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# Campaign Speech in Kansas City, Missouri, September 2, 1908

[extract]

by Eugene V. Debs

Published in "Will Not Go South: Debs' 'Red Special' Left This Morning for Omaha," in *Coffeyville [KS] Daily Journal*, vol. 16, no. 215 (Sept. 3, 1908), pg. 1.

Kansas City, Sept. 3 [1908].— Much refreshed from a good night's rest, Eugene V. Debs, Socialist candidate for President, and his party departed this morning on the "Red Special" for Omaha. Stops are to be made at Leavenworth and St. Joseph and the train is due to reach Omaha at 6:40 this evening. In the latter city a big meeting has been planned. Debs said he had not yet determined what to do in the matter of going to Birmingham, Alabama, to campaign for the striking coal miners. He said he thought it would be too expensive a proposition to alter his schedule now.

When the Debs special train arrived last night there was a crowd of Socialists at the Union depot disappointed. Mr. Debs had locked himself up in his stateroom to prepare an answer to the Gompers charge that the party management is taking money from Republicans to defray the expenses of the "Red Special." He declined to meet anybody until he completed his answer to Mr. Gompers which he said would be given to the press in Chicago in a few days.

## He Speaks Extemporaneously.

There are only a few hundred Socialists in Kansas City, but Convention Hall was fairly filled last night to hear the noted labor leader speak. Mr. Debs speaks extemporaneously. Not even the speakers nearest him, not even his secretary, not even himself, knows what he is likely to say when he faces an audience. Conditions determine that.

“This is about the time of the year,” said he, “when the orators of the capitalist parties — the Democrats and Republicans — are coming before you and telling you how intelligent you are to keep you ignorant. We tell you how ignorant you are to make you intelligent. You produce all wealth and have none of it. The capitalist class produces no wealth and has all of it. You make automobiles — and walk.”

“And get run over!” shouted a voice from the audience.

“There are always two classes,” continued the speaker, “the workers and the owners of the tools. The workers outnumber the capitalists ten to one, but the capitalists succeed in keeping you in the two capitalist parties. Whichever wins, the result is the same to the workingmen.

### **Should Be No Classes.**

“They say to us: ‘Don’t stir up all this class feeling,’ and yet the same class says in the constitution that there are no classes — that all men are free and equal.”

Mr. Debs had become so earnest now that he rested his hands on his knees and leaned out over the platform. Several times he mentioned that his party stood for equal rights for women and men. Every time the men cheered and applauded and the women didn’t.

“You produce the wealth,” he continued. “Why don’t you keep it? The only difference between chattel slavery and the wage system is that then they bought their hands outright for a lump sum and now they do it on the installment plan. You’re not even a man, you’re a ‘hand.’ All we want is to make the capitalists work for what they get and you get what you work for.

“The Republicans have run the country for ten years and what is your government now? The Senate is the property of the trusts. The lower house is the private property of Uncle Joe Cannon, who is owned by the trusts and who, instead of being a hayseed with one gallus [suspender], as they try to make you believe, is a plutocrat and a millionaire himself.

### **Raps Both Candidates.**

“Mr. Taft says frankly that he doesn’t know what is to be done for the millions of the unemployed, but he asks for your vote just the

same. The watchword of the Republicans in 1900 was 'Let well enough alone'; in 1904, when the country was still prosperous, 'stand pat.' This year, with the panic on, their watchword is 'God knows.'

"Mr. Bryan wants the government to guarantee the bank deposits. What you want is for the government to guarantee you a job. Mr. Bryan was once a great reformer. That was he came fresh from the ranks of the people in 1896 — I supported him that year.. Then he was fearless in his opinion. But little by little he has compromised to help his chances for the presidency. He tries to be for the corporations and for the workingmen at the same time. He doesn't dare say a word about the Brownsville, Texas, affair, for fear of offending the south. I believe that his real opinions are right, but he doesn't dare express them."

Mr. Debs ended his speech with a sort of synopsis of the benefits that Socialism would bring, not only to the workingmen, but to women and all humanity.<sup>1</sup>

*Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport*

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<sup>1</sup> Another news report, published in the *Topeka Daily Capital*, quoted an additional short excerpt of Debs' evening speech to the 5,000 members of the Kansas City audience:

"Our present system is wrong. Mr. Taft and the Republican Party stands for the system as it is today. Mr. Bryan and his party wants to bring back the old competitive system to force civilization backward and it can not be done. Socialism is the science of government that offers the only true solution of the present industrial questions. The interests of capital and labor are directly opposed. Each is trying to get all it can from the other and what one gets the other loses.

"So it is impossible for a man or a system to be for both, as both of the old parties are."