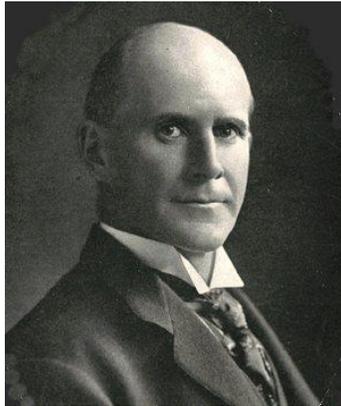


Who was Eugene V. Debs?



Eugene Victor Debs was born in Indiana in 1855 and was the son of French immigrant parents. He left school at 14 to work as a painter in the rail yards. By 1870 he had become a railroad fireman and was heavily involved in the local union. In 1880, he went into politics and was elected into the Indiana legislature.

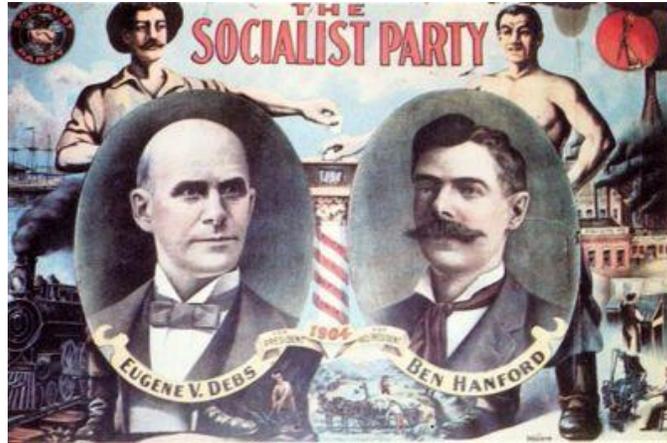
He was still an active union member and in 1893, he was the first president of the ARU-American Railway Union. It was Debs that led the famous Pullman Strike against George Pullman. The dispute was taken into the state Supreme Court where an injunction was placed against the union under the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. Subsequently, Debs was jailed for his actions, a setback for the union cause.

While in jail, Debs read the works of Karl Marx and by the time, he left prison in 1895, he had become a socialist. He believed that capitalism should be replaced by a new, cooperative system. In 1897, he was a co-founder of the Social Democratic Party (SDP).

In 1900, Debs ran for president against William McKinley and William Jennings Bryan but received less than 1% of the total vote.

The following year the SDP merged with the Socialist Labor Party to form the Socialist Party of America. Debs also became a major contributor to *Appeal to Reason*, a weekly political journal. By 1902, the publication had a circulation of 150,000 a week, making it the fourth largest publication in the nation.

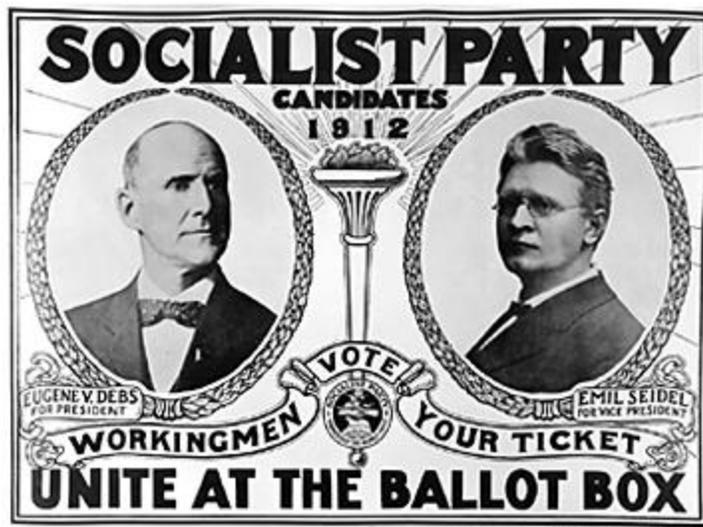
In 1904, Debs again ran for president, nominating Benjamin Hanford as his running mate. The Socialist Party finished third to Teddy Roosevelt with 402,810.



In 1908, he again ran for president but no major gain was made by his party, they received only 402,793 votes.

Between 1901 and 1912, membership in the Socialist Party grew from 13,000 to 118,000 and the journal *Appeal to Reason* was now selling 500,000 copies each week.

Debs ran again during the 1912 election, this time with Emil Seidel. This time he won 6% of the total (901,551 votes). In the states of Oklahoma, Nevada, Montana, Washington, California and Idaho, he received over 10% of the states' votes.



When World War I began, Debs and his Socialist Party were strongly opposed to the war. He believed that the conflict had been caused by an imperialistic competitive system. He blamed the ruling classes for the war and claimed that he “*would be shot for treason before entering such a war.*”

Capitalists wars for capitalist conquest and capitalist plunder must be fought by the capitalists themselves so far as I am concerned, and upon that question there can be no compromise and no misunderstanding as to my position. I have no country to fight for; my country is the earth; I am a citizen of the world. I would not violate my principles for God, much less for a crazy kaiser, a savage czar, a degenerate king, or a gang of pot-bellied parasites.

I am opposed to every war but one; I am for the war with heart and soul, and that is the world-wide war of social revolution. In that war I am prepared to fight in any way the ruling class may make necessary, even to the barricades.

There is where I stand and where I believe the Socialist Party stands, or ought to stand, on the question of war.

Eugene V. Debs

Between 1914 and 1917, before America entered the war, Debs made several speeches explaining why he believed that the United States should not join the conflict. Once the nation had entered the war in 1917, Debs and several members of his party were arrested under the *Espionage Act*. Debs was found guilty and sentenced to 10 years in the Atlanta Penitentiary.

Debs was still in jail when he ran in the 1920 Presidential Election. This time, he and his running mate, Seymour Stedman, received 919,799 votes. His party platform included improved labor conditions, housing and welfare legislation and an increase in the number of people who could vote in elections.

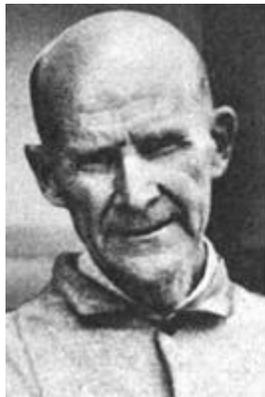
“Debs was a happy man in prison. He loved everybody there, and everybody loved him – wardens, guards, and convicts. Debs wanted to hear all about the Russian Revolution, the outrages of which he had denounced. It was not socialist, he pleaded... it was not an anarchist revolution. Like so many reds who rejected Bolshevism, Debs the socialist could not abide by the violence, bloodshed and tyranny.”

Lincoln Steffens after visiting Debs in jail.

President Warren G. Harding pardoned Debs in December 1921. After his release, Debs spoke out against and was highly critical of the dictatorship policies of the Soviet Union. Debs refused to ally himself with the newly formed American Communist Party.

Eugene V. Debs died in 1926 and was replaced by Norman Thomas as leader of the Socialist Party.

Debs is best remembered for the number of times he ran for president, once even in jail, an active founder of the Socialist Party and an anti-Communist during the era of the Palmer Raids and the Red Scare.



***"I'd rather vote for
something I want
and not get it than
vote for something
I don't want,
and get it."***

Eugene Debs
(1855 - 1926)