

MANIFESTO
OF THE
JOINT COMMITTEE OF SOCIALIST BODIES.

There is a growing feeling at the present time that, in view of the increasing number of Socialists in Great Britain, an effort should be made to show that, whatever differences may have arisen between them in the past, all who can fairly be called Socialists are agreed in their main principles of thought and action.

This is the more hopeful since, though much has been made of those differences by the opponents of Socialism, it is safe to say that they have been rather of less than more importance than similar disputes of the early days of great movements which have afterwards become solid and irresistible. There has indeed been constant co-operation in propagandist work between the individual members of different organisations, and occasional co-operation between the organisations in political emergencies; but more than this is now needed if we are to make a serious advance in the work of gathering together and directing the great body of thought and feeling which is setting towards Socialism.

Meanwhile the necessity for the development of a new social order is getting more obvious to all thinking people, and without the growing aspirations towards Socialism the outlook of modern civilisation would be hopeless.

The vigorous propaganda which has been

carried on for the last twelve years, and the complete change in the attitude of the working classes and the public generally towards Socialism, could not but attract the notice, and perhaps excite the anxiety, of the politicians of the possessing classes; but they have shown hitherto that they have lacked both the will and the power to do anything effective towards meeting the evils engendered by our present system. In spite of factory acts and factory inspectors, in spite of sanitary legislation and royal commissions, the condition of the working people is, relatively to the increased wealth of the country, worse than it was twenty years ago. Children are still growing up among such surroundings and so insufficiently nourished that health and strength are for them an impossibility; dangerous and unwholesome trades, inflicting hideous diseases on those who work at them, are still carried on by the capitalists with impunity; overcrowding, accompanied by increasing rents, is the rule rather than the exception in all our great cities.

At the same time the great and growing depression in the most vital of industries, agriculture, tends to drive the people more and more from the country into the towns, while it so narrows the field from which healthy and vigorous industrial recruits have been drawn in the past that the physical deterioration of our city population is more severely felt than ever before.

Moreover, the question of the unemployed is more pressing to-day than at any recent period. The incapacity of the capitalist class to handle the machinery of production without injury to the community has been demonstrated afresh by the crisis of 1890, itself following upon a very short period of inflation; since which time every department of trade and industry has suffered from lack

of initiative and want of confidence and ability among these "organisers of labour." As a result the numbers of the unemployed have increased rapidly; the prospect of any improvement is still remote; and the stereotyped official assurance that there is no exceptional distress only emphasises the fact that it is prosperity, not distress, which is exceptional. Indeed, the greatest "prosperity" possible under the present system could only lessen the mass of those without occupation, and bring them down to a number manageable by the employers. Meantime small improvements made in deference to the ill-formulated demands of the workers, though for a time they seem almost a social revolution to men ignorant of their own resources and of their capacity for enjoyment, will not really raise the condition of the whole people.

In short, the capitalist system, by which we mean the established plan of farming out our national industries in private property lots, and trusting to the greed of the owners and the competition between them to ensure their productive use, is the only arrangement possible in a society not organised enough to administer its own industry as a national concern. This shiftless method has indeed kept the shop open, so to speak, but at a frightful cost in human degradation, as might have been expected from its basis. All the investigations undertaken with a view to convicting Socialists of exaggeration and one-sidedness in their attacks upon it have shown that the facts are worse than any Socialist dared to surmise, and that half a century of ameliorative regulation by means of factory legislation and the like has failed to weaken the force of former exposures of Capitalism.

Among recent anti-Socialist statisticians Mr. Robert Giffen has been led by his own counterblast to Socialism into the exclamation, "That no

one can contemplate the present condition of the masses without desiring something like a revolution for the better." And the facts as to London poverty, laid bare by Mr. Charles Booth, dispose of the possibility of leaving things as they are; although Mr. Booth, who is a Conservative in politics, undertook his great inquiry expressly to confute what he then thought to be Socialist overstatements. The horrible revelations concerning English home life made by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children have effectually dispelled the illusion that the cruelty and selfishness of the factory and mine have not infected the household, or that society can safely abandon its children to irresponsible private ownership any more than its land and capital.

Under these circumstances of a continued degradation of the really useful part of the population—a consequence as inherent in the present system of ownership as it was in the system of chattel slavery—the need for a new social order is obvious. Some constructive social theory is asked for and none are offered except the feudal or Tory theory which is incompatible with democracy, the Manchester or Whig theory which has broken down in practice, and the Socialist theory. It is, therefore, opportune to remind the public once more of what Socialism means to those who are working for the transformation of our present un-socialist state into a collectivist republic, and who are entirely free from the illusion that the amelioration or "moralisation" of the conditions of capitalist private property can do away with the necessity for abolishing it. Even those re-adjustments of industry and administration which are Socialist in form will not be permanently useful unless the whole state is merged into an organised commonwealth. Municipalisation, for instance, can only

be accepted as Socialism on the condition of its forming a part of national and at last of international Socialism, in which the workers of all nations, while adopting within the borders of their own countries those methods which are rendered necessary by their historic development, can federate upon a common basis of the collective ownership of the great means and instruments of the creation and distribution of wealth, and thus break down national animosities by the solidarity of human interest throughout the civilised world.

On this point all Socialists agree. Our aim, one and all, is to obtain for the whole community complete ownership and control of the means of transport, the means of manufacture, the mines, and the land. Thus we look to put an end for ever to the wage-system, to sweep away all distinctions of class, and eventually to establish national and international communism on a sound basis.

To this end it is imperative on all members of the Socialist party to gather together their forces in order to formulate a definite policy and force on its general acceptance.

But here we must repudiate both the doctrines and tactics of Anarchism. As Socialists we believe that those doctrines and the tactics necessarily resulting from them, though advocated as revolutionary by men who are honest and single-minded, are really reactionary both in theory and practice, and tend to check the advance of our cause. Indeed, so far from hampering the freedom of the individual, as Anarchists hold it will, Socialism will foster that full freedom which Anarchism would inevitably destroy.

As to the means for the attainment of our end, in the first place we Socialists look for our success to the increasing and energetic promulgation of our views amongst the whole people, and next to

the capture and transformation of the great social machinery. In any case the people have increasingly at hand the power of dominating and controlling the whole political, and through the political, the social forces of the Empire.

The first step towards transformation and re-organisation must necessarily be in the direction of the limitation of class robbery, and the consequent raising of the standard of life for the individual. In this direction certain measures have been brought within the scope of practical politics; and we name them as having been urged and supported originally and chiefly by Socialists, and advocated by them still, not, as above said, as solutions of social wrongs, but as tending to lessen the evils of the existing *régime*; so that individuals of the useful classes, having more leisure and less anxiety, may be able to turn their attention to the only real remedy for their position of inferiority—to wit, the supplanting of the present state by a society of equality of condition. When this great change is completely carried out the genuine liberty of all will be secured by the free play of social forces with much less coercive interference than the present system entails.

The following are some of the measures spoken of above:—

An Eight Hours Law.

Prohibition of Child Labour for Wages.

Free Maintenance of all Necessitous Children.

Equal Payment of Men and Women for Equal Work.

An Adequate Minimum Wage for all Adults Employed in the Government and Municipal Services, or in any Monopolies, such as Railways, enjoying State Privileges.

Suppression of all Sub-contracting and Sweating.

Universal Suffrage for all Adults, Men and Women Alike.

Public Payment for all Public Service.

The inevitable economic development points to the direct absorption by the State, as an organised democracy, of monopolies which have been granted to, or constituted by, companies, and their immediate conversion into public services. But the railway system is of all the monopolies that which could be most easily and conveniently so converted. It is certain that no attempt to re-organise industry on the land can be successful so long as the railways are in private hands, and excessive rates of carriage are charged. Recent events have hastened on the Socialist solution of this particular question, and the disinclination of boards of directors to adopt improvements which would cheapen freight, prove that in this, as in other cases, English capitalists, far from being enlightened by competition are blinded by it even to their own interests.

In other directions the growth of combination, as with banks, shipping companies, and huge limited liability concerns, organised both for production and distribution, show that the time is ripe for Socialist organisation. The economic development in this direction is already so far advanced that the socialisation of production and distribution on the economic side of things can easily and at once begin, when the people have made up their minds to overthrow privilege and monopoly. In order to effect the change from capitalism to co-operation, from unconscious revolt to conscious re-organisation, it is necessary that we Socialists should constitute ourselves into a distinct political

party with definite aims, marching steadily along our own highway without reference to the convenience of political factions.

We have thus stated the main principles and the broad strategy on which, as we believe, all Socialists may combine to act with vigour. The opportunity for deliberate and determined action is now always with us, and local autonomy in all local matters will still leave the fullest outlet for national and international Socialism. We therefore confidently appeal to all Socialists to sink their individual crutches in a business-like endeavour to realise in our own day that complete communization of industry for which the economic forms are ready and the minds of the people are almost prepared.

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