

MANIFESTO OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN (1905)

FELLOW MEMBERS OF THE WORKING-CLASS,

In bringing to your notice the aims and methods of The Socialist Party of Great Britain, and in order that the reason for the existence of the Party may be clearly understood, it will be necessary to give a short survey of the position of our class under existing society, and a sketch of the historical development which has resulted in present conditions.

To-day the worker goes into the labour market as an article of merchandise, and his wages, that is, his price, is determined like that of any other article of merchandise, by the cost of production (*i.e.* the social labour necessary), and this in the case of the worker is represented by the cost of subsistence. The price of labour power fluctuates by the operation of supply and demand, but those variations cancel one another, so that on the average the worker gets but a sufficiency to enable him to exist and reproduce his kind. There are generally more workers in the market than are actually required by the employers, and this fact serves to keep wages from rising for any length of time above the cost of subsistence. Moreover, machinery and scientific applications are ever tending to render labourers superfluous, with a consequent overstocking of the labour market, decrease of wages, and an increase in the number of the unemployed. Under these conditions poverty is necessarily the lot of the working-class, and it is admitted by even the apologists of the present system, that in Great Britain today one-third of the population is on or below the poverty line. Herded together in slums, half starved and ill educated, the workers eke out a miserable existence, in many cases their whole life history being but the chronicle of a longer or shorter journey to the workhouse. The unhealthy conditions under which the workers live are the fruitful source of the diseases to which they are subject, and alone explain the physical deterioration which is working havoc with our class. The evils with which we are confronted are not temporary or accidental, but are the necessary outcome of the system of society itself. As long as that system remains its results will become more and more pronounced, and its effects increasingly felt by the working-class. Suffering from want and haunted by fear of want, life is a burden to the working-class today.

This was not always so. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries handicraft was the prevailing mode of production, and there was no machinery worth mentioning. Hence we wish to emphasise the fact that the handicraftsman was in possession of his tools, and usually of the raw material, and the natural consequence was that he generally owned the product. He was also entitled to his share of the common land. The craftsman, therefore, was not obliged to sell his labour-power continuously, and he worked when and how he pleased. The handicraftsman, accordingly, was in a favourable social position. With the growing trade he was enabled to command a high price, so much so that at the end of the fifteenth century the handicraftsman could earn enough in ten weeks to provision himself for twelve months, while the labourer could support himself for a whole year by what he earned in fourteen weeks. The workers also had abundant leisure and recreation, owing to the numerous holidays,

feasts, and fairs, and in their travels could always obtain food and a night's lodging free at any of the monasteries or convents.

The discovery of America and the new way to the East, round the Cape of Good Hope, increased commerce and brought in its train a greater demand for labourers. Then began the systematic enclosure of the common land on the pretext of improving agriculture, but in reality for the purpose of driving off the people so that they might be available as wage-workers. The land was enclosed, the old craft privileges curtailed, and advantage taken of the Reformation to abolish the holidays. Driven off the land, the workers found the basis of their freedom gone and were forced into the handicraft factories which were brought into existence about this time by the merchants, the forerunners of the modern capitalist-class. In these factories, although the work was still mainly handicraft, the division of labour was, because of its economy pushed forward more rapidly than before. Then came the introduction of machinery. Hargreaves invented the spinning jenny, Arkwright the water frame, Crompton combined both and produced the mule, and Cartwright brought out the power loom. Soon Watt's application of steam as a motive force for machinery revolutionised production, and enabled the capitalists to forsake hill and dale and bring the workers together in industrial centres, where the raw material, coal and iron were convenient. Hence have arisen the factory towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire.

From that day onwards there has been a ceaseless application of large and small inventions to machinery, increasing its power, speed, and productivity. The worker, however, lost his skill as craftsman, and now became a machine minder. Owing to machinery doing away with the need for great physical strength, women and children were next harnessed to the car of Commerce, so that the worker was brought face to face with two sets of competitors: the machines on the one hand, and his wife and child on the other. We see the result to-day, in that both here and more particularly in America there are "he towns" and "she towns," while even where men and women are employed the home life is destroyed, and the woman works during the day and the man at night. By a wise dispensation of capitalist Providence the workman sees his wife regularly each day – at the factory gate.

Here we have the worker entirely dispossessed of the means of getting a living except by selling himself as an article of merchandise to the owners of the means of living. *This is wage-slavery.* Society is to-day divided into two classes with opposing interests, one class owning the means of life and the other nothing but their power to work. Never in the history of society was the working-class so free from all trace of property as today. Of the wealth produced in this country, roughly £1,750,000,000 per annum, the workers' share is, according to capitalist authorities, less than £500,000,000, so that the working-class gets less than a third of the wealth produced. Wealth is natural material converted by labour-power to man's use, and as such is consequently produced by the working-class alone; and while the major portion of the wealth is appropriated by the capitalist-class, this class numbers some 5,000,000, or about an eighth of the entire population. Over two-thirds of the wealth is therefore retained by an eighth of the population. It is, indeed, computed by Carroll D. Wright, Commissioner of Labour to the United States Government, that the worker in that country gets only 12½ cents out of each dollar's worth of wealth he produces, that is an eighth of his product.

To-day production is social, but ownership and distribution individual. Production is co-operative and no man can claim that he produces a single article, for he has only carried out one operation of a whole series necessary to the final product.

But in the sphere of distribution, while the capitalists are a solid class against the workers as regards the ownership of the wealth produced by the working-class, they, the capitalists, are antagonistic to one another in the endeavour to get the larger share of the markets. Fourier pointed out at the beginning of the last century that this competition could only end in monopoly, and we see concentration and trustification going on in every branch of industry, more notably in the United States, the most advanced of capitalist countries. The present system contains within itself the germs of its own destruction. With increasing powers of production the worker's share, and therefore his purchasing power, grows less, and this leaves an ever increasing mass of wealth for the capitalists to endeavour to consume, resulting in a constant glutting of the markets. The latter become more and more restricted as each country in its turn produces for itself and then joins the scramble for the markets of the world. By this process the small manufacturer and trader are being eliminated and wealth is concentrated in ever fewer hands. National and international trusts become the order of the day, and capitalism enters upon its final phase. The anomaly of starvation in the midst of plenty, a distinctive feature of capitalist society, becomes more and more apparent to the workers, and the capitalists themselves, overpowered by the very forces of production they have perfected but are no longer able to control, suffocated by the enormous mass of wealth they can no longer consume, and faced by the ever-increasing army of the unemployed, will be compelled to give way to the economic and human forces around them.

Production and distribution are becoming more and more out of harmony, and it is a sociological as well as a biological fact that an organism living out of harmony with its surroundings must readapt itself in order to continue in existence. To bring about this re-adaptation it is necessary to make ownership and distribution harmonise with production, that is, to make them social. This can be done only by the overthrow of capitalism and – *The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth, by and in the interest of the whole community.* THAT IS SOCIALISM. In all human actions material interests rule, and therefore the dominant class can only be concerned in upholding wage slavery and increasing their power over the workers. The working-class, on the other hand, are driven by their material interest to struggle for the possession of the means of living. To the working-class history has committed the mission of transforming society from Capitalism to Socialism.

A glance over past history shows that every class that emancipated itself had to commence with the capture of the political machinery, that is, with the power of government. It is, therefore, necessary for the workers to organise a political party having for its object the capture of political power. This political party of the workers can only be a Socialist party, because Socialism alone is based on the facts of working-class existence. Socialism alone can free the worker from the necessity of selling himself for the profit of a master. Socialism alone will strip him of his merchandise character and allow him to become a full social being. Then, with the removal of the many artificial restrictions to production, those producing wealth,

owning and controlling it for their own well-being, will be interested in the further development of the productive powers; for every new conquest in the domain of science, every fresh extension of the dominion of Man over nature, will be hailed by all as a means of shortening the time necessary for the production of our material requirements, and increasing the leisure essential to the adequate development of our physical and mental faculties.

In this country there are many organisations claiming to fulfil the requirements of a workers' party. There is, for instance, the Social-Democratic Federation, established over twenty years ago by middle-class men. In most cases these men never had a real grip of the working-class position, and as a consequence middle-class ideas have usually dominated the S.D.F. Mr. H.M. Hyndman, "the father of British Social-Democracy," does not accept the statement of Marx that the emancipation of the working-class must be the work of the working-class itself, but contends that the workers will be aided and guided (particularly by the latter) by men from the class above. Thus having no sound basis of action the political party of the S.D.F. has reflected practically all phases of tactics, ranging from the revolutionary position to support of betrayers of the working-class like Mr. John Burns. Never having sufficient faith in the class it was supposed to represent, the S.D.F. went from the support of one section of the capitalist party to the other. Although continually mouthing the class war, its members at one time talked of voting Tory to smash the Liberal Party, and at another time of voting Liberal to smash the Tories, as during the South African war, when they supported, among others, Mr. John Burns, Liberal candidate for Battersea, Mr Henry Labouchere, Liberal Candidate for Northampton, and Mr. Phillip Stanhope, Liberal candidate for Burnley. Their utter lack of Socialist discipline in allowing members to support capitalist candidates and capitalist parties was shown in the case of the support by Mr. H. Quelch of five Liberal-Labour candidates for the London County Council, viz, Messrs. Ben Cooper, G. Dew, H. Gosling, J. Gregory, and W. Steadman, when these men were nominated at a meeting of the London Trades Council, of which council Mr. Quelch has since been appointed chairman. The Social-Democratic Editor of *Justice* also supported the candidature at North West Ham of Mr. J. J. Terrett, a thrice-expelled member of the S.D.F. Mr. Quelch likewise supported Mr. Steadman, Liberal Candidate for Central Finsbury. Mr. Will Thorne (a Parliamentary candidate of the S.D.F.), supported Mr. Percy Alden, Liberal candidate for Tottenham, in spite of the determined opposition of the local branch of the S.D.F. Mr Thorne also supported Mr Will Crooks, the Liberal candidate for Woolwich. Mr. J. F. Green (Treasurer of the S.D.F.), with the sanction of his Executive Council, supported Mr. D. Naoroji, Liberal candidate for North Lambeth. Mr. J. Hunter Watts (member of the Executive Council of the S.D.F.) supported Mr. Masterman, Liberal candidate for Dulwich. The Executive Council of the S.D.F. supported Mr. J. Hill, Liberal-Labour candidate for Govan. Five years ago Mr. Hyndman, in withdrawing from the Executive Council of the S.D.F, stated that the majority of that organisation were wholly destitute of political aptitude, and that very much was to be desired in respect of their understanding of the basic principles of Socialism, and the statement is still true.

In face of these facts the Social-Democratic Federation cannot correctly claim to be a genuine workers' party. The Fabian Society also poses as a Socialist organisation, for we are told that this society "consists of Socialists." It is, indeed, composed of "middle class" men, who naturally deny the class struggle, profess to believe in

permeating the capitalist-class with Socialism and hold that the tendency of society is towards government by the expert. Fabianism, therefore, tends towards the rule of bureaucrats. The Fabians are the cult of the civil service, and are Socialist neither in name nor in fact. Whenever they take part in elections they run as Progressives (Liberals) – or as anything but Socialists. This is fortunate for Socialism. Fabianism, that peculiarly British product, is merely a manifestation of the intellectual bankruptcy of the capitalist-class, and can be left to its own devices.

The Independent Labour Party, another party claiming to be of the workers, was formed on the theory that the S.D.F. was not practical. The I.L.P. was going to preach Socialism in such a way as to bring it into actual practice. In its early days there was a big struggle over what was known as the “fourth clause,” which practically forbade alliances in the political field and would have put the I.L.P. in such a position that it could not join hands with any other party. For some years there was a battle over this point, and the “fourth clause” was finally defeated. Soon after it came into existence the I.L.P. spent about £5,000 in election expenses, and it is a significant fact that to this day no explanation has been given as to where this money came from. The members of the I.L.P. were also to give special attention to the trade unions, which they did by sinking the principles of Socialism for the sake of the financial and political support of the unions. Among their early doings was the Bradford affair. There they were running a Mr. F. W. Jowett for the local council, and made a bargain with the Liberals for the exchange of support. Hence Mr. R. Roberts, a member of the I.L.P., supported a Liberal candidate in the Tong Ward in opposition to Mr. C. A. Glyde, the I.L.P. candidate; and one of the reasons why the I.L.P. opposed Mr. Quelch at Dewsbury was that otherwise they would have lost the support of the Liberals for Mr. F. W. Jowett at Bradford. There are indeed many instances of alliances between the I.L.P. and the Liberal Party. In '98 the Leeds I.L.P. approached the Liberals with a view to an alliance, which was refused; they then went to the Tories with the same object and the same result. In the same year, in London, they wanted some seats on the County Council, and in return for those seats they agreed to support the Progressives, but this action had the effect of opening the eyes of the honest rank and file of the I.L.P. in London, and killed their organisation in the metropolis. The so-called Independent Labour Party is independent only that it is free to sell to the highest bidder. The I.L.P. is in reality run by a set of job-hunters whose only apparent political principle is to catch votes on varying pretexts and by still more varying means. They openly repudiate the class struggle, the basis of Socialism, but nevertheless seek admission to the International Socialist Congress, where they acquiesce in what they call “a merely glorified animalism dangerously akin to bestiality” in order to pass muster in the presence of the assembled delegates of the international proletariat. The Independent Labour Party is evidently not a party of the workers.

The Labour Representation Committee came into existence chiefly, as far as the rank and file of the trade unions were concerned owing to the Taff Vale and Quinn v Leatham decisions, and as far as the trade union officials were concerned, because they saw a chance of Parliamentary jobs. At the first meeting of the L.R.C. Mr. John Burns opposed putting the movement on a working-class basis. Mr. James Sexton, of the Liverpool dockers, said that the Socialist resolution was magnificent but not war – not conducive to Parliamentary jobs, he meant – and he would vote for it anywhere but there. This position is characteristic of most alleged Socialists in Britain – they

would vote for Socialism anywhere but where a vote would help it. Mr. Steadman said they should elect those who had borne the heat and burden of the day – *i.e.*, men of the Steadman stamp. At Newcastle Mr. John Ward stated that they wanted to get their feet on the floor of the House of Commons and would not be particular how they did it. Mr. J. Keir Hardie said they did not want Toryism, Liberalism, or Socialism, only Labourism. Wonderful to narrate, this is the same Keir Hardie who sits as a delegate on the International Socialist Bureau. The L.R.C. constitution states that they should not support the Liberal or the Tory Party, but for every seat that has hitherto been contested the candidate put forward by the L.R.C. has been a Liberal-Labour hack, so much so that Mr. John Morley stated he would welcome them into the House of Commons, as they would always be found voting as Liberals. Last year Messrs. W. Crooks, D. Shackleton, and A. Henderson supported Mr. Benn, Liberal candidate for Devonport, and Mr. Bell, ex-chairman of the L.R.C, got his seat in the House of Commons by an arrangement with the Liberal party. Mr. D. Shackleton is a defender of child labour, and Mr. Henderson is an opponent of the legal reduction of the hours of labour. After all their cry of independence and after all their falling out with Mr. Burns, who told them they were selling themselves for two hundred dirty pieces of gold, they selected as Chairman of their Parliamentary group the same Mr. John Burns, the defender of Asquith (the murderer of miners at Featherstone), thus choosing as their leader one of the most bitter enemies of the working-class. The Labour Representation Committee is not the party of the workers.

A word with reference to trade unions may be found useful here. While writers like Smith, Howell and others imagined the present unions merely a continuance of the old craft guilds, later and more accurate research has shown this view to be untenable. With the break up of the feudal system and the advent of the manufacturing period, the old craft guilds died out. The grouping of large numbers of workers in factories, and, later on, the introduction of power driven machinery, rendered necessary the employment of capitals far too large for the workers to save out of their wages. Thus the workers remained workers all their lives, and the close communication between them in industrial centres, enabled them to interchange ideas regarding their various positions, with the result that unions began to be formed, based upon the recognition of the fact that the worker remained a worker during his life. Moreover, in many cases a grasp of the class antagonism necessarily arising from such conditions was obtained by the more virile and intelligent of their members.

For years they had to struggle to make their combinations lawful, and then to secure legal protection from the thieves who appropriated their funds; but at last both these objects were attained, and, until the Taff Vale and *Quinn v Leatham* decisions, the trade unions jogged along in a comparatively secure legal position. With this legal protection, however, ideas that had been growing up since the breaking down of the Chartist movement spread far and wide. Taught by the assiduous agents of the capitalist-class that “Capital” and “Labour” were brothers, the workers acted on the theory that between them and their masters were “common” interests: that if they demanded more wages than the capitalists cared to pay they (the workers) would drive the business out of the country; that as it was the employers who paid them their wages they should not “kill the goose that laid the golden eggs,” and such other phantasies as capitalist ingenuity could invent. As a result, portions of the textile and mining industries arranged “sliding scales,” under which wages were supposed to rise with prices. Long experience has, however, shown that in practice wages slide down

with express speed, but the sliding up process proceeds at a tortoise-like rate, and the only under pressure, so much so that even a conservative and religious section as the Welsh miners have been agitating for the abolition of the "sliding scale" system. While the employers were numerous and competing, the workers' unions were able to wring advantages from them and make employment a little less like the hellish slavery it had been, but now the growing combination of the capitalists in every branch of industry has rendered the chances of winning a fight by the old methods exceedingly small. Under those conditions, and coupled with the absurd idea of the mutuality of interests between Capital and Labour, trade unions upon their present base are little more than benefit societies which save the capitalist-class some amount out of the rates and taxes they would otherwise have to pay towards the support of their disabled slaves. Before the trade unions can become effective factors in bringing about a change of society, they must give up the superstition that the robbers can be friendly to the robbed. The other superstition, that the employer is an enemy on the industrial field but a friend on the political field, must also be abandoned. The spectacle presented by the Engineers in voting for Sir Christopher Furness, Parliamentary candidate for York, at the very time they were out on strike against him, could only arise out of ignorance of the antagonism between the worker and the master in the political no less than in the industrial field. Yet this political imbecility just instanced is supported by almost all the "labour leaders" and trade union officials as "practical politics." Defeated on the industrial field, the workers are advised by their "leaders" to place the only weapon left, the political weapon, in the hands of their enemies. May we be spared from such instances of criminal folly in the future. The basis of the action of the trade unions must be a clear recognition of the position of the workers under capitalism, and the class struggle necessarily arising therefrom: in other words, they must adopt the Socialist position, if they are going to justify their existence at all. Does this mean that the existing trade unions are to be smashed? That will depend upon the unions themselves. All actions of the unions in support of capitalism, or tending to side-track the workers from the only path that can lead to their emancipation, should be strongly opposed; but on the other hand, trade unions being a necessity under capitalism, any action on their part upon sound lines should be heartily supported.

In the industrial field to day there is an irrepressible conflict between the propertyless producers and the propertied non-producers. This conflict is represented in the political field by the organised party of capitalism, the Tory Party and the Liberal Party representing different sections of the same exploiting class. All political parties are but the expression of class interests, hence the working-class party cannot ally itself with or support any section of the capitalist party, for any alliance or bargain between them can only serve the interests of the ruling class by perpetuating the present system. The working-class party must be opposed to all other parties. There are many more or less well-intentioned persons who contend that the workers have something to gain by playing off one section of the capitalist party against the other, and that in this way a political footing can be obtained by the working-class. Of two evils choose the lesser, we are told; but these good people do not realise that between the Liberal and Tory on the one hand and Liberal Labour on the other the choice is between the devil and the deep sea. The capitalist-class has for centuries been in possession of the political machinery and knows all the tricks of the trade. The capitalist-class has men of wealth and men of leisure at its disposal for the control and manipulation of the machinery of government, and in the contest of political trickery

the workers cannot cope with the strategy of the professional prize fighters and trained tricksters of capitalism. The only true position for a genuine working-class party is that of open hostility to all who support capitalism in any shape or form. This is the safe, sure and scientific position. By applying this test it is easily seen that neither the Social-Democratic Federation nor the Fabian Society, neither the Independent Labour Party nor the Labour Representation Committee, is the party of the workers.

Realising that the economic forces working through the development of capitalist society demanded the formation of a revolutionary Socialist party; believing that the emancipation of the working-class can be accomplished only by the members of that class consciously organised in a Socialist party; and recognising that the class struggle can alone be the basis of such a party, a small but determined band of workers assembled in London on June 12th, 1904, and founded the Party of the Workers, THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN, a party based on clear and unmistakable principles interpreted in plain and unequivocal tactics.

Realising that, as in the order of social evolution the working-class is the last class to be emancipated, the emancipation of the working-class will involve the abolition of all class distinctions and class privileges, and free humanity from oppression of every kind, and resolved to adhere to the only position marked out by past experience as impregnable, THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN enters the political arena, and, in full faith that the members of our class will work out their historic mission, hurls defiance at all the forces of reaction. Generated by capitalist society, heir to the slavery of ages, outcast of civilisation, the working-class will prove a fitting instrument of the movement of history, and by the brain and sinew of Labour will arise the Socialist Commonwealth, a society wherein poverty, privilege, and oppression will find no place, and wherein all may lead a full, free and joyous existence.

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF
THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN,

E. J. B. ALLEN
A. ANDERSON
J. CRUMP
J. FITZGERALD
A. J. M. GRAY
T. A. JACKSON
A. JONES
J. KENT
F. S. LEIGH
H. NEUMANN
H. C. PHILLIPS
F. C. WATTS
C. LEHANE, General Secretary

London, June 12th 1905.

