
A Political Movement:
Statement to the *Milwaukee Daily News*
(circa July 7, 1897) ¹

The colonization scheme is very much misunderstood, even by my best friends. As a matter of fact this is but one feature of the Social Democracy. But it can be made an important one in vitalizing and developing the general movement.

The Social Democracy is not a colonization scheme. It is a political movement. Were the colonization plan to prove a failure, it would not stop the Social Democracy movement.

As I conceive it, the colonization scheme is an incidental plan to relieve the present distress all about us as much as possible. It is not a vital portion of the movement, though it may prove a great help.

The Social Democracy is a party, a political party, as much so as the Republican or Populist² parties. It is a reform party, and has a most radical reform program. It aims to do away with the present economic system and substitute collective ownership and cooperative operation of all means of production and distribution. As the Republican Party was organized to abolish chattel slavery, so the Social Democratic party is organized to do away with industrial slavery. One is no more revolutionary than the other. The only way to abolish industrial slavery is to abolish the competitive system.

A strike settles nothing permanently. It does not go to the root of the evil. It does not remove the cause of the trouble. The tow parties to the dispute are certain to renew it sooner or later, and if labor wins one time, capital will win another time.

The strike of the miners now on is somewhat different. In this case the miners are not getting work because they cannot live on the wages now paid. They are striking against starvation. Nor are the operators better off. They are making nothing. Profits have ceased.

In the district where I live there is an operator who formerly was a miner himself. He has struggled for years against the reduction of wages, but the pitiless law of competition has forced him to cut his men down to

starvation rates in order to operate his property at all. For some time he has operated at no profit and has given the men the benefit in wages.

A few days ago his men decided to go out [on strike] with the others, and the employer said to them, "Boys, I don't blame you! I advise you to quit. I would pay you more if I could, but I can't. I have sympathy for you, but I can't help you. I am powerless."

In the coal mining business rock bottom has been reached, and there is, in my opinion, but one escape from the heart-rending conditions which now prevail in this business. That is the collective ownership of the coal mines and cooperative operation.

As to the Social Democracy I have boundless faith in the future. Every day hundreds of letters from the very best people of the country come to us. The organization will expand with magical spontaneity. It will be a revelation even to the most sanguine. Mark it. It is not an experiment, but an actuality. My whole soul throbs and surges with it and I feel that I cannot be mistaken.

In 12 months it will be the most important factor in our social and economic affairs and in two years it will lead the world.

To those who lack faith in the intelligence of the people to carry out the plans of the Social Democracy, I would earnestly point out the fact that the people are being educated on these questions more rapidly than ever before. They have learned more in the past year along these lines than they learned in ten years previous.

"Sweet are the uses of adversity"³ and the hard times have brought along with suffering and misery, thought of as knowledge. The people are waking up.

Why if you give workmen \$1.25 a day, tomorrow they would as a whole settle down under the present conditions, satisfied. At least, they would have done so a year ago. But there are a constantly increasing number now who see that the present system is wrong, and would never be satisfied under it again under any circumstances.

I have a firm, unwavering faith that right is eternal, that truth must triumph, and I believe no man who has self-respect should ever despair. He dare not despair. He is bound by every atom of nobility in his nature to fight to the death for the truth, and to never, never surrender.

Men may betray. I have been betrayed by supposed friends, persecuted, blacklisted, maligned, misrepresented, and abandoned. But the

knowledge of my own uprightness of purpose and the serene faith in the power of truth has so far upheld me, and I believe always will.

I have faith in the right. I have faith that the principles of Social Democracy are right. I have faith that the people are awakening to the truth. Victory will come.

Published in *Milwaukee Daily News*, date unspecified. Reprinted as “A Political Movement” in *The Social Democrat*, vol. 4, no. 14 (July 15, 1897), pg. 4.

¹ Debs was in Milwaukee from July 7-11, 1897. The main speech delivered during his visit was held at West Side Turner Hall in the evening of July 7. This statement was probably issued that day or the day after.

² That is, the People’s Party.

³ From “As You Like It” (1599), Act II, Scene 1, by William Shakespeare.