
The National Labor Party
Interview with the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*
(September 9, 1899)

I have been addressing big meetings in the East and Central West and I am very much encouraged by the apparent interest taken by wage-earners in the pressing questions of the day. I am now on my way West and expect to cover the entire country before spring. On the first Tuesday in March a new political party will be born. At Indianapolis we will meet in regular delegated national convention to choose candidates for President and Vice-President of the United States.¹ Our party will be formed from the nucleus already in the field under the name of the Social Democracy.² The name of the new party will probably be the National Labor Party. We will carry the organization of the party into the states and cities and nominate state and city tickets wherever possible.

One very encouraging sign is the awakening of interest among the farmers. Heretofore agitation has been effectual only among the laboring classes in the cities, but my meetings have been largely attended by farmers, and I predict that there will be a combination of the agricultural and industrial elements. When this alliance comes, victory will be near.

One of the great troubles with movements like ours is lack of cohesiveness. This is the result of so many shadings of opinion. It has been the history of all great movements. In Germany the socialists were divided into several groups for many years, but they have now become homogeneous, and at the last elections cast 2.4 million votes and elected 56 representatives to the Reichstag. Now they move as one man. In France they are divided into groups, but they work in harmony on all great issues. We in America must pass this stage of development, but we will emerge in the end a united party.

This is the era of concentration. The capitalist is doing the preliminary work of combination and organization, but at the proper time the people will take possession. Do not make the mistake made by so many, and suppose that we propose to interfere with private property. Under our system of government, private property will be for the first time truly sacred. We

want the people to take charge of the means of production and distribution — the means of life.

The machine was the first step in the development toward the end we desire. In the beginning the tool was controlled by the artisan; now it has passed completely from his control to that of the capitalist. I believe in the machine, because I want to see labor of all kinds reduced to the minimum and leisure increased. The second step in the evolution toward socialism is the so-called trust. It is simply a monopolization of the machine, a concentration in the control of a few of the means of production and distribution, the means of life. The next step is socialism. the capitalist, in serving his selfish ends, is simply an instrument. He is the forerunner. He is preparing the way for an easy transition from what we have now to the supremacy of the people. It is useless to oppose this evolution. We should rather help it along.

Every department of industry is coming under the sway of concentrated capital. Even the farmers are becoming victims. The great syndicate farm is driving the small farmer off the land. We need not wonder why farm products have so rapidly depreciated in value. The syndicate farm has done it. The department store is doing the same thing to the small dealers in the cities. It is foolish to try to protect and hold up the small dealer. We can get what we want better and cheaper from the department stores, and we should patronize them for that reason.

The traveling man is disappearing. He is doomed. I was much interested in watching the tobacco situation when Liggett & Myers were holding out against the trust. I met a man who traveled for them in Indiana. He told me they would never surrender. I told him they would surrender within six months. Next morning the paper announced that they had gone into the trust. I met another St. Louis man who used to travel for Drummond. He was in the East looking over the situation, and in search of work. I told him he was on a fruitless mission; that his avenues were closing never to reopen. Three years ago the traveling man abused us agitators, calling us a dangerous class. Now the traveling man has become an agitator.

The revolution, which will surely come, will be peaceful. Not a drop of blood will be shed provided the socialists are allowed to control the situation. We will win by the ballot. We realize that we can do nothing until we have complete control of the government. We must have the Presidency and Congress before we can accomplish anything, and we will

attempt nothing until we control these offices. Then we will simply take, in the name of the people, the means of production and distribution. They have been paid for, over and over again, by the people, and are ours by every moral right.

Published as “Debs on the Trusts” in *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, vol. 51, no. 20 (Sept. 9, 1899), pg. 2.

¹ Reference is to the regularly scheduled 1900 convention of the Social Democratic Party.

² This is likely a transcription error as Debs had previously been consistent in referring to the Social Democratic Party by its correct name.