

Debs' Stirring Speech of Acceptance

Comrade Chairman and Comrades:

In the councils of the Socialist Party the collective will is supreme. Personally, I could have wished to remain in the ranks, to make my record, humble though it might be, fighting unnamed and unhonored side by side with my comrades. I accept your nomination, not because of any honor it confers—because in the Socialist movement no comrade can be honored except as he honors himself by his fidelity to the movement. I accept your nomination because of the confidence it implies, because of the duty it imposes. I cannot but wish that I may, in a reasonable measure, meet your expectation; that I may prove myself fit and worthy to bear aloft in the coming strife the banner of the working class (Applause); that by my utterances and by my conduct, not in an individual capacity, but as your representative, I may prove myself worthy to bear the standard of the only party that proposes to emancipate my class from the thralldom of the ages.

It is my honor to stand in the presence of a very historic convention, and I would that Karl Marx might be here today; I would that Lassalle and Engels, the men who, long before the movement had its present standing, wrought and sacrificed to make it possible for me to stand in this magnificent presence. I wish it were possible for them to share in the glories of this occasion. We are on the eve of battle today. We are ready for the contest. We are eager for the fray. We depart from here with the endorsement of a convention that shall challenge undisputed the approval of the working class of the world. The platform upon which we stand is the first American utterance upon the subject of International Socialism. Hitherto we have repeated, we have reiterated, we have followed. For the first time in the history of the American movement we have realized the American expression of that movement. There is not a line, not a word in that platform which is not revolutionary, which is not clear, which does not state precisely and properly the position of the American movement. We leave this convention standing on this platform, to throw down the gauntlet to the capitalist enemy (applause), to challenge the capitalist oppressor, to do battle for the perpetuation of a system that keeps in chains those in whose name we meet today.

There is a republican party; the dominant capitalist party of this time; the party that has its representatives in the White House; the party that dominates both branches of the congress; the party that controls the supreme court; the party that absolutely controls the press; the party that gives inspiration to the subsidized pulpit; the party that controls every force of government; the party that is absolutely in power in every department of our activity. And as a necessary result we find that corruption is rampant; that the congress of the United States dare not respond to the demands of the people to open the sources of corruption from which the lava streams flow down the mountain sides; that they adjourned long before the hour struck for adjournment in order that they might postpone the inevitable. (Applause.)

There is a democratic party—(A Voice: "Where?")—a party that has not stock enough left to proclaim its own bankruptcy (laughter and applause); an expiring party that stands upon the crumbling foundations of a dying class; a party that is torn by dissection; a party that cannot unite; a party that is looking backward and hoping for the resurrection of the men who gave it inspiration a century ago; a party that is appealing to the cemeteries of the past (applause); a party that is trying to vitalize itself by its ghosts, by the names of those who cannot be heard in their own defense. Thomas Jefferson would scorn to enter a modern democratic convention. He would have no little business there as Abraham Lincoln would have in a modern republican convention. If they were living today



they would be delegates to this convention. (Tremendous applause.)

The Socialist Party meets these two parties face to face. Without a semblance of apology, without an attempt at explanation, scornful to compromise, it throws down the gage of battle and declares that there is but one solution of what is called the labor question, and that is by the complete overthrow of the capitalist system. (Applause.)

You have honored me in the magnitude of the task that you have imposed upon me, far beyond the power of my weak words to express. I can simply say that obedient to your call I respond. Responsive to your command I am here. I shall serve you to the limit of my capacity. My controlling ambition shall be to bear the standard aloft where the battle waxed thickest. I shall not hesitate as the opportunity comes to me to voice the emancipating gospel of the Socialist movement. I shall be heard in the coming campaign as often and as decidedly and as emphatically, as revolutionarily, as uncompromisingly, as my ability, my strength and my fidelity to the movement will allow. I invoke no aid but that which springs from the misery of my class; no power that does not spring spontaneously from the prostrate body of the workers of the world. Above all things I realize that for the first time in the history of all the ages there is a working class movement perfectly free from the sentimentality of those who riot in the misery of the class who are in the movement. On this occasion above all others, my comrades, we are appealing to ourselves, we are bestirring ourselves, we are arousing the working class, the class that through all of the ages has been oppressed, crushed, suffered, for the one reason that through all of the centuries of the past this class has lacked the consciousness of its overmastering power that shall give it the control of the masters of the world. This class is just beginning to awaken from the torments of the past and the most hopeful sign of the times is that down the hill, the dim eye of the man who is in this class there goes forth for the first time in history the first gleam of intelligence, the first sign of the promise that he is awakening, and that he is becoming conscious of his power; and when he, through the inspiration of the Socialist movement, shall become completely conscious of that power, he will overthrow the capitalist system and bring the emancipation of his class.

To consecrate myself to my small part of this great work is my supreme ambition. I can hope only to do that part which is expected of me so well that my comrades, when the final verdict is rendered, will say, "He was not a candidate for president; he did not aspire to hold office; he did not try to associate his name with the passing glories, but he did prove himself worthy to be a member of the Socialist Party; he proved his right to a place in the 'International Socialist movement of the world' (applause). If, when this little work shall have been completed, this can be said of me, my acceptance of your nomination will have been so much more completely made than I could hope to frame it in weak words, that I close not with the decided utterance, but with the wish and the hope and the ambition that when the fight has been fought, when the task you have imposed upon me has been performed so far as it lies in the power of an individual to perform that task, that my acceptance of the honor you have conferred upon me will have been made and that your wisdom and your judgment will have been vindicated by the membership of the party throughout the country.

From the depths of my heart I thank you. I thank you, and each of you, and through you I thank those you represent. I thank you not from my lips merely. I thank you from the depths of a heart that is responsive to your consideration. We shall meet again. We shall meet often, and when we meet finally we shall meet in much larger numbers to ratify the coming of the Socialist Republic. (Great and prolonged applause.)

This edition of the Appeal to Reason will be posted up in every available place in the U. S. I estimate that the Appeal Army will need at least one million copies of this number to carry out the plan to familiarize the American voters with the principles of the Socialist party and our candidates for President and Vice-President. Concerted, prompt action is necessary. The Socialist party is always first to the bat---we know what we want, and it is not necessary to wait until after the other parties have framed their platforms and nominated their men, in order to find an issue. **The Issue is Already Made!** It is the abolition of wage slavery and the dethronement of organized capital. On these lines will the fight be waged until victory is won. Before that is possible, every American voter must know why it is necessary and how to do this. The Socialist declaration of principles tells the story. Read it carefully, Mr. Non-Socialist; and line up with the party which proposes to give every man the full product of his labor. To want more is to be a thief---to accept less is to be a slave.

CLOSING DAY OF CONVENTION

State and Municipal Program Adopted—Other Important Work Transacted—Plans for a Great Campaign.

A SUMMARY OF THE FIRST DAYS OF THE CONVENTION.

The Socialist National Convention met in Grand Hall, Chicago, Ill., May 1st, and continued six days... The convention was opened by a prayer... The first day was largely taken up with the work of preparing the convention program...

Wednesday afternoon was taken up largely with the reading of the National Executive Report. Comrade Mally made some recommendations based on his experience during the past year... Thursday morning the convention was held in session for minor changes...

MORNING SESSION—Friday, May 6.

Delegate Stedman, of Illinois, was elected chairman for the day, and Delegate W. M. Wilkins, of California, vice-chairman.

Report of Committee on State and Municipal Program.

Chairman Untermyer, of the State and Municipal Committee, presented a report from that committee... In presenting it he spoke approvingly of the work done by the committee...

The National Convention of the Socialist Party assembled in Grand Hall, Chicago, Ill., Mar. 29, 1904... Comrades: Your committee on State and Municipal Program beg leave to submit the following report:

We wish first of all to call the attention of the Convention to the fact that the report of this committee is unanimous... This is the first time in the history of the party that the committee has been so unanimous...

Whereas, the Committee on State and Municipal Program has the honor to report that the Socialist Party should have a permanent Committee on State and Municipal Affairs... Therefore, be it resolved that we, the Committee on State and Municipal Program...

Section B: The committee on State and Municipal Affairs shall have power to fill vacancies occurring among its members during the interim between the meeting of the National Convention and the meeting of the State and Municipal Affairs Committee...

Section C: The object of the committee shall be that of an advisory committee to suggest lines of activity to local state officers and workers... Section D: The Committee on State and Municipal Affairs shall elect a permanent secretary...

Section E: The expenses of the Committee on State and Municipal Affairs shall be paid from the National Treasury... Section F: The Committee on State and Municipal Affairs shall have power to fill vacancies occurring among its members during the interim between the meeting of the National Convention and the meeting of the State and Municipal Affairs Committee...

Appeal to Reason, Girard, Kansas.

Investigation, inspection and report upon conditions of labor. General Measures for Public Relief: (1) Establishment of public relief bureaus... (2) Public health department... (3) Adequate system of parks, public playgrounds and gymnasiums...

DELEGATE COGSWELL (Kans.): "I stand for immediate demands, or rather for the immediate demands in our program... I bitterly oppose a constitution in a state a short time ago because it went beyond what I thought was fair or what would be possible to have the people understand or stand for..."

CHAIRMAN UNTERMANN, of the program committee, in anticipation of possible criticism, made a few remarks in justification of the report... He said that many Socialists would be elected to office this fall, and in many localities difficulties had arisen in the past owing to the fact that comrades elected did not have to proceed along program lines...

DELEGATE CARR (Ill.), spoke in favor of the report. "It has been stated by one opposed to the program that this program would be favored by her if we were about to elect a president, senate and house... DELEGATE ROSE (Miss.): "I am in favor of this program because I have frequently heard it said, 'Aha, they don't agree on what they want themselves...'"

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DELEGATE KERRIGAN (Texas), argued in favor of the program, citing his experience in a municipal campaign in Texas where he had resorted to a scrap book in which he kept clippings of programs adopted in various places, and they were so out of harmony as to furnish practically no guide to him in the preparation of a municipal platform...

DELEGATE WALSHE (Mont.), offered as a substitute for the whole report the following: "The National Convention recommends that in the event any Socialist being elected in any locality on any state or municipal ticket, they be guided thereafter in all their legislative acts by the principle, 'Is the legislation in the interest of the laboring class?'"

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the working class and I will do anything they want... Let us remember above all things that this movement is at present a municipal movement. It will grow and develop within the cities, and you will take possession of them long before you do the national government...

DELEGATE BERLYN (Ill.), spoke in favor of the report. He said that there were some who called themselves revolutionists, but who did not know what a revolutionist was... DELEGATE WILKINS (Cal.): "I am in favor of this program because I have frequently heard it said, 'Aha, they don't agree on what they want themselves...'"

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The Platform of the Socialist Party of America.

The Defender of Individual Liberty.

We, the Socialist Party, in convention assembled, make our appeal to the American people as the defender and preserver of the idea of liberty and self-government, in which the nation was born; as the only political movement standing for the program and principles by which the liberty of the individual may become a fact; as the only political organization that is democratic, and that has for its purpose the democratizing of the whole society.

To this idea of liberty the republican and democratic parties are utterly false. They alike struggle for power to maintain and profit by an industrial system which can be preserved only by the complete overthrow of such liberties as we already have, and by the still further enslavement and degradation of labor.

Our American institutions came into the world in the name of freedom. They have been seized upon by the capitalist class as the means of rooting out the idea of freedom from among the people. Our state and national legislatures have become the mere agencies of great propertied interests. These interests control the appointments and decisions of the judges of our courts. They have come into what is practically a private ownership of all the functions and forces of government. They are using these to betray and conquer foreign and weaker peoples, in order to establish new markets for the surplus goods which the people make, but are too poor to buy. They are gradually so invading and restricting the right of suffrage as to take unawares the right of the worker to a vote or voice in public affairs. By enacting new and misinterpreting old laws, they are preparing to attack the liberty of the individual even to speak or think for himself or for the common good.

By controlling all sources of social revenue, the possessing class is able to silence what might be the voice of the protest against the passing of liberty and the coming of tyranny. It completely controls the university and public school, the pulpit and the press, arts and literatures. By making these economically dependent upon itself, it has brought all the forms of public teaching into servile submission to its own interests.

Our political institutions are also being used as the destroyers of that individual property upon which all liberty and opportunity depend. The promise of economic independence to each man was one of the faiths in which our institutions were founded. But under the guise of defending private property, capitalism is using our political institutions to make it impossible for the vast majority of human beings to ever become possessors of private property in the means of life.

Capitalism is the enemy and destroyer of essential private property. Its development is through the legalized confiscation of all that the labor of the working class produces, above its subsistence wage. The private ownership of the means of employment grounds society in an economic slavery which renders intellectual and political tyranny inevitable.

Socialism comes so to organize industry and society that every individual shall be secure in that private property in the means of life upon which his liberty of being, thought and action depend. It comes to rescue the people from the fast increasing and successful assault of capitalism upon the liberty of the individual.

International Socialism vs. International Capitalism.

II. As an American Socialist party, we pledge our fidelity to the principles of International Socialism, as embodied in the united thought and action of the Socialists of all nations. In the industrial development already accomplished, the interests of the world's workers are separated by no national boundaries. The condition of the most exploited and oppressed workers, in the most remote places of the earth, inevitably tends to drag down all the workers of the world to the same level. The tendency of the competitive wage system is to make labor's lowest condition the measure or rule of its universal condition. Industry and finance are no longer national but international in both organizations and results. The chief significance of national boundaries, and of the so-called patriotisms which the ruling class of each nation is seeking to revive, is the power which these give to capitalism to keep the workers of the world from uniting, and to throw them against each other in the struggles of contending capitalist interests for the control of the yet unexploited markets of the world, or the remaining sources of profit.

The Socialist movement therefore is a world-movement. It knows of no conflicts between the workers of one nation and the workers of another. It stands for the freedom of the workers of all nations; and, in so standing, it makes for the full freedom of all humanity.

The Workers vs. The Shirkers.

III. The Socialist movement owes its birth and growth to that economic development or world process which is rapidly separating a working or producing class from a possessing or capitalist class. The class that produces

nothing possesses labor's fruits, and the opportunities and enjoyments these fruits afford, while the class that does the world's real work has increasing economic uncertainty, and physical and intellectual misery as its portion.

The fact that these two classes have not yet become fully conscious of their distinction from each other, the fact that the lines of division and interest may not yet be clearly drawn, does not change the fact of the class conflict.

This class struggle is due to the private ownership of the means of employment, or the tools of production. Wherever and whenever man owned his own land and tools, and by them produced only the things which he used, economic independence was possible. But production, or the making of goods, has long ceased to be individual. The labor of scores, or even thousands, enters into almost every article produced. Production is now social, or collective. Practically everything is made or done by many men—sometimes separated by seas or continents—working together for the same end. But this co-operation in production is not for the direct use of the things made by the workers who make them, but for the profit of the owners of the tools and means of production; and to this is due the present division of society into two distinct classes, and from it has sprung all the miseries, inharmonies and contradictions of our civilization.

Between these two classes there can be no possible compromise or identity of interests, any more than there can be peace in the midst of war, or light in the midst of darkness. A society based upon this class division carries in itself the seeds of its own destruction. Such a society is founded in fundamental injustice. There can be no possible basis for social peace, for individual freedom, for mental and moral harmony, except in the conscious and complete triumph of the working class as the only class that has the right or power to be.

Socialism the Only Saving Force.

IV. The Socialist program is not a theory imposed upon society for its acceptance or rejection. It is but the interpretation of what is, sooner or later, inevitable. Capitalism is already struggling to its destruction. It is no longer competent to organize or administer the work of the world, or even to preserve itself. The captains of industry are appalled at their own inability to control or direct the rapidly socializing forces of industry. The so-called trust is but a sign and form of this developing socialization of the world's work. The universal increase of the uncertainty of employment, the universal capitalist determination to break down the unity of labor in the trades unions, the widespread apprehension of impending change, reveal that the institutions of capitalist society are passing under the power of inhering forces that will soon destroy them.

Into the midst of the strain and crisis of civilization, the Socialist movement comes as the only saving or conservative force. If the world is to be saved from chaos, from universal disorder and misery, it must be by the union of the workers of all nations in the Socialist movement. The Socialist party comes with the only proposition or program for intelligently and deliberately organizing the nation for the common good of all its citizens. It is the first time that the mind of man has ever been directed toward the conscious organization of society.

Socialism means that all those things upon which the people in common depend shall be by the people in common be owned and administered. It means that the tools of employment shall belong to their creators and users; that all production shall be for the direct use of the producers; that the making of goods for profit shall come to an end; that we shall all be workers together, and that opportunities shall be open and equal to all men.

To Secure Immediate Interests of the Workers.

V. To the end that the workers may seize every possible advantage that may strengthen them to gain complete control of the powers of government, and thereby the sooner establish the co-operative commonwealth, the Socialist party pledges itself to watch and work in both the economic and the political struggle for each successive immediate interest of the working class; for shortened days of labor and increase of wages; for the insurance of the workers against accident, sickness and lack of employment; for pensions for aged and exhausted workers; for the public ownership of the means of transportation, communication and exchange; for the graduated taxation of incomes, inheritances, and of franchise and land values, the proceeds to be applied to public employment and bettering the condition of the workers; for the equal suffrage of men and women; for the prevention of the use of the military against labor in the settlement of strikes; for the free administration of justice; for popular government, including initiative, referendum, proportional representation, and the recall of officers by their constituents; and for every gain or advantage for the workers that may be wrested from the capitalist system, and that may relieve the suffering and strengthen the hands of labor. We lay upon every man elected to any executive or legislative office the first duty of striving to procure whatever is for the workers' most immediate interest, and whatever will lessen the economic and political powers of the capitalist and increase the like powers of the worker.

But, in so doing, we are using these remedial measures as means to the one great end—the Co-operative Commonwealth. Such measures of relief as we may be able to force from capitalism are but a preparation of the workers to seize the whole powers of government, in order that they may thereby lay hold of the whole system of industry, and thus come into their rightful inheritance.

To this end we pledge our selves, as the party of the working class, to use all political power, as fast as it shall be intrusted to us by our fellow workers, both for their immediate interests and for their ultimate and complete emancipation. To this end we appeal to all the workers of America, and to all who will lend their lives to the service of the workers in their struggle to gain their own, and to all who will nobly and disinterestedly give their days and energies unto the workers' cause, to cast their lot and faith with the Socialist party. Our appeal for the trust and suffrages of our fellow workers is at once an appeal for their common good and freedom, and for the freedom and blossoming of our common humanity. In pledging ourselves, and those we represent, to be faithful to the appeal which we make, we believe that we are but preparing the soil of the economic freedom from which will spring the freedom of the whole man.