

Statement to the Press Regarding the Suspension of Chicago Local Branch No. 2 (September 19, 1897)

Our action in suspending the charter of this branch shows as plain as words can do that we will not be held responsible for utterances like the resolutions of last Sunday [Sept. 12, 1897].¹ At the same time we did not desire to take hasty action. We wish to discover how matters stand in this branch, and to see if the statement is well founded that the majority of its members are opposed to incendiary declarations. Until we take further action the Social Democracy will have nothing to do with this branch.

As said, we do not wish to be harsh, but there is no connecting link between the platform of the Social Democracy and anarchy. If any of the members of Branch 2 hold sentiments incompatible with our program there is nothing for them to do but withdraw, or, if they do not, the only course for us to take is to sever their connection with the organization.

Ours is a peaceable organization, which seeks to educate the people to the use of peaceful means of reform. We believe in the ballot, not in bullets.

I do not deny that the provocation offered by the Hazleton affair was great, and that an excitable young man like Fitzgerald Murphy² may have been led away, as he now declares. However our leaders should not allow themselves to be led by their feelings.

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¹ In the aftermath of the Lattimer Massacre of Sept. 10, in which 21 unarmed striking coal miners were shot to death near Hazleton, Pennsylvania by a county sheriff's posse, with dozens of others wounded, Chicago Branch 2 passed inflammatory resolutions calling for retaliatory violence against the capitalist class, provoking this reaction by the Executive Council of the SDA. Among the officers of Branch 2 was Lucy Parsons, widow of revolutionary socialist activist and Haymarket martyr Albert R. Parsons. After a four hour closed meeting during the night of Sept. 18/19 between the national Executive Council and the five member Executive Board of Local 2, the Local Branch No. 2 was suspended and Debs made this statement to the Chicago press.

² Fitzgerald Murphy (1869-1906), a journalist, playwright, actor, and the President of Chicago SDA Local Branch No. 1, was quoted as saying, "If I had my way I would kill 20

millionaires today to pay for the poor fellows who were shot down in Pennsylvania.” See: *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 14, 1897, pg. 6. Murphy speedily retracted the statement after it made print.