
Well Done!
The Social Democratic Party of America
Organized at Last Week's Convention

by G.A. Hoehn
(June 13, 1898)

Chicago, June 13, 1898.

Three cheers for the Social Democratic Party of America!

The organization of this new bona fide labor party will undoubtedly be cheering news to thousands of socialists and wage workers of this country.

The first national convention of the Social Democracy of America was opened at Uhlich's Hall, June 7, 1898. Comrade Eugene V. Debs called the delegates to order, stating the object of the gathering in a few remarks, expressing also the hope that the business of the convention would not be interfered with by parliamentary tricks and shyster tactics. According to report of the Credentials Committee, there were 75 delegates present; several delegates arrived later on.

Immediately following the report of the Credentials Committee, Secretary [Sylvester] Keliher announced that on Saturday, June 4, and Sunday, June 5, not less than 11 new branches of the Social Democracy of America were organized in Chicago, all of which had applied for charters Monday, June 6; i.e., just one day before the opening of the convention. In his opinion at least 9 out of the 11 were not entitled to representation in the convention, for which reason he refused to grant them the charters applied for. However, he would put this matter into the hands of the convention for final settlement.

[William E.] Burns and [James] Hogan declared that the 11 branches were entitled to representation, at the same time attacking Secretary Keliher for his refusal to grant charters. Comrade [Isaac] Hourwich of New York moved that the delegates of the new Chicago branches be not admitted, [J.] Phillips of New York, [Victor] Berger of Milwaukee, [James] Carey of Massachusetts, [Gus] Hoehn of St. Lois, Margaret Haile of Boston, [William] Mailly of Tennessee, [F.S.R.] Gordon of New Hampshire, [Morris] Winchevsky of New York, and [C.F.] Meier of St.

Louis bitterly opposed the admission of the new Chicago delegates, claiming that at least 9 out of 11 new branches were organized at the very last moment for no other purpose than to pack the convention, the 11 delegates representing less than 60 members in all. Maily ridiculed the idea that these “brave Chicagoans” did not discover the grandeur of the Social Democracy until 24 hours before the opening of the national convention.

Cook, [John] Lloyd, Osborne, Ingalls, and Hogan spoke in favor of admitting the delegates of the new Chicago branches. The discussion lasted the whole day [June 7, 1898] and was continued Wednesday morning [June 8]. There being no prospect of transacting any business, the delegates were finally admitted by a close vote.

The election of the various committees then took place. On Thursday morning [June 9] the Committee on Organized Labor submitted its report, which was adopted. Thursday afternoon Chairman Debs delivered his annual address, stating, among other things, that on his agitation trip to the Eastern states he addressed 148 public meetings in 77 days. Comrade Debs said the time had come when the working people must make use of the political power and inaugurate a political movement on strictly socialist lines. “In regard to colonization,” he said, “I have not changed my mind since our last year’s convention [Chicago: June 15-21, 1897], and I still believe that something good could be accomplished by working in the direction indicated in our constitution.” In conclusion he stated that if there should be any Iscariot present in the convention, he [the traitor] would certainly find a chance to hang himself before the convention was over.

Secretary Keliher submitted his report, according to which the total receipts were \$8,965.88, total expenditures \$8,894.44. Report received and referred to Auditing Committee.

On Friday afternoon [June 10] the Committee on Platform submitted its reports — a majority report signed by Margaret Haile and Victor Berger, and a minority report signed by John Lloyd. The latter report was read by delegate Ingalls; it was a very lengthy document, full of firework rhetoric and phrases and making the colony scheme the most important feature of the convention. A hot discussion followed. Hourwich, Phillips, [A.S.] Edwards, Maily, Miller, Hoehn, Carey, Haile, [Seymour] Stedman, Gordon, and others spoke against the minority report, claiming that its adoption would put the Social Democracy in a most ridiculous position. Special reference was made to last year’s work of the Colonization Commission, that nearly \$2,000 had been expended,¹ and

nothing whatever accomplished, and that this kind of business should be promptly stopped. Frank, Osborne, [C.F.] Willard, Lloyd, Ingalls, Cook, and others defended the minority report, some of them speaking against political action and advocating the colony scheme as the salvation of the American people.

The discussion continued until 2:30 [am] Saturday morning [June 11]. The vote on the minority report was then taken with the following result: 53 for, 37 against the adoption of the minority report.²

The delegates of the minority, seeing they could no longer cooperate with the majority without disgracing the cause of Social Democracy and the international labor movement, at once adjourned to the Revere House, and organized temporarily with Jesse Cox of Chicago as chairman, and William Mailly of Nashville, Tennessee, as secretary.

The [former majority] report of the platform committee was then unanimously adopted, except that the organization was named the "Social Democratic Party of America."

The organization of the Social Democratic Party of America was effected between 5:00 and 6:00 [am] Saturday morning, the golden rays of the rising sun greeting the delegates as they were enthusiastically and unanimously cheering the birth of the new clearcut and clean Social Democratic movement. The following delegates attended the Revere House early morning convention and pledged themselves to support the Social Democratic Party of America:

Anna F. Smith, Branch 1, of California.

A.G. Hicks, Branch 1, of Colorado.

Eugene V. Debs, Branch 3, of Indiana, who was seriously sick and confined to his room, sent word that he was heart and soul with the Social Democratic Party of America.

Theodore Debs, Branch 4, of Indiana.

Hugo Miller, Branch 6, of Indiana.

George Koop, Branch 7, of Illinois.

Seymour Stedman, Branch 1, of Illinois.

Jesse Cox, of Illinois.

J.F. Carey, of Massachusetts.

Margaret Haile, of Massachusetts.

G.A. Hoehn, Branch 1, of Missouri.

C.F. Meier, Branch 3, of Missouri.

F.G.R. Gordon, of New Hampshire.

M. Winchevsky, of New York.

L. Miller, of New York.
William Butscher, of New York.
I. Hourwich, of New York.
J. Phillips, of New York.
J. Barondess, of New York.
William Mailly, of Tennessee.
A.S. Edwards, of Branch Ruskin, Tennessee
Frederic Heath, of Milwaukee.
Victor Berger, of Milwaukee.
George Moreschel, of Milwaukee.
Jake Hunger, of Milwaukee.
W.G. Kuhn, of Milwaukee.
Oscar Leobel, of Sheboygan, Wisconsin.
S. Levin, of New Jersey.

Several delegates who were absent informed us later on that they would join the Social Democratic Party movement.

The platform adopted read as follows:

* * *

The temporary Executive Committee, E.V. Debs, Seymour Stedman, Victor Berger, Jesse Cox, and Fred Heath, was instructed to edit and revise the platform thoroughly before putting it to a referendum vote. The committee was also instructed to issue a statement to the branches throughout the country setting forth the causes leading up to the formation of the Social Democratic Party of America.

Comrade A.S. Edwards, of Ruskin, Tennessee, who is a staunch advocate of independent socialist political action, was elected as National Organizer.

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The Social Democratic Party of America is the beginning of a sound, clean political labor movement based on clear, plain socialist principles and on reasonable, healthy tactics. The movement is now freed of that incoherent material that make a healthy movement impossible.

The Chicago contingent was a disgrace to the convention. About 40 delegates represented Chicago branches, half of which number did exist in name only. Anarchist radicals, Democratic heelers, REpublican ward

politicians, Labor Exchange patriots, and various other elements had used the colonization scheme as a door through which they crept into the Social Democracy for no other purpose than to prevent the straight socialist political action of labor. Several Demo-Populist politicians of Kansas and California had also come to Chicago to “see to it that the Social Democracy would not enter politics as an independent party.”

However, the 30 or more socialist fighters present were ever on the lookout for these fellows and gave them clearly to understand that the hour of divorce between the true socialists and the anarchist-populist-Democratic-Republican-colony elements had come, and they acted accordingly.

I have never witnessed a more enthusiastic gathering than the delegates representing the new Social Democratic Party of America — all determined to make this movement spread like a wildfire all over the country.

One word in honor of our brave Comrade Debs. When the hour of decisive action had come, he cut loose from old friends whom he still holds to be honest and good, and cheered the new Social Democratic Party as the hope of the American people.

On Saturday afternoon a scene was witnessed in a little room at the Revere House which all those present will never forget. There lay our brave Comrade Debs on his bed, still very sick and weak. The next moment the door opened and in came the New York and New England comrades to bid their friend and leader goodbye and congratulate him on his brave and courageous action for international socialism.

One of the New York delegates, with his strong arms, raised Comrade Debs up in his bed, embraced and kissed him like a child; all the rest of the delegates thronged to the sick man’s bedside embracing and kissing him and urging him to take care of himself so he may live and be spared to our glorious movement for years to come. Tears were flowing freely from the eyes of all men and women present and all of them felt that the true socialist is something more, something better and nobler, than a soulless machine that may at any time be put into motion or stopped by any heartless, reckless individual who happens to get control of a part of the party machine. This scene in Debs’ little room reflected the noble spirit underlying the new movement of the Social Democratic Party of America.

Resolutions in memory of Edward Bellamy and Paul Grottkau were adopted; also resolutions condemning the murderous work of the Italian

government during the recent hunger revolt in Milan and resolutions sending congratulations to the Social Democratic Party of Germany.

The platform, properly edited and revised, as well as the new constitution will soon be published.

It is promised that general headquarters be removed to St. Louis; at any rate, headquarters can no longer remain in the abominable atmosphere of the stinking Chicago River with its corrupting political surroundings.

Three cheers for the Social Democratic Party of America!

Three cheers for International Socialism!

G.A. Hoehn.

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¹ The Colonization Commission operated semi-autonomously and its budget was presumably not part of the general SDA revenue and expenditures cited by National Secretary Sylvester Keliher above.

² Note that the minority report still would have carried 42-37 if the 11 challenged Chicago branches had been denied voting rights.