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## The Social Democratic Party and Labor Day (September 3, 1898)

It is eminently fitting that *The Herald*, as the representative of the Social Democratic Party, should show due recognition of Labor Day. This day is consecrated to the working class, and the Social Democratic Party is the party of that class.

What shall be said of labor's holiday and its opportunities? The interrogatory is inviting. Much can be said and will be said, but only that is worth of consideration which provokes inquiry or challenges reflection.

Where the day is given wholly to sports, most of which do no rise above the "greased pig" level, its significance is lost. For such as these, Labor Day means nothing except a few hours' release from slavery. I would not have solemnity the order of the day, I would not deny a due share of pleasure and recreation, but above all, the central object of this day, that of discussing the rights and duties of the working class, and considering ways and means of emancipation from the bonds of capitalism, should be the commanding feature of every program and impressed upon the minds of all.

The capitalist class are immensely pleased to see Labor Day turned into a cheap circus and given entirely to "horseplay." They command the day and contribute to its observance and smile upon the antics of their slaves.

Long ago it was written:

Labor itself is but a sorrowful song,  
The protest of the weak against the strong. <sup>1</sup>

Alas, how truly these lines describe the present situation. Think of New Bedford<sup>2</sup> and Oshkosh<sup>3</sup> — of the West Virginia coal miners whose "sorrowful song" has been changed to one of thanksgiving that they are not deprived of their rags and crusts and that they are permitted to remain upon the earth. They have been sunk to level where they seem glad that "the many still must labor for the one."<sup>4</sup>

Think of the railroad employees who have become too weak to protest — who are satisfied if the baying hounds to the blacklist no longer pursue them and who willingly wear chains as the price of the bread their loved ones eat. I have seen them all over this fair land, and at the dead of night, when others slept, have heard the whispered stories of their pursuit, capture, and moral death. At the approach of a boss I have seen the smile of servility light up their faces while hate and scorn rioted in their hearts.

Victor Hugo said:

A smile in irons! Can anything be more hideous? He who is not free is not a man; he who is not free has no sight, no knowledge, no discernment, no growth, no comprehension, no will, no faith, no love; he has no wife and children, he has only a female with young. <sup>5</sup>

Here we have themes for Labor day for ten thousand rostrums. Let the burning, quivering issues be discussed and let the truth ring wherever the voice of labor is heard.

The antiquated “pure and simple” orator who saws the air and exclaims “*Labor omnia vincit*,”<sup>6</sup> has fulfilled his mission if ever he had one. To the everlasting rear with the “leader” who persists that there is nothing better than the strike and boycott, and who opposes political action. How many more thousands of workingmen are to be clubbed, imprisoned, manacled, and murdered before the fact is recognized that emancipation does not lie in that direction?

There is but one course out of the slough of capitalism and that is socialism. Progressive trade unionists, such, for instance, as compose the Central Labor Union of Cleveland, realize this fact and are shaping policies and adopting tactics to meet demands. While struggling to maintain what they have on the economic field they are preparing to fight the enemy on the political field by organizing, not in antagonism to, but in support of, their trades unions, into a class-conscious — that is to say, independent and uncompromising — political party, and, this done, as it will be done throughout the country, it will not take long to put the enemy to rout, and then for the first time in the history of all the ages it can truthfully be declared that “*Labor omnia vincit*”

The Social Democratic Party is in harmony with the progressive spirit of the day. It is the friend and ally of trades unions. It does not believe in destroying them, but in molding and adapting them to modern needs in the

economic struggle. The trades unions are ours, built by our labor and consecrated by our suffering, and we propose that they shall serve the noble purpose for which they were intended by rescuing them from those who would dwarf and restrain and subvert them, that they may pursue unfettered their march to emancipation.

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<sup>1</sup> Couplet from the hymn "The Sorrowful World" by Frederick William Faber (1814-1863).

<sup>2</sup> Reference is to a strike of cotton workers over wage cuts at New Bedford, Massachusetts which took place from January through March 1898.

<sup>3</sup> Reference is to a strike of nearly 2,000 woodworkers in Oshkosh, Wisconsin in May and June of 1898 against the sash, door, and furniture manufacturers for whom they worked.

<sup>4</sup> From "The Corsair" (1814), by George Gordon Byron (1788-1824).

<sup>5</sup> From *William Shakespeare* (1864), by Victor Hugo (1802-1885).

<sup>6</sup> *Labor conquers all*, incidentally the official motto of the American Federation of Labor.