3

WORK

When life is not worth living, everything becomes a pretext for ridding ourselves of it. . . . There is a collective mood, as there is an individual mood, that inclines nations to sadness. . . . For individuals are too closely involved in the life of society for it to be sick without their being affected. Its suffering inevitably becomes theirs.

ÉMILE DURKHEIM, ***On Suicide***[1]

Dale Gustafson, sixty-one, used a gun to kill himself on May 14, 2015. He was a self-employed house painter in Rockford, Illinois, for more than thirty-five years.

"My brother liked to organize sports games," said his sister Lori of their childhood in Rockford in the 1950s and 1960s. "Baseball. We'd build forts. He was always compassionate and wanted everyone to have fun. I don't think it was popular at the time, to include people with disabilities. We had one kid in the neighborhood who was missing an arm. He made sure to include him. That was just the kind of guy he was."

Their father was a traveling salesman for companies that made nuts and bolts, pots and pans, and picnic baskets. He died from a heart attack in 1970, when Dale was sixteen. Their mother took a job as a seamstress for an upholstery shop.

Dale went to college in Oregon to study horticulture. He did not graduate. He came back to Rockford in 1980. He began to work as a

house painter. He got married in 1981. He and his wife had two daughters. He bought a small bungalow.

This was when the Rockford economy began to go into a tailspin. Lori did design work in the late 1980s for the Nylint Toy Corporation. The company made metal toy trucks, cars, and construction vehicles. The company sent more and more of its work to China. Lori soon found herself out of work. The company filed for bankruptcy in January 2001, its workforce reduced from a high of about four hundred, in the 1970s, to about eighty.[2]

Lori and her husband took out bank loans to buy apartments.

"We bought buildings pretty cheap and renovated them," she said. "We remortgaged the building. You'd usually remortgage for a percentage of the value of the building. The banker said, 'Just tell us how much you want.' It didn't matter what the value of the building was. It was way underwater. They just didn't care. They were ready to write the mortgage no matter what."

They charged about $400 for a one- or two-bedroom apartment. They had twenty-seven units.

"We had a lot of blue-collar workers as tenants," she said. "As they would lose their jobs, they'd try to hang on as long as they could. We'd try to work with them as long as we could. I don't even know where they ended up. Every time a factory closed, a batch of tenants would have to leave because they couldn't afford rent."

She and her husband began to bargain with their tenants, allowing them to pay in installments.

"But they would just fall further and further behind," she said. "They sometimes fell behind three or four months before we had to evict them. They knew they couldn't catch up. Sometimes they left on their own.

"We ran the applicants through a service to check their credit history, criminal records," she said. "Pretty soon, we didn't have much to choose from, so we took the best we could find. We started getting tenants who sold drugs. Prostitutes. Some of them would do a lot of damage to the building. We got out of the business. Anything on the West Side, we sold that first. There were a few tenants we evicted. The eviction court was so crowded. The landlords say, 'They ruined the carpet, they ruined this,

and here's the amount of damages.' But they were never going to be paid those damages. So when I'd go up there I'd say, 'All I want is my property back. I won't sign off on any damages because I know I'm not going to get it. Just give me the key back. Just to stop further damage.' We had to use a power washer to wash apartments that were stained with animal feces and urine."

They sold their units before the 2008 crash.

"He was frugal," Lori said of her brother. "He only shopped at Goodwill. He wouldn't buy people gifts for Christmas. He'd make these wooden animals and paint them all and give them funny names that he'd paint on the bottom. He made birdhouses. He made doll houses for his children and his niece."

"He basically painted everything—his golf clubs, faucets, bathtubs. He even painted his driveway," Dale's best friend, Bob Barker, said.

"My daughter played soccer and he was the coach," Barker said. "My daughter played on different teams. But she decided she wanted to be with Dale again and be on his team. He always loved kids. He'd be out running with the girls during practice up and down on the field."

Dale hired people who had developmental disorders, often bringing them home with him for Thanksgiving.

"He'd do anything to lift other people up," Lori said.

Dale hiked, in sections, the Cascade Mountain range. He ran marathons. He competed in the Birkebeiner cross-country ski race. He kayaked.

"Dale worked six days a week," said Art Wiss, his former neighbor and friend for more than twenty years. "He'd have side jobs cleaning lawns, landscaping, trimming bushes. He'd spend Saturdays or Sundays landscaping."

Dale was able to pay off the mortgage on his house. He saved money in IRAs for his retirement. Dale and his wife, however, began to cash them out, wiping out the funds and provoking penalties from the IRS. The couple divorced. The divorce settlement cost Dale $50,000. It wiped him out financially. He was forced to remortgage his house for $45,000. The house was valued at $90,000. He raised his younger daughter alone. His older daughter had already left home. He slowly paid down the second mortgage.

He met a woman, Sara, who worked for the state. They married. She had medical insurance. Her insurance allowed Dale to have a knee surgery that he had been delaying.

Dale continued to work hard. He paid off the house a second time. Sara, however, ran up $30,000 in credit card debt and had large student loans.

Dale remortgaged his house again to pay off his wife's debt. When the housing market crashed in 2008, his house was underwater. Rockford had the highest rate of underwater mortgages in the United States in 2013.[3]

Dale and Sara separated. Dale realized that he would never get out of debt. He would never pay off the mortgage. He was having problems with his knees again. It was becoming increasingly more painful and difficult to paint houses. He had not paid much into Social Security.

And then he had a car accident.

He was charged for the ambulance ride to the hospital and about $800 for the hospital visit. His mother, by this time, had dementia. Dale took turns taking care of her with his sister Lori. The world seemed to close in on him.

"On the last day I saw him, he was talking a lot about family stuff," Lori said. "We have a sister who was not very nice . . . He told me she said, 'Oh you're the only one who never graduated college and you're the only one who never went to Europe.' Her words had hurt him."

A few days later, Lori, who had been unable to reach her brother, found his body at his house. He left a note saying he had been suicidal for the past six months. He told his daughters, Kelcy and Megan, that he loved them. And he asked that someone take care of his dog Buddy.

Lori began seeing a medium to talk to Dale.

"This way it doesn't really feel like he's completely gone," she said. "If I couldn't talk to him, I don't know where I'd be right now."

A WHITE MALE IN ROCKFORD committed suicide, on average, every ten days in 2016.[4]

One hundred and twenty-one Americans commit suicide daily, according to the American Association of Suicidology.[5] The overwhelming majority—93 of the 121—are men. Seven out of ten of these men are white and between the ages of forty-five and sixty-five.[6] Around 44,193

Americans commit suicide every year[7] and another 1.1 million Americans attempt suicide annually.[8]

Princeton economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton blame the suicide rates among white males on what they term a "cumulative disadvantage," meaning a combination of unemployment or underemployment, the failure of marriages, the loss of social cohesion, and declining health. They argue that the "collapse of the white, high school educated, working class after its heyday in the 1970s" led to a variety of "pathologies" that fostered a potentially fatal despair.[9]

"These slow-acting and cumulative social forces seem to us to be plausible candidates to explain rising morbidity and mortality, particularly their role in suicide, and with the other deaths of despair, which share much with suicides," they wrote. They continued:

> Traditional structures of social and economic support slowly weakened; no longer was it possible for a man to follow his father and grandfather into a manufacturing job, or to join the union and start on the union ladder of wages. Marriage was no longer the only socially acceptable way to form intimate partnerships, or to rear children. People moved away from the security of legacy religions or the churches of their parents and grandparents, toward churches that emphasized seeking an identity, or replaced membership with the search for connection or economic success (Wuthnow, 1988). These changes left people with less structure when they came to choose their careers, their religion, and the nature of their family lives. When such choices succeed, they are liberating; when they fail, the individual can only hold himself or herself responsible. In the worst cases of failure, this is a Durkheim-like recipe for suicide. We can see this as a failure to meet early expectations or, more fundamentally, as a loss of the structures that give life a meaning.[10]

Durkheim, in his book *On Suicide*, wrote:

> It is sometimes said that, by virtue of his psychological make-up, man cannot live unless he attaches himself to an object that is

> greater than himself and outlives him, and this necessity has been attributed to a supposedly common need not to perish entirely. Life, they say, is only tolerable if one can see some purpose in it, if it has a goal and one that is worth pursuing. But the individual in himself is not sufficient as an end for himself. He is too small a thing. Not only is he confined in space, he is also narrowly limited in time. So when we have no other objective than ourselves, we cannot escape from the feeling our efforts are finally destined to vanish into nothing, since that is where we must return. But we recoil from the idea of annihilation. In such a state, we should not have the strength to live, that is to say to act and struggle, since nothing is to remain of all the trouble that we take. In a word, the state of egoism is in contradiction with human nature and hence too precarious to endure.[11]

General Motors in Anderson, Indiana, fifty miles from Indianapolis and four hours from Rockford, once had plants that employed more than 25,000 workers.[12] One in every three people in the city worked for GM five decades ago. The auto plants had to stagger their shifts so the city streets would not be jammed with workers trying to leave or get to work.[13] GM closed down its plants, relocating much of its production to Mexico, following the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). GM was gone by 2006.[14]

Anderson, like Rockford, went into a death spiral. The population fell from 70,800 to 55,000.[15] Schools, churches, supermarkets, restaurants, dry cleaners, and furniture stores were closed and boarded up. Parts of Anderson resemble a ghost town. With economic and physical decay came Durkheim's *anomie* and a powerful nostalgia to go back in time, to magically make the city whole again, to recover hope.

Pope John Paul II in 1981 issued an encyclical called *Laborem exercens*, or "Through Work." He attacked the idea, fundamental to capitalism, that work was merely an exchange of money for labor. Work, he wrote, could not be reduced to the commodification of human beings. Workers were not impersonal instruments. They were not inanimate objects. Work was about more than wages and profit. It was essential to human dignity and self-fulfillment. It imparted a sense of purpose,

empowerment, and identity. It allowed workers to bond with society and contribute to social harmony and cohesion.

The pope castigated unemployment, underemployment, inadequate wages, automation, and a lack of job security as violations of human dignity. These conditions, he wrote, were forces that destroy self-esteem, personal satisfaction, responsibility, and creativity. The exaltation of the machine, he warned, reduced human beings to the status of slaves. He called for full employment and a minimum wage large enough to support a family. He called for women who stay home with children and for the disabled to receive a living wage. He advocated for universal health insurance, pensions, accident insurance, and work schedules that permitted free time and vacations to build strong families. He wrote that every profession should be represented by unions with the right to strike.

The encyclical reads:

> And yet, in spite of all this toil—perhaps, in a sense, because of it—work is a good thing for man. Even though it bears the mark of a *bonum arduum* [a difficult good], in the terminology of Saint Thomas, this does not take away the fact that, as such, it is a good thing for man. It is not only good in the sense that it is useful or something to enjoy; it is also good as being something worthy, that is to say, something that corresponds to man's dignity, that expresses this dignity and increases it.[16]

Work, the pope pointed out, also "constitutes a foundation for the formation of *family life*, which is a natural right and something that man is called to."[17] Work and industriousness, he wrote, influence the whole *process of education* in the family, for the very reason that everyone "becomes a human being" through, among other things, work, and becoming a human being is precisely the main purpose of the whole process of education.

DENNY CHASER WORKED FOR GM for forty-two years. He is a member of United Automobile Workers 662, which once had 14,700 members. We drove through Anderson. He pulled over and parked on

the side of the road. He peered through a cyclone fence toward a huge, boxy white building that used to be GM Plant 20. The plant, bought by Sutong, a Chinese tire company, is now a warehouse that employs forty people.

I asked him how he felt, looking at the old plant where he used to work in "production control."

"I get sick," he said. "When I go by Plant 20 I want to turn in. I've been out of the plant eleven years."

When GM left it also drove out of business auxiliary companies, from trucking firms to repair shops that depended on GM for contracts. Those fortunate enough to have GM pensions suddenly became the few people in Anderson with disposable incomes.

"The next generation is going to have it tough," Denny said in his gravelly voice. "You can't raise a family on $9, $10, $12 an hour. You can't put money in savings."

Denny joined his first labor union when he was fourteen years old.

"The day we signed the first agreement in the late fifties, I went from 90 cents an hour to a buck and a quarter," he recalled. "That 35 cents is what made me where I'm at today, still union.

"If you really grasp unionism, you are a socialist," he said. "Because we're for the little people. Fair representation. Antidiscrimination. Wages. Benefits. It all comes hand in hand. There's strength in numbers.

"When I was hired, there were 117 people in a line," he said. "And we produced an alternator every five seconds. Four lines, each with 117. Later in my career, I had job rights in that department. They had automated with robots. My assignment on the line was [to] service thirteen robots and no people. And robots don't buy cars."

We got back in the car. We passed another former factory, Magnequench, which once produced sintered magnets and was a subsidiary of GM.

Jeffrey St. Clair wrote about the plant in his book *Grand Theft Pentagon.*[18]

Sintered magnets are made from rare earth minerals pulverized into a fine powder. These magnets are key components in electronics, especially in aviation. The firm's biggest client was the Pentagon, which uses the

magnets in the guidance system of cruise missiles and the Joint Direct Attack Munition or JDAM bomb. Magnequench made 85 percent of magnets bought by the Pentagon. The plant, however, was bought in 2004 by the Chinese, who shipped the machinery to China.

The Chinese appeared to have acquired Magnequench to obtain sintered magnets for their long-range missiles and for the firm's computers used to facilitate the enrichment of uranium for nuclear warheads. The 450 workers lost their jobs. The only rare earth mine is in Baotou, China. China now has control of both the technology and rare earth minerals to produce the magnets, something, as St. Clair noted, that should have been prohibited by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, which regulates the sale of high-tech and defense industries to foreign firms.[19]

Chaser and I drove past a Honda dealership and a gas station where there was once a Holiday Inn and a Sheraton. We passed a Kmart store—once one of three in Anderson—that had been closed for twenty years. There was one car parked in the vast, weed-choked asphalt lot. We drove by a shuttered gas station and a guns and ammo store.

"Guns and ammo. You've got to have that," Chaser said sarcastically. "When the city starts losing jobs, one of the first things to go is schools. Property taxes. You don't have as many people paying. Because of the unemployment."

We drove by several abandoned houses that were surrounded by overgrown grass and had windows boarded over with plywood. The chipped and peeling paint was covered with graffiti.

"The grocery stores have been closed," he said. "They still got one on the West Side in the black community. They closed one or two in this area. Now, we've got big black areas that don't have access to grocery stores. That doesn't mean they don't have five convenience stores. It means they don't have a grocery store to go buy their weekly groceries."

We stop on a street with dilapidated or abandoned row houses.

"They try to make drug houses out of them," he said of the abandoned houses. "Drugs and pain pills.

"Up here on the corner used to be a TV shop," he said, pointing toward a boarded-up store. "You don't need a TV repairman anymore. If it goes out, you buy a new one.

"There's homeless [people]," he said, pointing at a group of forlorn older men and women on a street corner.

We passed a shuttered dry cleaners.

"This town was booming," Denny said. "We had the population. We had strong schools. We had both hospitals. We had the union."

We drove by a Marsh supermarket. Red signs in the windows announced it would close in ten days. A church on the corner had a "For Sale" sign on the lawn. Not far away was a boarded-up public school.

"This is where the Guide Lamp union hall was," he said, pointing to an old factory building. "This was one of the original sit-down locations in the thirties."

The 11,500 workers in GM's Guide Lamp plant in Anderson joined the GM sit-down strikes held in Flint, Michigan, in 1936 to protest the grueling conditions, substandard wages, work schedules that left them unemployed for weeks, and GM's policy of firing workers when they turned forty.[20] Most GM workers lived in hovels and shacks at the time that lacked heating and indoor plumbing.[21]

The UAW, inspired by nationwide French sit-down strikes in May and June of 1936, demanded that GM recognize the union, agree to a minimum wage, establish a grievance system, and improve safety to reduce assembly line injuries.[22] The strike lasted forty-four days.[23]

GM obtained a court order to evict the workers from the plants[24] and when the temperature in Flint fell to 16 degrees on January 11, 1937, the heating system in Fisher Body No. 2 was mysteriously shut down.[25] A hundred workers huddled inside the freezing plant. Twenty-two policemen armed with clubs arrived at the factory. They cut off the strikers' food supply.[26] A fight erupted. Sixteen workers and eleven policemen were injured. The police lobbed tear gas bombs at the workers outside the plant. A police captain broke a glass panel above some double doors and fired his tear gas gun twice into the factory.[27]

The assault saw the UAW expand its sit-down strike to the Flint Chevrolet No. 4 engine factory in February. It was the sole producer of Chevrolet engines.[28] The takeover of the Chevrolet No. 4 plant dwindled GM's monthly car production capacity from 50,000 to 125 cars.[29]

GM was finally forced to sign its first union agreement on February

11, 1937. It recognized the union's rights to engage in collective bargaining. It recognized strikers as employees. It promised not to carry out retribution. Workers received a 5 percent pay increase. And they were permitted to talk to one another during lunch breaks.[30]

The success in Flint inspired sit-down strikes across the country. Eighty-seven sit-down strikes took place in Detroit.[31] Nine thousand shoe workers walked out of factories in New England.[32] Busboys, garment workers, longshoremen, and people in occupations that had never experienced any union activity began organizing.[33] United States Steel, the largest steel company in the world, signed a contract with the Steel Workers' Organizing Committee, a CIO-sponsored union, without a strike.[34]

The GM sit-down strike of 1936–37 was the most significant American labor conflict in the twentieth century. The UAW triumphed over one of the most powerful corporations in the nation. UAW membership grew from 30,000 to 500,000 within a year.[35] Autoworkers' wages increased by as much as 300 percent. The UAW wrote agreements with four thousand automobile and automobile parts companies.[36] Packard, Goodyear, and Goodrich announced immediate wage increases.[37]

The clout wielded by unions on behalf of workers is now a distant memory.

Denny pulled into the parking lot of a Christian school.

"This used to be Local 662," he said of the school. "It was twenty-two acres. This is what we had when we had 14,700 members. See them railroad ties? I sold them to them. I used to landscape on the outside. We used to have a Labor Day picnic here. I used to run it. I had eleven thousand hot dogs that I'd purchase. At four o'clock I had to buy another thousand to get by."

GM, at the end, demolished most of its buildings.

"It was gut-wrenching," Denny said, remembering the demolitions. "Our stuff was used all over the world. It's more than you can ever think. If you worked somewhere thirty years or more, you've got to have a certain heartfelt fondness."

I WENT TO A SPARSELY attended job fair held at the Madison Park Church of God, an African American church, in Anderson. A few

companies, including Amazon, a private prison contractor, and a trucking company, had set up tables.

Michael Hill, thirty-four and unemployed, stood holding some flyers and looking blankly at the tables. He was wearing a white sleeveless T-shirt. He had a wispy black goatee. The tattoos on his arms were copies of tattoos that his father, who was a plumber and died of a heart attack when Michael was fourteen, had on his arms. Michael lived with his wife, who was disabled, and six children in Muncie, Indiana. His last job was at a company called Thursday Pools that made fiberglass pools. He was laid off two and a half months ago. He did not have enough time on the job to qualify for unemployment. Before working for Thursday Pools, he worked on his own doing home remodeling. He made $10 an hour at both the pool company and doing remodeling. He had dropped out of high school at sixteen. He didn't vote in the 2016 presidential election because there "wasn't anything worth voting for."

"Bills are piling up faster than I can get the money together to pay them," he said wearily. "Ever since the economy crashed, people are pretty much working for pennies. It's been a hard road. I make sure my kids eat. It's stressful. Depressing at times. A lot of the people I grew up with took an alternate route. A lot of them are in jail. A lot of them are in prison. A lot of them got into drugs really bad. A lot of meth and cocaine."

Ever since Michael was laid off, he has been "constantly moving, trying to find the next job."

"Because I was self-employed for so long, McDonald's told me I was overqualified to work there," he said. "I've had three jobs in the last month. I had to drywall the lower floor of a house. I had to lay a floor for somebody. And I had to replace the plumbing in a bathroom."

He said he made $450 last month.

"They're not wearing Abercrombie," he said of his children. "I feel bad. They want this. They want that. And Dad can't give it to them right this minute."

Judy Streeter, who grew up in Anderson, is president of the Anderson Chapter of the Indiana Black Expo. She helped organize the job fair. About 15 percent of the city is African American. Most live in West Anderson.

"We lost our one and only grocery store," she lamented. "We seem to get dollar stores. But we don't have any real businesses on the West Side. Food restaurants, we have two. Taco Bell and Wendy's.

"We had W. T. Grants [a variety store]," Judy said of the city she knew as a girl. "We had a lot of places where individuals could go to find jobs. We had automotive stores. With the closure of General Motors, then you can see things start to deteriorate.

"The youth have nowhere to go," she said. "They have no hope. They have no desires to do anything."

The economic decline has been especially hard on African Americans.

"Young black men and women have to work twice as hard in order for them to be able to do what other kids are doing," she said.

"I lost a son because of drugs," she said. "He was killed by another boy. Then I had [another son] incarcerated. They came from a good family. They come from a different upbringing. [Drugs weren't] something that was encouraged. It wasn't an atmosphere that they were exposed to. It was a part of being out there and making some bad choices. Our kids are making bad choices. But at the same time, there's just no hope. They don't have any motivation to do the things that need to get done. Why is the motivation so low? I can't answer that. My one son who was incarcerated, he spent two years going to college. In the end he still got in trouble."

She said her son could not find steady employment after he was released from prison.

"If you're going to incarcerate them, then help rehabilitate them," she said. "Help them learn how to do trades and other things . . . I have an uncle who was a Supreme Court judge. One of the things that he talked about is the fact that when they come out, they still have to put on the application they were incarcerated, which keeps them from getting employment. If we always leave that stumbling block there for them and they can't get past it, then you're not helping them. You're hurting them."

Lieutenant Larry Taylor, a heavyset corrections officer, sat at a job fair table with a colleague, Sergeant Williams. They wore blue uniforms. Taylor had spent twenty-eight years as a corrections officer.

"We're in a position to make a job offer today," he said. "We brought applications with us. We can give them an interview today."

There was little interest from the job seekers, although Taylor said in his prison there were one hundred job openings. By late afternoon only three people had filled out applications. This may be because applicants must submit to "a background check, a clear urine analysis, drug screen, a check of the references they submit, and also a check to see if there's any back taxes they owe that they haven't made arrangements to take care of," he said.

The starting salary was $14.16 an hour. Veterans could get an extra 50 cents an hour.

"Benefits are from day one," he said. "As soon as the person receives a phone call saying, 'Report at six o'clock on Monday over here.' It will start right then. They'll have health insurance, vision, dental. They will start accumulating their leave time. They have paid military leave. We have a lot of people in the National Guard or Army Reserves."

"Why is it hard to fill these jobs?" I asked.

"My personal opinion: the work ethic is just not what it used to be," he said. "A job used to really mean something. You felt an obligation to your job. When you agreed to take a job from your employer, you worked for that employer. You don't call off sick when you weren't sick. You came to work. You felt an obligation towards them, towards the other people you work with. You knew what your job duties entailed. You know if you weren't there somebody else had to pick up that slack for you. That caliber of individuals is really hard to find now."

He admitted the job had its downsides.

"The old-school bullying type things—real hard stares, negative comments," he said. "To a female, they could say something really rude about their personal hygiene, things that a woman would take to heart. To a male, they might say something about how soft he is. It's almost a high school mentality.

"One of the hardest things for me was to tell someone my father's age, 'No,' " he went on. "But that is a part of my job."

The guards were unionized when Taylor first began working at the prison. But Indiana governor Mitch Daniels signed an executive order

in 2005 that eliminated collective bargaining for all state employees, essentially outlawing their unions, stripping them of unionized rights, and voiding their union contracts.[38] The order obliterated the unions for corrections officers, highway police, hospital workers, and other state employees. Daniels also privatized state functions, including the food service in the state's twenty-eight prisons. The governor claimed the state had saved over $100 million from 2005 to 2011, although the privatization cost hundreds of jobs.[39] Daniels signed a "right to work" provision in 2012 to the state's labor laws that bars union contracts from requiring nonunion members to pay fees for representation. The provision is used by unionized companies to employ nonunion labor.

"We had at least seven unions," Taylor said. "You had your pick. Now they're all gone. Now if an officer has a complaint or felt like he wasn't done fairly, he has the SEAC, the State Employees' Appeals Commission. It's his right to turn around and file paperwork. Of course, they always try to settle everything at the lowest level of the facility.

"It used to be the state ran everything that goes on inside the facility," he said. "Everything. The kitchens. The states were in charge of that. Aramark [a private contractor] runs our food service [now]. PEN Products runs our laundry. Grace College runs our education. Medical is always a contract now. The state used to run their own medical department. The state does [still] run commissary [a store within a correctional facility]."

Taylor said the quality of the food plummeted once food service was outsourced to Aramark. He brings his own meals.

"Back when I hired in, we had an officers dining room," he said. "A lot of facilities [that have] been around still have officers dining rooms. Nobody, to my knowledge, staffs them or runs them anymore. A long time ago, you would buy a meal ticket. The meal cost you 50 cents. And it was really good food. The offenders did prepare it. But it was prepared in the officers dining room and they had a man who was in charge of watching them."

The prisoners work in a variety of prison industries that pay about 25 cents an hour.

"There is a lot of industry there," he said. "Our facility, the Correctional Industrial Facility, we have a Meritor brake service, a PEN Products

shop that runs an upholstery shop. Those are both different companies. PEN Products is tied in with the state. Meritor is a private industry.

"The state pays on four different pay scales—A, B, C, and D. 'A' would be, for instance, 35 cents an hour," he said. " 'B,' a dime less. 'C,' a dime less. A [prisoner] that goes to work for Meritor, a private company, might start off with that 'A' pay. Every ninety days they get a dime raise. That continues for over a year. Then it gets up over a dollar."

Meritor refubishes old brakes and sells them.

"They look like they're brand-new when they go back out," he said.

"The only population that has dropped is the staffing population," he said. "At these job fairs, we tell people this is a job that they make into a career. Hopefully, we'll find career people and not just job people. Ideally, it's a younger person who has worked a little while and has their head screwed on straight. Someone who will say, 'I need a career. I need a future. I need something that will always be there.' It's sad to say but prisons will always be there."

Taylor, who was white, said he worried about the nation's moral decline. He and his wife, a bus driver, homeschool their children. The deciding factor was "evolution versus creation."

"We believe in the Bible," he said. "We believe the world was created by God just like the Bible says.

"Abstinence isn't taught in school," he went on. " 'We're just going to give you all the condoms and different things to prevent children. Here's the different diseases you could get.' But all that can be prevented if you just abstain.

"Bullying is always a factor," he said. "There's bullying everywhere. People commit suicide because of bullying. I think we felt [homeschooling] was a safer environment to raise our kids in.

"I used to wonder [about the prisoners] initially when I was first hired by the department, 'How many of these guys were just in the wrong place at the wrong time?' " he said. "Then after I was there for a little while, I got to know them. It changed to, 'How many of these gentlemen have had break after break after break?' And the judge finally got tired of looking at him."

He said he voted for Trump, as did most of his neighbors.

"I think people were ready for somebody to put their fist down and say, 'You know what, it's stopping right here,' " he said. "I think we should have circled the wagon as a country a long time ago. You know what, world, we're going to focus on ourselves the next year. So nothing is coming out. We're not exporting nothing and we're not importing nothing. Good luck to you. We'll see you in a year. Let the whole world rise up and say, 'Oh my gosh. What are we going to do without the United States?' I'm tired of not focusing on us. We have to focus on ourselves."

IN INDIANAPOLIS, AN HOUR FROM Anderson, the Carrier plant was being downsized—another in a long series of hammer blows to Indiana's workers. Carrier had announced in February 2016 that the facility would close, putting over a thousand people out of work, and move to Mexico, where workers earn $3 an hour without benefits. Workers in the U.S. earn about $20 an hour and have pensions, health insurance, and paid vacation.

I drove to the Steelworkers Local 1999 to speak with the former president Chuck Jones.

"We met with the company to see what we could do to keep the facility here in Indianapolis," Jones said. "We identified about $22 million, according to the company's figures, in concessionary givebacks per year. The company costed it out. Came back and said, 'Well, we're saving $65 million a year [by moving to Mexico].'

"They said, 'Well, the only way that you guys can achieve $65 million is if everyone worked for $5 an hour and you can't do that because that's below minimum wage,' " he said. " 'And nobody would have any benefits at all. So it's a noble gesture, seeing what you can do. But you can't get there.' "

"If I were in office right now Carrier would not be leaving Indiana," Trump announced on April 20, 2016.[40]

Trump and Mike Pence, the former governor of Indiana, came back to Indianapolis on December 1, 2016, to announce they had negotiated a deal with Carrier to save 1,100 jobs. Carrier is part of UTC Climate, Controls & Security, a unit of United Technologies Corp.

This "was an out-and-out lie," Jones said.

"The state of Indiana was going to offer $7 million in tax abatements [to UTC to keep Carrier jobs in-state], at taxpayers' expense," he said. "We sit there. There's a handful of us who'd been told two hours before that 550 jobs were going to Monterrey, Mexico. Trump and Pence and UTC never mentioned anything about losing 550 jobs.

"People assumed at that point in time that their jobs were safe," he went on. "Well, we know part of them were. But people thought the whole facility was safe.

"We got a company like Carrier, a corporation like UTC, who is making record-breaking profits," he said. "It's corporate greed. They don't care about what they're doing to their employees, our members, their families, the communities, the schools, the businesses. They don't care because the bottom line is, it's $65 million a year that they're going to be saving. It's all about making sure the CEOs and the people who have stock in UTC make a little more money.

"In Carrier's situation, the state of Indiana rewarded Carrier and UTC, at the taxpayers' expense, $7 million, over ten years, to move 550 jobs out of the city of Indianapolis," he said. "And then [losing] another 700 [jobs], in Huntington, Indiana, which is a UTC plant. Also, the federal government has rewarded UTC with more military contracts. They're involved with helicopters. They got close to $6 billion in military contracts. So you've got a company that takes jobs out of this country. Then we got our political people who reward them with military contracts. Something is wrong with that story.

"We couldn't sell Hillary," he said. "I wasn't even going to try to sell Hillary to them. The only thing I would ask them is, 'If you're going to vote for Trump'—he was going to win Indiana anyway—'Please vote for our Democratic nominee for governor in the down ticket.' And that didn't work out either.

"The Democratic Party got lazy," he said. "The working-class people, instead of coming out and voting, they stayed home. A lot of our people, labor people, get caught up too much on guns and stuff like that instead of looking at who has got their best interest in mind, as far as the economic part.

"The Democrats have let us down," he said. "They forgot about the working-class people."

I DROVE TO TERRE HAUTE to visit the home of Eugene Victor Debs, now a museum on the campus of Indiana State University.

Debs burst onto the national stage when he organized a railroad strike in 1894 after the Pullman Company cut wages by up to one third but did not lower rents in company housing or reduce dividend payments to its stockholders.[41] Over a hundred thousand workers staged what became the biggest strike in U.S. history on trains carrying Pullman cars.[42]

The response was swift and brutal.

"Mobilizing all the powers of capital, the owners, representing twenty-four railroads with combined capital of $818,000,000, fought back with the courts and the armed forces of the Federal government behind them," Barbara W. Tuchman writes in *The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World Before the War, 1890–1914.*[43] "Three thousand police in the Chicago area were mobilized against the strikers, five thousand professional strikebreakers were sworn in as Federal deputy marshals and given firearms; ultimately six thousand Federal and State troops were brought in, less for the protection of property and the public than to break the strike and crush the union."[44]

Attorney General Richard Olney, who, as Tuchman writes, "had been a lawyer for railroads before entering the Cabinet and was still a director of several lines involved in the strike,"[45] issued an injunction rendering the strike illegal. The conflict, as Debs would write, was a battle between "the producing classes and the money power of the country."[46]

Debs and the union leaders defied the injunction. They were arrested, denied bail, and sent to jail for six months. The strike was broken. Thirty workers had been killed. Sixty had been injured. Over seven hundred had been arrested. The Pullman Company hired new workers under "yellow dog contracts," agreements that forbade them to unionize.[47]

When he was in jail, Debs read the works of socialist writers Edward Bellamy and Karl Kautsky, as well as Karl Marx's *Das Kapital.* The books, especially Marx's three volumes, set the "wires humming in my system."[48]

"I was to be baptized in Socialism in the roar of the conflict. . . . In the gleam of every bayonet and the flash of every rifle the class struggle was revealed," he writes. "This was my first practical lesson in Socialism."[49]

Debs came to the conclusion that no strike or labor movement could ultimately be successful as long as the government was controlled by the capitalist class. Any advances made by an organized working class would later be reversed by the capitalists when they regained absolute power, often by temporarily mollifying workers with reforms. Working men and women had to achieve political power, a goal of Britain's Labour Party at the time, or they would forever be at the mercy of the bosses.[50]

Debs especially feared the rise of the monolithic corporate state. He foresaw that corporations, unchecked, would expand to "continental proportions and swallow up the national resources and the means of production and distribution."[51] If that happened, he warned, the long "night of capitalism will be dark."[52]

This was a period in U.S. history when many American Christians were socialists. Walter Rauschenbusch, a Christian theologian, Baptist minister, and leader of the Social Gospel movement, thundered against capitalism.

Debs turned to the Bible as often as to Marx, arguing, "Cain was the author of the competitive theory" and the "cross of Jesus stands as its eternal denial."[53] Debs's fiery speeches, replete with words like "sin" and "redemption," were often thinly disguised sermons. He equated the crucified Christ with the abolitionist John Brown.[54] He insisted that Jesus came "to destroy class rule and set up the common people as the sole and rightful inheritors of the earth."[55] "What is Socialism?" he once asked. "Merely Christianity in action."[56] He was fond of quoting poet James Russell Lowell,[57] who wrote:

He's true to God who's true to man;
Whenever wrong is done.
To the humblest and the weakest,
'neath the all-beholding sun.
That wrong is also done to us,

And they are slaves most base,
Whose love of right is for themselves
And not for all the race[58]

It was also a period beset with violence, including anarchist bombings and assassinations. An anarchist killed President William McKinley in 1901, unleashing a wave of state repression against social and radical movements. Striking workers engaged in periodic gun battles, especially in the coalfields of southern West Virginia, with company militias, National Guard units, paramilitary groups such as the Coal and Iron Police, and the U.S. Army. Hundreds of workers were killed. Debs adamantly opposed violence and sabotage, arguing that these actions allowed the state to demonize the socialist movement and legitimize violence by the state. The conflict with the capitalist class, Debs argued, was at its core about competing values.

Debs turned to politics when he was released from jail in 1895. He was one of the founders of the Socialist Party of America and, in 1905, the Wobblies, along with Mother Jones and William "Big Bill" Haywood.[59] He was the Socialist Party candidate for the U.S. presidency five times in the period 1900 through 1920—once when he was in prison—and ran for Congress in 1916.[60]

The Socialist Party in 1912 had 126,000 members, 1,200 officeholders in 340 municipalities, and 29 English and 22 foreign-language weeklies, along with three English and six foreign-language dailies. It included in its ranks tenant farmers, garment workers, railroad workers, coal miners, hotel and restaurant workers, dockworkers, and lumberjacks. Debs traveled from New York to California during the 1912 presidential campaign on a train called the Red Special. He spoke to tens of thousands.[61] He helped elect socialist mayors in some seventy cities, including Milwaukee.[62] He propelled two socialists into Congress.[63] In the elections of 1912 he received nearly a million votes, 6 percent of the electorate.[64] Eighteen thousand people went to see him in Philadelphia and in New York City fifteen thousand people paid 15 cents to a dollar to hear him speak in Madison Square Garden.[65]

The socialist and radical parties and unions terrified the ruling elites,

who instituted tepid reforms in an attempt to stanch the support for these groups. At the same time the state began a campaign to crush the movement. Department of Justice agents in 1912 made simultaneous raids on forty-eight IWW meeting halls across the country and arrested 165 IWW union leaders. One hundred and one went to trial, including Haywood, who testified for three days. One of the IWW leaders told the court:

> You ask me why the I.W.W. is not patriotic to the United States. If you were a bum without a blanket; if you had left your wife and kids when you went west for a job, and had never located them since; if your job had never kept you long enough in a place to qualify you to vote; if you slept in a lousy, sour bunkhouse, and ate food just as rotten as they could give you and get by with it; if deputy sheriffs shot your cooking cans full of holes and spilled your grub on the ground; if your wages were lowered on you when the bosses thought they had you down; if there was one law for Ford, Suhr, and Mooney [I.W.W. leaders] and another for Harry Thaw [heir to a multimillion-dollar mine and railroad fortune who used his wealth to avoid prison time for murder]: if every person who represented law and order and the nation beat you up, railroaded you to jail, and the good Christian people cheered and told them to go to it, how in hell do you expect a man to be patriotic?
>
> This war [World War I] is a business man's war and we don't see why we should go out and get shot in order to save the lovely state of affairs that we now enjoy.[66]

Debs demanded an end to child labor,[67] and denounced Jim Crow and lynching.[68] He called for women's suffrage, a graduated income tax, unemployment compensation, the direct election of senators, employer liability laws, national departments of education and health, guaranteed pensions for the elderly, nationalization of the banking and transport systems, and replacing "wage slavery" with cooperative industries.[69]

On June 18, 1918, in Canton, Ohio, Debs, as he had often done in the past, decried the unholy alliance between capitalism and war, the use

of the working class by the capitalists as cannon fodder in World War I, and the Wilson administration's persecution of antiwar activists, unionists, anarchists, socialists, and communists.[70] Wilson, who had a deep animus toward Debs, had him arrested under the Sedition Act, which made it a crime to "willfully utter, print, write, or publish any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of the Government of the United States,"[71] or to "willfully urge, incite, or advocate any curtailment of the production" of anything "necessary or essential to the prosecution of [a U.S. war, in this case against Germany and its allies]."[72]

Debs did not contest the charges. At his trial, he declared: "Washington, Paine, Adams—these were the rebels of their day. At first they were opposed by the people and denounced by the press . . . And if the Revolution had failed, the revolutionary fathers would have been executed as felons. But it did not fail. Revolutions have a habit of succeeding when the time comes for them."[73] On September 18, 1918, minutes before he was sentenced to a ten-year prison term and stripped of his citizenship, the sixty-two-year-old Debs rose and told the court:

> Your Honor, years ago I recognized my kinship with all living beings, and I made up my mind that I was not one bit better than the meanest on earth. I said then, and I say now, that while there is a lower class, I am in it, and while there is a criminal element I am of it, and while there is a soul in prison, I am not free.
>
> I listened to all that was said in this court in support and justification of this prosecution, but my mind remains unchanged. I look upon the Espionage Law as a despotic enactment in flagrant conflict with democratic principles and with the spirit of free institutions. . . . Your Honor, I have stated in this court that I am opposed to the social system in which we live; that I believe in a fundamental change—but if possible by peaceable and orderly means. . . .
>
> I am thinking this morning of the men in the mills and the factories; of the men in the mines and on the railroads. I am thinking of the women who for a paltry wage are compelled to work out their barren lives; of the little children who in this

system are robbed of their childhood and in their tender years are seized in the remorseless grasp of Mammon and forced into the industrial dungeons, there to feed the monster machines while they themselves are being starved and stunted, body and soul. I see them dwarfed and diseased and their little lives broken and blasted because in this high noon of Christian civilization money is still so much more important than the flesh and blood of childhood. In very truth gold is god today and rules with pitiless sway in the affairs of men.

In this country—the most favored beneath the bending skies—we have vast areas of the richest and most fertile soil, material resources in inexhaustible abundance, the most marvelous productive machinery on earth, and millions of eager workers ready to apply their labor to that machinery to produce in abundance for every man, woman, and child—and if there are still vast numbers of our people who are the victims of poverty and whose lives are an unceasing struggle all the way from youth to old age, until at last death comes to their rescue and lulls these hapless victims to dreamless sleep, it is not the fault of the Almighty: it cannot be charged to nature, but it is due entirely to the outgrown social system in which we live that ought to be abolished not only in the interest of the toiling masses but in the higher interest of all humanity. . . .

I believe, Your Honor, in common with all Socialists, that this nation ought to own and control its own industries. I believe, as all Socialists do, that all things that are jointly needed and used ought to be jointly owned—that industry, the basis of our social life, instead of being the private property of a few and operated for their enrichment, ought to be the common property of all, democratically administered in the interest of all. . . .

I am opposing a social order in which it is possible for one man who does absolutely nothing that is useful to amass a fortune of hundreds of millions of dollars, while millions of men and women who work all the days of their lives secure barely enough for a wretched existence.

> This order of things cannot always endure. I have registered my protest against it. I recognize the feebleness of my effort, but, fortunately, I am not alone. There are multiplied thousands of others who, like myself, have come to realize that before we may truly enjoy the blessings of civilized life, we must reorganize society upon a mutual and cooperative basis; and to this end we have organized a great economic and political movement that spreads over the face of all the earth. . . .
>
> Your Honor, I ask no mercy and I plead for no immunity. I realize that finally the right must prevail. I never so clearly comprehended as now the great struggle between the powers of greed and exploitation on the one hand and upon the other the rising hosts of industrial freedom and social justice.[74]

Three years later, Debs's sentence was commuted by President Warren Harding to time served. He was released from prison in December of 1921 in poor health.[75] His citizenship was not restored until five decades after his death in 1926.[76] The labor movement and Socialist Party had been broken by the time he died.

The breakdown of capitalism saw a short-lived revival of organized labor during the 1930s, often led by the Communist Party. This resurgence triggered yet another prolonged assault by the capitalist class, one that accelerated after the social unrest of the 1960s.

The social, political, and civil rights won by workers in long and bloody struggles have been stripped away. Government regulations have been rolled back to permit corporations to engage in abuse and fraud. Unions are moribund.

We have to begin all over again. We must do so understanding that we can only pit power against power. Our power only comes when we organize.

I walked through the Debs museum in Terre Haute with its curator, Allison Duerk. It has about seven hundred visitors a year. School groups rarely come. The valiant struggle by radical socialists and workers has been consciously erased from history and replaced with the vacuity of celebrity culture and the cult of the self.

The walls of the two-story frame house, built by Debs and his wife in 1890, are covered with photos and posters, including pictures of Debs's funeral on the porch and five thousand mourners in the front yard. There is the key to the cell in which he was held when he was jailed the first time. There is a photo of Convict No. 9653—Debs—holding a bouquet at the entrance to the federal penitentiary in Atlanta as he accepts the nomination from leaders of the Socialist Party to be their 1920 presidential candidate. There are gifts including an intricately inlaid wooden table and an ornately carved cane that prisoners sent to Debs, who was a tireless advocate for prisoners' rights.

I opened the glass panel of a cherry wood bookshelf and pulled out one of Debs's books, running my fingers lightly over his signature on the inside flap. I read a passage from a speech he gave in 1905 in Chicago:

> The capitalist who does no useful work has the economic power to take from a thousand or ten thousand workingmen all they produce, over and above what is required to keep them in working and producing order, and he becomes a millionaire, perhaps a multi-millionaire. He lives in a palace in which there is music and singing and dancing and the luxuries of all climes. He sails the high seas in his private yacht. He is the reputed "captain of industry" who privately owns a social utility, has great economic power, and commands the political power of the nation to protect his economic interests. He is the gentleman who furnishes the "political boss" and his swarm of mercenaries with the funds with which the politics of the nation are corrupted and debauched. He is the economic master and the political ruler and you workingmen are almost as completely at his mercy as if you were his property under the law.

I leafed through copies of *Appeal to Reason*, the Socialist Party newspaper Debs edited, which once had almost 800,000 readers and the fourth highest circulation in the country. It was shut down in 1922, a victim as well of the purges carried out against populist movements in the name of anticommunism.

Debs, like many of his generation, was literate. He read and reread Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* in French. It was his father's bible. It became his own. His parents, émigrés from Alsace, named him after the French novelists Eugène Sue and Victor Hugo. His father read Sue, Hugo, Voltaire, Rousseau, Dumas, and other French authors at night to his six children.

Debs found in Hugo's novel the pathos of the struggle by the wretched of the earth for dignity and freedom. He was well aware, like Hugo, that good people were usually relentlessly persecuted, were rarely rewarded for virtue, and that those who held fast to truth and justice often found the way to their own cross. But there was no other choice. The kingdom of evil had to be fought. It was a moral imperative. The stripping away of what is human, the loss of dignity and self-worth, negated all that was precious and sacred in life.

"Intellectual and moral growth is no less indispensable than material improvement," Hugo wrote in an appendix to *Les Misérables*. "Knowledge is a viaticum [the Eucharist given to those near death]; thought is a prime necessity; truth is nourishment, like wheat. A reasoning faculty, deprived of knowledge and wisdom, pines away. We should feel the same pity for minds that do not eat as for stomachs. If there be anything sadder than a body perishing for want of bread, it is a mind dying of hunger for lack of light."[77]