
Protest of the Chicago SDP Unity Committee Majority Against the Manifesto of the NEB (April 28, 1900)

To the Comrades of the Social Democratic Party:—

The manifesto issued by the National Executive Board of the Social Democratic Party and published in the SD Herald of April 7th, 1900, demands that the majority members of the committee on union in justice to themselves and the movement state their position to the party membership.

We regard the issuance of the manifesto as a grave mistake and one calculated to bring disruption into the party and thus cause injury to the cause of socialism. For this reason we submit to your consideration the following statement of facts.

We protest emphatically against the right exercised by the National Executive Board in issuing such a manifesto before receiving the official report of your committee on union.

The action of the board clearly usurps power and is entirely without the jurisdiction of an executive committee acting in the name of a democratic organization, and though no other reason existed *this one* alone justifies the members of the Social Democratic Party in voting “Yes” on the question of Union.

The New York conference closed Wednesday, March 28th. The manifesto is dated as written on the following Monday, April 2nd, only four days having elapsed. The results of the conference were not, and in fact could not have been officially submitted to the board and therefore was based upon information received from individual and irresponsible sources and was not actuated by the fear expressed by them of “a spirit of revolt thundering at our doors.”

The manifesto states that the committee of 18 “failed of performing its true work in two salient and vital points” — first as regards the name and second as to the referendum on the name. This statement is unequivocally false. The instructions received by your committee were to urge the name Social Democratic Party. This was done with all the ability and argument at the command of the committee. The committee of the Socialist Labor Party, however, were desirous that their party membership should be allowed to vote upon two names and after a

lengthy debate, your committee suggested that two names be submitted to a referendum vote of both parties: one the Social Democratic Party, and the other whatever name the SLP committee might select.

As regards the referendum vote your committee was instructed that a concurrent vote of each party should decide upon the name, but your committee understood that in the event of the names voted upon failing to receive a concurrent majority of each party, negotiations for union would have ceased.

In order that the efforts for union should not be annulled we submitted as a proviso that in case either of the names fails to receive a concurrent vote, the membership of each party should decide the question of name by voting upon the following proposition: "In case the party name voted for by you fails to obtain the concurrent majority of both parties shall the name receiving the majority of the total vote of both parties be adopted?"

The proposition also requires a concurrent majority before taking effect.

It is plain then that your committee has not violated any instruction and instead has left the entire matter of name to the membership of both parties.

On the matter of pledges, we insist that it is both unfair and unjust to hold the joint conference on unity responsible for any pledges made at any private conferences held without the authority or sanction of the convention. And we hold furthermore that the question of the union of the socialist forces is of too much moment to the cause of socialism to be in any way endangered by any individual or unofficial acts.

We protest against the indirect charge made against our comrades of the Socialist Labor Party that they studiously evaded giving any definite information concerning their membership, thus insinuating that the Socialist Labor Party would resort to unfair means in order to gain advantage over the comrades of the Social Democratic Party. This charge is an insult to the members of the Socialist Labor Party and one which deserves a stern rebuke from the members of your party. Comrade Job Harriman state upon the floor of the Indianapolis convention the enrolled membership of the Socialist Labor Party, and Comrade Harriman's statement was essentially confirmed by the National Secretary at the New York conference.

In view of the foregoing statement of facts we desire to impress upon the members of the Social Democratic Party the utmost necessity of voting "Yes" on the proposition embodied in the manifesto. The National

Executive Board has not only exceeded their authority, but also placed the movement for socialism in this country in a critical and perilous position.

After union had been practically consummated and a united ticket placed in the field which attracted the attention of the world and aroused the enthusiasm of socialists everywhere, the board places before the membership a proposition which would annul every act taken thus far toward union and thus hold the movement up to the contumely and ridicule of the enemies of our cause.

There was no reason why union should not have been accomplished easily and satisfactorily to the members of both parties and it would have been effected without undue friction had not the manifesto been issued.

The enthusiasm that first found birth at the Rochester convention and which had been steadily growing would have found expression in the most remarkable and energetic campaign ever made by the socialists of the United States. Instead, we are now engaged in a controversy involving details which are of infinitely small importance when compared to the great question of uniting the socialist forces.

Regarded in the proper light the manifesto coming when it did was the most serious blow that could be delivered the cause.

Nothing could serve more to dissipate the energy, shatter the hopes, and stem the rising tide of socialist enthusiasm than this manifesto. An autocratic assumption of authority, a mass of misstatements, and a glaring attempt to hinder the progress of our movement, it deserves severe condemnation at the hands of those who have labored to bring the Social Democratic Party to its present magnificent standing.

The socialists of America desire a united socialist movement. They are weary of wasted effort, of the loss of time, ability, and energy involved in controversies over technicalities which bear little significance besides the more important work of education, agitation, and organization; the emancipation of mankind, the liberation of the working class, depend upon concerted and harmonious action on the part of those who believe that all of this will reach fulfillment in the cooperative commonwealth.

The great task of abolishing the present capitalist system and inaugurating socialism rests with us.

A union of socialists will mean shortly a union of capitalists into one party, and the hastening of the conflict to be fought out between the friends and enemies of human freedom.

Let no Social Democrat fail in the full performance of is duty at this critical period. The ripening economic and political conditions demand Union. Let us show an example to the world by following the inspiring injunction enunciated by Marx: “Workingmen of all countries, Unite! You have naught to lose but your chains; you have a world to gain.”

Respectfully submitted,

William Butscher,
John C. Chase,
James F. Carey,
G.A. Hoehn,
W.P. Lonergan.

Please read this at the next meeting of your branch. Also show it to all comrades.

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