

**Report of the National Executive Board to the  
Special Convention of the Social Democratic Party  
with Headquarters in Chicago  
(January 15, 1901)**

Chicago, Jan. 15, 1901.

To the Social Democratic Party in National Convention Assembled,

Comrades:—

After passing through the most remarkable political campaign ever waged for revolutionary socialism in the United States, we are again assembled in national convention to take counsel of each other for the purpose of more effectively planning our battle-line for the future. Militant socialism knows no breathing spells. There has come to us the task of carrying the social democratic movement over into the new century, and of starting it in the most exact integrity on the ever-widening path that leads finally to a social condition [free] from class rule and free also from industrial exploitation. In taking a retrospective glance at the movement in the past and [comparing] that past to the present, we are almost bewildered at the wealth of opportunity before us. The day of little things is past; the day of great things is at hand.

We have to congratulate ourselves on the fact that the Social Democratic Party has moved steadily forward, with the utmost fidelity to its mission. In a year beset with problems and perplexities it has acquitted itself well, and so persistently pursued its work of organization that every nook and corner of the country has come under its influence. Its work has been dignified and earnest and its influence in the socialist movement wholesome.

Since the Indianapolis convention [March 6-9, 1900] an eventful 11 months have been passed. Of chief interest was the Presidential campaign, in which, for the first time in American history, socialism rose to the dignity of national importance. It is our right to call attention to this fact and to keep in mind that the great success of that canvass is our justification for having taken the socialistic movement out of the hands of a narrow, stagnating sect, under whose rule true progress was

impossible. The significance of the fact that our Presidential candidate was able to tax the capacity of the largest auditoriums of the country with crowds equally large with those of the candidates of the capitalistic parties will be plainer and plainer as its educational effects show themselves. The year has also given added testimony to the value of our plan of organization and of the tolerance of our methods of work. The best proof of this is that the party has kept itself clean. No scandal has attached to the conduct of its affairs, and this in the face of the claim that only the most rigid discipline could protect a national socialist organization from the wiles of the American politician and the oily self-seeker. If any such got into our midst, they found an uncongenial atmosphere. Besides this, our plan of organization has been such as not to be over-burdensome to the member. They have not had to give beyond their means, and a great amount of work has thus been done with a minimum of expenditure. The weekly visits of our official organ have been of the greatest value in keeping alive the spirit of fraternity and comradeship.

In Germany the Social Democratic Party only entrusts with leadership those comrades who have been long in the movement, and therefore, is not exposed to the dangers that obtain here. Their leaders are men whose loyalty and sincerity have been tested by time. Such caution is not possible or advisable in this country, owing to the constant extension of our organization into new territory. The danger that unseasoned men would thus secure the opportunity to either compromise or betray the party has thus far been met by the zeal of the comrades in the various localities, acting in harmony with the implied will of the membership at large. Party influence and party fealty have constituted the regulating force.

When we were last assembled in national convention, it was supposed that the faction that had split off from the Socialist Labor Party would soon become assimilated with us in the Social Democratic Party. Their demand that we sacrifice the party name and the organization we had been at such pains to build up found little favor, in spite of the wish, which we all shared, that there might be a unification. And so, with the assurance of the visiting delegation that the name would not be placed in jeopardy, a committee of nine was appointed to treat with the full Rochester committee at a meeting which took place some three weeks later at the Labor Lyceum in New York City. It had been felt that if the ex-SLP members were sincere in their wish to become one of us, that they would not insist on the disruption of our organization as the price of

that union. When the conference opened, however, it was at once clear that the Rochester delegates not only intended to disregard the understanding as to the name, but that they had a carefully prepared plan, whereby, under the guise of equal concessions from both sides, a new party was to be launched, a party which would be in many ways the counterfeit of the Socialist Labor Party, and so planned as to allow of undemocratic control from a headquarters located within their territory. Moreover, the distinctive feature in our successful form of organization — the publication of an official paper, furnished free each week to each member — was to be eliminated in the interest of certain papers published under their auspices. It was further found that a secret compact between one or more of our own committee and the Rochester committee existed, and doubtless had existed prior even to the Indianapolis convention. Under the lead of these members, and in spite of the protest of the other members of the committee, our committee itself was made to exceed its powers and to go beyond its instructions. The situation was so grave that the matter was brought to the attention of the board, which, after due deliberation, decided to lay the facts before the membership. Accordingly the board issued a manifesto and called for a referendum vote, the date of which was fixed far enough in advance to permit of the fullest discussion of the subject. The board ordered the columns of the *Herald* thrown open to a free consideration of the matter. The widest latitude was allowed those who availed themselves of the opportunity to debate the question in print, and the members of the Rochester faction were given equal privileges with our members. They also flooded our membership with circulars and other literature. Over a month was consumed in the discussion and when the vote was called for it resulted 1,213 against a union with the Rochester faction, and 939 in favor of it.

Shortly after this the Rochester committee, which, with certain disloyal members of our own committee, had repudiated the referendum, held another meeting in New York, to which some of our loyal members went, in an unofficial capacity, in the hope of coming to some agreement by which there could be a political affiliation for the campaign. This proposition was rejected, and our members withdrew. The Springfield people then set up a rival party, taking our name, and establishing a national headquarters. From that time down to the present our party has been harassed and obstructed, in the hope that it might be driven out of existence. At the beginning of the campaign, the new organization ratified the nomination of Eugene V. Debs for President, a ratification which in the interests of harmony he accepted.

In spite of our unpleasant experience, the fact remains that your officers, as well as the members at large, hope that the division in the movement may cease, and this convention will, it is hoped, be able to devise some plan by which this end may be accomplished, without running the risk of putting the movement back into the old ruts from which the formation of our party rescued it.

The official vote of the United States is now at hand, and it is found that our party cast 96,878 of the votes that were counted. Counting the votes of the Socialist Labor Party, a total of 131,069 is found to have been cast for the social revolution. During the campaign our headquarters sent out tons of socialist literature and in other ways met the requirements of the canvass with the greatest credit. The tours of Comrade Debs and other speakers contributed in no small measure to the successful showing. During the hottest weeks of the campaign, Comrade A.S. Edwards, editor of the Herald, made a tour of the Indiana gas belt, the chairman of the board [Frederic Heath] being in editorial charge of the paper in his absence. The Presidential campaign did a great deal to popularize socialism with the masses, and the starting of Social Democratic newspapers in various parts of the country shows to what an extent this was true.<sup>1</sup>

The result of the national election, as seeming to doom the Democratic Party to disintegration, gave rise to the hope that our ranks would not only gain accessions from the wreck, but that it was possible that capitalism would be left but the Republican party, and that the socialists might form the one great opposing party, making the fight hereafter a clearly cut one between the exploiters and the exploited. In December [1900], Prof. George G. Herron met with your board and urged the calling of a convention open to the mid-road [left wing] Populists, the radicals of the Democratic Party, and to all others socialistically inclined, in the hope that by this procedure there might be headed off the probable formation of a radical pseudo-socialistic middle class party that would occupy the reform field, give the discontent of the people a vent, and block the pathway of the social democracy. After carefully discussing the matter, your board deemed this venture too dangerous to be undertaken. The bringing together into a supposedly socialistic party of the motley-minded radical elements of the old parties could not but dull the edge of our battle-line against capitalism, even were it possible for us to organize those elements. The impracticability of such an undertaking was shown shortly after, when Professor Herron appeared on his own account before the Populists' committee at St. Louis

and made an unsuccessful attempt to get them to commit themselves to socialism.

At the Indianapolis convention the National Executive Board was continued until referendum nominations could be made for such a board as was called for under the new constitution.<sup>2</sup> The controversy over the proposition of unification so absorbed the attention of the party that there was delay in following out this instruction. Nominations for a new board were finally called for, however, and were published week by week in the *Herald*. By this time the campaign was on in its excitement, and at numerous requests the election of a new board was put over until after the [November] election. In the meantime the chairman of the board, Comrade Jesse Cox, resigned, and as his retirement from office was irrevocably made, the vacancy on the board was filled by the selection of Mrs. Corinne Brown, Comrade Heath being made chairman.<sup>3</sup> After the election the members nominated for the new board were again named in the *Herald* and the board was about to call for an election by referendum, when the formal requests for a national convention were received and the call thereupon prepared and published.<sup>4</sup> It was, therefore, deemed wise to leave the matter of the selection of a new board to the convention, particularly as there was the possibility of changes being made in the constitution that might alter the form of the executive board.

We deem it but just to say that the members of the board have worked together without friction and that they have labored without pecuniary compensation, those of the board who were obliged to travel to and from the meetings doing so at their own expense. When they consider the work performed by your National Secretary-Treasurer, Theodore Debs, however, they feel that their sacrifices have been small indeed. His office hours during the day have been supplemented by work at home on each evening of the week, nor has he rested a single Sunday during the past year. Your editor, A.S. Edwards, has performed his work uncomplainingly in a dingy office and has worked hard and faithfully. The *Herald* has been issued under numerous drawbacks, chief among which has been the lack of money to meet the cost of such a paper as it ought to be made. This convention will do well to provide means by which the paper can be improved and strengthened. It should be made more educational in plan and have sufficient space to give concisely the doings of the Social Democrats in the various sections of the country. In connection with the *Herald* there is a crying need for a series of standard educational leaflets, and this convention should arrange for such publication.

***Frederic Heath, Chairman,***  
***Seymour Stedman, Secretary,***  
***Corinne S. Brown,***  
***Eugene V. Debs,***  
***Victor L. Berger,***  
*The National Executive Board of the Social Democratic Party.*

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<sup>1</sup> Two such papers include *Challenge* in Los Angeles, published by Gaylord Wilshire and affiliated with the Chicago SDP, and *The Socialist*, published in Seattle by Hermon Titus and affiliated with Springfield.

<sup>2</sup> A new constitution was approved by referendum of the Chicago SDP in July 1900 by a vote of 801-50.

<sup>3</sup> The resignation of Jesse Cox was accepted by the NEB at its meeting of May 6, 1900.

<sup>4</sup> This chronology is belied by a letter of Nov. 9, 1900 from Eugene Debs to his brother which indicates that plans of the NEB were already in place for a convention "within 30 days after election" and a call written at that time. (See: EVD to Theodore Debs, Nov. 9, 1900, in J. Robert Constantine (ed.), *Letters of Eugene V. Debs, Vol. 1, 1874-1912*, pp. 154-156.)