

## Socialists Who Would Emasculate Socialism (April 20, 1901)

Socialism has been a long time on its journey from the past to the present. The truths it magnifies and the justice it demands have been in all the centuries in abeyance. The battles it has fought and the defeats it has sustained have not diminished, but increased its vigor. They were

...[B]ut the prelude Fate's orchestra plays,  
To the strains that shall come in the fullness of days;  
For the age-lengthened rhythm beat out by the Fates  
In the building of cities, the founding of states,  
In the earthquakes of war, in its thunder and groans,  
In the battle of kings and the crumbling of thrones,  
Is but prelude that's written by Destiny's pen  
To herald an epoch of masterful men.  
And socialist heroes from the hills to the sea  
Have sent forth this call to the years yet to be. <sup>1</sup>

Yes, socialism calls for men. The fields are ripening for the harvest of great deeds, the fruitage of centuries; and reapers are wanted — men of courage, dauntless men, men who dare and men who do, men of brains, men of vision, men of ideas and ideals:

Men with empires in their purpose,  
And new eras in their brains;  
Men whose thought shall pave new highways  
Up to ampler destinies. <sup>2</sup>

And such men — and women, too — are filling the ranks of socialism. The thrill of class-conscious solidarity is in their breasts. They defy defeat. The handwriting of destiny is on their banners.

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The *Social Unity*, organ of the Social Reform Union, has an editorial on “A New Party” in its April [1901] issue. It is a curious mixture, the product of a disordered vision and confused mind.<sup>3</sup> Brief extracts follow:

One of the main functions of *Social Unity* is to find out what people think by instituting referendums. We held a referendum on the Class Consciousness question and found out that among the 2,500 people to whom this magazine goes, no great interest is taken in that special question, but that of those who did take the trouble to express an opinion, a large majority was opposed to the Class Conscious position. We are now glad to institute a referendum on the question whether or no there should be a new political party formed for the campaign of 1901. We shall be curious to see how people vote on this question. \* \* \*

Eventually, we believe, we can do away with parties, but it may be that for the present we cannot and that it is necessary and possible, without being partisan, for the reform forces to establish and make use of a new party.

These people, mostly honest, imagine themselves socialists — that is, in a mild, not a malignant form. They have decided that there is no class struggle, and now they propose to determine whether or not to organize a new party — that is to say, whether or not capitalism will abolish itself. If a new party should be decided upon, it must not be partisan. Can any sane person conceive of such a monstrosity? Think of the wolf and the lamb in loving embrace, the fox and the pullet dancing a two-step, and the lion and the ox scouting the class conscious doctrine over peaches and cream, while the ass mused, “I have long been waiting for this party of ‘all the people.’”

Socialism was born of the class antagonisms of capitalist society, without which it would never have been heard of; and in the present state of its development it is a struggle of the working class to free themselves from their capitalist exploiters by wresting from them the tools with which modern work is done. This conflict for mastery of the tools is necessarily a class conflict. It can be nothing else, and only he is a socialist who perceives clearly the nature of the struggle and takes his stand squarely and uncompromisingly with the working class in the struggle which can end only with the utter annihilation of the capitalist system and the total abolition of class rule.

We count every one against us who is not with us and opposed to the capitalist class, especially those “reformers” of chicken hearts who are for everybody, especially themselves, and against nobody.

While I believe that most of these “reformers” are honest and well-meaning, I know that some of them, by no means inconspicuous, are charlatans and frauds. They are the representatives of middle class interests, and the shrewd old politicians of the capitalist parties are not slow to perceive and take advantage of their influence. They are “socialists” for no other purpose than to emasculate socialism. Beaten in the capitalist game by better shufflers, dealers, and players, they have turned “reformers” and are playing that for what there is in it. They were failures as preaches and lawyers and politicians and capitalists. In their new role as “reformers” they dare not offend the capitalist exploiters, for their revenue depends upon their treason to the exploited slaves over whom they mourn dolefully and shed crocodile tears.

I respect the honest effort of any man or set of men, however misguided, to better social conditions, but I have no patience with the frauds and quacks who wear the masks of meekness and in the name of “brotherhood” betray their trusting victims to the class that robs them without pity and riots in the proceeds without shame.

On the very eve of the last national election some of these “socialists” sprung a petition on me to withdraw in favor of Bryan. The Associated Press was cocked and primed and the petition was flashed all over all the wires and appeared in all the capitalist papers. It was a political sandbagging conspiracy that would have done violence to the code of Hinky Dink.<sup>4</sup> The reports were freely published that the socialists had turned me down and would support Bryan. I tried to put the truth on the wires, but it would not go. The wires had their orders, my denial was refused, and the disreputable trick served the miserable purpose of its reptilian instigators.

This element will be conspicuously in evidence at the Detroit conference and the capitalist press will accord them patient and respectful consideration.<sup>5</sup>

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Read this dispatch:

UNION CITY, IND., April 20. — Charles Penny of Greenville, O., a bricklayer, 30 years old, deadheading his way on a Pan Handle train, was ordered off by a brakeman, and in jumping he fell under the wheels. His leg was crushed from the knee to the foot. In this condition he crawled nearly a quarter of a mile, spending the night in a barn. He was brought here today, and the limb amputated.

It is enough to make one's heart stand still. Looking for work, no doubt, and no money to pay fare. Probably has wife and children. It is horrible beyond description and yet the chances are 99 in 100 that he votes with the Republican or Democratic Party, both of which support the existing system in which workingmen's lives are no more consequence than if they were vagabond dogs, and this is proclaimed to be the triumph of Christian civilization.

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It is unquestionably true that Prof. Ross of the Leland Stanford University of California was dismissed for utterances along economic lines which the widow of the dead millionaire objected to, and, as she is the reigning queen of the institution, her will is law.<sup>6</sup> Free speech is not tolerated in the Stanford University, nor in any other university, and whatever may be the boast of the educators in such institutions, the fact remains that they are as certainly the wage-slaves of capitalism as are the coal diggers in the anthracite mines of Pennsylvania.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from "The Coming American" (1894), by Sam Walter Foss (1858-1911). The next to last line is one of Debs's own creation.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Debs silently omits two lines and tweaks another, his version presented here unaltered.

<sup>3</sup> The editor of *The Social Unity* was W.D.P. Bliss (1856-1926), a prominent Christian socialist and editor of the massive *Encyclopedia of Social Reform* (Funk and Wagnall Co., 1897).

<sup>4</sup> Michael "Hinky Dink" Kenna (1858-1946) was a saloon owner and city alderman whose name epitomized political corruption in early 20th century Chicago.

<sup>5</sup> The National Social and Political Conference was held in Detroit from June 28 to July 4, 1901, bringing together activists from various branches of the progressive social reform

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movement. Despite Debs's disdain, the gathering was addressed on July 1 by Seymour Stedman, chair of the National Executive Board of the Chicago SDP, as well as A.M. Simons, editor of the *Workers' Call*, weekly Chicago newspaper of the Springfield SDP.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Edward Alsworth Ross (1866-1951), a professor of Sociology at Stanford University, was fired in November 1900 for public expression of anti-Japanese sentiments by President David Starr Jordan (1851-1931) at the behest of Jane Stanford (1828-1905). The Ross incident was the first major academic freedom case at Stanford.