

---

# **Mission of the Socialist Party:**

## **Speech at Coliseum Hall Arena, Denver, CO — May 26, 1902**

### **by Eugene V. Debs**

Published as “Eugene V. Debs Outlines Social Democracy” in  
*The Labor World* [Butte, MT], vol. 1, no. 6 (June 2, 1902), pg. 8.

In the present organization of society, character of government is determined by the political party it represents, and the party is simply the political expression of the economic interests of the class it represents. For example, the Republican Party is essentially the party of the large and successful capitalist class; the Democratic Party is that of the smaller struggling and less successful capitalists, who in large measure consist of the middle class society. The Socialist Party is the only party that is or can be truly representative of the interests of the working class, the only class essential to society and the class that is destined ultimately to succeed to political power, “not for the purpose of governing men,” in the words of Engels, but “to administer things.”

The present form of government based solely upon private property in the means of production is wholly coercive; in socialism it will be purely administrative. The only vital function of the present government is to keep the exploited class in subjection by their exploiters.

Congress, state legislatures, and municipal councils as a rule legislate wholly in the interest of the ruling capitalist class. Courts of justice, so-called, decided cases of importance not upon their merit, but in the interest of the ruling class.

#### **Under the Influence.**

Ministers of the gospel are subject to the same influence and their sermons are moulded to serve the same purpose.

The owning class is necessarily the ruling class. It dictates legislation and in case of doubt or controversy has it construed to its own interest.

Less than forty years ago chattel slavery, a tragic phase in our economic development as well as a necessary part of it, was a perfectly reputable institution. The Southern plantation owners practically controlled the government and even the Supreme Court of the United States was compelled to legalize the national iniquity.

Hundreds of able editors consecrated their talents to the perpetuation of the slave traffic. As many ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ quoted passages from the scriptures to prove that it was ordained of God himself. Statesmen were its tools, journalism its servant, ministers its apologists, lawyers its lackeys.

### **The Economic Basis.**

This proves that Karl Marx was right in declaring that the economic basis of society determines the character of all social institutions and the institutions noted therein [are modified in proportion only as this basis changes]. For instance, chattel slavery was an economic necessity and [is] no longer. When in the march of the industrial revolution, accelerated so swiftly by the development and application of modern machinery, slavery was overthrown, it became immoral, unjust, and disreputable.

In other words, it was moral as long as it paid; it became immoral only when it ceased, because of changed economic conditions, to be profitable to the capitalist class as a whole.

What is here said is applicable in every detail to the present wage system in which one man is the servant and slave and at the mercy of another and in which these having antagonistic economic interests are ceaselessly at war, and this accounts for the present strike in Denver and the hundreds of similar strikes, boycotts, and lockouts which are continually disturbing the peace of society and reducing our vaunted civilization to a mere meaningless phrase.

### **Class Struggle On.**

This class struggle will not, cannot cease. It is simply the manifestation of the law of development. All of the forces of evolution are

behind it. But for this same struggle in preceded ages human beings would never have emerged from the jungles of slavery.

Through all the centuries of the past man has enslaved and preyed upon his weaker fellow being. For thousands of years there were lords and slaves; through all the Middle Ages Europe constituted one vast feudal empire, ruled by barons and peopled with their serfs. In the closing years of the 19th Century, after the feudal system had run its course, its countless and long-suffering victims arose in their might and swept it from the earth. The bourgeoisie, of which the modern capitalists are the offspring, were installed into power, and under the modifications of the new system the relation between himself and the toiler was changed to the extent that he was free to choose his own master. Today we have capitalist masters and working slaves, who, although called sovereign citizens, are exploited of the fruit of their labor as completely under the present system as were their slavish predecessors in the dark centuries of the past.

The wage system, like the feudal system from which it sprang, will fulfill its mission and pass away. Upon every hand we behold the unmistakable signs of decline and decay. Centralization is paving the way to the new society that is evolving from the present competitive chaos. All capital, by the inexorable law of economic gravitation, will centralize in the hands of the few.

Already 80 percent of the American people are stripped of their possessions and constitute the dispossessed, propertyless class, whose historic mission it is finally, when concentration has completed its course, to dispossess the small possessing class in the name of the whole people.

To accomplish this, especially in the United States, where all men (and all women should) have the ballot, political organization is an absolute necessity, and hence the organization of the Socialist Party to represent the interests of the working class.

### **Only Two Ways.**

The prevailing economic system can only be abolished in two ways; namely, by securing control of government or by violent revolution. No sane man prefers violent to peaceful measures, and hence socialists rely upon the efficacy of a united class-conscious ballot to accomplish their end.

But few in number at present, comparatively speaking, their party will as certainly expand to continental and conquering proportions as did the Republican Party whose mission it was, as a political organization, to espouse the case of the black slaves of the Southern states, strike their fetters from their quivering flesh, and proclaim that by fiat of its immortal leader, Abraham Lincoln, the emancipation.

The Socialist Party is necessarily a revolutionary party in the sense above indicated, and its basic demand is the collective ownership of the means of production and distribution and the operation of all industry in the interest of all the people. This will mean an economic democracy, the base of the real republic yet to be.

### **Collective Ownership.**

Economic freedom can result only from collective ownership, and upon this vital principle the Socialist Party differs diametrically from every other party. Between private ownership and collective ownership there can be no compromise. As well seek to harmonize fire and water. One produces for profit, the other for use. One produces millionaires and mendicants, the other economic equals. One gives us palaces and hovels, robes and rags, the other will secure to every man and woman their full product of his or her toil, abolish class rule, wipe out class distinction, secure the peace of society, and make of this earth for the first time a habitable place.

*Edited by Tim Davenport*

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · August 2013 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.