

DELEGATE'S REPORT.

America at the International Socialist Convention at Zurich.

Development of the Socialist Movement—Past History and Present Progress—Extent of the Movement—The New Trades Union.

Following is the full text of delegate Daniel De Leon's report to the Zurich convention which assembles to-day:

In order to judge and correctly understand the labor, and especially the socialist movement, in the United States of America, the historic and economic development of the country must be kept in view.

Seeing that here the question of political freedom has been solved, at least theoretically, more than a century ago, there is, as a matter of course, no issue upon this subject. In this respect, the American proletariat, when contrasted with that of Europe, has a decided advantage, inasmuch as in Europe great effort must be put forth in the first instance to reach objects that here seem naturally and firmly established. But this is not an unalloyed advantage. It has nursed among our people the belief that our political liberties are endowed with miraculous powers, and are sufficient to cure all the ills of the present economic system, without any change in the system itself—a belief that has almost acquired the force of a deep-rooted superstition, and which makes it a severe uphill work to enlighten the masses of the native proletariat, and to move them to take part in any political

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uprising against the existing system. The difficulties that surround the work of enlightened propaganda are increased by a school system of automatic thinking, that disables the mind from going to the bottom of things, thus preventing it from comprehending the causes of recognized evils, and keeping it from undertaking any systematic changes in public life; this school system prompts our people to stick fast to existing conditions, or at best to resort to spasmodic and planless experiments, which naturally run speedily into the ground, leaving nothing but shattered hopes behind. Finally, the circumstance that the apostles of the Social Revolution were at first mostly men of foreign birth, who, landing here equipped with the learning and experience of older civilizations were not deceived by appearances, but whose foreign birth was used by schemers and corruptionists to pull the wool over the eyes of the American proletariat, and induce it to look upon Socialism as an exotic plant, has contributed not a little to retard the progress of the movement here.

The economic development of the United States, which proceeds with rapid strides, causes, true enough, the steady lowering of the standard of life among the American workingmen, and its reduction to the low level of that of Europe, at times pressing it even below that point, as is the case especially in the leading centers of industry. Nevertheless, this standard of life is, on the whole, superior to the European. As a result of this, a portion of the immigrants to this country who, at home labored under the most wretched conditions, feels here greatly relieved with wages that had already caused grumbling among the natives, and is, consequently, alienated, at least temporarily, from Socialist thought.

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The reckless methods of exploitation and the vandalism peculiar to American capitalism have not yet succeeded in wholly wrecking a country like this that is wonderfully favored by its geographic position, its historic development, and its boundless natural resources. Seeing, furthermore, that owing to the comparative sparseness of our population (65,000,000 inhabitants over an area, that, in Europe is populated by 350,000,000 souls) the country can not yet, speaking scientifically, be considered economically exhausted, there is still, although by no means to the same extent as formerly, the opportunity for the occupation of superfluous labor, and hence, speaking generally, we suffer a milder economic pressure.

If our European comrades will take these to heart, and judge the development of the Socialist and general Labor Movement in this country in the light shed by them, they will be able, not only to understand clearly all the occurrences in the domain of our Labor Movement, but also properly to appreciate the efforts of the American Socialists, the reason for their successes and failures, and the tireless energy and self-sacrificing spirit that animates them.

The reorganization of the American Socialist Labor Party took place on October 12th, 1889, in the city of Chicago. By that time, the tidal wave of the revolutionary Labor Movement, that had both started from and reached its height in the events that crowded into the years 1886 and 1887—in the political uprising of labor that polled in 1886 nearly 70,000 votes in New York City, and in the judicial murder of the so-called Chicago anarchists—had wholly spent itself. The trade union movement, that had risen to gigantic proportions,

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thanks to the tireless efforts of the Socialists, and that, between 1887 and 1885, won victory upon victory, had reached the end of its tether, and commenced to crumble to pieces. Extraordinary favorable economic conditions had favored the trade union movement to such an extent that all the efforts on the part of the Socialists to warn the trade unionists against entrusting their fate to the economic movement exclusively, and to induce them to move in mass on the field of independent political action, proved vain. The old and mischievous tradition that all politics, especially independent labor politics, must be kept away from the economic organization, was still too strong to be easily uprooted. The then large American secret labor organization of the Knights of Labor, the same as the American Federation of Labor, an organization that subsequently rose into existence, remained, under the weak and confused leadership of their heads, inactive and apathetic. So, likewise, did the movement of 1886, in New York City, with which the name of Henry George is connected through the simple accident of his having been the labor nominee for Mayor in that year, remain isolated, notwithstanding the strong Socialist spirit that animated it, and finally melted clean away just so soon as George, from whom the movement, oddly enough, got its name, proved himself, together with his lieutenants, nothing but common and unprincipled political wire-pullers. And so also, did the Chicago tragedy of 1886–1887 have no other immediate consequence than the almost complete disorganization of the Chicago working class.

This disinclination on the part of the American labor organizations to carry their principles into the political field, together with the constant defeats which they be-

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gan to suffer on the economic field at the hands of the capitalist class, who, having recovered from their first fright at the appearance of powerful economic labor organizations, had in turn banded themselves together in still more powerful bodies for defensive and offensive warfare against labor, misled some of our comrades into underrating the usefulness of the economic movement; the public expression of their opinion upon this subject in our party press had the inevitable result of alienating a large number of trade unionists from the party. Accordingly, when the Socialists set up their presidential electors for the State of New York in the presidential campaign of 1888,—i.e., one year before the Chicago Convention—their ticket received only 2,000 votes. At the Chicago Convention a new era was introduced, the fundamental lines for future agitation by the Socialist Labor Party were there laid down, and the unity of the economic and political movement was proclaimed. Since then, one of the leading endeavors of American Socialists has been to promote the New Trade Unionism, which, in aims and methods, is at one with and inseparable from the Socialist Labor Party. As a matter of course, the Socialist Labor Party, together with its New Trade Unionist allies, has, from that time on taken the field independently at every campaign. The excellent results of this policy were not long in coming. Already in 1890, the Socialist vote in the State of New York rose to 13,337; in 1891, to 14,561; and in 1892, when the party, for the first time in the history of the country, set up its own presidential candidate, to 18,147. These figures are still small, but they are growing, and already they exceed by far the presidential vote cast in the whole country by the abolition party—the party that demanded the abolition

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of chattel slavery—, when in 1840, i.e., not quite 25 years before their abolition programme was actually carried out, they set up their first presidential candidate. Besides the New York Socialists, those in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and a few distant localities in the West, also took part in this presidential campaign.

The presidential Electors set up in all these places were, of course, set up only to gather the Socialist vote, but there can be hardly any doubt now that {in} the next Presidential elections, our whole territory, with the possible exception of the South, will be sufficiently organized to join in the Presidential campaign.

These Sections are organized by nationalities. Besides the American and German, there are Flemish, French, Hungarian, Polish, Jewish and Scandinavian Sections. The States in which many Sections are organized have a central State administration. The seat of the chief executive authority of the Party—the National Executive Committee—is determined by the National Conventions, which meet as occasion may require. Since 1889, the seat of the National Executive Committee has been in Brooklyn near New York.

The Party has two official organs; an English one, THE PEOPLE, and a German, *Vorwärts*. Besides these there are other papers, daily and weekly, in the principal cities of the country, published in the English, German, Scandinavian, Hungarian, Jewish, Polish and other languages.

The Party is fully animated by the spirit of international solidarity. It proves this conclusively on every possible occasion{,} as recently on the occasion of the German elections; on the other hand, the progress of the

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Socialist movement abroad, as for instance the triumphal march of our German comrades, the organization of an independent Labor Party in England upon solid Socialist principles, and the steady increase of the Socialist representatives in the French National Legislature and her municipal bodies, have their stimulative effect upon the Party here, and thereby indirectly upon the whole American proletariat. The innumerable defeats which the latter have been recently suffering in the struggles which they conduct upon antiquated lines—from the affair of Homestead to that of Tonawanda—cannot but force them to reflect upon their condition, as is already evidenced by significant articles that are beginning to appear in trade papers and in the organ of the Knights of Labor.

This transformation in the spirit of the American working proletariat has been the result of the logic of events; to promote, hasten and confirm it; to enlighten our toiling classes; to cause them to adapt their tactics to the requirements of the times and to perfect their methods of warfare by the light of the more perfect understanding of the issue which they gain by experience, this is the mission the Socialist Labor Party of America is filling—a mission which it will carry out in the future, as it has done in the past, with tireless energy, ever cheered in its labors by the triumphs of its European comrades.

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of the United States of America.

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