
The Social Democracy (August 1897)

The public press has had much to say about the Social Democracy since its organization a few weeks ago. Most of the comment and criticism, both favorable and unfavorable, has been inspired by a total misapprehension of the organization, its principles, its plans, and its purposes. Columns have been written about the failures of colonization schemes of the past. Other columns have been written about the impossibility of establishing a new social system outside the existing one. The time and space given to such discussion have been simply wasted.

That some of our critics know better, but persist in misrepresentation, from motives of their own, is a fact too well understood to admit of doubt; and although some of these pretend to laugh the "scheme" to scorn, the large amount of space they devote to it makes it apparent that they are not blind to its immense possibilities.

The Social Democracy is a great social, economic, and political organization. It is at once national and international. Politically speaking, it is a party within and for itself, and within 12 months its national representatives will have formulated a national political platform. Similarly, the various state representatives will have adopted state platforms and the municipal representatives local platforms.

The unit of organization is the local branch. these are organized in each ward and township. Five or more persons can organize a local branch, and the membership is limited to 500.

The local branches have local or municipal jurisdiction. From these are chosen annually, in April, representatives to the State Union, who meet annually in May at the capital of the state to prepare a platform, nominate candidates, and transact other business pertaining to the state. The several State Unions elect representatives to the National Council, and this body meets annually, in June, to adopt a national platform, choose officers, nominate candidates, and transact other business pertaining to the national organization.

The National Council annually elects an Executive Board of five members, which constitutes the executive department of the organization.

The declaration of principles adopted by the late convention is too long to be introduced in full, and I will therefore only give two paragraphs, as follows:

We hold that all men are born free, and are endowed with certain natural rights, among which are life, liberty, and happiness. In the light of experience we find that while all citizens are equal in theory, they are not so in fact. While all citizens have the same rights politically, this political equality is useless under the present system of economic inequality, which is essentially destructive of life, liberty, and happiness. In spite of our political equality labor is robbed of the wealth it produces. By the development of this system it is denied the means of self-government, and by enforced idleness, through lack of employment, is even deprived of the necessaries of life.

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We therefore call upon all honest citizens to unite under the banner of the Social Democracy of America, so that we may be ready to conquer capitalism by making use of our political liberty and by taking possession of the public power, so that we may put an end to the present barbarous struggle, by the abolition of capitalism, the restoration of the land, and of all the means of production, transportation, and distribution, to the people as a collective body, and the substitution of the cooperative commonwealth for the present state of planless production, industrial war, and social disorder — a commonwealth, which, although it will not make every man equal physically or mentally, will give to every worker the free exercise and the full benefit of his faculties, multiplied by all the modern factors of civilization and ultimately inaugurate the universal brotherhood of man. The Social Democracy of America will make democracy, “the rule of the people,” a truth, by ending the economic subjugation of the overwhelmingly great majority of the people.

By far the greater part of the criticism has been directed against the “Colonization scheme,” and there are those who still insist that this is all there is to the movement, or, at least, that this is its chief purpose.

To all of these be it said that the proposed colonization scheme is simply one of the features of the movement and has been assigned a special department known as the “Colonization Department.”

There has never been any intention to organize isolated colonies, and they who have worked themselves up in describing the fate of other

“colonies” and predicting calamity have been wasting their time. They have been attacking the phantoms of newspaper reporters.

The purpose has been, and is, to mass a sufficient number of our supporters in a state to secure political control, and then another state, and so on. Meanwhile everything possible will be done to provide employment for the unemployed. At worst they will be no worse off than they now are. It is believed that with such financial support as can be given by the general organization, the soil of the state chosen can be put under cultivation, certain industries can be established, and work provided for the unemployed, while at the same time much can be done on this line to promote the National Cooperative Commonwealth.

Those who so violently oppose our “Colonization Scheme” will not give the real reason for their opposition. Why are they opposed to our carrying a state for the Social Democracy?

The magnitude of our undertaking is not underestimated. Of course, there are thousands who look sad and say, “It can’t be done.” They mean well, but are helpless and cannot help it. We say it can be done and what is more, it will be done. The program adopted at Chicago will be carried out in full. No part of it has been or will be abandoned.

The Colonization Commission will soon be appointed and will work in conjunction with a similar commission of the Brotherhood of the Cooperative Commonwealth in carrying out that part of the program. Meanwhile the work of organizing the general movement will be carried on with unceasing energy. Applications for charters are already pouring in from every quarter. It is safe to predict that the Social Democracy will grow more rapidly than any other organization ever started, and that its spontaneous development and expansion will be a revelation to the people.

The Social Democrat, the official paper of the organization, will be published weekly for the present, and on Jan. 1 [1898] a daily paper will be issued.¹ In addition to this, a literary bureau will be established for the printing and distribution of social, economic, and political literature.

In this brief article to *The New Time*, hurriedly written, I have no time for detail and I have not attempted anything beyond the statement of the scope and general purposes of the movement.

The success of the Social Democracy is assured from the very beginning. Its reception by the masses is proof positive that the people are ripe for it and that it will rapidly grow in favor until it fulfills its emancipating mission.

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¹ As was the case with Debs's forecast of a daily newspaper for the American Railway Union, this estimate proved unrealistic and was unrealized.