

The Hour for Unity Has Not Yet Arrived: Letter to the
Editor of the *Social Democratic Herald*
(January 14, 1900)

Kansas City, Mo., Jan. 14 [1900].

Editor of the *Herald*:—

For some time I have been asked to declare myself through the *Herald* in reference to the proposed union between the anti-DeLeon element of the SLP and our party. I have delayed doing so until I had the opportunity to examine the situation in various parts of the country.

First, let me say that while no one can be more desirous for a united party of socialists than I, it is my settled conviction that the hour for such a consummation has not yet arrived.

There are hundreds of SLP comrades of the faction named whom I have met and love and honor, and would be proud to greet as party comrades; but there is also an element in that faction, by no means insignificant in proportion to the whole, with whom we can have no affiliation without inviting disruption. A union with this element will simply not unite, or, if it does, it can result only in a dissension, and, sooner or later, a split, and we have had quite enough experience along that line.

Barring such papers as the *Cleveland Citizen* and *The Class Struggle*, I am not satisfied with the tone or temper of the press of the anti-DeLeon SLP and particularly with the official organ, *The People*,¹ which continues to retail malicious libels respecting our party and our comrades.

The People knows that in the past our party, from its very inception, has been foully maligned and our comrades vilely slandered by the promoters of the party of which, since its so-called expurgation, it is now the official organ. Has it ever uttered one word to atone for such shocking indecency or to make restitution for the outrages intended, if not committed? If it has done itself such a manifestly plain duty in its regenerated capacity, it has not come to my notice. Could honorable men have done less? For my own part, I have always ignored these petty detractors, and I do not want any apology now or at any time, but were I in the attitude *The People* maintains to the Social Democratic Party, I know what the plain

and unmistakable dictates of conscience must prompt me to say and do in mitigation of wrongs with which I had been at least identified in perpetrating.

When *The People*, as the official organ of the party, honestly and courageously clears its skirts, then we can wad will accept its professions that it is in favor of a united party.

Not only this, but *The People* continues to be the vehicle of libel and detraction of our comrades. In a recent issued it permits us to be charged with not yet having "cut loose from Bryanites," and our officers, especially myself, with drawing exorbitant salaries for party service. *The People* knows, or can know if it wishes to, that these statements and their like are bald-faced lies, and yet it continues to inoculate its readers with their poison. I care nothing about these lies, nor their craven authors, but I want no affiliation with such serpents of defamation.

As a matter of fact, I have never drawn a dollar of salary in any capacity in the Social Democracy or the Social Democratic Party. During the year I served as chairman of the National Executive Board of the Social Democracy and gave the party my whole time, I worked without a cent of compensation from the party, and during the past 18 months that I have served on the Executive Board and as General Organizer for the Social Democratic Party I have never been paid a cent, and I have met all my official expenses from my private means, and the same is true of every other member of the Executive Board. We are not making this statement by way of explanation, or to elicit credit, for none is due, but to emphasize the conviction that if *The People* is sincere in its professions, it will at least stop circulating lies and libels about those with whom it seeks affiliation.

The anti-DeLeon party has not yet had its last purging. They hated DeLeon, not because of his principles or lack of principles, but because he was their master at their own game. I am confident that our members stand for a united party and also that they will not rush rashly forward to what seems to be such a party, to find themselves the victims of deception. We are not egotistical when we say there will soon be a united party, and that without taking any chances. The Social Democratic Party has proved its right to live. It has emerged unscathed from all the assaults that have been made upon it, and is moving majestically to the front. No odium attaches to its name and no stain is upon its honor. The election of 1900 will indicate its standing and establish its supremacy.

Eugene V. Debs.

Published as “Debs on Unity” in *Social Democratic Herald*, vol. 2, no. 31, whole no. 81 (Jan. 20, 1900), pg. 3.

¹ Following the 1899 split of the SLP both factions for a time produced rival editions of *The People*, making use of the same volume numbers and identical front page banners. Debs was a regular reader of the dissident edition of *The People*, a fact illustrated by the partial run of complete issues retained in his newspaper files, preserved on reel 15 of *The Papers of Eugene V. Debs* microfilm edition.