
“They Fear Its Growing Power” :
Interview with the *Chicago Chronicle*
(November 13, 1899)

The present standing of the Social Democratic Party of America, of which I am an active member, may be likened to that of a child which is destined to grow to the proportions of a giant. Its lungs are perfect, its body is sound, and the food that is necessary for its sustenance is abundant. Its parent is the whole world, and as it grows in strength and comeliness its parent will love it with increasing fondness. The forces which will eventually contribute to the domination of all parties by the social democracy are already in existence. They are to be found in every hamlet, on every farm, and in every city, and they await only the master hand that will assemble them into one giant unit which will revolutionize the world. The assembling has begun and the progress made has seemed marvelous to me. Scarcely a year has passed since the first effort was made, and already the force of the social democracy is a factor in the affairs of our great country.

Enthusiasm in Canada.

My trip to the West and North has been one of unbounded success.¹ I have preached the doctrine of collective ownership of the means of production and distribution for the advantage of all the people of the Northwest territories, and it has met with the favor of the Canadian people. I have pointed out to the people of the Western states that private ownership of the means of production is responsible for the insecurity of subsistence, and my words have met with applause. In the state of Washington the enthusiastic receptions accorded me were astounding. At every place I was billed to speak the crowds that came to hear me were greater, two to one, than the houses would accommodate.²

No, my connection with labor organizations or the part I played in the Chicago strike had nothing to do with drawing the crowds. They came because they believed in the principles of the Social Democratic Party and because they are opposed to the present economic conditions. Washington will be the banner state in the West for the social democracy, and

Massachusetts will hold the palm in the East. The forces are already assembling and they will march and meet in the valley of the Mississippi, where they will united to celebrate the downfall of all other parties.

Combination of Old Parties.

Social democracy has already gained great advantages in Massachusetts and the old political parties are already moving in the direction of a combination against it. They fear its growing power, for they know that once it secures the mastery the capitalist will be a thing of the past, the sweatshops will be buried as in a deep dungeon, and liberty, freedom, and equality will become facts instead of sounding titles.

The social democracy is opposed to trusts and monopolies in every form. It believes in restricting production to the wants of the people. The present competitive system causes overproduction, or, rather, underconsumption. It is the ruination of the masses for the benefit of the classes. It has already enslaved millions and unless broken by the power of social democracy will drive millions to misery and starvation. The concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, if allowed to go on much longer, will result in the robbery of every right the workman now enjoys, and the monarchy of wealth will be succeeded by the autocratic authority of a sceptered ruler.

Our system of government, which we claim to be free, but which is not free, will become so despotic that the condition of the masses will be comparable only to that of the serfs of Russia and civilization will be destroyed. The promotion of social democracy is greatly helped by trades unionism. Trades unionism and independent political action are the great emancipating factors among the workingmen, the first representing the economic and the last representing the political wing, and they must work together.

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Will Name a Ticket.

Most assuredly the Social Democratic Party will nominate a ticket for the Presidential campaign of 1900. A convention will be held at Indianapolis March 10, when the Presidential candidate will be chosen.

Mr. Debs was asked whether it was true, as reported, that he was a candidate for the nomination. He replied that he was not. He said he was looked upon as the leader of the party, but he had absolutely no aspirations for Presidential honors. He was noncommittal when asked to indicate available timber for the office, but asserted the party had an abundance of it. He disapproved of the policy being pursued by Mayor [Samuel] Jones of Toledo and indicated he thought it lacked cohesion.

I am uncompromisingly opposed to fusion with any party. The Social Democratic Party of America will make no political alliances. It will stand on its own bottom and fight its way until it has the entire people a unit at its back. It will achieve the grandest triumph the world has ever seen in the amelioration of the conditions of the people, and its promoters, though now called demagogues and dreamers will go down in history side by side with the illustrious names of Elijah Parish Lovejoy, William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, John Greenleaf Whittier,³ John Brown, and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Mr. Debs said the American Railway Union would be revived, but the organization would be delayed until after his return from the East, where he will be engaged for the next three months on a lecturing tour. He said the railway men on every line over which he traveled in the West were anxious for the reorganization, and he was doing all in his power to bring it about.

Mr. Debs was outspoken in his denunciation of the war in the Philippines. He said it was more brutal than the war waged by England against the colonies in 1776. The result in the Philippines, he said, would be disastrous. The taxation it entailed on the American people was enormous, and it was all the result of greed. The prosecution of the war was a blot on the country's escutcheon but worse things were in store for the people should the tenets of the social democracy fail of adoption.

Published as "Will Launch New Party" in *Chicago Chronicle*, Nov. 19, 1899, unspecified page. Copy preserved in *Papers of Eugene V. Debs* microfilm edition, reel 9.

¹ Debs had just concluded a five week lecture tour during which he had appeared on stage in Manitoba, Ontario, Montana, British Columbia, Washington, and California.

² If true this estimate is not reflected in contemporary news accounts, which reported excellent-to-full house audiences of up to 4,000 people but which do not mention overflow crowds.

³ John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) was an American Quaker poet and abolitionist.