

The Erfurt Program

Wilhelm Liebknecht

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About the text

(October 1891)

- Written: As a speech in German, delivered October 20th, 1891.
- First published in English: No later than August 15, 1899.
- Source: Socialism: What It Is and What It Seeks to Accomplish (1899). 1901 printing, pp. 24-64. (Source Scan)
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- Transcription and Markup: Bill Wright for marxists.org, July 2023.

The Erfurter convention of Oct. 20, 1891, formulated the principles of our party into the following strong scientific form:

Exposition of the Erfurt Program

The economic development of industrial society tends inevitably to the ruin of small industries which are based upon the workman's private ownership of the means of production. It separates him from this means of production and converts him into a destitute member of the proletariat, whilst a comparatively small number of capitalists and great land-owners obtain a monopoly of the means of production.

Hand in hand with this growing monopoly goes the crushing out of existence of these shattered small industries by industries of colossal growth, the development of the tool into the machine, and a gigantic increase in the productiveness of human labor. But all the advantages of this revolution are monopolized by the capitalists and great land-owners. To the proletariat and the rapidly sinking middle classes, the small tradesmen of the towns and the peasant proprietors (Bauern), it brings an increasing uncertainty of existence, increasing misery, oppression, servitude, degradation and exploitation (Ausbeutung).

Ever greater grows the mass of the proletariat, ever vaster the army of the unemployed, ever sharper the contrast between oppressors and oppressed, ever fiercer that war of classes between bourgeoisie and proletariat which divides modern society into two hostile camps and is the common characteristic of every industrial country. The gulf between the propertied classes and the destitute is widened by the crisis arising from capitalist production, which becomes daily more comprehensive and omnipotent, which makes universal uncertainty the normal condition of society, and which furnishes a proof that the forces of production have outgrown the existing social order, and that private ownership of the means of production has become incompatible with their full development and their proper application.

Private ownership of the means of production, formerly the means of securing his product to the producer, has now become the means of expropriating the peasant proprietors, the artisans and the small tradesmen, and placing the non-producers, the capitalists and large land-owners, in possession of the products of labor. Nothing but the conversion of capitalist private ownership of the means of production — the earth and its fruits, mines and quarries, raw material, tools and machines, means of exchange — into social ownership, and the substitution of socialist production, carried on by and for society in the place of the present production of commodities for exchange, can effect such a revolution that, instead of the large industries and the steadily growing capacities of common production being, as hitherto, a source of misery and oppression to the classes whom they have despoiled, and they may become a source of the highest well-being and of the most perfect and comprehensive harmony.

This social revolution involves the emancipation not merely of the proletariat but of the whole human race, which is suffering under existing conditions. But this emancipation can be achieved by the working class alone, because all other classes, in spite of their mutual strife of interests, take their stand upon the principle of private ownership of the means of production and have a common interest in maintaining the existing social order.

The struggle of the working classes against capitalist exploitation must of necessity be a political struggle. The working classes can neither carry on their economic struggle nor develop their economic organization without political rights. They cannot effect the transfer of the means of production to the community without being first invested with political power.

It must be the aim of socialism to give conscious unanimity to this struggle

of the working classes and to indicate the inevitable goal.

The interests of the working classes are identical in all lands governed by capitalist methods of production. The extension of the world's commerce and production for the world's markets make the position of the workman in any one country daily more dependent upon that of the workman in other countries.

Therefore the emancipation of labor is a task in which the workmen of all civilized lands have a share. Recognizing this, the social democrats of Germany feel and declare themselves at one with the workingmen of every land who are conscious of the destinies of their class.

The German social democrats are not, therefore, fighting for new class privileges and rights, but for the abolition of class government, and even of classes themselves, and for universal equality in rights and duties, without distinction of sex or rank. Holding these views, they are not merely fighting against the exploitation and oppression of the wage-earners in the existing social order, but against every kind of exploitation and oppression, whether directed against class, party, sex or race.

Primary Demands

Starting from these principles, the German social democrats demand, to begin with:

I. Universal, equal and direct suffrage by ballot in all elections for all subjects of the empire over twenty years of age, without distinction of sex. Proportional representation, and, until this system has been introduced, fresh division of electoral districts by law after each census. Two years' duration of the legislature. Holding of elections on a legal day of rest. Payment of the representatives elected. Removal of all restrictions upon political rights, except in the case of persons under age.

II. Direct legislation by the people by means of the right of initiative and of veto. Self-government by the people in the empire, state, province and commune. Election of magistrates by the people, with the right of holding them responsible. Annual vote of the taxes.

III. Universal military education. Substitution of militia for a standing army. Decision by the popular representatives of questions of peace and war. Decision of all international disputes by arbitration.

IV. Abolition of all laws which restrict or suppress free expression of opinion and the right of meeting or association.

V. Abolition of all laws which place the woman, whether in a private or a public capacity, at a disadvantage as compared with the man.

VI. Declaration that religion is a private matter. Abolition of all expenditure from public funds upon ecclesiastical and religious objects. Ecclesiastical and religious bodies are to be regarded as private associations, which order their affairs independently.

VII. Secularization of education. Compulsory attendance at public national schools. Free education, free supply of educational apparatus and free maintenance [books and meals –MIA] to children in schools and to such pupils, male and female, in higher educational institutions, as are judged to be fitted for further education.

VIII. Free administration of the law and free legal assistance. Administration of the law by judges elected by the people. Appeal in criminal cases. Compensation to persons accused, imprisoned or condemned unjustly. Abolition of capital punishment.

IX. Free medical assistance and free supply of remedies. Free burial of the dead.

X. Graduated income and property tax to meet all public expenses which are to be met by taxation. Self-assessment. Succession duties, graduated according to the extent of the inheritance and the degree of relationship. Abolition of all indirect taxation, customs, duties and other economic measures, which sacrifice the interests of the community to the interests of a privileged minority.

Labor Protections

For the protection of labor the German social democrats also demand to begin with:

I. An effectual national and international system of protective legislation on the following principles:

(a) The fixing of a normal working day, which shall not exceed eight hours.

(b) Prohibition of the employment of children under fourteen years of age.

(c) Prohibition of night work, except in those branches of industry which, from their nature and for technical reasons, or for reasons of public welfare, require night work.

(d) An unbroken rest of at least thirty-six (36) hours for every workingman

every week.

II. Supervision of all industrial establishments, together with the investigation and regulation of the conditions of labor in the town and country by an imperial labor department, district labor bureaus and chambers of labor. A thorough system of industrial sanitary regulation.

III. Legal equality of agricultural laborers and domestic servants with industrial laborers. Repeal of the laws concerning masters and servants.

IV. Confirmation of the rights of association.

V. The taking over by the imperial government of the whole system of workmen's insurance, though giving the workmen a certain share in its administration.

As an introduction to this programme, which was unanimously adopted, Liebknecht said, according to the official minutes:

The party principles were formulated until the present time in a platform which was no longer up to date, and in its propositions and demands was in many ways defective; however, the party, in its further evolution, has kept to the true spirit, filling the old forms with new meaning.

A revision of the platform, which before the anti-socialist legislation was already necessary, could no longer be delayed, and on Oct. 16, 1890, the party drew up at Halle the following resolution:

"In consideration of the fact that the party platform agreed upon by the unanimous congress at Gotha in 1875 has so excellently stood the test in the conflict of the last fifteen years, especially under the anti-socialist legislation, but notwithstanding which, as formulated by the early party congress, is no longer in all points equal to the demands of the times, the convention resolves that: The board of directors of the party be instructed to submit at the next convention a draft of a revision of the party platform and to make this draft public at least three months before the meeting of the next convention, in order that the party have sufficient time for examination."

I shall not again refer to the debate at Halle. The review which I gave of the old programme in my exposition of it in former years found no opposition; it was proven by universal agreement, however, that the old platform, which was a compromise platform, must be replaced by a new and better one. An old platform could not be plucked to pieces and criticised and the foundation of the new one laid in a more thorough manner than has happened to this in the last year and especially in the last three and a half months since the draft of the board of directors has been made public. The

letter from Marx of March 5, 1875, published by Engels, in an essential manner gave a stimulation and lent an important contribution to this critique. I presume the contents of the letter to be known to you all; it is to be found in the *Neue Zeit* and in the remaining party papers, as well as being discussed by the opposition press, and it has been debated in the most thorough manner and considered with all due regard since the draft of the new programme has been perfected.[a*]

Concerning this letter I have personally one observation to make — not in reference to its contents. The reproach has been raised by those of the opposition that the few to whom the letter was directed have conducted themselves dishonorably, in a measure, toward the party comrades, since they did not communicate the contents of the letter to the congress in 1875. Had we done so the object of that congress would have been put in danger. And the letter was a strictly confidential one, not intended for publicity.

We have already in the *Vorwärts* expressed ourselves concerning our position in regard to the letter of Marx relating to the platforms — in an explanation which, coming from the faction, clearly sets forth our opinion of the contents after mature consideration.[b*] At the time of the letter affairs were in this condition: The two factions of the social democracy, the Eisenacher and the Lassallian, had for years been involved in a struggle with each other. In the beginning, indeed, we believed on each side that the ends were different, that fundamental questions divided us. In the course of the fight, however, we arrived at the conclusion that for the mass of the members of both factions such questions did not exist; that even if the watchword were different, still the object, the demands and the efforts on both sides were entirely the same. So gradually all were brought to the conviction that it was necessary to unite the two divided streams into one. Instead of wasting strength in this strife that murdered brothers, we must act together and be directed against the common enemy — this is what every one said.

And this thought stood out so strongly that on both sides, even if the leaders had put themselves in opposition to it, the body of men were not to be hindered from agreement.

A few days ago our oldest comrade, the senior of the party, [Karl Wilhelm] Tölcke, spoke here. He recalled to mind the grievous times of the conflict. I would bring back to his memory a more pleasant event. As I sat in the editor's office one beautiful morning in Leipzig, not long after I came from imprisonment in the fortress of Hubertusburg, a man came in, who appeared not wholly unknown to me, though I could not immediately say who he

was. I worked on, whereupon the man said to me: "Tölcke is here and wishes to speak to you." I arose immediately. Tölcke met me with his outstretched hand, in which I at once placed mine. It required no previous conclusion of peace. We betook ourselves to an adjoining room. "We must have peace," said Tölcke, and I answered: "Yes; we must have peace."

From that moment, for me, peace was concluded, and as about this time similar steps were taken in the north, in Hamburg, in Altona and in other places, it became evident to all of my friends in Germany that now we must unite ourselves, let come what would. A Hotspur on one side or the other sought to hinder the work of peace, but the union had to be; it was necessary for the interests of the party.

We met in conference for the purpose of acquainting ourselves with a programme for union; on this side and that concessions were made, and at last, after long, long deliberation, we agreed upon the draft known to you, which almost unchanged was accepted by the Gotha congress.

When Marx received information of the plan he wrote this letter, which was intended for a few of us Eisenachers. We went through the letter carefully. I myself, who had lived with Marx, a comrade in struggle, his pupil, who in London had tasted the cup of exile with him, always proud to call myself his pupil and friend — I was obliged to meet the question, Is it for the interest of the party that we should go on in the manner Marx wishes? I knew at that time, as well as to-day, that what he said theoretically against the plan was correct to the last letter. Theory and practice are, however, two very different things. So, though unconditionally I relied on the judgment of Marx as to theory; in practice I went my own way. I asked myself, Is it possible to carry out now such a programme as Marx demands? After mature examination I came to this conviction, that it was not possible, and at the peril of being, for a time, at variance with Marx — whatever happened not for long — I declared: "It cannot be. Marx is dear to me, but dearer to me is the party."

Thus we accomplished the union, and all of my friends, [Ignaz] Auer, [Wilhelm] Bracke, [August] Geib and the others — [August] Bebel was in imprisonment and could take no part in the proceedings — we all, had we to-day the same alternative, would to-day do the same.

And I for myself can say: I believe never in my life to have rendered the party a greater service than at that time, when I rejected the advice of my friend and teacher Marx and consented to the platform of a union. Soon Marx also perceived that his fears were ungrounded and until his death looked with pride on the united German social democracy.

The Gotha programme brought true union. It has been impossible since then to split the German social democracy. Sectarianism has not existed since, nor can it exist. A few immature and suspicious individuals have fallen off, but the labor party has remained one, and, while the fears of Marx have not been fulfilled, all that we foresaw, hoped for and prophesied has been fulfilled.

We Eisenachers, since with our programme we were more scientific at first, [c] reached the hand to the brothers who had climbed the mountain with us but were somewhat behind, and drew them up to us. But it was not for long. Soon the Lassallians stood on the same plane with us and shared in our views.

The old demands of the Lassallians, for productive associations with state assistance, etc., were recognized as outgrown, through the development of the movement and of circumstances, even by the former Lassallians themselves, without the respect for Lassalle being destroyed; and before long every difference between the aim of the Eisenachers and the former Lassallians was done away with.

And if the spiritual, centrifugal force and the life strength of the party, which are accounted for purely through its need for culture, ever appeared great, they did during the supremacy of the anti-socialist legislation. I do not mean the conflict that for twelve years, day by day, night by night, we were obliged to fight — that struggle explains itself; we [would have] been destroyed if we had not fought and won, for it was a matter of life — I do not mean that, but the spiritual, the intellectual activity of the party during the conflict. Throughout the incessant struggle the party along with it developed mentally.

Theory must, by all means, subside behind the requirements of rough practice, and theoretical education was frequently made to suffer in the practical conflict, but through the elite of the party, that is to say the best prepared combatants — immaterial in what position and wholly the same whether a former Lassallian or Eisenacher — its scientific development and its education in scientific socialism, alike under the period of anti-socialist legislation and under the most severe conflict, has not ceased for a moment, but has made encouraging advance.

The unity of the theoretical views was demonstrated at Halle. It was a great moment when at the convention there, after it had been explained that we must break with the last remnant of Lassallianism and must elaborate a new platform adequate to present knowledge, all the delegates enthusiastically agreed and not the slightest opposition was audible.

All were at one in this, that whatever was not in keeping with the spirit of the age and whatever was opposed to science must be done away with.

I have now to speak on the principles that have guided us in this platform that lies before you. Before all things it must not be lost sight of that a platform should be written in clear and universally understood language; it must be short and correct; it must not be scientifically disputable. All of these properties, clear language, conciseness and logic, it is extremely difficult to unite. One is inclined to say more in a platform than belongs there. We must not confuse a platform with a manifesto. The latter, a bill of indictment, reflects present society, as though a mirror was held before it, as did the communist manifesto forty-three years ago.

This manifesto should, moreover, be rewritten — or rather a new one must be written and fitted to the old one, which is an historical masterpiece of imperishable worth. And he will make himself of service to the party who after we have obtained a new platform will write also a new manifesto — a manifesto of 1891 — while the old one bears the date of 1848.[d] What belongs in a manifesto does not belong in a platform.

And though a platform is to be clear, it cannot at the same time be a commentary. The agitators, the journalists and the learned of the party must give the commentary.[e] The platform must be the principles with the demands arising therefrom. However, it must comprise no explanations — it should say merely so much as is absolutely essential in the interest of clearness.

Proceeding from this point of view, we in the commission saw ourselves compelled from the beginning to put aside a great number of demands, because according to our opinion they belonged in a manifesto or in a commentary, but not in a platform.

It is impossible to make a party platform so plain that from the first all propositions and demands shall be clear to every one who has not yet been educated in party science. The comrades must learn and be taught. The schooling is certainly a matter of propaganda, of agitation, of explaining, of educational institutions and of party literature.

Against Lassalle & the Gotha Program

I have one more general observation to make before taking up the different parts of the platform. It is understood, from the manner in which the will of the party was brought to bear at Halle, that the so-called “Lassallian demands” are done away with. And further, in accordance with the views

expressed, the “iron law of wages” has been set aside. It is true, the effort is yet being made on one side to retain the expression, provided with an explanatory sentence, but it can only create confusion. The great majority of the party have reached the conviction that that which constitutes the essential part of the “iron law of wages,” the necessary proletarianization and expropriation of the wealth of the producing laborer by the possessors of the instruments of production, is clearly and correctly expressed throughout the whole principal part of the platform.

The idea that those who possess the instruments of production have in these the means for enslaving, exploiting and expropriating their fellow-men who are found not in possession of these things, runs like a red thread through the new platform.

Further, the watchword of “a reactionary body”[f] has been dropped. One or the other side would have been glad to retain it. It is true that all opponents in a class conflict are to us in the relation of “a reactionary body,” and that the expression was often pertinent and has done good service. It may stand in a manifesto or it may be spoken of in a commentary, but it does not belong in a platform. First, it is not true that all other parties are “a reactionary body,” and, second, the expression is so unscientific that it must be avoided in a platform that lays claim to being scientific. It is a truth which is stated in the platform that all other parties stand on the principle of capitalism and therefore are at enmity with us, who would destroy capitalism.

Further, you will not find in the draft the word “labor product,” which had become very dear to the former Lassallians, and, through Lassalle’s writings, to the Eisenachers also. The sentence that “to the laborer belongs his product” was long ago discarded, yet many would have retained the expression “labor product.”

By one side it was proposed to say “private capitalistic” in place of “capitalistic.” That is not practicable. It is perfectly correct to speak of private capitalistic production, but the expression comprehends only a part of capitalistic production. We have to do with the whole of capitalistic production, which may not necessarily be private, but as we have already seen may also be carried on by the state. The state, when it assumes control in place of the private entrepreneur, carries on the capitalistic exploitation exactly as the private entrepreneur. It can, in fact, exercise yet greater oppression. As we expressed it in our first draft — in the present one the passage is lacking — state capitalism is the worst form of capitalism, since it concentrates the economic and political power in one hand, and can

exercise the power of exploitation and oppression more sharply and intensely than can private capital.

Another motion was made to say “great capitalistic” instead of “capitalistic,” since we are not obliged to consider small capital. Now, capitalism is capitalism. Marx wrote “Capital”; he did not call his book “Great Capital.” Capitalistic exploitation is one and the same thing and that it will become the more intense the more capital is concentrated lies in the nature of capitalistic production, which according to its nature must exploit and without exploitation is not conceivable. Therefore we retain the word “capitalistic.”

Further, one will observe that the word “state” is not to be found in the draft. It does not occur in the draft of the committee or in other outlines; neither is it in the Magdeburger, which contains many good formulations. I will not expand here upon the question of the state; that is, the question whether the socialistic society would be a state or not. I know that concerning this point I have different views from many of my colleagues, but so far as I am in the affair the difference is a pure strife of words. That the state corresponds to the form of society, that the industrial society utilizes every form of state for the purpose of exploitation, that the industrial state under all circumstances must be a class state; and that so long as industrial society remains the state will be a class state; that is to say, politically organized exploitation — these are truths that as a matter of course are evident to every thinking social democrat. For me the question is merely this, whether the form and organization which society will take after the class state, together with industrial society and capitalistic production having been abolished, can be called a state or not. I have not been able to find — and herein I differ from my various friends — that the idea of oppression and exploitation necessarily lie in the word and idea “state.”

The word “state” has a very wide meaning. It signifies generally organized society. One speaks of the “bee-state,” of the “ant-state” and of the “learned state,” in connection with which exploitation and slavery are not thought of, but only the conception of a closed, organized community is expressed. As it is, however, we cannot use the word “state” in the new social democratic platform; first, because the idea is questionable; second, because we now have to deal with the state only so far as it stands hostilely opposed to us.

What we wish to make clear is that the state now represents, and must represent, the ruling classes, so long as class rule remains it must be a class state; and this state we are obliged to struggle against in a political conflict and to utilize all the weapons that we have, in order to acquire political

power and free ourselves from it. We have nothing to do with the state in any other manner.

The Main Principles of the Platform

And now I will enter on the main principles of the platform. It is not to be expected, of course, that at present I will explain all points of view; I must confine myself to setting forth fully only the general parts. The thought that guided us, and that gradually became evident to the congress, was to show clearly the cause out of which the present critical social conditions arise, to set forth the economic development which has divided the capitalist world and present society into two hostile camps, to explain the necessity of the class strife in a capitalistic society, and to show how it is an absolute necessity that, so long as industrial society remains, so long also the system of exploitation and oppression must remain.[g]

As the cause for the separation of society into two hostile camps it must be stated that the means of production — that is, the land, the raw products, tools, machines, mines and the currency — have been changed from the possession of the whole, the general society, and have become the private property of individuals. If we think of a condition in which the necessary means of production are in the possession of every one, so that each can work independently, then it is evident there can be no production for exchange; each produces for himself. There is no dependence of one on another, no exploitation or slavery. It is the business of the commentator to amplify whether and how far such a condition has existed. It was possible and imaginable only in that form of society where the means of production, at least the most necessary of the same — the mother earth — was the possession of the real producers, the laborers.

From the moment that private possession in the means of production arose, exploitation and the division of society into two hostile classes, standing opposed to each other through their interest, also began. This process has not been accomplished suddenly, but goes steadily forward. It is to be traced back through the middle ages, even into remote antiquity. In the industrial society, with which we have to deal and with which the platform is concerned, it proceeds with additional speed according to the degree in which the means of production have become concentrated and the monopoly or property of a small minority, and according as the productivity of the means of production has become steadily more perfect. A simple tool has grown into a machine; the machine becomes more and more perfect; capital, and with it the intensification of production, continually increases.

Out of the small business develops the great business, which marks the beginning of great industry from which arose the modern giant industry, and this is not sufficient — the giant industry unites itself into trusts agreements, etc.

And with this concentration of capital the means of production take on in equal manner; on one side the intensification of production, that rises to unending height, and on the other side the intensification of exploitation, of expropriation of the middle classes, the uncertainty of existence of the proletariat, the lower grade of misery, of oppression, of slavery.

The process of historical social development and the laws according to which it proceeds must be set forth in the platform; it must be shown how present conditions have their origin in the separation of the laborer from his product; how exploitation has grown and must grow with the greater concentration of the means of production; how the root of the evil lies in the fact that the means of production have become private property; how out of this fact exploitation results as an absolute necessity. Every one who possesses labor power, but has not the means with which to use it, must, if he will realize upon this activity, bring himself into the “play of economic forces”; without this he cannot live.

He is inseparable from his labor power and if he is not to starve he must betake himself to the service of another who has private possession in the means of production. From this arises and develops economic dependence, economic exploitation, and out of this political dependence and slavery in every form, a process that, as we have seen, goes on with increasing rapidity.

The division of society will ever become deeper and more complete. That which stands between the two extremes — capitalist and proletariat — the so-called middle classes of the population, who still have a small possession in the means of production, but must themselves work, even if they also utilize the labor of others; these middle classes disappear more and more. The whole process of development in the present society goes on irresistibly by virtue of its essential character to this end — that the means of production concentrate themselves in fewer hands, and that the possessors, the monopolists of these means, exploit the propertyless and rob them of their property, so that the whole history of industrial society is a history of expropriation in perpetuity. The possessor of the means of production expropriates those who have nothing, but who must labor for him for wages; he pays them only a part of the value produced for him. The surplus value, the unpaid-for labor, becomes in the hands of the possessor of the means of production, capital, and puts him in a position to draw the fetters of the

laborer closer and more firmly and to complete his slavery and exploitation. So the laborer forges for himself the chains of slavery while he works and creates wealth. In this process optimistic dreams can change nothing. All criticisms of capital that do not go to the heart of the matter are unfruitful; all attempts to remove the “protuberances” while the foundation of capitalism remains are Utopian. These “protuberances” are the logical result, the unavoidable consequence of the capitalistic system. Whoever would do away with them must remove the cause, capitalism itself. Through this demand the social democracy differentiates itself from all other parties and is marked as revolutionary, since all other parties, without exception, stand on the foundation of private ownership in the means of production.

In consideration of its pre-eminent importance we have formulated this point more clearly and sharply in the draft before you than was the case in the first outline. It was said then that all other parties mutually stood on the principle of capitalism and therefore were altogether at enmity to the laboring class. Exception is taken to this and it is claimed that there is an endeavor in Germany that, if not of political significance, yet aims equally with us to clip the wings of capital, so far at least as it has grown to “great capital.” I mean the aim of the members of trades organizations, the guild enthusiasts and the anti-Semites. We cannot designate their aim as capitalistic, but, as we have pointed out in the draft, they stand on the basis of private property in the means of production, and on this ground they are in common with all other parties. The social democracy stands as a compact body opposed to all parties resting on that foundation. There can be no alliance, no compromise. Between us and the army of our united opponents yawns a chasm, a chasm that daily grows more deep and wide; a chasm which to be sure, since yonder bank is higher, can be economically leaped from there here, and daily, hourly, out of the ranks of our opponents, through the weight and logic of economic development, masses that till now fought on the other side are hurled into the proletariat, while thousands and hundreds of thousands fall into the abyss and miserably perish. But this bottomless chasm is not filled by their bodies, and it remains — it is the dividing line which separates us from all other parties. Every one who would pass this dividing line must give up small industrial Utopias and have clearly before his eye that only the removal of the cause — that is, the removal of private ownership in the means of production, and the whole present manner of production for sale, can make an end to misery, exploitation and slavery. He who believes that through compromise he can gradually, with little industrial ointments and palliative measures, make the evils of present society so mild that one will at least be able to bear them for a time — whoever cherishes such a view has forsaken the revolutionary

foundation of the party. It is this we have to bear in mind when we ask: Do you belong to us or not? The most beautiful phrases about improving the condition of the laborer are of no use to us. In that way there is no help for us.

It lies in the nature of present society and production that exploitation must ever become more intense. Can we, through the legislation of the state, be it ever so powerful, be unnaturally set back into the middle ages? Can the great industry be sacrificed to the small business, as the guild enthusiasts would have it? No; it is simply impossible. The present class state, the servant of capitalism, that has never yet had the power in the simple question of the protection of the laborer to tear itself loose from the ruling class — this state is designated by the dreamers as a “social kingdom and empire”! Society cannot be forced back into strange, early, historical forms of production and the new form leads irresistibly to ever greater concentration of the means of production, to ever greater exploitation of its labor, to more enormous proletarianization of the members of society. Therefore the social democracy demands that the cause of these conditions be seized at the root and destroyed from the foundations. We demand this, not as a whim, but as a logical necessity, since we stand on the height of a world philosophy which conceives society as an organism that with irresistible necessity ever grows and develops. We see that the present society has created conditions that will destroy themselves; we see that present society with iron logic pushes forward to a catastrophe, into its own “judgment day,” which is not to be avoided. Socialism is no arbitrary device. The so-called future state with which we have been scoffed, the foundation of which, as a matter of course, we can only point out in general outlines, is the necessary, unavoidable result of the present capitalistic state, as the socialistic production is the necessary result and consequence of present capitalistic production. Thus capitalism, while it ever further increases and gathers in giant grasp its means of power, creates at the same time the enemy and the powerful agencies to which it must succumb — creates, as it says in the communist manifesto, its own grave-diggers and digs its own grave. Capitalism makes, to be its heir, the proletariat, which it creates, prepares for him his heritage, forges the weapons for him, gives him the possibility to realize that for which we strive, produces for him the material condition for the realization of our ideals. In short, the capitalistic present state is the father, contrary to its will, of the socialist future state. In a condition of small industrial undertakings, dwarf businesses, there was possible, to be sure, a so-called socialism, a sort of philanthropic Utopianism, but the scientific revolutionary socialism, that has grasped the law of evolution and looks upon itself as the last product of this

development, was simply unthinkable. Socialism is the result of modern capitalism — the socialist state the successor and heir of the capitalist state.

Therefore we have not set forth in our platform any misty aim floating in the air. We have stated what is and what will be. We have said society is thus; there are certain laws that we can alter as little as can the present state. They lead irresistibly to socialistic society. Therefore, since socialism is a necessity, we strive for it and summon the worker to place himself under the banner of social democracy.

We have said that this movement accomplishes itself through class struggle. This word, which was first brought by Marx from the English into the German, forms the best refutation of the opinion that the Marxian theory, scientific socialism, excludes persons from taking a part in the social evolutionary process and inclined toward a certain fatalism and passive waiting. This is false. The exact opposite is true. It was Marx himself who explained the whole development of industrial society as a series of class conflicts, that corresponded to unbroken, ever more comprehensively developing economic relations, fulfilling themselves in ever higher forms with deeper and wider meaning. And the class struggle is a struggle of living persons, an actual personally directed struggle, and no one has expressed the nature of this conflict clearer than Marx.

If we announce that we will remove the present class state, then in order to meet the objections of our opponents we must also say that the social democracy, while it contends against the class state through the removal of the present form of production, will destroy the class struggle itself. Let the means of production become the possession of the community; then the proletariat is no longer a class — as little as the bourgeoisie; then classes will cease; there will remain only society, a society of equals — true human society, mankind and humanity.

For that reason it has been stated in the plainest manner that we should not substitute one class rule for another. Only malice and thoughtlessness could incidentally put such a wrong construction on our meaning, for in order to rule, in order to be able to exercise rule, I must have possession in the means of production. My private property in the means of production is the preliminary condition for rule, and socialism removes personal private property in the means of production. Rule and exploitation in every form must be done away with, mankind must become free and equal, not master and servant, but comrades, brothers and sisters!

Next to these general remarks we will speak of the international character of the party. Since the International Workingmen's Association was

established, in the middle of the '60s, the international character of the labor movement has been acknowledged and given practical proof of by the German workers on every occasion. In the new platform we have plainly given expression to the two phases of this thought; first on the economic side, since industrial development has in its nature an international character, and then on the political side, since out of the international character of economic evolution arises the impossibility of solving the social question in one country, and from whence arises the necessity for international united effort on the part of the laboring class.

And, further, because of misunderstandings and perverted conclusions and occurrences in other lands, that lead to these conclusions, it was doubly our duty to state with particular emphasis and in words that leave no room for doubt that we feel and declare ourselves one with the class conscious workers of all other lands. The international social democracy is not a phantom to us, not merely a beautiful phrase. No; it is an end, without the attainment of which the emancipation of the laboring class cannot be accomplished. This matter of internationalism is one of sacred seriousness with us. We are well acquainted with the consequences of our declaration and the obligations that it lays on us, and if we have not expressly stated it in this platform, as was the case in the former one, it has been merely for this reason, that we believe it to be superfluous, yes, weakening, after our present existing declaration that we hold ourselves to be one with the social democrats of all other lands.

What we solemnly determine here is for each and all to make a reality in life and to convert into deeds and acts that which stands in this platform. In the international union of the proletariat the German social democracy will always perform its obligations, turned back by nothing that duty requires.

I would now direct your attention to a sentence in the sixth paragraph: "The struggle of the working classes against capitalist exploitation must of necessity be a political struggle. The working classes can neither carry on their economic struggle nor develop their economic organization without political rights." Herewith we declare the political nature of our party and separate ourselves from those who advocate the so-called "propaganda of the deed," who in reality raise "inactivity" to a platform and with revolutionary phrases exercise the propaganda of "nothingness." We must act and work politically, apply all instruments in order to further our end.

There is much to do and the more strength we employ, the greater the sum of power we put into the work, the sooner will it be accomplished.

To expect the transformation of society and the social revolution to

accomplish itself without taking part in the political struggle is childish foolishness. Whoever thinks this has no conception of the difficulty and greatness of our struggle for emancipation.

I spoke in Halle on "The Growth of the Present Society into Socialism." In many ways that expression has become suspicious to me. I have designated therewith merely the organic character of the evolution of society, which is no machine, but a collective living organism. I have on every occasion, and also at that time, clearly stated that men are not the playthings of fate, and that they dare not stand inactive, anticipating a blessing from above; that circumstances, it is true, dispose of men, but are also in turn through men determined, and that, as the class struggle is a continual strife, so also the realization of our end can only be the fruit of the uninterrupted conflict in which all fight together and every one throws his whole being unreservedly into the balance scale, joyfully setting at stake possessions and life.

"They (the laboring class) cannot expect the transfer of the means of production to the community without being first invested with political power," it reads further in this paragraph. That is to say, we struggle for the power in the state for the "latch to legislation" that is now monopolized by our opponents for their class interests. "It must be the aim of social democracy to give conscious unanimity to this struggle of the working class to indicate the inevitable goal." It is not our task to hold enticingly before the workers a picture of the future state, but to inform them of the process of development and the laws that actuate present society; to point out to them what is necessary in order to bring exploitation and slavery to an end; to show them how industrial society itself in its further development more and more puts the means for abolishing it into their hands.

Here the double character of our party is plainly expressed; the scientific character, which refuses, according to the anarchistic Bismarckian prescription of blood-and-iron politics, to view the historical movement as an arbitrary one, which man after his own will can lead to revolution or reaction, but recognizes that there exist firm, unalterable laws for the social movement, and the practical character of our party, which is demonstrated in that it would show to the laborer the way to the end that it has already pointed out to him; how only through the attainment of political power we can hasten the decomposing process of present society, and, organizing ourselves more and more, can accomplish our object.

I come now to the separate demands.[h] At the head we have placed, as in all early platforms, the fundamental demand for universal equal suffrage. It is known to every one of you that we have not rated this too highly and I

will not repeat what has been said a hundred times — that this question belongs to tactics and must not be considered here. Since I must study brevity I will only dwell on those points that offer exceptions to the earlier platform, or require mention on other grounds. In the demand for suffrage we have said directly that we recognize no differences on account of sex. In the former platform we advocated the equal rights of women, yet in a somewhat modest form, only indirectly. As we on the whole insist on the absolute equal rights of both sexes, so now we demand clearly the suffrage for women. It will not repay the trouble to waste words over a discussion as to whether there is a separate woman's question. The emancipation of women in general must come with the emancipation of the working people. Fifteen years ago this question was an "apple of discord"; now there exists in relation to it not the slightest difference of opinion, and so I pass from this point.

Further, we demand proportional representation. This point is not in the former platform; but the demand is so self-evident and it has been so frequently analyzed and recommended by our papers that I need not dwell upon it. I will merely say that this form of election is the only one which makes possible a representation according to actual voters and does away with the inequality of election districts and the accidents of majorities which defeat the popular will. It makes the representation correspond exactly to the number of voters in the party. The election district being done away with, the whole state becomes erected into one elective body and representation will be determined by means of a simple arithmetical operation; this party has cast so many votes and another so many, so and so many representatives are to be chosen as a whole, and these representatives are apportioned according to the number of voters in each party. This is so clear that every impartial observer must understand it at once. Only the interests of the ruling class are in the way. Our party would gain great advantage from this system, for as you know we are scattered over all Germany. We are not located as the "center" and the other parties are only in definite districts, concentrated in single places. The social democrats are everywhere in Germany as they are everywhere in the world. But we are a young party and the election districts in which we have a majority are comparatively few. By the present system of elections the greater part of our votes are lost. According to proportional representation the number of our representatives would be doubled, perhaps even trebled.

Further, we demand two years' duration of the legislature. This demand also requires little argument. Already we have made a motion to this effect in the Reichstag. On every occasion we have explained in debate — it has also

occupied the attention of our press — that annual elections, as the English charter demands, come in too quick succession. When we once have a democratic state it will be possible to compel from a representative who has failed to perform his duty the resignation of his authority, or of the whole representative body, in case it has not the public confidence, and cause a new election to be held.

That the elections should be held on a legal day of rest is self-evident; likewise the removal of all restrictions upon political rights. For us there is only one case in which a person can be deprived of his right of suffrage; that is in the case of a minor, on account of mental incapacity, imbeciles, etc.

Further we demand direct legislation by the people by means of the right of initiative and of veto. That is, we would not have the “center of gravity” of the political life located in parliament. The “center of gravity” according to democratic principles lies in the people themselves, and the people should not be compelled to wait until, condescendingly, laws and bills that are necessary and desired come from their representatives. No; they should themselves have the right of initiative.

Complementary to this right of initiative — that is, the right of the people to make direct motion for law — is the right of veto — that is, the right of the people by means of direct ballot to give validity to the law or to repudiate it. This demand, which is always recognized by us as a principle, was contained in the earlier platform.

Next we demand self-government by the people in the empire, state, province and commune. The word state means here an individual state, not the state in the general sense of its economic relations in conformity with organized society. We have here for the first time stated that we consider only that state and form of government which rests on the broadest democratic basis, arises directly from the people and is by them controlled, as being in harmony with the principles of the people’s sovereignty.

We demand that the people be rulers of their own fate, that the well-being of the people be the highest law and their will be subordinate to no other will. We demand that all laws and arrangements that hinder the practical proof and activity of the people’s will be done away with. At a glance every one will perceive that herein is comprehended a complete transformation of the arrangement of the state. It means the absolute democratization of the political conditions in Germany.

Corresponding to this principle we demand the election of the magistrates by the people. The right of self-government by the people makes this

demand a logical consequence. But we formulate here a new demand — the accountability and responsibility to the people of the officers elected. That we say accountability and responsibility is no tautology, no repeating of two words that mean essentially the same. By the accountability of officials it is usual to understand the political accountability prescribed by the constitution and the laws. We wish something more. We require also the personal civil law responsibility of the officers for all that they do.

I said at the time I explained this idea in the Reichstag:

“The time will, it is to be hoped, come in Germany when the victims of the anti-socialist laws will be compensated and when the authors of these laws, all those who by means of the same have wronged thousands and hundreds of thousands in their person and property, will be made personally responsible for it. I do not wish that, as in France, the taxpayers should be obliged to meet the indemnity, but that the ones in fault be proceeded against.”

The expression “personal responsibility” was interpreted by certain reactionaries as though I had demanded lynch law. To be sure, I thought of the administration of law, but not of lynch law. The personal responsibility of the official is a necessary postulate of the people’s sovereignty. An officer is not a being of higher order; he has simply to accomplish the will of the people, or to act in harmony with that will. He is accountable for all his actions and must not stand beyond the pursuance of the civil and common law. That is what we wish to express. In England this is already a law and brings excellent results. Every commoner without exception is equal under the civil and common penal law for all his acts, as are also the officers and soldiers in service. Officers and soldiers are, it is true, in England, as with us, under military law, which demands blind obedience to orders, but they are at the same time accountable to the civil and criminal law for all their deeds, including those done in service.

Suppose an officer on the occasion of a riot gave the command to shoot. According to military law he is obliged to do so. He has the commission and is not accountable to military law for the blood and death of his fellow-men. Now comes the common civil law; first of all the post-mortem examination. Here are the dead, violently killed. How did they come to their end? Through the bullets of the soldiers. The officers gave the command. Fire! The soldiers shot and the people were struck by the bullets and killed. Did the officer do this in self-defense? is now asked further, or is it manslaughter or murder? And the law in England concerning manslaughter and murder counts for officers and soldiers exactly as for civil persons who commit murder or allow it. If it cannot be proven that the soldier was

absolutely obliged to shoot in self-defense or in justification of legal conditions the jurors simply state there was no satisfactory reason for the shooting; the people had not threatened; the firing was unnecessary. Then in the most favorable case the charge reads manslaughter, and, if the matter is worse, murder. The officer who gave the order to fire is not protected by the command which he holds from above, the jury pronounce his guilt, and, according to civil law, he is either, in case of manslaughter, put in prison, or if murder he is hanged, and the same can occur to every soldier who fires with orders.

One does not believe that such can happen. I recall many cases where officers were found guilty by the jury; directly after, to be sure, they were pardoned by the ruler. Eventually, however, this will be of no assistance. At any rate our demand is throughout a just one. Further, I can describe an example of personal responsibility in Germany — an isolated one it is true; I mean the case of Gen. Vogel von Falkenstein, who at the outbreak of the last French war arrested our then existing party managers and allowed them to be imprisoned. At the end of the war procedure was begun against him by those who were wronged on this account, and, on the civil complaint, he was condemned by all courts of judicature to a considerable indemnity. That was in Braunschweig and there was no further result.

Further, we demand that there be universal military education. Substitution of militia for the standing army. This is the old demand of the social democracy, which was brought forward by Fichte in his “Speech on the German Nation.” To-day we have a people with arms and a people without arms. Every one should be a soldier, however, as in Switzerland, and in order to bring about such a system it is necessary that every one from his youth be exercised in the use of arms, in marching, gymnastics, firing, etc.

In Switzerland every school teacher in every village knows the military exercise. He is at least an under officer in the confederate army; perhaps a higher officer. He teaches his pupils from the earliest age exercising, military gymnastics, to shoot with the cross-bow, and at a certain age the child receives a gun. In short, the youth are educated in all the exercises necessary for military service.

We demand decision concerning war and peace by the representatives of the people. Of this only a word. It was moved to say “directly by the people,” the present construction being thought a backward step. No; it is not. On the contrary, it is a positive advance on the road to the reasonable and practicable. Observe, once a war comes suddenly, how would it be possible for all the people to vote concerning it? And in these days wars mostly

come suddenly. We free ourselves from phrases and express our demand in a practical way.

Further, we require the decision of all international disputes by arbitration. It has already been sufficiently demonstrated at the congress of Brussels[i] that we are no Utopians in regard to “eternal peace.” In our well-known resolution there we have stated that the conditions which bring the permanent danger of war have their roots in the present economic society, in the system of capitalism. We are not like the “industrial enthusiasts,” who would leave the cause and merely remove the consequence. We make the demand that an international board of arbitration be established, before which all disputes between states shall be brought. However, this demand will not be realized, as many others we have made will not be, under the present state. Nevertheless we have declared ourselves on this question which touches so deeply the whole civilized world, and we will show that as a party we support every earnest effort to remove the dangers of war, without, however, falling into the weak industrial peace Utopia.

We demand further the abolition of all laws which subordinate woman to man, whether in a private or public capacity. Before admitting this demand we asked ourselves whether it were not superfluous to make this a separate point after we had already declared the absolute equality of the sexes. But it must be borne in mind that a resolution to this effect was accepted in Brussels and the desire was expressed that it might be adopted in the social democratic platforms of the different countries, and we have acted accordingly.

The two following paragraphs of the platform have given us much trouble in their formulation. To meet the difficulty it was moved to accept the democratic demands as found in the Eisenacher platform: Separation of the church from the school and from the state. That was quite right in its time, but at present it does not comprehend all that we would and must say. In the earlier formulation the church is regarded as an institution equal in rank with the state. This is not our idea. We go much further; according to our view in the free community for which we strike the church is simply a private association, which is controlled by its own laws, as all other private associations are. That is the meaning of the absolute equality to which we have here given expression. Therefore we say: “The ecclesiastical and religious bodies are to be regarded as private associations.” And in order that the catholics may not be able to say that we wish to offer them violence we have added: “Associations which order their affairs independently.”

In connection with this passage concerning the church we demand

“Secularization of education.” This means that the church, that religion, should have nothing to do with the school. We are bound by principle to demand this and the point is so clear that explanation seems unnecessary. However, it is worth while to meet beforehand all misunderstandings and intentional or unintentional misinterpretations to which such a demand in our platform could give occasion. It is well known how stubbornly the ecclesiastical bodies carry on the struggle concerning the school whenever that question comes to the front. One recognizes how much it means to them, catholics, protestants and others, to hold and make their control firm over the intellect. You know how the social democracy is represented as a red specter, how the ecclesiastical associations say of us that we are a party of atheists and that the social democrats would forcibly take religion from every one and violently crush the church. In order to take the foundation from and to break the point of these demagogical slanders and pious falsehoods, we state here that the regulation of religious matters lies with each individual, and we declare religion to be a private matter. I admit that I struggled for some time against taking up these practical considerations, since their meaning seemed so self-evident in the declaration of the platform. But in looking back over the systematic calumny of our position in regard to religion it appears necessary that they be stated. The social democracy as such has absolutely nothing to do with religion. Every man has the right to think and believe what he will and no one has the right to molest or limit another in his thoughts or beliefs, or to allow any one’s opinions to be a disadvantage to him in any way. Opinions and beliefs can only be proceeded against when they become converted into pernicious and unlawful acts, as for example with certain bigoted sects. But the opinions and beliefs in themselves must be free, perfectly free. We as social democrats must respect them, and those social democrats who respect the genuineness and worth of their fellow-men will also avoid scoffing at their beliefs. Above all, scoffing at a prejudice is foolish and impolitic, since it but strengthens it. Only education can be of help here. But if it were our duty to state that we will not rob any one of his religion or hinder him in the exercise thereof, we dare not offer the church any handle by means of which it can come into the schools, and therefore we say “Compulsory attendance at public national schools.” Every child must be sent by its parents or relatives to these secular schools, in which no religion is taught, but by virtue of the fundamental statement that religion is a private matter, it remains to the parents themselves to teach their children, or allow them to be taught, in the religion which they choose. At first we thought to expressly state this in the platform, but we found that such a practical commentary did not belong there.

We demand further that expenditures from the public funds not only to ecclesiastical but to religious objects be abolished. We have added the word “religious” because there are associations of a religious nature that are not ecclesiastical, and also there shall be no expenditure from the public funds, just because religion is a private matter.

The school question was one that engaged us for some time when we drew up the draft of the platform; whether or not we should state that instruction and educational apparatus [books —MIA] be free in all schools even to the highest — to the university. It was pointed out by a part that, according to the criticism of the platform by Karl Marx, only the bourgeoisie, the propertied classes, would gain an advantage thereby, since the laborer under the present conditions could not send his children to the higher grades of school. Hence we have decided on a restriction and demand free instruction and educational apparatus only in the public schools.

With this demand belongs the other, the maintenance [meals —MIA] of the children at school, incidentally a demand which is found for nearly a hundred years in the famous school law of Lakanal, that was presented to the French convention and accepted by it shortly after the execution of Louis XVI. At that time the fundamental principle was stated that the state which compelled the parents to send their children to school is also bound to care for the physical needs of the children. The school question is a social question. Hungry children can learn nothing.

Our further demand speaks for itself — that those children who show peculiar talents, and by examination prove themselves capable of attending higher schools, professional and other schools, shall have free instruction and maintenance. With this addition our paragraph concerning schools is formulated without falling into excess or leaving the ground of real relations.

A further demand is for free administration of the law, free legal assistance and free medical attendance. In principle both belong together. The possibility to seek justice is to-day in general the privilege of the wealthy. The right to complain is in most cases really taken from the poor, since the complaint and process are too expensive. It is exactly the same with medical help in case of sickness. The physician is not a public officer and if even now in individual cases free medical attendance is assured it is only on certain conditions which every one can or may not fulfill. Hundreds of thousands at present go deprived of medical help and legal assistance through lack of money and fear of the high cost. No new privileges are created for the propertied classes! All sorts of practical questions were raised concerning this. But we said to ourselves, with the simplification of

the forms of justice, many ways can be found in which our demand will be carried out and it is not our affair to establish individual cases. On the contrary, that is the business of the legislator. In behalf of this demand it may be remarked that the state, according to the definition in the "Philosophy of Law,"[j] is a great federation for the protection of justice, and the "just state" is always the ideal before the defenders of the present state. And do they not always say to us: "The state guarantees justice to every member of the state and city"? Very well; we demand that the right of defense, which now for the mass of the people only stands on paper, be made a truth for all. Now merely the wealthy, who need no civil defense, since they can help themselves to justice, have this right. To the poor, who are more easily and frequently oppressed, it is unattainable. For them in reality there is no defense by law. This is an injustice that must be ended.

We demand: "Graduated income and property tax to meet all public expenses which are to be met by taxation." The insertion of property tax gave occasion for debate in the commission. But we found that, next to income, property must be mentioned, as, for example, is the case in England with the income and property tax. It is necessary to make a distinction between the income of a person which simply arises from his individual labor and that which he receives without necessarily working for it — for example, from land, capital, bonds, etc. While with the one the income is united to the person and ceases if he cannot work, or if he dies, the other income is independent of the person. With an income of the latter kind the graduated tax must be higher. In other words, one who has an income from fixed property must be taxed more than one who has no property income.

Of the inheritance tax it is demanded that the graduated increase be measured not merely according to the extent of the inheritance, but also according to the degree of relationship.

I come now to the second part of the special demands — namely, those which we make specifically for the defense of the laboring classes. There is not one among these that requires minute discussion. I will merely state that we were obliged to strike out the proposal which was submitted that we demand political guarantee against unemployment. We did this unanimously, since we reached the conviction that such a demand could not be carried through.

The attempt has been made by the miners' unions in England to secure a guarantee against unemployment. There it has been proven that merely in the organizations of those trades in which on an average the pay is high and the number of idle small can such a guarantee be made effective — only in

those labor groups that need it the least. To all other labor unions in which to-day the idle count to the thousands the attempt is of no avail. And if we should demand such a proposition of the state we would do our cause a bad service.

As already said in the demands referring to the laboring class, we as a labor party must avoid all mistiness and that which cannot be carried out. What we demand in this part of our platform is highly practical and in great part already realized in other lands. We must not weigh down these demands with such as make it easy for our opponents to say: "You ask the impossible!" The security against lack of employment belongs, however, in the dreamland of "the right to work."

In the beginning of his rising power Prince Bismarck said to the advancing bourgeoisie: "flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo. (If I am not able to bend the high I will move the Acheron.)[k] If I cannot deal with you, the party of progress, and the liberals, then I will conjure with the proletariat; I will move the Acheron; I will unchain against you the socialist movement." Prince Bismarck called, but the Acheron, the German proletariat, did not move! Proffers were made to us. They were contemptuously sent back. Then the social democracy called and the Acheron, the German labor movement, arose, and the German labor power, as far as it is class conscious, united and with one mind marches under the banner of social democracy as in no other country of the earth. What Prince Bismarck could not do the social democracy has accomplished. It was stronger than he and along the whole line the social democracy stands as victor over the Bismarckian system.

Mention has been made of the "iron law of evolution." And it is an iron law. No one can alter it, bend or break it by force, and Prince Bismarck, who disposed of all the means of power in the state and society, who said of himself, "I am the realm; I am the state" — and who said it more truly of himself than did the king of France — he is to-day crushed to the earth, while state and society are yet here. Nothing has essentially been altered; a man less on the political stage and nothing further; one man overboard. The social democracy recognizes that, as little as Prince Bismarck could alter the laws of progress, even as little can we alter them. We know that industrial society, do what it will, hastens to destruction. It is like an ancient tragedy of fate — the hero knows he is condemned to be the sacrifice. It is a decree that he must fulfill. He defends himself against it. He seeks to escape the powers that be, but every step he takes to go away from it brings the catastrophe nearer, till the day of ruin, of destruction, of judgment comes. So it is with our bourgeoisie. They strain every nerve in order to escape fate,

but every attempt to turn it aside simply brings the execution of the sentence nearer. They may do what they will against us, they act for us; they may do what they will for themselves, they act for us; and we, we may do what we will, the conditions work into our hands all in state and society; persecutions, concessions, all the same. All incline to our advantage, we, the rising, victorious social democracy. Our opponents may seek what they will, they can only work for us.

I have stated before that industrial society is a society of expropriation; that capitalism is expropriation in perpetuity. The possessors of the instruments of production and labor expropriate those who possess nothing, and this process of expropriation — that is, the robbery of property — must continue as long as the present order of society remains. It calls itself, to be sure, the society of private property, but in reality it is that form of society which destroys personal property. The end of this process of expropriation can only be what Marx has said in his granitic words: “The expropriation of the expropriator.” Then for the first time, when this society is destroyed, property in the sense of the equal claim of all to the enjoyment of the goods which have been created by the general organized labor of all will become a reality.

The most beautiful platform counts for nothing, however, if a true energetic spirit is not infused into it. Therefore I beg of you to not quarrel with the words. Do not expect it to be a perfect platform. That platform which in one moment, according to the universal opinion of us all, is the best, in the next hour will have found a critic who could make improvements in one or the other formulation or sentence. As was said in 1875, we would not create a pope for ourselves in our platform. A platform has only one thing to fulfill: clearly and intelligently to state the object of our party, the evolutionary process of industrial society, to point out the irresistibility with which it destroys itself and brings the moment nearer when capitalistic production will be replaced by socialistic production. It is our sacred duty to hasten with all our strength this process of development, that the change may come at the earliest possible moment. Attend to it, that the new platform which we create here to-day lead the party on from victory to victory, as the former one did — from victory to victory until the final victory. Put the right spirit into the new platform. Struggle in the right spirit under this new banner. Sustain it, mindful of the lofty duties that arise for us out of the greatness and growth of our party. Manfully and full of energy go on. Fight fearlessly and without rest, as you fought under our old storm-torn flag. Put your whole strength, your whole personality into the realization of this platform and see to it that the time be the shortest possible till the day when

the present industrial society ends. For the fall of this society depends naturally on the sum of strength that is used against it. The more power we use in this agitation, the more regardless we throw ourselves into the scales, so much the sooner will we attain our end and so much the sooner the banner of social democracy will rise on the citadel of present society.

FINIS.

MIA Editor's Notes

[a] The letter, addressed privately to the Eisenacher leaders in 1875, was published in the theoretical journal *Die Neue Zeit* as Critique of the Gotha Program. The occasion for publication came when Liebknecht borrowed liberally from Marx's critique, without attribution, during his proposal for a new party program at the Halle congress of 1890. Engels then resolved to publish the letter, both to expose Liebknecht's plagiarism and to make sure Marx's ideas could be fully considered before the Erfurt congress. The publication of the Critique hurt Liebknecht's reputation as a theoretician significantly and contributed to the victory of the *Die Neue Zeit* editorial board's draft for the proposed program, written primarily by Karl Kautsky, over the party executive committee's draft written primarily by Liebknecht.

Liebknecht privately threatened to resign as congress referee as a result of this upset, but ultimately accepted the job to maintain party unity. I do not think however that this implies Liebknecht's core ideological disagreement with the program this speech defends. Both drafts offered the same basic theses on the nature of capitalism and the final goal of socialism, both drafts offered nearly the same minimum program of immediate demands, and both drafts were approved by Engels (although he preferred Kautsky's draft). The difference lies in their rhetorical emphasis: in Liebknecht's draft, the development of capitalism presents the moral duty of a transition to socialism, while in Kautsky's draft, the development of capitalism presents the economic necessity of a transition to socialism. The difference is best exemplified by these two passages:

July 4th Party Leadership Official Draft (Liebknecht):

The planlessness that is grounded in the nature of capitalist private production creates those ever longer-lasting crises and work shortages that make the worker's situation even worse, that further widen the gulf between the propertied and the propertyless by ruining the urban and rural middle classes — the petty bourgeoisie and the small farmers — that turn generalized

insecurity into a normal state of affairs and that prove how the class of the appropriators of the social means of labor have lost the vocation and ability for economic and political leadership.

The aim and task of social democracy is to put an end to this situation, one that is becoming more and more unbearable from day to day, by abolishing its causes and by winning the emancipation of the working class.

Adopted Erfurt Program (Kautsky):

The gulf between the propertied and the propertyless is further widened by crises that are grounded in the nature of the capitalist mode of production, crises that are becoming more extensive and more devastating, that elevate this general uncertainty into the normal state of society and furnish proof that the powers of productivity have grown beyond society's control, that the private ownership of the means of production has become incompatible with their appropriate application and full development. (...)

It is the task of the Social Democratic Party to shape the struggle of the working class into a conscious and unified one and to point out the inherent necessity of its goals.

A helpful comparison of the major draft programs for the Erfurt congress can be found as an appendix to the recent book Karl Kautsky on Democracy and Republicanism (2019), from which the translations above are sourced.

[b] This refers to an article written by Liebknecht for the February 13th issue of Vorwärts and reprinted in Die Neue Zeit shortly afterward. In it, Liebknecht replies to the publication of the Critique of the Gotha Program and systematically defends his decision to draft a compromise program for the cause of unifying the socialist movement. The article was appended with a declaration from the party's executive committee condemning Kautsky's publication of the Critique without first notifying them. This article has never been translated into English.

[c] The text of the Eisenach Program is available at an external link [here](#). While clearly inspired by formulations written by Marx for the First International, it is worth noting that the Eisenach Program also includes concessions to Lassalleanism, such as a demand for state-sponsored cooperatives, in order to accommodate high profile defectors from the Lassallean party (ADAV). Marx approved of these compromises at the time in the name of unity.

[d] That is, the Communist Manifesto.

[e] Karl Kautsky wrote the SPD's official commentary on the Erfurt

Program in his immensely influential Das Erfurter Programm of 1892, available in an abridged translation as The Class Struggle. With the help of Bruno Schönbank the most important insights of the book were adapted into a 60 page pamphlet that served as the de facto manifesto of the Erfurt Program; according to Andrew G. Bonnell in Did They Read Marx?, Kautsky and Schönbank's pamphlet had a circulation ten times higher than the Communist Manifesto.

[f] The modern standard translation for this phrase is “one reactionary mass”.

[g] As mentioned above, “industrial society” is an unconventional early translation of “bourgeois society”. Contra Ted Kaczynski, Liebknecht's vision of a society without oppression did not exclude the use of industrial machinery.

[h] This translation leaves out an interesting passage on the relation between the maximum program outlining the final goal of a socialist society, and the minimum program of political demands that will set the socialist transformation in motion. I reproduce here the entire missing passage, taken from the 1994 Erich Hahn translation:

I turn now to the particular demands. We did not adopt the three-part division of the program as was in the Gotha compromise program. Even at that time it was contested as being illogical and unscientific, and the transitional material inserted between the general principles and the particular demands is now simply unacceptable. Attempts were made to introduce the three-part division into the new program, even leaving out clauses which could no longer be retained, but they were rejected and the commission unanimously supports the program as it now stands.

We thus begin by presenting the organic development process of society—illustrating how society is split into two classes, how Capitalism functions, and how it creates its own demise. But we don't want to sit back now, contrary to the beliefs of our opponents, standing around fascinated or hypnotized by the fairy-tale land of the state of the future. The struggle calls to us; summoning all our strength we must fight in every realm, on every potential battlefield, fight to ensure that our influence in the state and society grows constantly. We must accept every means, be it ever so humble—no matter whether it be communal, provincial, or state elections, no matter whether the area of influence is large or small—we have to be active everywhere, and everywhere we must address ourselves to the existing facts and conditions in order to show the masses the necessity of Socialist transformation. Which is why we say we are a fighting party, constantly fighting; at every moment we are conscious of the revolutionary character of our movement. We are obligated to keep this

consciousness alive in our comrades and we will fight day by day, we will fight in the communal assemblies, in the provincial legislatures, in the Reichstag, in the press, in the popular assemblies—we will fight wherever we can. And we will fight and struggle to carry our vision, the vision of Social Democracy, ever farther afield and we will multiply the strength of our party.

Thus, since we are intelligent, active people who are not going to wait around for the milk and honey of social revolution, which would be tantamount to political abdication, we have put together and proposed a series of concrete demands, regardless of immediate legislative success—demands that for the most part can be initiated within the framework of the state, even if all of them cannot be realized within the current framework of society. These demands afford us the possibility of setting gears in motion and hastening the process of transformation.

As in all the previous programs we have put the fundamental demand of general and equal suffrage foremost. . . [Simons' translation resumes]

[i] A reference to the 1891 Brussels congress of the Second International, which had just recently convened. Wilhelm Liebknecht co-wrote the resolution against militarism and spoke passionately for its adoption.

[j] This passage is translated as “according to the definitions of legal philosophy” in the 1994 Hahn translation; it therefore does not seem to be a reference to Hegel’s book of the same name.

[k] A quote from the Aeneid that can be translated more succinctly as: “If I cannot move heaven, I will raise hell.”

Last updated on 24 July 2023