

Thanks for the Reminder

By Daniel De Leon

The New York Times of the 12th of this month announces that “many planks of the Bull Moose platform are only a paraphrase of pledges of the Socialist Labor Party of 1896.”

The *Times* deserves thanks for the discovery and reminder.

1896 was the last presidential year in which the SLP held a national convention clogged, hampered and otherwise fettered by the navel string of the curiosity named the Socialistic Labor Party. The fact manifested itself in the long list of “immediate demands”—a regular “appendix” to the anatomy of the party, and fit only to produce appendicitis—a political inflammation that is now afflicting the Socialist Party. The navel string being cut at the 1900 National Convention of the SLP, the “appendix” was removed and thrown into the political garbage can.

Whatever else a political party of bona fide socialism may be compelled to do in other countries, where the economic and political climate is different from ours—in America the program of a party of bona fide socialism has no concern with aught but the abolition of wage slavery. Here capitalism is confronted with socialism, no practical vestige of feudalism being left between the two, and to be removed by the latter. In such a country as America, “immediate demands” or “reforms” are a source of unqualified, and of double danger to the socialist movement.

In the first place, the “reforms” are a danger in that they operate as bait. A bait-recruited body may be useful in many, especially financial, ways to the holders of the other end of the line; to the socialist movement such a body is mainly injurious. It is a center from which radiates not one of the virtues that the social revolution requires for its triumph. The thing is a gelatinous bulk—big in mass, spineless in energy.

In the second place, such “reforms” in an American socialist program are a danger to the movement in that the reforms demanded—they being used as props, and the props belonging to bourgeois society—some of them, even all, may at any time be pulled away by the foe, and the structure reared upon them must then collapse.

It is at its own peril that the social revolutionary movement of America will take a single “plank” that fits in bourgeois society. Insofar as such a plank is good, it needs no entry in the socialist program. Socialism is impliedly a safeguard to all the great achievements of the civilizations that precede it. All such “planks” are self-understood. Insofar as such “planks” are not self-understood they are harmful, in that they are props to prop up the ills of the bourgeois social system.

Conscious of all this, the SLP made in 1900 the politico-surgical operation that cut off and cast off the “immediate demands,” and today the party stands forth with a program that proclaims both the economics and the sociology of the great pending revolution—the abolition of wage slavery, and also of the social structure of the same, the political state—

a proclamation not a note of which is muffled by any “immediate demands,” or aught else that can be stolen by the bourgeois foe.

By recalling the fact that Roosevelt merely paraphrased the SLP reform demands of 1896, the *Times* underscores the deep gulf that separates the SLP of 1896 from the SLP of 1912; and the paper simultaneously underscores the shortness of the bridge that bridges the Roosevelt party and the Socialist Party—Bullmoosia and Kangarusia.*

Daily People, August 27, 1912
Socialist Labor Party

*“Bullmoosia” refers to Theodore Roosevelt’s Progressive, or “Bull Moose,” Party, which used the bull moose as its emblem. Roosevelt had split with the Republican Party, set up his own party and had himself nominated for president in 1912. His Bull Moose platform not only mimicked the SLP’s platform of 1896, it provoked a howl from the reformist Socialist Party, which accused Roosevelt of “stealing its thunder.” “Kangarusia” refers to that element of the Socialist Party that belonged to the SLP until 1899. That element had tried unsuccessfully to take over the SLP by usurping the authority and attempting to depose the party’s duly elected national officers. The term came from the kangaroo courts of the old West, which, though they had no real authority under the law, dispensed “justice.” The kangaroos of 1899 failed in their attempt to overthrow the SLP’s national officers, but they succeeded in splitting the socialist movement. The minority of SLP members who followed them merged with Eugene V. Debs’ Social Democratic Party to form the Socialist Party in 1901.—SLP