

The Issue:
Speech at Courthouse Park, Girard, Kansas
(May 16, 1908)

Ladies and Gentlemen:—

When I made some inquiry a few moments ago as to the cause for this assembling I was told that it was the beginning of another street fair. I am quite surprised, and agreeably so, to find myself the central attraction. Allow me in the very beginning to express my heartiest appreciation of the more than kind and generous words which have been spoken here for me this afternoon. There are times when words — mere words — no matter how fitly chosen or tenderly expressed are almost meaningless. As the rosebud, under the influence of sunshine and shower opens, so does my heart receive your benedictions this afternoon.

I am a new resident of Girard; have been here but a comparatively short time, and yet I feel myself as completely at home among you, most of whom disagree with me upon very vital questions, as I do in the town in which I was born and reared and have lived all the days of my life. Since the day I first came here I have been treated with uniform kindness. I could not have been treated more hospitably anywhere. I have met practically all of your people and all of them have taken me by the hand and treated me as cordially as if I had been neighbor and friend with them, and to say that I appreciate this is to express myself in hackneyed and very unsatisfactory manner.

As to the Presidency

The honor to which reference has been made has come to me through no fault of my own.¹ It has been said that some men are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.² It is even so with what are called honors. Some men have honors thrust upon them. I find myself in that class. I did what little I could to prevent myself from being nominated by the convention now in session at Chicago, but the nomination sought me out, and in spite of myself I stand in your presence this afternoon the nominee of the Socialist Party for the presidency of the United States. Long, long ago I made up my mind never again to be a

candidate for any political office within the gift of the people.³ I was constrained to violate that vow because when I joined the Socialist Party I was taught that the desire of the individual was subordinate to the party will, and that when the party commanded it was my duty to obey.

There was a time in my life when I had the vanities of youth, when I sought that bubble called fame. I have outlived it. I have reached that point when I am capable of placing an estimate upon my own relative insignificance. I have come to realize that there is no honor in any real sense of that term to any man unless he is capable of freely consecrating himself to the service of his fellow men. To the extent that I am able to help those who are unable to help themselves, to that extent and to that extent alone, do I honor myself and the party to which I belong. So far as the presidency of the United States is concerned, I would spurn it were it not that it conferred the power to serve the working class; and he who enters that office with any other conception prostitutes and does not honor that office.

The Bounty of Nature

Now, my friends, I am opposed to the system of society in which we live today, not because I lack the natural equipment to do for myself, but because I am not satisfied to make myself comfortable knowing that there are thousands upon thousands of my fellow men who suffer for the barest necessities of life. We were taught under the old ethic that man's business upon earth was to look out for himself. That was the ethic of the jungle, the ethic of the wild beast. Take care of yourself, no matter what may become of your fellow man. Thousands of years ago the question was asked: "Am I my brother's keeper?"⁴ That question has never yet been answered in a way that is satisfactory to civilized society. Yes, I am my brother's keeper. I am under a moral obligation to him that is inspired, not by any maudlin sentimentality, but by the higher duty I owe to myself. What would you think of me if I were capable of seating myself at a table and gorging myself with food and saw about me the children of my fellow-beings starving to death?

Allow me to say to you, my fellow men, that Nature has spread a great table bounteously for all of the children of men. There is room for all, and there is a plate and a place and food for all, and any system of society that denies a single one the right and the opportunity to freely help himself to Nature's bounties is an unjust and iniquitous system that ought to be

abolished in the interest of a higher humanity and a civilization worthy of the name. And here let me observe, my fellow men, that while the general impression is that human society is stationary — a finality as it were — it is not so for a single instant. Underlying society there are great material forces that are in operation all of the circling hours of the day and night, and at certain points in the social development these forces outgrow the forms that hold them, and these forms spring apart and then a new social system comes into existence and a new era dawns for the human race.

The great majority of mankind have always been in darkness. The overwhelming majority of the children of men have always been their own worst enemies. In every age of this world's history the kings and emperors and tsars and the potentates, in alliance with the priests, have sought by all the means at their command to keep the people in darkness, that they might perpetuate the power in which they riot and revel in luxury while the great mass are in a state of slavery and degeneration, and he who has spoken out courageously against the existing order, he who has dared to voice the protest of the oppressed and downtrodden, has had to pay the penalty, all the way from Jesus Christ of Galilee to Fred Warren of Girard.

Coronations and Crucifixions

Do you know, my friends, it is so easy to agree with the ignorant majority. It is so easy to make the people applaud an empty platitude. It takes some courage to face that beast called the Majority, and tell him the truth to his teeth! Some men do so and accept the consequences of their acts as becomes men, and they live in history — every one of them. I have said so often, and I wish to repeat it on this occasion, that mankind have always crowned their oppressors, and they have as uniformly crucified their saviors, and this has been true all along the highway of the centuries. It is true today. It will not always be so. When the great majority have become enlightened; when the great mass know the truth, they will treat an honest man decently while he lives and not crucify him, and then a thousand years afterward rear a monument above the dust of the hero they put to death.

I am in revolt against capitalism (and that doesn't mean to say, my friends, that I am hating you — not in the slightest). I am opposed to capitalism because I love my fellow men, and if I am opposing you I am opposing you for what I believe to be your good, and though you spat upon me with contempt I would still oppose you to the extent of my power.

New System Needed

I don't hate the workingman because he has turned against me. I know the poor fellow is too ignorant to understand his self-interest, and I know that as a rule the workingman is the friend of his enemy, and the enemy of his friend. He votes for men who represent a system in which labor is simply merchandise; in which the man who works the hardest and the longest has the least to show for it. If there is a man on earth who is entitled to all the comforts and luxuries of this life in abundance it is the man whose labor produces them. If he is not, who is? Does he get them in the present system?

And, mark you, I am not speaking in a partisan sense this afternoon. I appreciate the fact that you have come here as Republicans and Democrats as well as Socialists to do me a personal honor, and I would be ungrateful, indeed, if I took advantage of such an occasion to speak to you in an offensive and partisan sense. I wish to say in the broadest possible way that I am opposing the system under which we live today because I believe it is subversive of the best interests of the people. I am not satisfied with things as they are, and I know that no matter what administration is in power, even were it a Socialists administration, I know that there will be no material change in the condition of the people until we have a new social system based upon the mutual economic interest of the people. Not until you and I and all of us collectively own those things that we collectively need and use.

That is a basic economic proposition. As long as a relatively few men own the railroads, the telegraph, the telephone; own the oil fields and the gas fields and the steel mills and the sugar refineries and the leather tanneries — own, in short, the sources and means of life — they will corrupt our politics, they will enslave the working class, they will impoverish and debase society, they will do all things that are needful to perpetuate their power as the economic masters and the political rulers of the people. Not until these great agencies are owned and operated by the people can the people hope for any material improvement in their social condition. Is the condition fair today, and satisfactory to the thinking man?

The Unemployed

According to the most reliable reports at our command, there are at least 4 million workingmen vainly searching for employment. Have you ever found yourself in that unspeakably sad predicament? Have you ever had to go up the street, begging for work, in a great city thronged with surging humanity — and, by the way, my friends, people are never quite so strange to each other as when they are forced into artificial, crowded, and stifled relationship.

I would rather be friendless out on the American desert than to be friendless in New York or Chicago. Have you ever walked up one side of the street and come back on the other side, while your wife, Mary, was waiting at home with three or four children for you to report that you had found work? Quite fortunately for me I had an experience of somewhat similar nature to this quite early in life.⁵ Quite fortunately because, had I not known my own experience just what it is to have to beg for work, just what it is to be shown the door as if I were a very offensive intruder, had I not known what it is to suffer for want of food, had I not seen every door closed and barred in my face, had I not found myself friendless and alone in the city as a boy looking for work, and in vain, perhaps I would not be here this afternoon. I might have grown up, as some others have, who have been, as they regard themselves, fortunate. I might have waved aside my fellow men and said: “Do as I have done. If you are without work it is your own fault. Look at me; I am self-made. No man is under the necessity of looking for work if he is willing to work.”

Nothing is more humiliating than to have to beg for work, and a system in which any man has to beg for work stands condemned. No man can defend it. Now, the rights of one are just as sacred as the rights of a million. Suppose you happen to be the individual one who has no work. This republic is a failure so far as you are concerned.

Every man has the inalienable right to work.

Evolution of Industry

Here I stand, just as I was created. I have two hands that represent my labor power. I have some bone and muscle and sinew and some energy. I want to exchange it for food and clothing and shelter. Between my right to apply my labor to the tools with which work is done there stands a man artificially created. He says, “No, no!” Why not? “Because you can not first make a profit for me.”

Now, there has been a revolution in industry during the last 50 years, but the trouble with most people is that they haven't kept pace with it. They don't know anything about it and they are especially innocent in regard to it in the small western cities and states, where the same old conditions of a century ago prevail. Your grandfather could help himself anywhere. All he needed was some very cheap, simple, primitive tools and he could then apply his labor to the resources of Nature with his individual tools and produce what he needed. That era in our history produced our greatest men. Lincoln himself sprang from this primitive state of society. People have said: "Why, he had no chance. See how great he became." Yes, but Lincoln had for his comrades great, green-plumed forest monarchs. He could put his arms about them and hear their heartthrobs, as they said: "Go on, Abe, a great destiny awaits you." He was in partnership with Nature. He associated with flowers and he was in the fields and he heard the rippling music of the laughing brooks and streams. Nature took him to her bosom. Nature nourished him and from his unpolluted heart there sprang his noble aspirations.

Had Lincoln been born in a sweatshop he would never have been heard of.

How is it with the babe that is born in Mott Street, or in the lower Bowery, or in the East Side of New York City? That is where thousands, tens of thousands, and hundreds of thousands of babes are born who are to constitute our future generations. I have seen children ten years of age in New York City who had never seen a live chicken. They don't know what it is to put their tiny feet on a blade of grass. It is the most densely populated spot on earth.

You have seen your beehive — just fancy a human beehive of which yours is the miniature and you have the industrial hive under capitalism. If you have never seen this condition you are excusable for not being a socialist. Come to New York, Chicago, San Francisco with me; remain with me just 24 hours, and then look into my face as I shall look into yours when I ask: "What about socialism now?" these children by hundreds and thousands are born in sub-cellars where a whole grown family is crowded together in one room, where modesty between the sexes is absolutely impossible. They are surrounded by filth and vermin. From their birth they see nothing but immorality and vice and crime. They are tainted in the cradle. They are inoculated by their surroundings and they are doomed from the beginning. This system takes their lives just as certainly as if a

dagger were thrust into their quivering little hearts, and let me say to you that it were better for many thousands of them if they had never seen the light of day.

Now I submit, my friends, that such a condition as this is indefensible in the twentieth century. Time was when everything had to be done in a very primitive way, and most men had to work all their days, all their lives, to feed themselves and shelter themselves. They had no time, they had no opportunity for a higher development, and so they were what the world calls "illiterate." They had little chance. It took all their time and energy to feed the animal; but how is it today? Upon the average twenty men can today, with the aid of modern machinery, produce as much wealth as a thousand did a half century ago. Can you think of a single thing that enters into our daily existence that can not be easily produced in abundance for all? If you can I wish you would do me the kindness to name it.

Why Suffer Amid Abundance?

I don't know it all. I am simply a student of this great question, and I am serving as best I can and I know my eyes are ready for the light, and I thank that man, no matter what he be, who can add to the flame of the torch that I bear in my hand. If there is a single thing that you can think of that cannot be produced in abundance, name it. Bread, clothing, fuel — everything is here.

Nature's storehouse is full to the surface of the earth. All of the raw materials are deposited here in abundance. We have the most marvelous machinery the world has ever known. man has long since become master of the natural forces and made them work for him. Now he has but to touch a button and the wheels begin to spin and the machinery begins to whirr, and wealth is produced on every hand in increasing abundance. Why should any man, woman, or child suffer for food, clothing, or shelter? Why? The question cannot be answered. Don't tell me that some men are too lazy to work. Suppose they are too lazy to work, what do you think of a social system that produces men too lazy to work? If a man is too lazy to work, don't treat him with contempt. Don't look down upon him with scorn as if you were a superior being. If there is a man who is too lazy to work there is something the matter with him. He wasn't born right or he was perverted in this system. You could not, if you tried, keep a normal man inactive, and if you did, he would go stark mad! You go to any

penitentiary and you will find the men there begging for the privilege of doing work.

I know by very close study of the question exactly how men become idle. I don't repel them when I meet them. I have never yet seen the tramp I was not able to receive with open arms. He is a little less fortunate than I am. He is made the same as I am made. He is the child of the same Father. Had I been born in his environment, had I been subjected to the same things to which he was I would have been where he is.

Tools and Tramps

Can you tell me why there wasn't a tramp in the United States in 1860? In that day, if someone had said "tramp," no one would have known what was meant by it. If human nature is innately depraved and men would rather ride on brake-beams and sleep in holes and caves instead of comfortable beds, if they would do that from pure choice and from natural depravity, why were they not built that way fifty years ago? Fifty years ago capitalism was in its earlier stages. Fifty years ago work was still mainly done by hand, and every boy could learn a trade and every boy could master the tools and go to work. That is why there were no tramps. In fifty years that simple tool has become a mammoth machine. It is larger and larger all the time. it has crowded the hand tool out of production.

With the machine came the capitalist. There were no capitalists nor was there such a thing as capital before the beginning of the present system. Capitalists came with machinery. Up to the time that machinery supplanted the hand tool the little employer was himself a working man. No matter what the shop or factory, you would find the employer sitting side by side with his men. He was a superior workman who got more orders than he could fill and employed some men to help him, but he had to pay them the equivalent of what they produced because if he did not they would pack up their tools and go into business for themselves.

Now, the individual tool has become the mammoth machine. It has multiplied production by hundreds. The old tool was individually owned and used. The modern tool, in the form of a great machine, is social in every conception of it. Look at one of these giant machines. Come to the *Appeal* office and look at the press in operation. Here the progressive conception of the ages is crystalized. What individual shall put his hand on

this social machine and say, "This is mine! He would apply labor here must first pay tribute to me."

The hand tool has been very largely supplanted by this machine. Not many tools are left. You are still producing in a very small way here in Girard, but your production is flickering out gradually. It is but a question of time until it will expire entirely. In spite of all that can be said or done to the contrary production is organizing upon a larger and larger scale and becoming entirely cooperative. This has crowded out the smaller competitor and gradually opened the way for a new social order.

Will Make Home Possible

Your material interest and mine in the society of the future will be the same. Instead of having to fight each other like animals, as we do today, and seeking to glorify the brute struggle for existence — of which every civilized human being ought to be ashamed — instead of this, our material interests are going to be mutual. We are going to jointly own these mammoth machines, and we are going to operate them as joint partners and we are going to divide all the products among ourselves.

We are not going to send our surplus to the Jim Hills, Goulds, and Vanderbilts of New York. We are not going to pile up a billion dollars in John D. Rockefeller's hands — a vast pyramid from the height of which he can look down with scorn and contempt upon the "common herd." John D. Rockefeller's great fortune is built upon your ignorance. When you know enough to know what your interest is you will support the great party that is organized upon the principle of collective ownership of the means of life. This party will sweep into power upon the issue of emancipation just as Republicanism swept into power upon the abolition question half a century ago.

In the meantime, don't have any fear of us socialists. We don't mean any harm! Many of you have been taught to look upon us as very dangerous people. It is amazing to what extent this prejudice has struck root. The capitalist press will tell you of a good many evil things that we socialists are going to do that we never intend to do. They will tell you we are going to break up the home. Great heavens! What about the homes of the four million tramps that are looking for work today? How about the thousands and thousands of miserable shacks in New York and every great city where humanity festers? It would be a good thing if they were torn down and

obliterated completely, for they are not fit for human habitation. No, we are not going to destroy the home, but we are going to make the home possible for the first time in history.

Progress Born of Agitation

You may think you are very comfortable. Let me make you a little comparison. You may not agree with me. I don't expect you to and I don't ask you to. I am going to ask you to remember what I say this afternoon and perhaps before I am elected president of the United States you will believe what I say is true. Now there are those of you who are fairly comfortable under the present standard. Isn't it amazing to you how little the average man is satisfied with? You go out here to the edge of town and you find a small farmer who has a small cabin with just room enough to keep himself and wife, and two or three children, which has a mortgage on it, and he works early and late and gets just enough in net returns to keep him in working order, and he will deliver a lecture about the wonderful prosperity of the country.

He is satisfied, and that is his calamity.

Now, the majority of you would say that is his good fortune. "It is a blessing that he is satisfied." I want to see if I can show you that it is a curse to him and to society that he is satisfied. If it had not been for the discontent of a few fellows who have not been satisfied with their condition, you would still be living in caves. You never would have emerged from the jungle. Intelligent discontent is the mainspring of civilization.

Progress is born of agitation. It is agitation or stagnation. I have taken my choice.

This farmer works all day long, works hard enough to produce enough to live the life of a man — not of an animal, but of a man. Now there is an essential difference between a man and an animal. I admire a magnificent animal in any form except the human form. Suppose you had everything that you could possibly desire, so far as your physical wants are concerned. Suppose you had a million to your credit in the bank, a palatial home, and relations to suit yourself, but no soul capacity for real enjoyment. If you were denied knowing what sorrow is, what real joy is, what music is, and literature and sculpture; and all of those subtle influences that touch the heart and quicken the pulses and fire the senses, and so lift and ennoble a man that he can feel his head among the stars and in communion with God

himself — if you are denied these, no matter how sleek or fat or contented you may be, you are still as base and as corrupt and as repulsive a being as walks God's green earth.

The Farmer's Need

You may have plenty of money. The poorest people on this earth are those who have most money. A man is said to be poor who has none, but he is a pauper who has nothing else. Now this farmer, what does he know about literature? After his hard day's work is done, here he sits in his little shack. He is fed, and his animal wants are satisfied. It is at this time that a man begins to live. It is not while you work and slave that you live. It is when you have done your work honestly, when you have contributed your share to the common fund, that you begin to live. Then, as Whitman said, you take out your soul; you can commune with yourself; you can take a comrade by the hand and you can look into his eyes and down into his soul, and in that communion you live. And if you don't know what that is, or if you are not at least on the edge of it, it is denied you to even look into the promised land.

Now this farmer knows nothing about the literature of the world. All its libraries are sealed to him. So far as he is concerned, Homer and Dante and Dickens might as well not have lived; Beethoven, Liszt, and Wagner, and all those musicians whose art makes the common atmosphere blossom with harmony never been for this farmer. He knows nothing about literature or art. Never rises above the animal plane upon which he is living. Within fifteen minutes after he has ceased to live he is forgotten; the next generation doesn't know his name, and the world doesn't know he ever lived. This is life under the present standard.

You tell me this is all the farmer is fit for? What do I propose to do for that farmer? Nothing. I want to awaken the farmer to the fact that he is robbed every day of the week, and if I can awaken him to the fact that he is robbed under the capitalist system he will fall into line with the socialist movement, and will march to the polls on election day; and, instead of casting his vote to fasten the shackles upon his limbs more firmly, he will cast a vote for his emancipation. All I have to do is to show that farmer, that day laborer, that tramp, that they are victims of this system; that their interests are identical, that they constitute the millions and that the millions have the votes. The Rockefellers have the dollars, but we have the votes;

and when we have sense enough to know how to use the votes, we will have not only the votes but the dollars for all the children of men.

Who Will Save Us From Congress?

This seems quite visionary to some of you, and especially to those of you who know absolutely nothing about economics. I could not begin to tell you the story of social evolution this afternoon; of how these things are doing day by day, of how the world is being pushed into socialism, and how it is bound to arrive, no matter whether you are for it or against it. It is the next inevitable phase of civilization. It isn't a scheme, it isn't a contrivance. It isn't anything that is made to order. The day is coming when you will be pushed into it by unseen hands whether you will it or not. Nothing can be introduced until the people want it, and when the majority want it they will know how to get it.

I venture the prophesy that within the next five years you will be completely dispossessed. You are howling against the trusts, and the trusts are laughing at you. You keep on voting in the same old way, and the trusts will keep on getting what you produce. You say Congress will give you some relief. Good heavens! Who will save us from Congress? Don't you know that Congress is made up almost wholly of trust lawyers and corporation attorneys? I don't happen to have the roll of this one, but with a few exceptions they are all lawyers. Now, in the competitive system the lawyer sells himself to the highest bidder, the same as the workingman does. Who is the highest bidder? The corporation, of course. So the trust buys the best lawyer and the common herd gets the poor one.

Politics Reflex of Economics

Now it is a fact that politics is simply the reflex of economics. The material foundation of society determines the character of all social institutions — political, educational, ethical, and spiritual. In exact proportion as the economic foundation of society changes, the character of all social institutions changes to correspond to that basis. Half of this country was in favor of chattel slavery, and half was opposed to it, geographically speaking. Why was the church of the South in favor of chattel slavery? Why was the church of the North opposed to chattel slavery? The northern capitalist wasn't a bit more opposed to chattel slavery from any moral

sense than was the southern plantation owner. the South produced cotton for the market by the hand labor of Negro slaves. On the other hand, the North wasn't dependent upon cotton — could raise no cotton. In the North it was the small capitalist at the beginning of capitalism, who, with the machine, had begun to manufacture, and wanted cheap labor; and the sharper the competition the cheaper he could buy his labor. Now, chattel slavery of the southern plantation owner was the source of his wealth. He had to have slaves, and what the plantation owner had to have in economics the preacher had to justify in religion. As long as chattel slavery was necessary to the southern plantation owner, as long as that stage of the economic condition lasted, the preachers stood up in the pulpits of the South and said it was ordained by God, and proved it by the Bible. I don't know of any crime that the oppressors and their hirelings have not proven by the Bible.

Analogies from History

Then, competition between workers began as machines took the place of hand labor. Manufacturers wanted larger and larger bodies of labor and that competition spread out here to Kansas, and I have always felt when in Kansas that I stood on sacred soil. When I hear the name of Kansas I doff my hat in reverence. The free soilers came here, despised, hated, and persecuted. They were the enemies of the human race. Why? Because they had hearts throbbing in their breasts. Because they looked with pity and compassion upon the Negro slave who received his wages in lashes applied to his naked back, who saw his crying wife torn from him and his children, pleading, snatched from his side and sold into slavery, while the great mass looked on just as the great mass is looking on today, and the preachers stood up in their pulpits and said: "It is all right. It is God-ordained." And whenever an abolitionist raised his head he was persecuted and hounded as if he had been a wild beast.

I heard this story from Wendell Phillips one evening. I never can forget it. How I wish he were here today. We sat together and he said: "Debs, the world will never know with what bitter and relentless persecution the early abolitionists had to contend." Wendell Phillips was the most perfect aristocrat in everything I have ever seen; who came nearest being a perfect man; who, when he stood erect, instantly challenged respect and admiration — almost veneration. Wendell Phillips was treated as if he had been

the worst felon on earth. They went to his house one night to mob him, and why? Because he protested against sending a young Negro girl and a Negro man back into slavery. They came to take them back, and the whole Commonwealth of Massachusetts said: "Take them back! Obey the law!" That is what they are everlastingly saying to us — "Obey the law!" Just above the door of the statehouse there was an inscription: "God Bless the Commonwealth of Massachusetts." Wendell Phillips said: "If Massachusetts has become a slave hunter, if Massachusetts is in alliance with the slave catchers of the South, that inscription over the portal of the doors should be changed, and in place of 'God Bless the Commonwealth of Massachusetts,' it should be 'God Damn the Commonwealth of Massachusetts!'" God smiled in that same instant.

Growth of Socialism

All of the slave catchers and holders, all of the oppressors of man, all of the enemies of the human race, all of the rulers of Siberia, where a large part of this earth's surface has been transformed into a hell — all have spoken in the name of the Great God and in the name of the Holy Bible.

There will be a change one of these days. The world is just beginning to awaken, and is soon to sing its first anthem of freedom. All the signs of the times are cheering. Twenty-five years ago there was but a handful of socialists; today there are a half million. When the polls are closed next fall you will be astounded. The socialist movement is in alliance with the forces of progress. We are today where the abolitionists were in 1858. They had a million and a quarter of votes. There was dissension in the Whig, Republican, and Free Soil parties, but the time had come for a great change, and the Republican Party was formed in spite of the bickerings and contentions of men. Lincoln made the great speech in that year that gave him the nomination and afterward made him President of the United States.

If you had to say to the people in 1858, "In two years from now the Republican Party is going to sweep the country and seat the President," you would have been laughed to scorn. The Socialist Party stands today where the Republican Party stood 50 years ago. It is in alliance with the forces of evolution; the one party that has a clear-cut, overmastering, overshadowing issue; the party that stands for all the people and the only party that stands for all the people. In this system we have one set who are called

capitalists, and another set who are called workers; and they are at war with each other over the division of the product.

Will Establish Private Property

Now, we socialists propose that society in its collective capacity shall produce, not for profit, but in abundance to satisfy human wants; that every man shall have the inalienable right to work, and receive the full equivalent of all he produces; that every man may stand fearlessly erect in the pride and majesty of his own manhood. Every man and every woman can be economically free. They can, without let or hindrance, apply their labor, with the best machinery that can be devised, to all the natural resources, do the work of society and produce for all; and then receive in exchange a certificate of value equivalent to that of their production. Then society will improve its institutions in exact proportion to the progress of invention. Whether you work in the city or on farm, all things productive will be carried forward on a gigantic scale. All industry will be completely organized. Society for the first time will have a scientific foundation. Every man, by being economically free, will have some time for himself. He can then take a full and perfect breath. He can go to his wife and children because then he will have a home.

We are not going to destroy private property. We are going to introduce and establish private property — all private property that is necessary to house man, keep him in comfort, and satisfy all his physical wants. Eighty percent of the people in the United States have no property of any kind today. A few have got it all. They have dispossessed the people, and when we get into power we will dispossess them. We will reduce the work-day and give every man a chance. We will go to the parks, and we will have music, and we will have music because we will have time to play music and inclination to hear it. Is it not sad to think that not one in a thousand know what music is? Is it not pitiable to see the poor, ignorant, dumb human, utterly impervious to the divine influence of music? If humanity could only respond to the higher influences! And it would if it had time.

Release the animal, throw off his burden; give him a chance; and he rises, as if by magic, to the plane of a man. Man has all of these divine attributes. They are in a latent state. They are not yet developed. It does not pay to love music. Keep your eye on the almighty dollar and your

fellow man. Get the dollar and keep him down. Make him produce for you. You are not your brother's keeper in this system. Suppose he is poor! Suppose his wife is force into prostitution! Suppose his child is deformed! And suppose he shuffles off by destroying himself! What is that to you? But you ought to be ashamed. Take the standard home and look it in the face. If you know what that standard means, and you are a success, God help the failure!

Our conduct is determined by our economic relations. If you and I must fight each other to exist, we will not love each other very hard. We can go to the same church and hear the same minister tell us in good conscience that we ought to love each other, and the next day we approach the edge of some business transaction. Do we remember what the minister told us? No, it is gone, until next Sunday. Six days in the week we are following the Golden Rule reversed. Now, when we approach the edges of a business transaction in competition, what is more natural than that we should try to get the better of the transaction? Get the better of our fellow man? Cheat him if we can.

And if you succeed that fixes you as a successful businessman. You have all the necessary qualifications. Don't let you conscience disturb you — that would interfere with business.

Humanity and the Future

Competition was natural enough once, but do you think you are competing today? Many of you think you are competing. Against whom? Against Rockefeller? About as I would if I had a wheelbarrow and competed with the Santa Fe from here to Kansas City. That is about the way you are competing, but your boys will not have even that chance — if capitalism lives that long. You hear of the "late" panic. It is very late. It is going to be very late. This panic will be with us five years from now, and will continue from now till then.

I am not a prophet. I can no more penetrate the future than you can. I do study the forces that underly society and the trend of evolution. I can tell by what we have passed through about what we will have in the future; and I know that capitalism can be beaten, and the people put ultimately in possession. Now, then, when we have taken possession, and we jointly own the sources and means of production, we will no longer have to fight each other to live; our interests, instead of being competitive, will be

cooperative. We will work side by side. Your interest shall be mine, and mine will be yours. That is the economic condition from which will spring the humane social relation.

When we are in partnership and have stopped clutching each other's throats, when we have stopped enslaving each other, then we will stand together, hands clasped, and we will be friends. We will be comrades, we will be brothers, and we will begin the march to the grandest civilization that the human race has ever known.

I did not mean to keep you so long this afternoon. I am sure I appreciate the patience with which you have listened to me. From the very depths of my heart I thank you, each of you — every man, woman, and child, for this splendid testimonial, for this beautiful tribute which I shall remember with gratitude and love until memory empties its urn into forgetfulness.

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¹ Reference is to Debs's nomination for president by the national convention of the Socialist Party of America, held in Chicago from May 10 to 17, 1908.

² From William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* (c. 1601), Act 2, Scene 5.

³ Debs had previously been elected as a Democrat to two terms as city clerk in Terre Haute (1879, 1881) and to a two-year term as a member of the Indiana house of representatives (1884). See: *The Selected Works of Eugene V. Debs: Volume 1: Building Solidarity on the Tracks, 1877-1892*. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019), *passim*.

⁴ Allusion to *Genesis* 4:9.

⁵ A reference to a brief period of unemployment in the fall of 1874 when as a fledgling locomotive fireman Debs was unable to find a permanent job in the St. Louis area. The 18-year old Debs soon returned home to the parental nest in Terre Haute.