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## Speech at the Second Joint Unity Conference (May 20, 1900)

*Comrade Debs took the floor and said he would in unequivocal terms state his position.<sup>1</sup> He had taken his stand against organic union of the two parties and he was more than ever convinced that his position and that of the Executive Board was right and would be completely vindicated in the course of events.*

To be successful [said Debs] union must be a mutual affair, entered into feely by both parties. Our party has by an emphatic majority decided that it wants no organic union at this time, and were the vote taken again that majority would be so overwhelming as to silence all controversy upon that point.

It has been freely charged that the Manifesto of the Executive Board is responsible for all the trouble; that but for this a united party would have been assured. this is wholly untrue. The real mischief was done and our comrades were up in arms before the manifesto was even thought of. Following the actions and conclusions of the conference a condition of affairs developed spontaneously which made union an impossibility. I, with others, recognize this absolute fact. I took up my stand against union under such conditions, not because I was, or am, opposed to union, but because I was, and am, opposed to the wrecking of our party. I assume full responsibility for my action, and I have no apology to make for it.

Let it be distinctly understood that I know my comrades are not responsible for the conditions which made union impossible. These had their origin long ago and the controlling purpose was to capture and secure control of our organization. Had this plan succeeded, our party would have been destroyed and the united party built upon its ruins would have been farther from a *united* party than ever before.

Enforced union under such conditions would prove abortive. There is no shadow of doubt about it. The party has expressed itself after hearing all the testimony, and it cannot be denied that the other side had a full hearing, for our branches were fairly deluged with their papers, circulars, and letters.<sup>2</sup>

While denying that organic union is possible at this time, I am in favor of cooperation. If it is claimed that this is not possible, then it must be conceded that organic union is out of the question, for certainly if we are unable to cooperate we are not ready to unite.

For the moment some of our members, in their eagerness to see a united party, have been misled and deceived; but their sober second thought will soon bring them into line with the Social Democratic Party, which will, in good time, give the country a truly united socialist party.

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The March 1900 convention of the Social Democratic Party named a nine member Unity Committee to meet with a similar group chosen by the January 1900 convention of the Socialist Labor Party's dissident faction which had separated from the organization the previous year. This so-called "Committee of 18" met in New York City from March 25-27 to hammer out terms of union, including name, headquarters city, constitution, and party press. The SDP delegation split over the agreement by a 5-3 vote (Victor L. Berger not attending due to illness), with the majority favoring the proposal, Frederic Heath, Seymour Stedman, and Margaret Haile dissenting. A vote on terms of union was scuttled by the National Executive Board, however, a five member body which included Heath, Stedman, Berger, bitter unity foe Jesse Cox, and Gene Debs. An anti-unity "Manifesto" was rushed into print one week before the majority report was released and a substitute vote on the question "Is union between the Social Democratic Party and the Socialist Labor Party faction desirable?" taken instead, with the proposition failing by a vote of 939 to 1,213. Thoroughly alienated by the anti-democratic tactics of the NEB, the majority of the Unity Committee continued forward with negotiations, meeting a second time in New York City, with Debs in attendance by request. The SDP minority took the position that the Unity Committee had been liquidated by the snap referendum of the NEB, a position supported by Debs in this speech.<sup>2</sup> In fact, debate in the *Social Democratic Herald* was significantly skewed, with unsigned anti-unity editorials by editor A.S. Edwards run each week in the party voice, certain pro-unity or anti-NEB resolutions truncated or delayed, anti-unity affidavits run twice, letters titled tendentiously, etc. A thumb was placed on one side of the scale through manipulation of the party press to generate the referendum result desired by the NEB — a tactic straight out of the Daniel DeLeon playbook.