
Immediate Demands

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The Socialists primarily concern themselves with analyzing the capitalist system, pointing out its defects and advocating the replacing of the capitalist system by the collective ownership and democratic administration of the means of production and distribution.

The success of the Socialist movement and the rapidity of its progress will depend very largely upon the method of education and the political tactics of the Socialist Party. Mere economic development in itself cannot bring the cooperative commonwealth.

In demanding measures for immediate improvement from the dominant capitalist parties, we in no way submerge the Socialist movement, nor do we waver from the belief in a class conflict. Immediate demands are perfectly consistent with the recognized fact that the capitalist class is in full control of the political state and uses its influence and power, including police, courts, and militia, to maintain its position of advantage and the permanency of its class.

The capitalist system, however, is not a consistent, methodical, and perfectly regulated device. It is filled with contradictions and the economic contradictions of capitalism, Socialists recognize very well... We find examples in the tendency of capitalism to obliterate competition on one hand, and to endeavor theoretically and practically to maintain competition on the other — such as the trusts, which negate competition, and against this contradiction pass laws which make it a penalty to form an agreement in restraint of trade.

The political program of the Socialists is essentially constructive. It must deal with the capitalist system as it is, and take advantage of every possible opportunity to assist in the transition from the private to the public ownership of capital. There is no place in the political movement for the midnight revolution

and cataclysmic transformation.

Among the many contradictory phrases in the political and the economic life of capitalism, there will many be found which have a tendency to strengthen and benefit the working class without giving any corresponding advantage to the capitalist class. All measures which have a tendency to raise the standard of life of the working class through shorter hours, superior educational facilities and opportunities, through higher wages and a better opportunity to organize trade unions, help and assist the Socialist movement because it strengthens those who are taking part therein and compose the bulk of its membership.

The so-called Revolutionary Socialists of Chicago went so far (some of them) as to oppose a general referendum on the proposition as to whether the citizens of Chicago should have the privilege of voting on the three questions, to-wit: Municipalizing electric lights, gas, and street railways; and when submitted to a vote, some voted against it.

The difference between those believing that we should advocate immediate measures together with our ultimate aim, and those opposed to everything except our ultimate aim, can be illustrated by their points of disagreement in regard to trade unions. The latter, or “clear cuts,” advocates trade unions because it is a class movement and educational. Its economic value he deprecates because it “makes pets” and favorites of some workingmen, believing that to raise the life standard of some working men breeds contentment and thereby retards the “revolution.” The former, of so-called “opportunists,” believes in the trade union movement not only because of its class character and educational value, but because as an economic weapon it maintains for the workingmen a higher standard of existence than that which they would enjoy if they were completely

disorganized.

Socialism does not advance necessarily in response to or because of great industrial distress. These crises may point out the fact that something is wrong, but the suggestion of the remedy and the cure for these ills is quite a different problem. Socialism has made more advance in the last two years in Chicago, than it did in the year 1893, when the stone floor of the City Hall was covered with the restless, homeless, and discontented men and thousands of unemployed paraded the streets. Of course, it is true that the very best paid workingmen may be a little slow in picking up Socialism, which is due to the fact that their condition economically is superior to the other workmen in different lines, for by comparison they have nothing to complain about; but all this is no reason why we should oppose or ignore municipal ownership and municipal coal and wood yards and ice houses, etc., which would benefit the people to at least some extent, and the working class more than others, because there are more workingmen than parasites.

In our recent convention, one "Revolutionist" was applauded when he announced his opposition to municipal ownership because it would improve the condition of the workingmen in those industries. He wanted to improve the condition of all workingmen together and simultaneously; the improvement of a part of them at a time to him was to make the favored "pets." I mention this not to reply, that would be stultifying, but because a majority of the convention supported his position, just as though the working class was an elevator and by pulling the "clear-cut, uncompromising rope" they could all go up evenly together.

One objection to demands made is that capitalists would not operate public utilities as well nor from the same standpoint as Socialists. This contains but a partial truth. Where a city has one or two industries which do not contribute to the health and welfare of its citizens through political corruption and private contracts, such enterprises may be manipulated in the interest of private contractors, etc.

The more and far-reaching the industries operated by the people, whether a water works or a fire department, the greater will be the interest manifested by the people in public affairs, and the better service will be rendered to the public. And furthermore, every assumption by the state in industries has a ten-

dency to turn the mind of the people from the operating of industries to serve private ends to the operating of industries to serve the public good. The motive of the two enterprises is entirely different. The former is capitalistic, the latter socialistic. The former to make money, the latter for utility, and the more extensive municipal or state ownership becomes the greater social consciousness springs up from the people. It is suggested that the Democratic and Republican Party will grant and make these concessions which form a part of the Socialist program. That should not make it any less our duty to demand them and agitate for them. If we are to abandon our objects because a capitalist party prints in its platform and declares for identically the same thing, then our existence as a political factor is precarious indeed, and it would be equally illogical to take the position opposing a public measure for the reason that capitalists favor it. Upon that theory, we would discharge the fire department and cashier the health officers, and abandon the life-saving service.

It is again urged that demands may be well enough, but they would result in emphasizing palliatives, rather than the fundamental principles of the party. I do not think that emphasis possible to the extent of endangering the party. At the recent municipal elections at Erie, Pennsylvania, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, both of which had progressive programs, there was a range of debate and agitation from the most inconsequential palliative to the entire abolition of the wage system, and in both campaigns it was noticeable that while they opened with discussions of minor points it soon shifted to the fundamental differences between capitalism and the Socialists. These two circumstances do not prove the futility of these demands, but emphasize their political value. Again, it is suggested that in Europe, where considerable nationalization exists, the working class is no better off than here. In the first place, in Europe the railroads are used to serve and support an extensive military regime. The political structure of the United States is quite different from that of European countries, and has no extensive military system to serve. Here there is a certain state autonomy, and in many states comparative municipal autonomy prevails.

The population of Chicago is nearly as large as that of Massachusetts, and greater than the combined population of Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecti-

cut, and Rhode Island. The municipal utilities employ thousands, and there is no force in the argument that municipalizing will build or strengthen a political machine. The Republican and Democratic politicians control far more offices, more positions and employees who are serving as laborers for the street car and gas companies, and over these employees they do over the actual city employees. These large private corporations in the cities do not hesitate to corrupt the judiciary, to defeat a working man's damage suit, steal a highway, and then prohibit their own employees from organizing into trade unions. Under city ownership these evils would be minimized, and while it might be slight, the benefits at least warrant a ten word demand in a Socialist platform.

To say that we must oppose these reforms until the Socialist Party has complete control of the city, state, and nation, is to become impractical, and leave no program for a possible elected candidate, and the conceit of it will breed sterility, and make DeLeon the true Messiah.

As a matter of fact, the capitalists are not willing to grant these reforms. A great public sentiment has been aroused and a pressure brought to bear which they realize cannot long be resisted. For franchises they appeal to the courts, resort to bribery, reach the press, and contribute to the pulpit. They give ground reluc-

tantly, and we should take our position against them. For every private enterprise wrung from capitalists and turned over to the public, no matter how imperfect its shape may be, is a weakening of the opposition and reduces the power of their resistance to Socialism.

The Manifesto has demands, the Social Democracy of Germany has demands, the same is true of Great Britain, Belgium and Sweden, and all other European countries, and in those countries they exploit every public question and capitalist contentions to make known the object and purpose of Socialism. Opportunities in this country are now afforded which are simply marvelous, claiming the public attention, and not infrequently disturbing the entire industrial system. [There exists such issues as] strikes, riots, public crimes, child labor, the invasion of the public schools by cutting off their means of support, and a thousand and one different popular means of securing the attention of the people. There is no ground for the conservative timidity or the fetish worshipping bigotry which has heretofore prevailed in the Socialist parties of this country. Its integrity can be maintained, its service to the people enhanced, and its beneficial effect to the working class increased, by availing ourselves of the opportunities of each succeeding day.

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