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

by Eugene V. Debs


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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 except 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 thraldom 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 move-
ment. There is not a line, not a word in that plat-
form 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) a party that is trying to vitalize itself by its ghosts, by its
corpse, 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 Abra-
ham Lincoln would have in a latter-day Republi-
can convention. (Applause.) If they were living
today they would be delegates to this convention.
(Tremendous applause.)

The Socialist Party meets these two capital-
list 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 com-
plete 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 sim-
ply say that obedient to your call, I respond. (Ap-
plause.) Responsive to your command I am here,
to serve you to the limit of my capacity. My con-
trolling 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 move-
ment. I shall be heard in the coming campaign
(applause) as often, as decidedly, as emphatically,
as revolutionarily, (applause) and as uncompromis-
ingly (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) — per-
fectedly 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 com-
rades, we are appealing to ourselves, we are bestir-
ing ourselves, we are arousing the working class,
the class that through all the ages has been op-
pressed, crushed, robbed, and debased, for the one
reason that it has lacked the consciousness of its
overmastering power that shall finally give it su-
preme control and make it the sovereign ruler of
the world. (Applause.) This class is just beginning
to awaken from the torpor of the centuries. (Ap-
plause.) 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 sig-
nal that he is waking up, and that he is becoming
conscious of his power; and when through the vi-
talizing 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 accep-
tance of the honor you have conferred upon me
will have been worthily made, and that your judg-
ment 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 ad-
dress of Comrade Debs, terminating with three rous-
ing cheers and a tiger. When a semblance of order
was finally restored the Chair said:

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