

The Socialist Party's Appeal for 1904 (October 13, 1904)

The Socialist party is the only international political party in the world. It has about 8 million supporters, and is, therefore, in point of numbers, the greatest political organization on earth. Its fundamental principles are essentially the same in all lands, for modern socialism is the product of industrial evolution and is coextensive with the working class. A socialist is a socialist irrespective of nationality, color, creed, or sex.

Where modern industry makes its way — and all barriers are going down before its triumphant march — socialism follows in its wake and raises the standard of international, working-class solidarity and economic freedom.

The socialist recognizes no national boundary lines. The nation in which he lives embraces the working class of the world. Every worker everywhere is his brother. Across the borders of all lands socialists clasp hands as comrades, and their conquering movement girdles the planet.

There are many who look upon socialism as utopian, illusory, impossible. They affect to regard it as a “reform” spasm that will soon subside. They are quite certain it will follow greenbackism and populism to the political potter's field.

There are others, like President Parry of the Manufacturers' Association, for instance, who make one of socialism and anarchism, and declare it an imported plague, a menace to be dreaded, and insist that patriotic citizens should unite to stamp it out of the nation.

Strange that some of these gentlemen should consider socialism so harmless and others so destructive, so impossible and yet so much to be feared, so visionary and yet so terrible.

All of which simply proves — assuming these gentlemen to be entirely honest — that of all subjects that engage attention in the world of thought, socialism can claim the palm for attracting a larger volume and variety of intelligent ignorance and educated stupidity than all others combined.

The man who says that socialism and anarchy are analogous makes a pathetic exhibition of his ignorance — to treat him gently — and is hardly excusable in this day of cheap and abundant literature.

Anarchy is individualism, the negation of government. Socialism is collectivism, the perfection of government. Anarchy regards every human being as a law unto himself, to do as he pleases without hindrance on the part of his fellows. Socialism looks upon society as an organism of which all are integral parts to be adapted and coordinated upon a basis of harmonious cooperation, not for "the greatest good of the greatest number," but for the greatest good of all.

Anarchy scorns the ballot and repudiates all politics as essentially corrupt and demoralizing. Socialism appeals to the ballot to express the untrammelled will of the people as the supreme law of society.

It is quite easy to discover the points of analogy between anarchism and the present system. It would be quite hard to tell them apart just now in Colorado. "To hell with the Constitution," the capitalist slogan in the Rocky Mountains, is echoed with enthusiasm by every anarchist in Christendom.

The Socialist Party is the only party that honestly stands for law and order. There can be neither until we have economic justice, and this is impossible in a system based upon exploitation.

The scenes now being enacted in Colorado, which in all likelihood will spread to other industrial centers, bear irrefutable testimony to the inherent contradictions in modern society, the outgrowth of our democratic tendencies in politics in conflict with our autocratic tendencies in industry.

"A house divided against itself cannot stand."

Political democracy and industrial despotism will not abide together. One or the other must go before we can have peace.

Industrial democracy or political absolutism! Which?

Socialism has given its answer: it is the answer of industrial progress and social evolution. And with these forces socialism has marched hand in hand from utopia to science.

Socialism is the next inevitable phase in the evolution of civilization. It is not "such stuff as dreams are made of," but a social system that is to be, evolving, according to scientific analysis, from the one that is, and built upon a granite foundation of demonstrated economic facts.

It may be retarded, checked, delayed, but its coming cannot be prevented unless the evolutionary forces underlying society can be arrested and humanity itself paralyzed.

Herbert Spencer, the arch-individualist, was opposed to socialism, but was candid enough to admit that it was inevitable.

What of this world movement in the United States of America?

The interrogatory is timely, since we are moving toward a national election, in which socialism may be a factor of sufficient importance to determine the result.

In the Presidential election of 1892 the socialists polled 21,164 votes. In 1896 the vote was increased to 36,274. Four years ago, in 1900, socialists polled a combined vote of 127,553. Two years later, in 1902, the vote was almost doubled, 240,795 votes being cast. This steady increase occurred during the period of the nation's greatest "prosperity," and while the boast was made that "two jobs were looking for every man" in the United States.

The industrial tide, having reached its highest point, is now receding and the period of depression, corollary to the period of activity, is setting in, and many thousands of workingmen are being discharged outright, or reduced to half or less than half time.

In vain will the professional politician appeal to the "full dinner pail" in addressing himself to the army of idle men who will have time to listen to him this year, and in vain will he exhort their appetites to "stand pat" upon the memory of that once inspiring issue.

Four years ago the conditions were as unfavorable for socialist propaganda as they well could be. The party was poorly organized in but half a dozen states. It was a national party in name only. The campaign was carried on without resources. Labor, as a rule, was employed and therefore contented. The socialist had everybody and everything against him.

This year all the conditions are as favorable as they were unfavorable four years ago. The Socialist Party is organized in almost every state and territory in the Union.

The late national convention, notwithstanding the silence of the Associated Press, was a revelation to every one who saw it. Such a body of men and women, students of labor problems, masters of economics, evolved from the working class itself, never met before in the United States in the interest of that class. There were scores of them, in their working clothes, who would put to shame any equal number of Senators or Congressmen in any discussion upon the labor question, or upon any political issue involved in the struggle between labor and capital.

The following is an extract from the national platform adopted by the convention:

As an American socialist party, we pledge our fidelity to the principles of international socialism as embodied in the united thought and action of the socialists of all nations. In the industrial development already accomplished the interests of the world's workers are separated by no national boundaries. The condition of the most exploited and oppressed workers, in the most remote places of the earth, inevitably tends to drag down all the workers of the world to the same level. The tendency of the competitive wage system is to make labor's lowest condition the measure or rule of its universal condition. Industry and finance are no longer national but international in both organization and results. The chief significance of national boundaries, and of the so-called patriotisms which the ruling class of each nation is seeking to revive, is the power which these give to capitalism to keep the workers of the world from uniting, and to throw them against each other in the struggles of contending capitalist interests for the control of the yet unexploited markets of the world, or the remaining sources of profit.

The socialist movement, therefore, is a world movement. It knows of no conflicts of interests between the workers of one nation and the workers of another. It stands for the freedom of the workers of all nations; and, in so standing, it makes for the full freedom of all humanity.

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The socialist program is not a theory imposed upon society for its acceptance or rejection. It is but the interpretation of what is, sooner or later, inevitable. Capitalism is already struggling to its destruction. It is no longer competent to organize or administer the work of the world, or even to preserve itself. The captains of industry are appalled at their own inability to control or direct the rapidly socializing forces of industry. The so-called trust is but a sign and form of the developing socialization of the world's work. The universal increase of the uncertainty of employment, the universal capitalist determination to break down the unity of labor in the trade unions, the widespread apprehensions of impending change, reveal that the institutions of capitalist society are passing under the power of inhering forces that will soon destroy them.

Into the midst of the strain and crisis of civilization the socialist movement comes as the only conservative force. If the world is to be saved from chaos, from universal disorder and misery, it must be by the union of the workers of all nations in the socialist movement. The Socialist Party comes with the only proposition or program for intelligently and deliberately organizing the nation for the common good of all its citizens. It is the first time that the mind of man has ever been directed toward the conscious organization of society.

Socialism means that all those things upon which the people in common depend shall by the people in common be owned and administered. It means that the tools of employment shall belong to their creators and users; that all production shall be for the direct use of the producers; that the making of goods for profit shall come to an end; that we shall all be workers together; and that all opportunities shall be open and equal to all men.¹

For the first time the socialists enter a national campaign with a national party — a party that is united, aggressive and enthusiastic from sea to sea.

The industrial conditions and tendencies are all well calculated to set the working class thinking and to open their eyes to the trend of events.

In the presence of the abundance their labor has created they are idle and helpless, their wives fret and worry and their children, instead of a joy, become a burden to them.

The more industrious they are, the more they produce, the worse they are off, for the sooner does overproduction close down the mill and torture with hunger pangs the too industrious workingmen.

Something wrong! Something wrong! That is the beginning in the mind of the intelligent worker and it never lets go until he is a socialist, and once he sees the light and becomes conscious of the latent economic power of his class he is a socialist through good and evil report to the last day of his life.

The campaign of the Socialist Party is and will be wholly educational. To arouse the consciousness of the workers to their economic interests as a class, to develop their capacity for clear thinking, to achieve their solidarity industrially and politically is to invest the working class with the inherent power it possesses to abolish the wage system and free itself from every form of servitude, and this is the mighty mission of the socialist movement.

Not a dollar for whiskey, or cigars, or carriages! Not a dollar for a vote if a single dollar could buy every office in the land!

Can the Republican Party or the Democratic Party truthfully say as much?

The campaign fund, such as it is, is used wholly to print and circulate literature, defray the traveling expenses of speakers, and other educational purposes, and this fund is raised, not by “frying the fat” out of law-defying

corporations, nor by extorting boodle from the corrupters of legislation and the beneficiaries of debauched public morals, but by each member contributing the equivalent of a half day's work from his wages.

We can challenge the record of political integrity and party cleanness without fear of accusation. We shall not compromise, nor shall we be deflected in the least by any consideration from the straight road to the cooperative commonwealth.

The Socialist Party is the only party that does not want a vote that is not intelligently cast. The popularity of a candidate is against him rather than for him in the Socialist Party. No vote is wanted on account of the personality of a candidate. It is the value of the socialist principle that is taught and emphasized, and if this is not understood and approved the vote is not wanted.

Mere disgust with other parties is not accepted by socialists as sufficient reason to encourage the voting of the Socialist ticket. Such votes are unreliable, deceptive and misleading. The men who cast them are apt to desert at the very time they are most needed. Any vote that is subject to the influence of personal considerations is so vacillating that it is of no use in the constructive work of a revolutionary political movement.

Better a thousand trained, tried and true men, united on the solid basis of principle, than ten times that number thrown together on the shifting sands of personality.

In the Republican and Democratic national conventions principle is subordinated to personality. "Who are the candidates?" is the all-absorbing question. The people, like helpless children, are forever looking for some "great man" to watch over and protect them.

In the Socialist convention principles are paramount; the candidates are the last and least consideration. The supreme question is, "What are the principles?" and all the ability and interest of the delegates are absorbed in producing a scientific platform.

Socialists are not on the alert for some mythical Moses to lead them into a fabled promised land, nor do they expect any so-called "great man" to sacrifice himself upon the altar of the country for their salvation. They have made up their minds to be their own leaders and to save themselves. They know that persons have deceived them and will again, so they put their trust in principles, knowing that these will not betray them.

Between the Republican Party and the Democratic Party there is no difference so far as the workingman is concerned. He works for wages,

and, as a rule, it costs him all he gets to live. If he organizes and forces up wages his exploiters raise prices. He has not the least interest in the tariff, or finance, or expansion, or imperialism. These issues concern the large capitalists represented by the Republican Party and the small capitalists represented by the Democratic Party, but they appeal to no intelligent wage-worker, and the fact that workingmen divide upon these capitalistic issues accounts for their being driven out of Colorado and Idaho, and for their being the victims of wage-slavery everywhere.

The Socialist Party addresses itself to the working class, seeking to develop the intelligence of that class, while it appeals to the ballot for the realization of its cooperative commonwealth.

Others than workers are welcome on condition that they recognize the class struggle and join the party on the basis of a working class party.

Why should workingmen support the Socialist Party?

Because it is the only party that is unequivocally committed to their economic interests, to the abolition of the wage-system and the freedom of the worker from exploitation and every other species of servitude.

The Socialist Party does not expect the support of the capitalist class, for it is opposed to their economic interests, and it would be foolish to expect them to abolish themselves.

Let no one charge that socialists have arrayed class against class in this struggle. That has been done long since in the evolution of capitalist society. One class now owns the tools while another class uses them. One class is small and rich and the other large and poor. One wants more profit and the other more wages. One consists of capitalists and the other of workers. These two classes are at war. Every day of truce is at the expense of labor. There can be no peace and good will between these two essentially antagonistic economic classes.

Nor can this class conflict be covered up or smoothed over. In Colorado, at this very moment, it is raging in full fury, and thousands of workingmen all over the United States are reading their own impending doom as wage-workers in the murderous volleys of capitalist misrule that belch from the rifles of the mine owners' militia as they assault a union hall and shoot down in their tracks their fellow workingmen for no other crime than that they belong to a union that is engaged in a strike to enforce an eight-hour law voted as a constitutional amendment by a majority of more than 46,000 of the people, and then denied the people by a corrupt legislature

bought bodily and brazenly by the mine owners to betray the people they were sworn to serve.

The workers are not all blind to the causes underlying this great struggle. They are beginning to see and to think, and this fall many thousands of them will begin to act.

They know that under Republican rule and Democratic rule conditions for them have remained unchanged. They know that under the administration of both the “panic” comes, that enforced idleness is certain, that strikes, boycotts, lockouts, injunctions, riots, and bloodshed are inevitable, and that many of their number are doomed to drift into poverty and crime and finally end their lives as beggars, suicides, in prison cells or on the scaffold.

They know, too, that under both Democratic and Republican rule the president is on the side of the capitalists, that the governors are all on the side of the capitalists, that Congress and all the state legislatures respond to the demands of the capitalists, that the courts are uniformly with the capitalists, while soldiers and injunctions and “bullpens” are for the exclusive benefit of workingmen.

The class struggle accounts for it all and the intelligent worker takes his place on the right side of this struggle and works with all his might to bring his benighted brethren to the same side.

The Socialist Party is the party of the workers, who are on the right side of this worldwide struggle, and, although a minority today, it contains all the elements of self-development and will expand to majority proportions to inaugurate the impending change as certain as the forces of industrial evolution are undermining the present system and making that change inevitable.

The Socialist Party is the party of the present and of the immediate future. It believes that the competitive system has outlived its usefulness, that it has become an obstruction in the path of progress, that, like feudalism, from which it sprang, it must pass away to make room for its cooperative successor.

The Socialist Party stands for the abolition of the wage system, for the economic freedom as well as the political equality of the working class, knowing that without the former the latter is impossible.

The Socialist Party stands for the collective ownership of the means of wealth production and distribution and the operation of industry in the interest of all.

The Socialist Party stands for industry of the people, by the people and for the people, that wealth may be produced for the use of all instead of for the profit of a few, and as the basis of a real republic, in which every citizen shall have the inalienable right to work and to enjoy all the fruit of his labor.

The Socialist Party stands for a social order, in which every human being, in the full enjoyment of economic freedom, shall have full opportunity, in the best possible environment, to develop the best there is in him for his own good as well as the good of society at large.

When the Socialist Party succeeds to power, as it will as certain as the tides ebb and flow, it will inaugurate these changes and usher in the socialist republic.

Upon these issues the Socialist Party makes its appeal to the American people.

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¹ From "The National Platform," in William Maily (ed.), *National Convention of the Socialist Party held at Chicago, Illinois, May 1 to 6, 1904*. Chicago: National Committee of the Socialist Party, 1904; pp. 307-308. The Committee on Platform elected to draft this document included Debs (143 votes), George D. Herron (137), William Maily (121), Ben Hanford (116), Hermon Titus (112), Victor L. Berger (92), M.W. Wilkins (79), George H. Strobell (75), and Thomas E. Will (75). The committee was chaired and the report read by Herron on May 5. Herron received rousing applause, after which the platform was approved unanimously without amendment. (See: *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 218.) There is no evidence that Debs participated in the platform committee's activities.