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# The Passing of the Debs Democracy

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CHICAGO, Ill., June 13 [1898]— If that which never really was can justly be said to have passed this heading may stand.

On the 7th instant there took place in this city a convention of the “Social Democracy.” There were present 75 delegates, representing, as they claimed, 95 organizations. When it is considered that 5 members are enough for one of these organizations, and that not less than 11 of them were organized right here for the express purpose of packing the convention, one may form an idea of the multitudes represented. But however that may be, the whole vanished. The convention sat 5 days. During that period a fierce tempest boiled in the Social Democratic teapot, till its cover flew off; the pot bursted, and the steam escaped.

It is difficult, if at all possible, to give a serious account of the farce.

Just a year ago the “Social Democracy” was launched. The speeches made at the time were pregnant with sneers at the Socialist Labor Party; it was slow, it was visionary, it could not attract the American people, it sought for the distant millennium; on the contrary, the Social Democracy was to rush quickly, it was to be practical, it was to attract the American masses, it was to do something NOW. The year has passed, and all there is of it is debts; a bankrupt treasury; a subscriptionless paper; soiled reputations; and fragments strewing the floor.

A bird's-eye view of the convention before the explosion showed that the Debs Democracy had indeed attracted “Americans.” But what Americans! They types of the worst thoughts and most backward ideas that this country ever produced. One of these, a Southern delegate, summed up the “American” element there present in these words: “We Americans don't believe in CLASS-consciousness; we believe in RACE-consciousness.”

Outside of this element, which, as a whole, was for colonization and against political action, in other words, was there simply on business, there was a rabble-rout of queers, most of them expelled members of the SLP, and constructively so; in short, the offal and refuse of the party, and they looked it. This element was against colonization and for political action.

This analysis of the convention's make-up leads me to point to another of its striking features. Looking at it, and especially hearing the speeches of

the two elements, one could not help being struck by the impression that the thing uppermost on the minds of the delegates was — THE SLP. But the thought affected each differently; how and why is of real interest.

The colonization element knew that the SLP had smashed their first colonization scheme, and thereby endangered all their subsequent ones. They do not quite realize that *The People* did so because all such “Socialist Experiments” are harmful. They imagine the SLP’s attacks were due to their organization’s claiming to be also a political party. Hence they sought to disconnect themselves from all political party pretenses, thus seeking to remove the opposition of the SLP, and, in pursuit of this policy, they even sought to gain the SLP’s good will by speaking well of it. Delegate G.C. Clemens, of Kansas, of the colonization element, typified this idea, and he voiced his element’s feelings and purposes when he said:

“If, as some here claim, the convention is packed against political action, then I am with those who did it. **For political action there exists in America the Socialist Labor Party.** It should be the business of the latter to look out for politics, and it is our duty to devote our time to the economic question, namely, colonization.”

On the other hand, the element that was for political action and against colonization, being in the main a refuse element of the SLP, is incapable of any feeling except hatred for the party that would not tolerate their monkeyshines, and of any thought except how to hurt it; and, in the conceit that is characteristic of such folks, they imagine they can. That element knew what a blank the colonization plan offered to the SLP attacks. To spite the SLP, to endanger its progress by setting up a party that looks like it, the colonization plan had to be dropped.

These are the “hows” and the “whys” of the lines on which the conflict raged; they reveal fundamental objects and aims that were irreconcilable. A smash-up was inevitable, and it came: the Spirit of the SLP stalked through the convention, and scattered it like a potter’s vessel.

While it is undeniable that the colonization rump had the better vitality, seeing that it is purely on “business” bent, and is made up of “business” material, while the political action rump has in its midst no one man of average common sense, and, being a hatred element, consequently, a negative element, is as sterile as a mule, the revelations made against “Organizer and National Secretary” [Sylvester] Keliher in particular are of such a nature as to throw both sides into hopeless disrepute. Moreover, Mr. Debs can’t be with both: he lumped himself with the political action element and against the colonization one. That helps to kill both. As a man and his liver are inseparable, so are colonization and Debs — without Debs, the colonization element must go out of business quicker than it would otherwise have to do; on the other hand, without colonization the political wing is stripped of the only pretext for being an opposition party to the SLP. Well-meaning and

even sensible people, who are uninformed, might be taken in with the colonization scheme and thus join a party with that attachment. But who is there who could be taken in by an opposition party to the SLP that does not have something “American” to distinguish it, and is run on no program other than “Damn the SLP”?

The rapid going to seed of the “Social Democracy of America” is one of the most promiseful symptoms of our time and our country.

*Edited by Tim Davenport*

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