
Debs Goes Out: Social Democracy is Split into Two Factions

Eugene V. Debs left the Social Democracy of America, which he founded and of which he was President, at 2:30 o'clock [am] yesterday morning [June 11, 1898] and the men who seceded under his leadership formed the Social Democratic Party of America. In one year's experience he had determined that the colonization scheme which he had fathered was chimerical and that political action should be the purpose of the organization. When the convention in Ulhich's Hall, after a night of bitter debate, upheld colonization by a vote of 52 to 36, Debs and his followers walked out and in the Revere House organized a new society and adopted a new platform.¹

While the old Social Democracy will embark at once on the establishment of its first cooperative community in the mining industry at Green Mountain Falls, Colorado, the Social Democratic Party will confine its work to propagating the principles of socialism by the use of the ballot. The division extends to the old leaders. Of the men who were imprisoned in Woodstock Jail in consequence of the great railroad strike of 1894 E.V. Debs and Sylvester Keliher are in the seceding faction, while W.E. Burns, James Hogan, Roy Goodwin, and J.F. Lloyd adhere to the old party.² In both organizations the officers are new, but the former leaders are the ruling spirits.³

Form a New Party.

The Debs faction opened its meeting at 3 o'clock, and at daybreak organization had been effected and a plan of work outlined. The final session was held at Hull House, where a platform was adopted and

¹ This dramatic lead places far too much emphasis on Debs's personal role in the split. There is no evidence he was present at the convention at the time of the break; he certainly did not attend the Revere House meeting that followed, and was the next day ill in bed.

² John F. Lloyd was not actually one of the 1895 Woodstock prisoners.

³ This is a great misreading of the power dynamics of both organizations.

committees were appointed. The leaders claim 4,000 members left the Social Democracy for the new organization.⁴

In the meeting at Hull House at 10 o'clock speakers denounced the Uhlich's Hall contingent as anarchists and paid henchmen of political parties. Feeling ran so high that when a resolution to decorate the anarchists' graves at Waldheim [Cemetery in Chicago] was introduced, which Delegate [James F.] Carey fought steadfastly, it was not considered.

Jesse Cox was made temporary chairman and William Mailly secretary. The following Executive Committee was appointed: E.V. Debs, Seymour Stedman, Victor Berger, Jesse Cox, and Fred Heath. It was announced that Mr. Debs would be unable to act as chairman owing to other duties. Secretary Keliher was reported as a delegate, but was not present. Details of organization were left to the Executive Committee, and A.S. Edwards was selected as national organizer.

Platform in Two Divisions.

The platform of the new party is in two divisions, one for application in cities and the other for farmers.

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The new party has the representatives of 66 branches of the old organization in the New England states, New York, Tennessee, Wisconsin, Colorado, and Missouri. A national central committee was appointed consisting of one delegate from each state. It was instructed to secure headquarters in a city other than Chicago.⁵ The convention adjourned sine die.

⁴ Obviously a gross exaggeration, interesting as a measure of total membership strength of the old Social Democracy.

⁵ While initial reports indicated that the SDP intended to establish itself in St. Louis, headquarters were ultimately obtained in Chicago, with Theodore Debs serving in Sylvester Keliher's former role as National Secretary.

Plan to Form a Colony: Last Session of Social Democracy Convention is Bitter and Busy

The secession caused gloom in Uhlich's Hall, where the Social Democracy met for its last session yesterday morning [June 11, 1898]. Of the supporters of political activity Secretary Keliher alone was present. He wished to reply to remarks impugning his honesty made Friday [June 10]. Vice President [William E.] Burns was in the chair. Secretary Keliher in answering James Hogan's accusation in regard to the purchase of 50,000 membership cards, said they had been bought at the lowest possible figure for an organization without credit. The secretary said Hogan had been given as large an allowance as the finances of the organization permitted. He declared he had held as secretary a thankless position for years and had tried to do all his work conscientiously.

Secretary Keliher had a letter from Edwards, Deutsch, and Heitman, who printed the cards, which corroborated his statements. The letter said the extra work on charters and cards not contracted for amounted to the difference between the agreed price and the larger amount paid for the order. The firm says no commission was paid the secretary.

The statements of Secretary Keliher did not satisfy the delegates, and when he announced his intention of resigning there was a clamor. Delegate Frank shouted that he was resigning because he knew he could not gain reelection. Secretary Keliher left the hall.

In the report of the committee on constitution Chairman Frank said the new constitution differs from the original in several particulars. Instead of central authority vested in one man the election of an Executive Council of nine members is provided for. Three organizations, economic, political, and educational, are made. Each commission may select its own headquarters and the whole council will decide upon national headquarters. The constitution also declares against amalgamating with any political body.

The Colonization Commission again outlined its plan to establish a mining colony at Green Mountain Falls, Colorado. This was adopted. An Executive Council was elected as follows: J.F. Lloyd, James Hogan, Isaac Frank, Col. Richard J. Hinton, Leroy Goodwin, L.L. Hopkins, J.C.

Borlund, Cyrus Field Willard, and G.C. Clemens. No chairman was chosen, this being left to the decision of the council. Vice President Burns had declared his intention to refuse and office, and his name was not offered. He said, however, he is heart and soul with the colonization platform and will work for its success.

Some ill feeling was felt among the colonizationists when it was announced that James Hogan had frustrated an attempt of the opponents to dispose of the furniture of the organization. Delegate [Seymour] Stedman of the seceders tried to foreclose on \$40 due him by having a constable remove the furniture from the Social Democracy headquarters. A warrant for this purpose was obtained in Justice Bowman's court and the constable had taken out a desk and a typewriter when Mr. Hogan came. The claim of \$40 was paid and the property restored. Most of the delegates left the city in the evening for their homes.

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