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FOR THE USE OF MEMBERS ONLY.

THE FABIAN SOCIETY.

REPORT AND RESOLUTIONS
of the Special Committee appointed
to consider Socialist Representation in
Parliament. Transmitted by the Ex-
ecutive Committee to the Members for
discussion at a Business Meeting to be
held at Essex Hall, Essex St., Strand,
on Friday, 24th Jan., 1908, at 7.30 p.m.

BRING THIS REPORT WITH YOU TO THE MEETING.

Only those presenting this Report at the door will be admitted
without question.

PREFACE.

A STATEMENT of the origin of the following report will be useful to the many members recently elected.

On February 9th, 1906, H. G. WELLS read to the Society a paper entitled "Faults of the Fabian," and moved a resolution, which was adopted unanimously, requesting the Executive Committee to appoint a committee of enquiry to consider "what measures should be taken to increase the scope, influence, income and activity of the Society." That committee was duly appointed, and presented its report in October, 1906. The Executive Committee printed this report, accompanied by a lengthy commentary or counter-report, which was discussed at a series of meetings concluding on March 8th, 1907.

At this meeting the following resolution, proposed by the Executive Committee in their counter-report, was adopted by a large majority:—

That as soon as possible after the next Executive election the new Executive shall appoint a special committee to enquire into and report upon the best means of promoting local Socialist societies of the Fabian type, with the object of increasing the Socialist representation in Parliament as a party co-operating as far as possible with the Labor Party, while remaining independent of that and all other parties.

Acting on this instruction, the present Executive Committee appointed a special committee consisting of:—

HUBERT BLAND	CECIL F. CHESTERTON	F. LAWSON DODD
R. C. K. ENSOR	L. HADEN GUEST	Rev. S. D. HEADLAM
S. G. HOBSON	AYLMER MAUDE	H. T. MUGGERIDGE
Mrs. W. P. REEVES	G. BERNARD SHAW	HARRY SNEILL.
SIDNEY WEBB	H. G. WELLS	

This committee elected SIDNEY WEBB its chairman, and after several meetings agreed upon the report annexed, which was presented to the Executive Committee on November 22nd, and ordered by them to be submitted to the members without comment.

FABIAN OFFICE, 3 CLEMENT'S INN,
STRAND, LONDON, W.C.
6th December, 1907.

Report of the Special Committee.

THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE appointed by the Executive Committee, in pursuance of the resolution passed at the Annual Meeting, has held three meetings, made special enquiries in various directions, and taken carefully into consideration the several suggestions and proposals that have been placed before it, including the definite recommendations of the Special Committee and the observations upon them of the Executive Committee of 1906-7.*

The duty placed upon the Committee was to "enquire into and report upon the best means of promoting local Socialist societies of the Fabian type, with the object of increasing Socialist representation in Parliament, as a party co-operating as far as possible with the Labor Party whilst remaining independent of that and of all other parties." It will be seen that the issues referred to us are not such as to be capable of decision in any brief or trenchant sentence. We have necessarily had to consider the wider questions of (1) the policy to be pursued in respect to political action by the Society in its corporate capacity, and (2) how far that or any other policy should be advised for adoption by the members individually, in respect of such political activity and influence as may from time to time be open to them.

A preliminary question has been raised as to whether it is desirable for the Fabian Society, in its corporate capacity, to take any political action at all. We think that this question has so repeatedly and so definitely been decided by the votes of the members that we are absolved from considering it. The Fabian Society has been, from its very inception, a political society; though not, of course, a society engaged in political action exclusively. The changes in the structure and in the working of social organization which it exists in order to promote are such as can be effected only—whatever may be the "change of heart"—by alterations in the law of the land. Throughout the Society's whole career an important part of its corporate work, in fruitful alliance with the efforts of individual members and friends in various positions in the political, official, Trade Union and journalistic worlds, has been to resist Bills hostile to Collectivist reforms, to secure amendments of Collectivist tendency, and to investigate, promote and support measures that made for Socialism. To the same end it has not only drafted a whole series of legislative projects, and repeatedly published manifestoes and tracts of definitely political character; it has also done its utmost, as occasion offered, to intervene in elections, to support some candidates and oppose others, to foster and aid candidatures of

* Report of the Special Committee . . . together with the Executive Committee's Report and Resolutions thereon, November, 1906.

its own members, both for the House of Commons and for local bodies, and to raise election funds. We cannot believe that any considerable section of the present members of the Society desire that this political work should be discontinued.

We are of opinion, on the contrary, that the time has come for the political activity of the Society in its corporate capacity, and of such of its members as have disposition and opportunity for such work, to be greatly increased. In fact, whilst in no way undervaluing the importance of scientific investigation and study of social problems, with a view to making Socialism practicable—whilst fully recognizing also the necessity of continuous work of merely propagandist character—we think that the circumstances of the moment call for special efforts in the broad field of politics.

The position of the various political parties in the House of Commons at the present moment is such as to offer greater opportunity for effective Socialist action on the political plane than at any previous time. The Tory, Conservative or Unionist Party has by no means yet recovered from the shattering that it has lately received, first as the result of the shifting of its intellectual basis by the Tariff Reform propaganda ; and secondly by the unexpected severity of its defeat at the 1906 election. One effect of the Tariff Reform propaganda has been to drive out of the Party many of its most doctrinaire Individualists, who now find themselves, as "Free Trade Unionists," high and dry, and without intellectual influence in the Party. The Protectionist element in the Unionist Party is necessarily being forced to take up measures of social reform which are of a more or less Collectivist character. There is a renewed turning, as yet, perhaps, mainly for election purposes, towards a policy of deliberate collective action for raising the condition of the poor, for which Toryism—the Party of the Factory Acts, Public Health Acts, Local Government Acts, Housing Acts and Unemployed Workmen Act—can easily find precedents. It is, we think, the business of the Socialists by their criticism to see that this tendency is stimulated by appropriate information ; strengthened as far as possible ; raised from mere electioneering to a legislative program ; suffused with Democracy ; and, above all, transformed in the process from sentimental philanthropy into really constructive measures of definite Collectivist character. The Liberal or Radical Party is in a condition no less chaotic than that of its principal rival. The tendencies that were formerly making for a transformation of the old Individualist Liberalism into a mild and hesitating Collectivism were, as it seems to us, arrested, first by the complete transfer of political attention to the Boer War, and then by the revival of the Free Trade propaganda on the basis of the Cobdenite statecraft, and the resistance to the Education Act on the basis of Individualist Protestantism. There has even been a marked recrudescence of Individualism. On the other hand, the need for a program of wider popularity than that which appeals to Nonconformity ; of a program that will rival in social attractiveness that of the Tariff Reformer, and of a program that cannot be instantly riddled by the Socialist as doing no good to

the poor, is necessarily pushing the Liberal Party managers to measures based essentially on an increase of collective action, whether to settle more people on the land, to give pensions to the aged, to facilitate and extend collective housing and other sanitary organization, and it may be even to supersede the Poor Law by large projects of collective provision for particular classes. It is, we apprehend, the business of Socialist criticism to emphasize the conflict between these measures and the old Individualist Liberalism ; to sharpen their force by facts and figures showing the necessity for bolder action ; and to transform them under this effective fire into legislative Acts of a character calculated to bring still more Collectivism in their train.

But we cannot expect that any Ministry not itself Socialist will carry through any really fundamental instalments of Socialism ; or even that any Ministry likely to be in power within the next few years—whether it call itself Whig, Liberal, Radical, Home Rule, Free Trade, Tory, Conservative, Unionist, or Tariff Reform—will spontaneously or willingly make any serious inroads into the present powers and incomes of the landlord and capitalist classes. We record, therefore, with the greatest satisfaction the rise and remarkable growth of the influence of the Labor Party, a political federation of independent societies, to which the Fabian Society has belonged from the start. This federation, though not adopting the Socialist name, not confining its membership to Socialist organizations, and not fettering itself by any very definitely formulated program of legislative projects, has already exerted great influence on the two main political parties. This influence has been, and is likely increasingly to be, in the direction of forcing practicable measures, of essentially Collectivist character, upon the Ministry and the House of Commons, whatever may be the party nominally in power. By its federal constitution, which enables the Trade Unions to become members, the Labor Party finds itself to-day, not only able to contribute towards the election expenses of a very large number of candidates independent alike of the Liberal and of the Conservative parties, but also to maintain in the House of Commons an independently organized party, which now numbers thirty-one members. This represents such an advance upon anything that has ever been possible in England before—an advance, too, full of so much promise for the future—that we think the Fabian Society has some reason for satisfaction in recalling the various efforts that the Society made to get some such Labor Party into being ;* and in recording the exceptionally friendly relations and close alliance in which we have stood with it ever since its inception.

The Labor Party, as it now exists, is not, however, necessarily or definitely a Socialist body. It is made up of two Socialist societies (the Fabian Society and the Independent Labor Party) and a large

* See Fabian Tract No. 11, "The True Radical Program," 1887 ; reissued in changed form in 1891 as "The Workers' Political Program" ; Fabian Tract No. 40, the "Fabian Manifesto" for the General Election of 1892 ; and Fabian Tract No. 49, "A Plan of Campaign for Labor," 1894.

number of Trade Unions. The constituent societies contribute to the funds in proportion to their numerical membership. The Trade Unions, though not in themselves Socialist societies, have now seldom any prejudice against Socialism; and it has so far happened that nearly all the candidates recognized by the Labor Party, nearly all those that have been returned, and nearly all their activities in Parliament have been distinguished by the greatest sympathy with practical measures of Socialism. For the most part, indeed, they have been of genuinely Socialist character. But the desirableness of Socialism as the final outcome of the representation of Labor in Parliament must not blind us to the fact that the transition from the present system might involve much avoidable suffering, and excite much unnecessary opposition, involving serious obstruction and delay, if, for instance, it were sought to be carried out with as little regard for the middle class as was shewn to the old handicraft workers during the transition from cottage industry to factory industry. The cost of the steps already taken has been thrown largely on the rates instead of directly on unearned income: that is, on the middle classes instead of on the proprietary class; and the middle classes therefore conceive Socialism as something for which they alone will have to pay whilst Labor reaps the benefit. In this they are not very far wrong as things are going at present, with landlords and capitalists in power. The remedy is, the representation of the middle classes in Parliament by Socialists who are themselves middle class or professional men, and who, whilst combining with the Labor Party to increase Socialistic public activity and Socialistic public expenditure, will make it a condition of such expenditure that it be levied on unearned income by means of a differentiated and graduated income tax and death duties, equitably distributed to the local authorities through grants in aid, instead of being thrown directly on the already cruelly overburdened local ratepayer. Until that is done it is useless to expect the poorer ratepaying class—that is, the great majority of the middle and professional classes—to take any other attitude towards Socialism than one of desperate resistance in combination with the proprietary class. Besides, though the sympathy of the Labor Party with Socialism has been so far as thorough as we could reasonably desire, we have no guarantee that this will always be the case. It has been suggested that there is a danger of the large Trade Union element in the Labor Party working, perhaps unconsciously, in such a way as to give too great a place to merely “labor” measures, as distinguished from a Socialist reconstruction of society. There is, moreover, the danger of the Labor members stampeding into intellectual alliance with the most old fashioned Liberalism, when some unforeseen national issue, not exactly covered by some familiar Labor formula, suddenly emerges for decision. We can even imagine questions arising on which some or all of the Trade Unions might insist on the members of Parliament whose salaries they pay acting in a direction contrary to that of Socialism. But it should, of course, be the duty of Socialists to continue their efforts to permeate the Trade Unions with Socialism

(whilst not at all urging them to injure their force or impair their function as Trade Unions by doing anything that would exclude non-Socialists); and so to influence the candidates, the members, and the counsels of the Labor Party as (whilst not deterring Trade Unions from adhesion) to ensure its activities being wholly in the Socialist direction.

The work of permeating the Trade Unions with Socialism, and of influencing the counsels of the Labor Party, falls, however, for the most part, most appropriately to the Independent Labor Party. The recent growth of this organization, which the Fabian Society did its best to foster,* and with which it has always remained in close friendly alliance, is the most remarkable example of Socialist expansion. It has now over 700 branches, with at least 40,000 members; it has nearly 1,000 members on town councils and other local governing bodies;† its sales of Socialist literature (including, it may be said, continuous streams of *Fabian Essays* and the various Fabian Tracts) amount to nearly £5,000 a year; and the meetings that it holds probably exceed a thousand weekly. Especially in most of the industrial centres of Yorkshire and Lancashire is the I.L.P. the dominant Socialist influence; carrying on an incessant propaganda; successfully putting its own candidates in the field for municipal offices; swaying Parliamentary elections; and even (as in seven constituencies at the late General Election, and at Colne Valley last year) returning its own Members of Parliament.

It might be urged that the growth and success of the I.L.P. was a reason for the Fabian Society abandoning any attempt at propagandist work outside the Metropolis; or, at any rate, foregoing any contemplation of organized political activity otherwise than by the London Society. We do not take this view. On the contrary, the very success of the I.L.P., and the rapid increase of its membership, which is chiefly (though by no means exclusively) made up of manual working wage earners, ought, we think, to stimulate the Fabian Society to extend its provincial work. The tone and methods of the I.L.P., whilst such as to succeed among the Trade Unionists, sometimes repel the sympathizer of middle-class extraction, and fail often to attract the teachers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, journalists, etc.

* We may recall, for the information of new Fabians, that in connection with the movement for independent labor representation, which between 1887 and 1892 the Fabian Society had helped to promote, a conference was held at Bradford in 1893, to which the Fabian Society sent delegates. At that conference a new society, called the Independent Labor Party, was formed, our delegates giving such help as they could, and assisting to choose the first governing body. Many members of the Fabian Society joined the new body without, it need hardly be said, leaving the Fabian Society. Subsequently, with the cordial assent of the Executive Committee, most of the then numerous branches of the Fabian Society outside the metropolis practically transformed themselves into branches of the Independent Labor Party. A considerable proportion of members of the Fabian Society to-day are members also of the I.L.P.

† It will be remembered that, as one of their joint activities, the Fabian Society and the I.L.P. co-operate in carrying on "The Local Government Information Bureau": an organization for supplying its subscribers (half-a-crown a year) with information as to local government measures.

This is not a matter of snobbery on the one side and suspicion on the other, though both these influences have to be taken into account, especially the latter, which is natural and justifiable. But when it comes to handling money and setting public machinery in motion, middle class societies require less explanation and persuasion, and can consequently act more swiftly and effectively than labor organizations, so that there is often a real gain for both in keeping them separate, even when their objects are the same, and their relations cordial. Besides, there is the need for steady propaganda among the professional class and the so-called upper classes generally; and the members of these cannot be converted at meetings where all the arguments are addressed to the interests of the wage-workers. We no longer want to make the rich pity the poor or dread them: we want to make those who have enjoyed the advantages of education and leisure desire Socialism for its sake and their own; and this is a sort of propaganda which Labor organizations have no time for, even if they desired it or were suitably equipped for it. It is not surprising therefore that I. L. P. members themselves urge that a local Fabian Society would often prove a useful ally. There are innumerable ways in which a local Fabian Society can very advantageously supplement even the most energetic and the most successful I. L. P. branch. There are many different kinds of propaganda, and various different sections to be appealed to. There is, in every town and county, great need for the elaborate working out of Socialist measures in their detailed application to the local circumstances of the district. Such Fabian Tracts as "Facts for Londoners" and "Facts for Bristol"—both of them of far-reaching effect in their respective towns for their own day and generation—ought to be prepared for every district. We think, therefore, that there is every reason for promoting Fabian "groups," or local Fabian societies, or similar local centres, all over the kingdom, as opportunity offers, to disseminate Socialist ideas, and for them to work, of course, in friendly harmony with existing local organizations of every kind, influencing them as much as possible in a Fabian direction. Such local Fabian societies will not, of course, abstain from any of the manifold political activities which have always characterized the Society; and we see no reason why they should.

Any local electioneering or Parliamentary activity encouraged by the Society would naturally be among the various functions of such groups or local societies, to be undertaken by them in such manner and with such energy as the progress of Socialist ideas in the constituency and its local circumstances might permit; and this must inevitably be left to the local centre from time to time.

It would be for the Executive Committee of the London Society to help to form such local centres; to encourage and assist them, to give such advice and guidance as it could; but they must necessarily retain their autonomy as regards local activities. This inevitable local autonomy must not be left out of account in considering which among several modes of political activity the Executive Committee and other members in London might from time to time prefer.

It has been suggested that the Fabian Society might well use its privilege as a constituent member of the Labor Party, formally to nominate one or more of its members as Parliamentary candidates for recognition as "Labor candidates" by the Executive Committee of the Labor Party. Such recognized candidates would then be entitled to receive at an election 25 per cent. of the Returning Officer's expenses; and, if elected, a stipend of £200 a year from the Labor Party's funds. As the exact conditions under which this privilege can be exercised are not generally understood, we give them in a foot-note.*

We do not say that the Fabian Society might not, under suitable circumstances, exercise its privilege of formally nominating a candidate. We suggest, however, one condition which seems to us essential. The recognition by the Labor Party of a Fabian candidate would necessarily involve the Party in an expense of from £40 to £60 as soon as the election occurred; and assuming our member to be successful, in an additional liability for his stipend (whether he himself desired to draw it or not) which, assuming a five years' Parliament, may be estimated at £1,000. We do not think that the Fabian Society would wish to remain in the Labor Party without paying its way, or that it would be wise to make our member a burden upon the funds subscribed by the Trade Unions. The contribution of the Fabian Society to the Labor Party's Parliamentary Fund is, at present, under £11 a year. It would, we think, be essential to accompany any formal application for recognition of even one Fabian candidate by a definite promise and an effective guarantee, not only that the Society undertook to provide the remainder of the election expenses, which might be anything between £400 and £1,000, but also, in addition, that the Society's contribution to the Labor Party would, in the event of the success of our nominee at the poll, be raised to at least £1,000, over the period of five years from his election. At present we do not see any probability of the Executive Committee being able to guarantee such a sum. Moreover, unless the funds were subscribed

* A candidate for the Labor Party must be nominated to its Executive Committee by an affiliated organization which must state that it holds itself responsible for his election expenses, and give evidence if required that it is able to carry out its undertaking. The candidate must submit himself to, and be adopted by, a delegate meeting in the constituency to which all affiliated organizations in the constituency must be invited and at which organizations entitled to be affiliated (*i.e.*, Trade Union, S.D.F., and Co-operative branches and societies) may be present. The candidate must himself sign the constitution of the Labor Party, which requires him to abide by the decisions of the Parliamentary Party in carrying out the aims of the [Party] constitution; to appear before his constituency under the title of Labor candidate only; to abstain strictly from identifying himself with or promoting the interests of any party not eligible for affiliation (*i.e.*, Liberal, Conservative, or Home Rule); not to oppose any candidate of the Party; and to join the Parliamentary Labor Party if elected.

It may be added that what the rules and practice of the Labor Party require from affiliated societies is that their "chief officials" (among whom may be included, we suppose, though the point has not been determined, members of their executive committees) should not oppose a candidate recognized by the Labor Party, or "act contrary to the spirit of [its] constitution." This obligation is, of course, binding on the Fabian Society, so long as it remains affiliated to the Labor Party.

expressly for that purpose, it would have to be a matter for consideration whether so large an expenditure from the general resources of the Society could be spent in that way more effectively than in others. Such a decision would depend on the particular circumstances of the moment.

There is a further consideration to be borne in mind. Even assuming, as we do, that the influences of the Fabian Society and the I.L.P. are sufficient to keep the Labor Party essentially in the Socialist direction, we do not think that Socialists should be satisfied with the position of having necessarily to enter the House of Commons as members either of the Conservative, the Liberal, the Irish, or the Labor Party. This is especially the case in respect of candidates unable themselves to provide the heavy election expenses.

The condition that all candidates running under the auspices of the Labor Party must appear before the constituency under the title of Labor candidates only is also in some cases embarrassing. Not only is it very desirable that the name Socialist should be popularized in connection with vigorous and intelligent political action: it is also a name that can be made to appeal to a large portion of the middle class which is left cold, or even antagonized, by the name Labor. To call a middle class Socialist, seeking the votes of middle class Socialists, a Labor candidate *only*, is a misdescription. And there are cases in which the manual workers themselves, whilst willing to accept a middle class candidate as such, are apt to accuse him of wilful imposture for the sake of catching votes if he uses a term which they understand to imply that he is an actual member of their own class.

We consider that the present Parliamentary situation renders it desirable that there should be some way of entering the House of Commons for Socialists unable to provide their own election expenses, without placing themselves in financial dependence on either the Conservative, the Liberal, the Irish, or the Labor Party.

The Fabian Society has, at previous General Elections, started small election funds in aid of the expenses of some of its members who were standing. Such funds have been of great use, though the donations received have never exceeded in the largest case £158. We do not know whether the members and friends of the Society may now be more able or willing to contribute; but we think there is no doubt that it would be desirable if a fund—to which, of course, only those members would subscribe who approved of its objects—were available, under Fabian trusteeship, for the assistance of Socialists desiring to be financially independent of any existing Parliamentary party. We think that the question of whether subscriptions should be invited to one general fund, or to particular funds for the benefit of such candidatures of members of the Society as may from time to time occur, may be left for future decision. We consider that, with a view to the Society maintaining a loyal attitude to the Labor Party, as long as the Society remains a member of it—and also with the object of discountenancing contests that would be both hopeless and useless—it should be an understanding that no candidate should

receive support from such a fund, under whatever local auspices he conducted his candidature, unless it appeared to have the general (though not necessarily the unanimous) concurrence of the local Socialist and Labor organizations of the constituency, although such a candidature should not be made dependent on nomination by these bodies, or any of them.

Without deciding the vexed question of the comparative value of general propagandist work and Parliamentary candidatures, we believe that valuable opportunities for Socialist candidatures do from time to time occur, especially in constituencies in which purely Labor candidatures would be hopeless, which the Fabian Society ought not to neglect, for which its membership could supply the candidates, and which it ought to be in a position promptly and energetically to support. There is no reason, for instance, why the constituencies which depend on a combination of country-town vote, farmer vote, and agricultural laborer vote, should be left for ever to the Conservatives merely because neither a Liberal nor a Labor candidate can harmonize the labor and middle class interests. If an Election Fund of, say, £5,000 were raised, it might be possible to seize four or five such opportunities. It might be left open to decision, according to the circumstances of the case—including the advice of the local supporters, and, if indicated, the wishes of the donors of the money—whether such a candidature should be promoted under the auspices of the Labor Party (as already described); or entirely independently (as was lately done by the local branches of the I.L.P. at Colne Valley).

Whether or not such a Fabian Election Fund is started, the establishment of local Fabian Societies appears to us to be the next important step to be taken. The main political function of most of these local centres for some time to come would necessarily have to be that of a vigorous educational propaganda; and care should accordingly be taken not to divert their attention from this indispensable and immediately practicable work, to premature expensive candidatures. The extent to which such local Fabian Societies gathered weight and influence during the next few years would be some guide to the likelihood of the success of Fabian candidates at the polls.

We may summarize our conclusions by the following resolutions, which we suggest that the Society might advantageously adopt:—

1. That it is desirable to promote the establishment of local Fabian Societies in the various towns of the United Kingdom.
2. That the members living in or near the principal urban centres in which no local Fabian Society yet exists, be invited to consider how such a society can best be formed there; and that they be assisted to take steps for that purpose.
3. That the activities of the local Fabian Societies can best be stimulated and assisted by (a) frequent lecturers from the

London Society ; (b) periodical conferences of local societies of both national and district scope ; (c) the publication of Fabian Tracts applying Socialist principles to the particular local government circumstances of the different towns ; and (d) constant correspondence with the London office.

4. That if any effective action is to be taken by the Society to get increased Socialist representation in Parliament, so far as its own members are concerned, it would be necessary to raise a Parliamentary Fund of £5,000.
5. That in order to test the willingness of members to contribute to such a fund, all the members be asked by circular (1) whether they think that such a fund ought to be at once started ; (2) what amount (to be spread over five years) they would be able to contribute to such a fund, if sufficient promises were received to warrant its establishment.
6. That the particular candidatures to be assisted by such a fund, and the exact method of such candidatures would, in view of the necessity of securing local support, necessarily have to be decided in each case according to circumstances.