

## Eva McDonald-Valesh, " The Strength and Weakness of People's Movement" (1892)

The emergence of the People's party generated great interest within social and political reform circles across the country. The following article in the Boston-based *Arena* magazine focused on the need for the agrarian-based organization to make common cause with the urban working class. Its insights and warnings proved to be quite astute.

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The rapid growth and popularity of the political movement known as the People's Party invest it with an importance that leads the general public to scan it closely for those indices which mark all truly great industrial movements. If it has not certain characteristics, it may excite those momentary outbursts of discontent emanating from a single class, only to die of inanition or be buried under a storm of well-directed ridicule.

A political movement, to be an instrument of real industrial progress, ought to be general enough in its scope to embrace all classes of workers whose conditions are affected by the same general causes. Today there is the agricultural population, on one hand, producing more than enough to feed the world; on the other, the city workmen; producing, in their many occupations, more than enough to clothe and supply all other civilized needs of the race. The two classes are quite distinct, so far as environment is concerned; yet consuming each other's products and supplying both necessities and luxuries to all other classes, there is between them a bond of common interest, stronger than either realizes.

Both classes, while conceding the immeasurable superiority of their present condition over that of their ancestors of any time, still feel that many differences are yet to be adjusted before industry attains the dignity warranted by the achievements and progress of the nineteenth century. Each division of the industrial body has various grades of expressed discontent with the present and hope for the future. . . .

The two great bodies of organized discontent<sup>1</sup> are working independently and by different methods on the same problem—the distribution of wealth. In the past, having observed so little their relations to each other, or the local conditions seeming to form a barrier between them, they now appear to have but faint sympathy or community of interest.

It is of vast significance that the two organizations have the same reason for existing, and are trying to solve the same problem. Some combination of circumstances must soon reveal its community of purpose, and from that moment the workers of the farm and the factory will be bound by that strongest of ties, self-interest. The industrial world is becoming convinced that the People's Party will be this agent.

The recent conference at St. Louis showed that a surprisingly large number of reform elements already agree on the general principles, leaving details to the future. . . . Still, to those familiar with industrial organization in cities, this conference revealed that the mass of city workers was unrepresented. Did this silence mean antagonism, even indifference, it might prove fatal to the

success of the new movement. For if the People's Party, in its ultimate development, only represents a class, no matter how large that class, its work must necessarily partake of a sectional character, and from a lack of breadth and depth, fail to accomplish those great reforms which mark epochs of civilization. . . .

A promising field of work open to view, although it still needs cultivation. Workingmen understand the value of the right of suffrage and its importance in securing industrial reform. They cannot fail to be keenly dissatisfied with the prospect held out by existing parties.<sup>2</sup> The agricultural classes equally need just the elements that the cities could contribute. Each organization would be the gainer from close contact and interchange of views with the other.

There is still an element wanting to insure harmonious action. It is a peculiarity of the People's movement that it has not yet produced a leader. It has teachers—earnest, thoughtful, and progressive. It has statesmen of good parts. But a leader, in the true sense, is yet wanting. . . . A true leader can unite them in so irresistible a force that by a peaceful revolution of ballots, great abuses will be swept away and replaced by more equitable conditions inuring to the benefit of all society.

Nor should such a coalition of the forces of farm and factory be feared by the most conservative. The *world will advance*, in spite of the remonstrances from those who are perfectly satisfied with the existing order. Reforms, working in peaceful and legitimate channels, are a sure guarantee against the violence which, in preceding eras, has so often accompanied popular movements.

1. Farmers and laborers.
2. I. e., national political parties.

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[From Eva McDonald-Valesh, "The Strength and Weakness of the People's Movement," *Arena* 5 (May 1892):726-31.]