

---

# Why I Shall Vote with the Social Democracy

by Walter Thomas Mills

Published in *Appeal to Reason*, whole no. 255 (Oct. 20, 1900), pg. 3.

In 1896 I voted my first and only national Democratic vote. For some years before, I had voted any ticket which at the time seemed to promise most to break up the old party alignment. I had contended that neither party stood for any principle which it could really carry out, without doing one of two things — either it would disrupt and destroy itself, or it would continue to pillage and betray the country, as both parties had done in all the states and the administration of national affairs.

But in 1896, in common with the great body of populist and independent reform voters, I was convinced that at last a real fight was on hand between the new born Democracy and betrayed Republicanism. The money lenders had attempted to double the value of all debts owed to them and so double the burdens of all the debtors and the revolt was so widespread and spirited that for many months, both before and after election, it really seemed as though the usury takers were all going into the Republican camp, thus leaving a free Democracy to gather into its own ranks in the final fight the balance of the whole people and under such a reorganization of political parties the radical Democrats would become and remain the controlling Democrats and it seemed to me that the government under their control might cease to consider dollars only, and attempt to provide for the common welfare of the people themselves. But today the situation is entirely changed. I came into the Democratic Party because certain other parties were going out. I am going out now because they are coming back. Not because I have any personal quarrel with any of them, but because their return indicates more clearly than anything else can possibly do that there remains no chance for the sharp division of the country on radical lines between the old parties.

I am aware that the Democrats attack imperialism, and I believe that imperialism abroad means a military despotism at home; but I know full well that commercialism and not McKinleyism, except as the two are one, is responsible for imperialism. I know that a campaign against imperialism by commercialism, whether under the leadership of McKinley or Bryan, will be helpless to destroy imperialism. I know that imperialism abroad cannot be destroyed nor a military despotism at home be averted, except the breeding pens of both shall be closed out in the overthrow of commercialism as the dominant factor in American life.

This neither Mr. Bryan nor his party, by any utterance whatever, have indicated any intention of doing. So as an anti-imperialist, I must vote for the only party which striking at commercialism, will make imperialism impossible.

The Democratic Party promises to destroy the trusts. But it would be just as reasonable for it to promise to destroy frosts, whirlwinds, and moonshine. I do not want the trusts destroyed, nor any other labor saving device. I want them socialized and all the people made sharers in their benefits. The great trusts are the inevitable outcome of the great machines and of the world market. The partnership was not able to do the business which the great machines made possible, and so made the corporations unnecessary. The corporations underbid each other for the same market, and were obliged to organize larger corporations, or trusts, in order to protect themselves from mutual destruction. As the market has become a worldwide market, the trust is becoming a worldwide organization also. It is the creator and defender of modern imperialism. To submit to it means universal industrial bondage. To destroy it means a return to imperfect means of production, and a plunge into universal bankruptcy as well. But we need neither submit nor destroy. We may socialize. To submit is the Republican program. To destroy is the Democratic program. To socialize and so bring its benefits to every one of us is the program of the Social Democracy. Until that can be done, nothing can be done worth the doing. I shall help the Social Democracy what I can in carrying out its program.

The Democratic Party promises direct legislation; but it has been doing so for some time in several states. And in the campaigns in these states, as in this national campaign, while it declares for direct legislation, it neither advocates it before the people, nor practices it in the government of itself. I do not believe that a party which will not

govern itself by a direct vote of its own members can be trusted to undertake the government of the country in such a way.

The Social Democracy practices the direct vote and will extend it to the affairs of the country as rapidly as it is able to advance itself.

The Democratic Party promises the free coinage of silver, but it explains that it will be powerless to secure it, and the opponents of free coinage are comfortable and satisfied in supporting the ticket. If Mr. Olney can come back to the party because it cannot possibly secure free silver, no one needs to vote of the party for the sake of free silver. Certainly no one who believes as I do, that free silver was an important issue, not for the sake of what the measure itself would secure, but for what its agitation might lead to in the reorganization of parties, can find any reason for doing with Olney, hoping to get what Olney don't want.

I know that the evil of trusts, the coming of imperialism, and the theft of the money conspiracy are all of them but incidents in the program which gives the producer a certain producing power, and then pays a wage which enables him to buy back only a portion of his products and leaves the rest in private hands and makes the foreign market necessary. If Mr. Bryan does not go after the foreign market with a gun, he must get it some other way equally as disastrous for the workers both at home and abroad. I am not greatly interested in the question whether it shall be sought for with a gun or some other way. What I want is such a purchasing power for the workers at home as will make it possible for them to buy out of the market all that their labor puts there. Then there will be no chasing after a foreign market either with or without a gun. There will be no robber so foolish as to put in his time trying to subjugate people that he cannot rob. McKinley justifies subjugation. Mr. Bryan attacks subjugation. I want to stop the robbery at home, which provokes the subjugation abroad. Neither Mr. McKinley nor Mr. Bryan will consent to that program and neither can have my vote.

There is just one thing which will carry out that program, and that is to put into one party those who produce more than they get; and into another, those who get more than they produce. The overwhelming majority will be with the surplus producer. The non-producing surplus getter, trying to find someone to buy the goods he cannot use, will be out of power, but he need not be out of a job. The producers, once in power, will proceed to place the means of production within the reach of all, including the sometime non-producer

with the rest. The class struggle will be over, the useless class will have joined the ranks of the useful. The useful class will become universal, and humanity at last will be conscious of itself.

The practical question for a dozen years has been to bring about this division. I am persuaded that a vote for Mr. Bryan or Mr. McKinley will in no way hasten its coming. A million votes for the Social Democracy will compel the reorganization, and that not by converting either of the old parties, but by compelling their union against the new party, and the speedy overthrow of both.

If we can get that number now, victory is near. If we cannot then all the more reason for beginning at once, for it will take a million votes in the new party to compel the reorganization by which imperialism will die, the trusts cease from troubling, the money conspiracy lose its power to enslave, and government come to be administered by direct authority of the people themselves. I want to be one of the million, and shall, therefore, vote for Debs and Harriman, the candidates of the Social Democracy.

*Walter Thomas Mills.*

Berrien College, Berrien Springs, Mich.

*Edited by Tim Davenport*

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · July 2013 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.