

Is the Recall a Reform?

By Daniel De leon

The following letter was received at this office:

Cleveland, O., Oct. 25, 1913

“Editor *Daily People*:

“Dear Sir:

“I have read in *Daily People* of Oct. 22 your splendid article ‘The Recall.’ It is the strongest and soundest plea for the principle of the recall I have so far read. Now I ask you to enlighten me on a very important point which has kept me constantly thinking since I read the article. I have attended several meetings of the local section SLP and listened to some very good and instructive lectures. From these meetings, lectures and talks with members of your party here I took home the conviction that the SLP is opposed to reforms.

“Now I would be pleased to have you answer in the next ‘Letter Box’ under ‘F.B., Cleveland, O.’ this question: Is the recall to be considered a reform? If so, is not your plea for the recall at variance with the general attitude of your party towards reforms? If the recall is such a good thing, for what reasons does the SLP not demand it in its platform?

“It is sincere desire for information that prompts me to ask this favor. I have become a student of socialism only about a year ago and I want to be sure and see my way absolutely clear before I join either of the two parties. Thanking you in advance,

“Very respectfully yours,”

The recall is not a reform—at least not a reform of the category that the Socialist Labor Party warns against.

The reforms that the SLP warns against are nonpolitical and economic in their nature.

Some of these economic reforms concern issues that do not concern the wage slave class. Such are tariff, currency, taxation and more of that sort. The capitalist class, ever seeking to enlist the services of the proletariat at the hustings, loudly asserts that these issues are raised for the benefit of the workers. The falsity of the claim the SLP stoutly exposes for the double purpose of teaching economics, and weaning the proletariat from mental subjection to bourgeois thought. These are obvious reasons for the not inserting of such demands in the SLP platform.

Another set of economic reforms does, theoretically, concern the wage slave class. Prominent under this head are factory acts—“labor legislation,” generally. At this stage of the game, however, the theoretic advantage to the proletariat is turned mainly to their disadvantage. If America were today at the stage of social development that Great Britain found herself in when the factory laws were instituted

the matter would bear another aspect. In Great Britain, the factory acts were started agoing by the feudal class as a move, not in behalf of the proletariat, but as a move against the bourgeois. Under such circumstances "labor legislation" was not likely to be a dead letter, nor was it likely to be a weapon for the corruption of the leaders among the working class.

For the last 30, surely for the last 20, years American "labor legislation" has been both. By the flames of every factory that costs the lives of proletarians the corpse-status of our "labor legislation" leaps to sight; and those without whose assistance the flames could not have been kindled, are members of the proletariat, who were bribed with the offices, presumably created to watch the observance of the "labor laws."

Moreover, in America, the vast majority of economic reforms that theoretically concern the proletariat, would, at best, only tend to make capitalism bearable. At best they are narcotics, or messes of pottage. For all these reasons, the SLP excludes such reforms from its platform; and, when the reforms are preached from the capitalist stump, the SLP unrolls the scroll of the immediate past, to warn the proletariat against the lure. It would take less time to overthrow the capitalist system than to capture enough wheels in the mechanism of the political state to secure the passage by legislatures, the signing by executives and the approval by judiciaries, of petty reforms which leave the tiger of capitalism alive.

With the posture of the SLP towards economic reform as its background, the SLP's posture towards the recall and some other political reforms, such as woman suffrage, may stand out all the clearer.

Whereas, not one of the stingy economic reforms but would become ridiculous, through being trifling, the recall, woman suffrage, statewide primaries, etc., will, together with the suffrage of which they are manifestations, preserve their vital importance in the socialist or industrial republic. Whereas, the conditions under which work will be done in the industrial republic will be a denial of the "rights of the capitalist class," and of the theory of compromise between capital and labor, which are at the base of "labor legislation," all the more vital will be the recall, as well the statewide, then become the industrial-wide primaries, along with a suffrage emancipated from sex restrictions.

The suffrage is one of the conquests of progress wrung by the bourgeois revolution from feudalism. Repeatedly has the point been emphasized in these columns that socialism is not merely the carrier of advanced principles of progress, it is also the safeguarder of the progress made through previous revolutions. Accordingly, SLP literature takes a decided stand in favor of the recall and statewide primaries, the same as it does in favor of woman suffrage, always, however, warning against the error of expecting automatic consequences from them, or from any other manifestation of the suffrage.

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Why, then, does not the SLP insert the recall in its platform? For the same reason that it does not insert woman suffrage—that is, for the reason that, in advocating either, the SLP appreciates the need of warning against false expectations concerning them.

The platform of socialism in America, where socialism and capitalism stand face to face, must begin and end with that demand the realization of which is exposed to no false expectations.

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