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## Comments on the War at the Opening of the First National Convention of the Social Democracy (June 7, 1898)

So far as I know, not one of the 10,000 members of the Social Democracy has enlisted to fight in this war.<sup>1</sup> Social Democrats are against war. The socialists of America have friendly relations with those of Spain, and do not cherish the slightest enmity toward them. Communications of friendship have passed between them, not officially, but as individuals.

This is not a war of humanity — far from it. It is true that people have been starving in Cuba by the thousands, but why? The original cause is because the capitalists of Spain and of this country ground them down and enslaved them to add to their wealth. We pitied them, and declared war ostensibly to save them from starvation. What do we do? Do we send food to relieve them, and do we kill off the capitalists who are responsible for the condition?

No; we establish a blockade so that more of the reconcentrados are starved than ever, leaving scarcely any by the time get down into Cuba to do anything for them. We send over a fleet to capture the Philippines, and we give a lot of contractors a chance to grow richer than ever equipping the army.

We send a lot of workingmen down to kill a lot of Spanish workingmen who had nothing to do with creating the conditions and are in no way responsible for them. Meanwhile, the capitalists grow fat on the situation. They lend money, secure valuable concessions, and altogether have a pleasant time out of it all.

If the people want to relieve the starving, why don't they begin at home? I can show them thousands of men in the coal camps and in other parts of America who lack food for themselves and their families. Why don't the people take care of them?

There is only one remedy, and that is social democracy. I don't believe in taking a man's personal property, but I do believe that all the means of production should be used for the common good — each man doing his share of the work and receiving his share of the returns.

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<sup>1</sup> These comments were apparently part of Debs’s introductory remarks to the approximately 125 people who gathered for the opening of the First National Convention of the Social Democracy of America. Debs’s mention of a membership size for the organization is a rare exception to the group’s silence on the matter and almost certainly represents a significant exaggeration.