

Old Parties Thieves of Ideas: Interview with the *St. Louis Star* (November 3, 1912)

Pressure from below has for years been forcing the old parties to steal the planks of the Socialists, but in this campaign, in trying to keep up with the irresistible demand of the masses for remedial legislation, Theodore Roosevelt has become the chief offender.

Roosevelt feels that his existence depends upon keeping himself in the limelight. He knows that he would be a political corpse if he did not continually turn to the spectacular. He is now poaching on the Socialist preserves and going farther than we ourselves have even gone.

In thus assuming the spectacular, Roosevelt has become a political Dr. Cook.¹ He is a monumental faker. He is a four-flusher. He tells the masses that he, and he alone, is standing for their interests, but the masses will no longer stand for him.

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Every decent man regrets and denounces the attempt to assassinate Roosevelt at Milwaukee, and none more so than the Socialists — but there is a though connected with the first announcement of the shooting which shows how the press is ruled by the capitalists.

“Roosevelt Shot Down By a Socialist,” the papers announce in big flaring headlines. As a matter of fact, investigation showed that not only was Schrank² not a socialist, but that on the contrary he had been a steady reader of Republican and Democratic literature. No wonder he was a maniac. This false announcement is only one of the many instances in which the capitalistic press, with one voice, seeks to throw all possible onus of crime upon the socialists.

These same papers, day after day, devoted columns and pages to Roosevelt’s condition, but if a downtrodden laborer was killed while at work because his employer had placed him at defective machinery, or if a sick child died of neglect while the mother was scrubbing at night in a big office building in order to get money for medicine and foot, you might search these same papers from beginning to end and find not a mention of either case.

Why is this? Is the life of one human, in the final analysis, worth more than the life of another? The general answer to this would be yes, but I say no — a thousand times no. Given equal opportunity that same workingman might have become the great man which Roosevelt admits that he himself is. That dead child was as dear to its mother as are any of his own to this apostle of large families.³ Possibly the reason these instances are generally ignored by the papers is that by calling attention to them they must at the same time reveal the economic injustice under which this country is now suffering. Vote the Socialist ticket on Tuesday [November 5] and you can correct these conditions.

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Let me explain what I mean when I say that in stealing from our platforms Roosevelt is the chief offender. In 1906, when we were forcing upon the country the cry of the initiative, referendum, and recall, which is now victoriously sweeping the country from coast to coast, Theodore Roosevelt, then in the White House, in a public declaration singled out the plank of the Socialists and called it anarchistic. Now he is not only demanding the recall of judges, but of judicial decisions as well, going even farther than the “anarchists” of 1906 had gone. This is simply another instance of the spectacular for which his nature seems to crave.

Another plank which we have jammed down willy-nilly into the jaws of the old parties, and which the copious Rooseveltian maw has swallowed at one gulp, is that declaring for workmen’s compensation laws. Both old parties are in keen rivalry to appropriate this cry for justice, and are telling labor that the only way to get this justice is to vote their own ticket, as the Socialists will never have the power of legislation. Roosevelt has been proclaiming this from the housetops.

It is evident that the capitalist politicians — and by this I mean the followers of all three of the supposedly dominant parties in the present campaign — have seen the handwriting on the wall. They see that the scales are falling from the eyes of the oppressed people, and in their desperate effort to retain their grip upon the government they are offering us a shadow instead of a substance.

There is only one way for the workingmen of this country to obtain economic justice, and that is by voting the Socialist ticket from top to bottom. Labor here, as in every country, is in the vast majority, but such is its position of servitude that it does not know its own power. Once it

realizes the power lying in its own hands, justice will descend upon the United States in an irresistible avalanche.

Scratch a Republican and you will find a Democrat. Scratch a Democrat and you will find a Bull Mooser, and so on ad infinitum. They are all stabled in the stalls of plutocracy, and when the Socialists begin to show the true power of independent labor at the polls these stalls will be depopulated by the capitalistic masters and the old party combination against us in Milwaukee will be duplicated throughout the country.⁴ The mass will be thrown off and the illicit love of the old parties will be revealed in all its nakedness. And when this triple team of unholy capitalism is harnessed up the Bull Moose will be the wheel horse of plutocracy.

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The platform of the Socialists may be stated in two words — economic justice. Labor wants no favors from capital. It simply demands its own. It is an age-long fight, and victory for humanity is rapidly looking up. The cry of the oppressed can no longer be silenced. Labor demands its just share in the profits of its brawn and skill, and this demand has now reached the irresistible stage, as witness the sops, which are continually being thrown out to us by the old parties.

I want to impress one truth upon the minds of the public. It is unnecessary to do so with the socialists, as it is our unyielding creed. The reforms which we demand in the name of humanity must come through peaceful channels. We are and ever will be foes of violence. Our remedy lies in the ballot box. With unity at the polls economic justice is nearly in sight.

Through the medium of the *Star* I want to appeal for this unity next Tuesday. In the name of its wives mothers, sisters, daughters, and sweethearts; in the name of true and not traitorous manhood I appeal to independent labor to show its strength in such a manner that our inevitable victory will be hastened and humanity finally come into its own through the outstretched hands of common justice.

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¹ Dr. Frederick A. Cook (1865-1940) was an explorer who claimed to have summited Mount McKinley in 1906 and to have reached the North Pole on April 21, 1908, nearly a year before the feat was accomplished by his rival, Robert Peary. Both claims were challenged and Cook was widely believed to have engaged in fakery to bolster his claims of success. In 1923 Cook was convicted of fraud for having organized startup oil companies in Texas which paid purported dividends from the proceeds of sales of stock. He was sentenced to more than 14 years in prison and ultimately remained behind bars until 1930.

² John F. Schrank (1876-1943) was a former New York saloonkeeper who stalked and shot presidential candidate Theodore Roosevelt on October 14, 1912. The delusional Schrank was found to be legally insane and was institutionalized at the Central State Hospital for the Criminally Insane at Waupun, Wisconsin for the rest of his life.

³ Theodore Roosevelt had six children by two wives.

⁴ In order to defeat the Socialist administration of Milwaukee, in 1912 the Democrats and Republicans buried their differences and launched a successful fusion campaign.