

The National Platform Explained

(July 18, 1902)

Salt Lake City, July 18 [1902].

The platform of the Socialist Party¹ declares in favor of the collective ownership of all the means of production and distribution: namely, the land, mines, mills, factories, and productive machinery, for the purpose of operating industry in the interest of the whole people.

This involves a complete change in the organic structure of government.

The present government is based upon private property and is essentially coercive, the vital function being to protect the interests of the owning and ruling class, and to keep their victims in subjugation.

When productive capital becomes common property, government will be purely administrative, and will cease to be unjust and oppressive. The owning class in the present, as in all past ages, is necessarily the ruling class, and all legislation is enacted and interpreted in the interest of said class.

Political equality under the present system is simply a myth. The wage-worker whose employment is controlled by his industrial master, and who in that relation is at the mercy of his master since he depends upon his arbitrary will for the opportunity to labor and support his family, is not on terms of political equality with his master. Political equality is rooted in economic freedom, and only when the means of production shall have become the common property of all, as they have been produced by all, are used by all, and are necessary to all, only then will political equality prevail and all men and women enjoy equal rights and equal opportunities.

In other words, a political republic and an economic despotism are incompatible and in ceaseless conflict and both must become one or the other.

The Socialist Party proposes to establish industrial democracy, based upon cooperative industry, thus converting the present bogus into a genuine republic. It should be understood that the party proposes to increase and not diminish the production of wealth; that it proposes to secure and

not destroy the right of private property. Capital, only, in its various forms, is to be owned in common, and instead of having countless capitalists at war with each other in an insane strife for profit, there will be but one capitalist, and that the people in their collective capacity. Rent, interest, and profit, three forms of exploitation, will be totally eliminated. Production will be carried forward for use and not for profit. The traffic in labor, that is to say, human beings — men women, and children — their purchase and sale upon a weekly or monthly installment plan, will cease.

The workday will be reduced in proportion to the progress of invention and every man will have the inherent right to employment and to the full product of his labor, and the socially due share of each will constitute the private property of the producer. This is the goal of the Socialist Party of America and of the international socialistic movement of the world.

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¹ Published version uses “Social Democratic Party” throughout. There is no reason to think that Debs would have misnamed his own party at this juncture, however; publisher and co-editor Victor Berger had tendentiously retitled the Debs article “How I Became a Socialist” to “How I Became a Social Democrat” for its republication in the April 12, 1902 issue of the *Herald* and it seems clear that similar editorial shenanigans were ongoing. It is worthy of note that the Social Democratic Party of Wisconsin *never* changed its name to Socialist Party of Wisconsin during Berger’s lifetime. Debs’s original text is therefore restored here.