

CHAPTER V.

THE POLITICAL PROGRAM.

IF the Socialists were in control of Congress, what would be the first thing they would do?

This is one of the questions most frequently addressed to the Socialist propagandist. On the surface the question seems perfectly legitimate, but on closer analysis it will be found to be based on a misconception of the Socialist philosophy and a wrong notion of the established course of social and political progress.

The one great aim of all Socialists is the socialization of the industries, but that is obviously not the "first thing" that Socialists in office could attempt to bring about. The collective ownership of the social instruments of wealth production cannot be established by a single legislative enactment. Rather will it be the culmination of a long series of political and industrial reforms of a socialistic nature. These reforms will be numerous and varied in character and scope. Some of them will have to be dealt with by Congress, others by state legislatures or local political units. The measures will probably not present themselves always and everywhere in the identical

form and sequence. Accidental occurrences and local conditions may force different issues to the front at different times and places. To determine in advance the exact succession of proposed Socialist reforms would be an idle undertaking. The test of practicality of Socialist politics is not whether the Socialists are agreed on a "first" practical measure, but whether they present a political program comprehensive enough to meet all important social problems of the day. They do.

The Socialist Party has a very definite political program, which differs radically from the platforms of all other political parties in scope, structure and contents.

The political platforms of the old parties are built largely on the same plan as a menu à la carte in an opulent restaurant. They are framed to meet all tastes and to satisfy all appetites. Their object is to "catch votes"—all kinds of votes, and each of their "planks" is designed to appeal to a special class of voters. The manufacturers and the workers, the railroads and the farmers, the producers and consumers, the foreign-born citizens and the negroes of the South in turn receive promises, pledges or compliments. The platforms are mainly adjusted to the minor "issues" of the hour and usually fight shy of the more vital and permanent social problems of the nation. The planks are often inconsistent and meaningless, and are never cemented by a cohesive social philosophy. There is hardly a pledge in the platform of

the Republican Party that could not find legitimate lodgment in that of the Democratic Party and vice versa. Very often it is a race between the two old parties for the most popular issue, and sometimes both endorse the same popular demands with varying degrees of emphasis. It would be a vain task to attempt to distinguish the social philosophy of the Bryan platform of 1908 from that of the Roosevelt platform of 1904, or that of the Parker platform of 1904 from the Taft platform of 1912.

The political platform of the Socialist Party, on the other hand, is based on a definite social conception and on a dominant and consistent political purpose. The Socialist aim in politics is to better the lot of the workers, to curb the power of the capitalist classes, to extend the social and industrial functions of the government and to place the latter more directly in the hands of the people—all with the ultimate object of transforming the present industrial and political system into a social democracy. These aims are formulated in concrete and definite planks or "demands," which constitute the invariable political platform of Socialism. The Socialist platform may be redrafted periodically and greater prominence may be given to the issues surging to the foreground at a particular time, but on the whole it is practically unchangeable. It could not consistently be otherwise. The Socialist Party was organized for the accomplishment of a definite social and political purpose. Its platform is but the expression of that pur-

pose and a statement of the steps by which it is expected to be realized. So long as that purpose remains unaccomplished and so long as the party adheres to its main aim, principles and methods, so long must the substance of its platform remain intact.

As the capitalist interests become more dominant and acute, representative government gradually ceases to be a government "of, for and by the people," and becomes tainted with class bias, bossism and corruption. The subversion of popular government to the interests of the great money powers and their avowed representatives in politics and government is growing more menacing every year, and is giving rise to the multiform movements for political reform within and without the established political organizations.

The main currents of such reform movements proceed along two lines. The first of these is directed against the personal unfitness or corruption of individual office-holders or politicians. To this class of reforms belong all sporadic movements of the good citizens to "turn the rascals out of office," which furnish the periodical political excitements in local elections. The recent enthusiasm for the Commission Form of Government in cities, for the Short Ballot in local, state and national elections, and all similar movements, are only practical applications, in different forms, of the same "good-men" theory in politics. They all proceed from the assumption that "good" officials make a "good" government. They believe that our present system of voting for a confusing

mass of candidates for important and trivial offices at every annual election, precludes the possibility of an intelligent choice of public officials, and they recommend a curtailment of the list of elective officers and the lengthening of their official terms as an efficient method of getting the best men.

The Socialists attach but slight importance to these "good government" movements. They hold that the paramount factor in politics is measures, not men—class interests, not personal qualities.

The Republican and the Democratic parties and every reform party organized by "respectable" citizens are alike founded on the present order of society, and consciously or unconsciously they stand for the preservation of that order and for the domination of wealth. They are managed and financed by the possessing classes and their political officials spring from these classes or are dependent on them for their careers. Whether they are personally good, bad or indifferent, honest or dishonest, capable or incompetent, they are tied to the capitalist class by environment, training, instinct and interest. Experience has demonstrated time and time again that "good government" is powerless even to check simple crime and corruption in politics for any considerable length of time. It is ludicrously ineffectual as an instrument for the betterment of the lot of the toilers.

What the Socialists are striving for is not a government of good capitalists for good capitalists, but a government of workers for all workers.

The more important movements of political reform are those concerned with the permanent improvement of political methods and institutions. These movements have for their object the extension of the suffrage to classes still excluded from it, or they aim to increase the political power of the people and to strengthen their control over their chosen representatives.

The National Platform of the Socialist Party, adopted at Indianapolis in 1912, contains the following political planks or "demands":

UNRESTRICTED AND EQUAL SUFFRAGE FOR MEN AND WOMEN.

THE ADOPTION OF THE INITIATIVE, REFERENDUM AND RECALL AND OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION.

THE ABOLITION OF THE SENATE AND THE VETO POWER OF THE PRESIDENT.

THE ELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT AND VICE-PRESIDENT BY THE DIRECT VOTE OF THE PEOPLE.

THE ABOLITION OF THE POWER USURPED BY THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES TO PASS UPON THE CONSTITUTIONALITY OF LEGISLATION ENACTED BY CONGRESS.

NATIONAL LAWS TO BE REPEALED ONLY BY ACT OF CONGRESS, OR BY A REFERENDUM VOTE OF THE MAJORITY OF THE VOTERS.

THE EXTENSION OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT TO ALL UNITED STATES TERRITORY.

THE IMMEDIATE CURBING OF THE POWERS OF



Socialists believe in the abolition of the Senate and the veto power of the President.

THE COURTS TO ISSUE INJUNCTIONS IN LABOR DISPUTES.

THE FREE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE.

THE CALLING OF A CONVENTION FOR THE REVISION OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES.

All these measures are essential, but in practice the Socialists lay particular stress on three of these demands: Woman Suffrage, Proportional Representation and Restriction of the Powers of the Courts.

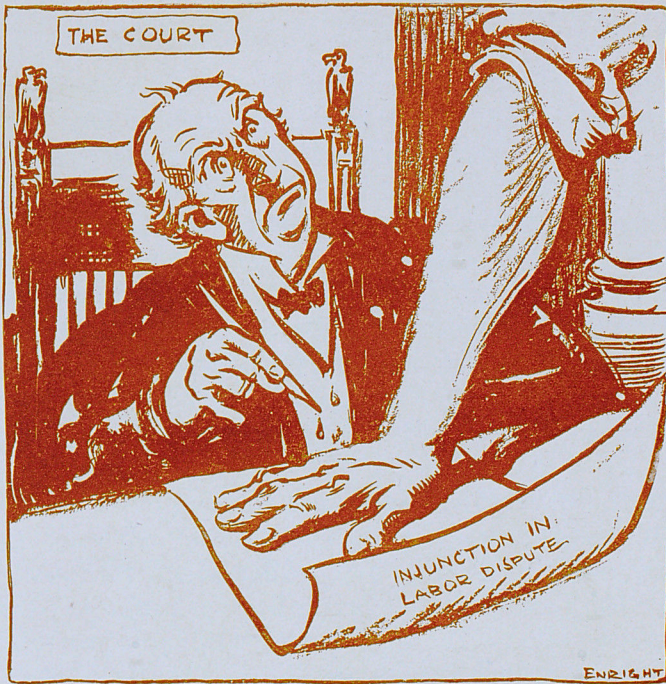
The Socialist Party was the first political party in any country to declare unequivocally for the full and equal right of all adults of both sexes to vote in popular elections and to hold public office, and it has fully established the principle of political sex equality within its own organizations. Women constitute a substantial part of the active membership of the Socialist Party and they are always largely and ably represented on its lecture platforms and in its executive councils and conventions.

The principle of Proportional Representation is a vital article of the Socialist political faith on grounds of expediency as well as principle. The Socialist Party is a minority party and a class party. As a minority party it is practically deprived of representation under the prevailing system of election by legislative districts of single constituencies. In the elections of 1912 the total number of votes cast for all parties was about 15,000,000. Of these the Socialist Party received in the neighborhood of 900,000, or about

6 per cent. On this basis the party was entitled to 26 out of 435 members of the House of Representatives. It did not elect one. Assuming that the Socialist vote is evenly distributed all over the country, which is very largely the case, we may conceive of a situation where, with a political strength equal to one-fourth or even a full third of the voting power of the country, it may remain without representation or voice in Congress. And the situation is similar with reference to our state legislatures and city councils.

The objection most frequently raised to the system of proportional representation is, that it would tend to enhance the importance of political organizations as against the personality of the individual candidates. But in the eyes of the Socialists this is rather an argument in favor of the measure than against it. For the Socialists consider their party first of all as the political instrument of the working-class struggles. The Socialist Party as such formulates the political demands of the movement, conducts the campaigns for their enactment, and is accountable to the workers for the results of its policies. The candidates of the party are merely its agents, agents with restricted powers and specific mandates.

The principle of proportional representation is directly opposed to the philosophy underlying the growing movement for direct or popular primaries within the organizations of the old parties. The Republican and Democratic parties are not separated by class lines. As between themselves they have no distinct



Socialists would curb the
Court's power of injunction

missions or functions. Their separate organizations only tend to develop political "rings" and "bosses" for the appropriation and distribution of political plunder. Hence the desire of the respectable citizens to abolish party organizations and conventions and to place the nomination of candidates, practically the sole function of the old political parties, in the hands of the voters. To the militant Socialists a movement to eliminate their party organization would appeal with the same force and conviction as a proposal to suspend military order and discipline would appeal to an army in battle.

The curtailment of the powers of our courts is probably the most fundamental political measure advocated by the Socialists. No other free nation has ever permitted a small group of men to set aside its laws and to nullify the expressed will of the people. These extraordinary powers are the distinctive attributes of absolute and autocratic sovereignty. So long as the people of the United States leave their ultimate political and social destinies at the mercy of nine men, appointed for life and often out of touch and sympathy with the needs, struggles and aspirations of the great masses, so long will our "self-government" be a sham and our "democracy" a delusion.

The great modern problems can be solved peacefully and rationally only by a people free to shape its own destinies, and to model and remodel its institutions without the arbitrary interference of a few old men nourished by the musty legal wisdom of the dead

past. The Socialists therefore consider the radical reformation of our judiciary system a condition precedent to all true measures of social reform.

The political planks in the Socialist platform aim to establish a closer connection between the people and their chosen representatives and to extend the direct participation of the citizens in the government. But the Socialists do not overestimate the importance of political reforms. Politics is not government, it is only the machinery of government. Tools in themselves, and be they ever so ingenious and apt, are entirely devoid of value unless applied to the production of socially useful commodities. Universal adult suffrage, direct legislation and control of public officials are the tools of democracy. They are of the highest importance and value if used for the enactment of measures to improve the every-day lives of the people and to increase their general happiness. They are purely ornamental otherwise.

The Socialists are vitally interested in all measures calculated to enhance the material welfare and to raise the intellectual level of the workers. They believe that the task of transforming modern capitalist society into a Socialist commonwealth rests primarily on the workers, and they realize that this gigantic historical task cannot be accomplished by a class of physical and mental weaklings, but that it requires the organized and persevering efforts of large masses of men and women physically, mentally and morally fit to assume the reins of government. The Socialist

efforts to raise the standard of the workers' lives are therefore not based on mere humanitarian or sentimental motives. They are an organic part of the practical work of Socialism, an indispensable condition of the progress and ultimate success of the movement. The platform of the Socialist Party contains the following comprehensive "demand" under this head:

"The conservation of human resources, particularly of the lives and well-being of the workers and their families:

"1. By shortening the workday in keeping with the increased productiveness of machinery.

"2. By securing to every worker a rest period of not less than a day and a half in each week.

"3. By securing a more effective inspection of workshops, factories and mines.

"4. By forbidding the employment of children under 16 years of age.

"5. By the co-operative organization of industries in federal penitentiaries and workshops for the benefit of convicts and their dependents.

"6. By forbidding the interstate transportation of the products of child-labor, of convict-labor and of all uninspected factories and mines.

"7. By abolishing the profit system in government work, and substituting either the direct hire of labor or the awarding of contracts to co-operative groups of workers.

"8. By establishing minimum wage scales.

"9. By abolishing official charity and substituting a non-contributory system of old-age pensions, a general system of insurance by the state of all its members against unemployment and invalidism and a system of compulsory insurance by employers of their workers, without cost to the latter, against industrial diseases, accidents and death."

The most important of these measures from a Socialist point of view are those dealing with the shortening of the labor time and with the system of "social insurance" of the workers. A shorter workday would tend to solve at least partly the problem of unemployment and at the same time and for the same reason to increase the average wage. It would give to the worker more time to live, think and enjoy, and would broaden his political, social and spiritual interests. It would also contribute largely to the curtailment of the evil of child labor. Government insurance of the workers in cases of unemployment, accidents, sickness, invalidity and old age would tend to remove that most dreadful feature of the life of the modern wage-worker—the uncertainty of existence, the fear of the morrow. Under present conditions the unfortunate worker who has been maimed or has gradually lost his youth, health and strength in the service of his fellow-men is mercilessly cast aside and allowed to starve and perish by degrees. Under a system of government insurance, society would take care of the victims and veterans of the large life-sustaining army of workers as it now pro-

vides for the victims and veterans of death-dealing warfares. The measure is not a Socialist Utopia, for systems of social insurance along the lines indicated, in more or less perfect form, are in actual operation in almost all advanced modern countries except the United States.

While seeking to secure all needed measures of immediate political and industrial reform, the Socialists also endeavor to extend the sphere of the social and economic functions of the government.

The Socialist platform demands:

"1. The collective ownership and democratic management of railroads, wire and wireless telegraphs and telephones, express services, steamboat lines and all other social means of transportation and communication and of all large-scale industries.

"2. The immediate acquirement by the municipalities, the states or the federal government of all grain elevators, stock yards, storage warehouses and other distributing agencies, in order to reduce the present extortionate cost of living.

"3. The extension of the public domain to include mines, quarries, oil wells, forests and water-power.

"4. The further conservation and development of natural resources for the use and benefit of all the people:

"a. By scientific forestation and timber protection.

"b. By the reclamation of arid and swamp tracts.

"c. By the storage of flood waters and the utilization of water-power.

"d. By the stoppage of the present extravagant waste of the soil and of the products of mines and oil wells.

"e. By the development of highway and waterway systems.

"5. The collective ownership of land wherever practicable, and, in cases where such ownership is impracticable, the appropriation by taxation of the annual rental value of all land held for speculation.

"6. The collective ownership and democratic management of the banking and currency system.

"7. The immediate government relief of the unemployed by the extension of all useful public works. All persons employed on such works to be engaged directly by the government under a workday of not more than eight hours and not less than the prevailing union wages. The government also to establish employment bureaus; to lend money to states and municipalities without interest for the purpose of carrying on public works, and to take such other measures within its power as will lessen the widespread misery of the workers caused by the misrule of the capitalist class.

"8. The adoption of a graduated income tax, the increase of the rate of the present corporation tax and the extension of inheritance taxes, graduated in proportion to the nearness of kin—the proceeds of these taxes to be employed in the socialization of industry."

Of all the planks of the Socialist platform, those

just quoted would naturally seem most closely allied to the ultimate aim and social ideal of the Socialists. As a matter of fact, they are not. The Socialists entertain no illusions as to the benefits of governmentally owned industries under the present régime. Government ownership is often introduced not as a democratic measure for the benefit of the people, but as a fiscal measure to provide revenue for the government or to facilitate its military operations. In such cases government ownership may tend to strengthen rather than to loosen the grip of capitalist governments on the people, and its effect may be decidedly reactionary. Similarly government ownership is often advocated by middle-class "reform" parties for the main purpose of decreasing the taxes of property owners and reducing the rates of freight, transportation and communication for the smaller business men.

The Socialist demand for government ownership of industries of a public or quasi-public nature, springs from different motives and contemplates a different system than the similar demands of other parties. The Socialists advocate government ownership primarily for the purpose of eliminating private profits from the operation of public utilities, and conferring the benefits of such industries on the employees and consumers. Their demand for national or municipal ownership of industries is always qualified by a provision for the democratic administration of such industries and for the application of the profits to the increase

of the employees' wages and the improvement of the service. Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that when the Socialist platform declares in favor of government ownership of certain industries, the Socialist Party at the same time nominates candidates for public office pledged to carry out these measures in the spirit of that platform. In other words, what the Socialists advocate is not government ownership under purely capitalist administration, but collective ownership under a government controlled or at least strongly influenced by political representatives of the working class.

The measures so far discussed do not exhaust the practical "demands" of the Socialist Party. For while the party is primarily concerned with the relief of the workers, its endeavors do not end there. The Socialists are deeply interested in all measures of social progress and national welfare.

Thus the Socialist platform contains planks in favor of the absolute freedom of press, speech and assemblage; the enactment of further measures for general education and particularly for vocational education in useful pursuits; the enactment of additional measures for the conservation of the public health and the creation of an independent Bureau of Health.

The National platform of the Socialist Party is supplemented by State and Municipal platforms, which are always concrete applications of the same general principles to the narrower spheres of their respective functions and jurisdictions, and together

they constitute a logical, consistent and comprehensive program of social progress. And it is just in that consistency and comprehensiveness that the strength of the Socialist platform lies. The separate practical measures advocated by the Socialists are often trivial in comparison with the lofty ultimate aim of the movement. Some of them may even occasionally be found duplicated in the platforms of other political parties. Not one of them, standing alone, has a distinctive Socialist character. But taken in its entirety, the Socialist platform presents a striking and radical departure from the platforms of all other political parties, and bears the unmistakable imprint of the Socialist thought and endeavors.