
Social Democrats, Stand Pat!

(June 30, 1900)

The unprecedented growth of the Social Democratic Party during the last few months is a vindication of the past and a guarantee of the future. The showing is most remarkable; it is extraordinary and must extort exclamations of surprise and delight from the most pessimistic.

Since January 1 [1900], 144 new branches have been organized — an average of 24 per month. Since the first day of the present month 29 branches have been instituted — the largest number in the same space of time in the history of our party.

In view of these facts it is evident that the “Manifesto,” the referendum vote thereon, and the comment and controversy that followed have not checked the growth of the party.¹ Indeed, it is more rapid at this hour than ever before, and will continue at an accelerating rate, all predictions to the contrary notwithstanding.

The plain meaning of this progress in the face of all kinds of opposition, from within as well as without, is approval of the policy and tactics of the party and endorsement of the administration of its affairs.

Through all these weeks of controversy, at times violent and acrimonious, the party has expanded with undiminished vigor, and promises even better for the future. There is, therefore, all reason for Social Democrats to be serene, hopeful, and confident — not the slightest for despondency or despair. The storm has been weathered — the gale has spent its force, the waves are receding, and the skies are brightening.

Comrades, stand pat!

The socialist movement is having its trials. This is to be expected. The transition from capitalism to socialism will be tempestuous at times. It would be folly to even hope for all smooth sailing. The storm is as necessary as the calm. It is a part, an essential part, of the development.

Let no comrade despair of the future. Above all the quibbles and quarrels of individuals, the movement sweeps on.

The Social Democratic Party has struck root in American soil. Its general course has appealed to the American people and its propaganda has

quicken the heart-pulse of the American proletariat. It has made mistakes enough to demonstrate that it is a human institution.

The cry of "bossism" heard in certain quarters can safely be ignored. The work accomplished, the results achieved, the progress made, which none can dispute, proclaim the truth and defy denial.

Karl Marx and Ferdinand Lassalle were violently denounced as dictators and usurpers by their own followers. The "bosses" are sometimes those who in wind and wave hold the party true to its desired course.

It is the storm that makes the sailor, the battle that makes the soldier, and it takes them both to make a socialist.

Comrades, stand pat!

The question of "union" need worry us no more. Let those of our comrades who desire to join with the SLP do so. That is their unquestioned privilege. Let the rest remain where they are. That is their absolute right. A united party is "a consummation devoutly to be wished," but it is a matter of growth and not compulsion. When conditions favor a united party, no power can prevent it. As long as cause exists for separate parties, no power can unite them. The matter will in time automatically adjust itself, and all the sooner if wrangling ceases and sense has sway.

Others may act as they choose, but I do not propose to be a party to an attempt to force men out of a party that suits them into a party that does not.

Whether we have one socialist party or a dozen, we can fight capitalism, the common enemy, as one, if we only will, and he who seeks to prevent this is the real enemy of socialism. Union of parties is of small consequence compared with union of action; and those who imagine that compulsory union would insure united action have something yet to learn about human nature.

Political cooperation has gone forward splendidly thus far without organic union. What has been done in some states can be done in all states. The question of party allegiance need not interfere with harmonious cooperation and vigorous action. Besides, only an insignificant part of the socialists are members of any party. They are not interested in our imbroglio; they are only disgusted with our kindergarten contentions.

Let us rise above the level of bickering and strife and vituperation. The columns and pages of accusations, insinuation, denial, and counter-charges alter nothing. I can better afford to permit a hundred falsehoods to go unchallenged than descend to the plane where they have their origin.

For the national and state campaigns each state can act for itself. The national candidates are already nominated. In each state a united ticket can be placed in the field by joint convention or otherwise, and this is the supreme demand at this time. The question of organic union is settled as far as it can be for the present.

This is the sane, sensible course to pursue, and will lead up to the highlands. We can then appeal to the hundreds of thousands of American socialists and multiply them into a million or more at the ballot box in November.

Comrades, once again, stand pat!

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¹ In the aftermath of the May 1900 rejection of the concept of organic unity between the SDP and the SLP dissidents, an intervention by the National Executive Board ostensibly to prevent a split of anti-unity elements, the SDP found itself in the midst of a split of its pro-unity elements, who continued and completed merger negotiations. A united party also named the "Social Democratic Party" was thereby launched with headquarters in Springfield, Massachusetts, the name chosen to avoid electoral cataclysm in Massachusetts in the forthcoming November election. The Massachusetts organization divided itself between the two party organizations, with the Haverhill organization going with Springfield and the Brockton organization going with Chicago. In this article Debs cheers on the Chicago-based SDP's course of action and attempts to find a middle ground between all out partisan warfare and merger of these two organizations, the latter of which Debs continues to refer to here as "SLP."