
The March of Socialism (January 28, 1899)

Each passing day adds new testimony to the progressive march of socialism throughout the civilized world. A letter just received from Russia contains words of greeting and congratulation, and prompts me to pen this article for *The Herald*. The Social Democratic Party of the United States commands the confidence and respect of the leading socialists of other nations, and they look to our party to organize the socialists of this country and bring them into harmonious alliance with the hosts of international socialism, in the universal battle for the overthrown of capitalism.

The work accomplished during the past few months is as gratifying and inspiring to socialists as it is abhorrent and alarming to their enemies. The superb victory at Haverhill sent a thrill of joy and consternation, hope and horror through the country.¹ The plutocratic press is still harping upon it, wondering how it happened and predicting all sorts of evils if there is any spread of this dread affliction. They are straining their old power to scare the people and make them mind their masters, as they have been so long in the habit of doing. Riley's nursery tale warning aptly illustrates the situation:

An' the gobble-uns 'll get you,
Ef you
Don't
Watch
Out! ²

The plutocrats and their parasites will not contemplate with calm indifference the march of socialism. Every artifice known to their Machiavellian resources will be employed to resist the advance. The ignorant and servile can be easily deflected from their course, but the thinking and vigilant will do ceaseless sentinel service and be prepared to parry every blow and expose every device and intrigue of the enemy.

A "Congress of Railway Employees" is to be held in Chicago next month to "protest against unfavorable railway legislation." Back of the

“congress” will be the agents of the railway companies to touch the secret springs that will start the performance for the delectation of the assembled slaves. There will be free transportation, lots of patriotism and brass bands, and railway employees will have a fine opportunity to attest and applaud their own degeneracy. Chauncey Mouth Depew, the \$50,000-a-year horny-handed labor agitator of the Vanderbilts, will be the star speaker, with such satellites as [Peter M.] Arthur, et. al., for corporation claqueurs.

Watch for the resolutions, prepared by the railroad corporations, that the slaves will put through with a whoop.

The recent convention of the American Federation of Labor was enlivened by the most intelligent and spirited debate in the history of that organization. Socialism held the boards for the greater part of two days, and when the final vote was taken, the friends of socialism had cause for hearty congratulation. Tobin, Hayes,³ Carey,⁴ Cowen, and others led the debate with commanding ability and their argument was simply unanswerable. At the next convention the contest will be renewed, and, in the meantime, the economic development will reenforce the socialists, and sooner or later they are bound to carry the day.

Some alleged socialists sneer about the results achieved at Haverhill and Kansas City.⁵ They seem as much distressed as their capitalistic allies. And these alleged socialists are all there is of scientific socialism in the United States — so they say. For one, I am not inclined to take issue with them. The way to silence them is to ignore them — pass them by as you would a mud machine in a brickyard. Their impotent rage will soon spend itself and the socialist movement will sweep past them. Their lies, their calumnies, and their ghastrly attempts at sarcasm will react upon themselves. True socialists will find them out and abandon them to isolation.

The question is often asked, how can we unify the socialists of the country? I answer by saying that they are unifying day by day. All the Social Democratic Party is required to do is to stick unflinchingly to its principles and it will not be long before the socialists of the country will be united in one compact, aggressive, and uncompromising party. The detractors, be they of the capitalist class or those who, masquerading as socialists, would transfer the “boss” of capitalist politics to socialism, can not arrest the unifying process. Never mind what the other party says or does, but attend to your own, and bear in mind that abuse is the compliment that failure pays to success.

Throw yourself with all your force and energy into the service of the party. Work for it, sacrifice for it, and, if need be, suffer for it. Hasten the social revolution by putting the strength of one loyal, unflinching soul behind it. Live in the faith and hope and serenity of a socialist, and every burden now upon your brain or body will become light as air.

Be not deceived by the cajolery of the old capitalist parties. The only difference between them is that one is in power and the other is willing to be. In point of principle they are exactly alike. Both are dominated by capitalism and both stand for the wage system. The fierce hostility of the Democratic Party to trusts is farcical enough to extort guffaws from a mummy. What do they propose to do with the trusts? Not one of them can or will answer. Other alleged issues such as "expansion," "imperialism," etc., will now take the place of "free silver," "tariff," etc., which have been overworked and must be taken to the back shop for repairs, to be sprung again when the sham battle between the two gangs of exploiters wanes and "new issues" are required to vitalize the performance.

With those socialists (?) who fear to be known as such, I have little patience. If socialism is right and the next link in the chain of economic development, as they admit, then why not come out from cover and take their stand against "the world, the flesh, and the devil?" If they lack the courage to do this, they are not ripe for our party.

The name of the Social Democratic Party suits me precisely. I love it for the same reason that some fear and others hate it. So far as I know, there is no valid objection to it and if in some states we are as yet unable to have it placed upon the official ballot, we will see about that later on.⁶ Social Democrats we are, every one of us, and by that name let us stand until it is relieved from odium and blazes resplendent in the sun of victory.

Straight socialism and no compromise must be our battlecry. The line must be drawn between those who are for us and those who are not. The clearheaded socialist knows what he wants and how to get it and simply bides his time, and with such the party is impregnable and the revolution near at hand.

As I survey the situation my heart throbs quicker in anticipation of the victories soon to be. All the forces are operating in our favor. Upon every tide there comes fresh accessions to our ranks. The skies of the future grow radiant with promise. What is now but a cherished hope is soon to be an actual realization. About this there is no element of doubt or speculation.

It is in accordance with the immutable laws of evolution and as unerring as a demonstration in mathematics.

Then for our individual and aggregate best effort, let each of us, with head and heart and hand, consecrate himself to the task.

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¹ The Social Democratic Party scored an electoral victory in Haverhill, Mass. in the election of November 1897, electing John C. Chase (1870-1937) as Mayor and putting four of its candidates on the city council.

² From "Little Orphant Annie," aka "The Elf Child" (1885), by James Whitcomb Riley (1849-1916).

³ Max S. Hayes (1866-1945), a newspaper publisher, was active in the printers' union in Cleveland as well as the Socialist Labor Party.

⁴ James F. Carey (1867-1938) was a shoemaker elected to the Massachusetts legislature in 1899 on the Social Democratic Party ticket.

⁵ Kansas City was the site of the 18th Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor, held Dec. 12-20, 1898. The "alleged socialists" to whom Debs refers were the hardline members of the Socialist Labor Party of America, headed by Daniel DeLeon.

⁶ According to some state election laws, greatly similar party names are prohibited. The name "Social Democratic Party" apparently was ruled in some locales as having been too close to "Democratic Party."