
An Address to Populists

Setting Forth the Difference between the Populist Movement and the Socialist Movement — Populists Should Join the SDP, but They Must Realize What It Means

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We understand that a conference of the middle of the road Populists of the United States will be held in St. Louis on Saturday, December 29 [1900], which will have an important bearing upon the future course of their party.

As might have been expected, the assembly of this party has not been heralded up and down the land by that harlot of capitalism, the Associated Press.

This gathering of men, imbued with deep-seated convictions and earnest purposes, will not be greeted by a blare of trumpets from the crags and mountain tops of capitalism. On the contrary, it is as sure as the law of gravitation that all of the agencies of communication and intelligence, altogether in capitalist hands, will be used either to ignore this meeting, or if that cannot be, to deride and belittle it.

And yet this gathering is fraught with momentous possibilities. The “Middle-of-the-Road” Populists have it in their power at this time to take such action as will define sharply and finally the political issue of 1904 to be Socialism. If they take this course and unite with the Social Democratic Party, they will deserve credit for having inflicted a courageous and decisive blow at capitalism, coming as it would at a most critical period in the alignment of the Socialist forces of the country. That they will declare uncompromisingly and unequivocally for Socialism, would seem to accord most fittingly with the history and traditions of their party. They assemble at a time in the history of the country when the class struggle between capitalists and laborers was never so sharply defined. Between

the capitalist class and the working class, there is now a line of demarcation that will soon be the scene of an irrepressible conflict.

With which of these two classes will the “Middle-of-the-Road” Populists align themselves? For answer, we must turn to the last platform of their party, adopted at Cincinnati on May 16, 1898.

Character of the Middle of the Road Platform.

The platform is too lengthy to be published here in full. But it consists of a preamble and seven clauses, in which they “reaffirm the cardinal tenets of the platform adopted by the People’s Party at Omaha; they demand public ownership of railroads, telegraph and telephone lines, coal mines, etc.; paper money and the free coinage of silver; a graduated income tax; elections of President, Vice-President, Federal Judges, and United States Senators by direct vote of the people. They also demand restoration to the people of all land held by railroads and other corporations above their actual needs; all land held by aliens; and oppose monopoly of land for speculative purposes. They also denounce trusts and the hypocrisy of the old parties in dealing with this question and declare no solution possible excepting the adoption of the principles of public ownership of public utilities.

Here is a platform that breathes of the discontent and resentment that find expression in revolution; but while all Socialists are revolutionists, no class conscious

scientific Socialist would be satisfied with a platform minus the letter and spirit of his faith. The Middle-of-the-Road platform upholds individualism; the private ownership of capital; the competitive system; the profit system; wage slavery, and ignores the class struggle.

We do not mean to say that their platform upholds these things in express language; but by omitting any mention of them. Socialists would condemn the platform for its evils of omission and commission. Those of omission have been stated and as to those of commission, a platform that expressly upholds private ownership of land, free coinage of silver, and graduated income tax is in our judgment an expression of middle class or small capitalists for whose salvation there is no hope. The middle class capitalist will be completely buried within the next four years. No power on earth can save him. The evolution of civilization has decreed the extinction of the middle class. Millions of people in the middle class have already been crushed and many of these have been satisfied to become “hewers of wood and the drawers of water” for the capitalist class. On the other hand, thousands of the crushed middle class all over the land have cast their lot with the downtrodden working class, to seek emancipation with them in the glorious advent of economic equality.

The Middle of the Roaders are now at the “parting of the ways.” Will they still hold out for the restoration of middle class capitalism, which is pregnant with the evils against which they revolt, or will they join forces with the 7 million organized Socialists of the world to bring about the cooperative commonwealth and the brotherhood of man?

Character of the Social Democratic Platform.

Let us now take up the platform of the Social Democratic Party. It is more lengthy than that of the Middle of the Roaders and will not permit of publication in full in the limited space at our disposal. But we will consider the main points, and as it so happens, those which are either omitted or remotely referenced in the People’s Party platforms adopted at Omaha [1892] and Cincinnati [1896]. The language of the Social Democratic platform dwells expressly and uncompromisingly, among other things, on economic equality; the industrial revolution; the private owner-

ship of the means of production; the class struggle between the capitalist class and the propertyless class; the trade union movement, and the collective ownership of the means of production. The platform declares the objects to be the formation of a working class party; the abolition of wage slavery; severance with all capitalist and reform parties; abolition of class rule; the establishment of international Socialism or the brotherhood of man.

It also makes certain demands as steps in the direction of Socialism, some of which are similar to those in the Omaha and Cincinnati platforms.

Herein is a radical difference between the People’s Party and the Social Democratic Party. The Populists make these demands the all important end and purpose (may we say paramount issue?); while the Social Democrats expressly state that they are merely means to an end. There is one feature in the Social Democratic platform upon which it lays chief stress, which is the keynote of the party and the foundation of its revolutionary program, and it is of this feature that we find no reference in the Populist platform. It is the class struggle on the evolution of capitalism.

The Class Struggle.

What is the meaning of capitalism? Capitalism is an economic term. It is applied by political economists and sociologists to the economic system of our civilization, by means of which men achieve economic independence and have the privilege of living idly upon the labor of others, who produce a surplus value above that which they receive for their own sustenance. Capitalism refers to the system. A capitalist is one who profits by the system. If he labors himself, it does not alter the fact that he has an income apart from his labor sufficient to sustain him for life without labor, and therefore his is economically independent.

Those who perform labor of some kind, yet are drawing some income through rent, interest, and profit (but not sufficient to live upon for a lifetime, without labor), are not economically independent. They belong to the middle class of capitalism. They may be producing a surplus above the cost of their own subsistence, which is being absorbed through capitalism, but they are contented because they are receiving a larger surplus from the labor of others than that which

they part with, and they hope to increase their income until they achieve complete independence, like other capitalists.

The working class under capitalism live in hope of crating an income and of increasing it through the appropriation of the surplus products of others who labor. They would like to achieve economic independence in the same manner as the capitalist class.

Capitalism therefore consists of three classes of society: the capitalist class, which has achieved economic independence; the middle class, which has partial economic independence; and the working class, which includes those who are not able to do more than sustain life by means of selling their labor to the capitalist class.

Capitalism divides society into two antagonistic forces, because it is based upon two sets of conflicting economic interests. They each desire economic independence. One of these forces believes that it is justly entitled to the economic independence which it has, but which it manifestly did not create; the other force believes that it is being unjustly deprived of that which it creates and which it never possesses. The Social Democratic platform, among other things, declares that the middle class is “disappearing in the mill of competition,” and that the issue is now between the capitalist class and the working class. Private ownership of the means of production and distribution is the seed or germ of capitalism, of which wage slavery is the most revolting feature. This seed has now brought forth a bitter fruit in the class struggle, but the Social Democratic party, championing the working class, declares its intention to be “the abolition of wage slavery by the establishment of a national system of cooperative industry, based upon the social or common ownership of the means of production and distribution, to be administered by society in the common interest of all its members and the complete emancipation of the socially useful classes from the domination of capitalism.”

Further Comparison of Platforms.

We have given preponderance in this article to the class struggle, because it is the most prominent and uncompromising feature of the Social Democratic platform, while the absence of it from the People’s Party

platform and the silence of their prominent speakers and influential journalists on the subject would seem to indicate that they do not quite grasp the philosophy or comprehend the fundamental economic principles of the Social Democratic Party.

The program of the Populist Party for the “public ownership of public utilities” is too vague and indefinite. It would be impossible in this epoch of the social evolution [*sic.*] for many men to agree upon just what constitute public utilities. Every day now sees the adoption of some new method in production and distribution by which enterprises formerly conducted through individuals become clothed in the garb of a corporation. While the public are still exploited for private profit, yet the corporation possesses functions which the individual did not and could not exercise. This creature of law applying new methods, more economical and suitable to our civilization than the old, exercises semi-public powers and necessarily bears a relationship to the public that in the very nature of things makes it a public utility, whether it be a street railroad or a milk trust.

So far as we can learn from the Populist platform, they define public utilities as railroads, telegraphs, telephones, and coal mines. This is limited cooperation or partial Socialism. In Germany, this program, under the name of State Socialism, was adopted by Bismarck to check the growth of democratic Socialism. Under State Socialism, while the people are relieved of the exactions of capitalism in railroads, telegraphs, telephones, etc., they are yet the prey of the private owners of other capital, who increase their exactions, in proportion to the extend of the relief which the people have obtained from the other parasites.

Democratic socialism proposes the relief of the people from the exactions of the capitalist class in every utility, and it was for the very purpose of defining the difference between state socialism and democratic socialism that the German Socialists, followed by the Socialists in other countries, named their party the Social Democratic Party. The attitude of the Populist Party in favor of the private ownership of land and productive capital; of free coinage of silver and absolute paper money and of an income tax, subject it is true to certain regulations and restrictions; nevertheless at best can only be regarded as a declaration of conservative individualism as opposed to the existing anarchy

of individualism.

The private ownership of land upholds with it the present planless system of production. As the Populist Party has a large representation among the farmers, we would ask them, “are you opposed to a scienti-fic and exact plan of national and international production?” The present planless system of production, due to the individual ownership and cultivation of land for private profit, together with the introduction of machinery which so greatly multiplies results is, under the competitive system, bound to be profitless and ruinous to the farmers. Why should they of all men be opposed to collective ownership of the land?

How many of them today own the land they live upon? Why should we struggle through a lifetime to maintain private ownership of a few acres, to leave to our children, subject to all the vicissitudes of the capitalist system, when through the substitution of collective ownership, we relieve ourselves of this death grapple with greed, make ourselves and our children the wards and defenders of society, and elevate competition for property to rivalry for praise of men?

The Money Question.

The declaration of the Middle of the Roaders for an increase in the quantity of money is the most marked middle class issue in their platform and one with which socialism has not the slightest sympathy. Under the system of competition for the private ownership of capital, the most that can be claimed by the advocates of an increase in money is that it will have a tendency to enable more individuals to compete and thus temporarily or permanently revive the middle class, and that this revival of the middle class interest would lead to more regular employment and better wages for the working class. Assuming all of this to be true (which it is not), it means the perpetuation of wage slavery.

Are the slaves to be blamed for voting against the proposal to perpetuate their slavery?

Are men whose consciences revolt against the cruelty of the competitive system to blame because they vote against it? The wage class have never been in thorough sympathy with the increased money advocates. The reason for this, we would state in the following terms — the wealthy of the world amounts in round

numbers to \$300 billion. Of this amount \$12 billion consists of money (including all the silver and gold in the world available for that purpose and all the paper money in use). Which is the working class most interested in: the possession of the property of the world which it created, or the possession of the money, which is a creation of capitalist laws and which is principally used to exchange property between capitalists that has been stolen from the workers? Ninety-eight percent of the wealth of the world is owned by the capitalist class. Two percent is owned by the working class. The chief function of money is as a medium for the exchange of property. The interest of the working class in the money question under capitalism cannot amount to more than the property which it has to exchange with the use of money. Statistics show that this mounts to 2 percent and that is just the amount of interest that a laboring man ought to take in the money question.

If the increased money advocates in any party hope to interest the working class in money as a measure of values, believing that the increase in the quantity of measures will increase the wages of the working class, we would like to ask how the worker can be interested in a measure of value that pays him \$2 for a day’s work in a factory or mine or on the farm and charges his wife \$5 for his product at the retail store? Every Socialist understands that the capitalist class can increase the price of its property more rapidly than the government can increase the quantity of money. We might as well try to “whip the devil around the stump” as to beat the capitalist class at their own game.

Under socialism, private ownership and barter in capital being at an end, money would lose the functions which it possessed under capitalism and would be abolished. The Socialists propose to use non-transferable labor certificates which each individual would receive in an amount equal to his per capita proportion of the annual national product.

Income Tax.

The proposition of the Middle of the Road Populists for a graduated income tax is one with which Socialists have no patience. We regard all such laws as middle class efforts at self-preservation, by forcing the capitalist class to disgorge part of their spoils, while leaving them in control of the capitalist system, by

which they can recover and absorb the property of the people.

Conclusion.

In presenting these views before the Populists of the United States who will meet in this city on December 29, we are not animated by unkindness or hostility to them as individuals or to their party, as a political factor. On the contrary, there is a revolutionary spirit prevalent in the language (if not in the actual letter of their platform), and in the past record and present attitude of their party that strikes a sympathetic chord in the Social Democratic Party. We hope that they will canvass the existing national and international situation, with reference to the application of scientific and humane principles of government. If they decide upon Socialism for their emancipation, they are on common ground with us. They may not unite with us in the Social Democratic Party, although if they did we could offer them a party standing for more than their own, just as well if not better equipped for its task, encouraged by large gains throughout the country and marching forward confidently with giant strides toward the historic mission of the working class — the abolition of wage slavery and establishment of the cooperative commonwealth.

WAGE EARNER.

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