
Immediate Demands.

by Louis Waldman

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The questions to be considered is: shall the party abolish its immediate demands? Of late there has been a lot of discussion going on within the party, stimulated largely by what is known as the "Left Wing" group, as to whether we shall have immediate demands in our platform. This question not only agitates those in the "Left wing," but also Socialists who are normally of the type that would have voted for immediate demands unquestioningly.

Here and there comrades say: "I think we ought to abolish our immediate demands." Whenever I speak to them more intimately, I find that they do not know two things: first, what the immediate demands really are; second, how a political party operates.

Immediate demands, as commonly understood, constitute that portion of the Socialist platform which embodies certain reforms. I should like to know how many of our party members have read the Socialist Party platform, not only of this year, but the one of last year and the years before. If they have, they must have noticed that the platform is divided into three parts: first, there is the general preamble stating the philosophy upon which the Socialist Party as a political organization is founded; second, there is the program of immediate demands; third, the ultimate goal.

This is the policy of all Socialist platforms — municipal, state, and national. At different conventions in different parts of the country the wording of the preamble might have been changed, different reforms might have been demanded, but

the goal remains always the same — Socialism, the cooperative commonwealth, the substitution for the present capitalist system of the cooperative commonwealth.

At the last [New York] State Convention, held at the Peoples' House only eight months ago, I had the pleasure of being a member of the committee which drafted the platform which was adopted by the convention with very slight changes. There were immediate demands in that platform, there was the ultimate aim stated better and more scientifically than in any hifalutin document now adrift among us.

Men like Wolfe, Gitlow, MacAlpine voted for the immediate demands. This was only nine months ago. The Revolution in Russia was then about a year old. The Bolshevik regime and the Soviet Republic had already been established. All the historical lessons that we could draw from the Russian Revolution could already have been drawn. Yet these people voted for immediate demands. Nothing has happened in the last nine months in the world's history, in this regard at least, to warrant any change of view on this question, except what has happened in the party itself and for different reasons than the existence of immediate demands in our platform.

Immediate demands may be classified largely into three groups — political, social, and economic. Among the political demands may be listed the following: the initiative, referendum, and recall; woman suffrage; proportional representation. The initiative means that the people shall have the

power to initiate laws directly, even if the Board of Aldermen, the Legislature, or Congress does not want them. The referendum means that if any bill is introduced in a legislature the people have the right to demand that that law go before the people for a vote. If we had the referendum, conscription could probably never have been foisted on the people. It would have been voted down. The nature of the political demands is such as to democratize the instruments of government so that it may properly register the will of the people, and become an adequate agency for the peaceful transformation of society.

Social immediate demands deal with the problems of education, academic freedom; they deal with relations between man and man, man and industry, industry and industry; they seek to properly coordinate the various institutions in modern complex society; they propose a comprehensive system of social insurance against sickness, old age, unemployment, and death.

Economic immediate demands usually provide for the six hour day, proper inspection against the perils of fire, proper sanitary control, minimum wage, protection of women against night work, and other measures improving the economic condition of the workers.

This, in general, is the nature of immediate demands. And the question is this: Shall we at the next National Convention make it the policy of the Socialist Party that immediate demands be **entirely** eliminated from our platform? Shall our platform consist of two parts only — a preamble stating our principles upon which we as a party exist and our ultimate aim? These are very practical questions. We must decide it, the rank and file must decide it, and embody the decision in an official document.

I say we must decide whether we want to do away with immediate demands **entirely** because of the inescapable fact that the present controversy is not whether this or that immediate demand is desirable. It is not a question as to whether we

should have a “cheap milk” plank, or a free university plank, or a state development of water resources plank. The wisdom or lack of wisdom of certain kinds of planks are proper subjects for experts, for students in current events, in politics and government. The issue is whether we desire immediate demands at all. This decided, the selection of the kind of immediate demands is a secondary consideration, particularly as far as the present controversy is concerned.

The critics of the party urge to objections to immediate demands.

First: That social reforms generate conservatism; that by reason of the fact that the Socialist Party is a revolutionary organization based on a revolutionary philosophy, and having a revolutionary goal, it has no right to incorporate social reforms in the platform; that the immediate demands vitiate the revolutionary character of the organization.

Second: That history has shown that revolutions come when the people are oppressed the most; that by having anything to do with social reform the Party only serves to bolster up the capitalist system and delays the revolution; that we ought to let capitalism run its course and “dig its own grave;” that our business is not to demand any immediate reforms — for capitalism will grant that — but preach revolution, **and that only**.

We will take each objection by itself and using it as a starting point, we will briefly examine the facts and draw our conclusions.

Do immediate demands, do social reforms in themselves breed conservatism? Is it in their very nature to destroy the revolutionary character of any organization once they are adopted and made part of the program of that organization? I like to answer these questions out of the mouths of our critics.

Those who are opposed to immediate demands are loud in advocating industrial unionism. In this we have no quarrel, except that we do not believe the industrial union is all we should

advocate, it is the revolutionary industrial unions we want — unions that have for their aim and purpose the [destruction] of capitalism, unions whose goal is socialism, industrial democracy, and the cooperative commonwealth.

Supposing we proceed to organize revolutionary industrial unions, what would be our policy? How would we do it? Would we get all the workers together — all the underpaid, into an industrial union — call them on strike and overthrow capitalism? No. Anyone who knows the working class, who knows its makeup and its character, knows that this is impossible. What procedure then, would we adopt? How could we organize the millions of workers into our desired revolutionary industrial union? Evidently by the unromantic method of taking a step at a time.

Is this the most desirable method, the impatient asks? Perhaps not, but it is the only practical one.

The probable procedure of organizing a real independent union would be this: An industry where labor works 10 hours a day would be organized and called out on strike for an 8-hour day. If the wage is \$18.00 per week, the workers would strike, perhaps for \$24.00. With this ground gained, with the organization perfected, with labor realizing its power, a strike would be waged for a 44-hour or a 36-hour week, for a minimum of \$6 per day, etc. And while these practical con-

flicts are on, while the workers are becoming conscious of the value of organization and the need for solidarity of labor, the [goal] that is held before them is not a fair day's work, but complete emancipation.

I do not know of any "Left Winger" who would deny that this would not be approximately the procedure in organizing revolutionary industrial unions. In fact, this is about the practice adopted by the most revolutionary sections of the economic labor organization, the IWW.

But what does it mean to strike for a 48-hour, 44-hour, or even a 36-hour week? What does it mean to strike for \$24.00 or \$30.00 or even \$50.00 a week? What does it mean to strike for sanitary conditions? Are not all these immediate demands upon capitalism? And is there anyone insane enough to claim that such strikes and such immediate demands necessarily diminish the revolutionary character of the revolutionary industrial unions? Is it not true that such struggles and such **partial victories** only intensify the class struggle?

Why then is not the same reasoning to be applied to the political organization of the working class? Why would immediate demands and partial victories in the shape of social reforms — if the ultimate aim is always held in view, and it is so held — on the political field be any the less effective as a stimulant to the class struggle, politically expressed, than they are in the economic field?

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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