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The Socialist Party of America and Eugene V. Debs Campaign in the 1912 Election

Jun Furuya

*Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?*² In spite of this famous book-form question posed by Werner Sombart in 1906, America in the Progressive Era (1901-1917) witnessed an indigenous, if not so strong but never negligible, socialist party. To Sombart's question many historians answered by pointing out endemic American conditions: the lack of a firm class-structure because of the absence of a feudal tradition, the great social mobility and relatively high wages due to an abundance of natural resources and shortage of labor force, and the existence of two major parties, which have persistently preempted reform appeals of various third parties. These conditions, no doubt, militated against socialists in America, but were never discouraging enough for them to give up all their hope of revolutionizing America. On the contrary, the country around the turn of the century seemed to them a very fertile ground for socialism. By that time, America had experienced a tremendous capitalist growth accompanied with various industrial evils. The gap between the rich and the poor was widening, as the movement toward concentration of control in industry was advancing. Labor disputes frequently occurred and usually ended with little gain to workers. Working conditions were deteriorating. Miserable child and woman labor was ubiquitous. Political machineries, federal or local, proved ineffective, some even corruptive, in treating these evils. These conditions, which contributed to the rise of progressivism, also precipitated the socialist movement. Thus the Socialist party of America was founded in 1901. By 1912, though tortured by an indissoluble contradiction between

universal Marxist theory and indigenous American conditions, the party had grown steadily.

In the history of the Socialist party of America the year 1912 is of great importance. The fact that the party had and has never polled a greater percentage of votes in a presidential election than in that year makes many historians conclude that it formed a watershed in the party's history. And they provide different reasons for the decline of the party after 1912. David Shannon and Daniel Bell explain the decline by referring to the irrelevancy of the left wingers of the party to the reality of the American society after 1912.¹ Ira Kipnis, to the contrary, reduces the main reason for the party's demise to the right winger's effort to accommodate the party's course to the progressive trend and to the resulting disappearance of the party's uniqueness as a revolutionary party.² Although these two views are different in their explanation of the failure of the Socialist party, there is a common recognition shared by both. Both of them recognized that in 1912 the Socialist party was facing the agonizing strategic question of how it should accommodate itself to the progressive trend, that there was severe strife within the party over this question, and that the party somehow failed to choose an appropriate course and to construct an effective strategy.

Criticizing these foregoing historians, James Weinstein proposes a new thesis based on a thorough investigation into various factors composing the socialist movement. According to him, the socialist force retained unity and remained viable in the woman's suffrage movement and labor unions until the United States was involved in World War I. The Socialist party was also quite active among intellectuals and among the blacks of northern cities. Moreover, as to

1. Daniel Bell, "The Background and Development of Marxian Socialism in the United States," in *Socialism and American Life*, 2 vols., Daniel D. Egbert and Stow Persons, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), vol. 1, pp. 213-405; David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America: A History* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1955).
2. Ira Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement: 1897-1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952).

the ballot box, the party was as strong in 1917 as in 1912 at least on local levels. Consequently, Weinstein asserts that the decline of the Socialist party began not in 1912 but after the war, and that the alleged intra-party antagonism between the Left and the Right before the war should not be as exaggerated as it is by those historians who underestimate "the underlying strength of the Socialists' anti-capitalist perspective."³ Thus the importance of 1912 in the party's history is lessened by this new thesis.

In spite of Weinstein's convincing view, however, the question of how the socialists tried to propose unique remedies for the political, social, and industrial problems of the progressive years seems to deserve further investigation, and the socialist election campaign of 1912 seems to offer the most appropriate case for this investigation. An article from a contemporary magazine explained the characteristics of the election campaign of 1912. As to the issues of the tariff, the cost of living, trusts, banking and currency reform, and labor legislation, "no party admits that it is reactionary," the article remarks. "The Republican platform is claimed to be the most progressive ever adopted by that party ; the Democratic platform is claimed to be the most progressive ever adopted by any American party of consequence ; the third party's platform claims to outdo either and to deal frankly with the most real and burning issues of the age, issues the old parties are charged with ignoring, either through dishonesty or lack of knowledge and insight."⁴ In this progressive campaign the Socialist party sensed acutely that it was necessary to present itself to the rank and file of the party and the American public at large as a party distinguishable from other parties.

Internally as well as externally, the party stood at a crossroads in 1912. Although, as Weinstein remarks, Socialists were united in the advocacy of their ultimate aim, the realization of the cooperative commonwealth, they could never agree on the immediate tactics for

3. James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (New York and London : Monthly Review Press, 1967), pp. 4-5.
4. *The Chautauquan*, LXVII (September, 1912), 6-7.

that aim. Indeed, the Socialist national convention of 1912 witnessed harsh controversies over such practical questions as, labor unions, farmers, and industrial violence. Even the nomination of Eugene Victor Debs as the presidential candidate, which had been unanimous, was challenged by Emil Seidel and Charles Edward Russell. All these controversies reflected the mounting antagonism between the Left and the Right over the party's tactics in coping with the progressive trend. If the fundamental aim was still visionary and the solidarity on it was superficial, the questions of immigration, farmers, and sabotage were imminent and the discrepancy over them was serious.

The objective of this article is to appraise how the Socialist party succeeded or failed to convince the country of its view of American politics and society in 1912. Considering the fact that the party was composed of many autonomous organizations at the state level, the national Socialist party is as elusive an entity as the national Democratic or Republican party. Nevertheless, as in the case of the major parties, it seems reasonable to talk of the national party as represented by its presidential candidate. Eugene V. Debs, therefore, is a central figure in this article. The objective of this article will be achieved to a great extent by tracing his campaign and analyzing his efforts to strike a balance between the two factions and present the Socialist standard to the voters.

1

"This is our year," Eugene Victor Debs declared confidently in 1912, after he was nominated as the Socialist party's candidate for President.⁵ In this year, not only Debs but most other Socialists perceived that they had reached the most propitious time in the history of their party. Even if they never believed in their hearts that it was possible to elect Debs, they could predict that in November Debs would poll at least a million votes, or twice as many as he had

5. Eugene V. Debs, "This Is Our Year," *International Socialist Review*, XIII (July, 1912), 16-18.

received in the election of 1908, and that they would elect several new Congressmen.⁶

The Socialists had good reason to expect great political gains in this year. In a campaign address, Debs remarked: "Four years ago, with a dues-paying membership of about 40,000, the Socialist party polled almost half a million votes. This year the party has almost quadrupled its membership and is quite likely to poll a vote to stamp it as a permanent factor in American politics."⁷ Indeed, the party's strength in the ballot box had been growing almost proportionately with the increase of membership during the previous four years. In 1908, Debs polled 424,483 votes, while in the national election of 1910 the party with its membership of 58,011 increased its vote to 607,674. Having 84,716 members in 1911, the party succeeded in gaining a considerable number of offices in state and local governments.⁸

In two articles published in late 1911 and in early 1912, a contemporary scholar assessed the growing political force of the Socialist party by counting the number of the party's office-holders.⁹ According to him, at the beginning of 1912 there were "not less than 1,141 socialist office-holders in 36 states of the Union and some 324 municipalities." Among them, were 1 Congressman, 2 state senators, 18 state representatives, and 55 mayors, village presidents, and township chairmen. Though the significance of these political successes should be tempered a little by the fact that most of these offices were local, it cannot be denied that these successes encouraged the optimism of the Socialists as to the prospect of the coming election.

However, the appearance of the Socialist administrations in many

6. "The Socialist Convention," *The Independent*, LXVI (May 23, 1912), 1130; *The Free Press*, July 13, 1912.
7. *New York Call*, October 21, 1912.
8. Socialist Party of America, *Proceedings, National Convention of the Socialist Party*, Indianapolis, Indiana, May 12 to 18, 1912 (Chicago: The Socialist Party, 1912), p. 219; hereafter cited as *Proceedings*, 1912.
9. Robert F. Hoxie, "The Rising Tide of Socialism: A Study," *The Journal of Political Economy*, XIV (October, 1911), 609-631; Robert F. Hoxie, "The Socialist Party in the November Elections," *The Journal of Political Economy*, XX (March, 1912), 205-223.

municipalities brought not only hope but difficulties which the party had not seriously experienced before 1910. It was a dilemma between revolutionary principles and practical politics. The report of a committee on a municipal program that was adopted at the Socialist national convention expressed this dilemma. In its preamble the report declared the principle of socialism: "evils of the present system will be removed only when the working class wholly abolish private ownership in the social means of production, collectively assume the management of the industries and operate them for use not for profit." But the same report frankly admitted that the party would or could not control all Socialist municipal governments uniformly by this principle. Moreover, it defended the deviation from these principles evident in some municipalities, saying "so long as national and state legislatures and particularly the courts are in the control of the capitalist class, a municipal administration, even though absolutely controlled by Socialists, will be hampered, crippled and restricted in every possible way."¹⁰

However, to puristic Left-wing Socialists the deviation from principles meant a breach of the cause. They thought that some Socialist administrations were really "hampered, crippled and restricted" to an inexcusable extent, for the administrators were more concerned with winning elections, catering to the middle class, and working for reform within the existing system, than with realizing the cooperative commonwealth through revolution.

A harsh controversy erupted in June 1912, when Walter Lippmann published his criticism of the Socialist government of Schenectady, New York, the second largest city seized by the party at that time. In the article, titled "Schenectady the Unripe," Lippmann, who had worked in the city as the executive secretary of Mayor George Lunn until four weeks before, frankly expressed his disappointment with the city's administrative record. Since his inauguration in January 1912, Mayor Lunn had initiated an impressive series of municipal

10. *Proceedings*, 1912, p. 214.

reform programs. These included a maternity nurse system, a better milk inspection system, an open air school for “subnormal” children, a dental clinic, a municipal grocery store and an ice plant for charitable relief, a lodging house, a farm for the able-bodied destitute, a play ground, and an employment bureau. “These things are worth having,” admitted Lippmann. But “nothing is being done there that twenty reform cities can’t duplicate,” he went on. “Why not let the ‘progressives’ do them... Although they [the Schenectady Socialists] are called Socialists they cannot be Socialists. They did not go through the long and painful process of educating public opinion until it desired real changes.” He concluded that power had come to the Schenectady Socialists too soon.¹¹

A week later, Morris Hillquit, leader of the New York Socialists and member of the National Executive Committee of the party, answered Lippmann in his article titled “An Unripe Criticism.” “What he [Lippmann] complains of is timidity of action, the lack of a bold plan, a kind of aimlessness behind the revolutionary speeches,” Hillquit wrote. “But what is that mysterious ‘bold plan’, whose absence so pains the critics, and what are the Socialist measures which simple reform cities could not duplicate?” Then he proceeded to defend the Schenectady Socialists. “They did not suffer from ‘visions’, and did not waste their time trying to evolve an occult ‘bold plan’.” He maintained that the list of what the city’s Socialists had undertaken was important to the workers of the city and to the

11. Walter Lippmann, “Schenectady the Unripe,” *New York Call*, June, 1912. About the Socialist government of Schenectady, see Kenneth E. Hendrickson, Jr., “Tribune of the People; George R. Lunn and the Rise and Fall of Christian Socialism in Schenectady,” Bruce M. Stave, ed., *Socialism and the Cities* (Port Washington, New York and London: Kennikat Press, 1975), pp. 72-98. Although Lippmann criticized the reformists in Schenectady from the Left’s point of view, he was by no means sympathetic with the IWW and Haywood. Ironically, soon after his resignation as Lunn’s secretary, he came to support a more conservative political force, the Roosevelt progressives. Charles Forcey, *The Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly, Weyl, Lippmann, and the Progressive Era, 1900-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 106-108.

Socialist movement of the country as well.¹²

Another controversy of the same kind occurred over Milwaukee, the largest city under the Socialist control. Victor Berger was the party's only Congressman at the time and the chief spokesman of the Social Democratic party of the city. He and the city's mayor Emil Seidel always hailed the regulation and reforms that they had enacted or proposed between 1910 and 1912 as the tremendous progress of socialism.¹³ But to the Left-wing Socialists the alleged achievement of Milwaukee was another illustration of the office-holding Socialists' inability to apply socialist principles in their administration.¹⁴ William English Walling, one of the most prominent socialist intellectuals, made a thorough investigation into the platform of the Wisconsin Socialist party and the record of the Milwaukee Socialists' activity.¹⁵ Based on it, he concluded that "to secure the political support of taxpayers and businessmen," the Milwaukee party had been unjustifiably opportunistic in such crucial areas to socialism as business, tax, and labor policies.¹⁶

The left-right split over political action was not utterly new in 1912 to the ranks of the Socialist party; it was rather a tradition rooted in the very nature of the party organization. The Socialist party of America, when it was organized in 1901, was a mixture of various radical groups — the Social Democrats of Milwaukee; the remnants of the American Railway Union led by Debs; former Socialist Labor party members led by Hillquit in New York, Max Hayes in Cleveland, and J. Mahlon Barnes in Philadelphia; former Populists from Oklahoma, Texas, and other southwestern states; and the Christian Social-

12. Morris Hillquit, "An Unripe Criticism," *New York Call*, June 16, 1912. See also Upton Sinclair, "A Bold Plan," *Ibid.*, September 15, 1912.
13. Sally M. Miller, "Milwaukee: Of Ethnicity and Labor," Stave, ed., *Socialism and Cities*, pp. 41-71.
14. For typical criticism of the Milwaukee Socialists by the Left, see *International Socialist Review*, XII (May, 1912), 775.
15. William English Walling, *Socialism As It Is: A Survey of the World-Wide Revolutionary Movement* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1912), 175-209.
16. *Ibid.*, 179.

ists. And soon after the foundation of the party, William Dudley Haywood and other leaders of the Western Federation of Miners joined.¹⁷ All of these groups, having their peculiar constituencies and their own organizational interests in the party affairs, were united loosely only by a vague ideological tie. Over the question of politics, these groups were divided into two camps: the urban Socialists and the rural Socialists. To the former, who had to work in the metropolis, political machines were indispensable to making their activities effective. These machines produced the usual bureaucracy with vested interests and the political participation that invited opportunism. To the latter, who worked among protesting workers and farmers, political organization compromising the purity of their cause were not necessary. Rather, they thought politics a dirty business.¹⁸ During the years between 1910 and 1912, this traditional split over politics was intensified all the more by the appearance of a large number of Socialist office-holders.

In 1912 the Left-wing Socialists, as well as their counterparts, while not for the same reason, were also confident in speaking of the rising tide of socialism. To them the clearest reason for it lay not in the ballot box but in social and industrial unrest. Indeed, the years between 1909 and 1912 witnessed many free speech fights and factory strikes led by the Socialists and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the rival labor union of the American Federation of Labor. Missoula in Montana, Spokane and Aberdeen in the state of Washington, and Fresno in California had experienced hot free speech fights; Gray Harbor in the state of Washington, as well as Carson, Grabow, and Merryville of Louisiana, had seen great strikes in the lumber industry; East Hammond, Indiana and New Castle, Pennsylvania had had steel strikes.¹⁹ In addition, in 1912, a great textile

17. Shannon, *The Socialist Party*, chapter I.

18. Sally M. Miller, *Victor Berger and the Promise of Constructive Socialism, 1910-1920* (Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press Inc., 1973), p. 12.

19. Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, vol. IV: *The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917* (New York: International Publishers, 1965), chaps. 7-10, 12-13.

strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts and a violent free speech fight in San Diego, California were in progress. The Left-wingers were elated by these fights, in which they participated and saw indisputable evidence of awakening class consciousness.²⁰

However, like the political uprising, the social and industrial uprising also brought a serious problem to the party. This was the question of violence or syndicalism. Violence was common in the fights which were fought despite tremendous pressure from local and state governments, militias, and local vigilance committees. Some radical participants in the fights openly advocated violent means. But the Socialists, who sought to achieve their aim through peaceful political activities, recoiled from violence, and reprehended the violence advocates as syndicalists. Syndicalism, which rose first in France in the late nineteenth century, opposes parliamentary democracy and the use of any political weapons in the class struggle. Instead, it assigns to the trade unions the supreme revolutionary function. For the improvement of the condition of workers, unlike the orthodox socialist, the syndicalist believes not in political action by professional politicians but only in direct action against the state and the employers by workers organized in trade unions. Thus sabotage, boycotts, and strikes are strongly recommended by the syndicalist as the indispensable weapons of the working class.²¹

If the Achilles's heel of the Right-wingers of the Socialist party was their socialism's proximity to reformism, that of the Left-wingers was their socialism's proximity to syndicalism. They tried to differentiate themselves from syndicalists by calling themselves industrial unionists and by declaring their respect for revolutionary political

20. Mary E. Marcy, "The Battle for Bread at Lawrence," *International Socialist Review*, XII (March, 1912), 533-543 ; Leslie H. Marcy and Frederick Sumner Boyd, "One Big Union Wins at Lawrence," *Ibid.*, (April, 1912), 613-630 ; Vincent St. John, "The Fight for Free Speech at San Diego," *Ibid.*, (April, 1912), 649 ; Hartwell S. Shippey, "The Shame of San Diego," *Ibid.*, (May, 1912), 718-723.

21. *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 1934 ed., s. v. "Syndicalism," by Lewis L. Lorwin.

activities.²² Nevertheless, their distaste for politics and their misgivings about the Socialist party's efficacy in the class struggle were obvious in the writings of such self-alleged industrial unionists as William D. Haywood, Frank Bohn, and so on.²³ They were much less concerned with the party's affairs than with the fights waged by their IWW. To them, direct action was by far superior to political action, and violence was sometimes justifiable by taking the workers' plight into account.²⁴

Although by 1912 the Left had stopped speaking publicly of the efficacy of violence, the Right always felt hampered by the violent image inscribed on their party by non-Socialist newspapers because of its cooperation with the IWW in some fights. Their anti-violence and anti-syndicalist feelings were intensified even more after the McNamara brothers, J. J. and J. B., who had been accused of having dynamited the Los Angeles *Times* on October 1, 1910, eventually confessed to their crime in December 1911. The Right-wingers were embarrassed by the confession, because they had believed in the brothers' innocence and had defended them together with the Left-wingers.²⁵

In addition, the Right-wingers were infuriated at the frequent skirmishes caused by Socialist members of the IWW in the party's meetings. Excoriating the IWW of its members' vandalic demonstration against a Socialist meeting held in New York City on May

22. Walling, *Socialism As It Is*, pp. 354-386.

23. Frank Bohn, "Is the I.W.W. to Grow?" *International Socialist Review*, XII (July, 1911), 42-44 ; Frank Bohn, "The Socialist Party and the Government of Cities," *Ibid.*, (November, 1911), 275-278 ; William D. Haywood, "Socialism the Hope of the Working Class," *Ibid.*, (February, 1912), 461-471.

24. Joseph R. Conlin, *Big Bill Haywood and the Radical Union Movement* (Syracuse, N. Y. : Syracuse University Press, 1969), pp. 30, 38, 39.

25. About the McNamara case, see Walter V. Woehlke, "Terrorism in America," *Outlook*, C (February, 17, 1912), 359-367 ; Eugene V. Debs, "The McNamara Case and the Labor Movement," *International Socialist Review*, XII (February, 1912), 397-401 ; Frank Bohn, "The Passing of McNamaras," *Ibid.*, 401-404 ; and Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, pp. 348-357.

Day 1912, a moderate Socialist wrote : "I believe the time has come when they [the IWW sympathizers in the party] will have to declare promptly either that they are essentially IWW's or that they are Socialists first, last and all the time." He insisted that "the theory of progressive impoverishment" on which Haywood and the IWW predicated their activities had been discarded long before by the International Socialist movement, and that their belief in "the ragged proletariat" as "the only revolutionary element in society" also was already out of date. "The International Socialist party utilizes another force, "he went on, "the force of brains, agitation, education and far-seeing positive action."²⁶

This was the criticism widely accepted in the rightist camp in New York and Milwaukee. Berger, while aiding the Lawrence strikers and the San Diego free speech fighters as the only Socialist Congressman, did not forget to let the public notice that he had no intention of helping direct actionists. Hillquit also debated against Haywood, asserting that Marx had never supported a general strike. They thought that violent tactics would alienate the progressives with socialistic tendencies from the party, and that Haywood's advocacy of dual unionism and support of the IWW would impair the Right's effort to win members of the AF of L over to the Socialist party. To them, it was the Left-wingers that thwarted socialist principles and were undermining their party.²⁷

It is true that the left-right split in the Socialist party was in fact less clear than suggested above. A contemporary observer wrote about the factions of the party :

The Socialist party is divided neither into two opposing camps nor into a number of warring factions, as is shown by the unanimity with which all groups cooperate in such enterprises as the party press, a contest for free speech, or a labor conflict. There is, rather, a gradual shading from the revolutionists on

26. Piet Viag, "The I. W. W. and the Socialist Party," *New York Call*, May 26, 1912.

27. Miller, *Victor Berger*, pp. 100, 102.

the left to the constructivists on the right, through groups whose characteristics are seldom exact and always changing, but whose members indulge in frequent and vigorous mutual criticism.²⁸

Besides, the Socialist themselves sometimes tried to minimize the split and forge the unity of the party. The *International Socialist Review*, the Left's organ, for example, wrote in reference to "the victory at Lawrence," "one most gratifying features of this struggle is that, in the presence of a common enemy, we Socialists forget our factional fights." It remarked, "While the Industrial Workers of the World were in direct charge of the struggle at Lawrence, the Socialist party contributed the greater part of the funds needed to keep the workers from being starved into submission... And Congressman Berger worked hand in hand with Haywood and gave invaluable assistance in exposing [the facts about the strike] to the American people through public hearings as Washington."²⁹

Nevertheless, usually each faction criticized, or ignored at best, the achievement of the other. They were unified less by comradeship than by a common fear that their influence in American society would be the smaller if they split. The difference between the Left and the Right reflected the needs of different constituencies who suffered from different kinds of plights the age brought to them. The Left saw an opportunity for socialism in the turmoil which marked the industrial situation, while the Right saw it in grievances among people who lived under corrupt city governments. Had they lacked a common ideology, there would have appeared as two parties long before. The difference was profound if not absolutely irreconcilable. And in view of the biennial national convention of 1912, both sides felt that it was high time to purge the party of the other's unorthodox tactics.

28. Jessie Wallace Hughan, *American Socialism of the Present Day* (New York: John Lane Company, 1911), p. 221.

29. *International Socialist Review*, XII (April, 1912), 679.

In an article in the May 16 issue of *The Independent*, William E. Walling wrote, representing the Left, "With the rapid rise of industrial or revolutionary unionism... a crisis has been created in the Socialist and labor union." He required "the conservative Socialists" to choose between "the revolutionaries" and "Gompers and Executives of the American Federation of Labor".³⁰ On the other hand, *The Masses*, an independent socialist magazine, and the New York *Call*, Hillquit's organ, insisted that Haywood's position as a direct actionist on the National Executive Committee was untenable and hoped that decisive action in regard to this matter would be taken at the coming convention. Berger also had expected that the party would rid itself of those attempting to destroy its effectiveness and reputation.³¹

2

The national Socialist convention of 1912 met at Indianapolis in the middle of May. For American Socialists, it was a memorable city, since, in 1901, they had held the initial convention of the Socialist party in this very city. Eleven years earlier, they had claimed only 10,000 party members and some 100,000 votes. Now the party returned to its birthplace boasting of its tremendous growth over the past ten years.

The festivity, however, could not ease the tension developing inside the party. Preliminary skirmishes began when the National Executive Committee met to consider the matter of sending financial aid to the fighters for free speech in San Diego, California. The San Diego fight had been started in December 1911 by Wobblies, Socialists, single-taxers, and even the local AF of L men, who had protest-

30. William E. Walling, "A Crisis in the Socialist Party," *The Independent*, LXVI (May 16, 1912), 1049-1051.

31. New York *Call*, May 12, 1912. "Direct Action," *The Masses*, March, 1912, p. 3; Miller, *Victor Berger*, p. 103; *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, May 13, 1912.

ed against the city council's order to close a downtown area to street meetings. Wobblies had soon taken the leading role in the controversy because they had already led similar fights in Spokane, Washington, and Fresno, California. But since the IWW had had no strong organization in San Diego, as in Spokane and Fresno, the fight had become a hard one. Frightened private citizens acted as vigilantes with the connivance of local officials to repress the fighters savagely. By May 1912, this vigilante violence, along with police brutality, had reached its peak. And just before the opening of the convention an IWW member had been injured fatally.³²

The NEC promptly decided to send \$250 to the IWW fighters in the city. But it split sharply over the question of the role of the IWW in the fight. During the considerable debate, Haywood, the only and defiant supporter of the IWW in the NEC, strongly defended the San Diego Wobblies,³³ while John Spargo, one of the most eloquent opponents of the IWW, denounced them as "a vicious element with criminal faces."³⁴ The San Diego affair thus became crucial issue. To the reformist faction, this was a perplexing issue, for it was not only an issue of the abominable IWW but also that of free speech, an undeniable cause for any Socialist. On the contrary, it was a favorable issue for the Haywood faction. By referring to the San Diego affair and seeking the support of the whole party for it, they could blame the anti-IWW faction for sidetracking the issue of free speech and weaken the charges against the IWW.

With tension mounting on all sides, the first session of the convention was called to order by John M. Work, the national secretary, at 10 a. m. on Sunday, May 12, in Tomlison Hall. It was crowded with delegates and visitors. The delegates, nearly 300 of them, had come from every state except Tennessee at the expense of the pros-

32. St. John, "The Fight for Free Speech at San Diego," 649; Shippey, "The Shame of San Diego," 718; Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (New York: Quadrangle, The New York Times Book Co., 1969) pp. 189-197.

33. *International Socialist Review*, XII (June, 1912), 808.

34. *New York Call*, May 12, 1912.

perous party. About a half of them were workers. Among the other half were lawyers, preachers, lecturers, newspapermen, doctors, mayors, small businessmen, farmers, and so on. This wide occupational variety reflected the fact that the party had developed rather as a liberal left party than as a strictly working class party. Eastern and western states sent relatively large delegations, while most southern states sent tiny ones. Pennsylvania furnished the largest group, composed of 28 delegates. New York (23), Ohio (21), California (18), and Illinois (16) followed. These five delegations alone represented 106 votes and were to play a conspicuous part in the convention. It meant that the convention was under the domination of the reformist group, because most delegates from these states, except for Ohio, were reformists.³⁵

The convention elected Morris Hillquit, the New York leader of reformists, as the chairman for the first day's session. In his opening remarks he emphasized the growth of the party and the important role of the convention "in laying the foundation for the future work, extension and struggles of this party." But even in this formal speech of celebration, he could not neglect the existence of "different and sometimes conflicting views on various questions of policy and tactics." Although he added the remark that no live popular movement could exist without differences among its adherents, and that the existing differences looked "trivial and silly" in the midst of the larger struggle, every delegate knew that the differences were neither trivial nor silly in fact.³⁶

The first three days, which were spent in deciding the rules and order of business, in nominating and electing special committees, and in discussing reports of some unimportant committees, passed without

35. *Proceedings*, 1912, pp. 3-4; New York *Call*, May 12, 1912. A delegate from Tennessee arrived on the second day of the convention. (*Proceedings*, 1912, p. 24). As to the composition of occupations among its membership as a whole, the party reported as follows: laborers 20 per cent, craftsmen 41, transportation 5, farmers 17, commerce 9, professional 5, housewives 3. Socialist Party of America, *Socialist Campaign Book* (Chicago: The Socialist Party, 1912), p. 37.

36. *Proceedings*, 1912, pp. 4-5.

a serious clash. The convention was proceeding mainly in the reformists' favor. They held overwhelming majorities in such important committees as platform, constitution, and labor organizations and their relation to the party.³⁷ Hillquit, J. Mahlon Barnes of Pennsylvania O. F. Branstetter of Oklahoma — the three daily chairmen — were all reformists. They steamrolled the convention.

The first major struggle occurred in the morning session of May 15, just after an address of greeting by Karl Legien, Social Democratic member of the Reichstag and an officer of the German Federation of Trade Unions. He was on a lecture tour arranged by Samuel Gompers and paid for jointly by Gompers and the Socialist party. Legien, who was thought by Gompers to be far to the right of the American reformist Socialists, pointed out the danger of the recent "syndicalist tendencies" in the Socialist movement. "Followers of the syndicalist unions should even be expelled from the party... In our German movement we have no room for sabotage and similar syndicalist and destructive tendencies," he declared. Great applause followed. It was evident that his references were aimed at Haywood and the IWW, and that he spoke for Berger, Hillquit, and other reformist leaders.³⁸

As soon as Legien left the platform, the Haywood camp moved to try to dispel the untoward impression created by his speech. The issue was the IWW at San Diego. This was not the first time that the San Diego problem had come before the convention. In the morning of the second day's session, Haywood had asked to have a telegram sent to him from San Diego read by the secretary. He had obviously sought to stir up discussion about the matter, only to fail. The reformists had succeeded in having the whole problem referred to the NEC, controlled by them, insisting that the convention "need

37. *International Socialist Review*, XII (June 1912), 812-815.

38. *Proceedings*, 1912, pp. 59-69 ; *New York Call*, May 9, 1912 ; Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labour*, 2 vols. (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1925), II, p. 35 ; *International Socialist Review*, XII (June, 1912), 815.

not waste any time.”³⁹

But this time the Left was not to be downed so easily. Reformist though he was, Job Harriman, Los Angeles Socialist leader, asked for the reading of new telegrams from San Diego. Again, the Right wing sought to refer these telegrams to the NEC “for immediate consideration and action.” William Bessemer, revolutionary Ohio delegate, then moved that telegrams be sent to the Governor of California and to President Taft, demanding protection of “the rights of our comrades, and of the working men of San Diego.” Reformists Spargo, Harriman, and so on, opposed the motion on the grounds that the whole matter had already referred to the NEC, and that no action should be taken before the committee made its report. Moreover, they warned that, since state and federal governments had already taken action in the matter, action without careful consideration by the Socialists might be used sensationally by the capitalist politicians. The IWW sympathizers, especially the Ohio delegates, insisted that it was more important to help the fighters in the class struggle and “to demand protection for the comrades in San Diego” than such a political consideration. Finally Meyer London, reformist of New York, said sarcastically, “This may be a Socialist convention... Let us conduct our affairs in an orderly and rational manner and not take immediate, ill-considered action upon any telegram received from some one outside of this convention hall.” A vote on the motion was then taken. It was defeated 102 to 137.⁴⁰

Although no delegate referred directly to the IWW or syndicalists, this vote was the first clear indication of the probable numerical lineup between two factions. When a reformist delegate tried to conciliate the Left with another motion to send telegrams to the fighters of San Diego assuring them of the party's support, Tom Clifford of Ohio, a Left-winger, roared out: “We have just voted down the only rational proposition. Now you want to send a message

39. *Proceedings*, 1912, pp. 25-26.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-62. *International Socialist Review*, XII (June, 1912), 816-817.

of condolence to the comrades there. Don't send anything if you can't do something that counts. Stand by your conservatism if you want to be consistent."⁴¹

By this time many delegates were irritated by the tardiness of the proceedings. Though there would remain only three more days, none of such major tasks as hammering out a national platform and nominating a presidential candidate had been acted upon.

The first substantial discussion of party strategy came during the report of the committee on a farmers' program submitted in the afternoon session of the fourth day. The agricultural problem had become one of the crucial issues for the Socialists after 1908. The rather disappointing results of the election of that year had made many Socialists reconsider their dogmatic attitude toward farmers. The 1908 platform had included no specific agricultural reforms, devoting only a phrase to the exploited condition of small farmers, and embracing in its immediate demands the collective ownership of all land.⁴² Within a year, however, the party had amended the platform. The words "of all land" had been struck, and the following words had been inserted instead: "It [the Socialist party] is not opposed to the occupation and possession of land by those using it in a useful and *bona fide* manner without exploitation."⁴³ This moderate position had been reaffirmed in the 1910 congress of the Socialist party. The farmers' program adopted by the congress reads: "Even to declare in any dogmatic manner that all the land must eventually become social property is somewhat utopian; to demand that the ownership of all land shall be immediately socialized is to make ourselves ridiculous."⁴⁴ As Algie Martin Simons, then editor of the Chicago *Daily Socialist* and a specialist in agricultural problems, stated, it had been apparent

41. *Proceedings*, 1912, p. 62.

42. Nathan Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States: 1828-1928* (New York: Russell, 1961), pp. 271-272.

43. Hughan, *American Socialism of the Present Day*, p. 124.

44. Socialist Party of America, *Proceedings*, National Congress of the Socialist Party, Chicago, Illinois, May 15 to 21, 1910 (Chicago: The Socialist Party, 1910), pp. 218-219; hereafter cited as *Proceedings*, 1910.

that the party would stand no chance of victory without getting the twelve million farmers into it.⁴⁵ The reformist faction had thought it necessary for the party to abandon the rigid Marxian stand on the problem and to acknowledge private ownership of land by individual farmers. This shift by the reformists had naturally aroused great antagonism among the revolutionists. The rival Socialist Labor party had pointed out the shift as proof of the "middle class" character of the Socialist party.⁴⁶ Though, as a historian writes, the farmers' program of 1910 is important because it was the first Socialist farm program based on careful research rather than on a priori dogma,⁴⁷ it never voiced the consensus of the party in 1912.

The farmers' committee of 1912 consisted of six reformists—A. M. Simons : Algernon Lee of New York, head of the Rand School of Social Science ; Oscar Ameringer of Oklahoma, editor of *The American Guardian* ; Carl D. Thompson of Wisconsin, director of the party's Information Department ; James H. Maurer of Pennsylvania, trade union leader ; and Clyde J. Wright of Nebraska, a party official. Although not one of them was a farmer, a report drafted by them was a typical Populist document demanding such reforms as governmental ownership not of land but of the means of transportation and storage and the establishment of educational and experimental centers and of cooperative associations.⁴⁸

No sooner was the report submitted than debate erupted over the question of governmental ownership of land.⁴⁹ Most reformists were opposed to the idea, for it was so radical as to alienate the farmers from the Socialist party. Thompson, representing the committee, frankly confessed that they had "endeavored to cover very carefully that question of the socialization of land," lest "the sense of ownership among the agricultural population" should be strengthened.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 231.

46. Hughan, *American Socialism*, pp. 124-125.

47. Bell, "Marxian Socialism in the United States," p. 285.

48. *Proceedings*, 1912, p. 193.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-70, 73-78.

To him and other reformists, the only possible socialization was a gradual one, through the process by which the state would acquire more and more land by various ways such as reclamation, purchase, condemnation, taxation, and so on, and would own it socially instead of giving it to private ownership. Only by this moderate means, they thought, could the Socialist party win over the small farmers. Thompson reiterated Simons's earlier comment : "We can never have a Socialist party, a successful Socialist Party, unless we get the farmers."⁵⁰

Compared to this practical and evolutionary view, the Left stand was simpler and more academic. Their point was that, since no private ownership could be free from wage slavery, if one opposed the latter he necessarily had to condemn the former. Henry Slobodin, a dissenter in the New York delegation, stood on the floor to sum up the Left opinion. He pointed out that workers and small farmers did not necessarily have the same interests and emphasized that the party, as a working class organization, should first address its agrarian program to "agricultural workers and nobody else." Some Leftists followed him, repeating that the question was whether the party should stand for the public ownership of all land, one of the important principles of the Marxian philosophy, or whether it should admit the private ownership of land.⁵¹

The Left's motion that the word "land" be inserted in the first clause of the program demanding governmental ownership eventually was lost. But even after that, the lengthy discussion on the rest of the program was mainly centered on this problem.⁵² And every effort on the part of the Left to force the party to stand for revolutionary principles was quashed by the reformists' steamroller. With only minor rhetorical amendments, the evolutionary farmers' program was about to be approved by the convention. In the morning session of the next day, after the ninth and last clause of the program was approved,

50. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-85.

the revolutionary faction tried to make a last protest. Charles Emil Ruthenberg, a Cleveland radical, stood and spoke: "I move the adoption of a new section, number 10, to read as follows: 'We also point out that the above should be considered only as an immediate program, and that we demand the ultimate collective ownership of all the land used for productive purpose.'"⁵³ However, the day's chairman, James F. Carey of Massachusetts, stopped Ruthenberg from taking the floor to explain his motion, under the pretext of expiration of the time apportioned for discussion of the farm program. Putting the question of the committee's report, he declared it adopted. An Ohio delegate appealed his rulings and demanded a roll call to decide whether they were due or not. But the reformists won it by a vote of 167 to 93.⁵⁴

The result was important. It was the first of only four roll calls taken during the entire convention. The others were on the famous "sabotage clause" and on the nominations of candidates for President and Vice-President. The division on the first roll call was almost the same as that on the "sabotage clause". The same delegates, almost to a man, who supported Ruthenberg in this roll call, were to oppose the "sabotage clause".⁵⁵ Secondly, the result of the roll call meant that the party had clearly adopted a progressive measure to secure the farmers' vote. The *International Socialist Review* lamented the adopted agricultural policy because it reflected the fact that "Populism was still strong among some of the delegates" and because it assured the little farmer "that the wicked Socialists don't intend to take his farm away from him."⁵⁶ On the other hand reformists were naturally satisfied. Simons wrote: "The Socialist party now goes forth with a clear statement of its position in regard to the farmer that should mean a tremendous growth in agricultural

53. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 82, 83-85.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-85, pp. 135-137. Only one delegate, John C. Young of Pennsylvania, supported Ruthenberg, while he did not oppose the "sabotage clause."

56. *International Socialist Review*, XII (June, 1912), 820.

localities in the near future.”⁵⁷

By the time of the adoption of the farmers' program, a feeling of tenseness pervaded the stuffy hall, not only because the roll call had distinctly delineated the split between the two factions, but also because it was widely known that the committee on labor organizations and their relation to the party was ready to submit its report.⁵⁸ The introductory fight over the issue of trade unions had already been fought on the previous day, when the NEC had interrupted the debate on the farmers' program by reporting its decision on the San Diego problem. The report had recommended that the convention send telegrams to the Governor of California, the secretary of the Building Trade Councils of California, the executive committee of the AF of L of the state, and the state executive committee of the Socialist party. The omission of the IWW from the list incurred the wrath of the Left. Kate Sadler of Washington asked impatiently “if there was not another labor organization in danger or in the fight.” Bessemer followed, denouncing the report for urging the party to cooperate with only the AF of L and for ignoring the IWW. The reformists, Harriman, Spargo, and Lee, the day's chairman, had explained the omission by pointing out that the IWW had no substantial organization in San Diego. Despite the opposition, the Left-wingers succeeded in persuading the convention to send a telegram also to the IWW in San Diego.⁵⁹

The committee on labor organizations and their relation to the party consisted of six reformists including Harriman, Lee, and Ameringer and three revolutionary men — Tom Clifford of Ohio, Tom Hickey of Texas, and Tom J. Lewis of Oregon. It was expected that the “three Toms” would bring in a minority report endorsing the IWW. At the same time there was a rumor afloat that the majority of the committee was planning to submit a report endorsing the AF of L.

57. A. M. Simons, “The Great Socialist National Convention,” *Appeal to Reason*, May 25, 1912, 1912.

58. *International Socialist Review*, XII (June, 1912), 821.

59. *Proceedings*, 1912, pp. 71-72.

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A big explosion seemed inevitable.⁶⁰

These predictions proved wrong. Instead of angry roars, jubiliations spread through the hall when Dan A. White, representing the committee, read its report in the afternoon on May 16. The report was unanimous.⁶¹ It first emphasized the equal importance of political and economic organizations in the working class movement. It then pointed out "the amalgamation of related trades into *federations* and *industrial unions*" as evidence of the recent growth of the American labor movement. And, finally, in the section concerning the party's position on the labor movement, it claimed that the Socialists should be neutral "over questions of form, organization, or technical methods of action in the industrial struggle," that it should call on all unions to undertake "the task of organizing the unorganized," and that "it is the duty of the Party to give moral and material support to the labor organizations."⁶² In sum, the report was hardly more than a reiteration of Socialism's orthodox labor theory. Moreover, neither the AF of L nor the IWW was manifestly favored in it. Therefore one could construe it as he liked. No serious debate was necessary. Job Harriman praised the report for giving the party an effective weapon to check the growing tendency of the labor movement towards syndicalism, while Hickey, Clifford, and Haywood greeted it as a declaration of industrial unionism.⁶³ Both factions were excited by "the greatest step that has ever been taken by the Socialist party of America."

The good feeling dominated the subsequent evening session over the report of the Platform Committee. Most of the planks were adopted smoothly. The only exception was the tariff plank which claimed "the gradual reduction of all tariff duties." Berger, the chief advocate of the plank, insisted that the constructive Socialists should explain its stand on the tariff to the voters. But the majority of the delegates

60. *International Socialist Review*, XII (June, 1912), 821.

61. *Ibid.*, 821-822.

62. *Proceedings*, 1912, p. 195.

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

were convinced that the issue was not a working man's one. And the plank was struck from the platform.⁶⁴

The platform adopted was a typical reformist one. It advocated collective ownership of the means of transportation and communication, governmental ownership of the means for production of living, governmental relief of the unemployed, collective ownership of land where it was practicable, shortening the work day, effective inspection of factories, prohibition of child labor, establishment of a minimum wage scale, direct election of the President and the abolition of the Senate, and women's suffrage. The Left wingers were not enthusiastic about the "immediate demands". But they were satisfied by the emphasis placed on the class struggle in the preamble of the platform.⁶⁵

The biggest fight between the Left and the Right erupted the next day during a discussion over the report of the committee on the party constitution. The focal point of the fight was article 2, section 6 of the draft of the constitution. It reads :

"Any member of the party who opposes political action or advocates crime against the person, or other methods of violence as a weapon of the working class to aid in its emancipation shall be expelled from membership in the party. Political action shall be construed to mean participation in elections for public office and practical legislative and administrative work along the lines of the Socialist Party platform."⁶⁶

This clause obviously connoted the anti-Left impulse. It became all the more clear when a Right wing delegate moved to strike out the words "against the persons" and insert the word "sabotage" in the same place. The Left wingers were desperately opposed to it, and one of them moved to strike out the entire clause. The Right thought that by the passage of the clause they could win the convention which otherwise might end in a draw. The heated argument, which started

64. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 196-198 ; Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, p. 401.

66. *Proceedings*, 1912, pp. 122, 199.

in the morning, lasted with only a short break until late in the afternoon.⁶⁷

Samuel Sadler, a delegate from the State of Washington, provided the Left with a logic. He spoke: "The Socialist party, a political organization, has no use for sabotage, crime, or anything else of that kind. As a political organization it is not within our jurisdiction to use sabotage and therefore it has no place in our programme." Other revolutionaries followed the same logic, by which they ironically appeared as if they were political actionists. Dan Hogan of Arkansas, another Left winger, declared, "I believe this is a united party. I believe it stands for political action. I believe it stands for all that is best in the working class. We don't have to be labeled by a clause in the constitution. We don't need to tell people that we stand for law and order."⁶⁸

The Right wingers agreed that the party was political. But for this very reason, they urged, the party should keep its hands off the direct actionists and the IWW. One moderate remarked that contrary to Hogan's argument almost all capitalist papers insisted that "it was the philosophy of Socialism... that was responsible for the acts of the McNamaras." In his argument, leading his Milwaukee organization, Berger vehemently defended the clause. For the adoption of the clause he threatened the convention even with a split of the party: "The time has come when the two opposite trends of thought that we have had in our party clash again. There is no bridge between Socialism and Anarchism... If there is to be a split—and it seems that you will have it, and must have it—then, I am ready to split right here."⁶⁹

Hillquit, chairman of the constitutional committee, kept strangely silent during the discussion. But finally he stood up to report that his committee would accept the insertion of the word "sabotage." Then urging the conclusion of the debate, he recommended strongly

67. *Ibid.*, pp. 122-137.

68. *Ibid.*, pp. 123, 131.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 130, 131.

the adoption of the clause.⁷⁰

The roll was called on the motion to strike it out. It lost by a vote of 90 to 191. Then the anti-sabotage clause was eventually carried.⁷¹ The result was obviously a victory for the political actionists. Not only they but many observers outside the party welcomed the decision as a great step for constructive socialism.⁷²

On the same day, the convention nominated Debs as presidential candidate. His nomination this year was not as easy as usual. The Milwaukee Socialists nominated Emil Seidel, former Mayor of the city, and the New York group nominated Charles Edward Russell, an eminent intellectual, respectively for the candidacy for President. One reason for these challenges to Debs was his absence from the convention and the rumor that he was too ill to be a presidential candidate.⁷³ Another was the effect of the antagonism caused by the anti-sabotage clause. But a third and most important reason was perhaps the growing misgivings of the moderate Socialists about Debs's apparent leftward inclination. By this time many moderate leaders had shared Ernest Untermann's remarks about Debs: "Comrade Debs is no doubt a great orator and a fiery revolutionist, but he is also one of the poorest generals and tacticians that our movement has... he has shown himself utterly unreliable in the meeting of the practical problems of the day and the selection of his advisers. Nearly all of his advisers in the labor movement have turned out to be crooked."⁷⁴

Debs was by no means a syndicalist. He had long before withdrawn his membership from the IWW.⁷⁵ And he had become more

70. *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135.

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 136-137.

72. As to the reactions of non-Socialists to the anti-sabotage clause, see *The Public*, XV (June 14, 1912), 556-559; *The Outlook*, CI (June 1, 1912), 235; *The Independent*, LXVI (May 30, 1912), 1181, and *The Century Magazine*, LXXXIV (July, 1912), 473.

73. *Proceedings*, 1912, p. 137.

74. Ray Ginger, *The Bending Cross: A Biography of Eugene Victor Debs* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1949), p. 309.

75. *Ibid.*, pp. 255-256.

and more critical of "violence." In February 1912, he contributed an article titled "Sound Socialist Tactics," to the *International Socialist Review*. In this article he tried to answer the moderates' criticism of his position and harmonize "industrial unionism" and "political action" from his point of view. "I am an industrial unionist because I am a Socialist, and a Socialist because I am an industrial unionist," he wrote. But emphasizing the importance of political power in the class struggle, he proceeded: "I am opposed to sabotage and to 'direct action.'... I am opposed to any tactics which involve stealth, secrecy, intrigue, and necessitate acts of individual violence for their execution." It was natural for the editor of the *International Socialist Review* to regret Debs's "betrayal."⁷⁶ Nevertheless, Debs's position over the question of sabotage and industrial violence was not resolute. After the convention he wrote about the adopted anti-sabotage clause as follows: "I am opposed to anarchistic tactics and would have the party so declare itself on moral grounds rather than oppose such tactics by prohibitions and exclusion. I believe in the fullest freedom of speech and action consistent with the fundamental principles of our movement."⁷⁷

To the Right wing Socialists, the Debs positions was not only indulgent toward anarchists but also impractical. Moreover, they felt themselves hampered by a certain public image of the leader. Referring to the Socialist adoption of the anti-sabotage clause, a non-Socialist magazine revealed well the discrepancy between the dominant tendency in the party and Debs. It reads:

The only fact that would seem to discredit the sincerity of this actions lies in the convention's nomination for the Presidency of Eugene V. Debs,... who, were he to repeat the offense of resistance to authority for which he was imprisoned,

76. *International Socialist Review*, XII (February, 1912), 481-486.

77. *Ibid.*, XIII (July, 1912), 17.

might now incur the additional penalty of disavowal and dismissal by his party.⁷⁸

For all this, Debs's popularity among the ranks was too high for the moderate leaders to surmount. Besides, the moderates could not overcome their parochialism and unite behind one Right wing candidate. Not only most of those who had voted against the anti-sabotage clause but also a considerable number of those who had voted for it supported Debs. The total vote showed 165 for Debs, 56 for Seidel, and 54 for Russell.⁷⁹ The next day, the last day of the convention, the secretary of the convention received Debs's telegram of acceptance of nomination. The nominee declared: "The convention this year marks a new and brilliant era in the working class movement. All things are combining to make this our year."⁸⁰ No doubt he knew these words didn't tell the truth. He just wished for the solidarity of all Socialists. And whether it would be realized or not was dependent to a great extent on his coming campaign.

3

Late in May, Debs had a conference with J. Mahlon Barnes, his campaign manager elected by the national convention, at his home in Terre Haute. Debs told Barnes that he was awaiting the coming campaign "with unbounded enthusiasm." He wished to spare himself during the hot summer weather for the long haul at the end of the

78. *The Century Magazine*, LXXXIV (July, 1912), 473. A newspaper article clipped by Debs himself maintains that not Debs but Berger should have been selected as a presidential candidate. "Mr. BERGER is one of the most popular members of Congress and contributes a good deal of the humor that keeps it sweet," the article reads. Its conclusion is that "DEBS was the logical candidate, but the Hon. VICTOR BERGER might have proved a stronger magnet to non-Socialists inclined to revenge themselves upon the old parties by voting the Socialist ticket." Eugene V. Debs Scrapbooks, Tamiment Institute Library, New York University, Book 9, p. 238.

79. *Proceedings*, 1912, pp. 138-141; *Milwaukee Leader*, May 19, 1912 in Debs Scrapbooks, Book 9, p. 233.

80. *Appeal to Reason*, May 25, 1912.

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campaign, when he was planning to have about sixty-five consecutive days of work. But his good health as well as the tendency of both major parties toward progressivism made Debs plunge into an early campaign tour late in June.⁸¹

On June 16, 1912, the national Socialist party opened its campaign at River View Park in Chicago. This was the first campaign in which the Socialist party had a complete ticket in every state. Debs stood up and addressed a large audience. "In this campaign there are but two parties and but one issue. There is no longer even the pretense of difference between the so-called republican and democratic parties. They are substantially one in what they stand for. They, or rather it, stand for capitalism." The other party, he went on, was "the young, virile, revolutionary Socialist party, the party of the awakening working class." And the only issue of this campaign was that of "honest toil, useful labor, against industrial robbery and political rottenness!" While acknowledging that the ultimate goal — "the unconditional surrender of the capitalist class" — could not be achieved in a day, he proceeded to differentiate the Socialist's "immediate demands" from "capitalist reform." "The latter is shrewdly designated to buttress capitalism; the former to overthrow it," he explained. The Socialist platform "points out the class struggle and emphasizes the need of the economic and political unity of the workers to wage that struggle to a successful issue." Debs then illustrated the class struggle by referring to the Lawrence strike, the San Diego fight, and the strike of the Pressmen's Union against the Chicago *Examiner*. He also claimed that his party alone stood for women's suffrage. He concluded :

Let us all unite as we never have before to place the issue of Socialism squarely before the masses... This is our year in the United States. Socialism is in the very air we breathe... Onward, comrades, onward in the struggle until triumphant Socialism proclaims an emancipated race and a new world! "⁸²

81. New York *Call*, May 30, 1912; Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, p. 310.

82. *New York Times*, June 17, 1912; *Appeal to Reason*, June 29, 1912.

This self-complacent view of their party and American politics, however unrealistic, was no doubt agreeable to the rank and file Socialists, who felt that they were part of the rising tide. Debs would repeat this formula hundreds of times in the following six months.

His first campaign tour took Debs to Pennsylvania, Vermont, Maine, and Missouri. In the cities of these states, Debs proclaimed the cause of socialism to audiences, which, according to his brother Theodore Debs, were surprisingly large. What Debs also had to do on the tour was to meet many local Socialists and local candidates of his party personally to boost their morale.⁸³

After coming back home from this tour, Debs spent most of his time at Terre Haute, Indiana, except for a short trip to participate in the Socialist meetings held near his home. His major task during July and August was to write propaganda statements for various Socialist periodicals such as *Appeal to Reason*, the *International Socialist Review*, and the *New York Call*.

Meanwhile, the Socialist campaign was frustrated by another intra-party conflict. The campaign manager, J. Mahlon Barnes, was criticized and asked to resign by the Christian Socialists and the leftwingers because of gossip about his personal life. Debs did not stay out this time. Marking his deep concern, his scrapbook during this period was filled with clippings on the affair from many Socialist papers. He was so enraged at Barnes that, in the Campaign Committee, he argued bitterly against Hillquit and John Spargo, who had selected Barnes at the national convention and now defended him strongly. In a letter to the *International Socialist Review*, the presidential candidate urged the quickest solution of the entire question by a national referendum of the party. "We may indulge in vain regrets but we cannot escape the issue," he wrote. "Its demoralizing effect is already but too apparent upon the national campaign." Later Barnes was cleared by the referendum. But Debs himself did not pardon him. His vigorous moralism forced him to wage his campaign

83. *New York Call*, July 1, 1912; *Appeal to Reason*, July 6, 13, 1912.

without the campaign manager.⁸⁴

By the beginning of August, Debs began to attack candidates of the major parties in person. The Democratic party had nominated Woodrow Wilson on a platform which won labor's plaudits as well as the small capitalist's. It advocated the rights of labor, the income tax, the direct election of senators, and "the vigorous enforcement of the criminal as well as the civil law against trusts."⁸⁵ Before Theodore Roosevelt was nominated on the Bull Moose's more radical platform, the prime enemy to Debs was Wilson and his party.

Debs addressed a meeting held at Milwaukee in early August. Woodrow Wilson "was seized upon as a 'progressive'; as a man who would appeal to the common people," Debs declared. "But he never could have been nominated without the votes controlled by Tammany and the 'predatory interests'." What bothered Debs the most about Wilson, was Samuel Gompers's effort "to round up the wage slaves and deliver them at the shambles for Wilson and his Tammanyized Democratic party." Debs asked his audience if Wilson had ever sided with the working class. No, he said definitely. Rather, Wilson's past had been marked by his clear anti-labor opinions and activities. He said, "Mr. Wilson may be satisfactory to Mr. Gompers but upon what grounds he would be satisfactory to the working class is not clear." His attack on Wilson, however, was modified after the Bull Moose convention. From then on, throughout the campaign, Debs's favorite strictures against Wilson were these: "Wilson? He is a mild-mannered gentleman, lady-like in his utterances. Personally, I haven't a word against him. Politically he has't a word to say on behalf of himself. Prof. Wilson, the school teacher, is the kid glove that covers the paw of the Tammany Tiger."⁸⁶

84. Debs Scrapbooks, Book 9, *passim*; Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, pp. 408-410; Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, pp. 310-311.

85. As to the Democratic platform, see Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The Road to the White House* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 463.

86. *New York Call*, August 18, 1912; Eugene V. Debs, "Woodrow Wilson and the Workers," *The Free Press*, July 27, 1912; *New York World*, September 30, 1912.

As to Howard Taft and his Republican party, that suffered from the separation of its progressive wing, Debs was less talkative. To him and his followers, it was now obvious that Taft and his party stood for the great capitalists of the Wall Street. In the campaign Debs constantly reminded his audience of the fact that Taft, as a celebrated jurist, was "a specialist in issuing injunctions" that paralyzed the labor movement. But sometimes he just remarked, "it is needless for me to say much against him [Taft], since Mr. Roosevelt had said enough already."⁸⁷

Theodore Roosevelt and his Progressive party were, by far, the most threatening enemies to the Socialists. When the Progressives held their convention at Chicago on August 5, only the radical left arena remained for them, because Taft and Wilson had already taken the *conservative and the moderate positions, respectively*. As a result, the Progressive platform was replete with radical spirit. Its preamble declared, "In accordance with the needs of each generation the people must use their sovereign powers to establish and maintain equal opportunity and industrial justice." Its planks were faithfully formed in this spirit. They advocated women's suffrage, legislation to prevent industrial accidents, the prohibition of child labor and of women's night work, the eight-hour day, and so on.⁸⁸ Some shuddered at the radicalism expressed here. William Jennings Bryan, for example, charged the platform as "a step toward socialism." Its proximity to the platform of their party infuriated Socialists so much that they cried out "Thou Shalt Not Steal!"⁸⁹

Although Debs, of course, led these voices, his appraisal of the Bull Moose was rather ambivalent. In a letter to the *New York Times*, he wrote, "The most significant thing about the Roosevelt Progressive

87. *Columbus Sunday Dispatch*, October 27, 1912; *The Free Press*, July 29, 1912; *New York World*, September 30, 1912.

88. As to the Progressive platform, see George E. Mowry, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Movement*, (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin, 1946), pp. 271-273.

89. *The Commoner*, XII (September 6, 1912), 3; *New York Times*, October 1, 1912.

Convention is that it represented hundreds of thousands of men who have voted the Republican ticket all their lives, and who have now quit the Republican Party forever." The progressive tendency emerging here was regarded by Debs as the first invaluable step towards the socialism in which it would find final expression. But this long term view never weakened Debs's antagonism against Roosevelt. "Mr. Roosevelt must be judged by his performances and not by his pledges," he insisted. According to him, Roosevelt had been and was being financed by the trusts. "At one end it [the Bull Moose Party] is going to head off the trusts", he went on, "and at the other end it is going to head off socialism." But Debs had to admit the fact that "Mr. Roosevelt has shrewdly seized upon the prevailing popular unrest and has baited his platform like a trap to catch the votes of the discontented people." It is on this point that difficulties for the Socialist party lay, since the party itself had grown up also thanks to "the prevailing popular unrest." Perhaps Debs might be right in his prediction that "a hybrid aggregation" such as the Bull Moose party would disappear sooner or later. However, it is also undeniable that he and his party could provide no effective weapon against Roosevelt's attraction for "the discontented people."⁹⁰

At the end of August Debs left Terre Haute for another campaign tour which took him to fourteen states from the Northwest to the Pacific coast and the South. In the West, wherever Debs stopped, large throngs welcomed him at the stations. The auditoriums in which Debs's orations reverberated were usually packed with sizable audiences. At Butte, Montana, three thousand Socialist miners enthusiastically greeted him. At Spokane, Washington, Debs was saluted by a parade enlivened by two Scotch pipers in full costume and their inspiring music. 8,000 people turned out to hear Debs at Portland, Oregon. The meetings at cities in California such as Oakland, Los Angeles, and San Francisco were also successful.⁹¹

90. *Ibid.*, August 14, 1912.

91. *New York Call*, August 27-31, September 1-3, 5, 7, 8.

On September 7 and 8, the Debs party received their most enthusiastic welcome from the miners of Phoenix and Bisbee, Arizona, before whom Debs paid tribute to their leaders Haywood and Charles Moyer. A correspondent of the New York *Call* jubilantly reported, "If there are any who question that Socialism is coming and coming rapidly, a few days with the Debs party on their campaign tour throughout the Great West would dispel all doubts."⁹²

In the South, however, partly because of hampering weather, heat and rain, but mostly because of lack of effective Socialist organization, gatherings were smaller and less enthusiastic. But the Louisiana lumberjacks' fight against the Southern Lumber Operators' Association and hindrances to the Socialist meetings effected by the Catholic Church of New Orleans only rekindled Debs's spirit. At the meeting in Mobile, Alabama, he devoted himself to an appeal for aid for the sixty timber workers who were in jail awaiting trial on a charge of murder. At New Orleans, he was so enraged at the Catholic Church that he criticized bitterly their hypocritical priest before an audience one-third of which were Catholics.⁹³

On September 16, Debs returned home to Terre Haute to stretch his tired limbs which, he said, had been too long for sleeping car berths.⁹⁴ After three days' rest, he started upon his third campaign tour to the Midwest, the East, and New England.⁹⁵ The climax of this tour came late in September. On September 28, nearly 15,000 people gathered at the new convention hall in Philadelphia to hear Debs. "This must be the red sea of Socialism," he opened fire. And for more than an hour he expounded the doctrines of socialism and chided the candidates of the major parties. Of them, Roosevelt was, as usual, the target of his bitterest criticism. When he finished, cheers and hand clapping mingled with the singing of the "Marseillaise" and the "Internationale," shaking the entire hall.⁹⁶

92. *Ibid.*, September 9, 10.

93. *Ibid.*, September 11, 13-16, 20.

94. *Ibid.*, September 17.

95. *Ibid.*, September 22-26, 28-30, October 1-11.

96. *Ibid.*, September 29, 1912. Philadelphia *Inquirer*, September 29, 1912.

The Socialist Party

The excitement and enthusiasm was brought into New York City the following day. Again about 15,000 people paid for admission tickets and packed Madison Square Garden. In addition, several thousand who were unable to gain entrance to the Garden gathered at the adjacent Garden Theatre to hear Debs through microphone. Debs again presented his criticism of the old parties and hailed the Socialist ideals, both of which were already quite familiar to most of the audience. But a rousing demonstration for Debs, which lasted about fifteen minutes, encouraged his eloquence more than usual. "There could be no more eloquent tribute than this to the genius of socialism!" he cried out. "What I can see here is infinitely more important than anything I can say here. I know that you thousands, you many thousands, share in one heartbeat and have turned your backs upon the black past and set your faces toward the golden future." On the floor it looked as if every man and every woman in the vast audience had been provided with a red Socialist emblem. Thousands of red handkerchiefs, red hats, cloths, red aprons, and red flags were waved. The scene really symbolized the heyday of the Socialist party of America.⁹⁷

Meantime, however, enthusiasm had hardly spread into the world outside the party. Newspapers reported the Debs campaign only sporadically. The Philadelphia *Inquirer*, for example, did not ignore the Socialist meeting at home, but did not leave any space for that in New York City. Consequently, information about the Debs campaign was conveyed mainly by the Socialist papers such as *Appeal to Reason*, which had about 750,000 circulation at that time.⁹⁸

The candidates of other parties were also indifferent to Debs. Wilson, speaking before the New York Press Club early in September,

97. New York *Call*, September 30, 1912. *New York Tribune*, September 30, 1912. *New York Times*, September 30, 1912. *New York World*, September 30, 1912.

98. James R. Green, "The 'Salesmen-Soldiers' of the 'Appeal Army': A Profile of Rank-and-File Socialist Agitators," Stave, ed., *Socialism and Cities*, p. 14.

said that he had "a great deal of respect for the Socialist party," because he knew "how many serious and honest men" were in it. Nonetheless he added that he wanted to confine himself to a discussion only of the three major parties in the campaign which had realistic possibilities of electing their candidates for the Presidency.⁹⁹ This attitude was maintained by Wilson most of the time in his campaign.

When the Socialist party invited Taft to its meeting to debate Debs in the middle of September, the President declined the invitation in a respectful manner. Taft's executive clerk Rudolph Foster wired: "President regrets that he cannot accept invitation extended, as he is taking no active part in the campaign."¹⁰⁰ Instead, a month later Taft contributed an article entitled "Socialism and Its Menace" to a popular magazine. In his rather scholastic treatment of socialism, Taft did not point directly to the Socialist party, yet he warned readers of the danger of the socialistic tendency in which he might have meant to include the Progressive party also.¹⁰¹

Only Roosevelt, who also declined the debate invitation from the Socialists, sometimes referred to Debs and his party, and provided them with some ammunition for attacking him. But clearly he did not think that the Socialist party represented any constructive force in the country, or that he needed to refute it. Nothing showed the Colonel's frank view of the Socialist Party better than the following post-bellum letter. He wrote: "We were fought by the Socialists as bitterly as by the representatives of the two old parties, and this for the very reason that we stand equally against government by a plutocracy and government by *a mob*."¹⁰² And his view of socialists was probably shared by the great majority of American voters in

99. New York *Call*, September 10, 1912.

100. *Ibid.*, September 21, 1912.

101. "Socialism and Its Menace," *The Century Magazine*, LXXXIV (October, 1912), 943-948.

102. Roosevelt to Edward Grey, November 15, 1912 in Elting E. Morrison, *et al.* eds., *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, 8 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 648. Italics mine.

1912.

Meanwhile, canvassing New England, upper New York state, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan in early October, Debs renewed his attack on Roosevelt. Roosevelt's testimony in a Senate committee about his alleged ties with J. Pierpont Morgan occasioned blistering remarks from Debs. In the meeting at Schenectady, where Mayor Lunn was bidding for a congressional seat, Debs ridiculed Roosevelt's statement that he had not known that Morgan or his trusts had contributed \$ 100,000 to his campaign fund. He asked, "Is it possible that the American people will be deceived by such a flagrant and self-evident falsehood?" Debs further maintained that the whole affair suggested the real nature of the Bull Moose party.¹⁰³

However, for all these criticisms, Debs could not help but admit that the Progressives "were particularly well received." In an interview held in the middle of October, Debs had to answer affirmatively to the question of whether the progressive movement would reduce the Socialist vote to any considerable extent. But, he added, "this does not mean that the Progressive party will get any Socialist votes." Rather, it meant that the Progressive party would "take from us many who have more or less pronounced Socialistic tendencies, but are not yet far [enough] advanced to avow themselves members of the Socialist party."¹⁰⁴ Debs's effort to discredit the Progressives was intensified after Roosevelt was shot by a Bavarian immigrant in Milwaukee on October 14. Debs frequently denounced "the capitalist press for trying to make it appear that Roosevelt's assailant was a Socialist." He reasoned that "It wouldn't have occurred, if the Socialist could have prevented it. The Socialists abhor murderous violence, and that is one of the reasons why they are opposed to the capitalist system." The attempt on Roosevelt, he emphasized, could not affect the fact that his Progressive party was a product of the capitalist

103. *New York Call*, October 7, 1912.

104. *Ibid.*, October 1, 1912; *New York World*, October 21, 1912.

system which was breaking down.¹⁰⁵

The campaign was drawing to a close. His last tour took Debs to the South, and brought him back to the Middle Atlantic and the Midwestern states. In the South, he was impressed and pleased by the sound growth in the number of his audience over that of the previous four years. In the West, meetings were still enthusiastic. But Debs was weary by this time. A newspaper commented that although he retained a striking intensity in his words, the 56 years old candidate lacked "both in voice and gesture, the prowess that might be expected of a presidential candidate."¹⁰⁶

On November 4, Debs wound up his long campaign at his home in Terre Haute. He was quite confident of a great gain in the Socialist's vote. All he did on election day was to take a rest and celebrate his fifty-seventh birthday. He could not vote because the campaign tour had brought him out of the town on registration periods.¹⁰⁷

4

In the election of 1912, Debs polled 901,255 votes, which meant 5.99 per cent of the total. In big industrial states such as California, Illinois, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, he received about 80,000 votes each. Proportionately, Oklahoma (16.61%) and Nevada (16.47%) led the other states in the tally. In Montana, Arizona, Washington, California, and Idaho, Debs also polled more than ten per cent of total vote. And in many states Debs doubled or even tripled his vote of 1908 both in number and in percentage. As a result, Debs's total vote also turned out double that of 1908. Moreover, in Florida Debs polled

105. New York *Call*, October 21, 1912; *Newark Evening News*, October 22, 1912. About the incident in Milwaukee, see Stan Gores, "The Attempted Assassination of Teddy Roosevelt," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, LIII (Summer 1970), 269-277.

106. New York *Call*, October 16-21, 23-31, November 1, 2, 4; *Columbus Sunday Dispatch*, October 27, 1912.

107. New York *Call*, November 6, 1912; *New York World*, November 6, 1912.

more than either Roosevelt or Taft, while in other five states, mostly in the South, he outdid Taft.¹⁰⁸

In addition to the gain in the presidential vote, the Socialist party elected three state senators and sixteen state representatives, mostly in midwestern states such as Kansas, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Many on the party's ticket were also elected for various local offices. But J. Mahlon Barnes's prediction that the party could send at least twelve of its members to the Congress proved totally wrong. In Milwaukee, Victor Berger, the only Socialist incumbent Congressman, was defeated by the candidate on the fusion ticket of the major parties. Other prospective candidates for the Congress, such as George Lunn of Schenectady and Meyer London of New York City, were also beaten.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, the results of the election as a whole were gratifying to the Socialists. Hailing one million votes cast for the party, the election issues of Socialist papers teemed with reports of victories from every section of the country. Even important setbacks such as Berger's defeat did not discourage the Socialists' jubilation, for they thought that the very strength of the Milwaukee Socialists had forced the two major parties to fuse into a capitalist party.¹¹⁰ In a telegram to *Appeal to Reason*, Debs declared, "a distinct victory" based on "a solid Socialist vote," while he urged the quickest preparation for the "next fight." About the victorious Democratic party, he wrote, "all the democratic party needed for its own destruction was power and after March 4th [the inauguration day] look out for the split that will tear it wide open, just as the republican party has been torn

108. Svend Petersen, *A Statistical History of the American Presidential Elections* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1963), pp. 74-75, 78-79.
109. "Bulletin—Information Department," December 7, 1912, Socialist Party Papers, Duke University; *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, November 6, 1912; *New York Times*, November 7, 1912; *New York World*, November 6, 7, 8, 1912; *New York Tribune*, November 9, 1912.
110. *New York Call*, November 10, 1912; *Appeal to Reason*, November 16, 1912; *The Free Press*, November 9, 1912.

assunder in its vain attempt to serve warring economic classes whose interests are in deadly conflict and never can be reconciled.” About the progressive party, he admitted that it was “surely a protest against republican and democratic corruption and misrule.” However, he went on, “it is too late in the day for a third party whose only claim to recognition is that it proposed to reform capitalist or the benefactor of a dying middle class [*sic*].” He concluded that only the Socialist party “from now on is the party of the people,” and that “it will make history in the next few years.”¹¹¹

The election returns surprised non-Socialist newspapers. Their headlines recorded “surprising strength” shown by the Socialists, whom they had almost ignored during the campaign. One of them said, “Socialists have given the politicians and the people considerable food for thought in the strength they displayed at the polls.” Taft, who was defeated badly in his race, told reporters that the vote for Debs, as well as that for Roosevelt, was “a great warning that their propaganda in favor of fundamental changes in our constitutional, representative government has formidable support.”¹¹²

Although many were warned by the big gains shown by the Socialist party, they did not necessarily agree on what the total returns indicated about the future of the party. The editor of the *New York Times*, for example, characterized the Socialist vote as national success (achieved by Debs) and local failure (such as the losses of Berger and Lunn.). The editor explained the national success by remarking that “nothing was risked in voting for Debs, since he had no chance of election.” On the other hand, he went on, “the country remarks the sad results of the trial marriages to Socialism in Milwaukee and Schenectady and elsewhere, and recoils from like experiences. “This view suggested the Socialists’ victory to be merely superficial and implicitly predicted an unhappy future to the party. In contrast to this, some observers foresaw the steady growth of socialism from the

111. *Appeal to Reason*, November 16, 1912.

112. *New York Tribune*, November 7, 1912; *New York Herald*, November 6, 1912.

election results. The editor of the *Chautauquan* wrote that the gains of the Socialist party in the election meant that "Socialism is no longer alien : it is no longer theoretical : it is no longer negligible." According to him, the Socialists, in spite of their local defeats and reverses, did not lose their standing, since America still had "poverty, slums, unemployment, sweating, child labor, and wages and hours sadly out of touch with the American standard of living." Different from the Progressive party which might cease to exist, he asserted, the Socialist party would remain viable as an independent radical organization.¹¹³

Though different in their conclusions, both of these views tell partial truth. The former view rightly indicated the differing significance of the local and the national Socialist vote, while the latter pointed out that the growth of socialism was not temporary but based on persisting problems plaguing American society. As to the future of the party, however, neither view was sufficiently penetrating because of a common disregard for two disparate factors composing the Socialist strength : industrial socialism and municipal socialism.

During the campaign the altercation between the Left and the Right was subdued under the disguise of solidarity. However, the fundamental disagreement between them over the question of tactics remained intact. To the Socialists, the election of 1912 meant not only a fight against capitalism but also a contest for supremacy within the party. After the election each faction claimed that the alleged victory of the party was due to its stance. The Right wingers attributed the victory to their consistent advocacy for political action and to their condemnation of violence. On the other hand, the Left wingers insisted that the total vote cast for Debs was clearly revolutionary.¹¹⁴ In terms of statistics each position was justified to a

113. *New York Times*, November 7, 1912 ; *The Chautauquan*, LXIX (January, 1913), 135-136.

114. "The Election," *The Free Press*, November 9, 1912 ; *International Socialist Review*, XIII (November, 1912), 433 ; "The Election," *Ibid*, XIII (December, 1912), 461.

certain extent.

The victories for the Left were illuminating. Most of the states showing a great increase in the Socialist vote were strongholds of the revolutionaries. These were Montana, Utah, Texas, Michigan, Kentucky, and West Virginia. Almost all of these states had recently witnessed serious industrial disturbances which had been led by revolutionary Socialists and members of the IWW. Even outside of these states, cities which had had great free speech fights and industrial strikes also gave the Socialists big gains. For example, Spokane and Aberdeen in the State of Washington, both of which had had the IWW free speech fight between 1909 and 1912, gave Debs more than double his vote of 1908. The same phenomenon occurred also in San Diego, California. Some Louisiana counties such as Vernon, Grant, and Winn, which had recently seen strikes of the IWW lumber-jacks, also yielded a rich harvest to the Socialists. So did cities in Pennsylvania such as New Castle, which had experienced a steel strike, and Patterson, which had had a textile strike. In Lawrence, Massachusetts, although the growth of the Socialist vote was checked by the fact that 80 per cent of the textile workers were disenfranchised, Debs polled over 35 per cent more votes than in 1908.¹¹⁵

Compared to these gains of the Left, the victories for the Right were less impressive. Examining the Socialist vote, William E. Walling wrote acrimoniously: "The losses were almost exclusively in states where the tactics were less militant... Our 'practical' politicians not only compromise out principles, but prove to be impractical."¹¹⁶ But, being too preoccupied with verifying the validity of the revolutionary tactics, Walling was unfair to the Right in concluding this.

115. This paragraph is based on statistics given in the following works: State of Washington, *Biennial Report of the Secretary of State*; *Smull's Legislative Hand Book and Manual of the State of Pennsylvania*; and *Report of the Secretary of State to his excellency the Governor of Louisiana*. See also *International Socialist Review*, XIII (January, 1913), 570-571, and *Appeal to Reason*, November 16, 1912.

116. William English Walling, "Socialist Gains and Loses in the Recent Election," *The New Review*, I (February 8, 1913), 175-181.

First of all, he compared the Socialist vote of 1912 solely with that of 1910. Consequently, he failed to recognize that in cities like Milwaukee the rising tide of socialism came between 1908 and 1910, while in the revolutionary area it came between 1910 and 1912. What should have been asked regarding municipal socialism in the 1912 election was not whether it ascended or not, but whether or not it maintained the strength attained in the years 1910 and 1911. Secondly, Walling did not take the results of the local elections of 1912 into consideration. Actually, as mentioned before, most state legislators elected on the Socialist ticket came from cities in the Midwest, the stronghold of the Right.

Taking these facts into account, it cannot be said that municipal socialism lost totally in the 1912 election. In fact, the growth of his vote between 1908 and 1912 in "reformist" states such as California, Illinois, New York, and Wisconsin was not smaller than in the "revolutionary" states. In Milwaukee, the total Socialist vote in 1912 increased even in comparison with that of 1910 in spite of the varied tactics utilized against the party by the major parties. More importantly, Victor Berger, as well as other local candidates of Wisconsin, fairly outpolled Debs. In Schenectady also, George Lunn polled nearly double the Debs vote. Not only that, Lunn's candidacy produced a large new Socialist vote in counties adjacent to Schenectady.¹¹⁷

Apparently the Socialists' strength shown in the results of the 1912 election comprised two distinct forces. Both equally contributed to the "victory" of the Socialist party in the election. And the future of the party would depend on the rises and falls of both forces. Immediately after the election of 1912, most Socialists believed in further development of their party in future. But in reality, at least on the national level, the party would never achieve results as fabulous as in the elections of 1912. What explains this decline in

117. The statistical sources for this paragraph are *The Wisconsin Blue Book*, *The New York Red Book*, and *New York Tribune*, November 6, 7, 1912. See also Miller, "Milwaukee," p. 54.

the national Socialist vote? A tentative answer to this question is as follows.

In the 1916 election, the Socialist vote in the states where the Left had boasted the great gains in 1912, decreased drastically. In Louisiana, for example, Alan Benson, the Socialist presidential candidate in 1916, polled only 292 as against 5,249 gained by Debs in 1912. In the State of Washington, another stronghold of the Left, Benson lost nearly 20,000 votes or fifty per cent of Debs's vote in 1912. Also in West Virginia Benson's vote was about one-third that of Debs. These losses were not solely due to the difference of the candidates' popularity, for Debs could not retrieve the losses when he again ran for the Presidency as the party's candidate in 1920. In these states, therefore, socialism lost its momentum forever between 1913 and 1916. In contrast, in states such as Wisconsin, New York, and California, not only was the loss of the vote in 1916 small, but the Socialist party remained viable during the years of World War One. In these states, despite the above-cited prophesy of the *New York Times*, municipal socialism never declined after 1912. Before the war, the Socialists succeeded in electing their candidates for mayors on the reformist platforms in some large cities such as Milwaukee and Minneapolis. In addition, they sent many party members to the state legislatures and some to the Congress in these areas.¹¹⁸ Judging from these results, the decline of the national Socialist party after 1912, if it happened, can be mainly pinpointed to the fall of the Left wing socialism.

In this respect, the effect of the anti-sabotage clause, which signified the end of cooperation between the party and the IWW and saw many Left-wingers depart from the party, was decisive. The decline of the party membership, mainly due to the loss of the Leftists, was further precipitated after the party recalled Haywood from its national executive committee early in 1913 on the grounds of his violation

118. Petersen, *A Statistical History of the American Presidential Elections*, pp. 81-85, 246-247; Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America*, pp. 93, 103-118.

of this clause. The Socialist party, as a result, lost about 50,000 members from the adoption of the clause to the end of 1913. But the demise of the Left within the party cannot be attributed solely to the anti-sabotage clause. A typical American cyclical depression, beginning late in 1913, played havoc with radical industrial unionism, the limitations of which had already been revealed by the defeat of a strike at a textile mill in Paterson, New Jersey. The strike was the last big one fought by the IWW in the East. After its defeat the organization entered a time of tribulation and remained moribund until its revival in the West in 1916. Therefore, though remnants of the Left in the party again tried to move the party toward revolutionary industrial unionism, there no longer remained the labor organization which could substantiate their aim. The industrial unionists lost ground also because of the advance of the domestic "New Freedom." The years under Wilson's first term witnessed a series of impressive industrial reforms, which improved the deplorable working conditions and considerably undermined the basis of radical labor movement.¹¹⁹

The Right-wingers, on the other hand, strengthened their grip on the party organization thanks to the anti-sabotage clause. The Wilsonian reforms, together with the relative success of the AF of L at the time, further convinced them of the irrelevancy of the tactics employed by industrial unionists. Although the Socialist party ruled by the Right-wingers continued to talk the language of class war in order to distinguish them from progressive reformers, it bent its efforts more and more on reform issues such as racial equality and women's suffrage. Unlike the Left, they succeeded in surviving Wilson's first term as radical reformers. They won several municipal elections and even elected a few Socialist Congressmen principally in the large cities of the industrialized East and Midwest.¹²⁰ This, as well as the fall of the

119. Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, chaps. 11-12; Michael R. Johnson, "The I. W. W. and Wilsonian Democracy," *Science and Society*, XXVIII (Summer 1964), 257-274.

120. Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America*, chap. 2.

Left wing, made the national Socialist party after 1913 not only more reformistic but also more parochial.

In retrospect, Debs's presidential candidacy of 1912 fairly represented the changing nature of the Socialist party. He, as well as his party, was almost torn asunder between the revolutionary and reformistic tendencies. To him both Berger and Haywood were good friends and indispensable comrades. Debs was a political actionist and industrial unionist. As the only national leader of the Socialists he did not appear distinctively either a Left-winger or a Right-winger. In other words, he could work as a tie, if tenuous, between two factions so long as he could blur the incongruity in the party by urging solidarity among working people.

In the 1912 election campaign, Debs propounded his own theory of radical political action. In this theory, first of all, he rejected the simple idea of vote-getting. To him political action should aim not at votes but enlightenment of the dormant working class. In order to revolutionize the class, he thought, the Socialist had to let the worker recognize interests of his own class. Political action would acquire significance only when it served this purpose. But in Debs's view, the worker could never be awakened merely by such political propaganda. The only way a worker could come to really know his class interests was through industrial fields. Debs, therefore, was always suspicious of intellectual socialists and political reformists. He believed only in the workers fighting at their working places. So, in his political campaign, using his usual revolutionary rhetoric, he consistently urged the worker to participate in industrial unions and fight the class struggle and to reject capitalistic reform.¹²¹

Thus in Debs political action and industrial unionism were not incompatible but supplementary to each other. Nevertheless, he often showed his inclination towards the latter, because his socialism

121. The paragraph is based on Debs's speeches and writings which were published in the Socialist periodicals such as *Appeal to Reason*, *New York Call*, and the *International Socialist Review* during the campaign period. See also Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, p. 307.

had its roots in his own past experience as a blue denim worker and organizer of railroad strikes. A story reported by a correspondent of Debs's campaign tour vividly illustrated this characteristic of Debsian socialism.

At nearly every station some old railroad man climbs onto the train to shake Debs's hand. In the course of the conversation it often turns out that the man was a member of the American Railway Union, which Debs organized. Debs remembered them all and seldom fails to call them by name.¹²²

Doubtlessly it is in these workers that Debs envisioned future revolution. But, though his radicalism based on this natural and naive belief in working men was very conducive to his popularity, it became increasingly irrelevant in the years of reform.

Debs's revolutionary rhetoric with its uncompromising tone seemed to work in two ways in the election of 1912. First, as Debs himself acknowledged, it apparently alienated many voters with a reformistic mind from the Socialist party, and forced them to vote for either the Bull Moose party or the Democratic party. Charles Edward Russell, the Socialist candidate for Governor of New York, lamented that the Progressive party had taken away at least 300,000 votes from the Socialist cause, while others thought the number to be nearer 700,000.¹²³ Doubtless, if Debs had taken a more moderate position toward reformism, the loss would have been smaller. His radical rhetoric, however, was attuned to the minds of strikers and free speech fighters. His campaign speeches were livelier and more spontaneous in the cities where strikes and fights were actually going on. In these cities Debs polled more than other local Socialist candidates, while in others, especially in the reformists' strongholds, he did not. This fact seemingly indicates that his candidacy contributed much to the growth of the Socialist vote in the revolutionary areas, but that in other reformist cities he rather owed a considerable part

122. *New York Call*, September 30, 1912.

123. *New York Tribune*, November 9, 1912.

of his vote to the indigenous local Socialist organizations.

Debs became the Socialist presidential candidate of 1912, neither because he was particularly able as a party organizer nor because he was an outstanding theorist of socialism. On the contrary, he avoided politics within the party to keep himself from indulging in factionalism, and he had no more special knowledge about the theory of socialism than an average American Socialist. He was rather a symbolic leader and a popular hero to the rank-and-file Socialists.¹²⁴ As such, he could scarcely furnish a facade of unity to a party on the verge of disruption. It is not surprising that he could not retain Haywood's faction within the party after 1913.

5

In 1912 the Socialist party of America stood at a crossroads. The election returns of the year showed the highest point of the party's strength. But the process from its national convention to the election day revealed its weakness too. It lay mainly in the vehement antagonism between the factions, which culminated in the anti-sabotage clause. But the factionalism was not solely responsible for the party's weakness, for the fight between factions, from a broader point of view, was a result of the party's difficulty in accommodating itself to the progressive trend. As Michael Bassett argues, the decline of the Socialist party was fundamentally due to its inability to take the initiative of reforms away from the major parties.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, the factionalism of 1912 is important in the sense that it clearly showed that the party lacked a single cohesive theory and a strong national leadership.

Weinstein, though admitting the year of 1912 is "the high point of

124. As to Debs's leadership, see Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, part III passim, V. F. Calverton, "Eugene Debs and American Radicalism," *Common Sense* (July 7, 1933), 10-13.

125. Michael Bassett, "The Socialist Party Dilemma, 1912-1914," *Mid-America*, ILVII (October, 1965), 243-256.

American socialism," denies that it was a great divide. According to him, "with the departure of Haywood and many of his IWW followers, there was a reduction in the factionalism that had been, and remained, a by-product of the Party's heterogeneity." Consequently, he argues, the party solidified its unity, on which it could pursue various radical policies more effectively than before 1912.¹²⁶ Weinstein is right in arguing that the decline of the Socialist party after 1912 was less dramatic than other historians such as Bell and Kipnis suggest. Certainly the party remained quite active in various fields until 1920. Even in politics its total strength did not decrease much after WWI. However the significance of the factional strife in 1912 and of the expulsion of the Wobblies should not be undervalued. The expulsion, as Weinstein points out, lessened the party's heterogeneity. Although the heterogeneity, on the one hand, meant lack of unity and so meant weakness, it, on the other hand, reflected a variety of component elements and strength. And on this pluralistic characteristic of its organization the growth of the party had greatly depended. By the purge of the Haywood faction, therefore, the party certainly heightened its unity, but at the same time changed its organizational characteristics.

The anti-sabotage clause and the subsequent purge made the party's basis and leadership more parochial and reformistic. The party before and after 1912, if it had not declined radically, had certainly changed. The internal strife and Debs's campaign in the year can be seen as the torturing process of this change.

126. Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America*, pp. 27-29.