

We Demand the Earth for All the People: Campaign Speech at Fergus Falls, Minnesota (August 27, 1912)

Friends and Fellow-Workers:—

The spirit of our time is revolutionary and growing more so every day. A new social order is struggling into existence. The old economic foundation of society is breaking up and the social fabric is beginning to totter. The capitalist system is doomed. The signs of change confront us upon every hand.

Social changes are preceded by agitation and unrest among the masses. We are today in the transition period between decaying capitalism and growing socialism. The old system is being shaken to its foundations by the forces underlying it and its passing is but a question of time. The new system that is to succeed the old is developing within the old and its outline is clearly revealed in its spirit of mutualism and its cooperative manifestations.

For countless ages the world has been a vast battlefield and the struggle for existence a perpetual conflict. Primitive peoples were compelled to fight nature to extort from her the means of livelihood. Since the forces of nature have been conquered and nations have become civilized the struggle of men is no longer to overcome nature but with one another for existence.

In this struggle which has appealed to the basest and not to the best in man the cunning few have triumphed and now have the masses at their mercy. These few are closely allied in their economic mastery as they are also in their control of the political machinery. Their money and their mercenaries controlled the Republican convention at Chicago, wrote its platform and dictated its nominees, and the same is true of the Democratic convention at Baltimore.

As for the so-called Progressive convention, it is sufficient to say that there is no attempt to conceal the fact that it was financed and controlled by three conspicuous representatives of the plutocracy which largely owns and rules the land.

Political parties are responsive to the interests of those who finance them. This is the infallible test of their character and applied to the Republican, Democratic and Progressive parties, these parties stand forth as the several political expressions of the several divisions of the capitalist

class. The funds of all these parties are furnished by the capitalist class for the reason, and only for the reason, that they represent the interests of that class.

Professional politicians of whatever party are very much alike and in one respect at least they are like workingmen, they serve the interests of their masters, and for the same reason.

The patriotism of professional politicians is reflected in the material interests of the master class and this fact has become so apparent that their noisy theatricals have lost their magic and now excite but the scorn and derision of intelligent, working men and women.

The Republican, Democratic and Progressive conventions were composed in the main and controlled entirely by professional politicians in the service of the ruling class. There were no workingmen and no workingwomen at the Republican convention, the Democratic convention, or the Progressive convention.

These were clearly not working class conventions. Ladies and gentlemen of leisure were in evidence at them all. Wage-slaves would not have been tolerated in their company. They represented the wealth and culture and refinement of society and they were there to applaud and smile approval upon the professional politicians and patriots who were doing their work.

But there was a fourth convention held this year which did not attract the wealthy and leisure classes. It was a convention great in purpose, though not big in numbers. This convention was held at Indianapolis and represented the working class. The delegates who composed this convention were chosen by the workers and paid by the workers to represent the interest of the workers and to clear the way for the workers in the present campaign.

The Socialist convention was the only democratic convention and the only progressive convention held this year; the only convention that represented a dues-paying party membership and whose acts before becoming effective must be ratified by a referendum vote of the party.

The Socialist Party is the only party in this campaign that stands against the present system and for the rule of the people; the only party that boldly avows itself the party of the working class and its purpose the overthrow of wage-slavery.

So long as the present system of capitalism prevails and the few are allowed to own the nation's industries, the toiling masses will be struggling in the hell of poverty as they are today. To tell them that juggling with the tariff will change this beastly and disgraceful condition is to in-

sult their intelligence. The professional politicians who have been harping upon this string since infant industries have become giant monopolies know better. Their stock in trade is the credulity of the masses.

The exploited wage-slaves of free trade England and of the highly protected United States are the victims of the same capitalism ; in England the politicians tell them they are suffering because they have no protective tariff and in the United States they tell them that the tariff is the cause of their poverty.

And this is the kind of a confidence game the professional politicians have been playing with the workers of all nations all these years. To keep them in subjection by playing upon their ignorance is the rule that governs their campaigns for votes among the workers. The "issues" upon which they keep the workers divided into hostile camps are of their own making.

Since the foundation of the government one or the other of these capitalist parties has been in power and under their administration the working and producing millions have been reduced to poverty and slavery. Professor Scott Nearing¹ has shown in his work on the wages of American workers that half of the adult males of the United States are earning less than \$500; that three-quarters of them are earning less than \$600 a year; that nine-tenths of them are receiving less than \$900 a year, while 10 per cent only receive more than that figure.

Professor Nearing also shows the starvation wages for which women are compelled to work in the present system. One-fifth of the whole number of women workers receive less than \$200 per year; three-fifths receive less than \$325; nine-tenths receive less than \$500. Only one-twentieth of the women employed are paid more than \$600 per year.

These figures bear out the report of the Chicago vice commission to the effect that the low wages of women and girls go hand in hand with prostitution. Despite all attempts to control the white slave traffic, which is now organized as one of the great profit-extorting trusts, along with the rest of the trusts, prostitution, like a terrible cancer, is eating out the very heart of our civilization.

And in the presence of this appalling condition the professional politicians prattle about tariff revision and indulge in silly twaddle about currency reform and regulation of the trusts.

The Socialist Party is absolutely the only party which faces conditions as they are and declares unhesitatingly that it has a definite and concrete plan and program for dealing with these conditions.

The Socialist Party as the party of the exploited workers in the mills and mines, on the railways and on the farms, the workers of both sexes and all races and colors, the working class in a word, constituting a great majority of the people and in fact *the people*, demands that the nation's industries shall be taken over by the nation and that the nation's workers shall operate them for the benefit of the whole people.

Private ownership and competition have had their day. The Socialist Party stands for social ownership and co-operation. The one is Capitalism; the other Socialism. The one industrial despotism, the other industrial democracy.

The Republican, Democratic, and Progressive parties all stand for private ownership and competition. The Socialist party alone stands for social ownership and co-operation.

The Republican, Democratic, and Progressive parties believe in regulating the trusts ; the Socialist Party believes in owning them, so that all the people may get the benefit of them instead of a few being made plutocrats and the masses impoverished.

The Republican, Democratic, and Progressive parties uphold the wage system; the Socialist Party demands its overthrow.

It is under the wage system that the 22,000 operatives in the cotton and woolen mills at Lawrence, Massachusetts, have been compelled to work, or slave rather, according to Commissioner Neill, for an average of \$8.76 per family. To earn this average wage, according to the commissioner's official report, requires the combined service of father, mother and three children. This is slavery with a vengeance. The mill is a sweat-hole; the hovel a breeding-pen. Home there is none. And there never will be under the wage system.

What have the Republican, Democratic and Progressive parties to offer to the wage-slaves of Lawrence, to the wage-slaves of the steel trust, to the wage-slaves of the mines, to the wage-slaves of the lumber and turpentine camps of the South, the wage-slaves of the railroads, the millions of them, male and female, black and white and yellow and brown, who produce all this nation's wealth, support its government and conserve its civilization, and without whom industry would be paralyzed and the nation helpless? What, I ask, has any of these capitalist parties, or all of them combined, for the working and producing class in this campaign? Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

These parties are bidding stronger than ever for the labor vote this year. That vote is now not so easily delivered as in the past. The competition for the votes of the wage-workers is the distinguishing feature of the

present campaign. Thousands of workers are now doing their own thinking. They have discovered that workers are as much out of place in a capitalist party as capitalists are in a workers' party. They have also found that politics express class interests and that the interests of those who make the wealth and those who take it are not identical. That is where the Socialist Party comes in and where the workers come in the Socialist Party.

The working class is in politics this year. It has always been in politics for its master; this year it is in politics for itself. The most promising fact in the world today is the fact that labor is organizing its power; its economic power and its political power.

The workers who have made the world and who support the world, are preparing to take possession of the world. This is the meaning of socialism and is what the Socialist party stands for in this campaign.

We demand the machinery of production in the name of the workers and the control of society in the name of the people. We demand the abolition of capitalism and wage-slavery and the surrender of the capitalist class. We demand the complete enfranchisement of women and the equal rights of all the people regardless of race, color, creed or nationality. We demand that child labor shall cease once and forever and that all children born into the world shall have equal opportunity to grow up, to be educated, to have healthy bodies and trained minds, and to develop and freely express the best there is in them in mental, moral and physical achievement.

We demand complete control of industry by the workers; we demand all the wealth they produce for their own enjoyment, and we demand the earth for all the people.

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¹ Scott Nearing (1883-1983) was at the time of this speech a young professor of economics at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. Nearing would become a cause célèbre of the American left in 1915 when he was fired for his socialist political beliefs. He quit the Socialist Party in 1923, and joined the Workers (Communist) Party in 1925 after having applied and been rejected the previous year. Nearing left the CP to chart a course as an independent radical in January 1930. During his century-long life Nearing wrote dozens of pamphlets and books, many of which were self-published, and edited a regular column on international affairs for the independent Marxist magazine *Monthly Review*.