

A Square Deal in a Round Place:  
Election Speech at Brand's Park, Chicago<sup>1</sup>  
[excerpt]  
(October 7, 1906)

There is but one issue involved in this campaign so far as the working class is concerned. That issue is capitalism and the wage slavery upon which capitalism is built. There are several parties in the field. They have nominated their candidates and adopted their platforms. Read the platforms for yourselves. They are plainly written; they can be easily understood. Read them for yourselves, and if you do you will find that so far as the workers are concerned there is not the slightest difference between the Republican and Democratic parties. They are precisely alike. Both are committed to the capitalist system, both to wage slavery, and whether one or the other wins, it is certain that you will lose.

There are not enough of the capitalists to elect their candidates. They rely upon you to do that for them, and you are stupid enough to do it. After you have done it, then you further stultify yourselves by standing like mendicants at the door of the capitalist. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, begging for the crumbs and the crusts; begging when you ought boldly to command and when your servants ought to be in duty bound to execute your orders.

Why are there two capitalist parties? For the simple reason that there are two sizes of capitalists, big ones and little ones — but they are all capitalists. The big ones are trying to swallow the little ones, and the little ones object to being swallowed, and so they divide and fight each other.

Hearst and Bryan have it not in their power to reverse the forces of evolution that are paving the way to the new social order which is steadily evolving from the present competitive chaos.

### **The Republican Party**

The Republican Party is the party of the capitalist class; that is, the dominant element of the capitalist class. It has been in almost uninterrupted power for nearly half a century. What has this party done for the

working class? Ask yourselves the question. Answer it at your own leisure. This party during all of the half century that it has had power and controlled the administration, has been the subservient political tool of the capitalist class, and in all of the list of those who have faithfully served it no one is entitled to a greater share of credit from the capitalist standpoint than the present incumbent of the White House.<sup>2</sup>

There are a great many working men who talk about our “square deal” president — the one president, they tell us, who is in favor of a square deal for the capitalist and also a square deal for the wage worker. The wage worker always get his square deal in a round place. You ought to know where that is. Stop and ask yourselves the question: How can a man be for a robber and his victim and give them both a square deal?

The capitalist gets what you produce. He produces nothing and gets everything; you produce everything and get nothing. You do everything and he has everything. And if you can stand this I think he by strict economy can manage to get along. And if you don’t change this it is not at all probable that he will.

No living man can be for [both] the capitalist and the wage worker. If he is for the one he is against the other, and no living man can take and hold a halfway ground — the man who tries it fails.

### **Roosevelt Servant of Capitalists**

Theodore Roosevelt is the president of the capitalist class, and the faithful servant of that class. True, on every conceivable occasion he takes time enough to tell the workingmen what fine fellows they are, how friendly he feels toward them, to what extent he is interested in their well-being, and so on. He came to Chicago not a great while ago, and he actually received a committee representing the working class. He gave that committee fourteen minutes of his precious time, and then he spent fourteen hours with the plutocrats of the city. In that fourteen minutes he took occasion to rebuke the working class: they must be law-abiding.

At that very time he had in his cabinet Paul Morton, a notorious violator of law, a criminal under the statutes. You workingmen here in Chicago ought to remember him well. I do, for I was here in 1888 when Paul Morton won his spurs as the strikebreaker of the Burlington system of railways. You remember that an investigation was instituted. Certain lawyers were employed, but they suddenly withdrew when they found that if they

conducted their investigation and made their report the prosecution against him would result in his landing in the penitentiary, and that prosecution was then abandoned and it became necessary for Morton to retire from the cabinet. Before he did so, President Roosevelt gave him a bill of moral health as long as the moral law, telling all of his virtues, what a splendid specimen of integrity he was, and this recommendation of the president landed him at the head of the Equitable Assurance Company, where he is now drawing \$80,000 a year.

The same President Roosevelt has in his cabinet as Secretary of War William Howard Taft, who issued the very first injunction that ever paralyzed a railroad organization in the United States.

### **Organized Appetite**

During all this time the Democratic Party, based upon a decaying middle class, has been trying to break into power. It has been well said that the party is simply an organized appetite, hungering for the spoils, ready to declare in favor of anything or against anything. Read its platform. It is a blessed thing that you don't have to understand it. What does the Democratic Party stand for — under Tammany, under Bryan, under Hearst, or any other leadership? Reform, we are told. Reform of what? Reform of the capitalist system.

But let me tell you that the capitalist system cannot be reformed. It has fulfilled its historic mission. It is now in a state of decline and decay, and the quicker it is totally abolished the better for the working class and all humanity.

### **Only Room for Two Parties**

There is just room for two parties. Let the capitalists have their Republican Party. We have our Socialist Party. then we will meet the exploiters face to face. We outnumber them overwhelmingly. While they have the capital we have the votes. The trouble is that we do not yet know how to use them. But fortunately the Socialist propaganda is organized in all of the states of the Union, making its appeal to the workers, opening their eyes so that they can see for themselves, and to the extent that they are developing intelligence enough to understand their material interests, they are severing their relations with the Republican and the Democratic parties

and joining the revolutionary working class party that is marching steadily to victory.

It is true that just at this moment industry is at high tide. It may be that you have a job, but it is suspended by a slender thread. You do not know how long you are going to have it. You do not know how soon that thread may be severed. You do not know how soon you are to be out of work.

### **Life and Work**

Now, you are told that you have an inalienable right to work, for you can only live by work. But under capitalism you have no inalienable right to work. you have no tools of your own with which to work. You cannot work unless you have a job. Between you and your job there stands the man or the agent of the man who owns the tool with which you work, and before you are allowed to use the tool, before you are allowed to accept the job, it is on condition that you will surrender to him most of what you produce.

What is the result? You get a wage in exchange for your labor-power. You are compelled to sell that labor-power. You do not sell yourself bodily under the law, but you sell your energy, the expression of your lives, ten hours a day, for a wage of perhaps two dollars a day. You go to work at seven and you work two hours, and with the aid of modern machinery you produce the equivalent of the exchange value of your wage. After you have produced that, you proceed to produce surplus value for the idle capitalist who lives in the Far East or has a palace on the boulevard. You don't know him; he never saw you and never expects to. The truth is that you would not know your master if you saw him....

He has no more to do with the operation of the factory, mill, mine, or shop in which you are employed than if he lived on the moon. He does not employ you, as a matter of fact. You employ him to take from you what you produce. And he sticks to his job. Now, what you want to do is to discharge him. Give him a square deal by setting him to work. He has no job now — give him one, and then he will produce what he gets and you will get what you produce. That is the Socialist square deal.

Now, there will never be any material change in your condition as workers unless you have tools of your own, unless you can freely employ yourselves without consulting any human on earth.

## **Conflict of Interests**

Your interests as wage workers are opposed to their interests as capitalists. They own the tools; you use them. They buy labor-power as cheaply as they can; you sell it as dearly as you can. Between you there is an irrepressible conflict for a division of what is produced. Why should there be any division at all? Why should not the workers get all they produce? Why should they work to produce multimillionaires and themselves remain in poverty?

## **Social Progress**

Every social state has its periods of birth and development and maturity. It fulfills its mission, outlives its usefulness, and then it passes away to make room for one more in harmony with the forces of progress and the onward march of civilization. Capitalism evolved from feudalism. Socialism is now evolving from capitalism.

Socialism is a theory of society based upon the line of evolution in which the workers are to own the social means of production and in which the workers will use them, not to produce multimillionaires, but to fill the land with wealth, so that poverty such as we now understand it may be abolished; that the workers may have not only work and wealth, but may have leisure, that they may cultivate their mines and give their hearts a chance.

## **Gompers in Politics**

Do not deceive yourselves with the belief that you will improve your condition in the least by choosing between the two old capitalist parties. The cry of reform is raised in every instance to deceive you, and as long as you are deceived conditions will remain substantially the same. It is gratifying to note the fact that upon an ever-increasing scale the workers are going into politics. Even Sam Gompers, after 20 years or more of declaration that union men had no business in politics, has been forced to declare in favor of political action. But as usual he is on the wrong side.

The kind of political action he favors is the division of the workers. He says that wherever you find a man who is in favor of labor, support him. If you find that there are none friendly to labor, why, then make a

nomination of your own, but don't nominate a working man if you can possibly help it. He still has the old idea that the working man is fit for nothing but to dig and delve and grub; that he has intelligence enough to use his hands, but not his brains.

You have a brain — use that; and if you do you won't have to depend on your hands and thus make a very wretched living.

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### **Working Class Awakening**

Within the last few years there has been a marvelous awakening. the future is rich with promise. The working class, so long in darkness, are steadily finding their way to the light, increasing in numbers, in clearness of vision, in mental and moral grasp. They have undertaken a great work. They do not underestimate its magnitude. They understand that all kinds of obstacles will be thrown in their way; that all the opposition that the capitalists can devise is to be used; that the workers are to be deceived and misled; that the workers are to be kept in darkness.

First of all, make up your mind where you properly belong. It will require but an instant of serious thought to satisfy you. the issue is so clear that it can be easily understood. When you have made up your mind that your place is in the Socialist Party, then take a beeline for the post of duty, and stand there as becomes a man.

The Socialist Party is organized in all of the states and territories in this Union. Its members are working with the enthusiasm born of the throb and thrill of the worldwide social revolution. The working class, nourished by its misery, vitalized by its aspirations, is raising the revolutionary standard of international socialism, and in due course of time the hour will again strike for an organic change, and the socialist movement, the greatest in all history, will spring into power, emancipate the working class, and proclaim freedom to all mankind.

Published as part of "Socialists Open Campaign" in *Chicago Socialist*, vol. 6, whole no. 397 (Oct. 13, 1906), p. 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Debs was the keynote speaker at a Socialist campaign festival held on Sunday afternoon, Oct. 7, 1906, at Brand's Park in Chicago. The gathering was preceded by a socialist parade

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for several miles along Belmont and Elston Avenues with marchers four abreast stretching three blocks long in the procession behind a brass band playing “La Marseillaise.” An estimated 3,000 people gathered at the park for socializing and dancing with two socialist vocal choruses performing. Following a short introduction, Debs’s appearance was greeted by a massive ovation.

<sup>2</sup> That is, Theodore Roosevelt.