

OUR HISTORY 51

Ramsay MacDonald - Socialism and Society (1905)

Ramsay MacDonald was the first Labour Prime Minister and led the Labour administrations of 1924 and 1929-1931. His decision to dissolve the Labour government in the financial crisis and serve as Prime Minister in the Conservative dominated National government of 1931-1935 and his status as leader of the 'great betrayal' has meant that labour historians overlook his critical role in developing the Labour Party as the main opposition to the Conservatives and as a party accepted by the electorate as 'fit to govern'. Political historians and theorists also overlook MacDonald's theoretical contribution. MacDonald authored some sixteen books, and edited the ILP's *Socialist Review*, which was the main theoretical journal of English socialism both before and after the First World War, as well as editing the ILP's Socialist Library of theoretical works by European socialist thinkers. MacDonald opposed the Boer War and the First World War, in the latter case having to give up the party leadership. He was a leading member of the Second International.



The illegitimate son of a Lossiemouth ploughman and a farmworker, he was self taught. An active member of the Fabian society in Bristol, before moving to London and becoming active in the ILP, the SDF and living in a communal house run by Davidson's *Fellowship of the New Life*. In the mid 1890s he became the ILP's leading propagandist, before becoming secretary of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 and MP for Leicester in 1906 under the Lib-Lab pact arrangement he had negotiated with the Liberal chief whip, Herbert Gladstone. He was chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party from 1911 to 1914 and from 1922 to 1931. MacDonald was no Marxist but instead believed in the

organic development of a socialist society. He was a moderate and opponent of syndicalism and direct action. He was however a collectivist and supported the nationalisation of land and believed that capital should be owned by the community and that production and distribution required social organisation. He was also a strong supporter of nationalist movements in the colonies and wrote books on the empire and Indian nationalism.

"Society in this country, with our free institutions and machinery which can respond to the least impulse of the popular will so soon as the people care to express themselves, progresses by an assimilation of ideas and circumstances. Individuals formulate ideas, Society gradually assimilates them, and gradually the assimilation shows its effect on the social structure. The laws of organic assimilation apply in a specially simple way to our conditions, our politics and our parties; and it is the operation of these non-catastrophic and non-revolutionary laws which today are causing social unsettlement and are calling for political readjustment.

"One of the assumptions which bear of the fabric of socialist thought and expectation is that as Society approaches in its organisation to the Socialist condition, the individual will respond to the moral responsibilities which that condition will lay upon him. The individual is in tune with his Society, and for that reason Socialism can purify the gross, blundering thing today called individualism into an impulse which will seek to express itself and find its liberty in social conduct through service to the community. Hence it is that the key idea to the understanding of Socialism is not a wiping-out but a transformation, not a re-creation but a fulfilment."

Please mail this protest, or a version of it, to: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, King Charles Street, London, SW1A 2AH
Or email to: fcocorrespondence@fco.gov.uk
Please mail a copy to: Tamil Solidarity, 205 Well Street, London, E9 6QU
Or email to: info@tamilsolidarity.org



PROTEST AGAINST COMMONWEALTH MEETING

- No to British government participation
- Stop arms sales to Sri Lanka
- Stop the land grab in Tamil areas
- Investigate all war crimes

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PROTEST!

David Cameron and Prince Charles are going to Sri Lanka to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in November. This is an outrage!

Holding CHOGM in Sri Lanka will give a world stage to Mahinda Rajapaksa and his regime, which stands accused of war crimes in the genocidal war against the Tamil-speaking people. Tamil Solidarity is at the forefront of protests against CHOGM and at the decision to send representatives from the British government and state.

Recent elections in the north were held to give the impression that life is returning to normal - a pre-CHOGM show. Yet, in the face of intimidation and violence by state forces, Tamils rejected the pro-regime parties on a mass scale.

War crimes: Over 100,000 Tamils were killed by Sri Lankan armed forces, or remain unaccounted for. Hundreds of thousands were put in concentration camps. Rape was used as a systematic weapon of war and oppression - and this continues today.

Military occupation: The largely Tamil areas of the north and east of Sri Lanka are under effective military rule.

Land grab: Whole areas have been taken over with the Sri Lankan regime pushing a settler plan, similar to the Israeli state's occupation of Palestinian land in the West Bank.

Attack on democratic rights: Throughout Sri Lanka, trade union and democratic rights are under threat. Protests are put down by force with trade unionists, journalists and anyone opposing the regime arrested.



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