

The Fight for Freedom: Campaign Speech at Pabst Park, Milwaukee (July 21, 1912)

Friends, fellow socialists, and fellow workers:—

The existing order of things is breaking down. The great forces underlying society are steadily at work. The old order has had its day and all the signs point to an impending change. Society is at once being destroyed and recreated.

The struggle in which we are engaged today is a struggle of economic classes. The supremacy is now held by the capitalist class, who are combined in trusts and control the powers of government. The middle class is struggling desperately to hold its ground against the inroads of its trustified and triumphant competitors.

This war between the great capitalists who are organized in trusts and fortified by the powers of government and the smaller capitalists who constitute the middle class, is one of extermination. The fittest, that is to say the most powerful, will survive. This war gives rise to a variety of issues of which the tariff is the principal one, and these issues are defined in the platforms of the Republican and Democratic parties.

With this war between capitalists for supremacy in their own class and the issues arising from it, the working class have nothing to do, and if they are foolish enough to allow themselves to be drawn into these battles of their masters, as they have so often done in the past, they must continue to suffer the consequences of their folly.

Let us clearly recognize the forces that are undermining both of the old capitalist parties, creating a new issue, and driving the working class into a party of their own to do battle with their oppressors in the struggle for existence.

Parties but express in political terms the economic interests of those who compose them. This is the rule. The Republican Party represents the capitalist class, the Democratic Party the middle class and the Socialist Party the working class.

There is no fundamental difference between the Republican and Democratic parties. Their principles are identical. They are both capitalist parties and both stand for the capitalist system, and such differences as there are between them involve no principle but are the outgrowth of the conflicting interests of large and small capitalists.

The Republican and Democratic parties are alike threatened with destruction. Their day of usefulness is past and they among them who see the handwriting on the wall and call themselves “Progressives” and “Insurgents,” are struggling in vain to adjust these old parties to the new conditions.

Broadly speaking, there are but two economic classes and the ultimate struggle will narrow down to two political parties. To the extent that the workers unite in their own party, the Socialist Party, the capitalists, large and small, are driven into one and the same party. This has happened already in a number of local instances, notably in the City of Milwaukee. Here there is no longer a Republican or Democratic party. These have merged in the same party and it is a capitalist party, by whatever name it may be known.

Temporarily this united capitalist party, composed of the two old ones, may stem the tide of Socialist advance, but nothing more clearly reveals the capitalist class character of the Republican and Democratic parties to their own undoing and the undoing of the capitalist system they represent.

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The great capitalists are all conservatives “standpatters;” they have a stranglehold upon the situation with no intention of relaxing their grip. Taft and Roosevelt are their candidates. It may be objected that Roosevelt is a “progressive.” That is sheer buncombe. Roosevelt was president almost eight years and his record is known. When he was in office and had the power, he did none of the things, nor attempted to do any of the things he is now talking about so wildly. On the contrary, a more servile functionary to the trusts than Theodore Roosevelt never sat in the presidential chair.

Senator LaFollette now makes substantially this same charge against Roosevelt, but by some strange oversight the senator did not discover that Roosevelt’s presidential record was a trust record until after Roosevelt threw him down in the “progressive” scramble for the Republican nomination.

When Senator LaFollette supposed he had Roosevelt’s backing, he pronounced him “the greatest man in the world” and it was only after he fell victim to Roosevelt’s duplicity that he made the discovery that Roosevelt had always been the tool of the trusts and the enemy of the people.

There is one infallible test that fixes the status of a political party and its candidates. Who finances them?

With this test applied to Theodore Roosevelt we have no trouble in locating him. He is above all “a practical man.” He was practical in allowing the steel trust to raid the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company; he was practical when he legalized the notorious “Alton Steal;” he was practical when he had Harriman raise \$240,000 for his campaign fund, and he is practical now in having the steel trust and the harvester trust, who made an anteroom of the White House when he was president, pour out their slush funds by millions to put him back in the White House and keep him there.

Taft and Roosevelt, and the Republican Party of which they are the candidates, are all financed by the trusts, and is it necessary to add that the trusts also consist of practical men and that they do not finance a candidate or a party they do not control?

Is the man not foolish, to the verge of being feeble-minded, who imagines that great trust magnates, such as Perkins, McCormick, and Munsey, are flooding the country with Roosevelt money because he is the champion of progressive principles and the friend of the common people?

The truth is that if the Bull Moose candidate dared to permit an itemized publication of his campaign contributions in his present mad and disgraceful pursuit of the presidency, as he has been so often challenged to do by Senator LaFollette, it would paralyze him and scandalize the nation.

Roosevelt must stand upon the record he made when he was president and had the power, and not upon his empty promises as a ranting demagogue and a vote-seeking politician.

For the very reason that the trusts are pouring out their millions to literally buy his nomination and election and force him into the White House for a third term, and if possible for life, the people should rise in their might and repudiate him as they never have repudiated a recreant official who betrayed them.

So much for the Republican Party, led by Lincoln half a century ago as the party of the people in the struggle for the overthrow of chattel slavery, and now being scuttled by Taft and Roosevelt in base servility to the plutocracy.

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The Democratic Party, like its Republican ally, is a capitalist party, the only difference being that it represents the minor divisions of the capitalist class. It is true that there are some plutocrats and trust magnates in

the Democratic Party, but as a rule it is composed of the smaller capitalists who have been worsted by the larger ones and are now demanding that the trusts be destroyed and, in effect, that the laws of industrial evolution be suspended.

The Democratic Party, like the Republican Party, is financed by the capitalist class. Belmont, Ryan, Roger Sullivan, Taggart, and Hinky Dink are liberal contributors to its fund. The Tammany organization in New York, notorious for its corruption and for its subserviency to the powers that rule in capitalist society, is one of the controlling factors in the Democratic Party.

Woodrow Wilson is the candidate of the Democratic Party for president. He was seized upon as a "progressive;" as a man who would appeal to the common people, but he never could have been nominated without the votes controlled by Tammany and the "predatory interests" so fiercely denounced in the convention by William Jennings Bryan.

It is true that Woodrow Wilson was not the first choice of Belmont, Ryan, Murphy, and the Tammany corruptionists, but he was nevertheless satisfactory to them or they would not have agreed to his nomination, and since the convention it is quite apparent that Wilson has a working agreement and a perfect understanding with the predatory interests which Bryan sought to scourge from the convention.

In his speech before the delegates denouncing Ryan, Belmont, and Murphy, Bryan solemnly declared that no candidate receiving their votes and the votes of Murphy's "ninety wax figures" could have his support. Woodrow Wilson received these votes and without these and other votes controlled by "the interests" he could not have been nominated, and if Bryan now supports him he simply stultifies himself before the American people.

Mr. Wilson is no more the candidate of the working class than is Mr. Taft or Mr. Roosevelt. Neither one of them has ever been identified with the working class, has ever associated with the working class, except when their votes were wanted, or would dare to avow himself the candidate of the working class.

When the recent strikes occurred at Perth Amboy and other industrial centers in New Jersey, Governor Woodrow Wilson ordered the militia out to shoot down the strikers just as Governor Theodore Roosevelt ordered out the soldiers to murder the strikers at Croton Dam, New York, for demanding the enforcement of the state laws against the contractors.

Both the Republican and Democratic parties reek with corruption in their servility to the capitalist class, and both are torn with strife in their mad scramble for the spoils of office.

The Democratic Party has had little excuse for existence since the Civil War, and its utter impotency to deal with present conditions was made glaringly manifest during its brief lease of power under the Cleveland administration. Should this party succeed to national power once more, seething as it is with conflicting elements which are held together by the prospect of official spoils, its career as a national party would be brought to an early close by self-destruction.

The Republican convention at Chicago and the Democratic convention at Baltimore were composed of professional politicians, officeholders, office-seekers, capitalists, retainers, and swarms of parasites and mercenaries of all descriptions.

There were no workingmen in either convention. They were not fit to be there. All they are fit for is to march in the mud, yell themselves hoarse, and ratify the choice of their masters on election day.

The working class was not represented in the Republican convention at Chicago or the Democratic convention at Baltimore. Those were the political conventions of the capitalist class and the few flattering platform phrases in reference to labor were incorporated for the sole purpose of catching the votes of the working class.

Let the American workers remember that they are not fit to sit as delegates in a Republican or Democratic national convention ; that they are not fit to write a Republican or Democratic national platform; that all they are fit for is to elect the candidates of their masters to office so that when they go out on strike against starvation they may be shot dead in their tracks as the reward of their servility to their masters and their treason to themselves.

The vital issue before the country and the world is not touched, nor even mentioned in the Republican or Democratic platforms. Wage-slavery under capitalism, the legalized robbery of the workers of what is produced by their labor, is the fundamental crime against modern humanity, but there is no room for the mention of this vital fact, this living issue in the platforms of the Republican and Democratic parties. They continue to babble about the tariff and other inconsequential matters to obscure the real issue and wheedle the workers into voting them into power once more.

These parties have been in power all these years, why have they not settled the tariff and the currency and such other matters as make up their platform pledges?

While the Republican convention was in session at Chicago and while the Democratic convention was in session at Baltimore, the Republican and Democratic congress was also in session at Washington. These

parties already have the power to make good their promises, then why do they not exercise that power to redeem their pledges and afford relief to the people?

In other words, why do not the Republican and Democratic parties perform at Washington instead of promising at Chicago and Baltimore? How many more years of power do they require to demonstrate that they are the parties of the capitalist class and that they never intend to legislate in the interest of the working class, or provide relief for the suffering people.

The Republican and Democratic platforms are filled with empty platitudes and meaningless phrases, but they are discreetly silent about the millions of unemployed, about the starvation wages of factory slaves, about the women and children who are crushed, debased and slowly tortured to death by the moloch of capitalism, about the white slave traffic, about the bitter poverty of the masses and their hopeless future, and about every other vital question which is worthy of an instant's consideration by any intelligent human being.

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In contrast with these impotent, corrupt and senile capitalist parties, without principles and without ideals, stands the virile young working class party, the international socialist party of the world. The convention which nominated its candidates and wrote its platform at Indianapolis was a working class convention.

The Socialist Party is the only party which honestly represents the working class in this campaign and the only party that has a moral right to appeal to the allegiance and support of the work era and producers of the nation. I am not asking you to give your votes to this party but only that you read its platform, study its program, and satisfy yourselves as to what its principles are, what it stands for, and what it expects to accomplish.

The Socialist Party being the political expression of the rising working class stands for the absolute overthrow of the existing capitalist system and for the reorganization of society into an industrial and social democracy

This will mean an end to the private ownership of the means of life ; it will mean an end to wage-slavery; it will mean an end to the army of the unemployed; it will mean an end to the poverty of the masses, the prostitution of womanhood, and the murder of childhood.

It will mean the beginning of a new era of civilization; the dawn of a happier day for the children of men. It will mean that this earth is for those who inhabit it and wealth for those who produce it. It will mean society organized upon a cooperative basis, collectively owning the sources of wealth and the means of production, and producing wealth to satisfy human wants and not to gorge a privileged few. It will mean that there shall be work for the workers and that all shall be workers, and it will also mean that there shall be leisure for the workers and that all shall enjoy it. It will mean that women shall be the comrades and equals of men, sharing with them on equal terms the opportunities as well as the responsibilities, the benefits as well as the burdens of civilized life.

The Socialist Party, the first and only international party, is rising grandly to power all around the world. In every land beneath the sun it is the party of the dispossessed, the impoverished and the heavy-laden.

It is the twentieth century party of human emancipation.

It stands for a worldwide democracy, for the freedom of every man, woman and child, and for the civilization of all mankind.

The Socialist Party buys no votes. It scorns to traffic in ignorance. It realizes that education, knowledge and the powers these confer are the only means of achieving a decided and permanent victory for the people.

The campaign of the Socialist party is a clean campaign; it is essentially educational; an appeal to intelligence, to manliness, to womanliness, and to all things of good report.

The workers are opening their eyes at last. They are beginning to see the light. They are taking heart of hope because they are becoming conscious of their power.

They are rallying to the standard of the Socialist Party because they know that this is their party and that here they are master, and here they sit at their own political hearthstone and fireside.

No longer can the workers be pitted against each other in capitalist parties by designing politicians to their mutual undoing. They have made the discovery that they have brains as well as hands, that they can think as well as work, and that they do not need politicians to advise them how to vote, nor masters to rob them of the fruits of their labor.

Slowly but surely there is being established the economic and political unity and solidarity of the workers of the world. The Socialist Party is the political expression of that unity and solidarity.

I appeal to the workers assembled here today in the name of the Socialist Party. I appeal to you as one of you to unite and make common cause in this great struggle.

To the extent that you have made progress, to the extent that you have developed power, and to the extent that you have achieved victory, to that extent you are indebted to your own class-conscious efforts and your own industrial and political organization. To the extent that you lack power, to the extent that you are defeated and kept in bondage, to that extent you lack in economic and political solidarity.

Rightly organized and soundly disciplined on both the economic and political fields, the working class can prevail against the world.

The economic organization and the political party of the working class must both be revolutionary and they must work together hand in hand. Industrial unionism means industrial solidarity, but craft unionism means division and disaster. The printing trades pitted against each other in Chicago in their struggle with the newspaper trust furnish a fatal illustration of the weakness and treachery of craft division in the present industrial conflict.

The workers of Milwaukee have to an exceptional extent overcome the obstacles to unity and have worked together with signal success on both the economic and political fields. I appeal to them in the name of the future to get closer and closer together in the bonds of economic and political solidarity. If they do this their complete and final victory is assured.

The Socialist Party of Milwaukee has marched steadily to the front since it first began its career. Its latest defeat was its greatest victory. It forced the Republicans and Democrats to unmask and to fly into each other's arms. There is no Republican or Democratic party in Milwaukee. They are dead, and in the coming election their remains, masquerading as a party of the people, will be buried by the Socialist Party.

The Socialists of Milwaukee will always have the distinction of having elected the first representative of the working class to the Congress of the United States. Victor L. Berger has made good at Washington. For the first time since he is a member the voice of labor has been distinctly heard on the floors of congress, and in every emergency when the working class needed a champion at the seat of power, they found him ready and eager to espouse their cause and defend their interests.

It was to defeat Berger's re-election that the Republicans and Democrats in Milwaukee combined, just as they did to defeat Emil Seidel for mayor and drive the Socialist administration from power.

But Berger is making a record at Washington and the Socialist administration made a record in Milwaukee that will stand the test of time, and if the workers now rally their forces in support of Berger, he will be triumphantly re-elected against the combined opposition of the old par-

ties, and in the next municipal election the City of Milwaukee will be permanently restored to a Socialist administration.

Comrades, you are face to face with the greatest struggle you have ever had since the Socialist Party was organized. You are now to be tested in every fiber as to your fitness to hold the ground you have gained and to press on to greater victories. May you be permeated to the core with the spirit of the socialist movement and enter the fray resolved that victory shall be inscribed upon your banners.

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I must not fail in the presence of all these workers to speak of Joseph Ettor and Arturo Giovannitti, the leaders of the Lawrence strike, who are in prison and soon to be tried upon the charge of murder, of which they are as innocent as if they had never been born.

This infamous charge has been trumped up against them by the defeated mill owners for no other reason than that they stood up bravely and fought successfully against great odds, the battles of the wage-slaves of the mills. Unless the workers unite in support of these two leaders they may be sent to the electric chair. Should we suffer these brave comrades to fall victims to such a monstrous crime, it would be a foul and indelible blot upon the whole labor movement. Let us arouse the workers of the nation in their behalf and prove to them when their trial takes place that we are as true to them as they were to the wage-slaves in the industrial battle at Lawrence.

Comrades, this is our year! Let us rise to our full stature, summon our united powers, and strike a blow for freedom that will be felt around the world!

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