Debs, Eugene V. (1855-1926) Encyclopedia Article

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Eugene Victor Debs, labor leader and five-time Socialist candidate for President, was born in Terre Haute, Indiana, on November 5, 1855. Working on the railroads since he was 14, Debs founded the American Railway Union in 1893. The following year, the union was destroyed and Debs served six months in jail after a failed strike against the Pullman company in Chicago. Subsequently, Debs joined the Socialist Party of America and was their presidential candidate in 1900, 1904, 1908, and in 1912 when he received about 6 percent of votes cast. Opposing United States entry into World War I, Debs was sentenced to 10 years in prison for sedition in 1918. In 1920, from his prison cell in Atlanta, Georgia, Debs ran for the presidency again gaining about 3.5 percent of the vote. A year later President Warren G. Harding commuted his sentence and Debs spent his last years in relative obscurity until his death on October 20, 1926. Debs is remembered as the most viable Socialist candidate for the nation's highest office and as a champion of workers' rights.

Further Reading:

Ginger, Ray. *The Bending Cross: A Biography of Eugene Victor Debs.* New Brunswick, Canada, Rutgers University Press, 1949.

Salvatore, Nick. *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist.* Urbana, University of Illinois, 1982.