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# Beginnings of Revolutionary Political Action in the USA.

by Vern Smith

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Working class political theory in the United States was backward throughout the last century for the same reason that labor organization here lagged behind that of Europe. The will-o'-the-wisp of the frontier, cheap land, danced ever westward, drawing after it the rebels. Labor fought a continuous rear guard action in the settled communities, always with an eye toward the easy path of retreat to more primitive communities. Even when the leaders did not actually run away to become farmers, the influence of the frontier farming communities was upon them, and on all politics, producing a queer tangled morass of theories.

Utopian socialism, imported from Europe but thoroughly naturalized, had a tremendous vogue in the first half of the century. Later, Greenbackism (cheap paper money theories) and Populism (anti-monopoly theories) drew far more votes than any proletarian class struggle doctrine.

The native working class political movement which grew out of the unions, in a healthy enough way, was continually being enticed towards some currency-tinkering or colonization panacea. The movement lived in the midst of a whole nation of farmers. It was always affected by the crude frontier Jacksonian democracy.

Even after the Civil War, when northern capitalism took sharp control of national affairs, and the frontier began to dwindle, this habit of thought persisted.

## **Utopianism.**

The Utopian socialist movement (colonization schemes) reached its height before the Civil War — the labor movement didn't shake it off entirely until

after Job Harriman's New Llano of a few years ago. In fact, we still have Brookwood and Commonwealth College as a kind of vermiform appendix of the Utopian period.

The cheap money trend in labor politics rose to a climax in 1888, when it won, under the National Greenback Labor Party, a whole list of city, state, and even national offices, and swept all through the 1870s and '80s a host of local labor parties into its stream, only finally to lead most of them on into the Republican or Democratic Parties.

## **Populism.**

The Populist ("Bust the Trusts") anti-monopoly movement did the same to the continual mushroom growths of local labor parties for a few years after the collapse of the greenback movement, only to run into Bryan Democracy in the middle of the 1890s and merge with it. Populism was a reformist party, with many of the demands of the labor unions: shorter hours, factory inspection, better schools, etc.

## **Single Tax.**

The period of 1886-1888 saw the rise of the fetish of single tax. It began as a labor reform party. "Progressive Democracy" it was called at the height of its influence. Its candidate and chief theoretician, Henry George, just barely missed being elected mayor of New York in 1886. George got 68,000 votes, Hewett (Tammany) got 90,000, and Theodore Roosevelt (Republican) got 60,000. During the first year even the Socialist leader held out illusions about the "partial socialism" of the Henry George campaign. Coupled with

the single tax demand were demands for no police interference with workers' meetings, right of workers to serve on grand juries, factory inspection and sanitary laws, abolition of contract labor, equal pay for women, government ownership of railways and telegraphs, etc., usual demands of labor at that period.

But George himself rebuffed the labor support, declaring he did not want to lead a "class movement," and the Socialists finally reoriented themselves and began to attack the single tax philosophy as false. The single tax movement quickly became a doctrinaire sect which it still remains today.

Now these foregoing movements were all native American, the natural expressions of a class of workers who had been or expected to be farmers or small employers, or they were the combined movements of workers and poor farmers with the farmers rather in the lead, and they were movements in a period of the shifting frontier and the beginnings of big capitalism. Undoubtedly, a true revolutionary working class political party could have eventually arisen from among them. There was always a minority of scattered individuals entangled in these confusing native and naive political organizations, who looked to the left.

But the revolutionary theory of Europe was through so far in advance, the working classes of Europe, in the absence of the frontier, so much more crystallized and class conscious, that Socialist theory developed first in Europe and was imported into the United States.

### **Marxism in America.**

The Marxians came over about the time of the Civil War and made the beginnings of revolutionary politics in America, and for years the history of these movements is one of small groups with a Marxian political theory, far in advance of the confused ideas of the American masses, and with no one during that time knowing how to build bridges from the masses to the vanguard. This bridge-building is even yet, after Marx and after Lenin, still not sufficiently well understood by the revolutionists here.

### **German Membership.**

Let us take a look at this history. Sections (branches) of the International Workingmen's Association were formed in the larger cities of the United States immediately after its organization in London in 1864. For years its membership in America was composed almost entirely of German immigrants, and later, radical French workers driven over here by the persecutions following the smashing of the Commune of Paris. Clear up to 1876 it was torn by factional struggles, not so much between Marxists and Bakuninists as in Europe, as between Marxians, demanding labor union organization and political action, and the Lassalleans, who sneered at unions and demanded entire concentration on parliamentarism for the purpose of winning state support for cooperative ventures. Of course the Lassalleans could draw on the generally common Utopian and colonization ideas of the American workers.

In 1871 the IWMA had 8 sections and only 293 members in the USA.

### **The First Split.**

Section 12, the only one largely American in membership, was a collection of freaks, who went off on a crusade for "free sex relations" and finally had to be expelled after much quarreling with Sorge and after appeals to the General Council, the center in Europe. Section 12 won over 12 other small sections (the IWMA was growing) and launched the "American Confederation of the International" in Philadelphia in 1872.

The General Council, which meant the international headquarters of the IWMA, was moved to New York in 1872, and Sorge became the recognized leader here.

In 1873 a new struggle broke out, which seems at first sight to have been mere unprincipled factionalism, at least the political trends are hard to see, between the 4 other sections in New York and Section 1 of New York, the largest and oldest. The 4 rebellious sections gathered a couple more around them, but just before at the IWMA convention of 1874, their opposition was badly defeated and several sections expelled. The membership then was about 1,000.

### **Gompersism Makes Its Mark.**

The leader of this rebellion against Section 1 and the IWMA headquarters was one Adolph Strasser, best known in the American labor movement as the co-worker of Samuel Gompers when both were officials in the Cigar Makers International Union, just a few years after the split in the International Workingmen's Association. Strasser worked out with Gompers the essentials of the philosophy known as "Gompersism" — high union dues, centralization of finances and power, struggle only for severely limited demands and no struggle at all if possible, conformity with the capitalist system, craft unionism as against industrial, and skillful and unprincipled demagogy.

That gives one clue to the nature of the factionalism in the IWMA. The fact that the splitters were in those sections with the greatest number of English speaking members gives another. It was primarily a split between the revolutionary vanguard and a group drifting toward the non-revolutionary masses.

### **Relief and No Evictions.**

The most important action by the International in this period was the leading of demonstrations of tens of thousands of unemployed in New York and Chicago, 1873. The demonstrations were mobilized around the following slogans, worked out by the IWMA federal council in New York, as advice to the unemployed central committee. They were:

Employment on public works at customary wages.

One week's relief, either in food or money, for needy cases.

No eviction of the unemployed for non-payment of rent.

The New York police set a precedent that lasted right down to and including this present crisis. The police made a merciless assault with clubs and guns on the demonstrators in Tompkins Square. Hundreds were injured.

In 1874, Section 1 seized the official organ of the International as a result of attempts by Sorge to put a little more revolutionary vigor into it and in the course of the resistance to Sorge by both the editors and Section 1. The General Council of the IWMA

suspended Section 1, which then sued in the capitalist courts and got control of the paper. But the paper died 2 months later, and 2 years later the International was dead, too, shattered by these (and other lesser) factional splits. The IWMA was formally dissolved at its last convention in Philadelphia. The seed it sowed, however, did not die out. Those who got their training in the First International developed in after years a Marxian core in the labor movement, and eventually it became a revolutionary left wing.

### **Social Democratic Party.**

The group led by Strasser continued its existence, held a convention in May 1874, and with a number of smaller labor groups, mostly Lassallean, formed the Social Democratic Party of North America. It is one more confusing thing that Strasser, the trade unionist, could take in these Lassallean factions. But Lassalle's theories were about played out.

After the Chicago unemployed demonstration of 1873, the Labor Party of Illinois was formed — Lassallean, but including a small Marxian group established by Weydemeyer before the Civil War and captured later by the Lassalleans. By 1874 the combined groups had swung back toward at least the Marxian tenet which calls for organization of labor unions.

Other local labor parties grew up. There was a general propaganda for unions, for the 8-hour day, for more public schools, against the militia in strikes.

### **Conventions of 1876.**

It was in 1875 to 1877 that the Greenback agitation was strong. One of the Greenback groups, a secret society calling itself "Junior Sons of '76," was organized in Pittsburgh, May 4, 1874. It was composed largely of workers, its program was cheap paper money, referendum and recall, no militia in strike struggles. It was for independent political action. It invited all labor and reformist organizations in the country to meet in national convention in Tyrone, Pa., Dec. 28, 1875. Among others, the Social Democratic Party of North America accepted this invitation. The convention did little aside from calling another to meet in Pittsburgh, April 17, 1876. The Pittsburgh Convention was controlled by the Knights of Labor and

the Greenback delegates, but there were represented the International Workingmen's Association (whose membership was now down to 635), the Labor Party of Illinois (593 members), the Social Democratic Party of North America (1,500 members), and the Social-Political Workingmen's Society of Cincinnati (250 members).

Otto Weydemeyer presented the program of 21 Socialist delegates: abolition of wage slavery as the goal, international affiliation to check the importation of European strikebreakers, organization of unions as the first task, independent political action but not until the movement was strong enough. This last was generally interpreted as meaning, not until a number of unions endorsed it.

The Greenback majority brushed aside the Socialist program and made paper money and high tariff the main demands. The Socialists bolted the convention. The convention then lost its nerve, adopted meaningless resolutions, and adjourned.

But before the delegates from the four Socialist parties left Pittsburgh they held a joint caucus, adopted "articles of fusion," and appointed a temporary joint central committee, then called their own national convention to meet July 19, 1876.

### Parent of the SLP.

The July conference was attended by Sorge and Weydemeyer of the IWMA, Strasser from the Social Democrats, and delegates from the other two parties. All these parties merged then and there, under the name of the Workingmen's Party of the United States, with a platform calling for abolition of capitalism, for immediate demands, for formation of unions, and for participation as an independent political party in elections "wherever the situation is favorable."

The IWMA now vanishes, and from this "Workingmen's party" the Socialist and Communist Parties of today descended in a direct line.

The Workingmen's Party established national headquarters at Chicago, but changed it almost every year thereafter. The party had three papers to begin with, of which the main one, in English, was *The Socialist* (its name temporarily was changed to *Labor Standard*).

The Workingmen's Party plunged into the elec-

tions. Its candidate, Albert R. Parsons, got a sixth of the votes for alderman in the 15th ward in Chicago in 1877. It elected some city officials in Milwaukee (German population) that same year. It fell down miserably in its duty to the heroic 1877 railroad strikers.

### SLP Appears.

The party's 1877 convention in Newark changed the name to Socialist Labor Party, and moved the headquarters to Cincinnati, where the official organ in English, *The National Socialist*, was also established.

At the Newark convention there were reported 72 sections, with 7,000 members, and 21 papers, of which two German language papers were dailies. Rapid growth followed, and considerable gains in vote, especially where there were close connections with the unions, as in Chicago. The Socialist vote in Chicago was 11,800 in 1879, with 4 Socialist aldermen elected.

The program of the party as shown in its platform during these years declares:

"Labor being the source of all wealth and civilization and useful labor being possible only by and through the associated efforts of the people, the means of labor should therefore in justice belong to society," which may be taken as a somewhat free interpretation of Marxism, but still a revolutionary doctrine. It goes on, without using the word "capitalist" to describe capitalist exploitation; it declares the "ruling political parties" to be instruments of the "dominant or wealthy classes," and calls on "the working people" to "organize themselves into one great Labor Party, using political power to achieve industrial independence." It urges "international affiliation" (does not say to what — there was no International at that time); it calls for labor unions, but prescribes no strategy or tactics or form of organization, nor does it mention those then existing either in praise or blame.

Then it says: "We demand that the resources of life, the means of production, public transportation, and communication, land, machinery, railroads, telegraph lines, canals, etc., become as fast as practicable the common property of the whole people through the government." (It is clear they were not syndicalists, but probably some of them were state capitalists.) It proposes to "abolish the wages system and substitute instead cooperative production with a just distri-

bution of its rewards.”

### **For Gradual Revolution?**

Then follows this curious paragraph (emphasis as in the original):

“The Socialistic Labor Party presents the following demands as measures to ameliorate the condition of the working people under our present competitive system and to gradually *accomplish the entire removal* of the same.”

This is the only official indication of the tactics they meant to use in abolishing capitalism, and the demands, which were all right in themselves, and were those of the organized trade union movement of the time, would hardly abolish capitalism, gradually or otherwise. They were: 8-hour day, sanitary and factory inspection, establishment of state and national bureaus of labor statistics, no convict labor contracted out to private persons or firms; text books, accident compensation, wages paid in money and weekly (scrip was common then as now), right to organize and strike, “gratuitous administration of justice in all courts of law,” abolition of indirect taxation and substitution of a graduated income tax, government banking and insurance, no limitation of suffrage; initiative, referendum, recall, and proportional representation.

### **White Chauvinism.**

No mention whatever appears in this platform or in the party press of the Negroes, who were then just being finally reconquered as slaves by the first KKK counterrevolution in the South. In fact the Negroes were absolutely forgotten by the Socialist movement from the end of the First International to the founding of the Third.

Perhaps worse than this omission is a sin of commission. The Newark convention (1877) of the SLP adopted a resolution denouncing Chinese labor at the moment the slaughter of Chinese was being prepared in California.

### **“The Socialist USA.”**

Such a program as that of the SLP is, at best, because of the looseness of language, capable of being

made in practice either much better or much worse. The official organs and speakers of the party made it much worse. Take, for example, the very first issue of *The National Socialist*, carrying the Arm and Hammer emblem, published May 4, 1878. An article begins: “A political democracy, such as the United States, is just as much a variety of socialism as social democracy is; indeed, the latter means nothing more than a complete development of the former...”

The leaders were not labor racketeers. Thaw was left for a later period in the history of the Socialist Party. The receipts of the SLP National Office from Aug. 7 to Sept. 22, 1878, were \$101. There were only two salaried officials, wages: \$6 per week each. Most of the money was spent on printing of leaflets and pamphlets.

The SLP was anti-prohibition. (Many of the native movements had been prohibition.) The SLP was anti-imperialist, if the imperialism was far enough away. In this 1878 period, the SLP followed carefully in its press the war of the Zulus in Africa against conquest by the British. But it didn't mention the Negroes in the United States.

### **Pledges Never to Revolt.**

It was vigorously parliamentary, and terribly afraid of being “accuse of the excesses of the Paris Commune.”

The SLP has not budged from this doctrine to this day. Since Bernstein, the present Socialist Party, child of the SLP, no longer believes in the inevitable downfall (or in the overthrow) of capitalism, but it is just as emphatic against force as a means of revolution. It has, however, used force to prevent revolution.

### **Workers Waking Up.**

But now we reach the period of big labor struggles, 1877 to about 1893, and we can no longer speak just of a morass with the shadow of the frontier creeping over it. The morass is there: Populism, Bryanism, Progressive Parties, etc., are ahead. But from now on, there is also a militant section of American workers, forging ahead of the other workers, and at periods forging far ahead of the official revolutionary movement of their time. Such as period is this of the



1880s.

It started in Chicago. The Chicago workers had been suffering terrifically from police brutality, and the leadership being German, a "Lehr und Wehr Verein" (Educational and Protective Association) had been organized in 1875, to defend workers going to the polls in elections. It extended its duties to strikes. It was after a while transformed into an armed defense corps, and it did good work. The Chicago sections of the SLP supported it, so did the unions; the membership was drawn from both.

The SLP national leadership cast a fishy eye upon it. They were, or pretended to be, afraid it was a bid for violent revolution.

The Lehr und Wehr Verein was only trying in the beginning to do just what the SLP declared was justifiable. But the direct attack on it forced it further along. Still more resentment and still more extremism came in Chicago when the National Executive committee of the SLP, on June 13, 1878, without permitting any defense, officially repudiated the Lehr und Wehr Verein and "all Socialist military societies." The SLP, had it said that this was not the time for a violent revolution, would have been correct. But when it repudiated all revolution as a matter of principle, and while officially pretending to approve the right of self-defense, actually ruled out that right in the case at issue, the Chicago membership went wild. Parsons, a pronounced parliamentarian so far, began to really consider Anarchism. Other Chicago leaders did the same.

### **Chicago Anarchists.**

The Chicago Anarchists became more and more extreme in the course of their reaction against the sickening legalism of the SLP, until they actually believed themselves that if the right word were given, a violent revolution was possible at that time. They were desperately sincere and marvelously heroic. Here is not space to go into the details of their leadership of struggles, of their agitation which resulted in the 8-hour general strike movement of 1886-1900 (though the AF of L stole the credit), nor the horrible terror and frame-up and executions by which the Chicago anarchists were crushed.

All we can say here is that the Chicago Anar-

chists were the finest product so far of the socialist movement since the days of Sorge, and that the official SLP shows up very badly in comparison. It had much to do with driving the Chicago Anarchists into their forlorn hope, and it betrayed them in treacherous cowardly fashion when they were facing the gallows.

The SLP survived the Anarchist split, and continued to grow slowly.

### **Daniel DeLeon.**

After a brief revival of Lassalleanism in the SLP in 1889, that faction was overthrown and disappears into history. At this time Daniel DeLeon and his chief lieutenant, Lucien Sanial, came to the front, and remained the leaders of the SLP until DeLeon died a quarter of a century later. The party platform was rewritten by Sanial, with all references to state support for cooperatives cut out, and with the whole thing modeled in language on the Declaration of Independence. Outside of these changes, the platform remained essentially the same.

The 1889 platform of the SLP begins: "The Socialist Labor Party in convention assembled, reasserts the inalienable right of men to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," and goes on to say:

With the founders of this government we hold that the purpose of government is to secure every citizen in the enjoyment of this right; but in the light of our social conditions we hold, furthermore, that no such right can be exercised under a system of economic inequality.

With the founders of this republic we hold that the true theory of politics is that the machinery of government must be owned and controlled by the whole people, but in the light of our industrial development we hold, furthermore, that the true theory of economics is that the machinery of production must likewise belong to the people in common.

To the obvious fact that our despotic system of economic is the direct opposite of our democratic system of politics, can plainly be traced the existence of a privileged class, the corruption in government by that class, the alienation of public property, public franchises, and public functions to that class, and the abject dependence of the mightiest of nations upon that class.

### **Waited for the Collapse.**

The fatalistic attitude toward the downfall of capitalism remained:

The time is fast coming, however, when in the natural course of social evolution this system, through the

destructive action of its failures and crises on the one hand and the constructive tendencies of its trusts and other capitalistic combinations on the other hand, shall have worked out its downfall.

They viewed it as a mechanical process, without much action by the proletariat — many of their speakers frankly admitted that they were organizing the workers merely to prevent anarchy after the collapse of capitalism.

But the party platform called the workers to “enroll under the banner of the Socialist Labor Party, ...so that held together by an indomitable spirit of solidarity under the most trying conditions of the present class struggle, we may put a summary end to that barbarous struggle by the abolition of classes, ... and the substitution of the cooperative commonwealth for the present state of planless production, industrial war, and social disorder,” etc.

The SLP officially aided in the launching of the Henry George movement, then withdrew. Large sections split away and went into Populism. Others were lost to the short-lived National Union Labor Party of 1887, which got 25,000 votes in Chicago against a Republican-Democratic fusion which got 50,000 votes.

### **Powerful Influence in AF of L.**

In the AF of L convention of 1892, SLP delegates nearly won a favorable recommendation from the convention to the international unions of a plan for a labor party. The word “favorable” was withdrawn only at the last minute.

A curious blindness and some cowardice was evident in the reaction of the SLP to the war with Spain (April 20 to Aug. 12, 1898).

This was a war of American imperialism, to loot from Spain her colonies. Like most imperialist wars it was waged under the most high-sounding demagogic excuses. The particular excuse in this case was: “Free the oppressed Cubans!”

### **How Not to Oppose a War.**

The SLP swallowed the imperialist propaganda, never once realized that it was an imperialist war, opposed it very mildly on pacifist grounds, and waged

the bulk of its struggle against graft, mismanagement of military affairs, and against injustice to the workers who had to live under war conditions. The particular injustice that the SLP concentrated its fire upon was conscription — and that turned out to be a sham battle because conscription was not needed at all by American capitalism during the Spanish war. From the beginning they had more volunteers than could be drilled and moved to the front.

Now the SLP was so careful to avoid any shock to patriotic sentiment (which most of the members themselves felt in full measure) that it actually assisted in whooping up national chauvinism. While the party centered its “anti-militarist” activity around the fake issue of conscription, it used language that actually stimulated volunteer recruiting.

Here is a sample, one of many from platforms and resolutions adopted by state and city conventions of the SLP during the war. This is from the platform adopted at the Iowa state convention of the SLP:

We view with admiration the ardent spirit of humanity which has impelled the workingmen of this country to volunteer their lives and services to politically emancipate the suffering Cubans from the barbarous oppression of the Kingdom of Spain and we extend the sympathies of American workingmen to the oppressed Cuban and Spanish workers who are trying to overthrow the hateful despotism which is destroying them.

Fellow workers, the capitalist class which is the enemy of oppressed Cuban and Spanish workers is our enemy...

Here follows a list of charges of graft and profiteering in the conduct of the war, then the platform continues:

We recognize that the patriotism of the workers is enthusiasm for humanity, while the patriotism of the capitalist is enthusiasm for profits. We heartily commend the self-sacrifice of the former, and condemn the self-seeking of the latter....

Then:

We demand that in case conscription becomes necessary to keep the army up to war standard, that the conscripts be drawn from the ranks of property owners.

There follows a specific plan for the percentage of conscripts from each type of property owner, and a demand that they not be permitted to purchase substitutes.

A new factional struggle developed in the SLP

toward the end of the century. That struggle was the origin of the present Socialist Party.

### **War on the AF of L.**

DeLeon, who had become the czar of the Socialist Party, split with the remnants of the Knights of Labor in a quarrel over the editorship of the K of L official journal. A clique he helped to power in the K of L promised to make Sanial editor, and then double-crossed him, and in 1895 refused to seat DeLeon in the K of L convention.

An SLP row with the AF of L centered around the right of local bodies of the SLP to affiliate with AF of L city central bodies.

In 1895 DeLeon pub through his decision for an independent socialist union movement, and the Socialist Trades & Labor Alliance was launched. It grew to some 20,000 members, and then started to decline. It really was too soon to put much emphasis on independent unions. The masses were in the AF of L, and the bureaucracy was not so firmly entrenched that it could not be unseated. An intelligent opposition movement within the AF of L was the proper place for the main emphasis. Independent unions, even a Socialist Trades & Labor Alliance, might well have been useful as an auxiliary force, and could have cooperated with the Left Wing inside the AF of L. But at that time, and even down to 1927, no one could see this. It was always "either/or." If you were for "boring from within," then you were against any sort of independent or dual unionism, and vice-versa.

### **Struggle Over Dual Unionism.**

The opposition to DeLeon's dual unionism began at once in the sections of the SLP. News of the struggle was kept out of the official party press and published reports as long as possible. Expulsions, however, were commonplace.

The DeLeonites had a certain amount of justice in their argument that the opposition to dual unionism was not an honest one. The argument of the "rebels" in the SLP was always in the form of a demand for the right to fight the "labor fakers" from within the AF of L. DeLeon had plenty of evidence that the right most of these "rebels" really wanted was

the right to surrender to the labor fakers, to make alliance with them, to become part of the bureaucracy of the AF of L. In general it was one more case of a "practical," mostly native-born group hunting around for the morass. DeLeon had led them into a desert of sectarianism and isolation, and they preferred the swamp of revisionism and degeneration. Nobody until the beginning of the Left Wing movement in the Socialist Party in the following century could see any but these two alternatives.

### **A Coup d'Etat.**

The leaders of the rebellion against DeLeon were practical enough to pierce a weak spot in his organizational apparatus. The constitution of the SLP had some hangovers from a more primitive time when communications were bad. It provided that the national leadership should be elected by the section in the city where the headquarters were located. The headquarters were in New York. The insurgents controlled the section known as Greater New York, which did not include Richmond, Williamsburg, and various other portions of what had come to be considered Greater New York, geographically. These outlying portions of the city were pro-DeLeon, and he relied on them for his political control of the SLP in New York. The SLP section "Greater New York," controlled by the anti-DeLeon faction, disregarded the outlying territories of greater New York, met, elected a new leadership, and seized all the headquarters' property it could get hold of.

The insurgents, having most of the membership with them, met in national convention in Rochester and, still calling themselves the "Socialist Labor Party," repudiated the Socialist Trades & Labor Alliance and all it stood for.

For a couple of years then there were two Socialist Labor Parties, each claiming to be the real one. There were also other Socialist parties. The most important of these was Debs' "Social Democracy of America." It grew to about 5,000 members in the Middle West and had the support of Charles H. Kerr & Co., for 25 years later the main publishers of Socialist classics in America. The famous and influential International Socialist Review started publication in this period as a supporter of Debs, and after the fusion of Debs' party and the SLP insurgents in 1901, this magazine be-



came the best of the Left Wing Socialist publications.

### **Colonization Again.**

“Social Democracy” was Debs’ favorite child, born out of a fusion of small socialist groups on June 7, 1898, after the Buffalo Switchmen’s and Pullman strikes had wakened him to the need of political action.

“Social Democracy” had all of Debs’ energy, warm heartedness, class feeling, and heroism, but also all his freakishness and sentimentality were expressed in it. Social Democracy’s declaration of principles, as it appears in his paper, *The Social Democrat*, is a repetition word for word of the Sanial “Declaration of Independence” platform of the SLP, with, of course, changes in the name of the organization.

### **Socialist Party.**

The SLP insurgents and Debs opened negotiations looking toward unity along in 1900, and a unity convention of the two parties met June 29, 1901, at Indianapolis, with 124 delegates representing 10,000 members of both parties. The result was a merger, form-

ing the Socialist Party of the United States (the present Socialist Party). It had a program loose enough to include both revolutionists like Debs and the “small traders,” usurious money lenders, and pure and simple corruptionists” whom DeLeon had berated. On the whole, it was one more step into the morass. It so demoralized the revolutionary theory of Socialism as to become in practice just another reform party.

[John] Spargo, William English Walling, [Charles Edward] Russell, came forward with an interpretation of Socialism that was worse than anything Bernstein thought of in Europe. Popular Socialist orators emphasized that socialism was “nothing but government ownership.”

The further history of working class politics in America is chiefly that of the development of a Left Wing, this time more than ever before a Left Wing based on American conditions, and a revolutionary Left Wing, too, for these conditions were no longer very different from those of Europe. It was a Left Wing that came into sharpest conflict with the reformist Socialists during the war period, a Left Wing that advanced towards Bolshevism, while the Right Wing went from reformism to social fascism. That whole struggle is the subject of another article. †

†- Vern Smith never completed a second article on this topic.

*Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.*

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