
The Pittsburgh Declaration of Principles: Adopted by the National Convention of the Social Democratic Federation, May 30, 1937

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The ultimate aim of the Social Democratic movement is the abolition of class rule and class conflict, with all their evil consequences, and the development of a state of society in which the few shall no longer be able to enjoy luxury and ease at the expense of overwork, want, and insecurity for the masses. This is today a thoroughly practicable idea. So greatly have science and invention increased our productive powers that an abundance of all the good things of life for the whole population could be produced without subjecting any human being to drudgery or exhausting toil. The continued existence of poverty is due solely to causes which intelligent social action can overcome.

To assure plenty, security, leisure, and freedom for all, it is necessary that the existing property system, the existing forms of economic control and distribution of wealth, be so changed as to adapt them to the conditions of modern life. Property institutions are the creatures of law. By law they have been changed in ages past, and by law they can and must be changed in the years to come.

In a state of economic evolution where production is carried on by hand labor, with the use of simple and inexpensive tools, each individual can employ himself and enjoy the full product of his labor. In such a stage, private ownership of the instruments of production means economic liberty on an individualistic scale.

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That state of affairs no longer exists. Modern industry requires the use of enormously costly aggregates of land, buildings, and machinery, operated by the combined labor of great numbers of workers. Under these conditions private ownership means power for the few and subjection for the many.

Social Democracy does not condemn private property as such. It condemns the private ownership of great socially necessary means of production, under which the workers are employed only on such terms as assure and unearned income to the owners and are thrown into idleness and want whenever the owners cannot profit by their labor. Only by the socialized ownership and democratic control of such productive wealth, doing away with exploitation and making the satisfaction of human wants the ruling motive in production, can the ideal of a classless society be realized.

The interest of the wage-working class, in the broadest sense of that term, imperatively demands this change. But the wage workers are not the only sufferers under the existing system.

The once great class of independent working farmers is steadily losing ground. They are exploited by the capitalist groups which control the transportation and marketing of their produce, by those from which they must purchase implements and supplies, and above all by those which control money and credit. Year by year many thousands of them lose title to their lands and either sink into the class of farm tenants or else give up farming altogether and seek employment in an overcrowded labor market. Year by year still greater numbers of their sons and daughters leave the land and are merged in the wage-working class. Meanwhile, capitalistic large farms, owned by corporations and operated by wage labor, are growing at the expense of the self-employed farmers.



The development of industrial technique, involving the need for ever larger plants and more nearly automatic machinery, not only disemploys workers and sharpens competition in the labor market, but also makes it increasingly difficult for small enterprises to survive.

The methods of great capitalism are now invading the fields of retail trade and ruining myriads of small merchants and dealers. The same forces are at work in the field of public entertainment, of book

and newspaper publication, and many others in which small enterprise formerly had a chance of success.

Nor do the professional and intellectual workers escape the conquering march of centralized capital. Engineers, accountants, technicians, scientists and inventors, research workers, members of the medical and allied professions, teachers, writers, and artists in ever greater number [are] being brought down to the status of wage workers, competing for employment and often seeking it in vain.

All these middle classes are being crushed by the same power which exploits the wage workers. Although their immediate interests may conflict with those of the wage workers at some points, they coincide with them at many others. In the long run, they all have a common interest in changing the basis of our economic system.



It would not be desirable to go back to the old methods of hand labor and small enterprise, thereby sacrificing the potential benefits of increased capacity for production. Nor would it be possible even if it were to be desired. **The choice before us is either to permit the uncontrolled development of capitalism to concentrate all power in the hands of an oligarchy of high finance and reduce the mass of the people to abject servitude, or to assert the right and duty of the nation to control and remodel its economic life.**

Under the stimulus of the depression which began in 1929, the tide of public opinion has been turning towards social control. Important measures of social and labor legislation have been carried. But these are only a small part of what needs to be done. There is danger that with the passing of the emergency, the work may be halted before it is more than well begun. There is an even greater danger that, for lack of a clear view of the problem as a whole and of a far-reaching program of basic reconstruction, false steps may be made which will bring new evils into existence.

The only safety is in the rise of a great popular movement, free from all political and other entanglements with capitalistic interests and ideals, equipped with a sound understanding of economic tendencies and social forces, clearly conscious of its final goal, capable of solving problems as they arise, and using all proper methods of action to achieve its aim.

The organization of the wage workers in a strong and united labor union movement, the economic organization of the working farmers on lines answering to their needs, and the establishment of mutually helpful relations between these two groups are absolutely necessary to defend their immediate interest and to provide the basis for the yet broader movement which must be built. Organization of purchasing power in cooperative societies is a valuable auxiliary. But there must also be a strong, clear-sighted and independent political party, national in scope, representing and supported by the two great producing classes of city and of country.

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The first principle of such a movement in all its branches must be the wholehearted devotion to the methods and ideals of democracy. No dictatorship, whatever its avowed purpose, can be trusted to bring liberty, plenty, and peace. The institutions of political democracy must be defended and improved in order that economic and social life may be democratized.

The appeal to revolutionary violence must be repudiated. It is unnecessary and unjustifiable in a country where the orderly and peaceful methods of democracy are available.

The change from capitalism to social democracy cannot be accomplished at a single stroke. It will be a gradual process extending over a period of years. The steps by which it will be achieved can in a broad way be foreseen and planned. They fall into three main groups, namely:

- 1.— Measures for alleviating the evils suffered by the working and middle classes while capitalism still generally prevails.
- 2.— Measures for the development of social services to improve the conditions and enrich the lives of the masses.
- 3.— Measures for socializing the great branches of industry, trade, and finance which are most vital to the people's needs and are now most completely dominated by great capital.

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Under the first head we establish the need for—

- Legislation to establish the wage workers' rights of trade union action and collective bargaining; to do away with the use of

injunctions in labor disputes and to put an end to the abuse of vagrancy and disorderly conduct charges against labor organizers, strikers, and pickets; to repeal the so-called “criminal anarchism” and “criminal syndicalism” laws in states where they exist; to prohibit the use of spies, stool pigeons, and armed guards by employers, and to prevent the extortion often practiced by employment agencies.

- Legislation to shorten the hours of labor and provide for vacations with pay; to establish a minimum wage for such elements as are least able to bargain effectively with their employers; to safeguard the workers against industrial accidents and occupational disease, and to prohibit the exploitation of child labor.
- Social insurance for all against the economic losses resulting from unemployment and from maternity, sickness, accident, old age, and the death of breadwinners; and social insurance for farmers against loss by drought, flood, storm, insect plagues, and other risks in agriculture.
- A comprehensive system of slum clearance and provision of low-cost housing, jointly financed by the nation and local communities, through the extension of which private landlordism can eventually be wiped out.
- The use of the taxing power and other powers of government to retard the growth of private monopolies in industry and trade, so as to reduce to a minimum the suffering of middle class elements in the inevitable development from small-scale to large-scale operation.

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Under the second head we lay stress upon the use of a greatly increased proportion of the nation’s wealth, to be obtained by steeply graduated taxation of incomes and inheritances, for non-remunerative but socially useful public works and services, such as—

- Extension of the system of free education, from kindergarten to the university, on a scale corresponding both in quantity and quality to the people’s needs, to the nation’s productive powers, and to the standards of modern pedagogical science; the teaching institutions to be supplemented by libraries, museums, concert halls, and other cultural facilities for the whole people.
- Development of a comprehensive public health system, including provision in every locality of adequate hospitals, clinics,

sanatoriums and convalescence homes, and progressive socialization of medical and related services.

- Provision everywhere of adequate recreational facilities for young and old, including parks and playgrounds, fields and buildings for athletic sports, bathing beaches and swimming pools, vacation camps, and so forth, to be put at the people's service free or at nominal cost.
- Provision throughout the country of roads, bridges, and other public improvements comparable to those already enjoyed by the more favored areas.
- A comprehensive long-range program of flood control, forestation, soil preservation, drainage, and irrigation.

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We call attention to the fact that besides the direct value of such public works and service, their creation and maintenance will give employment to vast numbers of persons disemployed by capitalist development; that by increasing their purchasing power it will benefit the farmers and shopkeepers; that it will not compete with private business and therefore will not throw other workers out of employment, and that its cost can and should be borne by accumulated private riches and large property income.

Simultaneously with these measures of protection from capitalist evils and promotion of the general welfare, the powers of government must be used for the systematic transformation of private profit-making capital into socially owned means of production for use. Those branches of economic activity which are most highly monopolized and which for any reason most deeply affect the interests of society should first be dealt with.

- The whole munitions industry must be nationalized without delay. A special reason in this case is the baneful influence of capitalist interest in promoting war between nations.
- All capitalist enterprises in the various branches of industry and commerce are rapidly passing under the control of a small number of great banks and other financial corporations, which are so linked together by interlocking directorates, holding companies, and other devices as to constitute an almost complete monopoly in the field of money and credit. For this reason, and in the interest of the wage workers, the farmers, and the lower ranks of businessmen, **the socialization of banking credit is urgently necessary.**

- This applies also to the great insurance companies, because the representatives of concentrated wealth in their boards of directors control the investment of many billions of dollars of reserves. They should accordingly be socialized along with the banks and trust companies.
- The railroads and other means of transportation, together with the telegraph and telephone, are as necessary to the economic life of the whole people as are roads and the postal service. Because it was practicable to derive profit from them and because the people did not exercise social foresight at the time when they were coming into existence, these nerves and arteries of the nation were allowed to fall under capitalistic and monopolistic ownership and control. The corporations which own them received enormous subsidies from the nation, states, and municipalities. Until partially restrained by legislation, they levied exorbitant tribute upon all who needed their services. The great capitalists who dominate them have not even run them efficiently; but have looted them to the injury of the small stockholders and of the general public. It is high time that the whole business of transit, transportation, and communication should be taken over by the people.
- Another group of industries which is in every sense ripe for socialization, which occupies a key position in the structure of capitalist power, and which is monopolized to a very high degree, is the production of electric and hydroelectric power and the sale of electric current for industrial and domestic uses. Through this monopoly the lighting and transit services and other public utilities throughout the country are rapidly being linked into one nationwide instrument of exploitation. The beginning which has recently been made by the federal government in the field of power production and distribution must be energetically followed up by the nation and the states; and in close connection therewith the public utilities must be municipalized.

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While it is true that in most cases the original investment in these and other capitalist enterprises has been repaid over and again in profits derived from the exploitation of labor and super-profits extorted from the consumers, it will probably as a general rule be advisable to compensate their present owners, not upon the basis of the profits which they realize, but to an amount not exceeding the initial investment, not the cost of physical replacement. The funds necessary for such purchase are to be obtained by graduated taxation of inheritances, incomes, and super-profits.

Through the measures indicated above and others of a similar nature it is within the power of the producing and exploited classes, if they but have confidence in themselves, to transform our society of non-producing owners and non-possessing workers into a social democracy in which all shall be joint owners and all comrade workers for the common good. Thus and only thus can class rule, with its attendant evils of social strife and international war, of undeserved poverty, of corruption and servility, be transformed into a truly free and democratic society, in which useful work performed by all through far shorter hours and under far more pleasant conditions than now generally prevail, will be able to produce the material basis of a livelihood for all far better than is enjoyed today by any except the very rich.

In the name of freedom, in the name of honesty, in the name of civilization itself, for the good of those now alive and of generations yet unborn, we call upon the workers of the city and country as a class, and upon all intelligent and humane men and women, to join us in winning the good new world which is within our reach.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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