
The Social Democracy.

by Cyrus Field Willard

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Much has been said in relation to the Colonization Commission of the Social Democracy of America, but the most of the published articles in the newspapers and elsewhere have been founded upon misapprehension as to the scope and nature of its work.

The Social Democracy was organized in June last at the convention of the American Railway Union, as described in the last issue of *The New Time*. When it was organized it was proposed to concentrate in some one state all those who believed in the ideas and principles of Socialism. Many persons have criticized the idea of the establishment of a colony, believing that it was to be conducted on a small scale in the old-fashioned, haphazard, and competitive manner. This, however, is a mistake.

The purpose of the Colonization Commission, as defined in the constitution of the Social Democracy, is to select suitable locations for colonies of persons believing in the ideas of the Social Democracy, and to locate them thereon subject to the approval and consent of the National Executive Board of the Social Democracy.

This was the work which by the nature of the organic law of the body must necessarily be confided to the commissioners selected by the board and in the constitution it provided that they must be appointed upon the 1st of August last. On that day Mr. Debs and his associates selected Colonel Richard J. Hinton of Washington, DC; Wilfred P. Borland, of Bay City, Mich.; and the writer of this article. Neither one of the three had any idea that he would be selected for this position and was not in any sense a candidate for such office, and the appointment came as a surprise to every one of the commissioners. In fact, Colonel Hinton did not know that he was appointed, or that his name was even being considered, until he saw an Associated Press dispatch in a Washington paper announcing the fact, whereupon he sent the characteris-

tic message: "I am a soldier and have learned to obey; use me as you can."

The first thing that was necessary to do — for the commissioners were men who had not seen or known each other intimately — was to consider the views of each other as to the manner of procedure in carrying out the ideal laid down in the constitution of the Social Democracy. Much correspondence was necessary and finally the several members of the commission arrived at definite conclusions as to the methods and plans to be followed in the work of colonization.

However, it can be said in a general way that the commissioners very soon determined that it would be impossible as well as unbusinesslike to attempt to carry on their work in the same manner as former cooperative colonies had been conducted. It would be the height of folly for a Socialistic organization to attempt to carry on such colonies along the old competitive lines and thus to become really only an immense joint stock company. Therefore the question of competition and the carrying on of industries along competitive lines was necessarily eliminated.

The work of the commission is based upon the Marxian idea that the control of economic conditions means the control of the political machinery. That this is true has been demonstrated by plutocracy during the last campaign, when they conducted their "factory campaign," and by controlling the factory and the employment of their employees they controlled their votes and forced them to vote as they desired. This was only rendered possible by their control of economic conditions. Realizing this the commission soon saw that it was their duty to as speedily as possible organize industries in community-owned land and thus control economic conditions, which being done, the control of the political machinery would quickly follow. Another advantage in this is that the persons who agitate for Socialism would not be in an

independent position. The organization of industry has been carefully considered and plans wrought out to carry it into effect, and in a short time bodies of land will be secured, and the idle and homeless of the land will be placed in happy and secure homes amid tasteful surroundings, producing wealth for themselves and a comfortable, almost luxurious, living for themselves and families, with the best education included, even to the highest university training for their children free of cost.

Colonel Hinton and the writer have been down in Tennessee looking at lands in the Cumberland plateau, and while there and in Nashville made a proposition to the city of Nashville to build a line of railroad and turn it over to the city as the property of the city.

This land proposition was brought about by the fact that at that time the city of Nashville was suffering from the exactions of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, and was desirous of securing relief. Two companies had made counterproposals, asking the city to give them \$300,000 in bonds to them or to subscribe to the capital stock of their road, which is the same thing, and they would build the road and the city would receive no other advantage than a possible reduction in freight rates. For the same amount, namely \$300,000 in bonds, the writer, in the name of Mr. Debs and the Social Democracy, made a proposition to the city to build the road and turn it over to the city of Nashville in fee simple, as its own property to use and dispose of as it might seem best in the judgment of its citizens. The object in so doing was to employ the unemployed members of our organization, many of whom were railroad men, and also to build up the idea of public-owned railroad. It was proposed to build seventy-five miles of the road, and it was estimated that by eliminating contractors' profits and taking into consideration the character of the country, that the road could easily be built for \$4,000 per mile, or \$300,000 in all. This would employ our members and the money would be paid to them and the city would have its road as the result. It was also proposed to utilize the idle labor of Nashville, which, after its present exposition is over, will have been increased many thou-

sands more than it is at present. It was estimated when I was there that there were 5,000 men out of work at that time, and there will be many more when the exposition is over, if we are to judge by the experience of Chicago. Besides this, the idea was to connect with the railroad owned by the city of Cincinnati, namely the Cincinnati Southern, and it in turn to connect with the state-owned roads of Georgia and North Carolina.

The wisdom of such an action is becoming more apparent, and I can only say now in a guarded way that the commission has been assured of sufficient financial support by those well qualified to speak that will enable the building of a great system of railroads and the operation of the same, if necessary, by the members of the Social Democracy. I wish it were possible at the present time to lay before the readers of *The New Time* all the facts in connection with these plans, but the folly of taking the world into our confidence is so apparent that nothing more need be said on this matter.

The grave responsibility of the work of the Colonization Commission and the immense magnitude of all its details is something that can only be understood after the plans of the commission begin to work out. Suffice to say that at a very short time after the publishing of this magazine there will be in all probability a vast body of land secured, under careful investigation, and that a large number of men and women will be settled thereon to make the beginning of the new Cooperative Commonwealth. The basis of this new Cooperative Commonwealth is, as I have already said, the brotherhood of man, and the idea of brotherhood carries with it toleration and toleration means liberty of thought, liberty of opinion, liberty of action.

Such in brief are the plans of the commission, and it is only possible to give them in a shadowy manner, if we do not desire to see these plans frustrated. At a later date it may be possible to give more fully the plans, purposes, and methods of our work than it is at the present time, and when that time does arrive I shall be only too happy to communicate it to the readers of *The New Time*.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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