

## **The Real Party of Progress: Campaign Speech in Chicago (August 26, 1912)**

It is with a full sense of the responsibility it imposes and the service it exacts that I accept the nomination for president tendered to me by the Socialist Party of the United States. Personally I did not wish the nomination. It came to me unsought. It came as a summons to service and not as a personal honor.

Every true member of the Socialist Party is at the party's service. The confidence of his comrades is to him a sacred trust and their collective will the party's law. My chief concern as a presidential candidate is that I shall serve well the party, and the class and the cause the party represents.

The Socialist Party is fundamentally different from all other parties. It came in the process of evolution and grows with the growth of forces which created it. Its spirit is militant and its aim revolutionary. It expresses in political terms the aspiration of the working class to freedom and to a larger and fuller life than they have yet known.

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The world's workers have always been and still are the world's slaves. They have borne all the burdens of the race and built all the monuments along the track of civilization; they have produced all the world's wealth and supported all the world's governments. They have conquered all things but their own freedom. They are still the subject class in every nation on earth and the chief function of every government is to keep them at the mercy of their masters.

The workers in the mills and factories, in the mines and on the farms and railways, never had a party of their own until the Socialist Party was organized. They divided their votes between the parties of their masters. They did not realize that they were using their ballots to forge their own fetters.

But the awakening came. It was bound to come. Class rule became more and more oppressive and wage-slavery more and more galling. The eyes of the workers began to open. They began to see *the cause* of the misery they had dumbly suffered so many years. It dawned upon them

that society was divided into two classes: capitalists and workers, exploiters and producers; that the capitalists, while comparatively few, owned the nation and controlled the government; that the courts and the soldiers were at their command, and that the workers, while in a great majority, were in slavish subjection.

When they ventured to protest they were discharged and found themselves blacklisted; when they went out on strike they were suppressed by the soldiers and sent to jail. They looked around them and saw a land of wonderful resources; they saw the productive machinery made by their own hands and the vast wealth produced by their own labor, in the shadow of which their wives and children were perishing in the skeleton clutch of famine.

The very suffering they were forced to endure quickened their senses. They began to think. A new light dawned upon their dark skies. They rubbed the age-long sleep from their eyes. They had long felt the brutalizing effect of class rule — now they saw the cause of it. Slowly but steadily they became class-conscious. they said, “we are brothers, we are comrades,” and they saw themselves multiplied by millions. They caught the prophetic battlecry of Karl Marx, the world’s greatest labor leader, the inspired evangel of working class emancipation — “Workers of all countries, unite!”

And now behold! The international socialist movement spreads out over all the nations of the earth. The world’s workers are aroused at last. They are no longer on their knees; their bowed bodies are now erect. Despair has given way to hope; weakness to strength; fear to courage. They no longer cringe and supplicate — they hold up their heads and command. They have ceased to fear their masters and learned how to trust themselves.

This is how the Socialist Party came to be born. It was quickened into life in the bitter struggle of the world’s enslaved workers. It expresses their collective determination to break their fetters and emancipate themselves and the race.

Is it strange that the workers are loyal to such a party, that they proudly stand beneath its blazing banners and fearlessly proclaim its conquering principles? It is the one party of their class, born of their agony and baptized in the blood of their countless brethren who perished in the struggle to give it birth.

Hail to this great party of the toiling millions whose battle cry is heard around the world!

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We do not plead for votes — the workers give them freely the hour they understand. But we need to destroy the prejudice that still prevails in the working class world. We need the clear light of sound education and the conquering power of economic and political organization. Only they who bear its burdens may rightfully enjoy the blessings of civilized society.

There are no boundary lines to separate race from race, sex from sex, or creed from creed in the Socialist Party. The common rights of all are equally recognized. Every human being is entitled to sunlight and air, to what his labor produces, and to an equal chance with every other human being to unfold and ripen and give to the world the riches of his mind and soul.

Economic slavery is the world's greatest curse today. Poverty and misery, prostitution, insanity, and crime are its inevitable results. The Socialist Party is the one party which stands squarely and uncompromisingly for the abolition of industrial slavery; the one party pledged in every fiber of its being to the economic freedom of all the people.

So long as the nation's resources and productive and distributive machinery are the private property of a privileged class the masses will be at their mercy, poverty will be their lot, and life will be shorn of all that raises it above the brute level.

The infallible test of a political party is the private ownership of the sources of wealth and the means of life. Apply that test to the Republican, Democratic, and Progressive parties and upon that basic, fundamental issue you will find them essentially one and the same. They differ according to the conflicting interests of the privileged classes, but at bottom they are alike and stand for capitalist class rule and working class slavery.

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The new Progressive Party is a party of progressive capitalism. It is lavishly financed and shrewdly advertised. But it stands for the rule of capitalism all the same. When the owners of the trust finance a party to put themselves out of business, when they turn over their wealth to the people from whom they stole it and go to work and make an honest living, it will be time enough to consider the merits of the Roosevelt Progressive Party.

One question is sufficient to determine the true status of all these parties. Do they want the workers to own the tools they work with, control their own jobs, and secure to themselves the wealth they produce? Certainly not. That is utterly ridiculous and impossible from their point of view.

The Republican, Democratic, and Progressive parties all stand for the private ownership by the capitalists of the productive machinery used by the workers, so that the capitalists can continue to filch the wealth produced by the workers.

The Socialist Party is the only party which declares that the tools of labor belong to labor and that the wealth produced by the working class belongs to the working class.

Intelligent workingmen are no longer deceived. They know that the struggle in which the world is engaged today is a class struggle and that in this struggle the workers can never win by giving their votes to capitalist parties. They have tried this for many years and it has always produced the same results for them.

The class of privilege and pelf has had the world by the throat and the working class beneath its iron-shod hoofs long enough. The magic word of freedom is ringing through the nation and the spirit of intelligent revolt is finding expression in every land beneath the sun.

The solidarity of the working class is the silent force in the social transformation of which we behold the signs upon every hand. Nearer and nearer they are being drawn together in the bonds of unionism; clearer and clearer becomes their collective vision; greater and greater grows the power that throbs within them. They are the twentieth century hosts of freedom who are to destroy all despotisms, topple over all thrones, seize all scepters of authority and hold them in their own strong hands, tear up all privilege by the roots, and consecrate the earth and all its fullness to the joy and service of all humanity.

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It is vain to hope for material relief under the prevailing system of capitalism. All the reforms that are proposed by the three capitalist parties, even if carried out in good faith, would still leave the working class in industrial slavery. The working class will never be emancipated by the grace of the capitalist class, but only by overthrowing that class. The power to emancipate itself is inherent in the working class and this power

must be developed through sound education and applied through sound organization.

It is as foolish and self-destructive for workingmen to turn to Republican, Democratic, and Progressive parties on election day as it would be for them to turn to the Manufacturers' Association and the Citizen's Alliance when they are striking against starvation wages.

The capitalist class is organized economically and politically to keep the working class in subjection and perpetuate its power as a ruling class. They do not support a working class union, nor a working class party. They are not so foolish. They wisely look out for themselves, the capitalist class. Why should the working class give their support to a capitalist party? Capitalist misrule under which the workingmen suffer slavery and the most galling injustices exists only because it has workingmen's support. Withdraw that support and capitalism is dead.

The capitalists can enslave and rob the workers only by the consent of the workers when they cast their ballots on election day. Every vote cast for a capitalist party, whatever its name, is a vote for wage-slavery, for poverty and degradation. Every vote cast for the Socialist Party, the workers' own party, is a vote for emancipation.

We appeal to the workers and to all who sympathize with them to make their power felt in this campaign. Never before has there been so great an opportunity to strike an effective blow for freedom.

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Capitalism is rushing blindly to its impending doom. All the signs portend the inevitable breakdown of the existing order. Deep-seated discontent has seized upon the masses. They must indeed be deaf who do not hear the mutterings of the approaching storm.

Poverty, high prices, unemployment, child slavery, widespread misery, and haggard want in a land bursting with abundance; prostitution and insanity, suicide and crime — these in solemn numbers tell the tragic story of capitalisms saturnalia of blood and tears and shame as its end draws near.

It is to abolish this monstrous system and the misery and crime which flow from it in a direful and threatening stream that the Socialist Party was organized and now makes its appeal to the intelligence and conscience of the people. Social reorganization is the imperative demand for this worldwide revolutionary movement.

The Socialist Party's mission is not only to destroy capitalist despotism but to establish industrial and social democracy. To this end the workers are steadily organizing and fitting themselves for the day when they shall take control of the people's industries and when the right to work shall be as inviolate as the right to breathe the breath of life.

Standing as it does for the emancipation of the working class from wage-slavery, for the equal rights and opportunities of all men and all women, for the abolition of child labor and the conservation of all childhood, for social self-rule and equal freedom of all, the Socialist Party is the party of progress, the party of the future, and its triumph will signalize the birth of a new civilization and the dawn of a happier day for all humanity.

Published as "Roosevelt Most Dangerous Man in United States," in *Chicago Evening World*, vol. 6, no. 258 (Aug. 26, 1912), pp. 1, 3.