
A Plain Statement

by James Hogan

Chairman, Social Democracy of America

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Those delegates who refused to abide by the will of an overwhelming majority in our recent convention [Chicago: June 6-11, 1899] have found means to enable them to send circulars to our branches throughout the country. These circulars are false and malignant. They are animated by the same spirit which led most of the delegates in question, in the adoption of their rule or ruin policy, to leave the SLP, and it is most unfortunate that they ever became affiliated with the Social Democracy.

It was the decision of the National Executive Council to treat the seceders in a spirit of brotherhood, and to refrain from criticizing their actions, but now, inasmuch as they have issued their circulars, I shall tell some things which are known to a large number of delegates and which I outlined in my report to the convention.

The Social Democracy, at its convention in 1897 [Chicago: June 15-21, 1897], laid down a policy and formulated a platform and constitution. It stood for both political and economic action. It had so able an advisor as Karl Marx to instruct it that economic conditions control all other conditions of social life — that political, educational, and even religious institutions are governed by economic conditions. Therefore, the Social Democracy, truly scientific, acting along the lines of least resistance, decided to attempt to secure land and capital in some of the thinly populated states of the West and to mobilize the unemployed therein, thus making them self-sustaining and at the same time giving them political power, of which nearly all of this vast army is divested. Chairman Debs, in closing the convention in '97, spoke eloquently upon the possibilities of such a movement, and as long as the policy outlined was adhered to the organization grew apace.

I was present at a meeting of the Executive Board in August last when the question of appointing a Colonization Commission came up in accordance with the constitution. Three members were appointed, all of whom were suggested by Chairman Debs. Col. Richard J. Hinton, of whom I had frequently heard Debs speak in the highest praise, who was a leading spirit of the emancipation forces before and during the Civil War,

one of John Brown's coadjutors and author of *John Brown and His Men*, an expert on irrigation, holding several splendid papers certifying to his capacities, who had been editor of several metropolitan newspapers, and who wrote an article in *The Arena* commending Chairman Debs for his Cooper Union speech and classing him as the peer of Abraham Lincoln,¹ was one of the commissioners appointed. Cyrus Field Willard, who was labor editor of the *Boston Globe* and performed yeoman service during the ARU strike, and other strikes, was another. W.P. Borland, who is well known throughout the country as an economic magazine writer, was the other member.

Things went along smoothly for a time. [Roy] Goodwin, [John] Lloyd, [William] Burns, and myself took the field, and were supplied with some funds. But suddenly a change took place. Financial support was withdrawn from the men in the field who believed in carrying out the policy of the organization as it had been outlined, and a tendency towards exclusively political action manifested itself. Suddenly the Colonization Commission became a target for abuse.

I want to say a word for the commissioners. They have done the very best possible. They have been handicapped in many ways. From the time the organization started until December last Secretary Keliher received the colonization funds, amounting to some \$300, and printing done by Campbell and Priebe at from 30 to 50 percent above the market rate was charged against the commission to help offset this money. Borland edited *The Social Democrat* and was paid out of the colonization fund, and the money paid him is still due the commission from the general organization.

The convention showed plainly that a conspiracy existed to eliminate the economic feature of the organization, and the conspirators, failing to carry their point, are now trying to retard the work of this movement.

What are they afraid of? Do they fear that the Social Democracy of America, by relieving the sufferings of a number of the helpless and hopeless proletarians and bringing joy and gladness into their lives, may retard the coming of the day when they may gain political power?

We are charged with packing the convention. Is it not strange that we were considered honest up to the day of the convention, and then suddenly turned into a set of rascals?

Again, they charge us with being anarchists. Whoever heard of anarchists packing a convention?

Then they say that we are Republicans, Democrats, Populists, Labor Exchange patriots, etc.

We say that they were, and are now, contending for the field held by the SLP. Their action proves our charge to be correct. We stand for the development of the tendency towards socialism. They contend for the leadership of those people already converted.

The Social Democracy of America, cleaned of its barnacles, will now press bravely forward to carry out the objects for which it was organized, and will proceed unflinchingly to establish economic security for the helpless proletarians of the country, in spite of the splenetic mendacity of its narrow-minded opponents.

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¹ Richard J. Hinton, "The New Politics," *The Arena*, vol. 11, whole no. 62 (Jan. 1895), pp. 216-226.