

Socialist Party Platform (1932)

The Socialist Party of America had suffered setbacks during and after World War I, when many of its leaders and members were arrested or deported during the Red Scare and others left to form the American Communist Party. The party suffered another major blow in 1926 when the charismatic leader Eugene V. Debs died. In the 1932 presidential election Norman M. Thomas was the party's nominee. By the middle of that year 13 million Americans were out of work, and dissatisfaction with President Herbert Hoover was growing. In the election, which Hoover lost to the Democratic nominee, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Thomas garnered almost 900,000 votes. The official platform of the Socialist Party is excerpted below. After 1932, Roosevelt's New Deal convinced many Socialist Party supporters to shift their allegiance to the Democratic Party. By the 1936 election, the Socialists had lost much of their national momentum, although the party remained powerful in some northeastern cities.

We are facing a breakdown of the capitalist system. . . . Unemployment and poverty are inevitable products of the present system. Under capitalism the few own our industries. The many do the work. The wage earners and farmers are compelled to give a large part of the product of their labor to the few. The many in the factories, mines, shops, offices, and on the farms obtain but a scanty income and are able to buy back only a part of the goods that can be produced in such abundance by our mass industries. . . .

The Socialist Party is to-day the one democratic party of the workers whose program would remove the causes of class struggles, class antagonisms, and social evils inherent in the capitalist system.

It proposes to transfer the principal industries of the country from private ownership and autocratic, cruelly inefficient management to social ownership and democratic control. . . . It proposes the following measures:

. . . A Federal appropriation of \$5,000,000,000 for immediate relief for those in need, to supplement State and local appropriations.

. . . A Federal appropriation of \$5,000,000,000 for public works and roads, reforestation, slum clearance, and decent homes for the workers, by Federal Government, States, and cities. . . .

. . . The 6-hour day and the 5-day week without a reduction of wages. . . .

. . . A compulsory system of unemployment compensation with adequate benefits, based on contributions by the Government and by employers.

. . . Old-age pensions for men and women 60 years of age and over.

. . . Health and maternity insurance.

. . . Improved systems of workmen's compensation and accident insurance.

. . . The abolition of child labor.

. . . Government aid to farmers and small-home owners to protect them against mortgage foreclosures and a moratorium on sales for nonpayment of taxes by destitute farmers and unemployed workers.

. . . Adequate minimum wage laws. . . .

. . . Increased Federal and State subsidies to road building and educational and social services for rural communities. . . .

. . . Proportional representation.

. . . Direct election of the President and Vice President.

. . . The initiative and referendum. . . .

. . . Abolition of the power of the Supreme Court to pass upon the constitutionality of legislation enacted by Congress. . . .

. . . Federal legislation to enforce the first amendment to the Constitution so as to guarantee freedom of speech, press, and assembly, and to penalize officials who interfere with the civil rights of citizens.

. . . The abolition of injunctions in labor disputes, the outlawing of "yellow-dog" contracts and the passing of laws enforcing the rights of workers to organize into unions. . . .

. . . Legislation protecting aliens from being excluded from this country or from citizenship or from being deported on account of their political, social, or economic beliefs, or on account of activities engaged in by them which are not illegal for citizens. . . .

The enforcement of constitutional guarantees of economic, political, and legal equality for the Negro.

The enactment and enforcement of drastic antilynching laws.

Document Analysis

1. What were the most radical planks of this platform?
2. How many of these proposals were implemented by federal or state governments under the New Deal? Were any of them enacted by subsequent administrations?
3. How “radical” does this platform appear today? Would any of these proposals be unacceptable by today’s standards? Explain your answer.