

During the 1800's, the nation began to become more industrialized. By 1901, it was estimated that one percent of the population held 54 percent of the wealth. Because of this concentration of wealth, a movement of socialist ideas began to grow in the U.S. Socialists believed that all of the country should share in the wealth it produced, not only those who owned the factories or land. The laborers who worked in the factories and on the farm should "own" some of the profits because of the work they had put into the products. They should share in the wealth generated from a factory or farm along with the owner of the business. They feared allowing this small number of people to control the wealth would be bad for the political freedom of the laborers. The government would only be responsive to the needs of the wealthy owners, not the laboring workers. They believed in order to protect America's democracy, the government would need to take some control from the wealthy elite.

The Socialist Labor Party was formed in 1877. They believed in an eight hour workday and published a newspaper called the Appeal to Reason that published the pamphlet of Upton Sinclair who exposed the horribly filthy and dangerous working conditions in the Chicago meatpacking industry. They ran candidates for office, including a man named Eugene Debs who ran for President in 1912. His campaign platform supported worker's rights for fair wages, more safe working conditions, the right to have a say in the decisions of a company, and shorter work days, better housing for the poor and welfare programs.

When World War I broke out, the Socialists opposed the war effort saying it was a war by the greedy industrial nations over land and trade that would be fought by the poor. The U.S. passed the Espionage Act (spying act) and made it illegal for Socialists to make speeches to undermine the war effort. Eugene Debs ran again for President in 1920 while serving time in the Atlanta Penitentiary for violation of the Espionage Act. He still won almost 920,000 votes.

Here is a list of issues for which the Socialist Party fought:

1. Reducing the hours of labor.
2. All public transportation and communications (telegraph, telephone, canals, roads, railroads, etc.) should be owned by the government and shared by the people rather than owned by private corporations.
3. Public lands should not be leased to private companies and the government should regulate the use of forests, waterways, and prohibit waste of natural resources.
4. Progressive income tax (tax the wealthy at higher rates than the poor).
5. School education for children under fourteen should be required and free.
6. Eliminate all debtors prison and laws.
7. Prohibit the employment of children of school age. Abolish the convict labor contract system.
8. Employ the unemployed for jobs in cities, counties, and nation.
9. Women should be paid equally to men for equal work.
10. Laws to protect life and limb in all occupations.
11. Abolish the veto power of the executive (President, governor, etc.)
12. Abolish the Senate and all upper legislative chambers.
13. Municipal self-government (cities run themselves).
14. Direct vote and secret ballots in all elections. Universal and equal right of suffrage without regard to color, creed or sex. Election days should be legal holidays.
15. All public officers should be subject to recall by their constituencies.

16. Administration of justice should be free of charge. Abolish capital punishment.

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