
“In the West Discontent is Widespread” :
Interview with the *Manchester Daily Mirror*
(November 1, 1898)

I come to Manchester this morning on my way from Somersworth [New Hampshire] by a rather circuitous route to Amesbury, Massachusetts, for the sole and express purpose of grasping the hand of my warm friend and co-laborer in the cause of socialism, your townsman, Mr. Gordon.¹ Last evening I spoke for two hours and a half in Somersworth to an audience which included persons of all degrees of life and who appeared to be deeply absorbed in the arguments of the speaker who addressed them. It was my only engagement in your state during the present political campaign, and it was made at the earnest request of the New Hampshire State Committee by cancelling a date in Massachusetts, where I was booked for the entire campaign. I have been in the East only since the 22nd [of October] and so have only a superficial knowledge of the local political situation, which, however, to me, so far as I can discern, trends most favorably towards the Social Democratic Party.

So far as this campaign goes there is no interest in the result from the standpoint of socialism only, as it indicates the growing strength of our party. It matters little which of the old parties succeed, because both are capitalistic parties and both stand for practically the same principles. There is no relief for the people from either party so long as the present system exists. I mean the private ownership of property and the operation of capital and industry for private profit. It is of course difficult to forecast the vote of our party even approximately, as the coming election is the first in which it has been a factor, but here in the East we expect a good showing, particularly in Massachusetts and in New York. In Massachusetts we will I think poll 2,000 votes. We shall look for our biggest votes at first in the manufacturing cities — the industrial conditions have become so bad that many are out of employment or working for such small wages that the issues at hand are brought very forcibly to their minds.

In the West discontent is widespread. I see by the morning papers that strikes are extending. They prevail both in Illinois and Pennsylvania. In my own state of Indiana I see that a new strike is on and I fear that within

a week there may be as bloody a riot as that which occurred last month.² Wages are so low that miners, their women and children are compelled to go without sufficient food. These are not the conditions which breed socialism. I do not blame the capitalists for the existing conditions. Competition compels them to lower wages and there is no way to correct the evil until the collective ownership of all industrial and commercial capital is brought about by legislative action.

You then believe in a trust, Mr. Debs?

I do; a general trust, of which all shall be shareholders and beneficiaries.

For our own party or at least its principles the future seems most promising. People are beginning to realize that any possible improvement under existing political rule will be temporary and spasmodic. Labor constitutes the bulk of the population and therefore the bulk of the consumption. If through lack of work or lowness of wages there shall be a limited demand for products, then stagnation results, which at last culminates in failures, which are not, I read, strangers to your state, and at last panic. Every student of political economy understands that the competitive system in manufacture and transportation is destructive and wasteful.

The interview closed with Mr. Debs calling the reporter's attention to the strong endorsement some of his radical points had received in the editorial columns of the Springfield Republican during his visit to that town and hazarded the prediction that he should live to see F.G.R. Gordon Governor of New Hampshire.

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¹ This interview was conducted on a streetcar traveling to West Manchester, with Debs in the company of F.G.R. Gordon, a founding member of the Social Democratic Party at the Chicago convention.

² Shots were exchanged between striking coal miners and company-armed African-American strikebreakers imported from Alabama and the sheriff's deputies protecting them at Pana, Illinois on Sept. 28, 1898. One person was killed and several others wounded in the exchange, which prompted Governor John Riley Tanner (1844-1901) to call out the state militia to prevent a further escalation of violence. The racially-charged situation spread to

Washington Depot, Indiana, on the night of Oct. 2, when masked men rounded up 50 black strikebreakers from their homes and deported them from town at gunpoint.