

RSDLP Program (1903)

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Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party Second Congress

Programme of the Social-Democratic Workers' Party

adopted at the Second Congress of the Party

The development of exchange has established such close ties between all the peoples of the civilised world that the great liberation movement of the proletariat has had to become, and has in fact long since become, international in character.

Regarding themselves as forming one of the detachments of the world-wide army of the proletariat, the Russian Social-Democrats pursue the same ultimate aim as that towards which the Social-Democrats of all other countries are striving.

This ultimate aim is determined by the nature of present-day bourgeois society and the way it is developing.

The principal characteristic of this society is commodity production on the basis of capitalist production-relations, in which the most considerable and important part of the means of production and exchange of commodities belongs to a numerically small class of persons, while the overwhelming majority of the population consists of proletarians and semi-proletarians, who are obliged by their economic situation either continuously or periodically to sell their labour-power, that is, to become wage-workers for the capitalists and to create, by their labour, profit for the higher classes of society.

The sphere in which capitalist production-relations prevail is spreading ever wider and wider, in proportion as the constant improvement in technique, increasing the economic weight of large-scale enterprises, results in the squeezing out of small, independent producers, transforming some of these into proletarians, narrowing the role of the remainder in social and economic life, and in places subjecting them to more or less complete, more or less obvious and more or less severe dependence upon capital.

This same technical progress also enables the entrepreneurs to make use to an ever greater extent of female and child labour in the process of producing and circulating commodities. And since, on the other hand, it leads to a

relative contraction in the entrepreneurs' demand for living human labour, the demand for labour power inevitably lags behind the supply, as a result of which the dependence of wage-labour upon capital increases and the degree to which it is exploited becomes greater.

This state of affairs in the bourgeois countries, and the mutual rivalry between these countries on the world market, which grows continually more intense, make it even more difficult to find outlets for the goods which are produced in constantly increasing quantities. Over-production, manifested in more or less acute industrial crises, which are followed by more or less prolonged periods of industrial stagnation, constitute an inevitable consequence of the development of the productive forces in bourgeois society. Crises and periods of industrial stagnation in their turn ruin the small producers still further, increase even more the dependence of wage-labour upon capital, and lead more rapidly to a relative (and sometimes also an absolute) worsening of the position of the working class.

Thus, improvement in technique, which means increased productivity of labour and growth in social wealth, results, in bourgeois society, in greater social inequality, a widening of the gap between the haves and the have-nots, and an increase in the precariousness of existence, in unemployment, and in many kinds of deprivation for ever-wider sections of the working masses.

But as all these contradictions, which are inherent in bourgeois society, grow and develop, so also grows the discontent of the working people and the exploited masses with the prevailing order of things, the numbers and cohesion of the proletariat increase, and the struggle between the proletariat and their exploiters intensifies. At the same time, the improvement in technique, concentrating the means of production and exchange and socialising the process of labour in capitalist enterprises, is creating at ever greater speed the material conditions for replacing capitalist production relations with socialist ones—that is, for the social revolution which is the ultimate aim of all the activity of the international Social-Democratic movement, as the conscious expression of the class movement of the proletariat.

By substituting social for private ownership of the means of production and exchange, and introducing planned organisation of the process of social production, in order to ensure the well-being and all-round development of all members of society, the social revolution of the proletariat will abolish the division of society into classes, and thereby free all oppressed mankind, since it will put an end to every form of exploitation of one part of society

by another.

A necessary condition for this social revolution is the dictatorship of the proletariat, that is, conquest by the proletariat of such political power as will enable it to suppress any resistance by the exploiters.

Setting itself the task of rendering the proletariat able to fulfil its great historical mission, the international Social-Democratic movement organises the proletariat into an independent political party, opposed to all the bourgeois parties, guides all the manifestations of its class struggle, exposes before it the irreconcilable contradiction of interests between exploiters and exploited, and explains to it the historical significance of, and the necessary pre-conditions for, the impending social revolution. At the same time it reveals to all the rest of the working and exploited masses the hopelessness of their position in capitalist society and the necessity of social revolution for the sake of their own liberation from the yoke of capital. The party of the working class, the Social-Democratic Party, summons to its ranks all sections of the working and exploited population, in so far as they go over to the point of view of the proletariat.

On the way to achieving their common ultimate aim, which is conditioned by the dominance of the capitalist mode of production throughout the civilised world, the Social-Democrats of the different countries are obliged to undertake different immediate tasks, both because this mode of production has not developed everywhere to the same degree and because its development in the different countries is coming to fruition under a variety of socio-political circumstances.

In Russia, where capitalism has already become the dominant mode of production, there are still very many survivals from the old precapitalist order, which was based on the enslavement of the working masses by the landlords, the state or the sovereign. Hindering economic progress to a very considerable extent, these survivals inhibit an all-round development of the class struggle of the proletariat, and contribute to the maintenance and consolidation of the most barbarous forms of exploitation of the many millions of peasants by the state and the property-owning classes, and to keeping the entire people in ignorance and deprived of rights.

The most important of all these survivals and the mightiest bulwark of all this barbarism is the Tsarist autocracy. By its very nature it is inimical to all social progress and cannot but be the most malevolent enemy of all the proletariat's strivings for freedom.

Therefore, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party takes as its most

immediate political task the overthrow of the Tsarist autocracy and its replacement by a democratic republic, the constitution of which would ensure:

1. Sovereignty of the people—that is, concentration of supreme state power wholly in the hands of a legislative assembly consisting of representatives of the people and forming a single chamber.
2. Universal, equal and direct suffrage, in elections both to the legislative assembly and to all local organs of self-government, for all citizens and citizenesses who have attained the age of 20; secret ballot at elections; the right of every voter to be elected to any representative body; biennial parliaments; payment of the people's representatives.
3. Extensive local self-government; regional self-government for all localities which are distinguished by special conditions in respect of mode of life and make-up of the population.
4. Inviolability of person and domicile.
5. Unrestricted freedom of conscience, speech, publication and assembly, freedom to strike and freedom of association.
6. Freedom to travel and to engage in any occupation.
7. Abolition of social estates, and complete equality of rights for all citizens, regardless of sex, religion, race and nationality.
8. Right of the population to receive education in their native language, to be ensured by provision of the schools needed for this purpose, at the expense of the state and the organs of self-government; the right of every citizen to express himself at meetings in his own language; use of the native language on an equal basis with the state language in all local, public and state institutions.
9. Right of self-determination for all nations included within the bounds of the state.
10. Right of any person to prosecute any official before a jury, through the usual channels.
11. Judges to be elected by the people.
12. Replacement of the standing army by universal arming of the people.
13. Separation of the church from the state and of the school from the church.

14. Free and compulsory general and vocational education for all children, of both sexes, up to the age of 16; poor children to be supplied with meals, clothing and textbooks at state expense.

As a fundamental condition for the democratisation of our state finances, the RSDLP calls for abolition of all indirect taxes and establishment of a progressive tax on income and inheritance.

In the interests of safeguarding the working class from physical and moral degradation, and also in order to develop its capacity for the struggle for freedom, the Party calls for:

1. Limitation of the working day to eight hours in every 24, for all wage-workers.

2. Legal provision of a weekly rest period, to last continuously for not less than 42 hours, for wage-workers of both sexes, in all branches of the economy.

3. A complete ban on overtime work.

4. Prohibition of night work (between 9 pm and 6 am) in all branches of the economy, with the exception of those in which it is absolutely necessary owing to technical factors which are endorsed by the workers' organisations.

5. Employers to be forbidden to utilise the labour of children of school age (up to 16), and limitation of the working day for adolescents (16-18) to six hours.

6. Prohibition of female labour in all branches in which it is harm-ful to the female organism; women to be given leave from work for four weeks before childbirth and six weeks after it, with payment of wages at the usual rate throughout this period.

7. Construction in connection with all factories and other enterprises where women work of crèches for infants and young children; release from work of women who are feeding their babies, at intervals of not more than three hours, for periods of not less than half an hour.

8. State insurance of workers against old age and against complete or partial loss of capacity to work, financed from a special fund to be raised by a special tax on the capitalists.

9. Prohibition of payment of wages in kind; payment of wages on a weekly basis and in cash to be laid down in all agreements for the hiring of workers, without exception; wages to be paid out during working hours.

10. Employers to be forbidden to make deductions from wages for any reason and regardless of the purpose (fines, defective work, etc.)

11. Appointment of an adequate number of factory inspectors in all branches of the economy, and extension of the scope of supervision by factory inspectors to all enterprises employing wage labour, including government enterprises (the work of domestic servants also to be subject to this supervision); appointment of women inspectors for those branches in which female labour is employed; participation by elected representatives of the workers, paid by the state, in checking on the enforcement of factory legislation, and also in establishing wage-rates and in the accepting or rejecting of material and of work done.

12. Supervision by the organs of local self-government, with participation by elected representatives of the workers, of the sanitary condition of the dwellings assigned to workers by their employers, together with the internal arrangements of these buildings and the terms on which they are let—with a view to safeguarding the wagedworkers from interference by the employers in their lives and activities as private persons and citizens.

13. Establishment of properly-organised health inspection in all enterprises employing hired labour, the entire medico-sanitary organisation to be wholly independent of the employers; free medical aid for workers at the employers' expense, with continuance of pay during illness.

14. Violation by employers of laws for the protection of labour to be made a criminal offence.

15. Establishment in all branches of the economy of industrial tribunals, composed of an equal number of representatives of the workers and of the employers.

16. The organs of local self-government to be made responsible for setting up offices (labour exchanges) to arrange for the employment of workers, both local and newly-arrived, in all branches of production, with participation in the running of these offices by representatives of the workers' organisations.

In order to eliminate the survivals of serfdom which weigh as a heavy burden directly upon the peasants, and in the interests of free development of the class struggle in the countryside, the Party demands, first and foremost:

1. Cancellation of redemption and quit-rent payments, and also of every form of obligation now imposed upon the peasantry as a taxpaying estate.

2. Repeal of all laws which restrict the peasants' freedom to dispose of their land.

3. Return to the peasants of the sums of money extorted from them as redemption and quit-rent payments; confiscation, for this purpose, of monastery and church property and also of appanage and crown lands and those belonging to members of the imperial family; imposition of a special tax on the estates of members of the landowning nobility who have benefited from redemption loans: the money raised in this way to be paid into a public fund for the cultural and welfare needs of the rural communities.

4. Establishment of peasants' committees: (a) for restoration to the rural communities (by expropriation or, in cases where the land has changed ownership, through purchase by the state at the expense of the large estates of the nobility) of the lands which were cut off and withheld from the peasants when serfdom was abolished and which now serve the landlords as a means of keeping the peasants in bondage; (b) for handing over to ownership by the peasants in Caucasia those lands which they have been working as temporary bondsmen, khizani and so on; (c) for doing away with the survivals of serfdom relations which are still intact in the Urals, in the Altai, in the Western Territory and in other parts of the country.

5. Granting to the courts of the right to reduce excessively high rents and to declare null and void all transactions involving servitude.

In striving to achieve its immediate aims, the RSDLP supports every oppositional and revolutionary movement directed against the social and political order prevailing in Russia, while at the same time resolutely rejecting all reform proposals which are connected with any sort of extension or strengthening of tutelage by the police and officialdom over the labouring classes.

For its part, the RSDLP is firmly convinced that complete, consistent and lasting realisation of the political and social changes mentioned is attainable only through overthrow of the autocracy and the convocation of a constituent assembly, freely elected by the entire people.