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## A Year of Growth Presages Success (June 16, 1899)

Zanesville, OH, [June 16, 1899].<sup>1</sup>

The first year of the Social Democratic Party has been completed and congratulations are in order. The results are equal to our most sanguine expectations. In a twelvemonth our party has extended over nearly all the states of the Union and is now in superb condition for the great work mapped out for it. Our comrades are active and harmonious, aggressive and hopeful. They enter upon the second year with a determination that presages success.

On this Anniversary Day I salute the Social Democratic Party, and tender hearty greeting and congratulation to each comrade. As we have tramped together on the highlands and in the valleys of the past, so will we keep step together to the strains of socialism in the future. Each day adds to the strength and influence and sweep of our movement. Each day brings us nearer victory. No backward step will be taken. No retreat will be sounded. International socialism is the goal and it will be reached while the 20th century is in swaddling clothes.

Looking up among the stars we behold Marx and Engels, and then press forward to the consummation of their grand work.

For some days I have been in Ohio.<sup>2</sup> The state is in a political ferment. There is a great moral impulse through it all, but it is extremely chaotic. An independent political party may be formed by the working class as the result of the labor convention lately held at Columbus. The supreme purpose seems to be to nominate Mr. Jones,<sup>3</sup> of Toledo, for Governor. There is plenty of enthusiasm everywhere. We are assured that the day of jubilee is near.

A hundred times at least during the past few days I have been asked if I would support the independent movement in Ohio, with Mr. Jones as its candidate. I answer candidly no. As a socialist, as a member of the Social Democratic Party, I will support no man for any office who does not stand squarely on a socialist platform, the representative of a socialist party.

Let me make myself clearly understood. Personally I have only respect for Mr. Jones. I believe him to be an honest, conscientious man. But that is not the question. It is a question of principles, and not of persons. Mr. Jones himself agrees to this. As far as I know, Mr. Jones has not yet quite the Republican Party, and a socialist in the Republican Party at this stage of the political development is to me inconceivable. Again, Mr. Jones would have accepted the Republican nomination for Governor had it been tendered him. If Mr. Jones is a socialist, this also passes my comprehension. The Republican Party is opposed to everything that socialism stands for, and for everything that socialism is opposed to.

There are at this time but two kinds of politics, viz.: capitalist politics and socialist politics. And they will not mix any more than will fire and water, and he who tries the experiment will get burnt or soaked.

In Mr. Jones's speech at the Columbus convention he failed to avow himself a socialist, and as far as he is publicly reported, did not even mention socialism. His utterances were vague and hazy. He aroused much enthusiasm, but that is easy. To me it seemed that he was trying the impossible task of uniting and harmonizing Republicans, Democrats, Populists, single-taxers, prohibitionists, etc., etc. Vain attempt. Neither Jones nor Jesus would be equal to such a task. As soon as the ebullition of the hour subsides this movement will go to pieces. I have had some experience. I have tried the "shortcut" to find that it is no cut at all.

For the most part, Mr. Jones's followers are honest. They are also mixed and confused. They see "trees as men walking."<sup>4</sup> They fail to perceive, as socialists clearly do, the economic trend. The "golden rule" is all right in its place, but it has no place in the fight against capitalism. There has got to be a social revolution, a complete wiping out of capitalism, peaceable or otherwise, and any compromise at this stage is fatal. Lassalle said: "You can't inaugurate a revolution with rosewater."<sup>5</sup> To Mr. Jones and the wage-workers of Ohio we have simply to say: We have got to get down to the bedrock of socialism, gentlemen, and throw down the gauntlet to capitalism for ceaseless and uncompromising war until the capitalist system and its wage-slavery is wiped from the earth, and the cooperative commonwealth is reared above its ruins.

In your platform you have not even mentioned the wage system, the foundation and capstone of your slavery. You have yet to learn, as you will learn by bitter experience, that the "step-at-a-time" program is a delusion and a sham that will result in nothing but failure and disappointment. And

in this I allude particularly to the “one-plank, initiative and referendum, platform.” Apart from socialism it is good for nothing except to catch and string the gullible. All along the track of our economic and political development there has been “compromise” for the sake of “harmony” until the wage-worker in all lands has been sunk to the fathomless depths of degradation.

For the existing ills of the wage-workers there is but one remedy. It is embraced in a single word — *socialism* — the collective ownership of all the means of production and distribution; and these can be secured by conquering the political power and seizing the reins of government through a united, class-conscious socialist ballot.

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In an interview recently Mark Hanna is quoted as alluding to the workingmen in the usual capitalistic terms of “voting cattle,” etc., and the latter are much stirred up about it, as their leaders declare that they will resent the outrage at the polls. No danger. Mark Hanna is not a fool. No man in America has the average workingman “sized up” more accurately than he. In the coming election nearly all of them will vote just as Hanna says they will. They will vindicate his estimate of them.

Mark Hanna is simply a fair specimen of the capitalist class — neither better nor worse. He is as good as Rockefeller and as bad as Pullman. I have no time to waste on Hanna — I am after the suystem that spawns the species.

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The continuous performance of the Industrial Commission is amusing, if nothing else.<sup>6</sup> It is a good sideshow to the capitalist circus. As a confidence game it ought to do a good business, and I do not doubt that the “bunko” returns will be equal to expectations. That a “representative” of labor is in the cast makes the farce comedy complete. In the fall campaign we will hear all about the creation of this commission for the express purpose of making gods of the working class, in return for which they will continue their allegiance to the parties that have enslaved and robbed them. How these capitalistic benefactors chuckle over the success of their skin games!

The Governor of Idaho,<sup>7</sup> a rampant, free silver, Chicago platform Bryan Democrat, is showing what workingmen may expect when the Democratic Party gets into power. This scoundrel has the record to date. He has used all the powers of his Democratic, Populist state to outrage the striking miners.<sup>8</sup> Here we have a specimen of the “step-at-a-time” politics. He is a fit representative of the mine owners of the West. They are all free silver Democrats. In the Leadville strike I had the occasion to meet them, and I know that if the Democratic Party gets into power they and their class will run the government, and the only difference there will be so far as the working class is concerned is the names of their masters.

To the working class of the United States we say, the Social Democratic Party is pledged to your complete emancipation. It promises no shortcuts and no quack remedies. It is a class-conscious, revolutionary party committed to the overthrow of capitalism and its wage-slavery and the establishment of the cooperative commonwealth and economic equality, and every wage-worker should rally to its standard and hasten the day of its triumph and their own deliverance.

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<sup>1</sup> Debs spoke in Zanesville, Ohio on the evening of June 16, 1899, the exact one year anniversary of the Social Democratic Party of America.

<sup>2</sup> Debs’s tour through Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania began in Montpelier, Indiana on June 3 and ended in Indianapolis on June 19 at the convention of the International Union of Pressmen and Assistants.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel M. “Golden Rule” Jones (1846-1904), a Christian socialist, was Mayor of Toledo from 1897 until his death in July 1904. A wealthy man through investments in the oil industry, Jones’s tenure as mayor was known for a broad array of progressive reforms, including construction of parks and playgrounds and implementation of the eight hour day for city employees.

<sup>4</sup> Allusion to *Mark*, chapter 8, verse 24.

<sup>5</sup> This is actually a paraphrase of a remark by Sébastien Nicolas de Chamfort (1741-1794).

<sup>6</sup> The Industrial Commission, a five member investigative board appointed by an act of Congress early in 1899, spent a great deal of its time on the question of trusts.

<sup>7</sup> Frank Steunenberg (1897-1905) was the Governor of Idaho from 1897 to 1901. Steunenberg was assassinated by a bomb blamed on the Western Federation of Miners in December 1905. Steunenberg gained the wrath of striking miners by issuing a request for federal troops to quash the violent 1899 Coeur d’ Alene mine strike.

<sup>8</sup> Reference is to the Coeur d’ Alene mine strike of 1899 was a battle conducted during April and May over union recognition and an attempt to establish a union wage scale among the hard rock miners of Northern Idaho. The conflict was marked by the intervention of federal

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soldiers and the holding of arrested strikers in an inadequate makeshift wooden “bullpen” jail near the town of Wardner, with three prisoners dying while in captivity.