

Manchester, Lawrence, Fall River, and other factory centers will find an attempt on the part of mill owners to help the hands after they leave the buildings. Saving societies, libraries, and hospitals are common. In Lawrence there are no less than three flourishing co-operative stores patronized exclusively by mill-hands. The rise in power of the unions seems to have made the mill-hands suspicious of all interference with matters outside the mill. One is apt to find a dozen unions in a cotton-mill, and in the shoe shops there are unions for every one of the score or more of operations through which a shoe passes. The factory law of Massachusetts prescribes that wages shall be paid weekly. This rule has been found to work rather disadvantageously so far as saving by the mill-hand goes, for, receiving no large sum of money in a lump, he finds it difficult to spare from the comparatively small weekly wage. Efforts are made almost periodically by many mill corporations to render the homes of the hands more sanitary than they were in earlier years, and attractive with gardens and flowers. In some towns, notably in Manchester, where the mill operatives number many native Americans, some success in this direction has been met with; in other towns, notably

the larger centres—Lowell, Nashua, Fall River, Lawrence—where the population is either foreign-born or but one generation removed from it, not much has been effected. The hands live mostly in tenements unadorned with gardens or even grass-plats. A large number of the hands in every factory are young people who have to board, necessitating the existence in all mill towns of large rows of tenements known as boarding-houses, as a rule dreary homes inside and out. The people who live in them, looking upon themselves as temporary inmates or tenants only, cannot be induced to better their surroundings, and will decline to care for the vines and flowers offered to them by their employers. . . .

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. In what ways does the author reveal ethnic prejudices and stereotypes?
2. What evidence does the author use to claim that discipline at the mill is lenient?
3. Are the workers described as better or worse off than their pre-Civil War predecessors?

EUGENE V. DEBS

FROM *Outlook for Socialism* in the United States (1900)

The Bernie Sanders argument —

By the end of the nineteenth century some labor activists insisted that capitalism itself must give way to a socialist system. Eugene Debs (1855–1926) was a railroad union organizer who converted to socialism during a stint in jail. He later would run as the Socialist Party candidate for president in several elections.

From "Outlook for Socialism in the United States," *International Socialist Review* 1 (September 1900): 129–35.

The sun of the passing century is setting upon scenes of extraordinary activity in almost every part of our capitalistic, old planet. Wars and rumors of wars are of universal prevalence . . . and through all the flame and furor of the fray can be heard the savage snarlings of the Christian "dogs of war" as they fiercely glare about them, and with jealous fury threaten to fly at one another's throats to settle the question of supremacy and the spoil and plunder of conquest. . . .

Cheerless indeed would be the contemplation of such sanguinary scenes were the light of Socialism not breaking upon mankind. . . . From out of the midnight of superstition, ignorance and slavery the disenthraling, emancipating sun is rising. I am not gifted with prophetic vision, and yet I see the shadows vanishing. I behold near and far prostrate men lifting their bowed forms from the dust. I see thrones in the grasp of decay; despots relaxing their hold upon scepters, and shackles falling, not only from the limbs, but also from the souls of men. . . .

Socialists generally will agree that the past year has been marked with a propaganda of unprecedented activity and that the sentiment of the American people in respect to Socialism has undergone a most remarkable change. It would be difficult to imagine a more ignorant, bitter and unreasoning prejudice than that of the American people against Socialism during the early years of its introduction. . . .

Socialism was cunningly associated with "anarchy and bloodshed," and denounced as a "foul foreign importation" to pollute the fair, free soil of America, and every outrage to which the early agitators were subjected won the plaudits of the people. But they persevered in their task; they could not be silenced or suppressed. Slowly they increased in number and gradually the movement began to take root and spread over the country. . . .

The subject has passed entirely beyond the domain of sneer and ridicule and now commands serious treatment. Of course, Socialism is violently denounced by the capitalist press and by all the brood of subsidized contributors to magazine literature, but this only confirms the view that the advance of Socialism is very properly recognized by the capitalist class as the one cloud upon the

horizon which portends an end to the system in which they have waxed fat, insolent and despotic through the exploitation of their countless wage-working slaves.

In school and college and church, in clubs and public halls everywhere, Socialism is the central theme of discussion, and its advocates, inspired by its noble principles, are to be found here, there and in all places ready to give or accept challenge to battle. In the cities the corner meetings are popular and effective. But rarely is such a gathering now molested by the "authorities," and then only where they have just been inaugurated. They are too numerous attended by serious, intelligent and self-reliant men and women to invite interference. . . .

Needless is it for me to say to the thinking workingman that he has no choice between these two capitalist parties,¹ that they are both pledged to the same system and that whether the one or the other succeeds, he will still remain the wage-working slave he is today.

What but meaningless phrases are "imperialism," "expansion," "free silver," "gold standard," etc., to the wage-worker? The large capitalists represented by Mr. McKinley and the small capitalists represented by Mr. Bryan² are interested in these "issues," but they do not concern the working class.

What the workingmen of the country are profoundly interested in is the private ownership of the means of production and distribution, the enslaving and degrading wage-system in which they toil for a pittance at the pleasure of their masters and are bludgeoned, jailed or shot when they protest—this is the central, controlling, vital issue of the hour, and neither of the old party platforms has a word or even a hint about it. . . .

Whether the means of production—that is to say, the land, mines, factories, machinery, etc.—are owned by a few large Republican capitalists, who organize a trust, or whether they be owned by a lot of small Democratic capitalists, who are opposed to the trust, is all the same to the working class. Let

¹ Republican and Democratic.

² The 1896 presidential candidates, William Jennings Bryan (1860–1925) and William McKinley (1843–1901).

the capitalists, large and small, fight this out among themselves.

The working class must get rid of the whole brook of masters and exploiters, and put themselves in possession and control the means of production, that they may have steady employment without consulting a capitalist employer, large or small, and that they may get the wealth their labor produces, all of it, and enjoy with their families the fruits of their industry in comfortable and happy homes, abundant and wholesome food, proper clothing and all other things necessary to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." It is therefore a question not of "reform," the mask of fraud, but of revolution. The capitalist system must be overthrown, class-rule abolished and wage-slavery supplanted by cooperative industry.

We hear it frequently urged that the Democratic Party is the "poor man's party," "the friend of labor." There is but one way to relieve poverty and to free labor, and that is by making common property of the tools of labor. . . .

The differences between the Republican and Democratic parties involve no issue, no principle in which the working class has any interest. . . . For a time the Populist Party had a mission, but it is practically ended. The Democratic Party has "fused" it

out of existence. The "middle-of-the-road" element will be sorely disappointed when the votes are counted, and they will probably never figure in another national campaign. Not many of them will go back to the old parties. Many of them have already come to Socialism, and the rest are sure to follow.

There is no longer any room for a Populist Party, and progressive Populists realize it, and hence the "strongholds of Populism" are becoming the "hot-beds" of Socialism.

It is simply a question of capitalism or Socialism, of despotism or democracy, and they who are not wholly with us are wholly against us. . . . Oh, that all the working class could and would use their eyes and see; their ears and hear; their brains and think. How soon this earth could be transformed and by the alchemy of social order made to blossom with beauty and joy.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did Debs say that Socialists should shun both Republicans and Democrats?
2. By what means did Socialists gain power?
3. Critics then and since dismissed Socialists as utopians. Do you agree?

19 THE SOUTH AND THE WEST TRANSFORMED

The end of the Civil War found Americans confronting two frontiers of opportunity: the devastated South and the untamed West. The sprawling regions were—and are—the most distinctive sections of the country, and both regions exerted a magnetic attraction for adventurers and entrepreneurs. In the postwar South, people set about rebuilding railroads, mills, stores, barns, and homes. In the process of such renewal, a strenuous debate arose over the nature of the “New South.” Should it try to re-create the agrarian culture of the antebellum period? Or should it adopt the northern model of a more diversified economy and urban-industrial society? The debate was never settled completely, and as a result both viewpoints competed for attention throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century. By 1900, the South remained primarily an agricultural region, but it also had developed a far-flung network of textile mills, railroad lines, and manufacturing plants.

African Americans in the former Confederacy often found themselves at the center of the economic and political debate in the New South. By the end of the century, black leaders themselves were divided over the best course to follow. For his part, Booker T. Washington counseled southern blacks to focus on economic and educational opportunities at the expense of asserting their political and legal rights. Not so, declared W. E. B. Du Bois. He attacked Washington’s “accommodationist” strategy and urged blacks to undertake a program of “ceaseless agitation” for political and social equality.

Controversy also swirled around the frenzied renewal of western settlement after the Civil War. During the century after 1865, fourteen new states were carved out of the western territories. To encourage new settlers, the federal government helped finance the construction of four transcontinental railroads, conquered and displaced the Indians, and sold public land at low prices to farmers and developers. Propelled by a lust for land and profits, millions of Americans headed west across the Mississippi River to establish homesteads, stake out mining