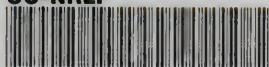


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Geo Hewitt
REPORT OF THE DELEGATES

OF THE

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY

of the United States of America

TO THE

INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST CONGRESS

PARIS, 1900

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Although behind their European comrades in point of numbers and influence in their country, the American socialists may well be satisfied with the results of their work when looking back upon the events of the past four years since the last International Congress.

The rapid growth of a socialist sentiment among the American people generally and the growing sense of solidarity and class consciousness among the working people have been prompted by great events quite new in the history of the United States. Although they appear to the Socialist as a natural result of the capitalist system, they have taken the rest of the people completely by surprise and have done more to stir them up and to stimulate thought and interest in political and economic questions than years and years of Socialist propaganda could ever possibly produce.

Four years ago the bankrupt middle class sought to prevent its own downfall by demanding the free coinage of silver at a fictitious value. It is needless to say that in their propaganda the Socialists have done their best to point out to the wage workers that their interests would not be conserved by the triumph of the middle class which had nothing but fine phrases for the working people. In the elections the middle class lost, and the Republican Party, the party of the great capitalists and trusts, went into power. But looking back to the political campaign of four years ago, we cannot now help recognizing that the denunciation of plutocracy and the exposure of its scandalous reign resorted to by the Democrats for political reasons, had its effect in creating among the people a spirit of distrust to and disgust with the rule of the capitalist class and paved the way for the ideas of Socialism and the political solidarity of the working class.

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The events of the succeeding years, the positive work of our triumphant plutocracy has but added oil to the flames of social discontent and wonderfully facilitated the educational and organizing work of Socialist agitators.

A period of intense business activity has succeeded the former stagnation, and with it came a change in the relative positions of the various classes and elements composing our body politic.

The great capitalists have come to feel the immense power at their command and obedient to the immutable laws of development which bid a class to grow or decay, have launched the Republic upon a new course of colonial expansion and military conquest. Radical as that departure is from the former peaceful policy of our Republic, fraught as it is with most momentous changes in the further political development of America, it is but secondary to and a result of another expansion of our capitalist system, which marks its entrance upon a new and higher stage, probably the last before the inauguration of the Co-operative Commonwealth.

The advent of the trust has stirred all the classes of our people to their depths and has served more than anything else to bring out in striking manner the soundness of the Socialist diagnose of our present system. At the same time it has deeply affected the interests of each separate class, revolutionizing old methods, ruthlessly destroying and displacing entire occupations, thus giving ample time to thousands of people to think of the wonderful change wrought by modern capitalism and their possible results.

The middle class has also been deeply affected by the economic development of the last four years and has practically been divided in two. Four years ago the farmers burdened with debts were foremost in demanding the free coinage of silver, and it was they that furnished the larger part of the Democratic votes. The coincidence of good crops at home with a failure of crops in Europe sent up the price of wheat and other agricultural products to an unusual extent, and the farmers not only improved thereby their condition, but have come to see that high prices of wheat are possible under a gold currency as well.

Not so with the industrial and commercial middle class. While they have also been able to improve their condition to some extent on account of the better times, they have had to suffer greatly from the competition of trusts and are, therefore, more dissatisfied than the farmers. The Democratic Party has, therefore, been compelled to take up the "trust evil" as its campaign issue, much to the dissatisfaction of the corrupt ring of politicians who stand at its

head and who are paid by the great corporations and trusts to prevent any hostile legislation that could really harm capitalist interests. At the last moment, however, they saw a way out of the difficulty in the Republican policy of imperialism, which they pretend to oppose (although, they have never refused in Congress to vote appropriations of money for military purpose) and have declared it the paramount issue of the campaign.

Meanwhile, the working people have been listening to the Democratic denunciations of the Republican policy, have been reading the exposures of the trusts and their methods in the press and been feeling the effects of the latent development of « prosperity ».

The idea of the nationalisation of the industries controlled by trusts as well as of the municipalization of the so-called natural monopolies which has been gaining more and more ground in the United States, has served to familiarize the American workingman with the Socialist ideals which only a few years ago was a bugbear in the hands of the capitalist press to frighten him with.

And, as is everywhere the case, the capitalist class took care lest the workingman imbibe the milk and water principles of Socialism which the middle class has been spreading. The great conflicts between capital and labor which have been assuming greater and greater proportions in our country, have helped to show the working class of America that the class struggle is no idle abstraction of Socialist philosophy.

It would be impossible to give an adequate account of the great strikes in a short review such as must necessarily constitute a report to this congress. Suffice it to say, that several of them have involved scores of thousands of men, and have invariably led to the interference of the police and the military force in favor of the employers. We need not add that the Socialists have utilized these occasions to point out to the working class that we have a class government, and that the workers need not expect better treatment until they learn to elect their own men to the legislative bodies.

The most notable strike for the open brutality and disregard for the rights of the workingmen displayed by the capitalistic government, took place among the miners of Idaho and has been fully described in a pamphlet by one of our delegates to your congress. Briefly told, the Democratic Governor of the State combined with the Republican President of the United States in shooting down peaceful strikers, throwing innocent men into prison, and subjecting them

to barbarities which have not been equalled in the annals of labor persecution in Russia.

The Socialist Movement

No wonder that such a persistent policy of brutality towards and contempt for the working class coupled with the other conditions we have described, facilitated the spread of Socialist ideas and has resulted in a rapid increase of Socialist votes. In 1896, the year of Presidential election and of the International Congress at London, we received a little over 36,000 votes. In 1897, the vote jumped to 55,000. In 1898, the combined Socialist vote of the Socialist Labor Party and Social Democratic Party was nearly 93,000, and we may expect double that number when the vote for our presidential candidate is counted next November.

There was only one Socialist elected to a municipal council in the United States at the time of the last International Congress. At present we have more than a dozen of Socialist councilmen in the various municipalities of the country; two Socialists are disturbing the peaceful slumber and easy conscience of the capitalist legislation in the Massachusetts legislature. Comrade John C. Chase has for the second time been elected mayor of the town of Haverhill, Mass., the last time against the combined opposition of the Republican, Democratic and Prohibition Parties, and comrade Coulter has been elected mayor of the town of Brockton, Mass.

The integrity, courage and energy with which these Socialist officials have discharged their new duties and stood up for the interests of the working people who elected them, have done more than years of propaganda could do, by giving the working class an object lesson of the soundness of our position, and instilling new hope in the hearts of those who are struggling for the abolition of wage slavery.

Still more wonderful has been the progress of our press. In 1896 we had only one English Socialist paper; at present we have nine weekly papers and one monthly magazine, besides a number of dailies and weeklies in the German and other languages.

When we turn from the Socialist movement generally to the inner development and progress of the party, we regret that we have to record a series of 'strifes' but for which the success of our movement would have been far greater.

At the time of the London International Congress, there was but one Socialist party in the United States, the Socialist Labor party: but shortly thereafter tactical differences

manifested themselves within its ranks which finally led to a split in the party. Briefly stated, the chief cause of the split was the objectionable, — at present criminal — policy of two or three leaders of the Socialist Labor Party towards the trade unions. Impatient at the slow progress of Socialism in the ranks of the trade unions, and justly indignant at the corrupt practices of some of the leaders of the American trade unions, these men conceived a new plan for the speedy conversion to Socialism of the American workingmen, namely: the organisation of rival trade unions which they called the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance.

The wisdom of organizing a rival trade union has always been questioned by Socialists. The last International Congress has left no room for doubt as to its attitude on that subject when it said in its trade union resolution: « Especially difference of political views ought not to be considered a reason for separate action in the economic struggle. » Disregard of the above resolution might be justified perhaps under exceptional circumstances: There might perhaps be some reason for it if the Socialists constituted a majority or at least a strong minority in the unions, though even under such circumstances the wisdom of such a step might be questioned. But when, as was the case with the Socialist Alliance, a rival organisation is set up by a handful of men belonging to a few unions mostly in one city, and when that is done not through the initiative of the workers themselves, but by a few ambitious leaders of a political party who have never been working at a trade and, therefore, are out of touch with the trade union movement, when moreover such a step is taken by them without consulting the Socialists who have spent their lives in that movement, then there can hardly be any doubt that such an organization has no right to exist. The Alliance was endorsed at first by the Labor Party on the express promise given by its founders that it would not interfere with the existing trade unions, but would devote itself to organizing the unorganized workers. Even at that time some of the Socialists who had more experience in the trade union movement, predicted that the promises could not be carried out and that the Alliance was bound to come in conflict with the other trade unions.

Experience has shown that even these men did not foresee all the consequences that were to follow. Soon after its organisation, the Alliance came in conflict with the existing printers union, and let its men take the places of striking printers at lower wages; similar conflicts soon followed with other trades, and the word « Socialist » came to be

synonymous with « scab » (blackleg) among the trade unionists. The worst of it was that it reflected upon the party which stood committed to the Alliance and whose official organ was made also the official organ of the Alliance without the consent of the membership of the party. Under these circumstances friction within the party became inevitable, and owing to the arbitrary conduct of affairs by the party officers and open disregard and contempt for the will of the rank and file, led to open revolt and the deposal of the National Executive Committee. We will spare the Congress the recital of the strife that followed. Suffice it to say, that the deposed officers refused to lay down their mandates although the majority of the party sustained by a referendum vote the action of deposing them, and they and their adherent still continue a separate existence under the name of S. L. P. although the regular organization had retained the bulk of its membership, every Socialist writer, speaker and trade union agitator of note, and all of its newspapers, except one Jewish newspaper in New-York City.

At its last convention held in the City of Rochester, in January of the present year, the party rescinded the previous resolution endorsing the Alliance and expressed its attitude on the trade union question, as follows :

« Whereas, the trade union movement of the working class is an inevitable manifestation of the struggle between capital and labor, and is absolutely necessary to resist the superior economic power of capital, to improve the condition of the workmen, and to maintain their standard of life, and :

« Whereas, the class struggle carried on by the trade unions tends to develop in the workmen the sense of solidarity and political independence by organizing them as a class antagonistic to the capitalist class :

« Resolved, that we, the Socialist Labor Party in National Convention assembled, fully recognizing that the exploitation of labor will cease only when society takes possession of the means of production, nevertheless, declaring the duty of all Socialists to participate in all struggles of organized labor to improve its conditions under the present system ;

« Resolved, that we hereby recall any and all previous resolutions expressing preference for one body of organized labor over another :

« Resolved, that we reaffirm the resolution of the Socialist Labor Party adopted in 1893 and re-adopted in 1896 recommending to all members of the party to join the organization of the trades to which they respectively belong ».

Another very important step taken at that Convention was the appointment of a committee of nine to confer with the Social Democratic Party with a view to bringing about a union of the two parties.

The Social Democratic Party was founded under the leadership of Eugene V. Debs in 1897, and was composed at first of somewhat heterogeneous elements, its socialism being rather confused as may be seen from the facts that they expected to inaugurate the era of Socialism by starting Socialist colonies in the less populated States. However, a period of about one year was sufficient to clear up the vision of its more advanced element, and the colonisation plan was thrown overboard. The only thing after that which kept that party separated from the Socialist Labor Party, was the unsocialistic attitude of the latter towards the trade unions and the fanatical sectarian spirit which actuated its leaders. With the change which had now, however, been brought about in the Socialist Labor Party there was no more reason why the two parties should not unite into one great harmonious organization and hence the appointment the above committee on Unity at Rochester.

The Social Democratic Party which met in convention two months after in the City of Indianapolis received the proposition of the Rochester Committee with great enthusiasm, and in its turn appointed a similar committee. The two committees met later in New York City and formulated a treaty of union as well as a constitution for the new united party, submitting to the two parties the names Social Democratic Party and United Socialist Party out of which one was to be chosen. By the referendum vote cast by the members of the two parties, the treaty of union was adopted and the name Social Democratic Party chosen for the united party. By the same vote Eugene V. Debs of the former S. D. P. and Job Harriman, of the S. L. P. were chosen as candidates for the respective offices of President and Vice-President of the United States. The union of the two parties was, however, not to be accomplished without friction. When all arrangements seemed complete, the national executive Board of the old Social Democratic Party issued a «manifesto» advising adversely. The union of the two greatest Socialist parties had become a necessity and although the officers of the former S. D. P. and their adherents still holdout against union and maintain a rival organization, the bulk of its membership had joined the United party and all of the papers of the old S. D. P. except its English official organ and the German, both of which are controlled by members of the Executive, are championing the cause of the United party.

Present indications, however, point to a speedy end of this controversy within the ranks of the S. D. P., and the enthusiasm of the comrades over the accomplishment of union, the popularity of our candidates in Socialist and labor circles and the extremely favorable circumstances for Socialist propaganda which has been mentioned above, — all point to a great Socialist triumph at the polls next november.

In conclusion we may assure our European comrades that the inner struggle through which the Socialist movement passed during the last two years has not failed to bear good fruit. The party has entered upon a new era in its history and looks back upon the time of its sectarian existence as the initial stage in its movement, unavoidable perhaps, but happily left behind. Its present size, form of organization, and spirit which actuates it make a repetition of any attempts to rule it by any one person or set of persons, impossible. Its frank avowal of former mistakes and its uniform friendship and good will shown the workingmen has won it the sympathies of the advanced elements of the working class of America, and make it possible for her in no very distant future to catch up with if not to excel our European comrades in the work of advancing our cause.

Fraternelly, for the Social Democratic Party.

JOE HARRIMAN, JACOB ROMBRO.

Dr. S. Ingeman,

Delegates.

New-York, September 1900.

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