

DEBS, EUGENE VICTOR

Debs, Eugene Victor (1855-1926), was a colorful and eloquent spokesman for the American labor movement and for socialism. He formed the American Railway Union (ARU) in 1893 as an industrial union for all railroad workers. The ARU ordered its members not to move Pullman cars in 1894, in support of a strike by the workers making Pullman cars. President Grover Cleveland used federal troops to break the strike, charging that it interfered with the mails. Debs went to prison for six months in 1895 because he had refused to comply with a federal court order to call off the strike. In 1897, Debs announced that he was a socialist.

During World War I (1914-1918), Debs publicly condemned both war and the U.S. government's prosecution of individuals for *sedition* (inciting rebellion). As a result, he was convicted under the Espionage Law in 1918. He went to prison in 1919, on a 10-year sentence. President Warren G. Harding commuted his sentence in 1921.

Debs ran for the presidency as a socialist candidate five times. He was the nominee of the Social Democratic Party in 1900, and of the Socialist Party in 1904, 1908, 1912, and 1920. Debs ran his 1920 campaign while in prison, but still received nearly 1 million votes.

Debs was born in Terre Haute, Indiana. He became a locomotive fireman and from 1880 to 1893 was national secretary and treasurer of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen. In this period, he organized workers in many occupations. Debs served in the Indiana legislature in 1885.

Contributor: Nick Salvatore, *Ph.D., Associate Prof., School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell Univ.*

Additional resources

Constantine, J. Robert, ed. *Gentle Rebel*. Univ. of Ill. Pr., 1995. *Letters of Eugene V. Debs, 1874-1926*. 3 vols. 1991.

Ginger, Ray. *The Bending Cross*. 1949. Reprint. Thomas Jefferson Univ. Pr., 1992.

Salvatore, Nick. *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist*. Univ. of Ill. Pr., 1982.

JONES, MARY HARRIS

Jones, Mary Harris (1830-1930), was a well-known figure in the United States labor movement in the late 1800's and early 1900's. She helped organize unions, largely among coal miners. She also helped found the Industrial Workers of the World, a labor organization formed to oppose conservative policies in the labor movement. Most workers called her "Mother Jones."

Jones convinced many laborers to strike for better working conditions, higher wages, and shorter hours. She was jailed in West Virginia in 1902 and 1913, and in Colorado in 1913 and 1914, for leading miners' strikes. The jailing of a woman who was more than 70 years old aroused sympathy for the labor movement. However, most of the strikes were unsuccessful.

Mary Harris was born in Cork, Ireland. She grew up in Toronto, Ont. She taught school in Monroe, Mich., and in Memphis before marrying George Jones, an ironworker, in 1861. In 1867, her husband and their four children died of yellow fever in Memphis. She moved to Chicago, where she opened a dressmaking shop. The great Chicago fire of 1871 destroyed her business.

Contributor: James G. Scoville, *Ph.D., Prof., Industrial Relations Center, Univ. of Minnesota, Twin Cities Campus.*



Mother Jones won the love of working people by fighting for their rights.