
A Plutocratic Government

by Eugene V. Debs

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Is it premature to suggest that a plutocratic government in the United States in the not remote future is not only possible, but is well up toward the head in the list of probabilities?

Does someone inquire what is meant by a plutocratic government, or a plutocracy? We will permit Mr. Webster to explain. He says a plutocracy "is a form of government in which the supreme power is lodged in the hands of the wealthy classes; government by the rich."

At present, numerous writers, orators, and statesmen, legislators and others of less note, aver that ours is a government by the people, that it is not a plutocratic nor an aristocratic government, but a democratic government. The averment, if we consult constitutions, is true; but if laws and decisions of courts are investigated it will be found that much is going on in the way of government strictly in accord with Mr. Webster's definition of plutocracy, "a government by the wealthy classes; the rich," and if the question is asked, what are the facts upon which such assertions are based, the reply may be prudently made that Mr. Thomas G. Shearman, in the January [1891] *Forum*, prints a table showing how the wealth of the country is distributed at present, as follows:

<i>Class</i>	<i>Number of families</i>	<i>Total Wealth to families</i>	<i>Average Wealth to families</i>	<i>Individuals per family</i>	<i>Average per individual</i>
Rich	182,000	\$43,300,000,000	\$237,912	5	\$47,582
Middle	1,200,000	7,500,000,000	6,250	5	1,250
Working	11,620,000	11,200,000,000	964	5	193

Total	13,002,000	\$62,000,000,000			

Referring to Mr. Webster's definition of Plutocracy, a government by the rich, the foregoing figures must impress every candid mind that the United States is approaching plutocratic conditions with fearful rapidity; indeed, Mr. Shearman says that "the evils" of "such an unequal distribution of wealth are even more serious than any here suggested, and might possibly include the *destruction of republican government, which is even now little better than a form among us.*"

It is now seen that of the estimated wealth of the country, \$62 billion, 182,000 families out of 13,002,000 families have possession of \$43.3 billion — equal to \$237,912 to a family, or \$47,582 to each member of the plutocratic family, allowing five individuals to a family. While this is true of the plutocratic class, the 11,620,000 families of workers have only \$11.2 billion of the wealth of the country, equal to \$964 to the family, and \$193 to the individual.

It will be borne in mind that the exhibit we supply is not furnished by an anarchist, a socialist, a "labor agitator," but by one of the clearest headed thinkers of the times, himself a man of ample fortune — a lawyer who does not consider cases of small fees — nor is he particularly opposed to millionaires. He sees the drift of affairs, and points out inevitable results, unless some means can be devised for a more equitable distribution of the wealth that labor creates, nor does he hesitate to say that the plutocrats have now such an influence upon political affairs that our republican government is "little better than a form among us."

In this connection it should be said that labor organizations have one supreme purpose in view, and that is to inaugurate a system of distribution of wealth whereby an individual worker may have more than \$193 and the individual plutocrat less than \$47,582, or that a family of five workers shall have more than \$964 of the country's wealth, while a plutocratic family of five has \$237,912 of the country's wealth.

To accomplish their patriotic purpose labor organizations would have wise laws and honest courts, and these things which must be had if a republican government is to be a fact rather than a form they would secure by argument, reason, and the ballot. If a change of program can not be brought about by such means then a plutocracy will be, if not already established, a "government by the rich," and when such a government is in full operation in this "land of the free and home of the brave," what will follow need not here be conjectured. History repeats itself, and those who study history need not err in

their conclusions. There is a time to apply remedies, the time is now — the present, and it will be well if legislatures and courts give the subject special consideration.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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