

For Joint Action in 1908:
Letter to Frank Bohn, National Secretary, Socialist Labor
Party of America

Terre Haute, Ind., Jan. 9, 1908.

Mr. Frank Bohn,
National Secretary, SLP
New York, NY

Dear Comrade:—

I have just received a copy of the *Daily People* of the 7th inst. containing the resolutions adopted by the Executive Committee of the SLP on the unity question, and I drop you this line to extend congratulations to your board and to say that the resolutions, in spirit and purport, have my hearty concurrence.¹ No matter what differences there may be they are not of sufficient account to prevent joint nominations and political unity all along the line in the national, state, and local campaigns this fall.

I shall do all I can to have the Socialist Party accept the resolutions of the Socialist Labor Party in the spirit in which they are offered. I am writing National Secretary Barnes and sending an article to the *Appeal to Reason*, urging favorable action.²

Earnestly hoping for the successful outcome of this move and for a united and vigorous campaign against the common enemy, I remain,

Yours Fraternaly,

E.V. Debs

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¹ The National Executive Committee of the Socialist Labor Party met for its semi-annual meeting January 5-7, 1908 at party headquarters in New York City. It passed a resolution on the second day acknowledging the 1904 and 1907 resolutions of the Second International urging its adherents to unite as a single party in each country and elected a unity committee of seven members for this purpose. These were to meet a like number of

delegates of the rival Socialist Party of America in March “in order to consider whether unity of the two parties of socialism in America is possible, and on what special basis.” (See: “Resolution on Unity Question,” *Weekly People*, Jan. 11, 1908, p. 6.) This SLP proposal was received in Chicago by National Secretary Mahlon Barnes and passed on to the governing National Committee of the SPA for decision through his weekly bulletin. Debs pointedly stood aloof from daily party politics and thus had no realistic opportunity to steer this debate. Instead, the SLP’s proposal drew an antagonistic comment and a hostile motion from Victor Berger of Milwaukee, an arch-foe of SLP editor Daniel DeLeon and his organization. Berger’s counterproposal invited members of the SLP to “join our party individually or in sections, and make their applications to our respective locals,” upon the pledge “to accept our platform and our tactics.” Berger’s proposal, effectively a call for the SLP’s total surrender, passed by a margin of 36 to 20, with 8 abstentions, effectively killing the SLP’s short-lived 1908 unification effort. (See: Motion No. 11, *Socialist Party Official Bulletin*, Feb. 1908, p. 3.)

² No such article seems to have been published, nor did Debs take the one step which might have actually yielded practical results, personally lobbying the 64 members of the National Committee of the SPA.