronated sovereigns of the world.

I congratulate my comrades, one and all, upon the very happy outcome of this historic convention. I would be less than just to myself if I failed to make some proper acknowledgement of the invaluable services rendered us by the committee representing the Socialist Labor Party.³ During the trying hours of yesterday I was more than impressed with their noble bearing, with their manly conduct. They appeared before us in the spirit of socialism. Fortunately for you and me, and for the party, they were met with the same spirit; and now, instead of being in hostile camps, with divided forces, we stand before the world in a united body that is to move forward until it wrests this government from the grasp of capitalism and restores it to the people at large. Comrades, we invoke your united aid and cooperation. We should be remiss in no single obligation that has been imposed upon us. We shall to the extent of our ability serve you and those you represent in this great cause. There is no mistake as to the ultimate outcome. Speaking for myself, I am not only hopeful, I am confident. The new crusade is now thoroughly organized, and when the message goes forth it will send joy and hope and enthusiasm to the heart of every socialist in the land.

Allow me to say, in closing, that I am deeply sensible of the great honor that you have conferred upon me—that when I attempt to express the gratitude with which my heart is overflowing, all language is meaningless. I am proud to be a socialist. I believe with all my heart in the conquering and emancipating power of socialism. With me it is something more than a conviction. It throbs in my heart; it surges in my soul; it is my very life. Without it, every star that blazes in the horizon would go out forever. Without it this earth were simply a jungle and we wild beasts

devouring each other. With it, this earth becomes transformed into a veritable paradise, and we are almost gods. Again and again, I thank you. All hail to the united socialists of America!

Short excerpt first published as “Eugene V. Debs Accepts” in *Indianapolis Journal*, vol. 50, no. 69 (March 10, 1900), pg. 8. Full version published as “Debs’ Speech of Acceptance” in *Social Democratic Herald*, vol. 2, no. 40, whole no. 90 (March 24, 1900), pg. 1.

¹ This speech was delivered shortly after noon at Reichwein’s Hall in Indianapolis, site of the SDP convention.

² Thursday, March 8, the third day of the convention, had been one of acrimony. A decision was made to name a nine member committee to negotiate unity with the Socialist Labor Party dissidents who had met in convention in January and named the ticket of Job Harriman for President and Max S. Hayes for Vice President. Things had spiraled downhill in the afternoon, however, when Gene Debs declined the convention’s nomination, citing reasons of health. In a scramble to fill the gap, SDP National Secretary Theodore Debs had been nominated, but he also was forced to decline, this time for reasons of age. Job Harriman was then nominated, but he also declined, and a discussion about whether to endorse the SLP ticket of Harriman and Hayes had degenerated into acrimonious debate that lasted until after dark. Only after multiple visits to his room at the Occidental Hotel was Gene Debs finally persuaded to accept the nomination of his party.

³ Several representatives of the Socialist Labor Party’s nine member unity committee elected at Rochester were in attendance, including Morris Hillquit, Job Harriman, and Max Hayes.