

A DEMOCRACY OF ITS OWN: MILWAUKEE'S SOCIALISMS, DIFFERENCE  
AND PRAGMATISM

by

Edward A. Benoit, III

A Thesis Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in History

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

August 2009

ABSTRACT

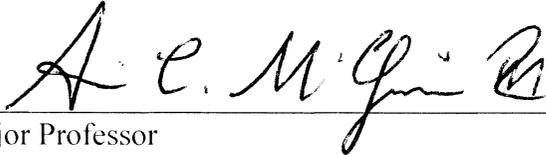
A DEMOCRACY OF ITS OWN: MILWAUKEE'S SOCIALISMS, DIFFERENCE  
AND PRAGMATISM

by

Edward A. Benoit, III

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2009  
Under the Supervision of Associate Professor Aims McGuinness

Historians regard Milwaukee Socialism as an atypical experience of socialism in the United States. Victor Berger remains the lone figure of historical inquest with the rest of Milwaukee Socialism remanded to follower status. An examination of three major leaders of the socialist movement in Milwaukee dispels both notions. The speeches, actions and writings of Victor Berger, Emil Seidel, and Daniel Hoan display a complex struggle between idealistic socialism and pragmatic municipal governance.

  
Major Professor

  
Date

© Copyright by Edward A. Benoit, III, 2009  
All Rights Reserved

To my mother and father,  
for all of your support

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter One: Victor L. Berger	26
Chapter Two: Emil Seidel	61
Chapter Three: Daniel W. Hoan	87
Conclusion	115
Bibliography	118

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1, Unknown, <i>Populistic Boarding House</i> , Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin	35
Figure 2, Unknown, <i>Emil Seidel and Victor Berger</i> , Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin	45
Figure 3, Unknown, <i>Eugene Debs and Victor Berger</i> , Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin	47
Figure 4, Unknown, <i>The Track is Cleared</i> , Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin	53
Figure 5, Unknown, <i>Victor L. Berger for U.S. Senator</i> , Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin	57
Figure 6, Unknown, <i>Solidartät</i> , Emil Seidel Papers, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archive, Milwaukee, Wisconsin	67
Figure 7, Unknown, <i>Come to Hear Emil Seidel</i> , History of Socialism Visual Materials, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin	79

INSERTED PAGE

**Notice:** Figures are redacted from this version for copyright and licensing protection. Some of the images are available from the Wisconsin Historical Society online (listed below). For the remaining figures, a print copy of the thesis is available through the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Golda Meir Library.

Figure 2:

[http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/fullRecord.asp?id=56202&qstring=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.wisconsinhistory.org%2Fwhi%2Fresults.asp%3Fsearch\\_type%3Dbasic%26keyword1%3DVictor%2BBerger%26submit%3DSUBMIT](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/fullRecord.asp?id=56202&qstring=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.wisconsinhistory.org%2Fwhi%2Fresults.asp%3Fsearch_type%3Dbasic%26keyword1%3DVictor%2BBerger%26submit%3DSUBMIT)

Figure 3:

[http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/fullRecord.asp?id=56204&qstring=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.wisconsinhistory.org%2Fwhi%2Fresults.asp%3Fsearch\\_type%3Dbasic%26keyword1%3DVictor%2BBerger%26submit%3DSUBMIT](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/fullRecord.asp?id=56204&qstring=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.wisconsinhistory.org%2Fwhi%2Fresults.asp%3Fsearch_type%3Dbasic%26keyword1%3DVictor%2BBerger%26submit%3DSUBMIT)

Figure 5:

[http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/fullRecord.asp?id=1901&qstring=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.wisconsinhistory.org%2Fwhi%2Fresults.asp%3Fsearch\\_type%3Dbasic%26keyword1%3DVictor%2BBerger%26submit%3DSUBMIT](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/fullRecord.asp?id=1901&qstring=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.wisconsinhistory.org%2Fwhi%2Fresults.asp%3Fsearch_type%3Dbasic%26keyword1%3DVictor%2BBerger%26submit%3DSUBMIT)

Figure 7:

[http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/fullRecord.asp?id=26096&qstring=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.wisconsinhistory.org%2Fwhi%2Fresults.asp%3Fsearch\\_type%3Dbasic%26keyword1%3DSeidel%26submit%3DSEARCH](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/fullRecord.asp?id=26096&qstring=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.wisconsinhistory.org%2Fwhi%2Fresults.asp%3Fsearch_type%3Dbasic%26keyword1%3DSeidel%26submit%3DSEARCH)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Aims McGuinness, whose direction, patience, expertise, and mentoring enhanced my graduate experience. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. J. David Hoeveler and Dr. Jasmine Alinder, for the assistance they provided throughout my research. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Bruce Fetter for assisting with demographic examination and Dr. Winson Chu for assisting with translations.

A special thank-you to the archivists at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the Milwaukee County Historical Society, and the Wisconsin Historical Society for assisting me in locating needed source materials. Additionally, I must thank my colleagues and coworkers for serving as sounding boards throughout this process. Special recognition to Joseph Davies, Katy Hardy, Joseph Walzer, Martin Christiansen, Laura Luepke, Cris Daining, Brian Mueller, and Ann Zeilke.

Thanks especially to the Wisconsin Historical Society for digital reproductions of the figures used throughout the thesis.

I would also like to thank my friends and family. Without their support, my research would never be able to happen. I must acknowledge the continued support of my parents, Patricia and Edward Benoit, Jr., throughout my academic and personal life. Their encouragement alone keeps me reaching for my dreams.

In conclusion, I need to thank the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Department of History for supporting my research during the past six years. From inspiring me as an undergraduate to accepting me as a junior colleague, the department has always provided me with ample support during this process.

## INSPIRATION

How are you heading? On up grade,  
Fearless, dauntless and unafraid,  
The light of vict'ry in your eye,  
Your shoulders squared and head held  
    high?

Because you vowed I will prevail  
You cannot, dare not, must not fail,  
No power on earth can hold you back,  
You're traveling on the victor's track.  
On, on, scale heights that tower so steep  
Through storm and night and tempest  
    sweep.

The goal is yours; you'll win the prize  
Though oft' you stumble, quickly rise,  
Be not discouraged, still pursue  
Until life's best is won by you.

One of Daniel Hoan's favorite poems in Thomas Robert Gaines, *Friendly Thoughts: A Book of Inspiration, Purpose and Happiness*. New York City: T.R. Gaines, 1927.

## INTRODUCTION

Historians have devoted so many pages to explaining the failure of socialism in the United States that they have rarely paused to consider socialism's successes. The city of Milwaukee was the scene of a number of notable socialist victories in the twentieth century. Milwaukee elected three socialist mayors between 1910 and 1960, as well as the first socialist member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Victor Berger. Although historians of socialism and Milwaukee have long recognized these victories, they have devoted relatively little attention to the ideas or policies of Milwaukee socialists.

Historians often dismiss Milwaukee Socialism as an exception to the American socialist movement; most explain socialists' success in Milwaukee as solely the achievement of a singular political machine boss, Victor Berger. Berger, the most prominent of Milwaukee's socialists in the early twentieth century, was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1910 and then again in 1918, 1922, 1924, and 1926. In writing about socialism, historians have focused more on speculating about the cause of its failure, rather than recognizing the handful of success stories during the movement. Even the few historians who specialize in the history of socialism in Milwaukee rarely examine the ideology of either Emil Seidel or Daniel Hoan. There has been a tendency to lump Milwaukee socialists together as "Sewer Socialists," a term that suggests that Milwaukee socialists were somehow devoid of ideas. Yet significant ideological differences existed among Milwaukee socialists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and socialists' efforts to improve the everyday lives of their constituents were informed by ideas that have been too often ignored by later scholars.

## Overview

The failed German revolution of 1848 and the emigration of its leaders traditionally mark the origins of Milwaukee's socialist movement. While the influx of German immigrants to Milwaukee both preceded and followed 1848, the radical core of the Forty-Eighters who moved to Milwaukee laid the foundation for socialism. In 1853, many of the Milwaukee Forty-Eighters joined in creating the Milwaukee Turnverein, or Turner Society, which preached "a sound mind in a sound body."<sup>1</sup> Among the founders of the Turnverein was August Willich. As Aims McGuinness notes, "Willich had been Friedrich Engels's commanding officer during the Revolution of 1848 and also was a member of the League of Communists, the organization that had commissioned Karl Marx and Engels to write *The Communist Manifesto*."<sup>2</sup>

Milwaukee's Turnverein promoted physical exercise and civic education as paths toward a proper life. In doing so, the society often held political discussions and lecture series. While the Turnverein was not a specifically socialist organization, many active socialists (including Victor Berger, Emil Seidel, and Daniel Hoan) participated in its social activities. In addition to the Turnverein, Milwaukee's German community established ethnic-based industries, community centers, performing-arts venues, and schools. The vast array of German-based organizations in Milwaukee "gave the city the international reputation as the *Deutsch-Athen*" or German Athens of the United States.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 2006), 62.

<sup>2</sup> Aims McGuinness, "The Revolution Begins Here: Milwaukee and the History of Socialism," in Margo Anderson and Victor Greene, eds., *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 63.

Following the Civil War, in which many Milwaukee Germans (including Willich) voluntarily fought, Milwaukee quickly grew as an industrial hub of the United States. By 1880, Milwaukee had become the scene of a growing labor movement. Organized by many of the German and Polish immigrants, unions urged radical reforms. Labor leaders, including Emil Seidel and Victor Berger, began struggling for the eight-hour workday. During the period of the Haymarket Affair in Chicago, Milwaukee's Bay View Massacre resulted in five to nine deaths.<sup>4</sup> The tragedy of Bay View was a setback for Milwaukee radicals. But widespread outrage over the killings ultimately helped to gather support for their goals of making improvements in the lives of working-class citizens.

In 1897, Victor Berger and other socialists founded Branch One of the Social Democracy of America in Milwaukee. The Social Democratic party quickly expanded in Milwaukee to six branches and began promoting its message through German, Polish, and English newspapers. As the number of citizens on the socialist party's rolls swelled, the movement decided to officially enter the political arena on January 5, 1898.<sup>5</sup>

The party's first candidate for mayor, in 1898, received a meager 2,444 votes, but the party continued growing.<sup>6</sup> Following a national divide at the 1898 convention (based on the issue of establishing socialist colonies in America), the Milwaukee delegation joined others in forming a new party, the Social Democratic Party of America. The new party "advocated government ownership of public utilities and monopolies, extension of equal rights to women, among other planks, to be achieved through political processes."<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> According to John Gurda, "the precise number of fatalities remains in doubt. County death certificates confirm five, but published estimates place the number as high as nine," *Making of Milwaukee*, 154.

<sup>5</sup> Elmer A. Beck, *The Sewer Socialists: A History of the Socialist Party of Wisconsin, 1897-1940* vol. 1 (Fennimore, Wisconsin: Westberg Associates Publishers, 1982), 10-15; McGuinness, "Revolution Begins Here," 4.

<sup>6</sup> Beck, *Sewer Socialists* vol. 1, 15.

<sup>7</sup> Beck, *Sewer Socialists* vol. 1, 18.

Despite the party's 1898 failure in Milwaukee, Wisconsinites became the first to elect socialists to public office in Sheboygan that year. The growing number of votes cast for socialist candidates indicated the growing strength of the party. In 1900, Frederick Heath, editor of the *Social Democratic Herald*, received 2,585 votes. In 1904, 15,343 citizens cast votes for Victor Berger as mayor. During the same election, the party elected its first aldermen, county supervisors, justices of the peace, and constables (a total of seventeen socialists, including Emil Seidel as alderman).<sup>8</sup>

By 1910, Milwaukeeans began embracing the possibility of a socialist government and both the spring and fall campaigns swept socialists into control of the city. In the spring campaign, Milwaukee elected its first socialist mayor, Emil Seidel, along with majorities in both the common council and county board of supervisors. Additionally, the Social Democrats marked victories with a city attorney, treasurer, judges, and thirteen state legislators. The overwhelming success of the socialist campaign continued in the fall with the election of Victor Berger to the Fifth Congressional District, making him the first socialist to sit in the U.S. House of Representatives.<sup>9</sup>

Following the 1910 election, Milwaukee gained international attention as the focal point of socialism in the United States. The Seidel administration attacked corruption in City Hall and transformed municipal government into an efficient machine. Socialists maintained fiscal discipline, refusing to start any project without adequate funding. Additionally, the administration advocated workers' compensation, higher wages, and better working conditions and "offered strike arbitration in the event of

---

<sup>8</sup> Beck, *Sewer Socialists* vol. 1, 23.

<sup>9</sup> Beck, *Sewer Socialists* vol. 1, 24; McGuinness, "Revolution Begins Here," 4.

conflicts between companies and unionized employees.”<sup>10</sup> The first socialist administration’s other priorities included public health, education reform, and regulation of utilities.<sup>11</sup>

Dismayed by the socialist administration, the opposition parties of Milwaukee selected a fusion candidate for the 1912 mayoral campaign. Despite the efforts of both the socialist and labor presses, Gerhard Bading defeated Seidel by more than 10,000 votes. Beyond the mayoral campaign, socialists lost their majorities in both the common council and the county board of supervisors. Additionally, Victor Berger lost his bid for reelection and most of the city offices returned to the opposition parties. A single holdover, Daniel Hoan, was reelected as city attorney.<sup>12</sup>

Failure continued in 1914, with Seidel’s failed attempt to unseat Bading. However, Milwaukee reelected Hoan for a third term as city attorney. With the United States’ entry into World War I looming, the socialist nomination of Daniel Hoan for mayor in 1916 marked a resurgence of the party. Hoan defeated Bading by a thin margin of 1,657 votes and promised a “better, bigger and brighter city” in his inaugural address.<sup>13</sup> Hoan would remain in office until 1940, enjoying the second longest term of any Milwaukee mayor.

World War I sparked the decline of the national movement and caused continual friction within Milwaukee Socialism. Immediately following the U.S. entry into the war, socialists called for an emergency national convention at St. Louis. The resulting declaration against U.S. involvement in the war caused several socialists to leave the

---

<sup>10</sup> McGuinness, “Revolution Begins Here,” 5.

<sup>11</sup> McGuinness, “Revolution Begins Here,” 5; Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 214-218.

<sup>12</sup> Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 219-220.

<sup>13</sup> Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 221.

Milwaukee party. Furthermore, the St. Louis convention forced Hoan to balance national duties with party loyalty. Mayor Hoan maintained his anti-war views, but fully adhered to the requirements of the federal government. He even found ways to provide food and supplies to the citizens of Milwaukee through his cooperation with the wartime effort.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, Victor Berger faced the most difficult period of his life. As an ardent supporter of the St. Louis position, Berger editorialized against the war effort in his newspaper, *The Milwaukee Leader*. In March of 1918, Berger and four other socialists were indicted for violations of the Espionage Act. Despite Berger's upcoming federal trial, the citizens of Milwaukee elected him to Congress again in 1918. The trial began in December, and Berger was quickly convicted. The following January, the U.S. House of Representatives refused to seat a convicted felon and ordered a special election. In the resulting election, Milwaukee again voted for Berger, and Congress again refused to seat him. Rather than hold an additional election, Congress allowed the Fifth Congressional District seat to remain vacant until the next election. Berger appealed, and in 1921, the U.S. Supreme Court found that Judge Landis presided over the case improperly and overturned the conviction. He was reelected as the Fifth Congressional Representative in 1922 and remained there until 1928.<sup>15</sup>

World War I destroyed most of the Milwaukee Socialists' gains. The party's relationship with labor unions eroded and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 caused further division within the party. Despite the weakening of the party, Daniel Hoan continued serving as mayor and pursuing a socialist agenda. Socialists maintained a handful of seats on the common council, but never gained a majority. Even without

---

<sup>14</sup> Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 227-229.

<sup>15</sup> Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 229-230; McGuinness, "Revolution Begins Here," 6.

majorities, however, the socialists pursued ambitious municipal programs including efforts to improve the city parks system, public health, public education reform, and government efficiency. The 1920s ended sadly with the sudden death of Victor Berger. Within a year of returning to Milwaukee from Congress, Berger died from injuries sustained in a streetcar accident in August of 1929.<sup>16</sup>

Daniel Hoan remained in office until his defeat in 1940 by Carl Zeidler. Hoan had led Milwaukee out of World War I and seen Milwaukee nearly to the end of the Great Depression. Socialism in Milwaukee returned for its final act following World War II, in 1948. The election and administration of Frank Zeidler from 1948-1960 marked the last period of municipal socialism in Milwaukee.<sup>17</sup>

### *Historiography of Milwaukee Socialism*

An examination of the existing literature on the history and impact of the Milwaukee Socialist movement reveals several common misconceptions. Historians sometimes consider Milwaukee Socialism as an abnormality within the national movement that needs no explanation since it is atypical. Others see it as a reaction by Milwaukee voters to previous corrupt municipal government (or a “protest vote”) rather than the approval of a socialist government. Still others explain socialism as the result of a powerful political machine directed by Victor Berger and a homogeneous group of “Sewer Socialists,” who are often dismissed by more radical historians as example of “right-wing,” conservative socialism or liberal progressivism, with an ideology that remained static.. These misconceptions are not limited to scholars focused on the

---

<sup>16</sup> Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 262-274.

<sup>17</sup> McGuinness, “Revolution Begins Here,” 11-12.

socialist movement on a national level, but also often stem from historians of the Milwaukee movement. Although not all historians have agreed with the Milwaukee Socialist stereotypes, few have attempted to focus the conversation on more evidence-based arguments.

*Milwaukee Socialism as an Exception*

One of the easiest dismissals of Milwaukee socialism's importance is its categorization as an abnormality. By labeling the Milwaukee movement as an exception, some historians ignore its successes within their arguments regarding the overall failure of socialism in the United States. Scholars more interested in the national movement often exhibit on this misconception.

In late 1911, Robert Hoxie addressed the increased acceptability of socialism in the United States following the 1910 Milwaukee mayoral election. In his analysis, Hoxie regards Milwaukee as an anomaly since most socialists were elected in small cities and villages rather than major cities.<sup>18</sup> Writing more than four decades later, David Shannon presented a contextualized view that remained aloof regarding Milwaukee Socialists. More often than not, Shannon regarded Milwaukee Socialism as an outlier in the trends of an American socialist movement. Having largely dismissed Milwaukee as an exception to the norm, Shannon had little to say about the content of municipal governance politics or policies.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Robert F. Hoxie, "'The Rising Tide of Socialism': A Study," *The Journal of Political Economy* 19, no. 8, (1911), 618.

<sup>19</sup> David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America: A History* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 21.

More recent scholars including Richard Judd have placed Milwaukee socialists in the broader context of municipal socialism in the United States. Judd's analysis, however, echoes many of Shannon's arguments regarding Milwaukee as an anomaly. Judd states that most "socialists in larger cities faced a more united, more sophisticated and often more flexible opposition."<sup>20</sup> Judd suggests Milwaukeeans were inherently more open to a socialist government than the citizens of other major cities. Historians' opinion leans toward suggesting the high percentage of German-Americans in Milwaukee created the proper atmosphere.

Most recently, Seymour Lipset and Gary Marks argue that Milwaukee's party had close similarities to European models. Lipset and Marks found the integration of union and party politics unique in Milwaukee. They state, "The Milwaukee party was rooted in a subculture of singing societies, carnivals, group picnics, a Sunday school, a party newspaper, and much else. This reflected the German origins of many socialist activists and their prior experience of union-party links within the dense socialist subculture of the German Social Democratic party."<sup>21</sup> Unlike Hoxie, Shannon, and Judd, Lipset and Marks' understanding of Milwaukee as atypical provides important clues toward solving why socialism failed in the United States. Rather than dismissing Milwaukee, Lipset and Marks examine it more closely.

Despite their effort, the "German heritage" explanation remains pervasive. Aims McGuinness states, "In its most simplistic form, this formulation minimizes the radicalism of socialism in Milwaukee by treating it as an artifact or quaint custom

---

<sup>20</sup> Richard W. Judd, *Socialist Cities: Municipal Politics and the Grass Roots of American Socialism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 24.

<sup>21</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: Norton, 2000), 116.

brought across the sea from the *Vaterland*, like beer or bratwurst—like both bratwurst and beer, socialism had potential good as long as it was not consumed in excess.”<sup>22</sup>

*Milwaukee Socialism as a Protest Vote*

Another misconception perpetuated by historians suggests the citizens of Milwaukee voted in favor of ousting corrupt politicians rather than confirming socialist dogma. The idea of “protest votes” feeds off the exception argument and claims that since Milwaukeeans did not *really* vote for socialist government, socialist successes do not matter. This position ignores the longevity of socialism in Milwaukee; if the citizenry merely voted for socialists in protest of corrupt government, why would they continually reelect socialists?

The “protest vote” explanation for Milwaukee Socialism extends beyond histories of the national movement and is found within recent social histories of Milwaukee. In fact, the popularity of the “protest vote” argument among Milwaukee historians predates its use by scholars of socialism in the United States. Hoxie, for example, used the argument as the basis for the future failure of socialism as he concluded that the success of socialism would quickly dissipate. He wrote, “The Socialist party has been simply a means used by all classes of the people to oust the old politicians and secure a general clean-up, or, in some places, a change in the form of government.”<sup>23</sup>

The origins of this misconception go back to one of Hoxie’s contemporaries, Selig Perlman. Perlman, a labor economist and historian, examined the socialist movement in Milwaukee immediately following Seidel’s election in 1910. His thesis

---

<sup>22</sup> Aims McGuinness, “Revolution Begins Here,” 9.

<sup>23</sup> Hoxie, “Rising Tide,” 618.

addressed the cause for the successes of the socialist movement and suggested the possibility for lasting socialist power. According to Perlman, socialism initially gained power because it was opportunistic and took advantage of the corruption within Milwaukee government.

In order to increase its power, Perlman stated, the socialist party “can ill afford to be dogmatic, and it is obliged to become opportunistic, because it is opportunistic Socialism alone that is capable of winning over to its side the trade-unionists, who are opportunists par-excellence.”<sup>24</sup> By arguing that Milwaukeeans elected socialist candidates both as a protest against the corrupt regimes of previous elected officials and as an experiment in responsible government, Perlman gave historians of the national movement an excuse to disregard Milwaukee’s successes.<sup>25</sup> In his defense, Perlman could not know of the continued success of Milwaukee Socialists since he initially wrote in 1910.

Of all the historical works, Frederick Olson’s 1952 dissertation provided the most in-depth look at Milwaukee Socialism. Written more than a half century ago, the dissertation’s generalizations about Milwaukee have often been cited by other historians. Olson portrays a socialist party consisting largely of German immigrants that capitalized on the corruption of city politics in Milwaukee in the late nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Olson’s work did not have the temporal limitations of Perlman’s thesis. Olson wrote near the beginning of the term of Frank Zeidler, Milwaukee’s last socialist mayor; therefore, he knew of the continued success of the party. The author of Daniel Hoan’s biography,

---

<sup>24</sup> Selig Perlman, “History of Socialism in Milwaukee, 1893-1910,” B.A. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1910, 17.

<sup>25</sup> Perlman, “History of Socialism,” 42.

<sup>26</sup> Frederick I. Olson, “The Milwaukee Socialists, 1897-1941,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1952.

Edward Kerstein, followed the same theories, titling one chapter, “Graft, Corruption and Protest Votes.”<sup>27</sup> Additionally, even with the election of Frank Zeidler in 1948, Kerstein commented that “when Milwaukeeans voted for Frank Zeidler, they voted not for Socialism but for a dynamic leader.”<sup>28</sup>

The two most recent historians addressing Milwaukee Socialism approached the movement from distinct social histories. William J. Reese examines the role of socialism and public education in Milwaukee and Judith Leavitt Walzer incorporates socialism into her discussion on Milwaukee public health policy. Both Reese and Walzer reaffirm traditional understandings of socialism in Milwaukee.

Reese attributes the election of socialists to municipal government to a general disgust for the corruption of Mayor Rose more than any real desire for a socialist agenda in Milwaukee. Furthermore, Reese suggests that the constant labor strikes and issues in Milwaukee during the late nineteenth century prepared the city for a socialist style of government. Regarding the socialist candidates, Reese states:

On the one hand, they distinguished themselves from “reformers” who basically accepted the capitalist system and espoused liberal reforms. At the same time, the Socialists also separated themselves from other nationally prominent Socialists further to the left who favored revolutionary struggle over political participation . . . The movement had been an amalgamation of different groups of people who had assembled at different points in time in response to the unique circumstances of Milwaukee politics at the turn of the century. These conditions were historically unique, and they were not reproduced in the 1920s, when the labor movement lost thousands of members.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Edward S. Kerstein, *Milwaukee's All-American Mayor: Portrait of Daniel Webster Hoan* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 29.

<sup>28</sup> Kerstein, *All-American Mayor*, 190.

<sup>29</sup> William J. Reese, "Partisans of the Proletariat: The Socialist Working Class and the Milwaukee Schools, 1890-1920," *History of Education Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1981): 11-37.

Similarly, Judith Walzer Leavitt also reinforced the views of Hoxie, Perlman, Olson, and Reese regarding the success of Milwaukee Socialism. According to Walzer Leavitt, “The success of Social Democracy, attributable more to the urge for municipal reform than to a devotion to Socialism, more to a negative response to the old than to a positive feeling for the new, cemented the growing commitment to municipal responsibility for community welfare in Milwaukee.”<sup>30</sup>

Not every historian agrees with previous “protest vote” arguments. Richard Judd breaks with traditional views in his rejection of protest-based vote explanation for the failure of incumbent socialist campaigns.<sup>31</sup> Judd writes, “Voters were not so easily put off by rival ‘reform’ programs offered by the progressives. The defeats provide no evidence of a simple casual flirtation with Socialism—at least among working-class voters.”<sup>32</sup> Judd’s position grants some explanation to the continued success of Milwaukee Socialists following the 1910 election.

### *Milwaukee Socialists as Homogeneous “Sewer Socialists”*

Perhaps the largest misconception about the Milwaukee Socialist movement is its reduction to the political ideology and life of Victor Berger. Although a national and local figure, Berger was not the lone socialist of Milwaukee. Limiting a discussion of socialism in Milwaukee to one political viewpoint, or suggesting no substantive distinctions between socialists, immediately weakens the argument. Yet this trend pervades any history of the national movement, as well as some of the Milwaukee-

---

<sup>30</sup> Judith Walzer Leavitt, *The Healthiest City*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 21.

<sup>31</sup> Judd, *Socialist Cities*, 26.

<sup>32</sup> Judd, *Socialist Cities*, 28-29.

specific histories. Additionally, the homogenization of Milwaukee Socialists spans the chronology of socialist historiography.

David Shannon's history, *The Socialist Party of America*, examines the socialist movement broadly. He limits his discussion regarding Milwaukee's impact. He expresses how many socialists viewed Berger and Milwaukee Socialists, but he gives little more than a nod to their success in remaining in power.

More radical members of the party were disgusted with Milwaukee's caution, with its gradual "step at a time" policies, and with its general stuffiness—Trosky's jibe that a convention of American Socialists looked like a meeting of dentists, while not a valid comment for the wild Westerners, certainly was an apt description of Milwaukee delegations—but the Milwaukee Socialists did build an organization that was successful politically.<sup>33</sup>

Shannon's comments on Berger portray Berger as little more than a machine boss concerned singularly with remaining in power. According to Shannon, throughout Berger's leadership of Milwaukee Socialism, national party quarrels often occupied his time, and Berger left municipal governance to Seidel and Hoan. However, David Shannon did note several disputes within party leadership regarding Berger, including a 1905 attempt to remove him from the Executive Committee and the constant struggle for party direction during the late 1910s.<sup>34</sup>

Overall, Shannon regards Berger as the political machine boss of Milwaukee, disregarding the leadership or ideologies of either Seidel or Hoan. Shannon mentions Seidel only once and notes Hoan only in passing references in which he groups him with several other political leaders.

---

<sup>33</sup> Shannon, *Socialist Party of America*, 21.

<sup>34</sup> Shannon, *Socialist Party of America*, 62-80.

Another example is a debate between Daniel Bell and Laslett regarding ideological rigidity. Within the initial essay, Bell mentioned Berger and Hoan only in regard to the 1924 presidential nomination. According to Bell, the selection committee rejected Berger because he was European-born and “Dan Hoan was busy being mayor of Milwaukee.”<sup>35</sup> In response, Laslett specifically discusses the role of Berger in national politics by comparing him to Debs and Thomas. Laslett states that Berger and Moris Hillquit “were in fact considerably more important than either of them [Debs or Thomas] in formulating party policy, at least until 1933—both of whom had the requisite ‘hard-headedness of the politician.’”<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, Laslett discusses Berger’s demonstration of “how socialist parties behave when actually in power at the national level,” regarding his terms as Milwaukee’s congressional representative.<sup>37</sup> Laslett’s discussion of the realities of socialists in power oddly never recognizes the Milwaukee Socialists participating in daily municipal governance.

Similar to the historians of the national movement, Frederick Olson focused his attention on the role of Victor Berger, although he does examine the success of both Seidel and Hoan in limited amounts. His review of Milwaukee Socialism never addresses the ideology of its leadership, and in fact noted, “An exhaustive examination of Berger’s socialist philosophy is beyond the scope of this paper; the present summary and incidental references scattered throughout the text will suffice.”<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Daniel Bell, “The Problem of Ideological Rigidity” in John H. M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Failure of a Dream?: Essays in the History of American Socialism*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press Doubleday, 1974), 101.

<sup>36</sup> John H.M. Laslett, “Comment,” in John H. M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Failure of a Dream?: Essays in the History of American Socialism*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press Doubleday, 1974), 119.

<sup>37</sup> Laslett, “Comment,” 121.

<sup>38</sup> Olson, “Milwaukee Socialists,” 22.

The Bell and Laslett debate summarizes how historians discuss socialists in Milwaukee other than Berger. The passing mentions of Hoan as mayor by Bell, Laslett, and even Shannon suggest that Hoan and Seidel were inconsequential to the success or failure of Milwaukee Socialism, simply by withholding any discussion of their role. Furthermore, Olson's blatant disregard for an ideological discussion illustrates the continued tendency to ignore difference within Milwaukee Socialism.

Margaret Rosalind Drosen's thesis pays more attention to the careers of both Seidel and Hoan than other histories of the movement. The proximity of the events to her authorship influenced this position more than the lasting legacy of the mayors (as seen from the lack of national scholarly attention). She wrote of Seidel's innovative "bureau of economy and efficiency, the only one in city governments in America at the time."<sup>39</sup> Drosen also noted that the public and press viewed socialism as "a paternalistic civic betterment plan" rather than a political revolution.<sup>40</sup>

Unlike nearly all historians of socialism, Drosen rarely mentions the role of Victor Berger in local politics. In fact, she offers some of the harshest criticisms of Berger among all historians. She states, "Only seven months after Seidel was in office, the Socialists ran Victor Berger for Congress and elected him, and this was foolish as Socialism was not a national issue."<sup>41</sup>

In a similar vein, Sally Miller investigated the ideological base of Milwaukee Socialist leadership. In her examination of Victor Berger, she considers the role Berger played throughout the national and local socialist movement. She argues that Berger's

---

<sup>39</sup> Margaret Rosalind Drosen, "This History of Socialism in Milwaukee, 1910-1930," B.A. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1931, 11.

<sup>40</sup> Drosen, "History of Socialism," 16.

<sup>41</sup> Drosen, "History of Socialism," 23.

ideology and leadership directed the party and led to its prominence from the early twentieth century through the onset of World War I. Regarding the division between revisionists and revolutionaries, Miller states, “Victor L. Berger as a national leader of the controlling reformist faction wished to direct the party out of its dilemma. He wanted the party to stand on a platform of updated Marxism from which it could wage a struggle against the status quo.”<sup>42</sup>

Miller argues that Berger led the party with his socialist ideology—part revisionist and part revolutionary—until the advent of World War I. The infighting of the national party during the war, combined with his personal legal battles against the federal government, led Berger to a point of exhaustion. Following World War I, Miller states, “Berger, weakened by immobilization, indictment, and isolation, had relinquished the burden [of leadership].”<sup>43</sup> Miller’s portrayal of Victor Berger remains the only attempt to isolate the leadership of the Milwaukee Socialist movement’s ideology. Unfortunately, she rarely analyzed the roles of either Hoan or Seidel since her argument focused on Berger’s role.

*Milwaukee Socialists as Conservative or Right-Wing Socialists and Liberal Progressives*

Perhaps the greatest weakness of most socialist histories involves the overuse of modern political terminology. Ever-growing numbers of scholars reduce Milwaukee Socialism to a singular political position by labeling it as conservative or right-wing socialism. Some even deny its socialist background, stating it was actually liberal progressivism. This unfortunate tendency to pigeonhole Milwaukee Socialists with

---

<sup>42</sup> Sally M Miller, *Victor Berger and the Promise of Constructive Socialism, 1910-1920* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), 14.

<sup>43</sup> Miller, *Victor Berger*, 244.

political labels dismisses the complexities of the differing ideologies within the movement. Furthermore, scholars use a linear political spectrum to avoid further investigation into the internal socialist disagreements.

David Shannon, for example, argues that Berger's ideology, and thereby leadership of Milwaukee's Socialist movement, belongs on the far right fringe of socialists of the time. He suggests that Berger always believed in an evolutionary style of socialism that "would come slowly, gradually evolving from capitalism as capitalism had evolved from feudalism, not from a cataclysm which would bring forth Socialism in a pure and finished form."<sup>44</sup> Shannon classified all of evolutionary socialism as part of the so-called right wing of socialism. Additionally, he states Milwaukee "was also one of the most conservative centers in the Socialist Party."<sup>45</sup>

Within the debate between Bell and Laslett, Laslett's critique contains the only contemporary rejection of the right-wing assertion regarding Milwaukee Socialism. Unfortunately, he does not reject the notion of a political spectrum, but simply the terms used. He acknowledges that prior to World War I, all of the socialist movements in the United States were teleologically based. Bell followed with an attack on historians who discounted the *right wing* of the socialist movement, such as Milwaukee and Berger's ideology. He states:

Left-wing historians assume that because there was a right wing in the Socialist Party (the extent of its rightism was that *some* in 1910, wanted a Labor Party!), this right wing was "conservative" and willing to compromise. But that is not true. The right wing was united largely against the use of violence, but in its own way—on the issue of socialist purity—it was as dogmatic and sectarian as any left-wing group in the party. One has only to consider the views of Victor Berger in this light.

---

<sup>44</sup> Shannon, *Socialist Party of America*, 24-25.

<sup>45</sup> Shannon, *Socialist Party of America*, 21.

He was right-wing, but equally a sectarian. The ideological blinkers were on tight for both groups.<sup>46</sup>

In a similar fashion, John Enyeart denounced historians' labeling of the evolutionary movement as conservative, unmindful of successful socialism in the United States. He criticized the view that only revolutionaries were "the 'real' socialists."<sup>47</sup>

Martin Sklar attempted to distance himself from the tangled web of political terminology when he argued a new interpretation of Socialist Parties' relationship with capitalism. He suggests that socialism did not fail as an economic idea, but only as a political movement. Just as capitalism exists without a specific capitalist party, socialism exists without a Socialist Party. Sklar noted his frustration with the lack of acknowledgement of socialist economic ideas within the Democratic and Republican parties. As he writes:

In my assessment, those who believed that being pro-socialism or pro-capitalism mean also the belief that one must or should preclude or exclude the other, were in so far utopian (ahistorical); those who were pro-socialism and viewed socialism as developing in and through, along with as well as in conflict with, capitalism were realist (historical), as were those who were pro-capitalism and saw capitalism generating, and developing along with as well as in conflict with, socialism.<sup>48</sup>

Sklar's attempt suffered from a contradiction, as he later labeled Berger as a left-wing realist and pro-socialist. Furthermore, his use of complicated terminology simply traps him into more ill-defined labels, from which he originally attempted to escape.

---

<sup>46</sup> Daniel Bell, "Reply" in John H. M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset eds., *Failure of a Dream?: Essays in the History of American Socialism*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press Doubleday, 1974), 130.

<sup>47</sup> John P. Enyeart, "Revolution or Evolution: The Socialist Party, Western Workers, and Law in the Progressive Era," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2, no. 4 (2003): 377-378.

<sup>48</sup> Martin J. Sklar, "Thoughts on Capitalism and Socialism: Utopian and Realistic," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2, no. 4 (2003), 375-76.

Drosen focused nearly half of her thesis on Daniel Hoan's mayoral career.<sup>49</sup> In following Hoan's political career, Drosen attempts to distance Hoan from socialist ideology, without denying his political affiliation. She comments repeatedly on how Hoan did not introduce "municipal socialism" in part because of a lack of support from the city's Common Council.<sup>50</sup> She also notes, "The *Milwaukee Journal* did not consider the reelection of city attorney Hoan as a Socialist victory, but rather as a victory for progressive legal action against corporate interests."<sup>51</sup>

According to Drosen, Hoan's party platform continued to adhere to strong socialist planks including "its purpose to fight graft, war and intolerance, militarism and race hatred and to promote public ownership of public utilities," regardless of the failure of "municipal socialism."<sup>52</sup> Drosen argues that toward the end of the twenties the public increasingly accepted Milwaukee Socialism since it "was generally called 'left wing progressivism' because of the support it had given to LaFollette, and because of the sentiment in the city by this time that had concluded the 'red flag' of 1910 was not such a flaming crimson after all."<sup>53</sup>

Drosen concludes her thesis by reiterating the role of socialism in 1930 Milwaukee as more of a progressive movement. She states, "Socialism in Milwaukee today is an accepted institution in the city's political life, and is no longer regarded either as a temporary phenomenon or as a threat to the present political and economic structure, but is commonly termed leftwing [*sic*] progressivism."<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> It is important to note that Hoan was the current mayor of Milwaukee at the time Drosen wrote her thesis, and would continue to be mayor until 1940.

<sup>50</sup> Drosen, "History of Socialism," 25-59.

<sup>51</sup> Drosen, "History of Socialism," 25.

<sup>52</sup> Drosen, "History of Socialism," 56.

<sup>53</sup> Drosen, "History of Socialism," 58-68.

<sup>54</sup> Drosen, "History of Socialism," 92.

These historians' overreliance on abstract political terminology as a substitute for a real discussion of the internal socialist divisions not only pigeonholes socialists to a set of ill-defined terms, but also encourages scholars to force them into a spot within a box-grid. A discussion of socialist ideology should extend beyond spectrum analysis and labeling. Despite its other misconceptions, Olson's dissertation demonstrates the possibility of exploring socialist ideology without political labels. In his dissertation, Olson disregards any impact Berger or Milwaukee Socialism in general had on socialist ideology. He states, "It should be apparent that Berger made no contribution to socialist thought, and that his chief significance in this area lies in his attempt to put into practice the Revisionist doctrines, rather than in originating or formulating them."<sup>55</sup> While Olson asserts this position, he never proves it.

#### *Milwaukee Socialists as a Static Group*

The final misconception many histories of socialism or Milwaukee Socialism make is an extension of the previous two. In viewing Milwaukee Socialists as a homogeneous group or labeling them as conservative or right-wing socialists, scholars fail to recognize how socialists changed over time. In fact, some blame a lack of change within the party as its cause for failure.

In 1976, C.T. Husbands edited a new translation of Werner Sombart's classic work *Why is there no Socialism in the United States?* Husbands reflected on the impact of Sombart's work and the lasting power of his initial analysis of socialism in the United States. Husbands criticizes Sombart for not discussing the role of immigrants in socialist

---

<sup>55</sup> Olson, "Milwaukee Socialists," 22.

movement resistance, but more importantly views Sombart's thesis in light of the post-World War I downturn of socialism. Husbands states:

For the war did not produce in America the profound changes of mood and social structure that occurred in Britain. . .It was as if America's late entry meant that the war was over while the country was still in a jingoistic, patriotic frame of mind and, indeed, several writers have used the image of *coitus interruptus* to describe the fact that the country was still fired with militant patriotism but had no war to fight. . . The Party, in any case already split by now into various factions, was totally unable to mount effective resistance against the repression represented by the Red Scare of 1919 and 1920.<sup>56</sup>

Husbands' interpretation fails to recognize the socialist movement's adaptation to a post-war landscape in Milwaukee.

Mark Pittenger argues that Berger adapted a "piecemeal" approach to socialism prior to the election of Emil Seidel. He states, "Like Bernstein, Berger proclaimed the priority of the movement over its intended endpoint and dismissed hopes for a socialist millennium in the near future."<sup>57</sup> In arguing this point, Pittenger suggests Berger no longer believed in the possibility of a socialist society in his lifetime. This argument, however, does not reflect the writings and speeches of Berger's congressional career until after World War I.

Perlman was one of the few historians who discussed the changes within the Milwaukee movement. As the party continued to grow in size, Perlman states, the socialists had to adjust to the immediate demands of the members of the working-class to gain their confidence. He states, "All concessions that the socialists were making in the direction of opportunism were so far intended solely for the purposes of bringing the

---

<sup>56</sup> C.T. Husbands, "Editor's Introductory Essay," in *Why is there no Socialism in the United States?* by Werner Sombart (White Plains, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1976), xxvii.

<sup>57</sup> Mark Pittenger, *American Socialists and Evolutionary Thought, 1870-1920* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 129.

trade-unionism within the fold of socialism.”<sup>58</sup> The significant gains during the 1904 election buoyed the possibility of municipal socialist rule in Milwaukee. Perlman states:

That prospect had for its natural affect [*sic*] that the socialists began to make stronger efforts to recommend themselves as practical and ‘realistic’ people . . . now they had to convince not only the working people of the practicability of their program, but also the other classes of the city population, for workmen’s votes alone would be insufficient to carry them into power.<sup>59</sup>

Historians have rarely paused to consider socialists’ ideas or motivations. Only Sally Miller has attempted to examine the personal ideology of the leadership of the party, but her work continues the tradition of viewing Victor Berger as solely responsible for the success of Milwaukee Socialism. Despite the need for correcting all the misconceptions propounded by historians, the task is too large for a single work. Rather, a closer examination of the three major leaders of Milwaukee Socialism from its origin through the effects of World War I illustrates the multifaceted ideologies of the movement. Additionally, the examination demonstrates how Milwaukee Socialism changed over time, specifically as a result of World War I.

Emil Seidel, Daniel Hoan, and Victor Berger represented three different understandings of socialist ideology, both in practice and in theory. After an examination of speeches, writings, interviews, memoirs and oral histories, the personal ideologies of Berger, Seidel, and Hoan suggest a wider range of beliefs within the Milwaukee branch of socialism. Comparing and contrasting the three ideologies illuminates the initial successes, struggles, adaptations of belief, and lasting strength of Milwaukee Socialism.

Victor Berger’s limited time within municipal government, his role as the national spokesman for socialism in Congress, and his role within the executive committee of the

---

<sup>58</sup> Perlman, “History of Socialism,” 36.

<sup>59</sup> Perlman, “History of Socialism,” 40.

Socialist Party allowed him to maintain a balance of revolutionary and revisionist theory. His speeches and editorials continually emphasized his teleological ideology until the U.S. entry into World War I. As Sally Miller notes, Berger's physical and mental trials during this period led to an adaptation of his understanding of socialism. Following World War I, Berger became more pragmatic and willing to cooperate, demonstrated by his endorsement of a progressive party candidate for office.

Emil Seidel had a more ambiguous ideological orientation than Berger. At times, his beliefs aligned closely with those of Berger. This version of Seidel appeared most often after his failed reelection campaign of 1912, and during his vice-presidential campaign and his lecture and debate series. The other side of Seidel's ideology followed Hoan's pragmatic version of socialism. His mayoral term, as well as his term as alderman from the end of World War I until his retirement from politics, demonstrated this best.

Finally, Daniel Hoan displayed the most pragmatic form of socialist ideology during his mayoral terms. Throughout his policies, speeches, and correspondence, Hoan recognized the ultimate goal for a socialist state, but always articulated an extremely pragmatic approach to municipal governance. Unlike Berger, Hoan did have immediate impact on citizens' livelihoods. Compared to Seidel, Hoan never enjoyed a socialist majority within city government. This, therefore, forced him to view the state of the city through a pragmatic lens. His understanding of socialism allowed for a longer success as mayor, and diminished the impact of World War I on his ideology.

World War I marked a drastic shift within both the national and local Socialist parties. Prior to the war, socialism continually grew, fueling a belief that the socialist

revolution was near. Following World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution, socialism quickly declined in numbers. While Milwaukee continued to be a socialist city, World War I caused Berger, Seidel and Hoan each to transform their own ideologies.

Victor Berger returned to Congress following his trial and conviction; however, his rhetoric became more conciliatory. During his final years in office, Berger openly supported the Progressive Party's legislation and candidates. Emil Seidel continued serving as an alderman following World War I. Seidel increasingly grew frustrated with younger members of the party, and their lack of compromise. As the number of socialists dwindled, Seidel began viewing the revolution as a long-term goal, rather than an immediate opportunity. Finally, World War I did not affect Daniel Hoan as drastically as Berger and Seidel. Hoan continued to fight for the public good, but found new enemies in the Ku Klux Klan. As his terms in office drew to a close, Hoan began distancing himself from the socialists. Upon leaving office, Hoan left the party altogether, and joined the Democratic Party.

Overall, the writings, speeches, and actions of Berger, Seidel and Hoan represent a wide array of personal ideologies within the Milwaukee Socialist movement from 1890 through World War I. Following World War I, however, both Seidel and Berger altered their ideologies toward a more pragmatic view of socialism in the United States. This pragmatic ideology of Daniel Hoan allowed socialism to remain successful in Milwaukee through the 1950s. A close examination of Berger, Seidel, and Hoan's personal papers best frames their personal ideologies and the alteration thereof due to World War I.

## CHAPTER ONE: VICTOR L. BERGER

Milwaukee's most recognizable socialist leader, Victor Berger, only briefly held local office as an alderman between the spring and fall elections in 1910.<sup>60</sup> His failed mayoral campaign in 1904 did not affect his reputation as the assumed political leader of Milwaukee throughout Seidel's and Hoan's administrations. Berger's ideology lent itself to a picture that extended beyond the landscape of city politics. As one of the party's three principal leaders (the other two were Eugene Debs and Morris Hillquit), he was called upon to make analyses on a national and international level to a greater extent than either Seidel or Hoan. His relative detachment from the workings of urban politics also meant that he had less need to engage in political compromise than his counterparts who held local office. His representation of Milwaukee in Congress, as well as his place as one of the three leaders of the national party, allowed him to grasp socialist dogma rigidly, rather than adopting a pragmatic approach to governance.

Marxist theory primarily characterized Berger's socialist ideology, unlike the more eclectic development of the ideologies of both Hoan and Seidel. His thoughts on government showed brief glimpses of outside influences despite his being a Marxist (although these were limited to his work within Milwaukee and disappeared in his national rhetoric). Berger's role as a national figure, his personal convictions and shortcomings, and his uncompromising approach to politics led to ideological conflicts with both Hoan and Seidel. Contrary to Sally Miller's argument, Victor Berger's ideology did not control the local governance of Milwaukee, nor did he "fail at the

---

<sup>60</sup> Doris Berger, Unpublished "Biography of Victor Berger," Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin, 53-54.

critical moment” of World War I.<sup>61</sup> His writings reflected a belief in an imminent peaceful transition to socialism caused by a natural evolution of society. The events of World War I shook these beliefs, leading Berger to adapt his ideology to align more closely with Hoan’s pragmatism.

### *Berger’s Personality*

Victor Berger’s personality significantly impacted his ideology. His initial aversion to public speaking, due to his so-called Milwaukee Accent, inspired his desire for education and editorializing (since he could convey his thoughts without speaking in his paper *The Vorwaertz*). More importantly, his personal behavior affected his relationships with others, as well as his ideological development.<sup>62</sup>

A tall, brooding man, he often silenced a room with his mere presence. People most often noted one of two characteristics: his temper or his stubbornness. Berger knew of both personal faults. Early in his relationship with his future wife Meta, he warned her through several letters of his behavior. In one such letter he warned against his violent temper, stating:

There is an evil spirit lingering about me, of which *I* only know; and whom I cannot master. Whenever I get *enraged*, my blood seems all to rush towards my head, and I (who otherwise can control my actions to an unusual extent,)[*sic*] lose control over myself entirely. During these fits of madness I am *capable* of committing murder, and while I hope and expect that such will never be the case, I on the other hand fear that this fault of temper may end with *insanity* . . . And now mind you, I cannot keep any *hatred*, not even against that man, for five minutes, and he was perfectly safe after he came in again, and he knew it. But the mere fact that I do not harbor any hatred before or

---

<sup>61</sup> Miller, *Victor Berger*, 249-252.

<sup>62</sup> “Berger Scores a Triumph in House,” *New York Evening Journal*, June 20, 1911.

afterwards, shows these spells to be *insane* spells. And a man like that is not a safe man for you to marry, my little darling Meta.<sup>63</sup>

Not only did Berger warn his future wife of his temper, but throughout his children's lives, he often discussed his fear that he would lash out and kill one of them. Such discussions led his daughter Doris to become concerned with the possibility of her father going to hell.<sup>64</sup>

In many ways, Berger acted as both a typical socialist and an atypical socialist. In describing himself to Meta, Berger states, "One V.L.B. is a well educated and unusually well read man. He is pretty conscientious, ambitious and all that, but queer and unsociable to the extreme...Although he styles himself a Socialist, he is proud and aristocratic...The man has no friends, expect [*sic*] probably his books."<sup>65</sup>

Berger struggled with his desires for a luxurious life. Doris Berger remembered, "His personal tastes were inclined to be aristocratic. He liked fine clothes, good leather, excellent wine, and somehow, he managed, [*sic*] even in the lean days and year, to indulge his tastes enough to sustain his optimism."<sup>66</sup> Like many socialists and other radicals, Berger remained a vegetarian throughout his life, although he viewed the practice as theoretical since he was "an ardent vegetarian who loved meat."<sup>67</sup> Further showing his aristocratic tastes, Berger states, "Seeing how other people travel, live and enjoy life I have almost made up my mind to quit the movement, go into some business

---

<sup>63</sup> Letter from V.L. Berger to Meta Berger, August 13, 1895, in Michael E. Stevens, ed. *The Family Letters of Victor and Meta Berger* (Madison: Center for Documentary History, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1995), 43.

<sup>64</sup> Doris Berger, "Biography of Victor Berger," 1-2.

<sup>65</sup> Stevens, ed., *Family Letters*, 44.

<sup>66</sup> Doris Berger, "Biography of Victor Berger," 12.

<sup>67</sup> Doris Berger, "Biography of Victor Berger," 14-15.

and also make the money. Yet I do not know how I can go out honorably before I have achieved certain things which I have started out to do.”<sup>68</sup>

The common man eluded Berger’s understanding. Doris states, “Papa’s socialism grew out of his sense of fairness and decency rather than out of emotional identification with his fellowman.”<sup>69</sup> While Eugene Debs often believed in a connected brotherhood within solidarity, Berger viewed fraternity as being more abstract. As his daughter writes, “For papa, it [fraternity] means equality of opportunity, not back-slapping and chumminess.”<sup>70</sup>

Beyond Berger’s difficulty relating to the common worker, he consistently struggled to prevent his relationship with Meta from disintegrating due to his various extramarital affairs. Regarding her parents’ relationship, Doris Berger writes, “Through all the years together, loving, praising, devoted. Even later, when he was two-timing Mama or three- or four-timing her, she was still the ‘finest, sweetest, woman’ in the world.”<sup>71</sup> Doris remarks on Berger’s numerous affairs with women. She understood how women could fall in love with her father, but she knew it did not take away from her father’s love for Meta. Berger always returned to his wife, even after affairs with wealthy and powerful women of the era.<sup>72</sup>

Victor Berger’s personality influenced his socialist ideology. His stubborn hard headedness, combined with his personal struggles with relationships and identity, helped fuel his uncompromising political nature. Sally Miller describes his personality as “a

---

<sup>68</sup> Stevens, ed., *Family Letters*, 69.

<sup>69</sup> Doris Berger, “Biography of Victor Berger,” 13.

<sup>70</sup> Doris Berger, “Biography of Victor Berger,” 14.

<sup>71</sup> Doris Berger, “Biography of Victor Berger,” 11.

<sup>72</sup> Doris Berger, Unpublished “Biography of Victor Berger Chapter 8,” Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin, 1-12.

very human mixture of bombastic, affability, confidence, and generosity.”<sup>73</sup> This personality, however, was not the sole source for his socialist beliefs. His background, socialist transformation, and dealings with the Populist Party also influenced his ideology.

### *Early Biography*

Born in Austria in either 1859 or 1860, Victor Berger attended school in both Budapest and Vienna. At the age of nineteen, he emigrated to the United States and began working as a laborer in New York City. Finding few job opportunities, Berger decided to move to Milwaukee because of its German culture and heritage. Unlike many of the early American Socialists, Berger’s socialist ideology did not stem from his life in Austria. His own conversion followed his election as *Erster Sprecher* or chairman of the Milwaukee Turnverein. As his daughter notes, “Papa took part in debates held by the *Turnverein* in which he at first opposed the liberal and socialist ideas, then quite reluctantly, he became convinced—really converted.”<sup>74</sup> His leadership of the Turnverein connected Berger to a wide array of socialist-leaning politicians and labor leaders.<sup>75</sup>

Following his conversion, Berger quickly became educated on all angles of the socialist movement. He had a voracious passion for education, and his massive library continually grew to include a wide variety of topics. His daughter remembered often challenging Berger to locate “weird titles” within the collection. Berger always knew where they were located, and he quoted material without the text.<sup>76</sup> His intelligence and

---

<sup>73</sup> Miller, *Victor Berger*, 23.

<sup>74</sup> Doris Berger, “Biography of Victor Berger,” 25-37.

<sup>75</sup> Miller, *Victor Berger*, 24.

<sup>76</sup> Doris Berger, “Biography of Victor Berger,” 4.

newly found passion for socialism combined into a powerful recruitment and leadership tool.

Victor Berger actively recruited various leaders to his cause, most notably Eugene Debs, following Debs's incarceration for the Pullman Strike of 1894. Berger visited Debs in his Woodstock, Illinois, jail cell, and "talked with him about socialism and gave him a copy of *Das Kapital*. Debs read it—or enough of it to be sold."<sup>77</sup> Remembering the significance of Berger's visit, Debs stated, "Victor L. Berger—and I have loved him ever since—came to Woodstock, as if a providencial [*sic*] intrument [*sic*], and delivered the first impassioned message of Socialism I had ever heard—the very first to set the wires humming in my system."<sup>78</sup>

Eugene Debs, Victor Berger, and Morris Hillquit became a three-pronged promotional machine for the organization of a new socialist party throughout the 1890s, Hillquit in the East, Berger in the Midwest, and Debs traveling between the two. The different approaches of the three leaders complemented each other. Hillquit's leadership in the East lacked emotional connection with the common man. A lawyer by trade, Hillquit remained idealistic throughout his time with socialism and was considered an intellectual or "theorist." He was described by Doris Berger as "brilliant, incisive, cold and convincing." Furthermore, Doris Berger remembered, "his effectiveness rose from the logic of his argument rather than because of any emotional appeal."<sup>79</sup> Not surprisingly, Hillquit often supported Berger's positions over those of Debs.

Eugene Debs's personality contrasted with Hillquit's. While most saw Hillquit as cold and unapproachable, Debs often wore his emotions on his sleeve. While Berger and

---

<sup>77</sup> Doris Berger, "Biography of Victor Berger," 39.

<sup>78</sup> Doris Berger, "Biography of Victor Berger," 39.

<sup>79</sup> Doris Berger, "Biography of Victor Berger," 39.

Hillquit fought for justice and people without necessarily liking all of them, Debs, “really loved people, even ‘The People,’ and passionately resented injustice to them.” Regarding his rhetoric, Doris Berger writes, “His eloquence was touched with the fervor of a revivalist, but it was wholly sincere. If his audience wept, he wept with them—and honestly.”<sup>80</sup>

Each of the three had a distinctive role within the future of socialism in the United States. Discussing the roles of Berger and Debs, Hillquit often “described Debs as the party’s St. John—its ‘inspired prophet, preacher, and poet.’ Berger was its St. Paul—the ‘practical propagandist and builder.’”<sup>81</sup> During the planning stages of a new socialist party, Berger and Debs supported the cooperative tickets of the Populist Party in 1892 and 1896. Through the process of spreading the socialist idea and working with the Populist Party, Berger entrenched his ideological positions and increasingly resisted the idea of compromise.

### *1896 and the End of Cooperation*

During his early years in politics, Victor Berger joined many different labor unions and political campaigns. Initially, he joined the Knights of Labor and assisted the eight-hour movement. Following the success of this movement, he joined both the populist movement and the Socialist Labor Party (although he would both quit and be kicked out of the SLP).<sup>82</sup> During the 1896 election, Berger became distraught about the developing fusion of the Democratic and Populist parties’ planks. He entered the Populist Party convention in St. Louis as a delegate for Wisconsin, hoping the party

---

<sup>80</sup> Doris Berger, “Biography of Victor Berger,” 40.

<sup>81</sup> Stevens, ed., *Family Letters*, 3.

<sup>82</sup> Beck, *Sewer Socialists*, vol. 1, 2.

would not nominate William Jennings Bryan, the Democratic nominee. As Eugene Debs declined the presidential nomination of the Populist Party, Berger demonstrated his disgust in a letter to Meta. Berger states, “If the People’s Party puts up its own candidate it means certain defeat to Bryan. If we endorse him, or rather if we *also* nominated him, it means certain victory. But it also means the surrender of all our principles and the death of the People’s Party.”<sup>83</sup>

The promising development of the Populist Party during the 1892 election gave Berger hope through its union of such diverse groups as socialists, the labor movement, farmers’ movements, and Edward Bellamy’s nationalism movement. Like other leaders of the joint causes, Berger rejected a fusion ticket of the Populist Party with any of the established political parties. His objections to the fusion ticket went beyond distaste for the Democratic Party, as he boisterously displayed in an editorial against the silver standard. The silver standard was a major plank of the Populist Party, and its supporters argued for the free coinage of silver in hopes of raising the prices farmers received for their crops. William Jennings Bryan’s infamous “Cross of Gold” speech drew national attention to the issue.

Although Berger knew many workingmen who supported both socialism and the silver standard, his steadfast dedication to socialism led him to “debunking that impression, knowing quite well that he would anger many working men.”<sup>84</sup>

Contemporaries, including many political leaders in Milwaukee, sometimes confused Berger’s dedication to educating people “at whatever cost” with grandstanding. Charles Pfister, the leading Republican in the city, approached Berger about purchasing the rights

---

<sup>83</sup> Letter from V.L. Berger to Meta Berger, July 21, 1896, *The Family Letters of Victor and Meta Berger, 1894-1929*, 49.

<sup>84</sup> Doris Berger, “Biography of Victor Berger,” 42.

to the anti-silver standard editorial. Berger's paper, *The Vorwaertz*, close to bankruptcy, could have used the money. Berger was unpersuaded by Pfister's assurance that the editorials would criticize the Democratic Party, which was the socialists' chief rival for sympathy of working-class voters, and he summarily refused to sell his editorial.<sup>85</sup>

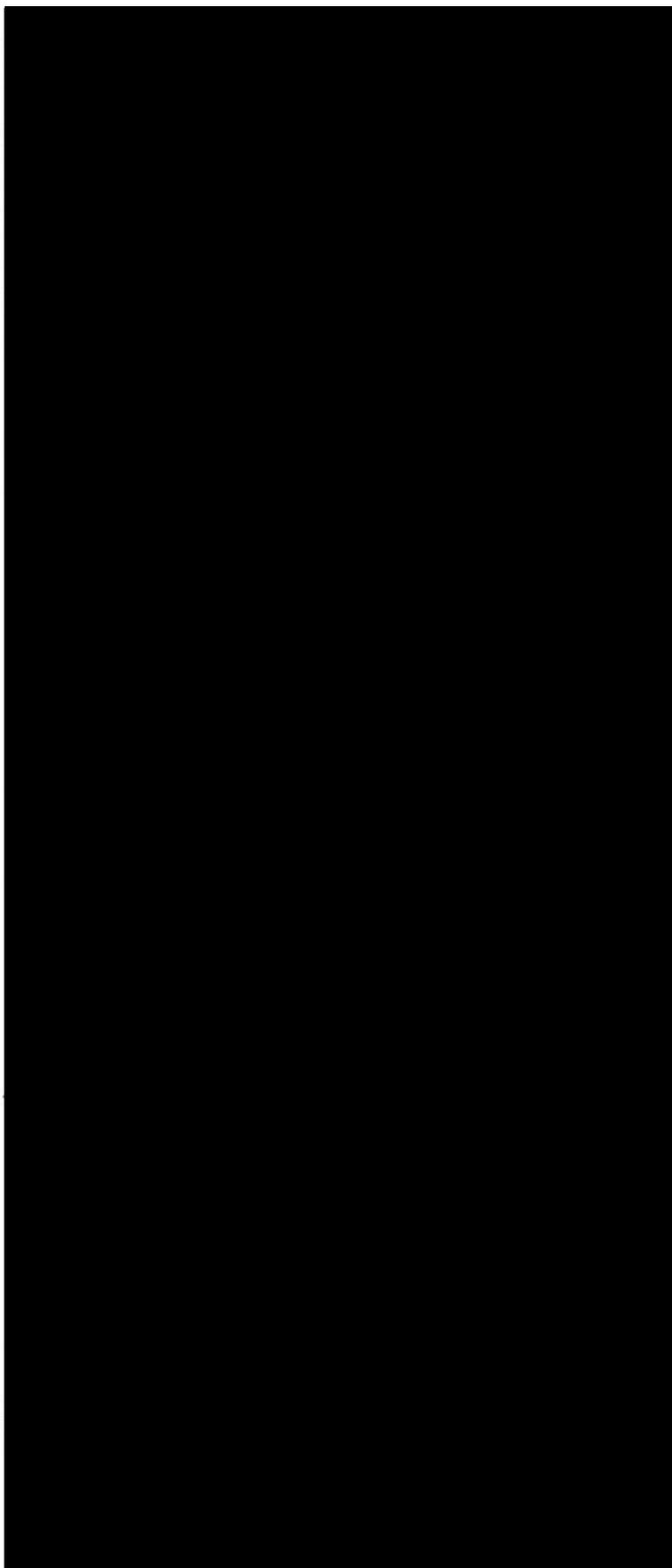
An editorial cartoon from November of 1896 best illustrates Victor Berger's falling out with the Populist Party (see Figure 1). Personally clipped by Berger and kept within his private papers, the cartoon shows the death of several political leaders' careers in Wisconsin. The cartoon measures 8" x 3.5", and pre-election (noted by the "September 2, 1896") and post-election (noted by "November 4, 1896") cell presentation divides it.

The pre-election cell, titled "Populistic Boarding Housing September 2, 1896," places four members of the Populist coalition inside a room. In the foreground, a character noted as Farmer Schilling attempts to blow out the light of socialism. His breath is identified as fusion, in reference to the Populist Party and Democratic Party ticket. Schilling attempts to snuff out socialism through the winds of a fusion ticket. In doing so, Schilling ignores the writing on the wall, as illustrated by several posters hanging on the walls.

The four posters reflect Berger's editorial and warn against the silver-standard issue. The posters read, "Don't blow out the gas -Vorwaerts;" "Beware of all bugs: Gold bugs, silver bug [*sic*], bed bugs & Humbugs;" "Silver Pills will injure your system;" and "Quick silver is poison." The reference to Berger's editorial and the specific quotation from his first paper (*The Milwaukee Vorwaerts*) suggest the cartoon likely appeared in the November 5, 1896 edition of *Vorwaerts*.

---

<sup>85</sup> Doris Berger, "Biography of Victor Berger," 41-43.



**Figure 1**  
**Unknown,**  
*Populistic*  
*Boarding House,*  
**Victor Berger**  
**Papers, Wisconsin**  
**Historical Society,**  
**Madison,**  
**Wisconsin**

The true identities of three of the four characters (Butt, Runge, and Lux) remain a mystery; however, Farmer Schilling's identity is ascertainable. Farmer Schilling refers to Robert Schilling, one of the original founders of the Populist Party and a Milwaukee labor leader who played a prominent role in the 1886 strike that culminated in the Bay View Massacre. Schilling became the first secretary of the party, and at the St. Louis convention he fought with Berger against a fusion ticket. Following the nomination of Bryan, Schilling fell back on his stance and began actively campaigning for Bryan. Berger, as represented in the cartoon, viewed Schilling as attempting to snuff out the Socialist Party for his own gain. Schilling would eventually help to form a Democratic-Populist fusion that led to the election of David S. Rose as mayor of Milwaukee in 1898.

The final cell of the cartoon illustrates the death of the political careers of the four men. Dated November 4, 1896, this cell illustrates the day after the failure of Bryan's presidential campaign. While the four men are being carried out, the light of socialism transforms into a haze maintaining its presence in the room. Through this display, the cartoon shows the ever-present spirit of socialism existing beyond the death of the Populist Party. The cartoon, in its entirety, indicates a growing trend within the national leadership of the Socialist Party. Following the failure of the Populist Party, the idea of any future coalition between socialists and another party disappeared, causing most of the leaders, including Berger, to adopt more explicitly socialist ideas and rhetoric.<sup>86</sup>

Following the failure of 1896, Berger and Debs began founding a series of socialist organizations: the Social Democracy in 1897, the Social Democratic Party in 1898, and the Socialist Party of America in 1901 (with the merger of Hillquit's branch of

---

<sup>86</sup> Beck, *Sewer Socialists*, vol. 1, 7-8.

the Socialist Labor Party).<sup>87</sup> Although Berger maintained interest in national politics, after 1896 he turned his attention more directly to municipal government in the hopes of gaining a foothold in Wisconsin politics. Through his newspaper, Berger disseminated his socialist ideology, hoping to convert Milwaukee into a socialist stronghold. Berger first ran for public office as a mayoral candidate in the spring of 1904 and he ran for Congress in the fall of 1904. Although both campaigns failed, Berger's constant optimism saw the growing strength of socialists in Milwaukee as support for this teleological belief in socialism's eventual triumph over capitalism.

During this period of Milwaukee Socialism, Berger continued to rise in national popularity. In the eyes of the nation, Berger became the exclusive leader of the socialist movement in Wisconsin through his leadership in the Socialist Party of America, his organization of Milwaukee Socialists, and his editorials in the *Milwaukee Vorwaerts*. International response to his editorials from such people as Arthur Brisbane (representing William Randolph Hearst), Lord Robert Cecil of England, William Dean Howells, and Upton Sinclair fed Berger's growing ego.<sup>88</sup>

### *A Developing Ideology*

Victor Berger's socialist ideology was shaped by his personal characteristics and his version of socialist theory. His ideology went through phases. Each of these time periods showed changes in how Berger viewed his idea of socialism and especially in his discussions on the matter. Prior to 1896, Berger believed in an imminent societal transition to socialism. During this time, Berger continued to expand his intellectual

---

<sup>87</sup> Stevens, ed., *Family Letters*, 4.

<sup>88</sup> Doris Berger, "Biography of Victor Berger," 48.

understanding of socialism by incorporating a wide array of materials. Following his destroyed trust in the Populist Party in 1896, Berger's ideology transitioned into a period of concern for municipal order, what critics in the early twentieth century would call "sewer socialism." He increasingly returned to the writings of Marx and Engels, abandoning the more eclectic influences following his loss of trust in the Populist Party. This period culminated with his 1910 election as a member of the House of Representatives. With his election to Congress, Berger moved into the longest phase of his ideology. Returning to a national stage, Berger began absorbing the national party rhetoric and distancing himself from the immediate needs of municipal government. He became more frustrated with politics as World War I approached. His uncompromising attitude about his ideology increased. An analysis of his writings and speeches illustrates these phases.

In preparation for the fiftieth anniversary of Milwaukee's incorporation in 1895, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* asked several leaders in the city, including Victor Berger, to write articles in celebration. Berger's article outlines the future of Milwaukee in a retrospective look at Milwaukee in the year 1945. Berger knew of Bellamy's often imitated retrospective structure (since he was a voracious reader). Berger's article, titled "Socialism in 1945 A.D.," reflects his teleological view of the creation of a socialist society.

Berger's look backward shows a definitive knowledge of Bellamy's work, incorporating a society without crime, without poverty, better educated, and with equal access to success. In discussing the future work force, Berger states:

We all work—all men and women above legal school age, which is 21. Men work until they are 48, women until 45, for four hours a

day and five days in the week, with a legal vacation of four weeks every year . . . The most dangerous and disagreeable work in mines, tunnels, etc., is very eagerly sought after by young, ambitious and energetic men, who like to achieve distinction.<sup>89</sup>

Furthermore, Berger describes the workforce as Milwaukee's "labor battalions."

Berger's vision of Milwaukee stressed how peacefully its citizens would make the transition to a socialist state. While other societies turned to violent upheaval, the adaptation to socialism in Milwaukee had begun in the late nineteenth century.

According to Berger, Milwaukee would avoid a violent outburst since its citizens already had accepted socialism. Just like Bellamy's new image of Boston, Berger's Milwaukee was a centerpiece of cultural opportunity. Berger states, "And while in 1945 you can find no saloons or gin mills and only one small brewery in Milwaukee, we have fifty-six fine theaters and opera houses and a large number of picture galleries, libraries, concert halls, and museums, and since there is plenty of leisure and animation for art and culture, the demand for these institutions is growing daily."<sup>90</sup>

Berger addressed the method of transition to a new Milwaukee as well.

Following the ideals of Bellamy's Nationalism movement, Berger discussed the growing power and size of trusts. The efficiency of these trusts allowed massive production, leading to a final question by society: "And if the bad socialism of the trusts works so well for the capitalists, why should the good socialism of the commonwealth not work well for all of us?" Berger conveyed his understanding of the natural evolution of socialism taking control of the trusts.

---

<sup>89</sup> Victor L. Berger, "Socialism in 1945, A.D.," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 16, 1895.

<sup>90</sup> Berger, "Socialism in 1945."

Differences appeared between Bellamy and Berger, however. In Berger's article, society would eliminate weakness through marital limitations. An open-access policy for health records would assist in preventing sickly persons from reproducing. The most interesting difference is the time span. While Bellamy looked over a century of time, Berger believed in a societal transition within fifty years. The transition belief extended Berger's constant optimism and shaped his views of the old vanguard.<sup>91</sup> According to his daughter, Berger did not agree with the socialists who wanted to set up a utopian socialist society as a colony. Rather, he saw socialism as the ordained resolution of all of society's problems.<sup>92</sup>

After the formation of the Social Democratic Party, Berger wrote an essay laying out the party platform. In it he describes the condition of the workingman as "damned to a hell without hope or likelihood of redemption."<sup>93</sup> He laments over the suffering of children caused by the misery of their parents, and he condemns the lack of education among members of the working-class. As Berger condemned the conditions of the working class, he promises the hope of salvation by stating, "There are all the elements near to make a comparative heaven out of this hell."<sup>94</sup> Victor Berger continued displaying his optimism and belief in a close-at-hand transition to socialism throughout the document.

Berger introduces his audience to the fundamental concepts of socialism: public ownership, equal opportunity, end of child labor, and the abolishment of the capitalistic system of government. Throughout his explanation, Berger refers specifically to Marx

---

<sup>91</sup> Berger, "Socialism in 1945."

<sup>92</sup> Doris Berger, "Biography of Victor Berger," 40.

<sup>93</sup> V.L. Berger, "The Social Democratic Party," Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin, 1.

<sup>94</sup> Berger, "Social Democratic Party," 2.

and Engels. He denounces the efforts of progressives and the remnants of the Populist Party. He states, “Various remedies have been proposed. Single tax, more silver dollars, greenbacks, etc. But since none of them does away with the deadly effects of competition and with the effect of the machine on the workman, I must dismiss them as insufficient.”<sup>95</sup>

Berger offers a plan for deliverance from capitalism, through the public ownership of the monopolies and the creation of a cooperative commonwealth government. He then proceeds to list the demands of his new party. These demands include: the nationalization of all trusts, nationalization of communications and transportation, introduction of a national pension for all workers, the end of the sale or lease of public franchises, the standardization of an eight-hour working day, and state-funded school costs (including books and utensils). Berger concludes his document, as he did many others, with the words of Marx, “Workers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains.”<sup>96</sup>

Laurence Gronlund’s *The Cooperative Commonwealth* in 1884 blended Marxist theory with the American economy. This was one of the first works by an American socialist, and in it Gronlund describes an evolutionary socialism with an aversion to violent revolution. According to Mark Pittenger, “He often represented history as a race between the constructive and destructive tendencies in capitalism, expressing his hope that the positive side would prevail and establish the new society before the cataclysmic collapse of the old one.”<sup>97</sup> The idea of a cooperative commonwealth government placed

---

<sup>95</sup> Berger, “Social Democratic Party,” 16.

<sup>96</sup> Berger, “Social Democratic Party,” 18-21.

<sup>97</sup> Pittenger, *American Socialists*, 48.

a higher priority on working through capitalism, rather than class struggle, for the transition to socialism.<sup>98</sup>

While visiting Germany, Berger wrote to Meta about the different leaders attempting to gain his support. He states, “Both Kautsky and Bernstein—the first the ‘theoretical exponent’ or rather the standard bearer of the radicals in the Social Democratic party—, and Bernstein, the foremost writer of the ‘Revisionists’—vied with each other in their attentions to me.”<sup>99</sup> Although Seidel maintained considerable contact with the German socialists, only Berger had the notoriety to dine with the grandson of Karl Marx, as well as Bernstein and Kautsky.<sup>100</sup>

Throughout his struggle to build the socialist base in Milwaukee, Berger used his pen, rather than his voice, to persuade others to join his cause. Through editorials, Berger informed the citizenry of Milwaukee of his personal ideology. In an editorial titled “Real Social Democracy,” Berger defines his views on socialism. Again, his optimism promised an imminent social-democracy. He further rebuked the progressives for attempting to “steal our thunder for exactly opposite purposes from ours. They want to preserve the system.”<sup>101</sup>

He denounced not only the progressives, but also the revolutionaries for backward thinking, thereby concretely defining himself as evolutionary believer. He states, “For it is foolish to expect any result from riots and dynamite, from murderous attacks and conspiracies, in a country where we have the ballot, as long as the ballot has not been

---

<sup>98</sup> Pittenger, *American Socialists*, 43-63.

<sup>99</sup> Stevens, ed., *Family Letters*, 99.

<sup>100</sup> Stevens, ed., *Family Letters*, 103.

<sup>101</sup> V.L. Berger, “Real Social Democracy,” in *Voice and Pen of Victor L. Berger: Congressional Speeches and Editorials* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Leader, 1929), 685.

given a full and fair trial.”<sup>102</sup> This statement also suggests that Berger considered joining a violent revolution if the ballot did not succeed, an opinion not voiced by either Seidel or Hoan.

Berger acknowledged that social reforms might be a step in the path to socialism, but he disagreed with their foundation: social reforms cannot change the fundamental problems with a capitalistic system. He concludes his argument by again referencing Karl Marx and arguing that socialists were not to force a historical change, but should focus on revolutionizing the mind, so socialism would become the inevitable will of the people.<sup>103</sup>

During the following years, Berger continued to display his thoughts on socialism through his editorials. In 1907, he argued for his comrades to have patience with the system. Rather than spreading numerous ideas to a handful of people, he suggested focusing on the single idea of a slow process of transition. He states, “Revolutions—and special evolutions—are brought about in human affairs not so much by the dissemination of a multitude of ideas, as by the concentration of a multitude of minds upon a single idea.”<sup>104</sup> His use of the phrase “special evolutions” suggests Berger thought the transition to socialism had a higher purpose. While human beings evolved in both thought and body over time, the socialist evolution appears as a unique elevation of the mind and body.

In answering the question, “How will socialism come?,” Berger again wrote about the slow process of change and reminded his readers that previous systems of government did not have a singular starting date. Furthermore, Berger argued that most

---

<sup>102</sup> Berger, “Real Social Democracy,” 685.

<sup>103</sup> Berger, “Real Social Democracy,” 686-689.

<sup>104</sup> V.L. Berger, “Give Them Hope!,” in *Voice and Pen*, 690.

businesses must follow the trust system prior to a transitional period since they lacked proper consolidation for collective ownership.

During the transitional period, according to Berger, socialism must provide capital support for the growth of the cooperative governments. He states, “The Socialist government can of course lend the necessary capital to the cooperative societies and furnish suitable guarantees.”<sup>105</sup> Throughout these editorials, Berger often introduced and referenced the ideas of Marx and Engels. Berger believed Marx and Engels held the keys to understanding socialism and his ideology. Doris Berger states, “Always he urged a study of history and Marx as a basis for the formulation of Socialist party policies in America.”<sup>106</sup>

### *1910 Election*

The election of 1910 swept socialists into municipal power in Milwaukee. Emil Seidel led the pack of more than forty socialists elected to office.<sup>107</sup> In reporting the success of socialism in Milwaukee, most news outlets gave credit to Berger, not Seidel. In fact, regarding Berger, “The newspapers proclaimed him the *real* mayor.”<sup>108</sup> The supposition that Berger controlled a socialist political machine in Milwaukee continually fed him the control and power he desired.

Berger appeared to think himself above his fellow comrades, especially Seidel. This is made apparent by comparing two portraits: one of Berger and Seidel and the other of Berger and Debs. The full-length portrait of Berger and Seidel, taken in a professional

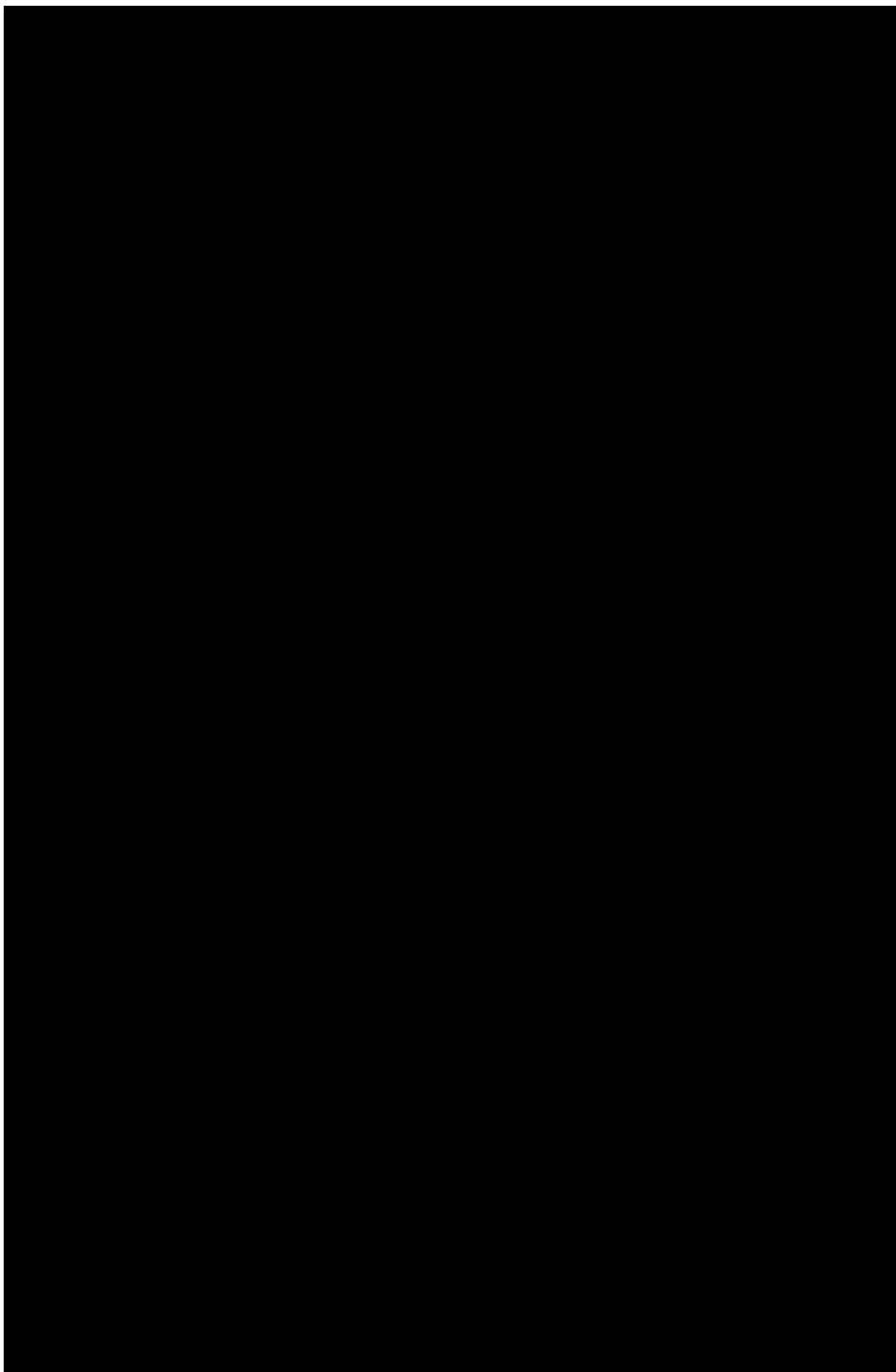
---

<sup>105</sup> V.L. Berger, “Labor Learns in the School of Experience,” in *Voice and Pen*, 693-701.

<sup>106</sup> Doris Berger, “Biography of Victor Berger,” 56.

<sup>107</sup> The number of elected officials is based on 1 mayor, 21 council seats, 2 judges, 13 state legislatures, and 7 major county officers. Beck, *Sewer Socialists* vol. 1, 24.

<sup>108</sup> Doris Berger, “Biography of Victor Berger,” 53.



**Figure 2 Unknown, *Victor Berger and Emil Seidel*, Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI**

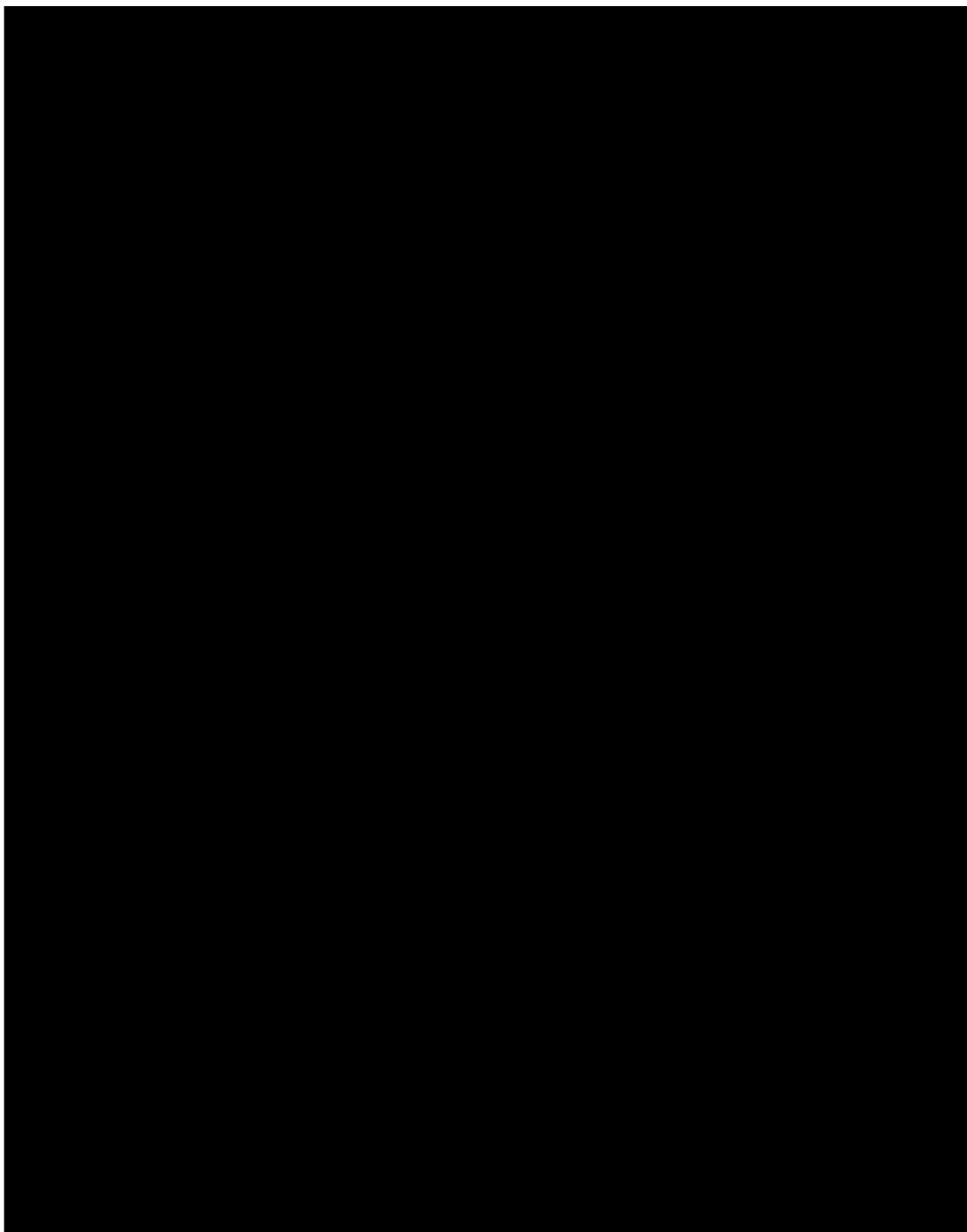
studio, has the appearance at first glance of an image of two friends (see Figure 2). Their roles within the party justified the initial impression; however, a closer examination reveals a more divisive connotation within the image.

The photograph, measuring 10" x 15", exaggerates the height differential between Seidel and Berger. Seidel's proportionally longer suit coat shrinks his stature further below a towering Berger. Furthermore, Seidel posed with his shoulders turned more toward the camera (and thus the viewer) than Berger. Since Berger's gaze is more directly focused on the viewer than Seidel's, Berger appears more confident and powerful.

The theme of power continues in the placement of hands within the photograph. Berger's left hand in his coat pocket displays the calm, relaxed demeanor of a man in control. The photographer placed Berger's right hand slightly behind Seidel's shoulder, and Berger appears to be grasping the back of Seidel's neck. Furthermore, Berger's body weight is shifted toward his right hand. The combination of weight distribution and the placement of his right hand suggest a powerful control over Seidel.

Along with Berger's hand placement, the mere placement of Seidel to Berger's right (viewer's left) suggests control, as Seidel appears to be the *right-hand man* of Berger. Overall, the photograph connotes Seidel was a mere assistant to Berger, rather than a fellow leader within the party. It is possible that Berger commissioned the photograph and had some control over its composition.

A second photograph shows that Berger did not have the same superiority relationship with all socialists. The photograph of Berger and Debs, taken in 1897, displays equality rather than dominance (see Figure 3). The composition of the 13"x 11"



**Figure 3 Unknown, *Victor Berger and Eugene Debs*, Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin**

image places both Debs and Berger at equal height. The three-quarter-length portrait style allowed the photographer to adjust the standing height of both men to maintain their equal stature.

Continuing the theme of equality, both men dressed in similar formal attire. Both men are glancing toward the same subject, and both are at the same angle to the camera. The overall effect of this picture, unlike the previous one, suggests a lack of dominance. The men's stern posture demonstrates a decisive power, but with neither subject in control of the other. Berger's place within national politics would eventually cause him to be hit hard by the events of World War I. As national attention focused on his actions, he ultimately became a key scapegoat for anti-socialist sentiment during the war.

*Mr. Berger Goes to Washington*

Victor Berger did not run for mayor of Milwaukee, but rather encouraged Emil Seidel in 1910. Although he did not comment on the matter, perhaps Berger feared losing his role within the national organization if elected mayor. While electing Seidel as mayor, the citizens of Milwaukee elected Berger as an alderman-at-large.<sup>109</sup> Berger's decision to run for the Fifth-District congressional seat ended his career in municipal government after a mere six months. Following his nomination to run for Congress, Meta wrote her husband in disgust. She states, "I so thoroughly dislike the socialists which make up the bulk of the party. They are all so narrow, so jealous of you & so hateful. But your superiority will have to win over their measly minds."<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Beck, *Sewer Socialists*, vol. 1, 24.

<sup>110</sup> Stevens, ed., *Family Letters*, 109.

Upon election in the fall of 1910, he became the first socialist elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. As the sole representative of his political party, Berger was not expected to do much in Congress. The lowered expectations for his term in office allowed his national party rhetoric to return to the themes of an imminent national transition to socialism. He no longer needed to worry about the daily operations of a municipal government, and he freely spoke his mind about socialism.

Throughout his terms in office, Victor Berger was the spokesman for the national party. Through his speeches and campaigns, he continued to represent a staunch, unrelenting approach to socialism. Instead of working to solve local issues, he dispensed socialist theory and proposed the creation of major socialist programs. Acknowledging their inevitable defeat allowed Berger this opportunity since it removed both political and fiscal ramifications. Overall, his movement into the national spotlight removed him from the normal track of Milwaukee Socialists. Berger no longer had to compromise his political ambitions, as Hoan and Seidel did in running a municipal government.

Following the election of 1910, Berger dismissed the image of socialists as violent revolutionaries and anarchists. In his article, “What is the Matter with Milwaukee,” Berger reaffirms the need for a gradual transition to socialism. Regarding the idea of a violent revolution, he states:

The Socialists were accused of preaching “bullets not ballots”; accused of favoring a bloody revolution and of intending to plant the “red flag of bloodlust” upon city hall . . . And it is moreover, clear to every observer that the Socialist party is a great organizer. And organization always means order. Socialism in itself never creates disorder—it stands for a new order and a higher order.<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> V.L. Berger, “What is the Matter with Milwaukee,” *Independent*, April 1910, Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin, 840-842.

While he was writing for an increasingly national audience, Berger's election to Congress in the fall of 1910 began shifting his focus once again, this time toward the needs of the national party. Regarding his first term in office, Doris Berger states, "He was acclaimed editorially from coast to coast as a man who, far from being a wild-eyed freak which the press of the country had predicted of a Socialist, he [sic] was genial, humorous, kindly, and persuasively intelligent."<sup>112</sup>

Most of his speeches in Congress did not focus on the issues of his constituents, but rather on displaying the platform of the Socialist Party of America. Berger's lack of interest in working for the people of Milwaukee disturbed Meta in May of 1911. In a letter to her husband she says, "Miss Thomas says that you are doing splendid propaganda work for the nation but that Milwaukee as the centre isn't getting the good out of it, [as] she should. In other words, do something for Milwaukee for Milwaukee needs it most and Milwaukee will send you back again."<sup>113</sup>

Berger continued to introduce legislation regarding national issues rather than the immediate needs of Milwaukee. In the fall of 1911, Berger introduced a pension plan that attracted more attention than any of his previous bills. Regarding his old-age pension bill, Victor wrote, "My Old Age Pension Bill has created more attention than anything I have done so far. And this is only the beginning, because we shall begin a nation-wide agitation for a constitutional convention and for the Old Age Pension bill—in every union, in every lodge and in every society."<sup>114</sup>

On the floor of Congress, Victor presented his plan on August 7. He railed against a system of government that abandoned the care of its former workers.

---

<sup>112</sup> Doris Berger, "Biography of Victor Berger," 46-47.

<sup>113</sup> Stevens, ed., *Family Letters*, 123.

<sup>114</sup> Stevens, ed., *Family Letters*, 136.

Regarding the condition of the workers, Berger stated, “There is hardly a more pitiful tragedy than the lot of the toiler who has struggled all his life to gain a competence and who at 60 years faces the poorhouse.”<sup>115</sup>

Furthermore, Berger defended his voting against legislation providing pensions only for veterans. He stated, “The work of the soldier of industry is infinitely more necessary than the bloody work of the soldier on the battle field.”<sup>116</sup> Throughout his speech, applause arose from the gallery as members of Congress poured into to hear the Socialist’s presentation.<sup>117</sup>

Through various speeches given during his terms as a congressman, Berger continued to argue for the issues of the national party rather than Milwaukee specifically. He spoke on the need for a new constitution and argued against an outmoded form of government. He stated, “In other words, a grown-up national has to wear its baby cloak. It does not fit anywhere and has been torn and patched in the most ridiculous way by ‘decisions of the Supreme Court’ in order to make it do, yet anybody who dares to suggest a new suit is considered a traitor by the ‘interests.’”<sup>118</sup>

During World War I, while he was still in Congress, Berger submitted another piece of legislation in an attempt to satisfy the goals of the national party. House Resolution 25680 was a bill “to provide for the employment of all willing workers, and for other purposes.”<sup>119</sup> The bill attempted to eliminate unemployment throughout the United States. Berger suggested those who could not find work should be put to work for

---

<sup>115</sup> V.L. Berger, “Old Age Pensions,” in *Voice and Pen*, 639.

<sup>116</sup> Berger, “Old Age Pensions,” 640.

<sup>117</sup> “Berger Scores a Triumph in House,” *The New York Evening Journal*, June 20, 1911.

<sup>118</sup> V.L. Berger, “The Working Class Must Have Its Own Party to Give Expression to Its Own Class Interests,” Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin, 9-10.

<sup>119</sup> V.L. Berger, “H.R. 25680,” Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin, 1.

the public good through building and repairing roads, parks services, or other public-works projects. The New Deal legislation of the 1930s incorporated most of these ideas.

While serving as a congressman, Berger increasingly grew frustrated with politics. The lack of response from Congress for his proposals, as well as the dwindling number of socialists elected to municipal office in Milwaukee caused his frustration. While discussing Meta's role as a member of the Milwaukee school board, Victor stated, "I *don't want* either you or my children to take a prominent part in public life. It is a losing game and the light is never worth the candle...When your term is over I don't want you to run again."<sup>120</sup>

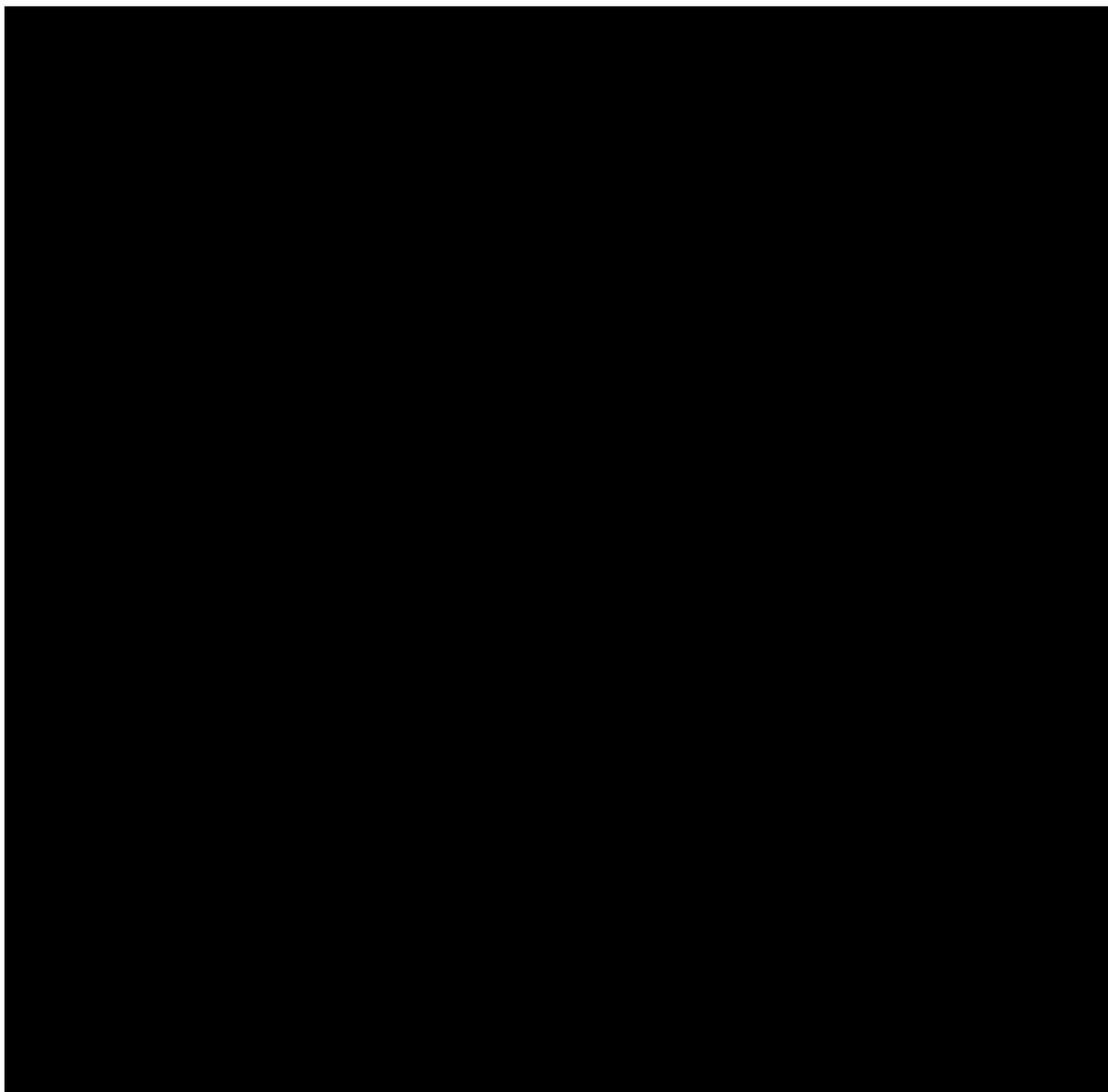
Throughout this period, even though he was no longer directly active in Milwaukee politics, the public still viewed Berger as the socialist leader of Milwaukee. Prior to the 1917 special senatorial election (which he lost), the federal government indicted Berger (and four others) for violating the Espionage Act. Even with a pending trial, Berger drew the most votes in Milwaukee for the senatorial election of 1917 and won the 1918 Fifth Congressional District election. Congress voted in 1919 not to seat Victor Berger due to his conviction. Following Congress's refusal to seat Berger, the results of emergency election proclaimed Berger still in the driver's seat of Milwaukee Socialism.<sup>121</sup>

An editorial cartoon, titled "The Track is Cleared," (see Figure 4) illustrates Berger plowing over his opposition. As he speeds away in his race car, identified as socialism, Berger leaves chaos in his dust. Within the wreckage are the opposition candidates, Bodenstab and Willis, along with the two anti-socialist newspapers, *The*

---

<sup>120</sup> Stevens, ed., *Family Letters*, 157.

<sup>121</sup> Beck, *Sewer Socialists* vol. 1, 195-198.



**Figure 4 Unknown, *The Track is Cleared*, Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin**

*Milwaukee Sentinel* and *The Milwaukee Journal*. He has also knocked over the fat cats of the Democratic and Republican machines. Through this cartoon, Berger asserted his hope of continued dominance in politics.

### *World War I*

World War I profoundly affected Berger, more than it did both Hoan and Seidel. Branded as a traitor by both parties in Congress, and placed on trial and convicted for crimes against the Espionage Act, Berger endured more direct attacks than most in his party. Many believed his anti-war stance stemmed from his ethnic background. In contrast, while discussing the American entrance into World War I, Doris Berger states, “Papa felt very *American*, not Austrian or German. He ardently believed in democracy, not dictatorship.”<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, his daughter states, “Papa was not a pacifist. He preferred to settle problems, even international problems, by reasonable and logical negotiations. But he often said if the United States were attacked he would ardently support its defense by any means.”<sup>123</sup>

As Daniel Hoan dealt with the pressures of a preparedness parade (to prove his cooperation with the wartime effort), Berger began defining how he viewed pacifism and an antiwar stance. Through an editorial in *The Leader*, Berger supported Hoan’s ideas regarding the parade. He states, “The Leader, therefore, is in favor of a ‘preparedness’ that shall protect and unite the bulk of our nation, that is, the working people.”<sup>124</sup> He

---

<sup>122</sup> Doris Berger, “Biography of Victor Berger,” Chapter 5, 5.

<sup>123</sup> Doris Berger, “Biography of Victor Berger,” 6/30.

<sup>124</sup> V.L. Berger, “National Service,” Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin, 1.

argued for the defense of freedom; if the United States were directly attacked, however, he suggested a different type of defense.

He called for a new kind of national service, one in which every citizen spent one year of his or her life in education. As part of this education everyone would be taught simple civil works (such as road building or bridge building) and instructed on personal defense. This education prepared every citizen to defend his or her nation when called upon to do so. Berger suggested that education would create a solution for many of society's inequalities. In conclusion, Berger states, "War may be hell, but there are some things in this world worse than hell."<sup>125</sup>

Throughout the war, Berger was never shy about speaking in opposition. He called the European problem a "mad orgy of death and destruction" and the result of capitalism and capital interests.<sup>126</sup> In this, he consistently upheld the party platform as laid down at the St. Louis convention. As was discussed earlier, his relationship with Hoan began to come under great strain, as Hoan continued to work on the defense council. After forcing Hoan's hand through his editorial pages, Berger wrote the party platform for Hoan's successful mayoral campaign, calling for "a speedy, general and permanent peace."<sup>127</sup>

Berger rejoiced in Hoan's reelection, and described the citizens of Milwaukee as "one of the most enlightened [electorates] in the United States [who] could not be bamboozled by 'paytriotic' [*sic*] phrases nor bought by 'paytriotic' [*sic*] money."<sup>128</sup> Even

---

<sup>125</sup> Berger, "National Service," 1-4.

<sup>126</sup> V.L. Berger, untitled, Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin, 1.

<sup>127</sup> V.L. Berger, "Platform and Program of the Socialist Party of Milwaukee," Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin, 3.

<sup>128</sup> V.L. Berger, "Press Release, April 3," Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin, 1.

through the humiliation of his trial and the subsequent refusal of his seat in Congress, Berger continued to demand peace. A campaign poster from his 1918 campaign for the Senate (see Figure 5) reflects as much.

### *Post-war Socialism*

Following World War I, Berger continued to fight for socialism; however, he began to take a new approach. As the number of registered socialists quickly fell from more than 100,000 in 1919 to fewer than 25,000 in 1921, Berger relented on an imminent transition to socialism. To this end, he urged socialists to give up the “old and defunct Socialist Labor party” tactics that rejected everything non-socialist.<sup>129</sup> In doing so, Berger endorsed cooperation with stronger political organizations in an effort to continue at least some socialist agendas.

Further demonstrating his changed beliefs about an imminent revolution, Berger writes in a 1921 article:

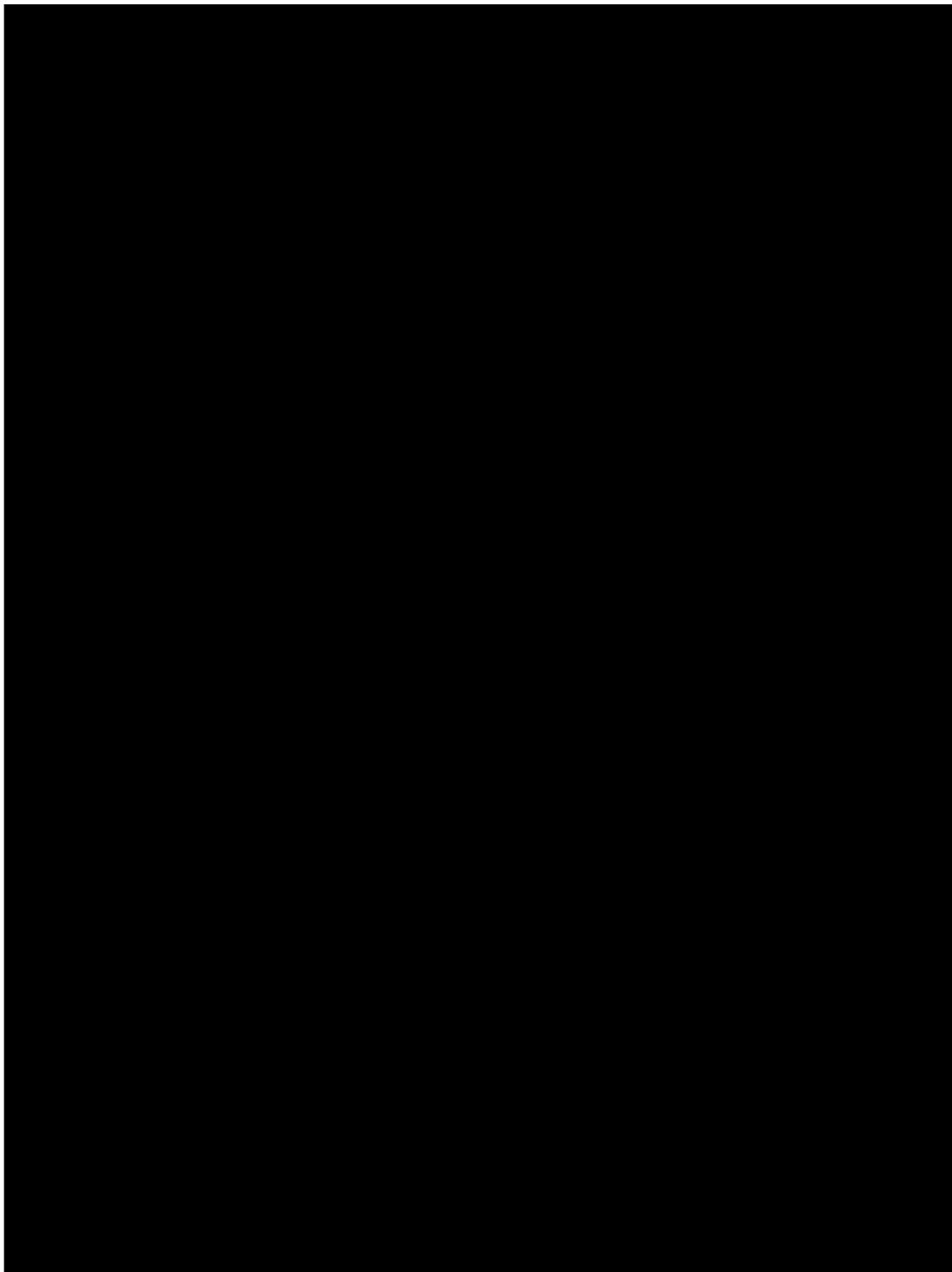
The time has come, where the questions for the Socialist in the near future will be mainly whether we want to remain outside of active participation in the government of the United States and simply criticize, or whether we intend to build up an organization that will do its part in the moulding the policy of the country.<sup>130</sup>

Berger returned to Congress and remained there until 1928. During these latter years, his speeches no longer spoke of the imminent socialist revolution, but rather supported many of the issues of the Progressive party and Robert La Follette. In 1924, Berger and other socialists joined multiple third-party progressives in supporting La Follette’s independent bid for the presidency.

---

<sup>129</sup> Beck, *Sewer Socialists* vol. 2, 205.

<sup>130</sup> Beck, *Sewer Socialists* vol. 2, 206.



**Figure 5 Unknown, *Victor L. Berger for U.S. Senator*, Victor Berger Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin**

Another example of Berger's changed role in Congress is his fighting for anti-lynching legislation. Prior to World War I, Berger went on record several times with anti-immigrant and racist views. According to Sally Miller, in 1920 Berger stated "that blacks constituted a lower race."<sup>131</sup> In addition to racist statements, Berger attempted excluding Asians from the Socialist party in 1912 "not on racial grounds, they [Berger and Ernest Untermann] maintained, but because of psychological and economic backwardness."<sup>132</sup> Miller argues Berger's apparent racism was common within the socialist movement despite its official "gender-free and colorblind invitation to membership."<sup>133</sup>

Although Miller provides ample evidence supporting her position, nearly all of the evidence comes from pre-war activities. Following World War I, Berger appears to have changed his views on race, as suggested by an anti-lynching law that he proposed to the House of Representatives. Berger described his bill as being "not any stronger . . . , than the exigencies of the situation require—or the menace with which it is intended to deal would justify."<sup>134</sup> Berger's changed attitude toward race, and his fight against lynching would be one of his last battles in Congress. After being defeated in 1928, Berger returned to Milwaukee for his last year of life.<sup>135</sup>

Berger and Hoan's relationship remained distant in Berger's later years. However, regarding their disagreements, Hoan's eulogy of Berger praised Berger's accomplishments. In remembering Berger, Hoan stated, "Victor cared nothing for money

---

<sup>131</sup> Sally M. Miller, "For White Men Only: The Socialist Party of America and Issues of Gender, Ethnicity and Race," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2, no. 3 (2003), 290.

<sup>132</sup> Miller, "For White Men Only," 289.

<sup>133</sup> Miller, "For White Men Only," 283.

<sup>134</sup> Victor Berger, "Lynching—A National Evil Which the Government Must Stamp Out," in *Voice and Pen*, 511.

<sup>135</sup> Beck, *Sewer Socialists* vol. 2, 205-239.

or earthly gain except as it might be used to help others. His overwhelming desire was to improve the material and social lot of humanity. I know of no greater tribute to be paid by anyone at his bier, than to have it said ‘He loved his fellow-man.’”<sup>136</sup> Hoan continued by describing Berger’s vigilant fight for socialism and Milwaukee. He ended his eulogy quoting the memorial of Tom Johnson of Cleveland: “He found us groping leaderless and blind; he left a city with a civic mind; He found us starving each his selfish part; he left a city with a civic heart; and ever with his eye set on the goal; the vision of a city with a soul.”<sup>137</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Victor Berger’s socialist ideology primarily developed out of the writings of Marx and Engels, more so than that of either Seidel or Hoan. Although he included a wide array of scholarly source materials, his stubbornness and uncompromising personality (especially after his falling out with the Populist Party) led him to firmly hold his belief in an imminent national transition to a socialist government.

Berger’s national image affected his ideology. His desire for the spotlight led him to focus on the national, and this desire was fed by widespread recognition of his importance. His role as the first socialist congressman allowed him to focus on rhetoric and theory rather than the reality of daily operations of a municipal government. While Daniel Hoan began to see the need for tri-partisanship within city politics, Berger continued to reject compromise. The events of World War I changed Berger’s beliefs,

---

<sup>136</sup> D.W. Hoan, “Eulogy,” August 10, 1929, Daniel Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

<sup>137</sup> Hoan, “Eulogy.’

however. Following the war, he no longer spoke of socialism in the same teleological manner, but rather in terms of cooperation for the better good.

Additionally, Berger's rhetoric transitioned toward a more conciliatory style. Throughout his last years in Congress, Berger openly supported Progressive Party legislation. He also began adapting his personal views, such as with his anti-lynching legislation proposal. Finally, Berger's campaigning actively for La Follette further demonstrates his reemerged belief in cooperation and compromise.

The complexity of Victor Berger's ideology goes beyond portrayals of him as "right-wing" or "conservative." Although Berger did control a political machine, he did not command blind obedience, and he allowed for differing opinions (such as those of Daniel Hoan). Furthermore, his understanding of socialism was not just conservative. It was a continuously evolving belief as to how best to introduce socialism to the nation. Sally Miller's description of Berger as a "constructive socialist" limits his actions to a vague label, rather than providing an in-depth analysis of his ideology.

## CHAPTER TWO: EMIL SEIDEL

### *Introduction*

Emil Seidel believed in an imminent transition to socialism throughout most of his political career. Having worked as a labor leader and having been educated in Germany, Seidel developed a socialist ideology based on his experiences and understanding of Marxist theory. His teleological beliefs directed his actions as the first socialist mayor of Milwaukee from 1910-1912. These ideals are evident in his writings and actions during his single term as mayor, his candidacy for vice president, and his many years as an alderman.

World War I shook the foundation of Seidel's belief structure, as it did the beliefs of Berger and Hoan. During the war, he lectured against the United States' participation while still believing in a socialist revolution. After World War I, Seidel's actions and writings displayed a growing internal struggle between idealism and pragmatism. He still wrote about a future socialist revolution, but he disagreed with the uncompromising attitudes of younger socialists. World War I shifted how Emil Seidel viewed the role of socialism both in the United States and in Milwaukee, as he grew increasingly frustrated with the lack of cooperation and compromise within the party.

### *Early Biography*

Emil Seidel followed his father into the trade of woodcarving at a young age. Throughout his apprenticeship, he witnessed the increased productivity and efficiency caused by the continued stream of new technology and machinery. Through seeing the jobs of several cabinetmakers reduced to a single machine, Seidel still thought his craft

would be secure. However, he noted, “Each arrival a new wood working machine, spread gloom among the artisans. The machine was a challenge to their skill, a threat to their job—meant final extinction of their trade.”<sup>138</sup>

Never having attended a university, Seidel continuously absorbed the books within his father’s library. In fact, his employers occasionally caught him reading at work. Seidel carried this lust for education outside of the home and shop and engaged like-minded individuals in friendship. On one occasion, he borrowed Max Nordau’s *Conventional Lies of Cultured Mankind* from his friend Willy Ostwald. This book would first bring the idea of universal education to Seidel’s attention. Ostwald and Seidel continued to lend each other books and pamphlets throughout their lives, often debating the ideas within them.<sup>139</sup>

Perhaps one of his first experiences of human misery occurred at the disastrous Newhall Hotel fire in 1883. Described as one of the most luxurious hotels in the Midwest, Milwaukee’s Newhall Hotel burned down on January 10, 1883. Although city officials blamed a variety of causes, most agreed the lack of proper building codes caused the massive loss of life. In describing the scene of the fire, Seidel remembers the “nauseous odor of death” and calls it a “gruesomely horrifying sight.”<sup>140</sup> Seidel also reflected on the number of workers who died, trapped within the building.

Throughout his early career, he saw several workers lose limbs only to suffer further due to inadequate medical facilities. The Newhall tragedy moved Seidel to act on behalf of his fellow workers. Since the woodcarvers of Milwaukee were not unionized,

---

<sup>138</sup> Emil Seidel, *Autobiography Part I*, unpublished manuscript, Emil Seidel Papers, 1916-1944, Milwaukee Manuscript Collection G, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 157.

<sup>139</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part I*, 161-166.

<sup>140</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part I*, 166-170.

Seidel arranged the first meeting of the Wood Carvers' Association in Milwaukee to address the working conditions and salary of his fellow laborers in 1883. Eventually the union removed its limitation to woodcarvers and joined the Knights of Labor. Through his acceleration within the ranks of the union, Seidel quickly embraced the ideals of solidarity and brotherhood displayed by the Knights of Labor.<sup>141</sup>

Seidel and his union fought for and won the nine-hour day for Milwaukee woodcarvers in 1884. In the following two years, Seidel continued to help the Knights of Labor strategize the movement for an eight-hour day in Milwaukee. Throughout the planning process for May of 1886, the Knights of Labor stressed the importance of a non-violent approach to a possible strike.<sup>142</sup>

Prior to the 1886 strikes, Seidel left the country for Germany at the urging of his father. Although he did not participate in the May movement, the violent response to peaceful strikes disgusted Seidel. Reading the headlines in Europe—"General Strike for Eight Hours Lost—Milwaukee Riots Kill Two—Rioting in Cincinnati—Chicago Anarchists Bomb Police, Many Killed"—further pained Seidel.<sup>143</sup>

While traveling in Berlin, Seidel continued his work as an activist for the eight-hour day. Elected the spokesman for the Berlin Wood Carvers, Emil used the same strategy he used in 1884 for the nine-hour day in Milwaukee. Despite his firing for being an agitator, his rhetoric helped the Berlin workers gain an eight-hour day. Seidel accepted his fate as an equal response to his actions and encouraged the workers to continue their efforts for the eight-hour day. His fellow workers dismissed his advice in

---

<sup>141</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part I*, 159-176.

<sup>142</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part I*, 177-180.

<sup>143</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part II*, unpublished manuscript, Emil Seidel Papers, 1916-1944, Milwaukee Manuscript Collection G, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 32.

an act of solidarity and walked off the job. For the next three months, Seidel helped lead a successful mass movement throughout Berlin for the eight-hour day.<sup>144</sup>

Emil Seidel had left Milwaukee for Germany upon the advice of his father. His father suggested that a German education would provide the best opportunities for Emil. While not the type of education his father had in mind, Seidel's experiences of German society began his conversion to socialism. During the late nineteenth century, socialist literature was illegal in Germany. Socialists smuggled it into the country through a series of cloak and dagger maneuvers.

Seidel had no problems encountering vivid debates on the subject despite the relative inaccessibility of the literature. His first attempt at entering into one such debate failed on all counts. Seidel states:

One time at the Stamm-tisch I ventured the opinion that Socialism is a fine dream which can not be realized.  
 "Why?" demanded several in unison.  
 "The workers themselves are too selfish," I answered.  
 They seemed amused: "May not the workers be selfish when all the rest are? You believe in equal rights, don't you?" Dupont taunted.  
 "Sure, but—" I sputtered and said no more.<sup>145</sup>

Not deterred by his initial failure, Seidel continued engaging in these debates in an attempt to understand the socialist ideology. Ironically, he would not find his answer within these debates. Seidel had his socialist epiphany while waiting for the train.

By watching the commuters bustle about, Seidel acquired an understanding of how socialism could be unselfish. He states, "All sorts of people coming to a common goal, all sorts going out to many goals; all of them riding on a common carrier, belonging

---

<sup>144</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part II*, 126-132.

<sup>145</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part II*, 123.

to the state...yet none of them are more or less selfish than they were when they walked.”<sup>146</sup>

Seidel’s socialist conversion took more than a brief understanding of its ideology. Throughout his efforts with the woodcarvers’ struggle for an eight-hour day in Berlin, Seidel tried unsuccessfully to find a copy of Marx’s *Das Kapital*. Finally able to purchase a pamphlet on Marxism, Seidel states, “The more I read, the more I craved. Headlong I plunged into the study of Socialism and became converted.”<sup>147</sup>

Having fully embraced the study of socialism, Seidel quickly became involved with the politics of Berlin and discovered a dramatic split within socialism. Many of the young socialists wanted an immediate violent revolution to eliminate capitalism, while the older socialists suggested a slower approach. Seidel initially sided with the younger, idealistic side of socialism, but he remained conflicted on the issue.<sup>148</sup>

A friendship formed in Germany would solve his dilemma. In 1888, Seidel met a young student, Dr. Phillips, who was studying surgery in Berlin. Dr. Phillips, originally from Stevens Point, Wisconsin, quickly befriended Seidel as a fellow American. Upon his return to Stevens Point, Dr. Phillips sent a letter informing Seidel he was forwarding a copy of a recently published book by Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, as it “was being widely read.”<sup>149</sup>

Of receiving and reading Bellamy, Seidel states, “Unbeknown to my friend Phillips, it was this book he sent me at the very time when I was struggling after the truth—it was *Looking Backward* which finally tossed me headlong into the cause of

---

<sup>146</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part II*, 123.

<sup>147</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part II*, 134.

<sup>148</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part II*, 134-139.

<sup>149</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part II*, 139.

Socialism.”<sup>150</sup> Soon after this time, Seidel returned to Milwaukee, fully accepting the ideology of socialism.

Seidel’s embrace of solidarity and his time in Germany made a profound impact on his life. In his autobiography, he included an ink drawing from his Berlin days (see Figure 6) titled *Solidartät*. The 5” x 7” drawing displays an angel joining hands with two male figures.

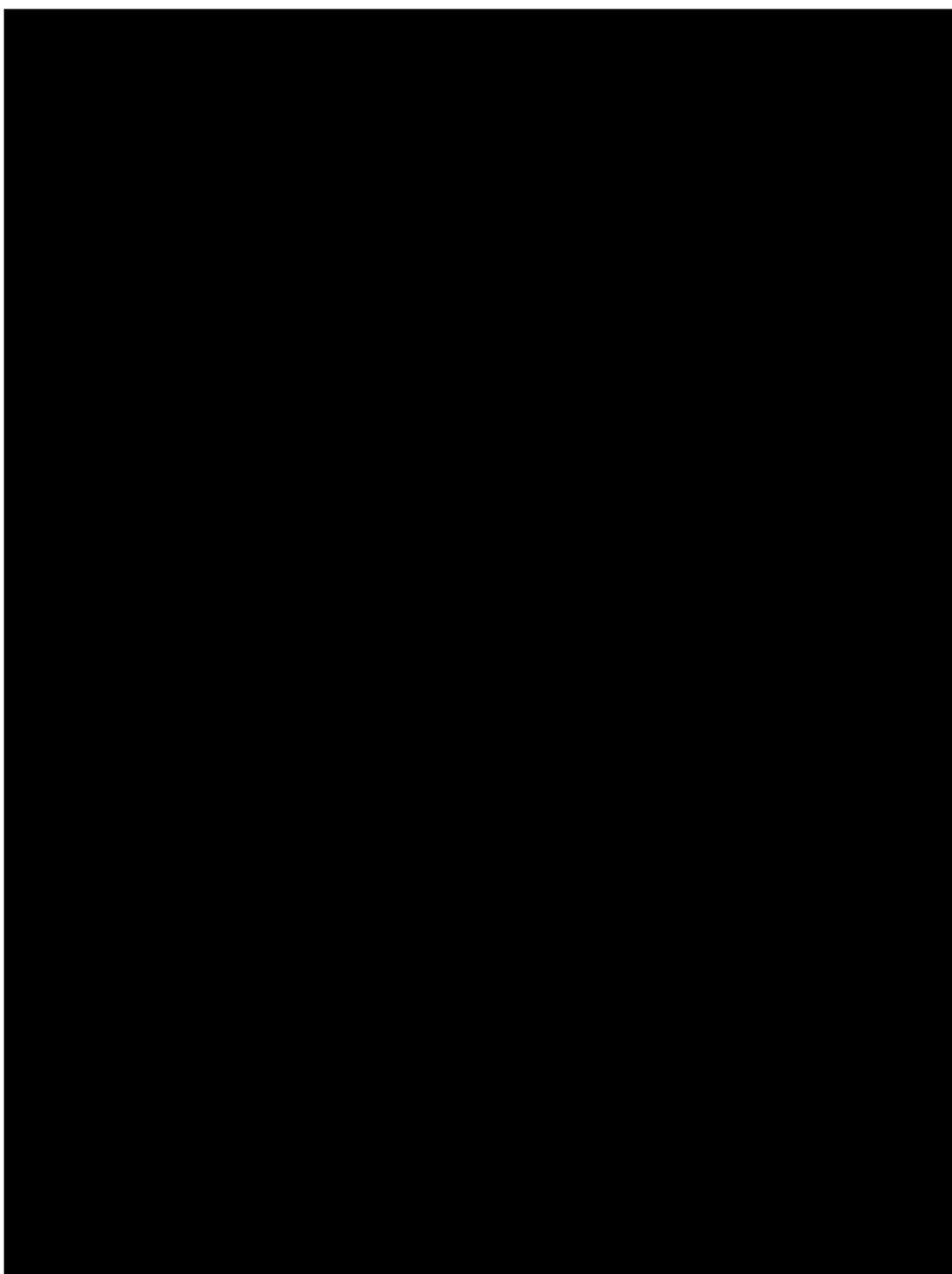
The three figures sit atop the world, with two holding onto a drooping chain. Attached to the chain is a sign announcing *Solidartät*. Below the sign, a cherub playing the harp offsets a statement of jubilation: “Es wirKejeder [*sic*] Geist und jede Hand fördernd belebend fürd Ganzen Wohl!” Translated, the writing states, “Every hand and every spirit advance the common good.”

The two male figures gaze toward the angel, longing for her help. The relationship between the divine and the socialist/labor movement suggests an ordination from God. The idea of a mandate from heaven helped feed into a teleological approach to socialism, since religious devotion characterized the labor leaders Seidel met.

Upon returning to Milwaukee, Seidel quickly began supporting the cause of socialism in his hometown by joining the Sozialistische Vereinigung. Through this association, he became friends with Victor Berger and other political leaders. Many of the members of the Vereinigung were former members of the Socialist Labor Party who left because of the amount of infighting within the party. While not a political organization, the Vereinigung continued as a social organization and attempted to spread its ideology throughout Milwaukee.

---

<sup>150</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part II*, 139.



**Figure 6 Unknown, *Solidartat*, Emil Seidel Papers, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archive, Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

The state of national politics disheartened Seidel throughout the final decade of the nineteenth century. Through three elections, Seidel's happiest moments were seeing the growing, though still miniscule, number of votes cast for various socialist candidates for president. Following the 1896 election, Eugene Debs and Victor Berger organized a new socialist political party, the Social Democracy.<sup>151</sup>

The first branch of the Social Democracy opened in the West Side Turn Hall, in a demonstration of the importance of Milwaukee to the movement. Invigorated by these events, Seidel raced over to the West Side Turn Hall to become the first person to sign his name to the membership list.<sup>152</sup> Through the party's national campaign, Eugene Debs received over 87,000 votes for president in 1900, much to the delight of Seidel.

While the Social Democratic party was taking form, the United States began to address the issue of the growing strength of trusts. Following the failure of the Sherman Antitrust Act, "the Chicago Civic Federation called for a 'Chicago Conference on Trusts.'" Seidel took a great interest in the proceedings held in September of 1899. As a socialist, he viewed the growth of trusts as a "logical process of economic evolution," but he remained interested in the findings of the conference.<sup>153</sup> Reflecting on the importance of the conference, Seidel states, "For us socialists the Chicago Conference on Trusts was an interesting interlude. Had I another 100 years of life before me, I would begin writing the epic of the class struggle starting with that conference."<sup>154</sup>

Milwaukee's Social Democratic movement continued to grow during the early twentieth century, and the Sozialistische Vereinigung disbanded, with most of its

---

<sup>151</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part III*, unpublished manuscript, Emil Seidel Papers, 1916-1944, Milwaukee Manuscript Collection G, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 37-47.

<sup>152</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part III*, 47.

<sup>153</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part III*, 56.

<sup>154</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part III*, 60.

members joining the new political party. Immediately, the demands of the Social Democratic party in Milwaukee reflected the high aims of the movement. According to Seidel:

We wanted our workers to have pure air; we wanted them to have sunshine; we wanted planned homes; we wanted living wages; we wanted recreation for young and old; we wanted vocational education; we wanted a chance for every human being to be strong and live a life of happiness. And, we wanted everything that was necessary to give them that: Playgrounds, parks, lakes, beaches, clean creeks and rivers, swimming and wading pools, social centers, reading rooms, clean fun, music, dance, song and joy for all. That was our Milwaukee Social Democratic movement.<sup>155</sup>

### *1910 Election and Writings on History*

Before the 1910 election, Milwaukee citizens had already elected socialists to public office. Starting in 1898, the socialist ticket continued growing from election to election. In 1904, with Victor Berger as a mayoral candidate, the socialists elected their first officials. Included among the initial lot of seventeen was the 20<sup>th</sup> Ward Alderman Emil Seidel. Four years later, with increasing support for socialist candidates among the electorate, Seidel came within 2,219 votes of being elected mayor. Two years after that, Seidel officially broke the barrier. Milwaukee voted him mayor, also electing nearly the entire socialist ticket.<sup>156</sup>

In his first message to the common council following the 1910 election, Seidel highlighted the election as merely the first step toward the inevitable socialist transition. As he laid out his plans for the administration, he asserted the need to address party-platform issues. He ended his message by noting the historical significance of the first socialist regime in Milwaukee. He stated:

---

<sup>155</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part III*, 80.

<sup>156</sup> Beck, *Sewer Socialists* vol. 1, 23-24.

By patiently toiling with one series of problems after another, by fighting battle on battle with an enthusiasm that never lessens, by moving forward from one point of victory to another, with a confidence that we are in accord with the trend of civilization and the highest ideals of humanity, out of such struggles as we are called by an irresistible summons to engage in, advances will be made and progress will be realized toward a great city with a free, independent civic spirit.<sup>157</sup>

The 1910 election served as apparent vindication for Seidel's theories of history. During his mayoral term, he used the public pulpit to argue that socialism would be a natural historical evolution. In one speech during his administration, he railed against historical oppression and suggested the reaction to oppression was always a revolution. History showed Seidel a strong and intelligent but oppressed people who were told freedom was not a possibility. Furthermore, the oppressors justified their constructs as "divine institution[s]." According to Seidel, both slaves and serfs rejected this argument and revolted; so should the working classes of his era.<sup>158</sup>

Reflective of nationalism, Seidel stressed the importance of the municipalization of major utilities such as the lighting system, waterworks, ice plants, and stone quarries. In all of these areas, the Seidel administration attempted to establish major inroads. The mayor's document, as part of the new enlightened policy of socialist rule, reflected the importance of governmental efficiency. As Bellamy noted, an increase in business efficiency correlates with an increase in the size of the corporate trust, and the socialists' governmental efficiency grew as their control over the government grew. The elimination of several governmental departments and the creation of new ones raised massive opposition. In his administration's defense, Seidel argued that politicians'

---

<sup>157</sup> Emil Seidel, "Mayor's Message," Emil Seidel Papers, 1916-1944, Milwaukee Manuscript Collection G, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 4.

<sup>158</sup> Emil Seidel, "Get into the Trusts," Records of the Emil Seidel Administration, 1910-1912, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 79, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1.

concern focused more on the loss of the opportunity to skim from the public coffers than on employment. As he stated, “When purchases are made through a purchasing department, instead of the many separate department heads, the latter naturally lose some power, and with the loss of that power also goes the cance [*sic*] of graft.”<sup>159</sup> Through the creation of the Bureau of Economy and Efficiency, the Seidel administration streamlined and standardized the operations of city government.

The Milwaukee Socialists attempted to run city government as an example of a cooperative commonwealth, in which every citizen both participates in and benefits from government. To this end, the Seidel administration enforced the idea that, “any citizen coming to an office occupied by a socialist has been received with courtesy.” Beyond encouraging the citizens of Milwaukee to engage in civil government, the administration “worked for every measure that will promote the interests of our people.” Seidel stressed the importance of expanding the influence of socialists beyond city politics into the state legislature, stating, “We have labored before legislators for laws to improve our civic affairs,” specifically referring to the issue of home rule.<sup>160</sup>

All of the changes effected by the Seidel administration attempted to fulfill their dream of a new socialist nation. According to Seidel, “The dreams that nations dream, are found to come true; so we are told. Some day this nation will awaken from its slumber, rub its eyes and set to work to realize this dream.”<sup>161</sup> His statement further reflects the idea of evolutionary socialism, the belief that the nation must adhere (or awaken) to a new system of governance.

---

<sup>159</sup> Emil Seidel, “Defense of the Socialist Regime in Milwaukee,” Emil Seidel Papers, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

<sup>160</sup> Seidel, “Milwaukee.”

<sup>161</sup> Seidel, “Milwaukee.”

Seidel expounded on his evolutionary argument for socialism through a discussion of the growing trust problem in the United States. Basing his views on the evolutionary process of nationalization described by Bellamy, Seidel discussed the increasing size of trusts and corporations and its correlation to the decreasing number of owners. According to this model, “This means that the railroads, the mines, the land, the food, the clothing, the shelter, etc., etc., are rapidly becoming the property of the trusts and monopolies.”<sup>162</sup>

As the trusts continued to grow, Seidel argued, a handful of owners manipulated the entire American working class and society as a whole. Because of this control the “trusts cannot be put out of business without putting civilization out of business.”<sup>163</sup> Seidel argued that regulation of the trusts by inserting the government into the trusts was the final evolutionary link in this system. Gradually, the people would begin to “collectively own and operate the trusts.” By doing so, “there is no one left on the outside for the trust to be exploited [and] then all exploitation must cease.”<sup>164</sup>

Seidel furthered his argument for the collective ownership of all trusts in his acceptance speech following his nomination as the socialist candidate for vice president. Seidel stated that the “growth of the trusts and the rapid concentration of wealth” caused the rising cost of living for all working Americans.<sup>165</sup> He continued by attacking the Progressive Party’s members for ignoring their own convictions. In doing so, Seidel suggested that members of the Progressive Party “admitted at one time or another that the

---

<sup>162</sup> Emil Seidel, “Get into the Trusts,” Records of the Emil Seidel Administration, 1910-1912, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 79, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1.

<sup>163</sup> Seidel, “Get into the Trusts,” 2.

<sup>164</sup> Seidel, “Get into the Trusts,” 2.

<sup>165</sup> Emil Seidel, “Letter of Acceptance,” Records of the Emil Seidel Administration, 1910-1912, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 79, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 3.

outcome of this industrial growth and development must be the collective ownership of monopolies.”<sup>166</sup>

Seidel’s building rhetoric culminates with a distinctive final summation of his understanding of the trust issue. He stated:

Trusts are bad only in so far as they deprive the people of the means with which to earn their livelihood. They are good in so far as they increase productivity with decreased waste. Collective ownership of the trusts would retain the good features and eliminate the bad features...The nation should through its government take possession at once of the national trusts...the management and regulation should be assumed by the people through and in cooperation with their governments...Thus we would enter upon a new era of democracy; a real democracy because it is an industrial democracy.<sup>167</sup>

Seidel’s acceptance speech did more than just continue the trust-based theories of socialism. Following his mayoral defeat in 1912 to a combination ticket, Seidel continued to hold his teleological beliefs, and in fact strengthened by the 1912 National Convention in Indianapolis. His acceptance speech also contained additional references to the historical inevitability of socialism.

He continually alluded to socialistic historicism. Seidel demonstrated this by simply stating, “Progress is with us,” and, “The future is ours,” in the beginning of his speech.<sup>168</sup> As he built up toward attacking the trust issue, he became more direct. He stated, “The Socialist Party recognizes in the present system only an epoch in the development of society. Slavery, Communism, Feudalism, Capitalism—each was an advance forward over all the rest.”<sup>169</sup> Furthermore, Seidel ended his speech by discussing the workers’ preparations for a political revolution (preparing a declaration of

---

<sup>166</sup> Seidel, “Letter of Acceptance,” 6.

<sup>167</sup> Seidel, “Letter of Acceptance,” 8.

<sup>168</sup> Seidel, “Letter of Acceptance,” 1.

<sup>169</sup> Seidel, “Letter of Acceptance,” 8.

independence, developing a separate political party, and electing their own people into office). This final argument culminated with a connection to both Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln and the ways, as Seidel claimed, that they had changed American politics. In ending his speech, Seidel stated, “The constitution then will have a new meaning—that of Jefferson—that of Lincoln. For we shall then have a republic of the workers which means a republic of the people, by the people, for the people.”<sup>170</sup>

In an undated letter to Otto Hauser, Seidel reflects on the eclectic background of many socialists as further proof of a revolution of necessity. He states, “The wonder is that we agree on so much with each one of us having a different historical, moral, material, economic and genital background.”<sup>171</sup> Seidel viewed socialism as a “picture puzzle” whose older pieces needed to be replaced by newer ones until the entire picture took shape. His letter contains a sample campaign argument for Hauser to use. In it, Seidel returns to the argument of historical evolution, suggesting that past systems (such as feudalism) developed a distinct culture. Capitalism, however, built on an existing culture. According to Seidel, “That’s why capitalists are reactionary. Their minds live in the past.”<sup>172</sup> Seidel argues that socialism, unlike capitalism, provided a new culture. He calls for the election of “men and women who understand the law of social evolution.”<sup>173</sup> In another campaign document, Seidel declares, “The social revolution is on.”<sup>174</sup> The momentum of history supported a socialist revolution enough for him to blame “those

---

<sup>170</sup> Seidel, “Letter of Acceptance,” 10.

<sup>171</sup> Emil Seidel to Otto Hauser, undated, Emil Seidel Papers, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1.

<sup>172</sup> Seidel to Hauser, 3.

<sup>173</sup> Seidel to Hauser, 4.

<sup>174</sup> Emil Seidel, “Socialist Campaigner,” Emil Seidel Papers, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1.

who would stay the hand of time with progressive palliatives” for holding off evolution.<sup>175</sup>

During his reelection campaign in 1912, Seidel wrote an extensive booklet responding to conflicting reports regarding his administration. Throughout his defense, Seidel views Milwaukee as the vanguard for an international socialistic revolution. The growing number of active socialists in Milwaukee meant that “this new power in politics is here to stay and capitalist politicians are not such fools that they will not reckon with it.”<sup>176</sup> A poem included within the booklet connects Seidel’s belief in Milwaukee as the vanguard of socialism with American traditional belief in the Puritan ideal of the “city on a hill.” The poem states, “This is a city that shall stand, /A light upon a nation’s hall, /A voice that evil cannot still.”<sup>177</sup>

The growing national support for socialism further buoyed his belief in a coming revolution. Seidel recalled that audiences occasionally reacted to his speeches prior to the 1910 election with rotten fruit and eggs. Following his national tour during the presidential campaign of 1912, he noted a change in audience’s demeanor: “Sometimes flowers were thrown, but never in any place eggs or fruit.”<sup>178</sup> The growth of a socialist movement in the United States appears as evidence of the impending revolution in many of Seidel’s writings. In one he states, “During the last fifteen years there have been many indications that pointed t a [*sic*] general awakening of the social, community and government forces—not only in the cities but likewise in the states and that nation.”<sup>179</sup>

---

<sup>175</sup> Seidel, “Socialist Campaigner,” 1.

<sup>176</sup> Seidel, “Milwaukee,” 2.

<sup>177</sup> “The City Great and Strong,” in Emil Seidel, “Defense of the Socialist Regime in Milwaukee,” Emil Seidel Papers, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1.

<sup>178</sup> Seidel, “Milwaukee,” 18.

<sup>179</sup> Emil Seidel, “Social Activities,” Emil Seidel Papers, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1.

The defeat of the Debs/Seidel ticket in 1912 did not stop Seidel from steadfastly preaching both the virtues of socialism and its inevitability nationally. In the summer of 1913, Seidel joined former Republican congressman J. Adam Bede for a series of 108 debates.<sup>180</sup> Drawing enormous crowds, the debates were part of the Redpath Lyceum Bureau's chautauqua circuit, often as one of the year's highlights.<sup>181</sup> Although every night's debate varied, Seidel's main points remained fixed on socialism's natural evolution.

According to one account of the July 10<sup>th</sup> debate in Marion, Indiana, Seidel's opening statement began and ended with a summary of his teleological view of history. He stated, "Socialism is the next step in economic evolution; capitalism is to be followed by socialism as certainly as feudalism was followed by capitalism...Socialism is not only logical, it is inevitable."<sup>182</sup> He continued to argue for the necessity of workers demanding their rights through the election of socialist politicians. Seidel rejected Bede's understanding of socialism as another form of anarchy. His final attack on Bede's position argued for socialism as the enlightened choice, while capitalism suffered the darkness of past ages. He stated, "Mr. Bede says that socialism is a 'joy ride in the dark.' The trouble with Mr. Bede is that he is groping around in the dark."<sup>183</sup>

---

<sup>180</sup> The 108 days of debates took place between May 18 and September 4 in eight states. According to Seidel's autobiography, the breakdown was as follows: "Nine in Georgia, 6 in Alabama, 10 in Tennessee, 17 in Kentucky, 25 in Indiana, 10 in Ohio, 20 in Michigan and 11 in Pennsylvania." *Autobiography Part III*, 174.

<sup>181</sup> The Redpath Lyceum Bureau hosted traveling assemblies for self-improvement through lectures and discussions, similar to the mission of the Turner Societies.

<sup>182</sup> "Seidel and Bede Argue the Issue of Socialism," *Marion Daily Chronicle*, July 10, 1913 in *Autobiography Part III*, 175.

<sup>183</sup> "Seidel and Bede."

*World War I*

Seidel continued to represent the party after his term as mayor of Milwaukee. As the certainty of war drew ever closer, Seidel worried about a division within the party. Following the declaration of war by the federal government, St. Louis hosted an emergency conference of socialists. As part of the Wisconsin delegation, Seidel drafted a version of the majority resolution on war.

Within the typical pacifist stance on World War I, Seidel included two unusual demands. First, Seidel demands, “That the families depending upon drafted soldiers be cared for.” This point, within the context of the entire document, suggests that Seidel, maintaining the socialist’s antiwar stance, conceded that the government would continue its efforts in World War I. Seidel’s interests therefore lay with the families left behind.<sup>184</sup>

Seidel’s other demand also accepted the government’s continued involvement in the war effort. Rather than allowing soldiers waiting for orders to remain idle, he suggests they work on civil construction jobs. Seidel suggests the soldiers work toward making the United States more efficient and effectively run by creating facilities such as water power plants, a national system of transportation (something not embraced until after World War II), storage houses, and canneries. With soldiers as the construction crews, Seidel intended the nationalization of these operations, furthering the nationalization of utilities and food production. Furthermore, Seidel insists that these soldiers be paid for their labor “at current union wages and an eight-hour day,” suggesting government workers deserve to be treated with equality.<sup>185</sup>

---

<sup>184</sup> Emil Seidel, “Document No. 27: Substitute for Majority Resolution on War & Militarism,” Emil Seidel Papers, 1906-1940, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 76, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

<sup>185</sup> Seidel, “Document No. 27”

Seidel's version of the majority resolution acknowledged the failure of socialism to prevent World War I; however, he did not place the blame on the idea of socialism, but rather on the lack of proper organization of the working classes. The entire document has a sense of desperation and demonstrates a distinct discontent with the prior efforts of socialist organizations. As Seidel states, "But we now have war and therefore we shall have to suffer the horrors of war," frustration and perhaps a hint of questioning if socialism is inevitable, filled his words.<sup>186</sup>

Following the convention, the Wisconsin delegation continued its division between the majority and minority reports, with Seidel advising the adoption of the minority report. In the following months, Seidel continued speaking out against the war effort and being arrested and found guilty, of disturbing the peace on one occasion.

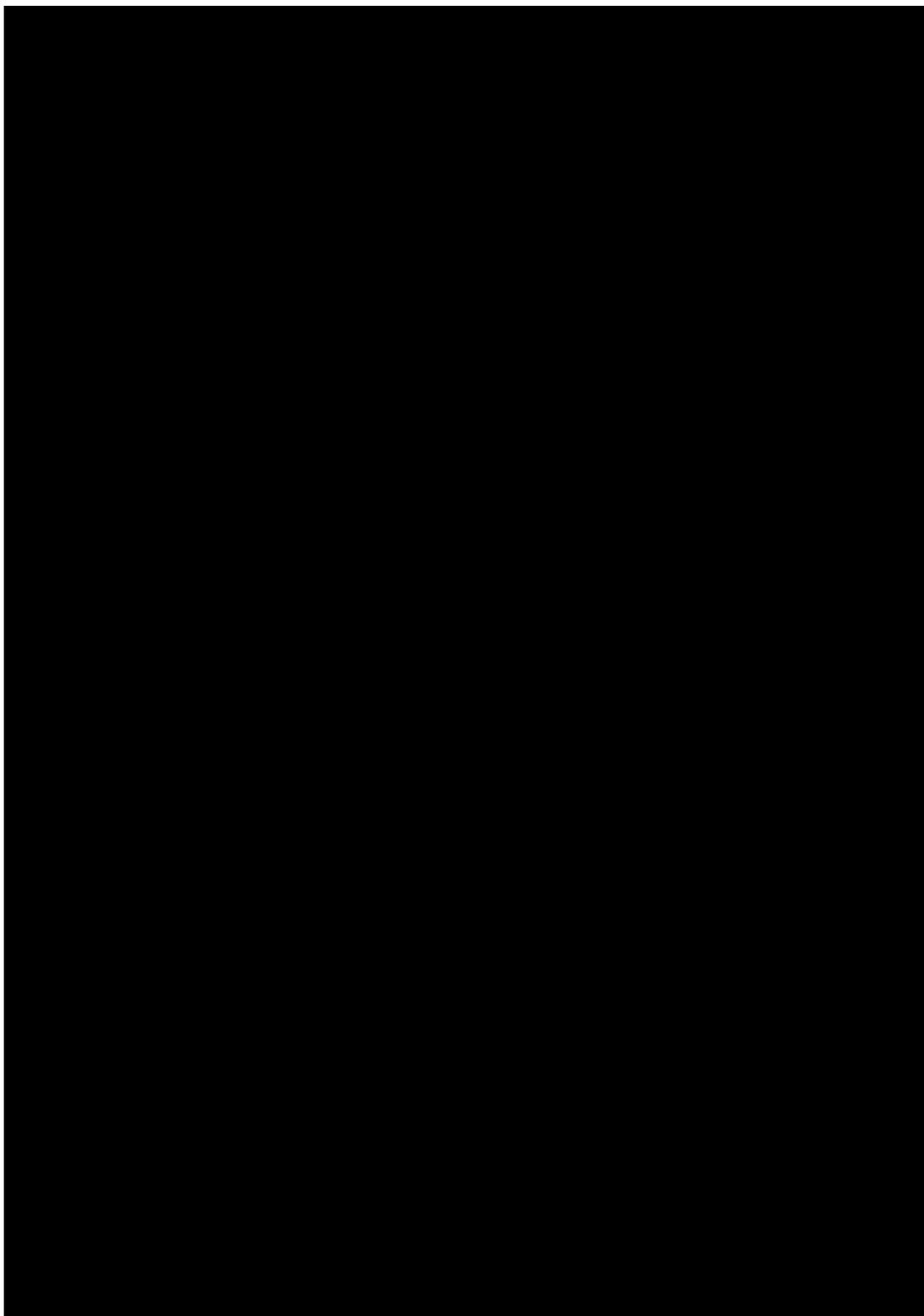
Posters advertised his lectures (see Figure 7) as a discussion of socialism and the war. Promoted as family affairs, his antiwar speeches focused on demonstrating that socialism was concerned with the preservation of life. In contrast, war destroys life. The poster implies war meant capitalism, through its positioning opposite socialism. Furthermore, the image of Seidel used for the poster shows him gazing toward the future, and, in this case, war.

The constant struggle between the socialists and anti-socialists characterized the wartime era of Milwaukee politics. Victor Berger and Daniel Hoan bore the brunt of the animosity, but Seidel's comment on this period best demonstrates the pervasive mood among Wisconsinites. He states, "Sometimes the path of duty is not a smooth road without boulders or pitfalls."<sup>187</sup>

---

<sup>186</sup> Seidel, "Document No. 27."

<sup>187</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part III*, 178-187.



**Figure 7 Unknown, *Come to Hear Emil Seidel*, History of Socialism Visual Materials, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin**

*After World War I*

Following World War I, Seidel no longer viewed socialism as imminent, but rather as a slowly developing evolution. He never gave up on socialism, but he did temper his expectations. While writing his memoirs, Seidel did not speak of socialism as specifically as he did in his speeches and writings during the 1910s. After World War I, Seidel thought of Milwaukee Socialism as “experiment with a sort of democracy of its own.”<sup>188</sup> Through this statement, he suggests that socialism’s origin in Milwaukee government was similar to the birth of a new form of democracy.

Emil Seidel’s actions and writings toward the end of his career in politics show a conflict between his former idealistic view of socialism and a growing realism about socialism’s place in politics. Upon his return as an alderman in Milwaukee, the former mayor experienced severe dissension within the party. Reflecting on these years, he states, “My last four years as alderman [were] the hardest of my public life.”<sup>189</sup> As some of the younger socialist aldermen pushed for strict adherence to socialist dogma, Seidel watched his beloved party lose members and seats on the council.

Seidel’s reflection on the internal arguments and their negative impact on the party displays his increasingly realistic view of the Social Democrats’ future. He states, “Sitting through those internal quarrels and seeing the movement for which we had worked so hard being wrecked is what hurt us old-timers—Strehlow, Dietz, Baumann, me and others more than words can tell. And how I warned them! But such are the chances of political movements.”<sup>190</sup> Additionally, once he retired, Seidel showed regrets about not compromising more. He states, “My term as mayor might have accomplished

---

<sup>188</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part III*, 240.

<sup>189</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part III*, 220.

<sup>190</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part III*, 221.

more if we had been a little more patient with some of our enemies. We should have reasoned with them and they might have been converted.”<sup>191</sup>

The poetry within his autobiography further demonstrates Seidel’s changed views of socialism. Although Seidel wrote poetry throughout his life, he included only a handful of original works in his memoirs. The majority of these appear in the final chapters, as he discusses life following World War I. Some only allude to his personal despair over the reality of socialism, although two specifically reflect his feelings.

His poem titled “Exploitation” is the first example. In it Seidel explores the role of the “Machine of Exploitation.” The entire poem appeared as another labor struggle poem, until the final stanza. In the final stanza, Seidel shows his interpretation of his final role in life. He writes:

I too, like you, did never shirk  
 When there was work to do;  
 Now that I’m spent, can no more work,  
 I’m cast away like you.<sup>192</sup>

The other poem is entirely about his frustration with socialism. It is simply titled “Frustration” and reads:

Garden of wasted dreams  
 Where grow the heartache flowers  
 Of plans that failed  
 And weeds of errors committed  
 Where souls writhe in agony  
 Each soul finds its Gethsemane  
 Where it and it alone must enter<sup>193</sup>

---

<sup>191</sup> Kerstein, *All-American Mayor*, 71.

<sup>192</sup> Emil Seidel, “Exploitation,” undated in *Autobiography Part III*, 251.

<sup>193</sup> Emil Seidel, “Frustration,” undated in *Autobiography Part III*, 253.

According to these poems, Seidel viewed the failure of a socialist revolution as his personal “Gethsemane” or struggle with God. Furthermore, it appears that he viewed his efforts as wasted, since the poems have a very morbid tenor.

Another of his writings following World War I seemed hopeful. In the poem, written during the Great Depression, Seidel pushes for the cooperation of Milwaukee citizens with the growing number of New Deal programs. He points out the effects socialist planning had on diminishing the power of the Depression in Milwaukee, especially with regards to the health of the city (health conditions continued improving during the Great Depression in Milwaukee). Hopeful about the benefits of the New Deal programs, Seidel states, “The historian of tomorrow may find this period far more inspiring than depressing. He may call it by some other name—perhaps: Rebirth.”<sup>194</sup> Although similar to his prewar rhetoric, Seidel’s writing no longer mentioned socialism or a natural evolution.

### *The Final Years*

During his later years in Milwaukee politics, Seidel joined a group dedicated to building a cooperative of one hundred homes called Garden Homes.<sup>195</sup> Garden Homes provided ample access to open spaces. One critic noted, “Two acres were wasted on a neighborhood park for the use of all.”<sup>196</sup> Rather than the modern idea of public housing

---

<sup>194</sup> Emil Seidel, “Milwaukee Today and Tomorrow,” *Emil Seidel Papers*, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1.

<sup>195</sup> Interestingly, when Seidel and his socialist administration initially planned to create public housing for working-class citizens in 1910, Thomas Edison contacted the administration. According to Rosalind Margaret Drosen, “Thomas A. Edison was enthusiastic about the plan when he was interviewed by Walter T. Mills, who was on a year’s tour of the world for Milwaukee Socialists to collect data on municipal improvements. Edison said he was willing to provide the city his concrete house inventions free.” Drosen, “History of Socialism,” 10-11.

<sup>196</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part III*, 222.

consisting of minimum standards, Garden Homes were based, “on standards equal or better than those guiding private builders.”<sup>197</sup>

As the first example of public housing or cooperative housing in the United States, Garden Homes addressed the growing housing shortage in Milwaukee. Through efficiency of design, Garden Homes created affordable, attractive homes. Families who invested in the cooperative “could save as much as \$1,500 on the cost of their homes,” an average of 32% to 35% savings over the typical cost of a home.<sup>198</sup>

Public recreation formed the central idea for the development of Garden Homes. While the lot sizes could have been larger, the needs of the collective were placed ahead of personal property size. The inclusion of a common space or park within the community took inspiration from the early European tradition of a common square, as it maintained its public ownership. In other words, unlike other European housing developments that contained private parks, the Garden Homes’ park was open recreational space for all.<sup>199</sup>

In his final years, Emil Seidel continued his fight for a new society. In December of 1939, the Social Democracy celebrated Seidel’s seventy-fifth birthday with a massive gathering of socialists. For many of the attendees, this celebration would be the last time they would gather with friends and share the stories of the struggle for a new society.

In attendance were such dignitaries of the old guard as Charles Whitnall, Carl Dietz, Henry Ohl, Jr., Meta Berger, George Hampel, Andrew Biemiller, Al Benson, and George Messing. Along with the older generation were the new rising members of the

---

<sup>197</sup> Wayne Attoe and Mark Latus, “The First Public Housing: Sewer Socialism’s Garden City for Milwaukee,” *Journal of Popular Culture*, X (Summer, 1976): 142.

<sup>198</sup> Attoe and Latus, 142-143.

<sup>199</sup> Attoe and Latus, 142-149.

party such as Frank Zeidler. People like Carl Sandburg, Frederick Heath, and Charles Boyd sent and read messages from across the world. With such an outpouring of recognition, Seidel could not “muster sufficient calm” to read a speech he had written, and he instead sent it to three hundred members in the following weeks.<sup>200</sup>

Seidel’s speech discounts the idea that socialism and the dream of a new society were dead. Rather than dead, the idea and dream were just different. Seidel continues by instructing his readers to look backward. Forty years prior, child labor was a major ill; now with its destruction “even many capitalists see the light.” Sixty years ago, the education system was broken; now it is fixed. Fifty years ago there was no place for recreation; “now we have the best recreational system in our country.” Forty years ago, the infant and child mortality rates were climbing; now public health has given Milwaukee the lowest rates in the United States. In his concluding remarks, Seidel summarizes his entire legacy, stating:

We’re on the Move—from long hours to few hours a day; from seven days to four days a week; from plague and death to health and life; from strife and warfare to world cooperation, world peace and the International Social Democracy.<sup>201</sup>

Near his eighty-first birthday, Seidel made some of his last remarks on his new society within his autobiography, stating:

I want to see a new world created. It must grow out of the old according to its strength and ability, free from the slag and shackles of capitalism. This new world requires new institutions—schools, playgrounds, workshops. . .When we play we learn; when we learn we work; when we work we play. . .When we learn to translate our power into life, living and better living we shall be on the way to the new world.<sup>202</sup>

---

<sup>200</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part III*, 231.

<sup>201</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part III*, 231-236.

<sup>202</sup> Seidel, *Autobiography Part III*, 259.

### *Conclusion*

World War I significantly altered Emil Seidel's understanding of socialism. Throughout his life and political career prior to the war, Seidel believed that history and evolution demanded a socialist revolution in the near future. His term as mayor combined pragmatic measures with a firm belief in preparation for an imminent complete transition to socialism. Following World War I, however, Seidel questioned both the timetable for a revolution and the role of pragmatism and cooperation. His final years as an alderman, from 1932 to 1936, were his most difficult since he struggled with his own ideology. As his personal struggles with these issues grew, he withdrew from public life in 1936 but never gave up on the idea of socialism. According to Kerstein, Seidel reflected on his career, stating, "My dream for Milwaukee has not been realized. Rarely are dreams realized anyway. But we have been moving ahead all the time, even if slowly. I have seen too much of life to be discouraged about the future."<sup>203</sup>

Furthermore, the militancy of younger members of the Socialist Party infuriated Seidel following World War I. This increasing frustration combined with his private struggles led toward his retirement from politics. He did not give up on the dream of socialism, but rather began viewing it as a long-term goal rather than an immediate opportunity.

Unlike Victor Berger, Seidel did not actively endorse cooperation with progressives like La Follette. Nor did Seidel accept a completely pragmatic approach to socialist governance like Dan Hoan. Rather, Emil Seidel, like an elder statesman, gracefully withdrew from a role in politics. He rarely spoke of his personal struggles after World War I, preferring to write about them in his memoirs. Seidel never allowed

---

<sup>203</sup> Kerstein, *All-American Mayor*, 68.

the public to see his internal dilemma as he continued to be a staunch supporter of socialist politics in his final years.

## CHAPTER THREE: DANIEL W. HOAN

### *Introduction*

Daniel Hoan approached socialism differently than Victor Berger. While Berger attained his national image through his strict socialist rhetoric in Congress, Hoan's popularity derived from his struggle for the common good of the citizenry. Throughout his administration as mayor of Milwaukee, Hoan stressed the need for a gradual transition to socialism, rather than the drastic immediate changes others supported.

The foundations for Hoan's socialism came from his education and early career as a labor lawyer and city attorney. During the early years of his administration, Hoan addressed the needs of the people alongside a traditional socialist ideology. With the U.S. entry into World War I, however, Hoan broke from the national party to focus on the needs of Milwaukee citizens. This separation marked a major transformation within the party and in Hoan's approach to socialism. His practice of pragmatic governance allowed him to retain office well beyond the rapid decline of socialism in Milwaukee.

### *A Radical Rising*

Daniel W. Hoan's socialist ideology, similar to Seidel's, began developing through the example of his father, Daniel Hoan, Sr. Born to Irish immigrants in Canada, Hoan, Sr., settled in Waukesha following his limited service in the Civil War. Through various labor jobs, Hoan, Sr., saved enough money to purchase a horse-drawn bus line, and he began developing a series of successful businesses. Unlike most citizens of

Waukesha, Hoan, Sr., did not follow the German Republicans who controlled political life in the town. Rather, his political activities would brand him the “town radical.”<sup>204</sup>

The influence of his father introduced Hoan to the ideas of various political theories, including those of Edward Bellamy. Daniel Hoan, Sr., “was the Waukesha agent for the sale of Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* when that famous utopia appeared.”<sup>205</sup> Ironically, since Bellamy despised anarchists, the first radical whom the younger Hoan met was Albert Parsons, the radical anarchist and a participant in the Haymarket Affair in 1886. Since Hoan, Sr., was the only subscriber to *The Alarm*, Albert Parson’s newspaper, in Waukesha, Parson decided his home would be a safe place to hide out following the bombing in Chicago. Parson decided to hand himself over to the authorities after staying more than six weeks. Soon after, he would be tried and executed as one of the “Haymarket Martyrs.” Even at a young age, Daniel Hoan had an exposure to radical causes.<sup>206</sup>

Daniel Hoan, Sr.’s, powerful shaping of his son’s political ideology ended upon his sudden death in the spring of 1894, during Daniel Hoan, Jr.’s, elementary education. Later in his life, Hoan remarked on the impact his father had on him. He states, “My father’s death marked a turning point in my career. He had exerted a great influence over me; he had impressed on my mind the necessity of always being truthful, of striving to do right and of never neglecting my duty.”<sup>207</sup> Hoan decided to go to work in order to support his family, and he worked in various kitchens and hotels throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. As his political ideology continuously developed

---

<sup>204</sup> Robert C. Reinders, “The Early Career of Daniel W. Hoan: A Study of Socialism in the Progressive Era,” M.A. Thesis, University of Notre Dame, 1948, 1-3.

<sup>205</sup> Reinders, “Daniel W. Hoan,” 3-4.

<sup>206</sup> Reinders, “Daniel W. Hoan,” 3-6.

<sup>207</sup> Kerstein, *All-American Mayor*, 12.

through these years, Hoan eventually decided to join the newly formed Social Democracy of America at the turn of the twentieth century. At the same time, Hoan decided to enroll with the University of Wisconsin to study law in the fall of 1901.<sup>208</sup>

The University of Wisconsin at the dawn of the twentieth century was a cauldron of radicalism, and Hoan flourished on the campus. As a socialist convert, Hoan organized a campus society, much to the dismay of the campus officials who believed the progressive movement would eliminate socialism. During one Christmas break, Hoan requested that the dean grant him additional time off to work on a congressional campaign, that of Victor Berger. Despite the dean's disapproval of Hoan's politics, he granted the request.<sup>209</sup>

Hoan engaged in the rest of university life, including making attempts to join the debate team. Although these attempts failed, "In his freshman year he entered the declamation contest, his speech on Toussaint Louverture being adjudged one of the four best in the preliminary contest."<sup>210</sup> Toward the end of his years in Madison, Hoan continued to rise in reputation among the academics at Wisconsin. Hoan received two high honors to end his term at the University of Wisconsin as he was elected president of his class and was invited to give the welcoming address at his commencement exercises in 1905.<sup>211</sup>

---

<sup>208</sup> Reinders, "Daniel W. Hoan," 5-9.

<sup>209</sup> Kerstein, *All-American Mayor*, 15.

<sup>210</sup> Reinders, "Daniel W. Hoan," 9-10.

<sup>211</sup> Reinders, "Daniel W. Hoan," 10-14.

*Entering Milwaukee*

Following graduation, Hoan left Wisconsin to open a small business in Chicago and continue his law training. According to an interview with Hoan in 1948, “In 1908, Victor Berger and Frederick Heath, Milwaukee Socialists whom Hoan had met earlier, came to Chicago and invited Hoan to Milwaukee as the official attorney for the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor.”<sup>212</sup> Soon after agreeing to work for the Federation, Hoan married Agnes Magner on October 5, 1909.<sup>213</sup>

Hoan’s reputation as an attorney quickly grew as he worked on the first workmen’s compensation legislation in the United States. As he struggled with state legislators, Hoan made sure the legislators knew the issue was not merely a socialist matter. He stated to an oversight committee that “the question of insurance is one in which the employers, manufacturers, and workingmen...can work on a common ground, and meet on a common basis...it is a problem in which they are mutually interested.”<sup>214</sup>

Through this struggle for workmen’s compensation, Hoan began showing his political ideology. Hoan, much to the dismay of many socialists, strongly urged a gradual approach rather than demanding a quick, all-encompassing solution. Regarding this legislation, Hoan “envisioned the law, not as a complete innovation, but as ‘an entering wedge,’ to educate ‘the masses to the plan so they will undoubtedly demand a universal system.’”<sup>215</sup>

Following a short career as the attorney for the Federation of Labor, Hoan reluctantly accepted the Socialist nomination for city attorney in 1910. Hoan

---

<sup>212</sup> Reinders, “Daniel W. Hoan,” 16.

<sup>213</sup> Agnes’s religion would at times be used to bolster Catholic support among the south-side Polish of Milwaukee during Hoan’s career in office.

<sup>214</sup> Reinders, “Daniel W. Hoan,” 21.

<sup>215</sup> Reinders, “Daniel W. Hoan,” 22.

immediately rose to the high ranks of Milwaukee Socialists with his inclusion on the platform committee. The committee included most of the major leaders of the party, such as Berger, Whitnall, Rummel, and Gaylord.<sup>216</sup> The official platform for the 1910 election included a variety of ideas such as public ownership of utilities, a municipal harbor, icehouse, slaughterhouse, quarry, coal yard, market place, urban planning and beautification, expansion of public education, and equitable municipal wages.<sup>217</sup>

With the entire Socialist ticket swept into office in 1910, Hoan began his long career serving Milwaukee citizens. Hoan's term as city attorney was marred by a constant battle between the socialist government and the city's railway system. The war between streetcars and Daniel Hoan placed undue strains on his staff and limited his ability to address the growing needs of the city.<sup>218</sup> While Hoan successfully prevented reduced water rates for commercial users (such as the railways), he failed in preventing other utilities, such as the gas company, from raising their rates. Hoan worried that the cost of reduced commercial rates would simply be passed on to residential user. All of the mounting failures perturbed Hoan, who blamed the lack of home rule.<sup>219</sup>

The failure of regulation commissions to represent the interests of Milwaukee citizens rather than those of businesses further proved, in Hoan's mind, the need for public ownership as a solution. Hoan stated that "'Socialism is the only remedy.' For Socialism would complete the final democratization of industry it would mean the

---

<sup>216</sup> Interestingly, the party decided to leave Emil Seidel, its mayoral candidate, off the committee for unknown reasons.

<sup>217</sup> Reinders, "Daniel W. Hoan," 39.

<sup>218</sup> Reinders, "Daniel W. Hoan," 52-82.

<sup>219</sup> Reinders, "Daniel W. Hoan," 40-87.

ownership of the trusts by the people directly, leading to the material and social equality of the cooperative commonwealth.”<sup>220</sup>

Hoan wanted to publicly discuss his views of the failures regulation forced upon the citizens of Milwaukee and began writing his first major work, *The Failure of Regulation*. Hoan asked for the advice of C.B. Whitnall regarding the distribution of his work. Whitnall suggested he “introduce your writing to the public through a magazine . . . the non-socialists, with the usual amount of prejudice, is the one we most desire to affect. Such people will take it home under cover of a magazine and study it as a problem, independent of, and without party prejudice.”<sup>221</sup> Furthermore, Whitnall warned against using only political dissemination for Hoan’s ideas as they would then only reach those who already held similar views.

Hoan debated this issue over a long period. Beginning in 1913, he attempted to solve the issue of addressing regulation by contacting Carl Thompson. In this letter, Hoan states:

Thirdly, I have made very little reference to the working class or made use of Socialist phrases. My idea was that the material should be written with the idea of getting in into the hands of persons who are not Socialists and convincing them that regulation is impossible. I would like to hear from you, however as to whether or not the general tone ought to be modified. Since no doubt the pamphlet will be used to furnish arguments to Socialists, it has been a puzzling problem.<sup>222</sup>

Even at the early stages of his political career, Hoan recognized the need to convince non-socialists of the benefits of socialist governance. Throughout his time in Milwaukee politics, he would present socialist ideology as benefiting the citizenry’s common good.

---

<sup>220</sup> Reinders, “Daniel W. Hoan,” 88.

<sup>221</sup> Letter from C.B. Whitnall to D.W. Hoan, November 20, 1913, Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

<sup>222</sup> Letter from D.W. Hoan to Carl Thompson, October 25, 1913, Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

In 1914, Hoan published his findings regarding regulation in *The Failure of Regulation* and (according to several letters within his personal collection) could barely keep enough copies of it to supply its demand. In his investigation, Hoan concluded that the trust regulation attempted by progressives led to disastrous results. While the government attempted to fine trusts for violations of the regulation, the trusts in turn merely manipulated prices to recover the amount fined.<sup>223</sup>

Hoan continued examining the results of regulation throughout Europe and in Wisconsin. He concluded that there were eight reasons for its failure. First, leaving public utilities in the private hands had no history of success prior to its attempt in the United States. Second, the system of regulation, without exception, consistently changed and never once was given enough time in one form to run its course.

A third reason for the failure of regulation was its own inefficiency. Each trust managed itself; but regulation required that a separate commission also be maintained for each trust. The mere cost of operating the necessary number of regulation commissions on the shoulders of the taxpayers was bound to be a failure due to the limitations on possible funding. The fourth reason for failure revolved around the lack of truth within corporate dealings. Regulation depended for success on public disclosure of industrial operating procedures.

The amount of time required for regulation commissions to meet, review the trusts, decide on appropriate actions, and thereby make a decision was extensive, and the fifth reason for their failure. Even if the regulatory commission decided to superficially reduce the public rates, the corporate trusts would conceive of a method to maintain similar profit margins. This method typically resulted in decreased quality of service,

---

<sup>223</sup> D.W. Hoan, *The Failure of Regulation* (Chicago: The Socialist Party of the United States, 1914), 1-12.

and was the sixth reason for failure. According to Hoan, the seventh reason was “that the commissions realize that if they should put the rates down where they ought to be, and then required the service to be kept up to a good standard, not another dollar would ever be invested in public service corporations by large capitalists.”<sup>224</sup>

The final reason for failure revolved around the manipulation of the commissioners themselves. Since the corporations refused to accept regulation, they simply attempted to manipulate the commissioners through graft, forcibly influencing appointments, or strong-arming the press. The availability for bribery and graft would promote itself from the corporate interests, and doom regulation to failure. With the possibility of graft and the impossibility of regulation, the only possible remaining option is to publically own the trusts.<sup>225</sup>

Although Hoan did not successfully achieve many of his original goals as city attorney, he based his 1912 reelection campaign on his many struggles on behalf of Milwaukee’s citizens. Throughout the campaign, Hoan highlighted these struggles in his campaign literature. One such document contains an impressive laundry list of his accomplishments during his first two years in office.<sup>226</sup> It states:

*What No Other City Attorney Can Claim*

1. He has won every important city case. 2. He has compelled the street car company to pave and sprinkle its own track zone, clean its cars, and obey the law. 3. He has licked every big law firm in Milwaukee. 4. He has won the municipal electric light case. 5. By enforcing the smoke, weights, and measures, and other ordinances he has brought in money enough to pay all expenses and salaries of his department. 6. He has won track elevation cases—the south side case

---

<sup>224</sup> Hoan, *Failure of Regulation*, 78.

<sup>225</sup> Hoan, *Failure of Regulation*, 72-83.

<sup>226</sup> Oddly most of Hoan’s campaign speeches contained a numbered list

alone will give Milwaukee a \$3,000,000 improvement with scarcely any expense to the city.<sup>227</sup>

Hoan's statement of success highlighted his strong belief in a gradual transition to a socialist society. Hoan believed in efficient and effective municipal government, as demonstrated by points four and five of his campaign literature. Furthermore, he noted the importance of municipally owned utilities. Hoan's 1912 campaign overwhelmingly succeeded, unlike the rest of the socialist ticket, as he garnered more than 5,000 non-socialists' votes. According to most newspaper reports, this was an effect of his nonpartisan approach to his office. His following two years of service as city attorney passed with similar success.

### *Municipal Governance*

When he was nominated for the first time as the socialist mayoral candidate in 1916, Hoan continued the themes of his previous campaigns. Hoan presented himself as a politician who worked for the people and not special interest groups, and he continued his argument for home rule. He continued to demonstrate his populist appeal and earned more votes than any other socialist candidate, easily defeating his opponents. The second socialist mayor of Milwaukee quickly promised "a better, bigger, and brighter Milwaukee" and continued his struggle for municipal ownership of several industries in Milwaukee.<sup>228</sup>

As mayor of Milwaukee, Hoan finally professed his own political ideology freely, and he often presented his ideas through his many speeches. Within these speeches,

---

<sup>227</sup> Daniel W. Hoan, "What No Other City Attorney Can Claim," Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

<sup>228</sup> Reinders, "Daniel W. Hoan," 102-115.

Hoan subscribed to many socialist beliefs about transforming the nineteenth-century government into a state closer to that envisioned by Bellamy. Soon after his election, Hoan addressed a group of socialists at The Auditorium in Minneapolis on October 29, 1916. He praised the citizens of Milwaukee for returning a socialist to the mayor's office. Hoan attributed his electoral victory to the recognition by Milwaukee citizens that a socialist administration was honest and efficient. Furthermore, Hoan stated, "I shall leave you to judge if this number of citizens, being a majority of the voters, after having listened to every political chicanery which can be conceived by the human mind, whether these 32,000 people have gone clean crazy or whether they are fully cognizant of the deceit of the fakery employed by the discredited [*sic*] politicians."<sup>229</sup>

Continuing the theme of governmental efficiency, Hoan demonstrated that the savings incurred by better business practices, such as an efficient budget and an inventory of public property, allowed Milwaukee to eliminate its deficit and debt. The elimination of municipal debt, according to Hoan, increased the credit rating of the city and allowed Milwaukee to sell bonds at a premium. Not only did the increase in credit encourage people to bid on bonds, it also allowed Milwaukeeans to invest in their city by providing for public purchase of bonds. Running an efficient government facilitated all of these improvements. In this regard, Hoan stated, "My friends, if a man wants to invest his money in a city and you have a good, clean, honest government, he would rather own his home in a city like that, than in a city where there are all kinds of rings, of street car companies and other public utilities, running the city."<sup>230</sup>

---

<sup>229</sup> Daniel W. Hoan, "Speech of Mayor Daniel W. Hoan of Milwaukee, Sunday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1916," Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1-2.

<sup>230</sup> Hoan, "Speech, October 29, 1916," 2-7.

Hoan argued that as socialists continued demonstrating the benefits of an honest and efficient government, citizens across the United States would elect them to office. Only when this happened would the public ownership of utilities and other major industries become a viable possibility for the entire nation. Finally, Hoan stated, once public ownership went into effect, the money brought in and saved through these businesses would reduce the tax burden on every citizen. This final point indicated a Bellamy style of interdependency: what is good for the citizen is good for the government and vice versa.<sup>231</sup> Edward Bellamy suggested interdependency throughout *Looking Backward*; however, his description of shared goals best demonstrates the concept. He states, “The field of industry was a battlefield as wide as the world, in which the workers wasted, in assailing on another, energies which, if expended in concerted effort, as to-day, would have enriched all.”<sup>232</sup>

The success of Milwaukee was another theme Hoan often presented in his speeches. On one occasion, Hoan demonstrated that despite the attempted blocking of several pieces of municipal legislation by non-socialists who controlled the common council, public demand enabled his administration to achieve the following items: a municipally owned lighting system, a municipal power plant, a municipal harbor project, city planning, and the organization of city beautification and safety commissions. The Wisconsin legislature’s denial of home rule prevented Hoan’s municipalization of utility corporations. Regarding this issue, he stated, “I have fought for home rule and charter

---

<sup>231</sup> Hoan, “Speech, October 29, 1916,” 2-9.

<sup>232</sup> Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1967), 245.

reform to the end that the city might be permitted to own and operate the revenue producing public utilities.”<sup>233</sup>

Hoan addressed the need for removal of international competition in a Labor Day speech on September 3, 1917. He argued against the endgame strategy behind World War I. Rather he discussed the only solution to international warfare, the cooperative commonwealth. In introducing this idea, Hoan stated, “I have faith that the producers of wealth who alone have the interest, vitality and determination to put an end to capitalistic oppression and wage slavery, will triumphantly march along the road of human progress which will found society upon the principles of human liberty and the rights of man—the cooperative commonwealth.”<sup>234</sup>

The principal foundation of war, according to Hoan, was the misappropriation of product by factory owners, to the detriment of the laborers. According to Hoan, the former “divides the product in the wage, keeping the lions share for himself.” As the wage-earner cannot purchase back all of the product, due to the limitations of his or her wage, the surplus must be sold internationally. The export of the product introduces the competitive market between nations’ surpluses and eventually leads to war. This cycle of overproduction and international conflict, according to Hoan, would continue until the overproduction ended.<sup>235</sup>

To solve this problem, Hoan proposed a plan. As he stated, “You propose abolish [*sic*] war by destroying its cause, namely, ending commercial rivalry among nations by beheading capitalism. Your plan calls for furnishing a market at home instead of markets

---

<sup>233</sup> Daniel W. Hoan, untitled speech from 1917, Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1-3.

<sup>234</sup> Daniel W. Hoan, “The Goal of Labor, an American Ideal,” speech delivered at Pabst Park, September 3, 1917, Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2.

<sup>235</sup> Hoan, “The Goal of Labor,” 3.

abroad for the products you produce . . . if the workers receive in wage the full product of their toil, they can purchase back the efforts of their labor. Then the struggle for foreign markets will cease.”<sup>236</sup> Hoan suggested the need for laborers to earn wages equivalent to the value of the products they produce. Furthermore, through this system the problems of overproduction would cease.

As anti-capitalistic rhetoric characterized socialists of Hoan’s era, many argued for a violent revolution. Unlike the revolutionary faction of the Socialist party, Hoan argued for a very gradual, peaceful transition. Hoan stated, “To accomplish this you plan peaceful means to take from private ends the means of exploitation and make them the property of the people.” Hoan also introduced religious tones into his rhetoric and argued such a plan was truly based within Christian ideals. In this regard, Hoan stated, “Even the Prince of Peace proclaims the coming of the brotherhood of man when swords shall be beaten in to [*sic*] ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks; when nation will declare war upon nation no more.”<sup>237</sup>

Although some socialists believed in a national revolution, many feared these plans would drive people away from the party. Though he was not a socialist, Edward Bellamy stressed the importance of a gradual transition between capitalism and his cooperative commonwealth. In doing so, he argued against a revolution that overthrew the government of the United States. Rather, he wished the American people would finally uphold their professed creed. In similar fashion, Hoan emphasized the need to uphold the ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. In an effort

---

<sup>236</sup> Hoan, “The Goal of Labor,” 4.

<sup>237</sup> Hoan, “The Goal of Labor,” 5.

to emphasize this point and to counter the anti-patriotic assaults thrown at him, Hoan noted:

While we hold that no democracy can exist until we have economic democracy, still we love our country from the bottom of our hearts. We love it as a mother does her child. We strive to make it just, to do good, to practice brotherhood, to love its sons and its daughters. We are proud of our bill of rights.<sup>238</sup>

Hoan's admiration of the American idealism and the socialists' adherence to this idealism continued to build through the conclusion of his speech. In a final attempt to connect his ideology with traditional icons of U.S. democracy, Hoan quoted Abraham Lincoln's personal philosophy and claimed Lincoln was the "personification" of the American ideology. Lincoln stated:

Whereas, God Almighty has given to every man one mouth to be fed and one pair of hands adapted to furnish food for that mouth, if anything can be proved to be the will of heaven it is proved by this fact that that mouth is to be feed by those hands, without being interfered with by any other man who has also his mouth to feed and his hands to labor with. I hold, if the Almighty had ever made a set of men that should do all the eating and none of the work, He would have made them with mouths only and no hands, and if He had made another class that He intended should do all the work and none of the eating He would have made them without mouths and with all hands.<sup>239</sup>

Hoan's socialist ideology went beyond his speeches, demonstrated through an analysis of his personal correspondence and his administration's efforts on behalf of its citizenry. In his annual review of 1918, Hoan argued for more municipal ownership within the city, since the efficiency of the city could easily reduce the operating expense of transportation and power plants, while increasing its revenues. Through this system, Hoan developed a successful market of staple goods during World War I. The efficiency

---

<sup>238</sup> Hoan, "The Goal of Labor," 6.

<sup>239</sup> Hoan, "The Goal of Labor," 7.

of this market proved “waste can be eliminated and prices can be kept at a fair level by having facilities to do public marketing.”<sup>240</sup>

Hoan’s devoted adherence to municipal ownership involved more than following socialist dogma. He continuously researched the effects of municipal ownership during his twenty-four years in the mayor’s office. Through many form letters, Hoan contacted the mayors of towns listed as tax-free communities. Within these letters, Hoan asked about the nature of municipal ownership; net earnings from utilities, school tax structure, and rate schedules. With this information, Hoan defended his statements in favor of municipal ownership.<sup>241</sup>

Throughout Hoan’s tenure in office, his administration attempted to execute the socialist platform, and included civic-minded programs such as the City Beautiful Committee, civic concerts, public housing, and projects for making Milwaukee attractive for tourism. Organized in 1916, the City Beautiful Committee, in conjunction with the parks system, created a beautification plan incorporating equal access to open spaces and beautiful places. The committee furthered the ideology of interdependency and the cooperative commonwealth through its use of the Boy Scouts in 1916 as the sellers of several different plants to local business. In a letter to one such business owner, Hoan “recommended a plan of beautifying some of our business streets by which the property owners would be induced to place flowers, either in hanging flower pots or hang flower

---

<sup>240</sup> Hoan, “Annual Review of the Year, 1918,” Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 4.

<sup>241</sup> Letter from H.W. Hoan to Mayor Mangum, March 7, 1936, Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin..

boxes on the sides of their buildings or on street posts.”<sup>242</sup> The City Beautiful Committee also “reduced the number of unsightly billboards on the city’s main thoroughfare.”<sup>243</sup>

Hoan provided public musical concerts in the city parks during the summers of his administration. Hoan’s administration also promoted the broadcast of music over the radio, providing equal access to the performing arts for the Milwaukee citizenry. In 1923, the Society of Authors, Composers and Publishers began litigation against all Milwaukee broadcast stations for broadcasting copyrighted music. In a demonstration of his dedication to the public good, Hoan entered the fight, unsuccessfully defending Milwaukee broadcasters’ rights.<sup>244</sup>

In the spring of 1919, Daniel Hoan and the city of Milwaukee implemented another socialist ideal, public housing. The Garden Homes project (previously discussed in regard to Seidel’s involvement) resulted from the recommendations of the Housing Commission and the Building Inspector. The commission’s wholesale purchasing strategy of obtaining large quantities of land and materials to build the homes made the homes affordable. Furthermore, the construction of numerous homes at once allowed for a reduction in cost. These savings were passed on to the investors, with the following results: “The home owner secures a house with a garden, plenty of fresh air, a house well built and beautiful, one in which he can take pride. He lives in a community where all are equally desirous of keeping up the property.”<sup>245</sup>

---

<sup>242</sup> Daniel W. Hoan, Letter from Hoan to Clifton Williams, March 14, 1917, Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

<sup>243</sup> Reinders, “Daniel W. Hoan,” 133.

<sup>244</sup> Daniel W. Hoan, “Civic Concerts,” Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

<sup>245</sup> Daniel W. Hoan, “The Milwaukee Plan,” Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Hoan referred to the public housing as the “Milwaukee Plan” and believed the success of Garden Homes provided a formula for other municipalities to follow regarding public housing. Unlike the dismal housing provided by other major cities, Garden Homes showed that for relatively little cost public housing could provide an equal access to quality homes. Hoan states, “The cooperative ownership, erection and administration of healthful homes for the people without private profit that has been demonstrated by this Milwaukee Plan, is capable and deserving of wide publication throughout the United States.” The “Milwaukee Plan” represented another step toward the cooperative commonwealth, according to Hoan.<sup>246</sup>

The execution of civic-minded projects was not limited to beautification, music, and housing. Hoan continuously developed the tourist market within Milwaukee. In 1917, he proclaimed Milwaukee the “greatest convention city in the United States,” with over 125 conventions. Two years later, the number of conventions held in Milwaukee increased to “30 more conventions than before.”<sup>247</sup> Furthermore, Hoan’s administration introduced a bread ordinance in 1916 to ensure the sale of bread by weight, not loaf. Also in 1916, the city installed temporary bathing booths, curbing demand during the summer as an “indication of efficient public service.”<sup>248</sup> A successful ballot referendum in 1918 ensured continued municipal efficiency by extending the mayoral term of office to four years.

---

<sup>246</sup> Hoan, “The Milwaukee Plan,” 3.

<sup>247</sup> Hoan, untitled speech from 1917; Hoan, “Achievements in 1919,” Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

<sup>248</sup> Daniel W. Hoan, “Progress of Socialists in Office Since April 1916,” Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

*World War I*

World War I transformed a growing rift within the national socialist party into deep divide. According to Reinders, “Adherence to the Marxian concept of modern war as a capitalistic institution drove the American Socialist party like lemmings to the sea of self destruction.”<sup>249</sup> For Daniel W. Hoan, World War I precipitated a personal ideological struggle, between party politics and his belief in the common good. Hoan attempted to maintain control over his administration while being simultaneously attacked by socialist party leaders, such as Victor Berger, and those on the political right within Milwaukee. The resulting situation provided Hoan with more political power and respect from Milwaukee citizens, because he maintained a more pragmatic approach to governance.

Immediately upon his election in 1916, Hoan faced demands for a Milwaukee preparedness parade as part of the re-armament of the United States. Hoan, understandably, took issue with the idea of supporting the enlargement of a standing army in the United States. In response to growing demands, Hoan wrote W. Rufus Abbott regarding the use of Hoan’s name in supporting preparedness parades around the country. He expressed his concern that the idea of preparedness could promote the notion “that the American People are in favor of militarism and a huge standing army.”<sup>250</sup>

Hoan stressed the importance of identifying a proper definition of what “preparedness” meant. If preparedness meant a strengthening of democracy and an opposition to imperialism, Hoan would agree to support these parades. Finally, Hoan required a list of concessions: “Improvement of the conditions of the masses; government

---

<sup>249</sup> Reinders, “Daniel W. Hoan,” 150.

<sup>250</sup> Letter from D.W. Hoan to W. Rufus Abbott, May 19, 1916, Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

ownership of munition plants and the principle of any organized and prepared citizenship as against a large standing army.”<sup>251</sup> If these demands were met, Hoan would agree to the use of his name in promotion of preparedness parades.

As Hoan continued discussing his reservations with others, the leader of a Milwaukee preparedness parade, M.C. Potter, asked Hoan to participate in the planning for a parade. Potter convinced Hoan with the stipulation the event be called a “National Civic Demonstration.” Furthermore, Hoan viewed the parade as “a demonstration of single hearted national consciousness.”<sup>252</sup>

Hoan’s participation in the parade opened a Pandora’s box within the socialist community. After several socialist newspapers throughout the country described Hoan’s actions with disgust, Eugene Debs inquired as to the truth behind the stories. Hoan responded quickly to Debs’s inquiry by attempting to explain his personal stance on the issue. Hoan writes:

We appreciated fully just what the position was, and what the outside party members and others might think, but rather than set the party back a number of years and deny any loyalty to the American Nation whatever, it was agreed that I march. While demonstrations originating from capitalistic sources are hypocritical and more or less discusting [*sic*], I submit that careful thot [*sic*] will lead any thinking socialist to the conclusion that every socialist is imbued with a genuine patriotic spirit, and that we are devoting our lives to make this nation a better place in which the men who toil may live, as well as displaying an international patriotism. I feel that it is surely preferable, rather than scoff at the word patriotism, to seize upon it and make it a word to express our ideas and popularize our thots [*sic*].<sup>253</sup>

---

<sup>251</sup> Letter from D.W. Hoan to W. Rufus Abbott.

<sup>252</sup> Daniel W. Hoan, “Mayor’s Proclamation on July 12, 1916,” Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Letter from D.W. Hoan to M.C. Potter, July 8, 1916, Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

<sup>253</sup> Letter from D.W. Hoan to Eugene V. Debs, August 15, 1916, Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The controversy over Hoan's support of the parade continued in the following months, as others viewed his actions as merely opportunistic. In responding to one of these letters of disgust with the mayor, Hoan takes aim at the national party, stating, "It is unfortunate that so many socialists are so very quick to criticize without knowing the exact local conditions . . . the thing that the socialist movement needs more than anything else is to learn to appreciate the word tolerance." Hoan begins the letter by again explaining that the parade was not a preparedness parade, but rather a showing of national pride. In order to protect Milwaukee Germans, Hoan explains, it was important that the Milwaukee Socialists' devotion to the country be made explicit. For Hoan, it was important to note, "Inasmuch as the socialists are internationalists, we are not anti-nationalists."<sup>254</sup>

Soon after the preparedness parade debacle began dying down, Hoan received notification of an emergency socialist convention in St. Louis. Although nominated as a delegate, he declined to participate and awaited the results of the convention. The St. Louis convention in 1917 produced two reports, majority and minority, and asked the entire party to vote on a referendum. The majority report denounces the war and demands "continuous active and public opposition to the war through demonstration, mass petition, and all other means within our party." In contrast, the minority report "criticized the spirit of intolerance in the party."<sup>255</sup>

Like Seidel, Hoan immediately criticized the majority report, urging other socialists to support the minority report. In a letter to M.H. Levine responding to Levine's inquiry about Hoan's position on the majority report, Hoan states:

---

<sup>254</sup> Letter from D.W. Hoan to F.A. Tingley, November 22, 1916, Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

<sup>255</sup> Reinders, "Daniel W. Hoan," 156-157.

I desire to say that it is one which I cannot support . . . while the [minority] report which is submitted to the referendum of the party is not as strong report as it should have been, it is nevertheless preferable to the majority report. In my opinion the party lost this splendid opportunity to draw up a constructive war program, and that it missed this opportunity when it submitted a purely negative program such as the majority report.<sup>256</sup>

Unfortunately for Hoan and Seidel, most socialists voting on the referendum did not agree with them, and they adopted the majority report as the party's stance on the war effort. The defeat of his position did not deter Hoan from taking advantage of the opportunities the war provided for his ideology. Soon after the United States' declaration of war, Hoan joined with other Milwaukee political leaders in founding a defense council to address the needs of Milwaukee's war effort. Hoan viewed his chairing of the relief committee as an opportunity to enact many of the ideals of socialism through limiting "profiteering and in raising the wages of Milwaukee workers living on sub-standard incomes."<sup>257</sup> Hoan's division of the defense council established a food board to level the rising costs of staples, a labor board to solve workers issues, attempted to control the cost of coal, and engaged in other similar activities. Following the war, Hoan remarked of his efforts on the food board: "I believe I have done more to lower the high cost of living than all the congressmen put together."<sup>258</sup>

Hoan's service on the defense council disturbed many party leaders, including Victor Berger. Throughout 1917, Hoan consistently avoided discussing his work and its relationship with the St. Louis convention's outcome. Upon calling an emergency election in January of 1918 to replace the deceased eighth-district state senator, Hoan actively campaigned in support of the socialist candidate. During one of the campaign

---

<sup>256</sup> Letter from D.W. Hoan to M.H. Levine, June 20, 1917, Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

<sup>257</sup> Reinders, "Daniel W. Hoan," 159.

<sup>258</sup> Reinders, "Daniel W. Hoan," 169.

stops, Hoan was asked about his personal take on the socialist antiwar stance. He evaded the question, only to be dealt a major blow from Victor Berger the following day.

Victor Berger's editorial was highly critical of Hoan and repeated demands that all party members strictly adhere to the St. Louis platform. While some of the rhetoric is generalized, Berger makes a deliberate and sharp stab at Hoan. Berger writes:

Any man who cannot stand on that platform—any man who cannot accept our international position—be that man mayor or constable—must get out of the party in justice to himself and the party. He may—or he may not—join the patriotic sons of Judas....but a man who is not with us on the most vital question of the day cannot honestly belong to our party.<sup>259</sup>

Responding to Berger's demand for an answer, Hoan released a statement defining his position on the war. He states that he hoped for an immediate end to the war, but he admits he voted for the minority report. Hoan writes, "I found when it [the majority report] was adopted that as mayor there was not only no way of complying, but that it was impossible to obey some of its requirements and demands."<sup>260</sup> Furthermore, Hoan offered his resignation if the stance of the socialist party required it. Regarding Berger, Hoan alluded, "this party nor its public officials be privately, not to speak of publically, bossed by individuals, however high the claim to the contrary."<sup>261</sup>

Besides the intraparty dispute, Hoan also had to deal with the the defense council. Representatives from thirty-nine organizations participated in the council in some way. Though it was originally meant to provide aid for the wartime effort, Hoan viewed the

---

<sup>259</sup> Victor L. Berger, "The Party Will Stand No Wobbling," *The Milwaukee Leader*, December 28, 1917.

<sup>260</sup> D.W. Hoan, "Mayor Hoan's Statement on His Attitude Toward the War," *Milwaukee Journal*, 1917.

<sup>261</sup> Hoan, "Statement."

council as a vehicle for receiving federal funding of public initiatives.<sup>262</sup> One night at midnight, his political rivals on the committee approached Hoan in his office and demanded his resignation. If Hoan did not resign, they would pursue his removal as an official.

In a letter to the council of defense regarding these events, Hoan vividly defends his service to the council and demands an immediate response. He states as the organization was voluntary and comprised in a nonpartisan fashion, they had no right to ask for his dismissal. Furthermore, since he was the executive of the city and the council spent taxpayers' money, he deserved to have a say in how it was spent.

The letter continues questioning the motives of those who visited him at midnight. He questions the necessity of such an act in the midst of a political campaign, and wonders if it could not have waited until the next meeting of the council. He finally asks the council to point to any instance of his neglect of the citizens of Milwaukee while he was working with the council. Hoan's resignation, according to the letter, rode on the council providing proof that the socialist stance on World War I influenced his decisions. He pointed out how quickly he instituted the national draft and that Milwaukee was the first city to complete its order.

In his conclusion, Hoan challenges the council to try to get rid of him. He states:

I care not for your commendation or persecution. I defy you. Throw me off. I cannot recognize such action. It is a violation of your own rule that we must consist of any political organization. It is a violation of the rule of courtesy . . . You may if you will, write for yourselves this epithet. I was one of those who in time of great stress, who in time of a great crisis in the city of Milwaukee, where many believed that serious disturbances might happened during the course of the war,

---

<sup>262</sup> Reinders, "Daniel W. Hoan," 159-168; Milwaukee County Council of Defense, *Report on Twenty Months of War-time Service in Milwaukee, May 1, 1917 to January 1, 1919* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Council on Defense, 1919).

that gathered together and organized a body composed of all religious and of all political faiths, and that we worked in harmony in the spirit of true patriotism, but that just before the municipal election of 1918, when it looked as though the socialist party would again elect their mayor and carry this city, that a few men who had been politically opposed to the mayor, whom we chose as chairman, because of our knowledge of him; I was one who stooped to stir up a political turmoil in the midst of the most harmonious, efficient and best organized County Council of Defense in America.<sup>263</sup>

Over the following months, Hoan continued to battle increasingly negative public opinion while attempting a political campaign. His campaign literature focused on the trust that the socialists had never broken with the citizenry of Milwaukee. He noted the full cooperation of his administration with the wartime demands of the government. Furthermore, he rejected the votes of those who would not elect the entire socialist ticket.<sup>264</sup>

In responding to several citizens' inquiries regarding his patriotism, Hoan simply told them to judge him on his record. He denounced the political tricks of the opposing parties' candidates who called him un-American.<sup>265</sup> Although the city reelected him as mayor, the stress of defending his actions against constant attack left Hoan extremely sick. For several months after the election, his secretary responded to all inquiries and speaker requests by apologizing for Mayor Hoan and explaining his doctor's orders for rest.

---

<sup>263</sup> Letter from D.W. Hoan to the Milwaukee County Council of Defense, March 13, 1918, Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

<sup>264</sup> Letter from D.W. Hoan to the Citizens of Milwaukee, March 28, 1918, Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

<sup>265</sup> Letter from D.W. Hoan to Thos. Shannon, April 1, 1918, Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

*Post-World War I*

As discussed earlier, World War I caused major disruptions within the socialist movement. Victor Berger stood steadfast in his support of the national party agenda. Emil Seidel became increasingly disillusioned with the younger politicians within the party. Dan Hoan, however, continued his pragmatic approach to city government. Hoan acknowledged the need to provide tangible progress rather than idealistic rhetoric in order to accomplish socialist goals. This adaptability helped Hoan spend twenty more years in office, while the majority of the socialists in Milwaukee fell out of favor.

Part of this adaptability was Hoan's attention to new challenges, including the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in 1921. Following World War I, Milwaukee's African-American community began growing. Hoan feared these growing numbers could lead to a Klan presence in Milwaukee and assisted with a petition to Wisconsin's governor encouraging all measures are taken in preventing Klan violence. According to the *New York Times*, the governor replied, "I cannot engage in the presumption that the Klan will indulge in violence or crime...I must grant them the same presumption under our Constitution that is granted others."<sup>266</sup>

Despite his efforts, the Klan moved into Milwaukee and gained over 4,400 followers following 1921.<sup>267</sup> According to Gordon Lee, many Socialists joined the Klan during its first three years in Milwaukee. None of the socialist leaders however joined since they "remained vehemently opposed to the organization."<sup>268</sup> After a Klan lecture in the Milwaukee Auditorium filled with anti-Catholic rhetoric, Hoan sent a letter to the

---

<sup>266</sup> "Won't Bar Ku Klux Klan," *The New York Times*, August 28, 1921, 16.

<sup>267</sup> Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 235.

<sup>268</sup> Gordon H. Lee, "The Ku Klux Klan in Wisconsin in the 1920's," Seminar Paper, Wisconsin State University—La Crosse, 1968, 11.

Klan Imperial Palace in Atlanta. According to Lee, “He said that the best governed city in the United States needed no advice from anyone from Georgia where lynching had become a common practice.”<sup>269</sup>

Hoan did not let up his fight against the Klan. By 1922, he barred the Ku Klux Klan from holding any more meetings in the Milwaukee Auditorium.<sup>270</sup> During the same year, Hoan told Klansmen, “Milwaukee will become the hottest place this side of hell for the Ku Klux Klan if any of the Klan pounce upon one of our citizens, whether he be black or white, red or yellow, Jew or Gentile, Catholic or Protestant.”<sup>271</sup> Finally, Hoan addressed the Klan problem within the Socialist party in 1924. During a party meeting, Hoan motioned for the removal of John C. Kleist because of his Klan affiliation.<sup>272</sup>

Despite his struggle with the Ku Klux Klan, Hoan’s relationship with the growing African-American community was not always positive. In 1932, Hoan opened a Socialist convention by telling a “Darky Story.” According to Joe Trotter, “Although the ‘Darky Story’ was uncharacteristic of the mayor’s relationship with blacks and although he earnestly apologized, his words clearly symbolized a historical process, a sharp upswing in racial proscription against blacks, that had grown deeper since the onslaught of the migration and the increasing shift of Afro-Americans into the industrial work force.”<sup>273</sup> Additionally, Trotter mentions Hoan’s supporting of segregated unions, although Hoan never agreed with segregation. In Hoan’s mind, however, it was more important that African-Americans be unionized than deal with the segregation issue.<sup>274</sup>

---

<sup>269</sup> Lee, “Klan in Wisconsin,” 11.

<sup>270</sup> Joe Trotter, *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 138.

<sup>271</sup> Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 235-36.

<sup>272</sup> Kerstein, *All-American*, 210.

<sup>273</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee* 118-19.

<sup>274</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 55.

Following his final reelection in 1936, Hoan recognized that the Socialist Party was failing and he began to disavow his association with the party. During his final years in office, he left the national executive committee and began supporting other organizations. Upon his defeat in 1940 (to Carl Zeidler), Hoan finalized his transformation by joining the Democratic Party. In the following years, he would run unsuccessfully for governor, and in 1948 he would lose to Frank Zeidler in the primary election for mayor of Milwaukee.

### *Conclusion*

Daniel Hoan's actions during and following World War I challenged the national socialist ideology. Rather than concern himself with bringing about revolution in the near future, Hoan focused on the needs of his constituents. In doing so, he alienated many socialists, while maintaining his office for over twenty years. Since Hoan preferred the translation of socialist ideals into improvements in his constituents' lives over the making of revolution, World War I did not have a shattering effect, as it did upon Berger and Seidel.

Hoan continued working for the public good, but increasingly found new challenges following World War I. The reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan, the number of socialist Klansmen, and the growing African-American community in Milwaukee forced Hoan to address racial tensions. Hoan achieved many socialist goals during his administration; however, he became disillusioned with the party as it declined during the Great Depression. His legacy of pragmatic or "sewer socialism" is often recognized as the most successful socialist administration in American history. One scholar ranks

Daniel Hoan as being among the top ten mayors in American history; others argue that he was not completely a socialist despite his continued devotion to the party.<sup>275</sup> In either case, his success is attributable to his understanding of socialist ideology as a guide to action in the present.

---

<sup>275</sup> Melvin G. Holli, *The American Mayor: The Best and the Worst Big-City Leaders* (Penn State Press, 1999), 60-65.

## CONCLUSION

Historians of socialism in the United States often describe Victor Berger as the political machine boss of socialist Milwaukee and devote much, if not most, of their analyses of Milwaukee Socialism to Berger's politics. In so doing, these scholars often gloss , the Milwaukee Socialist movement as a uniquely conservative form of socialism that proved more successful than socialist movements elsewhere in the United States. This limited view of Milwaukee Socialism assumes that Milwaukee socialists were unified in their ideology.

Contrary to these suggestions, Milwaukee Socialism's three major leaders, Victor Berger, Emil Seidel, and Daniel Hoan, viewed socialism in significantly different ways. The differences among these leaders mainly followed their specific roles within the party. Victor Berger's limited time with municipal government, his role as national spokesman in Congress, and his leadership on the national executive committee allowed him to preserve a distinct and largely uncompromising form of socialism.

Berger initially believed in an imminent, complete transition of the government to socialism. His frustration with the Populist Party in combination with his stubborn personality created a leader who refused any cooperation with other parties. During World War I, his personal struggles (including his trial and conviction) wore Berger out. Following these struggles, Berger's ideology became more pragmatic and similar to that of Hoan. Toward the end of his life and career, he increasingly supported cooperation with other parties, specifically the Progressive Party.

Daniel Hoan did not have as prominent a national role as Berger, but he focused on the needs of his constituents. In doing so, Hoan became the most pragmatic socialist

of the group. Hoan also never had a socialist majority on the common council, so he approached socialism in a down-to-earth manner. Emil Seidel's ideology reflected Berger's when he was running for the vice-presidency, on national tours, or fighting against World War I. In contrast, his ideology aligned with Hoan's during his mayoral and aldermanic terms. Following World War I, Seidel became frustrated with the growing militancy of younger socialists. The post-war era marked a transition for Seidel, as he began viewing a socialist revolution as a long-term goal rather than an immediate one.

Despite the difference between Berger's and Hoan's ideological stances, both ended at a similar point. Following his personal tribulations during World War I, Berger came to prioritize change in the present, even if modest, over the pursuit of large-scale revolutionary change. Thus, toward the end of Berger's life, Berger and Hoan became more similar in ideology. Following Berger's death, however, Hoan would begin slowly distancing himself from the party. Upon leaving office, Hoan left the party altogether, and joined the Democratic Party. World War I and the frustration of internal division in socialism also affected Seidel's ideology.

The recognition of a more diverse ideological base in Milwaukee Socialism dispels some of the generalizations made by many historians, including those made by Bell, Drosen, Laslett, Miller, and Shannon. Milwaukee Socialism was more complex than a collection of minions blindly doing Victor Berger's bidding. The multiple divergent ideologies and political motivations within the socialist movement may also explain the longevity of success of socialists in Milwaukee as compared to the national movement. The Milwaukee Socialist movement maintained a more evolutionary

ideology than the revolutionary branch of the national party. It drew from the mix of the city's ethnic heritage, diverse critiques of capitalism, and union relationships to create a unique manifestation of socialism in the United States.

Additional examinations of active members of the party could illuminate further the division between Hoan's ideology and Berger's. A study of both Meta Berger and Agnes Hoan may answer different questions. Did Mrs. Hoan's Catholicism influence Dan Hoan's ideology? Since Meta Berger was also an active politician, did her view of socialism agree with her husband's? What effect, if any, did she have on his movement toward pragmatism? Future historians should also investigate the role of women in the socialist party as a whole, although Sally Miller's recent article is a good beginning.<sup>276</sup>

Overall, the demonstration of the internal diversity of Milwaukee Socialist ideologies undermines labels long applied by historians of socialism. Far too often, historians prefer to label socialists as conservative or liberal, right-wing or left-wing. These labels imply the existence of static, homogeneous groupings and often rely on insufficiently defined or vague concepts. Similarly, historians' practice of placing socialists along a linear spectrum forces complicated ideas into ahistorical boxes. . Future investigations of socialism (or any other social movement) need to avoid such anachronistic labeling and pay more attention to the actual writings and actions of political actors in the past. .

---

<sup>276</sup> Sally Miller, "For White Men Only: The Socialist Party of America and Issues of Gender, Ethnicity and Race," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2, no. 3 (2003): 283-302.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Attoe, Wayne and Mark Latus, "The First Public Housing: Sewer Socialism's Garden City for Milwaukee." *Journal of Popular Culture*, X (Summer, 1976): 142-149.
- Bell, Daniel. "The Problem of Ideological Rigidity." In *Failure of a Dream?: Essays in the History of American Socialism*, John H. M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset eds., 85-111. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press Doubleday, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Reply." In *Failure of a Dream?: Essays in the History of American Socialism*, John H. M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset eds., 128-133. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press Doubleday, 1974.
- Bellamy, Edward, and John L. Thomas. *Looking Backward, 2000-1887*. The John Harvard library. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967.
- Berger, Doris. Unpublished biography of Victor Berger. Victor Berger Papers. Wisconsin Historical Society. Madison, Wisconsin.
- Berger, Victor L., Meta Schlichting Berger, Michael E. Stevens, and Ellen D. Goldlust-Gingrich. *The Family Letters of Victor and Meta Berger, 1894-1929*. Madison: Center for Documentary History, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1995.
- Berger, Victor L. "Socialism in 1945, A.D." *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 16, 1895.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Party Will Stand No Wobbling," *The Milwaukee Leader*, December 28, 1917.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Voice and Pen of Victor L. Berger: Congressional Speeches and Editorials*. Milwaukee: Milwaukee Leader, 1929.
- Beck, Elmer A. *The Sewer Socialists: A History of the Socialist Party of Wisconsin, 1897-1940*. 2 vols. Fennimore, Wisconsin: Westburg Associates, 1982.
- Buhle, Paul. "Comment." In *Failure of a Dream?: Essays in the History of American Socialism*, John H. M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset eds., 635-645. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press Doubleday, 1974.
- Burwood, Stephen. "Debsian Socialism Through a Transnational Lens." *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2, no 3 (2003): 253-282.
- Daniel W. Hoan Papers. Milwaukee County Historical Society. Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
- Drosen, Margaret Rosalind. "The History of Socialism in Milwaukee, 1910-1930." B.A. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1931.

- Emil Seidel Papers, 1916-1944. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection G. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives. Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
- Emil Seidel Papers, 1906-1940. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 76. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives. Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
- Enyeart, John P. "Revolution or Evolution: The Socialist Party, Western Workers, and Law in the Progressive Era." *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2, no. 4 (2003): 377-402.
- Gurda, John. *The Making of Milwaukee*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 2006.
- Hoan, Daniel W. *The Failure of Regulation*. Chicago: The Socialist Party of the United States, 1914.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Mayor Hoan's Statement on His Attitude Toward the War," *Milwaukee Journal*, 1917.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *City Government: The Record of the Milwaukee Experiment*. New York: Hartcourt, Brace & Co, 1936.
- Holli, Melvin G. *The American Mayor: The Best and the Worst Big-City Leaders*. Penn State Press, 1999.
- Howard, Michael W., ed. *Key Concepts in Critical Theory: Socialism*. Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2001.
- Hoxie, Robert F. "'The Rising Tide of Socialism': A Study." *The Journal of Political Economy* 19, no. 8 (1911): 609-31.
- Husbands, C.T. "Editor's Introductory Essay." In *Why is there no Socialism in the United States?* by Werner Sombart, xv-xxxvii. White Plains, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1976.
- Judd, Richard W. *Socialist Cities: Municipal Politics and the Grass Roots of American Socialism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.
- Kerstein, Edward S. *Milwaukee's All-American Mayor: Portrait of Daniel Webster Hoan*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966.
- Laslett, John H.M. "Comment." In *Failure of a Dream?: Essays in the History of American Socialism*, John H. M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset eds., 112-127. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press Doubleday, 1974.

- Lee, Gordon H. "The Ku Klux Klan in Wisconsin in the 1920s." M.S. Seminar Paper, 1968.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin and Gary Marks. *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States*. New York: Norton, 2000.
- Miller, Sally M. *Victor Berger and the Promise of Constructive Socialism, 1910-1920*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "For White Men Only: The Socialist Party of American and Issues of Gender, Ethnicity and Race." *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2, no. 3 (2003): 283-302.
- McGuinness, Aims. "The Revolution Begins Here: Milwaukee and the History of Socialism," in Margo Anderson and Victor Greene, eds. *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, forthcoming in Fall 2009.
- Muravchik, Joshua. *Heaven on Earth: The Rise and Fall of Socialism*. San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002.
- New York Evening Journal*. "Berger Scores a Triumph in House." June 20, 1911.
- New York Times*. "Won't Bar Ku Klux Klan; But Wisconsin Governor Promises Protection to All Citizens." August 28, 1921: 16.
- Olson, Frederick I. "The Milwaukee Socialists, 1897-1941." Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1952.
- Perlman, Selig. "History of Socialism in Milwaukee, 1893-1910." B.A. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1910.
- Pittenger, Mark. *American Socialists and Evolutionary Thought, 1870-1920*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993.
- Records of the Emil Seidel Administration, 1910-1912. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 79. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives. Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
- Reese, William J. "'Partisans of the Proletariat': The Socialist Working Class and the Milwaukee Schools, 1890-1920." *History of Education Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1981): 3-50.
- Reinders, Robert C. "The Early Career of Daniel W. Hoan: A Study of Socialism in the Progressive Era." M.A. Thesis, University of Notre Dame, 1948.

- Schneirov, Richard. "New Perspectives on Socialism I: The Socialist Party Revisited." *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2, no 3 (2003): 245-52.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Odyssey of William English Walling: Revisionism, Social Democracy, and Evolutionary Pragmatism." *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2, no. 4 (2003): 403-30.
- Seidel, Emil. *Autobiography Part I, Part II and Part III*, unpublished manuscript. Emil Seidel Papers, 1916-1944. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection G. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives. Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
- Shannon, David A. "The Socialist Party Before the First World War: An Analysis." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 38, no. 2 (1951): 279-88.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Socialist Party of America: A History*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955.
- Sklar, Martin J. "Thoughts on Capitalism and Socialism: Utopian and Realistic." *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2, no. 4 (2003): 361-76.
- Trotter, Joe W. *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985.
- Victor Berger Papers. Wisconsin Historical Society. Madison, Wisconsin.
- Walzer Leavitt, Judith. *The Healthiest City*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.
- Weinstein, James. "Anti-War Sentiment and the Socialist Party, 1917-1918." *Political Science Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (1959): 215-39.