

EDITORIAL

DEMANDS—“IMMEDIATE” AND “CONSTANT.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

A CINCINNATI, O., correspondent argues that—
Whereas the true political party of the workers must come through the workers, organized on the industrial field; and

Whereas a political party so organized will reflect in its political platform the demands made on the industrial field; and

Whereas, before the final overthrow of capitalism, which is the constant demand, there will be many immediate demands—shorter hours, higher wages, better conditions, etc., etc.,—

Does it not follow that this political party will and must have an immediate demand platform?

No; it does not follow.

The reasoning that, until the “constant” demand of Labor, the overthrow of capitalism, is attained, “immediate” demands are bound to appear on the platform of the true political party of labor, proceeds from a confusion of the term “demand” as used in the two instances.

The overthrow of capitalism—that is a DEMAND—it is THE demand—it belongs in the platform of a true political party of Labor.

Shorter hours—10 instead of 12, or 8 instead of 10—when really and ultimately the hours will be nearer to 3 than to 8; higher wages, which means less exploitation, when really and ultimately wagism is to be abolished; a minimum of sanitary ventilation in factories, when really and ultimately the factory is to cease being a hole and is to become a parlor; these and the like are not “demands.” They are intermediary stepping-stones, to be discarded soon as possible in the onward march. They have no place in the platform.

This is not an instance of a "distinction without a difference," or of "splitting of hairs," or of "substituting a different word for the same thing," a process which, in fact, changes nothing. It is a difference that goes to the root of things.

The test between "demands" and "non-demands," however desirable the latter may be, is that the latter are included in the former, as a matter of course. This feature of desirable but temporary steps places them under a category, in point of principle and of tactics distinct from the category of "demands."

An army that takes the field against a city has that city for its "demand." The setting up of tents, digging of trenches, providing for sanitation, etc.,—these are not "demands." These are means, toward the "demand"; and these means will vary according to circumstances, hence, need not be enumerated.

The "demand" is ONE—it is the proclamation of the goal. The so-called "immediate" demands are legion. The specification of them, or of any of them, is superfluous.

The importance of the distinction lies in its practical bearing.

The moment things that are not in the nature of a "demand," because they are not the goal, are raised to the dignity of a "demand" they are apt to be, and generally are, confused with the goal itself. A political party, that sets up "immediate" demands, by so much blurs its "constant" demand, or goal. The presence of "immediate" demands in a Socialist platform reveals pure and simple politicianism,—corruption, or the invitation to corruption.

Only the economic organization may and must reach out after crumbs—"improved conditions"—on its way to emancipation. The very nature of the organization preserves it from the danger of "resting satisfied," of accepting "improvement" for "goal." The economic organization is forced by economic laws to realize it can preserve no "improvement" unless it marches onward to emancipation.

Otherwise with the political organization. It must be "whole hog or none." The very nature of its existence—itsself only a path-clearer for the economic organization, and only a temporary means,—renders the political organization prone to "rest satisfied" with incidentals and "improvements."

There is no danger of the true political party of Socialism, that is, the party that

flows from class conscious Unions, dragging behind it the navel-string of “immediate demands”—as well imagine a Declaration of Independence with “Immediate Demands.”

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded April 2012

slpns@slp.org